

TANGENTYERE  
COUNCIL  
SUBMISSION



# Submission

To the Public Accounts Committee  
Inquiry into Local Decision-Making  
(LDM)



WORKING  
TOGETHER  
WALKING  
TOGETHER

Citation- Flouris, A. (2021). Tangentyere Council, Submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into Local Decision-Making (LDM). Alice Springs, NT: Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation.

## Table of contents

Executive Summary .....	3
The Tangentyere Context.....	4
Local Decision-Making (LDM) in the Alice Springs Town Camps .....	5
A New Lens - Town Camper Wellness .....	6
The Town Camp Wellness Framework (The Framework) .....	6
The Framework Dimensions.....	7
LDM supports a Place-based and Regional Approach.....	8
Opportunities of our LDM Approach .....	8
Strengthening Opportunities .....	9
Recommendations .....	10

# Executive Summary

Tangentyere Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into Local Decision-Making (LDM).

For more than 40 years Tangentyere Council has been the leading Aboriginal Organisation that supports the Alice Springs Town Camps and has proven the value of self-determination of Town Campers through re-empowerment and community control. In July 2020, we executed a Local Decision-Making (LDM) Agreement with the Northern Territory Government (NTG), and began the undertaking of our unique LDM process that genuinely places Aboriginal leadership and community control at the centre of reform. It is a committed avenue for collaboration and coordination amongst all relevant stakeholders, with the aim of improving outcomes for Town Campers. We therefore commend the NTG for developing the LDM Framework and support the ongoing partnership with Town Campers to progress to transition government services and programs to Aboriginal community control.

Our LDM approach is unique and Tangentyere Council has two roles throughout this process:

1. As a frontline service provider we are in strong position to hear from community members and stakeholders about the daily opportunities for LDM. We are therefore incorporating a place-based focus, with localised Town Camp-specific workshops, priority outcomes and planning.
2. As a peak for Town Camps, representing all 16 Town Camps in the Alice Springs Region, we are also taking a regional and sector-wide approach.

The opportunities of our unique approach are detailed in this document, however, to capitalise on these opportunities, genuine resourcing and expertise are needed to support the capacity building of governance structures, as well as adequate resourcing in the transition of services and programs. Transparency is also integral in transitioning programs and services to community control. This includes prompt data sharing and service mapping to improve local understanding of each sector as relevant to community members, including the relevant funding envelop. The key objectives and significance of the LDM Framework must also be clearly and regularly communicated across the NTG agencies. In doing so, NTG agencies should swiftly respond to the community-driven strategies and ensure timely but supported transition of services to community-control.

In strengthening the existing LDM Framework, Tangentyere Council makes the following specific recommendations:

1. Well-resourced and ongoing opportunities for governance capacity development for the development and implementation of LDM priorities.
2. Prompt data sharing and service mapping to improve local understanding of each sector as appropriate to community members, including the relevant funding envelop.
3. Genuine engagement from all levels of government such that the community control requests are being heard and implemented without delay.
4. The most appropriate staff representing the NTG and partnering with organisations and communities are those in positions of authority and decision-making power.
5. LDM is held at the forefront of all NTG agency reform, including policy development.
6. The development of place-based communication strategies to ensure that community consultations capture a variety of community voices and ideas.
7. The completion of the NTG Aboriginal Procurement Policy.

# The Tangentyere Context

TCAC was incorporated in 1979 as a service provider and umbrella organisation for the Town Camp Housing Associations, and these associations are the corporate members of the Council. Tangentyere is an Arrernte word meaning 'Working Together'.

40 years on and we are a strong Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) delivering human services and social enterprise activities for the benefit of Aboriginal people from Central Australia in the Northern Territory. We have 16 Town Camp corporate members and over 600 individual members. We offer service provision to approximately 285 individual households in the Town Camps and in excess of 10,000 people from a region that covers approximately 873,894 square kilometres having strong cultural links into remote Central Australia.

TCAC is a proud ACCO, and our well established human services are trusted by community members for the organisation's high level of cultural competency. We recognise that culture and community form an integral part of an individual's identity, and recognition of their importance in terms of potential impact on overall wellness is therefore vital.

We deliver a wide range of services and participatory development activities in Alice Springs, its Town Camps and throughout Central Australia, including:

1. Community Centres
2. Local Decision-Making
3. Early Childhood Education
4. Youth Development
5. Child Protection and Wellbeing, Kinship Care and Out of Home Care
6. AOD Harm Minimisation
7. Community Safety and Wellbeing
8. Violence Prevention
9. Tenancy Support
10. Aged Care
11. Food Security
12. Disability Support
13. Municipal and Essential Services
14. Repairs and Maintenance
15. Construction
16. Employment and Training
17. Land and Learning
18. Social Policy Analysis and Applied Research

We have a strong commitment to the employment of local Aboriginal staff, valuing this as a core feature of any culturally competent service, as well as the capacity development of Aboriginal people. At current, 56% of the TCAC workforce of 249 people is Aboriginal.

