

## **Northern Land Council welcomes historic reforms to the Land Rights Act**

25 August 2021

The Northern Land Council welcomes the introduction today in Parliament of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment (Economic Empowerment) Bill 2021*. This historic bill represents years of effort by the Northern Territory land councils working with the Commonwealth government on the most significant set of reforms since the Land Rights Act came into effect in 1976.

Chairman of the Northern Land Council, Mr Samuel Bush-Blanasi, acknowledged the significance of the reforms. “We have been working on this now for many years. For the first time Aboriginal people have been at the table with government ensuring the interests of Aboriginal people are front and centre. Finally we are seeing real progress.”

The creation of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation is the centerpiece of the reforms. This will create opportunities for investment and joint ventures in Aboriginal businesses and enterprises and large scale strategic investments that have never been possible before. These strategic investments will generate returns back to the corporation for reinvestment in more projects to benefit Aboriginal people in the NT. The Aboriginal Investment Corporation will replace the existing system of small grants from the Aboriginals Benefits Account, which has become slow and bogged down in bureaucracy.

“I am delighted to see this bill finally introduced and look forward to its speedy passage through the Parliament,” NLC Acting CEO, Mr Joe Martin-Jard said. “The reforms embed changes that put Traditional Owners in the box seat in managing their own communities through township leases, just like we saw recently with the historic handback of Jabiru to the Mirarr people. It also fixes up the permit system by changing it back to the way it was before the terrible Northern Territory intervention.”

Mr Bush-Blanasi welcomed the changes to the penalty regime in the Land Rights Act. “I am delighted to see the increased penalty provisions in the bill, this is a great start in addressing illegal activity on Aboriginal land but there is a lot more work to do yet. We now have to work with the NT government to lift the penalties under the Northern Territory’s *Aboriginal Land Act* and we are talking to the NT government about that right now.”

Other key reforms in the bill improve the processes for dealing with requests for mining and exploration on Aboriginal land. For example, allowing changes to applications for exploration licenses once the negotiation period has commenced, instead of starting the process again, potentially saving up to two years in some cases.

“Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory will see the benefits of these changes for generations to come. We want to grow our communities, create jobs and wealth for Aboriginal Territorians and see our grandchildren and great children enjoy these benefits, standing proud in their culture and caring for their country. I would like particularly to thank Minister Wyatt for his genuine commitment and support and the exceptional working relationship he has developed with all four NT land councils. I call on all members of Parliament to support the bill,” said Mr Bush-Blanasi.

ENDS

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