Aboriginal Areas
Protection Authority

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025 - 26



Protecting sacred sites across the Territory



Clouds over Mount John, Mparntwe NT

Cover image: AAPA Vehicle in Wilora Community, NT

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Authority acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional custodians of country across the Northern Territory and honours their enduring and powerful connection to this land and its waters. We thank all First Nations people with whom we work, and who help the Authority to protect our sacred sites for all Australians.

DISCLAIMER

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority has taken due care in ensuring information contained in this annual report is true and correct at the time of publication, however changes in circumstances after the time of publication may impact on its accuracy. The Authority disclaim's all liability associated with the use of this information by others in contexts not approved by the Authority.
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Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority
protecting sacred sites across the territory

The Hon Joshua Burgoyne MLA
Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment
DARWIN NT 0800

30 September 2026

Dear Minister,

I have the pleasure to submit to you, in accordance with the provisions of Section 14(1) of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989,* the annual report for the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority for the financial period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

The report refers to the thirty-sixth year of operation of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Yours Sincerely



Chairman
30 Septmeber 2026

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The Hon Joshua Burgoyne MLA
Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment
DARWIN NT 0800

30 September 2026

Dear Minister,

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) for the financial year 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026, in accordance with the Treasurer's Direction R2.1.6. Pursuant to the *Financial Management Act 1995* (FMA) and *Information Act 2002*, and Treasurer's Directions, I advise that to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. properr records of all transactions affecting the Authority are kept, and employees under my control observe the provisions of the provisions of the FMA, the *Financial Management Regulations 1995* and Treasurer's Directions;
2. procedures within the Authority afford proper interna control, and a current description of such procedures is recorded in the accounting and property manual. which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the FMA;
3. no indication of fraud, malpractice, major breach of legislation or delegation, major error in or omission from the accounts and records exists;
4. in accordance with the requirements of section 15 of the FMA, the internal audit capacity available to the Authority is adequate, and the results of internal audits have been reported to me;
5. the financial statements included in the Annual Report have been prepared from proper accounts and records and are in accordance with Treasurer's Directions; and
6. the Authority is working in compliance with the *Information Act 2002.*

Yours sincerely



**Robert Pocock**
Chief Executive Officer
30 September 2026

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# INTRODUCTION

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) is an independent statutory authority established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* (NT) (Sacred Sites Act). The Authority is responsible for administering the Territory's sacred sites protection regime.

Aboriginal sacred sites are places that have special significance according to Aboriginal tradition. They may include hills, rocks, waterholes, trees, plains, lakes, billabongs and other features of the landscape.

Sacred sites derive their significance from their association with particular aspects of Aboriginal social and cultural tradition. This body of tradition is primarily concerned with the activities of ancestral beings who are believed to have created the physical and social world that people now inhabit.

This Annual Report provides the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and the public with an account of the Authority's activities, performance and financial results for the 2025-26 financial year. It outlines how the Authority has discharged its responsibilities under the Sacred Sites Act and continued to support the protection of sacred sites across the Northern Territory.

# LEGISLATIVE FOUNDATIONS

Sacred sites are places of immense cultural and spiritual significance to Aboriginal people according to Aboriginal tradition. In establishing a system of Aboriginal land rights for the Northern Territory through the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth) (Land Rights Act), the Australian Parliament formally recognised the special significance of sacred sites under Australian law and embedded their protection as a fundamental element of that system.

The Land Rights Act defines a sacred site as:

> *'...a site that is sacred to Aboriginals or is otherwise of significance according to Aboriginal tradition, and includes any land that, under a law of the Northern Territory, is declared to be sacred to Aboriginals or of significance according to Aboriginal tradition.'*

Section 69 of the Land Rights Act provides a broad protection for sacred sites. Section 73 contemplates complementary Northern Territory legislation but requires that any such legislation be directed towards the protection of sacred sites and the prevention of their desecration.

