



THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

NORTHERN SYNOD

Statement on Northern Territory Government New Homelands/Outstations Policy

In 2008 the Northern Territory Government announced changes to policies and funding for NT Homeland Centres. These changes were discussed by Standing Committee in 2008 and a letter has been sent to the NT Minister for Indigenous Policy seeking recognition and a response concerning:

- homelands people have a spiritual relationship with the land which is behind their desire to remain in homelands. The Uniting Church believes government policy in the Northern Territory should recognise and reflect this significant aspect of Indigenous cultural life;
- there has been inadequate consultation to develop and insufficient information to aid understanding of the proposed changes, which has left some homelands residents thinking they cannot continue to live on their land due to the change in government policy;
- some Homelands people may be forced to move to one of the twenty service centres due to a lack of support services available, at least to the extent these services currently exist, in homelands;
- homelands people will come into larger communities, for reasons such as obtaining medical treatment. However, without support for homeland centres they may remain for longer periods of time, thus increasing the pressures on accommodation in the service centres, thus adding further to overcrowding and a worsening of living conditions in the service centres and increasing pressures on people to move to Alice Springs, Darwin or other regional centres;
- we are concerned that some homeland schools may be closed as part of the government's new approach. The practical withdrawal of access to education is a grave matter for our church.

The response received from the NT Government did not satisfy our concerns in relation to the matters raised. It should be noted that almost half the members of the Uniting church Northern Synod are Indigenous people.

The Uniting Church Northern Synod is committed to living and working in partnership with Indigenous people as part of our commitment to be in partnership with the Northern Regional Council of Congress. As part of this commitment we are in support of Homelands people as there are indications they will be adversely affected by the new NT Government Homelands policy.

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