
Adam Giles calls for renewed debate about Uluru climb

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ELEANOR HALL: Well, let's head now to the Northern Territory, where the Chief Minister Adam Giles has reignited the debate over whether tourists should be banned from climbing Uluru.

The park's managers are planning to close the climb once only a fifth of visitors take up the option.

But Adam Giles is calling for discussion about keeping it open and making it safer for visitors.

The son of a traditional owner in the area says he doesn't expect there'll be much appetite among the local Anangu people for that idea, as Sara Everingham reports.

SARA EVERINGHAM: The Northern Territory Chief Minister Adam Giles thinks there'd be wide-ranging benefits from keeping open the climb at Uluru.

He acknowledges there are traditional owners who want the climb closed for cultural reasons and because of concerns about safety.

But he's called for a debate about the merits of keeping open the climb and making it safer.

ADAM GILES: I believe we should explore the idea of creating a climb with stringent safety conditions and rules enforcing spiritual respect that will be endorsed, supported and even managed by the local Aboriginal community.

SARA EVERINGHAM: The Federal Environment Minister, Greg Hunt, last week reaffirmed his intention to stick with a plan to close the climb once less than a fifth of visitors climb the rock. But Adam Giles has told Parliament in the Northern Territory, he's concerned the Federal Government might be trying to accelerate the closure.

ADAM GILES: It appears that the Federal Government is yet again considering placing a total and permanent ban on climbing Uluru.

The first point to make about this ludicrous suggestion is that this should be a decision for Territorians not for bureaucrats in Canberra.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Donald Fraser is a former chairman of the Uluru Kata Tjuta board of management. He's also the son of a traditional owner.

He's satisfied with the plan for closing the climb set out in the park's management plan.

DONALD FRASER: We are very happy. There was an expression of interest went out through the world and the few Australian opposed the close but over these people and everybody and the traditional owners, want to close because we want to make the people who passed on, resting, sleeping now, happy by closing because they want it that way and that's what we aim and we are going to eventually close the climb.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Are you concerned at all that it would reduce the number of visitors who come there?

DONALD FRASER: No. We're not concerned at all. A lot of people talk about it will reduce the budget and everything else. It's not about the money. It's about our land and our land right.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Do you think there are enough other activities for people to do at Uluru when they go there?

DONALD FRASER: They opened up a lot of things at Uluru. The walk, go out and visit the country, listen to the story, do activities, join in and learn about Aboriginal people in the centre and it's not about the climb and the money.

It's about experiences we would like to share - cultural awareness and everything else.

SARA EVERINGHAM: The Chief Minister, Adam Giles, says regulating the climb at Uluru could help attract more visitors. The climb was on his mind during a recent visit to the park with golfer, Greg Norman.

ADAM GILES: But he, like I, could see the benefits of allowing people to climb. Just prior to that visit to Uluru I was in Sydney coincidentally watching people climb the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

More than 3 million people from over 100 countries have climbed the bridge since the climb was opened back in 1998. Of course I'm fully aware that the Sydney Harbour Bridge does not have the spiritual significance of Uluru to the traditional owners but allowing the Uluru climb will help visitors better understand the unique Indigenous culture and the significance for the Anangu.

SARA EVERINGHAM: Park managers have been trying to find new ways to attract more visitors to the area. Donald Fraser says that can be done without the climb. He says above all at Uluru, he wants to see Indigenous people playing a greater role in managing and running the park. He says that has to be the priority.

DONALD FRASER: The Aboriginal people need to be driving the bus instead of sitting in the backseat all the time and we are working towards it.

ELEANOR HALL: That's Donald Fraser, the former chairman of the Uluru Kata Tjuta board of management ending Sara Everingham's report.