Indigenous property ownership an important step forward

Indigenous people should have every right to own and sell their property, according to the Shadow spokesman on Indigenous Affairs, Terry Mills.

Mr Mills said such rights could lead to widespread individual home ownership by Aborigines on their traditional lands.

“This is to be welcomed,” Mr Mills said, “having the option of home and/or land ownership is one of the basic necessities for a strong democracy.

“It is important to understand that such options will be exactly that – options – for indigenous people. They will not be forced to participate.”

Indigenous Affairs Minister Amanda Vanstone today announced changes to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Land Rights Act to allow leases of up to 99-years on traditional indigenous lands.

Mr Mills said he had not seen the details of the proposed changes, but the principle of indigenous home ownership was to be supported. He said the announcement continued the revolution in Aboriginal Affairs started by the Howard Government two years ago, including the disbandonment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the establishment of a new National Indigenous Council.

“I believe that these proposed property changes have the potential to create economically independent and thriving Aboriginal communities within the Territory,” Mr Mills said. “As Senator Vanstone pointed out, with the security of long-term leases people can do more with their land -- they can invest in their homes and businesses, borrow against their assets and pass them on to their children.

“Quite obviously, the changes will need very careful monitoring and implementation. I think it is important to note what the incoming ALP national president Warren Mundine has said about this issue: ‘Let’s take the restriction off and let them have that choice. …..trying to stop Aboriginal people from having a choice, I call that racist’.”