



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 1st May 2009

TERRITORIANS' ACCESS TO JUSTICE THREATENED

The Northern Territory Government's announcement this week to boost funding to magistrates, prosecutors, court staff and security by \$3.3 million has again raised concerns over the provision of legal aid to all Territorians.

"This major funding hike is in response to increasing workloads in our courts and prosecution services," NAAJA Chairman Norman George said.

"This same increase also means additional workload for Aboriginal legal aid, yet there has been no announcements about additional funding to Aboriginal Legal Services who provide legal advice and representation.

"Over the past five years, NAAJA's criminal matters have increased by 20% and our civil and family matters have increased by 90%.

"The 18 new police stations and police posts recently opened in remote communities is not only adding to the load on bush courts, but it is also increasing significantly to NAAJA's workload.

"Despite this, our funding has not even matched inflationary increases during this time," Mr George said.

In 2007/2008 NAAJA lawyers attended to 7,418 matters.

This excludes the additional number of clients NAAJA sees when providing mediation, welfare rights, advocacy and community legal education.

Each individual NAAJA lawyer currently attends to approximately 280 new matters a year as well as the matters that continue from previous years.

"Our Solicitors carry heavy individual caseloads and they operate in culturally challenging and complex conditions.

"Justice requires excellent legal representation by both prosecution and defence. A one sided system is not a just system.

"With this recent announcement and no additional funding provided for Aboriginal Legal Services, Territorians will be attending court with no legal advice and representation."

The Australian Government in their 2007 election platform stated:

Labor acknowledges the many social and cultural dimensions of the Australian community, and the impact this has upon the understanding of and access to justice. Labor will ensure that Australians from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds are given access to information about their rights and responsibilities under the law, including court interpreter services, and the ways in which these rights and responsibilities can be fulfilled.

"We call upon both the Territory and Australian governments to increase legal representation for Aboriginal people to an adequate level," Mr George said.

Contact: Francine Chinn 0417 871 592 (NAAJA Communications Officer)

francine.chinn@naaja.org.au

Head Office: 1 Gardiner Street, DARWIN
GPO Box 1064 DARWIN NT 08012
Tel: (08) 8982 5100
Fax: (08) 8982 5199