Submission to the 2026 NT Local Government Representation Review

City of Palmerston – Introduction of Wards

Submitted by: Tony Gill - Palmerston resident and ratepayer

Purpose of submission

I am making this submission as a resident and ratepayer of the City of Palmerston.

I ask the Local Government Representation Review Committee to consider the introduction of a **multi-member ward structure** for the City of Palmerston.

My concern is not with the performance of individual elected members or whether the current Council works effectively as a governing body. Rather, it is whether an undivided municipality provides the most effective representation for the different communities that make up Palmerston.

There is an important distinction between good governance of the municipality as a whole and effective representation of individual communities within it. A Council may function effectively as a collective decision-making body while its electoral structure provides no particular councillor with responsibility or accountability for representing an identifiable geographic community.

The 2026 Local Government Representation Review provides an appropriate opportunity to consider whether Palmerston's current arrangements continue to provide fair and effective representation.

Previous consideration of wards for Palmerston

The introduction of wards in Palmerston is not a new proposition.

The previous independent Local Government Representation Committee considered Palmerston's representation arrangements in detail as part of the 2022 Local Government Representation Review.

The preliminary review considered two four-ward scenarios. The City of Palmerston opposed the introduction of wards and raised concerns about the proposed configurations. The Committee subsequently consulted further with Council, considered an alternative two-ward proposal put forward by Council, and developed two alternative three-ward scenarios addressing a number of Council's concerns.

The Committee ultimately determined that a three-ward structure should be implemented for the City of Palmerston. It also recommended increasing the number of councillors from seven to eight. Scenario A provided for three wards and eight councillors if that recommendation was accepted, while Scenario B provided an alternative three-ward arrangement if the number of councillors remained at seven.

The Committee's published information described the proposed ward structure as providing greater opportunity for fair representation to meet the needs of a fast-growing city.

The previous review is particularly relevant because the Committee reached its determination after considering the arguments both for and against wards, including repeated submissions from the City of Palmerston opposing their introduction.

Those wards did not ultimately operate at the 2025 local government election. The Minister subsequently abolished each of the Palmerston wards under section 16 of the *Local Government Act 2019*. The decision was dated 2 February 2025 and formally notified in Government Gazette G5 on 6 March 2025.

The current Review therefore provides an opportunity to reconsider the issue in light of Palmerston's current population, communities and future growth.

Palmerston is made up of demographically diverse communities

Palmerston is geographically compact, but its suburbs are not demographically uniform. The 2021 Census shows meaningful differences in housing circumstances, family composition and life stage across the municipality.

These differences do not mean that every resident of a suburb shares the same interests or views. They do, however, demonstrate that different parts of Palmerston contain communities with different circumstances, experiences and service needs. A representative structure should provide effective opportunities for those different perspectives to be heard.

Table 1. Selected demographic characteristics of Palmerston suburbs – 2021 Census

Suburb	*Rented dwellings*	*Median weekly household income*	*Aged 0–14*	*Families with children*	*Aged 55+*
Bakewell	45.6%	$1,955	23.7%	70.1%	15.3%
Bellamack	57.6%	$2,331	27.4%	68.9%	10.8%
Driver	46.1%	$1,984	22.6%	64.3%	18.2%
Durack	44.5%	$2,471	25.2%	63.1%	14.9%
Farrar	42.2%	$2,573	26.0%	68.6%	16.8%
Gray	50.2%	$1,479	22.7%	67.4%	21.5%
Gunn	40.3%	$2,485	23.8%	67.5%	15.1%
Johnston	61.7%	$2,254	27.9%	70.1%	7.7%
Marlow Lagoon	10.4%	$3,630	23.4%	61.2%	24.2%
Moulden	44.4%	$1,515	25.4%	71.9%	20.0%
Rosebery	52.2%	$2,397	26.5%	70.2%	11.9%
Woodroffe	41.3%	$1,891	23.4%	67.7%	18.6%
Zuccoli	24.6%	$2,682	28.3%	70.8%	5.5%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census, All Persons QuickStats, Suburbs and Localities (SAL). Age 0–14 and age 55+ have been calculated from the relevant Census age groups. Families with children comprises couple families with children and one-parent families. Percentages are subject to ABS Census randomisation and rounding.

