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## Clark must not return: ATSIC man

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ATSIC commissioner Kim Hill has broken ranks from his fellow board members, saying that Geoff Clark should not return as chairman of the peak indigenous body.

Mr Hill, who was not at last week's board meeting that called unanimously for Mr Clark's reinstatement as chief of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, said yesterday his return would not be in the interests of indigenous people.

"I was totally surprised by that call," he said. "Geoff has said enough and done enough damage to ATSIC and the representation of Aboriginal people in this country."

Several ATSIC commissioners said they had called for Mr Clark's reinstatement because of the lacklustre performance of acting chairman Lionel Quartermaine, who was handed the commission's top job soon after Mr Clark was suspended in August for "misbehaviour". Mr Quartermaine hit back yesterday at critics who said his timidity and lack of political savvy were harming the indigenous cause. He also invited more feedback on his efficacy.

"As leader, I have shown a willingness to consider new ideas and to grasp the nettle of change, and I will not be diverted by any petty bickering or backbiting," he said in a statement yesterday.

Five ATSIC commissioners this week criticised Mr Quartermaine's leadership style. Only one of them was prepared to say he had done a good job in the role.

Commissioners cited concern that ATSIC's advocacy had waned under Mr Quartermaine's tenure, accused him of failing to consult widely on matters and said he lacked understanding of important indigenous issues.

Said one: "I just think he's done a very, very ordinary job. We need someone who will lead us away from the cliff we are heading towards."

Mr Quartermaine rejected their criticisms yesterday as "media-driven bickering".

"Everyone has their own views of leadership," he said.

"For my part, bold and good leadership includes being prepared to lead debate, tackle hard issues, think strategically -- and be open to constructive criticism."

Mr Quartermaine's biggest policy foray as acting chair was his call for the introduction of a smart card that would quarantine part of a family's welfare payments to buying clothing, food or education.

The suggestion drew heated criticism from other indigenous leaders, who said it would herald a return to the bad old days of rations.

“I look forward to hearing from anyone who wants to convey their views to me, and I would welcome an open discussion at the next board meeting about these issues,” he said.

A day after a court upheld his conviction obstructing police during a pub brawl last May, Mr Clark persuaded the board to urge the Howard Government to restore him to office.