

AUSTRALIA - PAPUA NEW GUINEA

RATIFICATION OF THE TORRES STRAIT TREATY \*

The Papua New Guinea Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr John Giheno, MP, and the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Bill Hayden, MP, announced that they had exchanged instruments of ratification which had the effect of bringing the Torres Strait Treaty into force today, 15 February 1985.

The ratification ceremony held at the National Parliament Building in Port Moresby was attended by the Minister for Primary Industry, The Hon. Rabbie Namaliu CMG, MP, from Papua New Guinea, by the Australian Ministers for Primary Industry, Mr John Kerin, MP, and for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Clyde Holding, MP, and by representatives of the traditional inhabitants of the Torres Strait area from both countries.

The Ministers recalled that, when Papua New Guinea became independent, both governments had committed themselves to reaching an equitable and permanent settlement of the many social, legal, political and economic questions involved in the area between Papua New Guinea and Australia, including the Torres Strait. Following upon a period of intensive negotiations, the Treaty was signed on 18 December 1978. Novel and complex implementing legislation had then to be prepared and passed by the Parliaments of Papua New Guinea, Australia and Queensland before the Treaty could be ratified.

The Ministers said that the Treaty establishes the maritime boundaries between Papua New Guinea and Australia and provides for an equitable distribution of fisheries and seabed resources. A feature of the Treaty to which both their Governments attached importance is the protected zone established by the Treaty which will protect the way of life and livelihood of the traditional inhabitants of the Torres Strait area.

The Ministers noted that the Treaty makes detailed provision for consultation between the two countries on all matters relating to its implementation. They said that both their Governments were determined that consultations with all parties concerned would continue to be pursued actively to ensure the effective implementation of the Treaty. A Joint Advisory Council would be established on which the local inhabitants of the Torres Strait area would have a significant voice. The Council would keep the implementation of the Treaty under review and report to the two Foreign Ministers.

They regarded the ratification of the Treaty as an historic milestone in the course of the continuing development of the close and co-operative relations between two neighbours.

\* (This is the text of a joint statement issued on 15/2/85 by the Foreign Ministers of PNG and Australia).