The Town Camps of Alice Springs are the home of Aboriginal people from a diverse number of language groups. In the majority of cases, Town Campers are multilingual and English is seldom the first language spoken in Town Camp houses. Nine language groups are represented within our membership, as shown in the table overleaf.

TCAC was a finalist in the 2016 Reconciliation Australia, Indigenous Governance Awards and is one of the 8 largest Aboriginal Corporations in Australia.

Figure 1: Language Groups in the Alice Springs Town Camps

Name	Alias	Location Type	Languages
Akngwertnarre	Morris Soak	Town Camp	Warlpiri
Anthelk-Ewlpaye	Charles Creek	Town Camp	Arrernte, Anmatyerr
Anthepe	Drive In	Town Camp	Arrernte, Warlpiri, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara
Aper-Alwerrkngge	Palmer's	Town Camp	Arrernte
Ewyenper-Atwatye	Hidden Valley	Town Camp	Arrernte, Warlpiri
Ilparpa	Ilparpa	Town Camp	Arrernte, Pertame, Luritja
Ilperle Tyathe	Warlpiri	Town Camp	Warlpiri
Ilpeye-Ilpeye	Golders	Town Camp	Arrernte
Ilyperenye	Old Timers	Town Camp	Arrernte, Warlpiri, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara
Inarlenge	Little Sisters	Town Camp	Arrernte, Warlpiri, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara
Irrkerlantye	White Gate	Town Camp	Arrernte
Itwiyethwenge	Basso's	Town Camp	Arrernte, Kaytetye, Anmatyerr, Alyawarr
Karnte	Karnte	Town Camp	Luritja, Pitjantjatjara
Lhenpe Artnwe	Hoppy's	Town Camp	Arrernte, Pertame, Luritja, Anmatyerr
Mount Nancy		Town Camp	Arrernte, Kaytetye, Anmatyerr, Alyawarr
Mpwetyerre	Abbott	Town Camp	Arrernte, Warlpiri, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara, Warumungu
Nyewente	Trucking Yards	Town Camp	Arrernte, Luritja
Yarrenyty Arltere	Larapinta Valley	Town Camp	Arrernte, Pertame, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara

## Local Decision-Making (LDM) in the Alice Springs Town Camps

Our LDM process places Aboriginal leadership and community control at the centre of reform and is a committed avenue for collaboration and coordination amongst all relevant stakeholders, with the aim of improving outcomes for Town Campers.

For more than 40 years we have proven the value of self-determination of Town Campers through re-empowerment and community control. Following the direction of our Town Camp leadership, we have recently strengthened our approach to service delivery. Our locally-developed Town Camper Wellness Framework now underpins our outcomes-focussed approach to support services, through a formal Agreement with the NT Government (Agreement executed in July 2020) for Local Decision-Making (LDM), and supported locally by the Commonwealth through the NIAA.

A cornerstone of our operations, the Framework highlights the key impact areas for Town Campers which are critical to their wellness – Keeping Country, Shelter, Identity, Camp/Community Leadership, Knowledge, Healing and Community. Through the LDM process, we have initiated a robust consultation with Town Campers to determine localised priorities to improve Town Camper wellness. In partnership with the NT Government, we will support the implementation of these priorities and develop long-term place-based Local Agendas for each Town Camp. Our process includes the development of shared



processes and data gathering tools, measurement systems, targets and timeframes to monitor progress, and improved partnerships with key stakeholders, NGOs, and NT and Commonwealth Governments.

Given our well-established relationships and cultural approaches to innovative program and service design, it is not surprising that 86% of Town Campers surveyed to date in our consultation access Tangentyere Council services as a key support, and we were identified as a key organisation Town Campers would approach regarding child development and wellbeing. Our intimate knowledge of the needs of Town Campers and our ability to codesign solutions to meet those needs are a key feature of our business model.

## A New Lens - Town Camper Wellness

### The Town Camp Wellness Framework (The Framework)

We have self-funded a project to determine the key impact areas for Town Campers, to define what wellness means and looks like in a Town Camp, and the priorities we need to focus on to improve Town Camper wellness. In workshops with senior Town Campers and following the lead of the Board of Directors of TCAC, Self-determination projects were identified as the essential starting point and a number of self-determination projects have begun emerging. Here, we propose the Food Security Plus Program in line with the Shelter domain of the Framework, and have detailed this in the Management Plan.

