



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Public Accounts Committee

Annual Report

2022-23

July 2023

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Chair's Preface

The primary focus of the Public Accounts Committee during the 2022-23 financial year was the completion of the Inquiry into Local Decision Making (LDM). The inquiry was initiated by the Committee in June 2021, however, in February 2022 the Committee resolved to defer any action in relation to the inquiry to July 2022 due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions. The Committee travelled to Yirrkala and Alyangula in October 2022 to hold public hearings with stakeholder organisations and speak with community members about their experiences with LDM. The Committee had intended to visit other remote communities, however, a number of visits were cancelled due to unforeseen 'sorry business'. The Committee tabled its report in May 2023 which included eight recommendations for the Government regarding Local Decision Making and the coordination and implementation of Aboriginal Affairs policies more broadly.



During the reporting period the Committee received two briefings from the Auditor-General on matters raised in her reports tabled in the Legislative Assembly. I thank the Auditor-General for the high quality and professional assistance she has provided to the Committee.

There were a number of Committee membership changes during the reporting period. I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by the former Member for Arafura, Mr Costa, who participated in the Inquiry into Local Decision Making from its outset but sadly passed away in December 2022. I would also like to thank my fellow Committee members for their efforts to ensure matters of public interest are investigated and reported on.



Joel Bowden MLA
Chair

Committee Members

	Mr Joel Bowden MLA: Member for Johnston	
	Party	Territory Labor
	Committee Membership	
	Standing	Public Accounts (Chair) Legal and Constitutional Affairs
	Mr Brent Potter MLA: Member for Fannie Bay	
	Party	Territory Labor
	Committee Membership	
	Standing	Public Accounts (Deputy Chair) Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Chair) Standing Committee on the ICAC (Deputy Chair)
	Mrs Robyn Lambley MLA: Member for Araluen	
	Party	Independent
	Committee Membership	
	Standing	Public Accounts House Standing Orders (Deputy Chair)
	Mr Bill Yan MLA: Member for Namatjira	
	Party	Country Liberals
	Committee Membership	
	Standing	Public Accounts
	Mr Dheran Young MLA: Member for Daly	
	Party	Territory Labor
	Committee Membership	
	Standing	Public Accounts House (Deputy Chair) Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Deputy Chair)
<p>On 22 August 2022 the Member for Fong Lim, Hon Mark Monaghan MLA, was discharged from the Committee and the Member for Fannie Bay, Mr Brent Potter MLA, was appointed. Following the passing of the former Member for Arafura, Mr Costa, on 10 February 2023 the Member for Daly, Mr Dheran Young MLA, was appointed to the Committee.</p>		

Committee Secretariat

First Clerk Assistant:	Mr Russell Keith
Committee Secretary:	Ms Julia Knight
Senior Research Officer:	Ms Elise Dyer
Administration/Research Officer:	Mrs Melissa Campaniello (June 2022 – October 2022)
	Mr Caelan Ikin (November 2022 – June 2023)
Administration Assistant:	Ms Kim Cowcher
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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 1995* and the *Audit Act 1995*
 - (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 six¹ 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 Assembly resolution of 20 October 2020 provided that the Committee would have seven Members. Assembly resolution of 23 February 2021 provided that the Committee would have five Members.

Sessional Order 12

Action on Petition

Standing Order 121 is suspended and the following applies:

- (1) After a petition has been read in the Assembly, any Member may move, without notice, that the petition be referred to the Public Accounts Committee for consideration as to whether the petition should be debated.
- (2) If the committee recommends to the Assembly that the petition should be debated, the recommendation of the Committee will be notified to the Clerk who will read the recommendation to the Assembly at the commencement of the next meeting day, where any Member may, without notice, move the report be adopted.
- (3) If the motion is agreed, the debate on the petition will be set down on the Notice Paper as an order of the day on the following meeting day of the Assembly to be considered at the time in the Routine of Business made available at item 8 for Debates on Petitions and Responses to Petitions.
- (4) When the order of the day is called on, the Member who moved that the Assembly adopt the recommendation will move that the Assembly note the petition. This motion cannot be amended.
- (5) The debate may comprise a maximum of two Members speaking for up to five minutes each and two other Members speaking for up to three minutes each.

Adopted 20 October 2020

1 Introduction

Establishment and Functions of Committee

- 1.1 The Public Accounts Committee was established by the Assembly on 20 October 2020 under Standing Order 177.
- 1.2 The duties of the Public Accounts Committee are 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.'²
- 1.4 The Committee also considers whether petitions referred to it by any Member of the Assembly should be debated in the Assembly.

