

**SENATE FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

Public Hearing – Budget Estimates  
Cross Portfolio Indigenous Matters  
24 May 2023

Pennie Talbot  
Executive Director of Township Leasing  
Opening Statement

Good evening,

I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri Traditional Owners. I pay my respects to your families and elders and thank you for allowing me to gather on your country with my colleagues, Ms Annette Murtagh and Ms Elenoa Fuller. I would also like to pay my respects to all other Traditional Owners who have walked this land before us and all of us that are now responsible for our ancestral lands, stories, and families across this nation. Furthermore, I acknowledge and pay my respects to my sisters and brothers and colleagues in the room today and I thank the Committee.

As we enter the sixteenth year of Township Leasing in the Northern Territory, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify some key points of the Township Leasing Model and, in particular, its origin.

The Township Leasing Model has recently seen enhancements to the governing and administrative functions, which has enabled Traditional Owners the options to establish a Community Entity to hold the Township Lease or partner with the Executive Director, with the option then to transition to a Community Entity over time, if that is their aspiration. The differentiation in the Township Leasing Model is to provide Traditional Owners the choice when considering the governing and administrative functionality, it does not mean that there is an alternate model and importantly the principles of the Model remain the same.

Furthermore, while often misinterpreted as an intervention policy, discussions around the first Township Lease commenced prior to the intervention, driven by the late Mr Walter Kerinaiua, a Senior Mantiyupwi Traditional Owner from the community of Wurrumiyanga on the Tiwi Islands. As the Mantiyupwi Family Group happily remind me, over seventy meetings were held prior to their decision to enter into a Township Lease in 2007. When justifying his pursuit of a Township Lease, Mr Kerinaiua stated:

**“I want to empower my people by providing choices, choices that we in the bush have never seen before”.**

This vision and desire to see change for his people has resulted in economic, social, and home ownership opportunities for their community and others.

As the success of Township Leasing becomes increasingly evident, an increasing number of Traditional Owners and organisations are approaching the Office seeking information on the Model.

Through their vision to improve outcomes for their community, the Kardu Diminin Traditional Owners of Wadeye are advancing these discussions in partnership with our Office. Through regular engagement and information sessions, the Office will support them to make an informed choice about their tenure arrangements for their land.

The Township Leasing Framework will support these discussions and all Traditional Owner groups as they engage with the Model, allowing them to access the information they need to make free, prior, and informed decisions about their land.

With coordinated effort in a partnered approach, putting the needs and aspirations of Traditional Owners at the centre of what we do, we can effect long term, sustainable change over time for all Township residents.