



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Fishing co-operation the key to future

22 May 2002

Northern Land Council Chief Executive Norman Fry says that recreational fishers need to change their attitude to Indigenous rights from conflict to negotiation. Mr Fry identified the Kenbi land claim resolution as an opportunity for a new approach from government, fishers and Aboriginal people, focusing on shared interests not antagonism.

Speaking at the Third World Recreational Conference in Darwin today, Mr Fry said the Aboriginal people and fishers share much common ground, including the desire to keep waters in a pristine state and to protect fish stocks from over-exploitation.

“We share an interest in protecting and preserving the sea and its resources,” Mr Fry told delegates. “Our interests are in many ways different but we have a choice in how we deal with those differences.”

“We can either move forward by negotiating with each other in a cooperative fashion or we can ‘lock up the seas’ through ongoing conflict and antagonism. Having said that, I trust that as a group recreational fishers have got beyond competition with and opposition to Aboriginal groups.”

Mr Fry said it was fortuitous that the conference was taking place just days after a landmark decision by the NT Government not to pursue its appeal against the Larrakia people’s Kenbi land claim over the Cox Peninsula, just across the harbour from Darwin.

“This gives all involved the chance to establish a new way of working together,” he said. “For their part, the Larrakia know there is no way to turn back the clock. Their desire to protect their sacred sites and the land and waters that sustain them is not a weapon to be used against their fellow Australians, but a tool to build a shared future.”

Mr Fry said there were many examples of Aboriginal co-operation with outsiders, including the historical relationship between indigenous people and Macassan fishermen which successfully maintained a trepang fishing industry for centuries before the advent of European colonists. More recently, recreational fishers and the Northern Territory Government had negotiated with the NLC to reduce the environmental impact of recreational fishing at access points on the Daly River.

“The first step in ensuring similar positive outcomes in future is a recognition of the rights and interests of Aboriginal people to the lands, coasts and seas,” Mr Fry said.