

NLC Opening Statement

Thank you Chair.

Joe Martin-Jard, CEO Northern Land Council.

On behalf of the Chair, I would like to start by congratulating Senator McCarthy for her appointment as Minister for Indigenous Health and Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians.

And Minister Burney for her appointment as Minister for Indigenous Australians and Senator Dodson for his appointment as Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement.

May I also extend a special congratulations to other Indigenous Senators and Members of Parliament elected for the first time or re-elected in the Federal election earlier this year.

It is great to see so many of you around the table at this Estimates Committee.

I would like to acknowledge NLC Chair Samuel Bush-Blanasi as the 2023 Northern Territory Australian of the Year. Next year in April, the Chair will also receive an honorary doctorate from Charles Darwin University.

This year has been one of the most challenging but also one of the most significant for the NLC.

We started the year in the throes of COVID in a state of almost complete lockdown.

By March things were starting to open up.

We were able to host 3 ceremonies for the handback of Aboriginal land in one day.

It was a great day but it also signaled the end of an era.

Most of our land claims work is now done.

In the future our focus will be less about claiming land rights and more about activating those land rights.

A good example of this is the establishment of the Aboriginal Sea Company earlier this year.

This is about realising the potential of the High Court's 2008 Blue Mud Bay decision.

Another example is the establishment this year of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation.

This was the centerpiece of the reforms passed by the Australian Parliament in December last year.

For the first time in its 70-year history, Aboriginal people will have control over grants from the ABA.

As we head into 2023, we are currently holding elections for our Full Council.

Our new Full Council will commence its 3-year term when it meets in a few weeks in December.

So, next year will be big year with a new Full Council and the new ABA Corporation.

Next year is also the Northern Land Council's 50th Anniversary.

As we reflect on the last 50 years, the NLC is proud of its history fighting for land rights.

But the fight is not over.

Now we are thinking about the next 50 years.

This year our Executive Council started a project I alluded to earlier called 'Activating Land Rights'.

This expression comes from former long-serving NLC Chair and Australian of the Year, Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu AM.

What this means is realising the full cultural, social and economic potential of Traditional Owners' rights and interests in Aboriginal land, sea and waters.

So, there is a lot more work to be done.

But one thing will never change.

Traditional Owners and aspirations Aboriginal people in the NLC region and across Australia will always be at the heart of the NLC and everything we do.

Thank you.