

CONFIDENTIAL
CABINET DECISION

Copy No.

No. 3668

Submission No.: 3141

Title: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MAJOR NATIONAL
PARK IN THE VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT

Cabinet -

- (a) approved in principle the establishment of a proposed national park for the Victoria River District to be called the Gregory National Park;
- (b) recommended to the Northern Territory Development Land Corporation the immediate acquisition of Bullita and the southern sections of Innesvale Stations;
- (c) approved continued negotiations for the acquisition of sections of Delamere, Auvergne, Fitzroy and Victoria River Downs, and the purchase of Humbert River and the vesting of the south-east portion of the Humbert River lease in Victoria River Downs;
- (d) determined that while the Conservation Commission will be the management authority for the proposed national park, until such time as mineral exploration over the land has been completed it will be held by the Northern Territory Development Land Corporation whereafter, subject to satisfactory provision for any consequential mining activities in the park, title shall be transferred to the Conservation Land Corporation;
- (e) recognised the need for additional staff subject to further consideration by the Cabinet Committee on Establishment;
- (f) noted that the required funding would be subject to normal budget consideration; and
- (g) directed that a joint Submission be prepared by 15 August 1984 by the Department of Mines and Energy and the Conservation Commission regarding proposed legislative changes to permit and regulate exploration activities on parks and reserves prior to the completion of a plan of management.

A.G. Morris
(A.G. MORRIS),
A/Secretary to Cabinet.

19 July 1984

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FOR CABINET

SUBMISSION No: 3121

Title:

The establishment of a major national park in the Victoria River District

Minister

Minister for Conservation

Purpose:

To reserve an area of high conservation and recreational value in the Victoria River District

Relation to existing policy:

To increase the resource base to support the expanding tourist industry of this district

Timing/ legislative priority:

An early decision on this matter is recommended

Announcement of decision, tabling, etc:

A press release is recommended following the successful acquisition of the properties involved

Action required before announcement:

Acquisition of the proposed properties

Staffing implications, numbers and costs, etc:

An increase in two ranger positions would be required, at an annual cost of \$64,000 - \$80,000

Total cost:

Acquisition costs are estimated at \$400,000. Capital works development and recurring operational costs are estimated at \$1.33m over a four year period

Department/Authority LAW

COMMENT ON CABINET SUBMISSION No.

TITLE: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MAJOR NATIONAL PARK IN THE VICTORIA
RIVER DISTRICT

COMMENTS:

There are no immediate constitutional or legal barriers to the proposal. Constitutional and legal issues arising in implementation of the recommendations can be tackled as and when they arise.

SIGNED: S.R. BAILEY

DESIGNATION: DIRECTOR, EXECUTIVE & POLICY UNIT

DATE: 11 JULY 1984

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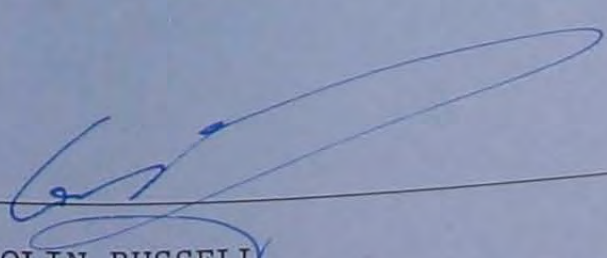
Department/Authority PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

COMMENT ON CABINET SUBMISSION No.
GREGORY NATIONAL PARK

TITLE:
.....
.....

COMMENTS:

This Office has no objections to the proposal.



SIGNED: COLIN RUSSELL
DESIGNATION: ACTING PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONER
DATE: 22 MAY 1984

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Department/Authority.....DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY.....

COMMENT ON CABINET SUBMISSION No.

TITLE: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MAJOR NATIONAL PARK IN THE
VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT.....

COMMENTS:

It is not possible to assess the justification for proposals of this type in terms of costs and benefits. However, Treasury supports the aim of the submission and notes its consideration of pastoral, mining, tourism and Aboriginal implications.

If Cabinet is of the view that there will be sufficient net benefits from the proposals for them to proceed, it would appear necessary for an upper limit to be placed upon acquisition proposals of, say, \$400,000.

The need for extra staff on account of this particular park is unclear and should be assessed at a later stage.



SIGNED: R C MADDEN

DESIGNATION: UNDER-TREASURER

DATE: 23 May 1984

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THE ISSUES

1. To establish a major national park within the Victoria River District.

BACKGROUND

2. On 26 August 1983, Cabinet by Decision No. 3133, deferred consideration of a submission to purchase Humbert River and Bullita Stations for national park purposes and again on 7 January 1984, by Decision No. 3352, to purchase Bullita Station for national park purposes. These deferrals were made pending the resolution of conflicting demands on the use of the land for mining, pastoral and Aboriginal interests.

CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUES

3. The Victoria River District has high conservation value, spectacular scenery and important historical significance. There are two small reserves administered by the Conservation Commission in the district.

4. There are existing tourist facilities in the district at Timber Creek and Victoria River Inn. The Red Valley River tours attracted 3000 tourists in its first year of operation. The existence of a national park in the district should generate additional tourist nights from traffic passing between Kununurra and Katherine as well as becoming a destination in its own right. Projected growth rates for traffic is estimated between 4 and 10% per year.

