

POLICY STATEMENT

A Bold Plan to Empower Aboriginal Territorians

By the year 2021, it is estimated that the Northern Territory population will be approximately 251,727¹, of whom 79,318 (31.5%) will be Aboriginal. A rapidly ageing Aboriginal population will present significant challenges for the NT, especially in the provision of appropriate regional and remote aged care and disability services. Working age (15-64yrs) men and women are also disconnected and disadvantaged and in need of improved training or job skills to identify and take up employment or business opportunities. This will present significant challenges if public policy does not adapt to a modern, inclusive approach to empowerment.

For too long, actions of governments in the Northern Territory have effectively taken a “we know what’s best for you” approach to Aboriginal affairs. By not effectively engaging with communities and working primarily at a high level with Governments and Land Councils, communities and individuals have been left out which has led to a disconnect and substantial policy failure.

A CLP government will empower communities by establishing genuine partnerships that will ensure that real decision making is focused at the local level. This will include Land Councils and local community groups working in partnership with Government to identify and remove impediments so that programs and initiatives are developed and implemented from the ground up.

The CLP will empower Aboriginal people to be part of decision-making processes to address issues like economic development, housing, health, education, employment and incarceration.

There has never been a more important time than in the upcoming election to reset the relationship between Aboriginal Territorians, the Northern Territory Government and the broader community. An elected CLP Government will base our policies on the principles of Empowerment, Self-determination, Partnerships, Support and Mentoring.

Reset the relationship with Aboriginal Territorians

The Gunner Labor Government has taken Aboriginal people for granted. Our actions to reset the relationship with Aboriginal Territorians will include meeting with all our major communities and establish an on-going dialogue with community leaders throughout our term of government to ensure we make the changes necessary and are able to track progress and be accountable to them.

This will conform with the policy directions of the Federal Coalition Government, as enunciated at the National Press Club on 10 July 2019 by Mr Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians: “The development of a local, regional and national voice will be achieved. It is my intention to work with the State and Territory Ministers to develop an approach underpinned with existing jurisdictional

¹ NT Treasury 2019 Release <https://treasury.nt.gov.au/dtf/economic-group/population-projections/population-projections-preliminary-update-2017-release>

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organisations and advisory structures established to provide advice to State and Territory Governments.”

To achieve a balance between the rights of traditional owners and the aspirations of communities, the CLP will ensure that parties have the tools to strengthen local approaches and make informed decisions. These new processes will be strength-based and will take into consideration:

1. Connectedness to country, land and history, culture and identity
2. Resilience
3. Leadership, roles and structures
4. Safety
5. Vitality

Housing

Aboriginal people know what is best for their communities and should be empowered to decide on solutions that are best suited for their own communities including housing. Our actions for remote housing will ensure that:

- an Aboriginal community-controlled peak housing body will advise and work collaboratively with the government to streamline Aboriginal housing policies including communities, homelands, outstations and town camps;
- transparency is realised by having local community groups and leaders applicable to each community, at the table with Land Councils, NT and Commonwealth Governments;
- Community housing groups or associations will be formed to be intrinsically involved in the design and delivery of remote housing. They will assist in setting the design parameters of housing; not be told what will be built, with these entities able to oversight expenditures.
- Work with communities to establish housing management models where tenancy management and maintenance can be performed locally, increasing services to tenants, reducing maintenance wait times and costs, and creating economic activity within communities.
- These Housing bodies will monitor and approve Housing procurement guidelines and targets so that increased local employment and enterprise outcomes are achieved; and
- Government will work with Aboriginal peak organisations, leaders and communities to develop housing models to explore opportunities for the private sector, including local Indigenous owned and operated businesses to assist in increasing housing availability that should reduce waiting lists and overcrowding.

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Health

Aboriginal community control and delivery of health services has proven to be a successful model. The social determinants of Aboriginal health are complex and we will take a holistic view of healthcare including the physical, social, spiritual and emotional health of Aboriginal people. Our actions on Aboriginal health will:

- Build the capacity of communities to support local and regional solutions for health outcomes;
- Commit to funding programs that have proven to work, not just endless trials.
- Deliver training and professional development in communities for nurses and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners; and
- Conduct an audit of facilities including morgues in remote communities.

Building a skilled workforce

The CLP will build a workforce for the medium and long-term future of the Northern Territory by developing a comprehensive plan for working age Aboriginal people. Our actions will include:

- Working with the Commonwealth Government to ensure its Community Development Program creates opportunities for employment and enterprise;
- Working with Aboriginal leaders to develop employment pathways that suit local needs, aspirations and expectations;
- Resourcing training providers to deliver appropriate Vocational Education and Training in remote locations that link in with real economic opportunities;
- Ensuring government procurement policy provides incentives to employ, train and retain Aboriginal employees and enterprises in both urban and remote communities.

