

LEASES GET MIXED REACTION

David Ross: 'Government deals not good enough'



Above: The meeting about leases at Lajamanu

CLC Director David Ross says that the deals put on the table by the Australian Government to lease the communities of Yuendumu, Hermannsburg and Lajamanu "aren't good enough".

"The Government has got to understand that people are feeling demoralised – there's been a lot of changes and a lot of attacks on Aboriginal people and they feel the Government is just going whack, whack, whack," he said.

Mr Ross said the government is already two years into a five year lease over communities but don't have anything to show for it.

"At a meeting in Hermannsburg recently traditional owners called for a show of good faith," he said.

"They haven't even seen any repairs to housing in their community in that time, so why would they have any faith that the government would do any better over the longer-term?"

"The offers are also being presented by the government in a dictatorial manner. They aren't partnerships.

"Unless the communities agree to one of the two options they are being offered, they will not get any new housing," Mr Ross said.

While negotiations are taking place with the three communities in the Central Land Council's region, the other Aboriginal communities aren't even being considered for new housing.

"In the past couple of years Aboriginal people have lost their com-

munity councils and related organisations to the super shires takeover, had their welfare income managed without any consultation or consideration, faced the existence of their outstations being called into question and are now being told under what circumstances they'll get new houses," Mr Ross said.

"They are always being told how things will be and apparently it's all for their own good. They are never being asked how things might work best. It's not a partnership, it's a dictatorship."

After a leases meeting in Lajamanu recently traditional owner Jerry Jangala said the government should be improving housing under the current five year lease it holds over the community.

"Right now, we're not agreeing," he said. "With the intervention and the shires everything is all mixed up.

"That government should give us houses with the five year lease.

I'm not happy for that new lease. Some people want money, money, money, but my grandfather wasn't born with money. I'm born in the dirt. We should be thinking about our land. If we give that away, and maybe I'm not right to



say anything, but the government might say, you gave us that lease, you're finished now.

"We want a say and we want to keep living on our country," Mr Jangala said.

"When people (meeting participants) say they want action (on housing) they need to be careful. There could be a trick in this one (leasing) and I'm worrying for that. It makes me feel no good."

Above: CLC Chairman Lindsay Bookie talks to the meeting at Hermannsburg; below: women at Lajamanu listen at the CLC meeting about leases recently

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Four Top End communities agree to leases

Traditional owners in the Aboriginal communities of Gunbalanya, Wadeye, Galiwinku and Maningrida have agreed to enter into 40-year housing leases with the Northern Territory Government.

Northern Land Council chief executive officer Kim Hill said the NLC

welcomed the commitment of \$159 million by the NT Government and the Federal Government to spend on new and upgraded housing over the next five years.

"Traditional Owners have consistently called for substantial increases in the number of houses as well as a boost in related infrastructure, as it will provide signifi-

cant and immediate benefits," Mr Hill said.

Each of the communities will receive major works including new houses and refurbishments, and include the following allocations: Gunbalanya - \$28.7 million, Wadeye - \$48.7 million, Galiwinku - \$33 million, Maningrida - \$48.7 million.

Mr Hill said access to adequate

and appropriate housing is one of the cornerstones of boosting the number of healthy Aboriginal communities in the northern regions of the Northern Territory.

Work on the projects is expected to commence in late 2009.

The lease agreements are granted under s.19 of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976.