ALGWA
AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Australian Local Government Women's Association
President Cr Kylie Spears | Correspondence to National Secretary
National Board founded Canberra 1951
M: [redacted] | Secretary@algwa.com.au | algwa.com.au
ABN 58853 856 904 | Inc A0020253H

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Northern Territory Local Government Representation Review

ALGWA NT welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of representation across the Northern Territory's 18 councils.

ALGWA works to strengthen the participation, leadership and representation of women in local government. Fair representation requires communities to have a meaningful voice in council decisions and a genuine opportunity for people from different backgrounds to stand for election and serve effectively.

ALGWA's figures following the November 2025 elections indicate that women hold approximately 40.5 per cent of Northern Territory Councillor positions. That overall figure masks differences between municipal, regional and shire councils. The review is an opportunity to examine whether current arrangements give women, including Aboriginal women and women in remote communities, a fair opportunity to represent their communities.

Assess representation within each council

ALGWA NT asks the Committee to assess proposed changes to wards, boundaries and Councillor numbers against both population and the practical realities of representation. In the Territory, distance, travel conditions, communications access, language and connections between communities can determine whether residents can reach their elected representatives and whether Councillors can fulfil the role.

A ward may provide a clear voice for a distinct community. In another area, the same arrangement may divide communities with strong connections or leave too few people able to stand for election. ALGWA NT does not propose one model for every council. We ask that each recommendation explain how the proposed arrangement would improve residents' access to representation and preserve meaningful local voices.

Consider who can stand and serve

The number of positions and the size of wards can affect the pool of prospective candidates. In particular, the Committee should consider whether a proposed arrangement would make it harder for people with caring responsibilities, limited access to transport or substantial work commitments to nominate and serve.

Councillor numbers should be sufficient for members to share the workload, maintain contact with their communities and bring a range of perspectives to council decisions. In geographically large councils, the Committee should examine the travel and community engagement expected of each Councillor before recommending a reduction in elected positions.

ALGWA NT asks the Committee to include an assessment of potential effects on women's participation in its reasons for any proposed change. This should inform the decision alongside the review's other considerations; it need not assume that a particular boundary or ward structure will produce a particular election result.

Hear directly from Aboriginal women and remote communities

Local knowledge is essential to this review. ALGWA NT encourages the Committee to hear directly from Traditional Owners, Aboriginal women, community leaders and residents of remote communities about how existing arrangements work in practice.

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Consultation should be accessible to people who cannot easily attend a meeting or prepare a formal written submission. Where appropriate, this could include conversations in community, opportunities to contribute orally, interpretation and information in relevant languages. Feedback should be sought on whether ward boundaries reflect community connections and whether residents know who represents them and can contact that person.

Make the evidence and reasons clear

For each council, ALGWA NT recommends that the Committee publish a clear explanation of the representation issues it identified, the options considered and the reasons for its preferred option. Where the information is available, this should include relevant population and enrolment data, geographic and travel considerations, community feedback, and the likely workload for elected members.

We also encourage the Committee to examine and report available data on who nominates and who is elected, including gender, while respecting privacy in small communities. This would help identify whether barriers to participation require attention beyond changes to representation boundaries.

Recommendations

ALGWA NT asks the Committee to:

1. Assess wards, boundaries and Councillor numbers council by council, taking account of community connections, geography, travel, communications and Councillor workload.
2. Consider how each proposed arrangement may affect the ability of women, particularly Aboriginal women and women in remote communities, to nominate and serve.
3. Provide accessible opportunities for Traditional Owners and remote communities to contribute directly to the review.
4. Publish the evidence and reasons for each recommendation, including an assessment of its likely effect on effective local representation.
5. Identify barriers to candidacy or service that fall outside the Committee's remit and refer them to the Northern Territory Government for further consideration.

The Territory's councils serve communities with very different circumstances. ALGWA NT supports recommendations grounded in those local circumstances and in the voices of the people each council represents. The measure of this review should be whether residents can participate in local democracy, reach their elected members and see their communities reflected in council decisions.

Warm regards

Mayor Athina Pascoe Bell
President
ALGWA NT

Cr Kylie Spears
President
ALGWA National