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## **PRIME MINISTER**

88/93

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP**

### **MABO - THE TRUTH ABOUT CONSULTATION**

From the moment the High Court handed down its decision the Government has been determined to develop a response in keeping with both the letter and spirit of the Mabo judgement.

As I said in Parliament in June, and on many occasions since, in ending at last the absurd doctrine of *terra nullius* and recognising the dispossession and shameful treatment of indigenous Australians, the Mabo judgement has done all Australians a great service, and created the basis for reconciliation.

Nothing in the Mabo judgement was ever of itself going to deliver justice. It created the basis for justice; but delivering justice depended on the nation's response.

There have been unhelpful reactions from many quarters around the country, but there is no doubt that the great majority of Australians want to see justice delivered and the economic interests of Australia secured.

This is the core of the Government's response and it will form the core of our legislation. The spirit and the letter of the High Court decision will be followed.

Ambit claims and appeals to prejudice will be ignored.

The Government has consulted widely and with goodwill.

The Aboriginal community was the first to be consulted by Government following the Mabo decision. At least 30 members of the Aboriginal community met the Cabinet for almost three hours. A smaller, representative group returned to consult with the Ministerial Committee for two hours. Numerous other meetings have taken place between Commonwealth officials and the Aboriginal community over the past year. I have met Mr Dodson on three occasions for periods of up to an hour in my office. I also met representatives of the Land Councils for more than an hour before last week's Cabinet meeting on Mabo.

These facts expose the accusations of lack of consultation as patently untrue and unworthy of those who made them.

It seems that despite several meetings held in good faith with the Aboriginal community the Government can secure only private decision and agreement which does not translate into public agreement.

If Aboriginal people seek justice and equity they must provide leaders who accept the responsibility of leadership. Some Aboriginal leaders have accepted this responsibility, others, clearly, have not.

The Aboriginal community asked for a right to be consulted. It also asked for proper protections in relation to actions affecting native title and the Commonwealth legislation will provide them. It is therefore patently untrue to say that Aboriginal people's views about development will not be taken into account.

The Government intends to proceed with its legislation which is workable, just and in the long term interests of all Australians. We have a responsibility to deliver justice for past and present wrongs and I am determined to do all I can to see that justice delivered.

But we also have a responsibility to the future of Australia and future generations of Australians, and it is my duty to do all I can to deliver that as well.

As I have said before, a mature, national response to Mabo can deliver both.

SYDNEY  
6 August 1993