

# Northern Territory Government Response to the Senate Inquiry into Regional Inequality in Australia

## 1. Background and context

On 14 February 2018, the Senate requested that the Senate Economics References Committee conduct an inquiry into and report on the indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia.

## 2. Introduction

The Northern Territory has a geographically dispersed and isolated population base. Three quarters of the population reside in the Territory's five regional centres (Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs), which also serve as vital supply and service bases for smaller remote communities. The majority of Territorians live in Darwin and the satellite city of Palmerston and surrounds (the current population of Darwin is 143 629<sup>1</sup>), and the Central Australia region (including Alice Springs) is the second most populated area. The remainder of the population lives in Katherine, Tennant Creek and the coastal town of Nhulunbuy or in the hundreds of other small remote outstations and homelands throughout the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory economy is largely cyclical and project-based, and prone to volatility, particularly once transition from investment to less labour intensive operational phases of major projects occurs. The short-term nature of construction employment associated with major projects causes the Northern Territory to experience volatile population growth - population surges during the construction phase of major projects and workers (and their families) often leave the Northern Territory once highly paid project-related construction jobs finish.

The government sector, mining and manufacturing and construction play a large role in the Northern Territory economy, contributing 50.6 per cent collectively to the Territory economy and 56.9 per cent of employment in 2015-16. Several regional towns have developed around mining or other dominant industries.

The Northern Territory has 96 major/minor Aboriginal communities and 613 recorded homelands dispersed widely across the Northern Territory.

The vast majority of these communities are in very remote locations as defined by the 'The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure'.

Over 51 000 Aboriginal people live in very remote Aboriginal communities or homelands (21 per cent of the total Northern Territory population).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://cmsexternal.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/434546/Northern-Territory-Economic-Development-Framework.pdf](https://cmsexternal.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/434546/Northern-Territory-Economic-Development-Framework.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Chief Minister – Presentation to UN-Rapporteur 2017

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### 3. Northern Territory Government Comments against the Terms of Reference

*The indicators of, and impact of, regional inequality in Australia, with particular reference to government policies and programs in the following areas:*

- a) fiscal policies at federal, state and local government levels;*
- b) improved co-ordination of federal, state and local government policies;*
- c) regional development policies;*
- d) infrastructure;*
- e) education;*
- f) building human capital;*
- g) enhancing local workforce skills;*
- h) employment arrangements;*
- i) decentralisation policies;*
- j) innovation;*
- k) manufacturing; and*
- l) any other related matters.*

In the Northern Territory there is substantial inequality largely determined by the presence of a significant employing industry that generates economic activity and income. While the Northern Territory Government believes all of the areas highlighted in the terms of reference are important, this response focuses on the following areas:

- Improved coordination of federal, state and local government policies;
- Regional development policies, including enhancing local workforce skills;
- Infrastructure;
- Education; and
- Decentralisation policies.

Research undertaken by the Northern Territory Government highlights the linkage between sustainable population growth and economic development. A suitably sized and skilled labour force is critical to economic growth and diversification. In the context of the Northern Territory's small population the limited supply of skilled labour means that major projects are largely completed through the use imported labour. The use of temporary workforces during periods of economic expansion associated with major projects is an inhibitor to longer term business and economic growth.

Due to remoteness, people are restricted in their access to everyday services that provide the foundation for growth and prosperity in today's economy. Examples of these impacts are seen in early childhood, education, health and employment outcomes.

The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) report produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. The indexes are based on information from the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing.

SEIFA 2016 shows that the 10 most disadvantaged local government areas in Australia can be found in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

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### **4. Improved coordination of federal, state and local government policy**

The Northern Territory Government's Local Decision Making plan provides a pathway for Aboriginal communities to have more control over their own affairs, including service delivery based on a community's aspirations and needs.

The Northern Territory Government recognises that building, supporting and investing in strong Aboriginal governance is necessary to ensure local people drive local solutions, and that Aboriginal organisations are supported in managing local decision making. This helps to set communities up for success.

