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CABINET DECISION

NO. 345

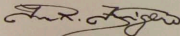
Submission No.: 300

Title:

PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A MACDONNELL RANGES
NATIONAL PARK AS A PLANNING INITIATIVE

Cabinet decided that a more concise submission giving particular consideration to the financial aspects of the proposal should be submitted to Cabinet within 28 days.

Cabinet also directed that assurances should be sought, in advance, that should the area be purchased by the Northern Territory Government, it would not immediately become subject to Aboriginal land claims.



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

5 JULY 1978

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THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

Copy No. 1

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FOR CABINET

SUBMISSION NO. 300

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| Title: | A PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A MACDONNELL RANGES NATIONAL PARK AS A PLANNING INITIATIVE |
| Cabinet Member: | Mr. I.L. Tuxworth, M.L.A., Cabinet Member for Resources and Health. |
| Purpose: | To establish a MacDonnell Ranges National Park and initially to purchase Glen Helen Station. |
| Relation to existing policy: | Conforms to existing policies of conservation of the natural environment and development of tourist industries. Is also associated with collaboration with Aboriginal people in National Parks management. |
| Timing/ legislative priority: | Urgent |
| Announcement of decision, tabling, etc.: | Announcement of Cabinet Decision could be made immediately after initial contact with Glen Helen Pastoral Company. |
| Action required before announcement: | Official discussion with Mr. Bowman of Glen Helen Pastoral Company. |
| Staffing implications, numbers and costs, etc.: | Not yet established, but will be available after development of planning initiative for this purpose. |
| Total cost: | Initially, approximately \$127,000. |

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ESTABLISHMENT OF MACDONNELL RANGES NATIONAL PARK

Comment by
Director of
Finance:

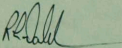
This submission calls for an initial outlay of \$127,000 most of which appears to be related to the acquisition of the Glen Helen Station. No provision was made nor was provision sought in the acquisition program for this purpose. By implication the acquisition of the Station will ^{contribute} ~~provide~~ the Northern Territory Government to further outlays in the coming financial year and succeeding years. The submission is rather vague on this matter and it appears that the total financial implications have not been seriously studied. There is no indication that the acquisition has been discussed with the Government's acquisition authority, therefore the basis of the valuation is not known. It is considered that Cabinet should only agree to the acquisition as a matter of principle rather than as a matter of fact. It is also considered that the funding of the acquisition of the Park and its future operation be made by the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission from the funds that will be made available by the Executive for the purposes of the Commission.

Signed:

Date:

Comment by
Public Service
Commissioner:

Establishment of a MacDonnell Ranges National Park will mean a requirement for a number of Ranger and associated positions.


R. DONALDSON
for Public Service Commissioner

Approved/Not Approved

Signed:

Date:

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2.

This is a proposal which has arisen as a matter of urgency to purchase the Glen Helen Pastoral Lease in Central Australia and is related to a longer term objective of establishing a MacDonnell Ranges National Park.

2.

THE ISSUES

The proposal to establish the MacDonnell Ranges National Park is seen to be of considerable significance to the Northern Territory and to the Nation, and should be established as a planning initiative of the Northern Territory Government.

On an opportunistic basis, the Glen Helen Pastoral Lease, which is presently available for sale, should be purchased as an initial positive step in the creation of this National Park.

The Aboriginal people, through the Central Land Council, have expressed an interest in this land and negotiations should be conducted with them for the future development and joint management of the proposed National Park.

BACKGROUND

3. The MacDonnell Ranges National Park is a concept which has long been regarded by the Northern Territory Reserves Board and others as a most desirable and important proposal. Small isolated portions of the ranges have been acquired by the Reserves Board which are of tourist interest and importance in the conservation of the natural environment. These include Ormiston Gorge, Red Bank Gorge, Glen Helen and Ellery Creek Reserves and are already subject to heavy visitor pressures. However, the grand vista of the MacDonnell Ranges is one of the most spectacular features of the Central Australian landscape and is a significant reason for the importance of Alice Springs to the tourist industry.

4. The owner of Glen Helen Station, which includes a very valuable portion of the MacDonnell Ranges, including Mount Sonder, has indicated to officers of the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission that he wishes to sell the greater portion of the lease to the Commission. The asking price for the lease area, free of stock, is of the order of \$127,000. He does wish to retain a small portion of approximately 50 hectares for mustering purposes.

5. The major hindrance in the past to the establishment of the MacDonnell Ranges National Park is that almost all of the ranges are included in Pastoral Leases and only

minor portions have been excised for conservation purposes. The total area of the Glen Helen Pastoral Lease which is now available for sale is 2,049 sq. kilometres.

CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES

6. The proposal to establish a MacDonnell Ranges National Park is seen to be of such significance that it should be established as a planning initiative of the Northern Territory Government and progress reviewed on a regular basis. The proposed park is of national and international significance and would enable the development of a major tourist attraction as well as the achievement of the conservation of a significant portion of the Central Australian landscape and environment. It does include a number of Aboriginal sites of significance which should be protected.

