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Islanders want out

TORRES Strait Islanders yesterday voted "wholeheartedly" to secede from Australia, a spokesman said.

Magan Malu Kess spokesman Steve Mam said from Thursday Island the decision was made at a meeting of the Island Coordinating Council.

Magan Malu Kess is an umbrella organisation representing Torres Strait Islanders who live on the mainland.

Mr Mam said the islands had been getting "crumbs" from Australia for too long.

**By CHARLES HAPPELL
in Canberra**

"We don't even get half a loaf of bread," he said.

"We're now looking at the full loaf of bread and the factory."

Mr Mam said a meeting attended by 400 delegates representing the residents of the 12 major islands of the Torres group would continue tomorrow so some of the legal implications of the decision could be clarified.

Delegates will consider plans to lodge compensation claims worth \$500 billion with the Federal Government.

The 1986 Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show the Torres Strait Islands have a population of 6821, including 4837 ethnic islanders.

The islands, which form part of Queensland, stretch from the tip of Cape York to the Papua New Guinea coast.

Council chairman Mr George Mye said many islanders felt the area could become self-sufficient if it became a separate nation with its lucrative fishing, oil and mining industries.

But, he said income from the industries was going back to Australia.

The Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Mr Hand, is said to be

monitoring the situation "very closely."

A spokesman for the Attorney-General, Mr Bowen, said section 123 of the Constitution indicated that for the secession plans to succeed, they must be approved by Queensland voters, and the Queensland and Federal Parliaments.

It is believed the French Government is also keeping a careful eye on proceedings.

The French will undoubtedly try to embarrass the Federal Government, which supports the Kanak independence movement in New Caledonia, if it rejects the islanders' call for independence.