



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**Public Accounts Committee**

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**Annual Report**

**2020-21**

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**September 2021**



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## Chair's Preface

The past year has been one of extraordinary times. A pandemic and lockdowns across Australia including the Territory has changed the way we work and live. However, during the 2020-21 financial year the Public Accounts Committee continued its work and received three briefings from the Auditor-General on matters raised within 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.

The Committee discussed wide and varied options emanating from the Auditor-General briefings and resolved to conduct an inquiry in Local Decision Making. The Committee subsequently received a private briefing from representatives of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet on the Local Decision Making Framework. The Committee will conduct an inquiry into Local Decision Making which will continue into the 2021-22 reporting period.

The Committee also received a private briefing from the Commissioner for Public Employment on the outcomes achieved through the Aboriginal Special Measures Recruitment and Selection Policy.


I would like to thank my fellow Committee members, Members of the Legislative Assembly and especially DLA staff for their efforts to ensure matters of public interest are investigated and reported on.



**Joel Bowden MLA**

**Chair**

## Committee Members

	<b>Mr Joel Bowden MLA:</b> Member for Johnston	
	<b>Party</b>	Territory Labor
	<b>Committee Membership</b>	
	Chair Chair Deputy Chair	Public Accounts Committee Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee House
	<b>Mr Mark Monaghan MLA:</b> Member for Fong Lim	
	<b>Party</b>	Territory Labor
	<b>Committee Membership</b>	
	Deputy Chair Deputy Chair	Public Accounts Committee Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee House Standing Orders
	<b>Mr Lawrence Costa MLA:</b> Member for Arafura	
	<b>Party</b>	Territory Labor
	<b>Committee Membership</b>	
		Public Accounts Committee Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
	<b>Mrs Robyn Lambley MLA:</b> Member for Araulen	
	<b>Party</b>	Independent
	<b>Committee Membership</b>	
		Public Accounts Committee House Standing Orders
	<b>Mr Bill Yan MLA:</b> Member for Namatjira	
	<b>Party</b>	Country Liberals
	<b>Committee Membership</b>	
		Public Accounts Committee

## Committee Secretariat

First Clerk Assistant: Mr Russell Keith

Senior Research Officer: Ms Elise Dyer

Administration/Research Officer: Mrs Melissa Campaniello  
(July 2020 – March 2021)

Mr Harry Lane  
(May 2021 – June 2021)

Administration Assistant: Ms Kim Cowcher

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## Terms of Reference

### Standing Order 177

#### **Public Accounts Committee**

- (1) 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 six<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>
- 1.4 The Committee also considers whether petitions referred to it by any Member of the Assembly should be debated in the Assembly.

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<sup>2</sup> Standing Order 177(1)(e)

## **2 Committee Program**

### **Meetings**

- 2.1 The Public Accounts Committee met seven times during the reporting period. The details of these meetings are contained in the Associated Minutes of Proceedings tabled alongside this report.
- 2.2 The key issues considered at those meetings are discussed in the following chapter.

### **3 Matters followed up by the Committee**

#### **Auditor-General's Briefings**

- 3.1 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 December 2020 to March 2021.

#### **Incorrect Payment of Superannuation**

- 3.2 In November 2020 the Auditor-General provided a private briefing to the Committee on her report on the incorrect payment of superannuation tabled in the Assembly on 20 October 2020. The audit was undertaken as the result of a direction issued by the Chief Minister under section 14 of the *Audit Act 1995*.
- 3.3 The Committee wrote to the Commissioner for Public Employment and the Chief Executive of the Department of Corporate and Digital Development seeking advice on the progress in implementing the Auditor-General's recommendations. The Committee received a joint response from the agencies. The Auditor-General advised the Committee that she was following up further with both agencies on the implementation of her recommendations and that a report is expected to be tabled in the Assembly in August 2021.
- 3.4 The Committee wrote to both agencies to advise them that it is planning to hold a public hearing with both agencies following the tabling of the Auditor-General's report.

#### **Aboriginal Special Measures Recruitment and Selection Policy**

- 3.5 The Committee invited the Commissioner for Public Employment to a private briefing in May 2021 to seek information on the effectiveness of the Aboriginal Special Measures Recruitment and Selection Policy in achieving its aims of increasing Aboriginal recruitment; providing greater promotional opportunities for Aboriginal people; and increasing Aboriginal representation in senior leadership roles.
- 3.6 The Commissioner provided comprehensive information during the briefing and foreshadowed the imminent release of the Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy 2021-2025.
- 3.7 The Committee was satisfied that progress continues to be made under the policy, despite the targets for Aboriginal recruitment and representation in senior leadership roles having not yet been met, and that an inquiry into the policy was not warranted at that point in time.

#### **Local Decision Making**

- 3.8 The Committee invited representatives from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet to a private briefing in May 2021 on the government's Local Decision Making Framework. In view of the importance of the Framework, the Committee resolved to undertake an inquiry into Local Decision Making 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.

3.9 The Committee issued a call for submissions on 11 June 2021 with submissions due by 13 August 2021. The Committee will report on its findings and recommendations regarding the Local Decision Making Framework at the conclusion of the inquiry.

## 4 Petitions

4.1 The table below details the petitions referred to the Committee.

No.	Title	Status
1.	Redesign the unfair priority school enrolment zones in Alice Springs	Under consideration.
2.	Amend <i>Tobacco Act 2002</i> to make it illegal for people under the age of 18 to be in possession of tobacco products	Noted.
3.	Re-open health facilities at Dundee Beach	Noted.
4.	The Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory to consult directly with the public on all political matters	Noted.
5.	Immediate eviction of all current tenancies at 2 Emery Avenue	Noted.
6.	Provision of a cyclone shelter for the residents of the Dundee to Annie River Estate Area	Noted.
7.	Upgrade access to appropriate medical care for the residents of the Dundee to Annie River Estate Area	Noted.