

Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council

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Committee Secretariat

Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Emerging Industries in Northern Australia

The Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council (NPARC) is pleased to submit to the **Joint Standing Committee's Inquiry into Emerging Industries in Northern Australia**.

Profile

Northern Peninsula Area (R) Local Government Area (LGA) has a total land area of 1,052.1 km², with an average daily temperature range of 23.5°C to 30.2°C and an average annual rainfall of 1,838 mm.

The Northern Peninsula Area Regional Local Government Area (LGA) includes the communities of Seisia, New Mapoon, Bamaga, Umagico and Injinoo, three of which were previously administered by Aboriginal shire councils and two of which are from Torres Strait Islander councils.

The Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council's (NPARC) creation was arbitrary and without community/resident consent, just as the creation of New Mapoon itself resulted from the forced removal of residents (who publicly and strenuously opposed the removal) from Mapoon to make way for Comalco's aluminium operations (bauxite mining), the difference being the Queensland government did not burn down all the houses in 2007 as it did in 1963. The present township of Bamaga was also created through tragedy - established after [World War II](#) by people from [Saibai Island](#) in the [Torres Strait](#), after Saibai Island was devastated by abnormally high tides. It is named after Saibai elder Bamaga Ginou, who envisaged the site but died before it was established. Umagico, originally known as Alau was established because of yet another forced relocation in 1962 when Aboriginal people were moved from the Lockhart River Mission. Seisia, formerly Red Island Point, was established as a reserve for Torres Strait Islanders. The antecedents of NPARC are deeply rooted in a racist and capricious "colonising" past.

Data for Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA are based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), July 2021.

The following is a statistical overview of the Northern Peninsula Area (R) Local Government Area (LGA) derived from the Queensland Statistician's Office, Queensland Treasury, Regional Profiles report¹:

¹ Queensland Regional Profiles Resident Profile - people who live in the region Northern Peninsula Area (R) Local Government Area (LGA) (ASGS 2021) Compared with Queensland, 3 September 2025

- As of 30 June 2024, the estimated resident population for Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was 2,928 persons.
- From 2021 to 2046, the population for Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA is projected to increase from 2,886 persons to 3,239 persons.
- The percentage of Aboriginal peoples and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was 82.2% compared to the Queensland figure of 4.6%.
- The percentage of persons in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA with a different address one year ago was 8.7% compared to the Queensland figure that was more than double (17%).
- The percentage of persons in the Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA with a different address five years ago was 20.3%, which is more than a fifth of the population but less than half the figure applying to Queensland (44.8%).
- The percentage of total families in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA which were couple families with children was 42.7%, slightly higher to the Queensland figure of 41.2%.
- The percentage of one family households in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was 70.2% (very similar to the Queensland figure of 69.0% of total households were one family households)
- The percentage of total occupied private dwellings in the Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA which were separate houses was 78.2%, which is higher than the Queensland figure of 74.8%.
- The percentage of total occupied private dwellings in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA which were fully owned was 2.7% compared to the Queensland figure of 29.1% (informed by the impact of past colonisation in terms of land tenure – the status of Deed of Grant in Trust - DOGIT).
- The level of homelessness is alarming. The rate of homeless persons for Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA in 2021 was 143.8 per 10,000 persons compared to the Queensland figure of 43.2 homeless persons per 10,000 persons, which means that the NPARC rate is 3.33 times higher than the Queensland rate.
- The percentage of dwellings in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA with 3 or more motor vehicles was 10.2% which is just over a half the figure applying to the rest of Queensland (20%).
- The percentage of developmentally vulnerable children in two or more domains in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA in 2024 was 23.6%, which is more than double the Queensland figure of 11.6%.
- The percentage of total persons in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA with the highest level of schooling as Year 11 or 12 was 62.9%, which is comparable to the Queensland figure of 63.6%.
- The percentage of persons in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA with a non-school qualification was 63.6%, which is higher than the Queensland figure of 62.5%.
- The most common non-school qualification field of study in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was Management and Commerce (13.6%) compared to the Queensland figure of 18.4%.
- 10% of the NPARC population hold a non-school qualification in the field of Society and Culture, whereas the next highest non-school qualification in Queensland after Management and Commerce is in Engineering and Related Technologies at 14.5%.
- As sadly remains the case, the percentage of persons with one or more long-term health conditions in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was 12.5% compared to the Queensland figure of 3.3% - almost 4 times lower than the NPARC percentage.
- The number of aged care service operational places in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA as of 30 June 2024 was 0 places. This figure must be challenged. The figure is derived from information on aged care services as provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health. Information is based on the location of the service, rather than the region in which the service is delivered. In some instances, aged care services may have provided the address information of their approved provider in place of the address information of the individual aged care service. Aged care services are subsidised by the Australian

Government under the *Aged Care Act 1997*. Data are updated annually with a release approximately 12 months after the reporting period. The next planned update is in October 2025. Once this figure is published, Council will review.