Housing circumstances

Housing circumstances vary markedly across Palmerston. The proportion of occupied private dwellings being rented ranges from **10.4% in Marlow Lagoon to 61.7% in Johnston**, while median weekly household income ranges from **$1,479 in Gray to $3,630 in Marlow Lagoon**.

The differences are not simply between higher- and lower-income suburbs. Johnston, for example, combines relatively high household income with the municipality's highest proportion of rented dwellings, while Zuccoli combines relatively high household income with a much lower proportion of renting.

Housing tenure and household income can influence how residents experience their local area and the issues they bring to Council. Longer-term property interests, housing affordability, neighbourhood amenity, development, local infrastructure and the needs of a more mobile rental population may have different significance in different communities. A geographically based representative has a defined constituency within which to understand and represent those circumstances.

Families and children

Palmerston is generally a young municipality, but the concentration and composition of families also varies between suburbs. Children aged 0–14 account for **22.6% of Driver's population compared with 28.3% in Zuccoli**, while the proportion of families with children ranges from **61.2% in Marlow Lagoon to 71.9% in Moulden**.

The underlying Census data also show differences in family structure that are not fully apparent from these headline figures. Some suburbs have substantially greater proportions of one-parent families, while others are dominated by couple families with children.

These differences can affect the relative importance of issues such as playgrounds and recreation facilities, safe walking and cycling connections, access to community facilities, youth services and the design and maintenance of neighbourhood public spaces. They reinforce the point that even within a small municipality, communities can have different priorities and experiences of Council services.

Life stage

There are particularly pronounced differences in the age profiles of Palmerston's suburbs. Residents aged 55 and over comprise only about **5.5% of Zuccoli's population and 7.7% of Johnston's**, compared with **21.5% in Gray and 24.2% in Marlow Lagoon**.

At the same time, Zuccoli has the highest proportion of children aged 0–14 at **28.3%**. This produces substantially different community profiles: some suburbs are dominated by younger households and families establishing themselves, while others have a much larger proportion of older and longer-established residents.

Life stage can influence the way communities use and value local infrastructure and services. Younger communities may place greater demands on playgrounds, sporting and family facilities and

safe pedestrian connections, while communities with larger older populations may place greater emphasis on accessibility, footpaths, lighting, amenity and maintaining established neighbourhood environments.

What this means for representation

The Census data do not suggest that suburbs should be treated as homogeneous communities or that demographic characteristics determine residents' views. They demonstrate something more fundamental: **Palmerston's physical compactness does not make its communities interchangeable.**

Residents in different parts of Palmerston live in measurably different housing, family and life-stage circumstances. Those differences can shape the issues that arise locally, the services residents interact with and the perspectives they bring to Council.

A ward structure provides a mechanism for those geographically based differences to be consistently represented. It gives councillors a defined community with which they are expected to engage, while retaining their responsibility to deliberate and make decisions in the interests of Palmerston as a whole.

The representation gap in an undivided municipality

Under the present system, all seven councillors are elected to represent the entire municipality. This has the benefit that any resident can approach any councillor, but it also means that no individual councillor has a defined electoral responsibility for any particular geographic community within Palmerston.

This creates a simple question for a resident with a local issue:

Who is my local councillor?

At present, the answer is effectively all of them.

But representation by everyone can also mean that no one councillor has a particular responsibility to advocate for that community.

This can matter most where a community's concerns do not have municipality-wide prominence. Residents of communities experiencing particular social, economic, infrastructure or amenity challenges should not depend solely upon their ability to attract the attention of one of seven municipality-wide councillors.

A ward structure changes that relationship. Residents have identifiable councillors elected by their area, and those councillors have an identifiable constituency to which they are electorally accountable.

This does not mean that every local issue will be resolved or that a ward councillor must agree with every constituent. It establishes something more fundamental: **who has a particular responsibility to listen to, understand and represent that community's interests.**

Representation should create an obligation to engage

In my view, one of the most important differences created by a ward structure is that it establishes an identifiable representative responsibility.

Under the current undivided structure, all councillors represent all residents. Individual councillors may choose to engage extensively with particular communities, but there is no defined geographic constituency for which particular councillors carry an identifiable representative responsibility.

A ward structure changes that.

