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PRIME MINISTER

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

MABO NEGOTIATIONS

I have spent most of today with Aboriginal Land Council and ATSIC representatives over the Mabo issue.

The talks have been positive and constructive from both sides.

Encouraging progress was made - the original 20 or more outstanding issues between the Commonwealth and Aboriginal representatives have now been narrowed to three or four.

While there has been progress, I remain concerned that two or three of the outstanding matters are currently incompatible with elements of the position now emerging in the useful discussions with the States.

On these points the Aboriginal leaders have undertaken to provide a detailed written response as soon as possible.

As I said yesterday, it is the Government's intention to seek passage of the Commonwealth legislation before Christmas this year and to introduce the Bill this month.

Given the progress made over the past 48 hours it is worth exploring every avenue of potential settlement on these outstanding points rather than bring the negotiations to a premature halt.

The Cabinet also met this evening and agreed on a number of details arising from discussions between State and Commonwealth officials today.

I think it is important to note that some Aboriginal leaders who have tonight made statements about the Commonwealth's position were not in any of the meetings over the past 48 hours, and have not accurately reflected the constructive approach of the Commonwealth, nor the significant progress made.

CANBERRA
7 October, 1993