

Resignation is my own choice: Stone

NT News 8/2/99

By DAVE ENGLISH and GREG THOMSON

Outgoing Chief Minister Shane Stone said yesterday his resignation was "pretty much" of his own timing and came only slightly sooner than he had planned.

Mr Stone said yesterday: "I knew some people were snapping at my heels."

"I looked at it and thought: 'Do I want to go through this for the next few months or not?' I decided not."

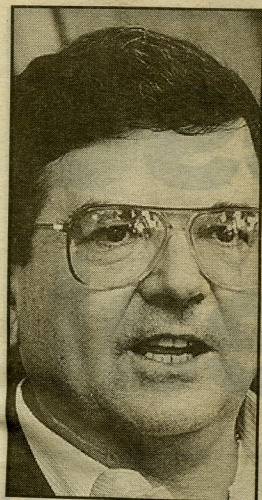
"And remember it was I who called the meeting today."

He said he had made up his mind almost a year ago to quit about June this year.

He said: "Those backbenchers who are doing all the talking didn't have a unanimous position in the party by any means."

He said he had not received a letter demanding his resignation.

Mr Stone — who had four years in the top job — will formally resign at a special party meeting this afternoon.



Mr Poole ... facing chop



Mr Palmer ... dump tip



Ms Martin ... new Labor boss



Mrs Hickey ... resigned

Unopposed

Health Minister Denis Burke is expected to be elected unopposed as the new Chief Minister.

Mr Stone said: "It's an amicable transition. It's been going on for a while."

Mr Stone will stay on as Port Darwin MLA.

Three CLP backbenchers who contacted the *Northern Territory News* yesterday said Mr Stone had been pushed.

One backbencher, who did not wish to be named, said: "Basically, we've had enough."

"It's a culmination of things which started back when Shane appointed himself as QC."

"We are basically reflecting the community concerns, he's on the nose out there, and we wanted him out."

Yesterday Mr Stone hosed down suggestions he'd been pushed, saying: "Of course there are always people snapping at your heels — in politics like everything else, there are different personalities at work."

Declined

He declined to say who was snapping at his heels.

It's understood last week's ALP leadership change which saw Clare Martin replace Maggie Hickey, who resigned to be with her sick husband, touched off the CLP backbench revolt.

Backbenchers who contacted the *Northern Territory News* yesterday said a letter of no-confidence in Mr Stone as party leader had been written last Friday.

It is understood at least two of Mr Stone's Cabinet ministers assisted in its drafting.

The letter was drafted after a majority of backbenchers met last Thursday and then held a subsequent meeting with at least three Cabinet ministers last Friday.

Mr Stone, who was in Perth for talks with Chinese officials about sales of NT gas, was telephoned about the letter.

The letter set out grounds for dissatisfaction with his leadership and also gave a period of grace in which he could quit in a dignified way.

Mr Stone informed fellow MPs, staff, close associates and key Darwin business figures on Saturday about his imminent departure.

He said yesterday he had decided, after nearly a decade in politics, "enough was enough."

Mr Stone said: "Quite frankly, it's nice to have my life back."

Mr Stone, who is 49, will remain as a backbencher until the next Territory election, as he does not want to prompt a by-election.

