

Central Desert Regional Council CEO, Leslie Manda, has provided a submission to the committee.

NT LG council on which they are commenting: Central Desert Regional Council

Leslie Manda's submission:

The Preliminary report is proposing a reduction in the number of ward members from 2 to 1 with no clarity as to what happens to the member removed from the Akityarre ward and the total number of elected members for Central Desert Regional Council. Below is Council's feedback on the report:

Reasons for no nominations or non-participation in past elections

Consultation with residents and pastoralists within the ward revealed the following reasons for non-participation in elections:

- Lack of confidence in the local government system, services and leadership
- Lack of services, engagement and advocacy by Council with pastoralists
- Residents felt unheard and did not have confidence their views were taken into consideration
- Electoral allowance insufficient to support family
- Nomination form difficult to complete for residents and lack of flexibility from NTEC regarding correction of minor errors for remote community nominations

Since 2019, 3 by-elections and a supplementary election were conducted in the Akityarre ward costing Council approximately \$4,815.30 – despite the cost and resources involved, Council believe that the by-elections are an important process and cost to ensure adequate representation across all its communities/region. The reason for vacancies is an important one that Council would like to raise as it humanizes the process:

- Bruce Finter and Liz Bird were past Councillors who were pastoralists until 2016 and did not participate in future elections due to lack of confidence in local government, services and absence of engagement/advocacy.
- Renita Webb resigned in 2018 due to compassionate reasons to support a seriously ill family member.
- Jamie Webb attempted to complete his nomination forms but they contained an error and resulted in a failed by-election Jamie then resubmitted his forms at the next by-election and was successfully appointed as Councillor in early 2021 however resigned in May 2021 due to economic factors and family reasons – Electoral allowance not enough to support him and his young family and consequently took a job with Exact Constructing.

Council has been extensively consulting with residents to identify future leaders and the appointment of Rosslyn Campbell from Bonya is testament to the successful exercise by Council. Significant progress has been made to engage with residents and restore their confidence in local government. In 2021/22 financial year, is the first year since 2008 that all Local Authorities within the central desert region met the minimum 4 times required under Guideline 1 – Local Authorities. Council is also undertaking a research study and developing a youth leadership program to identify and develop youth to participate in Council and Local Authorities – since 2021, Council has nominated 2 individuals to the First Circles Leadership Program. Council has commenced re-engaging pastoralists and business owners within its region and regular meetings (quarterly) are held where pastoralists have the opportunity to raise issues, concerns and ideas with the Council's CEO. Further the report does not take into consideration the future economic growth of the region from

Jervois mine and the Plenty Highway tourism which will contribute to not only population growth but also economic development.

All the above are a reflection of the improved engagement, confidence in local government and service delivery between Council, pastoralists and residents and reducing the number of ward members would be:

- an erosion of the renewed confidence in local government,
- questioning of the democratic principle as Council has been advocating for increased resident participation in voting,
- loss of adequate representation (community voice) for a geographically large wide spread ward and
- disadvantage to the population within the ward.

Therefore, Council propose no change in the number of ward members for the Akityarre ward.