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19 February 2025

Committee Secretary
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
Legislative Scrutiny Committee
GPO Box 3721
DARWIN NT 0801

By email: LA.Committees@nt.gov.au

Dear Secretary

City of Palmerston submission to the inquiry into the Territory Coordinator Bill 2025

I am writing on behalf of City of Palmerston in response to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory's invitation for submissions to its enquiry into the proposed Territory Coordinator Bill 2025 (TC).

We welcome the energy of the CLP to expedite development in the Northern Territory, which we believe has significant implications for the planning and development of our region, particularly regarding the future growth of Palmerston and surrounding areas. However, we also ask that there are sufficient checks and balances to ensure the long-term safety and security of the City of Palmerston, also.


Primary concern

Our primary concern is that the Territory Coordinator, appears to prioritise economic development at the expense of ecologically sustainable development principles. These principles have long been enshrined both nationally and internationally to ensure that economic progress does not come at the cost of environmental and social outcomes. The drive for a Territory Coordinator seems to override these longstanding principles, allowing for economic development without sufficient regard for the broader environmental and social consequences.

Scrutiny, enforceability and regulatory oversight

The TC's powers to exempt projects from standard reviews based on timelines risks prioritising economic benefits without considering long-term impacts is concerning. While some processes may be slow, adequate time is necessary to gather baseline data and assess potential effects thoroughly. The proposal that judicial review would be the sole means of challenging TC decisions is also concerning. Without merit-based assessments, there is a risk that decisions may be made without sufficient evidence or scrutiny, making judicial review an inadequate safeguard.





We ask that merit reviews are still available for decisions of the TC, although with reducing standing to genuine stakeholders, to allow projects to proceed without unnecessary delays from groups far removed from the decision.

We also have concerns about the enforceability of TC decisions. If the TC bypasses statutory processes without ensuring adequate data, regulatory agencies may be forced to enforce decisions without proper information. This could weaken oversight and lead to unchecked development that may harm our environment and communities. While we acknowledge the broad scope of the TC's proposed functions, we seek clarification on certain aspects of the TC, particularly regarding the scope of projects it is intended to cover. The consultation paper indicates that the TC will be involved in both Projects of Significance and planning activities, but the specific projects and developments that will fall under its remit remain unclear.

Exemption Notices, suggests that various statutory safeguards will be disregarded, without detail about the criteria on which Exemption Notices will be used and which statutory processes are exempted. While the proposal indicates that the TC or Minister is required to consult with the **responsible authority**, it also goes on to say that they **may consider** other entities affected by a proposed exemption notice.

We feel that the six-day review of exemptions by the Legislative Assembly is minimalistic, and the Legislative Assembly would benefit by having a fair opportunity for members to thoroughly assess and seek advice on an exemption prior to making a decision to disallow.


Clarification on scope of involvement

The explanatory statement's wording, particularly in clauses 19 Functions; 25 Declaration of infrastructure coordination area and; 43 Designation of Territory development area, suggests that the TC's functions will primarily focus on significant or major projects. However, it also includes language relating to planning activities, which raises the possibility that the TC may be involved in projects of a smaller scale, such as developments within the Palmerston region (e.g. Zuccoli) or nearby areas like Holtze.

We believe the Bill would benefit from further clarification on the following points:

- **Scope of Projects Involved:** Does the TC's role extend to all developments within the region, including those of smaller or medium scale, or is it limited to major projects and TDAs (Territory Development Areas)? This distinction is critical for understanding of how the TC will interact with local councils and community stakeholders.
- **Involvement in Planning and Land Use Matters:** Clauses 44 and 46 of the consultation paper refers to the TC's role in facilitating consultation on planning and land use matters. Could you please clarify whether this will include local planning initiatives, such as zoning and land use changes within growing communities like Palmerston and adjacent areas?

As the City of Palmerston continues to grow, we are particularly concerned about the proximity to major development areas such as the Middle Arm and Beetaloo Basin. The TC, by allowing for exemptions based purely on economic priorities, could significantly increase environmental and social risks for our community. For example, the TC could potentially allow developments to proceed without sufficient environmental protection, or without due consideration of the social impacts on local communities, particularly in terms of displacement, social infrastructure, and the pressure on urban areas. This could lead to unintended consequences such as increased strain on local resources, social tensions, or irreversible environmental damage. We are also deeply concerned about the lack of a clear framework for assessing and mitigating the social and



environmental impacts of development on local Indigenous communities. These communities, whose land may be directly impacted by development, should be afforded full consultation and consideration before any major decisions are made, although we acknowledge that the NT legislation cannot over-ride Commonwealth legislation.

Potential benefits for local communities

We also see potential benefits for our region, particularly in relation to the TC's role in supporting infrastructure development. In particular, the provision of supporting infrastructure for communities, such as regional waste management and transportation networks, could be a key area where collaboration with the TC may result in positive outcomes. These types of initiatives are crucial to ensuring that our growing communities can thrive in a sustainable and well-planned manner.

We urge the scrutiny committee to reconsider the TC's provisions to ensure that development is balanced with responsible environmental management and social outcomes. We also recommend that any new framework for development include a more transparent process for ensuring that all relevant data is considered before decisions are made, and that proper scrutiny is maintained to protect both our communities and our natural environment.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns and would be available for further discussions on how we can collaborate to ensure a sustainable future for Palmerston and the Northern Territory.

Yours sincerely



Mayor Athina Pascoe-Bell