Submission to the Local Government Representation Review Committee

Council Authority for this Submission
Moved: Cr Travaris
Seconded: Cr Hayes
THAT Council direct the CEO to prepare a submission to the Local Government Representation Review, requesting a reduction in Elected Members from twelve (12) plus a Mayor to eight (8) plus a Mayor, and a mechanism to ensure representation from both the north and south of the Alyawarr ward.
CARRIED

SUBMISSION SUMMARY

Barkly Regional Council makes this submission to the Local Government Representation Review Committee following Council's resolution to support a change to its elected member representation arrangements.

Council requests that the Committee recommend a reduction in Elected Members from twelve Councillors plus a Mayor to eight Councillors plus a Mayor, together with a mechanism to ensure representation from both the north and south of the Alyawarr ward.

- An annual reduction in governance costs from $897,000 to $664,000.
- A change in the ratio of Elected Members to electors from an average of 1:380 to 1:570, an increase of 190 electors per Elected Member.
- A change in the ratio of representatives, including Elected Members and Local Authority Members, from an average of 1:66 to 1:70, an increase of four electors per representative.

The submission is based on the financial, governance and representation information considered by Council, including the role of Local Authorities as a key mechanism for community advice and place-based engagement across the Barkly region.

The proposal would reduce governance costs, assist long-term budget sustainability and allow savings to be redirected toward councillor development, Local Authority support, community engagement technology, travel, equipment and core service delivery.

Council has operated at an average loss of $2.922 million between 2019 and 2025 and needs to undertake a range of financial reallocations and reductions to return to a sustainable breakeven budget. This will help ensure there are adequate funds to pay for all aspects of Council operations.

The proposed reduction in elected membership should therefore be considered as one contribution to a broader sustainability program. It will not, by itself, resolve the average operating loss; however, it provides a practical and visible governance saving that can be redirected toward councillor development, Local Authority support, community engagement technology, travel, equipment and core service delivery.

Council requests that the change take effect from the next local government elections, subject to the statutory review process and Ministerial determination.

SUBMISSION CONTEXT

Review Context

The Local Government Representation Review is the appropriate statutory process for considering Council's resolved position. Council provides this submission to assist the independent Representation Review Committee in assessing representation arrangements for the Barkly local government area.

Timeframes

2026

23rd July	Discussion Paper and 1st Consultation
2nd October	Submissions close
5th Oct to 15th Jan	Committee Review

2027

18th January	Preliminary Report & 2nd Consultation
2nd April	Submissions close
Apr to Jun	2nd review period
July	Final Report
August	Ministerial consideration

2028

~February	Ministerial determinations

Research and Evidence

There is limited evidence to suggest that simply increasing the size of a governing body improves effectiveness. Governance research generally indicates that larger boards can bring more perspectives and expertise, but they also increase coordination costs, meeting complexity and the risk of diluted accountability. Recent research on board size has found that the relationship between size and performance is context dependent, and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate.

For the Barkly context, the relevant question is not whether the Council should be as small as possible, but whether the elected body is large enough to provide diversity, ward representation and committee capacity while remaining small enough to deliberate effectively, make timely decisions and maintain clear accountability. A Council of 8 Elected Members plus a Mayor sits within the practical range commonly identified in governance practice for effective decision-making bodies, while preserving Local Authorities as a key mechanism for place-based representation.

The evidence should be applied cautiously because corporate board research is not directly equivalent to elected local government representation. However, it is useful in demonstrating that larger governing bodies are not inherently more effective and that effective governance depends on size, skills, local connection, committee design, information flow and the quality of engagement with residents.

In local government, representation also needs to be assessed through community identity, ward boundaries, travel realities, resident access and the role of supporting structures such as Local Authorities. In the Barkly, technology-enabled engagement, hub-and-spoke travel patterns and the presence of Local Authorities reduce the extent to which geographic distance alone should determine the number of elected members.

