



PRIME MINISTER

68/93

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P J KEATING MP

**RELEASE OF COMMONWEALTH PRINCIPLES AND DISCUSSION PAPER
ON THE MABO DECISION**

The Commonwealth has today issued a discussion paper on the Mabo decision. It has been prepared by Commonwealth officials at the request of Ministers following extensive consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, State and Territory governments and industry groups.

The paper sets out the legal and other issues which need to be addressed in the wake of the High Court decision and identifies possible responses to the challenges posed by it. The discussion paper provides an analysis of the issues intended to inform and focus discussion. It is not a statement of Government policy, nor is it legal advice.

Included as an Annex to the discussion paper is a framework of suggested key principles, which has been endorsed by Ministers, to guide the development of a response to the implications and uncertainties arising from the decision. It is not our intention that the principles should be seen as an ultimatum or that they should be regarded as set in concrete. We hope they will be a means of lifting public debate to a new and more focussed level.

The High Court has made a landmark decision, and all governments need to come to terms with its consequences. We should view the Mabo decision as a national issue requiring a national response and as an opportunity rather than a problem. There are differing positions, often strongly held, on the questions raised by the High Court decision. This imposes a particular obligation on all Governments to keep open the channels of consultation, to examine proposals on their merits, and to develop a sensible and sensitive package.

The release today of the discussion paper and the principles will, I hope, encourage an informed debate and assist Governments in the development of a response to the High Court decision which is workable and just.

CANBERRA
3 JUNE 1993