

AUSTRALIAN STATEMENT TO THE 4TH SESSION OF THE
WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS UNDER AGENDA ITEM 4
ON 1 AUGUST 1985

SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE (NAC)

MADAME CHAIR, DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I AM SPEAKING TO AGENDA ITEM 4 UNDER THE HEADING OF "SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE".

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF ABORIGINAL SELF MANAGEMENT CALLS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, AT BOTH THE NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS, IN ORDER THAT THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE MAY ASSERT CONTROL OF ALL ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES.

AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE SELF-DETERMINATION POLICY IS THE INVOLVEMENT OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS IN THE PLANNING, MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY.

THE DEPARTMENT OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS OPERATES WITHIN A VERY LARGE INFRASTRUCTURE OF ORGANISATIONS WHICH PROVIDES SERVICES TO ABORIGINALS.

THERE NOW EXIST SOME 1200 INCORPORATED ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS WHICH UNDERTAKE A WIDE RANGE OF SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY.

MOST ARE RELATIVELY SMALL AND CONCERNED WITH SERVICES AT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY LEVEL.

THE DEPARTMENT'S REGIONAL AND AREA STAFF HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONSULTING RELEVANT ABORIGINAL BODIES TO ASCERTAIN THE NEEDS AND PRIORITIES OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS.

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THE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION AND PROGRAM COORDINATION INVOLVES DISCUSSIONS WITH COMMUNITIES THROUGH A SERIES OF AREA AND REGIONAL COORDINATION CONFERENCES.

REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS AND LOCAL, STATE AND COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES PARTICIPATE IN THESE CONFERENCES.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF ABORIGINALS IN ALL ASPECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS IS FURTHER STRENGTHENED BY PORTFOLIO MEETINGS DESIGNED TO COORDINATE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT AND MAJOR ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS WITHIN THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS' PORTFOLIO.

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PROVIDES FUNDS FOR A LARGE NUMBER OF ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS, MANAGED BY ABORIGINALS, WHICH PROVIDE SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY.

AN INCREASING PROPORTION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S EXPENDITURE ON ABORIGINAL ADVANCEMENT IS BEING CHANNELLED THROUGH THESE ORGANISATIONS.

SOME OF THE MORE IMPORTANT OF THESE ORGANISATIONS ARE: THE ABORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION, ABORIGINAL HOSTELS LTD., ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICES, AND ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICES, AND ABORIGINAL HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS.

THE ABORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION WAS ESTABLISHED ON 1 JULY 1980 TO FURTHER THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLAND PEOPLE AND, IN PARTICULAR, ASSIST THEM TOWARDS SELF-MANAGEMENT AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY THROUGH LAND ACQUISITION, BUSINESS ENTERPRISES AND HOUSING.

IT HAS AN ALL ABORIGINAL BOARD OF TEN MEMBERS.

IT RECEIVED \$66.1M, FROM THE DEPARTMENT IN 1984/85, AND ITS TOTAL INCOME IN 1984/ 85 IS ESTIMATED AT \$81.2M.

ABORIGINAL HOSTELS LTD. WAS INCORPORATED IN 1973.

THE COMPANY PROVIDES HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION IN COMPANY-OWNED AND RUN HOSTELS AND IN "THIRD-PARTY" HOSTELS, WHERE THE COMPANY PROVIDES THE FUNDS, BUT A COMMUNITY GROUP OR ORGANISATION MANAGES THE OPERATIONS.

BOTH CATEGORIES OF HOSTELS PROVIDE ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS IN AREAS SUCH AS HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT TRAINING, EDUCATION AND NURSING CARE FOR THE AGED.

IT OWNS 67 HOSTELS AND PROVIDES FUNDS FOR ANOTHER 103 THIRD-PARTY HOSTELS.

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF BEDS PROVIDED IN THESE HOSTELS IS APPROACHING 4000.

IN 1984/85 ABORIGINAL HOSTELS LTD. RECEIVED \$16.2M FROM THE DEPARTMENT TO ASSIST WITH ITS OPERATIONS.

THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER HEALTH ORGANISATION (NAIHO) IS AN UMBRELLA ORGANISATION REPRESENTING ABORIGINAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA.

NAIHO'S PRINCIPAL ROLE IS TO ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT, ASSIST COMMUNITIES AND PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND CONDUCT OF NATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAMS FOR ABORIGINALS.