Once councillors are elected by a defined constituency, there should be a clear expectation that they actively engage with that constituency, understand its communities and issues, bring relevant perspectives into Council processes and communicate Council outcomes back to those communities.

This should be regarded as a **core obligation of ward representation**, rather than an optional activity dependent upon the interests or preferred working style of individual councillors.

I am not suggesting that creating a ward, by itself, automatically creates a new statutory duty to undertake particular forms of engagement. Rather, the ward creates the defined constituency and representative responsibility. An appropriate governance framework can then give practical effect to that responsibility and make its performance visible and accountable.

Effective representation should involve more than elected members being available when residents choose to approach them. A representative relationship should operate in both directions.

There is a fundamental difference between providing residents with an **opportunity to engage** and elected representatives having a **responsibility to actively seek engagement** from the people they represent.

Council consultation remains important, but consultation and representation are not interchangeable. Consultation generally seeks community views about particular proposals or issues. Representation is an ongoing democratic relationship between electors and those they choose to represent them.

A ward councillor also has a direct electoral reason to maintain that relationship between elections. If they seek re-election, they must return to the same constituency and demonstrate that they listened to it, understood its concerns and represented it effectively.

Wards therefore have the potential to shift the emphasis from:

> **"How can residents engage with Council?"**

to:

> **"How are elected representatives engaging with the residents they represent?"**

This is particularly important for residents who may be less likely to participate in formal Council consultation processes. Low participation should not necessarily be interpreted as an absence of views or concerns. Active representation can help bring those voices into Council processes.

Electoral accountability does not depend on where a councillor lives

A ward structure does not necessarily require a councillor to reside within the ward they represent. I do not consider that this diminishes the case for wards.

The important issue is not where a councillor lives, **but who elects them and to whom they are electorally accountable**.

Under the current undivided structure, a candidate seeks support across the whole of Palmerston. Under a ward structure, a candidate must make their case directly to a defined constituency: why those residents should elect them, what they understand about those communities, and what they will bring as their representative.

That accountability continues after election. A councillor seeking another term must return to those electors and demonstrate how effectively they represented them.

The value of a ward structure therefore lies not in requiring councillors to live within a ward, but in requiring candidates to earn the support of a defined community and remain accountable to that community.

Diverse communities can strengthen representation and Council Decision-Making

There is a further potential benefit where ward councillors genuinely engage with their constituents.

Palmerston's communities do not necessarily have the same needs, experiences or priorities. Councillors engaging with different geographic constituencies may therefore bring different community perspectives into Council deliberations.

This diversity can be valuable to Council itself.

Where all councillors are elected from the same municipality-wide electorate and receive broadly the same information through Council processes, there is a risk that similar perspectives develop about which issues are important and how they should be addressed.

I do not suggest that this necessarily occurs under an undivided structure, nor that disagreement between councillors should be encouraged for its own sake. The point is that effective decision-making benefits from assumptions being tested against different community experiences, priorities and points of view.

A councillor actively engaging with one ward may bring forward an issue or perspective that receives little attention at a municipality-wide level. Councillors representing another ward may bring a different perspective arising from the communities they represent.

This can broaden discussion and help ensure Council decisions are informed by the diversity that exists within Palmerston, rather than principally by the issues and perspectives most visible to Council.

The *Local Government Act 2019* describes the principal role of a council as being a "**representative, informed and responsible decision-maker in the interests of its constituency**."

A defined constituency creates a stronger basis for genuine engagement. Genuine engagement can bring a broader range of community experiences and perspectives into Council processes. Those perspectives can challenge assumptions, add information and contribute to better-informed deliberation.

Figure 1 – How ward-based engagement can contribute to better-informed Council decision-making

The point is not that wards automatically produce better decisions. Rather, a properly functioning ward structure can **broaden the information and perspectives available to Council when it makes decisions for Palmerston as a whole.**

There is also another aspect to diversity. Wards may broaden the pathways through which people seek election to Council.

Under an undivided system, candidates effectively seek support across the entire municipality. With wards, candidates can make their case to a smaller and more clearly defined constituency. This may

provide opportunities for people with strong local knowledge, community connections or experience to nominate without first needing to establish a municipality-wide profile.

The 2026 Discussion Paper itself raises whether wards could encourage representation from a broader range of locations, backgrounds and experiences.

