

Response to John Ah Kit's Ministerial Statement 7 March 2002

Norman Fry, Chief Executive, Northern Land Council

"I welcome Mr Ah Kit's frank acknowledgment of the extent of problems we face in Aboriginal communities today. I probably would not agree with him as to the extent of the dysfunction and despair in Aboriginal society, but I am grateful for his honesty in calling it as he sees it.

"What Mr Ah Kit's statement really points to is that Aboriginal people in the NT have been badly served by all levels of government for many decades. The failures at the Commonwealth and Territory level are manifest in the problems of health, education and housing.

"I particularly appreciate Mr Ah Kit's refreshing analysis of the weakness of NT local "community" government with its inherent internal contradictions which lead to almost inevitable failure to deliver for its constituents.

"My only concern about the statement is that after mapping out a broad sense of the scale of the problem in Indigenous communities, Mr Ah Kit's proposed solutions seem rather limited at this stage.

"What his analysis leads to is a whole of governments solution– Commonwealth, NT and local – to deal with the problems he has identified. As the Minister assisting the Chief Minister on Indigenous Affairs I hope that, Mr Ah Kit will be able to implement a holistic response to the issues that face us, rather than attempting to solve them all through his own Department of Community Development.

"John Ah Kit refers to the Commonwealth Grants Commission's report on Indigenous Funding, and the level of disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal people in the NT. The clear conclusion from the CGC's report is that past NT Governments have been able to freely spend Commonwealth money allocated on the basis of Aboriginal need on anything they liked. I hope and trust that our new government will ensure that money earmarked to address Aboriginal disadvantage will be spent to alleviate those problems.

"Equally importantly, the Commonwealth Government cannot be allowed to shirk its constitutional responsibilities to Aboriginal people. Now that we have a new government in the NT without the ideological baggage of the CLP we should be able to get a bigger slice of the federal pie – and make sure it is spent responsibly to address social and economic problems for the benefit of all NT citizens."

ENDS