



Shooting an Elephant: Four Giant Steps

Address to the Garma Festival Corporate Dinner

10 August 2013

I want to talk to you tonight about the elephant in the room in Indigenous affairs.

Actually, it's not just one. There's a whole herd of elephants. We all know they are there. We even know their names. But we continue to forge on, pretending they don't exist.

The group here contains a cross section of business, representing some of the most successful companies in Australia. As you all know, there are times when a company's strategy simply doesn't work. When this happens, the company's leadership has to make a call – how long do they keep funding a strategy that isn't achieving what it was supposed to? At what point do they pull the plug, learn from the failure and start again?

We have all seen examples of companies that make the hard decisions, regroup and move forward. This is part of doing business. Not all strategies succeed.

We have also all seen examples of companies holding onto a failed strategy for too long, continuing to invest money into it rather than accept that the sunk costs have been wasted and will not deliver a return. This usually results in greater damage to the company and its people and takes a lot of time, effort and resources to turn around.

Over 40 years ago, Australia embarked on a strategy for bringing Indigenous people to full and equal participation in its society. The strategy was informed by the politics, social values, prevailing ideologies and priorities of that time and has developed in scope and objectives over the years with changing attitudes, laws and governments. Community attitudes have radically changed. There has been real reform in land rights and anti-discrimination laws, access to university and professions and access to employment.

About the Garma Festival

Hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation, Garma Festival is the pre-eminent festival and conference in Australia covering culture, policy, economic development & business in and for Indigenous communities.

The Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce supports the Garma Festival.

In 2013 Warren Mundine, Executive Chairman of the Indigenous Chamber, delivered a landmark speech at the Garma Festival Corporate Dinner.

An edited version of the speech was published in the Weekend Australian on 10th August 2013.

The strategy has had significant successes. Indigenous people do not suffer anything like the discrimination they suffered 50 years ago and have achieved things they could never have achieved in the past.

Undeniably, the status of Indigenous people in Australian society has completely changed. In the 1960s my father had to apply for a Certificate of Exemption under the Aborigines Protection Act so he would be allowed to go to the pub with his cricket team after matches. Aboriginal people like him (and me) were not the same class of citizens as other Australians and the law prevented him from going into the pub unless he was exempted from it.

My father carried that certificate with him for the rest of his life and was buried with it in our family homeland at Baryulgil in Northern NSW. Whenever any young Indigenous person complained to my father that nothing had changed for Aboriginal people and life for them was unfair, he would produce his certificate and rightly tell them to pull their head in.

But if someone had told me in the 1970s that over the following four decades Australia would spend billions and still have a vast gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in areas like health, education and employment, I would have been shocked. If someone had told me that by 2013 Indigenous people would actually have gone backwards in some areas I simply would not have believed them.

Yet that is the reality. I've visited communities where the reading level of younger people is worse than their grandparents, where the last group of people who learned how to read were the ones educated by the Mission Schools. Indigenous incarceration and alcohol abuse have actually increased in the last 40 years.

The Closing the Gap initiative, introduced by this government and Minister Macklin in 2008, was a transformative reform in Indigenous affairs. The initiative focusses on six specific indicators in health, education and employment, sets empirical targets based around the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in those metrics, regularly measures achievements against the targets and publishes those results.

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I strongly support this initiative because it focuses on measurable outcomes, rather than process and activity, and provides an objective assessment of whether programs are working to close the gap. If you don't measure it you can't improve it. Even if targets are not met or progress is slow, it is critical that we can see that through measurable and published indicators.

We know from the most recent report that the gap is not closing. This year marked the halfway point for the Closing the Gap targets and so far the outcomes have fallen short on health targets, moved backwards in some education targets and shown minimal improvement in employment figures.

Where Indigenous people are getting ahead they are doing it at a marathon pace. Where they have gone backwards it seems to have happened at a sprint.

It would be simplistic to blame this on this government or any government, past or present. It is not the fault of any one government or the public service or the charities or the private sector, which has also invested heavily in programs to reduce Indigenous disadvantage.

Indigenous policy, over four decades and across multiple sectors, has not translated to a closing of the gap. In fact, what is extraordinary is that the gap continues to exist, and in some areas widen, despite an almost complete transformation in the attitude of Australian society and the efforts of government and others.