This does not mean that wards will necessarily produce a more diverse Council. That will continue to depend upon who chooses to nominate and who electors choose to support. However, reducing the geographic scale at which candidates must establish their electoral case may provide a more accessible pathway for candidates whose strengths and connections are concentrated within particular communities.

Multi-member wards would retain the additional benefit of residents having access to several elected representatives rather than becoming dependent upon a single ward councillor.

Local representation and whole-of-Palmerston decision-making are compatible

I recognise the concern that wards may encourage councillors to focus excessively on their own areas, while an undivided municipality may encourage a whole-of-Palmerston perspective.

That is a legitimate consideration, but the two responsibilities need not be mutually exclusive.

A councillor can have a particular responsibility to understand and represent the communities that elected them while also participating in collective decisions in the interests of Palmerston as a whole.

Wards should also not be expected, by themselves, to produce better councillors or better governance. Those outcomes depend upon candidates, councillor training, governance arrangements, codes of conduct and the behaviour of elected members.

Whether councillors work effectively together is principally a governance issue. Whether communities have effective and identifiable representation is a representation issue.

A multi-member ward structure can accommodate both.

It would also retain one of the benefits of the present system: residents would still have access to more than one elected representative rather than depending upon a single ward councillor.

Supporting councillors to be effective ward representatives

A ward structure creates a clearer representative responsibility, but councillors should also be supported to perform that role effectively.

Local government candidates come from a wide range of backgrounds and bring different skills, experience and levels of familiarity with Council processes. That diversity can be a strength. Election

should not depend upon candidates already possessing professional expertise in governance, community engagement, strategic planning or local government administration.

The important issue is what support is available after election to help councillors become effective representatives.

For ward councillors, this should include developing the capability to actively engage with their communities, identify and understand local issues, distinguish individual concerns from broader community interests, and effectively bring relevant matters into Council processes.

Just as importantly, councillors need to understand that representing a ward does not mean advocating for that ward without regard to the wider municipality. Their role requires them to bring the perspectives and interests of their constituency to the Council table, while ultimately participating in collective decisions in the interests of Palmerston as a whole.

This balance should be an explicit part of councillor induction, training and ongoing professional development.

The objective should be to help councillors become **strong advocates for the communities they represent and effective decision-makers for the municipality as a whole**.

Supporting genuine constituency engagement and accountability

If wards are introduced, consideration should also be given to how the representative responsibility created by them is supported, made visible and held accountable.

The ward establishes the constituency and the representative relationship. The supporting governance framework should help turn that relationship into meaningful practice.

Supporting genuine engagement

Consideration could be given to establishing a modest, transparent and accountable **Constituency Engagement Fund**, or equivalent access to Council resources, specifically for genuine engagement between ward councillors and their communities.

I am not proposing additional personal remuneration.

The distinction is important:

> **Publicly funded constituency engagement resources should facilitate genuine two-way communication between elected members and their communities, not personal promotion, electoral campaigning or activities whose predominant purpose is enhancing the profile of an individual elected member.**

Appropriate uses could include community meetings, venue hire, forums, surveys, facilitated consultation, communication about matters on which community views are sought, engagement with community organisations and targeted outreach to communities with low participation in formal consultation processes.

Conversely, expenditure principally directed towards promoting an elected member's name, image or personal profile should not qualify merely because it is distributed to constituents.

There should be a clear distinction between resources that facilitate representation and engagement and resources that facilitate personal or electoral promotion.

Such arrangements would require appropriate safeguards, including defined eligible and ineligible expenditure, reasonable limits, approval and acquittal arrangements, public reporting and safeguards approaching an election.

Making ward representation visible through Council

Engagement should not occur separately from Council's formal decision-making processes.

If wards are introduced, I believe ordinary Council meeting agendas should include a standing **Ward Matters** item.

This would provide councillors with a regular and transparent opportunity to raise issues, concerns or emerging matters identified through engagement with the communities they represent.

The purpose would not be to turn Council meetings into separate debates about individual wards or to require every councillor to provide a formal report at every meeting. Rather, it would establish a recognised pathway through which matters arising from ward representation can be brought to the attention of Council as a whole and recorded through the normal Council meeting process.

Residents should be able to see not only that their councillors have engaged with them, but also that relevant matters arising from that engagement have been carried forward into Council processes.

