

**Petition**

Registration No:	35
Title:	Save Our Parks Estate – Top End
Presented on:	23 August 2006
Presented by:	Dr Lim
Referred To:	Chief Minister
Response due:	17.10.06 - Refer P. 29
Response received:	29 August 2006
Response presented:	30 August 2006

Petition

A Petition to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
Save Our Parks Estate

We the undersigned, respectfully showeth our great sense of betrayal by the Northern Territory Government in its plans to handover 48 Territory owned to a select group of people.

Your petitioners do humbly observe that the government plans to handover parks including:

Mary River
Fogg Dam nature Reserve
Flora River Nature Park
Black Jungle/Lambells Lagoon Conservation Reserve
Gregory National Park
Harrison Dam Conservation Area
Melacca Swamp Conservation Area
Gregory's Tree Historical Reserve
Kuyunba Conservation Reserves

Your petitioners do further observe that the handover is akin to asking NSW residents to handover Bondi Beach or SA residents to handover Glenelg Beach, or indeed the waterways and beaches around Darwin no questions asked.

Your petitioners do humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory take the necessary steps to make the Northern Territory Government immediately rescind its decision to handover the parks estate to sectional interests and to retain ownership of the parks for ALL Territorians.

Response

- The parks to which the petitioners have referred are listed under Schedules 1, 2 and 3 of the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*.
- Parks listed in Schedule 1 are to be included in the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ARLA)*.

- Parks listed in Schedule 2 will be granted freehold title.
- Parks listed in Schedule 3 will be subject to joint management agreements.
- All parks listed in the schedules are subject to joint management arrangements, in accordance with the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*.
- The result of the 2002 Ward High Court decision created legal uncertainty for 49 Territory parks and reserves.
- Legal opinion provided to Government was that the declarations of these parks and reserves were potentially invalid. 38 of these Parks were quickly re-declared but legal advice confirmed they were still vulnerable to native title determinations and compensation claims. The remaining 11 Parks could not be re-declared because they were already subject to claim under the ALRA, preventing the grant of other interests in that land.
- To secure certainty over the future of the 49 parks and reserves, the Northern Territory negotiated settlement of outstanding land rights and native title claims. To pursue settlement through the Court system was seen to risk losing some areas from the parks system altogether, at great public expense.
- *The Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* defines the joint management partners as the Northern Territory Government and the Aboriginal traditional owners of the park or reserve.
- The objective of joint management is to manage parks for the benefit of traditional owners and the wider community, for biological diversity and to serve visitor and community needs for education and enjoyment.
- Day-to-day management of jointly managed parks will remain with the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Under the terms of the joint management agreements, there will be no entry fee to these parks, and no requirement for a permit.
- Public access within most parks is already controlled for safety, conservation or cultural reasons. Traditional owners generally want to share their country, so expanded access and opportunities is a likely result.
- In the long term, many Aboriginal people will be employed directly and indirectly on parks. Through joint management, traditional owners are also keen to engage in the tourism economy, thereby meeting the large and increasing interstate and international demand for authentic cultural tourism products.
- Joint Management Plans will be prepared and the public will be invited to comment on the draft plans as has always been the case.
- Joint Management is a great success story, and is well supported by Territorians.