LAND CLAIM OVER ABORIGINAL CATTLE STATION BECOMES ELECTION ISSUE. Report by ERWIN CHLANDA.

The role of land rights in Aboriginal commercial development has drawn sharply diverging comments from the candidates of the two main parties in Lingiari for the November 10 elections, with a focus on the lengthy legal wrangle over Alcoota, an Aboriginal owned cattle station near Alice Springs. The CLP's Ron Kelly says the award winning property should remain in the hands of those currently holding the pastoral lease, an Aboriginal corporation of some 160 people headed by traditional owner Arthur Turner. But Labor's Warren Snowdon is supporting a land claim lodged by the Central Land Council (CLC), which if granted would transfer control of the enterprise to about 1000 people, the CLC and the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Mr Kelly says Alcoota is "operating well and is productive, creating wealth and employing people". Mr Snowdon is the sitting Member for the NT, which has now been split into two electorates. He is giving enthusiastic support to the first significant move in Aboriginal politics by the new Martin government, withdrawing financial assistance Ð said to have been more than $1m to date Ð for the Alcoota Aboriginal Association's case in the Territory Supreme Court. NT Attorney-General Peter Toyne announced a stop to the funding just two weeks into Labor's first ever term in the NT. He described the CLP's 1996 decision to fund the case as "ideologically driven and inappropriate". Neither was it, according to Dr Toyne, likely to achieve a positive outcome and its resolution in the courts should be left to "the parties involved". Jim Noonan, the barrister representing Alcoota against the CLC, says his clients don't want to surrender control over the station to a much bigger group. Says Mr Noonan: "The CLC claim was made on behalf of 932 Aboriginal people. "By the time the claim started that number had grown to in excess of 1100. "Our client, the Alcoota Aboriginal Corporation, comprises 160 or so Aboriginal people who were nominated by the CLC anthropologists in 1995 to the Commonwealth Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations as the traditional owners of Alcoota. "Arthur Turner is the elected chairman of that group and has been ever since it was created by the CLC. "One of the reasons there is opposition to the land claim is the concern that the CLC is trying to swamp [the current lessees]." Mr Snowdon, a staff member of the CLC in the early 'eighties, is highly critical of the support given to Mr Turner by successive Country Liberal Party governments: "It is a matter of record that the CLP has sought division over Aboriginal issues for its own cynical political reasons for most of its 26 years in government. "They wasted millions of taxpayers' dollars in this process, attempting to subvert the rights of Aboriginal Territorians under the Land Rights Act. "In the case of Alcoota, the CLP government spent $1.1m assisting Mr Turner," Mr Snowdon says. The Alcoota Aboriginal Corporation is holding a pastoral lease Ð the same form of tenure held by white cattle men Ð over the 2402 square kilometre station on the Plenty Highway, 100 km north of Alice Springs. Mr Turner and his extended family live on an excision from Alcoota, about two kilometres north of the homestead, in the Engawala Community established in 1973. Mr Turner and others from Engawala Ð population now about 80 Ð worked for decades as ringers for the former station lessee, Tom Webb. When Mr Webb wanted to sell out, Mr Turner Ð with help from the CLC Ð applied to ATSIC for money to buy Alcoota. Mr Snowdon says the late Kumanjai Perkins, "prominent activist, ATSIC Commissioner and Aboriginal leader, was most responsible for advancing the purchase of the property with the CLC and ATSIC, after discussions with Mr Webb". The Alcoota Aboriginal Corporation was formed and ATSIC made a grant to it of nearly $6m to buy the station in 1993. Mr Snowdon claims the grant was made "on the understanding that upon its purchase the property would be the subject of a land claim for the benefit of the traditional owners. "The twin objectives of the purchase were the protection of traditional interests in the land, and to provide a viable pastoral enterprise in order to create employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people." But Mr Turner says it was at all times clear that the ATSIC grant was to the members of the Engawala Community who are doing "a good job". He says at no time was there any suggestion that any other Aboriginal people should have an interest in the property. An ATSIC source says the grant had two purposes: to ensure that Alcoota remained a viable cattle station, and to place it into Aboriginal hands. The source also says ATSIC was aware at the time it made the grant that because of the Land Rights Act, the station was likely to