- As of April 2025, the number of schools in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was 1 school. This is slightly misleading in that the Northern Peninsula Area State College is a K-12 College with three campuses. Injinoo and Bamaga Junior Campuses have Kindergarten to Year Six grades, while Year Seven to Twelve secondary needs are met by the Bamaga Senior Campus. All campuses are managed by a Head of Campus, with the College Principal overseeing strategic direction.
- Socio-economically, the percentage of persons in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA in the least disadvantaged quintile was 0.0% compared to the Queensland figure of 20%.
- The median total personal income for Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was \$604 per week and the mean total family income in the Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was \$1287 per week compared to the Queensland figure of \$2024 per week (almost double the NPARC figure). The median total family income in Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA was \$66,924 per year compared to the Queensland figure of \$105,248.
- These figures in turn have an impact on offending where the rate of total recorded offences for Northern Peninsula Area (R) LGA in 2023–24 was 17,766 per 100,000 persons compared to the Queensland figure of 10,964 per 100,000 persons. Well-documented criminogenic risk factors include the very socio-economic factors outlined above. including homelessness and poverty

Terms of Reference

NPARC (hereafter referred to as “Council”) notes that on **28 October 2025**, the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, the Hon Madeleine King MP, referred a revised terms of reference for an inquiry into preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia. The terms of reference are as follows:

The Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia shall inquire into and report on preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia, with reference to:

- a. The global transition to net zero and furthering renewable energy, decarbonisation and carbon abatement;*
- b. Developing the critical minerals industry;*
- c. Supporting the development of export industries;*
- d. Supporting the decommissioning industry;*
- e. Supporting the defence industry;*
- f. Supporting infrastructure;*
- g. Managing biosecurity risks;*
- h. Training, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce;*
- i. Empowering and upskilling local First Nations people;*
- j. Barge landings and marine access for remote communities; and*
- k. Research and development.*

Council proposes to address ToR f., h.-k in this submission. So far as ToR (i) is concerned, it is referred to throughout the submission. In addition to the details outlined in this submission, Council is happy to outline additional detail to the Joint Standing committee and is pleased to respond verbally, in writing or in person to any queries the Joint Standing committee may have, noting that the deadline for submissions of **12 December 2025** has been moved to the **30 January 2026**.

f. Supporting Infrastructure

Current funding outcomes for critical infrastructure inexplicably disadvantage Council (and our region) and thus the efficacy of Council and the region supporting emerging industries. Whilst there is undeniable opportunity for emerging industries in our region, this funding disadvantage acts as a fetter on progress.

By way of example, Council undertook modelling on the Works for Queensland Allocation based on unemployment and population data as proposed by the Queensland government. This shows NPARC has been unfairly deprived of approximately \$1.5mil of the 2024 – 2027 allocation (refer table 1 below).

Table 1 W4Q allocation – a comparison to other discrete communities

	NPA	Yarrabah	Palm Island	Doomadgee	Cherbourg
W4Q Allocation	\$2,610,000	\$4,920,000	\$4,440,000	\$2,230,000	\$1,900,000
Population	2781	2505	2098	1387	1194
Unemployment	14.00%	37.20%	9.80%	17.60%	19.80%
	Aurukun	Kowanyama	Mornington	Woorabinda	Hope Vale
W4Q Allocation	\$3,560,000	\$2,560,000	\$2,120,000	\$1,670,000	\$1,940,000
Population	1101	1079	1025	1019	976
Unemployment	17.10%	40.60%	7.40%	20.90%	20.90%
	Napranum	Pormpuraaw	Lockhart River	Mapoon	Wujal Wujal
W4Q Allocation	\$1,940,000	\$2,400,000	\$1,820,000	\$1,630,000	\$1,630,000
Population	883	661	640	432	276
Unemployment	15.90%	43.80%	33.50%	27%	29.30%

Housing and funding models

Since the end of the NPRIH Agreement, there has been limited housing funding provided to the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA).

In 2018, the Queensland Government allocated \$40M through the Interim Remote Housing Program. Money was split equally across councils.

In 2019, the Federal Government allocated \$105M for remote housing in Queensland. It is no doubt stating the obvious, but without housing in large remote regions of the North, emerging industries have no chance to flourish.

