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Human Rights
Commission**
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**ANTI DISCRIMINATION
COMMISSION QUEENSLAND**

Media Release

5 June 2009

From self-respect comes dignity and from dignity comes hope

Seventeen years have passed since the Mabo case overturned the long-held legal untruth of *terra nullius* in Australia, but many more truths still remain to be embraced if we are to honour the legacy of Koiki Mabo, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. Tom Calma will say tonight when he delivers the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission's prestigious *Mabo Oration 2009*.

Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Susan Booth said the third Mabo oration is a continuation of a national dialogue on Indigenous rights that began with Noel Pearson's oration in 2005.

"The Mabo Oration is an opportunity for Queenslanders to listen to leaders in Indigenous rights — Tom Calma speaks of dignity and hope for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a goal that the Queensland commission supports and works towards."

Commissioner Calma will deliver the Oration with an overarching theme about self-evident truths in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. He will focus on the need to build stronger relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians based on honesty, acknowledgment and understanding.

"Eddie Mabo spoke about a fundamental truth. It is the truth that the land we now call Australia was occupied when the British came here and that the land (and the seas) continued to be cared for, occupied, utilised and identified as the land of different tribal groups, operating in accordance with their customary laws and traditions," Commissioner Calma will say.

Commissioner Calma will say in his Oration that a lack of reality and grounding in Indigenous policy-making too often goes unnoticed, and that it is most often Indigenous people who are blamed when new initiatives fail.

He will say fundamental issues remain to be addressed including: ensuring Indigenous participation in decision making that affects Indigenous people; adequately protecting Indigenous human rights; ensuring education is available to all Indigenous children; being proactive about crime prevention by investing in Indigenous communities; and seeing native title as a core part of the social justice agenda.

"Regrettably, the reality is that we cannot put our hands on our hearts and say with any conviction that current Indigenous policy adequately addresses the fundamentals I have listed," Commissioner Calma will say.

"These truths, while they are self-evident, will not go away."

"Sometimes we reach a point where opportunities open up for us to seriously reflect on why we do the things we do. We are at one of those moments at present," he will say.

Commissioner Calma will say that the *Apology* was such a momentous event because it recognised the truth and was offered with generosity of spirit.

“The *Apology* showed, for just one day, what a united Australia looks like when we squarely acknowledge our history and share our pain,” he will say.

“It showed that ultimately, whether you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, or not, our futures are inextricably bound together by the common threads of dignity, respect and hope.

“Ultimately, a system built on discrimination or dispossession is a house of cards.

“Such a system is not a stable basis for a society and will not guarantee sustainability and cohesion into the future.”

He will tell an expected audience of 1200 people that governments need to develop genuine and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“This requires developing relationships across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities themselves so governments hear what matters to people.”

Commissioner Calma will deliver the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland’s 3rd Biennial Mabo Oration in Queensland tonight, Friday 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*’.

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