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The strategies that Australia as a nation has been pursuing in Indigenous policy during the last four decades have therefore largely failed. And our leadership has to make a choice about how it will proceed.

I believe we will go another 40 years with no change unless we have a new strategy built from the real data and experience such as insights from the Closing the Gap initiative.

That strategy should be built on four fundamental principles - Governance, Land Ownership, Social Stability and Openness. I want to talk about each of these tonight.

The first principle is Governance.

Look around and it's very obvious that good governance is essential for a prosperous, functioning community. By good governance I mean a stable, representative government, a functioning bureaucracy, no systemic corruption, the rule of law and transparency of dealings and fair, certain and transparent systems for dispute resolution. Most countries with poor living standards fail one or more of these criteria.

Indigenous people are the most highly governed people in Australia. At every level of government there are additional structures for Indigenous people, on top of those that exist for the rest of Australia. The resulting system is mind boggling in its complexity.

Over-governance stifles autonomy and entrepreneurship and makes it nearly impossible to get anything done. Poor governance means that no-one will want to do anything in the first place.

The current system is crippled by over-regulation and does not meet the criteria for good governance. Most statutory Indigenous governance bodies are not truly representative and many are not transparent. The bureaucracy encasing Indigenous people is complex, inefficient and unwieldy. We have seen over the years examples of corruption taking hold in Indigenous governance bodies - I do not believe this is the norm but the perceived lack of transparency makes these bodies more vulnerable to it. In Indigenous communities there are too many examples of a complete failure of the rule of law - with alcohol abuse, violence, sexual abuse of children, property crime and systemic truancy.

When I talk about transparent and representative governance here I don't mean voting. I mean that many of the special bodies created to represent Indigenous people are not reflective of the Indigenous nations.

We don't need special Indigenous bodies to handle things like municipal services, commerce and service delivery which are common features of every community in Australia. Where special governance is relevant is for matters uniquely relevant to the Indigenous nation.

There are many statutory bodies with levels of authority in Indigenous communities, such as Land Councils, Regional Councils, Homeland Councils, Aboriginal Corporations and Indigenous Shire Councils.

These bodies are not always transparent with meetings and records open to the public or even the members. Many of these statutory bodies have substantial "gatekeeper" power over traditional lands or the exercise of native title. They may also hold royalties generated from the land from use by mining companies or from government compensation for dispossession. There are bodies with custody of hundreds of millions in funds held and collected on behalf of traditional owners but the structure does not contemplate funds being distributed directly to the traditional owners. It has to be asked what the benefits are for Indigenous people from these funds.

When European people came to Australia, Indigenous people were grouped in nations, each with a distinct geography, language and culture. The identity of Indigenous people was tied to the culture and language of their own

nation, not to the Australian land mass as a whole.

Most statutory bodies created to govern Indigenous people are not aligned to Indigenous nations. In NSW there are twice as many Land Councils as nations and Land Council members do not need to be descended from a nation that the Land Council services. Here in NT there are four Land Councils and dozens of nations.

If you want to run a business on traditional lands you usually need permission from one or more of these special statutory bodies. I know from my observations, travels and conversations that these bodies frequently don't give permission or put many barriers in place. Why? Perhaps because they think they should run those sorts of businesses themselves, or because the business will compete with a Community Development Employment Project or a council-run business, or because of some kind of small-town politics, or because the statutory body thinks the business will fail.

I was a councillor on Dubbo City Council for nearly 10 years. The Council's job was to ensure a clean, functioning community, encourage investment and provide municipal services. The Council did not run business operations unless it could demonstrate that it would do so better than anyone else and it certainly could not stop private operators from competing with it. The Council had to tender for any contracts it awarded. Council meetings were open to the public and dealings were transparent.

Many Indigenous statutory bodies are expected to be all things to all people, carrying out normal municipal functions as well as running commercial operations and owning all the land and housing. Seeking permission from the Council may mean seeking permission from the local government authority *and* the landowner *and* the monopoly service provider all in one. If they say "No", there is nowhere

practically to go for review. This wasn't the case for Dubbo City Council and it shouldn't be the case for these bodies either.

