



EXECUTIVE MINUTE
on
**JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND
AUDIT REPORT**
[No. 506]
[Inquiry into Commonwealth Financial Statements 2022-23]

General comments

An entity can provide background information to supplement the responses on the specific recommendations. This might, for example, explain the policy and legislative context for the entity's actions in response to the recommendations. It might also provide an overview of the strategies or administrative actions being undertaken by the entity relevant to the recommendations.

Response to each specific recommendation

Recommendation No 1:

The Committee requires an update within six months of the tabling of this report from the Northern Land Council on their progress in addressing the significant legislative breaches identified by the Australian National Audit Office.

Summary of response: agreed

The NLC continues to pursue a number of strategies to fulfil its statutory responsibilities to distribute payments received by the NLC in respect of Aboriginal land to, or for the benefit of, the Traditional Owners of the land, within six months after that amount is received.

In 2021 the Northern Land Council (NLC) established the Benefits Distribution Unit (BDU), dedicated (among other things) to resolving this problem of delayed payment. The BDU has continuously improved receipting, traditional owner consultations and payment processes, and continues to implement the strategies reported in 2023 and 2024.

The NLC recently achieved 88.23% compliance with the obligation to pay within six months, after obtaining in the last three years standing instructions from many

traditional owner groups as to how they want their income paid, obviating the need to arrange on-country consultations with them regarding every payment, which has been the main cause of past delays. The NLC is confident that recent improvements and the NLC's focus will bring 100% compliance with the section 35 six months payment obligation very soon.

For 2025, NLC has already scheduled 75 on-country consultations with traditional owners to obtain:

- Three-year standing instructions to avoid payment delay
- Renewal of existing standing instructions
- Approval to pay every six months (e.g., June and December) instead of annually as has been more common
- From those groups who still want just one annual Christmas distribution, NLC will ask for a request in writing to hold money received before June each year for payment at Christmas, as this will be more than six months.

Total Aboriginal land receipts under the *Land Rights Act*

1 March – 31 August 2024 (six months)	\$28.34M
1 September 2024 – 28 February 2025 (last six months)	\$36.16M

Total payments within six months of receipt under the *Land Rights Act*

1 March – 31 August 2024 (six months)	\$24.08M	84.94%
1 September 2024 – 28 February 2025 (last six months)	\$31.91M	88.23%

Total Land Rights Act payments under standing instructions:

2022-23 financial year	\$30.22M paid to 326 groups
2023-24 financial year	\$31.06M paid to 458 groups
January-December 2024	\$29.17M paid to 419 groups

Recommendation No 3:

The Committee recommends that the Northern Land Council provide a response within six months on why their annual report has not been tabled in time to be scrutinised at supplementary budget estimates for the past three years.

Summary of response: not agreed

Supporting rationale:

- NLC's has submitted its Annual Reports for the last four financial years on or before the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (Cth) deadline of 15 October.

Note below table shows relevant submission, approval, tabling and publishing dates for NLC's Annual Reports since 2020-21.

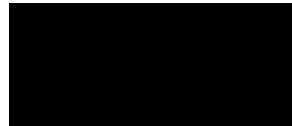
AR Year	Date Final Draft Submitted	Date of Ministers letter approving tabling	Date Tabled	Date NLC Published on website
2023-24	15 October 2024	31 October 2024	8 November 2024	11 November
2022-23	12 October 2023	4 December 2023	18 January 2024	19 January 2024
2021-22	14 October 2022	26 October 2022	10 November 2022	10 November 2022
2020-21	15 October 2021	28 October 2021	19 November 2021	22 November 2021

Signed by Joint Accountable Authority of Northern Land Council



Yuseph Deen
CEO

2/5/2025



Matthew Ryan
Chair

2/5/2025