The Commonwealth's funding to local government through the FAGS and roads funding is heavily based on demography when road funding should surely consider as significant the linear kms of roads required to be constructed and maintained.

So far as housing funding is concerned, it is based on population, overcrowding and homelessness data. If the Joint Standing Committee undertakes even a cursory examination of the statistics found under the heading "Profile" earlier in Council's submission, it is evident that rather than significantly disadvantage the NPA in accessing valuable Commonwealth funding, the NPA should be supported. Perhaps it is the raw size of population rather than the egregious rate of homelessness and overcrowding that has captured the Commonwealth's funding attention? If this is so, Council asks the Commonwealth to seriously rethink its approach.

Council draws the Joint Standing Committee's attention to the fact that significant emerging industries in our region (the northern most part of the Australia – the tip of Australia) include civil and housing construction. The cement batching plant at Injinoo is a strategic asset and if scaled up can support these industries as well as achieve a return on investment to our Council and, through the ILUA, traditional owners.

It is our view that here is an excellent example of where the dots have not been joined. There is much published commentary about the need for local governments to be financially sustainable, but the State Treasury rejects applications by indigenous councils for loans through the Queensland Treasury Corporation for business investment and development. Their retort was not only to reject but to enquire if Council was coming to see the Treasurer about further grant funding. Quite aside from the paternalism exhibited in the approach, it completely misses the point. The following outlines the context in which Council is making this assertion:

Council strongly supports constitutional recognition of local government in the Australian constitution, but as the Prime Minister has advised that only one referendum will be a feature of his Prime Ministership, bold measures must now be taken. One such **practical** measure to overcome the impact on local government finances due to this lack of constitutional recognition is to permit local governments to borrow under its own steam under the Commonwealth Government's AAA credit rating, thus obtaining money at a much lower cost.

Local governments were once able to raise debentures. But what do we have now? Local governments borrow (if permitted) under the State's umbrella, and this potentially places pressure on the State's credit rating that may be lower than that of the Commonwealth. This is the case in Queensland, where the Queensland Government's credit rating was downgraded by Standard and Poor's Global to AA+/Aa1, whereas the Australian Government has been given a AAA credit rating, with a stable outlook.

Council's proposal is not world leading (the US, for example, has a municipal bond market) but would be a very important initiative in terms of the sustainability of local government finances, effective support for emerging industries in the regions of Northern Australia and wealth generation.

The current Australian superannuation system delivers \$4 trillion so if there were bonds issued by local governments, like what occurs with the municipal bond market in the US, superannuation funds could buy those bonds - risk adjusted, good, steady, backed by government – the potential benefits are obvious. This is not fanciful. The housing bond aggregation model used by community housing providers in this country generates \$8 billion of funds. Now is the time to open the examination up to other models that constructively support both emerging industries as well as First Nations self-determination.

If we keep doing the same old things, throwing grant money after grant money to First Nations local governments and communities without having regard to our stated concerns about the sustainability of this model, we will be talking about the same things we have been talking about for the past 20 years in the next 20 years. Nothing will change. Nothing will progress.

We have advised on so many occasions that the grant funding-only approach at a macro level is no different than the disempowering and demoralising dependency of First Nations people on social welfare –a form of “welfare” dependency.

We are urgently seeking that the Commonwealth change perspective when approaching First Nations advocacy, from one where unconsciously we are approached as though we are petitioning supplicants to one that appreciates that we are thoughtful advocates whose ideas have the potential to transform Northern Australia, whilst simultaneously achieving self-determination for First Nations people.

Tourism

Our NPA region includes one of the places that features on so many people’ s bucket list – journey to the tip of Australia.

Approximately 100 000 tourists per year (and growing) visit our region and the tip and whilst tourism is a significant and developing industry, it simultaneously places considerable demand on local services, roads and trunk infrastructure. Roads, water, sewerage and waste require constant upgrade above normal population travel. This should not be simply noted by the Joint Standing Committee and then left unexamined. This well-known tourist destination attracts people from all over Australia and the world. Council highlights some areas of critical trunk infrastructure requiring attention later in this submission.

Housing Need

Council adopted its Strategic Capital Investment Plan in 2023.

Council received federal funding for subdivisions in Seisia and Bamaga and trunk infrastructure to support subdivisions in New Mapoon. Council is seeking support for the remaining subdivisions in Umagico, Injinoo and New Mapoon. Council seeks to ensure that the Commonwealth and State work in collaboration with our regional local government to this end; and, importantly, we seek funding to ensure the houses are culturally fit-for-purpose, designed to community preference and consider neighbouring house designs, livability and visual amenity.