Government and Aboriginal communities will work together to develop policies and practices for service delivery, such as housing; local government; education, training and jobs; health; children and families; and law and justice.

This place-based approach should also be considered by the Commonwealth Government as an appropriate way to co-design policies and services for regional and remote areas.

The Northern Territory Government believes it is important that any new or revised Closing the Gap strategy is developed in partnership with states and territories and with Aboriginal stakeholders, communities and organisations. This will ensure that it is coordinated, meaningful, and able to be implemented on the ground. Furthermore, the Northern Territory Government believes any new or revised strategy should be evidence-based and accompanied by appropriate resourcing and commitments to sustainability.

The Northern Territory Government believes the existing framework for Closing the Gap, which focuses exclusively on disadvantage in the areas of health, education and employment, should be expanded to capture a more holistic picture. The refreshed agenda should be expanded to capture targets or commitments about socio-economic indicators that Aboriginal Territorians have identified as being important through Council of Australian Governments Aboriginal community consultations. Specifically, the Northern Territory Government would like to see housing, economic participation and justice as priority areas for the refresh of Closing the Gap.

### **5. Regional development policies and enhancing local workforce skills**

Commonwealth regional development policies would benefit from establishing a quality database to facilitate access to potential investors, businesses and government to address the knowledge gaps and to help promote the potential untapped assets available to support economic development across the regions. An established quality data base will facilitate better informed investment and business project decision-making which will enable investments to be appropriately planned to maximise opportunity for successful outcomes and mitigate identified risks early.

Regional development policies may consider and establish solutions to address the limited supply chain infrastructure to enable economic development opportunities in regional/remote areas and the centralisation of services (particularly private sector) to major population centres which impacts on the widening inequalities between communities.

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Regional development policies should consider the Northern Territory's unique characteristics to mitigate identified risks and improve implementation, such as:

- smaller and highly dispersed population with a large proportion living in regional and remote areas spread across vast geographical distances
- a majority of unsealed roads become affected by wet season conditions resulting in access to communities and residents being cut off, further isolating communities and businesses, and
- long distances and poor economies of scale result in expensive freight costs for communities in regional and remote locations so access to goods or services are restricted and costs to transport produce to markets relatively higher.

Effective regional policies will enable the Northern Territory Government to support and encourage greater private sector investment to the Northern Territory to establish new economic opportunities.

The high cost of living and services in remote areas is not adequately covered by zonal taxation offsets, and therefore wages have to be increased which itself has a multiplying effect on the costs of living in a remote region. This also impacts through the high cost of rents. Not only are building costs higher than in more populated areas, but investment in property in a regional town is inherently more risky, as the economy of that town can fluctuate with the fortunes of a few businesses. Rental costs therefore tend to be much higher than the equivalent cost of house ownership.

There is a shortage of skilled people for employment, and particularly lack of a sustainable supply of skilled people. In some professions in small towns, the difference between an adequate supply and none would be the loss of one or two people.

A factor increasing staff instability is that staff tend to be younger. Even if a staff member has a satisfactory work life and good conditions, their stability is often upset by relationships, partners not finding suitable work or not choosing to live in a remote or regional area. Schooling (lack of choice and options) and shortage of child care also impact on staff retention.

For most businesses, access to town water and mains electricity are a pre-requisite. Having to supply their own water and electricity infrastructure makes the development of businesses on remote sites unviable in most cases.

The Northern Territory Government continues to build local workforce skills in regional and remote communities, with a focus on upskilling, training and education for local people to build community capacity.

To enhance local workforce skills in regional remote areas of the Northern Territory, there must be improved access to communication technology and infrastructure to support effective online education and training services readily available in larger townships.

Consistent and reliable communications infrastructure is a costly factor for business and industry in regional and remote areas, without the same level of access that east coast Australians enjoy – this limits application of technology and impedes efficiency gains.

A key consideration for the residents living in rural and remote communities is to access employment and training opportunities throughout the year that will allow them to continue to develop and build current skills through ongoing workforce participation.

