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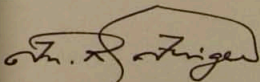
CABINET DECISION

NO. 2440

Submission No.: 2056

Title: ESTABLISHMENT OF A ZOO AT BERRY SPRINGS

Cabinet approved in principle the allocation of \$4M over the next five years for the construction of the Berry Springs Zoo subject to normal budgetary considerations.



(M.R. FINGER),
Secretary to Cabinet.

29/30 July, 1982.

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THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

Copy No. 1CONFIDENTIALFOR CABINETSUBMISSION NO. 2056

Title:	Establishment of a zoo at Berry Springs.
Cabinet Member:	The Honourable P.A.E. Everingham, M.L.A., Chief Minister.
Purpose:	To recommend the funding for the development of Stage 1 of a zoo in the area acquired for that purpose in the Berry Springs area near Darwin.
Relation to existing policy:	Conforms with existing policy.
Timing/legislative priority:	N/A
Announcement of decision, tabling, etc.:	It would be appropriate for a statement to be issued after the budgetary decision has been made.
Action required before announcement:	N/A
Staffing implications, numbers and costs, etc.:	As indicated in Cabinet submission No. 852, it is envisaged that 9 additional staff will be required to supplement the 3 staff presently engaged at Yarrowonga Zoo. It would be useful, almost critical, to the project if the superintendent could be recruited early in the developmental stages of the project.
Total cost:	\$2.5 million

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THE ISSUES

1. This submission seeks the approval of Cabinet for funding in the order of \$2.5 million over the next 3 financial years for the construction of Stage 1 of a zoo at Berry Springs.

BACKGROUND

2. Several small privately owned zoos have operated in the Territory at various times. None have been of good standard or been successful. The Government assumed responsibility for Yarrowonga Zoo upon the death of the owner in 1974 and this has been operated by the Conservation Commission ever since. The facilities have been upgraded to a modest level but the site is not suitable nor of sufficient size for the development of a good quality zoo.
3. In 1979 the Commission briefed Dr. Peter Crowcroft, former Director of Taronga Park Zoo in Sydney, to prepare a report outlining realistic objectives and criteria for a Darwin Zoo.
4. An area of land adjacent to the Berry Springs Nature Park was subsequently recommended for the development of a zoo. By Decision No. 997 of 19.12.79, Cabinet -
 - (a) approved the establishment of a Top End Zoo on the site selected near Berry Springs;

- (b) approved that immediate steps be taken to acquire the freehold land involved to allow forward planning to proceed;
- (c) agreed to the preparation of detailed plans for the zoo, construction of which will be funded through the normal budgetary process; and
- (d) agreed that any public announcement of this decision be left to the discretion of the Chief Minister.

Legal problems were experienced in the acquisition of the freehold block, but, except for minor formalities, acquisition is now complete.

- 5. Dr. David Butcher, Assistant Director, Zoological Board of N.S.W. and O.I.C. Western Plains Zoo, Dubbo, has been retained to assist the Commission with project development. He has prepared a concept plan and some preliminary site works have been carried out.
- 6. The design concept proposed is that of an open range zoo, that is, large enclosures of natural appearance without fences or bars set in attractive bushland. The site includes an attractive lagoon, is well timbered and has a range of interesting natural features that can be developed. (See attachment A)

Visitor access proposed allows for driving through or using walking tracks and cycle paths for closer enjoyment of particular features. Although educational aspects of such a zoo are important, the major emphasis is on visitor recreation, with the provision of an information centre, kiosk, toilets, picnic areas, etc.

Rationalisation of existing boundaries with the Berry Springs Nature Park will be necessary and amendments will be required to the Plan of Management for the Berry Springs Nature Park. These should not be difficult.

7. CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES

All other Australian States have large public zoos. With the exception of the Western Plains Zoo at Dubbo, these were all established many years ago along traditional lines. Animals are confined behind bars in artificial surroundings, and exotic animals not native to Australia are featured.

Today, a zoo like that would cost too much to build and operate and people now like to see animals in a free and natural condition. Other Australian and overseas zoos are trying to move into the open range system and emphasize Australian Animals.

