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Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

ONE NATIONAL CIRCUIT
BARTON ACT 2600

The Hon Peter Slipper MP
Chairman
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Legal
and Constitutional Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Slipper

On 7 February 2007, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet received additional questions from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, arising from the Northern Territory statehood inquiry public hearing held on 6 February 2007. The department's answers to those questions are set out below.

1. In the event of Northern Territory statehood proceeding, what would the department identify as priority work areas for the Commonwealth?

Areas of work for the Commonwealth will depend on the nature of the proposed form of statehood.

2. Can the department outline the main steps that would be involved in coordinating the Commonwealth's response/workplan in the event of Northern Territory statehood proceeding?

It is difficult to say at this stage, other than that workplan development would be a key issue in the event of a formal decision that statehood should proceed. There would be coordination work for a lead Minister and department, as well as whole of government coordination which would be expected to involve Cabinet consideration at appropriate times.

3. *A major issue in relation to Northern Territory statehood is the representation of the new state in the federal Parliament, including the current lack of a guarantee of representation for the Territory in s.122 of the Constitution and the question of a minimum level of representation.*

What in the department's view would be some of the main considerations in addressing this issue?

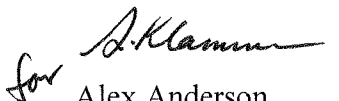
These are fundamentally policy issues, on which it would be inappropriate for the department to pre-empt government consideration.

4. *What, in the department's view, is the next stage on the road to Northern Territory statehood? How does the department envisage the timeline for statehood progressing from this point onwards?*

The Northern Territory Minister for Statehood, the Hon Syd Stirling MLA, and Shadow Minister for Statehood, Mr Terry Mills MLA, recently met with the Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Philip Ruddock MP, and Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Hon Jim Lloyd MP, to discuss Northern Territory statehood. Mr Stirling and Mr Mills delivered letters to Mr Ruddock and Mr Lloyd at the meeting. The Commonwealth Government is considering its responses to these letters. Stages in consideration of statehood, and possible timelines, are matters for governments, on which it would be inappropriate for the department to pre-empt government consideration.

If you have any queries in this matter, I can be contacted on 6271 5532.

Yours sincerely


Alex Anderson
Assistant Secretary
Legal Policy Branch
February 2007