



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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JOINT STATEMENT WITH THE MINISTER FOR THE ARTS, TOURISM AND TERRITORIES, DAVID SIMMONS

A major step has been taken by the people of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands toward achieving full mainland standards and conditions of living with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed today by the Prime Minister and representatives of Cocos (Keeling) Community, Haji Wahin bin Bynie OAM, Chairman of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council, and Parson bin Yapat OAM, Chairman of the Cocos Co-operative Society Ltd.

The Memorandum of Understanding marks a significant stage in the integration of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands with Australia.

When the Cocos community voted for integration in 1984 in an United Nations Act of Self Determination, the Government gave a commitment that equivalent mainland standards of living would be introduced for the Cocos Islanders within 10 years.

This Memorandum of Understanding now sets out the remaining measures to be taken by each of the parties towards fulfilment of that commitment. When fully implemented, the people of Cocos will have the same rights, benefits and obligations as mainland Australia.

The agreement affirmed by the MOU signing provides for a broad range of reforms, including major law reform, upgrading of government works and services, and the application of mainland employment conditions, taxes and assistance measures.

For their part, the community has agreed to broaden the role and responsibilities of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Council, in line with the functions carried out by mainland local government, and to restructure the Cocos Co-operative Society along more commercial lines.

The terms of the MOU were developed from the recommendations of the Commonwealth Grants Commission's Second Report on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The Government announced in August last year that it accepted most of the Commission's recommendations, following extensive consultations with the Cocos community.

In setting appropriate standards for delivering services to the community, the Government has decided to adopt Western Australian models, principles and practices as far as possible.

This will provide the community with an identifiable mainland model against which to measure their progress in achieving comparable mainland living conditions.