There is insufficient developed land to build. Therefore, Council is seeking ongoing partnership with the State and the Commonwealth to continue planning works for future subdivisions.

So far as the impact of climate change is concerned, there are several houses that face flooding due to rising sea levels. A strategic approach for the relocation of these properties is needed in the short term for proactive management before it becomes a critical issue.

Table 2 below sets out a profile of housing needs in our region:

Table 2 Community census and waitlist data

Community	Census Data	Waitlist Data	Gap
Seisia	95 bedrooms	79 bedrooms	16 bedrooms
New Mapoon	175 bedrooms	38 bedrooms	137 bedrooms
Bamaga	606 bedrooms	124 bedrooms	482 bedrooms
Umagico	176 bedrooms	64 bedrooms	112 bedrooms
Injinoo	321 bedrooms	52 bedrooms	269 bedrooms

Houses built under the previous NPRIH agreement are of a poor standard. Houses were delivered prefabricated to the NPA and were joined down the middle. Some houses are falling apart at those joins.

The houses were not built of appropriate materials and have rapidly deteriorated. Ongoing work is needed to assess the building condition of Logan Homes to understand if they are worth the investment to fix or if it is necessary to rebuild the sites.

Council is advantageously placed, having the necessary resources and local tradespeople, to be able to project manage the building of new houses in our region as part of an emerging construction industry.

Unconscious racist bias in funding and standards of infrastructure

Inadequate, degraded or absent infrastructure serve to undermine the huge tourism industry potential in the Northern Peninsula Area and Council could be forgiven from observing that red dirt roads have been seen as acceptable and fitting for our indigenous region, where roads become muddy and unsafe during the wet season so that vehicles become bogged and the roads become impassable. If these same conditions applied to the Bruce Highway or other important access roads to tourist destinations, it would result in public outrage and a concomitant Commonwealth Government financial response.

Further, from a purely economic and industry development perspective, the continuance of substandard road conditions reduces the emerging tourism market by half - to only 6 months of every year. Funding must not only be for construction but also for maintenance.

The construction and maintenance of purpose-built, culturally appropriate housing is germane to the successful support of an emerging and successful construction industry in our region. The racist tropes attached to degraded indigenous dwellings that characterise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as delinquent, negligent, failing to care for our homes is deeply distressing, insulting and ignores the obvious: if the funding is only for construction and the construction is by using inferior and inappropriate materials (including asbestos in the past) and if the dwelling/buildings are not fit for purpose and if there is no funding for ongoing maintenance of the assets/homes over their useful lives, it leads precisely to the outcomes that give rise to the tropes. The preponderance of evidence to support this observation makes it difficult not to conclude that the Commonwealth's funding approach betrays an unconscious racist bias. Council requests that the Joint Standing Committee seriously consider this point and that it makes recommendations that will prevent repetition of the bias in the future. Because, if it does not, there are also other serious consequences such as the continuance of serious health risks and early deaths – e.g. rheumatic heart disease is directly linked to poor housing conditions and overcrowding.

The madness of this approach is very upsetting to Council and our communities. We have advised the Commonwealth for so many years how the millions and millions of dollars spent in the health portfolio could be

saved if homes were properly built, cooled and maintained; if proper roads and trunk infrastructure for our regions were funded and properly maintained; if our road networks were properly built and maintained using long lasting materials so they are not reduced to red dust traps or muddy bogs and where our people end up dying of Melioidosis, which is a rare tropical disease caused by bacteria called *Burkholderia pseudomallei*. The bacteria are commonly found in soil and water and often occur during the wet season after heavy rain or flooding

Limited air conditioning is currently a feature of housing in our region posing a significant health risk, including the rare immune disorder known as hypersensitivity pneumonitis, in which the lungs become inflamed from breathing in large amounts of specific substances (allergens) frequently over time. Symptoms of hypersensitivity pneumonitis are like the flu (fever, cough, chills, shortness of breath) and may become more severe the longer the exposure continues.

Airconditioning is essential for climate change adaptation and to control harmful mould. This point underscores Council's observation, which the Joint Standing Committee may view as self-evident, that if these issues are properly addressed then simultaneously it encourages industry/economic development, supports training, attraction and retaining of a skilled workforce and empowers and upskills local First Nations people through prosperous housing construction and maintenance industries.

NPARC was the first Indigenous Council in the north to adopt a Local Housing Plan within Queensland. This plan clearly defines a path for the NPA Communities to resolve the capital and operational issues faced with housing in the region. We would appreciate support to look at innovative pilot strategies to address these key goals. We have finalised our social housing provider registration to look at opportunities to access mainstream funding sources as well.

