

23rd January 1988

# Hand for talks with islanders

By DENNIS ATKINS  
THE Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Mr Hand, is flying to Torres Strait today for talks on the islanders' demand for independence from Australia.

Mr Hand decided to go to Torres Strait after talks with the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke.

The islanders voted to secede from Australia and have demanded both immediate talks with Mr Hawke and Mr Hand and made a substantial compensation claim.

Mr Hand plans to stay on Thursday Island until tomorrow afternoon but his schedule is being kept flexible in case he needs to stay longer.

Mr Hand is meeting representatives of the Islanders Co-ordinating Council and will discuss their demand to secede.



● Mr Hand ... island talks.

The islanders accepted that Mr Hawke would not accompany Mr Hand.

Mr Hand said he would not comment further on the claim by the islanders until after the talks on Thursday Island.

And in Port Moresby, Prime Minister Pias Wingti has ruled out any Papua New Guinea government support for moves by Torres Strait islanders to secede from Australia.

The islands were part of Australia and the islanders were Australians, Mr

Wingti said yesterday on his return from Indonesia.

He said his government would not talk to any delegation from the islands.

"It's an internal matter for the Australian Government to decide. I don't see that as a very important issue," he said.

"The Torres Strait islanders are part of Australia and that's a fact we've got to recognise."

Mr Wingti's decision to turn his back on the latest Melanesian secession movement is consistent with his government's hands-off policy in dealing with its near neighbors.

While his government is a vocal critic of French policies and a supporter of Melanesian independence in New Caledonia, it denies support for Melanesian guerrillas opposing Jakarta's rule in Irian Jaya, which Mr Wingti has acknowledged as an "integral part of Indonesia".