We don't need special Indigenous bodies to handle things like municipal services, commerce and service delivery which are common features of every community in Australia. A Local Shire Council that is part of the regular local government system can perform municipal functions just as effectively, if not more so, as an agency established under some special statute.

Where special governance is relevant is for matters uniquely relevant to the Indigenous nation, such as the use of traditional lands, native title rights, community assets, culture, heritage and language.

For this there should be one governance body representing each Indigenous nation. One governance body to represent that nation on land and native title; hold land and other assets; collect royalties for use of the land or compensation for loss of land and use that for the benefit of the people of that nation; and preserve its culture, heritage and language. One governance body that companies who want to invest in an area can deal with on development and use of traditional lands and the protection of culture and heritage in the process.

I'm not talking about independent national sovereignty or suggesting that Indigenous nations cede from the rest of Australia. I am talking about establishing a governance system that reflects the identity that Indigenous people have to their own nations, governs the matters and decisions that are distinctive to those nations and provides certainty to those who want to engage with that nation.

The current situation with multiple bodies not aligned with nations and with overlapping scope, interests and geographies creates confusion. Organisations wanting to do business in an area can go "forum shopping" or

attempt to bypass the bodies altogether by putting ads in the paper calling for affected individuals to attend meetings. The risk is that discussions on commercial development disintegrate into an unmanageable mess with no real sense of who speaks for the nation and who speaks for other interests. This jeopardises economic development on Indigenous lands.

Only members of a nation should be involved in its governance system using an objective and transparent test for identifying them. These governance bodies should have transparent operations like other arms of local government with open meetings, probity and Freedom of Information, proper record-keeping, enforcement of compliance and probity requirements, and officeholders that meet character requirements for public office. This is stating the obvious of course and most Indigenous entities do this or something similar already. But it is not part of a uniform system across the board, like it is for local government for example.

We need governance to reflect the way Indigenous people look at themselves, not the way others have chosen to look at them.

In the next term of Federal parliament, Australians will be asked to pass a referendum that formally recognises Indigenous people in the Australian Constitution. Wouldn't it be fitting if we also implement a system of governance that recognises the Indigenous nations and gives members of those nations the ability to govern matters concerning their traditional lands, assets, culture, language and heritage. A system of governance that also provides simplicity, elegance and certainty in engaging with Indigenous communities and doing business on their traditional lands.

If we are serious about economic development in Indigenous communities then local Indigenous communities need to have the same levels of representative governance, transparency, checks and balances and respect for the rule of law as other Australian communities. And we need that governance to reflect the way Indigenous people look at themselves, not the way others have chosen to look at them.

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The second principle is Land Ownership.

Many people don't realise that there are actually two economic systems operating in Australia.

The first is the one that applies in most of the country – an economy based around free market principles and built on entrepreneurship supplemented by a solid safety net and targeted social infrastructure. That's the system that exists in Sydney, Darwin, Cairns and Broome and also in Weipa, Nhulunbuy and Kununurra, for example.

The other system applies in communities on traditional Indigenous lands. In this system welfare and government spending are the main source of revenue. There is no privately owned real estate and none of the normal commercial activities that exist in even the smallest Australian towns – like shops and basic services like tradesmen. To the extent that seemingly commercial ventures exist, they are almost always owned by statutory agencies or community not-for-profit corporations.

About a fifth of Australia's land mass has been transferred to Indigenous ownership. This land is communally held by traditional owners and individual private title is not recognised. Indigenous statutory bodies administer the ownership of the land for the traditional owners.

People in these communities cannot personally own a home or a plot of land. It is not legally possible under the communal ownership structure. In communities where people have built housing themselves, they usually do it without any private title over the land or the home.

A communal ownership model administered by a statutory body made some sense in the early days of the land rights movement. I think we all understand how and why this structure came about. However, things have changed in half a century and now the model needs to change too. The communities themselves are demanding it.

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In recent years there have been some attempts to introduce private homeownership through 99 or 40 year leases, granted by government or the statutory ownership body. However, the process is usually so complex or impractical that leasing is effectively impossible or the relevant statutory bodies can prevent it from happening.

Community members living on traditional lands should be able to own their own homes. People in remote communities, who have no choice but to live in public housing, are denied the pride, personal responsibility and stability of home ownership. More broadly, community members cannot acquire real estate for

commercial use such as shops which is a barrier to commerce.

