

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Old Executive Office Building
Room 361
Washington, D.C. 20506

01/2 Public Lands file



November 1, 1973

The Honorable Edward E. Johnston
The High Commissioner
Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands
Saipan, Mariana Islands 96950

Dear Mr. High Commissioner:

The U.S. Government's review of the TTPI public lands question, in which you and your staff have ably participated, has now been completed after several months of intensive study and consultations. From these a new statement of policy has been formulate in response to the Micronesian request for the early transfer of public lands from the TTPI Government to the districts of Micronesia. The new approach has the endorsement of the Secretary of the Interior.

To carry-out this policy the attached statement of policy and necessary implementing actions has been developed by the U.S. Government. It will require detailed action by the Trust Administration at both the central and district levels. The cooperation of the Congress of Micronesia is being requested and action at the district level will of course be necessary since the basic U.S. position is that the districts in the first instance must decide for themselves how they want public land to be handled in their respective districts.

In essence this new policy represents an attempt to be just as responsive as possible to the desires of the people of Micronesia in this important matter. At the same time it will establish certain safeguards for the protection of individuals who may have acquired property interests in public lands over the years and for the retention of the land needed by the Trust Government for public purposes during the remainder of the trusteeship. A background statement explaining the plan in more detail is also attached for your information and use.

As I promised Senator Salii, Chairman of the Congress of Micronesia's Joint Committee on Future Status, I am sending him a copy of this new policy statement prior to our discussions scheduled to begin on November 13, 1973, here in Washington. I would appreciate it if you would send copies of the statement and the background paper to the DISTADS and to the District Legislatures.

In addition, in order to assist in keeping the DISTADS fully informed of the latest developments, I have asked Mary Trent to discuss the new statement and any of its facets on which the DISTADS may desire elaboration while they are meeting in Saipan. Hopefully, these discussions will generate a full measure of territory-wide understanding for the American response to the request that it make a decision to transfer title to public land prior to termination of the Trusteeship Agreement to those districts requesting such action.

To the extent that we have been able to, consistent with protecting public and individual interests in land in Micronesia, our plan for transferring control over public land to the districts has incorporated virtually all of the elements of Senator Sali's telegram to me of three weeks ago on the subject. Washington agencies believe that it is eminently fair in that it meets the desires which the Micronesian people have expressed to date, permits them to reaffirm their interest in having the lands returned to district control, and invites them to establish the mechanism for accomplishing this.

Thanks again for your cooperation, as well as that of your staff, without which our efforts would not be so far advanced. Although I sincerely hope this plan will facilitate a solution to the important issue of public lands, I am fully cognizant that the ultimate success of our endeavor depends on successful supervision and execution by the Executive Branch of the TTPI Government. During the period of the new policy's actual implementation, the Department of Interior will, of course, be primarily concerned with providing you any necessary support from the Washington end. I know that we can all count on your wholehearted, continuing support for this effort.

Sincerely,

Franklin Haydn Williams

Franklin Haydn Williams
The President's Personal Representative
For Micronesian Status Negotiations