Australian Government

National Indigenous Australians Agency

EC26-000829

Local Government Representation Review Committee
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Dear Review Committee

(NT) The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the 2026 Northern Territory Local Government Representation Review.

The NIAA recognises that local government structures and electoral representation are matters for the NT Government and does not seek to recommend specific council or ward boundaries. The NIAA's interest is in ensuring the Review takes account of the circumstances of remote Aboriginal communities and supports their effective participation in local decision-making.

The Northern Territory's geography and dispersed population mean that enrolment figures alone may not provide a complete picture of effective representation. Regional councils can cover vast areas, with communities affected by distance, seasonal access, telecommunications, language and travel constraints. The Review should therefore consider whether proposed arrangements provide communities, particularly smaller and isolated communities, with practical access to their representatives and an effective voice in local decision-making.

The Review should also consider the relationships between communities when determining council and ward arrangements. Traditional Owner connections, language groups, cultural ties and existing governance arrangements may extend across administrative boundaries, while neighbouring communities may have distinct identities and priorities. These factors are relevant when considering whether proposed groupings reflect meaningful communities of interest, although NIAA is not suggesting that electoral boundaries should mirror cultural or Traditional Owner boundaries.

The Review should also consider how representation arrangements may affect existing and emerging community-level governance, including community council models. Electoral representation and community governance serve different purposes, but the structures established through the Review may influence how local decision-making develops. Arrangements should retain sufficient flexibility for regional councils, local authorities and locally determined

governance approaches to operate alongside each other without unnecessarily constraining future community-led models.

These considerations are consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including its emphasis on stronger partnerships and shared decision-making. Effective local representation also supports NIAA's work with Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, Land Councils, local governments and the Northern Territory Government on place-based priorities and Commonwealth investment.

Where significant changes are proposed, NIAA supports direct engagement with affected Aboriginal communities. Communities should be provided with clear information about the proposed changes and their practical implications, and a genuine opportunity to express their views. Engagement with Land Councils, Traditional Owners and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations can provide important perspectives and should complement direct engagement with affected communities.

NIAA encourages the Review to balance electoral equality with the practical realities of representation in the Northern Territory and ensure its recommendations support accessible representation, community participation and sufficient flexibility for locally determined governance arrangements to develop over time.

Yours sincerely

JOSHUA SMITH
A/Chief Executive Officer

23 September 2026