



Northern and Central Land Councils MEDIA RELEASE



NT Govt, Land Councils agree on Land Rights Act reforms

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The stage has been set for the first significant reforms to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* in almost two decades with the Northern Territory Government and the four NT Land Councils agreeing on a package of measures to enhance the workings of the Act.

“This is an historic moment in the history of Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory,” Northern Land Council Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu said. “Never before has a State or Federal Government sat down in a non-adversarial way to reach consensus with Aboriginal people on ways to improve the Act.”

“On behalf of all the Land Councils, I wish to extend my appreciation to Chief Minister Clare Martin and the NT Government for the positive manner in which they have approached these often difficult discussions over the past year.”

Central Land Council Director David Ross said the 12 recommendations agreed to by all parties included:

- delegating powers to the Land Councils’ regional committees;
- improving the accountability and governance of the Aboriginals Benefit Account;
- providing Land Councils with more certainty of funding;
- enhancing Land Councils’ ability to ensure royalty payments are distributed properly;
- freeing up the Act’s mining and exploration provisions to cut complexity and encourage a more collaborative approach.

“These and other recommendations, if agreed to by the Federal Government, will provide a quantum leap forward in the ability of Land Councils to respond quickly and efficiently to the twin demands of safeguarding traditional owners’ interests while at the same time promoting economic independence for Aboriginal people living in the NT,” he said.

“Much has been made in some quarters of how the Land Rights Act has been an impediment to the development of the NT. The challenge for our critics now is to respond constructively to this initiative rather than continuing to run a negative campaign based on the prejudices of yesteryear.”

“We look forward to working with the Minister, Philip Ruddock, to get these important changes through the Federal Parliament.”

The four NT Land Councils comprise the NLC, CLC, Tiwi Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council.