



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Investment in ranger programs crucial

7 September 2007

Northern Land Council (NLC), Chief Executive, Norman Fry, has called on the Federal Government to maintain investment in the NLC's nationally recognised Caring for Country (CFC) program.

The NLC is concerned that the removal of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program in the NT, without appropriate transition arrangements for Aboriginal rangers currently employed in ranger groups, will have a significant negative impact on the ability of the NLC's CFC program to continue to deliver environmental services on Aboriginal land and waters.

"The NLC's CFC program supports over 400 Aboriginal rangers. The wages for most of these workers has been supported by CDEP. It is critical that investment is maintained into the CFC program to keep these workers on the job. The withdrawal of CDEP must be managed very carefully to prevent a collapse of the Aboriginal ranger network," Mr Fry said.

"The work for the dole scheme does not provide a workable alternative to CDEP for these workers," Mr Fry said. "It provides less money than can be earned under CDEP and does not provide a figure akin to a full time wage."

"This incentive and the on-country nature of ranger work has been a key factor in the high level of participation in Caring for Country programs across the NT, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities where there is little or no other basis for activity or employment," Mr Fry said.

"Without a sufficient number of rangers in the CFC program, large land management tasks such as prescribed burning, feral animal control and the control of mimosa and other exotic vegetation can not be undertaken effectively or safely. This will have an effect on the NT environment and the economy, and will also threaten current and future government investment in a number of very significant Commonwealth initiatives," Mr Fry said.

The Aboriginal ranger network is widely acknowledged as being the most cost effective means of controlling noxious weeds like Mimosa in the remote parts of the NT. The Commonwealth Government, through the Indigenous Land Corporation, has invested \$1.8million over the last five years in the control of Mimosa in the NLC's region, and will be making a similar investment over the next three years.

"The Mimosa project relies on the integrity of the Aboriginal ranger network," Mr Fry said. "If the employment of Aboriginal rangers is not maintained at current levels, then the weed will quickly return and continue to spread across the top end of Australia resulting in millions of dollars in lost pastoral production."

“I welcome the Commonwealth Government’s *Working on Country* initiative, which will deliver about 20 full time jobs for Aboriginal rangers in the NLC’s region. This is a very important first step. However, the *Working on Country* program needs to be expanded to ensure that the Aboriginal ranger network remains viable, and that all rangers have a chance at a full-time job,” Mr Fry said.