

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS REPORT TO THE
41ST PARLIAMENT, *THE LONG ROAD TO STATEHOOD*

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO *THE LONG ROAD TO STATEHOOD*

On 28 May 2007, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs tabled *The Long Road to Statehood* (the report). The report identifies and highlights some of the major issues around statehood and the associated Federal implications. The report acknowledges that establishing the first new State since federation is a complex matter that raises a broad range of constitutional, policy and administrative issues, not just for the Northern Territory, but also for existing states and for the Commonwealth itself. The report argues that the Commonwealth has a role to play in helping to shape discussions on the terms and conditions of the potential new State.

The report contains one recommendation. The Commonwealth Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that it update and refine its position on Northern Territory statehood and re-commence work on unresolved federal issues relating to statehood.

The Commonwealth Government supports in principle the granting of statehood to the Northern Territory, subject to the resolution of outstanding policy and constitutional issues by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments, and the Commonwealth Parliament's consideration of any proposed terms and conditions of statehood.

The Commonwealth Government expects that the Northern Territory Government will continue to be the driving force for this constitutional change. It remains the responsibility of the Northern Territory Government to present the Commonwealth Government with a clear and detailed proposal, based on a sound financial, legal and social foundation, supporting their aim to become a State of the Commonwealth of Australia. The proposal must also demonstrate that it is based on broad consultation with, and support from, Northern Territory residents.

This case should present the Northern Territory Government's preferred approach to the unresolved policy issues for Northern Territory statehood raised in the report, including the:

- future management and control of Commonwealth land, national parks and world heritage areas within the Territory;
- future management of indigenous issues;
- future management and control of uranium and mining within the Territory; and
- future management of other matters currently reserved to the Commonwealth under existing self government arrangements.

The report observes that creating a new State under the Constitution is not a straightforward matter. The Northern Territory will need to show clearly that statehood can be achieved and maintained without additional financial impost on the Commonwealth Government. Any specific terms and conditions that the Northern Territory Government considers essential for establishing the State should also be presented for Commonwealth Government consideration.

As the Northern Territory Government develops and presents the details of its proposal, the Commonwealth Government will develop its preferred approach to the constitutional issues that will arise.