Private home ownership can exist without adverse impact on the traditional owners' rights over the land as a whole by granting 99 year leases over sections of the land (as exists in the ACT) or potentially by excising townships from the communally owned land.

The mention of the word "excising" can make traditional owners very nervous. This is because in the past, towns have been excised from traditional lands without their consent or even consultation. This happened here in north east Arnhem Land, for example, and was a catalyst for the bark petitions by the Yolgnu people 50 years ago.

I am not talking about that kind of situation here. What I am talking about is traditional owners determining how their lands are used with all options on the table. Just as the government should not impose excision of land, nor should it stop traditional owners from taking the steps they choose to enable private land use to co-exist with communally owned land. In the same way that the Crown determines how public land can be used, traditional owners can do so for their traditional lands.

The difference here is that traditional owners would be making their own decisions and choices.

I expect most traditional owners would choose to retain substantial land for the community as a whole and for the enjoyment of traditional rights and interests whilst allocating some to private individual and commercial title. Public and community space is present in every society, as it should be.

You will hear all sorts of reasons why private home ownership won't work on traditional lands – the banks won't lend, there is no market, people can't afford it or do not understand they could lose their home if they

don't repay a mortgage. These are all valid concerns - *for the people involved and their lenders*, not for the government or a statutory body. Let's start by clearing away the regulatory hurdles and the communities can work on these other issues next.

When confronted with the bleak reality of remote Indigenous communities you will usually hear the mantra "there are no jobs". This is a myth.

There are jobs and most of them are done by non-Indigenous people from outside the community. Teachers. Police. Health Workers. There is other work that needs to be done in remote communities as in any other community which is generally done by external government services, under work-for-the-dole or not at all.

In the past I have described the system existing on traditional Indigenous lands as "state-sponsored socialism". This is no exaggeration.

There are also thousands of jobs in remote areas in the mining and agriculture industries that remain unfilled, some of which have been allocated for Indigenous people. But not enough local Indigenous candidates meet the basic requirements such as job-literacy and sobriety or perhaps because taking one of these jobs would mean earning less than what they receive in benefits.

What is true is that there are not *enough* jobs in remote Indigenous communities. Most people blame this on remoteness. But the main reason there are fewer employment opportunities is not because the communities are remote. It's

because there is almost a complete absence of commerce. Jobs are created by commerce, not by government.

I am sick of hearing that remote Indigenous communities should be closed because there are no jobs. As I've observed before, when the First Fleet sailed into Sydney Harbour the people did not say, "There are no jobs here. Let's go home." Nor did they create a community frozen in a 1788 way of life. They created a vibrant city with an economy that adapted and evolved in step with the rest of society. There is no reason that resource-rich regions in northern Australia the size of some states cannot be self-sustaining economies with jobs and commercial opportunities.

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In 1917 Vladimir Lenin introduced a new model of land ownership in the Soviet Union and nationalised all land to the state. Under this model private land ownership was not allowed and all housing and farming land was owned by the nation for the community; the laws and housing authorities determined who lived where; land became part of a national land fund and its distribution among the community the responsibility of local and central government bodies; and when people left a community their land reverted to the land fund.

We know what happened to countries that adopted this model. They either collapsed, continued in isolation and abject poverty or were forced to adopt radical reforms to replace socialist economic principles.

Commercial systems don't just emerge from nothing and suddenly become mature and self-sustaining. As for any society that has gone through this kind of transition you need to start small. A self-employed tradesman. A coffee cart. A sandwich shop. A person with a boat taking people out on fishing trips. These are

the kinds of small green shoots that will grow, over time, into a real economy.

Private land ownership is the foundation of commercial systems and a crucial enabler for economic development. If we don't allow private ownership on traditional lands then these communities will continue to languish and be wedded to the taxpayer like a baby to its mother's breast.

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If we are serious about economic development for Indigenous communities then we need land reform to allow individual land ownership and commercial activities.

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The third principle is Social Stability.

By this I mean a society which is functional, where laws are overwhelmingly respected, where people are physically safe, both in public and at home, where adults take proper care and responsibility for children, ensuring they have regular meals, get enough sleep and go to school and where people take personal responsibility for their community and environment.

