COUNTRY LIBERALS
MEDIA RELEASE
LABOR THROTTLES INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT
Adam Giles MLA
Date 16th March 2010

Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin, should offer a personal explanation to the Tiwi Land Council outlining why she rejected a funding application to support the Tiwi forestry project.

Shadow Indigenous Affairs Minister, Adam Giles, said the Tiwi Land Council sought $4.5million from the Aboriginal Benefits Account to be used to manage the Tiwi forestry project.

In the short term the money would have employed 27 people to prune and maintain the forest over the next four years.

Beyond that 180 people, the majority locals, would have been employed to harvest the crop on a rotational basis and to keep the forestry project going.

The Aboriginal Benefits Account is a fund that receives resources from mining ventures on Aboriginal lands. It has a board that oversees funding proposals and recommends these to the Federal Minister for official sign-off.

“The Aboriginal Benefits Account Board puts significant rigour into examining applications for funding by Indigenous organisations,” Mr Giles said.

“But instead of showing equal rigour, Ms Macklin sat on the Tiwi’s application for three months while the forestry project, recently taken over from Great Southern Plantations, remained in limbo.

“To ultimately decide that this proposal shouldn’t be approved is a bullet to Indigenous economic advancement.

“Jenny Macklin should release the ABA Board’s recommendations into this project and detail why the application was refused.

“And in the interests of representing her people, Arafura MLA Marion Scrymgour should stand up to Ms Macklin and demand an explanation for this regressive decision.

“This project actively promoted Indigenous economic development and provided business stimulus and employment generation for an Island whose people are motivated to work and break the welfare cycle.

“The Minister’s refusal means the next step for the Tiwi people is to sell off the forest to non Indigenous interests, which would remove a significant opportunity for economic self determination.

“What’s more, failure to properly maintain the forest could mean the Tiwi’s are overrun by introduced species from within the forestry plantation, which has the potential to change the ecology of the islands.

“Like the Wild Rivers debacle in Queensland, this is another example of Federal Labor tying up economic advancement for Aboriginal people.”

Further comment: Adam Giles 0421 588 118