

State of confusion

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Boffin reckons Territory is democratic enough

TERRITORIANS should not vote for statehood just because they think it will give the NT a more democratic system, a Charles Darwin University professor has said.

CDU's Prof David Carment said he feared Territorians were being misled by recent suggestions that the NT was not democratically governed under the present system.

"The Northern Territory has much the same system democratically as other parts of Australia," he said.

"We have free and responsible elections, freedom of speech . . . and an elected Parliament.

"Yes, the Commonwealth has the ability to overturn Territory legislation.

"But it's only been exercised on a couple of occasions. And the states don't have unlimited rights either. Statehood can be more effectively argued than concentrating on democratic rights.

"I support statehood -- just not the politics behind it over the past few years."

Prof Carment said some Territory Aboriginal leaders saw little benefit in a move to statehood.

"Some feel that they cannot trust the NT Government, that certain rights, such as land rights, might be less clear or watered down under a Bill of Rights," he said.

"They see not much point in statehood unless it could improve the lives of Aboriginal people."

At a statehood symposium at CDU in Darwin last week, Queensland University professor James Allan said a Bill of Rights could open the door to excessive use of judicial power.

And the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) said a Bill of Rights could erode existing human rights.

ACL's Lois Fong said a Bill of Rights would lower the status of human rights from being innate to being legislated.

Prof Carment said that given the number of voices against statehood, it was unlikely that it would be achieved in the near future.