5. There is potential for establishing a park of national significance which provides a resource base for the existing and expanding tourist industry associated with the Victoria Highway, as part of National Highway One, and the Victoria River. Recreational opportunities include fishing, river trips, walking and 4WD tours, and would utilize existing facilities at both Timber Creek and Victoria River Inn.

6. Boundaries for the proposed park have been selected to ensure that areas of high conservation and recreational values are protected and managed; that natural boundaries are used to reduce fencing costs and ensure feasible control of stock and feral animals; that areas of productive grazing land are not included; and that existing tourist facilities and access are used and promoted.

7. The proposed boundaries are shown in Map 1. Detailed consideration for each area is given in Attachment A and include the following areas:

the southern section of Innesvale; the Victoria River Gorge including the western section of Delamere; the Stokes Range on Fitzroy; Bullita; Jasper Gorge which includes the stock route and 40 sq km of Victoria River Downs; and the Newcastle Range and East Baines Gorge area of Auvergne.

8. Bullita and the southern section of Innesvale are available for immediate purchase by the government from their respective lessees.

9. Discussions have been held with the managers of Delamere, Auvergne and Fitzroy Stations concerning the acquisition of these sections. They have expressed their willingness to present these proposals to their respective owners as in each case the land proposed for acquisition is not actively used.

10. Agreement in principle has been reached between the Conservation Commission and the Department of Mines and Energy over procedures with respect to exploration and mining (including petroleum exploration) within national parks. Details of these arrangements will be the subject of a further cabinet submission that proposes legislative changes to the Mining, Petroleum, and Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Acts.

11. Discussions have been held with officers of the Aboriginal Liaison Unit and with the Northern Land Council to determine the extent of Aboriginal interest in the district. An area of prime interest to the local Aboriginal groups, Humbert River Station, has not been included in this acquisition proposal. A land claim has been placed over the Jasper Gorge stock route. If this land claim is successful, the Conservation Commission would negotiate to lease this area for park purposes. The local Aboriginal groups would be involved in the management of the proposed park.

OPTIONS

12. There are two main options for Cabinet to consider:
1. To proceed with the acquisition of the identified areas for park purposes, including the immediate purchase of Bullita and the southern section of Innesvale.
 2. Not to proceed with the acquisition of the identified areas and of the establishment of a major national park in the Vistoria River District.
13. Option 1 would establish a resource base for the developing tourist industry of the region without competing with other viable land uses as well as provide for the management of an area of high conservation value.
14. Option 2 would not support the developing tourist industry of this district.

PUBLIC IMPACT

15. The acquisition of a major national park in the region would promote tourist development. Possible adverse effects upon the pastoralist industry have been considered and boundaries proposed to avoid the acquisition of productive grazing lands. The Conservation Commission's presence in the region will aid in the effective control of feral animals, fires and tourist pressures.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

16. An initial Government valuation estimate for Bullita has been given at \$205,000. Estimates for the other sections have been prepared by the Valuer-General. Based on an unimproved value of \$40/sq km the acquisition costs for these other sections would be approximately \$150,000, exclusive of stock. It is known that Innesvale would have additional costs due to improvements. Thus, estimated total acquisition costs, including Bullita is \$400,000.

17. Capital works development costs are estimated to be \$935,000 over a four-year period. Details are presented as Attachment B.

Estimated annual funding requirements are as follows:

	<u>Capital Works</u>	<u>Salaries and Operational Expenses</u>
1984-85	\$ 200,000	\$ 87,000
1985-86	345,000	109,000
1986-87	170,000	100,000
1987-88	<u>220,000</u>	<u>100,000</u>
	<u>\$ 935,000</u>	<u>\$ 396,000</u>

EMPLOYMENT CONSIDERATIONS

18. Immediate employment opportunities include two full-time rangers and additional part-time staff including the employment of Aborigines.

19. Additional employment opportunities would be generated within the existing and developing tourist operations in the region, especially the Red Valley Tours, the Victoria River Inn, Timber Creek Inn and planned caravan park.

COMMONWEALTH, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

20. N/A

CO-ORDINATION AND CONSULTATION

21. In developing this submission the Northern Territory Tourist Commission, Aboriginal Liaison Unit, Department of Lands, Department of Mines and Energy, Department of Primary Production, N.T. Museum and Art Galleries Board and the National Trust have been consulted. Their comments on a previous draft submission are given as Attachment C. This final submission incorporates these comments.

22. Agreement in principle has been reached with the Department of Mines and Energy over procedures to permit and regulate exploration and mining activities on the proposed park.

23. Negotiations with local Aboriginal groups are proceeding through the Aboriginal Liaison Unit and Northern Land Council to determine the nature and extent of Aboriginal involvement in the management of the proposed park.

24. The areas of prime interest to the Department of Primary Production ie. viable pastoral areas on Kidman Springs, Victoria River Downs, Humbert River, Fitzroy, Auvergne and Delamere have been excluded from this submission.

LEGISLATION

25. Not applicable at this time. A further cabinet submission will specify legislative changes needed in the Mining, Petroleum, and Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Acts to permit and regulate exploration activities on parks and reserves, prior to the completion of a plan of management. This submission will be jointly prepared by the Department of Mines and Energy and the Conservation Commission.

