

I also made it clear that, with the bulk of the inquiries then completed, the Government felt in a position to inform the Parliament of its views and intentions concerning organisational arrangements for the future, and I advised the House of actions which the Government proposed to take, while standing ready to refine our response and undertake any further action should that be necessary when remaining reports were received.

Madam Speaker, the final report from Mr Menzies was received by the Government during the parliamentary recess.

That report has four parts, but Mr Menzies has recommended, and the Government accepts, that Part 4 not be published, given that it contains only names and addresses of certain persons and one Aboriginal agency who made submissions in confidence.

The report makes reference elsewhere to the inputs of the persons and agency concerned but their identities are not central to the issues discussed.

Copies of Part 4 of the report have been made available to the Leader of the Opposition (Mr Peacock), the Leader of the National Party (Mr Blunt), the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate (Senator Chaney) and the Leader of the Australian Democrats (Senator Haines).

3.

For the information of Honourable Members, I now table in the House the final report from Mr Menzies, other than Part 4.

Honourable Members will find that Part 1 of the report is an introductory chapter, including an overview.

Part 2 covers the inquiries into three matters involving Mr Charles Perkins, to which I shall return shortly.

Part 3 of the report deals with a number of miscellaneous allegations which Mr Menzies has investigated. In the case of two of these allegations, the report indicates that they have been referred to police for investigation. By agreement with Mr Menzies, the Auditor-General will be reporting on one other case.

In none of the cases in Part 3 on which Mr Menzies himself has reported was corruption or serious illegality established.

While Mr Menzies finds some cases of questionable practice, he recognises that action is already in hand to respond properly in those cases.

In Part 3 of the report, the only formal recommendation made by Mr Mensies relates to the activities of an organisation which is not a Commonwealth agency but is in receipt of Commonwealth funding. The relevant department, the Department of Community Services and Health, is acting on this recommendation. That Department is also following up the recommendation that the activities of a South Australian Aboriginal agency be reviewed.

I now turn to that part of the report which deals with matters involving Mr Charles Perkins.

By way of introduction, I remind Honourable Members that various allegations made about Commonwealth administration in the Aboriginal Affairs area over the past months have attracted a great deal of publicity.

Many of the accusations have been extremely serious.

Some, for example, alleged patronage, favouritism, nepotism and cronyism in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Others alleged or implied corruption.

The name of Charles Perkins was linked with many of those allegations and much of this publicity.

5.

The facts are that none of the several inquiries conducted for the Government, including this final report from Mr Menzies, supports allegations of that kind.

I advised this House in April that the Public Service Commissioner did not substantiate allegations of patronage, favouritism, nepotism and cronyism in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

None of these reports has substantiated in any way allegations of corruption.

It can and should be firmly said, therefore, that these serious allegations, so prominently publicised, have been grossly unfair to Mr Perkins and his family.

There is nothing which emerges from any of these intensive inquiries to suggest that Charles Perkins ever took any action out of self-interest or self-reward.

It is true that he has occasionally been a controversial figure; but only, I believe, where he saw this as important to his continuing effectiveness as a leader of his people.

Honourable Members will see that this final report from Mr Menzies brings out some further shortcomings in administration in the area of Aboriginal Affairs - in some cases shortcomings for which Mr Perkins, as the departmental Secretary over much of the period, has to bear ultimate responsibility.

Although such shortcomings are identified, however, Mr Menzies does not find that Mr Perkins' role in any of the three issues addressed in this final report amounts to failure to fulfil his duty as an officer such that disciplinary action should or could be taken against him.

I would add, Madam Speaker, that the bulk of the deficiencies identified in the various inquiries conducted for the Government were in the Aboriginal Development Commission and not in the Department for which Mr Perkins carried ultimate responsibility. And even within the Department, there would be incongruity in any attempt to find the blame for most of these deficiencies in Charles Perkins personally. As the Public Service Commissioner found, there were deficiencies in systems and procedures going well beyond the realm of Mr Perkins' personal responsibility.

7.

There is only one of the three issues relating to Mr Perkins on which I wish to comment further.

This relates to the source of the \$50 which Mr Perkins paid for taxi fares for some of the persons who were demonstrating outside the RSL Headquarters on 9 September 1988.

In the conclusions in his report, Mr Menzies expressed regret that Mr Perkins had refused to disclose to him the source of this \$50.

The report notes at paragraph 3.10 that Mr Perkins gave an "unequivocal assurance that the \$50 used for the taxi fares did not come from any political source at home or abroad or from any corporation or organisation. Neither did the money come from any official source".

The fact that Mr Menzies was not satisfied with this response has caused Mr Perkins' advisers to write to me submitting further information. I now table their letter.

The letter points out that Mr Perkins' refusal to disclose the precise source of the funds was based on legal advice first in relation to a dispute over Mr Menzies' jurisdiction in this matter and, secondly, on what was seen as an undue invasion of personal privacy.

8.

