

# Media Release

## Parliament Should Carefully Consider NT Emergency Plan Laws

The Law Council is urging all Parliamentarians to carefully consider the Government's NT Emergency Plan package of legislative measures when it is introduced into the Parliament later today.

Law Council President Tim Bugg criticised Minister Mal Brough's proposal to ram the legislation through the House of Representatives today and the Minister's expressed intention to conclude Senate debates by week's end.

"While no doubt suited to the Government's electoral timetable, the ultra-speedy passage of these Bills is also clearly designed to avoid public scrutiny not just from Aboriginal communities but also from other community bodies with legitimate concerns about the Government's proposals," Mr Bugg said.

"We are advised that there has been very little meaningful consultation or partnership with the communities the Government claims it wants to assist. Nor, because of Government secrecy, is the broader community much wiser about what is currently either in or out of the plan," he said.

"When one considers how long the Government sat on its hands in regards to this issue in the first place, its sudden desire to rush the legislation through Parliament seems even harder to fathom."

The Law Council wrote to the Minister and the Prime Minister over a month ago expressing reservations about the plan as it then was. No reply has been received. Its concerns related to the proposed changes to the permit system, the proposed compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal townships, any move to limit courts' discretions in sentencing and bail proceedings, compulsory medical examinations for Aboriginal children, the need for legal and interpreting services and other matters.

"Some of the plan's elements have been drastically moderated since first announced and that has principally been due to the force of public criticism levelled at them. Much of that criticism has been constructive and has helped save the Government from its own rhetoric. But the Government still appears to see any critic as an enemy that needs to be demonised and Parliament as a rubber stamp. The arrogance of the Government is palpable," Mr Bugg concluded.

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