



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 281
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NEW LAND DEAL FOR NORTHERN TERRITORY ABORIGINALS

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, today announced that Cabinet had accepted in principle the recommendations made in the Second Report of the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission.

Mr Whitlam said that the recommendations provided for full Aboriginal ownership of all existing reserves in the Northern Territory and certain other lands and for the establishment of a Land Commission to enquire into Aboriginal land claims and land needs outside the Reserves. Aboriginal Regional Land Councils and Land Trusts would be incorporated to hold title and administer land matters.

Cabinet authorised preliminary drafting of a comprehensive Aboriginal Land (Northern Territory) Bill with a view to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs introducing the Bill into the Parliament during the Budget Sittings. Final drafting must, however, await full consultation with the Northern Territory Aboriginals through their Land Councils, which are at present considering the Report's recommendations.

Cabinet also authorised the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to appoint an Interim Land Commissioner, in order to hasten action on such matters as the provision of land for the Gurindji of Wave Hill and for Aboriginal groups in towns. Any such appointment would be without prejudice to the outcome of discussions with the Aboriginals.

Drafting of Bills to provide for the incorporation of Aboriginal groups and communities, and for the establishment of an Aboriginal Land Fund is already well advanced. The Aboriginal Corporations Bill will allow the incorporation of Aboriginal Councils, some of which could hold land in accordance with the Commission's recommendations. Other lands would be held by Trusts to be established under the proposed land legislation.

The Land Fund will provide for the purchase of lands in the Northern Territory as recommended by the proposed Aboriginal Land Commission. It is proposed, however, that the Fund should be used for land purchases in the States as well as in the Northern Territory.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will be discussing the Commission's Report with State Ministers responsible for Aboriginal affairs. This matter was discussed at the recent Premiers' Conference.

CANBERRA. A.C.T.