



ABC Online

Stateline Northern Territory

[This is the print version of story <http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/nt/content/2006/s1791608.htm>]

Transcript

The Path to Statehood

Broadcast: 17/11/2006

Reporter: Melinda James

[Print](#) [Email](#)

SUE BRADLEY - Statehood Steering Committee:

It really irks me that if I want to have equal rights I have to move out of the Territory.

STEVE HATTON - Chief Minister, 1986-1988:

I find it repugnant that we as Australians find ourselves excluded from the Australian constitution for no other reason than the fact that we happen to reside in this particular geographic area of Australia.

MELINDA JAMES - Reporting:

Every year on the first of July, Territorians celebrate the anniversary of self-government. It's usually a loud and proud display of what it means to be a Territorian. But are we in fact second-class citizens? This flag raising in 1978 represented the start of a new-found autonomy and self-determination for Territorians.

(1978) JOHN ENGLAND - Administrator:

Under this flag may God guide and prosper all the peoples of the Northern Territory.

MELINDA JAMES:

But even with self-government, Territorians are still denied some fundamental democratic rights enjoyed by other citizens.

SYD STIRLING - Minister for Statehood:

We've seen two lots of legislation struck down, dually and validly passed by the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and undone at the Commonwealth level.

(1998) JOHN HOWARD - Prime Minister:

The Northern Territory is to become the seventh state of Australia

MELINDA JAMES:

A referendum on Statehood in 1998 failed by a narrow margin, despite the support of the Prime Minister and both political parties in the Territory. Blame was placed squarely at the feet of the then Chief Minister, Shane Stone.

(1998) SHANE STONE - Chief Minister:

It's finished. It's finished; it's off the agenda. You've got to accept the will of the people. And no two-ways about it, it's a vote against change.

STEVE HATTON:

I was gutted in 1998. I expected the result, I anticipated the result, I was gutted by the process.

MELINDA JAMES:

Former Chief Minister Steve Hatton has been called the father of statehood. This week he addressed a Federal Parliamentary Committee hearing. Steve Hatton's passion hasn't dimmed but his bitterness about why the push for Statehood failed in 1998 has.

STEVE HATTON:

I hope the lessons have been learned because I believe the results of that referendum were probably the straw that broke the camels back in the breaking the long term trust and faith the Territory people had in the CLP Government.

MELINDA JAMES:

Voters felt the process had been hijacked by politicians. That lack of faith was felt most keenly by the Aboriginal population.

(COMMERCIAL, 1998) GALARRWUY YUNUPINGU:

If you don't know your rights are being protected in the constitution, vote no for the Statehood on the third of October.

BARBARA McCARTHY - Statehood Steering Committee:

It was quite clear that the process towards statehood was one that was very questionable. It was one that certainly Aboriginal people right across the Northern Territory felt that they were excluded from.

MELINDA JAMES:

During committee hearings this week, it was clear the Northern Land Council feels that trust is still lacking.

JOHN DALY - Northern Land Council:

How can Aboriginal people trust this Government? I put it to you people...How can we trust the Government of today?

MELINDA JAMES:

If the NT wins Statehood the Northern Land Council wants the Commonwealth to retain control over the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

JOHN DALY:

I don't think the Territory's old enough to make decisions, the quality of the politicians that we're getting through the Northern Territory is just lacking as far as Commonwealth Politicians are

concerned.

MELINDA JAMES:

Labor MLA, Barbara McCarthy was asked to respond as the co-chair of the Statehood Steering Committee.

BARBARA McCARTHY:

We are acutely aware of the massive work that has to be done in terms of the whole education and information process of getting out to our communities and Aboriginal people in every part of the Northern Territory.

MELINDA JAMES:

The Statehood Steering Committee is in the early stages of canvassing public opinion. The first polls since the 98 referendum were conducted on the show circuit last year. This year another survey of about one-thousand Territory residents in urban centres found that more than 80 per cent support a move towards Statehood.

SUE BRADLEY:

People were actually coming up to us this year and saying...starting to talk about some of the issues, whereas last year we were sort of trying to drag them in to try and talk about Statehood and they were sort of looking at us blankly.

MELINDA JAMES:

But even if Statehood is endorsed by Territorians, it's the Commonwealth that has the final say. The Minister for Statehood, Syd Stirling and the CLP member for Blain, Terry Mills will travel to Canberra in February to deliver a bipartisan submission to the Commonwealth.

STEVE HATTON:

We as Territorians have got to stand up and scream that we demand that we get these rights back, that we demand that we be treated as equals constitutionally in Australia.

© 2013 Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Copyright information: <http://abc.net.au/common/copyrigh.htm>

Privacy information: <http://abc.net.au/privacy.htm>