

# OPENING STATEMENT

## THE HON SELENA UIBO MLA MINISTER FOR TREATY AND LOCAL DECISION MAKING MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

- I would like to begin by making a brief opening statement addressing key areas of responsibility within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet (CM&C). I have <sup>accompany</sup> ~~with~~ me ~~Ms Jodie Ryan, CM&C Chief Executive Officer~~ and Mr Andrew Cowan, CM&C Deputy Chief Executive Officer.
- The Northern Territory <sup>labor</sup> Government is making progress on its significant Aboriginal Affairs reform agenda.
- This Aboriginal Affairs reform agenda is underpinned by Treaty, Local Decision Making, ensuring land and sea ownership delivers on economic and social aspirations of Aboriginal Territorians, and the new 'Everyone Together' 10 Year Aboriginal Affairs Strategy (the Strategy) released earlier this year <sup>in Alice Springs</sup>.
- The Strategy is integrally linked to the National Closing the Gap Agreement (the National Agreement) which was signed in July 2020.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NT  
TABLED DOCUMENTS

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Tabled By: *Uibo*  
Signed: *[Signature]*

- The Strategy recognises that the way government does business with Aboriginal Territorians needs to improve and change.
- The Strategy also recognises the critical importance of language, culture and connection to country to Aboriginal Territorians, and how these elements are integral to individual and community capacity to engage in society.

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- **THIS** government believes that local decisions are better decisions.
- We believe that it is important to ensure that people and place are at the centre of government policy design and service delivery, and that people are empowered to determine their own futures.
- These important initiatives in Aboriginal Affairs are strategically linked to an increased focus on the regions, through growing the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet's regional network, and linking the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Interpreter Service into the regions in a better way to assist the implementation of programs.
- A number of Machinery of Government changes have taken place to reflect the Chief Minister's vision to grow the economy across

the Territory, with a particular focus on the regions to maximise the opportunity for synergies and alignment across government.

- For CM&C these include the transfer of new functions from Investment Territory, Local Government and Community Development and the Aboriginal Interpreters Service which will help foster a greater level of agility, flexibility and decision making across government.
- While MOG changes are in the process of being implemented, the Territory's COVID response was a good example of public servants responding to critical issues and working with Aboriginal peak bodies and stakeholders to keep people safe.
- I <sup>would</sup> like to outline the approach that was taken in relation to the Territory's COVID response.
- It has been an extraordinary partnership approach which has led to unprecedented cooperation focused on protecting our communities from COVID-19.

## **COVID-19 Regional and Remote Taskforce**

- In line with local decision making principles, the COVID-19 Regional and Remote Taskforce was established quickly to provide advice on matters of significance to Aboriginal Territorians.
- The Taskforce is co-chaired by the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet (CM&C) and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT); and includes broad representation from Aboriginal organisations (Land Councils), the Non-Government sector, LGANT, NAAJA, NTCOSS and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and key Northern Territory Government agencies including health and NT Police.
- The Taskforce was established to directly inform policy discussions. The Taskforce initially met weekly and has now moved to fortnightly arrangements and supported the implementation of the Biosecurity Act.

## **Biosecurity Determination and Checkpoints**

- The Commonwealth Biosecurity Determination came into effect on 26 March 2020 and expired on 5th June 2020.

- There were 13 Biosecurity Check Points (BCPs) and 12 Border Check points at the height of operations across the NT managing entry into designated biosecurity areas.
- This included people with **Approved Remote Essential Worker (AREW)** identification cards, and residents of communities within designated areas who had completed the required 14 day quarantine prior to entry.
- The designated areas were put in place to protect vulnerable people in remote communities from exposure to COVID-19. The requirement to quarantine prior to entering a designated area means a Territory-wide Return to Country quarantine program was established.
- On 5 June 2020, the Determination was lifted, meaning the 'Designated Areas' no longer existed. This has allowed people to freely move around the Northern Territory without having to seek exemptions or approvals, other than those required by the Aboriginal Land Councils under ALRA.

## Return To Country

- The Return to Country Quarantine program was established to ensure people who needed to return to their communities that are within designated areas were provided with a culturally appropriate place to self-quarantine before they entered the Biosecurity Zone.
- This applied to residents who left a designated area for any reason (shopping, health appointments etc) and then wished to return. They were required to self-quarantine for 14 days unless they had an exemption from a Delegated Decision Maker or an Approved Remote Essential Worker card.
- The cost per person for this Return to Country quarantine program is approximately \$4000 for a 14-day period, which covered both the compliance and health-related risks associated with culturally appropriate quarantine. This included accommodation and food costs, security and cleaning.
- Approx 600 people completed quarantine under the Return to Country quarantine program.

- An intensive Return to Country (RTC) program was put in place during the first two weeks of March to assist community members to return home before restrictions came into place.
- During this time, 2,222 people accessed the Return to Country program and returned home prior to the Biosecurity Act coming into place.

