



Tiwi Land Council

**Submission to the
Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia**

**Inquiry into preparing for emerging industries across
Northern Australia**

February 2026



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Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Any Federal Government support for the NT Remote Power Partnership Program (RPPP) should be contingent on the NT Government demonstrating that the program is underpinned by a strong community benefit framework that:

- 1) delivers lower energy costs to households, not just the utility provider.
- 2) includes a well-planned and adequately resourced training and employment program that leverages other opportunities through housing and homelands investment.
- 3) facilitates investment and ownership opportunities for Aboriginal communities with the desire and capability to do so.

Recommendation 2: Consistent with Action 3.4.1 of the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy (*Deliver needs-based funding across the project lifecycle*), ensure Federal Government funding is available to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Aboriginal businesses for early-stage renewable energy project development.

Genuinely community-led projects require accessible funding for fulsome early-stage community consultation, access to technical experts to support project development, and the groundwork to build strong community governance for a project.

Recommendation 3: That further carbon methods applicable to northern Australia are prioritised for development, in particular removal of feral herbivores for savanna restoration.

Recommendation 4: All recipients of public funding for critical minerals development should be required to demonstrate their commitment to meaningfully engage with traditional owners and local Aboriginal communities.

Recommendation 5: That the Australian Government commit to multi-year funding to sustain and grow the Tiwi Cultural Festival.


Recommendation 6: That the Australian Government consider options to address insurance challenges for large infrastructure projects in northern Australia.

Recommendation 7: That the Australian Government work with Indigenous stakeholders to consider the development of methodologies within the emerging Nature Repair Market for the remediation and rehabilitation of infrastructure sites.

Recommendation 8: That the Australian Government and the NT Government jointly commit to sealing the remainder of the Tiwi road network.

Recommendation 9: That the Australian Government and the NT Government jointly invest in fit-for-purpose waste management on the Tiwi Islands.

Recommendation 10: That the Australian Government reassess funding for local government, particularly in remote areas, recognising the extent to which the under-funding this level of government is undermining local efforts at economic development in remote Australia.



Recommendation 11: That the Australian Government and Northern Territory Government continue to invest in remote housing, recognising that it is foundational to economic participation.

Recommendation 12: Fund the TLC to establish a centralised quarantine facility in Darwin for freight travelling to the Tiwi Islands. Consider the establishment of a regional facility the enables centralised biosecurity inspections of all freight travelling by barge or road across the Top End.

Recommendation 13: That the Australian Government continue to expand the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program, including a greater focus on supporting school-to-work pathways in future iterations.

Recommendation 14: That the Australian Government is responsive to community feedback on the new Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES) to support its continued improvement.

Recommendation 15: That the Australian Government provide funding to establish secure, fit-for-purpose barge yards at all three major Tiwi communities.

Recommendation 16: That the Australian Government provide funding for appropriate, cost-effective options to improve the Paru-Wurrumiyanga ferry landing.

Recommendation 17: Prioritise the development of carbon and Nature Repair Market methodologies applicable to northern Australia, recognising the significant Indigenous estate to which they will be applicable.

Recommendation 18: That the Australian Government make significant investment in community-led climate change adaptation planning and this should include infrastructure funding. Industry and infrastructure planning must incorporate climate risk.



Introduction

The Tiwi Land Council (TLC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's *Inquiry into preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia*.

The TLC was established in 1978, as a corporate commonwealth entity under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (ALRA). The establishment of the land council was a significant milestone for Tiwi people and the culmination of years of work seeking recognition as the custodians of the Tiwi Islands and the keepers of Tiwi cultural identity. This formal recognition marked a pivotal moment in the assertion of Tiwi self-determination and cultural authority. Today, the TLC continues this work, guided by our vision to secure the effective management of Tiwi country and revitalisation of Tiwi culture for the benefit of future generations of Tiwis.

TLC is responsible for a number of functions under ALRA. Most relevant to economic development, these functions include:


- Negotiating land use agreements under section 19 (s19) and issuing permits under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1978*
- Consulting with Aboriginal people and obtaining consent
- Distributing royalties and payments
- Assisting with commercial and other activities.

Tiwi people are entrepreneurial and have expressed a consistent desire for economic independence. Over the decades, the TLC has supported these aspirations, including through the establishment of forestry and port operations, and the Tiwi Islands Training and Education Board (TITEB), a Tiwi-led training entity.

Tiwi people have demonstrated their willingness to develop industries which are part of local, national and global markets, for the benefit of Tiwi people. Through forestry, port operations, tourism and carbon abatement, Tiwi people have shown they are not just bystanders to economic development on their country, but proponents. Tiwi people have sought to find paths to economic development that align with their values of caring for country, recognising that Tiwi culture and health of country are their greatest asset.

This is an important and at times challenging balance. The Tiwi Islands and their surrounding waters are havens for a diverse range of species, including many not recorded anywhere else in the world. This diversity includes 19 threatened plant and 31 threatened animal species, and its ecological values are of national and international significance. In recognition of Tiwi stewardship of the islands and the importance of the islands for biodiversity conservation, the Tiwi Islands have recently been dedicated as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), adding 718,626 hectares to the Australian National Reserve System. The dedication of the IPA makes it increasingly important for industry development to be consistent with the IPA Values and Plan of Management.¹

¹ Tiwi Islands Indigenous Protected Area Plan of Management ([weblink](#))



Under the current [Corporate Plan \(2025-2029\)](#), the TLC is seeking to reinvigorate our support for Tiwi people’s aspirations for economic self-determination. Over the course of the year, we will be working with Tiwi people and stakeholders to develop a vision for the future Tiwi economy that is consistent with Tiwi values and informed by rigorous analysis of industry opportunities for the islands. The purpose of this work is to build a holistic and coordinated picture of the current Tiwi economy and provide a practical road map that can be used by Tiwi people, the land council and other stakeholders to work towards this vision in the short and long term – creating jobs, building wealth and supporting the wellbeing of Tiwi people. Importantly, this process will be guided by Tiwi values and learn from both the successes and failures of past endeavours. We look forward to sharing more about this work with the Committee as it progresses throughout 2026.

