

## **FAQs**

These questions have been asked at Forums, Presentations and Shows.

### **Won't Statehood mean we lose our uniqueness?**

Statehood offers an opportunity to cement our unique Territory way of life by creating a modern inclusive constitution and establishing systems that promote and protect what is precious to Territorians. Have a look at the Fact Sheets to see how Territory characteristics do not have to change because of Statehood.

### **When has Canberra ever really interfered in Territory law making?**

The Commonwealth Parliament in 1997 passed a law that amended the Northern Territory Self Government Act and overturned a law made by the Northern Territory Parliament.

Canberra has the power to change any NT made law at any time. They do not have that power over States.

### **Why can't we just stay as we are?**

Statehood is something Territorians will decide on before any approach is made to the Commonwealth for admission to the Federation.

Change will only come if Territorians want it to come.

### **What are the pros and cons? Why are the Fact Sheets only in favour of Statehood?**

The Fact Sheets are designed to answer the most commonly asked questions and address the issues raised.

We have a Fact Sheet on why some people may not support Statehood (Fact Sheet 25). The Statehood Steering Committee's role is to educate and consult Territorians. As part of this we are developing answers to people's concerns. This means Fact Sheets often provide the answer to an objection that has been raised about Statehood.

Please contact us and suggest a Fact Sheet or ask a question that can be addressed here.

### **Do we have to change the name?**

No. This will be a decision for all Territorians. So far we have surveyed over 1500 people and around 90% are saying they do not want to change the name. The current name reflects our history and our identity. If Territorians want to keep the name there is no need to change it with the grant of statehood.

### **How can we be called Northern Territory if we are a State?**

There is no requirement for us to be literal. No one thinks New South Wales has anything to do with the Welsh, but the history of its governance caused it to be

named in honour of Wales. South Australia is not *south* if you are situated in the State of Victoria. Victorians have also probably moved on since the death of Her Majesty Queen Victoria in 1901, and QANTAS did not change its name when it became an international airline. The new state does not have to have a new name.

### **What has happened to all the work done on Statehood in the past?**

The work done by previous committees of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly remains available to the public. It consists of reports and papers completed after consulting Territorians and includes constitutional documents and debates on the merits of various model constitutions. You can find this work on the website of the Legislative Assembly.

The work remains an important resource for informing the Statehood Steering Committee and Territorians, but time has passed and there is much to be done in terms of education and consultation with Territorians now.

### **What will the terms and conditions of Statehood be?**

The Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments will discuss what the terms and conditions are going to be. Will the Northern Territory control uranium mining, Aboriginal Land Rights, Kakadu and Uluru and have its own industrial relations system? These and other issues are not yet determined. The Commonwealth Parliament can, under the Australian Constitution, create a State on the terms it sees fit.

It is the aim of the Statehood Steering Committee to establish what Territorians want and seek the admission of the Northern Territory as a State rather than being made a State. This is an important difference because it allows Territorians to determine the conditions acceptable to them. If the Commonwealth were to admit the Territory only as an unequal State, Territorians should have the chance to either agree or disagree with such a proposal.

### **Can we trust the Commonwealth Government to engage in good faith negotiations?**

The Prime Minister is on record as supporting Statehood so long as Territorians want it. There is nothing to suggest anything other than a willingness to engage in good faith discussions on the issue of Territory Statehood.

### **What if Territorians say *NO*, will the NT Government keep coming back to ask again?**

Government policy on whether to ask again would be a matter for the Government of the day.

It is the role of the Statehood Steering Committee to advise the Northern Territory Parliament. If the Statehood Steering Committee, after undertaking education and consultation work, is of the view the majority of Territorians would

not support Statehood, the Committee would be unlikely to recommend the holding of a referendum on the matter.

A referendum will be recommended when there is evidence that enough information has been made available for Territorians to make an informed decision and if there is a general feeling the majority of people in the Territory will support Statehood it.

### **I don't understand how Statehood will improve my everyday life**

Statehood at its most basic means more decision making in the Territory and less chance of the Commonwealth changing Territory laws. How it changes everyday life will depend upon the constitutional model created and adopted by the people.

If the Territory has a constitution similar to the existing Commonwealth *Self Government Act* giving the Territory ultimate control and taking away Commonwealth control, the day to day lives of Territorians will be similar, with a little more certainty and a little less opportunity for buck passing in law making.

If the new Territory Constitution is more expansive, for example including a Bill of Rights, or recognising specific laws or rights for Aboriginal Territorians it may make more of a day to day difference to some Territorians.

The difference made is very much up to you. What do Territorians want? Let us know your views by contacting the Statehood Steering Committee.

