Building Stronger Regions
Stronger Futures

Northern Territory

"By building stronger regions, we build a strong Territory. With everyone involved in developing the Territory,
we give ourselves the best possible chance of achieving the outcomes that we all want."

John Ah Kit
MINISTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Foreword

The Northern Territory is a unique part of Australia. It has a small population scattered over a wide and diverse area; proportionally the largest Indigenous population of any State; and a huge potential to develop and grow. However, in the past, regional development has often received only lip service.

The diversity of the Territory can be its major strength. Every region has different opportunities and challenges. The Territory needs these opportunities to be taken up and these challenges met if we are to realise our potential.

Broadly, the government's strategic approach to regions centres on the development of sustainable regional economies through the identification of opportunities; negotiation of governance arrangements which support regional social and economic development; and the provision of physical infrastructure that fosters sustainable development. Underpinning this approach is an emphasis on the development of partnerships that focus our activity in progressively improving levels of education, health, infrastructure and opportunity and which provide an environment in which our young people can confidently build their futures and the futures of their communities and regions.

Regional development with our Government is not something that is done to a region. It requires the focused collaboration of individuals and organisations of the region along with the Government. Organisations and structures need to be in place that own and drive development. This strategy for *Building Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures* includes the establishment of five Regional Development Boards.

The other major structural initiative included in *Building Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures* is provision for establishment of Regional Authorities where existing community councils agree to amalgamate. These elected representative bodies will have the power to take on a broad range of functions and responsibilities to provide an effective framework for good governance and service delivery.

The Government is also changing the way that it does business in the regions. We will be taking an increasingly direct role in the facilitation of regional development. Staff will be applied directly to assist communities and regions to develop the capacity they must have if they are to participate fully in a strong developmental approach.

A keystone of the *Building Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures* strategy is commitment to the negotiation of Partnership Agreements. These will be negotiated by the Government and those representing a region. They will identify the service delivery outcomes all of us agree should be achieved, and initiatives that we all agree will be pursued. Most importantly, they will be monitored and evaluated through a rigorous, formal and transparent process.

The *Building Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures* strategy signals the start of a new era in regional development in the Northern Territory. The models and approaches we will take are not untested. A considerable amount of work has already been done and progress is being made. *Building Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures* advances that work and sets it in a strategic framework that clearly articulates where we are going, how we will get there and how we will ensure that we stay on track.

I am confident that in the times ahead we will together lift our regions to new levels of economic and social development and sustainability.

John Ah Kit

Minister for Regional Development

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Vision

Planning for development of the Territory has been marked by separateness - by plans and strategies for development of specific industries, Aboriginal land, the economy, urban areas, Aboriginal people, towns, communities or homelands.

The Territory Government wants to deal with the issues that are important to people where they live, work and relax in a way that deals with the whole of the community. We know that the potential of the Territory will be realised where each region is as strong as it can be and where all of the people of a region are engaged and included in its development.

Real regional development happens when people in an area agree on what is to be done and work together to achieve those outcomes and where the rest of the Territory, represented by the Government, is a partner in working for those results.

The Territory Government's vision for regional development is one where all of the people in a region are included in the achievement of economic and social outcomes that are environmentally sustainable and that respect and encourage cultural diversity.

We need regions where business and industry recognise opportunities and develop enterprises confident that necessary physical infrastructure, such as transport and telecommunications, will be available to support growth. Business and industry should be confident that they know what the Government will, and will not, do to support enterprises.

We need regions where society is confident, where people can obtain the skills they need to obtain the jobs they want, where opportunities for work are available for all, where services are available at a level and of a nature that meets priority needs and where young people routinely complete Year 12.

Clearly, the regions the Territory needs will not be achieved by a statement of desire. They will develop where they have a capacity to take their own decisions, and accountability for those decisions, and where they are able to negotiate with strength for the participation of the Territory Government in achieving the outcomes they seek.

Strong, powerful regions should determine their own future in partnership with the wider Territory society.

Summary

Outcome

Strong, sustainable regions where economic and social outcomes are sustainable and where cultural diversity is respected.

Roles

Strong regions are the product of individuals, communities and governments working together. Each has a role and concomitant responsibilities.

Context

- The Strategy provides pathways for the achievement of key initiatives of *Building a Better Territory* and builds on previous work.

- Up to 20 areas of the Territory have groupings of people and communities that could benefit from the approaches outlined in this Strategy.

