

Good morning, Senators. My name is Helen Daiyi, and I am employed as the Policy Officer at the Tiwi Land Council. I work closely with our Biosecurity and Environmental Officers, as well as our team of Anthropologists.

The Tiwi Land Council is one of the four Northern Territory Land Councils. Currently, we have nineteen staff members, fifteen females and four males.

Our responsibilities lie with the Tiwi Islands, located 80 kilometers north of Darwin, the second-largest islands in Australia after Tasmania.

Over the past year, the Tiwi Land Council has focused on reform and rebuilding following a full audit by the ANAO. We are committed to implementing all ANAO recommendations, and much of this reform has now been finalised. These efforts aim to strengthen governance and accountability, especially in the areas of finances and service provision, including towards external stakeholders but particularly towards the land council's Tiwi clients.

A major initiative agreed upon by resolution of the full Tiwi Land Council last year is a new method of choice for land council membership selection—positions are now decided by an externally conducted ballot, with 50% of these members required to be women. Elections were held in December and January, and soon the new council members, with 50% women representing their clan groups for the first time, will take up their positions.

One of our major priorities is protecting the islands' biodiversity against serious and very real threats from feral animals and invasive species, including cane toads, gamba grass, and fire ants.

The Land Council recently completed a survey for ghost nets around the entire coastline and identified 40 nets in 28 locations off our shores or tangled on reefs, rocks, and beaches.

Rising sea levels are causing coastal erosion and the loss of seagrass, a food source for dugongs, turtles, and other animals.

We are planning measures to counter these damaging menaces.

Tiwi cultural mapping is a major project currently being undertaken by our team of anthropologists working alongside our resource and environment officers to ensure that our Tiwi cultural knowledge and sites are properly recorded and protected.

The Tuwurrampila Cultural Heritage Forum has been established to facilitate and oversee the implementation of Tiwi cultural heritage projects and events that support, strengthen, and sustain Tiwi culture.

We are committed to assisting Tiwi people develop viable business by encouraging culturally and environmental appropriate economic development on the islands.

Over the past year and a half, I have had the chance to observe closely as Tiwi people have been divided by a large gas company on one hand and environmental activists on the other. Under current arrangements, the Tiwi Land Council does not have any statutory role in relation to the Tiwi Sea country affected by that project because that is native title business.

The Land Council membership is composed of eight clan groups. The Jikilaruwu, Wurankuwu, Malawu, Mantiyupwi, Munupi, Marrikawuyanga, Wulirankuwu, Mantiyupwi, and Yimpinari.

Each clan has 4 councilors and one trustee. It is the only representative body of the Tiwi people. The recent dispute has shown that it is high time for the Tiwi Land Council to become formally appointed as the representative body under the Native Title Act for Tiwi sea country.

The Tiwi Land Council is dedicated to bringing Tiwi people back together after this divisive time and ensuring that we become stronger with a determination to slowly and steadily secure native title recognition for all our Tiwi waters. We are committed to working with our people to secure this kind of change.

Thank you for your time.