



# Local Government 2030

A STRATEGY FOR A STRONG, RESPONSIVE, WELL-  
GOVERNED LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR

Consultation draft October 2021

## WHAT IS LOCAL GOVERNMENT 2030?

The Local Government 2030 Strategy is a collaboration between the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT), the NT's 17 local government councils, and the Northern Territory Government through the Local Government and Regional Development unit in the department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet (CM&C). It articulates the local government sector's aspirations for a strong, responsive, well-governed sector; what it would look like in 2030; and the strategy for the sector moving from the current state to that vision.

It supports a community benefit, advocacy and influence platform; and provides a clear pathway for the development of a strong, mutually respectful and productive relationship with the Northern Territory and Australian Governments.

It is a Strategy that is ambitious and outlines key areas that will support sustainability and growth. Not all of the goals can be achieved in a ten-year period; the intention is to provide a pathway forward.

## NT CONTEXT

The NT has a rich cultural diversity with occupation dating back more than 40 000 years. There are over 100 Aboriginal languages and dialects spoken in the NT and approximately 30% of the population are Aboriginal. The level of social disadvantage is significant and compounded by the reality that almost 77% of the Aboriginal population live in remote areas where services and infrastructure are limited or non-existent.

The local government sector in the Northern Territory is very diverse servicing a land mass of 1.35 million square kilometres, making it Australia's third biggest jurisdiction; but with a population of approximately 250 000 is less than half the population of Tasmania.

The legislative framework outlined in the principles of the *Local Government Act 2019* (the Act) enables councils to play a 'broad role in promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of their local communities'. It includes acting as a representative, informed and responsible decision maker in the interests of its constituency; representing the interests of its area to the wider community; and encouraging and developing initiatives for improving quality of life.

Local governments are primarily resourced through public monies (including rates and grants), and prioritisation by the council is guided by the use of those resources in a fair, effective and efficient manner. Indeed, one of the functions of a council is to make prudent financial decisions.

The Act is based on the following underlying principles:

- Local government is a distinct and essential sphere of government.
- The system of local government;
  - needs to be flexible and adaptable to the diverse interests and needs of the many communities within the Territory; and
  - needs to be comprehensive, democratic, responsive to community needs and accountable both to local communities and the public generally.

The Act is also clear that councils are to cooperate with the NT Government and Australian Government in the delivery of services for the benefit of the council's area, reflecting a focus on the public benefit when spheres of government collaborate, within their mandates, and in the best interests of their communities.

The distinction between the spheres of government and roles and responsibilities is not always clear, but Local Government is closest to the community and often the first port of call for communities. The challenges for Local Government include limited economies of scale and own-source revenue and lack of a market to build economic development opportunities and achieve efficiencies through competition; legacy issues in relation to infrastructure and assets; a complex operating environment; and workforce capability limitations.

Local Government is the most trusted form of government.<sup>1</sup> It has a direct impact in terms of wellbeing and concrete services that support liveability. It is often the provider of last resort for essential services such as child care, aged care and disability care and a frontline responder in a crisis such as flooding or COVID19. The Local Government Sector injects over half a billion dollars annually in local expenditure into the NT community, employing approximately 1400 people, and two-thirds of regional staff are Aboriginal. Local Government is represented by 157 Councillors with Aboriginal Councillors comprising two thirds of regional elected members.

## WHY?

Well-governed, responsive local governments correlate with strong engaged communities.<sup>2</sup>

Local government councils, like the other two spheres of government, are led by elected representatives. Within governing legislation and resources, each council sets its own focus as determined by the strategic objectives of the council, consistent with the council's annual and long-term plans. The status as a 'distinct and essential sphere of government' recognises this responsibility, and the public value of three distinct spheres of government.

Local Government represents, delivers, regulates and develops where people live. It is closest to the community, providing good insights into local needs and the capacity to tailor services to local needs.

The role of Local Government continues to expand into a broad range of social and economic services. Its role as a key link in the governance chain is implicit but not always given appropriate recognition or resourcing. Local government capacity and capability continues to be stretched, and this is particularly so in remote areas.

The sector in the NT is relatively young and diverse, and has challenges including limited own-source revenue, legacy issues with infrastructure and assets, a complex operating environment and workforce capability limitations. Unlike most jurisdictions, local government in the NT does not play a role in land planning and development, limiting its levers in terms of sustainable development and requiring both cooperative working and alignments of interest with the NT government.