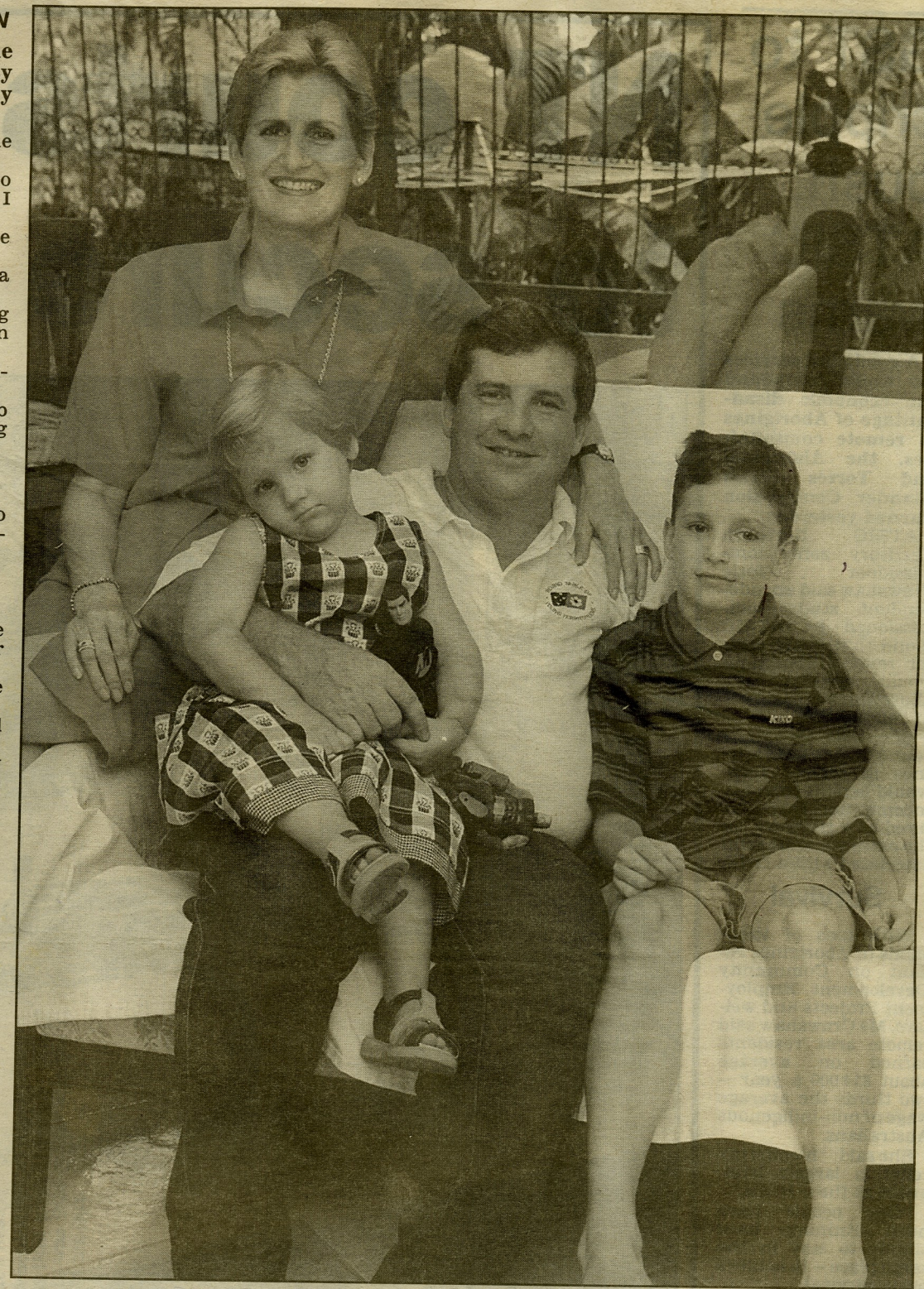
He said he was quitting now because he wanted to give the

new CLP leader sufficient time to put his stamp on the "way things work" before the next election.

He ruled out a move either into federal politics or back to a career in law.

He hinted at a federally-appointed post connected with Asian relations.

He said: "It would be irresponsible not to give the new Chief Minister sufficient time to settle in — to work out how it all works. I came to the top job half way through a term, so its



Mr Stone relaxes at home yesterday with his wife Josephine, Jack, 9, and Madeleine, 3. Picture: KELLIE BLOCK

Backbenchers 'were snapping'

economic progress — I mean, 15 000 new jobs and that's in less than one term in office."

Asked how he felt personally about quitting the leadership, he said: "I'm fine."

"It's a crossroads for me."

"There must be a huge adjustment to be made which I'm sure I'll feel tomorrow."

And the lowlight? He said: "Statehood was a disappointment."

"I was never going to be the first Premier of the NT State."

Mr Stone said he believed he had achieved significant progress for the NT economy.

He said: "Even my biggest critics couldn't deny we've made ec-

"Sure, there's some feeling of sadness but heck, you get your life back."

The Stones have two children, Jack, aged 9, and Madeleine, aged 3.

Mr Stone's wife Josephine, who is a lawyer, said: "It has been a frantic 10 years."

"It has been intense and unremitting."

"I look forward to getting back our privacy."

Mrs Stone said the move coincided with her 40th birthday next week, which was "the nicest news for years".

Her husband quipped: "Not a bad birthday present."

● Wicking Page 10
● Statehood Page 10