

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Public Accounts Committee

Annual Report

2015-16

June 2016

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Author:	Public Accounts Committee
Title:	Annual Report 2015-16
ISSN (printed copy)	1030-6315
ISSN (electronic copy)	2201-9699

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Chair's Preface

The Public Accounts Committee has undertaken two formal inquiries over the last year and held public hearings on a number of issues of concern to the Committee. The first inquiry was the Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin, which was referred by the Legislative Assembly in August 2015 and reported on in November 2015. The second inquiry, initiated by the Committee, inquired into Housing Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps and the Committee reported to the Legislative Assembly in May 2016.

The Committee held a number of public hearings on matters of public interest including the Palmerston Regional Hospital, Northern Territory Correctional Industries, Homelands Funding and government and ministerial travel undertaken through Latitude Travel. These hearings are outlined within this annual report.

The Committee has maintained its interest in performance reporting and has received briefings from the Auditor-General regarding reporting service information. The Committee examined a number of departmental annual reports to assess their compliance with reporting requirements. The Committee wrote to the heads of the agencies reviewed to inform them of the findings and to seek information that was absent from the annual reports.

The Committee continued to examine the Auditor-General's reports and receive briefings from the Auditor-General on the findings of agency audits.

In April 2016 the Committee hosted the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees Mid-Term Meeting which was held in Alice Springs and attended by members of public accounts committees and their secretariats from most Australian jurisdictions.

The membership of the PAC was reconfigured in September 2015 to be composed of two Government Members, two Opposition Members and two independent Members. Despite numerous written requests from the Committee, the Government did not nominate its Members to the Committee until 24 May 2016.

I thank the Members of the Committee who have worked together since my appointment to the Committee during what has been a busy and productive period, and the individuals and organisations who have assisted the Committee with its inquiries by making submissions and giving evidence. I also thank the Chief Executives of Agencies subject to the Committee's inquiries who have continued to be responsive to the Committee's requests for information.

Hambelly

Mrs Robyn Lambley MLA Chair

Committee Members

	Mrs Robyn Lambley MLA:	Member for Araluen
	Party:	Independent
	Committee Membership	
	Standing:	Public Accounts (Chair).
	Mr Gerry Wood MLA: Meml	per for Nelson
	Party:	Independent
	Parliamentary Position	Acting Deputy Speaker
6	Committee Membership	
Ke J	Standing:	Public Accounts (Deputy Chair); Standing Orders; Members' Interests.
NO D	Sessional	Northern Territory's Energy Future.
\frown	Mr Matthew Conlan MLA: N	
	Party:	Country Liberal Party
1501	Parliamentary Position	Deputy Speaker
(End)	Committee Membership	
	Standing:	Public Accounts.
7	Sessional	Northern Territory's Energy Future.
	Ms Natasha Fyles MLA: Member for Nightcliff	
	Party:	Territory Labor
	Committee Membership	
	Standing:	Public Accounts; Standing Orders; Privileges; Members' Interests.
	Ms Nicole Manison MLA: N	lember for Wanguri
	Party:	Territory Labor
	Committee Membership	
No.	Standing:	Public Accounts.
	Sessional	Northern Territory's Energy Future.
Mr Willem Westra van Holthe MLA: Member for Katherine		he MLA: Member for Katherine
A COLOR	Party:	Country Liberal Party
	Committee Membership	
3	Standing:	Public Accounts; Legal and Consitutional Affairs (Chair).
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Terms of Reference

STANDING ORDER 177

Public Accounts Committee

- (1) A Public Accounts Committee will be appointed at the commencement of each Assembly and have the following duties:
 - (a) to examine the accounts of the receipts and expenditure of the Northern Territory and each statement and report tabled in the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to the *Financial Management Act* and the *Audit Act*
 - (b) to report to the Legislative Assembly with such comments as it thinks fit, any items or matters in or arising in connection with those accounts, statements or reports, or in connection with the receipt or disbursement of the moneys to which they relate, to which the committee is of the opinion that the attention of Parliament should be drawn
 - (c) to report to the Legislative Assembly any alteration which the committee thinks desirable in the form of the public accounts or in the method of keeping them or in the method of receipt, control, issue or payment of public moneys
 - (d) to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly on any question in connection with the public accounts of the Northern Territory
 - (i) which is referred to it by a resolution of the Assembly or
 - (ii) which is referred to it by the Administrator or a Minister
 - (e) to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly on any matters within the executive authority of Ministers of the Territory to which the committee is of the opinion that the attention of the Assembly should be drawn.
- (2) The Committee will consist of six Members.
- (3) The Committee must take care not to inquire into any matters which are being examined by a Select Committee of the Assembly especially appointed to inquire into such matters and any question arising on possible overlap may be referred to the Assembly for determination.
- (4) The Committee will elect a Government Member as Chair.
- (5) The Committee will have power to appoint sub-committees and to refer to any such sub-committee any matter which the Committee is empowered to examine.
- (6) The Committee will provide an annual report of its activities to the Assembly.