### **What are the benefits of remaining a Territory?**

The Statehood Steering Committee can see no benefit to remaining a Territory. To remain a Territory is to remain subservient to the rule of the Commonwealth Parliament in Canberra, a parliament where the Territory has just four members out of 226 in both Houses.

There is no financial benefit in remaining a Territory. See Fact Sheet 6.

Fact Sheet 25 lists some reasons people have given us as to why they may oppose Statehood. The Committee is interested in any argument that there is a real benefit to remaining a Territory instead of becoming a State and asks that you write down your arguments and forward them to us.

### **Doesn't Statehood mean State Taxes?**

The Northern Territory Government already has the power to extract State like taxes. Some States have stamp duty on property purchases and transfers, land tax, and other fees. The introduction of the GST in 2000 saw the abolition of some State taxes and charges such as financial institution and bank fees. The Northern Territory maintains stamp duty on motor vehicle and other transportation purchases, and on housing purchases.

The capacity of the Territory Government to charge taxes is unlikely to be increased or decreased by Statehood.

### **Can we change the way the NT Parliament works?**

The operation of the Parliament is a matter for a Constitution. *The Self Government Act* (Commonwealth, not Territory made law) spells out the way members are elected and how they serve.

During 1996 the former Legislative Assembly Sessional Committee on Constitutional Development published a *Final Draft Constitution for the Northern Territory* which suggested some options for a new system. Copies of the document are linked above or hard copies can be obtained from the Statehood Steering Committee.

The document provides some interesting ideas for Territorians to consider in the Statehood debate. Whether we want to change the way the NT Parliament works will be a matter for Territorians to decide together.

### **Statehood means more regulation, how can we prevent that?**

The Statehood Steering Committee sees Statehood as an opportunity.

It may be an opportunity for Territorians to reject 'over regulation'. Many Territorians have told us that they appreciate the *Territory way of doing things* and do not appreciate the prospect of duplicating rules and regulations from other States.

It may be an opportunity for Territorians to require the Government of the day to consult more widely on proposed regulations. It may be an opportunity to require regulatory impact statements on each proposed new law or regulation. It might be an opportunity for the Territory Parliament or Constitution to require Government to undertake to keep regulation relevant and streamlined.

There is no reason why Statehood itself means we need to copy the laws and regulations of the existing States.

### **Would Statehood make any difference to the Nuclear Waste Dump?**

The proposed radioactive waste management facility could be placed on any Commonwealth land so long as it stores waste generated from the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO).

South Australia avoided the waste facility being placed in that State because the Federal Court ruled the Commonwealth had wrongly claimed urgency in the public interest in acquiring the land in South Australia.

The Commonwealth could place the facility on land correctly acquired or already owned by the Commonwealth in South Australia or in any State.

The decision not to place the facility in South Australia was taken a few months out from the 2004 Commonwealth election. South Australia has 23 seats in both Houses of the Commonwealth Parliament, the Northern Territory has four. The Coalition Government in Canberra is said to have made a pragmatic decision not

to pursue placing the facility in South Australia based on the likely risk of losing South Australian based seats in at the 2004 election.

For more detail on this issue see Fact Sheet 22.

### **What Aboriginal participation is there in the Statehood process?**

Aboriginal Territorians are an important part of the education and consultation work of the Statehood Steering Committee. All Territorians are being targeted through education using schools, town and Shire Councils, organizations, Fact Sheets, this website and other mediums including radio advertising. More picture-based and less text-based education is being developed for those who may not speak English as a first language with a focus on developing Story Boards for Aboriginal Territorians.

Aboriginal members of the Statehood Steering Committee play an important role in assisting in the development of our program to include Aboriginal Territorians. Comments from Aboriginal readers of this website are welcome.

### **Is there a more independent Statehood Group I could join?**

The Statehood Steering Committee encourages participation at any level. Territorians may wish to contact organisations such as *Territorians for Statehood* or form their own group to discuss how they would like Statehood to develop.

The Statehood Steering Committee is appointed by the NT Parliament and is only reliant on Government to provide the resources for its secretariat.

The Committee represents a range of Territorians. Please feel free to contact the Committee if you represent an organisation or are an individual wanting to have a say on Statehood.

### **Would we get more federal politicians and who pays for them?**

Whether the Territory gets more representation in the Senate or the House of Representatives will depend on discussions about Terms and Conditions. See Fact Sheet 4 and Fact Sheet 5.

Politician's salaries are paid by the Parliament in which they serve, but ultimately tax payers pay their salaries.

### **Will the ACT ever become a State?**

Unlike the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory was created specifically for the seat of the Commonwealth Government so it probably cannot become a State. S.52(i) of the Constitution gives the Commonwealth exclusive power to make laws for the seat of Government. The ACT has had limited self government since 1989.