***73 Reciprocal legislation of the Northern Territory***

> *(1)The Power of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory under the Northern Territory (Self-Government Act) 1978 in relation to the making of laws extends to the making of:*
>
> *(a) laws providing for the protection of, and the prevention of the desecration of, sacred sites in the Northern Territory, including sacred sites on Aboriginal land, and, in particular, laws regulating or authorising the entry of persons on those sites, but so that any such laws shall provide for the right of Aboriginals to have access to those sites in accordance with Aboriginal tradition and shall take into account the wishes of Aboriginals relating to the extent to which those sites should be protected.'*

Through these provisions, sacred sites are afforded a unique and enduring legal status within the Northern Territory's land rights framework.

The Sacred Sites Act gives effect to this framework. It establishes practical mechanisms for the protection and registration of sacred sites and provides a framework through which people proposing to carry out work on or use land in the Northern Territory can identify and avoid sacred sites, helping to facilitate the use and development of land without damaging or desecrating sacred sites.



**Kata Tjuta NT**

# OUR HISTORY

The Northern Territory's sacred sites protection regime has existed in various forms for almost half a century. Its history is closely connected to the development of Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory and the recognition of the importance of protecting sacred sites under Australian law.

The history of the Authority is closely entwined with the Land Rights Act, which recognises the significance of sacred sites and provides the foundation for Northern Territory legislation directed towards their protection.

When the Northern Territory achieved self-government in 1978, one of the first pieces of legislation introduced into the new Legislative Assembly was the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Bill 1978. This became law in November 1978 and led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Authority in 1979, the precursor to today's Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

The new law represented a significant step in the formal recognition of Aboriginal culture and provided a statutory framework through which sacred sites could be recorded, protected and considered in the context of land use and development.

Under the legislation, it became an offence to enter, remain on, carry out works on, or desecrate sacred sites anywhere in the Northern Territory. Other enduring aspects of today's sacred sites protection regime were also established at that time, including a Board comprising predominantly Aboriginal custodians nominated by the Northern Territory's Land Councils and a statutory definition of a sacred site.

The early years were characterised by ongoing debate regarding the operation of the sacred sites protection regime and its interaction with government decision-making and development activity. Public understanding of sacred sites and their cultural significance was often limited.

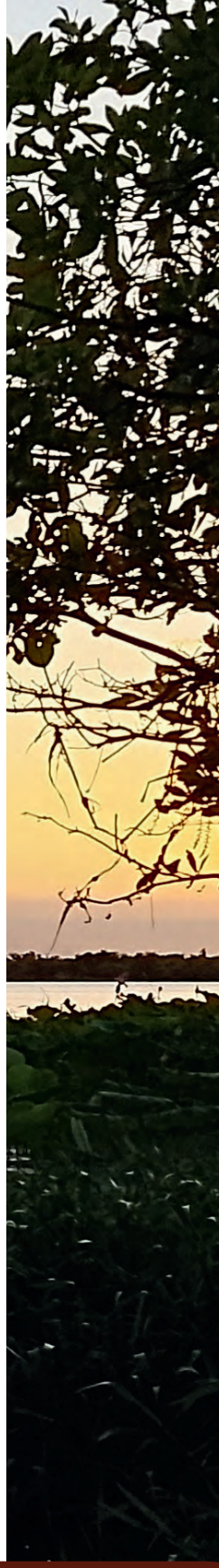
However, under the leadership of senior Aboriginal Chairmen, including the late Raphael Apuatimi OAM and Wenten Rubuntja AM, the Authority worked to build understanding by engaging with governments, industry and communities to develop practical solutions that supported both the protection of sacred sites and the responsible use and development of land.

Throughout the 1980s, a number of proposals were advanced to reform the *Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1978* (NT). The Northern Territory Government subsequently introduced the Aboriginal Areas Protection Bill, which resulted in the enactment of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 and the establishment of the current Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Under the legislation, the Authority is responsible for identifying and consulting with Aboriginal custodians and for issuing Authority Certificates. Authority Certificates reflect consultation with custodians about proposed works and set out the conditions under which activities may proceed while avoiding impacts to sacred sites.