This submission provides an overview of current activity and opportunities in relation to each of the relevant terms of reference. We note that a number of other Tiwi stakeholders have provided submissions to this inquiry, reflecting interest across the islands in advancing Tiwi economic self-determination.

We would welcome a visit by the Committee to the Tiwi Islands in the course of your inquiry, to meet with the TLC others, giving you greater insight into the opportunities that Tiwi people identify for themselves and their islands.

Responses to the terms of reference


A. The global transition to net zero and furthering renewable energy, decarbonisation and carbon abatement.

Remote Power Partnership Program

The Northern Territory (NT) Government is pursuing a plan to transition remote communities from predominantly diesel generation² to predominantly solar. Under the former NT Labor Government, this plan was the Remote Power Systems Strategy (RPSS). It aimed to achieve an average of 70 per cent renewable electricity generation for the 72 remote communities serviced by Indigenous Essential Services (IES), contributing to its overall renewable energy target of 50 per cent by 2030.

The NT Country Liberal Party (CLP) Government has dropped all renewable energy targets (remote and NT-wide), and the renamed Remote Power Partnership Program (RPPP) is now focused on the least-cost delivery of energy to 55 remote communities (those not connected to the Darwin-Katherine or Alice Springs grids).

² Through the Solar Energy Transformation Program (SETuP) there is currently 10MW of solar PV generator capacity spread across 25 communities (including Wurrumiyanga on Bathurst Island) and around 12 per cent of electricity consumed in IES communities is sourced from renewable energy. See Power and Water Corporation: Solar energy transformation program ([weblink](#)).



The TLC, along with the Northern Land Council (NLC) and Central Land Council (CLC), are part of a working group with the NT Government informing the development of the RPPP. The working group was established in 2023 at the request of the land councils, to reflect the NT Government’s commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to formal partnerships and shared decision-making.

The RPPP has the potential to reduce emissions generated by remote power operations, reduce the cost to government of remote energy supply³ and – *if well-designed* – directly benefit communities. Alignment on what constitutes reasonable and meaningful community benefit and how this might be achieved is a key focus of Working Group discussions.

The RPPP is unfunded and will likely rely on Federal Government and other investment. Consistent with the principles of the *First Nations Clean Energy Strategy 2024-2030*, the TLC encourages any Federal support for the RPPP to be contingent on the NT Government demonstrating that the program is underpinned by a strong community benefit framework. The key concerns for the land councils are that the RPPP should:

- deliver lower energy costs to households, not just the utility provider.
- be supported by a well-planned training and employment program that leverages other opportunities through housing and homelands investment.
- facilitate investment and ownership opportunities for Aboriginal communities with the desire and capability to do so.

Community-owned renewable energy projects like the Marlinja Microgrid (NT), the Ngardara Project in Borroloola (NT)⁴, Aalga Goolil ‘Sun Turtle’ project in Djarindjin (WA)⁵, and Ngarluma Green Energy Park (WA) show that new models of community-owned energy are possible.

At the same time, in the case of the NT projects, they have highlighted the significant policy and regulatory barriers that need to be overcome to make these models more achievable for more communities.


Locally, the need to replace the Pirlangimpi power station (damaged beyond repair by an electrical fire in 2025), is an opportunity to deliver community-owned renewable energy on the Tiwi islands. The TLC understand that Port Melville Pty Ltd is currently investigating options to develop a Tiwi-owned power station using solar and battery technology (with diesel back-up) at the port that would also supply the community of Pirlangimpi.

The TLC, CLC and NLC would be happy to provide the Committee with further information about the RPPP if requested.

³ The annual IES diesel spend is at least \$30 million per year based on 2019 PWC Report to ARENA – likely much higher now as diesel costs continue to increase.

⁴ [Ngardara Project](#)

⁵ ‘Kimberley solar project aims to flip power model to close the gap’, N. Clark, 16 September 2025, National Indigenous Times ([weblink](#))



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Genuinely community-led projects require accessible funding for fulsome early-stage community consultation, access to technical experts to support project development, and the groundwork to build strong community governance for a project.


Carbon abatement

Carbon abatement is a very significant economic opportunity already embraced by Tiwi people, combining traditional knowledge and western science to manage country for cultural and biodiversity values, while generating income for the benefit of Tiwi people.

Tiwi people have been early leaders in the sector. Commencing in 2009, the Tiwi Islands Fire and Carbon Project was a critical project in the development of the savanna burning methodology⁶; in 2024, the Tiwi Fire and Carbon project became the first fully independent Indigenous-owned carbon enterprise (managed by Tiwi Resources and undertaken by the Tiwi Rangers)⁷; and the sale of Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) is a key commercial plank of the next rotation of the Tiwi forestry plantations (employing the plantation forestry methodology) – set to be one of Australia’s largest nature-based carbon ventures (see **section C**).

⁶ Tiwi Land Council: Tiwi Carbon Study ([weblink](#))

⁷ The project was initially registered in 2016 and supported by the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation’s (ILSC) Savanna Fire Management Program (SFM) with funding from the INPEX Corporation. At the point of transition, the project had generated 223,000 Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs), valued at over \$7 million, engaged over 100 traditional owners and their families in annual fire planning and operations, and provided accredited training in fire management practices to 90 individuals. Now fully managed by Tiwi Resources, and will continue to generate income to sustain the carbon enterprise and other work of the Tiwi Rangers in land and sea management, and also supporting Tiwi people through the Community Benefit Fund. See p.5 *Pupuni Ngnirramini (Tiwi News)* June/July 2023 for overview of income investment from the Tiwi Carbon Project ([weblink](#)).



The recent dedication of the Tiwi Islands Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) and parallel expansion of the work of the Tiwi Rangers provides an opportunity to generate further income from carbon abatement while caring for country, if appropriate methods are available. The TLC encourages the development of further methods, in particular removal of feral herbivores for savanna restoration.

Recommendation 3: That further carbon methods applicable to northern Australia are prioritised for development, in particular removal of feral herbivores for savanna restoration.

The Australian Nature Repair Market and international environmental markets are a complementary emerging opportunity touched on in **sections D and K** below.

B. Developing the critical minerals industry

There are critical minerals on the Tiwi Islands, including zirconium, titanium and rare earth elements in the islands' mineral sands.⁸ The Tiwi Islands have been a past producer of zircon from mineral sands deposits when sand mining took place between 2006 and 2013.

