

Odd timing and a lot of hurdles yet

Do you think the Northern Territory should become a state?



NO I reckon we'd lose too much. Stricter licences coming into effect and things like that.

Daniel Cairns, Humpty Doo



YES If the benefits outweigh the negatives. It depends on the funding, what we would get for it.

Eddy Daun, Leanyer



NO We need to just leave it as it is, why would we go and change it? People from down south will just take over.

Keith Alchin, Moulden



NO I wouldn't want to see it happen, the Territory's different and it should stay that way.

Joeline Petterson, Anula



NO I'm 100 per cent opposed to statehood, I think it stands on its own feet well enough.

Mary DePalma, Howard Springs

DAN BOURCHIER
Sky News Darwin bureau chief

STATEHOOD is back on the agenda – say the nation's leaders in supporting Chief Minister Adam Giles' push for equality as the nation's seventh state by July 1, 2018.

But it came out of left field, at a time when constitutional development hasn't even been on the table and the Government has been plagued by scandal.

Even as recently as estimates this year, the NT's Statehood Minister couldn't even say she supported moves to become a state.

Many will be wondering if the Territory even wants this.

Previous attempts to become a state have been driven from the ground up, with lengthy discussions and a chance for all Territorians to be engaged in the debate; to air their concerns and map out their vision for the NT.

I'm worried this won't happen.

I was a member of the bipartisan NT Statehood Steering Committee from 2005 to 2010, which was charged by Parliament to engage with all Territorians and find out if Statehood should be on the agenda, what it should look like and how it should work.

These five years provided an illuminating view into the psyche of Territorians and the deep interest in having greater autonomy from Canberra while maintaining the uniqueness of living in the Territory.

Unfortunately, politics would again destroy the momentum when then-CLP leader Terry Mills scotched the convention by slamming having the election of Constitutional Convention delegates



The statehood push has come out of left field.

on the same day as local government elections, as politicising it. That model was chosen to save significant amounts of money.

But by then the damage was done: the momentum squandered, the good will evaporated, and the sense of direction lost. This added to the pain from the failed 1998 referendum, when Territorians felt betrayed by the political process around the constitution taken to the vote.

I still believe we should become a state – with all the trappings of political independence, being counted equally in referendums, and creating the first Australian constitution in more than a century which maps out the kind of people and place we are and hope to become – but I'm concerned

about the process. There's been no groundswell, or wave of interest in reform. No conversation or resourcing either.

And there are many serious debates to be had, like what the terms and conditions from the Commonwealth would be, or whether we would need to face a national referendum.

On top of that there is the question about federal parliamentary representation – each state and territory started with 5 MHRs and 12 senators – we have two of both and there is concern increases would create a dramatic over-representation.

But it's also an opportunity to create a system where representation could perhaps increase in time, if population also increases.

Then legislating about Ab-

original land, national parks, uranium mining, and some aspects of industrial relations would need to be determined – the NT currently can't legislate on these matters.

But while having this debate, how about an honest conversation about governing the north. What about amalgamating local government with state politics to create one level of government – similar to the ACT. Or talk about having an upper house in the Legislative Assembly.

But we are just a year out from the next election.

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HOW WOULD STATEHOOD WORK IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY?

SENATORS: The Territory currently has two senators – all the Federation states have 12. The last statehood proposal suggested three, but the NT population wouldn't logically support any more without backlash from other states about their influence being watered down.

NAME: The most logical idea is to retain the name Northern Territory, given we

identify strongly as "Territorians". That was the proposal in 1998, even though it could be confusing. Northern Australia is also a possibility.

LAND RIGHTS: Half the NT's land is covered by native title law, which is administered by the feds. That would almost certainly have to pass back to a new state entity and might be a problem for powerful land councils.

LAWS: The Federal Government would notionally lose their power of veto over any Territory laws they did not like – that could put things like euthanasia and croc safaris on the table.

RESOURCES: Another sticking point could be our uranium reserves. Who would have oversight of these?

SOVEREIGNTY: Australia's other states are enshrined in the constitution – it would take a national referendum to put the NT there. We can be made a state under existing Commonwealth law, but would that mean our statehood could be taken away just as easily? Wouldn't that mean we did not have the same level of sovereignty as Federation states?

Old issues must be addressed for bid to succeed

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The 1998 referendum was largely lost on the Aboriginal vote with concerns over land tenure.

Representation in Federal

Parliament will also be a topic of debate because the states all have 12 Senators. This has repercussions nationwide because the number of members in the lower house should be

very near double the number of senators.

"What we certainly don't want is to see a whole lot more politicians, but if it's going to help the Territory move in sta-

tus like this, let's make it happen," Mr Abbott said.

Statehood would give a Territory government more power to resist the will of Federal Parliament.

Do you think the Northern Territory should become a state?



NO We're not ready for it. We rely a lot on federal money and I'm not sure how we'd go.

Shirley Maguire, Driver



NO Have they thought about how they're going to fund us? There should be a step by step process towards that before rushing it.

Leonie Williams, Lee Point



NO It works fine, we can let the other states and Commonwealth pay things for us for a while longer.

Barry Williams, Lee Point



NO The Territory has always been the way it is, I don't see why they would change it.

Corey Greaves, Berry Springs



NO I'm not sure, but I think things are OK as they are so they should leave it.

Jade Hardwick, Berry Springs