20 March 2002
Commonwealth helps Port Keats youth stay out of gaol

"Keeping more young people out of the court system and involving them in schemes that will divert them away from criminal and anti-social behaviour is the Commonwealth and Northern Territory’s commitment to Territorians," the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, said today.

The NT Police Minister, Syd Stirling, today presented a Commonwealth Government cheque for almost $168,000 to the small Indigenous community of Wadeye (Port Keats) in the Northern Territory for diversion programs.

The funding is part of a $762,000 Commonwealth commitment over three years to juvenile diversion programs in Wadeye.

"Our commitment to keeping more young people out of the court system is demonstrated by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government’s Agreement to establish a juvenile diversion program and a jointly funded Aboriginal interpreter service," Senator Ellison said.

"An important aspect of the Agreement is the establishment of programs in remote Aboriginal communities.

"I am very pleased that the Indigenous community of Wadeye, in conjunction with NT Police, will be one of the first to establish a youth development service and other community-based juvenile diversion programs," he said.

"The Wadeye community should be proud of all the work it has put into getting the programs off the ground. I congratulate the people of Wadeye whole-heartedly and wish them every success in running the programs."

At the launch, Mr Stirling called on the Wadeye community to support the youth support unit by becoming actively involved in the activities organised by the unit and, wherever possible, assisting in the teaching of life skills.

The NT police have been working closely with the community to develop the Unit and the Kardu Numida Council has provided some additional funding.

"The program’s priority is to teach young people life skills and I am confident that the Wadeye Youth Support Unit will provide locals with the opportunity to learn the value of life skills that reflect the local community’s respect for people, property and culture," Mr Stirling said.

During the first 18 months of the Northern Territory Agreement there has been a significant impact on the number of juveniles appearing before the courts and being held in detention.

For example, by 31 August 2001:
1,215 juvenile apprehension cases — 78 per cent — had been offered diversion
365 juvenile apprehension cases had been dealt with by way of family or victim offender conferences
35 juveniles had been referred to registered programs and 44 to non-registered/informal programs.

The Commonwealth is providing $5 million per year for four years for the Agreement. The Northern Territory Police have been instrumental in helping the Wadeye community develop diversion programs for their young people.

Media contact: Louise Patroni (Senator Ellison) 0418 420 917
Mary Fall (Mr Stirling) 0401 119 770