become the subject of a land claim. Mr Webb stayed on for about a year to help the new owners, and at the same time
Christopher and Margo Knott were employed as managers and are still working there. Five to six ringers living at
Engawala are working the cattle. Alcoota has a prize winning herd of 5000 head. The station won the "champion pen
of steers" at this year's Alice Show, and turns off about 1500 head a year. Most of the profits are ploughed back into
the property. Mr Knott says the list of improvements since 1993 Ð yards, troughs, bores and fences, water ponding,
and pasture development Ð is "endless" and they are worth "millions". On the day Alcoota was purchased the CLC
placed a land claim under the Land Rights Act over the entire station. Land held by Aborigines under any form of
tenure, including pastoral lease, can be converted to Aboriginal freehold under the Land Rights Act, but the owners'
"consent is required before the claim can be heard," says Mr Noonan. At the time Alcoota was claimed and before
legislative changes were made, the mere lodgement of a claim, which could occur without the consent of the lessees,
could adversely affect the management of the enterprise. Says Mr Noonan: "There are two parts to the process, lodging
the claim and the hearing itself. "The fact that the hearing cannot start before consent is obtained is not much use to the
Aboriginal owners because the claim can be lodged before consent is obtained and once a claim is lodged the owners
are prohibited from selling, leasing, mortgaging, even granting a grazing licence." CONTROL If the claim is
successful, Mr Turner says he and his community will lose the independence and control their present form of
land holding affords them. Says Mr Noonan: "If land becomes Aboriginal land, ownership is vested in a Land Trust,
but Land Trusts are only permitted to act in accordance with the directions of the CLC." Mr Snowdon disagrees: "Land
councils must act in accordance with instructions of traditional owners." While white pastoralists were immune from
land claims, Aboriginal pastoralists were not, simply by virtue of their Aboriginality. The Land Rights Act was
amended in the late 1980s to prevent further claims over pastoral leases acquired by Aboriginal interests, with a
sunrise clause of June 1997. Alcoota was bought and claimed four years before that. Mr Turner said last week he had no
intention of caving in at all, when asked where he would find the funds to continue fighting the case, he said: "I
wouldn't know, mate. My lawyers will be fighting. They won't give up." Mr Turner says the pastoral lease under which
Alcoota is operating is the most suitable form of tenure. He says he wants the same lease as other cattle people in the
NT. "It's very good for cattle business, running cattle. "A lot of Aboriginal properties were put under land claims and
have now fallen down. "Aboriginal people can't run businesses on Aboriginal land, not cattle, not farming. "I wouldn't
know why, but I've seen it with my own eyes, when they put a land claim everything is finished, cattle and all.
"Everything that is on a property is sent away to make some more money for you mob." Mr Kelly says the ATSIC
grant made to the Alcoota community is no different to financial support given to thousands of Aboriginal enterprises
around the nation. He says he is aware of many failed cattle stations operating under land rights. He describes them as
the result of a "utopian position" while Alcoota is "creating self esteem, achieving something, putting into practice
what the ALP talks about in theory". Mr Snowdon says many cattle leases Ð not including Alcoota Ð were
commercially unviable before being sold to Aborigines. He says: "Mr Turner is in the courts contesting his rights
against those of other Aboriginal people over Alcoota. "This is a dispute between Aboriginal people with competing
claims and interests. "I am pleased that the NT Government has withdrawn its support from this legal contest. "If the
traditional owners want to run the property as a cattle property and they are happy for Arthur Turner to run it as a
cattle property then that's what will happen." Mr Noonan: "If the land claim is successful and the land becomes
Aboriginal freehold, it cannot be leased unless all the traditional owners agree, the CLC agrees and the Commonwealth
Minister agrees. "If they then want to sublease, or mortgage or do anything a white owner could do, they have to go
through the whole process again."

