LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 310

WRITTEN QUESTION

J Davis to the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, Hon Joshua Burgoyne MLA:

Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority

1. **A member of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) board also chairs the NT Planning Commission — an appointment made by the Minister on 22 September 2025 — and until recently served as managing director of a government consultancy company. How are the actual or perceived conflicts of interest arising from these concurrent roles being managed?**

   The Authority maintains a framework to identify, disclose and manage actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest involving Board members, the Chief Executive Officer and staff.

   Board members are required to complete conflict of interest disclosures on appointment and declare any conflicts at Board meetings and as matters arise. Any identified conflict is assessed and managed having regard to the particular matter under consideration and may include restrictions on participation in discussion or decision-making.

   The relevant member completed the required conflict of interest disclosure on appointment and remains subject to the Authority's ongoing conflict management requirements.

2. **Budget Paper No. 3 for 2026–27 records total expenses for the AAPA of $8.376 million budgeted and $10.309 million revised for 2025–26, against $7.435 million budgeted for 2026–27, with the Protection of sacred sites output falling from $7.940 million revised to $5.672 million. Output appropriation over the same period rises from $3.323 million to $3.445 million. The Budget Paper attributes the decrease to "self-generated revenues returning to baseline and finalisation of time-limited funding for increased sacred site clearance requests from Northern Territory Government agencies".**

   a. **What was that time-limited funding, what was its total value and term, which agency or agencies provided it, and on what date was the decision taken not to continue it?**

b. What volume of sacred site clearance requests from Northern Territory Government agencies did that funding support in 2025–26, and what volume is forecast for 2026–27?

c. Is the AAPA expected to receive fewer clearance requests in 2026–27 than in 2025–26 and, if so, on what basis?

d. What is the AAPA's forecast self-generated revenue for 2026–27, and what assumptions underlie it?

The 2026-27 Budget does not represent a reduction in the Authority's baseline funding. Output appropriation increases from $3.323 million in 2025-26 to $3.445 million in 2026-27 and is forecast to increase in line with CPI across the forward estimates. The change between the revised 2025-26 expenditure figure and the 2026-27 budget was addressed during the Estimates Committee hearing on 15 June 2026.

During 2025-26, the Authority:

- issued 119 Authority Certificates;
- achieved $6.828 million in self-generated revenue, compared with $4.482 million in 2024-25;
- recorded its highest level of self-generated revenue to date; and
- generated total income of $11.287 million.

The Authority's financial statements describe this outcome as reflecting sustained growth in demand for the Authority's services and strong operational performance.

The Authority is not forecasting a reduction in underlying demand for its services. Applications for Authority Certificates increased from 137 in 2022-23 to 158 in 2023-24, 165 in 2024-25 and 183 in 2025-26.

The Authority's forecast self-generated revenue for 2026-27 is $3.223 million. The forecast reflects anticipated Authority Certificate activity and project-specific funding arrangements.

3. Budget Paper No. 3 for 2026–27 sets the AAPA a target of 100 authority certificates issued for 2026–27, against a 2025–26 estimate of 118, while retaining the measure "Average time between receiving authority certificate applications and completing service (days)" at no more than 120 days, with a 2025–26 estimate of 120 days. Staffing for 2026–27 is 37 full-time equivalent.

a. How many authority certificate applications were received in each of the three years to 2025–26, and how many were completed?

b. **If demand in 2026–27 matches the 118 certificates issued in 2025–26 rather than the target of 100, how will the average 120-day standard be met with reduced expenditure?**

c. **What was the longest time taken to complete an authority certificate application in 2025–26?**

d. **How many applications were on hand and incomplete at 30 June 2026, and how long had the oldest been on hand?**

e. **What was the AAPA's full-time equivalent staffing in each of the three years to 2025–26?**

The target of 100 Authority Certificates is a budget performance measure and not a cap on activity. Actual outputs vary according to demand, the scale and complexity of applications, consultation requirements and development activity across the Northern Territory.

Applications received and Authority Certificates issued over recent years were:

Financial Year	Applications	Certificates Issued
2022-23	137	131
2023-24	158	83
2024-25	165	94
2025-26	183	119

Applications received and certificates issued are not directly comparable measures. Applications may be withdrawn, varied, divided into separate project sections or remain under assessment at year end. Similarly, certificates issued in a particular financial year may relate to applications received in an earlier year.

The longest time taken to complete an Authority Certificate application during 2025-26 was 906 days. The application related to a complex proposal requiring extensive consultation and was identified by the applicant as a lower-priority project. A period during which the application was effectively inactive pending the availability of custodians and specialist anthropological resources should have been recorded as suspended in the Authority's case management system, but was not. As a result, the elapsed time recorded for the application overstates the period during which active assessment work was being undertaken.

As at 30 June 2026, the Authority had 142 Authority Certificate applications on hand and incomplete. The oldest application had been on hand for 639 days. Progression of the application was significantly delayed while the applicant company recovered from a period of voluntary administration and reconsidered the future direction and timing of the project.

The measure of 120 days is an average service standard across completed applications. It is not a requirement that every individual Authority Certificate application be completed within 120 days.

Full-time equivalent staffing was:

Financial Year	Full-Time Equivalent Staff
2022-23	33.44
2023-24	31.93
2024-25	37.29
2025-26	39.02

The 2026-27 Budget continues to support approximately 37 full-time equivalent positions.

4. The AAPA is an independent statutory authority established under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989.

a. Has AAPA advised the Minister of any effect of its 2026–27 funding on its capacity to perform its statutory functions and, if so, on what date and can that advice be provided?

b. What consultation with the AAPA preceded the 2026–27 budget decision, and on what dates?

The Authority did not advise the Minister that the 2026-27 Budget would adversely affect its capacity to perform its statutory functions.

The Authority did not identify a need for additional baseline funding and did not submit a request for additional funding through the budget process.

The Authority did not participate in the budget process by submitting a request for additional baseline funding because no such request was considered necessary.