



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 211

2 April 1974

TORRES STRAIT MARINE PARK

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam said tonight that he wrote to Mr Bjelke Petersen in December 1972 suggesting that Papua New Guinea, Queensland and Australian officials hold discussions, but Mr Bjelke Petersen had said he could not see that any good purpose would be served by such a meeting.

Since then, Ministerial and official discussions have been held between the Australian and Papua New Guinea Governments. There have been consultations with the Torres Strait Islanders and discussions have been arranged between the Torres Strait Islanders and the coastal people of Papua New Guinea.

Arising out of these discussions, proposals have been put forward for an agreement between the Government which would protect the environment of the Torres Strait and the way of life of the Islanders and the coastal people. Queensland officials have been kept informed of these proposals. As the issues have not yet been discussed between the Australian and Papua New Guinea Governments, it is not possible to conclude whether such an agreement would be acceptable to the Governments and the peoples concerned. The Australian Government is hopeful that the concept of an environmentally protected area can contribute to a satisfactory settlement.

The Prime Minister said that in view of the Premier's changed attitude he would again invite the Queensland Government to take part in official discussions with the Australian and Papua New Guinea Governments with a view to reaching an agreed settlement.

The Prime Minister stressed, however, that negotiations on such a settlement could only be undertaken by the two Governments concerned - that is Papua New Guinea and Australia. Papua New Guinea is not able to reach a separate agreement with Queensland and this is understood and accepted by Mr Somare.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.