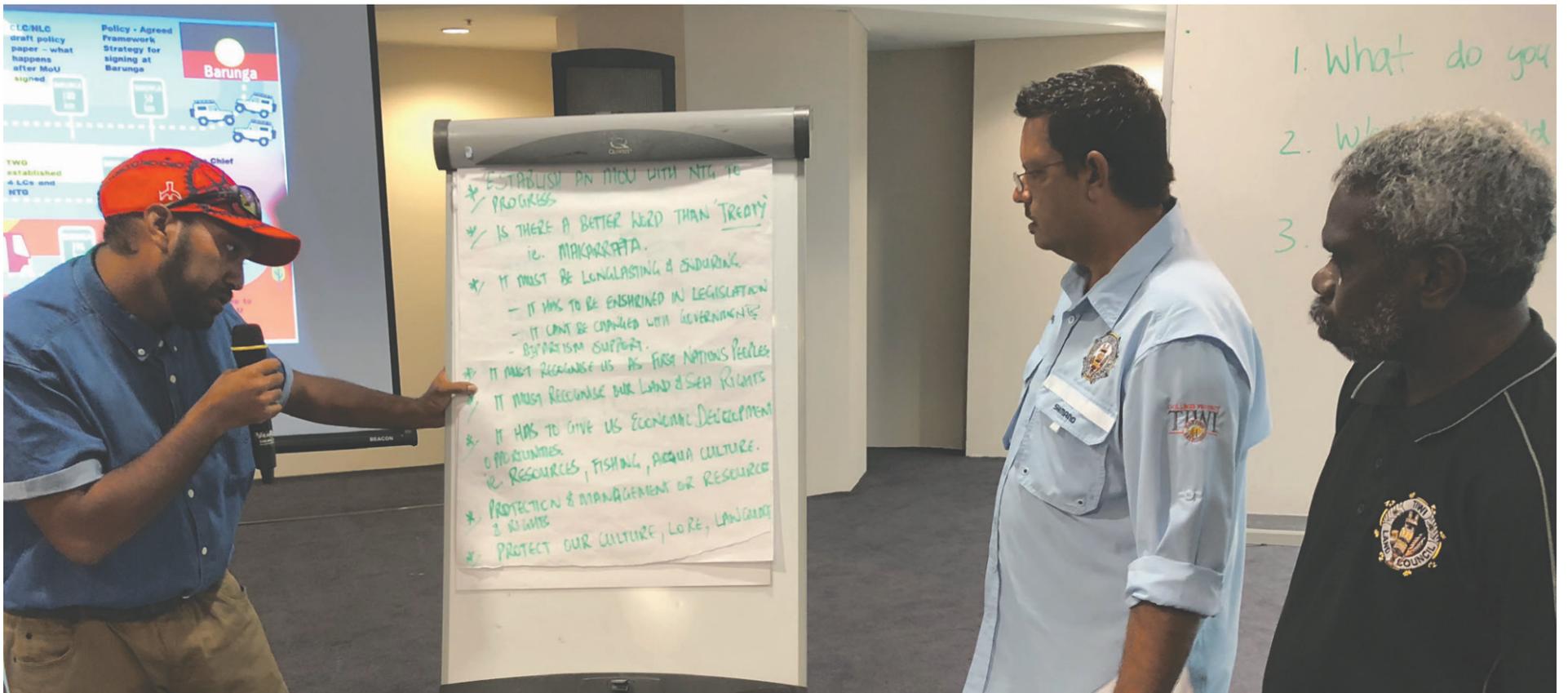


# LAND COUNCILS SUPPORT TREATY



The meeting of the Executives of the four NT Land Councils broke into groups to consider what could be included in a treaty. James Durrilla (left, Anindilyakwa Council) presents a list of aspirations with Andrew Tipungwati (centre, acting CEO Tiwi Land Council) and David Guy (Tiwi Land Council).

In the wake of the despair of Indigenous Australians about the refusal of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to accept the recommendation of the Referendum Council as espoused in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the four Northern Territory Land Councils have embraced the decision of NT Chief Minister Michael Gunner to open a discussion about a treaty with the Territory's Aboriginal people.

The Executives of the Northern, Central, Tiwi and Anindilyakwa Land Councils gathered in Darwin to consider the implications of a treaty and how to progress consultations with their constituents and with the NT Government.

When he announced his new Ministerial line-up in September 2016, Mr Gunner appointed a sub-committee of Cabinet to "progress public discussion about a treaty with indigenous Territorians".

The Chief Minister subsequently wrote to the Northern and Central Land Councils: "I agree that the process of engagement around a treaty will be vital. It is important that Aboriginal voices are heard and consultations will need to be inclusive and accessible. The Northern Territory Government is committed to working with Aboriginal people and we will take time to get this right."

After their meeting in Darwin, the four Land Councils wrote to Mr Gunner, supporting his "historic" announcement.

The letter noted his statement that Land Councils would be an important part of

discussion about a treaty, and stated that Traditional Owners, who make up the Land Councils, "ought to be at the centre of negotiations of a treaty as the prior owners and occupiers of the Northern Territory".

"(Our) meeting resolved to proceed from here in a constructive and united way. In particular, we are wanting to reach a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Northern Territory about an engagement process with Aboriginal people that is led by Aboriginal people," the Land Councils wrote.

"We agreed that the MoU should also include a statement acknowledging certain realities, such as Aboriginal people being the prior owners and occupiers of the Northern Territory; that their land was taken without their consent and that deep injustices have occurred; that treaty-making involves the acceptance of obligations and responsibilities on both sides; and that non-Indigenous Australians are here to stay in the Territory."

The Land Councils have proposed the establishment of a Treaty Working Group (TWG) to develop the substance of the MoU; the TWG membership should comprise the Northern Territory Government, Land Councils and members of Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) which, with the Northern and Central Land Councils, comprises the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT, and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency.

The Land Councils are hoping that an MoU

with the NT Government can be negotiated in time for an announcement at the Barunga Festival in June – the 30th anniversary of the presentation to Prime Minister Bob Hawke of the "Barunga Statement", which is now on permanent display at Parliament House in Canberra. In reply, Mr Hawke affirmed that his government was "committed to work for a negotiated Treaty with Aboriginal people."



Indigenous Australians despaired when Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull refused to accept the recommendations of the Referendum Council which evolved from the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Illustration: Nick Bland