From: [redacted]
To: Local Government Representation Review Secretariat
Subject: RE: Local Government Representation Review Committee
Date: Wednesday, 30 September 2026 8:26:40 PM

Apologies this is my correct submission, addition on transcripts:

SUBMISSION TO THE NT LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION REVIEW DISCUSSION PAPER 2026

To: Local Government Representation Review Committee

Postal Address: PO Box 2075, Parap, NT 0804

Email: submissions@lgrr2026.com.au

Submitted By: Planning Action Network Inc. (PLan)

Date: 30 September 2026

Executive Summary

Planning Action Network Inc. (PLan) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the 2026 NT Local Government Representation Review. As a community-based organization dedicated to transparent urban planning, environmental conservation, heritage protection, and democratic participation across the Northern Territory, PLan emphasizes that local representation must remain accessible, equitable, and directly accountable to local residents.

This submission focuses on six key priorities:

1. **Defending and strengthening ward systems** in urban municipalities to preserve localized accountability.
2. **Correcting electoral malapportionment** caused by rapid urban growth.
3. **Integrating the Darwin Waterfront and coastal precincts** into transparent, democratic municipal ward structures.
4. **Capitalizing on the Northcrest transition to the City of Darwin** to establish clear, forward-looking ward boundaries.
5. **Overhauling voter engagement**, fixing unsafe and inaccessible polling booth selection, and establishing comprehensive, year-round civic education.
6. **Mandating publicly accessible audio recordings and transcripts** for all open council meetings to ensure genuine transparency.

1. Retaining and Rebalancing Ward Systems in Urban Municipalities

PLan strongly advocates for retaining ward structures in major municipal council areas, particularly the City of Darwin and Litchfield Council.

- **Preventing Electoral Skew:** Undivided (non-ward) councils tend to advantage well-resourced candidates and city-wide interest groups, diluting the voice of distinct neighbourhood communities. Ward systems ensure that councillors maintain direct relationships with local residents and understand precinct-level amenity issues.
- **Rebalancing Elector-to-Councillor Ratios:** Data in the Discussion Paper highlights expanding disparities in voter representation across Darwin's wards. Waters Ward currently stands at **4,575 electors per councillor** (+6.9% change),

whereas Lyons Ward stands at **4,284 electors per councillor** (-2.3% change).

- **Preserving Communities of Interest:** Ward boundary adjustments must ensure that contiguous suburbs, coastal catchments, and heritage enclaves are kept wholly within single ward boundaries, satisfying Section 32(2) of the *Local Government Act 2019*.

2. Integration and Governance of the Darwin Waterfront Precinct

The Darwin Waterfront and surrounding CBD foreshore represent critical public assets where high-density residential living, tourism, commercial activity, and coastal public space intersect.

- **Democratic Representation for Waterfront Residents:** As residential density at the Darwin Waterfront continues to increase, residents living within the precinct must have direct, clear, and accountable local government representation within the municipal ward structure (Waters Ward / City Centre catchment).
- **Transparent Planning and Amenity Oversight:** Complex planning decisions surrounding foreshore development, public access, height limits, and urban heat mitigation must be subject to elected council scrutiny and community participation, rather than isolated administrative arrangements.
- **Protecting Public Foreshore Amenity:** Integrating waterfront governance into local ward representation ensures that elected members remain accountable for preserving public access, open green space, and coastal protection along the Darwin harbour front.

3. Incorporating Unincorporated Growth Areas: The Northcrest Precedent

PLan strongly welcomes the formal decision to incorporate the **Northcrest** estate development into the City of Darwin (COD). This ensures that its expanding resident population gains direct municipal voting rights, local council representation, and equitable ratepayer services.