1 Introduction

Establishment and Functions of Committee

- 1.1 The Northern Territory Standing Committee on Public Accounts was established by the Assembly on 23 October 2012 under then Standing Order 21A.
- 1.2 The duties of the Public Accounts Committee include to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly on any question in connection with the public accounts of the NT as it deems necessary as well as any matter referred to it by the Assembly, Administrator or any Minister. The Committee also examines the reports of the Auditor-General.
- 1.3 It also has the duty "to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly on any matters within the executive authority of ministers of the Territory to which the committee is of the opinion that the attention of the Assembly should be drawn".¹
- 1.4 The duties and composition of the Committee are set out in Standing Order 177, which replaced the former Standing Order 21A with the adoption of new Standing Orders from 1 December 2015.
- 1.5 On 16 September 2015, the Assembly resolved that the Public Accounts Committee's six Members would comprise two Government Members, two Opposition Members and two Members who are not Members of the Government or the Opposition, and that the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee is not to be a Member of the Government or the Opposition. These changes were to apply until the end of the session.

¹ Standing Order 177(1)(e)

2 Committee Program

Meetings

2.1 The Public Accounts Committee met 18 times during the reporting period. The details of these meetings are set out below.

MEETING	KEY AGENDA ITEMS AND RESOLUTIONS
Meeting No. 35	• The Department of Housing briefed the Committee on repairs and maintenance contracts for remote housing and the progress of housing construction, rebuilds and refurbishments under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing.
25 August 2015	 The Committee resolved to seek an update from the Department of Health on the Grants Management System.
	The Committee adopted the 2014-15 PAC Annual Report.
	• The Department of the Chief Minister and the Department of Treasury and Finance briefed the Committee on performance reporting in the public sector.
Meeting No. 36	 The Auditor-General briefed the Committee on the findings of her August 2015 Report to the Legislative Assembly.
15 September 2015	• The Committee discussed the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin and agreed that the Chair and Mr Wood would discuss asking the Assembly to amend the terms of reference to allow evidence to be provided in camera during the inquiry hearings.
	Mrs Lambley was elected Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.
	 The Committee discussed options for the Northern Territory hosting the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees (ACPAC) Mid-Term Meeting in 2016.
	 The Committee discussed the Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin and resolved:
Meeting No. 37	$_{\odot}$ To advertise calls for submissions in the NT News.
19 October 2015 (morning)	 To invite the Departments of the Chief Minister, Education, Treasury and Finance, Infrastructure and Sports and Recreation to make submissions.
	 To invite the Australian Football League NT, National Rugby League, National Rugby League NT, Northern Territory Rugby League, Football NT and Touch NT to make submissions.
	 The Committee agreed to develop a discussion paper on performance auditing.
	• The Committee agreed to write to the Leader of Government Business seeking government members for the PAC.
Meeting No. 38	• The Committee discussed the proceedings for the public hearing
19 October 2015	and public forum for the Inquiry into Funding of Rugby Leag Facilities in Darwin and resolved to table an Interim Report Tuesday 17 November 2015 in the Legislative Assembly.
(afternoon)	

