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Public Accounts Committee  
NT Government  
GPO Box 3721  
DARWIN NT 0801

13<sup>th</sup> August 2021

Dear Members

### **Inquiry into Local Decision Making**

We thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry to share our views and experience with the Local Decision Making policy.

The Local Decision Making Agreement (**LDMA**) between the Anindilyakwa Land Council (**ALC**) and the Northern Territory Government (**NTG**) was signed on 14 November 2018 and marked a historic day for the Anindilyakwa people.

Under the LDMA, NTG made a nine year commitment to the Anindilyakwa people to work with them in a meaningful way to transition the delivery of key services to community control, build a future for their children and grandchildren according to local views and traditional culture, and establish harmonious and co-operative relations.

The ultimate vision for the Anindilyakwa people is self-determination. The ALC sees this vision being fulfilled through a treaty, a legally binding instrument that will recognise the Anindilyakwa people as the sovereign owners of the Groote Archipelago and provide for substantive self-governance. The bridge to self-determination and a treaty is through the LDMA.

The LDMA identified six key service delivery areas that would be transferred to community control during the short to medium term. We summarise below the progress achieved to-date and the future potential in each of those six areas.

Despite the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of good progress has been made so far and our commitment to achieving the outcomes agreed under the LDMA remains unwavering.

### **Housing**

Housing is the most progressed of all service delivery areas, and the Implementation Plan was signed on 19 June 2019. Under the LDMA, the ALC established the Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation (**AHAC**), which was put in place to provide a single and equitable housing management system on Groote Eylandt.

AHAC achieved registration as a Community Housing Provider in early 2021, a key milestone for taking responsibility for tenancy management and maintenance services for remote and satellite community houses.





AHAC currently employs 13 people, six of whom are local Aboriginal people, with another seven local Aboriginal people set to be employed when NTG Remote Housing contracts are awarded later this year.

Discussions have also commenced for the transfer of the Township Leases for Angurugu, Umbakumba and Milyakburra to a community-controlled entity, together with the Homelands, which presents a unique opportunity to integrate satellite and community housing management under AHAC.

### **Law, Justice and Rehabilitation**

The Implementation Plan was signed on 19 June 2019 with the objective to increase the involvement and leadership of Anindilyakwa people in the justice system, including access to rehabilitative services.

Groote Eylandt was identified as a trial site for 'Law and Justice Groups' under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Following community consultation, the ALC (together with Social Ventures Australia) developed a model for the Community Justice Group (**CJG**) which will bring together Anindilyakwa people ('champions') with knowledge about the justice system to work towards making the community safer and the justice system fairer for local people. The CJG will listen to community views, work on finding solutions, and remain independent of the ALC, NTG and other local organisations. The key areas of focus for the CJG are:

1. Describing rules for community and beginning dialogue with Police about community expectations and safety.
2. Advising the design of the new Alternative to Custody facility and other diversion programs.
3. Beginning to engage with Courts to inform them about community expectations.

The ALC will partner with the North Australia Aboriginal Justice Agency to support the CJG and strengthen its capacity during the initial period. A suitable site has been identified for the Alternative to Custody facility and works are expected to commence soon.

### **Economic Development**

The Implementation Plan was signed on 19 June 2019 with a vision to create a viable, culturally rich and sustainable two-stream (diversified) economy in the Groote Archipelago, not dependent upon mining royalty income, which is controlled by the Anindilyakwa people.

The key outcomes are:

1. *Winchelsea Mine* – the Traditional Owners are undertaking a joint venture to mine manganese on Winchelsea Island, which is a unique project making the Traditional Owners commercial partners in a mine as opposed to passive royalty recipients. Exploration has been completed and early works are expected to commence soon.
2. *Improved Telecommunications* – the ALC has co-funded works to upgrade the telecommunication backhaul infrastructure for improved reliability and connectivity with the outside world. These works are expected to be completed later this year.





3. *Aquaculture Industry* – discussions have commenced with the private sector to create a large-scale aquaculture industry post-mining, and various trials (tropical rock lobster, trepang, black lipped oyster) are already underway.
4. *Tourism and Logistics Base* – develop a logistics and tourism hub to service the Winchelsea mine, sustain the Aquaculture industry, accommodate staff, and attract high-end tourism to Groote Eylandt.
5. *Future Groote Strategy* – community consultations have commenced to establish the Traditional Owners' vision for Groote Eylandt post-mining, including the development of a long term power solution. The ALC is currently in talks with the private sector to develop a large-scale solar farm capable of sustaining the local economy post-mining.

## Education

The Implementation Plan was signed on 30 April 2020.

Following community consultation, the ALC formed the Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Primary College Aboriginal Corporation to design, build and manage a purpose-built, non-government boarding college in the Groote Archipelago for primary school age children (**Independent Boarding School**).

The parties also agreed to implement a bi-lingual curriculum across the Independent Boarding School and the Anindilyakwa Community Schools, establish an ongoing program to develop and grow Anindilyakwa education workers to engage both preschool-aged and school-aged children who are not in school, and prioritise early childhood development and education as well as bi-lingual education for children aged 0-8.

In early 2021, the National Indigenous Australians Agency approved funding for the Independent Boarding School, which will be situated on Bickerton Island. Funds are to be provided from the Aboriginal Benefits Account and design and construction work is expected to take about 18 months to complete.

## Health

Under the LDMA, it was agreed to transition control and responsibility for health clinics in the Groote Archipelago from NT Health to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation nominated by the Anindilyakwa people.

Discussions for transitioning health services in the Groote Archipelago to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation are well underway, with important input being received from the Anindilyakwa people.

The parties mutually agreed to extend the deadline for finalising the Implementation Plan until 31 October 2021, as a result of delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Local Government

Under the LDMA, it was agreed that the Anindilyakwa people would take responsibility for local government in the Groote Archipelago by the establishment of an Anindilyakwa Regional Local Government Council.

This would see control of local government returned to the Anindilyakwa people, after it was merged with the East Arnhem Regional Council following the introduction of 'super shires' in 2008.





The *Local Government Act 2019* commenced on 1 July 2021 and provides legislative authority for the Administrator or the Minister for Local Government to formally separate the Groote Archipelago out of the East Arnhem Regional Council's boundary area.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions, the planned community consultations for local government reform did not occur and have been rescheduled for late 2021.

We trust that this information is useful to your inquiry and we would welcome any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Hewitt'.

Mark Hewitt  
Chief Executive Officer

