

SENATE ESTIMATES 2025 OPENING STATEMENT BY NORTHERN LAND COUNCIL CEO YUSEPH DEEN

Good morning Chair and Senators.

I acknowledge and recognise the Ngunnawal and Ngambri who are the sovereign first people of the land we meet on today.

I acknowledge and pay my respects to the old people - the ancestors whose wisdom and strength has guided the leadership and commonsense decision making that endures today, despite the negative impact of colonisation on our communities.

I also acknowledge that here - in this place and everywhere else on this continent - sovereignty was not ceded.

This land always was, and always will, be Aboriginal Land.

I have been asked to pass on an apology from Northern Land Council Chair Matthew Ryan who unfortunately is unable to be here today.

I am very proud to be here today as the CEO of the NLC, having started in the role in December last year.

I am a descendant of the Wuthathi, with ancestral connections to Iama, and cultural connections to the Gunggandji.

Since joining the NLC I have been in a discovery phase, working closely with the executive council and senior leadership team to understand the strengths of our organisation and the opportunities for us to effectively and efficiently deliver core business, and fulfil our statutory functions.

For over 50 years the Northern Land Council has fiercely pursued Land Rights and Native Title Rights for its constituents.

Now, in a post land claim era, we are taking immediate steps to ensure our strategic priorities are fit-for-purpose.

We are focusing on building the bush, maximising economic opportunities for Aboriginal people across our region and ensuring that Land and Native Title rights are universally respected.

Genuinely listening to Aboriginal people on the ground is the answer to many of the problems for which we are all trying to develop effective and enduring solutions.

The NLC is leading the way in showing governments, and others, what is possible.

For example, Learning on Country is an award-winning program that delivers two-way learning in schools through strong, engaged Aboriginal led decision making in each of the program locations.

Currently delivered in 14 locations, the program embeds traditional lore and culture into a contemporary curriculum, teaching young people the skills they need to be ready for employment after their schooling.

There's also our Community Planning and Development Program which is working with over 30 groups of who are investing their own money into economic and community building projects.

Over \$15 million has been invested by Traditional Owners into more than 50 projects that have resulted in community infrastructure and outstation upgrades; cultural events and festivals; youth justice and diversion support; small business planning; and governance support for local Aboriginal corporations.

This program is a prime example of the NLC assisting Traditional Owners to invest their own money into projects that deliver a lasting impact for future generations.

This is Aboriginal self-determination through informed decision making in motion.

Senators, in my short time with the NLC I have witnessed the passion and dedication from our council and our staff to improve the lives of Aboriginal people through the delivery of our statutory functions; and I look forward to working with all of them to make a genuine difference on the ground for the communities that we represent.

- *ENDS* -