

The group met four times during the year and CLC facilitated direct consultations with traditional owners of the area at Hermannsburg

- organised and represented traditional owner interests in a forum in March 2006 with NT PWS, NLC and CLC (attended also by the NT Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts) to review progress in new joint management arrangements for NT parks and reserves and related issues

- member of the Central Australian Camel Industry Association.

Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK-CRC)

- represented traditional owner perspectives and interests in a range of collaborative research projects with the DK-CRC and other research institutions including:

- participation in a DK-CRC steering committee and workshop for a DEH-funded project on Market Based Instruments for Biodiversity Conservation Spinifex Dominated Rangelands Case Study

- participation in a steering committee and workshop for a collaborative DK-CRC research project focussed on feral camel management in the cross-border region of NT, SA and WA

- co-ordination and implementation support for the DK-CRC Desert Fire Project focussed on the Tanami Desert region

- participation on a steering committee for the Charles Darwin University's Cultural Values of Water Project focussed in the Ti-tree region

- participation on a steering committee for the DK-CRC Understanding Desert Livelihoods research project

- member of the Bush Harvest (Merne Altyerre-ipenhe) Reference Group for the collaborative bush foods research project between DK-CRC and CDU.

Government agreements

The CLC continued to meet with the local Indigenous Coordination Centre to discuss Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) and Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs).

Senior staff attended an SRA/RPA workshop held in May 2006.

The Land Rights Act

The Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Amendment Bill 2006 was finally introduced into Federal parliament in May 2006.

It was the culmination of a nine year process of review of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976 (ALRA).

During this period the Act was the subject of three distinct processes:

(1) The review of the Act carried out by John Reeves QC (1998),

(2) Review of Part IV by Dr Ian Manning (1999)

(3) the inquiry into the Reeves Review by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1999).

In August 2003 the four Territory Land Councils and the Northern Territory government made a joint submission to the Australian government of a package of amendments designed to improve the workability of the Act.

Whilst these jointly-developed reforms were largely adopted in the Amendment Bill and were supported by the CLC, there were several significant issues that were identified that will detrimentally impact on the rights of traditional owners and the functions of Land Councils.

The most significant provisions of the Amendment Bill which were not supported by the Land Council were:

- the amendment that allows for the delegation of decision-making powers from the Land Councils (ALRA section 28C).

- the amendment to allow for changes to the process of the creation of new Land Councils (ALRA section 21).

- the amendment that allows for the leasing of communities on Aboriginal land to an NT entity for 99 years (ALRA section 19A).

- the removal of restrictions on mining negotiations contained in the existing s.44A

- the proposal to remove the statutory guarantee of funding for the four Land Councils out of the Aboriginal Benefits Account (section 64(1)).

During the course of the year the CLC provided comments to the draft Lingiari paper on community leasing issues and staff attended OIPC briefings on the amendments.

Comprehensive briefing materials were prepared and presented by staff to the Council and Executive on the amendment proposals as further information became available and detailed comparative tables were generated to analyse those aspects of government policy which went beyond the amendment package negotiated between the Land Councils and the Northern Territory Government.

Plain English leaflets were prepared for discussion at Council meetings and staff meetings were held with the Northern Territory Government Caucus sub-committee on land rights to provide a written response to that committee regarding the NT government's community leasing proposal.

It is expected that the amendments will pass through the Federal Parliament early in the next financial year.

ABA Issues

The CLC remains concerned that the Aboriginal Benefits Account (ABA) is being increasingly used to fund the Australian government's