A standing Ward Matters agenda item would also reinforce the distinction between local representation and whole-of-Council decision-making. A councillor could bring an issue identified within their ward to the Council table, while Council collectively considers what response, if any, is appropriate in the interests of Palmerston as a whole.

Reporting back to communities

There should also be an equivalent level of accountability through Council's annual reporting.

Council's annual report should include meaningful information for each ward, such as community engagement undertaken, significant issues raised by residents, matters brought before Council through ward representation, and significant Council activities, projects or outcomes affecting that ward.

This should not become a scorecard comparing wards or councillors, nor should it become a promotional vehicle for individual elected members.

Its purpose should be to provide residents with a transparent record of how the representative relationship has operated within their ward during the year.

Accountability should therefore extend beyond reporting expenditure or simply listing engagement activities. Residents should be able to see the connection between engagement, representation and Council action.

If ward representation is to be meaningful, engagement should form part of a continuing cycle rather than ending when a resident raises an issue. Community concerns should have an identifiable pathway through their ward representatives into Council processes, with Council's consideration and outcomes subsequently visible to the community.

Figure 2 – A continuous cycle of ward engagement, representation and accountability

This is what gives practical meaning to the representative obligation. It creates visibility in both directions: **community perspectives into Council and Council outcomes back to the community.**

Embedding the accountability framework

These arrangements should not depend solely upon whether an individual council chooses to adopt them.

There are a number of possible mechanisms through which consistent reporting and governance requirements could be established, including legislation, regulations, Ministerial guidelines, meeting procedures and council policies.

I therefore consider that an appropriate governance framework should be established for councils operating with wards, rather than leaving these practices entirely to the discretion of each council.

The precise mechanism is a matter for Government to determine. The important issue is that the framework should establish a consistent minimum expectation of what meaningful ward representation involves.

At a minimum, I suggest that such a framework provide for:

- appropriate and accountable resources to support genuine constituency engagement;
- a standing Ward Matters item at ordinary Council meetings through which councillors can raise matters arising from the communities they represent;
- annual reporting for each ward on community engagement, significant issues raised and relevant Council activities and outcomes;
- transparent reporting on the use of constituency engagement resources; and
- safeguards ensuring that constituency resources and reporting mechanisms are used for representation and accountability rather than personal promotion or electoral campaigning.

The framework should be sufficiently formal and durable to ensure these minimum practices continue irrespective of the preferences of the particular Council or elected members of the day.

The important principle is that wards should not simply identify who represents a community. The governance framework should give practical effect to the representative obligation created by that relationship and make it visible and accountable between elections.

Practical considerations in introducing wards

The introduction of wards also raises legitimate practical questions. These should be considered in designing and implementing the representation model.

Candidate numbers, electoral competition and uncontested elections

A potential concern with introducing wards is that dividing the municipality into smaller electoral areas could reduce the number of candidates available for each contest and increase the possibility of candidates being elected without a contested election.

The experience of comparable Northern Territory councils suggests that this risk should be considered, but does not in itself provide a reason to reject wards.

NTEC election data show that Palmerston's at-large system has not consistently produced greater electoral competition than ward-based councils.

In 2021, Palmerston attracted 12 candidates for seven councillor positions, equivalent to **1.71 candidates per vacancy**. Darwin attracted 25 candidates for 12 ward positions, or **2.08 candidates per vacancy**, while Litchfield attracted 17 candidates for six ward positions, or **2.83 candidates per vacancy**.

The pattern continued in 2025. Palmerston attracted 15 candidates for seven positions, or **2.14 candidates per vacancy**. Darwin attracted 32 candidates for 12 ward positions, or **2.67 candidates per vacancy**. Litchfield attracted 12 candidates for six positions, or **2.00 candidates per vacancy**.

These figures do not demonstrate that wards prevent uncontested elections. In 2025, Litchfield's North Ward had two candidates for two vacancies and consequently no councillor ballot was initially required.

They do, however, demonstrate that a ward system is compatible with healthy candidate competition. Darwin's multi-member wards have repeatedly attracted more candidates than vacancies, while Palmerston's municipality-wide system has not consistently generated a higher number of candidates per available position.

