



PRIME MINISTER

6/94

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP NATIVE TITLE ACT

Mr Downer's position on abolishing the Native Title Act has revealed that he is a weak leader without vision, without policies and without a commitment to social cohesion and social justice.

Mr Downer saw the opportunity to deliver a cheap political line in Western Australia and took it at the expense of one of the most important pieces of legislation ever enacted in this country.

He is attempting to create damaging uncertainty for what he sees as short term political gain.

He has treated the Aboriginal people with contempt in exchange for some fleeting applause at a party conference. He is clearly trying to be all things to all people and told the Western Australian Liberals what he thought they wanted to hear.

It is a further indication that Mr Downer has no policies and stands for nothing.

What are the implications of Mr Downer's position on Mabo? Is he saying that he does not accept the High Court decision on Native Title? Is he saying that - worse than having no policy - he is simply happy to do what state Premiers, "especially Richard Court", tell him to do? What would he do after the Act was repealed?

What now of his coming PR stunt in the Northern Territory? Will he tell the aboriginal people of the Northern Territory that he is going to wipe out Native Title? Will he tell the aboriginal people that land is no longer important to them? Will he tell them that they can have health and education but they can't have land, either through native title rights or the Land Fund?

Is he going to tell the aboriginal people that Richard Court knows what is best for them?

Mr Downer says he will announce his policies when he wants to, not when the press or I want him to. Apparently, now he plans to announce policies when Richard Court wants him to. Not now, not before the election - but after the election.

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BRISBANE**