Office of Aboriginal Affairs Northern Territory ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS STRATEGY





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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER

Adam Giles

I am pleased to present my government's 'Aboriginal Affairs Strategy'.

It is an innovative strategy. It is not business as usual. Many of its policies represent a substantial departure from those tried and failed over many decades in Australia, and they are designed to achieve different results. Results that deliver economic and cultural success for Aboriginal Territorians.

My Cabinet colleagues and I believe every Territorian has the right and responsibility to participate in and contribute to our economic growth, to benefit from the Territory's prosperity, and to enjoy all our cultural diversity and enviable lifestyle has to offer.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the oldest continuing cultures on the planet and that they are globally significant. We respect and agree with Aboriginal people when they tell us that they want to continue practising their cultures and customs and to keep their languages and lore strong but at the same time want economic development through business success and jobs for themselves, their children and the generations to come.

We have listened to Aboriginal people tell us they want a direct say in the design and delivery of relevant government policies, programs and funding, and we have responded with a suite of innovative mechanisms to ensure this happens. This includes our 'First Circles' initiative, in which 30 new and emerging Aboriginal leaders have direct, structured engagement with my Cabinet. I was delighted to see one of the group's first areas of focus was on remote jobs, and their engagement played a direct role in the recent remote jobs changes announced by the Commonwealth Indigenous Affairs Minister.

To facilitate the Territory's economic and cultural success, in February 2015, I announced a new Cabinet portfolio for Indigenous affairs, and I am honoured to be the responsible minister. To support whole-ofgovernment coordination and on-ground delivery, I established the new Office of Aboriginal Affairs within the Department of Local Government and Community Services. Aboriginal policy and service delivery is the core business of every government department, and this new office will drive policy reform across agencies and coordinate government effort to achieve real outcomes.

My Cabinet colleagues and I constantly engage with Aboriginal Territorians, whether it is with the Board and executives of land councils or with traditional owners in remote communities. More recently this engagement has demonstrated significant common ground and a shared vision. We have placed this shared vision at the heart of our Strategy. Our shared vision is to keep Aboriginal cultures strong and to ensure the sustainability of outstations and homelands; to see hard won land rights support economic rights and facilitate a transition from welfare dependency to jobs and businesses; for Aboriginal children to go to school and enjoy the benefits of a sound education and for adults to access sustainable jobs; to see Aboriginal people living in safe and nurturing home environments where you can reach your full potential; to ensure that Aboriginal people are healthy and looking after their families and communities; for governments to decentralise, delegate and devolve more decision making responsibility to local communities so Aboriginal Territorians are empowered to take control of their lives; and that Aboriginal people maintain their strong connections to their lands and waters, and continue to practise their cultures, customs, languages and lore.

This strategy articulates my government's clear direction and priorities for Aboriginal policy issues and demonstrates the Northern Territory Government's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities to achieve our shared vision.

We are all Territorians, and together we can make a difference. We can embrace our cultural diversity and help create an inclusive, strong and vibrant Northern Territory community.

Adam Giles Chief Minister of the Northern Territory

THE NT GOVERNMENT APPROACH

The Northern Territory holds a unique place in Australia's future. We are the gateway to Asia, our economy is growing rapidly and our lifestyle is the envy of many Australians. We are the cultural heart of our nation and a stronghold of the oldest continuing cultures on the planet, where ceremonies and lore are still practised today as they have been done for millennia.

The 'Aboriginal Affairs Strategy' sets the Northern Territory Government's vision for working in partnership with Aboriginal Territorians to deliver economic and cultural success.

The Northern Territory Government's 'Framing the Future Strategic Plan' guides the way forward to enable us to realise our full potential and plan our future.

Framing the Future focusses on four strategic goals:

- a prosperous economy
- a strong society
- a balanced environment
- a confident culture

FRAMING THE FUTURE

ECONOMY

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BALANCED ENVIRONMENT CONFIDENT CULTURE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS STRATEGY

This strategy identifies the objectives to be achieved against each of Framing the Future's four priority areas. Importantly, there are a number of indicators and measures attached to each objective. The indicators and measures are collectively included in the Aboriginal Affairs Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework and will support improved transparency and accountability.

The Office of Aboriginal Affairs will coordinate quarterly whole-of-government reporting to Cabinet so we can monitor the performance and identify trends about what is working and what is not, and respond accordingly.

PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

Economic participation is the key to building strong and sustainable communities. Maximising Aboriginal people's participation in the Northern Territory's economy will result in greater financial independence, a better quality of life and help break the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage.

Approximately 64 000 Aboriginal people live in remote or very remote communities, presenting challenges for the facilitation of economic development to go along with the strong cultural expression. To ensure future generations can raise their families on country, continuing to speak language, practice lore and observe cultural and ceremonial requirements, the Government is facilitating sustainable remote economies and communities.

