



Anindilyakwa Land Council – Opening Statement

Ida Mamarika: Thank you for inviting the Anindilyakwa people to Ngunnawal and Ngambri country, and to appear before the Senate Estimates Committee today. We, the elected members of the ALC Board, have come here today from the Groote Archipelago to speak to you directly on behalf of our people. Before we begin, I'd like acknowledge the tragic loss two weeks ago of the Deputy Chair of the ALC, Mr T Amagula, who was a long-standing champion for the Anindilyakwa people and will be greatly missed. He would have been proud to be here today.

Scott Wurramarra: The Anindilyakwa people have lived on the Groote Archipelago for thousands of years. We are Saltwater People. Our country is not just the Land – but also the Sea as far as the eye can see. We lived life on our terms, managed our own lives, spoke our own language and practiced our culture until the Church Missionary Society arrived over 100 years ago, and then the BHP GEMCO Mine in the 1960s. Since that time, we have seen our health decline, our culture challenged, our children fail to be properly educated or locked up, and decisions made by outsiders for their own benefit.

But since 2012 we have decided to take our future into our own hands. We are doing this by taking back control of our own housing, education, health, economic development, law and justice, and local government. We are leading this process ourselves, and that is the only way things will improve for our people.

Mark Hewitt: The ALC has grown rapidly in the past 10 years to prepare the Traditional Owners for a sustainable and financially independent future after the imminent closure of the GEMCO manganese mine. Key highlights include:

- In 10 years ALC employment has risen from 36 to 173, with over 50% being Traditional Owners;
- The number of Aboriginal Corporations operating on Groote has more than doubled from 15 to 32;
- Among primary school students supported by the ALC, school attendance rates have increased from 19% to 63%;
- 106 new houses have been or are being built, employing over 30 TOs in the process, to reach parity with national standards by 2028;
- Since 2006, Gross Annual Income for indigenous residents has doubled to \$20.2 million;
- Through successful community-led justice programs, over the past 4 years no Anindilyakwa children have been incarcerated;
- We are developing the NT's first Alternative to Custody Facility for male Aboriginal offenders, which is set to open at the beginning of next year and will reduce the number of Anindilyakwa men in prison by over 50%.

As was identified in the 2023 ANAO governance audit, this rapid growth in the ALC and its work has at times resulted in a lag in internal processes and policies. Our previous governance audit was in 2008, and a great deal has changed since then. We have welcomed the findings of the ANAO, and we are on track to implement all necessary actions by their due dates.

James Durilla: Although the ALC Board is disappointed by the outcome of the Voice referendum, we will not stop advocating for our people. That is why we have come to Canberra today.

Sometimes we might speak to each other in our language, before giving our answers in English. This is how we work. As elected members of the ALC Board, we are here to speak on behalf of our people, so please direct your questions to us where relevant. Thank you.