Economic Development/Northern Development

The CLP recognises the importance of supporting and mentoring economic development opportunities in or near regional and remote communities and homelands.

The vast Aboriginal estate, nearing 50% of the Northern Territory land mass is underdeveloped. Significant areas should and must have their cultural and environmental values preserved and protected, but there are other areas that could provide economic opportunities for Aboriginal people. While many past development proposals have come from third parties, many others have originated from Traditional Owners or community members.

The overlapping and often competing and even conflicting aspects of Federal Government, Northern Territory and Land Council legislation and regulations must for once and for all be sorted. The CLP will empower to truly develop the north we must free up and empower Indigenous Territorians to pursue economic development opportunities.

Our actions will include:

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- Bring Federal, Northern Territory, Land Council and Aboriginal community leaders to the table to identify necessary amendments to legislation that frustrates or prevents economic development of Indigenous lands.
- Working with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal leaders, organisations and experts to create a “prospectus” of economic development opportunities across the Aboriginal estate. Not tell people what should be done, but work on what could be done. This will build upon the learnings and success of the Tiwi Prospectus developed in partnership between the Northern Territory Government and the Tiwi Land Council.
- Working with the North Australian Ministerial Forum, northern governments and the Indigenous Reference Group to establish business hubs and incubators to assist Indigenous Entrepreneurs or groups to establish registered businesses to tender for and secure work in or near communities.
- Through existing business support programs, fund business mentors to provide ongoing support to Indigenous businesses to build business and financial acumen within Indigenous owned and operated businesses.
- Breakdown government tenders to a size and scope that are not only financially sustainable but are of a scale and scope of work that will allow Indigenous businesses the opportunity to win and deliver the work.
- Working with land councils, AFANT and NTCA to finally resolve the Blue Mud Bay negotiations and find enterprise opportunities for all parties;
- Working with the Commonwealth Government and Aboriginal claimants to resolve outstanding land and native title claims including negotiations to settle compensation claims. Until there is certainty there will be no realisable opportunities;
- Establish a scholarship program for students to gain or enhance business qualifications.

Environment and Water

The CLP understands the unique environment, culture and traditions of the Northern Territory, that they should be protected by the people who are the guardians for future generations and that our unique places are shared. Our actions will include:

- Supporting Aboriginal rangers with training and enforcement and compliance powers to work in Territory parks and reserves as well as on country and double the funding for the Aboriginal Ranger Grants program;
- Working with the Commonwealth Government to increase the numbers of Aboriginal rangers and their resources in Federal Parks;
- Committing to the vision of Jabiru as a vibrant, modern and culturally rich town;
- Working with the Commonwealth Government and traditional owners to ensure Kakadu National Park and Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park achieves their potential as a premier destination for domestic and international visitors with Aboriginal people working to provide the cultural aspect of the visitors experience;
- Protecting Aboriginal sacred sites and other sites of cultural significance while economic opportunities are pursued;
- Committing to water allocations based on science;

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- Ensuring that communities have access to World Health Organisation standards of water for domestic purposes.

Justice

The CLP understands the concerns of Aboriginal Territorians in relation to the justice system.

The CLP supports the Draft Aboriginal Justice Agreement and will work to implement its vision, principles and aims in consultation with Aboriginal Elders and stakeholders. As the Agreement states, Aboriginal Territorians deserve to live 'safe, fulfilling lives and to be treated fairly, respectfully and without discrimination'.

The over-representation of Aboriginal people in NT prisons points to current and past policy failures. More offending leads to more arrests and higher incarcerations. This must be turned around and will only occur if we work together.

Our actions on Justice include:

- Creating a justice reform strategy with Aboriginal leaders, legal experts and the community that prevents and protects victims while holding offenders accountable for their actions.
- Establish a local community justice system where some action or consequence is applied from the first interaction with the justice system to prevent further escalation of offending.
- Institute programs to reduce imprisonment and reoffending rates, engage Aboriginal Elders and leadership in engaging the justice system and make the justice system more responsive to the need of Aboriginal Territorians.
- Committing to diversionary programs that build capacity, confidence and connect with employment prospects
- Exploring justice reinvestment as a primary approach to criminal justice reform.
- Working with the Commonwealth Government and Aboriginal leaders to implement the necessary and sensible recommendations of the Royal Commission that meet community expectations and those of Aboriginal Territorians.