

The Jabiru Statement

I acknowledge the ancestral owners of this spectacular country. Here at Jabiru, the Mirarr.

Gakbi, to the north, the Bunitj, Manilakarr, the Kunwinjku speaking people at Gunbalanya and the Iwaidja and Mauing speakers even further north.

Goyek, to the East and South East, the Bolmo the Djok and Badmardi.

Walem, to the South, the Murumburr and the Jawoyn.

Garrigad, to the West, the Murumburr, Limilngan and Minitja people.

I acknowledge your connection to this land and your right to live your traditions and speak your languages.

I acknowledge Kakadu and Jabiru is your country and that I, like my forebears, am but a guest.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for coming and accommodating me this afternoon at the Mahbilil Festival to join the celebration of Kakadu and its people.

It was great to officially open the newly resurfaced netball courts earlier today. Thanks to the Member for Arnhem, Selena Uiobo, for delivering on this election commitment so quickly.

It is one year since Territorians placed their faith in Territory Labor, but I'm not here to spin you a list of achievements or milestones.

I am here to assure you Jabiru has a future – a great future.

I'm here to talk about reconciliation, engagement and respect.

And how the Northern Territory, under the Territory Labor Government, will lead the conversation – and the action – to unite our nation.

We will lead because half our land mass and 80 per cent of our coastline are Aboriginal under Australian law.

Because close to a third of our population is Aboriginal.

Because more than any other Australian jurisdiction, the Northern Territory is alive with language and culture.

The Northern Territory is still – as it always was – Aboriginal.

We offer the First People of the Northern Territory a new way.

Bigger than words.

Written into policy and Northern Territory legislation.

We believe in treaties. They will be the foundations of lasting reconciliation, stronger communities and, ultimately, a stronger Northern Territory.

It is time for more than lip service, and conversations have begun about how treaties would look.

But they must say to future generations of First People that their identity – their cultures, languages and lore - are valued.

And that value is written in our attitudes, and in our laws.

With Aboriginal communities, we will address unemployment and disadvantage through the culturally-responsible development of land and sea.

This means resolving outstanding land claims so more Aboriginal people can go to work building their futures.

It means recognising traditional owners at the beginning, middle and end of economic development decisions on their lands.

With Aboriginal communities, we will address disadvantage through unprecedented investment in remote housing and in the first 1000 days of a child's life.

And with Aboriginal communities, we will we address the Territory's shameful indigenous incarceration rates through a new, community-led Aboriginal Justice Agreement. An Aboriginal Justice Unit was formed in July and consultation has begun.

Underpinning it all is Local Decision Making – if not the most significant Aboriginal Affairs reform of this generation it is, at least, the most decent.

The degradation and humiliation of the Intervention convinced me 10 years ago meaningful progress, engagement, reconciliation and protection of culture lay not in taking power but returning power.

My team and I believe this today more strongly than ever.

We will partner with Aboriginal communities to determine the shape and control of local healthcare, schools, justice systems, local governments, housing, and how to grow happy and healthy kids.

Instead of Government telling communities how it will be, communities will tell Government.

This could be how to best nurture the kids who have slipped through the gaps, because we know governments can fall short.

Or it could be who manages the health clinics, or whether schools adopt bilingual education.

Community-led decision making in schools is already happening up the road at Gunbalanya.

In February, overseen by the Australian Electoral Commission, the community elected its inaugural school board.

91 parents voted on eight members from 31 nominations; and 60 students voted on two positions from four nominations.

They are in charge of language in their school; not me, a politician in Darwin.

Returning decision making is not only decent, it is smart.

Because history shows us when a wrong decision is made in Darwin it's hard to fix.

And when a wrong decision is made in Canberra, it's even harder to fix.

Local decisions are the best decisions.

I understand there is not one homogenous Aboriginal Northern Territory and so each community will take on only what they are comfortable taking on and when they are comfortable doing so.