PUBLICITY

26. A press release would be appropriate following the purchase of the proposed properties.

TIMING

27. An early resolution is desirable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

28. It is recommended that Cabinet:

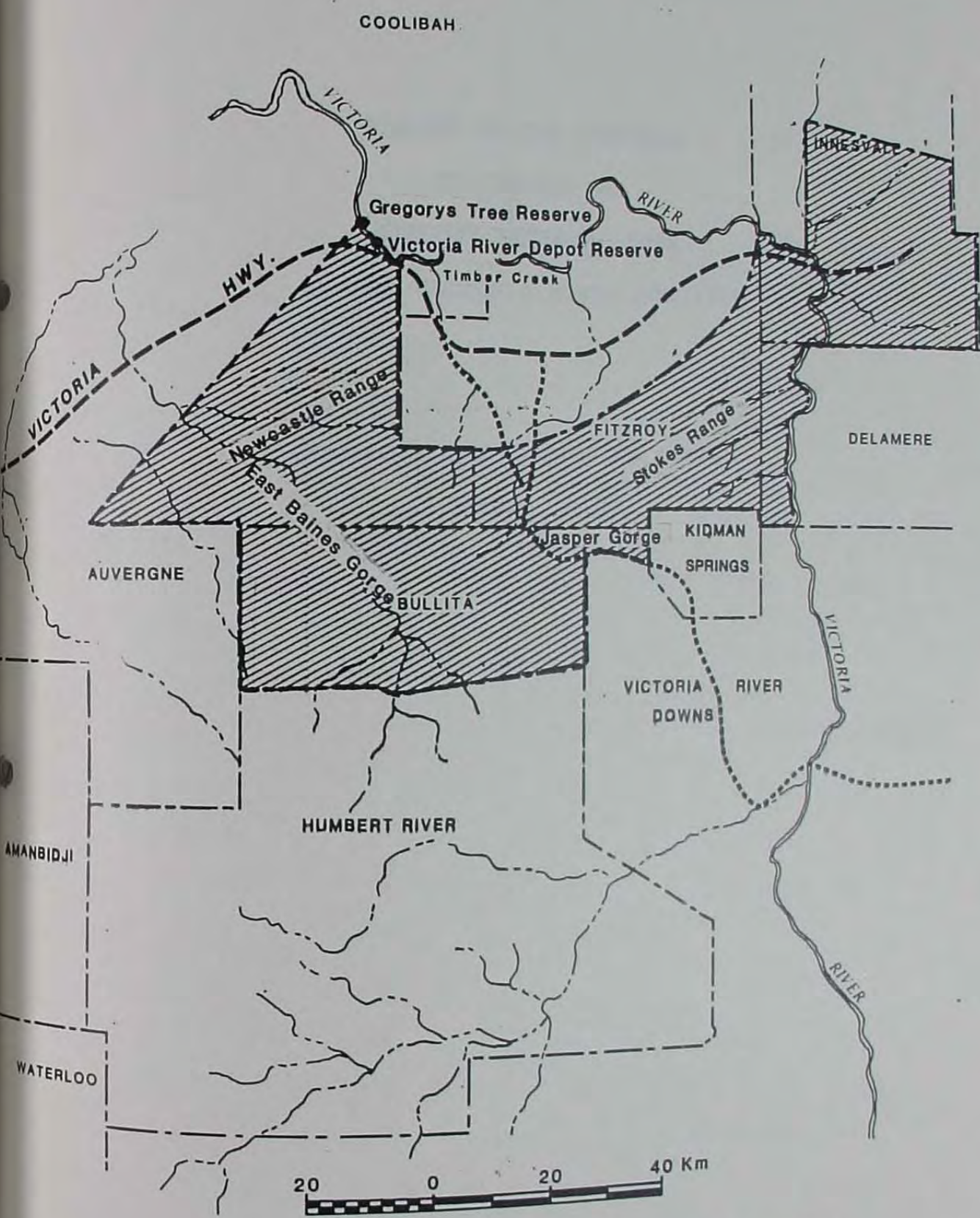
1. Approve in principle the establishment of the proposed national park for the Victoria River District;

2. Recommend to the Conservation Land Corporation the immediate acquisition of Bullita and the southern sections of Innesvale Stations;
3. Approve continued negotiations for the acquisition of sections of Delamere, Auvergne, Fitzroy and Victoria River Downs;
4. Approve in principle the additional staff recommended subject to further consideration by Cabinet Committee on Establishment;
5. Provide the required funding subject to normal budget consideration;
6. Note the preparation of a joint submission from the Department of Mines and Energy and the Conservation Commission regarding proposed legislative changes to permit and regulate exploration activities on parks and reserves prior to the completion of a plan of management.

C. L. Padgham-Purich

N. PADGHAM-PURICH
Minister for Housing
and Conservation

Map 1



PROPOSED ACQUISITION FOR A NATIONAL PARK IN THE VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT

--- Proposed boundary for National Park - - - Pastoral Lease boundary

REPORT ON THE PROPOSAL
TO CREATE THE
GREGORY NATIONAL PARK
IN THE VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT

Conservation Commission of N.T.

Darwin, N.T.

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INTRODUCTION

For approximately twelve months there has been a proposal for a major national park in the Victoria River area. It was originally put forward by Roger Steele, when he was Minister for Primary Production. The proposed boundaries of the park were based on the need to provide maximum facilities and recreation experience for tourists and Territory people and to set aside lands for conservation purposes. In addition there was a desire to avoid the annexure of viable pastoral lands and to assist the pastoralists in the region in the BTB control programme. The total area proposed for inclusion to the park was approximately 11,850 sq km.