OBJECTIVE Build an enabling environment and support open land use regimes

Build an 'enabling environment for economic development through infrastructure investment in power, water, sewerage, telecommunications and transport.

Provide land planning and surveys, and encourage a more open land administration regime that can deliver on Aboriginal people's aspirations to attract private sector investment and transition from land rights to land use and economic development.

Encourage Aboriginal people to use their land and/ or attract private sector investment by providing government developed information and data on water security and soil type to identify pastoral, agricultural and horticultural opportunities.

OBJECTIVE Training and sustainable employment

Increase job opportunities across the NT but especially in remote communities by leveraging government's infrastructure investment and provisional sum contract requirements and Indigenous Participation on Construction Projects Policy. Provide on-the-job training and other training directly linked to a job.

Support individuals and their families to manage a sustainable transition from welfare to employment.

OBJECTIVE Support local jobs and Aboriginal businesses

Apply the Remote Contracting Policy

Map five year government investment horizons to identify select and open tendering opportunities for local Aboriginal businesses. Use longer-term investment horizons to support capacity building, sustainable businesses and improved trade qualification opportunities.

OBJECTIVE Business development and professional services support

Provide ongoing professional service support through a retainer model to ensure Aboriginal businesses have access to the sustainable support they need.

Connect local Aboriginal businesses with potential debt and/or equity investors from the public, private and community sector. Promote broader opportunities through collaboration with relevant national organisations such as Indigenous Business Australia and Supply Nation.

STRONG SOCIETY

A strong society is one in which each member has an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. Governments play an important foundation role in a strong society by investing in public goods, like education, health and infrastructure.

The Northern Territory is blessed to have a very diverse society with high levels of social inclusion and cross cultural respect and celebration. Approximately 30% of the Territory's population is Aboriginal and some 80% of the Aboriginal population lives in remote or very remote communities. This isolation presents challenges for government in delivering public goods like education and health, and essential services like power, water and sewerage.

The Northern Territory Government has adopted a holistic and integrated delivery model so Aboriginal people can benefit from and contribute to a strong society for the prosperity of all Territorians.

OBJECTIVE Education, training and qualifications

Facilitate a supportive environment for early-childhood education that is focussed on literacy and numeracy, and parental engagement.

Significantly improve primary and secondary school retention and performance outcomes.

Significantly improve year 12 or equivalent level attainment and transition from school into further study, trades or work.

Align training with work opportunities and provide up-skilling opportunities to attain qualifications that lead to management and executive roles.

OBJECTIVE Physical and mental health and wellbeing

Enhance the role of Aboriginal community controlled health organisations in providing frontline health services, especially in remote communities.

Ensure health issues are raised and managed through local authorities that have strong local voices and can influence the design and delivery of Territory-wide Aboriginal health policies, programs and funding. Promote equal access to physical and mental health services across the NT, including in remote communities.

Encourage more Aboriginal people into professional health care roles.

Provide integrated services that target mental health linkages with matters such as home overcrowding, incarceration rates, and alcohol and drug use.

OBJECTIVE Safe and supportive communities

Support local councils to deliver enhanced public amenity, such as street lighting and footpaths, especially in remote communities.

Deliver preventative programs and provide required resources to support victims of domestic violence, including the provision of safe houses. Encourage people with alcohol problems to use the alcohol rehabilitation services available to them.

Support community leaders and local authority members to support the rule of law and social norms in all communities.

BALANCED ENVIRONMENT

The Northern Territory is home to some of the most beautiful and rare environments on Earth. For example, Kakadu National Park is one of the few places on the planet with dual World Heritage listing for its cultural and environmental values, and it is the only fully catchment-protected conservation area in the world. It is the environment we live in that underpins our enviable lifestyle and we want locals and visitors alike to enjoy and experience everything it has to offer now and into the future.

The Northern Territory Government is striking the right balance between the protection and use of our environment and preventing or minimising the impact that development may have on it, particularly large resource projects. In doing so, we are very cognisant of the Aboriginal people's connection to and responsibility for land and sea country. Firstly, we want to ensure that the Territory has appropriate laws for the protection of lands and waters, particularly those with cultural heritage significance for Aboriginal people. Secondly, we want Aboriginal people to have an influential say in decisions that impact the environment, and ongoing management roles in environmental protection.

Linking with our economics focus, we also respect that for a long time now Aboriginal people have expressed the desire to utilise their lands to provide sustainable economic and social opportunities for present and future generations as well as to continue to practise their cultures and customs.

Government will support these wishes through increased land-use planning in remote areas and the previously mentioned leadership engagement mechanisms.

OBJECTIVE Rangers and caring for country

Work with the Australian Government and traditional owners to identify opportunities to expand the 'caring for country' ranger programs.

Support economic development opportunities for rangers by engaging project proponents on initiatives such as landscape-scale fire management, including savannah burning for greenhouse gas emissions abatement, cultural site maintenance, including survey and monitoring activities and tourism opportunities.

