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Ms Mary Watson / Committee Chair
Local Government Representation Review

Email: submissions@lgrr2026.com.au

Dear Mary

**Re: Local Government Representation Review**

Thank you for the opportunity for Land Development Corporation (LDC) to comment on the Local Government Representation Review 2026.

Our comments primarily relate to maintaining the unincorporated status for the strategic industrial precinct at East Arm. While we understand this may not be the main focus of the review, it is an opportune time to highlight why maintaining the current unincorporated boundaries for this strategic industrial area is important for the Territory's future.

LDC is the Northern Territory Government's strategic land developer, established under the Land Development Corporation Act 2003 to support economic development, population growth and the delivery of serviced land across the Territory. Operating as a Government Business Division, LDC acts on a commercial basis while aligning with Government priorities. Its role is to ensure land is made available in the right locations and at the right time, particularly where market conditions or strategic considerations limit private sector delivery.

Over time, LDC has delivered key industrial precincts and residential communities that have supported major industries, attracted investment and facilitated economic and population growth across the Northern Territory. LDC develops land within both incorporated and unincorporated areas. As noted earlier, LDC's comments focus on the strategic industrial area of East Arm and we strongly recommend that this area retains its current unincorporated status.

Background

East Arm is a major industrial and logistics hub that supports the Territory's economy through nationally significant infrastructure including East Arm Wharf, the Marine Supply Base, the Northern Marine Complex including the Darwin Ship Lift, rail terminal facilities, fuel storage, marine industries and freight operations. Municipal services are provided directly by the Northern Territory Government and rates collected within the area are paid to the Territory rather than a local council. The 2021 Census identified only 21 residents within East Arm, most likely associated with caretaker accommodation. The low resident population negates the need for traditional local government services and representation.

Given its primary function as a port, logistics and industrial precinct serving the whole Territory, there is little rationale for its inclusion within a neighbouring municipality. Direct Territory Government administration enables planning, land release, infrastructure investment and industrial development decisions to be coordinated efficiently and consistently with broader economic development objectives.

Planning and Design Approvals

Strategic industrial development is critical to the Territory's long-term economic growth and must remain competitive with interstate and international locations to attract major investment. The planning and design approval framework is therefore a significant factor in the successful delivery of these areas.

Maintaining Territory Government oversight ensures that planning decisions can respond to the specialised requirements of strategic industries. In contrast, the relevant Division of the Development Consent Authority within an incorporated area is likely to assess a development application through a community focused lens applicable to significant residential population areas. This assessment is unlikely to consider the specialised operational needs of large-scale industrial developments.

Similarly, local government technical approval processes generally rely on strict application of the NT Subdivision Design Guidelines (NTSDG), which are primarily designed for residential subdivisions. However, strategic industrial areas (and to a lesser extent light / general industrial subdivisions) require customised and innovative solutions to accommodate specialised equipment, heavy vehicle movements, marine maintenance operations and industry-specific infrastructure requirements.

It is LDC’s experience that during the planning and design approval phase, Council technical staff have limited capacity to consider variations from the specified road designs in the NTSDG.

Examples of Successful Outcomes

Precinct 1 of the Northern Marine Complex at East Arm demonstrates the benefits of direct Territory Government approval processes. As an unincorporated area, road design approvals are managed by the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (DLI), enabling fit-for-purpose solutions tailored to the intended strategic industrial activities.

Following extensive consultation with marine maintenance industry providers, Defence, Darwin Port and other key stakeholders, the estate and infrastructure was designed specifically for vessel maintenance and ship lift support activities. The adoption of non-standard infrastructure solutions for the internal public road within Precinct 1 includes specialised pavements, road layouts and clearances capable of accommodating large self-propelled modular transporters to facilitate vessel movements.

A similar approach was taken in the delivery of Truck Central being the first stage of the Wishart Estate. Following close consultation with the NT Road Transport Association and industry stakeholders, this greenfield site now incorporates fit-for-purpose pavement solutions tailored to heavy transport operations. This included non-standard road geometry, kerb-free interfaces, specialised access arrangements and road layouts that improved safety, efficiency and productivity for heavy vehicle operators and the transport sector. Truck Central was designed and developed when Wishart was an unincorporated area and the former Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics was the responsible road authority.

The specialised road designs at the Northern Marine Complex and Truck Central developments vary significantly from NTSDG standards to provide significant benefits to the tenants and users of these strategic industrial estates.

Conclusion

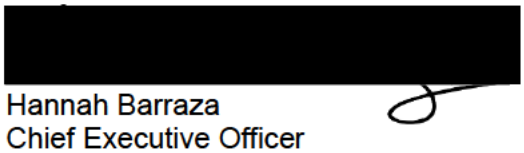
East Arm is not a conventional urban community. It is a strategically significant industrial, logistics, marine and infrastructure precinct that supports economic development across the Northern Territory and northern Australia. The planning, development and operation requires a level of coordination and understanding that extends beyond the functions typically performed by local government.

The Territory Government has successfully facilitated the development of this area through direct control of planning, design, infrastructure provision and development approvals. This has enabled fit-for-purpose solutions that respond to industry requirements, improve investment certainty and maximise economic outcomes for the Territory.

Incorporation into a local government area would introduce additional administrative complexity and constrain the flexibility required to attract investment and deliver strategic industrial infrastructure. Given the negligible residential population in the area and the importance to Territory and national economic objectives, the benefits of local government representation are limited, while the impact on industrial competitiveness, coordinated planning and fit for purpose design outcomes are significant.

Accordingly, LDC strongly recommends that East Arm remain an unincorporated areas under the direct administration of the Northern Territory Government to ensure the continued delivery of strategic industrial development and infrastructure of Territory-wide significance.

Yours sincerely



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