

PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT

7 May 1974

Aboriginal Land Rights Commission - Second Report

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, announced today that the Government had accepted in principle the recommendations contained in the Second Report of the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission.

The Report had been received by the Government following its presentation to the Governor-General last Friday, 3 May, and was now being released in accordance with the undertaking given by the Prime Minister in his Policy Speech.

Following its re-election, the Government will arrange discussions with Aboriginal Councils and communities in the Northern Territory, with a view to early legislation.

Mr Whitlam paid tribute to the Commissioner, Mr Justice A.E. Woodward, for the way in which he had conducted the Inquiry. The Commissioner had enabled Aborigines to participate with an effectiveness wholly new in Australian history. At the same time widely ranging evidence was received on the issues affecting his terms of reference.

Mr Whitlam said that the Government strongly endorsed the Judge's view that "an imposed solution to the problem of recognising traditional Aboriginal land rights is unlikely to be a good or lasting solution", and would adopt the suggestion that the proposals be taken as a basis for negotiation between the Aboriginal Representative Councils and communities and the Government.

Mr Whitlam said the Government believed that the Report provided a well balanced consideration of the claims and needs of Aboriginal Australians in the Northern Territory while ensuring respect for rights granted under previous Governments. Its recommendations offer a framework under which the legitimate claims of Aborigines can be met - and their deep affiliation with the land acknowledged. It would therefore provide a basis for the development of the Northern Territory which Australians can in good conscience accept and defend.

The Government welcomed especially the Report's recommendations relating to mining. They clearly justify the Government's concern to enable Aborigines to protect their way of life from the destructive effect of mining development. In particular it endorses the Government's decision on Queensland Mines proposals to mine uranium at Nabarlek.

The Prime Minister said that the electorate was entitled to know what attitude the Opposition would take to the recommendations of the Report. He had made arrangements for copies of the Report to be passed to Leaders of the Opposition Parties in the Parliament, to the Premiers and to Corporations referred to in the recommendations.