



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

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LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Public Briefing Transcript

Inquiry into the Lands and Planning Legislation Amendment (Red Tape Reduction) Bill 2026

8.15 am – 8.45 am, Monday 31 August 2026

Litchfield Room, Level 3, Parliament House

Members: Mr Clinton Howe MLA, Deputy Chair, Member for Drysdale
Justine Davis MLA, Member for Johnston
Mr Dheran Young MLA, Member for Daly
Mrs Laurie Zio MLA, Member for Fannie Bay

Substitution: Mr Andrew Mackay MLA, Member for Goyder, for Mrs Oly Carlson MLA,
Chair, Member for Wanguri

Witnesses: *Department of Lands, Planning and Environment*
Jennifer Harlock: Executive Director Planning
Sally Graetz: Director Lands Planning
Mark Meldrum: Executive Director Land Services
Dawna Turner: Director Land Services Reform

**INQUIRY INTO THE LANDS AND PLANNING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (RED TAPE REDUCTION)
BILL 2026
Department of Lands, Planning and Environment**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome everyone to this public briefing into the Lands and Planning Legislation Amendment (Red Tape Reduction) Bill 2026.

I welcome to the table to give evidence to the committee from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, Jennifer Harlock, Executive Director, Planning; Sally Graetz, Director, Lands Planning; Mark Meldrum, Executive Director, Land Services; and Dawna Turner, Director, Land Services Reform. Thank you for coming before the committee. We appreciate you taking the time to speak to the committee and look forward to hearing from you today.

This is a formal proceeding of the committee and the protection of parliamentary privilege and the obligation not to mislead the committee apply. This is a public briefing and is being webcast through the Assembly's website. A transcript will be made for the use of the committee and may be put on the committee's website. If at any time during the hearing you are concerned that what you will say should not be made public, you may ask the committee to go into a closed session and take your evidence in private.

Could you please each state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing.

Mr MELDRUM: Mark Meldrum, Executive Director, Land Services, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

Ms HARLOCK: Jennifer Harlock, Executive Director, Planning.

Ms GRAETZ: Sally Graetz, Director, Lands Planning.

Ms TURNER: Dawna Turner, Director, Lands Services Reform.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Ms Harlock, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr MELDRUM: I will make the opening statement, thank you, Chair.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Mr MELDRUM: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee and provide a briefing on the Lands and Planning Legislation Amendment (Red Tape Reduction) Bill 2026. Through this briefing our intention is to provide to the committee a short overview of the key amendments contained in the Bill.

The Bill delivers targeted reforms across key Lands and Planning legislation to streamline approvals and decision-making processes and respond to recommendations from the Ombudsman NT investigation report titled 'Can we fix it? Building certification in the NT'.

The Bill amends the *Building Act 1993*, the Building Regulations 1993, the *Place Names Act 1967*, the *Planning Act 1999* and the *Valuation of Land Act 1963*, and repeals the Valuation of Land Regulations 1981.

The reforms in the Bill will improve administrative efficiency, certainty and effectiveness of Lands and Planning legislation by removing unnecessary administrative processes, streamlining regulatory processes and addressing technical and operational issues that have been identified through administration of the various legislation. As regulators, we recognise the importance of legislation that is clear and easy to interpret and apply. The Bill addresses some of the known issues that people and businesses have been facing for some time.

First, I would like to outline the *Building Act* and Building Regulations amendments. For context, in November 2024 the Ombudsman NT released the investigation report into building certification, titled 'Can we fix it? Building certification in the NT'. This report considers what building certification means in terms of the ongoing quality, safety and health of a building. The report made five recommendations, four of which are related to the legislative change, these being:

1. The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment give priority to developing a legislative solution to the current impracticality of achieving certification for legacy base buildings.

2. That the proposed legislative solution provides adequate protections around the safety, health and amenity of legacy base buildings.
3. That the department consider the merits of additional legislative measures to ensure appropriate checks are made on an ongoing and regular basis to ensure the continuing safety, health and amenity of buildings used for public assembly.
4. That the department consider issues relating to timing of NT Fire and Rescue Service inspections and the carrying out of certification remotely in any review of certification requirements.

Changes to the *Building Act* and regulations proposed in the Bill respond to these recommendations, which I will talk through now.

There are different types of occupancy certification that can be obtained for building work: an occupancy permit; a certificate of substantial compliance; a certificate of existence; and temporary occupancy. The key changes in the Bill address current issues with certificates of existence and temporary occupancy.

