

Commissioner's Update



Commissioner's Update No2 August 2019

This is my second update and a lot has happened since my first update in May.

I am extremely proud to announce that Ms Ursula Raymond has commenced as the Deputy Treaty Commissioner. Deputy Commissioner Raymond will fulfil an important role with a focus of ensuring that women and girls are included in all consultations in a culturally appropriate way.

Deputy Commissioner Raymond hit the ground running by attending a meeting of the Full Council of the Central Land Council at Ross River on 30 July and then followed that up with attendance at the wonderful Garma festival at Gulkula, Arnhem Land.



Photo: Deputy Treaty Commissioner Ursula Raymond

We are currently in the “education and awareness” phase of our initial consultation program and are in the process of meeting with over 50 large Aboriginal organisations across the Territory. So far I have met with a number of Aboriginal organisations in Darwin as well as on Groote Eylandt, in Katherine and in Alice Springs.

I have also spoken at forums across the NT including the northern and southern First Circles program, the NTPS Aboriginal Employment Forum and the Aboriginal Leadership and Governance forum. I also spoke at the Opening Ceremony at the Barunga Festival in June. We will be in Tennant Creek on 28/29 August and visits to Jabiru, Nhulunbuy and Wadeye are being finalised.

My key messages in these meetings have been to discuss:

- What a Treaty is (or could be);
- What my role is; and
- A brief overview of what is happening in the Treaty space across Australia and overseas, with an emphasis on Victoria, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and British Columbia in Canada.

You may recall a couple of things from my first Update:

- Under my Terms of Reference, it is NOT my job to negotiate a Treaty or Treaties. Assuming that Aboriginal Territorians want it, my job is to develop a framework for future Treaty negotiations.; and
- I am due to deliver an Interim Report and Discussion Paper to the Chief Minister by the end of March 2020. These documents will also be released to the public.

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Once the “education and awareness” phase is completed we will start drafting the Discussion Paper utilising the feedback we have gained to date and hope to workshop an early version of the Discussion Paper with organisations toward the end of the year before completing it early in the New Year.

I am particularly proud that we have had my first Fact Sheet, which describes my role, converted into Plain English and translated into 17 Aboriginal and Kriol languages used across the Territory. The audio recordings of these translations, as well as a video of me explaining my role are on our web site www.treatynt.com.au. It has been particularly effective to play the relevant language version of the audio recording at the beginning of a number of our meetings. I would like to again thank the Aboriginal Interpreter Service for their efforts to produce these translations.

I have recently arranged for the engagement of a Research Officer through a partnership with the Australian National University; commenced considering the legal issues that impact Treaty in the NT in more detail; and am continuing research on overseas Treaty models.

One of the key legal risks to the negotiation of Treaties in the NT is the Commonwealth’s constitutional powers in relation to both Territories and Aboriginal people. The best way to mitigate that risk is to as far as possible work cooperatively with the Commonwealth. To that end, I have written to the new Minister for Indigenous Australians advising of my appointment and role and have invited him to meet with me to discuss these things. The Chief Minister has written to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on similar lines.

Drafting of legislation to convert my appointment from a consultancy to a statutory one is currently being finalised.

Finally, arrangements for the NT Treaty Commission’s move into our longer term premises are well under way and we should be moved in before the end of September. I will let you know our progress on this and everything else in my next Newsletter.

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: <https://treatynt.com.au/contact-us>

Regards,

Commissioner Mick Dodson AM

Northern Territory Treaty Commissioner

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