The Conservation Commission put forward a proposal based on the original boundaries but were requested to consult further with pastoralists, aboriginal people and representatives of the mining industry. Subsequently the Department of Lands have examined the park proposal and have suggested that the inclusion is to maximise the tourist development potential along the Victoria River and the Highway. A further substantial gain was achieved when Ian McBean, owner of the Innesvale pastoral lease voluntarily offer 1200 sq km of the Southern end of the lease for sale for park purposes. This is a very valuable section with exceedingly high park values adjacent to the Highway, the river and the developed tourist facilities at the Victoria River Wayside Inn.

PARK BOUNDARIES

In determining the boundaries of the proposed Gregory National Park there are a substantial number of factors which must be taken into consideration. The boundaries drawn up by Roger Steele some 12 months ago should be put to Cabinet, with comment and recommendations. The Department of Lands have put forward a proposed park larger than the original proposal in that Fitzroy is included and has a total area over 12,000 sq km.

In examining the proposal for the proposed park the following comments are provided on an individual property basis.

1. V.R.D.

V.R.D. is a viable grazing property and for the most part has limited conservation values, with the exception of Jasper Gorge in the northwest section of the property. It is recommended that Jasper Gorge Stock Route and the 40 sq km of V.R.D. to the north of the stock route be included in the national park proposal. This small area is rugged country and therefore difficult to manage for pastoral purposes, especially with respect to the requirements of the B.T.B. control programme. Since the area proposed for inclusion in the national park is restricted to a small section north of the stock route, the issues of an excision area for Aborigines and the subdivision of the V.R.D. lease do not affect the national park proposal.

2. V.R.D. Homestead

The development of V.R.D. homestead complex for a mix of commercial and tourism uses is not an attractive one to the Commission. The natural resources to attract tourists to the location are inadequate and the distances are real handicaps. The matter could be referred to the N.T.D.C. and the Tourist Commission.

3. Jasper Gorge Stock route

This area, presently subject to land claim, is an important natural feature and the conservation of its features is important. Tourist use of the area will obviously increase and control is necessary. The adjoining part of V.R.D. immediately to the south of Jasper Gorge is not a significant inclusion in the park and is not recommended. Only the adjoining part of V.R.D. immediately to the north is recommended for inclusion.

4. Kidman Springs

This area is a Government Research Facility for primary production purposes. Its inclusion within the boundaries of the national park is not recommended. However the existence of the Government facilities here could be effectively used to facilitate the overall management of the proposed national park.

5. Delamere

Following discussions with the manager of Delamere Station, it is recommended that the Victoria River and the section of Delamere on the western side of the river is included within the park proposal. Because of access problems across the river and the rugged nature of this country, it is not used for pastoral purposes. In contrast, the river and the adjoining escarpments have very high conservation value and its acquisition is critical to the proposed national park.

6. Innesvale

Originally it was proposed the extreme SW corner of Innesvale be acquired and this includes the Victoria River section and surrounds the lease of the existing tourist resort of the Wayside Inn. This is an important sector. The present owners of Innesvale have now offered a much larger area on either side of the highway which includes very rugged country of

Ryans Creek, Matt Wilson Creek and Gregory Creek. These areas have very high national park values, far exceeding the pastoral values and can be developed for recreational use with little cost. The area on offer is the unutilized part of the lease and its management as a park would assist the disease control programmes of the property. The boundary proposed by Ian McBean are recommended.

7. Fitzroy

Originally it was proposed to include the Stokes Range area of upland into the Park as an excision of the SE sector of Fitzroy. Lands have proposed the inclusion of all of Fitzroy because of the high tourist values of the Victoria River. However, Fitzroy is a valuable pastoral property, thus the recommendations of areas to be included are restricted to a few sections which have high conservation value and low value for pastoralism.

An area of very hilly country on NW part of Fitzroy from Skull Creek west to the Timber Creek commonage, and including approximately 30 km of Victoria River frontage is an attractive option. The conservation values are high and recreation opportunities on the river are excellent. The National park values again far exceed the grazing values. The area included is 200 sq km.

It is recommended that the Stokes Range area of upland also be acquired from Fitzroy, this adjoins the Victoria River Gorge and Jasper Gorge and is contiguous with the Bullita property. The conservation and park values are high. These proposals have been discussed with a representative of the owners of the lease.

8. Timber Creek Commonage

This is a large area, presently used as a grazing licence. It is under a land claim. If the land claim is successful a portion of the area could be leased from the owners to develop

recreation potential along the river and in association with the Timber Creek town and traditional owners. If the claim is not successful a major part of the commonage could be added to the park. The acquisition of a land resource base adjacent to Timber Creek for recreation is important to tourism and recreation. The historical association of the Timber Creek area are important to the park and the Commission already has two reserves associated with the exploration of Gregory near the town; i.e. Gregory's Tree Historical Reserve (2.02 ha) and Victoria River Depot Conservation Reserve (37.01 ha).

