



Indigenous Affairs ministry not the answer: Pearson

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One of Australia's most prominent Indigenous leaders has rejected the Federal Opposition's calls for Indigenous affairs to become a separate ministry.

The director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, Noel Pearson, has told ABC's *Insiders* program the focus should be on reducing government involvement in Aboriginal communities, and encouraging individual responsibility.

Mr Pearson says Labor's approach has failed in the past.

"We are going back to the old Department of Aboriginal Affairs," he said.

"If we think that's a new idea, we did that in the 70s and 80s.

"Indeed, we moved to ATSIC because of the shortcomings of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs alone. "I reckon it is a neither here nor there debate."

Mr Pearson backed the Prime Minister's approach to Indigenous affairs, outlined at the Reconciliation Australia conference last week. On Monday, John Howard said he recognised the importance of symbolism to Aboriginal people in the reconciliation process. He also gave a commitment not to wind back land rights, and described Aboriginal health figures as "unacceptable".

Mr Pearson says the speech marks a major shift in direction. "This has been one of the most under-reported speeches in the history of Howard's Prime Ministership," he said. "I think the shift that happened on Monday this week has been fundamentally tectonic in its significance because the Prime Minister has affirmed very clearly that symbols and practical reconciliation, as he has called it, both must occur."