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SUBMISSION.

**INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE ON
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE NORTHERN
TERRITORY.**

The Tiwi Land Council thanks the Committee for an opportunity to respond to this inquiry and has considered these matters at meeting 255 of 3rd October last. Members have reflected generally on the outstanding lack of Northern Territory Government funding support, or any economic development support, over many years on the Tiwi Islands. Other than service delivery funding to Health, Police and Local Government, our landowners could not readily identify any project or development program of any description that had in fact been supported by the Northern Territory Government over the past decade.

This is the same decade during which a forestry industry has been established with private investment exceeding \$168m; an aquaculture industry with private investment of \$25m; a Tiwi College with both Federal and private investment of \$15m; a Mining industry with private investment of \$32m., and airstrips, roads and port facilities constructed, also with private investment, exceeding \$13m. Landowners, having attracted investment of over a quarter of a billion dollars during this decade express their concern that rather than finding support from the Northern Territory Government, they have not only been ignored but condemned by that Government for their determination and their development solutions.

Terms of Reference:

In responding to “service delivery and outcomes” of expenditure of both Federal and Northern Territory Governments, the Land Council notes consistent and continuing Federal Government programs seeking both performance and deliverable outcomes,

and a lack of Northern Territory Government policy, participation or compelling interest in either.

Expenditure through the Commonwealth Grants Commission has provided a secure source of Local Government funding with outcomes that appear to have been recognised as concluded upon transfer of funds to that Local Government organisation. Recent Shire Council formation is finally recognising the limitations of capacity to deliver “core functions,” let alone meeting disadvantage and regional need; which begs the question, “Is Local Government on aboriginal land the appropriate “service recipient” for Grants Commission funding, and why has “disadvantage and regional need” exploded during a decade of assumptions that it was?”

“Disadvantage and regional need” are the disadvantage of people living upon their own regional land, when they are denied their own participation to secure any advantage from it. The social and economic impact implicit in landowners themselves founding and growing of an identifiable Tiwi economy has not been acknowledged or recognised by the Northern Territory Government. Specifically:

- Road funding for major roads that have increased in tonnage and usage over 10,000% during the past decade have been in receipt of annual Local Government token funding only; and this largely reliant upon “working for the dole money.” There is now a gap of serious Government expenditure that will require in excess of \$35m to rectify. During the decade the Northern Territory Government has matched some federal funding for a road (\$0.5m). Private investors have contributed over \$8m to roads during the decade.
- Land and Sea Management funding of \$75,000 only from the NT Government for annual costs exceeding \$1m.
- Development of a Secondary College that has received no capital funding or recognition or support of any kind from the Northern Territory Government. Now with resident students, the Northern Territory Government is obligated to assist with some recurrent funding.
- Development of the major Township of Nguiu recently assessed (December 2007) with 75% of the 210 houses “unfit for human habitation” receiving funding for nine houses only over the decade to 2008.
- Collapsing school educational performance at Nguiu with significant deterioration of buildings and infrastructure through the past two decades.
- Funding earmarked for a swimming pool at Milikapiti that was not delivered.
- The absence of oversight of the NT Government’s own expenditure of service delivery and program performance through Local Government throughout the decade to 2008.

Land Council members noted that all these concerns had been brought to the attention of the Northern Territory Government through letters and meetings on many occasions over many years. Some had received no response; others the comment that there was no money available to assist.

Without precise knowledge of what funding “should have been available” through the past decade, it is difficult to challenge the “no money available” response. What the Land Council can assert with accuracy is that very little “observable” funding has ever been made available to Tiwi landowners to support their strategy and plans to secure the lives of Tiwi people upon Tiwi land. And that Tiwi reliance upon private and Federal funding has been the only possible development resource available to secure these outcomes.

Tiwi landowners also regret that having established sustainable industry upon their land there continues to be a significant absence of support from the Northern Territory Government for their endeavours, or any recognition of the successful outcomes they have achieved.

Robert Tipungwuti.
Chairman.

Marius Puruntatameri
Deputy Chairman.

Cyril Kalippa OAM.
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Andrew Tipungwuti.
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Matthew Wonaeamirri.
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John.S.Hicks
Executive Secretary.

20th. October 2008