A reasonable standard display featuring a modest collection of exotic animals such as large carnivores, elephants, etc. at Berry Springs would be costly to develop and maintain and would provide poor competition for the larger and longer established collections of southern zoos. We have an opportunity to adopt a unique emphasis on Australian fauna.

8. Tropical wildlife is one of the major attractions for both tourists and residents of the Top End. An opportunity exists to capitalise on this and feature species native to the north and those introduced feral animals such as buffalo, Bali cattle, Timor ponies, donkeys and deer.

The proposed open range Berry Springs Zoo could reflect the very real pride of the average Territorian in our abundant local, natural heritage. It would be a prime addition to the tourist resources of the region; an important education resource for schools and a major recreation facility for local people.

OPTIONS

9. The option of not proceeding with the development of a zoo but of continuing with the existing facilities at Yarrowonga is not recommended. Public expectation has been geared to a major development at Berry Springs and

strong support has been forthcoming from organisations such as the Darwin River and Berry Springs Progress Association. The Yarrowonga site does not allow for development as a prime tourist attraction.

10. It therefore appears that there are three options open to government and they are:

10.1 Allow private enterprise to undertake the development of a major zoo, either in association with Government on this project or entirely independently as part of some other proposal.

10.2 Approve the development of an open range zoo featuring a unique display of Territory Wildlife at an overall development cost of \$4 million.

10.3 Proceed with a lesser development with significant reduction in initial development cost as Stage 1 of a zoo which could be later expanded to a total development as indicated in 10.2.

CONSIDERATION OF THE OPTIONS

11. Involvement of private enterprise

There have been several promotions by private interests to establish zoo and associated developments in the

Northern Territory. The most recent of these was a proposed safari park by Mr. Robb Mann of Nimrod Safaris and one that is operating is Crocodile Farm N.T. The Berry Springs proposal if properly planned, would complement rather than compete with these enterprises. Experience Australia wide has demonstrated a notable lack of success by private entrepreneurs in the establishment and operation of zoos with a wide diversity of exhibits. The direct income generating potential of such zoos is low, generally barely sufficient to cover operating costs, let alone service capital. Zoos that display a wide spectrum of fauna are associated with high capital costs, complex management, limited income and are usually public sector projects. Private animal displays are generally an adjunct to some other commercial activity and not meant to complement the tourist industry in general or provide public education and recreation at reasonable cost. This option is not recommended.

12. Proceed with the development of an open range zoo at an estimated overall development cost of \$3.9 million over 3 years.

Although more costly in the short term this option could be less expensive in the end. It would result in a unique, high class and significant public resource and tourist attraction in Northern Australia.

13. Proceed with a lesser development

If the initial development cost of \$3.9 million over three years was of major concern, an alternative may be for Cabinet to approve the total concept in principle, with initial development of \$2.5 million over three years and completion of development in subsequent years after the zoo had been opened to the public. This could be achieved by postponing the construction of some expensive elements, such as the nocturnal house and the reptile house and by staging development in other areas.

This option is recommended.

PUBLIC IMPACT

14. It can be expected that the zoo will receive considerable and enthusiastic public support. Public support has already been indicated. There will be some opposition to the consequent closure of Yarrowonga. A positive public information campaign will be required to defuse the issue of closure of Yarrowonga. This should incorporate proposals for improved public transport to Berry Springs, possibly operated by private enterprise and might include both scheduled bus services and a harbour ferry service.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

15. Development costs

Cabinet Submission 852 of 1979 indicated overall

development costs in the order of \$2 million. More detailed estimates and cost increases since then project a more realistic total estimate of \$4 million. This estimate has been prepared with a view to reducing costs at all opportunities, including the use of existing Commission resources for earthworks and basic roadworks. It compares favourably with the overall development costs of the only other major zoo constructed in Australia in recent times: the open range zoo in Dubbo in 1976 at a cost of approximately \$3 million. The development of Stage 1 over the next 3 years is estimated at \$2.5 million.

Provisional breakdown of costs subject to finalisation of design is provided at attachment B.