7. The Glen Helen Pastoral Lease is available for sale and it is seen as important in achieving its objectives that the Government should take the opportunity to purchase the lease at an early date. This is a rare opportunity and in view of the importance of the land, it should be put forward as a matter of urgency, despite other issues which will take longer to negotiate and consider.

8. The Central Land Council has indicated to the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission that they are aware that the Pastoral Lease is available for sale and that

there is interest amongst Aborigines with traditional affiliations with the land. If the land is purchased by the Northern Territory Government, it would become subject to land claims and this must be recognised. An approach has been made to the Central Land Council (Attachment B) proposing joint management of the proposed National Park when Aboriginal land claims are established. The proposal offers employment of Aborigines and involvement in commercial ventures associated with tourism in the area. Under these conditions, but subject to an agreement in principle to the proposal, there would be no further hindrance to the acquisition of property.

THE OPTIONS

9. There are a number of options available, particularly in respect to the management of this area in the future.

The most favoured option is for the Government to purchase the land and negotiate with the Central Land Council and to make suitable arrangements for future joint management when land claims by Aborigines have become established. This is seen as the most positive approach to the establishment of this National Park.

An alternative option is to do nothing and this would mean that either another pastoralist or pastoral company could purchase the land and it would remain alienated for pastoral purposes. It seems unlikely that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs would be able to estimate and provide finance in the short term for the purchase of land for the benefit of Aboriginal landowners.

PUBLIC IMPACT

10. The purchase of the land with the stated objective of creating an important National Park would be very well received by the community both in the Territory and in other States. It is believed that the Australian tourist industry and, in particular, the tourist industry in Alice Springs, would fully support the proposal. The Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service previously proposed that the MacDonnell Ranges would be one of the parks of significance in Australia which they would seek to dedicate under Federal Legislation. It is anticipated that they would fully support the proposal. It is not anticipated that the Centralian pastoral industry would voice opposition to the proposal although there may be some fears that the proposed National Park could be expanded and take in more pastoral land.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

11. The initial expenditure of approximately \$127,000 (subject to negotiation) should occur early in 1978/79 and it is likely that savings can be made from the operational estimates of the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission for this purpose. (There is an item of \$90,000 included in the 1978/79 programme to establish a ranger station at Ellery Creek and much of this expenditure could be avoided by the utilisation of the existing house and facilities on Glen Helen.) Future financial implications in ensuing years have not been developed but will be shortly in further consideration of this item as a planning initiative.

EMPLOYMENT CONSIDERATIONS

12. There will be a requirement for additional Ranger positions to staff this proposed National Park and, as referred to above, there will certainly be a need to employ and train a number of Aboriginal Rangers under the terms of any joint management of the park.

PUBLICITY

13. A draft press statement announcing the Cabinet Decision, if approved, is provided at Attachment A. Mr. Bowman of Glen Helen is keen to sell the property to the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission, but discussions with him have been informal. It would be appropriate to contact Mr. Bowman officially prior to making a press statement.

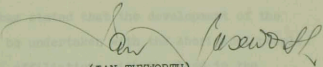
8.

TIMING

14. In view of the advantages of this invaluable area of great significance for conservation and National Park development, a request for urgency for Cabinet's consideration is made. The Commission is not sure how long the option to purchase the lease is available, but it could be foreclosed at any time by the owner selling to another company.

15. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) To adopt the concept of the establishment of a MacDonnell Ranges National Park in principle and to include this proposed National Park as a planning initiative of the Northern Territory Government.
- (2) To purchase, as a matter of urgency, the Glen Helen Pastoral Lease, free of stock.
- (3) To negotiate with the Central Land Council a basis for joint management and participation of Aborigines in the proposed National Park.


(IAN TUXWORTH)

June, 1978.

DRAFT PRESS STATEMENT

MacDonnell Ranges National Park

For many years there has been a great amount of interest in the establishment of a MacDonnell Ranges National Park in Central Australia. The grand vista of the Ranges extending from Alice Springs is one of the most valuable scenic attractions of the region and typifies the Central Australian landscape.

Mr. Everingham announced that the establishment of this important National Park is a policy objective of the new Northern Territory Government and that the Government are to purchase the Glen Helen Pastoral lease as an initial positive step to create the National Park. The acquisition of the lease will unite the existing reserves of Glen Helen, Ormiston Gorge and Redbank Gorge which are already important tourist attractions. Some of the most magnificent scenery of the MacDonnell Ranges is in the Glen Helen lease, including Mount Sonder and the approaches to Mount Zeil and Mount Razorback.

Mr. Everingham stated that the development of the National Park would be undertaken with the Aboriginal people who have traditional affiliations with the land in the proposed park and negotiations would soon commence to establish joint management with the Aborigines and the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission.

