

The Chair and Members of the Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
Re: Inquiry into Local Decision Making
Via Email: pac@nt.gov.au

Dear Chair and Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experience with the Northern Territory Government's Local Decision Making policy.

Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation (previously Ingkerreke Outstations Resource Services Aboriginal Corporation) was established in 1985 by the Traditional Owners of the land to the north of Alice Springs. The aim of the Corporation's founding members was to ensure that Aboriginal people were provided with support services enabling them to maintain a healthy and sustainable lifestyle on their homelands.

Today, Ingkerreke Services has an annual revenue of more than \$9 million and provides housing repairs and maintenance and municipal and essential services to 46 Northern Territory homelands across Central Australian and municipal services to 11 Town Camps in Alice Springs. Ingkerreke Services also administers and delivers numerous capital works to homelands through various funding streams accessed through the Commonwealth Government, Northern Territory Government, and the Central Land Council. Key to our vision and mission is providing advocacy for homeland residents and supporting local Aboriginal workforce participation through employment and training.

1

Ingkerreke Services' Board believes that we are a local decision-making body already and that the voices of our Directors, Members, homeland residents and other clients should be reflected in the government policy that affects them. When the NT Government's Local Decision Making policy was announced, our Board and Management were keen to find out more detail about its effects on our service delivery and on our clients.

In 2018 members of our Management team met with a NT Government representative for a short introductory briefing about her role in disseminating information on the Local Decision Making Policy to stakeholders. After that meeting, Management still had questions about how Ingkerreke Services could best engage with the policy without raising Members' and clients' expectations beyond what could be delivered. Management requested that the NT Government representative attend a Board meeting to discuss Local Decision Making. Several attempts were made in July 2018 to facilitate a Local Decision Making presentation to the Board; however, this meeting did not eventuate, and we were later advised that the representative who made the initial contact was no longer employed in that role with the NT Government. Our understanding was that a new staff member would make follow-up contact.

In July 2019 another Central Australian service provider, Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation (TCAC), signed a Commitment Agreement for Local Decision Making with the Northern Territory Government, and in July 2020 TCAC signed a Local Decision Making

Agreement with the Northern Territory Government. Ingkerreke Services' Management believe that this Agreement will affect our future delivery of municipal services on Alice Springs Town Camps. Ingkerreke Services initially received this Town Camp contract after a selection process was applied, and we believe that competition has promoted better services from each of the town camp service delivery providers to town camp clients since then.

Membership of Ingkerreke Services' Board is limited to its twelve founding homelands. This vision of our founding Traditional Owners is maintained to this day. However, Ingkerreke provides services to Aboriginal people across a much wider footprint. Thus, we now have concerns that Local Decision Making policy may affect the future growth and sustainability of our organisation.

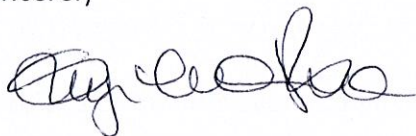
The NT Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities also recently proposed to introduce substantial reforms to the homelands sector with implementation in financial year 2021-2022. While the Department has now withdrawn these changes until existing contracts expire on 30 June 2023, the effect is less clarity about the future of Homelands Policy and its intersections with Local Decision Making Policy (Department of Chief Minister).

In addition, in the last few months, the NT Government, the Land Councils, AHNT, and senior officers from the National Indigenous Australians Agency have discussed the establishment of a dedicated body to develop a new Homelands Policy and Strategy. The Australian Government also announced reforms to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, which includes a new Aboriginal-controlled corporate federal entity, funded through the Aboriginal Benefits Account, to administer grants and investments in the Northern Territory, including on homelands.

Unfortunately, due to these significant changes happening at a high level involving the future of Homelands Policy and the lack of known detail about how Local Decision Making Policy will be impacted by these changes, we are unable to fully address the three key components that this inquiry is focusing on.

I hope that this information provides insight into our experience with the Local Decision Making policy to date. As always, Ingkerreke Services' Board and Management look forward to positive and productive relationships with all stakeholders to deliver the best possible services to Central Australian Aboriginal people now and in the future.

Sincerely



Skye Thompson
CEO
Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation
13 August 2021