

Constitutional change called for at Yirrkala

Constitutional recognition for Indigenous Australians has been called for by Yolngu leaders of north-east Arnhem Land during the first Federal Government Community Cabinet held in a remote Aboriginal community.

On the 23rd of July, the community of Yirrkala played host to the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard, as well as many Federal Cabinet Ministers, in what is part of a series of Federal Cabinet meetings in remote, regional and rural Australia.

Yolngu clan leader, and Northern Land Council chairman, Wali Wunungmurra, said Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land were looking forward to 'working in partnership' with the new Commonwealth Government and the NT Government.

"The enshrining of the rights of Indigenous Australians into the constitution is one way of ensuring those inherent rights aren't eroded by any particular government or change in political climate," Mr Wunungmurra said.

Mr Rudd was also presented with a bark petition, by Gumatj



Yolngu dancers conduct ceremony for the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his cabinet in Yirrkala.

clan leader Galarrwuy Yunupingu, during a ceremony calling for constitutional recognition and protection of the rights of Indigenous Australians.

A statement by clan leaders, associated with the communities of Yirrkala, Gunyangara, Gapuwiyak, Maningrida, Galiwin'ku, Milingimbi, Ramingining and Laynhapuy homelands, representing 8000 Indigenous peoples of Arnhem Land, called on the Australian Government for a better working relationship.

"Yolngu and other Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory have been marginalised and demeaned over the past decade by the Howard regime and have been denied real opportunity to have a say about our aspirations and futures," the statement read.

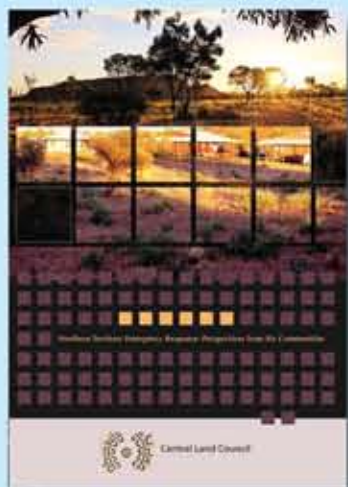
"We recognise that we are now in a new era, and are hopeful of a fundamental change in the way Government does business with Yolngu."

The statement also refers to education and training, housing and

infrastructure, and national environmental issues.

"The National Estate needs to be managed, not left unoccupied, and Aboriginal people can contribute formally to this by continuing to live on country through expanded ranger programs and Indigenous Protected Areas."

The petition called for recognition and protection of "our full and complete rights", including "our way of life in all its diversity", property and economic independence.



CLC surveys intervention

The Central Land Council says a survey of people in Central Australian Aboriginal communities has given them a chance to

voice their views on the Federal Government's emergency response in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.

The research was undertaken in six case study communities – Titjikala, Papunya, Yuendumu, Ali Curung, Kintore and Hermannsburg - between February and June this year with the help of local Aboriginal researchers.

It focussed on the main measures of the intervention, including income management, housing repairs and maintenance, the abolition of CDEP, the introduction of store licensing, voluntary child health checks, increased police resources, the introduction of five year leases over communities, the roll out of government business managers and changes to the permit system.

The research was based on a participatory evaluation survey of 141 Aboriginal residents in the communities. They were asked their awareness of the intervention measures, feelings on the measures and the effect on them and their community.

The community surveys were supplemented by 51 semi-structured interviews with other community-based employees or agencies such as government agencies and government business managers in the target com-

munities. Additional information was provided by the Intervention operations centre, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Centrelink.

CLC director David Ross said the survey is the first real effort to collect evidence of the effects of the intervention on people in remote communities.

"There's a wide range of views out there," Mr Ross said. "For instance, on income management, half supported it and half were opposed to it."

"The results of this survey show that it's not as simple as saying well, someone in this community likes it so everyone does. This survey shows that what works in one community doesn't necessarily work in another."

The findings of the survey will form part of the CLC's submission to the committee, which is reviewing the intervention.