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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

13 DECEMBER 1990

JOINT STATEMENT WITH THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS, THE HON ROBERT TICKNER MP

The Government has given in principle support to a framework for advancing a process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the wider community.

The Government wishes to consult with the Opposition and the Australian Democrats before releasing full details of the proposal.

Under the proposal, the Government would establish a Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation composed of prominent Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The Council would play an educative and leadership role in bringing about a deeper understanding of the history, culture, past dispossession and continuing disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Government believes there is considerable agreement in Australia that there needs to be a process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. We believe such a process could lead to an instrument of reconciliation giving formal recognition to the place our indigenous people should hold in Australia. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation would initiate extensive community consultation on this matter and, most importantly, ascertain whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe the reconciliation process would be advanced by the development of a formal instrument.

The Government's desire is that the process of reconciliation and the issues involved be considered thoroughly and thoughtfully by all Australians. We have sought to remove party politics from the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio and foster a bipartisan approach on Aboriginal issues so these important matters can be considered solely on their merits. The Government is pleased that the move has been strongly supported by political leaders across Australia, as well as by church and community groups.

In honouring its commitment to work co-operatively on this issue, I have today contacted the Leader of the Opposition, Dr Hewson, and the Leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Powell, seeking consultation on the detail of the proposal for a process of reconciliation. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will conduct these discussions on behalf of the Government.

He will then initiate further consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and leaders in the wider community before final decisions are taken by the Government.

The Government believes these proposals can build greater bridges of understanding between the first Australians and the wider community. We believe they can forge a better future for all Australians, but a future recognising and respecting the special place in this country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.