Regional Development Plans

- Plans will progressively be developed for all regions.

- Plans will be the vehicles for negotiation of initiatives.

- Initiatives accepted will be budgeted for by the Government.

- Five Regional Development Boards will be established.

- Agency coordination processes within Government will be enhanced.

Capacity Development

- Capacity development will be facilitated with either grant funding or directly by officers.

- Development Officers will be allocated to work with communities and regions to facilitate the development of capacity over time.

- Stronger administrative capacity in local and regional areas.

Regional Authorities

- Legislation will be introduced to provide for the establishment of Regional Authorities where existing community councils agree to amalgamate.

- Regional Authorities will have the power to deliver a broad range of functions and services.

Partnerships

- Partnerships will be formal, binding agreements where the Government and a community commit to the achievement of service delivery outcomes.

- Agreements will specify the resources to be applied and the process of monitoring.

- Partnerships will be negotiated progressively with those regions and communities keen to do so.

Evaluation and Monitoring

- A State of the Regions conference will occur every two years;

- A framework for evaluation will be developed and agreed this year.

Roles and Responsibilities

Strong regions are a product of individuals, communities and governments working in partnership to achieve greater regional economic and social development. Each has a role to play in the identification of issues, and achievement of agreed outcomes, that are essential to the development of strong communities. With these roles come concomitant responsibilities.

Individuals
- involvement in community representative organisations;
- contribution to local planning and action;
- investment in, and support of, local businesses;
- participation in regional development advisory mechanisms;
- participation in training and education to develop skills;
- conservation and protection of the natural and cultural environment; and, critically;
- active involvement in realising their children's potential by providing a safe, supportive and healthy home environment.

Community
- development and support of strong and appropriate local leadership and decision making structures;
- establishment of representative arrangements to pursue the development and implementation of Regional Development Plans;
- identification of regional social and economic issues and priorities;
- development of partnerships within communities focused on achieving agreed outcomes; and
- agreement on ways to care for the natural and cultural environment.

Government
- whole of government approach to service delivery and support for regional development planning;
- facilitate the development of effective management and governance structures that support social and economic development;
- provision of assistance for capacity building, regional development activities and achievement of identified outcomes;
- development of framework agreements for improved governance;
- negotiation of formal Partnership Agreements;
- establishment and support of regional development advisory mechanisms;
- long-term commitment to the regional planning process and achieving workable regional agreements; and
- ongoing measurement and reporting on progress of regional development.

Context

Regional development is a term that tends to suffer from differences in interpretation. In this strategy, the term is used to describe outcomes achieved in areas bound together by a "community of interest" or common purpose, geography, shared issues or challenges. Under this interpretation regions are not just those places outside Darwin. Every part of the Territory is in a 'region'.

There are differences also in the approaches that regional development strategies take. The most common approach has been to focus on economic and social development as two distinct streams of activity. An approach increasingly being adopted aims to take a holistic approach to the development of a region with economic and social development strategies entwined and taking into account environmental and cultural requirements and needs.

The approach taken in the Territory to date has been to focus primarily on economic and business development issues. This approach has generated regional development plans in Alice Springs and in the Barkly. While their focus was on economic development, neither were able to ignore social issues.

There has been a tendency to look at the Territory as comprised of four or five regions. For Government administrative purposes five regions tend to be identified. There are, however, seven Regional Councils of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and four Aboriginal Land Councils. Other organisations break the Territory into the Top End and Central Australia or Darwin and the rest.

The value of a regional approach is that a focus can be developed within an area where there is a reasonable degree of common purpose, identity, geography, issues or challenges. It is axiomatic that such regions must be identified by or with the people and communities living in them. It is possible to identify, though, examples of the sorts of regions that might benefit from the type of approach that is proposed by this strategy:

- The Tiwi Islands
- The Greater Darwin Area
- Kakadu - including Jabiru, Gunbalanya, Warruwi, Minjilang and Coburg Peninsula
- East Arnhem
- Groote Eylandt
- Maningrida and surrounding communities
- Wadeye and surrounding communities
- Pine Creek, Coomalie and Douglas Daly
- Katherine
- Katherine East - including Barunga, Manyallaluk, Wugularr, Bulman and Weemol
- Katherine West
- The Roper River
- The Gulf - including Borroloola
- The Barkly
- Anmatjere - including Ti-Tree
- The West MacDonnells - including Papunya, Walungurru, Ikuntji, Mt Leibig and possibly other communities
- Alice Springs
- The Warlpiri communities and the Tanami
- Southern Arrernte
- Southern Central - including Imanpa, Mutitjulu and Kaltukatjara
- The Plenty and Sandover

While these groupings are simply possibilities they serve to make it clear that in each a focused approach to development could be of considerable value in ensuring that their full potential is achieved and all opportunities are pursued.

