

>>OVERVIEW



NLC Chairman Galarrwuy Yunupingu speaking at this year's Garma Festival.

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>>CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Land Councils by Justice Woodward to assist him with his Commission of Inquiry into appropriate ways to recognise Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory.

I am proud to say that 30 years on, Land Councils remain important bodies through which Aboriginal people make their voices heard on the array of issues which impact on their land, seas and communities. The united voice of the Aboriginal people through the Land Councils and the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976* serves as a strong foundation on which to build cultural and economic growth.

This past year has yielded several historic negotiated outcomes which Aboriginal people have never achieved before. The first is a collaborative negotiated position on reform of the *Land Rights Act*. This was a constructive process which saw the four Land Councils work with the Northern Territory Government to enhance the workability of the Act while preserving, or strengthening, the rights of traditional owners and Aboriginal people.

The second major development is the ongoing negotiations with the NT Government over the tenure and future joint-management arrangements of numerous Northern Territory Parks and Reserves. Both these processes illustrate the maturity of the parties to seek negotiated outcomes for the benefit of the whole of the Northern Territory.

The success over 30 years of both land and native title claims means that the NLC is focusing on "land management" and all the economic benefits it can bring our people. There are enormous opportunities for economic growth on the horizon, which the NLC must ensure are successful and sustainable.



Galarrwuy Yunupingu

I have seen our people meet the land management challenges with the same spirit of determination they showed when rising to the challenge of land claims. Caring for country is one of the primary cultural obligations we have as Aboriginal people and this can only be achieved with people living and working on country.

Currently the greatest challenge is to access the funds needed to resource this important work. Unfortunately there has been a hiatus in Ministerial consideration of numerous applications under section 64(4) of the *Land Rights Act* for funding Caring for Country programs.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my fellow Land Council members. There are many great men and women who work hard to ensure the voice of their people is heard. Without them my job would be impossible.



>> CEO'S REPORT

This past year saw the release of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit of the Land Councils and the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA). I welcomed the audit's findings, which recognised the dynamic and complex environment in which we operate with very limited resources.

The ANAO found that the NLC delivers "services" to a diverse range of stakeholders and clients who include traditional owners, mining companies and tourists, and, importantly, that it delivers these services in accordance with the *Land Rights Act*.

While giving the Land Councils a clean bill of health, the ANAO report also proposed some constructive changes to the way we do business and the way performance is measured. Of the seven recommendations only four related to the Northern Land Council, and these are focused on improving reporting frameworks, performance and risk management and communication with stakeholders.

The new layout of the NLC Annual Report reflects some of the changes made in relation to adopting an Outcomes/Outputs performance reporting framework. In addition the NLC is working on a Service Charter and client/stakeholder feedback mechanism, risk management and monitoring and evaluation procedures. These new ways of doing business will assist in clearly demonstrating what the NLC does, and how well it is done.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

This year the NLC has unqualified financial audit reports. We are confident that with the implementation of a new risk management, fraud control and financial software package, our finances will remain in their present sound condition.



Norman Fry

THE YEAR AHEAD

The implementation of the ANAO recommendations, the development of a new three-year corporate plan, and some organisational restructuring will result in a more effective management approach at the NLC over 2003/04.

The major economic projects – the gas pipelines, mine expansions, ongoing exploration – will continue to provide the NLC with opportunities to implement its new integrated employment and benefits model. Most of the major developments in the NT are happening on Aboriginal land and it is the NLC's job to ensure that the benefits of the NT's progress hit the ground with Aboriginal people.

The coming year will again bring many new challenges to the NLC, but under the leadership of the Chair and Full Council and with the many skills of the staff, the challenges will be met with vigour and determination.





ABOVE: West Arnhem Council members. BELOW: Northern Territory Chief Minister Clare Martin with NLC Chairman Galarwuy Yunupingu.

