150th Anniversary of the Document that Created the Territory

04 July 2013

Attorney-General John Elferink has officially opened a new exhibition at the Northern Territory Library which celebrates the creation of the Northern Territory as we know it today.

On 6 July 1863, a document assented to by Queen Victoria ordered a vast area of northern Australia be placed under the administration of South Australia, which led to permanent European settlement in the Northern Territory.

The legal document was formally known as the Letters Patent annexing the Northern Territory to South Australia.

“The Letters Patent played a crucial role in the Northern Territory’s history but are often forgotten,” Mr Elferink said.

“At a time when the British had laid claim to the rest of the Australian continent, what we know as the Northern Territory now was considered part of New South Wales. The Letters Patent and declaration by the Queen handed legal control of the land over to the South Australian Parliament who then went on to pass the Northern Territory Act in the same year.

“This weekend marks exactly 150 years since the Letters Patent were assented to so to commemorate the milestone the NT Library is hosting a special exhibition, which includes a replica of the historic document, and rare maps showing the extent of European exploration in the Northern Territory prior to 1863.

“Without the Letters Patent the Northern Territory might never have been created so I encourage everyone to view this rare and insightful exhibition.”

Minister for Arts and Museums Matt Conlan said that a lot of work had gone into to securing the replica Letters Patent document for the 150th commemorative display.

“The Letters Patent is such an important part of our history and we worked very hard to try and secure the actual 150 year old documents for this special commemoration but unfortunately because of their age and the rigours of travelling such a long way they must remain with State Records of South Australia in Adelaide,” Mr Conlan said.

“Still, this exhibition will be the first time the public will be able to view a replica of the Letters Patent here in Darwin. The replica Letters Patent were secured with the help and support of State Records of South Australia and it’s hoped this special exhibition will educate more Territorians and visitors about this pivotal moment in our history that is often overlooked.”

The Letters Patent Exhibition will run at the NT Library at Parliament House until 28 July.

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