Under ALRA, it is the TLC's responsibility to consult with traditional owners regarding any mining exploration and production proposals. If traditional owners consent to exploration (and they may choose not to), the TLC negotiates an agreement with proponents on behalf of traditional owners. As highlighted above, landowners will need to give careful thought to the impact that any mining activities would have on IPA values and associated funding.

The Australian Government's Critical Minerals Strategy 2023-2030 highlights strong Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices as key to Australia's success in an increasingly competitive international market.⁹ As acknowledged in the strategy, strong agreement making with First Nations people is a key component of success.¹⁰

Recommendation 4: All recipients of public funding for critical minerals development should be required to demonstrate their commitment to meaningfully engage with traditional owners and local Aboriginal communities.

⁸ Northern Territory Department of Mining and Energy 'Critical Minerals in the Northern Territory 2025' ([weblink](#))

⁹ Australian Government 'Critical Minerals Strategy 2023-2030' (June 2023), p.35-36 ([weblink](#))

¹⁰ Ibid, p.30-31.



C. Supporting the development of export industries

Tourism

Tourism is one of the most promising export industries of the Tiwi Islands. Its value lies in the unique richness of Tiwi people's culture and country, and it is a growing market. Data collated by Tourism Australia show that demand for 'Indigenous experiences' from international visitors is growing. In the year ending March 2025, the number of international trips that included Indigenous experiences reached 1.1 million – a 22 per cent increase on pre-pandemic levels in 2019 and a 65 per cent increase on the figure in 2015.¹¹ A large proportion of travellers are willing to pay more for Indigenous experiences as part of their travel. Domestic interest and value is also significant.

There are a number of established Tiwi-owned organisations providing tourism experiences from the Tiwi Islands, including [Tiwi Enterprises](#) (whose 2023 acquisition of Sea Darwin, now operating as [Sea Darwin Sea Tiwi](#), has enabled tourism offerings to expand beyond the islands¹²), [Tiwi Designs](#), Tiwi Tours (facilitated by [AAT Kings](#)), Tiwi Islands Adventures (Melville Island Lodge) (acquired in 2012); along with smaller Tiwi operators that include [Tarrantipi Bush Camp](#), [Mamata](#), Tampu King and Wulirankuwu Tours. There is also the non-Tiwi owned, Tiwi Islands Retreat.


Where new tourism offerings are being developed and proposed, the TLC has a role under s19 of ALRA to ensure that the traditional owners and affected Aboriginal people understand and consent to any proposal on their land. While appropriate consultation can take time, the TLC balances its responsibilities to traditional owners and affected Aboriginal people under s19 with its priority of supporting economic development by seeking to process applications as quickly as possible. Efficient processing is best supported by detailed information provided by an applicant and where enterprises are environmentally and culturally appropriate for Tiwi country.

In line with Council's priority of economic development, the TLC is also providing support to Tiwi people working to establish their own tourism offerings. This has included supporting Tiwi people to participate in the annual NT Aboriginal Tourism Forum and the NT Aboriginal Tourism Accelerator Program (run in conjunction with Indigenous Business Australia). Both opportunities provide valuable support to Aboriginal people developing their tourism businesses and the TLC commends Aboriginal Tourism NT for this work.

In the context of an increasing number of tourism products and potential operators across the islands, a priority will be to support the cohesiveness of the sector, accommodating both established and newer Tiwi operators. Our work with Tiwi people and stakeholders on the future Tiwi economy will be directly engaging with this opportunity over the course of 2026.

¹¹ Tourism Australia 'Indigenous Tourism Insights and Data' August 2025

¹² See *Pupuni Ngirramini (Tiwi News)* March 2024 'New jobs and economic boosting ventures planned after take over of award-winning eco-tourism company', (p.16) ([weblink](#))



Lastly, the [Tiwi Cultural Festival](#)¹³, organised by the TLC, is playing an increasingly significant role in generating tourism to the islands. Piloted in 2024 and expanded in 2025, the festival is a vehicle for preserving and sharing Tiwi culture, strengthening community connections, supporting local artists and enterprises, and stimulating regional tourism and economic activity.

The festival is currently reliant on short-term and ad-hoc funding from a range of Australian and NT Government grant streams. The TLC is actively seeking consolidated multi-year funding to support the sustainability and long-term growth of the festival.

It is our ambition that the event become one of the NT's signature cultural events, alongside the Barunga and Garma Festivals. Multi-year funding will go a long way to supporting this outcome.

Recommendation 5: That the Australian Government commit to multi-year funding to sustain and grow the Tiwi Cultural Festival.

Forestry

The Tiwi Islands have a long history of forestry, dating back to the establishment of three sawmills on Melville Island in 1889 for the export sale of native timber, and CSIRO-led plantation trials from the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴ In 2009, Tiwi Plantations Corporation (TPC), a wholly Tiwi owned and governed entity, was established to manage the plantations.

While the industry has had challenges, Tiwi people have remained committed to seeing it become a success and are hopeful that a second rotation will write a new chapter for the industry on their islands.

Building on a comprehensive industry research project facilitated by the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRC DNA), TPC is about to embark on a rotation of a new species, *Eucalyptus Pellita*. Once fully established, the plantation will cover 30,000 hectares across Melville Island. This represents close to 5 per cent of the total Australian hardwood forestry estate and will be both the largest Indigenous plantation venture in northern Australia and one of the country's largest nature-based carbon ventures. The project will generate income through both carbon abatement (yielding an estimated 5 million Australian Carbon Credit Units over its lifetime) and high-value wood products.

The agreement follows extensive consultation by the TLC (as required under ALRA) and stands to deliver significant benefit to traditional owners and the broader Tiwi community, from now and over the life of the 39-year lease. The negotiated benefits include:

¹³ See also *Pupuni Ngirramini (Tiwi News)* December 2025 'Mega weekend of festival and footy a huge success', pp.4-7 ([weblink](#))

¹⁴ The Senate Environment, Communications and the Arts References Committee 'Forestry and mining operations on the Tiwi Islands' (October 2009) ([weblink](#))

- Direct rental income to the five land-owning clan groups
- Significant Tiwi employment with a mandatory requirement of 50 per cent Tiwi employment on the project, equating to approximately 30-40 individuals employed per year across a range of positions
- 12.5 per cent of the project’s carbon and forestry product income to TPC under a profit share arrangement, to be used for the benefit of the Tiwi community
- Annual income to Port Melville Pty Ltd (also a wholly-owned Tiwi entity) for use of the Port Melville facilities
- Repayment of existing family debts (amounts advanced by various Tiwi families to support the prior rotation)
- Improved environmental outcomes from active management of the further spread of *Acacia Magium* from the existing plantations.


