

NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

ADULT GUARDIANSHIP ACT 1988

No. 45 of 1988

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NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

No. 45 of 1988

AN ACT

making provision for a scheme of guardianship for certain adults under an intellectual disability, and for related purposes

[Assented to 15 September 1988]

BE it enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory of Australia, with the assent as provided by the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978* of the Commonwealth, as follows:

PART I - PRELIMINARY

1. SHORT TITLE

This Act may be cited as the *Adult Guardianship Act 1988*.

2. COMMENCEMENT

This Act shall come into operation on a date to be fixed by the Administrator by notice in the *Gazette*.

3. INTERPRETATION

(1) In this Act, unless the contrary intention appears -

"adult" means a person who has attained the age of 18 years;

"Court" means a Local Court;

"disability" means an intellectual disability;

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"Executive Officer" means the Adult Guardianship Executive Officer appointed under section 7;

"guardian" means an adult guardian appointed pursuant to this Act and includes the Public Guardian;

"intellectual disability" means a disability in an adult resulting from an illness, injury, congenital disorder or organic deterioration or of unknown origin and by reason of which the person appears to be unable to make reasonable judgments or informed decisions relevant to daily living;

"near relative", in relation to a person, means a parent or the spouse or another relative of that person;

"Public Guardian" means the Minister, and includes the person or, where there is more than one, each person to whom the powers and functions of Public Guardian have been delegated by the Minister under section 6;

"represented person" means an adult in respect of whom an adult guardianship order is in effect.

(2) In the definition of "near relative" -

(a) the reference to "another relative" is a reference to a person connected by blood relationship, marriage, adoption or custom, and for this purpose persons are connected -

(i) by blood relationship if within the fourth degree of relationship;

(ii) by marriage if one is married to the other or to a person who is connected by blood relationship to the other;

(iii) by adoption if one has been adopted as the child of the other or as a child of a person who is within the third degree of relationship to the other; and

(iv) by custom if the relationship is generally regarded in a community as being akin to one of blood, marriage or adoption; and

(b) the reference to the spouse of a person includes a reference to a person who is not legally married to the first-mentioned person but who lives with that person on a bona fide domestic basis.

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(3) A person shall not be considered to be under an intellectual disability by reason only that the person -

- (a) expresses or refuses or fails to express a particular political, anarchic, religious, irreligious, legal, illegal, moral, or immoral opinion; or
- (b) engages in or refuses or fails to engage in a particular political, anarchic, religious, irreligious, legal, illegal, moral, or immoral activity.

(4) Except as provided in section 21A(2) of the *Powers of Attorney Act*, nothing in this Act shall derogate from the provisions of that Act.

4. BEST INTERESTS OF REPRESENTED PERSON TO BE PROMOTED

Every function, power, authority, discretion, jurisdiction and duty conferred or imposed by this Act is to be exercised or performed so that -

- (a) those means which are the least restrictive of a represented person's freedom of decision and action as is possible in the circumstances are adopted;
- (b) the best interests of a represented person are promoted; and
- (c) the wishes of a represented person are, wherever possible, given effect to.

5. PUBLIC GUARDIAN

- (1) The Minister is the Public Guardian.
- (2) The functions of the Public Guardian are -
 - (a) to apply for guardianship orders pursuant to section 8(1);
 - (b) to provide reports to the Court pursuant to section 12(3);
 - (c) to make representations to the Court pursuant to section 13(1);
 - (d) to act as a guardian if appointed pursuant to sections 14 or 19;
 - (e) to apply for a review of a guardianship order or to make representations to the Court at such a review under section 23; and
 - (f) to perform such other functions as are conferred on it by or under this or any other Act.

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(3) Where the Public Guardian is advised by the Executive Officer that a guardian -

- (a) is ill or incapacitated and unable to perform the functions of a guardian; or
- (b) wishes to be relieved of the duties of guardian for the purposes of taking a holiday, attending to business matters or for other sufficient reason during such period or periods in each year as is reasonable in the circumstances,

the Public Guardian shall act as guardian during the illness or incapacity or that period or those periods.