### **Remote Travel Hotline**

- On 16 March CM&C established the Remote Travel Hotline to provide information to the community about restrictions on travel. As at the last day of operation on the 30 October the hotline had taken 25,053 calls.
- The total number of calls across all hotlines was 83,781.
- The hotline had 15 FTE at any one time seconded from CM&C and other agencies, operating seven days a week at the height of operations. An external provider was then engaged from June to operate the hotline till the end of October.

### **Approved Remote Essential Workers (AREW)**

- CM&C established the Approved Remote Essential Worker program as a policy response to manage permissions for people

undertaking essential activities in designated areas, as defined in the Biosecurity Determination.

- The AREW program required people undertaking essential activities to apply for an AREW identification card, providing details of the essential activity, application to the relevant Land Council if the work will be on Aboriginal Land, and photo identification.
- The AREW team assessed each individual application, liaised with the Land Council and produced interim digital cards which were emailed to applicants, along with a hard copy card, lanyard and vehicle stickers that were posted.
- At its peak the AREW program had up to 60 staff seconded from CM&C and other agencies helping with processing and/or the Hotline. An online ticketing system and form enabled the processing work to be managed more efficiently and the initial rush of applications reduced after its peak in late March and early April.

- Costs associated with card production for the AREW program are estimated at \$42,600 with a total of 9734 AREW cards or certificates issued as at 26 August 20.

## **Food Security**

- During COVID-19 period, the Department also worked collaboratively with key stakeholders including the Commonwealth Government, remote community stores, distribution centres, suppliers, manufacturers and the freight sector to ensure food security was maintained in the Northern Territory and across our remote regions.
- This included actively highlighting the urgency to get supplies to remote stores and keep stores well stocked during this critical time.
- The efforts and strong engagement from suppliers, retailers, government and many of our Aboriginal organisations ensured the NT experienced minimal food security impacts.
- However, there is more work to be done which the recent tabling of the Commonwealth's House of Representatives Standing

Committee on Indigenous Affairs 'Report on Food Pricing and Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities' outlines.

- I am very proud of the work done by the Agency and would like to thank all public servants involved in keeping Territorians safe.

## Treaty

- In July 2019, the Northern Territory Government committed to establish the Northern Territory Treaty Commission. Since then, Professor Mick Dodson AM has been appointed as the Northern Territory Treaty Commissioner and Ms Ursula Raymond as the Deputy Treaty Commissioner.
- In July 2020, the Treaty Discussion Paper was released and is available on the Northern Territory Treaty website. Translations in ~~interpret~~ 18 languages
- The Treaty Office has engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting to facilitate Northern Territory-wide community consultations, which have commenced and will take place over the next 18 months.
- A final report on the outcomes of consultation, recommendations of next steps and a proposed negotiation framework for Treaty in

the Northern Territory is expected to be delivered to the Chief Minister in 2022.

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## **Local Decision Making**

- The Local Decision Making Policy (LDM) agreed in August 2018, formally commits Government to a process of ceding decision making back to where it belongs, in communities.
- There are five signed LDM agreements between Government and communities <sup>which</sup> are in various stages of implementation across the Territory, while there are also four signed Statement of Commitment's which commits Government to work with communities to jointly explore LDM opportunities.
- The LDM agreements under implementation in Groote Eylandt, Ngukurr, Kalkarindji, Alice Springs and Katherine are working towards greater decision making for communities in the areas of: housing, local government, education, health, economic development, jobs and training, law and justice, environmental sustainability, social and cultural continuity, and, local service delivery.

- The Alice Springs Town Camps LDM Heads of Agreement was officially launched during this year's NAIDOC week and Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation see this agreement as their most significant agreement with government in the last 30 years.
- A couple of weeks ago the Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation and Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation came together to share ideas and success stories, discussing how LDM can work for them, *in their respective regions + communities.*
- It's been exciting to see the rise in interest with 1,564 views of the LDM information videos on the website which includes 737 viewed in Aboriginal languages. There has also been 2,940 views of the videos that were posted on the website by communities relating to their LDM stories. In total, the website has had 21,482 page views between March 2019 and November 2020.
- My team is fully committed to working across the Territory with communities and Aboriginal organisations that have an interest in exploring LDM opportunities. There are many consultations

underway and I am looking forward to signing more agreements in the near future.

### **Aboriginal Affairs**

- Key to the Aboriginal Affairs agenda is strong leadership, governance and capacity building – this is not only for Aboriginal Territorians and communities but government as well - to change the way we engage and work with Aboriginal people.
- The Northern Territory Government continues to invest in the bush, to support emerging Aboriginal leaders through its First Circles Leadership Program.
- Government is currently seeking nominations for the next cohort of emerging Aboriginal leaders to join the First Circles Leadership Program for in 2021, to equip them with skills to influence change in their communities, and across government.
- Each year, the First Circles Program selects 20 Aboriginal Territorians from remote communities to develop and expand their leadership skills, with the aim of participants returning to communities as **strong** community leaders.