The Framework is the overall balance within the Town Camp and impacts on the wellness of each individual living there. We know that strong wellness of a Town Camp will improve the wellbeing of individuals living there. From this Framework we have developed a survey tool to contribute to the measurement and understanding of the wellness of individuals and each Town Camp. The domains of the Framework are aligned with the 'Closing the Gap' priorities and considers cross-system priorities such as racism, discrimination and social exclusion, healing and trauma, and the promotion of culture and language. The Framework is underpinned by the premise that strong wellness of a Town Camp will improve the wellbeing of individuals living there. The Framework concepts were workshopped with senior women and men from Town Camps, many of whom are recognised as leaders, and some young people. A total of four workshops were conducted with 38 engagements representing 10 different Town Camps and 8 language groups.



*The Framework is a first of its kind and the Art works which represents this Framework is currently hung in the NT Parliament.*

## The Framework Dimensions

The seven dimensions of the framework required for Town Camp wellness are:



### **Iwenhe unte aneme / IDENTITY**

A positive sense of self and culture underpins all of the other dimensions and is fundamental to overall Town Camp wellbeing. Cultural wellness refers to an ability to both enact one's own cultural values as well as interact effectively with people from different cultures and working towards eliminating racism and systematic discrimination, whilst spiritual wellness is seeking meaning in existence.



### **Apmereanwerne- kenhe anetyeke / KEEPING OUR COUNTRY**

Encompasses the interactions between individuals and their 'habitats' at a local, community and global level, and includes safety in nature, home, work and the community.



### **Apmere / SHELTER**

Access to basic things needed to live a 'normal' life, including financial and occupational wellness, stable and healthy housing, clean water, clothing, healthy food, etc.



### **Akalye anetyeke / KNOWLEDGE**

Formal and informal experiences in the classroom, at home and in community, throughout the course of one's life, to maximise life opportunities. Includes cognitive and creative pursuits to also enrich one's capacity to make decisions, problem solve and maintain mental agility.



### **Apmere tyerrtye mape-kenhe / COMMUNITY**

Embraces positive relationships and connections with families and others and includes love.



### **Utengeanwerne- kenhe mwarre anetyeke / HEALING (MIND, BODY AND SOUL)**

Having one's physical, developmental, psychosocial and mental health needs met to achieve optimal developmental trajectories and opportunities. Includes access to preventative measures and health education as well as access to services to redress emerging health issues.



### **Apmere tyerrtye mape kenhe iwenhe-ke unte awelheme / CAMP/COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

Engagement with peers and community, including governance and decision-making, determining systems and having a voice and say on matters. Includes access to digital systems and technology for social connections.

# LDM supports a Place-based and Regional Approach

Our method is place-based and also takes a regional and sector-wide approach for Town Campers.

The process, in brief includes:

- Invitation to participate in the Wellness survey to every Town Camp household (with the support of Aboriginal researchers who are multilingual). There are approximately 250 occupied houses across the 16 sites. To date, we have engaged with more than 50% of households.
- Feedback from the data collected will also be provided to residents within each Town Camp, and participants will be welcome to attend these sessions if they chose.
- Multiple workshops will then be conducted in every Town Camp, to determine key priorities for each Town Camp to focus on.
- Master planning and safety mapping in partnership with residents, for every Town Camp.
- Concurrently, we are holding regular steering group and implementation working group meetings across each of the wellness domains with key NTG departments, the Commonwealth and relevant agencies, with aim to develop detailed strategies to address the priorities for Town Campers as they arise.
- Our approach therefore has both a community-level focus as well as a regional and sector-wide approach.

## Opportunities of our LDM Approach

Our LDM approach genuinely places Aboriginal leadership and community control at the centre of reform. It is a committed avenue for collaboration and coordination amongst all relevant stakeholders, with the aim of improving outcomes for Town Campers. It incorporates both a place-based focus, with localised Town Camp-specific workshops, priority outcomes and planning, but we also have a regional and sector-wide approach as we are in a position to operate as a peak for Town Camps, representing all 16 Town Camps in the Alice Springs Region.

The opportunities of our unique approach are outlined below:

- Identification of strengths and positive impacts of Town Camper Wellness;
- Identification of overarching priorities and service gaps across 16 sites;
- Genuine community control over government funded services and programs;
- Strengthened internal, regional and local partnerships for joint decision-making of new program/services, procurement, investment and policy development;
- Strengthened internal, regional and local partnerships to improve current service delivery (including MOUs, service agreements and co-design principles);
- Identification of opportunities for improved coordination and collaboration between service systems and agencies;
- Identification of advocacy opportunities;
- Identification of responsibilities and accountabilities of services, programs, agencies and providers funded in the region;
- Identification of capacity-building and community strengthening opportunities;
- Development of shared evaluation measures across Town Camps;



- Informal training of Town Campers as identified through the LDM process (e.g. facilitation skills development);
- Genuine partnership - working in close proximity with NTG so that all government agencies are brought along for the development of the local and regional strategies and so there are no surprises with the programs and services Town Campers recommend transition to community control.
- Potential development of a model for ascertaining community-led solutions and local decision making; and

Completing the LDM consultations as a research project to ensure the process is robust and effective, and complies with national Human Research Ethical Standards.