A focused approach to development in regions is a common desire but it is rarely easy to achieve. In regions such as those listed above there are many complex and difficult issues to address before it will be possible to truly achieve the desired outcomes.

Context.......

The impact of the railway and of the development of new industries with the availability of gas will influence regions that can develop opportunities. Horticulture offers considerable potential in many regions where it is possible to take advantage of the climate and land to meet market niches competitively. The live cattle trade and mining offer opportunities that must be realised. The developing aquaculture industry and the well developed tourist industry based heavily on the nature and culture of the Territory continue to offer considerable opportunities to regions.

The capacity of regions to deal with social issues will allow them to take advantage of the available economic opportunities. Education and training that provides the skills necessary for the available or possible jobs is vital. Current education levels in Indigenous communities are so low that the people are not in a position to compete for available employment, or to generate new jobs themselves.

People will live in regions where the services are not as good as they are in the larger towns, but not normally in the numbers necessary to create markets or provide a labour force. In these situations, people often drift away to larger population centres. However, good health services, sport and recreation facilities, libraries and jobs for locals provide people with a quality of life that will attract population. Providing such services in remote areas with available funds requires innovative approaches and flexibility. It is necessary to make the best use of all resources, to balance the need to achieve a critical mass with the need to have services available as close as possible to where people live and work. Importantly, at present decisions on priorities are made by agencies in Darwin. Decisions made in the regions or at least with the regions would be desirable.

Regions and communities that are able to develop the means to deal with the social and economic challenges that face them in a coordinated and focused way have a distinct advantage over those that don't. Coordinated effort requires agreement on the issues that are important both within the region and, unless the region has the resources to deal itself with the issue, the Government.

A lack of agreement leads inevitably to frustration and waste.

In many of the types of groupings listed above there is a substantial deficit in the capacity of the region to address either their social issues or take advantage of economic opportunities. The Minister Assisting the Chief Minister on Indigenous Affairs, John Ah Kit MLA, in his statement to the Legislative Assembly on 7 March 2002 noted that it was difficult to find a functional Indigenous community in the Territory. The development of the capacity in regions with Indigenous populations is clearly a key prerequisite for the achievement of any development outcomes.

The lack of capacity in governance in Indigenous communities is particularly serious in the context of regional development where the people lack legitimate and appropriate vehicles for decision making. Such capacity is available in the larger towns through local government and through a variety of industry and community organisations that are able to cooperate to achieve common purposes. In all cases it is essential that capacity be developed in communities to take an effective joint approach.

Regional development can be a cornerstone of a strategic approach to the stimulation of economic growth and to ensure that the prosperity flowing from that growth is shared by all Territorians.

When introducing the economic development strategy, *Building a Better Territory*, the Chief Minister, the Hon Clare Martin MLA, stated that the true measure of the Territory's prosperity is the level of opportunity and security enjoyed by all, including "our vital regional communities".

The *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy* contains pathways for the achievement of regional initiatives outlined in *Building a Better Territory*. It provides a framework, structure and community development processes to enable the ideas and views of the people living in each region to be expressed directly to government. A robust structure and process is vital to the achievement of regional development outcomes.

Context.......

This Strategy is complementary to a number of existing initiatives that have a regional focus. Various Northern Territory and Commonwealth agencies have adopted regional approaches to service delivery that have laid a useful foundations for further development. The two main factors driving the exploration of regional service delivery strategies were the financial impediments of sustaining the delivery of services to small, stand alone, remote communities and the difficulties in properly planning and efficiently managing such small, detached service delivery points.

The Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments in partnership with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory and ATSIC are working on the roll out of a regional funding and service delivery model. The Tiwi Health Board and the Katherine West Health Board are the successfully regionally governed outcomes of this partnership arrangement, with more to follow.

The Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training is implementing the recommendations of the Collins *Learning Lessons* Report that aim for self-managed schools in remote areas with regional relationships. A number of regions are being considered to progress this concept, with the 'Warlpiri Triangle' of communities (Lajamanu, Yuemdumu, Willowra and Nyirripi) being the most developed proposal to date.

A trial coordination program involving the collaboration of the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments and the people of the Port Keats area, through the culturally based Thamurrurr structure of governance, is being developed under the auspice of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

ATSIC has trialed several regional CDEP programs seeking to obtain gains through economies of scale and improved management arrangements. It also organises its Indigenous representative arm through democratically elected Regional Councils.

These few examples of regional administrative and regional service delivery models provide a clear indication that both Northern Territory and Commonwealth agencies, as well as ATSIC are moving in similar directions.

The broad whole-of-government, whole-of-community regional partnership approach to regional social and economic development and the use of inclusive community development processes stand as central pillars of the *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy*. They are applicable to city, town, rural or remote regional environments as the basic method of building a new, community driven relationship between the government and the regions.

The building of this different type of relationship provides a method to address the key issues of concern in the community, to provide an avenue for use of local leadership and organising talent and to enable people to feel good about themselves and their regions. This will assist the achievement of social and economic development targets in a way that would never be possible when agencies simply attempt to service a region without appropriate negotiation with local communities or consideration of regional uniqueness.

Regional Development Plans

The concept of regional development planning is not new to the Territory. *Alice in 10* provides a focus and direction for shared initiatives in the development of Alice Springs. The *Barkly Blueprint* provides a similar service for Tennant Creek and the Barkly. Plans are being developed in the Katherine and East Arnhem Region. While these plans have tended to range across economic and social development agendas, their primary thrust has been in fostering economic and business development.

Other 'regional' plans are also in place. Each ATSIC Regional Council has a regional plan. Regional Land Use Structure Plans are developed and maintained and local government councils develop plans for the regions that they incorporate.

The most useful Regional Development Plans are those that clearly articulate the economic and social outcomes that are to be achieved; seek approaches that are environmentally sustainable; and support and encourage cultural diversity. Plans should then go on to identify both the initiatives that will achieve the outcomes and the processes that will be used to implement and monitor those initiatives.

The wider focus that the Government will now take in regional development required a review of regional development advisory structures which has now been completed. The accepted recommendations of that review are reflected in the new approach.

The Approach Now

Plans for All Regions

All regions should have the benefit of a plan that guides and focuses the development of that region.

What is a 'region' ?

A region is an area that the people in it see as a region and that the Government agrees should be treated as such.

Priority to Regional Development Planning will be given in those regions:

- that have a reasonable community of interest;
- where there is the capacity to achieve economies of scale in the achievement of outcomes; and
- where there is a demonstrated capacity or need for whole of community action to cooperate in the achievement of shared objectives.

Negotiated Plans

Ownership of a Plan by the people of a region is vitally important to its value. Ownership by a region, however, is not enough. There must also be ownership and commitment to the plan by the Government on behalf of all other Territorians.

Regional Development Plans will be negotiated between the regional community and the Government. At the end of this process a Regional Development Plan will be a real statement of whole of government/whole of community commitment to action.

Agency Budgets

Commitments given to initiatives agreed under Regional Development Plans will be incorporated into the budgetary process of agencies and will be reflected in the outcomes and outputs for which those agencies will be held accountable.

Regional Development Advisory Mechanisms

Government requires a source of high level advice on regional development issues. This source of advice should come to the Government after it has been properly considered and debated by the stakeholders. Those stakeholders must in turn be both accountable for the advice they provide and have the capacity to provide advice at the level required.

Five Regional Development Boards will be established responsible for the Southern, Barkly, Katherine, East Arnhem and Top End areas. The Boards will be constituted by representatives of Local Governments, ATSIC Regional Councils, Land Councils and Ministerial appointments of people with special expertise, particularly economic and business expertise or others that may be required due to particular regional developments such as the Primary Health Care Access Program. The establishment of Regional Development Boards will take into consideration functional regional governance authorities such as Health Boards, and the relationship between the two.

Regional Development Plans.......

Regional Development Boards will have a direct role in the preparation of Regional Development Plans within their area of responsibility and in the monitoring of implementation of those Plans. A Board may be responsible for a number of plans within the area they represent. They will report direct to the Minister for Regional Development.

