



## PRIME MINISTER

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### GREAT BARRIER REEF

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The Prime Minister, Mr. Whitlam, said in Cairns today that the Australian Government would create a marine park based on the Great Barrier Reef in order to protect the reef from oil drilling.

Mr. Whitlam said the Government was closely studying the recent report of the Wallace Royal Commission into drilling on the reef. The report would go before the Cabinet again. However, because of the urgent need to protect the reef from despoilation, the Government will now proceed with the creation of the marine park. Drilling would be banned in any area of the park where it was considered harmful to the reef or to the environment as a whole.

"We will take this action to protect an irreplaceable part of Australia's natural heritage," Mr. Whitlam said. "We are determined to safeguard the reef and ensure its survival. We will preserve it both for its intrinsic value and its importance to the tourist industry of Queensland."

Mr. Whitlam said it was essential that the marine park be established in co-operation with the Queensland Government. The Australian Government wanted a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to administer the park with members appointed jointly by the Australian and Queensland Governments.

Mr. Whitlam said there had been little evidence of Mr. Bjelke-Petersen's willingness to co-operate. Queensland needed a Labor Government to ensure the survival of the reef.

"The Premier did not even bother to reply to my letter of 23 September inviting his Government to co-operate with the Australian Government in the creation of the Authority," he said. "We will, if necessary, go ahead and create the Authority without Queensland."

Mr. Whitlam recalled that the Wallace Royal Commission had been appointed because of a conflict between Mr. Bjelke-Petersen and a former Liberal Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton. Mr. Gorton believed that Mr. Bjelke-Petersen's Government was not sufficiently aware of environmental issues.

"There is ample evidence to justify Mr. Gorton's view," Mr. Whitlam said. "The Queensland people must face that they are being governed by environmental vandals."

The Labor Party in Queensland had promised in the last election to dedicate national parks over five percent of the State. The amount now was a mere 0.6 percent and this had been achieved only by adding 800,000 hectares in the Simpson Desert. If one excluded the Simpson Desert, Tasmania had as much land dedicated as national park as Queensland. Yet Tasmania had a land area of only 3.9 percent of Queensland's.

Mr. Whitlam said the beautiful Weymouth rainforest was still a pastoral lease and the Iron and McIlwraith ranges were still under threat. In a State with a civilized government such areas would be national parks.

"The Labor Party in Queensland has promised and will implement its promise to dedicate five percent of the State as national park, including the biologically significant areas," Mr. Whitlam said.

"Through our Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service and our grants to the States for nature conservation the Australian Government will be delighted to help achieve this goal.

"The Queensland people have waited since 1969 for the Cooloola National Park to be created. They still don't have it, but it is already clear that when they do get it, it will only be a fraction of the size it should be, and most incredibly of a doughnut shape. It was promised before the last election. It is only because of conservationist and union vigilance that Queensland is even being offered this apology for a park.

"The Queensland Government has also agreed to create a National Park at Cape Cleveland around the Australian Institute of Marine Science. The Australian Government, and the Queensland people are still waiting.

"The Greenvale nickel project is being built at Yabulu and will pollute the sea one mile out with highly toxic ammonium sulphate, nickel and cobalt. The Australian Government has not even been consulted.

"Cabinet last Thursday approved the drafting of a Marine Environment Protection Bill. When this is law, we will be looking at such projects very closely."

Mr. Whitlam said the co-called Clean Air and Clean Waters Acts in Queensland were a farce. There had been only one prosecution under the Clean Air Act.

The Government's treatment of the Bellevue Hotel and The Mansions showed its contempt for the historic buildings of Queensland. In an incredible act of vandalism, Mr. Bjelke-Petersen had had all the verandahs ripped off the Bellevue Hotel knowing that this would create an eyesore and hasten the destruction of the building. "We have funds in our National Estate program for historic buildings," Mr. Whitlam said. "I invite the Queensland Government to apply for the \$150,000 needed to save the building."

CANBERRA, A.C.T.