

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Public Accounts Committee LA](#)
Subject: TRM: Njanjma Aboriginal Corporation - Call for Submissions - Inquiry into Local Decision Making
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Chair, Public Accounts Committee

On behalf of the Directors and Senior Management, staff and the members of Njanjma Aboriginal Corporation (Njanjma Rangers), please accept our submission which I ask be presented to the Public Accounts Committee during the conduct of their Inquiry into Local Decision Making (LDM). We at Njanjma have a lot to say about this LDM ambition by the Parliament but all of our detailed examples can be reduced to a very few words. I have kept our submission very brief so that our points can be made clearly and with maximum effect.

LDM is a concept that has been trotted out by all governments and their agency heads for the past many decades. It has been presented using many different descriptors including, but not limited to:

- Self determination support for Aboriginal People
- Local inclusion that results in local solutions to local problems
- Transparency and inclusiveness in local decisions to understand and address local problems

The list of well-meaning motherhood statements sprouted by politicians and government agency employees over the past decades is almost endless. All of these descriptors, including the most recent one "LDM", are intended to 'Close the Gap' between all meaningful statistics involving differences between Australian non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. Yet, despite these passing decades and the ever-increasing Indigenous Affairs budget allocations, the 'Gap' has widened across all meaningful measures.

The current LDM intentions are being thwarted by government agency employees across Federal and State levels. It has always been that the actual application of funding initiatives at the Agency level that has led to failures. The current situation is no different.

Our organisation receives funding from both the Commonwealth and the NT Government. Both of these funding streams are so detailed in their monitoring and prescriptive oversight of expenses that even the program managers in the Darwin office of the National Indigenous Australian Agency (NIAA) and the NT Government project officer in Nhulunbuy (Gove) are often unable to provide advice on whether a particular expenditure intent is allowed! Indeed, these agencies have adopted the approach that our emails and telephone calls are to be ignored on the basis that the agency staff are unable to provide the type of advice required. This can only be explained as a tactic employed by these personnel to avoid responsibility and accountability. Whatever the reasoning, the outcome of the current operating methodologies employed by the grant-providing agencies under both Federal and State government levels is to fatally hinder LDM ambitions.

Recently the NIAA invoked extremely harsh and draconian clauses in our grant conditions which resulted in our funding payments remaining unpaid for the period January to June 2021. Our organisation has lost the ability to keep our workers employed during this time, resulting in this most underprivileged group of over 14 Indigenous Australian workers and their extended families losing a collective wages stream of around \$80,000 during this time. Most of our workers were forced to join the unemployment welfare lines (CDP) in Gunbalanya as a consequence. There are wider consequences of this type of action that our current bureaucrats seem to be wilfully avoiding: That some of our workers have lost their most intimate relationships and some have been unable to accept a 'seperation certificate' because to do so would admit to their parole officers that they had become unemployed. This in turn carries the threat of returning to prison.

This was an even greater tragedy when it is revealed that our half-yearly performance report was fully accepted by the NIAA as compliant. Our organisation is not 'in breach' of any of the NIAA grant conditions. This unwarranted and draconian action by the NIAA was put into action on the basis that a faceless staffer in the Canberra-based bureaucracy deemed that they 'considered the Njanjma Board and CEO and Senior Staff did not have the required levels of expertise to properly manage their organisation and the Working on Country program going forward'. Yet, we provided all required financial statements and confirmed that our administrative and accounting procedures and professional support (external accounting contract) was and remains in place. At the time of writing, and despite our repeated requests, no proper explanation has been provided by the NIAA. It appears this assessment of 'a profound lack of capability to continue to deliver the program' is based solely on the fact that our Aboriginal Corporation no longer has a 'white person' in charge. The Board and CEO/Senior staff are all local Indigenous. They are all very articulate in expressing their feelings of betrayal and ongoing 'sleight of mouth' in relation the current government slogan of 'Local Decision Making'

To add insult to injury, the current [REDACTED] for West Arnhem under the NT Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, [REDACTED], has openly been making it known that Njanjma Aboriginal Corporation "will not receive any assistance from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet whilst certain individuals are involved with the corporation." This has resulted in strong protest from the current CEO of Njanjma, Mr Kurt Tipungwuti, and his Board that the era of white-domination and seemingly relentless attitude of self-righteous intervention into community based and run (indigenous) organisations by government is very much alive and strong.

Yours faithfully,



Kurt Tipungwuti
Managing Director
Deputy Chair
Njanjma Rangers