THE ALICE IS A HAVEN AFTER THE BATTLEFIELDS OF AFRICA! Report by KIERAN
FINNANE.

While the talk back shock jocks, fresh out of their cash for comment scandals, are enjoying a booming trade in racial
prejudice, and the would-be prime ministers are competing in strategies for keeping asylum seekers offshore Ð so far
at an estimated cost of $100m Ð Peter Rik (pictured) is quietly building a new life in Alice Springs. The former press
ganged soldier of the south Sudanese rebel army spent years in Kenyan and Ethiopian refugee camps. Now he works
in the Alice Hospital and studies IT at Centralian College. This is Part One of a series by KIERAN FINNANE about
refugees who have found peace in The Centre.

At last month's citizenship ceremony in Alice Springs Peter Rik, a refugee from South Sudan, became an Australian,
securing his future against the odds of incredibly insecure past.In his mid teens Peter ran for his life from the civil war
that has been tearing his country apart since 1956. Both his parents and two of his brothers had been killed; later he would hear that one of his sisters was also dead. He has had no other news of his family since 1984. With a friend he escaped on foot to a refugee camp, Itang in Ethiopia. He says they walked for at least a month, at night sleeping in trees for fear of attack by soldiers, bandits, lions and tigers. They survived and in Itang Peter met and married a young woman from his tribe. He also took advantage of education programs in the camp and learnt to read and write English. Life with his wife came to abrupt end when he was kidnapped from the camp by South Sudanese rebel forces who forced him to take up arms with them. He never saw his wife again. He describes the conflict as one between the Muslim north and the Christian south. He says the north fights with the help of Arab countries but the south fights alone, with only the weapons they capture from their enemies. They are forgotten by the rest of the world: their struggle is hopeless. Because he saw no end to the conflict Peter says "it was not my feeling to fight". In 1995 he fled to a United Nations base on the Kenyan border, again on foot, walking for some six weeks, eating what people in the countryside were kind enough to give him. The UN sent him on to Kakuma inside Kenya, a camp run by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and mainly populated by South Sudanese. Once again the rebel forces came looking for him. He was warned that he would have to leave or be captured that night. People from his tribe D refugees like him but old men and women not fit for battle D helped him to buy a bus ticket to Nairobi, the Kenyan capital. They sold their shoes, other items of clothing, and parts of their meagre food rations to put the money together."They knew there was no solution to this war and that I would be killed if I went back," says Peter. The UNHCR in Nairobi accepted that it was too dangerous for him to return to Kakuma and sent him to another camp, Dadaab, used mostly by Somalians. In the camp Peter obtained work with the UN as a counsellor, and later with Care International as an administration clerk and as a teacher, implementing an adult literacy program. He also volunteered his services to represent the concerns of other refugees to the camp's officials. A reference, written by the Care field officer in Dadaab, commends Peter for his work "under difficult conditions " demonstrating "a rare commitment to duty". He was encouraged by UNHCR to apply for resettlement in another country. He hoped only for "any peaceful country, even in Africa". When Australia was proposed he said "this is a country I dream about". A cousin who had migrated to Australia had told him "it is a peaceful country where you can get an education"."I can say I am a very lucky person," says Peter."Some people's applications take two to three years, mine took less than three months."I think maybe God said, ÔHave this chance'."In Alice Springs, the Christian Outreach Centre supported Peter's settlement. His first job was doing casual office work for them. Not long after he got a job with Central Australian Supported Accommodation, working with disabled people, and another as a patient services assistant (PSA) at Hetti Perkins nursing home. At the start of this year he was employed by the Alice Springs Hospital as a permanent part-time PSA, and he continues to look after two disabled clients. He also does occasional work for Commonwealth and Territory translating and interpreting services. Of Alice Springs he says the most important thing to him is that people "love one another, they share things together, they say hello". In Melbourne, where his cousin lives, "you don't even know the name of your neighbour". Another advantage is that in Alice "you can get a job easily". Peter intends to stay unless he needs to do further study. At present he is doing a course in IT at Centralian College and aspires to work as a programmer. Returning to war-torn, impoverished Sudan "is very far from my thoughts". "When I hear America is fighting terrorism, I wonder why they don't do anything about Sudan," he says. Peter sometimes goes with a church group to Sunday service at the Alice Springs Gaol. He says he tells inmates how lucky they are in this country: "In my country there is no Centrelink." He is grateful to Australia for the chance he and other refugees have had to remake their lives. His only concern is that the processing of applications from most refugees takes such a long time. "There are a lot of desperate people in refugee camps. You can see children living by themselves without parents, old people, mothers of children with no support, only a little bit of food, shelter, and not enough medical treatment."

GOVERNMENT'S ASYLUM SEEKERS' POLICY IS 'FAILURE OF DIPLOMACY'.

