



NLC Opening Statement

8 November 2024

Chris Neade:

Good morning everyone,

We acknowledge that we meet today on unceded land and we pay respect to the Traditional Owners of this Country, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples.

My name is Chris Neade, I am an Executive Member for the Borrolloola Barkly region and I want to thank you all for this opportunity to address the Committee on behalf of the Northern Land Council (NLC). Today we are representing our full council and appear on behalf of our Chair, Matthew Ryan, who is unable to attend due to unforeseen Sorry Business.

The NLC, built by our strong leaders, has fought hard, for over 50 years, to reclaim our traditional land, water and sea country. We continue this fight to fulfil these rights so that our communities have the opportunity to thrive on their country. We are tired of being used as a political football and being blamed for delays by governments and proponents when we strive to serve, represent and empower our people.

This is why the NLC is working hard to change the way we do business, empowering traditional owners to seek opportunities for what they want on their land – and not be held to ransom by the expectations of proponents. It's why we are constantly strengthening the NLC's governance, finding ways to improve the section 19 process and building our capacity to empower community and economic development opportunities.

The NLC would like to take this opportunity to raise awareness of some key issues.

We no longer want to be passive bystanders as other people conduct business on our country. Our future economic independence lies in us leveraging our land and sea rights so that we are not just stakeholders to be consulted but true shareholders in economic development.

Our communities face challenges with employment, infrastructure, and access to essential services. We need culturally respectful initiatives in local industries to create lasting pathways to economic independence. To achieve this Government must be bipartisan and walk with us.

We also ask governments to do all that they can to ensure major projects in the Top End, prioritise local Aboriginal economic development and real jobs. This is an approach to which the NLC is committed through compliance of contractual obligations in Land Use Agreements.

The new NT government says they are “tough on crime”, we want this to extend beyond Darwin. Law and order must be upheld in our communities; police need to be properly directed and resourced to ensure this.

Additionally, we call on the Government to strengthen the consequences on those doing the wrong thing on Aboriginal Land, things like damaging sacred sites, unlawful access on Aboriginal land, illegal land clearing, fishing without permission. It jeopardises our culture and our future.

Raymond Hector:

Hello Senators, my name is Raymond Hector, I am an Executive Council member representing the Victoria River District.

Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory, such as my home of Nitjpurru, face challenges in emergency response and being prepared for disasters. We’ve been told every year that the floods are one in one-hundred-year event, yet every year the floods come. Nitjpurru is not the only community affected in this way and I call on you to stand side by side with us as we call for change, we deserve the basic human rights given to others in a crisis.

We want to see investments that empower our communities to respond straight away. Things like safe emergency shelters built in the right place, with secure power and water and phone service to keep us safe and connected during a disaster.

Conway Wirrpanda-Blanasi:

Hello senators, my name is Conway Wirrpanda-Blanasi. I am an Executive Council member for the Katherine Region.

I am a senior cultural man. We want to see recognition of traditional lore, and the recognition of our Elders' role in the passing down of knowledge.

Once you scratch the surface you will find many stories where local people have led the journey from the beginning. These are the projects that work and make a real difference.

When you respect our cultures, communities are healthier, more resilient, and able to thrive. Yet, this respect often falls short in practical policy and implementation.

We remind the government that Aboriginal voices and self-determination must guide decisions impacting Aboriginal lands and waters. We ask that government policies and initiatives listen actively to these voices.

Expanding investment in Learning on Country initiatives and NT Aboriginal Ranger Programs can empower our young people to navigate "two worlds" – one of tradition and the other of modern opportunity – giving them hope, pride, and pathways for future success.

The issues we have raised today highlight the need for cultural respect, strong local leadership, and working together. It is only by placing Aboriginal knowledge and leadership at the centre, that we can meaningfully address these challenges.

The NLC stands ready to work with the Australian government to promote sustainable, culturally-grounded development that upholds the rights and aspirations of Aboriginal people in our seven regions.

Thank you.

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