The design of wards may therefore be important. Litchfield's experience is informative. In 2017, when its council comprised four single-member wards, only six candidates contested four councillor positions and one ward was uncontested. Following the move to three two-member wards, 17 candidates contested six positions in 2021 and 12 candidates nominated for six positions in 2025.

This does not establish that multi-member wards will always produce contested elections. Candidate numbers will vary between elections. It does suggest, however, that the risk can be considered as part of ward design rather than treated as an inherent consequence of having wards.

For Palmerston, this supports consideration of **multi-member wards rather than single-member wards**, providing residents with identifiable local representation while retaining a sufficiently broad electoral area from which multiple candidates can nominate.

Wards should therefore be large enough to sustain electoral competition, but sufficiently local to create a meaningful connection between councillors and the communities they represent.

Transition to a ward structure

Introducing wards would involve adjustment.

Candidates would need to adapt from campaigning across the municipality to seeking election within defined constituencies. Electors would need to become familiar with ward boundaries and candidates. Council would need to establish practices accommodating both ward representation and collective responsibility for Palmerston.

These transitional effects should be anticipated and managed, but they should not be confused with structural shortcomings in the ward model.

Litchfield provides a relevant example. Its representation arrangements changed from four wards to three two-member wards for the 2021 election. Seventeen candidates contested the six councillor positions under the new arrangements, which remained in place for the 2025 general election.

This is particularly relevant to Palmerston. The three-ward structure determined through the previous representation review did not ultimately operate at a local government election before the wards were abolished.

A new representation model should be given a genuine opportunity to operate as intended. Transitional disruption should be recognised and managed as part of implementing structural change, rather than becoming a reason to discontinue wards before their representational benefits have had an opportunity to become established.

Electoral participation and strengthening the representative connection

Palmerston's electoral participation also raises a broader question about the connection between electors and those seeking to represent them.

At the 2025 Palmerston councillor election, 14,766 of 25,914 enrolled electors voted, representing turnout of **57.0%**.

Preferential voting determines which candidates are elected, and an elected councillor's legitimacy does not depend solely upon their first-preference vote.

Nevertheless, first-preference results provide useful context when considering the strength of the initial electoral connection between candidates and electors. In 2021, three ultimately successful councillor candidates commenced with 598, 666 and 510 first-preference votes respectively before being elected through the distribution of preferences.

This is not a criticism of those candidates or of preferential voting. It raises a broader representation question:

> Can Palmerston's electoral structure do more to strengthen the relationship between electors, candidates and councillors?

A multi-member ward structure would reduce the geographic scale across which candidates need to establish their electoral case. Candidates would seek support from a defined constituency and have a clearer incentive to build recognition, understand local issues and engage directly with the communities whose votes they are seeking.

This cannot guarantee higher voter turnout, larger first-preference counts or greater engagement. Those outcomes depend on many factors. A ward structure can, however, create a clearer and more local electoral relationship around which engagement and accountability can develop.

Importantly, that relationship would continue between elections. The same constituency from which a councillor seeks support is the community to which they return for engagement, representation and, ultimately, electoral accountability.

Proposed approach

I ask the Committee to consider the introduction of a **multi-member ward structure for the City of Palmerston**.

I do not propose specific boundaries. Those should be developed through appropriate electoral and demographic analysis, taking account of:

- communities of interest and identifiable suburbs;
- current elector numbers and electoral equality;
- population growth and anticipated development;
- geographic connections between communities; and

- the desirability of having multiple councillors within each ward.

I favour multi-member wards because they would retain access to several elected representatives while creating the geographic accountability absent from the current structure.

The objective should not simply be to divide Palmerston geographically. It should be to establish **meaningful communities of representation**.

Importantly, I do not believe reform should stop at drawing ward boundaries.

If wards are to improve representation, the defined constituency should create a clear representative responsibility, supported by a governance framework that gives practical effect to that responsibility.

I therefore ask the Committee to consider not only the introduction of multi-member wards, but also an appropriate framework providing for:

- a clear expectation that ward councillors actively engage with the communities they represent;
- genuine and appropriately resourced constituency engagement;
- a standing Ward Matters item at ordinary Council meetings;
- meaningful ward-based reporting through Council's annual report;
- transparent accountability for constituency engagement resources; and
- appropriate safeguards against personal promotion or electoral campaigning.