The acquisition of this land for the conservation of a very important National Park, to be developed and managed in co-operation with the Aborigines is one of the most significant actions of the Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission, which was created last year.

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FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF LETTER SENT TO CHAIRMAN, CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL, ON 23 JUNE 1978:

FOR SOME YEARS THERE HAVE BEEN PROPOSALS TO CREATE A MACDONNELL RANGES NATIONAL PARK IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA AND THIS CONCEPT HAS A VERY WIDE FOLLOWING THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA AS WELL AS THE NORTHERN TERRITORY. THE PROPOSED PARK IS CERTAINLY ONE OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AND IS SEEN BY THE COMMISSION TO BE A NATIONAL PARK OF VERY GREAT IMPORTANCE IN CONSERVATION AND TOURISM AS IT REALLY CHARACTERISES THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENT. IT IS APPRECIATED BY THE COMMISSION THAT WITHIN A NATIONAL PARK TYPE OF MANAGEMENT PROTECTION, THE ABORIGINAL SITES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN THE AREA CAN BE PROTECTED FROM INTRUSION BY PEOPLE AND CATTLE AND NOT FURTHER THREATENED BY PASTORAL DEVELOPMENT.

ALTHOUGH THE CONCEPT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MACDONNELL RANGES NATIONAL PARK HAS BEEN IN FRONT OF US FOR SOME YEARS, THE MAJOR CONSTRAINTS HAVE BEEN THE LAND STATUS OF THE RANGES, MOST OF WHICH HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN PASTORAL LEASES AND AT TIME OF GOOD CATTLE PRICES, HAVE BEEN OF CONSIDERABLE VALUE TO PASTORAL PRODUCTION.

THE GLEN HELEN PASTORAL LEASE, WHICH INCLUDES IMPORTANT AREAS OF THE MACDONNELL RANGES, IS AVAILABLE FOR SALE, FREE OF STOCK. THE TERRITORY PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION IS DESIROUS OF PURCHASING ALL OR PORTION OF THIS LEASE TO ESTABLISH AN IMPORTANT NATIONAL PARK AND TO INCORPORATE THE EXISTING ORMISTON GORGE, GLEN HELEN AND REDBANK GORGE RESERVES INTO A CONSOLIDATED NATIONAL PARK.

THE COMMISSION IS AWARE OF THE INTEREST OF THE CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL ON BEHALF OF THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TO ACQUIRE THIS PROPERTY AS ABORIGINAL LAND AND RESPECTS THEIR WISHES IN THIS REGARD. WE ARE PROPOSING THAT THE NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT SHOULD ACQUIRE THE PROPERTY FOR THE PURPOSE OF A NATIONAL PARK AND THUS ENABLE ABORIGINES WITH TRADITIONAL INTERESTS AND AFFILIATIONS IN THE AREA TO MAKE LAND CLAIMS. FOR THOSE PORTIONS WHERE LAND CLAIMS ARE SUCCESSFUL IT IS PROPOSED THAT JOINT MANAGEMENT BETWEEN ABORIGINAL LANDOWNERS AND THE COMMISSION BE ESTABLISHED TO PROTECT THE AREA ALONG SIMILAR LINES TO THE PROPOSED KAKADU NATIONAL PARK IN THE NORTHERN PORTION OF THE TERRITORY. PLANS OF MANAGEMENT FOR THE AREA WOULD BE JOINTLY PREPARED AND BE MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE. WE ARE SURE THAT THIS JOINT MANAGEMENT WOULD BE OF BENEFIT TO OUR COMMON INTERESTS.

IT IS ENVISAGED THAT THE MANAGEMENT PLAN WILL INVOLVE THE TRAINING OF ABORIGINAL RANGERS TO ASSIST WITH THE STAFFING OF THE PARK AND WE CAN JOINTLY EXAMINE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOME COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES BASED ON THE TOURIST USE OF THE PARK AS HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL AT STANDLEY CHASM.

WE ARE TREATING THIS MATTER AS ONE OF URGENCY TO AVOID THE SITUATION OF ANOTHER PASTORAL COMPANY OR INDIVIDUAL PURCHASING THE LEASE FOR PASTORAL USE IN THE FUTURE. IF YOUR COUNCIL IS AGREEABLE TO THE PROPOSAL WE WILL PUT IT FORWARD AS A SUBMISSION TO THE NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT IMMEDIATELY.

I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR EARLY REPLY IN THIS MATTER AS WE BELIEVE IT IS NECESSARY TO MOVE VERY QUICKLY. YOU WILL APPRECIATE THAT THE FINAL DETAILS OF JOINT MANAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION CANNOT BE WORKED OUT AT THIS STAGE BUT WE DO PROVIDE THE ASSURANCE THAT THE TERRITORY PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION WILL WORK IN CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL AND THE ABORIGINES IN THIS MATTER."