13 March 2003
Customary law inquiry committee announced

The membership of the Territory Government’s Inquiry into Aboriginal Customary Law – Towards Mutual Benefit – was unveiled today by Attorney-General Dr Peter Toyne.

Dr Toyne said the committee is made up of grass roots indigenous people senior in their culture, and experts in law and justice.

"The membership strikes a real balance between customary law custodians with wider legal knowledge and expertise from members of the Law Reform Committee.

The Inquiry is to be co-chaired by former Chief Justice and Territory Administrator Austin Asche and Yananymul Murunggur of Laynhapuy Homelands.

"I am confident the Committee is well placed to deliver on the complex task of addressing those hot-spots in the relationship between indigenous customary practices and the wider community as a whole, and communicating the broader aspects and role of customary law to the wider population.

"The outcomes sought from this inquiry are practical reforms to alleviate some of the difficulties that sometimes occur between customary practices and western law, and new processes to realise the potential of customary law to mutually benefit the community and assist in the delivery of government services," Dr Toyne said.

"The independence of the Law Reform Committee will support the independence and credibility of this very important inquiry," Dr Toyne said.

The Toward Mutual Benefit: An Inquiry into Aboriginal Customary Law will seek to find some mutual benefit in areas including but not limited to governance, social well-being, law and justice and economic independence.

The Committee is expected to report back to Government mid-year with room to extend the period by a couple of months if required by the Committee.

The indigenous membership is balanced in gender and represents different regional areas of the Territory.

The membership of the Customary Law Inquiry:

- **Co Chairs**
  - Austin Asche
  - Yananymul Murunggur, Laynhapuy, East Arnhem
Members drawn from the existing Law Reform Committee (voluntary members):

- **Mid-NT**
  - Majorie Limbiari, Ali Curung
  - Gwen Brown, Ali Curung
  - Roy Hammer - Borroloola

- **Central Australia**
  - Warren Williams, Yuendumu
  - Robert Hoosen, Finke
  - Agnes Palmer, Santa Teresa

- **Top End**
  - Galarrwuy Yunupingu, chairman of the Northern Land Council, Nhulunbuy
  - Mary Yammiar – Croker Island

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