We will move at your manner and pace.

This is big reform and it will not happen overnight – we are working to a 10-year Territory-wide timeframe – and there will probably be mistakes along the way.

But guiding and scrutinising every step on the journey is Australia's first Aboriginal sub-committee of cabinet, which is made up of all five Labor Aboriginal MLAs and our bush MLAs who have an 80 per cent Aboriginal constituency, and nine external Aboriginal advisors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We talk of the Northern Territory as a remarkable place and rightly point to our landscapes - our national parks, rivers, gorges and plains.

Our unique towns and communities built in the harshest of environs and from war and cyclone.

Our fishing and weather and sunsets.

But we are so much more: The songs, the dances, the mountains and rivers and rocks; the stories told unbroken and unamended a thousand generations.

How remarkable it is to step into our communities and hear the most ancient words ever spoken on earth.

To see art older than the pyramids, or to hear the story of the landscape through the rumble of a yidaki and the stamp of feet in the sand.

This is what is truly special about the Northern Territory and we can celebrate it so much better.

Our Government is building the Iconic National Indigenous Art Gallery in Alice Springs, not only to draw tourists from around the world but to say to Aboriginal kids of Alice Springs and across Australia that what and where you come from is special.

We are building an arts trail from the Centre all the way to the Top End.

And we are rejuvenating the Alice Springs and Darwin CBDs to reflect our Aboriginal history and project our immense shared future to the world.

Our first Languages matters

I can announce today my Government will begin consulting about complementary street and place names to elevate Aboriginal identity, language and history into the everyday.

Aboriginal language existed everywhere on this continent long before English.

How many Australians know the land under Alice Springs is Mparntwe to the Arrernte, the first people of that place; or that Darwin is Garramilla to the Larrakia? Or that there are special places all around us with treasured stories and histories?

We should know this.

This is about historical accuracy as much as it is about respect.

Uluru was Uluru many generations before it was Ayers Rock.

It is not Hooker Creek at the edge of the Tanami desert, it is Lajamanu.

And Vincent Lingiari did not lead his people to a place their ancestors called Wattie Creek, but to a place called Daguragu, where this weekend they are celebrating 51 years since the Wave Hill Walk-Off.

I have written to the Place Names Commission and met with chair Dr Tom Lewis to begin this important work.

Honour, acknowledge, observe

Let us acknowledge the entire history of this nation.

Let us teach in our national curriculum the displacement, the trauma, disease and the massacres.

I support the idea of an ongoing annual day of observance for the horrors meted out at the frontier.

What shape or form or date this may take place each year, if at all, is up to Aboriginal Australians.

But what I can do – and will do - next year, with the support of the traditional owners, is visit the site of the Coniston Massacre for its 90th anniversary.

Like I've done at Gallipoli as a private citizen, like I do each year at Anzac Day, and like I will later this year at Pearl Harbour for Remembrance Day, I will pay my respects.

I will also be speaking with Aboriginal groups and land councils, landowners, the Parks and Wildlife Commission and the NT Heritage Council to ask how we can acknowledge the historical injustices in our own backyard better.

This could mean markers or monuments so people know what happened, where it happened, and when it happened.

It could mean pulling together the excellent research already out there into one easy-to-access website and map.

Aboriginal men, women and children died for their country ... for their families ... for their way of life ... and they will be remembered.

Australia Day for all

Ladies and gentlemen we are blessed to call Australia home.

January 26, 1788, marked the beginning of our modern nation.

It marked the beginning, good and bad, of the co-existence of the First Australians and the new Australians.

This is our history and it is important.

The arrival of Arthur Phillip at Sydney Cove also marked the landfall of the disease and dispossession – and for many Australians, it is a date of mourning.

The Northern Territory is alive to this more than anywhere in Australia.

It is clear in my own caucus, which has five Aboriginal Australians.

It is clear when I travel around the Territory.

