

Brahim takes over ABA reins

The general manager of the Jululakiri Council in Tennant Creek, Pat Brahim, has been appointed the new chair of the Aboriginal Benefits Account.

Ms Brahim chaired her first ABA meeting in Darwin in August. She says her long service with the Commonwealth Government and working for Aboriginal people in the Barkly region will help her in the role.

"Probably where my strengths lie is I've worked 35 years in the Commonwealth Government and so knowing the system fairly well and then working with an Aboriginal organisation on the ground so, the last 10 years, so you're getting a balance in your understanding, being able to work in the two worlds stuff and challenge both and not feel I have to be protective of where I sit in all this because I am independent," Ms Brahim said.

Ms Brahim said she'd like to see some reform in the way those involved in the ABA decision-making process approach the work.

"I think as well as working with the community, the government department staff to think laterally as well, because they're conditioned in the systems of bureaucracy and the way Aboriginal people work a lot of times is with emotions and spirit whereas bureaucracy talks of tasks and intellect and it's getting the balance between the two groups and do the talking around that so the learnings have got to be for both not just our mob, it's the bureaucracies as well," she said.

Getting the message to interpreters



Warlpiri interpreter Tess Ross recently completed her first day of court interpreting. An increasing number of Warlpiri people are becoming interested in taking on the vital role.

The Aboriginal Interpreter Service in the Northern Territory has opened new offices in Maningrida in the Top End and Yuendumu in Central Australia.

Tess Napaljarri Ross is a Warlpiri woman who did her first day of court recently at the Yuendumu Bush Court. The first court was a Community Court, sometimes called a Circle Court. In this type of court, community elders make recommendations to the magistrate about what should happen to the accused.

"That was first time for me interpreting with the Justice Group," Ms Ross said.

"The magistrate spoke and I put the words he spoke into Warlpiri. Some of the elders already understood but some only understood a little bit. I helped them really understand.

"It is good to have an interpreter for old people or when young people get into trouble because they have to understand both Yapa and Kardiya law.

"We are trying to help them and having an interpreter helped this young fella take what we were telling him," she said.

New Indigenous rep body plans announced

A plan for a new Indigenous representative body to replace ATSIC has been proposed by a steering committee led by Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma.

The new body would be independent from government, have an equal number of men and women in leadership roles and rely on strict ethical standards.

In an address to the National Press Club, Commissioner Calma said Australians could be on the cusp of great change.

"Today is a day when, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we begin a new journey and express our determination to put our future in our hands," Commissioner Calma said.

"This model is about a way

forward, that is focused on the future and flexible enough to adapt to new or emerging priorities.

"What we are proposing today will be radically different from anything we have ever seen in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. It will certainly not be 'business as usual'."

Commissioner Calma was asked by Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin in December 2008 to convene an independent Indigenous Steering Committee to undertake phase two of consultations and develop a model for a new national Indigenous representative body.

He said the new representative body should be a private company limited by guarantee and should be funded by the Australian Government on a recurrent basis for

an initial five-year period, subject to negotiation thereafter.

The proposed body would have four main components including: a National Executive led by full-time male and female co-chairs; a National Congress that would be the primary accountability mechanism for the National Representative Body to set national policies and priorities through an annual congress; an Ethics Council that would apply a merit-based process to shortlist candidates for election as members of the National Executive and to develop and maintain the ethical standards of the organisation; and an administrative or Executive Support Unit.

"This model we are proposing today is a rare opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to work together with governments, industry and

the Australian community to secure the economic and cultural independence of our peoples, and to enable us to truly experience self-determination, for the first time in this country," he said.

"We have proposed a body that will exhibit the highest standards of ethical conduct and will set a new benchmark for gender equality in national organisations - which all Australians can learn from."

The final model is contained in the report, "Our future in our hands" - Creating a sustainable National Representative Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, available at www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/rebody/

The report has been handed to the government for consideration.