

# Vote by 2008 to decide Statehood

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A referendum on Northern Territory Statehood will be held within the next five years, Chief Minister Clare Martin announced yesterday.

Ms Martin, speaking at a forum on northern Australia at Northern Territory University, said she had spoken with Prime Minister John Howard about Statehood.

"I spoke to the Prime Minister this week, and he has agreed to support our new campaign for Statehood," she said.

"A possible time frame is

that Statehood might coincide with the 30th anniversary of self-government (in 2008).

"But if the community wants us to take longer to draft a new constitution, that satisfies its many important constitutional, political and social priorities, so be it."

Ms Martin said a central principle of the campaign would be respect for the rights of Aboriginal Territorians.

Ms Martin said the Territory was "separated from the rest of the nation" by a constitutional divide that meant Territory laws could be over-

ridden by the Federal Government.

This was the case when the Howard Government overruled the Territory's euthanasia legislation.

"We are part of the Australian nation, we take on all the responsibilities of nationhood, in peace and conflict, therefore we should be afforded the same democratic rights as the rest of the nation."

Ms Martin said delegates to a constitutional convention would be elected rather than appointed, as happened before the 1998 referendum.

Opposition Leader Denis Burke called for the referendum to be held before 2008.

He said there were several reasons why the referendum was rejected last time, but denied it was the fault of the Country Liberal Party.

"Labor and Clare Martin were always reluctant supporters of Statehood," Mr Burke said.

"They did nothing to promote the issue.

"Clare Martin has always said it's not high in Territorians' minds, and they're still reluctant supporters."