

Chancellor

I have the honour to present to you the Honourable Tom Harris, who Council has determined should be awarded the degree of Doctor of Letters *Honoris Causa*.

Tom Harris was the Country Liberal member for the seat of Port Darwin from 1977 until 1990. During this time, he served under four Chief Ministers and held varied Ministerial portfolios, including Housing, Health and Labour and Administrative Services. His most enduring portfolio, however, was that of Education. It was in this role that he became integral to the history of Charles Darwin University.

The establishment of a University in the Northern Territory was a priority of the Government led by Chief Minister, Paul Everingham, and his successor Ian Tuxworth. This government saw a University as integral to the social fabric of the Territory, which could help to stabilise the population. There were serious concerns at the time, that members of the community with invaluable skills and experience were being forced to go south to pursue University-level study for their children, and that this social, intellectual and economic drain could be halted by a Territory alternative.

At this time, Tom was the Minister for Education and was heavily involved in initial correspondence with the Commonwealth concerning the establishment of Territory University. This included negotiations with the University of Queensland to establish a university college in Darwin at the earliest opportunity. Tom was absolutely clear that the new college should be a separate institution from the Darwin Institute of Technology, which was at the time the only other major provider of tertiary education in the Territory, and that it would provide a university standard of education that could not be questioned.

The Commonwealth, however, regarded this as premature and refused its support, offering instead to fund a very limited number of University level places which shared facilities with DIT. This was considered unacceptable, however, to the Minister and the Government that saw the need for an institution which was equal in credibility with other Australian universities, whilst also noting that the proposed university college had received over 200 applications already – more than 10 times the places the Commonwealth had offered to fund.

So the NT Government realised its vision without Commonwealth support, and the University College of the Northern Territory opened in February 1987 with almost 250 enrolments. By this time, Tom was no longer Minister for Education, but he returned to the portfolio in 1988, where he introduced the Legislation to establish the Northern Territory University, merging the University College with the Darwin Institute of Technology. The merger was controversial and encountered much opposition from staff at both institutions as well as the community, but was largely inevitable, forced by the legislative changes made by the Federal Minister for Education, John Dawkins, as part of his reform agenda for Higher Education. Again, Tom was pivotal in ensuring the legislation was enacted, and the Northern Territory University was founded on 1 January 1989.

Of course, establishing the NT's first university was only one part of the Education portfolio Tom had responsibility for. Throughout his service as a Minister, he faced challenges and opportunities in primary and secondary school education and particularly in Indigenous education.

Bi-lingual teaching in primary schools was an issue explored and adopted during the period that he was in Parliament. During his final term as Minister for Education, the Arts and Cultural Affairs, Tom Harris wrote and published a book entitled *Talking is not enough: a review of the education of traditionally oriented Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory* (1991).

Today, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the development of tertiary education in the Northern Territory, the Honourable Tom Harris has been awarded by the Council of Charles Darwin University, the degree of Doctor of Letters, Honoris Causa

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