The signing of the lease for the second rotation is testament to the entrepreneurial vision and commitment of Tiwi people.

As highlighted in TPC’s submission to this inquiry, further opportunities could exist for TPC, including developing processing facilities on island (likely on a small to medium scale, with log exports to be maintained) to enable the supply of processed timber to domestic and international markets.¹⁵ TPC is exploring these opportunities.



Source: Tiwi Plantations Corporation website

¹⁵ Port Melville Pty Ltd and Tiwi Plantations Corporation, submission no. 73 to the *Inquiry into preparing for emerging industries across northern Australia* (2026) ([weblink](#))



It is worth noting that the issue of insurance arose during the plantation project – namely that it's difficult to access insurance for infrastructure projects in remote parts of Australia at commercial rates. This was ultimately navigated by the Tiwi plantation project, but in other cases it could be a dealbreaker. Insurance products for large scale projects are increasingly hard to find, given the fire and cyclone risk of northern Australia. The TLC would welcome action by government to address this.

Recommendation 6: That the Australian Government consider options to address insurance challenges for large infrastructure projects in northern Australia.

Port Melville

In 2024 the Tiwi people (through a Tiwi owned entity, Port Melville Pty Ltd) acquired 100 per cent of the shares in NT Port and Marine Pty Ltd (NTPM) and in doing so, took ownership and control of Port Melville, a licenced international export port. This transaction was a significant step for Tiwi. The port currently provides:

- An important service as a deepwater port to service Melville and Bathurst Islands
- 30,000,000 litres of fuel storage capacity, managed by Viva Energy
- Short-term accommodation for use by community members and service providers (20-25 beds)
- A meeting venue
- Rudimentary laydown and storage facilities for industries on the Tiwi Islands as well as offshore oil and gas
- A strategic alternative to the Port of Darwin for refuelling/berthage of commercial and defence vessels.

With strong management and further investment, Port Melville can be a catalyst for sustained, positive social and economic outcomes. Development opportunities identified by NTPM include:

- Establishing a local fuel distribution business
- Utilising part of the 32-hectare laydown area for permanent commercial activities
- Increasing the number of accommodation units to support local tourism initiatives
- Further support to the Australian Defence Force.



D. Supporting the decommissioning industry

Any industry development must deal with end of life and legacy issues. All too often, projects are set up on Aboriginal land, only for the infrastructure to be unmaintained and left at project end resulting in environmental harm and injury liability. Removal and rehabilitation are expensive, so the incentive for industry is low. The TLC is pleased that the recently signed forestry agreement includes end of life commitments, but these are not always easily obtained.

Consideration could be given to the development of methodologies within the emerging Nature Repair Market for the remediation and rehabilitation of infrastructure sites, providing income to Aboriginal landowners and delivering better environmental outcomes.

Recommendation 7: That the Australian Government work with Indigenous stakeholders to consider the development of methodologies within the emerging Nature Repair Market for the remediation and rehabilitation of infrastructure sites.

E. Supporting the defence industry

Current Australian Defence Force activity on the Tiwi Islands includes fuel storage at Port Melville, managed by Viva Energy, and exercises on Tiwi land.

Defence has shown increasing interest in running more exercises on Tiwi land and surrounding waters as part of their pivot north. Tiwi people are generally open to partnering with Defence but have identified that there is minimal benefit to them under current arrangements. The TLC has proposed to Defence that we work together on longer term licence agreements to give Defence certainty about access for exercises, and to give Tiwi people certainty about benefits to them for use of their land and waters.

F. Supporting infrastructure

The state of essential infrastructure on the Tiwi Islands is limiting the potential of both current and future industries on the Tiwi Islands. The submission by the Tiwi Islands Training and Employment Board (TITEB) has highlighted the underinvestment in local roads, housing, community buildings and workplaces, training facilities, public amenities and digital connectivity.¹⁶

Two priorities the TLC would like to highlight that would make a significant difference to business and to the day-to-day lives of Tiwi people are sealing the remainder of the Tiwi road network and making significant improvements to waste management. Both are also job-creators in their own right.

¹⁶ Tiwi Islands Training and Employment Board (TITEB), submission no. 75 to the *Inquiry into preparing for emerging industries across northern Australia* (2026), p.3 ([weblink](#))



Tiwi road network

The Tiwi Islands Road Program has delivered \$75 million in joint investment by the Australian and NT Governments to upgrade and seal priority sections of Tiwi roads. Most of the works committed under this funding have now been completed, and sealing the first 16km of the Pirlangimpi road from Three Ways towards the Forestry Camp is expected to commence in the 2026 dry season.

While this investment has been very welcome, there remains 82 km of road network on Melville Island to complete, in addition to work on Bathurst Island to seal the road between town and the tip at Wurrumiyanga and between Wurrumiyanga and Ranku.

A draft paper prepared by the NT Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (formerly the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics) outlines the proposed investment of approximately \$300 million to complete the Melville Island network (this can be provided to the Committee). Options for much-needed improvements to the road to Ranku on Bathurst Island have also been costed, with options ranging from approximately \$12 million to \$40 million.

While these costs are significant, they are an investment in economic potential for the islands, by substantially reducing the cost of doing business.

Recommendation 8: That the Australian Government and the NT Government jointly commit to sealing the remainder of the Tiwi road network.


Waste management

Waste management on the Tiwi Islands is now beyond the scope of local and Territory governments to manage alone and requires Federal support. The cleared areas of bush that have functioned as landfill areas outside community boundaries (although never fit-for-purpose) are now at capacity.

As a result, the Tiwi Islands Regional Council (TIRC) has closed the landfill to all commercial dumping. This is necessary but will have a material impact on development on the islands. For example, the recent \$4 billion Federal and NT Government investment in remote housing is planned to deliver replacement of 44 houses in Wurrumiyanga in addition to an expected 13 new houses. The need to make alternative arrangements for waste generated by these developments is impacting the ability of government to deliver this work.

