

Tangentyere Council Inc.

PO Box 8070
ALICE SPRINGS NT 0871
Ph. (08) 8951 4222
Fax (08) 8952 8521
Email: tangentyere@tangentyere.org.au



MEDIA RELEASE

Tangentyere Council welcomes community support for re-funding a 'Return to Country' Program

23 April 2007

Tangentyere Council welcomes the widespread support for the re-funding of a 'Return to Country' Program expressed at the Community Leaders Summit in Alice Springs on Friday 20 April.

William Tilmouth, Executive Director of Tangentyere Council, says: "Public anxiety about visitor numbers in Alice Springs is high, and has increased since the funding was cut early last year for our 'Return to Country' program. Many see urban drift as a contributing factor to antisocial behaviour in Alice Springs. These concerns are shared by town camp residents."

"A 'Return to Country' Service is a "safety valve" for Alice Springs, providing a valuable community service to adequately deal with problems associated with visitors to town who have overstayed their welcome."

Evidence from the 'Return to Country' program's operations between 2001 and 2006, combined with research evidence, indicate the success of the program would be immediate and sustained. During the life of the 'Return to Country', Tangentyere Council assisted an estimated average of 355 each year to return home.

William Tilmouth, Executive Director of Tangentyere Council, says: "When our Return to Country program first started in 2000, there were hundreds of visitors from remote communities camping in the Todd River and other public areas in Alice Springs. After our Return to Country workers started helping them return home, there were only 30 people left. However, the service was de-funded in 2006 by the NT Government."

It is proposed that a re-funded 'Return to Country' service would be a partially user-pays system, offering discounted transport to clients in most need. It would cost an estimated \$85,000 per annum in Government funding to operate. It would operate in conjunction with the Tangentyere Community Day Patrol Service and the fully user-pays 'Return to Home' transport referral service.

William Tilmouth, Executive Director of Tangentyere Council, says: "'Return to Country' is a targeted strategy to support those most in need of assistance to return home."

Tangentyere Council currently operates a fully user pays transport referral service, funded by the NT Government's Community Harmony Strategy. Over 40 people have used this service since October 2006. However, William Tilmouth, Executive Director of Tangentyere Council, says: "The fully user-pays service is clearly not fully addressing the issue of visitors stranded in Alice Springs at present."

For further information, contact: Catriona Elek, Social Services Manager: 0428 891 556