



3

PRIME MINISTER

NAIDOC WEEK

NAIDOC Week is an event of national importance for all Australians.

It is a week to celebrate the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose cultures extend back as far as 50 000 years and are among the most ancient on our planet.

That these cultures continue to exist is reason enough for celebration; but more than that, NAIDOC Week is an occasion for celebrating the unique features that our indigenous cultures contribute to our national identity.

Australia's indigenous arts, crafts and lifestyles, for which there is a growing international appreciation, are continuing to develop a distinct personality for our nation - both as a cultural producer and as a desirable destination. The economic benefits we reap from these developments are unmistakable.

Further, within the general Australian community, there is a growing awareness of what it means to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australian - the *Mabo* decision has done much to encourage this, but so has the increasing interest among younger Australians who are keen to explore the combined history of the peoples who form our nation.

There can be no denying that indigenous Australians are significantly disadvantaged. My Government recognises this fact of life, and is committed to doing everything possible to improve the appalling health, education and employment conditions in many indigenous communities. We will act decisively and responsibly, with regard for the best application of the government's resources, to see real improvements.

NAIDOC Week is a time for putting into practice some of the ideals of reconciliation. I see it as a time for all Australians to acknowledge a very important aspect of our shared contemporary culture.

It is another opportunity to recommit ourselves to an Australia respecting a common set of laws to which all are accountable and from which all are entitled to an equal dispensation of justice.

I encourage all to join in local NAIDOC activities and to share in celebrations which demonstrate the ideal of an inclusive but diverse nation.

9 July 1996