



Embargoed until 9:30am 24 July 2025

Strong together: Territory land councils will be respected

The four Northern Territory land councils have gathered for the first time since 2020 to warn against making decisions about their people – more than a third of the NT's population - without them.

Meeting in Darwin, the executive committees of the Northern, Central, Tiwi and Anindilyakwa land councils have reminded decision makers that they are strong together and here to stay.

"Many people come and go. Our people are not going anywhere," Matthew Ryan said.

"Economic growth for all Territorians can only happen in genuine partnership with our people."

"Federal funding for our people props up the NT's budget. The Australian government needs to hold the NT government accountable and make sure its laws and policies match the intent of that funding – to help our communities," said Mr Ryan.

"Between us we own more than half of the Territory's land and 85 per cent of the coastline. Any government that ignores and harms our fast-growing population may win an election or two, but it has no future," TLC chair Leslie Tungatalum added.

The 650 Aboriginal corporations in the NT benefit all Territorians by offering skilled jobs and economic development on country.

Aboriginal people manage vast areas for national security and biosecurity, creating industries such as tourism, fisheries and aquaculture.

In 1976 the federal government set up the NT land councils with statutory powers and functions to support Aboriginal decision-making about land and waters.

They have a strong record of facilitating consensus and informed consent across groups that creates the certainty needed for all Territorians to thrive.

ALC chair Cherelle Wurrawilya said the land councils will not be sidelined.

"Everyone will suffer if governments keep punishing and neglecting our people, but we will all gain when governments work with us. Just look at the big drop in crime we achieved on Groote Island since we took control of delivering justice."

The NT's justice and police racism crises were high on the agenda of the joint meeting.

The land councils called for an independent police misconduct body and for the publication of an implementation plan based on all the recommendations of the Kumanjayi Walker Coronial Inquest.

"The findings and recommendations of the inquest must inform the NT Police Anti-racism Strategy, even if this delays the release of the strategy," CLC chair Warren Williams said.

"There must be full public consultation of the review of the Youth Justice Act."



Mr Ryan said the land councils want to co-design the terms of reference of an independent inquiry into structural racism in the NT police force, alongside other representative Aboriginal organisations.

“We want a working group of relevant agencies to develop and implement better procedures to address complaints by Aboriginal people about police racism and use of force - a group that consults with the land councils and affected families and communities.”

The four executive committees also vowed to fight for Aboriginal water rights like their old people fought for land rights.

“We want the federal government to strengthen the National Water Agreement, extend the water trigger in federal environment laws to all thirsty industry proposals and keep funding remote community drinking water projects,” said Mr Williams.

24 July 2025