- **Strategic Ward Allocation:** The addition of Northcrest to the City of Darwin requires careful ward placement (e.g., alignment with adjacent eastern wards such as Richardson or Waters). Because Northcrest will experience sustained residential growth, its future voter count must be fully factored into the Committee's boundary calculations to prevent creating immediate malapportionment in neighbouring wards.
- **Closing Remaining Unincorporated Voids:** Approximately **9,004 residents** across the NT still reside on unincorporated land without local representation. Bringing Northcrest into COD sets a positive precedent for resolving other urban fringe pockets (such as the Cox-Daly and Marrakai-Douglas Daly areas), ensuring all urbanized residential precincts operate under accountable local government.

4. Overhauling Voter Participation, Polling Accessibility, and Civic Education

Representation reviews cannot occur in a vacuum; structural ward boundaries are meaningless if electors are disenfranchised by low participation, poor polling booth logistics, or a lack of civic awareness.

- **Tackling Historically Low Voter Turnout:** Local government elections in the NT consistently suffer from low participation compared to state/federal polls. Lower turnout weakens democratic mandates and enables small voting blocks to disproportionately influence council outcomes.
- **Fixing Inappropriate and Inaccessible Polling Locations:** The selection of voting sites directly impacts turnout and accessibility. Using congested commercial precincts—such as the **Nightcliff shops**—presents serious safety and access barriers:
    - **Accessibility Deficits:** Commercial shopfronts frequently lack full DDA-compliant wheelchair access, wide turning radii, or accessible ramps for elderly residents and people with mobility limitations.
    - **Traffic & Pedestrian Hazards:** High-traffic retail hubs create significant vehicular congestion, limited mobility parking, and safety risks for pedestrians navigating busy carparks on polling days.
    - **Standardizing Public Facilities:** Early voting and election day polling places must be restricted to purpose-built public facilities (such as local schools, community halls, or sports centers) equipped with dedicated disability parking, clear pedestrian pathways, and full wheelchair accessibility.
- **Establishing Ongoing Civic & Voter Education:** A fundamental question for this review is: *Who is educating voters on local government?*
    - **Beyond Transactional Marketing:** Current efforts are largely restricted to short-term, administrative messaging about *where* and *when* to vote.
    - **Proactive Civic Programs:** The NT Government, NTEC, LGANT, and local councils must fund year-round, non-partisan civic education programs that explain what councils actually do, how ward representation works, how rates are spent, and why local voting directly impacts neighbourhood liveability.

5. Open Governance: Mandating Public Meeting Transcripts and Audio Archives

Democratic accountability does not end at the ballot box; residents must have full, unobstructed access to the debates and decisions made by their elected representatives.

- **Mandatory Audio Recordings & Written Transcripts:** While written council minutes summarize final resolutions, they omit the substance of debate, councillor voting rationales, and community contributions. All councils should be required under the *Local Government Act* framework to publish full audio/video recordings alongside searchable written transcripts for all open council meetings and public forums.
- **Accessibility for Remote and Time-Poor Residents:** Written transcripts (including text-to-speech accessible formats) ensure that residents who are hard of hearing, time-poor, or living in areas with bandwidth constraints can easily search, read, and verify council discussions without having to stream hours of

raw audio or attend late-night chambers in person.

- **Verifiable Record for Planning Decisions:** Verifiable meeting transcripts establish a clear public record of commitments made by elected members on land-use zoning, development applications, and public asset sales, strengthening trust between local government and ratepayer networks.

6. Ward Naming and Place Heritage

- **Reflecting Cultural and Community Identity:** PLan supports the review guidelines requiring ward names to recognize local heritage, traditional cultural connections, and significant historic figures (deceased for at least 12 months).
- **Avoiding Commercialization:** Geographical landmarks and commercial branding should be avoided, ensuring ward names reflect public history and local community identity.

Conclusion

PLan urges the Committee to prioritize grassroots democratic access, transparent planning oversight, equal voter weight, accessible polling locations, and open meeting transparency in its recommendations. Welcoming Northcrest into the City of Darwin, integrating the Waterfront precinct, mandating public meeting transcripts, and investing in genuine voter education will significantly strengthen local democracy across the Northern Territory.

Regards,

Nick Kirlew
Convener **PLan: the Planning Action Network Inc** [redacted]