

FOR PRESS

A special committee of Federal Ministers will investigate the possibility of establishing an international airport at Townsville.

This was announced today by the Minister for Tourism and Recreation (Mr. Frank Stewart).

Such an airport would be expected to boost the tourist potential of the entire region, Mr. Stewart said.

It would also continue to be used by the RAAF as a joint military-civil venture.

"The committee will carefully study the location and also the physical requirements for an airport, the anticipated needs of international airlines and the environmental, urban and regional development aspects," he said.

"We will also look at the operational and economic factors which would speed up the tourist development of Northern Australia in general and the Great Barrier Reef area in particular."

Mr. Stewart said the Prime Minister (Mr. Gough Whitlam) in his policy speech had been specific about the Government's intentions to declare the Great Barrier Reef a National Park.

This would follow the expected early passage of the Territorial Sea and Continental Shelf Bill.

Such a move would necessitate the establishment of an international airport at Townsville.

Chairman of the special Cabinet Committee is Mr. Frank Stewart.

Other members are Dr. Rex Patterson, Minister for Northern Development, Senator Reginald Bishop, Minister for Repatriation and Minister assisting the Minister for Defence, Mr. Tom Uren, Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Mr. Charles Jones, Minister for Transport and Minister for Civil Aviation and Dr. Moss Cass, Minister for the Environment and Conservation.

The committee held its first meeting last night, shortly after the full Cabinet meeting.

Mr. Stewart said the proposed new Townsville airport would cut travelling time for overseas tourists and would also eliminate many of the inconveniences associated with changing aircraft.

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