



# PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 21

15 December 1972

## ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS

The Australian Government has decided to hold a judicial inquiry as the first move towards the legal recognition of Aboriginal rights in land.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, announced the appointment of Mr. Justice Woodward as the Commissioner to conduct the inquiry.

Mr. Justice Woodward's commission is not concerned with whether rights in land should be granted since the government has already decided that they shall.

His task is simply to advise how they shall be granted.

He has been asked to report on :

- arrangements necessary in the Northern Territory for vesting title to Aboriginal reserved land, including rights in minerals and timber, in the Aboriginal groups and communities concerned;
- procedures for the examination of claims based on traditional rights in the areas outside reserves or alternative ways of meeting effectively the needs of Aboriginal communities outside the reserves for land;
- amendments to legislation necessary to give effect to his recommendations.

The Commissioner has been advised that in preparing his recommendations he should take into account already existing commitments affecting the areas of land involved.

The precise terms of reference will be decided by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and announced in due course.

The Government intends to refer subsequent matters involving Aboriginal rights in or claims to land to Mr. Justice Woodward as soon as the first stage of his commission is complete.