Statehood call from first Chief Minister

By SUELLEN HINDE

The Territory's first Chief Minister under self-government, Paul Everingham, says Statehood should be pursued straight away "not five years from now."

Mr Everingham made the comments during his acceptance speech for an Honorary Doctorate from the NT University at its graduation ceremony on Friday.

It is the first time an Honorary Doctorate has been awarded to a Territory politician since the University began the practice in 1992.

Mr Everingham, now a solicitor in Brisbane, was honoured for his contribution to the NT and to the creation of the NTU.

"I am proud of the recognition," he told the Sunday Territorian.

"You have got to have some good feelings about spending 15 years in public life in the NT and being, in a way, a father to the uni. I am very proud of it, after all, back then the uni was virtually an orphan but it is funny when a thing is successful an orphan suddenly gets 1000 fathers." He said initially there was resistance to the idea of a university.

"All the other units in Australia fell starting a uni in the Territory would degrade their status - so we had a battle with them," he said.

"We had a battle with the Federal Government and with local people with vested education interests who motivated various politicians to go to bat for them. We were really pushing it uphill to get it through.

"Self-government was always about enhancing opportunities in the NT and one of the biggest problems ... was people left school and left the Territory."

Mr Everingham said a move towards Statehood now would give Australia a shake-up.

"The north, hardly represented at all in regional or Federal Government, has a lot to contribute to the political and economic problems which as a nation we face."