



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

The Northern Land Council welcomes historic reforms to the Land Rights Act

1 December 2021

The Northern Land Council today welcomes the passage of a historic set of reforms to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.

“This is a proud day for the Northern Land Council and for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory,” the Chair of the Northern Land Council, Mr Samuel Bush-Blanasi said.

“We have been working on these reforms for a long time. Finally we got it done. Now it’s time to hit the ground running and make it happen.”

The reforms include the creation of the first Aboriginal controlled organisation managing grants under the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA). Aboriginal Territorians have been calling for control over the ABA for decades.

Aboriginal people will also have more control over who comes on Aboriginal land. Penalties for trespass on Aboriginal land will increase almost five-fold to \$11,100 and Land Councils will once again be able to revoke permits if a majority of Traditional Owners decide that is what they want.

“When Aboriginal people are at the table and have a say on big decisions, we make things better for Traditional Owners and for our children and our grandchildren. I would like to acknowledge Minister Ken Wyatt's support. He met with the four Land Councils in 2019 and said he would get this done. He came back to Barunga in June this year and he kept his word,” said Mr Bush-Blanasi.

The changes to the Land Rights Act give Traditional Owners more control over important decisions such as mining on Aboriginal land.

“A lot of time and money is wasted on unnecessary meetings with miners when Traditional Owners have already said no. These changes mean Traditional Owners won’t have to meet with miners if they have already said no. No means no,” the acting CEO of the Northern Land Council, Mr Joe Martin-Jard said.

“The Northern Land Council is neutral about mining. But if Traditional Owners give their consent, even if people outside the Northern Territory think they shouldn’t, my job is to make sure they get the best possible deal. Traditional Owners have the first say and the last say,” said Mr Martin-Jard.

The reforms also update the Land Rights Act to reflect long overdue changes such as the development of geothermal energy and community-controlled leasing arrangements.

“We have been here for 65,000 years and we will be here for another 65,000 years. This is about Aboriginal people taking back control,” Mr Bush-Blanasi said.

“We have been fighting COVID and before that we were fighting for land rights. Now we are equal partners with the Government but this is just the start. Aboriginal people working together are strong. We can make things better for everyone. Today is a great day,” Mr Bush-Blanasi said.