



PRIME MINISTER

155/93

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

NATIVE TITLE BILL - IMPLEMENTATION

The passage of the Native Title Bill is an important step towards justice for Australia's indigenous people.

Australia now has a coherent framework for dealing with native title, as established by the High Court in June 1992.

The Government is moving now to implement the scheme.

The legislation will come into force from 1 January 1994. There will be no hiatus between the cut-off date for validation of past grants and Acts (31 December 1993) and the commencement of operation of the new land management regime. This will provide the certainty sought by the Government and interested parties.

The full institutional structure for determining native title claims and managing dealings affecting native title land, and permanent appointments to those institutions, will be put in place as rapidly as possible in the new year. In the meantime, from 1 January, the President of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal has agreed to act as President of the Native Title Tribunal and the Registrar of the AAT will act as Registrar of the Tribunal. I am grateful to Justice O'Connor and her colleagues for their active help and co-operation in this important national enterprise.

A Task Force in my Department, headed by a Deputy Secretary, supported by other key agencies such as the Attorney-General's Department and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, is already well advanced on arrangements to implement the legislation. In particular, the necessary regulations are being prepared; designated Aboriginal organisations to represent claimants are being identified; discussions are under way with States and Territories willing to co-operate with the Commonwealth scheme on recognition of State and Territory institutions and processes according to the criteria in the Bill; and a range of other matters is being addressed.

The Government is determined to devote the resources and the effort necessary to establish the Native Title framework and to make it work. We wish to do so in co-operation with States and Territories. A national approach remains our clear objective.

The Commonwealth Government is also committed to sharing with co-operating States and Territories the costs of compensation for any necessary validation of past grants and Acts and for administrative and legal expenses. Our intention is to finalise these details early in the new year.

The legislation is constitutionally sound. Any challenge to it would prove fruitless and be counter to the common objective of certainty in land management. The Bill provides every opportunity for States and Territories to retain control of land management as it affects native title, and they should support the Bill.

We now move on to address the wider opportunities presented by Mabo for a just reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. In particular, we will be giving priority to establishing, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the land acquisition initiative provided for in the legislation. The target date for the establishment of the land acquisition arrangements is 1 July 1994.

With the passage of the legislation Australia has an unparalleled opportunity to establish a new era of legal, social and economic justice for the oldest Australians - the original occupants of our country.

CANBERRA
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