



5th October, 2005

Clare Martin
CHIEF MINISTER



FEDERAL LAND RIGHTS CHANGES - STEP IN RIGHT DIRECTION

The Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Clare Martin, said today that Commonwealth changes to leasing Aboriginal land was in principle a step in the right direction and as a broad policy direction could deliver lasting benefits to remote communities.

“The details of the Federal Government proposal should reinforce traditional ownership of land and encourage economic opportunities through the new voluntary scheme,” said Ms Martin.

“The NT Government will be working with the Australian Government and peak indigenous bodies on the details of these changes to make it easier to boost economic development through private and Government investment in townships on Aboriginal land.

“Consultation to finalise the practical details of the new leasing scheme will ensure that it has the best chance of success.

“The first raft of legislative amendments to be announced by the Federal Government should be welcomed as a chance to cut red tape and create a springboard for sustainable growth in remote Aboriginal townships.” said Ms Martin.

The changes flow from submissions by the Land Councils and the NT Government to the Commonwealth Review of the Land Rights Act.

One of the key principles announced today is the right of traditional owners and their organisations to ‘opt in’ and use the new voluntary regime to offer security to investors through sub leases.

Take up, may be limited in the early years but the voluntary approach will most likely attract the larger communities first.

Under the reforms, the NT Government has been asked to establish an ‘entity’ to issue sub leases. These will be in line with the terms and conditions of head leases over a township which is agreed to by traditional owners and Land Councils.

An independent statutory authority with a board including an independent Chair and representation from Land Councils and both the Northern Territory and Australian Governments is the favoured structure at this stage.

“When the amendments are publicly released we can commence consultations on the detail with Land Councils and Aboriginal communities to make this work,” said Ms Martin.

The Federal Government also announced a new home loan package for Indigenous Australians in remote communities.

The NT sees this as a practical commitment and a good start but the reality of unemployment and the limited ability to service mortgage needs to be taken into account.

Further initiatives will also be examined given the commitment by the Australian Government to address housing as a priority issue.

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