External Revenue (Operational Subsidy) impact

Northern Territory Operational Subsidy allocations do not take governance costs, or the number of council or Local Authority Members, into account. Financial Assistance Grant allocations are also not calculated on this basis.

There is therefore no direct link between Council's governance costs and its Operational Subsidy. As neither Council numbers nor Local Authority Member numbers form part of the calculation, a change to either would not, of itself, affect the allocation.

On this basis, a reduction in Council membership from 13 members including the Mayor to 9 members including the Mayor is not expected to result in a reduction to Council's Operational Subsidy.

Current Position

Barkly Regional Council currently has a Mayor and 12 Elected Members. This governance structure is supported by approximately 60 Local Authority Members. The total cost of governance is $897,000, which represents 17% of rates income. From 1 July 2026, changes to the Local Government Act will allow Elected Members to add superannuation payments to their allowances. If adopted, this would increase the total governance budget to $943,411, or 18% of rates income.

The current level of representation is one elected member per 380 voters. When Local Authority Members are included, this reduces to one representative per 66 voters.

Across the Northern Territory, the ratio of voters to Elected Members varies significantly from more than 4,000 to as low as 69. While some councils have a lower ratio than Barkly, those councils typically have a smaller number of Elected Members, generally between five and seven.

This comparison suggests that Barkly's present structure provides a high level of elected representation relative to many other councils, but at a significant cost. The question for the review is whether the current number of Councillors is necessary to achieve fair and effective representation, particularly when approximately 60 Local Authority Members also contribute to local advice and community connection.

While the Barkly is the second-largest Council by area, its population is concentrated within major centres in the wards. It also operates on a hub-and-spoke model, with residents frequently visiting the major hubs for sport, community visits and commerce.

The use and availability of technology is also making connectivity easier each year. It is also estimated that, in the Patta and Alpurrurulam wards, more than 90% of the electors are in the major centres and therefore within easy physical reach of their elected representatives. While this is slightly lower for the Alyawarr and Kuwarrangu wards, the additional Local Authorities in these areas make local representation more accessible.

Technology should not be treated as a replacement for local representation. Rather, it can supplement and strengthen representation by enabling hybrid meetings, online community forums, live-streamed Council meetings, digital surveys, remote briefings, SMS updates and better circulation of Council information between meetings. This is particularly relevant where residents already travel to regional hubs for sport, commerce, visiting and services.

Current 2026-27 Budget as per the Barkly Regional Plan

	Current without Super	**Current with Super**
EM Allowances	531,000	577,411
EM Expenses	289,000	289,000
LA Allowances	63,000	63,000

LA Expenses	14,000	14,000
Total	**$897,000**	**$943,411**

Current Elected Member ratios and enrolment.

Current	COUNCILLORS PER WARD	CURRENT ENROLMENT	VOTERS PER COUNCILLOR
COUNCIL TOTALS	**12**	4,562	380
Alpurrurulam Ward	1	233	233
Alyawarr Ward	4	1,789	447
Kuwarrangu Ward 2	2	485	243
Patta Ward	5	2,055	411

Current Elected Member ratios and enrolment, including Local Authority Members.

Current	COUNCILLORS PER WARD	LA Members	Total Members	CURRENT ENROLMENT	VOTERS PER MEMBER
COUNCIL TOTALS	**12**	57	69	4,562	66
Alpurrurulam Ward	1	9	10	233	23
Alyawarr Ward	4	32	36	1,789	50
Kuwarrangu Ward 2	2	7	9	485	54
Patta Ward	5	9	14	2,055	147

Council's Requested Change

Council requests that the number of Elected Members be reduced from 12 to 8 while retaining the position of Mayor. Council submits that this change recognises the important role Local Authorities already play in Barkly governance and creates capacity to strengthen them through training, broader scope and responsibilities, improved meeting support, travel assistance, technology-enabled participation and increased input into local priorities and community infrastructure.

It may also create the capacity to fund superannuation payments for Elected Members if Council chooses to adopt them.