The Northern Territory workforce in regional and remote communities could benefit from initiatives that support a mobilised workforce to allow workers to move between areas of low employment and economic activity to places where there are more jobs and skills development which are not readily available where they live.

Transport connectivity, particularly airline connections, can be a significant business impediment both for travel and freight purposes.

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### 6. Infrastructure

The Northern Territory's small and dispersed population, long distances, geographic make-up, and climatic extremes impacts on the cost, quality and availability of transport infrastructure and services across the Territory. Passenger and freight services are critical for the Territory's economic and social wellbeing and growth, and are vital to support efforts to close the gap on Aboriginal disadvantage for remote Territorians.

In particular, Aboriginal Territorians living in remote areas are faced with significant challenges in accessing essential services and opportunities due to limited transport services and the high cost of services when they exist. This creates transport disadvantage for the Territory's Aboriginal population, 80% of which live outside the greater Darwin area, and a transport inequality between remote and non-remote areas.

While some major remote communities have access to some essential social support services, others have access to only very limited or no services. Transport services are therefore relied on by remote Aboriginal Territorians to receive or get to education, health, justice and welfare services, or to access employment or social, cultural and recreational opportunities.

Only 25% of the Northern Territory's vast 36 000 kilometre road network is sealed. The condition of many roads means that any improvement works need to start from a very low infrastructure base. Work to improve the quality of the road network is required to improve accessibility for remote Territorians and enable them to receive an equitable level of service as their urban counterparts, as well as to provide viable transport connections that enable businesses to be established and maintained in regional and remote areas.

Many remote communities are cut off for a number of months every year when roads are cut or access is limited due to flooding. During these times, air services are relied on to transport people and essential freight. For the Territory's island communities, air services are relied on year-round to transport people, and barge services to transport freight.

For remote Territorians, some of the transport service challenges faced include a lack of access to vehicles and/or maintenance facilities, the high cost of fuel, the high cost of goods due to the cost of freight, a lack of public transport and high cost of commercial transport services when they are available. These high transport service costs are attributable to long distances and low levels of demand due to a small population, leading to reduced economies of scale. Further adding to higher costs is the need for increased infrastructure maintenance and capital expenditure, more robust vehicles, and more frequent vehicle maintenance and fleet replacement, due to unsealed roads, a harsh climate and challenging geography. In addition, the aviation industry in particular is also faced with the high cost of regulatory compliance which adds to the cost of travel for remote Territorians.

Given the challenges with delivering transport and logistics infrastructure and supporting transport services, the Northern Territory Government will need to continue to partner with the Commonwealth Government to fund programs to provide equitable access for remote Territorians.

There is a critical need for wider social benefits to be considered when assessing infrastructure investment to ensure remote projects are not disadvantaged. Traditional economic cost benefit analysis greatly disadvantages the Northern Territory's efforts to improve critical infrastructure, particularly when remote projects are competing for funding against high population urban areas. Infrastructure investments in built up urban environments should not be compared to infrastructure investments in remote – they will never compare favourably for remote Australia.

The recently developed White Paper on Developing Northern Australia has recognised the opportunity to address the lack of developments by past governments with respect to establishing freight routes to facilitate economic development opportunities with more competitive and improved access to international and domestic markets.

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The majority of the prospective areas currently being targeted for development opportunities such as mineral exploration are usually remote and difficult to access. Improving networks and infrastructure that would provide year round heavy vehicle road access to provide the link between developments and markets.

The rollout plan for the National Broadband Network (NBN) is fundamentally inequitable and the impacts of this inequity are disproportionately high in the Northern Territory, as the below comparison table for the percentage of population to receive NBN by service delivery mode highlights.

	Fixed line	Fixed Wireless	Satellite
Australia	91%	6%	3%
Northern Territory	65%	6%	29%

Only major urban centres in the Northern Territory will receive a suitable standard service. There are 39 remote Northern Territory communities that have optic fibre connections to the national telecommunications network that are still being required to use an inferior satellite service.