The Howard Government's policy on asylum seekers is a "failure of Australian diplomacy", says Territory MHR Warren Snowdon, now contesting the new seat of Lingiari. He says it is clear that the community wants Australia's borders protected and demands an orderly entry of asylum seekers into Australia. However, spending $100m and patrolling the borders with "significant Naval assets" hasn't achieved that. Mr Snowdon says the problem must be dealt with at its source, in particular in Indonesia and in Pakistan. "It is very likely that a large proportion of those seeking to come, albeit improperly, will end up here anyway, because they will be assessed as genuine refugees. "But it would be desirable for them to be assessed in Indonesia and Pakistan or in their home countries" and this should be brought about through diplomatic channels and funded "partnership solutions" with other countries. Meanwhile, the borders
should be patrolled by a properly resourced Coast Guard, releasing our Naval assets for defence duties. He says any
government has to be "conscious of the community's wishes" but it is important to have an informed discussion of the
issues, including the level of our migrant and refugee intake."That won't happen in this environment, but as soon as the
election is over, I'm sure a more rational debate will take place," says Mr Snowdon.His opponent, CLP candidate Ron
Kelly, "whole-heartedly" supports the Howard Government's stance: "Australians should determine who comes into
our country, not people smugglers."They are masking genuine refugees who may be desperately trying to flee despotic
regimes," says Mr Kelly.Is the present approach sustainable in his view?"The people smugglers have tested our
resolve, we've stood firm, and so less and less people will come in this way and the expenditure will diminish. The
word will spread through Indonesia and other step-off ports, I've no doubt that will happen."If you are persecuted and
genuinely in fear of your life, then you are a refugee and we should look after people in that situation. But are the
asylum seekers fleeing terrorism or are they simply people who have decided they don't like living in Afghanistan
because they don't like the political climate there and have chosen to go somewhere else?"

KIDS SEEK SEX ASSAULT AID.

Alice Springs' sole full-time sexual assault counsellor sees at least four people every day: the majority are survivors of
childhood sexual abuse who are now adults; some are survivors of past rape in adulthood; others of assaults and rape
that occurred in the last 12 months. At least one client a day is a child under 12 years. Tracy Quinney, in the position
for the last two years, says it is "well known" that the Northern Territory has the highest incidence of sexual assault in
Australia. And she repeats what is often heard, that she is only seeing "the tip of the iceberg". How does she know
that?"Because of what I hear in here and out in the community."The more work I do, the more is generated."Everyone
I talk to knows of someone else who has been abused and who hasn't yet sought help."That is also the experience of
other counsellors, says Ms Quinney who has been in the profession for five years. The service, sadly, has been quite
bustly with recent assaults. The incidence fluctuates according to the time of year and events: Ms Quinney says
there are on average one to two assaults per fortnight, although there can be periods of weeks when there are none at
all. Then, just recently there were two in two hours. In the past, a spate of "acquaintance rapes" occurred around the
time of high school formals. "Trends come and go," says Ms Quinney, "but research shows that, contrary to popular
belief, assaults are planned, victims targeted. They are not spontaneous events where the perpetrators mostly but not
exclusively men lose control."She says she hears over and over again of similar behaviours by perpetrators: of them
insinuating themselves into a group, targeting a particular woman and working on separating her from her friends. But
although the approach may be similar in many cases, the perpetrators are not: the are from all walks of life, of all
ages. "They can be well educated, well trusted, even prominent members of the community, as we have seen in some
recent interstate cases," says Ms Quinney. Most perpetrators are known to the victim, be they close family members or
acquaintances. Alcohol can be involved but is not the reason; neither is sexual drive. "Sex is used as a tool, but what
the perpetrator is really getting off on, is having power and control over someone," says Ms Quinney. She is adamant:
ultimately the perpetrator is the only one to blame."It is important to educate our youth about protective behaviours,
but equally important for them to know that if it happens to them, they are not the ones who should feel guilty."The
service Ms Quinney heads offers victims timely information and support. Ms Quinney says there is a correlation
between early support and recovery. She says people who suffer long-term effects are those who aren't believed,
supported and given good information at the outset. "I can't accept that people who are assaulted become 'damaged
goods' for life. It doesn't have to take over your life. "I couldn't sustain myself in this job if I didn't think that people
could get through this with proper support, which is all about giving them back power and control over their lives." Ms
Quinney works office hours, but when she knocks off an on-call roster of five other qualified counsellors, all women,
takes over. There are also three female doctors on-call who can carry out forensic examinations if that is what the
victim wants. Even if a woman chooses not to take the matter to the police, it is important that she receives medical
help, including advice about sexually transmissible diseases and possible pregnancy. The service also attempts to
educate and inform, both in town and in remote areas to the extent that just one full-time officer can do that. The
annual march with the theme "Reclaim the Night" is one way of keeping the issues before the public. These marches
began as protests against the curfew mentality which placed restrictions on women's behaviour in response to male
violence. A march in Alice Springs is planned for October 26, from 7pm, starting in Todd Mall, followed by
performances on the council lawns.
HER FIRST PLAY ON STAGE: 'WOW, I WROTE ALL THAT!' Report by KIERAN FINNANE.

