Restoring Dignity

Aboriginal Land Tenure Reform and Home Ownership
This session

• Lack of clarity about responsibilities and accountabilities, as they apply to government and communally controlled lands, are holding back Aboriginal communities.

• The session will put forward a case for land tenure reform which supports economic development and home ownership for Aboriginal land owners.
The Problem

• 15,000 Aboriginal people live in remote communities or on Town Based Reserves
• The highest form of tenure is usually a community lease on a Crown reserve

• There is essentially no prospect of home ownership in these communities
• The tenure is also an obstacle to the establishment of businesses
The Problem

- Remote and regional communities are
  - Characterised by significant disadvantage
  - Reliant on Government funding
  - Patchwork of different arrangements in services provision
    - Roads
    - Recreational areas
    - Essential services such as water
Town Based Reserves

• Mirima and Nulleywah, Kununurra
MEDIAN PERSONAL INCOME
$260 PER WEEK
EMPLOYMENT OVER 15 YEARS OLD
31%
Nulleywah
TOTAL POPULATION 139
The Tale of Two Parks
Balgo

• 14 hours drive south of Kununurra
• About 500 people
A red tape standoff
Unmanaged structures
Unmanaged risks
Unauthorised structures
No management of public spaces
Lack of clarity is holding back communities
Appetite for Home Ownership?

• Over the last three years, the State has issued 1,300 KeyStart loans to Aboriginal people
• But these have been issued on freehold land in urban areas
• Is there an appetite for home ownership in remote communities?
  • Home ownership is currently not possible because of the land tenure arrangements
Economic Case for Change

• Home ownership is an important part of family wealth generation
• It links to notions of
  • Family aspiration and security; and
  • Regular service provision through rateable services
Economic Case for Change

• Private Property Rights provide security for investment decisions in business

• Need for stronger forms of tenure for business opportunities
  • Stores
  • Small business, tyre repairs, mechanical workshops, consulting services, civil contracting, social services
  • Agriculture
  • Tourism
Social Case for Change

• Home ownership fosters a psychological attachment to property
• Tenants have inherent sense of insecurity about tenure - highlighted in the recent debate around community closures
Challenges

• The notion of communal control versus private property rights?
• Land tenure reform can be expensive!
• The State’s tenure system is fettered with considerable red tape
• Native Title can also be a regulatory barrier
Opportunities

• Native Title determinations now provide a basis for negotiations and discussions with communities
• A big opportunity where Native Title Holders have a vision for property rights
• The State is thinking about reform
• Increasing conversation around this issue
• Some examples within the regional context which are leading to outcomes
• But there are many questions