Too many Indigenous communities are rife with dysfunction. Ten times as many Indigenous children as non-Indigenous children are in need of out-of-home or foster care and the gap is increasing. Health and social problems resulting from alcohol use are

at a rate disproportionate to non-Indigenous Australians. Alcohol-related deaths and hospital admissions are also significantly higher. Indigenous people also experience much higher rates of assaults, about half of which are alcohol-related.

Indigenous Australians represent only 2.5% of the population yet make up 26% of the adult prison population and 46% of the juvenile detention population. This is getting worse. When the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was released, Indigenous people were eight times more likely to be imprisoned than non-indigenous people. Ten years later it was 10 times. Now it is 15 times.

Factors contributing to this disproportionate incarceration include alcohol and substance abuse, poor education, unemployment and inadequate housing. In other words, social instability.

Social instability cannot simply be blamed on past discrimination, colonisation, dispossession or the Stolen Generation. Some of the communities with the greatest dysfunction are remote communities on lands that have been returned to the traditional owners. Areas like alcohol abuse and incarceration have gotten worse in the same period that the Stolen Generation policies had ended, discrimination against Indigenous people decreased and opportunities for advancement increased.

For example, during the last half century Australians overwhelmingly supported the 1967 referendum and the National Apology; Aboriginal Protection legislation was abolished; Universities opened to Indigenous people; Australian businesses set aside more than 60,000 jobs for Indigenous people; land rights, native title and anti-discrimination legislation was enacted; Indigenous people were elected to parliament and the NT Legislative Assembly is close to parity.

There are many people in the world through history who have suffered terrible wrongs and dispossession who have none-the-less managed to re-build their communities and achieve prosperity in successive generations.

We must never forget past wrongs. We must also move forward. We cannot change the past. But using the past as an excuse is as good as admitting the problems can't be solved. If that's true then we may as well give up trying to fix them.

We all know that social dysfunction breeds in communities with inter-generational welfare dependency and high unemployment, where communities have no jobs, no commerce and nothing much to do.

No-one is going to do business in a town where alcohol and substance abuse is out of control or where violence and property damage are rampant.

Not too long ago I stayed in one of Australia's remote Indigenous communities suffering these problems. When I left my lodgings one morning there was a man next door sitting on his front porch staring into the distance. When I returned later in the day the man was still sitting there. During the night I was woken by an almighty row between this young man and his wife. He was drunk on sly grog, screaming to be let into the house and trying to smash the door down. Eventually the police calmed the situation down and he slept the rest of the night by the side of the road.

This man was perhaps 30, almost certainly illiterate and unskilled. With an average life expectancy there of under 50 he may sit on that porch for the better part of the next 20 years if

he doesn't die earlier from alcohol abuse or assault. How can it be that an Australian man in the prime of his life, born into a society that overwhelmingly wants him and his community to prosper, can be in this situation?

On another occasion while working on a volunteer project in a remote Indigenous town I met a young man aged 20. He had nothing to do so he joined in as a volunteer for the day. We got to talking and I learned that he had a wife and children and had been training for a job in the nearby mining town for 2 years but hadn't yet started work.

The mine wanted him to learn to operate machinery but he really preferred concreting. I soon worked out that he couldn't read and that not being able to read signs and safety manuals was likely holding back his machinery training.

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He clearly wanted to keep himself busy so had joined the volunteer project. But I can't help but wonder how many years before he too starts spending his days sitting on the front porch and his nights drunk and bashing down his front door.

The solution for these two young people is not a mystery. We know that if we train people for a guaranteed job, case manage them to overcome barriers like illiteracy and alcohol use and to remain in that job for at least 6 months, then they will stay in the workforce for life.

That is the work that many organisations are now doing to close the gap in Indigenous employment.

But in a community where there are not enough jobs to employ every adult, we need commercial activities and development to create more jobs. Communities will not attract even small amounts of investment if there is a breakdown of social behaviour and the rule of law. No-one is going to do business in a town where alcohol and substance abuse is out of control or where violence and property damage are rampant. This is why Alcohol Management Plans are so important to economic development.

