



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 19 August 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Injinoo Lands

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10.15 a.m.), by leave: One of the starkest distinctions between this Government and those who occupy the Opposition benches is that we are governing for all Queenslanders. When this Government came to office, one of our priorities was to improve the social and economic wellbeing of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, based on the principles of social justice and reconciliation.

Later today, this Government will be taking a significant step towards reconciliation with the return of the Injinoo lands in northern Cape York Peninsula to their traditional owners. On behalf of our Government, I have asked Queensland's newest far-north Queensland Senator, Jan McLucas, to represent me at a ceremony at Injinoo, to present a deed granting freehold title over 345,000 hectares of land on the cape to four Aboriginal communities that have come together under one Aboriginal land trust.

This land includes the historic settlements of Somerset, Crab and Albany Islands and reaches as far south as the Skardon River. It is bounded on the east by the Jardine River National Park and the Heathlands Reserve.

This deed of grant under the Aboriginal Land Act 1991 provides freehold title to the west and east coasts of the present Injinoo deed of grant in trust, plus three existing Crown reserves established for indigenous purposes between 1948 and 1986.

The incidents that occurred on those lands in the late 19th century, as European settlers attempted to establish dominance, are etched in Australia's history. The return of these lands to their traditional owners comes 135 years to the month after the HMS Salamander and the Golden Eagle dropped anchor at Port Albany, heralding the start of European occupation and Aboriginal dislocation.

In the space of 40 years from 1864, the Aboriginal population in northern Cape York was decimated, reduced from over 3,000 to less than one-tenth of that number, mainly due to the establishment of a Government settlement at Somerset and the construction of an overland telegraph line. Introduced diseases, shootings and kidnappings disrupted an indigenous culture that had existed for thousands of years. Incidents took place of which no Australian could be proud and it is remarkable that the indigenous culture survived in that region as well as it did.

The process to achieve this freehold grant to the Injinoo community has involved a large number of people over the past five years. I congratulate all of those people for their inclusiveness, goodwill, patience and hard work.

This is the most secure title that the Queensland Government can provide. It will enable the Injinoo community to progress its excellent work of managing this area for all Australians. The four Aboriginal tribes that make up the Injinoo community have formed a single land trust to oversee the management of this land as a way of presenting a united body for the northern peninsula region.

The trust will look after the land on behalf of their ancestors, the current inhabitants and future generations. As an inaugural member of the Cape York Peninsula Development Association, the Injinoo community has taken an active role in fostering reconciliation among people living and working

in the cape. It has helped to establish common ground between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, based on economic development and cultural respect.

It is 135 years this month since European settlement in Cape York Peninsula changed forever the lives of the indigenous people. Today's historic initiative by the Beattie Government is a significant step in recognising the need for healing and ushers in a new era towards reconciliation.
