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**PRIME MINISTER**

7 November 1983

The attached speech will be delivered by Mr Basil Atkinson, Chairman of the National Aboriginal Employment and Development Committee to the NAEDC Seminar in Canberra on behalf of the Prime Minister today.

EMBARGOED UNTIL 3.30 P.M.



## PRIME MINISTER

I am pleased to participate in this seminar which has been organised by the National Aboriginal Employment and Development Committee to highlight the need for greater numbers of Aborigines to be employed in Commonwealth statutory authorities and departments.

My Government is committed to increasing the numbers of Aboriginal people in Commonwealth Government employment to a point at least equal to their representation in the community - a level generally believed to be between 1 and 2 per cent.

Numbers, however, are not in themselves enough.

Aboriginal people should be at a sufficiently influential level to be able to play a significant part in Aboriginal self-management.

Accordingly an Affirmative Action strategy in Commonwealth Government employment is now being developed.

We should be appalled at the continuing high unemployment rate amongst Aboriginal people - this is estimated to be in excess of 50 per cent.

My Government is actively working to try and alleviate the situation.

Aboriginal employment in the Australian Public Service today is not as good as it should be, but is improving.

At 1 October 1982 there were 804 Aboriginal staff in the APS - representing only 0.53 per cent full-time staff.

This is an increase of 13.4 per cent over the previous year.

The figures from the survey of Aboriginal staff conducted in October 1983 are not yet available but there are indications that the situation is continuing to change for the better.

Already this year 261 Aborigines have been placed by the Public Service Board in permanent employment in the APS.

In addition there are currently 430 Aborigines who have been employed under the Training for Aborigines Program in APS.

In the next few months at least 200 Aboriginal people are expected to receive jobs in the APS under the Commonwealth Component of the Community Employment Program - CEP.

If present recruitment trends continue the proportion of Aboriginal staff in the APS, excluding those in temporary training positions, is expected to approach 1 per cent by the end of 1984.

Although recruitment targets may easily be met overall employment figures will not increase at the same rate unless attention is paid to the induction and training of new recruits to prevent high resignation rates.

Neither will the numbers of Aboriginal people in decision making positions increase at a satisfactory rate unless properly structured career development programs are introduced for Aboriginal staff.

Over the years the Board, with the support of relevant departments and authorities, has sought to address these aspects.

Let me briefly review a number of these initiatives.

#### 1 Equal Employment Opportunity Officers

In 1978 a program to implement a National Employment Strategy for Aborigines in the Australian Public Service was established.

Early next year my Government plans to introduce an Affirmative Action Strategy.

Departments and authorities who have not already done so should designate an officer to be responsible for developing and implementing these programs for Aborigines.

## 2 Aboriginal Services Program

The Clerk (Aboriginal Services) Program was introduced by the Public Service Board in 1981 to meet the Service's continuing demand for staff with a knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people.

At present the Board is undertaking a major nationwide recruitment drive for the 1984 Aboriginal Services intake.

Officers from the Board have been visiting departments seeking vacancies for the program.

I am told that departments are being very helpful and the Board expects to receive in excess of 200 vacancies for 1984.

I urge those departments which have not already offered opportunities to this program to do so.

The Board is particularly interested in receiving vacancies from country and isolated offices in areas of high Aboriginal unemployment.

All departments however can participate in the program whether or not they provide services directly to Aboriginal communities.

## 3. Lateral Recruitment

In previous years the Board has asked departments to identify positions where an ability to communicate with Aborigines or a knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and communities is seen as necessary for the efficient performance of duties.

The Board has introduced a number of initiatives to try and increase the Aboriginal occupancy rate of these positions.

It is now discussing with departments the possibility of running regular nation-wide recruitment programs for identified positions.

This should provide a pool of suitable applicants for a number of middle level vacancies.

Revised guidelines are being prepared to assist in the selection of applicants for identified positions paying particular attention to the weighting of the selection criteria in these positions.

The revised guidelines will be issued early in 1984.

#### 4. Temporary and Exempt Employment

The employment of Aboriginals in temporary and exempt positions requires particular attention.

I would urge all departments employing exempt staff to ensure that vacancies are made known to Aboriginal people and that Aboriginal applicants are given full consideration.

The Government would like to see the number of Aboriginal people employed in exempt positions in the APS at least double the 1982 figure the end of 1984.

#### 5. Vocational Training

The training function is crucial to long-term success.

During the five years August 1978 to September 1983, 2,295 Aboriginal people have received vocational training in the APS to prepare them to compete for employment in both the public and private sectors.

Five hundred of these trainees (36 per cent) entered employment at, or shortly after the conclusion of their training periods - 61 per cent of these were placed in APS employment.

Additional trainees found employment in the next few months in both the private and public sectors.

Training programs to date have been primarily oriented towards basic on-the-job experience for unemployed Aborigines who lacked skills and work experience.

In addition to this base level training, other schemes have also catered for Aborigines who already possess skills or who have had some experience in the workforce and who require enhancement or broadening of these skills.

