

PRIME MINISTER'S QUEENSLAND BROADCAST NO. 5

CONSERVATION

Sunday 20 April 1975

I don't suppose there is a more beautiful State in Australia than Queensland. Its rich vegetation, its tropical climate, its diverse natural beauty, its superb coastline make it a haven for tourists and a constant joy for its own citizens. Whatever I may feel about the Queensland Government from time to time, I hope no one blames me when I come to Queensland as often as I can for a spell of relaxation. Queenslanders have a special obligation to preserve the natural beauties of their State - not just for themselves, but for all Australians and for future generations. It's distressing to find the State Government neglecting this important task. They just don't seem to care.

The best way to keep an area unspoiled and beautiful is to declare it a national park. That means it will always be protected from mining, from building, from development; and that wildlife will be safe. Here in Queensland you ought to have more national parks than any other State. Five percent of the State's land area would be a reasonable figure - The Labor Party in Queensland promised a 5 percent target in their election policy three years ago. The actual amount now is a little over half of one percent, and even that low figure has been achieved only by adding a vast slab of the Simpson Desert. If we exclude the Simpson Desert, Queensland has as much land dedicated as national park as Tasmania. That's not good.

Of course it's not possible for the Australian Government to set up national parks on State territory, but we can help in other ways. We have established a National Parks and Wildlife service to manage national parks in Australian territories, and the professional help of that service is available to the States. This financial year we are providing \$9 million as part of a three-year program to help the States acquire land for nature conservation purposes. That \$9 million is a first instalment. We have launched the National Air Monitoring Program; and a program to prevent sea pollution by the dumping of wastes from ships; and we are insisting that all Australian Government projects likely to affect the environment are subject to detailed scrutiny by the Department of Environment.

One very important thing the Australian Government can do is create marine national parks to protect parts of the sea or the coastline. That's what we're doing around the Great Barrier Reef. Naturally we would like the marine park established in cooperation with Queensland, with a park authority appointed jointly by the two Governments. Unfortunately Mr. Bjelke-Petersen has shown little willingness to cooperate.

I mentioned in an earlier broadcast the row between Mr. Bjelke-Petersen and Mr. Gorton over the Barrier Reef. Mr. Gorton, when he was Prime Minister, wasn't satisfied that the Queensland Government was doing enough to protect the Reef and its environment - and he was quite justified in that suspicion. Because of his row with Queensland a Royal Commission was set up jointly by Queensland and the previous Australian Government. We shall be acting promptly on the basis of the Commission's report. It declares quite firmly that there must be no oil drilling or other damaging activity on the reef. But now Mr. Bjelke-Petersen comes along and asks us to hold up our legislation for a marine park while he challenges in the Courts our sovereignty over the Continental Shelf. He is still waiting for a Court decision on the validity of some earlier legislation on this subject. Quite frankly, we are not prepared to wait any longer while he argues the toss. The Royal Commission's findings are perfectly clear. Our responsibility to protect the Reef is perfectly clear. While we would rather set up a Barrier Reef marine park in cooperation with Queensland, we will, if necessary, go ahead and do it alone. There has been delay enough already. We are quite resolved that the Reef - a natural asset of unique beauty and irreplaceable value - should be preserved for all time. I only wish Mr. Bjelke-Petersen, with his oil and mining interests, showed the same determination.

And it's not just natural beauties we have to preserve. What we call the "National Estate" includes all the beautiful buildings, historic sites and parks, and Aboriginal areas that must be safeguarded by any civilised community. This idea of a national estate is a fairly recent one. We are the first Australian Government to recognise its importance; one of the first things we did was establish a nation-wide investigation into the places and things worthy of preservation. This year we are setting aside nearly a million dollars to assist worthwhile projects in Queensland. The money is there; the projects have been recommended; the plans are ready; the agreement with Queensland has been signed. I regret to say that the Queensland Government has not yet made a request for payment, and until they do, not a cent can be paid. All sorts of restoration works and studies in Queensland cities and towns are waiting to go ahead the moment the Queensland Government chooses to request the funds. Let me mention a few : the re-erection of the beautiful old Bellevue Homestead, formerly situated near Coominya; the restoration of the old Government House and

the Colonial stores in Brisbane; the historic City Hall in Warwick; the Caloundra lighthouse; the Bowen River Hotel near Collinsville; the James Cook monuments at Round Hill Head.

The list is long. It will be tragic if these works are neglected, if the Barrier Reef remains at risk, if our efforts to preserve the natural beauty and wildlife of this State are frustrated by a State Government that simply doesn't care enough about the great natural heritage which belongs to Queenslanders - and to all Australians.