

2 December 2022

Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Via email www.aph.gov.au/Committee/Submissions

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job Opportunities in the Northern Territory

The City of Darwin submits this response to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs for their consideration in the Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job Opportunities in the Northern Territory. On behalf of the Elected Members of the City of Darwin I submit this response.

City of Darwin

As the Capital City of the Northern Territory, Darwin is the social, cultural and economic heart of the Northern Territory. Darwin is well-positioned to enhance the Northern Territory's economic, social and cultural advantages and Council is well placed to support, lead and advocate on behalf of the people of Darwin.

Guided by our Darwin 2030 Strategic plan Council's Mission is: We will work with the community and partners, provide leadership, and deliver services that create opportunities to enhance the economic, cultural and environmentally sustainability of Darwin.

a) The preparation for the sunseting of the Stronger Futures legislation;

City of Darwin have been informed by Northern Territory Government (NTG) Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet through the Regional Co-ordination Committee of their consultations across the region on the sunseting of Stronger Futures Legislation. The consultations led by NTG have resulted in four of the seven town communities opting into declarations as Alcohol Protected Areas (APAs) under the Liquor Act 2019. The declarations result in liquor being prohibited from 17 July 2022 to 16 July 2024. These include communities that sit within Darwin municipality – Bagot Community and Railway Dam aka One Mile Dam. Other communities within the municipality of Darwin such as Kulaluk and Minmarara have alcohol management plans in place and Acacia Larrakia have confirmed their capacity to self-manage with NTG.

NTG have stated they will continue to monitor and respond to any indicators or trends of alcohol related harm and work in partnership with community members, elders, leaders and residents, along with frontline service providers across the region. Media reports have noted the impacts of the changes in relation to alcohol related illness on Royal Darwin Hospital admissions.

b) Community safety and alcohol management;

Approximately 48% of adults in the NT exceed the National Health Medical Research Council guidelines related to alcohol consumption, these consumption rates are 173% greater than the national average.

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City of Darwin commits significant resources responding to the needs of vulnerable people in its public spaces and in addressing antisocial behaviour including public intoxication across the municipality. Our 2021/22 Municipal Plan details approximately \$2M allocated to this area.

City of Darwin provides support and programming guided through the Safer Vibrant Darwin Plan 2016-2019 to ensure vulnerable people in Council's public spaces receive assistance, should they require it.

City of Darwin also addresses public intoxication and works collaboratively with Northern Territory Government, Police and Emergency Services, Community Service Organisations and Larrakia Nation.

The causes of homelessness and the complexity of social issues impacting vulnerable people in our community include:

- inadequate provision of shelters and refuges
- limited access to, and availability of, public housing
- control and supply of alcohol
- inadequate level of Police and emergency resources
- limitations on the resources of welfare and health service providers both within remote and regional settings and across the Darwin municipality

The issues above are outside the remit of local government. Addressing these issues and their impact on public spaces within the municipality requires a collaborative approach from a wide range of stakeholders and significant financial investment.

Consumption of alcohol and high levels of public intoxication occur in City of Darwin public areas. Despite continued and intensive activity by City of Darwin working in collaboration with a range of NT Government agencies and community welfare partners, the issues of public consumption and intoxication persist.

The current services and investment by City of Darwin include:

- Darwin Safer City - including Assertive Outreach
- Public Places Rangers
- Crime Prevention Through Environment Design
- Libraries – Community Wellbeing Program
- Youth Services
- Closed Circuit TV
- Funding contribution to Northern Territory Government (NTG) City Safe Security Patrols

Darwin Safer City Program

The Darwin Safer City Program works in partnership with a range of Government departments and non-Government agencies to achieve a safer, vibrant Darwin. There are several components to the program guided by the [Safer Vibrant Darwin Plan 2016- 2019](#).

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The Safer City Coordinator manages the program, including Assertive Outreach and manages Council's walkways including community consultation regarding closures and security concerns. The Safer City Coordinator is also involved in a variety of advocacy forums to reduce alcohol supply as a key strategy to address public intoxication and improve public safety.

The Safer City Program aims to reduce the high level of alcohol harm and rough sleeping in the Darwin municipality and improve community safety and amenity.

Key aspects of the Darwin Safer City program include:

- Working with residents and retailers to address community safety issues and public intoxication
- Provision of advice to Council on applications under the Liquor Act for licensing
- Gazetting of restricted areas for alcohol consumption within the municipality
- Collaboration and partnerships with a range of government and non-government agencies to address immediate issues as well as structural reforms needed to improve high levels of homelessness and alcohol misuse
- Advocates for alcohol reforms, harm minimisation and strategies to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping
- Administers and provides the Secretariat the Darwin Northern Suburbs Liquor Accord
- Reviews and coordinates all activity in relation to anti-social behaviour in walkways and/or other City of Darwin owned public places

Assertive Outreach

The Assertive Outreach team are managed by the Safer City Coordinator.