Opportunities for those requiring enhancement of existing skills have however been limited.

More opportunities should be provided for skill enhancement, particularly for Aboriginal people already employed in Aboriginal organisations and enterprises.

As well additional procedures for monitoring of the progress of the trainees to ensure that they are receiving good quality and effective training are needed.

Guidelines to be released by the Board early in the new year should receive the particular attention of departments and authorities.

## 6. The Commonwealth Employment Program

The Commonwealth component of the Community Employment Program - the CEP - is providing a useful channel by which Commonwealth Departments and authorities can employ Aborigines.

In the next few months at least 200 Aborigines will be employed in departments on CEP projects.

In addition approximately 30 Aborigines will be employed in authorities.

A major aim of the CEP is to ensure that women receive an equal share of the jobs created.

I am encouraged, therefore, to see that departments have not only provided jobs for Aboriginal women but that many of these will result in benefit to Aboriginal women generally.

For example 59 aboriginal women are being engaged to consult with Aboriginal communities about the needs and views of Aboriginal women on a wide range of issues.

Information gathered by these CEP participants will be referred to the Government by the Task Force on Aboriginal women, which was set up in my department in July.

I urge Departments and authorities to join in this very worthwhile program and to pay particular attention to the development of projects which will offer employment for Aboriginal people.

## 7. Study-based Development Programs

The Board has introduced two study based programs to assist the career development of Aboriginal staff.

These are the Aboriginal Undergraduate Study Award Scheme, and the Aboriginal APS Staff Sponsorship Program.

I know that several of the Commonwealth authorities with Aboriginal staff have expressed keen interest in these two programs.

I would encourage authorities generally to develop their own study-based development programs as a positive and effective means of assisting the career development of their Aboriginal staff.

## 8. Training of Recruits

There is a wide variation in the extent to which departments carry out their responsibility for development of their Aboriginal Services recruits.

The Board is now developing a more structured objectives based training program for Aboriginal Service recruits.

Departments will be responsible for organising the program of rotation placements, training course attendances and counselling agreed for each of their recruits.

Emphasis will be placed by the Board on co-ordination of effort and the co-operative pooling of training resources in the regions.

## 9. Management Development Initiatives

The Board's Equal Employment Opportunity Bureau has taken steps to review the Board's programs and enhance the extent and effectiveness of the Board's monitoring of the status of Aborigines in the APS.

Already it is apparent that, in a hierarchical system like the APS, what is really important is getting Aborigines into the senior levels in increasing numbers, on merit.

The focus must go beyond enhancing recruitment opportunities to a commitment by departments and authorities - not merely the Board - to keep developing their Aboriginal staff and provide fair opportunity for them throughout their careers.

The Board will shortly be considering a number of proposals for service-wide special measures designed to meet those needs not met by existing recruitment and development programs for Aborigines.

These proposals include:

- . development of a Service-wide Middle Management Program for Aborigines aimed at rapidly increasing the number of aborigines at middle and senior management level.
- . development of a Personal Development Bridging Program aimed at assisting Aboriginal officers at lower Third Division levels to develop the basic skills and knowledge needed to successfully compete for promotion or for Service-wide development programs.

## 10. Affirmative Action

As I mentioned at the outset, my Government is committed to an Affirmative Action strategy for Aborigines.

Affirmative Action is a systematic approach to the identification and elimination of the institutional barriers that disadvantaged groups encounter in employment.

An Affirmative Action program is a planned, results orientated, management program designed to achieve Equal Employment Opportunity.

There are two popular misconceptions about Affirmative Action.

Firstly that it is inconsistent with a system of selection and promotion based on merit and secondly that it involves the use of rigid quotas.

Dr Peter Wilenski, the new Chairman of the Public Service Board, put these issues in perspective when he said:

"In Government services where the merit principle applies Affirmative Action is consistent with that principle. Indeed, Affirmative Action can be a means of making competition more open, that is, of implementing the merit principle. By introducing social equity, the element which should be fundamental to competition, Affirmative Action removes the effect that characteristics such as sex, race, national origin and physical handicap can have on the assessment of merit. Affirmative Action can provide a much broader range of efficient applicants to be considered in selection".

Affirmative Action does not involve the use of quotas - fixed numbers or percentages which must be attained or which cannot be exceeded regardless of the numbers of qualified applicants available.

The setting of numerical goals and targets, is, however, an essential part of affirmative action.

Goals and targets included in Affirmative Action Programs are an expression of the expected outcome of the merit system in conjunction with the programs undertaken to remove discrimination and ensure equality of opportunity.

The administrative arrangements for the introduction of affirmative action in Commonwealth Government employment are currently under consideration in the Task Force on Public Service Matters.



I expect my colleague, Mr John Dawkins, to be able to announce details of this new program to all Permanent Heads early in the new year.

I would like to conclude by thanking you all for the interest in this area.

I cannot emphasize too strongly how important it is that you carefully address how best to increase employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people in your departments and authorities.

This deserves your priority attention.

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