

Dodson lets fly at fellow leaders

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ABORIGINAL leader Patrick Dodson has used his role as a paid consultant to the Northern Territory Government to launch an extraordinary attack on Cape York leader Noel Pearson, Aboriginal professor Marcia Langton and Labor powerbroker Warren Mundine, telling indigenous people during a government meeting that the trio "don't recognise you and don't recognise your culture".

During consultations in northeast Arnhem Land yesterday on outstations policy, Mr Dodson urged the federal Government to scale back the intervention in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities and advocated regionally based decision-making for indigenous affairs in the Territory.

Responding to a question during the talks about where the impetus for a new policy on outstations originated, Mr Dodson launched a bitter attack on his fellow Aboriginal leaders Mr Pearson, Mr Mundine and Professor Langton, whose ideas he ideologically opposes.

He said the movement towards greater intervention into Aboriginal people's lives began with Howard government ministers such as Amanda Vanstone and Mal Brough, who believed that "people who live in these remote places (homelands) should all come in back to the missions ... because that is the better way for Aboriginal people in a white man's terms".

"You may recall a minister called Amanda Vanstone," he said. "They were talking in Canberra and the east that Aboriginal people who live in these remote places have got no future.

"And then some other people got involved and they talked about social reform because of drugs and alcohol and all sorts of things. Some people said we have got to change the way public money is given to Aboriginal people. And some Aboriginals were involved in that and you probably know them -- Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Warren Mundine.

"So there is a lot of people who are not very supportive, they are not backing you, they don't recognise you, they don't recognise your culture. They are only looking one way. Some of them got a good heart, but some of them not."

Mr Pearson, Mr Mundine and Professor Langton could not be contacted last night.

Mr Dodson, the recipient of this year's Sydney Peace Prize, has been appointed a consultant to the NT Government as it devises a policy for its approximately 500 outstations -- a process

that is sparking an impassioned response across Arnhem Land as communities accuse governments of a return to the mission days when clans were forced to leave their homelands.

During the fiery meeting yesterday at the Elcho Island community of Galiwinku, off the northeast tip of Arnhem Land, Yolngu leaders presented Mr Dodson with a manifesto in which they vowed never to leave the homelands, which they returned to on foot after the missions closed during the 1970s.

In the document, Aboriginal leaders expressed their angst at the NT Government's neglect of homelands schools, which do not have permanent teachers, with the Government directing its funding to hub schools in an effort to encourage parents to send their children to high school in larger communities.

Mr Dodson praised the gathering of Yolngu people for organising themselves and expressing their opposition to any scaling back of government support for homelands. "It is a very important day because you people have demonstrated how to govern yourselves, how to rule, how your law works," he said.

"Governments think they're the boss of everything, but you still have your own law."

Mr Dodson, who was frozen out of consultations on Aboriginal affairs under the Howard government, said the intervention came about because pressure was brought to bear on politicians by people in powerful positions.

"Governments listen to certain people and they don't listen to other people," he said. "You people living in the homelands, your voice hardly ever gets heard."

"Pressure gets brought to bear on politicians and they make decisions. Some times they make terrible decisions and we wear the consequences."

He told the gathering the Rudd Government had decided to continue the intervention but that "they have to change it".

He said the NT Government was attempting to extract more money from the commonwealth to support outstations.

"Your culture is important to people all around the world."

"If we lose all of that, then the world will be poorer for it, we will be poorer for it."