



Chamber of
Commerce
NORTHERN TERRITORY

A day is a long time in politics and if ever that adage held true, the ALP experienced the full brunt on Saturday night. No doubt there will be all sorts of analysis and reasons advanced for the final outcome of this election but one message came through strong and clear right across the Territory, the performance of the ALP government has not been outstanding over the last three years.

There are a number of interesting issues that came out of this election campaign and a closer examination of some of them is warranted. The low voter turn out on Saturday is extraordinary and yet, not unexpected. I feel that there is a degree of disillusionment with the two party electoral system and voters are searching for real alternatives to offset the influence of the major parties. The performance of the Greens in the electorates where they fielded candidates and the performance of at least one high profile independent would appear to bear out this view.

The condemnation of the Northern Territory government for their performance in the regions was universal. In part an election campaign called on a purely Darwin centric issue demonstrated a lack of understanding and a complacent disregard for the very real situation outside Darwin. If the Federal Intervention was not a clear enough sign to the Territory government that delay and obfuscation in the bush is not acceptable at any level, the lesson continues. On the issue of the Inpex Gas Plant. The Chamber of Commerce has a responsibility to protect the interests of its members and was forced to speak out when the government chose to use Inpex as a political tool. An understanding of the role of business and some cultural sensitivity would have suggested that policy drives election campaigns, not gas plants. If the government feels that they were justified in their approach, I suggest they should have another look at the results.

Since Saturday night there has been a lot of comment from within government circles about returning to where they were in 2001. Again, I suggest that this is wishful thinking on the part of members. In 2001, the swing was to the ALP. In 2008 the swing is against the ALP. Therefore the final dynamics are quite different and the mood of the electorate will reflect this. There is a mood for change out there, but it is not towards the incoming government.

The Northern Territory is currently enjoying one of the strongest growing economies in Australia. It is the role of government to facilitate business but the growth of the economy comes from business drivers. Whoever assumes power after this election needs to keep that in mind to ensure that policies remain in place to assist business to continue to deliver the growth. Change those policies and the Territory, and its people, will suffer the consequences.