I want to stand with my colleagues and friends and acknowledge everything our forebears have contributed and struggled against to get us where we are, be it over four generations, or a thousand generations.

Australia Day should be about unity, not division, and for the health and harmony of our nation, Australia Day must evolve.

January 26 must hereon meaningfully acknowledge the entire story of our nation.

This means more than acknowledgement of country and a smoking ceremony.

It means a genuine celebration of the Aboriginal contribution to our national identity.

A celebration of all this continent's waves of immigration.

And acknowledgement of the frontier trauma passed from generation to generation and still killing people today in the guise of grog, suicide and sickness.

Can we hit a balance between commemoration and respectful celebration? That is a discussion to have and I'm open to all conversations.

I have written to the NT Australia Day Council, of which I am the president, to explore new ways forward.

The Territory should and will lead how we best celebrate Australia Day together.

A strong Jabiru

Ladies and gentlemen,

Some may think it odd to deliver a one-year anniversary address in Jabiru - far from the function rooms of Darwin or Alice Springs.

But there can be no more appropriate place than here in the heart Kakadu National Park, at this time.

The history of the Northern Territory lives in this place.

Just up the track at Madjedbebe is evidence people walked this very land at least 65,000 years ago.

The dispossession lives here, too. The arrogance of top down policy lives here.

The Aboriginal land rights movement and the fightback lives here.

And so too does a close community worth protecting, where kids of all colours play together and are looked after by all.

I am here at our one-year anniversary because the future of the Northern Territory can live here, too.

As Jabiru stands as a symbol of old way, of white man's will imposed upon the First People, it can live on tomorrow as a symbol of the

new way ... of cooperation, community control, and coming together.

Jabiru is, in many ways, the Northern Territory scaled down.

It has enormous potential as an under-appreciated jewel in a larger crown, yet beholden to boom and bust economies

It is a magnificent place to raise kids, yet it faces constant population and job pressures

It is home to the world's most ancient languages and traditions, yet its people still must clamber and scrape for respect and the power to decide their lives for themselves.

In Jabiru we can acknowledge and celebrate what is truly special about the Northern Territory.

In Jabiru, as in the Northern Territory, we can, in time, hand back local control to its First People.

And in Jabiru, as in the Territory, we can build something great for generations to come.

In December 2015, the CLP Government wrote to the Commonwealth and the NLC to say they were walking away from Jabiru.

Their message was, 'level this community. Level its services and shops'.

This would be a tragedy.

The Northern Territory Labor Government believes in this place and its people.

Just weeks after the election, we told the Commonwealth the Northern Territory was back at the table.

I tell you now the lake will not be filled in. The school, clinic, police station and shops will not be razed.

We are working with the Commonwealth, ERA and Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation to transition Jabiru from tired mining town to a services and tourism hub.

Where people from all over west Arnhem can come buy their food, get check-ups and medicines, and send their kids to school.

Where visitors come from all over the world to learn about this special place through the eyes of its ancient people.

I thank the Mirarr and Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation for your work building momentum to this shared goal.

I genuinely believe that by repurposing Jabiru – investing in Jabiru’s future - services will increase, or at a bare minimum remain the same.

We support moving the Kakadu Visitor Centre into town. We support the Mirarr endeavours for a section 19A lease over the Jabiru township.

We support using existing housing stock where appropriate to attract new enterprise, similar to the arrangement in Nhulunbuy following the mothballing of Rio Tinto’s alumina refinery.

But in Jabiru I want to explore going even further to include the airstrip or other valuable assets in the economic mix.

We are all in this together: ERA, Governments, traditional owners, business owners and community members.

I can't give you all the answers today. But I can give you the most important answer – Jabiru will live and thrive beyond 2021.

Its services will remain. The lake will remain.

And in time this will be – as it should be - an Aboriginal-led town.

Kakadu will always be – as it should always be – an Aboriginal-led park.

And Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory – as they should be – will be Aboriginal-led communities.