

MEDIA RELEASE

Canadian First Nations experience highlighted at National Native Title Conference

2 June 2011

Australia Indigenous peoples and Canada's First Nations would derive significant benefits from the sharing of each others challenges, opportunities and experiences in Native Title - a keynote speaker has told a national Indigenous conference in Brisbane today.

Andrew Leach, CEO of Canada's Aboriginal Housing Management Association and member of the St'at'imc Nation, has told delegates at the 2011 National Native Title Conference that Canada's First Nations face similar opportunities and challenges as those experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

"We have similar stories, face similar challenges and can benefit from sharing our experiences in native title," he said.

"A common thread weaves through First Nations' stories of success: strong leadership, sound management, organisational cohesion, internal accountability and a dedication to following through on an agreed strategy."

Mr Leach told delegates that it is vital that First Nations work with what they've got and make the most of it – investing in the future to make native title to start working for them.

"You don't need to be sitting on a gold mine of raw resources, or beach front land, to gain benefits from your native title," he said

In his keynote address, Mr Leach recalled how far Canada's First Nations have come since the 1980s when the primary benefits sought for use of native title land were leases and a limited number of jobs.

"We've learnt there are more meaningful ways we can benefit from the assertion of our rights – longer term strategies that will deliver money and development into the future."

He acknowledged that there are both opportunities and challenges in asserting native title rights and that genuine partnerships with the right people and organisations play a significant part in successful outcomes.

“Developing strong partnerships with governments, lawyers, consultants and financial advisers and managers are vital to the successful assertion of native title rights,” he said.

Mr Leach also noted that that overcoming the challenges within our organisations will assist in successfully managing external issues and resistance.

“Good leaders don’t just bang their fists on the table - they remain calm and committed to moving the organisation forward, to securing benefits for their people and asserting their peoples’ rights.”

“We must stop the internal jealousy, fear and ignorance which threaten to derail our efforts to derive benefits from our recognised rights.

“We must control and manage these corrosive elements and focus on strengthening our organisations – strong organisations with a clear vision of where they need to head and a commitment to investing in their future, have the best chance of securing their people a better future.”

It is these elements that Mr Leach regards as the most important factors for all First Nations, including Australia, in ensuring successful outcomes in the assertion of native title rights.

He praised the National Native Title Conference - Australia largest Indigenous Policy Conference – as an excellent forum to share these stories and learn from one another.

“I’m learning as much as I am sharing,” he concluded.

The Conference concludes Tomorrow’s with the annual Mabo Lecture which will be delivered by Dr Kerry Arabena, former Co-Chair of the National Congress and current Chief Executive of the Lowitja Institute from 9:00am at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Convened annually by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and co-convened this year by Queensland South Native Title Services (QSNTS), the conference will be hosted by the Turrbal, Jagera, Yuggera and Ugarapul Peoples, the traditional owners of the wider Brisbane area.

For more information please visit the conference website at www.aiatsis.gov.au

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