City of Darwin has two Assertive Outreach Officers who work with a range of partner agencies to link vulnerable people with services such as accommodation, health and wellbeing services, alcohol and other drugs services, legal and material aid and transport.

The Assertive Outreach Officers work Monday to Friday, starting early in the morning @ 7am each day and move through City of Darwin public places such as parks, reserves and beachside areas. Officers patrol as a team of 2 for 7.25 hours per day, finishing in the afternoon.

In the period 1 July to 31 December 2021 the Assertive Outreach team conducted 8,907 engagements (4,628 men, 4,037 women, 242 children) and provided 1,334 referrals (735 men, 570 women, 29 children).

The Officers work closely with a range of partner agencies using a strength-based approach, focused on advocacy for vulnerable people. The service engages with people on a voluntary basis and has no regulatory powers.

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Key aspects of the Assertive Outreach program include:

- First Nations staff, with strong cultural competency and links with the local community
- First response, short intervention service which engages with vulnerable people many of whom are sleeping rough and are alcohol dependent
- Refer to external agencies that can assist people across a range of services, including health and medical, accommodation, alcohol and other drugs, legal, material aid, transport and income support
- Agile patrolling to respond to areas of high need
- Municipality wide service
- Regularly provide intelligence to Police and Emergency Services, welfare and health providers and work proactively with community groups and stakeholders including local businesses

Public Places Rangers

Public Places Rangers are part of the City of Darwin's Regulatory Services team and monitor our public spaces to manage illegal camping, anti-social behaviour and general By-Law compliance.

Key aspects of the Public Places Rangers program include:

- A regulatory approach to public space issues in City of Darwin owned parks, reserves, facilities, and beach side areas
- Providing a municipality wide service
- Active monitoring and regulation of public spaces areas to ensure they are clean and safe for the enjoyment of the community
- Discouraging public drinking and antisocial behaviour, however they cannot seize or tip out alcohol or forcibly remove people
- Managing general By-law compliance issues such as untidy or overgrown properties, illegal dumping and storing of goods in public places
- Issuing of infringements fines under the Local Government By-laws for regulatory offences
- Close working relationships with a range of collaborative partners such as NT Police, Larrakia Nation Patrols and NT Government's Parks staff
- Assist and participate in joint patrols to address public intoxication and illegal camping on Crown Lands when requested

The Public Places team includes the Supervisor Public Places to coordinate operations and seven rangers who operate in the field to enforce Darwin City Council By- laws (1994) in public places.

The resources within the Public Places team are allocated Monday to Friday for:

- Public Places Morning Patrol, 6am to 2.15pm, 2-person patrol
- Public Places Afternoon Patrol, 10.45am to 7.00pm, 2-person patrol
- Three rangers for general By-law issues

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Plans to implement a trial of additional weekend patrols are underway. It is intended to have two Public Places Rangers work approximately 6 hours per day on Saturday and Sundays from December 2022.

In the period 1 July to 31 December 2021 the Public Places rangers on morning and afternoon patrols observed 27,070 vulnerable persons in public places, engaged with 6,822 persons and liaised and escalated matters to NT Police 331 times.

The Public Places Rangers are authorised to exercise powers under the Local Government Act and Darwin City Council By-laws.

The current By-laws regarding public places for which Rangers can infringe include camping in public spaces, public urination or defecation, obstruction, littering, including breaking glass, lighting fires without a permit.

Often the community expectation is that Public Places Rangers enforce anti-social behaviour legislation. Rangers do not have the power, authority or training of police or emergency services. Beyond specific items listed in By-laws Rangers do not have authority to enforce people's behaviour in public places. The Rangers patrol and seek to ensure public safety and amenity through voluntary compliance.

Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED) Principles

The International Crime Prevention Through Environment Design Association (CPTED) defines CPTED as a multi-disciplinary approach to crime prevention, utilising urban and architectural design, and the management of built and natural environments. While it notes that CPTED aims to reduce victimisation and deter offender decisions that precede criminal acts, CPTED also aims to build a sense of community so that inhabitants gain a sense of ownership over public space to not just reduce crime, but also the fear or perception of crime.

City of Darwin reference CPTED in their infrastructure and planning work. While Council has not formally adopted CPTED as such, when designing public spaces, the CPTED principles are used to guide design outcomes.

