



## CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL

### **Submission to the Inquiry into Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012**

The Central Land Council (CLC) is a Commonwealth statutory authority established under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Land Rights Act)* and a Native Title Representative Body under the *Native Title Act 1993*.

The CLC is first and foremost a representative organisation for the Aboriginal people in its region, particularly on land related matters including land claims and economic uses of land.

The CLC is one of four Northern Territory land councils. The CLC region covers the entire southern half of the Northern Territory, an area of some 780,000 sq km of land. The Council is made up of 90 Aboriginal people from more than 15 language groups elected from communities across the region.

The Central Land Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012*. The CLC is encouraged by Minister Macklin's intention that the Bill be 'a clear step forward towards holding a successful referendum to change the Australian Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.'

The CLC supports the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012* as a step on the road to constitutional recognition. We consider that the Bill is warranted given the relatively low public awareness about constitutional reform which makes a successful referendum in 2013 unlikely. As Minister Macklin recognised '[c]hange will not happen without support from across the political spectrum and the support of the majority of Australians.'

The Central Land Council is pleased by the bipartisan approach that led to the introduction of the Bill and the formation of the Joint Select Committee. Though the Bill will not bind any future Parliament, the commitment to 'placing before the Australian people at a referendum a proposal for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' is welcomed. The Bill should properly be seen as an important but interim statement of recognition that ought to build, rather than stall, momentum towards meaningful constitutional change. The CLC notes that each and every Member of the House of Representatives and the Senate will have an important role to play among their constituents to build awareness and support for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The recognition by Parliament that further work needs to be done to refine proposals and build consensus is important. More important still is the unqualified



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acknowledgement of prior occupation of Australia by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the ongoing relationships with traditional lands and waters and the acknowledgement and respect for the continuing cultures, languages and heritage of our people.

The Central Land Council supports the nature of the review provided for and the continued reference to the recommendations of the Expert Panel. In this regard we note our submission together with the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) to the Expert Panel.<sup>1</sup>

The sunset within 2 years of commencement is understandable given the need to take further steps to secure constitutional, rather than legislative, recognition. The Central Land Council will continue to advocate to ensure that such constitutional change takes place in the near future.

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<sup>1</sup> APO (NT) Submission to the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians  
[http://www.clc.org.au/files/pdf/APO\\_NT\\_submission\\_to\\_Expert\\_Panel.pdf](http://www.clc.org.au/files/pdf/APO_NT_submission_to_Expert_Panel.pdf)