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EMBARGO: 7.30 PM FRIDAY 23 NOV. 1973

NATIONAL BROADCAST BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
FOR THE ELECTIONS OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
TELECAST 8.00 PM, 23 NOVEMBER 1973

Tonight I want to speak directly and personally to the Aboriginal people of Australia. I take great pleasure in doing so. This is the first time that an Australian Prime Minister has addressed himself on radio and television to our Aboriginal people. I certainly hope it will not be the last time, and that what I have to say tonight will be heard by all Australians with a concern for the welfare and progress of our country and its reputation in the world.

I want to tell you of a most important election that is taking place tomorrow. Nothing like it has been held before. All Aboriginal people in Australia are eligible to vote. You will be voting to elect the members of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee. This committee - the N.A.C.C. - will have a significant role to play in advancing the cause of Aborigines and Torres Strait Island Australians. I hope all Aboriginals will exercise their right and duty to take part in this historic and democratic process.

Let me explain how the Consultative Committee was set up and what the Government wants it to achieve. You may recall that in my policy speech last November I said that Aboriginals had for too long been denied their rightful place in Australian society and that all Australians were diminished while this was so. Since taking office we have done much to restore the dignity and opportunities of Aboriginals. We have embarked on many important reforms in education, health and vocational training. We are pledged to end racial discrimination, and we shall soon be introducing legislation for this purpose. We have appointed a commission to determine the best way to grant land rights to the Aboriginal people. In accordance with the clear wish of the people expressed in the referendum of 1967, the Australian Government is moving to assume full responsibility from the States for the administration of Aboriginal affairs.

Many of the things we want to do are quite new when compared with the old assimilation policies of the past. We want to preserve the culture of the Aboriginal people - their tribal values such as music, languages and beliefs. We regard that as our sacred trust.

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Our most important objective now is to restore to Aborigines the power to make their own decisions about their way of life. Already the Department of Aboriginal Affairs has been transferring responsibility for community affairs from Government superintendents and managers to Aborigines themselves. We believe the establishment of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee is an important part of this process. We want the committee to be a forum for the expression of Aboriginal opinion. We want it to allow a healthy two-way communication between Aborigines and the national Government.

Let me give you a few details about the voting tomorrow. You will be electing 41 delegates from a field of 193 candidates who have nominated throughout Australia. The elected delegates will be paid a salary and allowance, and we expect the committee to meet two or three times a year. Already nearly 37,000 people have enrolled to vote. But let me remind you that, even if you have not yet enrolled, you will still be permitted to enrol and vote at the polling booths tomorrow. For those in isolated communities voting has been going on since last Saturday and will continue for another week.

I am confident that this committee will work well and achieve much. I hope all Aborigines will seize this opportunity to participate in its election. I should like to remind you of some words I used earlier this year when I spoke to a meeting of Aboriginal people in Canberra. I said this - and the words still apply -

"If there is one ambition my Government places above all others, if there is one achievement for which I hope we will be remembered, if there is one cause for which future historians will salute us, it is this: that the Government I lead removed a stain from our national honour and brought back **justice and equality** to the Aboriginal people."

Good night.