9. Auvergne

It has been proposed that a very large area of rugged mountain country within the Auvergne lease, totalling 1200 sq km be acquired. This includes the East Baines Gorge, the Barracbarac area, Newcastle Range, and the headwaters of the East and West Baines and Dick Creeks. This is a substantial area and a very large proportion of the Auvergne lease. Resource values are not well known over the whole area. In priority, an area west of the Timber Creek town and including the river frontage to Gregory's Tree must rank highly. The Barracbarac Creek and West Baines Gorge have very significant conservation and National park values and are important to the Park. The area of Newcastle Range between these two is also important to the park. The region comprising 1250 sq km to the west of Bullita and south of the East Baines Gorge is almost unaccessible, has unknown resource values and is of low priority for park acquisition. These views have been put to representatives of the company which own the lease and they have noted the Commission's priorities and referred to the traveling stock route through Auvergne as a negotiation point.

10. Bullita

This pastoral lease of 1326 sq km has high park values and low pastoral use. Access to the rugged central areas of the park is available and there is high recreation potential. The limestone karst areas are of particular interest, and there is

access from Bullita to Jasper Gorge, and to the East Baines Gorge. The owner of the lease is willing to sell to the N.T. Government.

11. Humbert River

This pastoral lease is extremely remote to the tourists on the Victoria River Highway. It has a small amount (600 sq km) of pastoral land adjacent to the proposed Yarralin aboriginal area and to the VRD grazing lands. The remainder of the property exceeds 5000 sq km in area, is difficult to manage and protect and few people would seek recreation opportunity in the area. Conservation and scenic values are high but not at risk, whilst they are relatively unknown and remote. This property would be suitably managed as a wilderness area. It is not recommended that Humbert River be acquired for the proposed national park because of the high costs of effective management and a poor cost/benefit ratio. However if the N.T. Government were to acquire the lease for some other purpose, the areas of high conservation value and recreation potential can be identified with a view to their addition to the park.

Conclusions

The recommended changes to the proposed Gregory National Park have been made to establish a park of high conservation and recreation value to provide a resource base to the tourist industry associated with the Victoria Highway and Victoria River and to establish a park which can be feasibly managed. In making these recommendations, there is a desire to avoid the unnecessary annexure of viable pastoral lands which are currently in use, or to needlessly involve the Commission in the rationalisation of pastoral boundaries. The Humbert River Station has been excluded from the proposal because it is too remote, too expensive to manage and its conservation values are not at risk.

The tourist industry is fast developing along the Victoria Highway and growth projections indicate a demand for the

development of recreation facilities in this area of rugged grandeur and high conservation values. The proposed park, as recommended seeks to optimise on those resources which are more readily available to this tourist potential along the Highway.

The location of a national park in the Victoria River region has very positive implications for the tourist industry. A 'target destination' should be developed to take advantage of the rapidly increasing use of the Victoria Highway, part of Australia's No. 1 Highway, by tourists, travelling between W.A. and Katherine as part of both round-Australia tours and shorter regional tours.

The area in the vicinity of the Victoria River, where it crosses the Australian No. 1 Highway is one of spectacular landscapes which includes the river, the gorges and escarpments and the vegetation. Recreation potential is very high with walking, fishing, river trips and 4WD vehicle tours. The use of the river boat facilities at the Victoria River Wayside Inn reached 3000 tourist in its first year and the establishment of a national park around this operation and the Vic Inn and its associated camping facilities will substantially enhance the tourist potential of this location. The natural features in Ryans Creek, Matt Wilson Creek and Gregory Creek are outstanding, and there is also the historical features of the latter.

The tourist values associated with Timber Creek, Jasper Gorge and Bullita area also high with outstanding natural features, access to the rugged mountain country and the recreation opportunities associated with the Victoria River. The historical elements around Timber Creek are of considerable interest.

When all these features are integrated into a cohesive National Park with ready access from the Victoria Highway together with the reservation of a significant area with high conservation values of flora and fauna a park of very considerable stature and up to international standards is available. The location of the park in relation to the development of the tourist industry in the Territory is also important. The location is such that additional tourist traveller nights can readily be generated from passing

traffic. Probably more important is the creation of a valuable tourist region including Kununurra, Keep River, and the proposed Gregory Park in the Victoria Region.

It should be possible to quantify the benefits to tourism of the development of an important National Park in the region. The normal growth rate of the through traffic of tourists to the Territory and from the Territory residents can be calculated. A factor of expansion for the completion of sealed access through South Australia and Western Australia can be added and an estimate made of the additional tourist use of the region as a destination.

Aboriginal involvement to Gregory National Park

There are some registered sacred sites within the proposed area, but it is obvious that there are other sites and areas of significance within the park as proposed. There are quite a few outstanding scenic facilities in the area and these are frequently of significance to aboriginals. There is a requirement for park management to consult with aboriginals about the protection of sacred sites in the park.

The Jasper Gorge is located within the Stock route and is subject to a land claim. This Gorge is an important part of the park proposal and negotiation with the aboriginal claimants is vital.

The Timber Creek Commonage is a large area of vacant land adjacent to the town and some of the land should obviously be set aside for future commercial development associated with the highway, the park and the region generally. There is however an important area of river frontage and some escarpment country which would be valuable adjuncts to the park. The use of the river for recreation close to Timber Creek is important to tourism. There is a land claim over the Timber Creek commonage.

Aboriginal interests have been expressed in acquiring Humbert River Station for pastoral and living purposes. It is partly for this reason, that Humbert River has been excluded for acquisition in the park proposal.

It is important that negotiations with the aboriginal claimants be held as soon as possible, through the Northern Land Council. These negotiations should be conducted with the following objectives.