While Authority Certificates are not mandatory under the Act, except in relation to certain petroleum activities, they provide an effective mechanism for identifying and avoiding impacts to sacred sites. They also provide proponents with greater certainty regarding sacred site constraints associated with a proposal and may afford a defence to prosecution under section 34(1) of the Act, provided their conditions are complied with.

The Sacred Sites Act also strengthened penalties for entering, carrying out works on, or desecrating a sacred site. Sites registered under the Act became prima facie sacred sites and the legislation extended protection to sites including land covered by water, including land within the Territorial Sea, and the water covering that land.



## Authority Board Chairs

**1979 – 1982**
RAPHAEL APUATIMI OAM

**1982 – 1985**
WENTEN RUBUNTJA AM

**1986 – 1997**
MUSSOLINI HARVEY AM

**1997 – 2007**
ROY HAMMER

**2007 – 2009**
MILLIWANGA SANDY

**2009 – 2015**
BERNARD ABBOTT

**2015 – 2016**
JENNY INMULUGULU

**2016 – 2019**
PHILIP WILYUKA

**2019 - CURRENT**
BOBBY NUNGGUMAJBARR



Mary River, NT

# Message From Our Chairman



**Protecting sacred sites is not red tape, nor is it a barrier to development. For more than 45 years, the Authority has supported the responsible use and development of land across the Northern Territory by helping proponents identify and avoid impacts to sacred sites, while protecting places of enduring significance under Aboriginal tradition.**

I am very pleased to have been reappointed as Chairman of the Authority for another three-year term. Having served on the AAPA Board for more than a decade, including seven years as Chair, I know that every year brings its own challenges and achievements. This year has been a period of significant change for the Authority, but also one of important achievements.

The Board has navigated a period of significant change following the departure of our former Chief Executive Officer, Dr Benedict Scambary, workforce transitions, and amendments to the Sacred Sites Act. We also farewelled our longest serving Board Member, Ms Jenny Inmulugulu, whose wise counsel and commitment helped guide the Authority for 20 years. Despite these changes, the Board has remained focused on ensuring the Authority continues to protect sacred sites while supporting the responsible use and development of land across the Northern Territory.

Protecting sacred sites is not red tape, nor is it a barrier to development. For more than 45 years, the Authority has supported the responsible use and development of land across the Northern Territory by helping proponents identify and avoid impacts to sacred sites, while protecting places of enduring significance under Aboriginal tradition. The Authority's independent decision making and the Authority Certificate process provide confidence for developers, support productive relationships with custodians, and help minimise project delays, disputes and additional costs.

The Authority does not profit from Authority Certificate applications. Fees are limited to recovering the costs associated with processing applications, including staff time, travel expenses, Aboriginal custodian consultation fees and administration costs. At the same time, we continue to support community initiatives through full or partial fee waivers. During this financial year, fee waivers were granted for 17 projects, including emergency works on sacred trees undertaken by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Aboriginal Corporation in Alice Springs and an office extension project for the Central Land Council. These fee waivers help ensure that community organisations and Aboriginal bodies can access the Authority's services where projects deliver important community benefits.

The Board held four meetings during the year and considered a wide range of matters relating to the protection of sacred sites across the Territory. This included the implementation of recent amendments to the Sacred Sites Act, including provisions relating to the transfer of Authority Certificates and the recording of additional parties

These amendments attracted considerable public interest during the year and required the Board to exercise its statutory functions in relation to several matters arising under the new provisions.

The introduction of the new provisions has highlighted the importance of ensuring Aboriginal custodians, land users and the broader community understand how the amended legislation operates. While understanding of the new provisions continues to develop, it is important to recognise that the transfer of an Authority Certificate or the addition of a Recorded Party does not alter the land covered by a Certificate, the works authorised under it, or the conditions that apply.

