



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Permit removal will mean free-for-all and rampant tourism

8 July 2007

Northern Land Council (NLC) Chief Executive, Norman Fry, today said Minister Brough's 'one-size fits all' approach - whereby all significant communities on Aboriginal land will be compulsorily acquired for five years with the permit system totally abolished for those communities - polarizes complex issues and will inevitably lead to High Court legal action, international complaint, and universal opposition.

"Minister Brough says that all Australians must be treated equally, but this includes consulting with traditional owners before their property is arbitrarily acquired - and ensuring traditional owners can participate in housing and other commercial development on their country," Mr Fry said.

"Compulsory acquisition of private property without consultation is discriminatory and cannot be justified."

"This short-sighted approach polarizes complex issues and will inevitably lead to High Court legal action, international complaint, and universal opposition from traditional owners and communities," Mr Fry said.

Mr Fry said the NLC had written to the Prime Minister on 28 June 2007 offering general support for the Commonwealth Government's law enforcement and health interventions, but seeking consultations regarding the resumption and permit issues - but to date had received no reply.

"Minister Brough accepts that all Australians are entitled to privacy, but this must include ensuring that tribal Aboriginal people are not subjected to rampant tourism or rampant journalism - and can live their lives without being photographed and gawked at by busloads of tourists," Mr Fry said.

"Removing the permit system will mean a free-for-all, with Arnhem Land instantly becoming the world's most sought after backpacker destination - an exotic must - with busloads of tourists leaving Darwin for remote communities every day."

"Arnhem Land will be flooded with tourists and backpackers bringing in alcohol and drugs, whose primary purpose is observing tribal Aboriginal people - not the scenery," Mr Fry said.

"Beaches and rivers in communities will be packed with sunbathing backpackers, four-wheel drives, recreational fishers and campers - at the expense of fragile ecosystems and the interests of Aboriginal people who have lived on their country since time immemorial."

"This invites a vision of hordes of backpackers sleeping on beaches and around billabongs with no sanitation or ablution services," Mr Fry said.

“Respect for private property rights, and protection of privacy and the environment, are legitimate concerns shared by all Australians.”

“Minister Brough must seek a negotiated and pragmatic outcome - rather than riding roughshod over the private property rights of Aboriginal people,” Mr Fry said.