The Northern Territory Government has provided submissions to Australian Government Joint Standing Committee Inquiries on the National Broadband Network in rural and regional areas in 2017 and 2018.

Two relevant quotes from these submissions are

- *Telecommunications services have become increasingly critical and underpin the delivery of essential health and education services, social interaction and business and economic development. It is therefore essential that access to the internet is available equitably to all Australians and maintained to a level that creates no disadvantage regardless of location (March 2017).*
- *Almost half of the 29% of Territorians relegated to satellite services do not have mobile phone access meaning they have no alternative internet access, even using costly mobile phone data (March 2018).*

The Northern Territory Government has lobbied NBN Co (board and management) and the Commonwealth Government on many occasions on this matter.

The Northern Territory Government will continue to strongly advocate for disadvantaged families and businesses living and working in remote areas of the Northern Territory to receive fair, equitable and reasonable services.

Recognising that reliable and affordable telecommunications services provide significant social and economic benefits, the Northern Territory Government has been proactive in the provision of telecommunications infrastructure to remote communities. The current co-investment agreement with Telstra is a four year, \$24 million program to deliver mobile phone and fixed line broadband coverage to remote communities, transport corridors and tourist destinations in the Northern Territory.

## Inequality Examples

- A large pastoral property approximately 160 kilometres north of Alice Springs has access only to satellite broadband because of its location. The property relies on broadband for numerous activities including sales, accounting, employment of regular and itinerant workers, accommodation enquiries and tourism venture bookings.
- According to the managers, satellite broadband suffers from reliability issues three to four days a week ranging from partial to complete outages. A change in Retail Service Provider (RSP)

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did little to alleviate these issues indicating that the satellite infrastructure is the underlying cause of the outages.

- A rapidly growing fish farm 60 kilometres from Darwin seeking broadband access for the IT systems supporting their business. Despite having fibre to their driveway, an initial quotation from a service provider for a fibre installation was approximately \$300 000.
- Even more frustrating was the lack of business account availability for the NBN satellite service and a lack of response from any Retail Service Providers generally to their enquiries. The result is a multi-million dollar and rapidly expanding business running their internet business on a 3G cellular connection with all of the associated bandwidth, expense and data download problems that occur.

## 7. Education

The Northern Territory demographic, low population density and large number of remote and very remote Aboriginal communities provides a distinctive set of challenges in delivering quality, accessible education to all students within a reasonable distance from their home. Northern Territory student characteristics differ vastly from the national average:

	NT	Australia
Aboriginal student population	40%	3%
Under 15 years population	22%	19%
Remote/very remote population	45%	3%
Developmentally vulnerable at age 5 (2 or more Australian Early Development Census domains)	23.1%	11.1%

There are a number of complex and inter-related factors which affect Aboriginal student engagement and achievement in school, both within the scope of education delivery and beyond. For example, less than one third of Aboriginal adults in the Northern Territory have attended school beyond Year 10. From early childhood onwards, parental health and wellbeing, parental employment and levels of educational attainment, the home living environment, and attendance in early childhood education form an important platform for future learning and engagement.

Further, research by the Northern Territory Government shows that on any one day, approximately 20 per cent of Aboriginal students in very remote communities may be 'out of community'. Students who are highly mobile, have lower attendance levels, do not speak English at home, struggle to access stable and secure housing, or experience overcrowding, and/or who experience health problems, struggle to achieve their educational potential.

Despite significant investment and considerable effort by communities and governments, there remains a gap in educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. By Year 3, Aboriginal students in remote Northern Territory communities are two years of schooling behind Aboriginal students in remote communities in other states and territories. This gap widens to about five years by Year 9.

The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage<sup>[4]</sup> (ICSEA) is a school-level measure of relative advantage or disadvantage that a student population brings to a school. The measure is based on the education and employment of students' parents, but the school location (remoteness

<sup>[4]</sup> More information on ICSEA is provided at: [http://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/About\\_icsea\\_2014.pdf](http://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/About_icsea_2014.pdf)

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level) and the proportion of Aboriginal students are also factors. The index is strongly correlated with school achievement levels.

