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Congress Joins Opposition to Big Stick Policies in the NT

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples today released its position on the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), calling on the Federal parliament to take a long-term view of the development of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

Congress opposes the key one-size-fits-all measures which are the basis of the policy.

Congress Co-Chairs Jody Broun and Les Malezer met with peak Northern Territory (NT) Aboriginal organisations in Darwin to ensure that Aboriginal people have free, prior and informed consent on the government's next round of legislation.

"Congress tells the Government it is time to hand back management to people and communities, to protect and support traditional homelands and to repeal other one-size-fits-all solutions applied to Aboriginal communities in the NT," said Congress Co-Chair, Les Malezer.

"It's time to get rid of the destructive approaches of the old Interventions," he said.

The Congress Statement says that misdirected policies have led to stigmatisation and disempowerment of Aboriginal communities, particularly in remote areas, but also across Australia.

The effects of such bad policy have led to:

- undermining of good governance structures and systems in communities
- violation of the autonomy of Aboriginal people and their communities
- destruction of community participation and decision-making in services that affect them
- loss of good faith relationships with government and service agencies.

"We are also concerned that unwarranted measures are still in place and imposed over land leases, customary law, alcohol management and family incomes. These measures detract from the spirit of partnership, self-determination and development- as intended in negotiations for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples- and which now must be used as the basis for any future policies and programs in the NT," said Mr Malezer.

Congress Co-Chair Broun acknowledged the significant boost to infrastructure and services delivered by the interventions and welcomed the opportunity to invest in more communities.

"Congress strongly believes that an essential element of the next phase is a commitment to long term investment in, and support for, local Aboriginal leadership, as well as in strengthening communities at the local level," said Congress Co-Chair Jody Broun.

“It’s also important that the Federal Government continues to involve communities and representative groups right through the legislative process. Government must also acknowledge the presence and role of Congress and respond to the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“We will be scrutinising the draft bill when it is released. The Federal Parliament must engage with Aboriginal people on the final detail of the legislation and not merely pay lip service to our right to self-determination,” Ms Broun concluded.

Congress’s full statement to the Australian Government on the “Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Discussion Paper” can be read [here](#) on our website <http://nationalcongress.com.au/welcome/>