



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Railway jobs initiative highlight of PM's visit

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The Northern Land Council has welcomed today's visit by Prime Minister John Howard to a construction site near Adelaide River in the Northern Territory, where he was able to see for himself the benefits of the NLC's Indigenous employment and training initiative on the Alice Springs to Darwin railway project.

NLC Chief Executive Norman Fry, who joined the Prime Minister on his visit, said it was important that the Prime Minister witnessed the success of the initiative first-hand.

"The Prime Minister has made it clear that genuine economic development for Australia's Indigenous peoples is among his top priorities, as it is for the NLC," Mr Fry said. "There is no doubt he was impressed by what he saw here today."

"Over the past three years the NLC has developed a comprehensive training and employment program with our partner, the Territory Construction Association, which has succeeded far beyond our initial expectations."

"When we signed the Land Use Agreement with the Northern Territory Government in April 2001, ADrail committed itself to providing 50 job placements and training for Indigenous workers over the life of the project in the NLC's area. We have now well and truly smashed this target."

"By the end of 2002 more than 150 job placements for Aboriginal workers had been secured either with ADrail or its contractors, and more than 200 Aboriginal people in the NLC's area had participated in railway training programs."

"These are not pretend jobs or training programs – we are talking about sought-after skills and properly accredited training being provided to many Aboriginal people along the length and breadth of the railway project, which will stand them in good stead as the Top End moves into a new era of economic development."

Under an innovative training and employment program, the NLC took direct responsibility for identifying, training and providing on-the-job mentoring to Aboriginal people as part of its "One Point of Contact" approach. For its part the TCA oversaw the delivery of properly accredited training programs, including pre-employment courses, to Aboriginal recruits.

"The benefits of this model are plain to see," Mr Fry said. "In the NLC's region Aboriginal workers have consistently comprised around 30% of the overall railway project workforce, which is well above Indigenous participation rates in virtually any other sector of the Australian workforce."

Mr Fry said that the NLC had now positioned itself to take advantage of new economic development opportunities with the creation of an employment and training database and the establishment of a dedicated Employment and Training Unit within the NLC.