Although ICSEA is correlated with achievement, it is not an indication of the quality of teaching or the potential of individual students. It is possible for a low ICSEA school to be high achieving and for a student to excel in a low achieving school. The average ICSEA score for schools nationally is approximately 1000, however only schools in Major Cities have an average score above this level. Average ICSEA scores for schools drop significantly with each increasing remoteness category<sup>[5]</sup>. Darwin, the least remote area in the Northern Territory, is Outer Regional which is two categories more remote than the Major Cities category.

**Table 1: Schools Index of community socio-educational advantage by remoteness category**

Remoteness Category	Number of Schools		Average ICSEA	
	Aust	NT	Aust	NT
Major Cities	4565	-	1043	-
Inner Regional	2214	-	983	-
Outer Regional	1412	54	951	967
Remote	291	35	927	797
Very Remote	244	81	782	627
<b>Total</b>	<b>8726</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>1002</b>	<b>770</b>

Source: ACARA 2018 My School Data Set

For schools in the Northern Territory, the average ICSEA for both remote and very remote schools is significantly lower than for schools from the rest of Australia with the same remoteness category. Ninety per cent of schools nationally have an ICSEA over 900, so the scores of 797 and 627 for Northern Territory remote and very remote schools respectively represent extreme levels of disadvantage.

A Commonwealth Grants Commission research paper<sup>[6]</sup> identified attributes impacting on the cost required to provide a standard level of education service, via regression analysis of ACARA data. Higher costs were associated with Aboriginal students, students in remote areas and communities where smaller schools are required. A finding of the analysis was that the Northern Territory would need to spend nearly double the national average to provide the same standard of education service.

It is more difficult to attract and retain high quality educators in regional areas and the difficulty is exacerbated with increasing remoteness. Furthermore, it is difficult for regional educators to access other professionals and participate in professional development. The factors include travel costs, extra time, and reduced ability to cover workloads in small school environments.

<sup>[5]</sup> The ABS 2016 Australian Statistical Geography Standard [Remoteness Structure](#)

<sup>[6]</sup> What States Do – School Education; CGC Research Paper; CGC 2016-15-S, September 2016.



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In large areas with low density populations schools are large distances apart and small in size. In addition to the increased cost required to maintain a small school, other issues include difficulties in providing: a diversity of subjects; flexibility for class separation; extra-curricular activities; and any non-essential facilities. The average size of schools in outer regional areas is 222 students compared to 548 in major cities nationally. In the Northern Territory the average school size is 219, however there are some schools with less than 10 students.

**Table 2: School Size by remoteness category for Australia and the Northern Territory**

Remoteness Category	Number of Schools		Average Enrolment	
	Aust	NT	Aust	NT
Major Cities	5026	-	548	-
Inner Regional	2337	-	308	-
Outer Regional	1488	62	222	385
Remote	316	40	152	210
Very Remote	298	88	100	107
<b>Total</b>	<b>9465</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>219</b>

Source: ACARA 2018 My School Data Set

In regional areas with low population density, the logistics, costs and time of travel to and from school are issues compared to the metropolitan context.

High levels of mobility and transience are characteristic of the regional Northern Territory population and this impacts on the difficulty in being able to provide a standard level of education. High mobility has an impact on student connection to school, gaps in attendance, learning discontinuity, curriculum gaps and reduced retention through schooling. John Hattie found student mobility to be the single highest negative effect on academic performance.

The difficulties regional areas face in providing a high standard of education contributes to a “brain-drain” effect, with more-able people taking opportunities to leave. Education is a driver for this brain-drain with families leaving the Northern Territory for children to attend more prestigious schools and universities. In the Northern Territory it is also common for some families to send children to interstate boarding schools.

