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COMMISSION QUEENSLAND**

Media Release

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Mabo's warrior-like leadership still needed 17 years on from landmark case

Tomorrow's 17th anniversary of the landmark Mabo native title decision remains a cause for celebration but Mabo's warrior-like leadership is still needed to secure improvements to the Native Title Act and the flow on benefits this will bring to Indigenous people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said today.

"The 'promise' of the Mabo case and the significance of the High Court overturning the long held legal untruth of Terra Nullius has not fulfilled the expectations of many," Commissioner Calma said.

"The native title system continues to disappoint many Indigenous people, characterised often by long, exhausting and painful experiences for the claimants.

"The majority of claims remain unresolved, with the system grinding along endlessly. Some have been afoot for over 15 years now, and the National Native Title Tribunal says, at the current rate, it will take 30 years or more to determine native title across the country."

On the eve of the anniversary of the Mabo decision, Mrs Bonita Mabo called for the day to be nominated a public holiday, with a theme of reconciliation of all Australians.

"It makes me very sad that we seem to be forgetting how hard we had to struggle to get to where we are today; what better day than 3 June to celebrate these achievements," Mrs Mabo said.

Mrs Mabo expressed concern that 17 years on from the High Court's decision, Indigenous peoples are still struggling to gain recognition for their human rights in Australia.

"Aboriginals, Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders should work together to continue to fight for our rights, just as Eddie and others did to gain native title. A day of national recognition would remind people of the need to work together for reconciliation," Mrs Mabo said.

"The Mabo decision was a gigantic step forward but Australia must remain committed to the long journey towards building stronger relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians based on honesty, acknowledgement and understanding."

Commissioner Calma, who is nearing the end of his five-year term as Social Justice Commissioner will deliver the prestigious Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland's 3rd biennial Mabo Oration in Queensland on Friday evening (5 June), entitled "*From self-respect comes dignity, and from dignity comes hope: Meeting the challenge of social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*"

Media contact: Louise McDermott (for Tom Calma) 0419 258 597

MaryBeth Gundrum (for Mrs Mabo and Commissioner Susan Booth, Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland) 0439 676 364 | TTY 1300 130 680