

# The Aborigines' voice

Tomorrow's election for the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee will be as important for the Aboriginal people as any election this country has ever had.

The election will be the first of its kind held in Australia. Only members of the Aboriginal and island peoples of Australia are eligible to vote in it and they will cast their votes for 165 candidates. The 41 successful candidates will receive a salary of \$6,000 a year and an allowance of \$3,000 for a term of two years.

The body they will be part of will perform a major advisory function to the Federal Government on matters associated with Aborigines. It will be expected to advise the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and his department on matters of policy and administration, and also to develop policies of its own.

For too long too many Aborigines have been placed in the situation in which they have felt that those representing their interests in Canberra either didn't understand their problems or else were mere Government "yes-men." The selection of this committee should go a long

way towards changing that. It can also be expected to come up with its share of constructive proposals on matters affecting Aborigines. And, further to this, it will be in a strong position for getting things done. Having set the committee up, the Government will find it difficult to ignore its demands.

Even at this stage, however, it is possible to pin-point several potential trouble spots in the functioning of the NACC. One stems from the fact that it will have only an advisory function, and another could result from divisions within its ranks. And it would be absurd to expect the committee to solve the host of intractable problems facing the Aboriginal people. For all that, it is a step in the right direction and it deserves full support.

Another step in the right direction is the South Australian Government's move to surrender to Canberra most of its responsibilities in Aboriginal affairs. Aboriginal policy is a national issue and it needs a national approach. It also needs the sort of funds to which only the Federal Government has access.