



**DEPARTMENT OF
FOREIGN
AFFAIRS**

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AUSTRALIA TRANSFERS LAND TO PEOPLE
OF THE NEW HEBRIDES

The Australian Government has agreed to relinquish Australian land holdings in the New Hebrides to enable them to be used by the people of the New Hebrides.

Announcing this today, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Whitlam, released the following agreed joint communique by the Australian and British Governments:

"The Australian and British Governments have agreed in principle that Australian lands in the New Hebrides known as the 'Commonwealth Lands' should be transferred to a Land Trust Board to be set up by the British Resident Commissioner in the New Hebrides under Queen's Regulations.

As part of a contract made in 1902 between the Australian Government and Burns Philp and Co Ltd, Burns Philp transferred the right of disposal of approximately 25,000 acres of land in the New Hebrides, to which it held claims, to the Australian Minister for External (now Foreign) Affairs, in return for an increase in shipping subsidy.

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Most of the land is registered in Burns Philp's name and the company has continued to act as agents for the Australian Government in dealing with the land.

It will be the duty of the Land Trust Board to further the use of the land vested in it from time to time for the benefit of the people of the New Hebrides.

The 'Commonwealth Lands', with some possible exceptions to be agreed between the British Resident Commissioner and the Australian authorities, will be vested in the Board.

In reaching this agreement the Australian and British Governments have had very much in mind the interests of the New Hebrideans.

Detailed discussions and negotiations consequential upon the agreement will be held as soon as possible between the British Residency in Vila and the Australian authorities."