10 November 2002

NT showcases work in indigenous communities to WA

Attorney-General and Minister for Central Australia Dr Peter Toyne has met with the Western Australian cabinet on invitation to outline the Territory’s experience with addressing remote and indigenous community issues and the Territory’s remote communications strategy.

Dr Peter Toyne said he was invited by the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development Tom Stephens to address the Regional Policy and Social Policy Cabinet Committees, the meeting chaired by Premier Geoff Gallop. The purpose of the briefing was to share the Territory’s experiences and outline strategies working in the Territory.

"The Territory is many respects leads the way in managing issues of service delivery, communications and social issues for remote indigenous communities.

"The WA Ministry were very interested in hearing of the Territory's examples.

"As a Minister of the Territory Government and as past resident of a remote community I could lend some real-life examples to the WA Ministry from both ends of the problem of service delivery and social issues in remote indigenous communities," Dr Toyne said.

Dr Toyne also addressed the WA’s Strategic Management Council, made up of twenty of the states most senior public servants and met with staff from Clive Brown’s office, Minister for State Development and Alan Carpenter's office, Minister for Aboriginal Development and Indigenous Affairs and Education. This meeting discussed the NT projects in more detail.

"There was a high degree of interest from all levels of Government in the Territory’s initiatives and success in this area," Dr Toyne said.

The invitation from the WA Government was timely given it is now looking at recommendations from a commissioned report on how it can address problems in Western Australian indigenous communities.

Dr Toyne said the Territory has many examples of strategies showing positive results but delivered an integral message to the WA Government- to address social order issues in communities to enable effective service delivery.

"Getting communities on track and working well socially by dealing with law and order issues avoids other programs being impacted upon negatively by dysfunctional community spirit.

The Territory’s Community Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy was highlighted to WA as leading the way for the rest of Australia, as judged by ATSIC and the Federal Government.

"The approach taken in the strategy to work with communities to achieve justice
outcomes that everybody can agree with is underpinning its success," Dr Toyne said.

The Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy is currently operating in Ali Curung, Lajamanu and Yuendumu.

"Having just returned from Yuendumu where the Kurduju Committee formed the first Territory Indigenous Regional Crime Prevention Council I outlined examples of community led law and order strategies and how the positive outcomes of these strategies are having a rolling effect on other community development strategies such as education.

"The community of Ali Curung, a member of the Kurduju Committee, has shown how communities can have great results in dealing with community and family violence problems through community led initiatives," Dr Toyne said.

Representatives of Ali Curung Community reported to the first meeting of the Kurduju Regional Crime Prevention Council earlier this month, they no longer need restraining orders and kids are back in school due to their community focus on addressing social problems.

The role of remote telecommunications as a medium to achieve health and education outcomes was also outlined.

Dr Toyne relayed the Territory Government’s priority to develop and enhance telecommunications services to remote areas and communities because the potential for these services to improve social and economic conditions for remote Territorians is immense.

The Outback Digital Network (ODN), funded through the Networking the Nation by $10.7 million, will deliver enhanced telecommunications infrastructure and wireless connections to 34 communities across the top end of the Territory and Queensland. ODN has also received funding to explore expansion into WA.

"The Territory Government heavily endorsed the ODN proposal, and committed to supporting the project through the purchase of services by Government agencies, underwriting the cost of the network up to $2.5m over three years if necessary.

"This strong Government support at the Territory level was a critical factor in the ODN’s success in attracting the Networking the Nation funding.

"Projects such as this can give communities the ability to realise economic and development opportunities such as delivering cultural and anthropological lectures into international universities, accessing health and education services and employment opportunities.

"The Tanami Network operating in the NT since the late eighties has already demonstrated the potential telecommunications offers to remotes communities such as the sale of aboriginal art through the internet, distance education information sessions and video conferencing facilities for communication between communities, government agencies and local business.

Dr Toyne said the Territory Government has also recognised the need to ensure government telecommunication projects aren’t operating in isolation and whole communities can benefit from broadband technology.

"The Government has put in place a project focused on ensuring a whole community can benefit from projects such as the LATIS (Learning and Technology in Schools) Project that has introduced electronic links to 70 remote schools, rather then just the school community."