Playwright Anne Harris, together with Bryn Williams and OLSH drama students, bring the Centre's second Young Playwrights' Festival to Araluen audiences this weekend. Six plays were selected from her classes' first playwrighting efforts, and one imported from NSW. The latter, Experiencing Us by Kara Lysiak, won the NSW Young Playwrights' Award last year, and was chosen for production because it is set on the Ngaanyatjarra lands, where an art advisor on a community is visited by her daughter. The other plays are delightfully varied in their subject matter. In Do Cats Always Land on Four Legs? Bayan Brentnall looks at the kind of antics kids get up to when they're pondering "what if ..." questions. Kurt Boehm's Passion for Climbing is an absurdist take on what happens when a young guy gets into trouble at school and his mother is called to the principal's office! Jordan Mellors cleverly captures the way teenage girls gossip with each other in I Don't Know You. The Show, by Veronica Haddon, is full of tender, honest writing about young Indigenous people at the Alice show, while the writing in Story of a Girl, whose author remains anonymous, is described by Harris as "extraordinary". It's about a girl who travels with her father to Sydney to pick up her mother from rehab. One of the issues explored by the students with Harris was how to write about yourself safely. Kate O'Leary says she tried stayed away from a subject too close to home in making her main character a real estate agent in her twenties, living in Melbourne, who finds her boyfriend in bed with another woman at a house open inspection. During the emotional upheaval that follows the young woman realises how important her friends and family are to her. Kate only saw the script in production for the first time last week. She realised it needed a few changes to lines of dialogue and certain actions, and she also realised that it is more personal than she'd expected. "My friends play the friends of the main character and if I'd cast the play I would have chosen them because they reflect how I feel about friends, how important they are when things go wrong." Kate says she found the process of writing a play "exciting", especially when she's seen the end result and can think, "Wow, I wrote that!". But she's not sure that she'll pursue it in the future: her ambition is to do a BA majoring in fashion design and textiles.

CRICKET: RAIN THE TORMENT OF TURF.

As with the start of recent seasons, A Grade cricketers had to be content to sit and watch the lower grades battle it out on the concrete over the weekend as their beloved turf pitches remained unplayable because of rain. It is the price you have to pay if opting to play on the ultimate surface. A similar fate has already affected the preparation of State sides in the South, and it is a factor elite players have to live with. The price however is much deeper than simply the loss of play for a day. The inability to play matches and hence force a premiership point scoring result is foremost in all players' minds. Time and again teams have regretted the lack of point scoring opportunities in the pre Christmas period, when the business end of the season approaches. This weekend both A Grade matches will be conducted at Albrecht Oval as the Charlie Perkins Indigenous Carnival will be staged at Traeger Park. On Saturday West will play Rovers and then on Sunday Federal Demons will challenge RSL Works. West have retained the services of a core of potential premiership winners. They have Ken Vowles "signed" for the season by virtue of his employment with the ASCA. The veteran Peter Lake, and Peter Tabart, who is in his prime, add class. And on top of this this is the cornerstone and captain Jeremy Bigg. The Bloods also boast at least three recruits in Darren Clarke, Rick Hall and Andrew Fair. Rovers love to face Westies and with the charismatic Mark Nash at the helm the one day challenge will be far from boring. The Blues have lost a string of players including former captain Murray Hier, Brendan Blandford, and Shane Catford. However they have "blooded" a talent in Matt Cheswik and will go to the crease in traditional Rovers' spirit. The Federal Demons have been the side to watch in recent years, but just as they show promise they seem to lose players. This year Allan Rowe has again taken the reins and has Jarrod Wapper and Craig Prettejohn as experienced warriors. In their youth department the Demons boast Tom Clements and Rory Hood as stand out talents, and they will be called upon for mature performances. In opposition, Works have retained the services of Matt Forster who will combine with stalwart Graham Schmidt in steering the ship. Forster's penetrating bowling attack has over the years enabled Michael Chunys, and Cameron and Scott Robertson to develop their skills with the ball. In the batting department it has been consistent Schmidt who has given the Works a solid base on which to develop an innings. Being a one day game, and the first hit for the season, the game should be entertaining and will provide an insight into where the clubs are at!