1. Some limited management of the Jasper Gorge area be undertaken by the Commission prior to the land claim being heard.
2. In the event of the land claims being successful, agreements for lease back of the Jasper Gorge and some parts of the Commonage.

3. In co-operation with the Sacred Sites Authority, the identification of these sites within the proposed park which require protection from tourist access and those sites which can be shown to tourists.
4. The involvement of aboriginals in the management of the park and the commercial enterprises associated with the park. This should include aboriginals at Yarralin.

Initial discussions have been held with the Office of Aboriginal Liaison but real progress can only be made through the N.L.C. There is a further need to continue negotiations through these organisations with the traditional owners.

The wishes of the Lingarra people concerning Humbert River and the Yarralin area are not included in this report because of the recommendation to exclude Humbert River. However the Office of Aboriginal Liaison have conducted discussions with these people and determined their views.

Within the boundaries of the proposed national park are two exploration licences, one oil permit and one application for an oil permit. The Department of Mines have sought assurances from the Conservation Commission that the rights of the companies to continue to explore or to develop mines within the park are maintained.

The Director of Mines has also sought assurance that further exploration can proceed in the park without additional expense or undue restrictions on licences.

The T.P.W.C. Act has specific and rigid provisions for mining in parks and these have been reflected in the Mining Act. Firstly, there must be provisions for mining in the plan of management, and a detailed description of the operation must be provided. The Administrator must approve the exploration or mining operation and the conditions under which it is to be carried out. Exploration is encompassed in the definition of mining under the Act.

One major stumbling block to exploration within parks is the lack of a plan of management. This detailed document is prepared after exhaustive investigations of the resources (excluding mineral resources), the long planning processes for park management and the public comment stages. It is a lengthy and time consuming operation.

The Linch pin in the argument between conservation in parks and mineral exploration is the separation of exploration from extractive mining in the definition and provisions of the T.P.W.C. Act and Mining Act. The provisions for mining (and exploration) in the Act are rigid and difficult. When the provisions of the Environment Assessment Act are also applied, as will occur if mine development and processing are proposed, there will be very considerable scrutiny and deliberation before extractive operations on processing are permitted in a park or reserve.

Exploration on the other hand is not generally as destructive as mineral extraction, it is an important part of the resource data base necessary for park planning processes, and exploration licence operations can be kept from permanent destructive effects without the very rigid provision of the Act, by using the existing by laws and special conditions in the exploration licence.

Generally, the provisions of the Mining Act, with certain specific conditions relating to parks and reserves, sensitive areas and public recreation are adequate. The Department of Mines have defined those exploration actions which involve significant disturbance to the surface and are prepared to make special provision for such activities.

The Conservation Commission, at a meeting in August 1983, agreed that a preliminary environmental report be prepared before any mineral exploration is undertaken in any park or reserve. In the Keep River Plan of Management, the condition was included that a detailed report of the nature and location of exploration operation be made available before any field work is carried out. Section 16 (e) and (f) of the Mining Act requires licencees to provide a programme of operations prior to exploration and to comply with the Directions of the Secretary of Mines.

The stances of the Commission and the Department of Mines are not far apart on this issue. It is an important principle to the Commission that there must be some restraint and approval process for exploration in parks and reserves.

The format and the extent of the information to be given to the Commission are not difficult to determine and need not require additional costs, time delays or create over regulation of the beleaguered miners. Once approvals to explore have been obtained within any park or reserve, with extra conditions applied for the special protection of the environment and recreational activities there is no reason why mineral exploration cannot proceed under the provisions of the

Mining Act, including compensation provision, and for such operations to be monitored by the environmental staff of Department of Mines and staff of the Commission.

As both the Mining Act and the T.P.W.C. Act would need to be amended to separate exploration from extractive mining, it may be necessary to prepare an interim plan of management for Gregory, although this depends on the view of the Department of Mines and the Commission. A suitable compromise could be achieved if the two exploration licences are not likely to be active for some time.

NOTE: Since this report was prepared, further negotiations have proceeded between the Department of Mines and Energy and the Conservation Commission. The present status of the working agreement reached to date has been summarised by the Department of Mines and Energy.

"The agreement in principle entered into by the Conservation Commission and Department of Mines and Energy provides for the granting of exploration licences containing appropriate conditions for the protection of the park and a consultation process where an explorer proposes to undertake any exploration that involves significant ground disturbance. No change has been made to the provisions of the Acts in respect of mining on a National Park and such operations would be considered concurrently under the Environmental Assessment Act, and Mining or Hydrocarbons Acts. Mining operations would also need to be consistent with the plan of management for the park."

SUMMARY

The available options

The first option available is the purchase subsequent management of over 1200 sq km, including Fitzroy, a large area of Auvergne and the Humbert River. This option is not favoured because of the low cost benefit of the Humbert River area, situated so far from the Victoria Highway, the unnecessary inclusion of inaccessible parts of Auvergne and the closure of the developing pastoral areas on Fitzroy.

A second option is the acquisition of Bullita and part of Innesvale only to create a park around the Victoria River Inn, with a second destination to Bullita. This appears to be the easiest option, but it ignores the available areas of high resource values surrounding the proposal and the important historic, conservation and recreation features around Timber Creek, which is second node of the proposed park.