(4) The Public Guardian shall act in the place of a guardian who has died.

6. DELEGATION

(1) The Minister may, by instrument in writing, delegate to a person any of the Minister's powers and functions under this Act (including those that relate to the Public Guardian), other than this power of delegation.

(2) A delegation under subsection (1) may be made to -

- (a) a specified person or specified persons;
- (b) a person or persons of a specified class;
- (c) the holder for the time being of a specified office or appointment; or
- (d) the holders for the time being of offices or appointments of a specified class.

(3) A power or function delegated under this section, when exercised or performed by the delegate, shall, for the purposes of this Act, be deemed to have been exercised or performed by the Minister.

(4) A delegation under this section is revocable at will and does not prevent the exercise of a power or the performance of a function by the Minister.

7. EXECUTIVE OFFICER

(1) The Minister may, by notice in the *Gazette*, appoint an employee within the meaning of the *Public Service Act* to be the Adult Guardianship Executive Officer.

(2) The Executive Officer shall perform the functions and exercise the powers conferred on the Executive Officer by or under this or any other Act.

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(3) The Executive Officer shall attend the Court in relation to all guardianship proceedings under this Act before the Court, and shall present to the Court the advice, reports and recommendations of the Guardianship Panel in relation to an application for an order.

PART II - ADULT GUARDIANSHIP

8. APPLICATION FOR GUARDIANSHIP ORDER

(1) The Public Guardian, a near relative of, or a person who has provided or is providing substantial care and attention for a person under a disability may apply to a Court for an order appointing an adult guardian in respect of that person.

(2) A magistrate or judge may direct any person to make an application under this section in respect of a person under a disability.

(3) An application under this section shall be in a form approved by the Chief Magistrate for the purpose, and shall be lodged without fee with the Clerk of a Local Court.

(4) The Clerk of a Local Court shall, as soon as practicable after an application under this section has been lodged, advise the Executive Officer of the application.

9. GUARDIANSHIP PANELS

(1) The Minister shall, upon being advised by the Executive Officer that an application for a guardianship order has been lodged with the Clerk of the Local Court, set up a Guardianship Panel to advise, give reports and make recommendations to the Court in respect of the application.

(2) Each Guardianship Panel shall consist of -

(a) the Executive Officer as Chairman; and

(b) two other persons appointed by the Minister, of whom -

(i) one shall, in the opinion of the Minister, have skills or expertise in the assessment of persons under an intellectual disability; and

(ii) the other is a member of the community in or near to which the proposed represented person lives.

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(3) Each Guardianship Panel, acting through the Executive Officer, shall, from persons having the appropriate qualifications or expertise or from the members' own knowledge, obtain such information as will enable the panel to provide advice or make recommendations to the Court at the hearing of the application on -

- (a) the extent of any intellectual disability of the proposed represented person;
- (b) the nature and extent of any support system which is available to maintain the proposed represented person in the community in which the person lives or which has previously been utilised by or in respect of the person;
- (c) any matters or issues which are of cultural significance to the proposed represented person or to the community in which the person lives;
- (d) whether or not a guardian should be appointed in respect of the proposed represented person;
- (e) if the appointment of a guardian is recommended -
 - (i) the suitability of the proposed guardian for the proposed represented person;
 - (ii) any limitations or conditions which, in the opinion of the panel, should reasonably be incorporated in a guardianship order; and
 - (iii) the implications, effects or results which an adult guardianship order, if made (including and excluding the limitations and conditions which are considered necessary) may be expected to have on the proposed represented person, the family and relatives of the person, and the community in which the person lives.

(4) The Guardianship Panel shall make or obtain an estimate of the value of the estate of the proposed represented person.

(5) A Guardianship Panel shall complete its functions under subsection (3) in respect of each adult guardianship application within 6 weeks of the matter being referred to it.

10. REMUNERATION OF GUARDIANSHIP PANEL

Every Guardianship Panel is deemed to be a statutory body within the meaning of and for the purposes of the *Remuneration (Statutory Bodies) Act*.