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<sup>1</sup> Griffith University, *Australian Constitutional Values Survey 2014*, Centre for Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Local Government Professionals Australia, *Australia in a Century of Transformative Governance, A Federation for Community and Places*, March 2016

The challenges for Local Government in meeting the vision of a strong, well governed and responsive third sphere of government, as identified by the LG 2030 Steering Committee, include:

- Sustainability and resilience
- Social and economic development
- Workforce recruitment and retention and capacity building
- Community engagement and participation
- Improving governance, representation and decision making
- Roles and responsibilities and collaboration and cooperation
- Addressing environmental challenges

The Strategy aims to develop a deliberate, collaborative and strategic approach to addressing these challenges and to define a pathway to a strong, well governed and responsive sector.

The ultimate focus is strong and resilient communities, supported and served by strong, sustainable and well governed local governments working together with other spheres of government, industry and community.

## **VISION:**

To create the most valued, culturally diverse, sustainable and liveable communities in Australia. The Local Government Sector can act as enablers to the vision by being:

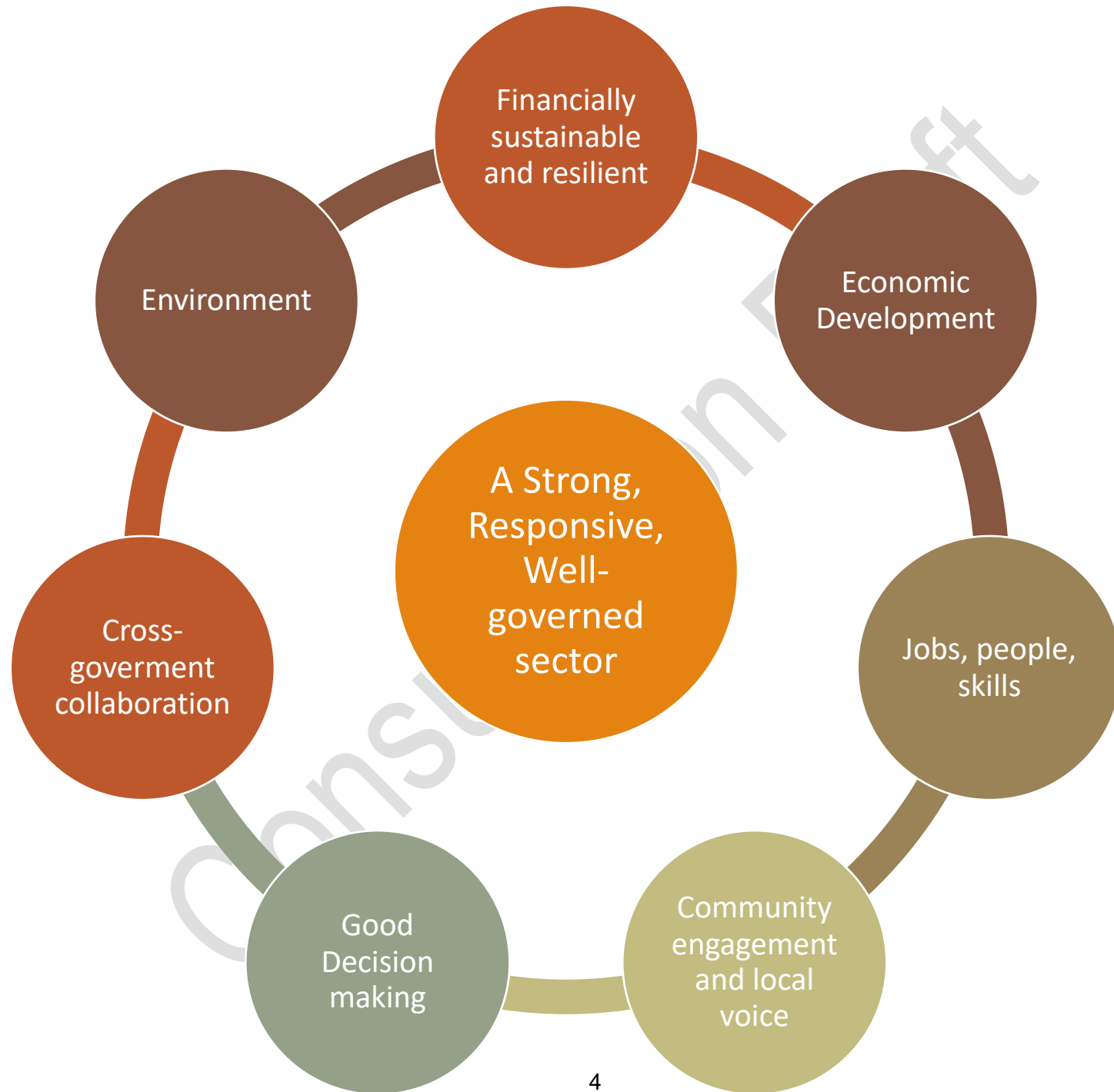
- ▶ Relevant, responsive, flexible and central to wellbeing
- ▶ Modern, well-governed, sustainable
- ▶ A respected influencer, player and partner in governance