ToR (f) and (j)

The following are some of the improvements required to support infrastructure in our region, and specifically marine infrastructure and barge services, to ensure safe passage of emerging industries:

Infrastructure

To achieve the objectives of the Joint Standing committee inquiry, there needs to be a review of the NPA Marine Hub Master Plan. Attention must urgently be given to

- Safety improvements to the Seisia Wharf
- Critical boat ramp repairs including the relocation and rebuilding of the Seisia Boat Ramp and pontoons at the Injinoo & Fishbone ramps
- Improvements to lighting to allow safe passage of marine craft
- Review of the location and size of the barge ramp and integration into future shipping network planning
- Installation of stinger nets
- **Jardine River crossing**
 - A short-term replacement for the Jardine River Ferry
 - Support for consultation on the long-term solution at the Jardine River crossing
- **Northern Peninsula Area Airport**
 - Funding to enable terminal upgrade to address comfort, size and screening issues undertaken while the airport is closed for runway works

Marine Infrastructure

Seisia Wharf

- Council undertook master planning to complete the NPA Marine Hub Master Plan. This relied on the existing Seisia Wharf continuing to be used for commercial reasons for the next 10-20 years. However, recent maintenance identified that the damage being done by the SeaSwift vessel means the wharf will only last for another 5-10 years.
- Council needs support to review the master plan to look at the best strategy moving forward, including the need for a new wharf in the next 5-10 years. If the Master Plan was implemented, it would enable Seisia to become an import and export facility with goods freighted by road to Seisia and out to the islands; and crayfish divers and fishing businesses exporting seafood from the region to the world. Fishing tourism and adjunctive recreational fishing are growing industries in our region.

Boat Ramps

- A previous study identified the need to relocate and rebuild the Seisia Boat Ramp as well as install pontoons for public safety at the Injinoo & Fishbone ramps.
- Council has been advised that there are no funds under the Torres Strait Islands Marine Infrastructure Program to facilitate these works. It is hard to support the developing marine industry without the existence of safe and reliable boat ramps.
- Council has safety concerns due to the lack of lighting and safety on the boat ramps. Seafarers rely on these lights to return home when travelling at night and they are critical to ensuring safety of marine craft users. While an interim solution was introduced at the Seisia Boat ramp in 2023, a longer-term solution is needed before the boat ramp deteriorates again due to sand movements. The interim solution also requires ongoing sand removal maintenance.

Barge Ramp

- The barge ramp at Seisia is owned by TMR.
- Due to the design and location of the barge ramp, this requires extensive amounts of sand to be moved every week.
- There needs to be consideration of the sand movements especially during the northwesterly wind and monsoon season. Council understands that \$3.5M has been allocated by MSQ for repairs at the barge ramp but is concerned this funding may restrict very important advocacy regarding the appropriate location of the barge ramp, the widening works that are required, and its integration into the Master Plan.

ToR (h)

- Council is experiencing serious breaches of the Training Policy in the NPA
- The Training Policy sets minimum requirements for certain works within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure economic opportunities and skills development in the building and construction industry.

- Several projects delivered where the Queensland Government Department was the procuring agency failed to meet the minimum target expenditure for indigenous employment opportunities or procurement from indigenous businesses. This represents a loss to the economy and therefore the communities of the NPA, but more importantly our local community members have missed out on critical skills development opportunities.
- If the returns associated with this procurement had been realised and this loss of economic development had not occurred, Council could have employed labourers for two years and enabled skill development in the building and construction industries.

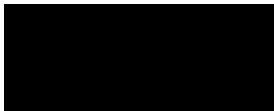
Council may cite many other examples, but rather than labour the point, Council offers this example as a practical case study of the importance of training to economic development and emerging industries and to the uplifting of skills development and the retaining and attracting of skilled labour.

Conclusion

Council is pleased to present this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia and has much additional information to share with the Joint Standing Committee; however, currently is restricted by the date of the Ordinary Council Meeting and the deadline for submissions being **12 December 2025**. Council wrote to the Standing committee and obtained advice that the deadline has now been extended to **30 January 2026**

Council is pleased to respond verbally, in writing and in person to any queries the Joint Standing committee may have, and to provide any further information it may wish Council to present. Please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Dalassa Yorkston, Chief Executive Officer on [REDACTED] should you have any further information you require.

Yours faithfully



Cr Robert Poi Poi - Mayor

For and on behalf of the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council