Notwithstanding these changes, the foundations of the Territory's sacred sites protection regime remain strong. Sacred sites continue to receive the protections afforded by the Land Rights Act and the Sacred Sites Act. The Authority continues to consult with Aboriginal custodians, register sacred sites, issue Authority Certificates and investigate breaches of the legislation. These functions remain central to protecting sacred sites while supporting informed decision-making throughout the Territory.

This year also marked a successful transition to our new Chief Executive Officer, Mr Robert Pocock. Together, we are implementing new processes and systems to improve efficiency, strengthen service delivery and ensure the Authority remains well positioned to meet growing demand for its services. We are also entering the final year of AAPA's five-year Strategic and Business Plans, and work has commenced on developing a new long-term vision for the Authority.

It has been a significant year for the Authority. I extend my sincere thanks to my fellow Board members, Authority staff and Aboriginal custodians for their dedication and hard work in protecting sacred sites across the Northern Territory. This is important work and I thank all those involved for their contribution. Through their efforts, sacred sites continue to be protected for future generations while supporting the responsible use and development of land across the Northern Territory.

**Mr Bobby Nunggumajbarr**
Chairman

# Message From Our Deputy Chairman



**Authority Certificates remain one of the Authority's most important tools, enabling development to proceed with the informed support of custodians while protecting sacred sites for future generations.**

Protecting sacred sites depends on strong relationships between Aboriginal custodians, Land Councils, proponents and the Authority. Throughout 2025-26, the Board remained focused on supporting those relationships while carrying out its responsibilities under the Sacred Sites Act.

In addition to my role as Deputy Chairman of the Authority, I also serve as the Deputy Chair of the Northern Land Council and as the Authority's representative on the Northern Territory Heritage Council. These appointments have provided me with a broader appreciation of the Authority's work and its vital role in ensuring proper consultation with Aboriginal custodians to protect sacred sites.

Through my involvement with the Northern Territory Heritage Council, I have seen firsthand the value of Aboriginal perspectives in protecting the Territory's rich cultural heritage. Aboriginal cultural heritage, archaeological places and objects are fundamental to the history of the Northern Territory and are often closely connected to sacred sites and songlines. The reinstatement of an Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority representative on the Heritage Council recognises the important relationship between heritage protection and the protection of sacred sites. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen the consideration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives in discussions about the Territory's heritage.

AAPA's relationship with the Land Councils also remains critically important. During the year, the Northern Land Council provided valuable support in helping to facilitate a complex Authority Certificate application for the SunCable project, enabling the process to proceed smoothly and efficiently. While the Authority's independence ensures that Aboriginal custodians, proponents, and the broader community can have confidence in our decisions, our close relationship with the Land Councils strengthens understanding among Aboriginal people about the Authority's role, amendments to the Sacred Sites Act, and the importance of registering sacred sites.

The Authority's work depends upon Aboriginal custodians who continue to share their knowledge and participate in consultations to ensure sacred sites can be identified and protected for future generations. Their willingness to engage with the Authority and contribute their knowledge remains fundamental to the effective operation of the sacred sites protection regime.

During the reporting period, the Authority registered five sacred sites across the Northern Territory, including sites on Croker Island and at Birdum Creek. This brings the total number of registered sacred sites to 2,274. While this is an important achievement, there remains more work to do in promoting the value of site registration within communities.

This year, the Authority responded to 1,188 requests for information. Each request reflects a person, organisation, or developer seeking to understand whether sacred sites have been recorded within a particular area. Authority Certificates remain one of the Authority's most important functions, helping proponents identify and avoid impacts to sacred sites while providing greater certainty about how land may be used or developed.