Importantly, the impacts of the waste management challenges on the islands extend beyond the economic. Rubbish dumped outside landfill areas is leading to contaminated land and waterways, air pollution, and an increase in pests, with consequential health, cultural and environmental impacts for Tiwi people and country.

Acknowledging the ecological and cultural significance of the Tiwi Islands, the TLC's vision is for a waste management system that reduces waste on the islands, facilitates resource recovery, cleans up country and enables the rehabilitation of legacy dumps.



The TLC is actively supporting TIRC’s work to identify options to better manage the islands’ waste.

We note the current *Inquiry into Local Government Funding and Fiscal Sustainability*. Submissions by the Local Government Association of the NT (LGANT) to the earlier *Inquiry into Local Government Sustainability (2024)* highlighted the challenges for remote councils in the NT, whose low rate base make them highly dependent on grant funding, which is generally insufficient, and often lacking reasonable flexibility and without adequate consideration of ongoing operational costs.¹⁷

Given the current fiscal realities for TIRC, any effective and enduring solution to the Tiwi Islands’ waste management challenges will require financial support by both the NT and Federal Governments. The benefits of this investment are multiple: improving the health of people and country, creating jobs and overcoming barriers to housing and other economic development.

Recommendation 9: That the Australian Government and the NT Government jointly invest in fit-for-purpose waste management on the Tiwi Islands.

Recommendation 10: That the Australian Government reassess funding for local government, particularly in remote areas, recognising the extent to which the under-funding this level of government is undermining local efforts at economic development in remote Australia.

Housing

TLC echoes TITEB in emphasizing adequate housing as a baseline need for economic participation¹⁸. While the \$4 billion partnership agreement is significant, it only goes part of the way to addressing overcrowding and more could be done to make the most of the opportunity to increased local employment in construction and maintenance.


Recommendation 11: That the Australian Government and Northern Territory Government continue to invest in remote housing, recognising that it is foundational to economic participation.

G. Managing biosecurity risks

Invasive species are one of the highest priority threats to the cultural and biodiversity values of the Tiwi Islands – which are, as highlighted throughout this submission, foundational to the wellbeing of Tiwi people and key to future economic opportunities.

¹⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport *Inquiry into Local Government Sustainability (2024)*, submission no. 86 ([weblink](#))

¹⁸ TITEB (2026), p.2-4



The environmental impacts of invasive species such as cane toads and gamba grass are well-documented on the mainland and have been the catalyst for the TLC to implement much stronger controls to protect the islands.

In 2023, the TLC employed a full time Quarantine and Biosecurity Officer to raise awareness within the community about the risks posed by invasive species, and to commence quarantine inspections on freight bound for the islands.


The role was informed by conversations with the Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC), as they have well-established policies and procedures in place. The major difference between Groote Eylandt and the Tiwi Islands is that Groote has limited entry points via the barge landing and airport, and all the quarantine inspections are conducted as freight arrives at Groote Eylandt. In contrast, the TLC has to manage multiple barge companies, airports and Sea Link ferry services as gateways for freight to the islands. To reduce the risk of accidental incursions, the TLC therefore decided to focus on quarantine inspections of freight prior to it departing Darwin.

To date, the introduction of the role has been a success. The Tiwi Islands remain free from cane toads, with only one live toad captured and removed in 2008 from Pirlangimpi. One other toad was intercepted and removed from freight in Darwin during quarantine inspections in June 2023. There have been 31 gamba grass incursions detected and treated on the Tiwi Islands. The majority of these have been identified in areas associated with vehicle, equipment and freight movements. With the current density of gamba grass infestations within the greater Darwin area, gamba grass will continue to make it to the islands without very thorough quarantine standards and inspections to support them.

Building on the success of this role, the TLC has previously sought funding to centralise all quarantine inspections for Tiwi freight to one location: establishing a quarantine facility in Darwin where all freight can be inspected at one location before being delivered to the relevant barge company, air service or ferry. This would further strengthen biosecurity protections for the islands and create jobs.

While so far unsuccessful in our funding bid, the TLC still hopes to see such a facility established: including a large, weather-proof, drive-through, covered area to facilitate inspections of heavy equipment and vehicles; a basic wash pad, quarantine bins and vacuum to allow people to correct non-compliances quickly and efficiently; and office space for staff to ensure the service can be provided 52 weeks a year. A quarantine pass would be issued for the particular item of freight, which could then be presented to the barge company, ferry or air service to confirm that the freight is clean and safe to travel to the islands. Possible locations for such a facility include Winnellie, Berrimah, East Arm – relatively central to all barge yards and close to car wash facilities (the TLC has identified three possible sites in Berrimah).

Although the quarantine facility is proposed as a Tiwi Islands initiative, the facility could be beneficial to other land councils with similar challenges. A larger, coordinated facility for the region would be a job-creator and significantly enhance our capacity to reduce incursions of invasive species into our remote areas.



Recommendation 12: Fund the TLC to establish a centralised quarantine facility in Darwin for freight travelling to the Tiwi Islands. Consider the establishment of a regional facility the enables centralised biosecurity inspections of all freight travelling by barge or road across the Top End.

H. Training, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce

See below: *I. Empowering and upskilling local First Nations people*

I. Empowering and upskilling local First Nations people

A key goal of any industry operating on the Tiwi Islands should be to maximise Tiwi employment. This includes jobs at all levels: developing the pipeline of Tiwi workforce from entry-level roles through to senior management.


The TLC refers the committee to TITEB's submission (submission no. 75), which details workforce development opportunities and challenges on the Tiwi Islands.

In addition to this input, the TLC would like to comment on the role of government in job creation. Industry has a critical role to play in job creation on the Tiwi Islands. As highlighted in the submission to this inquiry by Port Melville Pty and Tiwi Plantations Corporation (submission no. 73), the port and plantation are currently employing around 50 Tiwi people in a range of roles. The negotiated agreement of a minimum 50 per cent Tiwi employment under the recently signed forestry agreement reflects the importance Tiwi people place on local jobs in local industry.