MEETING	KEY AGENDA ITEMS AND RESOLUTIONS
	• The Committee held a public hearing for the Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin with witnesses appearing from:
	 Department of Sports and Recreation;
	 Department of Education;
	 Department of the Chief Minister;
	 Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment; and
	 National Rugby League NT and National Rugby League.
Meeting No. 39 12 November 2015	• The Committee discussed the work agenda for the remainder of the 12 th Assembly and resolved to invite chief executives to a hearing in 2016 to discuss the following issues:
	 Palmerston Regional Hospital with particular reference to the funding agreement between the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments, the payment milestones contained in the agreement and the progress of the project.
	 Northern Territory Correctional Industries with particular reference to policies governing these industries and competition with private enterprises.
	 Funding and grants for housing repairs and maintenance in homelands.
Meeting No. 40 16 November 2015	• The Committee discussed amendments to the draft report for the Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin.
Meeting No. 41 17 November 2015	 The Committee adopted the draft report for the Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin.
	• The Committee resolved to hold hearings in the first week of February 2016 to discuss Palmerston Regional Hospital, Northern Territory Correctional Industries and Homelands Funding.
Meeting No. 42	The Auditor-General briefed the Committee on the qualification of audits of the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report.
1 December 2015	• The Committee resolved to host the ACPAC Mid-Term Meeting in Alice Springs on 27-28 April 2016.

MEETING	KEY AGENDA ITEMS AND RESOLUTIONS
	• The Committee held public hearings to discuss Palmerston Regional Hospital, Northern Territory Correctional Industries, Homelands Funding and Latitude Travel with witnesses appearing from:
	 Office of Major Projects, Infrastructure and Investment;
	 Department of Infrastructure;
Meeting No. 43	 Department of Health;
4 February 2016	 Department of Correctional Services;
	 Department of Local Government and Community Services; and
	 Department of the Chief Minister.
	• The Committee resolved to hold follow up hearings regarding Palmerston Regional Hospital and Northern Territory Correctional Industries in April 2016.
Meeting No. 44	• The Committee visited the Darwin Correctional Centre and viewed
5 February 2016	a number of the Correctional Industries operating from the facility.
	• The Committee visited the Alice Springs Correctional Centre and viewed a number of the Correctional Industries operating from the facility.
	• The Committee resolved to inquire into housing repairs and maintenance on town camps in the Northern Territory and to:
Meeting No. 45 16 February 2016	 Advertise for submissions in the NT News, Alice Springs Centralian Advocate, Tennant and District Times and the Katherine Times;
	 Write to town camp housing associations and past and present contract service providers seeking submissions; and
	• To invite the Department of Local Government and Community Services and the Department of Housing to a public hearing in March 2016.
	The Committee held a public hearing for the Inquiry into Housing Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps with witnesses appearing from:
Meeting No. 46	 Department of Local Government and Community Services; and
2 March 2016	 Department of Housing.
	• The Auditor-General briefed the Committee on the findings of her February 2016 Report to the Legislative Assembly.

MEETING	KEY AGENDA ITEMS AND RESOLUTIONS
	The Committee resolved:
	 That the Chair would write to the Department of the Chief Minister regarding outstanding questions on notice for Latitude Travel.
Meeting No. 47	 To publish the answers to questions taken on notice at the hearing on 4 February 2016 regarding Palmerston Regional Hospital and Northern Territory Correctional Industries.
15 March 2016	 To publish the first three submissions received for the Inquiry into Housing Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps.
	 To write to the Chief Executive Officers of selected government departments regarding compliance of annual reporting.
	 That the Chair would write to the Chief Minister regarding the 2016 Estimates arrangements.
	• All Committee members advised they would be attending the 2016 ACPAC Mid-Term Meeting in Alice Springs on 27-28 April 2016.
	• The Committee resolved to publish Town Camps inquiry submission numbers 4 to 6 and 8 to 11.
	• The Committee held a public hearing for the Inquiry into Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps with witnesses appearing from:
	 Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation;
	 Aboriginal Development Foundation Inc.;
	 Kalano Community Association Inc.;
	 Tangentyere Council;
	 Zodiac Business Services;
	 Ingkerreke Commercial;
Maating No. 49	 Central Australian Affordable Housing Company;
Meeting No. 48	 Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service;
11 April 2016	 North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency;
	 Department of Housing; and
	 Department of Local Government and Community Service.
	• The Committee held a public hearing on the Palmerston Regional Hospital with witnesses from:
	 Department of Health;
	 Department of Infrastructure; and
	 Office of Major Projects, Infrastructure and Investment.
	• The Committee held a public hearing on Northern Territory Correctional Industries with witnesses from:
	 Department of Correctional Services.

