



6 June 2022

Representative Review Committee
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To whom it may concern

2022 Northern Territory Local Government Representation Review

The West Daly Regional Council appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the 2022 Local Government Representation Review conducted under the *Local Government Act 2021* (The Act). We understand the aim of the Representation Review is to ensure fair and adequate representation of the electors within our council area.

BACKGROUND

As part of the Local Government reforms in the Northern Territory, the West Daly Regional Council came into existence on 01 July 2014 through the de-amalgamation of the Victoria Daly Shire Council into the Victoria Daly Regional Council and West Daly Regional Council.

At the time, the Minister for Local Government and Regions determined in the Northern Territory Government Gazette No. S45 at clause 7 the number of Elected Members for the West Daly region.¹


The fundamental role of Council is to represent the interests of their region. In being elected, councillors are individually and collectively bound to carry out the functions and exercise the statutory responsibilities and principles of local government.

Councillors contribute considerable time and effort to their Council activities regardless of the size and remoteness of the region they represent. The workload expected of councillors bears no relationship to the number of ratepayers on the books.

Councillor responsibilities continue to become increasingly complex with more accountability and a higher level of professionalism expected during recent challenging and difficult times such as with COVID-19 restrictions, food security and community unrest. Furthermore the West Daly region has numerous Homeland and

¹ The number of members to be elected for a ward of the West Daly Region is determined to be:

- (a) for the Nganmarriyanga ward - 1;
- (b) for the Thamarrurr/Pindi Pindi ward – 4;
- (c) for the Tyemirri ward - 1.



Outstations that require representation. These are geographically located over a vast area.

This submission has been prepared having regard to the provisions of the *Local Government Act 2019* (NT) Part 3.2.

In accordance with the assessment criteria, factors to be considered when deciding upon a change in council representation, matters such as physical and topographical features of the local government area are not applicable in this submission.

Factors that are relevant include:

- Community of interests in the local government area including economic, social and regional interests;
- Types of communication and travel in the local government area with issues arising out of remoteness;
- Trend of population changes in the local government area;
- The density of population in the local government area;
- Ratio of councillors to electors.

CURRENT SITUATION

Community of interests in the local government area including economic, social and regional interests.

The term ‘community of interest’ has a number of elements. These include a sense of community identity and belonging, similarities in the characteristics of the residents of a community, and similarities in the economic activities. This is strained in the West Daly region as it is ranked low in the socio-economic index (ABS Census 2016) which is indicative that many households have low income or paying low rent.

Revenue raised from rates collection is an extremely small proportion of the total budget, due to the low number of rateable properties and valuations. Income is supplemented by the securing of government grants.

Types of communication and travel in the local government area with issues arising out of remoteness.

West Daly Regional Council comprises of 6 Councillors with 4 representing Thamarrurr/Pindi Pindi Ward (1,571 electors), 1 representing Nganmariyanga Ward (208 electors) and 1 representing the Peppimenarti Ward (89 electors). The Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected by the Councillors.

The role of Mayor, and to a lesser extent, Deputy Mayor is more demanding and comes with a greater workload and more responsibility than the role of Councillor. This is reflected in the level of allowance they receive.



It is challenging for effective engagement and communication to take place in community due to the instability of the telecommunications network and power grid failing on numerous occasions over many years. An all-weather, all year-round sealed road network will be vital for the communities of Wadeye, Nganmarriyanga (Palumpa) and Peppimenarti. A sealed network encourages economic development and allows community members to improve their quality of life via travel to sporting and cultural events, as well as allowing for the efficient transport of goods and the provision of services to the region.

Trend of population changes in the local government area

The Estimated Resident Population has increased from 2014 to 2021 by 177 with an estimated current population of 3,764 people. There are 332 households with children and overall, 23.8% of total households with children were couple with young children, and 6.0% were couples with older children.²

There is an expectation of reasonable population growth in the foreseeable future across the Council Wards and Homelands, primarily because an undertaking given by the Labour government to immediately spend \$100 million on urgent housing and infrastructure on the NT's homelands. This will include improvements to water, power and community facilities, as well as housing upgrades, extensions, and new builds.³

This promise gives hope for our region with the potential of the redevelopment of existing sites, residential development and infill development planned. The extent and timing of any of this future development (and resultant increase in elector numbers) is difficult to determine at this time.

