



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

Nitjpurru (Pidgeon Hole) Community Leader Calls Out NT Chief Minister

01 February 2024

Raymond Hector has voiced his dismay at the Northern Territory Chief Minister's recent statements concerning flood-ravaged Nitjpurru (Pidgeon Hole).

The Northern Land Council (NLC) Executive Member for Victoria River District quashed Eva Lawler's claims of community disagreement. Mr. Hector said there has long been consensus among the Nitjpurru community to relocate out of the floodplain and he stressed that Northern Territory Government (NTG) inaction was traumatising his people.

Speaking from Darwin – to where many residents have had to evacuate, twice in the past 12-months – Mr Hector highlighted that a lack of listening to residents was also leading to ineffective, and costly, responses that didn't solve this now critical issue.

Community members urge the NTG to swiftly excise a miniscule portion of pastoral lease land – 0.45% of Victoria River Downs, for which Heytsebury Cattle Company has now voiced support. Residents of Nitjpurru are waiting for the Chief Minister to provide a concrete timeline on their relocation to this higher ground and to put an end to their huge physical and emotion strain.

Quotes attributable to Raymond Hector, Victoria River District's Executive Council Member, Northern Land Council.

On ABC 730 this week the Chief Minister said "There'll be people who don't want to move..." that's just false. Everyone in Nitjpurru wants to relocate our community out of the floodplain.

The Minister saying that we're the reason for delays puts our people at risk. It creates confusion and mistrust because people think there is disagreement. But since the big flood in 2001, our community, the NLC and the pastoralists, have been coming together to talk about the best way forward.

We've had back-to-back floods now, clearly not a once-in-100-years thing. It's an urgent situation that can no longer be ignored. Over the next few weeks, we need the Chief Minister to sit down with us, to hear our experience, and work with us to plan the move.

Across more than two decades there have been meetings with different government workers, but it's clear from the Chief Ministers' statements that the leadership is not really listening to us. The truth – that we've been asking for this relocation for years – is not getting through to the decision-makers.

In meetings in July 2021, our member Chancey Paech acknowledged our consistent calls to relocate. And in March 2023, with the NLC, we wrote to Paech, then Housing Minister, to again request our relocation out of the flood zone.

This situation is traumatising for our people. We need it to change, we must move ahead with a permanent solution. At Nitjpurru the worry doesn't stop; we're often encircled in water, people continually monitor rain fall - losing sleep terrified that it's going to flood. It's not safe. At any time, we could lose all of our possession to the waters.

Many local leaders are speaking out in support of the relocation: Brian Pedwell Victoria Daly Region Mayor, Rob Roy from Gurindji Aboriginal Corp, and I've also talked with Victoria River Downs station general manager Rusty Richter.

Our lives, and especially those of our young people, depend on having the NTG listen and work with our community to relocate.

Raymond Hector is a Billarna man from Nitjpurru (Pigeon Hole). He is currently serving his second non-consecutive term as a member of the Northern Land Council's Executive Council. Mr Hector has previously held positions with the Katherine West Health Board and Territory Health Service and has also worked as a ringer throughout the VRD region. As a member of the NLC, Mr Hector is committed to highlighting the health and education needs of his community, as well as inspiring the younger generation.

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