



## PRIME MINISTER

Press Statement No. 112

13 July 1973

### NATIONAL ABORIGINES DAY

The Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, today issued the following statement to mark National Aborigines Day (Friday 13 July).

" In my election policy speech I said that 'There is one great group of Australians who have been denied their basic rights to the pursuit of happiness, to liberty and indeed to life itself for 180 years...' I referred to the Aboriginal Australians whose ancestors settled this continent at least 30,000 years ago.

It is appropriate on National Aborigines Day that newer arrivals to this country recall that we have dispossessed the Aboriginal Australians, and in our settlement and development of this country have wrought great damage to Aboriginal society.

The Australian Government is undertaking programs which will be developed in consultation with them, to ensure that the Aboriginal people shall enjoy the rights and opportunities they are entitled to as Australian citizens and shall enjoy a full and free life in Australian society.

I hope that 1973 will come to be seen as a watershed in Aboriginal affairs. The Australian Government is assuming the responsibilities to Aboriginal people accorded to it by the Referendum of 1967. The Australian Government now accepts full responsibility for policy in Aboriginal affairs and is establishing a direct relationship with Aboriginal communities and individuals throughout the nation. We will maintain this special responsibility to and relationship with Aboriginal people for as long as they themselves desire it.

The Government's undertakings in Aboriginal affairs, as defined in the Labor Party's policy platforms' are clear. We are carrying out these commitments.

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The underlying principle of the Australian Government's approach in Aboriginal affairs may be briefly described as self determination. We believe that Aboriginal communities and individuals must themselves decide the pace and nature of their future development. The situation where policies have been developed and special programs administered exclusively by whites must be changed. At the local and at the national level emphasis must shift towards Aboriginal control and responsibility.

At the local level, to assist Aboriginal people to exercise autonomy in matters of interest to them, we will be introducing into the Parliament legislation to enable Aboriginal groups and communities to incorporate for the conduct of their own affairs.

These incorporated societies will be set up for purposes chosen by their Aboriginal members and will return them their own decision-making processes. They will enable them to choose their own leaders and executives in ways they will themselves decide.

At the national level, Aborigines will be choosing the members of a national consultative body to advise the Government. Increasing numbers of Aborigines will also be recruited both into administrative positions connected with Aboriginal affairs and into other areas of the Australian Public Service.

Self determination implies a degree of economic independence. Economic deprivation is one of the most crippling of Aboriginal handicaps. Programs to support and encourage Aboriginal enterprises and to enable Aboriginal people to continue their education and vocational training are vital.

There are many Aboriginal communities whose way of life depends on their land being secured to them. It is my Government's firm policy to vest such land in the Aboriginal communities concerned. We appointed an Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner to investigate how this might best be done and expect to receive his preliminary report within a few weeks. In the meantime, we are helping Aboriginal communities to acquire land outside reserves, and are providing \$5 million per year for the next ten years for this purpose.

We believe that Government services to Aboriginal communities should be of comparable standard to those enjoyed by the general population. Adequate services must be provided by the appropriate Government and local authorities in fields such as health, education, social welfare and communications.

The Government trusts that all Australians will support it in the pursuit of these objectives. "

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