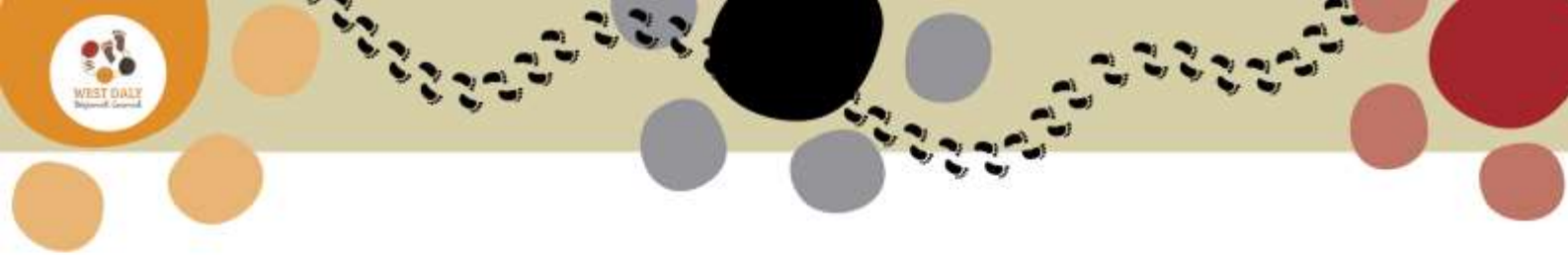
Regardless, the anticipated increase in the future population will likely result in an increase in elector numbers, higher elector ratios and potentially greater workloads for the Elected Members.

The density of population in the local government area.

Underlying problems include overcrowded housing, poor health conditions, and the need for more support in education are real issues for the West Daly region. Council cannot address these problems alone, and change will not happen overnight. That is why Council is further supporting relationships to better understand our challenges and future opportunities. We will approach these issues in partnership with our regional stakeholders and government departments.

² [Households with children | RDA Northern Territory | Community profile \(id.com.au\)](#)

³ [Restoring Funding for Homelands and Improving Remote Housing | Policies | Australian Labor Party \(alp.org.au\)](#)



Council believes children are our future but we need to provide a safe place for them to flourish and grow into citizens with prospects. This can only happen through positive change, with improved housing and infrastructure with government assistance.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ELECTED MEMBERS

The **advantages** of an increase in the number of Elected Members include the following:

- A greater number of elected members may result in a decreased workload on each Councillor increasing effectiveness.
- Diversity of interests around Council table and less dominance in Council by an interest group, clan or family group.
- An increase in opportunities for community participation in Council's affairs with a greater number of Elected Members to contact.
- The decision-making process may be more effective and efficient if the number of Councillors is increased.
- Consultation with the community may be achieved through a variety of means in addition to individuals and groups contacting their local Elected Member.
- A greater number of Elected Members are more readily identifiable within the community.
- Councillors can become role models within their community.
- Training and skills opportunities.

The **disadvantages** of an increase in the number of elected members may include the following:

- The increase of cost maintaining Elected Members.

Ratio of Councillors to electors

When determining the appropriate number of councillors to provide fair and adequate representation, Council was mindful that:

- Sufficient Elected Members must be available to manage the affairs of Council,
- The Elected Members workloads should not become excessive,
- There is an appropriate level of elector representation,
- A diversity in members skill sets, experience, expertise, opinions and backgrounds is maintained to ensure robust discussion amongst Elected Members, and
- Adequate lines of communication must exist between the community and council.



West Daly Regional Council Elected Members have a representative ratio of 1:332. There is a diverse range of Councillor/elector ratios across the Top End, reflecting the sparsely populated remote areas and the highly populated urban areas. The structure of the Council's operations will provide some input into the number of Councillors needed to service the West Daly region.

CONCLUSION

As the third tier of government, local government through West Daly Regional Council is responsible for ensuring local communities run as smoothly and efficiently as possible, with constituents able to access the services and programs they need to live safe and healthy lives. It would be virtually impossible for state and federal governments to provide these essential services to individual communities. That's why local infrastructure and services are best delivered locally with oversight of our Elected Members.

Our Council have arguably the biggest impact on people's day to day lives. Council believes that it is important to increase the quality and level of representation by adding to the number of councillors to represent the community. For the reasons addressed earlier, Council is confident that its future composition will provide the optimum number of Elected Members required to manage the affairs of Council if it was increased in number.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Eastham', written over a horizontal line.

Matthew Eastham ASM
Chief Executive Officer