The precise legislative, regulatory or governance mechanisms for implementing these arrangements can be determined separately. What is important is that they are sufficiently durable to form part of the ongoing representative model rather than depending upon voluntary adoption by the Council of the day.

Conclusion

The proposal in this submission is broader than simply dividing Palmerston into wards.

It is a model of representation in which communities have identifiable representatives; those representatives have a clear responsibility to actively engage with their constituents; community issues and perspectives have a visible pathway into Council processes; and Council's consideration, actions and outcomes are reported back to the communities affected.

The complete representative model proposed in this submission is illustrated below.

Figure 3 – Proposed model for community representation, engagement and accountability

The purpose of these arrangements is not to diminish the responsibility of councillors to act in the interests of Palmerston as a whole. It is to strengthen that collective responsibility by ensuring Council's deliberations are informed by the different communities that make up Palmerston.

Wards are therefore not an end in themselves. They provide the defined constituency around which a stronger representative relationship can be built. The supporting governance arrangements proposed in this submission would give practical effect to that relationship and make it visible and accountable between elections.

The intended result is stronger communities, more accountable representation, better-informed decisions and more effective local government.

Good governance, active community engagement and effective local representation are not competing objectives. Palmerston should have all three.

For these reasons, I ask the Committee to give serious consideration to introducing an appropriate **multi-member ward structure for the City of Palmerston**, supported by a governance framework that establishes clear expectations for engagement, provides formal pathways for community issues to reach Council, and ensures meaningful reporting back to the communities represented.

From: [redacted]
To: Local Government Representation Review Secretariat
Subject: Re: 2026 NT Local Government Representative Review - Submission
Date: Friday, 2 October 2026 3:07:28 PM

Dear Committee,

I would like to provide some brief supplementary context about what prompted me to make my submission to the Representation Review.

Over a number of local government elections, both in Darwin and Palmerston, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the level of engagement I have experienced with candidates and elected councillors. This has been my experience under both ward-based and municipality-wide electoral arrangements.

At several elections, I have voted for Mayor but otherwise returned a blank ballot paper because I did not know enough about the candidates standing for councillor, had experienced little or no engagement from them, and did not feel I had a sufficient basis to make a meaningful choice between them.

That experience is important to the intent of my submission. I do not see the introduction of wards, by itself, as solving the problem. A ward structure can establish a clearer relationship between councillors and a defined constituency, but that relationship still needs to be made meaningful.

My submission is therefore an attempt to address two related issues.

First, I believe residents should be able to identify councillors who have a particular representative responsibility for their part of the municipality. Secondly, and just as importantly, those councillors should be actively encouraged and appropriately supported to engage with their constituents, understand local issues and bring those issues into Council processes for consideration.

The model I proposed is therefore not simply wards for the sake of wards. It is intended to establish a practical representative pathway:

For that reason, my submission also considers the practical mechanisms that could support this relationship, including appropriate resources for councillor engagement and opportunities for ward-based reporting through Council.

Ultimately, my interest in this review comes from a fairly simple question arising from my own experience as a voter and resident: who represents my local community, how do I engage with them, and how do the issues affecting my community find their way into Council's decision-making?

My submission is an attempt to propose a structure and supporting processes that provide clearer answers to those questions, not only for me, but for other Palmerston residents and elsewhere who may have experienced a similar disconnect from their elected representatives.

I would appreciate this supplementary information being considered alongside my original submission.

Regards,
Tony Gill

When you believe I-CAN-DO-IT, the HOW-TO-DO-IT develops.
-- David J. Schwartz (The Magic of Thinking Big)
Lets all be; Bigger, Wiser, Stronger, Kinder
Follow your heartbeat!

On Wed, 30 Sept 2026 at 11:07, Tony [redacted] wrote:

> Hi there.
>
> Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission as part of the Local Government Representation Review.
>
> Please find attached my submission for consideration.
>
> I would also appreciate the opportunity to participate in any further consultation undertaken following the preparation of the preliminary report, including any second round of consultation.
>
> Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review process.
>
> Regards,
> Tony Gill
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> ---
>
> *When you believe I-CAN-DO-IT, the HOW-TO-DO-IT develops.*
> *-- David J. Schwartz (The Magic of Thinking Big)*
> ***Lets all be; Bigger, Wiser, Stronger, Kinder***
> ***Follow your heartbeat!***
>
> ---