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Editorial

## **ATSIC—THE FUTURE?**

ATSIC will provide a vehicle for Aboriginal viewpoints and direction.

But will government bureaucracy really HEAR what Aboriginal people are saying? With all the time and effort that has gone into Aboriginal affairs over the years including telling us about all the benefits of ATSIC and how a treaty can be signed, have people really HEAR WHAT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE SAYING?

With the scarcity of resources available to us and limited opportunities, we have proven that we are the best ones to do our own work looking after our people. And we have been forced into the position of having to make do while we are under resourced.

ATSIC will continue with the same trend - except that we will have some more say about the use of those scarce resources. The prospects for greater participation in decision making will be there with ATSIC and an opportunity for providing a better direction in Aboriginal affairs is also possible. But will ATSIC really change the face of Aboriginal affairs if the bureaucracies and people in them remain the same and continue to have the same attitude and approach to the way they deal with our lives?

We are in a Catch 22 situation where to be funded we have to be part of ATSIC but then our problem is compounded by the fact that we won't be able to blame anyone else if ATSIC fails. We will find ourselves in a position of turning on ourselves, amongst ourselves, when everybody's needs are not being met.

We can look at what is wrong with ATSIC, the way it was arrived at, continue to disagree about it until another mob of foreigners "own" this country. But it won't make any difference in the short term - because ATSIC IS HERE.

There may be a sense of personal satisfaction, publicly or quietly denigrating the new administration arrangements in Aboriginal affairs. But the thing to remember is that this too will probably change - that is, ATSIC itself and the way people feel about it will change. One sure thing that we as Koories can understand immediately, is that we are going to be continually faced with trying to do the job for our mob without having the true and just means at our disposal to do that job.

Historically we can see the direction of the way things have gone in Aboriginal affairs. We can look at the different approaches that have been taken by governments in trying to come to terms with what is deemed the "Aboriginal problem" and each attempt in trying to come to terms with it has produced some small benefits. But a lot of the problems are still there and are indeed made worse because of the inability of non-Aboriginal people to LISTEN and HEAR and UNDERSTAND what's being said. At this point ATSIC is to be a means or a tool in the direction given to Aboriginal affairs. But we need to remember that whatever it is that governments do to assist us in this country, is based on the lie of "TERRA NULLIUS" and there can be no justice given for the theft of our land. Greater participation and involvement in decision making, program development, the direction of our affairs, are the things that are purported to be the new face of Aboriginal affairs. But will this mean that the people who control the operations of the systems in this country FINALLY HEAR WHAT WE ARE SAYING?

There is a bigger picture for us to see and to make sure we don't lose sight of. That is, regardless of ATSIC and treaty talk, we still need to continue and fight for what we know is right.