A certificate of existence certifies that the existing building work meets a minimum level of safety, health and amenity and is suitable to be occupied. At the moment, a certificate of existence cannot be granted for building work completed without a building permit if the work was completed after 1 May 2016 or for buildings of a public nature such as commercial and industrial buildings.

The changes in the Bill expand occupancy pathways by removing current restrictions. Certificates of existence can be granted for building work completed after 1 May 2016 for work that did not require a building permit at the time of construction and for public type buildings identified in the National Construction Code as Importance Level 3 or 4. Technical standards will be specified in the Building Regulations to assist building certifiers to assess that minimum levels of safety, health and amenity are met.

Changes are also proposed to requirements for buildings and temporary structures used for public assembly. Currently, the legislation requires that for buildings, places or temporary structures used for public assembly an occupancy permit is required.

Amendments proposed allow for other types of occupancy, such as a certificate of substantial compliance, a certificate of existence or temporary occupancy to be suitable. The Bill also exempts from requiring occupancy certification, simple temporary structures used for public assembly that are a marquee or shade structure that does not have tiered seating or fixed internal structures. Other changes are made to clarify that temporary occupancy can be granted for temporary structures in addition to buildings.

With regard to the timing of the NT Fire and Rescue Service inspections in the certification process, at the moment building certifiers are only required to seek a report from the service before issuing a building permit. This is not required for standalone residential homes and residential apartments that are three storeys or less.

The changes in the Bill provide for the building certifier to have the ability to request the NT Fire and Rescue Service to report at the occupancy certification stage as well, so they can be sure that the constructed works meet fire safety requirements. The amendments to the Bill provide a robust process that strengthen transparency and accountability and clarify requirements.

Changes allow for the fire service to undertake an inspection and notify of any extensions required to the standard 10-day timeframe. If an extension is required then the timeframe for building certifiers to make a decision on the application for building permits and occupancy certification is also extended.

Another key change for building legislation is enhanced investigation powers and functions for the Director of Building Control. The Bill modernises the legislation through the inclusion of general investigation powers for the director. This change will allow the director to investigate a matter not subject to a building practitioner complaint, if the director considers it appropriate to do so. The amendment supports proactive investigations and monitoring of the work of building practitioners and the ability to enforce compliance where required.

There are other minor changes to the building legislation to address discrepancies related to building certification and proposed changes to fees to reflect the current cost of services provided. I will not go through all these changes, but I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Next, I will talk about the changes to the *Place Names Act*. The Place Names Committee is responsible for ensuring that the views of interested persons have been sought on all place-naming submissions before making a report to the minister recommending the naming of a place. At the moment, the *Place Names Act* provides a single pathway for all naming requests, which is not proportionate to differences in complexity and risk. Many of the naming submissions are considered low risk and do not require the level of stakeholder view and committee oversight that they currently receive.

The amendments in the Bill provide for low-risk place names to be assessed differently from complex place names. Low-risk place names include roads and neighbourhood parks which are predominantly names in new developments as they are constructed. Complex place names include geographic or topographical features—for example, mountains, rivers or valleys; suburbs or localities; public cemeteries; public infrastructure associated with transport facilities; educational institutions; medical institutions or nursing homes; or a place of public or historic interest.

The amendments in the Bill clarify the meaning of ‘place’ so that naming of low-risk places can be assessed differently from the naming of complex places. The Bill inserts new provisions to provide for the Surveyor-General to make reports to the minister relating to the naming of low-risk places.

These changes also allow for the Surveyor-General to refer a place to the committee to make a report to the minister. The Surveyor-General may do this for place names that are considered sensitive or significant and require consideration by the committee—for example, the naming of a major road which would attract a high level of public interest or a proposal to rename an existing road that would impact on the addresses of owners, residents and businesses. Changes are proposed to clarify that committee reports to the minister are for naming of complex places or a naming that has been referred to the committee by the Surveyor-General.

Complex place name submissions will continue to require the views of interested persons to be sought and considered by the committee before a recommendation is made to the minister. Low-risk place names will no longer require consultation with interested persons. However, I should clarify that a commemorative place name—that is, a place that is named in commemoration of a person who has passed away—will still require that the views of family or descendants have been sought. This is for both low-risk and complex place names.

The Bill includes changes to allow the minister to delegate powers to the Surveyor-General to approve low-risk place naming. This change simplifies the approval process and will reduce approval timeframes. The minister’s ability to direct the committee to consider certain names or recommend specific names will be amended to an ability to direct the Surveyor-General to provide advice on a proposed name without consulting interested persons.

