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# PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

MONDAY, 7 JUNE 1982

## OPENING OF KAKADU NATIONAL PARK HEADQUARTERS

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to open the headquarters building for Kakadu National Park. I first visited here many years before the National Park was established in 1979, and I have come back whenever I could.

In earlier years, I found time to stay here for a day or two and I came to appreciate something of its fragile and unique beauty and the importance of the area to Australia and to the world. A visitor can come here for a few hours and enjoy the spectacle of the Arnhemland escarpment, or the Wetlands, or the floodplains. Or one can return for longer periods at different times of the year and experience a deeper appreciation and enjoyment. The face of the Kakadu changes with the seasons, from the summer monsoons to the dry spring, the park is home for a vast array and variety of wildlife.

Kakadu also has another dimension. It is a store of cultural values, greatly significant to aboriginal people and important to all of us. The park is full of sacred and significant places. When such features are identified and pointed out, even people who have no direct cultural ties with them can begin to glimpse the relationship which has grown over thousands of years between a people and their ancient land.

As a national park Kakadu ranks with the finest in the world. The Government nominated it for the world heritage list not only for its natural values, but also for its cultural importance. And as many of you will be aware, Kakadu was accepted by the World Heritage Committee meeting in Australia last September, the first national park in Australia to be so honoured. At the same time, the Great Barrier Reef and the Willandra Lakes area of New South Wales were also placed on the World Heritage List. Kakadu contains some of the most important wetlands in Australia and with this in mind the Government declared Kakadu a "Wetland of International Importance" in accordance with our obligations under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as waterfowl habitat.

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Kakadu National Park owes its existence in its present form to an unprecedented action by the traditional aboriginal owners of the area. These people, in laying claim to the land now comprising the Park, indicated that if their claim was granted they would be prepared to lease the land to the Commonwealth Government for the purposes of a national park for the benefit of all Australians. Following the granting of land rights and detailed negotiations between the Government and the Northern Land Council, agreement was reached on the terms and conditions that would apply to the operation of the Park once it was established. On 3 November 1978 the Northern Land Council, the Kakadu Aboriginal Land Trust and the Director of the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service signed an agreement which set out details of how the Park would be managed particularly in relation to aboriginal involvement.

A particularly satisfying aspect of the management of Kakadu is the involvement of the traditional aboriginal owners. This involvement is obtained not only through employment and training but also through the detailed consultation that takes place between the Parks Service and the traditional owners on all matters of significance. The assistance of the Northern Land Council and the Gagadju Association in this consultative process, and the relationships built up between the parties involved, contribute much to the success of the Park.

One feature of aboriginal involvement in the Park is the Aboriginal Ranger Training Program, run by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. This program, which is required by the lease agreement, has received acclaim both nationally and internationally. It is seen as a most successful initiative leading, within a reasonable time frame, to a situation where most of the senior positions in the park will be held by aboriginals.

I understand that we have with us today representatives of the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service who, with representatives of the aboriginal people having ties to the Gammon Ranges National Park are spending a week in Kakadu looking at the training program and at aboriginal involvement generally. At Mr Tonkin's request I have agreed that the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service will assist their South Australian counterparts in establishing a similar program in the Gammon Ranges National Park. I hope that the visit by these officers will be fruitful, and that the experience gained in Kakadu over the last three years will be of assistance elsewhere in Australia.

Kakadu is a magnificent national park. It is an outstanding addition to our system of national parks, which is one of the oldest in the world, dating back more than 100 years. And, in the five years to June 1981, the area of national parkland in Australia more than doubled, to more than 31 million hectares, with new national parks in every state and territory of Australia - 31 million hectares: more than the entire area of the State of Victoria.

I want to refer more broadly to environmental protection, and the unrivalled record that we have achieved. We prohibited sand mining on Fraser Island; we have banned whaling completely; we have substantially increased grants and research in marine science; we are progressively declaring sections of the Great Barrier Reef marine park. We have worked towards the preservation of the Antarctic and the preservation of Antarctic seals; we have worked to protect migratory birds and for nature conservation in the South Pacific; we were the first Party to sign the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance; we have assisted in the establishment of the World Wildlife Fund in Australia and before Federal Parliament now is a special wildlife protection bill to bring together the export controls which protect Australia's unique wildlife.

Only two days ago, on World Environment Day, I launched the Australian Year of the Tree and announced that the Government would initiate a national tree program to encourage people to value trees and to plant and care for them. And, as you will be aware, the Government is currently conducting an information campaign across the nation to educate Australians to protect and conserve their natural environment.

Governments must be concerned with the preservation of Australia's natural environment, and at the same time with the necessary balance between development and conservation and the reconciliation of competing land uses and this is very much the position in this part of Australia. Aboriginal interests and those of tourists, conservationists, researchers, miners and others all have to be considered. Our success in harmonising competing interests will reflect the quality and sensitivity of the management applied in areas such as this Park and it will also reflect on our maturity as a nation. In the last three years, a great deal has been done at Kakadu, improving road access and providing facilities for staff and visitors and producing a range of informative material.

The Commonwealth is very conscious of the growing importance of tourism in the Northern Territory. I understand that the tourist industry has welcomed the workshops and seminars conducted by park staff. Similarly, the Park Service has provided courses and seminars for the staff of mining companies to inform them of the biological and cultural values of the Park and to seek their co-operation in protecting those values. This building is very much part of the process. It provides an administrative centre for the Park operation and is an information centre for visitors.

I understand that several people concerned with the design and construction are here today, and I would like to congratulate you on how well you have succeeded in creating a complex that fits in with, rather than intrudes upon, the environment. Congratulations should also be extended to the staff in the Park who have worked so hard and so successfully to get everything ready for today. I fully appreciate the time and the effort needed to maintain this standard in such a climate.

Of course, Kakadu is a great inspiration. I am confident that the commitment of the Government and the dedication of everyone associated with Kakadu will ensure that this priceless part of our national heritage is passed safely to future generations of Australians.

Thank you Mr Wilson for inviting me to officially open this fine building, I am proud and delighted to do so - to unveil this commemorative plaque and declare the Kakadu National Park Headquarters officially open.

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