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11. JURISDICTION OF COURT

(1) The Court has jurisdiction in all matters relating to adult guardianship, has the functions required of it under this Act, and has the power to carry out those functions.

(2) In particular, the Court may -

- (a) hear and determine applications made to it under this Act;
- (b) make guardianship orders, whether with or without limitations or conditions;
- (c) review, amend, or revoke guardianship orders; or
- (d) make such other order or give such directions as may best assist it in carrying out its functions.

12. PROCEDURE OF COURT

(1) Subject to this Act and any direction of the Chief Magistrate, the Court may regulate its own procedure.

(2) The Court, in hearing any matter, is not bound by rules or practice as to evidence but may inform itself in such manner as it thinks fit, including admitting as evidence any matter or thing that would not otherwise be admissible in a court of law.

(3) As well as accepting any advice, report, or recommendation from the Guardianship Panel, the Court may, through the Executive Officer, require an officer of a government department including a Commonwealth department, Territory or Commonwealth statutory authority or service provider or the Public Guardian or a guardian or administrator (including the Public Trustee) to provide a report on any matter relating to the proceedings to the Court.

(4) The Court may interview the person in respect of whom the application is made, any near relative of the person, the applicant for the guardianship order or any other person the Court thinks fit.

13. REPRESENTATIONS AT HEARING

(1) At the hearing of an application for an adult guardianship order, the following persons may make representations:

- (a) the applicant;
- (b) the person in respect of whom the application is made or a legal practitioner representing that person;

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- (c) a near relative of the person in respect of whom the application is made, or any relative or person who has relevant information that relates to the care of that person;
- (d) the person who has taken or is taking primary care of the person in respect of whom the application is made;
- (e) the Executive Officer on behalf of the Guardianship Panel;
- (f) the manager of the person's estate or, if there is no manager, the Public Trustee;
- (g) the Public Guardian; and
- (h) such other person as the Court considers necessary.

(2) The Executive Officer shall ensure that in any proceedings the person in respect of whom the application is made is legally represented before the Court.

14. PERSONS ELIGIBLE AS GUARDIANS

(1) The Court may appoint as a guardian any natural person who has attained the age of 18 years and consents to act as guardian if the Court is satisfied that that person -

- (a) will act in the best interests of the proposed represented person;
- (b) is not in such a position that the person's interests conflict or may conflict with the interests of the proposed represented person; and
- (c) is a suitable person to act as the guardian of the proposed represented person.

(2) In determining whether a person is suitable to act as the guardian of a represented person, the Court shall take into account -

- (a) the wishes of the proposed represented person;
- (b) the desirability of preserving existing family relationships;
- (c) the compatibility of the person proposed as guardian with the proposed represented person and with the manager (if any) of the proposed represented person's estate if an order is made under the *Aged and Infirm Persons' Property Act*; and

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- (d) whether the person proposed as guardian will be available and accessible to the proposed represented person so as to fulfil the requirements of guardianship of that person.

(3) Where a near relative of a proposed represented person is proposed as the guardian that person is not, because of that fact only, to be taken to be in a position where the person's interests conflict or may conflict with those of the proposed represented person.

- (4) Where it appears to the Court that -

- (a) the person in respect of whom the application is made should have an adult guardian appointed; and
- (b) no other person fulfils the requirements of subsection (1) for appointment as the guardian of that person,

the Court may appoint the Public Guardian as the guardian of that person.

(5) This section does not prevent the Court from appointing persons (including the Public Guardian and any other person) as joint guardians of the proposed represented person if -

- (a) each person fulfils the requirements of subsection (1); and
- (b) the Court considers it appropriate to do so.

15. ORDERS

(1) Where the Court is satisfied after a hearing that the person in respect of whom an application for a guardianship order is made -

- (a) is a person under an intellectual disability; and
- (b) is in need of an adult guardian,

the Court may make an order appointing an adult guardian.

- (2) The order of the Court may be -

- (a) a full order having the effects set out in section 17;
- (b) a conditional order having the effects set out in section 18; or
- (c) a temporary order having the effects set out in section 19.

