

Media Statement

11 March 2015

PRIME MINISTER NEEDS TO APOLOGISE FOR “LIFESTYLE CHOICE” COMMENTS

The National Native Title Council (NNTC) says the Prime Minister needs to apologise to Aboriginal people and warns that moving people from their homelands is not-negotiable. The NNTC calls on the Government to take the closure of communities off the table.

NNTC’s Chief Executive Officer, Brian Wyatt said that the recent comments from the Prime Minister are disrespectful and extremely concerning. “The Prime Minister is threatening the very identity of Aboriginal people in this country. People have spent years fighting for their native title rights in Court where they have to prove an ongoing connection to their country, only to have Governments deliberately trying to sever those ties by removing people from their cultural lands.

“The Western Australian Government sets the highest requirements across Australia to prove an ongoing connection to country, making it very difficult for Traditional Owners to prove native title if they do not live on their traditional country.

“This is outrageous and frankly very close to threatening our cultural genocide” said Mr Wyatt. “And Aboriginal people are once again being blamed for the failures of Governments. People moved on to their homelands because of the dire conditions they were faced with in major towns and the lack of proper planning processes across regional and remote Australia.”

Western Australian Premier, Colin Barnett has flagged the closure of around 150 communities in Western Australia, however no clear rationale has been provided to justify why these communities need to close.

“The Premier has recently said that he is already anticipating findings of abuse in remote communities yet hasn’t even commenced the investigation,” said Mr Wyatt. “This smacks of political expediency to move people off their lands to make it easier for development.”

“Aboriginal people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Governments of all persuasions need to come out and talk to people first before making ill-informed comments that only create fear and confusion.

“The NNTC strongly urges the Government to enter a serious dialogue with people on the ground to develop clear and positive strategies geared towards improving the economic conditions of remote communities.

“Improvements will not be made by Governments making unilateral decisions. Improvements will only ever be made when Governments enter a proper and respectable partnership with Aboriginal people.”

The NNTC is the peak body for native title representative bodies and service providers.

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