

Aboriginal land rights plea is turned down

THE Federal Government has rejected Aboriginal pleas for land rights in the Government's long-awaited statement on the rights of Australian Aboriginals.

The Prime Minister, Mr McMahon, last night announced the creation of general purpose leases for Aboriginal application on Aboriginal reserves — and proposed funds for Aboriginal enterprises.

"The Government has concluded that it was in the national interest, as well as largely in the interest of the Aboriginals themselves, for mineral exploration and development on Aboriginal reserves to continue," he said.

The chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Dr H. C. Coombs, said last night the council was disappointed with the Government's decision rejecting land rights.

Mr McMahon's 14-page statement reveals no change in Government policy. It offers financial inducements to Aboriginal communities while recognising their "deep affinity" with their land.

The Government will allocate funds to the Aboriginal Advancement Trust Account for loans to Aboriginal enterprises "with reasonable prospects of success," he said.

GOVE TITLE

The Government also will help the Yirrkala community on Gove Peninsula to gain "firm title under Australian law" to land for economic and social purposes, if they satisfy Land Board requirements.

It has decided to set aside funds to buy land for many Aboriginals living off reserves in Commonwealth territories.

Funds for Aboriginal enterprises will be available for communities in the States as well as the Northern Territory.

Dr Coombs said his council had placed a wide range of proposals before the Cabinet committee on Aboriginal land rights.

Some of these had been accepted wholly or in part, others were rejected.

"The council is disappointed in some aspects of the outcome," Dr Coombs said.

"However the decisions reached could, if the Aboriginals are able effectively to take advantage of them, provide the basis for an improvement of

their economic and social conditions and for the preservation and development of their culture.

"Much will depend on the spirit in which the decisions are administered and the understanding and reaction of Aboriginals to them, without which it is at least premature to speculate.

"The outcome could well depend less on the content of the policy than on the integrity of its administration."

Dr Coombs said Aboriginal communities would now be able to apply for general purpose leases of the land in which they were interested, and their application would have to be granted if certain conditions were met.

Applying for all-in lease

THE Yirrkala Aboriginals of the Gove Peninsula are to apply for a general purpose lease, mineral rights and forestry rights over the 6000 square mile peninsula, which includes the mining town of Gove and vast bauxite reserves.

A Melbourne spokesman for the Aboriginals said last night they would apply for the lease and rights "for the whole of the area from Arnhem Bay to Blue Mud Bay."

The spokesman said 90 per cent of Australia's Aboriginals would be grossly dissatisfied with the new Federal Government policy.