That would change the ratio to one Elected Member per 570 voters. However, when Local Authority Members are included, the ratio only rises slightly to one representative per 70 voters.

This provides a clear sustainability benefit. Without superannuation, the governance budget would reduce from $897,000 to $664,000. With superannuation included, the governance budget would reduce from $943,411 to $699,870. This creates an estimated saving of $233,000 without superannuation or $243,541 with superannuation.

Current 2026-27 Budget as per the Barkly Regional Plan and Option

	Current without Super	**Current with Super**	**Proposed without Super**	**Proposed with Super**
EM Allowances	531,000	577,411	387,000	422,870

EM Expenses	289,000	289,000	200,000	200,000
LA Allowances	63,000	63,000	63,000	63,000
LA Expenses	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000
Total	**$897,000**	**$943,411**	**$664,000**	**$699,870**

Elected Member ratios and enrolment.

Proposed	COUNCILLORS PER WARD	CURRENT ENROLMENT	VOTERS PER COUNCILLOR
COUNCIL TOTALS	**8**	4,562	570
Alpurrurulam Ward	1	233	233
Alyawarr Ward	3	1,789	596
Kuwarrangu Ward 2	1	485	485
Patta Ward	3	2,055	685

Elected Member ratios and enrolment, including Local Authority Members.

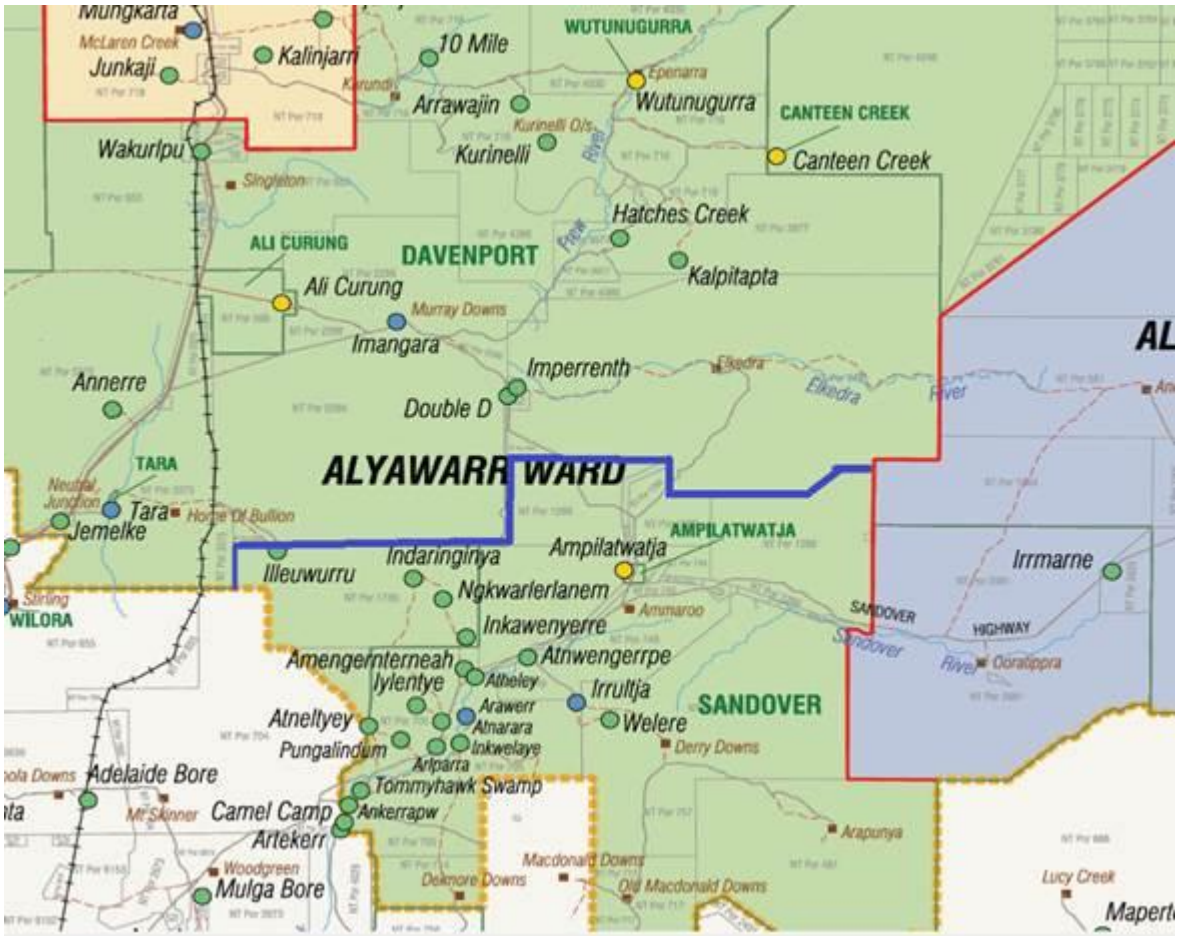
Proposed	COUNCILLORS PER WARD	LA Members	Total Members	CURRENT ENROLMENT	VOTERS PER MEMBER
COUNCIL TOTALS	8	57	65	4,562	70
Alpurrurulam Ward	1	9	10	233	23
Alyawarr Ward	3	32	35	1,789	51
Kuwarrangu Ward 2	1	7	8	485	61
Patta Ward	3	9	12	2,055	171

