

## Tiwi Land Council

### Senate Estimates opening address

8 November 2024

Good morning Committee Members.

Over the past two years, the Tiwi Land Council has been attending Senate Estimates with a consistent message that we are rebuilding and strengthening our organisation. And we're proud of the progress that we have made.

- We have implemented a new method of choice and terms and conditions of membership. We now have a Council that is reflective of Tiwi people, with equal numbers of men and women and representation of our 8 land-owning groups.
- Our Council has endorsed new meeting rules and a stronger Conflict of Interest policy.
- We have developed a framework to define the responsibilities and operation of our Accountable Authority.
- We have recently re-established our Executive Committee to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our decision-making.
- We have worked with an external provider to develop a comprehensive risk management framework.
- We have reviewed staff position descriptions and restructured our operating model.
- We have documented, and are in the process of embedding, key operational policies, including procurement, recruitment and work health and safety.

Through these and many other changes, we have fully or substantially implemented all recommendations delivered by the Australian National Audit Office, Commonwealth Ombudsman and Ernst and Young in their respective reviews.

The journey that we're on from here is one of continuous improvement, embedding this reform and consolidating the renewed trust of Tiwi people.

With the important foundations of our organisation stabilised, we are now focussed on delivering outcomes for Tiwi people. The key priorities identified by our council members, who represent the eight Tiwi clan groups, are ***culture, country and community***.

To ensure that we have oversight and input across all three domains:

- The Tuwurrampila Cultural Committee is now embedded within our Governance Structure.
- We are transitioning the Tiwi Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) Committee into a formal sub-committee of Land Council; and
- We are taking on responsibility for coordination of the Tiwirrampila Leaders Forum.

The Tuwurrampila Cultural Committee has been established to guide and foster the maintenance and celebration of Tiwi culture. The outcomes of this initiative will support programs aimed at maintaining our cultural traditions, reducing suicide rates and chronic health conditions, and support a range of programs that will improve wellbeing, employment and sustainable and culturally appropriate economic opportunity.

In 2024, the standout project to emerge from the Cultural Committee was the recommendation to re-establish a Tiwi Cultural Festival. The inaugural Tiwi Cultural Festival was held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2024. This "pilot" event was significant because it marks the beginning of an annual celebration aimed at promoting, preserving, and sustaining the rich and vibrant culture of the Tiwi Islands.

Aligning the Tiwi Cultural Festival with the Tiwi Islands Football League grand final promises to become one of the most important first nations community events in the nation.

The Tiwirrampila Leaders Forum aims to empower young emerging Tiwi leaders and their elders to coordinate responses to issues identified by the Tiwi Leadership including:

- High suicide rates;
- Chronic health conditions;
- Gambling;
- Youth crime and family or community violence; and
- Elevated levels of unemployment and lack of economic opportunity.

Consultation in relation to a Tiwi Indigenous Protected Area has been on-going for the past three years and we are now working – together with our partners – towards dedication of the IPA in 2025. The IPA will empower Tiwi to look after their country, consistent with an agreed plan of management.

This includes working with Tiwi Rangers and research institutions to manage feral cats, pigs and buffalo, and prevent the introduction of further biosecurity threats posed by ghost nets, cane toads, fire ants and gamba grass.

A further priority will then be to establish rights and interests over Tiwi sea country, including through a Native Title claim, enabling the Land Council to represent Tiwi people when activities are proposed that affect Tiwi people and their seas.

Finally, we are committed to increasing the employment of Tiwi people within the Land Council. Plans for a permanent office on the Tiwi Islands are underway, alongside our commitment to ensure that Tiwi people take the lead in these initiatives.

Together, we are paving the way for a sustainable future for the Islands and our communities.