Agency Coordination

A 'whole of government/whole of community' approach can only be achieved where there are effective mechanisms to ensure that these approaches are, first, properly negotiated and, secondly, implemented and monitored.

Agency coordination will be achieved through the normal coordinating processes of government but with the addition of a Regional Development Coordinating Committee that will be chaired by the Chief Executive of the agency responsible for regional development reporting to the Minister and Cabinet.

Specific Initiatives

Establishment of the Regional Development Boards

Regional Development Boards will be fully operational within three months and will be provided with executive support by identified departmental officers. Boards will be responsible immediately and as appropriate for development, implementation and monitoring of Plans.

Barkly Blueprint

This Plan has been endorsed by the Government. Its implementation will be vigorously pursued.

Alice in 10

The processes for implementation of the *Alice in 10* Regional Development Plan have been in place for several years. It is timely to review progress and strategic linkages of the *Alice in 10* projects.

Katherine Regional Development Plan

A Discussion Paper was issued in late 2002 and this is now being finalised into a Regional Development Plan. It will be formally considered by the Government and proceed to implementation.

East Arnhem

A Discussion Paper for a Plan is nearing completion. It will be completed and will be the basis for the formal consideration of a Regional Development Plan for the East Arnhem Region.

Gulf Region

Funds have been allocated for the development of a Plan. A Steering Committee is being formed to guide its development and to identify and pursue any initial key initiatives.

Development Officers

The utilisation of Development Officers to facilitate particular plans will occur on a case-by-case basis. Recruitment action is under way for an officer to carry out such a task in the Barkly and Gulf Regions.

Capacity Development for Governance

The capacity to make, implement and be accountable for decisions about matters of common interest and concern is a vital prerequisite for the negotiation and implementation of a strategy for development in a region.

Many regions lack the capacity to make decisions that take the needs of the whole region into proper account, lacking information, frameworks for governance, or analysis necessary to the consideration and debate of issues. Because they are not able to identify possible options, settle on strategies or negotiate effectively with other stakeholders to achieve outcomes they cannot take advantage of available opportunities.

Effective and legitimate frameworks for governance are the foundation of any regional development strategy that will be sustainable over time. It is a relatively straightforward exercise for people in a region to sit down and make some plans for initiatives they would like to see in the future. It is considerably more difficult and complex to ensure that the planned initiatives are realistic, meet the real needs of the regional community, are achieved and have their effects monitored. For these purposes regions need a means of working in concert over extended periods.

Current arrangements for local government provide some foundation for regional decision making. In the major towns local governments can provide a vehicle for legitimate decision making. In the more remote areas, however, local government structures tend not to be seen to have a legitimate role in regional decision making. Most lack the capacity to take on the role required.

There is no menu that can be followed in the development of capacity for decision making in a region. Flexibility in approach is the key to establishing processes that will be useful and relevant for the people of a region. While a regional government may meet some needs, an alliance among key groups could suit other regions equally well. While in some areas the focus will be on social issues, in others the primary focus will be on establishing businesses that can provide flow-on effects for the rest of the community. Provided that the approach taken and the focus of

efforts enhances the capacity of the people of the region to control their lives and pursue their outcomes then the approach and the focus is legitimate.

The Approach Now

More of the same equals more of the same and is unacceptable. The reality is that we will not achieve different outcomes by continuing with existing models, strategies and approaches.

Facilitation of Development of Capacity

Specific resources will be provided to regions where there is a priority need to facilitate development of capacity for decision making and governance. A Capacity Development Fund has been established to fund initiatives.

Development Officers

Departmental officers skilled in capacity development will be allocated to priority regions for extended periods to work on issues considered central to the development of the region by both the regional community and the Government.