A strong example of the success of the LDM framework is the case of municipal services for Town Camps. The agreement between the NTG and Tangentyere to transition all Municipal and Essential Services (MES) on the Alice Springs Town Camps is a positive outcome for LDM. Consolidation of MES under TCAC has been an aspiration of our individual and corporate members since the Alice Springs Transformation Plan. This is evidenced through the Town Camp Wellness Surveys and Town Camp AGMs. The alignment of MES and LDM means LDM processes including built environment master-planning sessions yield information that can be immediately actioned.

Through such processes TCAC has been able to identify a range of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) issues that require amelioration and/or mitigation. Some of these issues are within the scope of existing service delivery. The maintenance of street lights is one example of such an issue. TCAC for its part undertakes a quarterly audit of street lights within its MES delivery footprint. TCAC LDM master-planning was able to identify the prevalence of street lights requiring repair on Town Camps outside of its MES delivery footprint. TCAC has reported this issue to the relevant Department and third party provider. This report was accompanied by the recommendation that the third party provider at these sites emulate TCAC quarterly street light audits. LDM in MES service delivery ensures stronger accountability and better reporting mechanisms. MES is one example of a service delivery outcome that benefits from and strengthens LDM. CPTED is a priority for MES on the Town Camps. The consolidation of MES as outlined in the agreement will ensure Local Decision Makers are direct stakeholders in the delivery of MES.

## Strengthening Opportunities

To capitalise on these opportunities, genuine resourcing and expertise must be allocated, firstly to support opportunities for governance skills development. Such resourcing must be ongoing, and not through one-off grants that organisations need to apply for every 6 to 12 months to ensure effective development, implementation and monitoring of the community-driven LDM priorities. Such a commitment from the NTG will ensure a realistic transition of services and programs to community control as it will support the organisation that represents each community, whilst also sharing the power to manage the process. In this way, the NTG will strengthen the community-controlled sector and better equip organisations to enter into opportunities for shared decision-making. The Commonwealth's Empowered Communities (EC) Framework initiated in 2015 supports this model, and provides secure ongoing funding for "backbone organisations" across their EC Regions.

Transparency is also integral in transitioning programs and services to community control. This includes prompt data sharing and service mapping to improve local understanding of each sector as relevant to community members, including the relevant funding envelop. Despite having an LDM Agreement that stipulates the importance and commitment between the NTG and Tangentyere Council to complete these, the process has been slow and will likely delay the development of a number of community-driven priorities and implementation of strategies. The flexibility of the Agreement will, however, allow for regular review and refinement of the process.

The key objectives and significance of the LDM Framework must also be clearly and regularly communicated across the NTG agencies. In doing so, NTG agencies should swiftly respond to the community-driven strategies and ensure timely but supported transition of services to community-control.

In some cases, these requests from the community are clear and well developed, but reluctance from some agencies has slowed down the process significantly. It is therefore essential that the most appropriate staff representing the NTG and partnering with organisations and communities are those in positions of authority and decision-making power.

Further, a clear understanding of LDM across all NTG agencies will ensure that LDM can be held at the forefront of all government reform, such that LDM principles and partnership agreements are being leveraged and strengthened. This will minimise the likelihood that government reform undermines community-derived strategies that have been developed and/or are being implemented.

## Recommendations

1. Well-resourced and ongoing opportunities for governance capacity development for the development and implementation of LDM priorities.
2. Prompt data sharing and service mapping to improve local understanding of each sector as appropriate to community members, including the relevant funding envelop.
3. Genuine engagement from all levels of government such that the community control requests are being heard and implemented without delay.
4. The most appropriate staff representing the NTG and partnering with organisations and communities are those in positions of authority and decision-making power.
5. LDM is held at the forefront of all NTG agency reform, including policy development.
6. The development of place-based communication strategies to ensure that community consultations capture a variety of community voices and ideas.
7. The completion of the NTG Aboriginal Procurement Policy.



**Tangentyere Council**

4 Elder Street  
Alice Springs NT 0870

PO Box 8070  
Alice Springs NT 0871

P 08 8951 4222  
F 08 8952 8521  
E [info@tangentyere.org.au](mailto:info@tangentyere.org.au)

**WORKING  
TOGETHER  
WALKING  
TOGETHER**