Link traditional owners with major research projects on their country, such as CSIRO's biodiversity and carbon farming programs.

OBJECTIVE Land and natural resource management

Link Traditional Owners with project proponents for commercial contracting engagement on matters such as wild fire management, carbon abatement and sequestration projects, rehabilitation projects, (feral) animal and weed management and biodiversity survey and monitoring activities.

Support traditional owners into commercial natural resource management businesses, including fisheries,

forestry and water management, and the sustainable commercial harvest of native plants and animals.

Encourage collaboration between Aboriginal traditional knowledge and government scientific initiatives developing data on water sources, and vegetation and soil types to underpin remote economies.

CONFIDENT CULTURE

Territorians are self-sufficient people, confident in our capacity to succeed and our ability to look after each other. We persevere through the tough times, celebrate together in the good times, and respect and celebrate each other's difference and contribution. Of course Aboriginal people have been doing just that for tens of thousands of years in the NT.

There is extraordinary diversity amongst Aboriginal people in the NT with more than 100 different Aboriginal languages spoken. The Northern Territory Government will work in partnership with Aboriginal people across the Territory to promote and protect their languages, cultures and customs.

In particular, the Northern Territory Government wants to decentralise decision making to provide significantly increased opportunities for Aboriginal people at the community level to be directly involved in, and lead the design and delivery of relevant government policies, programs and funding.

We will also prioritise investment in cultural and artistic activities and events that provide opportunities for people to learn from, communicate with and understand each other better. These cultural activities and events have direct and indirect social and economic benefits, particularly through tourism—the largest employment sector in remote NT.

OBJECTIVE Local decision making

Promote local Aboriginal leadership through delegating and devolving decisions in key areas, including health, education and housing.

OBJECTIVE Culture and heritage

Provide legal protection for Aboriginal heritage assets and a direct role for Aboriginal people in heritage-related decisions, particularly about major resource developments.

OBJECTIVE Land and language

Protect and promote Aboriginal languages to strengthen intergenerational relationships and provide for the ongoing transmission of cultural knowledge.

Provide structured engagement for local leadership through expanding the role and number of local authorities.

Deliver culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal Territorians, especially in remote communities.

Support cultural maintenance through sustainable investment in municipal and essential services in homelands and outstations.

Promote community development initiatives by providing greater opportunities through language maintenance and revival work.

Support economic development and tourism opportunities through protected lands management.

OBJECTIVE Arts, museums and events

Celebrate and connect with communities by providing opportunities and funding for Aboriginal communities to showcase culture and the arts and to promote and profile events and festivals.

Invest in the growth and development of the Aboriginal arts sector and creative industries.

IMPLEMENTATION

OFFICE OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The Office of Aboriginal Affairs has whole-ofgovernment coordination responsibility for the Aboriginal Affairs Strategy and direct responsibility for the following associated policies:

- Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework
- Community Champions program
- First Circles Engagement initiative
- Remote Contracting Policy
- Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy
- Remote Fit-for-purpose Planning Policy
- Remote Aboriginal Economic Development Fund
- Remote Information Coordination System.

In particular the Office of Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for collating and reporting the outcomes against the performance indicators and measures in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework.

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

While the Aboriginal Affairs Strategy is a whole-of-Northern-Territory-Government document, each agency is, where relevant, directly responsible for the development and implementation of Aboriginal affairs-related policies.

Other Aboriginal affairs-related policies and their responsible agencies are:

- provisional sum contracting requirements Department of Infrastructure
- A share in the future: Indigenous Education Strategy 2015–2024 Department of Education
- Indigenous Housing Strategy Department of Housing
- Professional Services Support Policy Department of Business
- Indigenous Tourism Fund Department of Business.

Each agency is responsible for tracking its outcomes against the performance indicators and measures in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework and reporting them to the Office of Aboriginal Affairs.

TRACKING AND MEASURING PERFORMANCE

The strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework to ensure the highest levels of accountability and transparency. The framework includes 33 indicators, associated measures and specific targets to achieve in the allocated timeframe.

ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

As the whole-of-government coordinating agency, the Department of Local Government and Community Services, through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, will report twice per year to Cabinet on performance against the indicators and measures.

Other reporting requirements under the strategy are that all relevant NTG agencies will report performance to the Office of Aboriginal Affairs on a monthly basis and the office will report performance to the Aboriginal Affairs Standing Committee (AASC) at the AASC's scheduled meetings every second month. The AASC is made up of 16 NTG agency chief executive officers with direct responsibilities in Aboriginal affairs across government.

The Northern Territory Government, in partnership with Aboriginal Territorians, will ensure the strategy is a living document that is used to develop an evidence base on what is working and what is not. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs will ensure Aboriginal people are genuinely engaged in the performance monitoring and review and continuous improvement of policies, programs and funding to deliver economic, social and cultural success for Aboriginal Territorians.

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