



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

Racism in the AFL is a shameful betrayal of trust for all Aboriginal Territorians, says NLC Chair

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Chairman of the Northern Land Council, Samuel Bush-Blanasi has reflected on the continuing controversies about racist treatment of Aboriginal players in the AFL system.

Speaking from Katherine in the Northern Territory, Mr Bush-Blanasi supported the calls by AFL legends Eddie Betts and Shannon Motlop for a review of how all AFL clubs are dealing with these issues.

“But to my way of thinking, it isn’t just the clubs that need a good shakeup, the AFL needs to take a long hard look at its administration. Some of the clubs have a lot of work to do to root out systemic racism in their administration and fan base. What we have seen in recent months and years is that despite all the fine words and handwringing about how important Aboriginal players and cultures are to the AFL, when push comes to shove those players can be treated terribly and our cultures ignored. The AFL needs to lift its game and must make sure the clubs do as well,” said Mr Bush-Blanasi.

“Every Aboriginal person in the NT has a family member who has been or is playing in the AFL or wants to. If this goes on for much longer then I can’t blame families for looking at other codes for their family members to play in. For them these scandals represent a shameful betrayal of the fundamental trust they put in the clubs and the AFL when they send their loved ones south to play. It’s just no good if they don’t feel that their family members are safe.

“The local NT Football League has always done a great job supporting Aussie Rules right across the NT – for example with the Big Rivers Football League based in and around the Katherine region that sees lots of my family members and hundreds of other young men and women playing competitive and exciting football every season that gives them a pathway right through to professional level down south,” said Mr Bush-Blanasi.

“It is up to the AFL and the clubs to get their house in order. Lots of other sporting codes treat Aboriginal players with the respect and dignity they deserve. The NLC and other Territory organisations will be happy to provide support and guidance to the AFL and the clubs – if they ask us.”

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