



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

18 NOVEMBER 1987

I want to make a brief general statement about the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy before Gerry Hand and Clyde Holding answer your questions about the detail of this new policy.

The Aboriginal Employment Development Policy represents a major commitment by my Government to enhance the economic, educational and employment opportunities of Australia's Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

This nation has few problems as tragic and as complex as the persistent poverty in which the majority of Aboriginal people live. Despite the earnest endeavours of Governments over the past twenty years, Aboriginal unemployment persists at unacceptably high levels - five or six times higher than among the rest of the community - and Aboriginal incomes remain on average only half those enjoyed by other Australians

In response to the pleas of the many Aboriginal people who reject the welfare dependency of the past, we must look to ways of ensuring the progressive development of Aboriginal economic independence.

This is the fundamental objective of the AEDP. To achieve that goal it will create jobs for the nearly 50% of the Aboriginal population who live in remote and rural communities; ensure fair access for Aboriginals to jobs throughout the wider Labour market; and improve the educational and training opportunities for Aboriginal people.

The AEDP is a carefully tailored and carefully measured approach. It arises from the recommendations of Mr Mick Miller's 1985 report on Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs. I want to congratulate Mr Miller and his committee for their hard work and for their valuable recommendations.

In 1986 the Government endorsed the broad findings of the Miller Committee and established the AEDP. Today we are embarking on a long-term co-ordinated policy involving a substantial financial commitment by the Commonwealth to achieve employment equity for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.

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I have written to the six Premiers and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory seeking their cooperation in the adoption of complementary measures. That cooperation, which I hope will be readily forthcoming, will introduce a new era of effective and efficient delivery of public sector services to Aboriginal people.

I want to commend AEDP also to Aboriginal communities and organisations, trade unions and employer groups, all of whose support will also be critical for its effective implementation.

The two hundred years of European settlement of Australia have been characterised by the development of Government policies which all too frequently have failed to answer the legitimate demands of the Aboriginal people.

I believe a program such as the AEDP avoids the pitfalls of the past because it is based on the oft stated views of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that they want to be involved in the decisions about their future and about the way in which they will earn their livelihood.

It is my hope that the Bicentenary celebrations will allow us not only to reflect on the richness of the 40,000 year old Aboriginal culture but also to appreciate with greater clarity the need for Aboriginal people today to achieve economic independence.

This new policy cannot of course achieve results overnight: the imbalances in the standards of living of Aboriginals and of the rest of the community are too severe for that.

But the AEDP does provide a tangible demonstration of the community's capacity to direct its resources in an effective way to alleviate the very real problems facing the Aboriginal people.