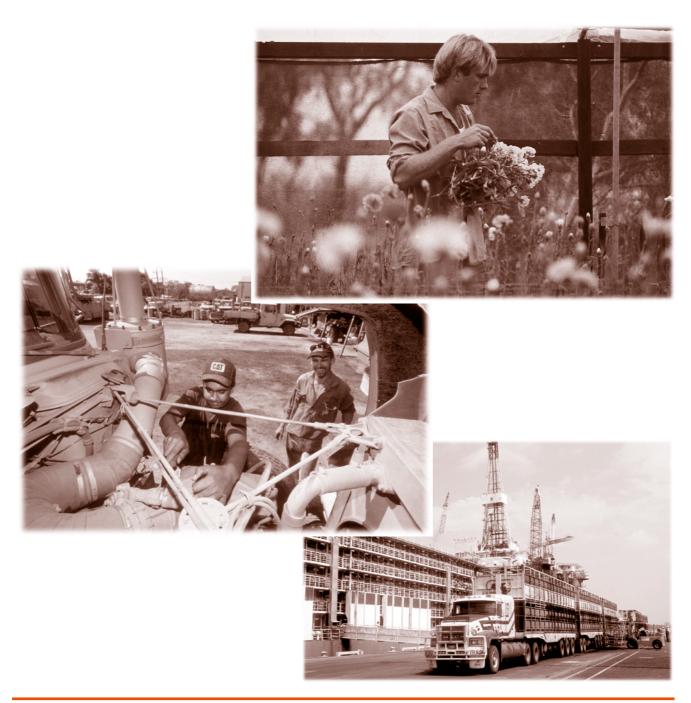### Stronger Administration in Local and Regional Areas

In view of the importance of the role of local government in regional development, a number of strategies will be introduced to strengthen local government:

- agreement with the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory to expand its activities in provision of training and support for elected members;

- enhancement of current arrangements for monitoring of the financial and service delivery capacity of local governments; and

- stronger action to ensure that the staff of organisations are of sufficient capacity including a requirement for assessment and approval of all chief executive officers and development of appropriate training programs.

Capacity Development for Governance.......

Specific Initiatives and Targets

- The Warlpiri Law and Justice Project will be expanded with the Kurduju Committee, jointly with the Government, taking responsibility for management of the Project and the allocation of resources.
- The Nyirranggulung-Mardrulk-Ngadberre project will continue with resources being applied to the establishment of the capacity for regional governance under a new 'Regional Authority'.
- Work will continue towards the establishment of a structure of governance for the Wangka Willurrara group of communities in the West MacDonnells.
- Specialist units established in the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs to monitor financial accountability and service delivery on the one hand and to coordinate capacity building projects on the other.
- Steering Groups for capacity building projects will be chaired by a person able to effectively champion and lead the project.

Regional Authorities

The delivery of services presents challenges in much of the Territory and a lack of adequate services seriously affects the capacity of a region or a community to develop.

An efficient and effective service delivery framework in the Territory must achieve a balance between the need to achieve maximum value from available resources and the requirement to deliver services in areas of high need.

The current service delivery framework in remote areas is primarily comprised of local councils that service small, scattered Indigenous communities struggling to maintain some form of autonomy and subject to decreasing levels of financial support. The failure rate of small councils is very high and they have, in the main, developed a huge dependency on resident non-Aboriginal staff and government agencies for their basic survival.

The *Northern Territory Local Government Act* provides for a comprehensive range of functions which might be undertaken by councils. At present the range of functions is available to all councils incorporated under the Act but is not available to those incorporated under other Territory or Commonwealth legislation. Small councils have either been unwilling or incapable of exercising the full range of functions available and consequently, because of economies of scale and inefficient management, have not achieved anywhere near the maximum value from the legislation or expressed functions. There is little chance in the foreseeable future of regions developing in a coherent fashion whilst the existing regime continues.

It has always been extremely difficult for small, remote local government bodies to take up the service delivery role provided to them by the Act. It has proved almost impossible for them to achieve this due to an endemic structural problem. Most Community Government Councils no longer meet the need for a sustainable framework for the management of services as effectively as is required. Regional cooperation has become a necessity.

The regional authority proposal allows for the voluntary establishment of a representative structure which will have the authority, economies of scale and legislative force to carry a full range of functions currently available under the local government legislation. The range of functions will also include those which might be negotiated, under outcome focussed regional agreements, with the Territory and Commonwealth governments and other statutory authorities such as ATSIC.

An authority established under Northern Territory legislation will have no greater power than that provided to it by the Northern Territory Government and which is available to the Territory under the Commonwealth *Northern Territory (Self - Government) Act 1978*. The proposal to establish Regional Authorities is essentially based upon the formation of larger local government bodies than currently exist and will replace existing local government councils in those regions. It is not about the establishment of another tier of government.

The development of broad regional structures offers a more effective and efficient service delivery framework than the small local councils. Administration costs can be minimised, highly paid

professionals can be utilised more productively and regional organisations can be more powerful negotiators with suppliers and funding bodies. The Tiwi and Katherine Health Boards have

demonstrated that such structures can be effective. The health partners of the Northern Territory (NT) Aboriginal Health Forum are implementing the Primary Health Care Access Program in priority health zones throughout the Northern Territory.