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(3) The Executive Officer shall forward a copy of the order made to each person who made representations to the Court at the hearing.

16. PROPERTY OF REPRESENTED PERSON

(1) The Court, at the hearing of an application for a guardianship order under this Act, may order the Public Trustee or any other person to make an application under the *Aged and Infirm Persons' Property Act* for a protection order in respect of the estate of the person who is the subject of the application.

(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), if the Court is satisfied that the estate of the person who is the subject of the application consists of -

- (a) cash from or entitlements to social security benefits;
- (b) other property appearing to have a value of not more than \$2,000, more or less; or
- (c) both,

the Court may require the adult guardian, if one is appointed, to manage the estate in accordance with the terms of the guardianship order.

(3) Unless otherwise provided in a guardianship order, a manager under subsection (2) shall, at least once a year, give the Executive Officer an account of the management of the represented person's estate, showing assets and liabilities and receipts and payments in respect of the estate.

(4) The Executive Officer shall report on the management of the estate to the Court at the time the guardianship order is reviewed pursuant to section 25.

17. AUTHORITY OF GUARDIAN UNDER FULL ORDER

(1) Subject to section 4, a full guardianship order appointing a guardian confers on the guardian in respect of the represented person all the powers and duties which the guardian would have if he or she were a parent and the represented person his or her infant child.

(2) Without limiting subsection (1), an order appointing a guardian confers on the person named as guardian the power -

- (a) to decide where the represented person is to live, whether permanently or temporarily;
- (b) to decide with whom the represented person is to live;

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- (c) to decide whether the represented person should or should not be permitted to work and, if so -
 - (i) the nature or type of work;
 - (ii) for whom the represented person is to work; and
 - (iii) matters related thereto; and
 - (d) except as otherwise provided in section 21, to consent to any health care that is in the best interests of the represented person.
- (3) The Court may make a full order subject to such conditions or restrictions as it thinks fit.
- (4) Where a decision is made, action taken, consent given or thing done by a guardian under a full order the decision, action, consent or thing has effect as if it had been made, taken, given or done by the represented person and the represented person had the legal capacity to do so.

18. AUTHORITY OF GUARDIAN UNDER CONDITIONAL ORDER

(1) Subject to section 4, a conditional order appointing a guardian confers on the guardian such one or more of the powers and duties in respect of the represented person that are conferred on a guardian under a full order as the Court may specify in the order.

(2) The Court may make a conditional order subject to such conditions or restrictions as it thinks fit.

(3) Where a decision is made, action taken, consent given or thing done by a guardian under a conditional order, the decision, action, consent or thing has effect as if it had been made, taken, given or done by the represented person and the represented person had the legal capacity to do so.

19. TEMPORARY ORDERS

(1) Any person may apply to the Court for a temporary order appointing the Public Guardian as the adult guardian of a person in respect of whom an application could be made under section 8.

(2) An application may be made under subsection (1) whether or not an application has been made under section 8.

(3) If the Court considers that the circumstances of the person in respect of whom the application is made are such that a hearing should be held without unreasonable delay, the Court shall hold a hearing under this section.

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(4) If the Court is satisfied that the person in respect of whom the application has been made -

- (a) is a person with a disability; and
- (b) is in need of an adult guardian,

it may make a temporary order appointing the Public Guardian or another suitable person as the guardian of that person.

(5) The Court may make a temporary order subject to such conditions or restrictions as it thinks fit, and shall specify whether the powers of the guardian are to be those as if the order were a full order under section 17 or a conditional order under section 18.

(6) A temporary order remains in effect for such period not exceeding 90 days as is specified in the order.

(7) The Court shall hold a hearing before the expiry of the temporary order to determine whether a guardianship order, if made at all, should be made under section 17 or section 18.

(8) Sections 12 and 13 apply with such modifications as are necessary in respect of the hearing.

20. EXERCISE OF AUTHORITY

(1) Without derogating from section 4, a guardian must act in the best interests of the represented person.