Other minor amendments modernise the *Place Names Act*. The changes include transferring the responsibility for the place names register and notification of naming from the committee to the Surveyor-General. The Surveyor-General is a member of the committee and oversees the Place Names Unit within the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. The Place Names Unit already undertakes these administrative tasks on behalf of the committee. The changes support operational efficiencies and clarify responsibilities.

I will now talk through some of the key changes in the *Planning Act*. These amendments do not alter the functional purpose and objectives of the Act or the planning framework; instead, amendments seek to address current process inefficiencies and remove unnecessary red tape, whilst ensuring necessary safeguards and regulatory powers are effective.

New delegation powers from the Northern Territory Planning Commission is one example of how the Bill seeks to address process inefficiency. Currently, the Planning Commission is unable to delegate any of its powers and functions under the Act. For the majority of its work this does not present any issues; however, in its more routine role as reporting body on behalf of the minister, where it receives submissions, holds hearings and reports back to the minister on consultation about planning scheme amendments, the process lacks the flexibility that delegating some of this work would allow. By providing similar powers to those that already exist for the Development Consent Authority, the Planning Commission will be able to delegate some decisions to the chairperson or another member, enabling more efficient decision-making.

Another key change is to more closely align the Planning Commission and Development Consent Authority statutory hearing and meeting processes. Clarifying the circumstances when hearings and meetings should be held in a consistent way will make it easier for all participants to navigate the planning system and avoid unnecessary meetings and hearings being held about simple planning proposals.

A significant enhancement to the Planning Commission process also removes the requirement for the Planning Commission to notify all parties if it intends not to hold a hearing and allow for further responses. For otherwise straightforward proposals, this would mitigate delays caused by a single party or small number of submissions and enable the Planning Commission to make its decision once and carry on.

Together, these amendments support a more simplified and certain planning system so that all stakeholders know what to expect.

Another change relates to the initiation of investigations and enforcement under the *Planning Act*. At present, investigations can only be initiated on receipt of a complaint. This limits government's ability for more responsive action to identified contraventions. A new enforcement pathway that enables government to bring matters before the Development Consent Authority for investigation will address this.

In addition, shortening the response timeframe for show cause notices will result in prompter action and more effective and efficient resolution of enforcement matters.

Other efficiency-based amendments include reducing the time that the minister has to consider planning scheme amendment proposals from 90 days to a more contemporary 30-day period; extending the standard term of appointment for Planning Commission and Development Consent Authority members from two years to four years; and providing more flexibility on how a quorum is achieved at consent authority meetings. Longer terms of appointment better align with longer-term projects led by the Planning Commission and provide greater certainty in decision-making for the consent authority decisions.

Other amendments also included clarify requirements for existing processes that are often misinterpreted, are unnecessarily restrictive or have been included to address identified legislative deficiencies. I will not go through each of these, but I am happy to respond to any questions.

Lastly, the Bill makes minor amendments to the *Valuation of Land Act* and repeals the Valuation of Land Regulations. The changes proposed modernise the legislation as follows.

The changes clarify requirements for the service of notices to allow for notices to be sent by electronic mail. This will mean that you can receive your notice of valuation by email rather than by post.

The Bill amends the Act to specify a fee for obtaining a certified copy of an entry in the valuation roll. The fee is currently specified in the regulations. By including it in the Act, the regulations can be repealed.

The changes also adjust a couple of penalty and revenue amounts from a dollar value to penalty units and revenue units in line with contemporary drafting.

In summary, the Bill before the committee is a practical reform package. The Bill delivers a system that is clearer, more certain and more reliable, and should give all Territorians confidence in how decisions are made.

We are happy to assist the committee with any questions.

Mrs ZIO: Thank you very much, Mr Meldrum, for that very comprehensive overview. I will open up the floor to questions.

J DAVIS: Thank you, that was very useful. I think you touched on this, but how is 'low-risk' defined for the place names? Where is that outlined, what you read out today?

Ms TURNER: Do you mean in the Bill?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Ms TURNER: The Bill separates—it is in the section regarding 'meaning of place'. We are essentially separating the places that the Surveyor-General can make recommendations for compared to the committee. For the Surveyor-General, it is around a road, a thoroughfare, a laneway and an urban park. There are two things—do you want to look at the Bill?

J DAVIS: I wanted to be pointed to the specific—is that listed in the ...

