

Land for Aborigines — offer by PM

From STAN HUTCHINSON

CANBERRA, Tuesday. — New style land leases are to be available to Aborigines in the Northern Territory under changed Government policies announced tonight.

To qualify for leases Aborigines will have to show that they intend, and are able, to make reasonable economic and social use of the land.

The Prime Minister, Mr McMahon, announced the new plan tonight in a 5,000-word statement of Commonwealth policy on Aborigines. (Full text, pages 7, 8 and 9.)

Mr McMahon announced the

spending of \$44 million on Aboriginal advancement in the current financial year, an allocation of \$5 million to buy for Aboriginal communities land off the reserves as it comes on the market and grants to Aboriginal enterprises.

The new definitions of policy arise from a ruling by the Northern Territory Supreme Court last April that Australian law did not recognise Aboriginal title to land.

As a result, a Cabinet committee has produced a five-point statement of objectives.

WHAT THEY SAY... Equal rights

The general secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, Mrs Faith Bandler, said last night her organisation was disturbed by the new policy.

Aborigines should have absolute right to their own land and not be given slices of it with strings attached.

White people could not understand that land was part of an Aboriginal.

Author Frank Hardy, a campaigner for the Gurindji tribe of the Northern Territory said last night the new policy was inadequate.

The Government was now empowered to purchase the Vestey's lease covering tribal land when it became available.

But the lease would not expire until the year 2004.

Young Aborigines of the Black Power movement — six men and a girl — demonstrated outside the NSW Parliament last night in protest against the Federal Government's attitude on land rights, and against the possibility of Nabalco's establishing a wood chip venture at Gove.

The objectives are: Aborigines should be assisted as individuals, and if they wish as groups, to hold "effective and respected places within one Australian society, with equal access to the rights and opportunities it provides, and acceptance of responsibilities toward it";

The Government recognises the rights of individual Aborigines to choose the degree and the pace of identification with the Australian society, and expresses its belief that they will do so more readily and happily if attracted voluntarily and encouraged to take pride in their identity, traditions and culture;

Programs must take into account the expressed wishes of Aborigines themselves;

Strategy, administered in collaboration with the States, should encourage Aborigines to manage their own affairs, increase their economic independence, reduce social, health, housing, education and vocational training handicaps, and eliminate remaining legal discriminations, and

Special, transitional measures should be introduced to overcome disabilities now experienced by those of Aboriginal descent.

Mr McMahon said the Government believed the changing needs of the Aboriginal people themselves would require that they made more use of land to which they obtained title.

The new Northern Territory leases, known as General Purpose Leases, would be sought by individuals, groups or communities.

"We decided to create this new form of lease rather than attempt simply to translate the Aboriginal affinity with the land into some form of legal right under the Australian system," he said.

"We concluded that to do so would introduce a new and probably confusing component.

"The implications could not clearly be foreseen and could lead to uncertainty and possible challenge in relation to land titles elsewhere in Australia which are at present unquestioned and secure."

Mr McMahon said the General Purpose Leases would differ from existing NT agreements in that they would allow for a combination of uses.

They would cover areas adequate for all the economic and social purposes contemplated and would be for up to 50 years, in line with existing leases.

Land on reserves available for general purpose leasing would not include existing Government or mission community areas or areas already under lease.

As with other leases, all mineral and forest rights would be reserved to the Crown.

Mr McMahon cited the Yirrkala community, on the Gove Peninsula, as one which could apply for a general purpose lease.