(2) Without limiting subsection (1), a guardian acts in the best interests of a represented person if the guardian acts as far as possible -

- (a) as an advocate for the represented person;
- (b) in such a way as to encourage the represented person to participate as much as possible in the life of the community;
- (c) in such a way as to encourage and assist the represented person to become capable of caring for himself or herself and of making reasonable judgments in respect of matters relating to his or her person;
- (d) in such a way as to protect the represented person from neglect, abuse or exploitation; and
- (e) in consultation with the represented person, taking into account, as far as possible, the wishes of the represented person.

(3) A guardian may on behalf of a represented person sign and do all such things as are necessary to give effect to any power or duty vested in the guardian.

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21. MEDICAL PROCEDURES

(1) This section applies to a represented person in respect of whom there is in force -

- (a) a full order appointing a guardian; or
- (b) a conditional order appointing a guardian having the power to consent to any health care that is in the best interests of the represented person,

but does not apply in respect of any medical or dental procedure carried out on any person in an emergency where the medical or dental procedure appears necessary to save the life of that person.

(2) A medical practitioner or person registered pursuant to the *Dental Act* must not carry out any procedure which is a major medical procedure on a represented person unless the consent of the Court has been obtained.

(3) A medical practitioner or person registered pursuant to the *Dental Act* who contravenes subsection (2) is guilty of professional misconduct.

(4) For the purposes of this section, a major medical procedure is -

- (a) a medical or dental procedure that does not remove an immediate threat to a person's health and which is generally accepted by the medical profession or, as the case may be, dental profession as being of a major nature; and
- (b) a medical procedure relating to -
 - (i) contraception; or
 - (ii) the termination of a pregnancy.

(5) The Court shall commence to hear an application under this section within 14 days after the day on which the application is received by the Clerk.

(6) After receiving an application under this section the Court shall ascertain the wishes of the represented person as far as is reasonably possible.

(7) Subject to subsection (8), if the Court is satisfied that the represented person understands the nature of the proposed major medical procedure and is capable of giving or refusing consent to that procedure, the Court shall give effect to the represented person's wishes.

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(8) If the Court is satisfied on hearing an application under this section that it would be in the best interests of the represented person, it may by order consent to the major medical procedure.

22. NOTICE OF DEATH OF REPRESENTED PERSON

Where a represented person in respect of whom an adult guardian has been appointed dies, the guardian shall report the death to the Executive Officer without delay.

23. REVIEW OF ORDER

(1) The Court shall, within 2 years after the making of a guardianship order or at the expiry of such shorter period as may have been specified in the order, hold a hearing to review the order.

(2) The Court may at any time -

- (a) of its own volition;
- (b) on the application of the represented person or a person on behalf of the represented person;
- (c) on the application of the Public Guardian; or
- (d) on the application of any other person,

hold a hearing to review a guardianship order.

(3) The Executive Officer shall, at least 14 days before the review hearing is to be held, cause notice of the hearing and of its time and place to be given to -

- (a) the guardian of the represented person;
- (b) the Public Guardian;
- (c) any administrator (including the Public Trustee) or manager of the estate of the represented person; and
- (d) the represented person and to a legal representative for the represented person.

(4) The Executive Officer shall provide the Court at the hearing with such information and reports as it considers necessary to -

- (a) determine the effectiveness of the guardianship order in providing for the care and protection of the represented person;
- (b) consider the need for the continuation of the order;

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- (c) consider any changes in the circumstances of the represented person or of the person's guardian; and
 - (d) determine any changes which might be considered necessary to the existing order.
- (5) Upon completing a review the Court may, by order, amend, vary, continue or replace the guardianship order subject to any conditions or restrictions it considers necessary, or revoke the order.

24. APPEALS

(1) A party to a proceeding under this Act before the Court who is aggrieved by a decision or determination of the Court may appeal against that decision or determination to the Supreme Court within the time and in the manner prescribed by the Rules of the Supreme Court.

