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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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The Federal Government has agreed to transfer the title to Uluru National Park to the traditional aboriginal owners.

Title to the park will be transferred from the Commonwealth to an Aboriginal Land Trust established under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act.

The Government accepted the proposal put forward by the aboriginal owners of the land that title would be transferred to aboriginal ownership on the basis that the area would continue to be used as a national park which would be available for the use and enjoyment of all Australians and the many thousands of visitors from overseas who travel to the park every year.

This is an historic decision and is a measure of the willingness of this Government on behalf of the Australian people, to recognise the just and legitimate claims of a people who have been dispossessed of their land but who have never lost their spiritual attachment to that land.

In 1979 an aboriginal land claim over an area including Uluru National Park was heard by His Honour Mr. Justice Toohey, the first Aboriginal Land Commissioner.

However, it was held at that time that the national park fell outside the jurisdiction of the Commissioner because title to the land had been vested in the Director of the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service.

But when Mr. Justice Toohey reported on 31 August 1979 he stated that: "Both Ayers Rock and Mt. Olga are of enormous significance not only for the local descent groups immediately responsible for them but for the claimants generally and for a wide range of aboriginal people". The Government has taken account of these comments when taking its decision.

The granting of aboriginal title and the leasing back to the Commonwealth for the purposes of maintaining and operating a national park has already been done in the top end of the Northern Territory in relation to the Kakadu National Park.

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These lease arrangements with the Director, Australian National Parks and Wildlife, have in no way adversely affected the operation of that park and it is not expected that similar lease arrangements in relation to Uluru will in any way adversely affect the operation of the national park at Ayers Rock.

In granting title to the aboriginal people the Government wanted to ensure that the Northern Territory would have continuing participation in the overall management of Uluru National Park.

A management regime will be established to provide an opportunity for Northern Territory participation.

Discussions will be held between the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment and the Northern Territory Government and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and relevant aboriginal bodies with a view to outlining mutually acceptable management arrangements under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975.

Those talks are expected to start soon so that the new arrangements can be put in place as soon as practicable.