

Aborigines seek fund takeover

From MICHELLE GRATTAN

CANBERRA. — The National Aboriginal Consultative Committee wants complete control over the spending of the Federal Government's \$117 million budget for Aboriginal Affairs.

The newly-elected chairman of the NACC (Mr. Bruce McGuinness) said the immediate need was to have control over the \$70 million allocated by the capital fund for loans and grants to Aboriginal enterprises.

But last night the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (Senator Cavanagh) rejected the proposal.

He said the time had not yet come for handing over this responsibility to the committee.

The NACC is holding its second meeting in Canberra this week. The 41-member committee was elected by Aborigines late last year to advise the Government on Aboriginal policy.

It is understood the committee's call for control over Aboriginal Affairs funds was not a motion but a general expression of opinion.

The meeting passed two main motions yesterday. One was to re-name itself the National Aboriginal Congress and the other was to adopt in principle an interim constitution.

Mr. McGuinness said the ultimate aim of the congress would be to make the Department of Aboriginal Affairs its secretariat.

The capital fund for Aboriginal enterprises would be administered by the department acting on the advice of the congress.

Pressure from the NACC is clearly going to be a further embarrassment to the Government, which has stressed Aborigines' autonomy in their affairs and has been forced to commit itself to the importance of the NACC.

Yesterday the NACC met for two hours with the



Mr. McGuinness

matters affecting Aboriginal welfare were discussed.

It is understood the Aborigines were angry that Senator Cavanagh is not spending more time with them during their five-day meeting.

Senator Cavanagh said last night he hoped the time would come when, by its demonstration of responsibility, the NACC could justify the Government handing over control to it of all Aboriginal expenditure.

"But the time hasn't arrived for that yet," he said.

"If they'd showed responsibility as an Aboriginal parliament, they'd be better equipped to spend the funds than the white parliament."

He would not predict when the time might come for the funds to be handed over to the NACC.

"I'm not of the belief that it will be done in the immediate future.

"At present I don't think handing over control of the funds would meet the requirements of the Treasury or the Auditor-General," he said.