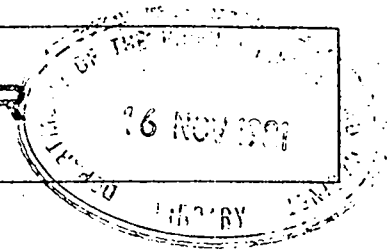




PRIME MINISTER



FOR MEDIA

THURSDAY, 12 NOVEMBER, 1981

JOINT STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

CAIRNS SECTION OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the wonders of the world. It is a focus of national pride, and all Australians treasure it. There is deep concern in the community for the welfare of the reef, and a universal conviction that proper care of the reef is a priority responsibility of governments.

Since 1975, the whole of the reef has been protected by the Commonwealth Government under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act. Australia is indeed a world leader in conservation management of the marine environment. The policy of the Commonwealth Government is to proclaim the various sections of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park progressively. The Capricornia section was proclaimed in 1979.

The Cairns section has been the subject of negotiation for more than 12 months, the one outstanding issue being whether the western boundary should be the low water mark on the mainland or a line some distance off the coast.

The view of the Commonwealth Government is that the low water mark on the Queensland coast must form the boundary where features of ecological significance are involved.

The Commonwealth Parliament has full jurisdiction and responsibility right up to the low water mark. The Commonwealth Government was willing to allow discussions with the Queensland Government to be extended to a very considerable length in the interests of achieving co-operation and agreement. But despite the length of the discussions, agreement has not been reached.

Accordingly, the Commonwealth Government has decided to move at once towards proclamation, and the enabling action leading to the proclamation of the Cairns section will be started immediately.

The Minister for Home Affairs and Environment will immediately request the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to identify precisely the boundaries involved and report to him on its recommendations to allow him to recommend to the Governor-General that the area be proclaimed.

The total length of the Western Boundary will be some 550 kilometres, and for about 30% of this distance the boundary will be the low water mark on the coastline.

Among the ecological features included, will be the sea grass beds north of Cape Flattery, which are an important habitat for dugong - an internationally recognised endangered species; high quality reefs fringing the mainland and islands; and marine areas adjacent to Queensland-proclaimed national parks which extend down to the shoreline.

The Cairns section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park will be some 36,000 square kilometres. When this is added to the 12,000 square kilometres in the Capricornia section, the park will then be many times larger than any existing or proposed marine park anywhere in the world.

The Marine Park concept and the way it is being implemented will ensure the conservation of the Reef ecosystem. It is the Government's policy that regulation should be the minimum necessary to conserve the Reef. As with the Capricornia section, there will be perfectly satisfactory provision for recreation, shipping, tourism, commercial and amateur fishing and other activities. The Park boundaries will exclude port and other marine areas adjacent to intensive industrial or agricultural developments on land, unless conservational reasons dictate otherwise.

The selection of the boundaries of the Cairns Section of the Marine Park has been made only after the most careful consideration of alternatives by the Government and by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

The eastern boundary of the new Cairns section will follow the eastern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Region itself. In the south, the boundary will be a line commencing at low water mark and coincident for most of its length with the line adopted for State purposes between the Cardwell and Johnstone Shires and thence passing immediately south of Taylor Reef to the eastern boundary of the Regions. In the north, the boundary will be a straight line commencing at low water mark on the mainland at 14 degrees 40 minutes south and passing through Two Mile Opening to the eastern boundary of the Region. Lizard Island is within the new Section of the Marine Park.

Once the Cairns Section is formally proclaimed, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is required under the Act to develop a zoning plan for the Section and, in this context, will be seeking public submissions. All submissions which the Authority receives will be examined carefully and will be taken into account in preparing a draft Zoning Plan. The draft plan will then be published so that members of the public are aware of the detailed nature of the Authority's proposals and are able to comment on them. The draft Zoning Plan will be open for comment for at least one month.

I regret that the Queensland Government has not come in with us on the western boundary of the Cairns Section. But I believe there is support throughout the whole of Australia for the course of action being followed. I hope that now a decision has been made, co-operation between the two Governments in Park matters will proceed.