

# Aborigines 'will be consulted first'

From MICHELLE GRATTAN

**CANBERRA.** — Aborigines at Gove on Cape York peninsula will be consulted before a decision is made on the Nabalco proposal for a wood chip industry there [the Minister for the Interior (Mr. Hunt) said yesterday.

The Government is considering an application from Nabalco Pty. Ltd. for a forestry licence to establish a wood-chip industry on up to 5000 square miles in the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve, in the Northern Territory.

Mr. Hunt said it was unrealistic to suggest that there should be a 51 per cent. — or any other specific percentage — Aboriginal equity, regardless of the economics of a project.

A substantial "infrastructure cost" would be involved, running into many millions of dollars.

"No company could be expected to finance this on the basis of a 49 per cent. equity, particularly as any company operating a wood-chip industry would be required to pay a royalty on

the timber taken," Mr. Hunt said.

These royalties would be paid to the Aborigines' Benefits Trust Fund, which also received all royalties from mining on Northern Territory Aboriginal reserves.

The trust fund is used to grant financial assistance to Aborigines throughout the Territory for social and economic purposes.

Mr. Hunt said the area of the proposed woodchip industry included land with which both the Yirrkala and Elcho Islanders had long associations.

The Government believed it should be possible to establish a viable woodchips industry in the interests of the Aborigines and the country as a whole.

"It would be counter-

productive to lay down terms at the outset which the economics of the enterprise could not sustain.

"To do so could prevent the establishment of an industry which could secure an economic future for the Aborigines concerned," Mr. Hunt said.

There was no question of the company being given tenure of any part of the Aboriginal reserve, he said.

Labor MHR Mr. Gordon Bryant (Wills, Victoria) warned that the proposed development would turn the north-east corner of Arnhem Land into a wasteland.

"The struggle of the Yirrkala people is being remorselessly eroded by a combination of Swiss-Australian industrial exploitation and Liberal-Country Party materialism," he said.