² Standing Order 177(1)(e)

2 Matters followed up by the Committee

Meetings

- 2.1 The Public Accounts Committee met 12 times during the reporting period. The details of these meetings are contained in the Associated Minutes of Proceedings tabled alongside this report.

Auditor-General's Briefings

- 2.2 The Auditor-General, Mrs Julie Crisp, provided two private briefings to the Committee during the reporting period on the findings of agency audits reported to the Assembly from July 2022 to June 2023.

Infrastructure Procurement

- 2.3 A primary duty of the Committee is to examine the accounts and expenditure of the Northern Territory. Government agencies regularly outsource the management and construction of infrastructure projects to private sector construction firms. The Northern Territory Government Procurement Framework, Procurement Legislation and Directions establish the mandatory requirements that agencies must follow when undertaking procurement activities. The Auditor-General regularly undertakes audits of government procurement activities and programs, and provides recommendations on how to improve the management of procurement processes.
- 2.4 A considerable amount of the Northern Territory's budget is expended on infrastructure projects. In light of this, the Committee requested a private briefing from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to gain a better understanding of the NT Procurement Framework and its application to infrastructure procurement. The private briefing was provided on 31 March 2023.

3 Inquiry into Local Decision Making

- 3.1 In June 2021 the Committee resolved to undertake an inquiry into Local Decision Making (LDM) in accordance with the following terms of reference:

The Public Accounts Committee will inquire into and report on the implementation and future of the Local Decision Making (LDM) Framework, having particular regard to:

1. the progress, achievements, challenges and future potential of LDM implementation across the Northern Territory.
2. how to foster community and leadership interest in and commitment to new LDM agreements.
3. the impact of technology, Treaty, Truth-Telling and Voice on LDM development.

- 3.2 In anticipation of an inquiry, in May 2021 the Assembly resolved that:

Standing Order 193 (2) is suspended insofar as it would otherwise prevent the Member for Mulka attending the Public Accounts Committee's deliberative or in camera meetings regarding any inquiry into Local Decision Making or related matters.

- 3.3 The Committee received 29 submissions and over the course of the inquiry held 7 public hearings across the Northern Territory including in Darwin, Alice Springs, Yirrkala and Alyangula. The Committee had intended to visit remote communities in all regions across the Territory, however, COVID-19 related travel restrictions and unforeseen 'sorry business' prevented the Committee from undertaking this travel. Meeting with stakeholders and community members in remote communities provided the Committee with insights that could not have been gained through only reading submissions and holding public hearings in Darwin. One of the key takeaway messages for the Committee was the need for governments and Aboriginal communities to not only work together, but to learn from each other as well.

- 3.4 The Committee completed the inquiry during this reporting period and tabled its report in the Legislative Assembly on 18 May 2023. Based on the evidence provided over the course of the inquiry, the Committee found that there was considerable support for the principles underpinning the LDM Framework and the Government's commitment to transform the way it works with Aboriginal communities. However, the evidence provided by stakeholders illustrated there were concerns about the Framework and how it is being implemented. The Committee made eight recommendations to the Government regarding Local Decision Making and the coordination and implementation of Aboriginal Affairs policies more broadly.³

³ Further information about this inquiry including submissions, hearing transcripts and the Committee's report can be found at <https://parliament.nt.gov.au/committees/list/PAC/LDM>.

4 Petitions

4.1 Pursuant to Sessional Order 12(1), petitions read in the Legislative Assembly may be referred to the Public Accounts Committee for consideration as to whether the petition should be debated in the Assembly. The table below details the petitions considered by the Committee during the reporting period.

No.	Title	Status
13	Opposing the passing of the Public and Environmental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2022	Noted
14	Cease the Incorporation of Local government to the Cox-Daly and Marrakai-Douglas Daly areas	Noted
15	Upgrade and sealing of the balance of Mermaid Circuit (Dundee Beach)	Noted
16	Northern Territory Government to rescind its decision to recall the \$12m grant for the Darwin Turf Club Grandstand	Noted
17	Immediate establishment of permanent police presence at Karama Shopping Centre	Noted
18	Provide suitable disability toilets and change facilities	Noted
19	Moratorium on the current housing development proposal for Lee Point	Noted
20	Re-open public amenities at the Darwin River Dam	Noted
21	Protect the Litchfield-Finniss region from uranium and lithium mining	Noted
22	Protect religious freedom and parental rights in the NT	Noted
23	Levels of criminal activity in township of Katherine	Noted