

# Aborigines to elect own national body

One of the most significant events in the recent history of the Aboriginal people is due to take place next month.

A national election, being organised from Canberra, for 41 representatives on the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee will commence on November 10.

Enrolments closed on Sunday and at the last count about 37,000 Aborigines had registered to vote in the 41 electorates involving about 270 Aboriginal population centres and reserves from the Torres Strait to Cape Leeuwin.

It will be the first time that Aborigines throughout Australia will have had the chance to elect members of their own race to a national body, which it is thought will meet at least four times a year in Canberra.

Although the election was initiated by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Bryant, its organisation has been mainly the

responsibility of Aborigines themselves, acting in consultation with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

The national co-ordinator of the election, Mr John Moriarty, an Aboriginal in his mid-20s who was seconded from the Department of Labour in March to take up the position, said in his office in Canberra this week that once elected the NACC would enable Aborigines to speak and act on their own behalf.

## Provide direct link

Aborigines would be able to elect their own people to the first democratically elected national

By *TONY O'LEARY*

Aboriginal body in Australia.

It also would provide a direct link between Aborigines and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Government, and would advise the Minister on anything relating to Aboriginal affairs.

He hoped that the NACC would eventually have its own secretariat and budget provided by the Australian Government so that it could operate as an independent body, but this was something which had to be decided by the elected representatives, he said.

Apart from the fact that only Aborigines will participate there are several other aspects which make the election unique.

Because of the vast distances involved and the inaccessibility of many of the electors, voting will be conducted with what have been called roving ballot boxes from November 10 to 24.

## Enrolling electors

About 250 Aborigines have been engaged since early this year enrolling the electors and many of them will again go into the field during the voting period to collect votes.

One of the highlights of the voting period will be an election ball on November 16 which will be attended by the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam. The Premier of South Australia, Mr Dunstan, has also been invited.

Mr Moriarty said that it was hoped the first meeting of the NACC would be held in Canberra, although this was a matter for the newly elected members to decide.

Guidelines for the operation of the NACC had been worked out by a steering committee of 31 but these also would have to be approved by the elected representatives.

The draft constitution of the committee provided for elections to be held every two years.

One of the issues which the committee could consider after the election was the employment of more Aborigines in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

There were only eight employed full-time in the department at present and this number should be increased, he said.

There were enough Aborigines, who, although not academically qualified, were capable of making decisions about their own people and could do a better job than many white people.