The third option is the acquisition of the area recommended in this report totalling approximately 6000 sq km and including Bullita in total and portions of the surrounding leases and the Jasper Gorge Stock route. This option is favoured as it optimises the tourist developments along the Highway and the Vic River, is acceptable to the pastoral industry and is a feasible proposal for management by the Conservation Commission.

The Humbert River option is not of sufficient priority in the Commission programmes because of management costs, acquisition costs and the remoteness of the area. The Commission would however support its acquisition by Government of other reasons and seek opportunity to identify the areas of conservation value.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Commission should seek the development of the proposed Gregory National Park in the following manner:-

1. Acquisition of Bullita Pastoral Lease and Part of Innesvale Pastoral lease as stage 1 of the park.
2. Continue negotiation with Aboriginal traditional owners on the inclusion of Jasper Gorge and part of the Timber Creek Commonage in the park and on the involvement of the aboriginal people in the park.
3. Negotiate with the owners of Auvergne, Delamere and Fitzroy pastoral leases for those areas of the leases favoured for park purposes with a view to acquisition on stage 2 of the Park.
4. Finalise discussions with Department of Mines and the Chamber of Mines to reach agreement on exploration in the proposed park.

ESTIMATED CAPITAL WORKS DEVELOPMENT COSTS
(At Today's Prices)

1. Roads

- Access road along Gregory Creek 10 km @ \$15,000/km	
- Access road along Matt Wilson Creek 5 km @ \$15,000/km	\$150,000
	75,000
	<hr/>
	\$225,000

2. Visitor Facilities

- Picnic sites at Matt Wilson, Gregory, Big Horse Creeks, Jasper Gorge, Gregorys Tree Historical Reserve	50,000
- Pit toilets at Gregory Creek	10,000
- Wet toilets at Bullita	80,000
- Campground at Bullita	40,000
	<hr/>
	\$180,000

3. Ranger Accomodation at Timber Creek

- 2 residences @ \$135,000	\$270,000
- Workshop	100,000
- Entry Station	100,000
- 2 vehicles @ \$15,000	30,000
	<hr/>
	\$500,000

4. Boundary Fencing

20 km @ \$1,500/km	\$30,000
	<hr/>
	\$935,000

ESTIMATED OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

(at todays prices)

	<u>1984-85</u>	<u>1985-86</u>	<u>1986-87</u>	<u>1987-88</u>
Salaries	\$ 32,000	\$ 64,000	\$ 80,000	\$ 80,000
Administrative	10,000	15,000	20,000	20,000
Resource survey/ plan of management	10,000	20,000	-	-
Feral animal control	35,000	10,000	-	-
	<u>\$ 87,000</u>	<u>109,000</u>	<u>100,000</u>	<u>100,000</u>

Department/Authority OF MINES AND ENERGY

COMMENT ON CABINET SUBMISSION No.

TITLE: VICTORIA RIVER NATIONAL PARK

COMMENTS:

The department supports this submission on the following conditions being met -

- the Conservation Commission and Department of Mines and Energy proceed immediately with a submission to Cabinet which seeks to ratify the agreement reached between the two organisations and recommends the proposed legislative changes to both the Mining Act and Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act aimed at facilitating mineral exploration;
- the above arrangement clearly includes petroleum exploration and development;
- existing title holders are allowed to continue their exploration unhindered; and
- minor amendments are made to the submission (Attachment 1) in relation to the agreement between the Conservation Commission and the Department of Mines and Energy.

SIGNED: _____

DESIGNATION: A/SECRETARY

DATE: _____

In respect of the agreement in principle entered into between the Conservation Commission and the Department of Mines and Energy, it was understood that the agreement would be appended to the Cabinet Submission. If the agreement is not appended, there are a number of minor amendments to the Cabinet Submission necessary to accurately reflect the agreement reached.

1. The agreement deals essentially with exploration therefore paragraphs 10 and 22 of the Submission should be amended to refer to both exploration and mining.
2. Attachment A, page 24, paragraph 4 suggests the department and Commission are "not far apart" when an agreement in principle has been reached. Furthermore, the agreement does not provide for the Commission's approval of exploration licences. With respect to paragraph 5, information provided to the Commission will be the company's exploration program as provided to the department and this would provide the Commission with opportunity for early comment. There is to be only one approval process which will be the grant of an exploration licence under the Mining Act. There will be consultation on conditions prior to any proposal which involves significant ground disturbance.

I recommend the last two paragraphs on page 24 are replaced by the following:

"The agreement in principle entered into by the Conservation Commission and Department of Mines and Energy provides for the granting of exploration licences containing appropriate conditions for the protection of the park and a consultation process where an explorer proposes to undertake any exploration that involves significant ground disturbance. No change has been made to the provisions of the Acts in respect of mining on a National Park and such operations would be considered concurrently under the Environmental Assessment Act, and Mining or Hydrocarbons Acts. Mining operations would also need to be consistent with the plan of management for the park."



NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA
DEPARTMENT OF LANDS

ATTACHMENT C

Telephone: 89 7238

Reference: 83/304

G.P.O. BOX 1680
DARWIN, N.T. 5794

The Director,
Conservation Commission,
Northern Region Office,
P.O. Box 38496,
WINNELLIE, N.T. 5789

Attention: K.S. Shurcliff

CABINET SUBMISSION - PROPOSED NATIONAL PARK

Your Ref: D83/1013

In response to your request for comment on the draft submission I am disappointed that the whole of the Fitzroy pastoral lease has not been included in the proposal.

