



Aborigine admits 'we never took treaty seriously'

By ANNA GRUTZNER

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ABORIGINES had never taken seriously a treaty between black and white Australians, a key member of the Aboriginal body charged with organising treaty consultations said yesterday.

An executive member of the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations, Mr Gary Foley, also denied a \$500,000 grant from the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) had been intended for treaty discussions, saying the money was to have been spent on talks about the proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

And he accused the Government of freezing the coalition's funds because it was running scared of the Opposition after the spate of allegations of mismanagement at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs late last year.

Mr Foley's attack on the Government throws into further doubt the future of the proposed treaty, negotiations for which were announced by the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, at the Barunga festival last June.

"A treaty's never had any credence with black Australia. We've never taken the proposition of a treaty seriously. You go into any community and people ask, 'what treaty?'" Mr Foley said.

He told *The Australian* Aborigines were more interested in land rights and economic independence than a treaty.

Another of the three coalition executives, the general manager of Tranby Aboriginal College, Mr Kevin Cook, said: "If people don't want it, then it's no good drawing up a treaty."

But he said the consultation process must continue until the views of all Aboriginal communities had been considered.

The coalition hopes to meet the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Hand, later this month to demand a resumption of funding.

Mr Foley said: "They're too

timid to do anything (with funding) because they're frightened of the Liberals."

The chairman of the ADC, Mrs Shirley McPherson, and her former general manager, Mr Mick O'Brien, told a Senate estimates hearing last October that the ADC had decided to give Tranby College, which has close links with the coalition, \$500,000 to conduct consultations on the treaty.

But Mr Foley said: "There were proposals for this new ATSIC. That was the real substance of what the coalition was meant to be convening meetings about."

The three ADC commissioners assigned to monitor the treaty funds could not be

contacted yesterday.

Mr Cook said Tranby had received only \$100,000 for two meetings last year on the treaty, at which the ATSIC had also been discussed.

The Opposition yesterday accused Mr Hand of snubbing traditional elders for failing to set up the treaty committee agreed to at Barunga.

"Whether the treaty was a con-job or an example of the minister's administrative inability, the Hawke Government should recognise that it raised expectations and its separatist policies have had a serious negative impact on race relations in 1988," the Opposition spokesman on Aboriginal affairs, Mr Chris Miles, said.