Libraries – Community Wellbeing Program

City of Darwin Libraries are inclusive, welcoming and safe places for many vulnerable people in our community. Library Officers provide additional support through a range of services to vulnerable community members including:

- National Homelessness Week – in 2021, in partnership with NT Shelter and supported by 16 service providers, Homeless Link Up drew 150 attendees. Hygiene packs, food, clothing, laundry vouchers and haircuts were provided. In 2022 The Community Support and Advice Group was launched. These regular drop in sessions provide vulnerable people with an opportunity to chat with a case worker or advocate for one- on-one support with housing, legal, financial and government services.

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- Therapy Dog program – two dogs and their handlers roam the library interacting with vulnerable people during weekly sessions during the harshest time of the year in Darwin, the build-up and wet season.
- Carpentaria Story Time – fortnightly story sessions for people with disabilities from NDIS provider for four months in 2021
- Job Club – assists struggling to find employment with support such as job searches, resume writing, confidence building and interview tips.

Youth Services

The Youth Services team support young people across a range of initiatives and programs including regular Saturday night LAUNCH programming; Get That Job skills development training and SKATE Nights. These programs provide positive pathways, connecting to role models and mentors, and connecting young people with each other through positive programming.

Officers contribute to NT Government's Multi-agency Community and Child Safety Team – Northern Suburbs as high-level sector intelligence sharing information on vulnerable and at-risk young people.

The Youth team also administers and provides Secretariat for the Darwin Working with Youth Network (DARWWYN) to share sector intelligence; with network members providing services to young people who are vulnerable and at risk.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

City of Darwin provide access to NT Police and Emergency Services to our #SmartDarwin CCTV camera network of 138 cameras. Through the Darwin Safer City Program and Public Places Services Collaboration Group regular contact is made with NT Police and Emergency Services regarding their mobile CCTV units and hot spots across the municipality.

Financial Contribution to Northern Territory Government City Safe Security Patrols

In January 2021, City of Darwin signed an agreement to contribute funding to Northern Territory Government's City Safe Security Patrols. The City Safe Security Patrols operate every day throughout the Darwin CBD.

Northern Territory Government are responsible for the management of this security contract and as such Council has no oversight of these services. Council receives security patrol statistics from the contractor via Northern Territory Government. The current agreement with NTG committed Council \$400 000 annually for three years.

c) Job opportunities and Community Development Program reform;

Unlike other Local Government Areas across the Northern Territory City of Darwin does not run any Community Development Programs (CDP) but understands the impact the CDP has on remote First Nations Australians. Provision of meaningful training and employment opportunities in remote communities is critical and our understanding is that there continue to be limited training providers, a distinct lack of local jobs on regional and remote projects such as remote housing or other construction projects.

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City of Darwin encourage investment in First Nations organisations that seek to empower and build First Nations businesses such as NT Indigenous Business Network in order to build capacity, ownership and empower First Nations people and the economy.

City of Darwin supports the commitment by the Australian Government to reforming the Community Development Program in partnership with First Nations people, increasing local control and engagement in order to create economic benefit and jobs in remote locations.

d) Justice reinvestment community services and;

City of Darwin see benefit in supporting the provision of appropriate alternatives to the crowded prison system. We encourage the Federal Government to invest in strategies that decrease crime and strengthen communities and to work closely with agencies such as the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency.

Strategic long term investment in solutions proposed by First Nations run and led organisations seeking to keep young people out of the juvenile justice system is required. Adequately resourcing organisations providing these services such as First Nation's not for profit organisations and enabling them to collect long term data about the impact of these programs is critical.

Reviewing work in the justice reinvestment realm that is taking place in NSW and emerging work in other locations including Katherine, NT, may provide an established process and model for consideration.

The development of a Youth Hub in Darwin's Northern Suburbs is also critical to provide a safe, welcoming and resourced space for young people to gather and to connect with service providers. The proposed Youth Hub is long overdue; movement on this critical piece of infrastructure is needed.

The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, Correctional Services run a paid employment program which can enable community members to enter the workforce while also receiving support and training. There is potential to extend this existing program or to consider the development of similar programs for post release.

e) Any related matters.

Data provided from NT Shelter shows approximately 4.16% (1 in 24 people) in the NT are seeking assistance due to homelessness compared to 1.1% Australia wide. 46% of those accessing homelessness services in the NT are doing so due to family or domestic violence. 8% of the NT's homeless population are sleeping rough. Specific data for the municipality of Darwin is not currently available.

Data provided from Primary Health Network states that the NT has the highest alcohol consumption per capita and the highest rates of hospitalisations and deaths due to alcohol misuse in Australia. Approximately 48% of adults in the NT exceed the National Health Medical Research Council guidelines related to alcohol consumption, these consumption rates are 173% greater than the national average.

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Greater investment in remote and local public housing and culturally safe social services that are genuinely accessible is required as is greater investment in appropriate shelters for those fleeing family violence.

Yours sincerely



THE HON. KON VATSKALIS
LORD MAYOR OF DARWIN