- The Northern Territory Government is continuing to evolve Australia Day to ensure it celebrates and meaningfully acknowledges a united Territory that showcases our rich Aboriginal culture, language, history and people.
- As part of the Australia Day celebrations each year, a grant program of \$40 000 is available to Aboriginal individuals, organisations and Aboriginal businesses to apply for grants of up to \$5000, to go towards how community wants to acknowledge, recognise and/or celebrate their way.
- The Northern Territory Government is supporting Aboriginal self-determination through strengthening Aboriginal community controlled organisations and partnerships in areas of governance, leadership and capacity building.
- The Remote Aboriginal Governance and Capacity Building Grant Program, which commits \$500 000 is available to support remote communities and regions across the Northern Territory to strengthen their capacity and capabilities to actively participate in community-led initiatives and programs that supports the journey towards Local Decision Making.

- The Northern Territory Government recognises that building and supporting strong Aboriginal organisational governance is important to ensuring local people drive local and community-led solutions and service delivery at a community level.
- By strengthening corporate governance, leadership and capacity building, there are opportunities to improve and better understand corporate governance and its operations, whilst improving accountability and strengthening community capacity for the future.
- The Northern Territory Government, through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, hosts the annual Aboriginal Leadership and Governance Forum in Alice Springs. The Forum is designed to acknowledge and recognise the importance of Aboriginal people and communities working in two forms of governance – Aboriginal traditional governance systems and structures and that of corporate governance.
- The Forum brings together Aboriginal leaders, senior members of communities, aspiring Aboriginal youth, and heads of corporate, government and community organisations.

- This year's Forum was scheduled for May 2020 in Alice Springs, however due to the changing and widespread impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Forum was rescheduled to June 2021.

### **Aboriginal Land Claims**

- As part of the Blue Mud Bay Implementation Action Plan, the NT Government is providing up to \$10 million to support the establishment of an Aboriginal fishing entity to facilitate participation of Traditional Owners in fishing, aquaculture and other opportunities associated with fishing activities in the Northern Territory.

### **Aboriginal Affairs Strategy**

- The 'Everyone Together' Aboriginal Affairs Strategy is a 10-year plan to improve how government works with Aboriginal people and community, and draws on three guiding principles of Healing, Respect and Engagement.
- Through healing government will strive to acknowledge and understand the history, contribution and continuing strength, innovation and resilience of Aboriginal people; while respecting the important place Aboriginal culture, beliefs and governance

have at the centre of how government engages and designs policies, services and programs; and improving our engagement and responsiveness with communities that is genuine, open, honest and respectful.

- The implementation of the Performance and Reporting Framework for the Strategy is currently underway with the collection of baseline data from across NT Government agencies, and regular reporting mechanisms to communicate government's progress.

### **Joint Council on Closing the Gap**

- Joint Council on Closing the Gap met on 17 November 2020.
- The Joint Council agreed to focus investment on developing the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to deliver on Priority Reform Two.
- The NT Government committed \$2 million over four years to the joint funding pool (from the existing NT Government Remote Aboriginal Governance and Capacity Building Grant Program).
- Four sectors have been identified in the Agreement for the first tranche of investment. The sectors are Early Childhood Care and

Development (includes child protection); Housing; Disability; and Health.

- The NT Government also committed to another five year funding agreement with the Aboriginal Peak Organisation of the Northern Territory, contingent on stronger governance arrangements, the expansion of members and the appointment of an independent Chief Executive Officer going forward (\$1.5 million conditional).

### **Aboriginal Interpreters Service**

- The recent machinery of government changes resulted in the Aboriginal Interpreter Service moving to the Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet, within the Office of Aboriginal Affairs.
- The addition of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service will further enhance and strengthen the regional portfolios to implement and deliver programs at a local level. As we all know, the best decisions are local decisions.
- The Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) was formally established in the year 2000, the service is jointly funded by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments.

- The AIS employs over 200 casual Aboriginal Interpreters from remote communities across the Northern Territory.
- There are 57 full time equivalent staff located in the central and regional offices supporting the operational delivery of interpreting and recording services to Australian Government, Northern Territory Government, Non-government organisations and the private sector.
- For the 2019-20 financial a total of 31 000 hours (=1200 days) of interpreting and recording work has been completed.
- The AIS provides critical interpreting services to the Federal and Local Courts, including Bush Courts in most remote regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.
- The Aboriginal Interpreters employed at AIS receive formal training, development and certification through a partnership with the National Accreditation Authority for Translating and Interpreting (NAATI).
- AIS provide interpreters on a rostered basis to hospitals in the across the Northern Territory, work with ABC Radio in Darwin to provide news broadcasts in Northern Territory Aboriginal

languages and provide essential messaging in languages during emergency incidences.

- Recently, the AIS were awarded a Chief Ministers Award for Excellence for the recorded messages it provided about COVID-19 in eighteen of the more commonly used Northern Territory Aboriginal languages.
- I would again like to thank everyone who was involved, both past and current, in supporting, progressing and developing these key priorities for the Northern Territory.
- <sup>I am</sup> ~~We are~~ now happy to take any questions <sup>from the</sup> ~~from the~~ <sup>Committee.</sup> ~~Committee.~~

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