

# House Hears Plea in Strange Tongue

CANBERRA, Wednesday. — The strangest petition yet received by the House of Representatives — written in the aboriginal language on a length of stringy bark — was presented to the House today.

It began — “Bukudjulni gonga yuru napurrunha yirrkalalili . . .”

Which means — “The humble petition of the undersigned aboriginal people of Yirrkala . . .”

It was signed by 12 members of the 17 Yirrkala tribal groups in Arnhem Land.

The yellow, white and ochre-painted bark petition, about two feet long and one foot wide, was presented by the Northern Territory member, Mr. Nelson (Lab.) to the Clerk of the House to read.

The clerk (Mr. A. G. Turner) said it was the first time in his knowledge such a petition had been presented to Parliament.

## Sent by Post

The petition, traditionally decorated with turtles, fish, goannas and bandicoots, was sent to Mr. Nelson in the mail.

Similar copies were sent to the Prime Minister (Sir Robert Menzies) and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell).

The petition draws attention to the fact that almost 500 members of the tribes once lived on land excised from the aboriginal reserve in Arnhem Land for a £45 million alumina mining project in the Gove Peninsula.

It said the procedures of the excision of the land and the effect of it on the people who lived there were not explained to them beforehand and were kept secret from them.

“The land has been hunting and food gathering land for the Yirrkala tribes from time immemorial; we were all born here,” the petition said.

“The place is sacred to the Yirrkala people as well as vital.

“Their livelihoods are in the excised land, especially Melville Bay.”

In April, the Minister for Territories (Mr. Hasluck) announced that a trust fund to be formed by the bauxite mining interests in Arnhem Land would provide about £4 million for the welfare of aboriginal wards in the area.

The Government, he said, had taken “exceptional measures” to protect the rights of aborigines and ensure that they benefited from the development.