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*Building the capacity of local government builds the community's capacity*

*Professor Roberta Ryan, University of Newcastle, 2020.*

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# 1

## FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- The role of local government is understood and valued
- Councils are financially sustainable
- Councils are recognised for best practice standards for services that respond to place and context.
- Sustainability is supported by longer term planning, funding and revenue models
- Social and economic status is improved through investment in enabling infrastructure.
- Collaboration between spheres of government, industry and community
- A range of shared support services optimising efficiency and reducing cost to individual councils.
- LGANT is a strong respected voice of local government

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The NT has a small population, widely dispersed across a vast land mass that presents service challenges. While Municipal Councils control their own source revenue through rates and are more financially secure, Regional Councils have very low own source revenues and are dependent on government funding. Changes are needed if sustainability is to be achieved.

Levels of social and economic disadvantage, particularly amongst remote Aboriginal communities, are significant. However investment to address Aboriginal disadvantage is shown to have significant long term productivity impacts.

Service delivery and infrastructure development costs are among the highest in Australia but are fundamental to sustained economic and social outcomes. Regional councils in particular are managing legacy issues with important community assets and infrastructure.

Appropriate resourcing, utilised well can provide a foundation for strong, healthy communities.

### SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Conditional Rating is discontinued
- All unincorporated areas are incorporated into council areas
- Develop the evidence base through collation of data, sharing of information and case studies to support changes to funding models.
- Funding models recognise cost of services across diverse communities; and longer term funding assists long-term asset management, planning and workforce development.
- The value of Local Government and place based responses is promoted and place-based co-design approaches to infrastructure and service provision prioritised in negotiations with government, NGOs and the private sector.
- Influence national policy supporting the development of services and infrastructure to remote communities to enable them to thrive.

### LONGER TERM

- Adopt best practice, utilising combined expertise and sharing services.
- Develop cross sector and cross-government collaboration to drive efficiency and effectiveness.
- Options identified and progressed for additional services and functions, with funding, to be delivered by local government
- Initiate and enhance cooperation across all spheres of government to address basic infrastructure such as housing and digital connectivity to embed lasting upstream impacts across a range of socio-economic factors, strengthen communities and support more effective Local Government delivery of infrastructure and services.

# 2

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- All spheres of government work together and in partnership with industry and community, to achieve economic development outcomes
- Local productivity is supported by social and community infrastructure
- Collaborative planning for infrastructure and services
- Increased own source revenue and diversified funding
- Flexible, mobile and smart operating environment
- Clear asset management and maintenance strategy developed across government.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Local government is a significant player in the NT economy.

Local government has a key role in underpinning regional economic growth, from infrastructure and services, to attracting and retaining a workforce.

Addressing legacy issues with ageing infrastructure, equipment and waste management provides an economic opportunity but requires resources.

Economic development builds resilience of communities, including in response to crises such as COVID19.

It sustains the diversity, community bonds and connection to place of regional communities.

### SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Leverage purchasing power to achieve policy objectives (buy local, inclusive employment, and contracting).
- Implement a trade services panel to assist councils with local procurement.
- Local government is appropriately resourced for provision of services such as early childhood, aged care and disability.
- Promote the economic and jobs contribution of health, education, care (aged and childcare), public administration.
- Negotiate retention of Roads to Recovery model and shape investment to adequately maintain and develop roads.
- Promote population growth, jobs, and liveable communities through collaborative economic planning with all spheres of government, industry and stakeholders
- Provide enhanced support for small business start-up in remote communities

### LONGER TERM

- Coordinate with other spheres of government for more integrated planning of enabling infrastructure and secure resourcing for maintaining assets; e.g. roads, housing, education and training, community facilities, health, digital connectivity
- deliver on goals of regional economic growth plans, leveraging the cross-government and industry collaboration
- Develop cross sector regional partnerships to strengthen economic outcomes, including more regional deals along the lines of the Barkly regional deal.
- Grow our regions through efficient, collaborative development planning and approvals to maximise population growth and private investment

# 3

## JOBS, PEOPLE, SKILLS

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Increased local workforce – providing employment pathways and opportunities for our community.
- Councils have high standards and a strong focus on professional and leadership development.
- Elected members and staff embrace and seek out learning and upskilling.
- Employer of choice – recruiting, rewarding and retaining good people.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Local government is a major employer but faces challenges in recruiting, retaining and developing staff.

Local growth and wellbeing is supported by developing a skilled and committed local workforce.

Workers in local government are directly investing in their community.

Issues around housing, staff facilities and competition for staff means, especially in regional areas, there are high recruitment and retention costs. Reducing staff turnover reduces costs and improves service delivery. This improves councils' relationship with stakeholders that helps make council a more attractive employer which adds to the cycle of retention.

### SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Conduct a Territory-wide skills audit and identify skills, capacity and capability and needs.
- Include a focus on growth sectors such as healthcare and social assistance; as well as critical areas of skill shortage such as engineers.
- Support local capacity building and the development of accredited training and certification and professional and leadership development in the Local Government Sector.
- Promote the shared services/shared expertise approach, supported by business case analysis to determine where this can best be applied.
- Secondment, and mentoring opportunities developed across the sector.
- Utilise flexible working and digital connectivity to attract a range of skills and experience
- Address housing and infrastructure deficits to enable the recruitment and retention of regional and remote staff.
- Review options for incentivising recruitment and retention

### LONGER TERM

- Promote reforms and provide input to national, state and regional job programs, CDP, and training support programs to enable a place-based, community centric model.
- Influence and access government regional incentives
- Promote local government as an employer of choice



# 4

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LOCAL VOICE

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- High levels of democratic participation representative of the community with nominations and voter turnout high.
- Local government is valued by its communities, is transparent and accountable
- Planning and service delivery incorporates local knowledge, experience and perspectives
- Councils are agile and responsive, with effective models of community engagement tailored to the needs of their own communities
- Councils are valued by their communities
- Communities are diverse, sustainable and liveable

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Good governance builds trust and public confidence.

It supports the delivery of effective, well managed services and enables Councils to be effective advocates for their community. It encourages more people to be involved and to take pride in their local area.

Local government makes decisions closest to the people the decisions' impact and is best placed to channel community views.

Good governance is critical as Local Government provides infrastructure and services that are vital in addressing the underlying social determinants of disadvantage.

### SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Actively seek community input into what they expect councils to deliver to 'create the most valued, culturally diverse, sustainable and liveable communities in Australia'.
- Promote a better understanding of the role of local government and continue to engage in advocacy for the sector.
- Develop a stronger profile and communications and media capability.
- Increase community engagement through community events, feedback forums, and structured and informal engagement appropriate to the constituency.
- Continue to draw on the wealth of local and cultural knowledge and expertise and historical connection to country.
- Support the role of Local Authorities in regional councils in providing a valued conduit between communities and councils.
- Local Government, and Local Authorities, are partners in the development of strategies and priorities such as Local Decision Making, Closing the Gap and Treaty.
- Promote the role of local government and outcomes that can be improved through collaboration with other spheres of government and Aboriginal community controlled organisations to strengthen local governance, place-based responses and community engagement.
- Develop regional partnerships across the private, public and community sectors to deliver more effective engagement and collaborative planning.
- Develop understanding of the role of Council and encourage voter participation and increased nominations.

### LONGER TERM

- Utilise innovation and technology to develop and foster interaction.

# 5

## GOOD DECISION MAKING

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Local government is valued as a well-governed sector, making short term and strategic decisions in the best interests of their communities and the efficient expenditure of public funds
- Strategic decision making
  - Is informed by data and best available information
  - Represents community views and interests
  - Takes into account different views and perspectives
- Local Government takes a proactive approach to decision making, exhibiting strong environmental awareness

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The role of Local Government is fundamental in representing and promoting community outcomes.

Representatives come from a range of backgrounds and experience.