A little less than half of the lease has potential to carrying about 2500 cattle and there is scope for some improved pasture development which would increase that capacity.

Against this there are spectacular features along the Victoria River which in itself is a great public attraction.

If the whole lease were purchased most of the cattle country could be subdivided out and a pastoral block released.

The property is to be auctioned on 22nd June 1984 and I believe we should take this opportunity to purchase the whole of the lease and offer the pastoral land for lease separately.

Otherwise I support the submission.

T.R. LAWLER
for Secretary

17/5/84



TELEPHONE
089/89 6309

NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

ATTACHMENT C

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER

OFFICE OF ABORIGINAL LIAISON

G.P.O. BOX 4396
DARWIN, N.T. 5794

SAFETY HOUSE
45 Mitchell St.,
Darwin

17 May 1984

84/349

Director,
N.T. Conservation Commission,
P.O. Box 38496,
WINNELLIE N.T. 5789

Attention: Ms K.S. Shurcliff

Dear Ms Shurcliff,

PROPOSED VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

I refer to your letter D83/1013 of 9 May, to which you attach a draft Cabinet submission on the proposed establishment of a national park in the Victoria River Downs district. This is (or was) to be known as the "Gregory National Park".

There have been previous discussions and correspondence between your Commission and this Office on Aboriginal interests in national park proposals in this area. Aboriginal groups are seeking the excision of community living areas from a number of pastoral properties in the district, but none of these requests seem to be directly affected by the revised proposal your Commission is now putting forward for a national park. On the other hand, there are several Aboriginal land claims to areas within or contiguous to the national park, and although you suggest that the Commission might negotiate some sort of agreement or lease-back arrangement with the NLC, I would be cautious about the outcome of such negotiations. As you know, in some areas the NLC is now refusing to negotiate with your Commission at all. *Here?*

The national park proposal appears to include parts of the Auvergne and Coolibah stock routes. These are included in the Schedule to the Northern Territory Development Land Corporation (Vesting of Land) Bill 1984. The Territory Government is endeavouring to alienate them so as to prevent Aboriginal land claims to them, on the grounds that they are areas reserved for public purpose and must (in this case) remain open as stock routes. Having adopted this stance, the Government might be criticised if it endeavours to incorporate these areas within a national park.

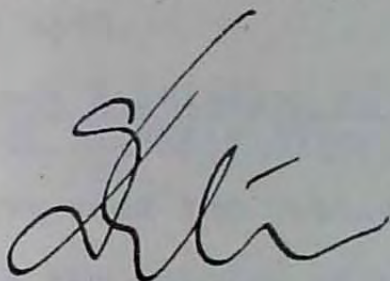
.../2

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Any proposal for the establishment of a national park in this area will be of direct interest to Aboriginal people living in the district. Extensive consultations with these people are essential. So far, only some groups have been contacted and discussions have been of a very preliminary nature.

Finally, I would add the comment that in discussions last year with some Aboriginal groups listed on the original Gregory National Park proposal, it was made quite clear to us that Aboriginal people would not only like freedom of access to the park and to any sacred sites within it, but would also wish to become involved in any tourist activities focussed on the park. Increased opportunities for employment and training in such positions as rangers, guides, and so on, are also sought by local Aboriginals.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ian Pitman', written in a cursive style.

IAN PITMAN
Director

MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

ATTACHMENT C

NORTHERN TERRITORY MUSEUM OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
BULLOCKY POINT, FANNIE BAY, N.T.
POSTAL ADDRESS: G.P.O. BOX 4646, DARWIN, N.T. 5794
TELEPHONE: (089) 82 4211



OUR REF.
YOUR REF.

10 May 1984

The Director,
Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory,
P.O. Box 38496,
WINNELLIE, N.T. 5789.

Attention: Ms Kath Shurdiff

Dear Kath,

Cabinet Submission to Establish a National Park
in the Victoria River District

I have read the Cabinet Submission prepared by the Commission.

It is the opinion of this Authority that the establishment of a National Park in the area is highly desirable. The arguments put forward by the Commission seem to be entirely reasonable. Whilst the establishment of National Parks is not a primary interest of this Authority, we are concerned, indirectly, with the preservation of wild life, habitat, the environment generally and archaeological and other sites of significance. From an archaeological point of view there is certainly merit reserving and protecting some sections of the proposed area.

Yours sincerely,

Colin

COLIN JACK-HINTON
DIRECTOR



CONSERVATION COMMISSION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

NORTHERN REGION OFFICE:
BERRIMAH FARM, DARWIN,
P.O. BOX 38496, WINNELLIE,
N.T. 5789 AUSTRALIA
TELEPHONE: (089) 22 0211;
TELEX: PARKS AA85336; VOCADEX: (089) 22 0376



OUR REF:

D/83/1013

YOUR REF:

26 June 1984

MINISTER

PROPOSED NATIONAL PARK IN THE VICTORIA RIVER DISTRICT

Enclosed is a Cabinet Submission relating to the establishment of a major national park in the Victoria River District.

Cabinet has twice deferred consideration of the proposal pending resolution of conflicting demands for use of the land. This has been addressed in the revised submission and accordingly it is requested that you endorse the recommendations by signing the Cabinet Submission.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A. Bishaw', written over a horizontal line.

A. BISHAW
Director

Encl.