



**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
Additional Estimates 2025-26**

Central Land Council appearance: 9 February 2026

Opening statement, Central Land Council CEO – Les Turner

The Central Land Council has a strong record on upholding robust governance and delivering outcomes for and with its constituents. We do so with respect for both the governance realms that we exist within – being Commonwealth legislation and Aboriginal culture, country and law. The drive for better outcomes for Aboriginal people across our region underpins our work. We work to realise land rights so that traditional owners are decision-makers for their country and can exercise their custodial duties. We assist constituents to achieve outcomes that strengthen their lives, such as through ranger programs and community development projects. We acknowledge the continued and tireless engagement of our constituents, as well as the many stakeholders we work with to deliver on our functions, be accountable to constituents, and comply with statutory requirements.

In planning for its audit of the CLC's 2025-26 financial statements, the Australian National Audit Office has assessed there to be a low risk of material misstatement in the financial statements. This follows the CLC working closely with the ANAO to ensure appropriate disclosures were made in our 2024-25 financial statements, with no unresolved findings at the conclusion of the ANAO's 2024-25 audit.

Tomorrow, on 10 February, CLC will be standing beside native title holders of Singleton Station for the High Court hearing of their challenge of the Singleton Water Licence. Native title holders have instructed the CLC to challenge the decision to grant this licence, which allows the proponent to take 40 billion litres of groundwater per year for 30 years from underneath the Station, for free. This is the biggest water licence in the Northern Territory, and likely the whole country. It is predicted to destroy vast stretches of rich biodiverse country, including sacred trees and water places. This case is about supporting native title holders to have a genuine say about what happens on their land, to meaningfully benefit from projects and to hold the government accountable for poor decision-making. Getting to the High Court is a huge achievement and we congratulate the native title holders who have continued to fight so hard to protect their country for future generations.

We also wish to draw the committee's attention to the negative impacts of climate change on our constituents' lives and the grim climate predictions for the near future. In recent years, forecast temperature rises have been exceeded in both Alice Springs and Darwin. Impacts on living conditions are further exacerbated for people living remotely and in poverty, with regular power disconnections, flooding and road closures, and poorly designed and maintained housing that is often hotter inside than out, with few cool places to escape to. Aboriginal people are seeing changes in country, species dying out and waterholes drying. Buffel fuelled fires are burning hotter and more often and the window for our ranger teams to manage country is narrowing as the number of very hot days increases. We are - and will continue to - work steadfastly to support our people to manage and protect country. We also require courageous, decisive and coordinated Northern Territory and Commonwealth action on climate change now. Otherwise, many parts of country that our people have lived on for millennia will become unliveable in our lifetimes.