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Submission to the 2026 Local Government Representation Review

Groote Archipelago Regional Council | 25 September 2026

Council supports a ward-based representation model that protects community voice and reflects the cultural, geographic and service-delivery realities of the Groote Archipelago.

1. Council position

Groote Archipelago Regional Council supports a representation model that is lawful, practical, culturally appropriate and capable of providing effective representation across the Groote Archipelago.

Council's preferred outcome is to retain a ward-based structure that protects community voice and recognises the distinct circumstances of the communities Council serves. Any change should be supported by transparent evidence, meaningful community consultation and a clear assessment of governance and service-delivery consequences.

Council asks the review to give particular weight to effective representation, access to elected members, community identity, cultural authority, geographic remoteness and the practical operation of local government in remote communities.

2. Background

Prior to the de-amalgamation of the East Arnhem Regional Council, extensive consultations were undertaken with communities across the Groote Archipelago, with particular emphasis on engaging the 14 Anindilyakwa clan groups to determine the most appropriate local government model.

The consultations considered the views and interests of the 14 Anindilyakwa clan groups, representing communities across the Groote Archipelago, with the following population figures:

- **Umbakumba:** 482 residents, of whom 437 identify as Anindilyakwa.
- **Angurugu:** 883 residents, of whom 858 identify as Anindilyakwa.
- **Milyakburra:** 112 residents, of whom 104 identify as Anindilyakwa.

The outcome of the consultation was that a ward based Local Government model would provide a system of Local Government that had proper regards to culturally appropriate Anindilyakwa clan representation on Council while simultaneously recognising the different communities of interest across the Archipelago.

In concluding that a ward based system was appropriate, it was recognised that there would be different franchise across each of the wards. Currently our breakdown is as follows,

Ward	Members	Current enrolment	Electors per member
Central	3	731	243
East	2	312	156
West	2	97	48
Total	**7**	**1,140**	**162**

Despite these different weighing on the value of each vote across wards, the current system is considered far more preferential to one where Anindilyakwa clan representation is excluded and communities of interest are not represented.

3. Recommendations

- That the review retain a ward-based electoral structure for Council unless evidence and community consultation demonstrate that an alternative would deliver materially better effective representation.
- That ward boundaries and councillor allocation be assessed against community identity, cultural and Local Authority structures, geographic accessibility, population and elector distribution, and the practical demands of representing remote communities.
- That numerical equality not be pursued in isolation where it would materially weaken community representation, cultural legitimacy or access to elected representatives.
- That affected communities and Local Authorities be directly consulted before any proposed change to ward boundaries or representation is finalised.
- That the final determination clearly explain the evidence, criteria and reasons relied upon, including how effective representation and remote-community circumstances were weighed.

4. Principles for effective representation

Principle	Council position
Effective representation	Residents should be able to reasonably access, communicate with and be heard by elected members.
Community of interest	Ward design should respect established communities, local identity and culturally legitimate decision-making relationships.
Geographic reality	Distance, transport constraints and the dispersed nature of remote settlements are substantive governance factors.

Population and electors	Numerical distribution is relevant, but it should be considered with the qualitative factors that determine whether representation is effective.
Stability and confidence	Change should deliver a demonstrated governance benefit and avoid unnecessary disruption to community representation.
Transparency	Any proposed change should be supported by evidence, consultation and reasons that are clear to Council and community members.

5. Local governance context

Council operates in a remote archipelago context where local government representation works alongside strong community identity, cultural authority and Local Authority engagement. The electoral structure should complement, rather than dilute, place-based community participation.

Council's service-delivery planning also relies on community-level engagement. The Council operates via place-based approach that connects Council services and priorities with the needs of a specific community. This reinforces the value of clear community voice within the representative structure.

Representation arrangements must also work in practice. A model that appears balanced on population data alone may still weaken representation if it creates excessive travel demands, reduces regular elected-member contact or combines communities with materially different local interests.

6. How ward options should be assessed

Council submits that each ward and any proposed alternative should be tested against the following questions:

- Whether the community of interest is coherent and readily understood by residents.
- Whether residents have reasonable access to elected representatives.
- Whether the arrangement recognises remote geography, travel constraints and service-delivery realities.
- Whether it preserves meaningful representation for discrete communities rather than aggregating communities for numerical convenience.
- Whether councillor allocation is proportionate when population and elector data are considered with the other relevant governance factors.
- Whether the change would strengthen accountability and community confidence.

7. Community consultation

Council considers direct community consultation essential where changes may alter ward boundaries, councillor allocation or the way a community is represented. Consultation should be accessible, culturally appropriate and provide enough information for community members to understand the practical effect of each option.

Local Authorities are an important place-based governance interface and should have a clear opportunity to comment on proposals affecting their communities. Written submissions should be complemented by engagement methods suited to remote communities wherever practicable.

8. Evidence and reasons

Council asks that the review's final report identify the population and elector data used and its reference date; the options considered, including the current model; the community and stakeholder consultation undertaken; the effect of each option on effective representation and community access; how geography, community identity, cultural considerations and Local Authority structures were considered; and the reasons for the recommended ward structure and Councilor allocation.

9. Ward re-distribution upon discontinuation of mining/Alyangula

Mining operation in Groote Island are due to be discontinued around the year 2032. The discontinuation of mining will necessitate consideration by the department as to whether the unincorporated land in the town of Alyangula should be incorporated within the Groote Archipelago Regional Council. The incorporation of these populations would necessitate a reconsideration of the vote franchise weighing for the central ward and either redistribution of ward boundaries or an additional allocation of representation.

The alternative model of having a separate unincorporated township within the boundary of the Groote Archipelago Regional Council is in the view of Council both unsustainable due to the current Alyangula population of approximately 957 residents and the likely future reduced population after mining is discontinued.

Any potential redistribution of the central ward into two separate wards, one based on Alyangula and the other based on Angurugu or in the alternative any increase in the representation for the central ward ought not occur until the completion of mining and the stabilisation of Alyangula population thereafter. The consideration as to which option is most appropriate should have proper regard for the communities of interest in each of the townships and the relevant populations at the time.

10. Conclusion

Council supports a representation framework that combines democratic fairness with the realities of governance in remote communities. Effective representation cannot be reduced to population arithmetic alone. Community identity, cultural legitimacy, geography, accessibility and the practical capacity of elected members to maintain genuine local contact are central considerations.

Council therefore asks the review to preserve strong place-based representation, consult directly on any material change and provide a transparent, evidence-based rationale for its final determination.