The role of industry is complemented by government investment in direct job creation. The TLC strongly supports the Federal Government's Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program. The investment to date of \$707 million towards 3,000 new jobs across remote Australia is a very positive first step to follow more than a decade of Federal neglect of remote employment under the failed Community Development Program (CDP)¹⁹. RJED has delivered a number of jobs to multiple organisations on the Tiwi Islands. These subsidised, entry-level jobs don't replace the jobs created by industry: they provide a supported first step into the workforce that grows the pool of Tiwi people who have the confidence and skills to take on new jobs with many employers across the islands.

The need for investment in 'real jobs', at scale, in remote Australia was identified in the final report of the previous parliament's Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia's *Inquiry into Northern Australia Workforce Development*. Importantly, the Committee acknowledged the damage caused by the abandonment of the original Community

¹⁹ For discussion



Development Employment Program (CDEP) – established from community initiative in the late 1970s and persisting with success for more than three decades.²⁰

The TLC encourages the continued expansion of Federal investment in ‘real jobs’. We welcome the additional \$299 million announced recently to increase the number of RJED jobs from 3,000 by 2027, to 6,000 by 2030 – and encourage the program’s further growth. There are close to 40,000 people across remote Australia on the Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES) caseload (the renamed CDP). NIAA’s own assessment has identified that at least 15,000 people on this caseload are ‘work-ready’.²¹ While private industry can and should deliver a portion of these jobs, it is unlikely, at least in the short and medium term, to provide them all. A well-designed remote employment program should go hand-in-hand with and be a support to industry-generated employment. The Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) *Fair Work and Strong Communities* model remains a sound policy proposal, in particular the call for the creation of a minimum of 12,000 new jobs in remote communities across Australia, including 1,500 paid training roles for young people.²² Alongside the more limited scale of job creation, a dedicated focus on school-to-work pathways is a key gap in the government’s remote employment programs.

The TLC notes that in the context of much disruption and underperformance to employment services in recent years²³, the Tiwi Islands is lucky to have TITEB: a strong, community-controlled employment service provider.

While the Tiwi Islands have a reasonable proportion of local jobs filled by Tiwi or other Aboriginal people (highest in Pirlangimpi (88 percent) and lowest in Wurrumiyanga (68 percent)²⁴, there remains the challenge of developing local people into skilled and more senior roles so that there is a pipeline for Tiwi management and leadership. This challenge (and opportunity) reflects challenges elsewhere in the system, not least of which is the education system. We encourage this Committee to refer to the extensive discussion of workforce participation barriers experienced by Aboriginal people in northern Australia in the *Northern Australia Workforce Development* inquiry.²⁵

We also refer the committee to TITEB’s Community Workforce Plan 2025-2027²⁶ and further employment data for the Tiwi Islands available from the NT Government’s 2023 Remote Town Jobs Profiles.²⁷

²⁰ Klein, E. and Markham, F. (2025) ‘A review of remote employment policy: where are we, and how did we get here?’ POLIS Working Paper No. 4/2025. POLIS: The Centre for Social Policy Research ([weblink](#))

²¹ Auditor General (2024) *Remote Employment Programs* (Auditor General Report 29: 2023-24) Australian National Audit Office, p.83 ([weblink](#))

²² APO NT (2023) *Fair Work and Strong Communities* ([weblink](#))


²³ Australian National Audit Office (2024) Performance Audit Report No. 29 of 2023-24: Remote Employment Programs ([weblink](#))

²⁴ NT Remote Towns Jobs Profiles 2023 ([weblink](#))

²⁵ Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia (2024) ([weblink](#))

²⁶ TITEB (2025) Community Workforce Plan 2025-2027 ([weblink](#))

²⁷ NT Remote Towns Jobs Profiles 2023 ([weblink](#))



TITEB's Community Workforce Plan was the result of extensive community consultation and provides valuable insight into the occupations and industries that are attractive to the Tiwi workforce. They identified jobs that are:

- *Strong in culture* – including Tiwi language teaching, cultural education, arts, cultural tourism, content creation
- *Working on Country* – including ranger programs, land and sea management, fire management and eco-tourism
- *Caring for family and community* – health, aged care, disability support, youth and family services
- *Building and servicing the community* – construction, housing maintenance, town services and local government roles.

TITEB has identified these place-based and people-centred industries as the most viable pathways for local employment when properly supported.²⁸

Recommendation 13: That the Australian Government continue to expand the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program, including a greater focus on supporting school-to-work pathways in future iterations.


Recommendation 14: That the Australian Government is responsive to community feedback on the new Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES) to support its continued improvement.

J. Barge landings and marine access for remote communities

Barge landings are critical infrastructure for remote communities. They provide a lifeline for food, fuel and freight, especially when roads are off-limits. There are currently five 'community' barge landings on the islands, servicing Wurrumiyanga (directly onto the beach) and Wurankuwu (Ranku) on Bathurst Island, and Pirlangimpi, Milikapiti and Paru (onto the beach) on Melville Island. There are also landings that service businesses: including Port Melville (currently out of service due to wash-out underneath), Port Hurd (a beach landing supplying Tiwi Island Retreat) and Point Fawcett (supplying the Defence Radar Station).

The condition of these landings vary, but the highest priority improvement is to have secure freight handling and lay-down areas at each landing. While Wurrumiyanga has a fenced compound, there is nothing at Milikapiti and an unusable facility at Pirlangimpi. This is an issue for public safety (for example, forklifts operating in a public area), security of freight and poses a quarantine and biosecurity risk. The lack of secure lay-down areas also creates an additional challenge and likely cost to construction on the islands: whether for new housing, roads or any other infrastructure development.

²⁸ TITEB submission, p.2



For all these reasons, the TLC would like to see secure barge yards established at all three major communities. Consideration will need to be given to the design of these areas to accommodate waste transfer/resource recovery facilities.

The second priority for investment is the Paru ferry landing. Paru-Wurrumiyanga ferry is the only vehicle access route to connect the three major communities of the Tiwi Islands. When the ferry is out of order (as it has been this week), it makes movement around the islands near impossible: whether that be for work, school, to access health services, for emergency services, to visit family, and for cultural or any other reason. Currently on lower tides, it is effectively impossible to get a vehicle off the ferry without getting bogged or damaging either the vehicle or the ferry. This has economic implications beyond the cost of damage – for example, Tiwi Enterprises has stopped sending hire cars to Melville Island on the interisland ferry: reducing business and further impacting people’s ability to move between the islands.

