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## Conditions of bush courts 'professionally compromising'

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The principal lawyer at the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) has backed calls to improve the standard of remote community courts, saying he feels professionally compromised in the current conditions.

In a submission to the report on the federal intervention, the Chief Magistrate Jenny Blokland said remote legal staff had to share facilities with the police station, removing the neutrality of court.

She also said there was little privacy for people to have legal consultation in some courtrooms.

Those criticisms have been supported by NAAJA's Glen Dooley, who says remote, cramped and rundown court conditions are unacceptable.

"I feel compromised as a lawyer out in those communities.

"Justice is certainly not being served in situations where, from the defence side, we're forever struggling to even get a moment with our clients in some sort of privacy to take instructions and on the other side of the fence where prosecutions are struggling perhaps to install confidence in witnesses."

"[And where courts are part of police stations], I really think a lot of Aboriginal people go to those bush courts are probably really struggling to delineate between their lawyers, the prosecutors who've flown in, even the magistrate [so] it must seem like a blur to a lot of Aboriginal people as there's no separate building."

The Territory's Justice Minister, Chris Burns, says he's aware of the problems raised by the Chief Magistrate and he's asked his department to look at options and prioritise the issues.

That includes the option of adapting other buildings as courts.

"We need to be quite flexible here because there is generally a lack of infrastructure in communities, whether it be housing, health clinics or whatever, so we need to work very flexibly about what are the existing resources and how they might be adapted and used.

"I think that's a very sensible approach."

Dr Burns says he'll raise some of the issues with the Federal Attorney General.