I am honoured to have been reappointed as Deputy Chairman of the Authority for a further three-year term. I thank my fellow Board members, Authority staff, and our new Chief Executive Officer, Mr Robert Pocock, for their dedication, professionalism, and hard work throughout a year of considerable change. Their commitment has ensured that the Authority continues to fulfil its important responsibilities on behalf of Aboriginal custodians and the people of the Northern Territory.



**Ms Lorraine Jones**
Deputy Chairman

# Message from the CEO



**As the first Aboriginal Territorian appointed as CEO, I am deeply conscious of the responsibility that accompanies that appointment, and of the important role the Authority plays in protecting sacred sites while supporting the responsible use and development of land across the Northern Territory.**

It is both an honour and a privilege to serve as Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. As the first Aboriginal Territorian appointed to the role, I am deeply conscious of the responsibility that accompanies that appointment, and of the important role the Authority plays in protecting sacred sites while supporting the responsible use and development of land across the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory continues to experience significant development activity across a range of sectors, including resources, infrastructure, telecommunications, tourism, housing and primary industry. As demand for the Authority's services continues to grow, it is important that the Authority remains well positioned to protect sacred sites while supporting the responsible use and development of land across the Territory.

Against this backdrop, 2025-26 has been a significant year for the Authority, marked by record demand for services, organisational renewal and the commencement of a number of initiatives designed to strengthen the Authority's long-term capability and sustainability.

The year also marked the departure of the Authority's long-serving Chief Executive Officer, Dr Benedict Scambary. Dr Scambary played a pivotal role in shaping the Authority into a highly regarded independent regulator and strengthening the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites across the Northern Territory. I would like to acknowledge and thank him for his outstanding contribution to the Northern Territory and for his 17 years of dedicated service to the Authority.

During the year, the Authority commenced workforce and business planning initiatives to ensure it remains well positioned to meet increasing demand. Work also progressed on a new integrated sacred sites database, which will replace legacy technology with a contemporary platform that streamlines internal processes, improves information management and enhances the client experience. Together, these initiatives will strengthen organisational capability, improve efficiency and support the Authority's long-term sustainability.

The Authority also refined its flexible project funding model to support major projects without compromising service delivery for Aboriginal custodians, proponents and other applicants. The model has already been successfully applied to a number of significant projects, including the Telstra Aura Network project, and demonstrates how the Authority can respond to increased demand while maintaining the integrity of its statutory processes.

The Authority has further developed its processes to support the new powers introduced through recent amendments to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989. During the year, seven Authority Certificate transfers were approved and three Recorded Parties were added to existing Authority Certificates. It is important to recognise that transferred Certificates, and those with additional Recorded Parties, continue to apply to the same land, works and conditions as the original Certificate. To date, the Authority has not entered into an Enforceable Undertaking.

During 2025-26, the Authority issued 119 Authority Certificates and responded to 1,188 requests for information relating to sacred site records. These figures reflect the continuing demand for the Authority's services and the important role the Authority plays in supporting informed decision-making throughout the Northern Territory. Authority Certificates were issued for a broad range of projects, including telecommunications, tourism, community infrastructure, pastoral, resource and government initiatives across the Territory.

While the Authority has experienced significant change during the year, the foundations of the sacred sites protection regime remain strong. The Authority continues to consult with Aboriginal custodians, register sacred sites, issue Authority Certificates, provide information about sacred site constraints and investigate potential breaches of the legislation. These functions remain central to protecting sacred sites while providing certainty to those seeking to use or develop land.

I extend my sincere thanks to the Authority's Board, staff, Aboriginal custodians and stakeholders for their continued support and commitment throughout the year. The protection of sacred sites relies upon cooperation, trust and a shared commitment to respecting Aboriginal cultural heritage while supporting the Territory's future.

Together, we remain committed to protecting Aboriginal sacred sites, supporting informed decision-making, and ensuring the Authority continues to meet the needs of a growing and developing Northern Territory.