In 2013, the former Northern Territory Government commissioned an independent review of Aboriginal education in the Northern Territory which was undertaken by Mr Bruce Wilson. The review report, *A share in the future – Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*, provided a comprehensive description of the issues affecting Aboriginal education, particularly for students in remote and very remote communities.

The report recommended a coherent strategic program across all years of schooling, and emphasised the need for long-term planning and sustained resourcing to gain significant

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improvement in outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The Northern Territory Government's response to the review is the 10-year *Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024* ('the Strategy'), which identifies five focus areas:

- Foundations: Early childhood programs from birth to the start of full-time schooling;
- Essentials: Structured literacy and numeracy programs in the primary years;
- Pathways: Secondary education provision in regional and urban schools and the provision of workplace literacy and numeracy programs;
- Engagement: Opportunities for students, families and communities to have purposeful engagement in education, including transition points, for improved outcomes in student attendance, well-being and achievement; and
- Workforce: A comprehensive workforce strategy to provide skills and support required to improve educational outcomes.

The Strategy forms the basis for joint deliberation between the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments, particularly in relation to the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Aboriginal Investment Schooling Implementation Plan (formerly Stronger Futures) funding, and provides a structure for the coordination of investments in Aboriginal education by both governments.

Stage 1 (2015-2017) of the Strategy outlined 25 key actions across all program elements considered to have a direct and measurable effect on education outcomes for Aboriginal students. The strategy has now entered Stage 2 (2018-2022), which will focus on the consolidation of activity across the elements and work towards embedding program delivery to mainstream departmental practice.

Both the Wilson review and the first three years of implementation of the Strategy have confirmed that there are no silver bullets for improving the education outcomes for Aboriginal students, particularly in remote and very remote communities. The Northern Territory Government maintains that the pathway to better outcomes requires quality programs, strong community relationships, professional development and support for staff, and a consistent focus on measurable outcomes.

## 8. Decentralisation

The reduction in the number of Commonwealth employees working in Darwin and other Northern Territory centres directly undermines Northern Territory Government efforts to develop a diverse ecology of jobs in the Northern Territory. Recent examples of this include the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) achieving efficiencies of \$1.5 million in 2017-18 (\$8.4 million over the forward estimates) by restructuring the AEC Northern Territory office, reducing the AEC's physical presence and delivering some services from Queensland. This equates to a reduction of AEC's Northern Territory workforce by 13 positions.

To put this matter in a broader context, in addition to the AEC changes, over the last six years the Commonwealth Government has reduced its footprint in the Northern Territory by closing the Darwin office of the Australian Taxation Office (2015), halved CSIRO's workforce and reduced the permanent Australian Defence Force (ADF) workforce in the Northern Territory. The 20 per cent reduction of numbers of Army personnel, mostly within 1 Brigade, equated to a loss of almost 1200 permanent ADF personnel, which when families are taken into account, represents a loss of approximately 2500 members of the Northern Territory community.

The Northern Territory Government is keen to work with the Commonwealth Government on the policies outlined in Regions 2030. One way forward for both Governments is to work in partnership to secure new opportunities for decentralised government activity. However, it is critical that the Commonwealth Government cease using reductions in its presence in regional and remote Australia to achieve budget savings.

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Given the challenge of moving existing positions to the Northern Territory, the Northern Territory Government recommends the Commonwealth Government undertake and publish regional impact assessments for all future proposals to reduce staff numbers in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government also recognises that the Commonwealth has offset some of the lost positions by establishing a Northern Territory presence for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and transferring the Office of Northern Australia to Darwin.

The Northern Territory Government welcomes the Commonwealth Government's renewed interest in decentralising the administration of their departments, entities and functions. This is very much in keeping with the commitments given in their White Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

As the Developing the North White Paper states, Northern Australia has its own innovative and solutions based governance arrangements — both government and non-government — to manage issues that are prominent in the region. These issues include:

- Indigenous affairs with a focus on new and flexible governance arrangements in regional and remote localities;
- regional development based on shared priorities, policies and investment opportunities;
- improving health care outcomes, especially for residents of Indigenous communities and in a manner that builds the capacity of the local health workforce;
- border and quarantine control; and
- preparedness for disasters anywhere in either Northern Australia or our near neighbours.

