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MEDIA RELEASE - Canberra, 3 November 1989

*Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Gerry Hand, MP
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 Tel. (062) 72 6207*

ATSIC FINALLY PASSES THROUGH BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) will shortly become a reality, the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Gerry Hand, said today. Mr Hand was speaking after the Government last night agreed to accept Opposition and Democrat amendments and pass the ATSIC legislation in the House of Representatives.

"The Government took the view that the only outcome of rejecting the amendments and sending the legislation back to the Senate would be further delay. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have already been made to wait too long for these important reforms and any further delay is unacceptable," Mr Hand said.

The Minister said the Government was disappointed that the Preamble had been deleted from the ATSIC Bill. "The Government totally rejects the position of the Opposition and the Democrats in this matter. It is our view that we have lost the opportunity to place on record, in enduring form, the Parliament's recognition of the facts of history - that is, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were the prior occupiers and original owners of this land, that they suffered dispossession without compensation and that as a result they have become the most disadvantaged group in Australian society."

Mr Hand said the establishment of ATSIC will begin a new era in the administration of Aboriginal Affairs at a Commonwealth level.

"Change is never easy, but it is essential if we are serious about providing a vehicle for Aboriginal and Islander self-management in this country. ATSIC, especially through the operations of the Regional Councils, will provide such a vehicle. The structure ensures that self-management is put into practice," Mr Hand said.

As previously announced by the Minister, ATSIC will begin as soon as practicable on an interim basis with the appointment of five Aboriginal and Islander Commissioners. Arrangements for the election of Regional Councillors and Commissioners will follow

as quickly as possible after the Interim Commission begins operations.

MAIN FEATURES

ATSIC will replace the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Development Commission. Through ATSIC, Aboriginal and Islander people will have a much greater say in matters affecting them.

WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE

- There will be 20 ATSIC Commissioners who will determine ATSIC policies and advise the Federal Government. Until elections can be held, however, there will be only five Commissioners. All Commissioners will be Aboriginals or Torres Strait Islanders.
- There will be 60 Regional Councils around Australia, elected by Aboriginal and Islander people. These Councils will decide on how funds for many ATSIC programs will be spent in the region and will generally represent the interests of the people in their region. Each Council will have between 10 and 20 Councillors, depending on the size of the Region.
- There are special arrangements for Torres Strait Islanders and one ATSIC Commissioner will come from the Islands.

WHEN IT WILL START

- ATSIC will begin operations on an interim basis early in 1990. Regional Councils elections will be held within the next eight months. Regional Councillors will then elect 17 of the 20 ATSIC Commissioners.
- ATSIC must be fully operational within twelve months of the interim start-up date.

WHAT IT WILL DO

- ATSIC will take over the functions of DAA and ADC. It will not be taking over the functions of other Commonwealth bodies, such as DEET. State and Territory Government bodies will also continue to provide services to Aboriginal and Islander people.

- ATSIC will take over DAA and ADC offices around the country. Later, some office locations may change. The head of ATSIC's administration will be a Chief Executive Officer, and staff of ATSIC will be public servants.
- Another new body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation, will help people to engage or participate in commercial enterprises.

Media Release - Canberra, 13 December 1989

The Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Gerry Hand today announced the Government will be recommending to the Governor-General the appointment of Ms Lois O'Donoghue as the first Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Mr Bill Gray is to be appointed as Chief Executive Officer. The term for both appointees is two years.

Ms O'Donoghue, a descendant of the Yankuntjatjara people, was the first Aboriginal person to enter the Royal Adelaide Hospital as a trainee nurse. She graduated and became a charge nurse at the hospital where she stayed for ten years. In 1967 she was elected Foundation Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Conference and in 1984 was appointed special adviser to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. In 1977 she was awarded the Order of Australia and in 1983 was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to her people. On January 26, 1985 she was made Australian of the Year. In 1988 she was appointed a member of the Order of Australia Council. She was appointed as a Commissioner of the ADC in May 1988 and became the ADC's Chairperson in August, 1989.

Mr Gray has extensive experience covering some 24 years in the Aboriginal Affairs field and has occupied a number of senior positions in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. In his various appointments he has established close working relationships with the Aboriginal community. He has had considerable field experience of Aboriginal living conditions including through his assignments in remote areas of the Northern Territory. In December 1987 he was appointed Chairman of the task force in DAA to oversight planning and implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. He was appointed Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in November 1988.

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