**Robert Pocock**
Chief Executive Officer

# AAPA Farewells former CEO Dr Benedict Scambary



**The Authority operates at the intersection of Territory law, industry and Aboriginal cultural law, and is recognised nationally and internationally as the benchmark for balancing Aboriginal heritage and development. I am incredibly grateful for the years I have spent as part of its small and dedicated team.**

In August 2025, the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority farewelled its long-serving Chief Executive Officer, Dr Benedict Scambary, following 17 years of service with the organisation. During his tenure, Dr Scambary played a significant role in strengthening the Authority's operations, supporting the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites and guiding the organisation through a period of substantial growth and change.

Over almost two decades, Dr Scambary worked closely with Aboriginal custodians, the Authority Board, Land Councils, governments, industry and community stakeholders across the Northern Territory. Under his leadership, the Authority continued to develop as an independent statutory authority responsible for administering one of Australia's most unique cultural heritage protection regimes.

Dr Scambary's time with the Authority coincided with some of the Territory's most significant developments, including major infrastructure, telecommunications, tourism, pastoral, resources and community projects. During this period, the Authority issued more than 3,000 Authority Certificates and was involved in a number of landmark compliance and litigation matters that helped clarify and strengthen the operation of the Sacred Sites Act.

Chairman Bobby Nunggumajbarr acknowledged Dr Scambary's contribution to the Authority and the Northern Territory.

> *"Dr Scambary worked tirelessly to ensure the protection of sacred sites while supporting development across the Territory. He earned the trust of custodians, the respect of industry and the confidence of governments through his steady leadership, integrity and commitment to the Authority's statutory responsibilities."*

Reflecting on his time with the Authority, Dr Scambary said the most rewarding aspect of the role had been the opportunity to work alongside Aboriginal custodians and learn from the cultural knowledge entrusted to the Authority.

> *"Protecting sacred sites is not simply about places. It is about supporting Aboriginal people to maintain and pass on their culture, knowledge and traditions to future generations. I have always been grateful to the custodians who shared their knowledge and placed their trust in the Authority's processes."*

> *"The Authority operates at the intersection of Aboriginal law and culture, Territory legislation and land use and development. It has been a privilege to contribute to that work and to support the protection of sacred sites across the Northern Territory."*

The Authority thanks Dr Scambary for his dedicated service and acknowledges his significant contribution to the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites and the development of the organisation.

# GOVERNANCE

Ormiston Gorge, NT

# GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Authority's Governance arrangements are an important component of the sacred sites protection reigme and help ensure decisions are informed by Aboriginal custodianship, cultural knowledge and independent statutory decision-making.

## HOW THE AUTHORITY IS GOVERNED

The primary policy and decision-making body of the Authority is the Authority Board, established under section 5 of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* (Sacred Sites Act).

The Board's composition reflects the important role Aboriginal custodians play in the protection of sacred sites. The Board comprises predominantly Aboriginal custodians nominated by the Northern Territory's Land Councils, together with members appointed by the Northern Territory Government. Equal representation of men and women helps ensure decisions are informed by Aboriginal cultural authority and knowledge.

The Chief Executive Officer is appointed by the Administrator and is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Authority and managing its day-to-day operations.

All Authority staff are employed directly by the Authority under section 17 of the Sacred Sites Act. Section 19 provides for the delegation of certain powers and functions under the Act. The Chief Executive Officer holds some of these delegations and also exercises responsibilities under the *Financial Management Act 1995*.

## HOW THE AUTHORITY IS MANAGED

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the day-to-day administration and operation of the Authority and for implementing the decisions of the Authority Board.

To support the effective operation of the organisation, the Chief Executive Officer is supported by the Executive Management Group, which oversees organisational performance, strategic initiatives, workforce planning, financial management and operational delivery.

The Authority's operational areas are Research, Corporate Services, and Policy and Governance. Together, these teams support the Authority's statutory functions, including consultation with Aboriginal custodians, sacred site registration, the issuing of Authority Certificates, compliance and enforcement activities, and the provision of information relating to sacred sites.

## PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNANCE

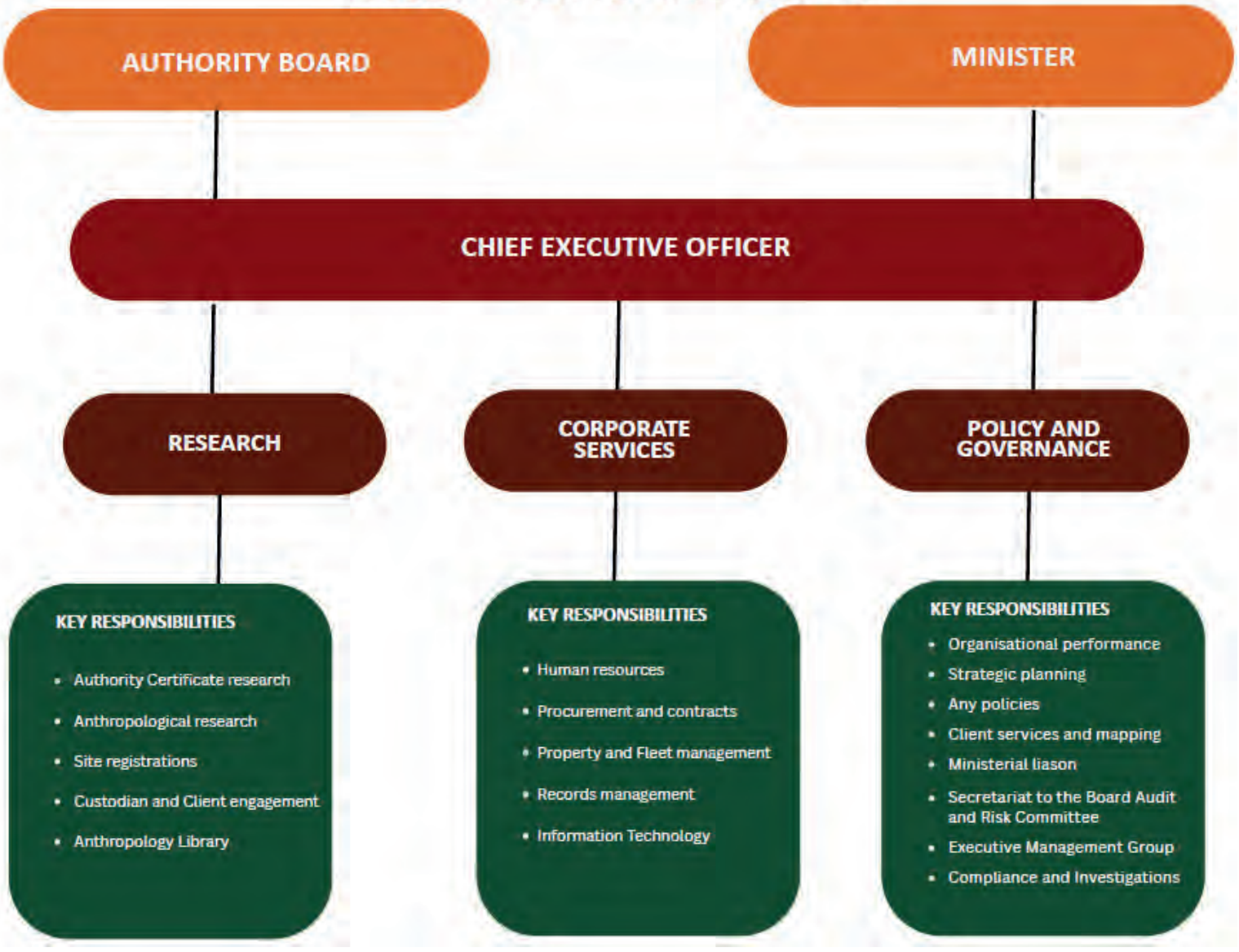
The Authority's governance framework is designed to support the effective administration of the Sacred Sites Act and ensure the Authority performs its functions independently, efficiently and transparently.