Finally, social stability requires that people embrace the idea of contributing to their communities. This means abiding by laws, respecting culture, performing civic duties, ensuring school attendance, finding a job, showing civil treatment to others and volunteering. This is an ethos that was very much a part of traditional Indigenous nations. Everyone was expected to bring something to the campfire and people would not turn up empty handed.

One of the problems for people conditioned to look to government for everything is that they can lose the sense of duty to give back to their community. This is one reason I do not like Community Development Employment Projects where welfare is paid to Indigenous people at real wage rates in return for doing community work. Work that people in other communities would do as volunteers.

I actually believe that nurturing volunteerism in Indigenous communities will help improve social stability. The next time you organise a working bee or community day in an Indigenous community, I urge you to include the locals in your working group as well. Better still, make it their working group.

If we are serious about economic development in Indigenous communities then social instability cannot be allowed to take hold in Indigenous communities. Where it does, those communities will likely not survive or, if they do, their people will be trapped in poverty and social disrepair.

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The fourth principle is Openness.

Tonight I want to confront one of the great sacred cows of the land rights movement – the idea that Indigenous people can flourish separately from the rest of Australia without allowing outsiders to be integrally involved in their communities.

We see separateness manifested in many ways on traditional lands. The permit system in NT, for example, required people who are not traditional owners to obtain a permit to enter traditional lands. Current government policy is to reverse the exceptions to this system introduced by the Howard Government. The lack of any commercial lodgings for outsiders to stay in, combined with a ban on camping, makes it impossible for outsiders to visit remote communities other than for a few hours, unless they know a resident. Aside from people there temporarily to work in teaching, policing or community work, outsiders can't take up permanent residence in a remote Indigenous community. There is nowhere they can rent.

There is no society in the world that exists completely separately from any other. Very few still attempt political and economic isolationism. North Korea is one and it is not a society anyone would want to emulate.

Australia's prosperity since Federation was built on foreign investment, immigration and international trade. Indigenous communities are no different.

Indigenous art is one area where communities are producing value-added goods and selling them all over the world. But otherwise, the communities themselves have little ability to generate capital from within. Land is a valuable asset but requires capital investment to generate an income whether from resources, agriculture or tourism. Indigenous communities need outside investment and infrastructure. That means opening up the communities to outsiders to invest and contribute to their societies, just like every other community in the world.

Social stability requires people to contribute to their communities. This ethos was part of traditional Indigenous nations. Everyone was expected to bring something to the campfire. This is one reason I do not like CDEP where welfare is paid to Indigenous people at real wage rates in return for doing work that people in other communities do as volunteers.

Indigenous communities know that they need to bring the outside in to achieve economic development. We often hear Indigenous leaders talk of their need for investment to develop. This is true. But how many times have you heard people talking about the need for investment but at the same time resisting the idea of people from outside the community having influence over the project or taking profits out when the project delivers?

Investors who put their money into a project expect to have a say in the running of it and they expect to receive a return on the investment.

Investment without control rights and an expectation of a profit is not investment at all – it's a grant.

If Indigenous communities want investment for development then they need to accept that this involves letting outsiders in, allowing them in to drive the development hand in hand with Indigenous people and letting both the community and the developer make a profit from it. Communities can't have it both ways.

This doesn't mean that Indigenous people are trampled on. Every day partnerships are created where people bring different skills and resources to the table. An external investor brings money, skills and experience. The local community brings the land, knowledge of the area, access to workforce and a potential customer base.

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The two groups need to listen to each other and respect where the other group has greater expertise. Both can share in the rewards. For the investor, the rewards are profits and business growth. For the community those rewards are access to services produced by the development, royalties, jobs, skills transfer and contract opportunities for locals. Traditional owners can benefit greatly from alliances with established businesses who are awarded contracts from a project.

Through those alliances local businesses established by the traditional owners can build their knowledge, skills, experience and operating funds and are then able to run their own enterprises with their own capital or with investment from outside.

Only governments and charitable foundations provide grants and donations. If you want someone to invest in the community who knows how to build infrastructure or housing or who wants to set up a business that will employ local people in commercial activities then it has to make objective business and financial sense for them.

