

ABOUT THE CLC

The Central Land Council's roots lie in the history of the Aboriginal struggle for justice in Central Australia — in events like the famous strike and walk off by the Gurindji people at Wave Hill cattle station in 1966. In response to Aboriginal demands, in February 1973 the Commonwealth Government set up a Royal Commission under Mr Justice Woodward to inquire into how land rights might be achieved in the Northern Territory.

The Commissioner presented his first report in July 1973. He recommended that a Central and a Northern Land Council be established to present to him the views of Aboriginal people.

In 1974 the Central Land Council was formed. At that stage the staff consisted of one officer of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, who liaised with lawyers in Melbourne and Adelaide.

Following a meeting of representatives of Aboriginal communities, the Council was restructured in 1975. Charles Perkins was elected Chairman and Wenten Rubuntja elected Vice Chairman. A lawyer was assigned by the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service to work for the Council.

After considering Mr Justice Woodward's final report, the Government drew up an Aboriginal Land Rights Bill. However, the Labor Government was dismissed before the Bill

passed through Parliament.

In June 1976 Wenten Rubuntja was elected Chairman. After vigorous public and parliamentary debate the legislation was passed. The new Liberal/Country Party Government omitted provisions for land claims based on need and various other features of the original Bill.

The Aboriginal Land Rights Act was assented to on 16 December 1976 and came into operation on 26 January 1977. It gave Aboriginal people title to most of the Aboriginal reserve lands in the Northern Territory and the opportunity to claim other land not already owned, leased or otherwise being used by someone else.

The Central Land Council is now one of the four Northern Territory Land Councils operating under the Act.