Resources are limited but impact can be significant and so decisions need to add value.

Decisions are not made in isolation and can have impacts beyond the local government sphere.

### SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Promote the different roles and responsibilities of Council members, Local Authority members, CEOs and staff.
- Collect information, both qualitative and quantitative, and conduct impact assessments to better support planning and decision making.
- Develop financial literacy and improve financial management.
- Enhance accountability through a focus on integrity and outcomes based and standardised reporting.
- Develop capacity and provide training to staff and elected members to support decision making, including mandatory training

### LONGER TERM

- Establish mentoring and expertise networks across the sector to draw on for advice. Include a focus on cross cultural mentoring and establish a pool of Aboriginal local government mentors.
- Commitment to open data platforms and sharing of information across government.
- Collaboration across spheres of government and sectors, recognising overlaps and interrelationships of services, infrastructure and economies.
- Initiate the development of an integrated planning framework with NTG.

# 6

## CROSS-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Councils are clear in their own roles and responsibilities and how they work with others.
- The mandates and roles of each sphere of government is understood and clear processes for cooperation established.
- There is mutual respect for, and understanding of, the roles, mandates, powers, and resourcing of each of the spheres of government.
- Local government is an influencer and partner in government.
- Collaboration, cooperation and shared problem and planning solving across the spheres of government improves outcomes and efficient allocation of resources.
- Partnerships and project management across government services and infrastructure (no matter who is delivering)
- Clarity of roles within a more holistic approach to provision of services and infrastructure.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Shifting of costs and responsibilities is inefficient and ineffective, creates confusion about who is responsible and compromises outcomes.

Causation is often not easy to pinpoint and wicked problems require a joined up approach. To get the best outcomes the three spheres of government need to work together with a focus on the best interests of communities.

Collaboration is likely to achieve better and more cost effective results than individual efforts.

Citizens don't always distinguish between levels of government. They expect a standard of services and responsiveness and for governments to work together.

### SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Adopt co-design and community decision-making principles that underpin outcomes. Emphasise the “from the ground up” approach and the position of trust that Local Government holds.
- Map services and share data, evidence, and information across service and infrastructure providers.
- Identify mutual interests and objectives. Develop collaborative policy and programs with clear goals, responsibilities and built in evaluation and review.
- Seek commitments to long term investment and funding, giving enough time for programs to succeed and for efficient and effective planning and delivery.
- Increase collaboration across Aboriginal governance and through representative organisations.
- work with other spheres of government to identify and implement partnership opportunities

### LONGER TERM

- Develop regions through cross-governance and cross-sector agreements.
- Build trust and participation through modelling cooperation.
- Joint approach to resource allocation.

# 7

## ENVIRONMENT

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Climate change adaptation planning and support.
- There is collaboration between the spheres of government and industry in effective, sustainable waste management solutions
- Pro-active environmental management
- Councils have resources to maximise investment in low emissions technology, infrastructure, recycling and services.
- Reducing transport miles and low emission solutions
- Disaster and crisis preparedness

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Local government operates on the ground and is often the first to be impacted by environmental degradation and climate change impacts.

Local government are part of the response and recovery teams in disasters, such as floods, cyclones, fires. Local Government knows its community and the lay of the land.

Councils have responsibility for waste management, with larger volumes and demand for greater categorisation of waste and use of recycling.

Local government plays a crucial role in public health and safety and supporting sanitation, water security, and energy solutions and infrastructure.

### SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

- Focus on renewable energy and long term waste management solutions
- Planning climate change adaptation and resilience measures.
- Educate and involve the community in environmental sustainability, including using local and cultural knowledge and practices.
- Model energy efficient and sustainable operations and encourage through procurement and investment process.
- Develop a coordinated response to waste management.
- Reduce carbon emissions and promote carbon offsets as a local economic opportunity.
- Promote sustainable renewal for disaster recovery and local approaches to restoring degraded environments. Work with the National Disaster and Resilience Agency on mitigation and prevention measures.
- Utilise data and provide input on needs to the new Australian Climate Service.

### LONGER TERM

- Address legacy issues of waste management facilities in regional areas in collaboration across spheres of government.
- Work with other spheres of government to develop national waste solutions and incentivise minimisation of waste and the development of markets for waste materials.
- Development of innovative recycling and waste management solutions.
- Support the research and development of smart, sustainable technologies and sustainable solutions designed for the NT context.

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