16. Development would span 3 years and if commenced in 1982-83, the zoo could be opened to the public in late 1985. The cash flow requirement for Stage 1 would be -

1982 - 83	1983 - 84	1984 - 85
\$900,000	\$900,000	\$700,000

17. Operational Costs

At least for the first few years some operational subsidy will be required. Revenue will include gate takings of about \$150,000 per annum based on projected

visitor numbers of 50,000 per annum at an average entrance fee of \$3 per head (i.e. \$4 per adult, \$2 per child or pensioner).

Further income will also be generated by the operation of a kiosk, souvenir shop, hire of bicycles which may involve sub contract to private enterprise.

Animal feed costs will be one of the most significant annual operating costs and these can be partially defrayed by the production from 80 ha of irrigated pasture within the zoo. The summary of projected annual operating costs is -

	<u>Costs</u>		<u>Income</u>
Salaries	\$180,000	Entrance fees	\$150,000
Operational	<u>200,000</u>	Kiosk and other	<u>\$ 50,000</u>
Total	<u>\$380,000</u>	Total	<u>\$200,000</u>

Initial annual subsidy \$180,000. In future years it is anticipated that the operational subsidy would gradually reduce and might eventually reach zero.

EMPLOYMENT CONSIDERATIONS

18. In order to manage the zoo seven days a week, a minimum complement of 9 staff will be required. This includes the three existing at Yarrawonga, leaving a net

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14.

requirement for 6 additional staff. Provision should be made for the early recruitment of the O.I.C. during the development of the project. The remaining staff will not be required until after construction.

19. The zoo will create further employment opportunities in private enterprise, directly related to increased tourist activity.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

20. No significant effects are anticipated on Commonwealth or local government.

CO-ORDINATION AND CONSULTANCY

21. The Departments of Lands and Mines and Energy were consulted during the preparation of Cabinet Submission No. 852 with respect to the land acquisition and mining exploration licences respectively. Comments were also solicited from other Departments as well.

PUBLICITY

22. A press statement could be issued at the time of approval of funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

23. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the allocation of \$2.5 million over the next 3 years for the construction of Stage 1 of the Berry Springs Zoo.

BERRY SPRINGS ZOO CONCEPT PLAN

LEGEND

- Boundary fence
- Major public road and parking area
- Service road
- High existing water main
- Water main
- Utilities and structures
- Utility
- Well
- Service area
- Emergency treatment
- Major terrace area
- Existing roads
- Proposed road
- Proposed road (existing structure)
- Proposed site for new water
- Proposed site for treatment
- Proposed site
- Major lot park
- Possible new access system

- Acoustic shield
- Recreation house
- Reception house
- Administration building
- Animal exhibit
- Large animal exhibit
- Managers and facilities
- Event organization



BERRY SPRINGS
NATURE PARK



ATTACHMENT B

TOTAL CAPITAL WORKS ESTIMATE - BERRY SPRINGS ZOO

	<u>OPTION</u>	<u>OPTION</u>
	<u>10.2</u>	<u>10.3</u>
		(Stage 1)
Fence Boundary - 10 km	\$ 315,000	315,000
Reservoir	20,000	20,000
Pipe line 7 km 150mm, 2 km 200mm, 8 km 100mm	540,000	270,000
Sprinklers	100,000	50,000
Two pumps	200,000	100,000
Sewerage	90,000	90,000
Electrical supply and reticulation	450,000	450,000
Drainage, roadworks, carpark	900,000	615,000
7 km sealed visitors road		
6 km gravelled service road		
Visitors centre	150,000	-
Toilets 4	160,000	80,000
Kiosk, picnic areas and barbecues	140,000	140,000
Service and storage buildings	180,000	180,000
 <u>Exhibit enclosures</u>		
Large Australian animals, feral ungulates	140,000	70,000
Bustards exhibit	20,000	20,000
Water holding structures	50,000	50,000
Aviaries and rainforest walkways	50,000	50,000
Mangroves and crocodiles	30,000	-
Aquatic exhibit	150,000	-
Nocturnal house	250,000	-
Reptile house	50,000	-
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	\$3,985,000	\$2,500,000