The TLC is current exploring appropriate, cost-effective options to improve the Paru landing (specifically ground mats). The challenge is to identify an appropriate source of funding for this necessary and urgent infrastructure improvement.

Recommendation 15: That the Australian Government provide funding to establish secure, fit-for-purpose barge yards at all three major Tiwi communities.

Recommendation 16: That the Australian Government provide funding for appropriate, cost-effective options to improve the Paru-Wurrumiyanga ferry landing.


K. Research and development

Role of research and development

Research has played a critical role in the development of key industries on the Tiwi Islands. In the case of the Tiwi Carbon Study (which commenced in 2009), it has been influential across northern Australia, informing the development of savannah burning methodologies.²⁹ Research has also been the foundation of the second rotation forestry project: the 4-year *Maximising tropical forestry* project, tested the viability of a second rotation and was critical to informing the investment decisions of the TPC Board and investment partners.³⁰ Other industry development research underway on the islands

²⁹ Richard, A. et al. (2012) ‘Savanna burning, greenhouse gas emissions and Indigenous livelihoods: Introducing the Tiwi Carbon Study’ *Austral Ecology* 37(6): 712-723 ([weblink](#))

³⁰ Project funded by the Cooperative Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA), the University of Melbourne, Charles Darwin University, Midway Limited (Plantation Management Partners), Forest and Wood Products Australia and the NTG. See CRCDNA News: Research and development investment delivering for Tiwi community, 20 June 2022 ([weblink](#))



includes the Blacklip Rock Oyster farm trials,³¹ prawn farm trials (with the CSIRO)³² and previous trials of medicinal plants on the islands.³³

Tiwi Research Protocols

Acknowledging both the importance of research to industry development, and the importance of ensuring that research is led by and delivers for Tiwi people, the TLC is in the process of working with our Council to develop process improvements for research applications. This work is focused on establishing a clear set of Tiwi-directed research principles by which to assess research proposals and embed in Research Access Agreements. The protocol will require there to be a clear link between research and benefit to Tiwi people and for Tiwi people to be appropriately compensated for their time in contributing to research, particularly in the case of expert knowledge. Tiwi people currently bear a heavy consultative and research burden, and there is opportunity to ensure that research delivers for them.

Carbon and Nature Repair Market methodologies

As identified above, both the carbon market and recently established Nature Repair Market provide opportunities for Tiwi people to generate income by caring for country. The Tiwi Islands Fire and Carbon Project currently uses the savanna burning methodology. As identified in **section A**, there would be opportunity to generate further income if additional carbon methods were available, appropriate to Tiwi and similar northern Australian landscapes, in particular removal of feral herbivores for savanna and wetland restoration.

In the case of the Nature Repair Market, the TLC urges the prioritisation of methods relevant to northern Australia. The only method currently available (*Replanting native forest and woodland ecosystems*) doesn't apply to the Tiwi Islands and other large areas of northern Australia. The *Protect and Conserve* method is likely to be applicable on the Tiwi Islands, but we would encourage the prioritisation of further methods suitable for northern Australia, in particular the Introduced Hooved Animal Management method and the Indigenous Fire Management method (research currently being led by the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network and its members).

Recommendation 17: Prioritise the development of carbon and Nature Repair Market methodologies applicable to northern Australia, recognising the significant Indigenous estate to which they will be applicable.

³¹ See CRCDNA News: Tiwi Islands celebrate milestone in Territory-grown oyster industry, 23 June 2025 ([weblink](#))

³² CSIRO 'Indigenous-centred prawn farm collaboration to make a splash on Tiwi Islands', 12 January 2024 ([weblink](#))

³³ 'Meet the Tiwi man using the power of bush medicine to revive his community', E. Kellaway and Laetitia Lemke, NITV, 17 July 2024 ([weblink](#))

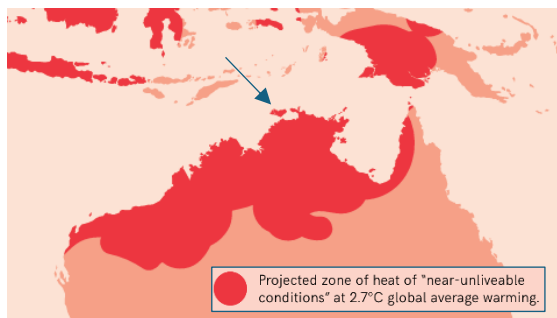
Further comments

Climate change

It is surprising and concerning that the terms of reference of this inquiry are not engaging with the reality of climate risk faced by communities across Australia.

The global transition to net zero is an imperative for Tiwi Islanders and communities across northern Australia, who face projected near-unliveable conditions by 2070 under the current emissions pathway.³⁴ The data presented below is drawn from a 2024 report by the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group that has highlighted the existential risks posed by climate change, particularly in northern Australia, and the implications for communities, future industries, regional trade expansion and defence operations in the region.³⁵ It is a frightening read for any Australian. But for Tiwi and other First Nations people whose identity is rooted in country, it is even more so: with the very real prospect of facing an impossible choice between displacement or the struggle to survive.

Figure 1: Projected zone of heat of 'near-unliveable conditions' at 2.7 degrees global average warming



Source: Australian Security Leaders Climate Group (2024)
Too hot to handle: The scorching reality of Australia's climate security failure

While this inquiry is focused on industry in northern Australia, it is important to emphasise that industry elsewhere impacts (in possibly extreme ways) the futures of Tiwi people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the region.

While we hope that Australia and the world can move quickly to an emissions pathway that reduces the risk of this future, the reality is that climate impacts are already here, will continue to increase, and need to be planned for.