Ms TURNER: In the Act currently, in the section there is 'Meaning of place'. We are separating it, so that when we are talking about the roads, thoroughfares and laneways, that would be the Surveyor-General. There is another one which we are splitting which refers to parks. We are talking about neighbourhood small parks, but the provision in the Act currently also includes sporting grounds or large recreational areas, which would still be the responsibility of the committee. It is separating out the small urban parks for the Surveyor-General.

J DAVIS: Places names are often—there are issues around them, I cannot think of what the word is. If people have concerns, what will the process be then?

Ms TURNER: The low-risk ones that we are talking about are generally new suburb developments, so there are no residents who currently live there. Generally, there is naming theme that is applied. When we look at the new suburb of Asche, they have a flora and bush medicine naming theme, so we have road names like Plumbush Street. Those ones are considered to be non-controversial ...

J DAVIS: That is the word I was looking for.

Ms TURNER: Yes. When it comes to the significant names—we are talking about the name of the suburb itself—people care, and it is usually commemorative naming. Those ones are still with the committee with the full consultation required.

J DAVIS: My question was: if there is a name that the Surveyor-General determines is in a low-risk area that potentially could be controversial, what is the process then?

Ms TURNER: The process is the Surveyor-General can refer a name to the committee for consideration.

J DAVIS: Will it then be up to them to make that decision?

Ms TURNER: Yes.

Mrs ZIO: I know this was through red-tape reduction and doing reviews of things, can you talk through the consultation that happened, how this process came to be and the recommendations that you put forward?

Mr MELDRUM: With the building certification amendments, we did two rounds of consultation with the industry, particularly building certifiers who were most affected by these changes. The first round was in response to the Ombudsman's report. The second round of consultation about the fire department, we sat down and worked through with the fire department and then we went out and consulted with industry on that. We did a couple of rounds of consultation over a couple of years since the report was issued in 2024.

J DAVIS: My question is in relation to lowering the certification standards for public gatherings. The minister's statement referenced things like BASSINTEGRASS and Darwin Festival. Presumably, they are the kind of things you are talking about. In the first reading speech the minister said for events like Darwin Festival and BASSINTEGRASS, the changes will no longer require the highest level of certification.

Mr MELDRUM: As I read out in the opening statement, there are changes proposed in the Bill for temporary structures to be used as public assembly, and currently the legislation requires a high level of certification. The second part of it is for the temporary structures used for public assembly, so marquee and shade structures that do not have tiered seating. I went to a festival thing which was not tiered seating, for example. It did not have a shade structure, so it was a bit of a weird one, but if they did want to put a shade structure over it, they would not require the level of certification. Because it is at a higher bar at the moment, we are lowering the bar for that type of thing. I have not seen the media release ...

J DAVIS: It was in parliament when he gave the first reading.

Mr MELDRUM: Thank you.

J DAVIS: I think you said, when you were giving your outline, that if there is tiered seating or marquees?

Mr MELDRUM: Exempt simple temporary structures used for public assembly that are a marquee or shade structure and does not have tiered seating or fixed internal structures from requiring occupancy certification.

Mr YOUNG: Going back to place names, I am trying to understand if the committee will be consulting with First Nations people if there are specific cultural sites for those place names and how that would be worked

through for the committee. The second question is: usually will that the report go to the minister with recommendations and they have the final say or can they also recommend a name to the committee?

Ms TURNER: The naming as it relates to potentially using Indigenous names or on Indigenous land will continue to require consultation. Normally, it is not the committee that would undertake the consultation; it would be whoever is proposing the name. The committee requires that the consultation has occurred before putting a recommendation through to the minister. When the committee puts a recommendation through to the minister, it is a recommendation to name and then it is up to the minister to determine whether he or she would or would not name it as recommended. There is ability for the minister to push it back to the committee to be reconsidered.

Mr YOUNG: The other part to the question was: can a minister recommend a name to the committee for consideration? I get they can make the final decision.

Ms TURNER: I think I understand what you are asking. At the moment, the Act allows for the minister to direct the committee to make a recommendation about a certain name or specific name. The committee is then obligated to make that recommendation to the minister. The Bill makes amendments to that so that the minister has the ability to direct the Surveyor-General to give advice on a name. The Surveyor-General would then have a look at it and consider whether it was a low-risk or a complex name and provide advice on how to progress that name.

Mr YOUNG: I suppose there is no obligation to consult with First Nations communities around place naming or place names?

Ms TURNER: The legislation at the moment requires that views be sought for specific names. If it is falling under that complex name, it would still require those views to be sought.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, everyone, for coming in today; we appreciate your time. If we have any further questions, we will write to you.