




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

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MOTION: REVOCATION OF PROTECTED AREAS

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (8.16 pm): I rise to lend support to the notice before the House tonight in relation to the revocation of the state areas in relation to section 32 of the Nature Conservation Act 1992, revoking by regulation the dedication of parts of the protected areas estate as set out in proposals tabled by the minister tonight. They include Curtain Fig National Park, Great Sandy National Park, Jardine River National Park, Millstream Falls National Park, Wooroonooran National Park, Eumundi Conservation Park, the Heathlands Resources Reserve and, in my shadow ministerial role, the area that I would like to concentrate with my brief contribution tonight, the Jardine River Resources Reserve, which is an area of about 6,760 hectares described as lots 1 and 2 on AP23106.

I rise to specifically lend support in relation to that particular parcel because I noted from the comments made by the minister, and also the accompanying notes, it is proposed to be revoked from the Jardine River Resources Reserve to be granted as Aboriginal freehold land in accordance with the Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program. The importance of this is it enables the traditional owners unfettered access and use of their land to pursue economic opportunities and, importantly, reconnect with their traditional lands.

I would like to contribute tonight the whole notion of economic empowerment. I am sure the minister would agree that no matter which Indigenous mayor or councillor one visits what comes through time and time again is this whole notion of economic empowerment being a real key to future success for their local communities. That potentially will be unlocked with this particular revocation of this Jardine River area of some 6,750 hectares.

The importance of giving Indigenous people the opportunity to pursue economic empowerment comes back to the notion of closing the gap, which has been spoken about by previous speakers. Although this is a brief contribution, it is one very much from my heart because since I was honoured to become the shadow minister a few months ago I have spent considerable hours reading and consulting and then doing more reading and more consultation.

For the benefit of members in the chamber, I will provide a quick recap. On 20 December 2007, 10 years ago—and I will return to that point shortly—COAG committed to closing the gap, something with which most members would be familiar, in relation to life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. Indeed, COAG agreed to be accountable for reaching this goal within a specific time frame.

The strategy initiated at this time by COAG has become known as Closing the Gap. To enable the proper monitoring of these targets, COAG identified a number of building blocks, as they called them, that needed to be addressed, and they were outlined in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. These building blocks by COAG included early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation—there it is in black and white—healthy homes, safe communities, governance and leadership. That all sounds very, very noble but as members in this chamber would also probably be

familiar with—and I certainly know that the minister is—on 14 February this year the Prime Minister on the steps of Parliament House in Canberra—it was embargoed until about midday on 14 February—released the Closing the Gap report for 2017.

I will recap for the benefit of the House a couple of quick themes. In relation to progress against the targets—which is why this revocation of 6,700 hectares in Jardine potentially will unlock for those particular people the opportunity to countenance some of these particular KPIs—the Closing the Gap report on 14 February said that one of the targets was to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018. It is not on track. The target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is, sadly, not on track. The target to halve the gap in reading and numeracy for Indigenous students by 2018 is not on track. The target to halve the gap in employment by 2018 is also not on track. This is a state and national tragedy.

One of the first things I did when I was honoured with the position of shadow minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships and multicultural affairs was go to the parliamentary library and ask them to compile a report outlining the total amount of funding for this policy space from a federal, state and territory perspective going back 10, 20, and 30 years. For the benefit of the House I will keep it brief because I did not intend to speak too long, but I will go back over the last 10 years. The parliamentary library spent about a month to compile this and it is something I am prepared to take up with the minister directly. It is an absolute spaghetti can of worms just to find the sources of funding within state budgets, territory budgets and specifically, as the minister would know, federal budgets. It is absolutely tricky even to get your way through it. But the bottom line is, sadly, we are not closing the gap.

In this area of public policy, if we go back to 2007 to 2008 and come to 2015-16, we have spent in excess of \$40 billion. That is one decade and it probably would be similar in constant dollars going back 20 and 30 years. Billions and billions of dollars are being spent. I give the Rudd government praise, which is very rare for me to do but I would be churlish if I did not do so, because at least it had the gumption and the ability to start to measure something. I do give it credit for that, but it is a national disgrace that, despite the billions of dollars being spent, we are no closer to closing the gap.

I aim to continue to work with colleagues on both sides of the chamber to do whatever we can to do just that—close the gap. I return to the fact that the revocation of land tonight in this particular parcel as it relates to the Jardine River Resources Reserve will potentially—and I stress potentially—unlock economic empowerment and opportunities for those Indigenous people.