MEETING	KEY AGENDA ITEMS AND RESOLUTIONS
	• The Auditor-General provided an update to the Committee on the audit program.
Meeting No. 49	The Committee elected Mr Wood deputy chair of the PAC.
19 April 2016	• The Committee resolved to send written questions relating to the Inquiry into Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps to the Department of Housing and the Department of Local Government and Community Services.
	The Committee adopted its report on Repairs and Maintenance of Town Camps.
Meeting No. 50 20 May 2016	• The Committee authorised publication of answers to written questions on Town Camps from the departments of Housing, and Local Government and Community Services; and answers to questions taken on notice by the Department of Health on Palmerston Regional Hospital.
20 may 2010	• The Committee agreed to write to relevant agencies seeking responses to its letter on annual reporting of 11 April 2016.
	• The Committee discussed arrangements for forthcoming Estimates and Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee hearings.
Meeting No. 51	• The Committee authorised the publication of responses to the Committee's letters to departments regarding annual reporting compliance.
26 May 2016	• The Committee agreed to write to the Shareholder Minister for the Power and Water Corporation in relation to why the 2014-15 Annual Report had not been tabled.
Meeting No. 52	The Committee adopted its 2015-16 Annual Report.
23 June 2016	

Auditor-General

- 2.2 The Auditor-General, Ms Julie Crisp, provided four briefings to the Committee during the reporting period. The briefings included findings of agency audits undertaken in the 2015-16 financial year and the disclaimer of opinion in her audit of the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report.
- 2.3 The Auditor-General also attended a number of the Committee's public hearings. The Committee considers that its scrutiny of the public accounts is enhanced by the attendance of the Auditor-General - as it allows the Committee to obtain immediate advice from the Auditor-General in the presence of agency representatives and encourages good communication, further transparency and accountability.
- 2.4 The Auditor-General also provided a presentation to the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees' (ACPAC) Mid-Term Meeting on the forthcoming accounting standard regarding reporting service performance information.

Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees

- 2.5 The Committee hosted the ACPAC Mid-Term Meeting in Alice Springs on 27-28 April 2016. The ACPAC mid-term meetings are held every second year and consider the agenda for the ACPAC Biennial Conference and provide a forum for each jurisdiction to discuss the work and challenges of their Public Accounts Committee. Queensland was scheduled to be host the 2017 ACPAC Biennial Conference.
- 2.6 The meeting was attended by members of Public Accounts Committees and secretariat staff from the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. The secretariat of the Commonwealth committee also participated by teleconference.
- 2.7 The agenda included:
 - Lessons learnt from the 2015 ACPAC Biennial Conference and the draft program for the 2017 Biennial Conference.
 - The establishment of the Commonwealth Association of Public Accounts Committees.
 - Ms Julie Crisp, NT Auditor-General, delivered a presentation on Reporting Service Information and the Australian Accounting Standards Board Exposure Draft ED270.
 - The role of committees in scrutinising public works projects.
 - External reviews of audit offices in different jurisdictions.
 - Comparisons of public accounts committees that are established through legislation or standing orders.
 - Jurisdictional reports on the work of public accounts committees.

Performance Reporting

- 2.8 The Committee has maintained a focus on performance reporting and has received a number of briefings from the Auditor-General on this topic and the changes proposed by the Australian Accounting Standards Board in Exposure Draft 270 *Reporting Service Performance Information.*
- 2.9 The Committee undertook an examination of six departmental annual reports to evaluate their compliance with the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*, Treasurer's Direction F2.1.3 and Treasury Circular B03-03/04. The Committee found that only one of the six annual reports was fully compliant.
- 2.10 The Committee wrote to the Chief Executive of each department outlining its appraisal of the annual report's compliance and seeking information that was deemed to be absent from the report and explanations regarding non-compliance. The Committee published the responses it received.

3 Reports on Hearings

3.1 The Committee held a number of public hearings in 2016 on issues of concern to the Committee that were not subject to a full inquiry. A brief overview of the issues discussed during the hearings are outlined below.

Palmerston Regional Hospital

- 3.2 On 4 February 2016 the Committee heard from the Office of Major Projects, the Department of Infrastructure and the Department of Health about the Palmerston Regional Hospital development.
- 3.3 Issues discussed included:
 - governance arrangements between the departments involved in the project;
 - funding agreement between the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments;
 - timing and achievement of payment milestones contained within the funding agreement, including negotiations to alter the milestones;
 - cost of the project, payments received from the Commonwealth Government and expenditure to date;
 - costs of the connecting headworks associated with the project and internal fit out not accounted for in the \$150 million funding;
 - contracting and subcontracting arrangements;
 - clinical services and staffing to be provided at Palmerston Regional Hospital; and
 - progress of construction.
- 3.4 The Committee received and published answers to questions taken on notice.
- 3.5 At a subsequent public hearing on 11 April 2016 the Committee received updates from the departments on the progress of the Palmerston Regional Hospital since the last public hearing. The Committee's areas of focus during the hearing were the reviewed payment milestones, completion of these milestones and the cost of the project.

