

Northern Territory Treaty Commission

Commissioner's Update



Commissioner's Update No#3 – November 2019

Welcome to my third update.

Well another magnificent dry season has come and gone and we have continued delivering education and awareness sessions across the NT, and conducting research.

So far I have addressed over 40 large Aboriginal organisations across the Territory including a number of Regional Councils and I have made presentations at 9 conferences and workshops in the NT.

Since my last update our team has been to Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy twice – including the wonderful Garma weekend, the Tiwi Islands, Wadeye, Katherine for a second time and of course more organisations around Darwin.

We have been warmly welcomed everywhere we have been and I would like to thank all of the organisations we have visited for their interest and hospitality.



On the set of the Drum at the Garma Festival at Gulkula, Arnhem Land



Delivering the Garran Oration at the Institute of Public Administration Australia national conference in Darwin

Some of the key themes that have emerged from these meetings include:

- A strong interest in Treaty and the work we are doing;
- A desire for Treaties at a local level – which may also involve a Territory wide Treaty which sets minimum standards and ground rules rather than just one Territory wide Treaty on its own;
- Some scepticism of the value of NT Treaties without national Treaties;
- A desire to understand what difference Treaty can make on the ground;
- A keen awareness of the Constitutional and legal issues facing the Territory as well as the risks if we went it alone without Federal government involvement;
- An acceptance that even if the framework I ultimately recommend is implemented, similar to Land Rights claims and Native Title applications, the negotiation of Treaties will take a generation;
- Concern about the longevity of Treaties; and
- Concern for what happens if there is a change of Government in the NT.

I am pleased to advise that the NT Government has committed to introducing legislation to convert my appointment as Treaty Commissioner to a Statutory Appointment in the February 2020 Parliamentary Sitzings.

The idea behind the education and awareness sessions was to facilitate a common understanding of what a Treaty is, what my role is and how I plan to fulfil my responsibilities under the Terms of Reference in order to set the scene for the Discussion Paper I expect to release in March 2020.



Excellent meeting at the Language Centre in Tennant Creek



Productive meeting at the Laynhapuy Homelands office at Yirrakala

Planning for our Interim Report and Discussion Paper is well advanced and we will be doing some serious writing between now and Christmas.

At a minimum, the Discussion Paper will:

- Discuss the level of interest in Treaty in the NT;
- Advise and share information and ideas on national and international best practice;
- Provide explanations of the legal context; and
- Explore possible models for a Treaty.

Given the critical nature of the legal context of Treaty, I have briefed a Senior Counsel to provide me with independent advice to ensure that I cover all bases.

Finally, I am extremely pleased that the NT Treaty Commission now has its own office on the Ground Floor, 16 Bennett St Darwin. While we appreciated being able to share office space with the Strategic Aboriginal Partnerships staff in the Department of the Chief Minister, it is important that an independent Commission has its own independent office.

I hope that all Aboriginal Territorians will feel comfortable to come to our office and talk about Treaty business knowing that they are in a culturally safe and trusting environment.

Our web site: treatynt.com.au is a good source of information.

However, you can also email us on admin@treatynt.com.au or call us on (08) 8999 5413.

To register for email updates please visit: treatynt.com.au/contact-us

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your families.

Regards,

Commissioner Mick Dodson AM

This email was sent by Northern Territory Treaty Commission, (08) 8999 5401, admin@treatynt.com.au to steve.rossingh@nt.gov.au

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