Given the conclusions on this matter reported by Mr Menzies, however, and notwithstanding their continuing concerns about privacy, Mr Perkins and his legal advisers have now provided in their letter to me an unequivocal assurance from Mr Perkins that he paid for the taxis out of his own pocket.

I accept that assurance.

I state again that none of these various and extensive inquiries commissioned by the Government has found any evidence of misconduct or other actions by Mr Perkins of a serious kind warranting disciplinary action or censure.

It is time this House and this Parliament put those matters behind it and instead expressed its recognition of the substantial contribution Charles Perkins has made throughout his working life in the interests of advancing the cause of the Aboriginal people.

Mr Perkins was at the vanguard of Aboriginal people to have a degree conferred on him from an Australian university, and while at university was President of Student Action for Aborigines.

He became more widely known during the period from 1965 to 1969 when he was Manager of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs.

He t
20 y
deep
from

He h
up t
unti
best
of v

Char
role
Abor
poss
was
inva
peop

This
view
admi
whic

9.

He then moved into the government arena and for some 20 years has been applying all his energy, and drawing deeply on his commitment, to advance the cause of his people from his various positions within the Government.

He has been a path-breaker for his people in working his way up through public service ranks in a competitive environment until he reached the top - the position from which he was best able to guide the development of policies and programs of value to Aboriginal people.

Charles Perkins believed that one of his most important roles was to keep in close touch with as many individual Aboriginal people, and as many Aboriginal communities, as he possibly could. Accordingly, he travelled extensively, and was able to bring to this and previous governments an invaluable insight into the concerns and attitudes of his people.

This is the context in which Honourable Members should view the reflections in these various inquiry reports on administrative shortcomings in organisational areas for which Mr Perkins has had responsibility.

Madam Speaker, Charles Perkins advised me some time ago that he wished to retire from the public service as soon as possible to pursue an alternative career, and has recently arranged to do so in the normal way through the Public Service Commissioner. I am advised his retirement will take effect from today.

I express, on behalf of the Government, regret that his services as a full-time officer will be lost to the Government, and I hope Honourable Members will join me in wishing him well in his future career.

For the Government's part, it will be actively seeking appropriate opportunities to engage Mr Perkins in appropriate part-time activity so that the wealth of his knowledge and experience is not totally lost to the Commonwealth.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I want to turn to the central issue in all of these inquiries - the quality of administration in Aboriginal Affairs.

I remind the House of the Government's approach set out in my statement of 11 April: that we should draw upon the lessons from these inquiries and look to the future, ensuring that mechanisms are put in place and support provided so that future administration is enhanced.

11.

Since then, steps have been taken in both the Aboriginal Development Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs to respond to findings in the earlier inquiry reports which were addressed in my statement.

In the case of the Aboriginal Development Commission, the adequacy of the Commission's procedures, systems and management controls has been audited by Price Waterhouse in the light of the findings in the earlier inquiries, and the recommendations from Price Waterhouse have now been implemented. A Budget Management Committee and Audit Committee consisting of senior managers have been established in order to strengthen financial management and accountability. The Commission has also established a computer-based reporting system on program and project performance using monitoring indicators similar to those used in its reports to the Senate Estimates Committee. Program and project performance reports are provided regularly to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

In the case of the Department, substantial progress has been made in the development of program budgeting and in the provision of training for implementation of program budgeting and continues to be made in the administration of grant programs.

Ways in which aboriginalisation may be advanced are under discussion with Unions, the Public Service Commission and the Department of Employment, Education and Training.

New guidelines have been issued for official hospitality and for use of consultants; travel practices have been reviewed; and corrective action has been taken in regard to classification matters as recommended by the Department of Finance.

Most importantly, priority has been given to staff development and training which will provide the specialist skills required for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

I conclude by reminding Honourable Members of what I said in this House about ATSIC in my statement on 11 April.

The Government's view then was and still is that this new Commission is the logical and appropriate next step for the advancement of both the great principles of self-management and ministerial accountability.

Noth
repo:
of tl
repo:
ATSI
supp
init
of A

As H
the
repo

Havi
with
as p

I ho
pass
clea
the
abor
abor

13.

Nothing in the earlier inquiry reports, nor in this final report from Mr Menzies, has shifted that belief on the part of the Government. Indeed, as I said in April, the inquiry reports give us encouragement that the proposed structure of ATSIC will be beneficial. As Prime Minister I fully support, and the Government as a whole fully supports, the initiatives the Minister has taken in proposing the creation of ATSIC.

As Honourable Members know, we have made some amendments to the ATSIC legislation in the light of these various inquiry reports and the report of the Senate Select Committee.

Having done so, we are now firmly committed to proceeding with this legislation and establishing this body as quickly as possible.

I hope this House and this Parliament will now accept that passage of this legislation and establishment of ATSIC is clearly in the best interests both of good government and of the necessary advancement of the administration of aboriginal policy and programs for the benefit of the aboriginal people of this country.