

Let me assure you, member for Nelson, this is not Commonwealth land; this is Territory land. It has been sold by the Commonwealth and all the planning processes, rules and regulations will apply to this land. Added to that, a memorandum of understanding will be signed with the Defence Housing Authority, so we will apply planning principles on that land. The DHA has given an undertaking, as part of the memorandum of understanding, that local people will be employed.

Let me remind the opposition that The Chase did not go through a proper tender process; it was given directly to Delfin and DHA by Cabinet decision. Therefore, to come here today and accuse us of botching the sale of land and the process is absolute rubbish.

Reports noted pursuant to Sessional Order.

**PARKS AND RESERVES (FRAMEWORK
FOR THE FUTURE) BILL
(Serial 180)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

Ms MARTIN (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

I am proud to speak to the Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Bill 2003, which provides a framework for the establishment, maintenance and management of a comprehensive system of parks and reserves in the Northern Territory. This framework draws together a range of government objectives including job creation; protection of biological diversity; enhancing recreational, educational and tourist opportunities; and creating a sound and sustainable economic base for regional development.

It puts these objectives together with the Aboriginal obligation to care for country and maintain cultural traditions. The Territory's parks and reserves will be substantially enriched by recognition of traditional Aboriginal ownership. The government will involve traditional custodians in planning and management of parks, and recognise the outstanding cultural values that are to be found in many of the parks will significantly enhance their attraction to visitors.

The implementation of this bill will ensure that the vigorous indigenous culture of the Northern Territory is strongly reflected in the park system. It will give Aboriginal landowners and traditional custodians throughout the Northern Territory opportunities to actively participate in the overall management of the parks, and an opportunity to

guide how their culture is presented to visitors. Joint management arrangements between Aboriginal people and the Parks and Wildlife Service will become the norm in these parks, together with the employment of Aboriginal people in a range of roles within the park system.

This bill results from initiatives which I announced on 25 October last year to resolve uncertainty created by land claims over parks and reserves; in particular, uncertainty that arose from the High Court's judgment in the Ward case. At that time, I confirmed that the government had decided to act responsibly and decisively in seeking to resolve the uncertainty, whilst also avoiding costly and long-term litigation. As I pointed out at the time, there were two broad options facing the government. The first option was to engage in litigation and disputation at every possible level. This option would have left us in the courts for countless years. It would have delayed economic development opportunities and maintained uncertainty over our parks system. Such an approach would have been an abrogation of government's responsibility to find a comprehensive solution. The second option was to develop an agreement, whereby litigation would be put to one side, while we sought to negotiate a framework that dealt with the uncertainty arising from the High Court's decision, and which would resolve outstanding litigation in relation to our parks and reserves.

As a responsible government, we put a high priority on the need to balance the public interest in this matter, and to ensure an outcome that meets the community benefit test. The government, therefore, specified core principles that would be central to any framework agreement, and these were accepted by the land councils. Apart from the re-declaration of 38 parks last November that were previously invalidly declared under section 12 of the *Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, and agreement to put litigation aside while negotiations proceeded, the other core principles that I announced last October are all reflected in the framework that has been negotiated with the land councils. These include: development of a parks master plan to expand and more effectively manage the parks estate; current mining and exploration leases are unaffected, and existing applications will be fast-tracked; current tourism operator concessions are guaranteed; all Territory parks and reserves will remain accessible to all Territorians and visitors on a no-fee, no-permit basis; business as usual in parks until negotiations are completed; and where title changes occur, they will be conditional on the land being leased back to the Northern Territory subject to joint management under NT legislation.