



NORTHERN TERRITORY

ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS

A STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR THE INTERIOR
THE HON. P. J. NIXON ON 9 AUGUST 1968

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The Minister for the Interior, Mr Nixon, today urged that the question of land rights for Aborigines be considered in a wider context than the emotional plane on which it is frequently presented.

The Government is in favour of Aborigines gaining title to land but believes that this should be under the land tenure system which applies to the rest of the community and under conditions which will give them real prospects of improving their position in life.

The Government's aim is to ensure in the most effective way possible that all of the opportunities which the Australian community offers for a full and satisfying life are open to every Aborigine and that all Aborigines are equipped to take advantage of those opportunities in the way which most appeals to them.

Singling out the issue of land rights and pressing for areas of land to be granted to groups of Aborigines in remote places would not serve this purpose. On the contrary we could end up with a series of depressed Aborigine communities tied to a form of sub standard living with a barrier between them and the rest of the Australian community. Separatism and segregation of Aborigines would create here problems now being faced in other countries.

The Aborigines in the Northern Territory are not deprived of land rights. A substantial part of the Territory - nearly one-fifth - had been set aside by reservation for the use and enjoyment of Aborigines. Government efforts are being concentrated on the best way of establishing Aborigines on the land in economic areas.

This is being done by an examination of resources of reserves to assess the opportunity for development and land settlement. Legislation to provide for titles of land on reserves to be granted to Aborigines is at present before the

Legislative Council for the Northern Territory. Funds will come from royalties for mining and forestry projects on reserves which are paid to a special trust fund to assist Aborigines. Also the Prime Minister has announced that a special fund will be set up to provide capital assistance for Aboriginal enterprises. As further land is required Aborigines will be given opportunity to obtain economic blocks. The Aborigines' future in the Northern Territory is not a bleak prospect - it is a prospect of great promise.

Government policies are directed towards the objective of the assimilation of Aboriginal Australians as fully effective members of a single Australian society. The Government wishes to avoid measures which are likely to set Aboriginal citizens permanently apart from other Australians through having their development based on separate or different standards.

Demands for land grants built up from protests, with only vague generalisations about intended use, and with no thought about how the people could live at a reasonable standard and what opportunity there is for the children, will be detrimental to Aborigines.

So far as the claim made on behalf of some of the Gurindji tribe in the Territory for rights to traditional land is concerned, it is by no means clear that the Aborigines themselves had in mind an area of 500 square miles on which to run their own cattle station. They were asking for a residential area where they and their families could live with possibly the opportunity to run a contract droving and mustering business if any of them so wished. The Government has answered this proposal by agreeing to establish a residential area on Crown land at Wave Hill where facilities for education and medical care of Aborigines in the area have been established for some years; and to provide land to run horses if any of the people set up as contract musters.

and drovers. In time this residential area will be developed as a town to serve the needs of all the people in this part of the Territory.

Neither Wattie Creek nor the site for the township is known to contain sites which are of special sacred significance. As previously announced arrangements are being made to ensure that Aborigines who have been living at Wattie Creek will not be disturbed in their occupancy should they wish to remain there. The laws of the Northern Territory also protect the rights of aborigines who wish to camp, roam or hunt anywhere on the pastoral properties in the Northern Territory.

There are perhaps 130,000 people of Aboriginal descent in this country - there are about 20,000 full-blood Aborigines in the Territory. A significant proportion of people of Aboriginal descent are living and making their own way in the community without special assistance. The majority however need some form of assistance and guidance. They all have a legitimate claim to participate in this assistance - no one group has a greater right than the remainder. Whatever is done for one must be capable of application and be applied to all who might seek the same help.

Some Aborigines will find their future as landowners. Others will choose to follow a different vocation. The Government's approach is that those who want to take up land and work it in the same way as other Australians do should be assisted to secure land under normal titles. Those who want to find their future in other occupations should also be assisted where necessary.

Land rights should be regarded not as an end in themselves but a means to an end. The ultimate end the Government seeks is full participation by Aborigines with other Australians in the life of a single Australian community.