



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

NLC to Chief Minister Gunner: “Don’t throw Aboriginal Territorians under the National Plan bus”

13 October 2021

The Northern Land Council – and other NT land councils and Aboriginal health peak bodies like AMSANT and NACCHO – has worked closely with the NT and Federal governments to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among our most vulnerable populations, particularly Aboriginal Territorians living in remote communities and homelands.

The NLC has always been guided by one over-riding principle – to do everything possible to keep our communities safe.

So far, so good. Through close and careful cooperation between land councils, the Aboriginal health sector and governments at all levels we have dodged more than a few of the bullets that this terrible virus has thrown at us.

Recent events in western New South Wales illustrate the devastating consequences that rash and poorly-informed decisions can have on Aboriginal communities.

We know that some vaccination rates out bush are unacceptably low and land councils and the Aboriginal health sector are working hard to fix those issues.

But it is unacceptable for anyone – governments or the media - to play a “name, shame and blame” game about those rates. More work needs to be done to address low vaccination rates on a case-by-case basis.

Later today NT Chief Minister Michael Gunner is expected to make an announcement consistent with a “National Plan” that neither the NLC nor the Aboriginal Health Sector has been consulted on.

The NLC is gravely concerned that the Chief Minister’s announcements will be guided by recent comments by NT Health Minister Natasha Fyles quoted in the ABC on Monday this week – that the NT government might not be able to protect Aboriginal people unless they are vaccinated.

The NLC considers that Minister Fyles’ statements represent a fundamental and unacceptable abandonment of the health and welfare of Aboriginal Territorians in the name of the National Plan.

The NLC’s message to Chief Minister Gunner, Health Minister Fyles and the NT government is simple - stand by Aboriginal Territorians as we have stood by you throughout this crisis and in our time of greatest need.

NLC Chairman Samuel Bush-Blanasi reinforced the importance of cooperation, "I urge Chief Minister Gunner not to throw Aboriginal Territorians under the National Plan bus. Do not abandon us or expose our communities to a very real threat that we know will – literally – tear our communities apart".

"The NLC recommends the NT government adopt the very cautious and sensible approach taken by some state governments to restrict travel to those with at least one vaccination dose and preferably two. Only people with double doses of COVID-19 vaccine should be allowed to enter the NT," said Mr Bush Blanasi.