Control of services is a critical factor in the determining the pace and nature of development of a region, allowing regional decision making to determine priorities, establish delivery policies and allocate resources. A body with such power must be properly accountable to its constituents with clearly articulated powers and responsibilities.

Regional Authorities will neither be necessary, nor desirable, in all areas of the Territory. Some people, even in remote areas, will not want to be part of such a structure. For those that do wish to seek a different arrangement for governance to that they currently have, establishment of a Regional Authority provides an alternative.

The Approach Now

Legislation will be developed to allow for the establishment of Regional Authorities to provide for:

- decision making structures that meet the needs of the communities to be governed and, where applicable, will incorporate strong relationships with cultural decision making arrangements and particularly traditional land owners;
- the capacity to establish and maintain a service delivery framework for the region and provide a management regime for all service delivery functions including health, education, roads, CDEP, economic development and infrastructure planning; and
- monitoring and accountability processes appropriate to organisations with this level of power and resources.

All constitutions will be negotiated within parameters established by the legislation.

Specific Initiatives and Targets

- Develop proposals for amendments to the *Northern Territory Local Government Act* to create the *Northern Territory Regional Authority and Local Government Act.*
- Negotiate with the key stakeholder groups, including the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Land Councils to establish agreed principles and parameters for the development and support of Regional Authorities.
- Convene within six months a conference of key stakeholders and people with specialist expertise in regional and Indigenous governance to discuss issues of concern and interest.
- Report back to Minister within one month of the Conference.
- Regional Authorities to be considered initially for the Tiwi Islands, West MacDonnells (Wangka Willurrarra), Katherine East (Nyirranggulung-Mardrulk-Ngadberre), Wadeye (Thamurrurr), and possibly, Barkly.

Partnerships

Partnerships between Government and regions is a simple concept but with powerful potential to improve service delivery outcomes. The Government and a region would agree: that an issue is of importance to each; on the approach to be taken; the resources each would apply; and the way they would jointly measure success. Agreements would be as extensive or as limited as the parties agree.

A whole of community approach to regional development will allow regions to focus on issues without regard to the functionally devised administrative arrangements of the Government. In many instances, for the Government to respond effectively, it will need to be in a position to take a whole of government approach to the issues raised.

Governments of all types and at all levels at times find that they must change direction. While this is not something that could or should be prevented, the value in the maintenance of commitment to a consistent and focused direction in the development of a region should not be lightly dismissed. A formal, binding agreement with legal contracts settled where financial arrangements are required provides a powerful mechanism for the maintenance of focus and direction.

The Approach Now

Regional Partnership Agreements will be developed where there is a consensus between the Government and the region on the need and priority.

Partnership Agreements will provide a means by which specific initiatives identified in Regional Development Plans may be carried into implementation. Negotiation of Agreements may be assisted where the regional body has the capacity to make decisions on behalf of a region or where there is a Regional Authority in place.

Priority will be given by the Government to negotiation of joint approaches on issues relevant to the promotion of sustainable social and economic development and the development of job creation.

Negotiation of partnerships can commence when the:

- representative body is considered to be legitimate by both the community and the Government; and
- need (or needs) has been identified and agreed by both parties.

Specific Initiatives and Targets

- Palmerston Partnership Agreement to be settled by June 2003.
- Thamarrurr Agreement to be settled by June 2003.
- West MacDonnells and Nyirranggulung Agreements to be pursued and settled by December 2003.
- As Regional Development Plans are progressively developed, they can be actioned through the negotiation of Partnership Agreements.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The evaluation and monitoring of the *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy* is integral to the Strategy. An evaluation framework for a Strategy that will potentially seek outcomes across the spectrum of economic, social, environmental and cultural issues without regard to the functional boundaries must be developed.

The development of an evaluation framework will be a task to be carried out during 2003. This framework will be formally discussed and settled, if appropriate, at a Stronger Regions Conference to be convened towards the end of the year by the Minister for Regional Development.

The importance of the *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy* and of ensuring that it continues to provide the direction necessary for regional development justifies the convening in every second year of a conference to consider whether the outcomes sought by this Strategy and Regional Development Plans are being achieved. This Conference will provide a public and transparent analysis of the progress being made against each and every stated outcome.

