

# The Northern Territory: a new state for a new century

**On Tuesday 11 August 1998, joint announcements were made in the Australian and Northern Territory Parliaments confirming a schedule for Statehood for the Northern Territory. In the nation's capital, Canberra, the announcement was made by Australian Prime Minister John Howard, while the Federal Minister for Territories, Alex Somlyay, presented an address to the Territory's Legislative Assembly in Darwin. Below are extracts from the address by Chief Minister Shane Stone given two days later to the Legislative Assembly.**

It was my honour earlier this week to stand beside the Prime Minister, Hon John Howard, in Parliament House in Canberra and hear him announce, to use his words, 'a new state for a new century' – Northern Territory statehood by 1 January 2001.

To use other words that the Prime Minister conveyed to the people of Australia, Territory statehood was to be the 'centrepiece of the centenary of federation'.

It is an important date, in the sense it is now firmly on the national agenda. For the first time, we have the commitment of a Prime Minister to statehood. It was a momentous occasion for all Territorians – the first time that we have had a clear and unequivocal statement from the Commonwealth government in support of our aspirations, documented in a formal Cabinet decision.

In giving Territorians his support (the Prime Minister) has turned statehood from

a concern only of Territorians into a national cause. Statehood is now part of the national agenda, part of the next century of federation.

What we ask for is no more or less than the founding states have. Equality is the key word.

There is one area in which all thinking Territorians will concede a level of inequality for the time being – Senate representation.

It is now a matter of history that the Senate was designed as an institution that would protect the less populous states in the federation from being overwhelmed by the populous – in particular, Victoria and New South Wales. It is also a matter of history that the Senate has been long dominated by party loyalty over state representation.

Given that equal representation would mean one senator for every 8500 constituents, it is clear that this would be

more than our current federal system – or all Australians, including many Territorians – would be prepared to accept.

When the nexus with the House of Representatives is applied, then the exercise would create 30 additional federal politicians.

Statehood is not just for Territorians. It is for everybody who ever lived here, who has ever been committed to the Territory, who count among the thousands interstate who are our supporters.

Statehood for the Territory is for the nation – the seventh state, the centrepiece of the centenary of federation. ■

## From the address by Alex Somlyay MP

*This is an historic announcement, not just for those Territorians who, for many years, have been striving for statehood, but for all Australians.*

*This announcement represents the first occasion, since federation, on which real steps have been taken towards the creation of a new state.*

*It is a moment of which we should all be proud. We should be proud of our capacity as a nation, proud of your achievements as a territory, and proud that we have the political maturity and stability that allows our constitutional arrangements to develop in a way and at a pace that we can all accept.*

*It is a moment when the Commonwealth government, on behalf of the rest of Australia and the rest of the Australian community, is saying to the people of the Northern Territory that we respect your achievements, we recognise your potential and we want to help you realise your ambitions.*

*Already, 1998 has been a significant year in the constitutional history of the Northern Territory. During the course of the year, the Territory has celebrated both the 50th anniversary of representative democracy in the Territory and the 20th anniversary of self-government.*

*This announcement gives further cause for celebration and marks the beginning of the final stage of the Territory's journey to statehood. ■*



Australian Prime Minister John Howard (left) and Northern Territory Chief Minister Shane Stone at the announcement of a timeframe for Territory statehood at Australia's Parliament House in Canberra.

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