

MEDIA RELEASE

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Committee Marks Important Anniversary for Aboriginal Australians

**BARBARA McCARTHY MLA, COMMITTEE CHAIR
SUE BRADLEY AM, COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR**

“The 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum reminds us voting in referendums is a major Statehood issue.” Say the Statehood Steering Committee Chair and Co-Chair.

At a meeting held in Alice Springs today, the Northern Territory Statehood Steering Committee resolved to promote the significance for all Territorians of the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Aboriginal Referendum.

On 27 May 1967, Australians living in the Australian States voted to change the Australian Constitution to ensure Aboriginal citizens were counted in the census and to give the Commonwealth Parliament the power to make specific laws for Aboriginal peoples.

“Not one person resident in the Northern Territory had the right to vote at that referendum” Committee Chair Barbara McCarthy said today.

“Because we were, and remain a Territory, we have no guaranteed right to vote at a referendum to change the Australian Constitution.”

Committee Co-Chair Sue Bradley noted: “The situation is not much better today as Territorians are still not counted in the referendum formula requiring a majority of voters in a majority of STATES to carry a referendum. It was not until 1977 that Australians living in the States voted at a referendum to give Territorians limited voting rights at referendums.”

Barbara McCarthy said the issue is important for us all: “Living in the Northern Territory, a unique place in Australia where approximately 30% of our population is made up of Aboriginal Australians, but none of us living here have the same rights as other Australians living within the borders of a State.”

The Northern Territory now has six Aboriginal members of its Legislative Assembly, but in those 40 years, Aboriginal representation in Australian parliaments has not improved greatly. Apart from our six in the Northern Territory, there are currently only three other Aboriginal members of all the State, Territory and Commonwealth parliaments in Australia.

The Northern Territory has led the way in Aboriginal participation in politics with 12 Aboriginal Members of our Assembly since 1974. Yet, the Territory Assembly still remains a second-class parliament, subject to another parliament (the Commonwealth) having the power to override our member’s decisions because we are not a State.

Statehood may mean further participation by Aboriginal people in our system as we look at how our constitution may work with the recent release of a Discussion Paper: *Constitutional Paths to Statehood*.

All Committee members today renewed the Committee’s commitment to informing Territorians, particularly Aboriginal Territorians that we do not have the same democratic rights as other Australians in our own country.

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