



# Northern Land Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Negotiation the key to good governance

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Northern Land Council Chief Executive Norman Fry has urged policy-makers to recognise Aboriginal customs and law when developing governance systems that affect the lives of Aboriginal people.

Speaking at the Indigenous Governance Conference in Jabiru this afternoon, Mr Fry said that long-term institutional and political antagonism towards both the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the *Native Title Act 1993* had created a situation in the Northern Territory characterised by complexity, conflict and duplication of governance systems and approaches.

The reality, Mr Fry told conference delegates, was that land rights and native title rights were here to stay, and that there was a need for a more accountable and capable system of governance to be put in place for Aboriginal communities.

“Aboriginal governance in the NT is a complex issue,” he said. “It operates at many levels and across many spheres. Clearly this complexity can lead to duplication and lack of transparency and effectiveness.”

“Where the system has failed us so far has been in a deliberate refusal within the local government framework to acknowledge Aboriginal governance and law. The Local Government Act (or its successor) should be explicitly consistent with the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the Native Title Act. This is a simple but important step forward.”

Mr Fry said the most effective path towards building traditional ownership into existing regional and local arrangements was through negotiating agreements, and this could be achieved by utilising the existing framework of the *Land Rights Act* and the *Native Title Act*.

“Both Acts are based on the recognition of pre-existing Aboriginal law and decision-making. They effectively recognise Aboriginal governance,” Mr Fry said.

Mr Fry said the agreement between the Larrakia people of Darwin and the NT Government – which allowed the development of the Rosebery/Bellamack area for housing – was an example of what could be achieved through negotiation.

“The settlement has resulted in the Larrakia – as a group of people under their own law – forming a development corporation and obtaining the rights to develop a significant portion of the new housing estate,” Mr Fry said. “Rather than simply being paid compensation for the value of the land, the Larrakia are participating in an ongoing business on their own land.”

“Ultimately, if we are not talking about concrete improvements in social and economic outcomes, then all the talk of governance is irrelevant.”