



PRIME MINISTER

67/95

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON PJ KEATING MP

JOHN HOWARD'S MEAN SPIRITED POSITION ON ABORIGINAL FLAG

With his mean-spirited position on the flags of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples John Howard has shown he believes their flags should have no official recognition.

He has again demonstrated that he cannot tolerate change.

The Government decided on the 20th of June that the flags of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be proclaimed official flags bringing them into line with at least 22 other flags in Australia.

Flags in this category - such as the Civil Air Ensign, the flag of Norfolk Island, and the Customs flag - are all secondary to the National Flag.

The National Flag will still be flown in the pre-eminent position.

This change means that, for example, it will no longer be a breach of protocol for a young athlete like Cathy Freeman to carry the Aboriginal flag with pride.

Recognition of the flags is an inclusive act. For John Howard to argue that this move is divisive is to suggest that these flags are somehow less worthy than other Australian symbols.

Official recognition of the flags is in line with a unanimous recommendation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in its recent report to the Government on proposed social justice measures. The coalition is represented on the council.

The only person seeking to play politics with flags is Mr Howard.

CANBERRA
4 July 1995