As its first priority, the Commonwealth Government should commit to making no further reductions to its existing employment footprint in the Northern Territory. The Commonwealth should look to reopening or re-expanding offices that it has either closed or downsized in recent years. This would include reopening the Australian Tax Office and expanding the role of the Darwin office of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and re-investing in the CSIRO's Darwin and Alice Springs research facilities.

A number of functions associated with the Indigenous Affairs portfolio should be based in those jurisdictions that have the most significant challenges to manage. The most senior bureaucrats with responsibility for Indigenous Affairs need to be accessible to the people most impacted by their work. There are multiple Government entities involved in managing various aspects of the Indigenous Affairs portfolio that should be headquartered in the Northern Territory. The NT Government notes the Budget 2018 announcement that some positions within ORIC headquarters will be relocated to Darwin and believes that headquartering ORIC in Darwin would demonstrate it has both the intention and the capacity to work with the many Indigenous organisations operating across Northern Australia.

Other Commonwealth controlled functions and organisations that should be managed from the Northern Territory include the Indigenous Cadetship Support scheme, Aboriginal Hostels Limited, Indigenous Land Corporation, Indigenous Business Australia, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the National Native Title Tribunal.

The Northern Territory Government would encourage larger Commonwealth agencies giving consideration to moving some of their more niche functions to the Northern Territory as a mechanism for sustaining their presence in the Territory. For example, the Department of Human Services might transfer administration of the Australian Immunisation Register, the Centrelink Confirmation eServices program, the Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Scheme, the Australian Organ Donor Register and all the programs aimed at supporting remote Australians. By transferring the Doctor Connect program, telephone health advisory service and/or the Hearing Help program to the Territory, the Department of Health will bolster the Northern Territory's health sector.

Smaller agencies such as the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research that work almost exclusively with our near neighbours could be re-located to Darwin with little difficulty. Given

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the scale of Defence's presence in the Northern Territory, the Australian Civil-Military Centre could usefully be transferred to Darwin where its role in preparing for and responding to conflicts and disasters overseas would undoubtedly be enhanced. Similarly, the Department of the Attorney-General could sensibly relocate resources used to prepare for national and international disasters to Darwin as part of a coordinated program of disaster preparation and management.

The Northern Territory is the obvious place to headquarter those agencies that protect our borders and sustain Australia's quarantine regime. Commonwealth Government functions associated with managing the marine environment, including programs aimed at dealing with marine pollution issues would be a good fit for Darwin. Other programs run by the Department of the Environment and Energy such as Hazardous Waste Management and the National Pollution Inventory can be managed from Darwin or Alice Springs.

**Summary Table of Commonwealth Government agencies, entities and functions suited to transfer to the Northern Territory**

Agency	Business Unit or Program
Aboriginal Hostels Limited	Headquarters functions
Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research	Headquarters functions
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	Product Safety Australia
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies	Entire institute
Department of Communication and the Arts	All program functions and staff that relate to Indigenous arts and languages
Department of Employment	Indigenous Cadetship Support
Department of Health	Doctor Connect
	Health advice service
	Hearing Help
Department of Human Services	Australian Immunisation Register
	Centrelink Confirmation eServices for businesses
	Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Scheme
	Australian Organ Donor Register
	Programs that support rural and remote Australians
Department of Immigration and Border Protection	Border Watch
Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development	Regional Development Australia

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Agency	Business Unit or Program
Department of the Attorney General	Programs and agencies associated with disaster management
Department of the Environment and Energy	Hazardous Waste Management
	National Pollutant Inventory
	Programs that address marine pollution issues
	Programs that address species profile and threat issues
Department of Veteran Affairs	Australian Civil-Military Centre
Indigenous Business Australia	Indigenous Business Australia
Indigenous Land Corporation	Indigenous Land Corporation
National Native Title Tribunal	National Native Title Tribunal