Northern Territory Correctional Industries

- 3.6 On 4 February 2016 the Committee heard from the Department of Correctional Services on a number of issues relating to Northern Territory Correctional Industries including:
 - goods and services provided by Correctional Industries in Darwin and Alice Springs;

- competition between Correctional Industries and private enterprises in the open market;
- reduced operating costs of Correctional Industries using prisoner labour which may derive a competitive advantage for the Department of Correctional Services and associated private businesses; and
- absence of an organisational policy to assess potential impacts of new Correctional Industries on private enterprises or to review existing Correctional Industries.
- 3.7 The Committee visited the Darwin and Alice Springs Correctional Centres to view a number of the Correctional Industries that are undertaken in each centre.
- 3.8 The Committee received and published answers to questions taken on notice and received further information from the Commissioner for Correctional Services in response to written questions and about Correctional Services policies.
- 3.9 A subsequent public hearing was held on 11 April 2016 with the Department of Correctional Services where the Committee focussed on issues relating to the development of the Northern Territory Correctional Industries policy and potential economic advantages that may be experienced by private businesses using prison labour within their businesses.

Homelands Funding

- 3.10 On 4 February 2016 the Committee heard from the Department of Local Government and Community Services on a number of aspects of Homelands Program including:
 - funding arrangements for the Homelands Program and expenditure for each component of the program;
 - transfer of financial responsibility for the management of homelands from the Commonweath to the Northern Territory Government as of August 2015 in exchange for a \$154.8 million one-off payment;
 - number of Homelands Extra Allowance applications received, approved and deemed ineligible and common reasons for ineligibility;
 - application process for grants provided through the Homelands Program;
 - service provider compliance with agreed deliverables and reporting requirements;
 - quality assurance processes to ensure that repairs and maintenance works undertaken are of an acceptable standard;
 - Homelands Program policy review; and
 - Indigenous employment provided through the Homelands Program

3.11 The Committee received and published answers to questions taken on notice.

Latitude Travel

- 3.12 On 4 February 2016 the Committee heard from the Department of the Chief Minister regarding government travel expenditure; particularly departmental and ministerial travel booked through Latitude Travel.
- 3.13 The Committee sought information on a range of issues including:
 - fraudulent activities of travel agents through the Northern Territory Pensioner Concession Scheme;
 - audits of government travel including ministerial travel booked by Latitude Travel between 2009 and 2015;
 - directions given to departments to conduct the audit and the adequacy and appropriateness of conducting internal audits;
 - policies relating to ministerial travel and transparency in reporting on ministerial travel;
 - Departmental compliance with the new air travel policy over the first half of the 2015-16 financial year; and
 - introduction of a single corporate provider for booking all government and ministerial travel and the potential impact on local travel businesses.
- 3.14 The Committee received and published answers to questions taken on notice.

4 Inquiry Referrals

Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin

- 4.1 On 28 August 2015, the Legislative Assembly referred to the Public Accounts Committee (as amended 15 September) that the Public Accounts Committee investigate all matters relating to the funding of rugby league facilities in Darwin. This would include:
 - The original budget allocation for new facilities at Marrara Sporting Complex; and
 - The decision to spend \$20 million to upgrade Richardson Park.
- 4.2 The Committee reported on this inquiry to the Legislative Assembly on 17 November 2015.²

Inquiry into Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps

- 4.3 On 16 February 2016 the Committee resolved to inquire into and report on the repairs and maintenance of housing on town camps in the Northern Territory, with particular regard to:
 - a) Timeliness of completing repairs;
 - b) Costs of repairs; and
 - c) Consistency, accessibility and efficiency of administrative arrangements.
- 4.4 The Committee reported on this inquiry to the Legislative Assembly on 25 May 2016.³

² http://www.nt.gov.au/lant/parliamentary-business/committees/public%20accounts/public-accountsreports.shtml

³ http://www.nt.gov.au/lant/parliamentary-business/committees/public%20accounts/public-accounts-reports.shtml