Alyawarr Ward Representation

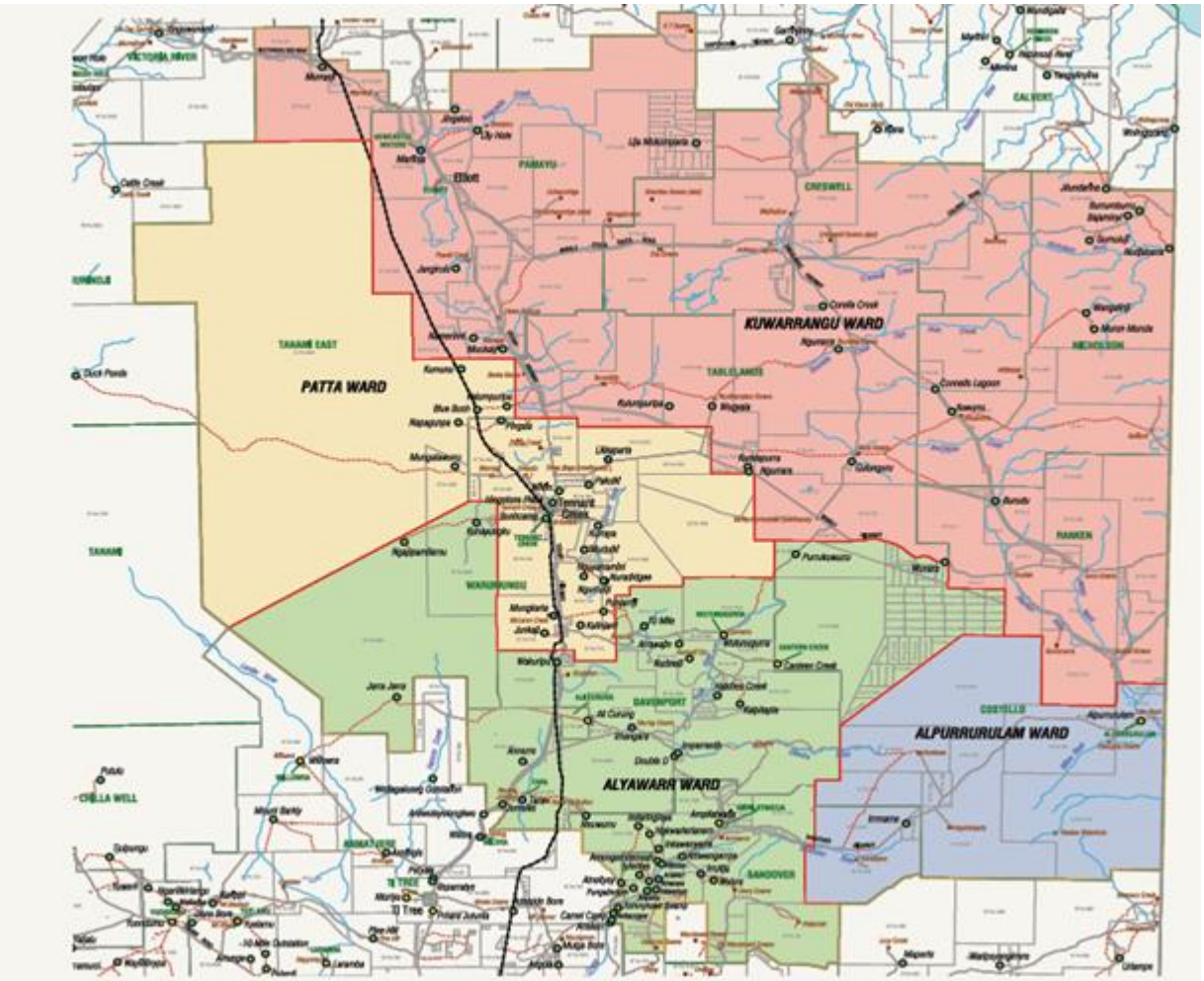
In addition to the reduction in members, Council asks the Committee to recommend a mechanism that ensures representation from both the northern and southern parts of the Alyawarr ward, including the Ampilatwatja and Ali Curung areas. Council submits that the mechanism should be determined through the review process and may not require the creation of a new ward. The important outcome is that the final representation structure preserves the financial and governance benefits of a smaller elected body while providing clear local representation for these communities.

