

# Pastoral freehold: give us one good reason . . .

**T**HE controversy over Sydney developer Mr Warren Anderson's alleged ban of mining operations on his Top End stations raises the subject of freeholding pastoral leases.

The Chief Minister, Mr Steve Hatton, said last year that 240 or so pastoral properties in the Northern Territory would be offered the opportunity to transfer their leases into freehold title.

Following that a committee was established to look at the pros and cons of the proposal. The committee's chairman is Mr Grant Heaslip who also happens to be the Country Liberal Party's president and a large pastoral leaseholder himself.

No-one questions Mr Heaslip's honesty or his ability to carry out an objective examination of the

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issues involved. But for the sake of justice seen done his appointment to the chair of that important committee is unwise to say the least.

The same thing must be said about the proposal to freehold pastoral leases. It should be rejected forthwith.

What are the benefits?

A 99-year renewable lease is as good as gold when it comes to raising bank loans or for equity purposes.

And about 150 of the 240 leases are in fact held by multinational companies whose interests in the Territory are often solely financial or economic.

Just about the only way to ensure that programs such as brucellosis and tuberculosis eradication campaign (BTEC) are carried out and that the environment is respected are implemented is by leasing the land. Freeholding it would immediately lock up about half the Territory's land mass in the

hands of just 240 people or companies.

With the other half under inalienable title by Aborigines, the question arises as to precisely what kind of Territory do we want to bequeath our children.

Miners have already objected strenuously to the proposal on the grounds that it is already difficult enough to drill a hole in much of the Territory. The industry, let us not forget, is the mainstay of our economy producing more than \$1 billion of wealth every year and employing thousands of Territorians.

The last thing we want is to put even more obstacles on its way which is what freehold title for pastoral lessees could do.

Nor is the NT Government united on the issue. Only two weeks ago the former lands minister, Mr Ray Hanrahan, came out strongly against the proposal. The Mines and Energy Minister, Mr Barry Coulter, is also believed to be hostile to the idea.

And while there has been no canvassing of Territorians to find out how they feel, it is a fair bet to say that most would also oppose transferring of title without some very substantial reason for it.

No such reason has been advanced. Until it is there must be a firm rejection of freeholding pastoral leases.