



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous Territorians celebrate rail progress

13 December 2002

Northern Land Council Chief Executive Norman Fry described today's completion of the railway track between Tennant Creek and Katherine as an occasion of "historic significance" for the Northern Territory and Australia.

"I am immensely proud as an Indigenous Australian to have been a party to the construction of this railway," Mr Fry said. "Aboriginal people have a long history with this railway line, and most of the land it is being built on is our land – either through inalienable freehold or native title interests."

"We have worked with the Northern Territory and South Australian governments, their jointly owned Austral Asia Railway Corporation and railway developers Asia Pacific Transport Consortium to ensure they involved Indigenous stakeholders in the project from a very early stage."

"The fruits of that co-operative approach are clear in the NLC's area, with over 150 Indigenous people employed on the Top End portion of the rail link by ADrail and the various railway subcontractors since work commenced in April 2001."

"A further 124 Indigenous people have completed a variety of training courses, including access training and on-the-job training. Of those beginning access training, about 94% have completed their courses, with the overwhelming majority of those progressing to secure employment."

"Traditional owners have also benefited from the railway project, with community development projects being rolled out on Aboriginal land with funds provided by the NT Government as part of the original Land Use Agreement with Indigenous stakeholders."

"Traditional owners at today's ceremony, the Murrinji people, have already started a fencing and cattle agistment business. Another seven Community Development Fund applications from other Aboriginal communities are due to be considered in the new year."

Mr Fry said Aboriginal people would continue to benefit from the railway well into the future, both through their direct stake in the venture and through ongoing employment opportunities.

On a broader scale, Mr Fry said the railway project had acted as a springboard for the NLC to implement its new employment and training strategy, which aims to facilitate opportunities for Aboriginal people on major infrastructure projects across the Top End.