A 2010 report by AECOM (commissioned by LGANT) assessed the risks posed by climate change to assets and infrastructure on the islands.³⁶ The report identified increased risk of damage from greater intensity cyclones, as well as risk of damage or loss of power

³⁴ Lenton, et al. (2023) 'Quantifying the human cost of global warming' *Nature Sustainability* Vol 6 (pp.1237-1247) Weblink: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-023-01132-6>

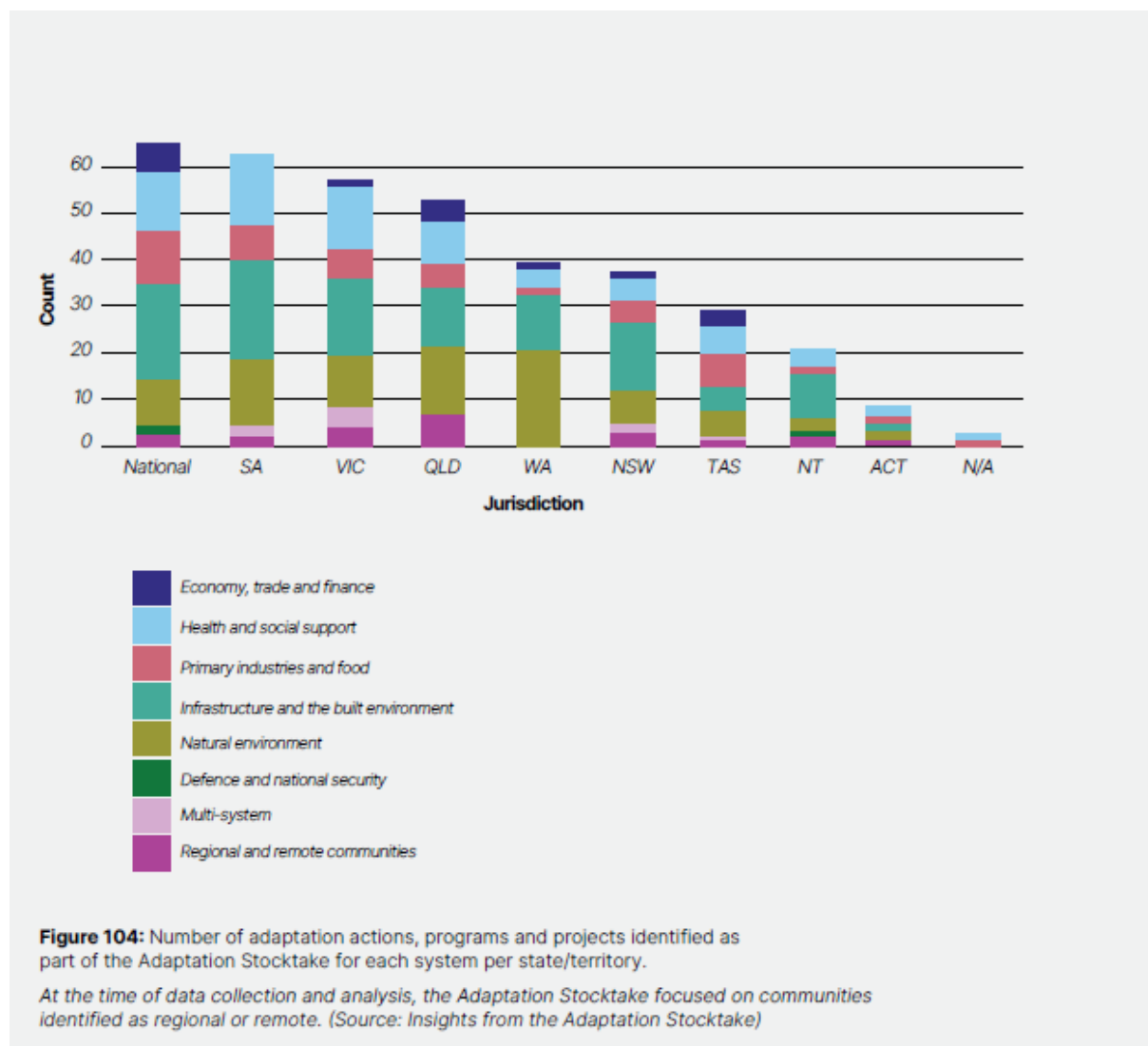
³⁵ Australian Security Leaders Climate Group (2024) *Too Hot to Handle: The scorching reality of Australia's climate-security failure* ([weblink](#))

³⁶ AECOM (2010) Climate Change Risk Assessment and Adaptation Planning: Tiwi Islands Shire Council, prepared for LGANT ([weblink](#))


transition and distribution, damages to communities from bushfire, and damages to settlements from storm surge and flooding.

As the National Climate Risk Assessment (NCRA) has identified, these kinds of risks will not be unique to the Tiwi Islands. They are faced across northern Australia. It is therefore concerning that neither the NT or the Federal Government are appropriately investing in adaptation planning to protect people’s lives and livelihoods into the future. Despite the NCRA report recommending community-based adaptation planning, the TLC is not aware of any significant funding for this. Particularly pertinent to this inquiry, it is also concerning to see in the report that of all jurisdictions, the NT has the lowest number of adaptation actions relating to the *Economy, trade and finance* system (see figure below).

Figure 2: Number of adaptation actions, programs and projects identified as part of the Adaptation Stocktake for each system per state/territory



Source: Australia’s National Climate Risk Assessment 2025, p.238 ([weblink](#))



The TLC and stakeholders on the island have taken steps to plan for their future, including climate change adaptation workshops hosted by the TLC in 2017 (partnering with the University of Melbourne, National Centre for Coasts and Climate, and the National Environmental Science Program Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub³⁷) and community master planning commissioned by the Office of Township Leasing.

This work is important, but it needs to be adequately resourced. By way of example, the recently master planning for Wurrumiyanga has directly engaged with the reality that the current location of the township may not be viable in the future, given the risks of coastal flooding, coastal erosion and storm surge, increased by climate change. This kind of planned retreat is a significant undertaking that will come at a significant expense that is currently unfunded.

Recommendation 18: That the Australian Government make significant investment in community-led climate change adaptation planning and this should include infrastructure funding. Industry and infrastructure planning must incorporate climate risk.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this preliminary submission to the inquiry. We encourage the Committee to visit the Tiwi Islands as part of your hearings schedule and look forward to providing you with further information over the course of your inquiry.

³⁷ Barnett, J. et al. (2017) 'Adapting to Climate Change in the Tiwi Islands' *Report on the Climate Change Adaptation Workshop for the Tiwi Land Council* ([weblink](#))