A product of the Stronger Regions Conference will be a State of the Regions Report. This Report will provide detailed analysis of the progress made towards the achievement of the outcomes of this Strategy and each of the Regional Development Plans. The Report will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

Implementation and Coordination

The Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs will coordinate implementation of the *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy* and resources for specific projects will be provided through that agency.

Some of the initiatives brought together in the *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy* are either currently being trialled or are extensions or expansions of current approaches. Some initiatives, however, are new and will require that changes be made in the workings of agencies and in regional communities. While it is recognised that some changes will take some time to settle, there is a clear desire to achieve progress without delay.

The Minister and Cabinet will oversee the process of change through a series of regular reports on progress.

Where major initiatives under this Strategy require coordination at a regional level, encouragement will be given to the formation of Steering Committees under the chairmanship of the Minister or a senior public servant. Such Committees would not be necessary where a Regional Development Board could carry a task but may be established for work to develop capacity, establish regional governance arrangements or negotiate a Partnership Agreement.

Within the Government, the Chief Executive of the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs will chair a Regional Development Coordination Committee that will include representation from relevant agencies and departmental regional coordination committees.

Resources

Implementation of the *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy* will utilise most of the resources currently available for the Local Government and Regional Development function. This will include the application of at least 35 officers.

In addition, the expenditure criteria for two grant funding pools have been changed so that funds will now be applied in accordance with this Strategy.

- The Regional Development Fund of $500,000 per annum will be applied to projects that pursue priorities in the preparation of regional development plans.

- The Capacity Development Fund of $600,000 per annum will be applied to priority projects aimed at developing community capacity in decision making.

Further funding proposals will be considered in the Budgetary context in the normal manner.

Summary of Current Activity

The following provides a listing of the projects that are currently proceeding or planned to commence and that fit within the parameters of the *Stronger Regions - Stronger Futures Strategy.*

Initiatives that will flow immediately from the Strategy will be the establishment of five Regional Development Boards.

Region	Regional Development Plan	Capacity Development	Governance Structure/ Regional Authority	Partnership Agreement
Katherine				
Katherine Region	Plan being finalised for consideration by the Government	Funds provided to assist in the development of capacity through the establishment of administrative structures	Governance structure being negotiated. Constitution being settled	
Nyirranggulung-Mardrulk-Ngadberre				
Gulf Region	Funds provided for the development of a Plan. Steering Committee being formed.			
Barkly				
Barkly Region	Barkly Blueprint developed and accepted by Government. Implementation of initiatives is proceeding.	Funds provided for the development of capacity and consideration of regional governance arrangements with a view to the eventual negotiation of a Partnership Agreement.		

Region	Regional Development Plan	Capacity Development	Governance Structure/ Regional Authority	Partnership Agreement
East Arnhem				
East Arnhem Region	Discussion Paper for the development of a plan is being settled in the region. This will form the basis for a Plan.			
Central Australia				
Alice Springs Region	*Alice in 10* Plan is in place and is being implemented.		Alice Springs Town Council provides a governance capacity.	Proposals for a Partnership Agreement being developed.
Anmatjere Region	Discussion paper for a Plan Issued late 2002. A Plan has been settled and is being considered by Government.		Anmatjere Community Government Council provides governance capacity.	
Warlpiri Region		Long term Law and Justice Project continues in three communities aimed at developing governance capacity		
West McDonnells Region		Funds provided, Steering Committee operating, Project Management arrangements in place with a view to the development of capacity, establishment of a regional governance model and eventually the negotiation of a partnership agreement.		

Region	Regional Development Plan	Capacity Development	Governance Structure/ Regional Authority	Partnership Agreement
Top End				
Palmerston		Funds provided for a joint community planning project aimed at informing the negotiation and implementation of a Partnership Agreement	Palmerston City Council provides capacity for governance.	A Partnership Agreement is being negotiated under the auspices of a Steering Committee chaired by the Chief Minister.
Daly River/Peppimenarti/ Palumpa/Port Keats	Economic Development Strategy for the Region being developed. Discussion Paper will be available early 2003.	Funds provided and long term support to capacity development project. Regional governance proposals developed and constitution being settled. A Whole of Government/Whole of Community Partnership is being negotiated between the new Thamurrurr Community Government, the Territory and the Commonwealth under a Steering Committee overseen by the Council of Australian Governments.		