

Aboriginal committee Cavanagh faces an uneasy truce

CANBERRA, Tuesday. — An uneasy truce exists between the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Cavanagh, and leaders of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee after their meeting today.

The NACC leaders have agreed to continue the body's advisory role until the Government constitution to form a National Aboriginal Congress has considered recommendations and a new gress.

In a short statement after the meeting, Senator Cavanagh said any questions that might arise if the Government rejected the altered constitution would be for decision by NACC delegates.

However, the acting president of the NACC, Mr Bruce McGuinness, made it clear that the group would want to take part ultimately in decision-making and control of funds.

Seven members of the NACC, four more than expected, met Senator Cavanagh for more than an hour.

The dispute has arisen over the committee's renaming itself the National Aboriginal Congress and appointing nine "ministers," who would have some executive responsibility.

Mr McGuinness said Senator Cavanagh would probably receive the recommendations and new constitution in April.

The nine "ministers" would meet in Canberra next week to review recent events and complete a policy for submission to the Government.

Senator Cavanagh had told committee representatives that the Government could fund an advisory body, but not an executive group. Payments to the committee would continue meanwhile.

Senator Cavanagh spoke to the head of his department, Mr B. Dexter, before today's meeting, apparently discussing a Treasury report on the matter. At the weekend, he threatened to withdraw funds from the committee.

Mr McGuinness said that when the new constitution came through, the committee's role would still be advisory as far as the Government was concerned. "But we must have a dual role. We cannot operate just as a tool of the Government," he said.

Speaking on a television interview last night, Senator Cavanagh said he was fairly sure NACC did not represent the opinions of the majority of the Aboriginal electorate.

Letters, telegrams and telephone calls he had received indicated this.



The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Cavanagh (left), shakes the hand of the president of the National Aboriginal Council, Mr B. McGuinness, at Parliament House yesterday.