IN 1984/85 NAIHO RECEIVED \$600,000 FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS TO ENABLE IT TO ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT ON HEALTH ISSUES AND CONDUCT A REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL TRACHOMA AND EYE HEALTH PROGRAM.

THE DEPARTMENT ALSO PROVIDES FUNDS FOR 43 (ABORIGINAL) COMMUNITY CONTROLLED (AND CONDUCTED) MEDICAL SERVICES WHICH CATER FOR MANY ABORIGINAL HEALTH NEEDS, INCLUDING GENERAL PRACTITIONER, SPECIALIST, DENTAL, NURSING, REFERRAL, SOCIAL WORK AND NUTRITIONAL SERVICES.

IN 1984/85 \$17.0M WAS ALLOCATED FOR FUNDING OF MEDICAL SERVICES, DENTAL SERVICES AND ALCOHOL REHABILITATION CENTRES.

THERE ARE 18 ABORIGINAL (CONTROLLED) LEGAL SERVICES OPERATING FROM 58 OFFICES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA.

IN 1984/85 \$12.3M WAS ALLOCATED FOR LEGAL AID LARGELY TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR THESE SERVICES.

TERMINATION OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE (NAC)

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT REMAINS COMMITTED TO THE VIEW THAT ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS OUGHT TO HAVE A NATIONAL INDEPENDENT REPRESENTATIVE STRUCTURE CAPABLE OF ADVISING THE GOVERNMENT AND PUTTING FORWARD A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON ABORIGINAL ISSUES.

THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS MR CLYDE HOLDING ANNOUNCED ON 2 APRIL THAT HE DID NOT INTEND TO EXTEND THE TERM OF OFFICE OF PRESENT MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE BEYOND 30 JUNE.

THIS FOLLOWED CONSIDERATION OF A REPORT BY DR H.C. COOMBS ON THE ROLE OF THE NAC, WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT IN 1977.

DR COOMBS REPORTED THAT THERE WAS ALMOST UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT BY ABORIGINALS THAT THE NAC IN ITS PRESENT FORM WAS INEFFECTIVE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ABORIGINAL POLITICAL INFLUENCE OR ACTION.

HE CONCLUDED THAT ANY ORGANISATION DESIGNED TO GIVE ABORIGINALS AN EFFECTIVE VOICE ON GOVERNMENT POLICY MUST BE FIRMLY BASED ON, DERIVE ITS ABORIGINAL AUTHORITY FROM, AND BE ACCOUNTABLE TO, LOCAL GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS.

HE RECOMMENDED FURTHER DISCUSSION WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONS AND NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THEM AND THE GOVERNMENT ON A REPLACEMENT ORGANISATION.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE NAC WAS THEREFORE TERMINATED ON 30 JUNE 1985.

A PROMINENT ABORIGINAL, MISS LOIS O'DONOGHUE, CBE, AM, HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO ADVISE THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS ON A NEW CONSULTATIVE STRUCTURE TO BE BASED ON ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND TO DRAW REPRESENTATIVES FROM EXISTING ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS.

MR HOLDING HAS NOW RECEIVED AN INTERIM REPORT FROM MISS LOIS O'DONOGHUE FOLLOWING HER CONSULTATIONS WITH NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES.

AS A RESULT OF THESE CONSULTATIONS SHE HAS OUTLINED IN HER REPORT HOW A NEW NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE ORGANISATION WILL BE STRUCTURED AND DEVELOPED.

IT WAS HER ADVICE, THAT THE CONSENSUS OF OPINION AMONG ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP, WHOM SHE HAD CONSULTED, THAT A FURTHER PERIOD OF CONSULTATION WAS REQUIRED TO ENABLE THE EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW ORGANISATION AND PARTICULARLY ONE WITH WHICH ABORIGINALS WOULD IDENTIFY.

SOME OF THE MATTERS IDENTIFIED BY MISS O'DONOGHUE WILL FIRST HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

MR HOLDING HAS ANNOUNCED INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS UNDER WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONSULT WITH ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES UNTIL A REPLACEMENT CONSULTATIVE ORGANISATION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED.

THE MINISTER SAID HE WOULD CONTINUE TO CONSULT ABORIGINAL PORTFOLIO ORGANISATIONS ON MAJOR MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT MATTERS UNDER PROCEDURES HE HAD ESTABLISHED SINCE BECOMING MINISTER.

WHEN SPECIFIC MATTERS WITHIN THEIR FIELD OF INTEREST ARE LISTED FOR DISCUSSIONS, NATIONAL ABORIGINAL SERVICE ORGANISATIONS WOULD BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PORTFOLIO MEETING.