(2) The Supreme Court shall decide the matter of appeal under this section and may either dismiss the appeal or reverse or vary the decision or determination appealed against and may make such order as to the costs of the appeal or the proceeding before the Court, or both, as it thinks fit.

25. PROCEEDINGS GENERALLY TO BE HELD IN PUBLIC

(1) Subject to subsection (2), all proceedings relating to this Act before the Court are to be open to the public.

(2) A person who is directly interested in any proceedings referred to in subsection (1) may request the Court to have the proceedings or part of the proceedings closed to the public.

(3) Upon a request under subsection (2), the Court may, if it thinks fit, direct that any persons,

- (a) who in its opinion are not directly interested in the proceedings; or
- (b) who have not been authorized by the Court to be present at the proceedings,

are to be excluded from the place where the proceedings are being or are to be heard.

26. REPORTS OF PROCEEDINGS

(1) Unless the Court otherwise determines in a particular case, no person shall publish or broadcast or cause to be published or broadcast any report of any proceedings of the Court relating to this Act.

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(2) Where the Court considers it would be in the public interest to do so, it may determine that a person may publish or broadcast or cause to be published or broadcast a report of such proceedings if -

(a) the report does not contain particulars calculated to lead to the identification of a person in respect of whom the proceedings have been brought or any other person concerned in the proceedings; and

(b) pictures are not taken of a person in respect of whom proceedings have been brought or any other person concerned in the proceedings.

(3) Any person who contravenes this section is guilty of an offence against this Act.

Penalty: In the case of a body corporate - \$2,000;

In the case of an individual - \$500 or imprisonment for 6 months.

PART III - MISCELLANEOUS

27. GIVING NOTICE

(1) Where a notice is required to be given to a person in respect of whom an application has been made or to a represented person, the notice shall be given personally to that person in accordance with this section.

(2) The contents of any notice referred to in subsection (1) shall be explained by the person serving the notice to the maximum extent possible to the person in the language, mode of communication and terms which that person is most likely to understand.

(3) An explanation given under subsection (2) shall where possible be given both orally and in writing.

(4) Where a notice is required to be given to a person other than a person referred to in subsection (1) the notice may be given to that person by sending it by pre-paid post to that person at the person's usual or last known place of residence or business.

(5) Unless the contrary is proved, a notice sent by pre-paid post is deemed to have been given to that person at the time at which the notice would be delivered in the ordinary course of post.

(6) Where, except for this subsection, notice would be required to be given to a person in more than one capacity it is sufficient compliance with this Act if notice is given to that person in one of those capacities.

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(7) A hearing or determination of the Court is not invalidated or affected by reason only of a failure to give notice to a person other than a proposed represented person or a represented person.

28. TERRITORY NOT LIABLE TO PAY COMPENSATION

A person is not entitled to receive compensation from the Territory or the Minister (except as Public Guardian) in respect of any damage, loss or injury sustained by that person by reason of an act or omission of an adult guardian, administrator or manager under this Act.

29. PROTECTION OF GUARDIANSHIP PANELS, &c.

No action or proceeding, civil or criminal, shall lie against the Public Guardian, the Executive Officer, a member of a Guardianship Panel, or against any other person making a report or supplying information to any of those persons, for or in respect of an act or thing done or omitted to be done in good faith in the performance of a function or the exercise of a power under this Act.

30. ARRANGEMENTS WITH STATES

The Territory may make arrangements with a State or another Territory having provisions in its law relating to the appointment of adult guardians for persons under an intellectual disability, being provisions similar in nature to those contained in this Act, for the recognition and enforcement in that State or Territory of orders made by the Court under this Act.

31. APPROPRIATION

The costs and expenses of or relating to the performance of a function or the exercise of a power pursuant to this Act by the Executive Officer or a Guardianship Panel shall be payable from the Consolidated Fund, which is appropriated accordingly.

32. REGULATIONS

The Administrator may make regulations, not inconsistent with this Act, prescribing matters -

- (a) required or permitted by this Act to be prescribed; or
 - (b) necessary or convenient to be prescribed for carrying out or giving effect to this Act.
-