And of course it is not all one way. Traditional owners can invest the funds they receive from land access payments, rent and royalties into enterprises of their own and these do not have to be on traditional lands. Groups can invest in urban or other regional areas. This is especially important for groups whose traditional lands are in urban and developed areas.

Communities also can't have it both ways on public access to traditional lands. If traditional lands are treated as private property and outsiders are not able to set foot on them without a permit, then presumably the community should cover the costs of building, water, power, sewerage and maintaining infrastructure like roads. If government is maintaining the road then the road should be public and outside the protected private areas.

We all understand where the mindset of separateness has come from. We know what happened to Indigenous communities in the southern and coastal parts of Australia where colonisation had the biggest impact.

Remote communities in northern and central Australia look at those places and fear that their culture will also be subsumed by outsiders too if they open them up.

It is not necessary to fear openness any more. It is not the same situation that existed 150 years ago. Traditional owners can allow the outside in from a position of control and autonomy. Their communities will not be decimated. Their cultures and language need not be lost.

We can see a small but important example of this here at the Garma Festival which this year advertised on Qantas flights inviting Australians from all across the country to join the Yolgnu nation at this important cultural and business event.

The fact is that Indigenous communities are not separate now anyway. They are completely dependent on governments. An Indigenous nation can only achieve real independence if it has a real economy.

These days we talk a lot about sustainability. Some people think sustainability means not changing anything. That is incorrect. Sustainability means having a system that will endure. Remote Indigenous communities will only endure if their people can thrive in them for the long term with a level of self-sufficiency. This will not happen under the current model.

We may not want to admit it, but the truth is that remote Indigenous communities are far less likely to survive if they continue as they are currently going than if they open themselves up to the outside world.

If we are serious about economic development in Indigenous communities then those communities need to embrace much greater openness.

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In April this year the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce launched its Seven Point Reform Agenda for commercial activities in Indigenous communities and prosperity for Indigenous people. The seven pillars of the Agenda are Jobs, Regulatory Reform, Private Ownership, Investment, Infrastructure,

Sustainability and Desegregation. The detailed agenda is published on our website.

On its face our agenda seems uncontroversial, perhaps obvious. However, when you look more closely at what is really going on in Indigenous communities, you realise that these principles challenge the very core of the framework that underpins a 40 year strategy in Indigenous affairs – a strategy that is failing Indigenous people and Australia as a whole.

Like the company that holds onto a failed strategy for too long, if Australia continues down this path there will be more harm for Indigenous people than good.

Only governments and charitable foundations provide grants and donations. If you want someone to invest in the community ...then it has to make objective business and financial sense for them.

In the end, we're not engaged in an interesting discussion on policy. We're talking about people's lives. Real people like the two young men I spoke about earlier. Citizens of our country living in seemingly hopeless situations. We are also talking about the long term survival of Indigenous communities.

I am optimistic about the future that can exist for Indigenous people. This is because I know there are examples of Indigenous people, organisations and communities who have already implemented some of the things I have talked about tonight.

A cattle station run by traditional owners on traditional lands; a young Aboriginal person from the city buying and operating a cattle station on private land that is situated in his

nation; a boat owner who takes tourists on fishing or camping trips on country; a construction company owned by traditional owners that started out small, doing basic labour services, and that over time through alliances with established companies grew into a full service civil and mining construction business.

But these are not happening on a broad scale

In the end, we're not engaged in an interesting discussion on policy. We're talking about people's lives. Real people. Citizens of our country in seemingly hopeless situations.

These initiatives have developed despite the structural impediments I have talked about, like green shoots through concrete.

These are the examples that give me hope for the future, knowing that if we remove these impediments Indigenous communities can achieve so much more.

I am calling on all of us to do what needs to be done to smash through the socio-economic ills of Indigenous peoples. This requires that we make some hard decisions. Australian governments, business and Indigenous communities need to work together to recast the strategy, regroup and move forward with a new strategy that focuses on Governance, Land Ownership, Social Stability and Openness.

Indigenous people can and should take the lead on this. Because without the leadership of Indigenous people, governments may struggle to find the courage to do what needs to be done to deal with the elephants in the room.

Warren Mundine is the Executive Chairman of the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce.

The Indigenous Chamber has been established to encourage and promote self-reliance and economic prosperity for Indigenous Australians and their communities through commercial activities.



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