

I'M READY TO QUIT — DEPT. BOSS

CANBERRA. — The permanent head of the Aboriginal Affairs Department, Mr Barrie Dexter, has offered to resign in favor of anyone considered "more competent" to do the job.

But Mr Dexter said today that this was not because of the Charles Perkins dispute or allegations that Mr Dexter was a "racist."

"There is nothing I would like more than to give up the job," Mr Dexter said.

"It is a killer and if I stay in it for 10 years I will not be here."

"It is 'killing' a lot of others too—two people in the department have had nervous breakdowns," Senator Cavanagh said.

Mr Dexter is expected to decide on Monday whether to charge aboriginal public servant Charles Perkins with a breach of the Public Service Act for having called the Liberal and Country Parties the most racist in the world.

Right

Mr Perkins has refused to apologise for his remark.

Yesterday, Mr Dexter walked out of a meeting in his office with members of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, which said they would support Mr Perkins' right to speak out.

Mr Dexter left the room when the committee chairman, Mr Eddie Bennell, used the term "racist" to Mr Dexter.

Mr Bennell said today that Mr Dexter had told him he was not concerned about what Mr Bennell thought.

Mr Bennell said: "I said to Mr Dexter: 'Does this put you in the category of a racist?'"

But Mr Dexter said today that to the best of his recollection Mr Bennell had called him a "racist" after Mr Dexter said that the same public service rule must apply to both black as well as white public servants.

Mr Dexter said that he made it clear to the consultative committee that he took "the greatest account of their views on the Perkins issue as on any other."

Asked what he said to the accusations that he was a racist, Mr Dexter said: "My defence is my life."

Mr Dexter, 53, has been director of Aboriginal Affairs since 1957.

"But I will not abandon ship half-way through."

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Cavanagh, said today he knew that Mr Dexter was prepared to resign if the Minister believed there was someone more suitable for the job.

But Senator Cavanagh said: "I have complete faith in Mr Dexter."

"I think he is one of the most sincere and hard-working men in the public service."

Senator Cavanagh said he knew the job was "killing" Mr Dexter because of the pressure of work in a short staffed department and "unrealistic demands" made upon it by some aboriginals.

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