Proposed new boundary

New border -
blue line



Existing boundaries



COUNCIL SUBMISSION POSITION

Requested Outcome

Council requests that the Local Government Representation Review Committee support the following representation model for Barkly Regional Council:

- A reduction in Elected Members from twelve Councillors plus a Mayor to eight Councillors plus a Mayor.
- An appropriate mechanism to ensure representation from both the northern and southern parts of the Alyawarr ward, including the Ampilatwatja and Ali Curung areas.
- Recognition of Local Authorities as a central part of Barkly's place-based representation model.
- Retention and strengthening of Local Authorities through training, broader responsibilities, improved travel and meeting support, technology-enabled participation and increased input into community infrastructure priorities.

- Use of governance savings to support councillor induction, professional development, community engagement, Local Authority effectiveness and core service delivery.
- Implementation from the next local government elections, subject to the review process and Ministerial determination.

Risks and Mitigations

Risk	Mitigation
Perception that reduced Councillor numbers will reduce local representation.	Strengthen Local Authorities, publish clear engagement schedules and ensure Councillors continue to visit and communicate with communities.
Increased workload for remaining Councillors.	Invest in induction, training, technology, better briefing material and clear committee arrangements.
Digital engagement may exclude residents with limited access or preference for face-to-face engagement.	Use technology as a supplement only, supported by community meetings, printed information, phone contact and Local Authority engagement.

FINANCIAL IMPACT AND TIMING

Council understands that any Ministerial Determination would likely be effective from the next election.

Council submits that the savings from the proposed change would assist Council to:

- Include superannuation as part of Elected Member allowances.
- Improve training, transport and communication options for Elected Members.
- Increase the funding available to community projects.
- Reduce operational deficits.

CONSULTATION AND REVIEW

Council supports continued consultation with communities as part of the Representation Review process. If the Council's recommendations are advanced by the Committee, Council would support further engagement on the most appropriate mechanism to ensure representation from both the northern and southern parts of the Alyawarr ward, while maintaining the broader benefits of the eight Councillor plus Mayor model.