This includes:

- supporting informed and independent decision-making;
- maintaining the integrity, security and confidentiality of sacred site information;
- ensuring effective consultation with Aboriginal custodians and stakeholders;
- maintaining effective risk management and internal control systems;
- supporting organisational capability, accountability and performance; and
- planning for the Authority's long-term strategic direction and sustainability.



# ORGANISATIONAL CHART



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2024–2027

Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority

*protecting sacred sites across the territory*

## 2024 TO 2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

**MISSION STATEMENT**

Protecting sacred sites across the Territory

| GOAL | OUTCOME |
| --- | --- |
| **Raise Community Awareness** Grow our community awarenessof the importance of Aboriginal sacred sites across the Northern Territory | Increased community and stakeholder awareness |
| **Elevate the Client Experience** Greater efficiencies and legal certainty | Delivery of consistent service that meets client and stakeholder expectations through development of a streamlined service delivery model |
| **Grow our Expertise** Growour expertiseto drive our strategic priorities | A high performing workforce with the requisite specialist expertise |
| **Build Digital Connectivity** Deliver digital platforms to streamline and enhance the AAPA experience for all users | Tailored digital platforms that are secure and responsive to the changing context of Aboriginal sacred site protection |

**OUR VALUES**

**Custodian Values:** traditional law and knowledge **Authority Guiding Values:** Two Laws, Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act, Independence and Integrity **Client Values:** Legal Certainty, Advice.

# THE ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY BOARD

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority Board comprises 12 members.

Ten members are Aboriginal custodians nominated by the Northern Territory's Land Councils in equal numbers, with five men and five women. The remaining two members are appointed by the Northern Territory Government.

To fill vacancies for Aboriginal custodian positions, the Land Councils are requested to nominate a panel of candidates consisting of twice the number of custodians required for appointment, with equal representation of men and women.

Members of the Authority Board are appointed by the Administrator of the Northern Territory by notice published in the Northern Territory Government Gazette.

Section 6(3) of the Sacred Sites Act provides that the Administrator appoints an Aboriginal member as Chairman and another member of the opposite sex as Deputy Chairman from among members nominated by the Authority for that purpose.

These arrangements reflect the important role Aboriginal custodians and cultural authority play in the protection of sacred sites and help ensure balanced representation of Aboriginal men and women at the highest level of the Authority's governance.

Mr Bobby Nunggumajbarr and Ms Lorraine Jones were reappointed as Chairman and Deputy Chairman respectively for a further three-year term during the reporting period.

The Authority Board is responsible for the strategic direction of the Authority and the exercise of its statutory powers under the Sacred Sites Act.



**Authority Board, CEO and Minister Burgoyne**

# AUTHORITY BOARD MEETINGS

Under the Sacred Sites Act, the Authority must meet a minimum of four times each calendar year.

In the 2025-26 financial year, the Chairman called the following meetings:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 149th board meeting | 26 & 27 August 2025 | Darwin |
| 150th board meeting | 24 September 2025 | Darwin |
| 151st board meeting | 15 December 2025 | Darwin |
| 152nd board meeting | 17 & 18 March 2026 | Darwin |

# EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT GROUP

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the day-to-day administration and operation of the Authority and for implementing the decisions of the Authority Board.

The Chief Executive Officer is supported by the Executive Management Group (EMG), which comprises the Authority's senior managers and provides leadership across the organisation's operational areas.

The EMG is responsible for overseeing organisational performance, implementing the Strategic Plan, managing key risks and ensuring the effective delivery of the Authority's statutory functions.

During 2025-26, the EMG comprised:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Director, Corporate Services
- Director, Research
- Director, Policy and Governance

The Authority's operational functions are delivered through three business units:

- Research.
- Corporate Services.
- Policy and Governance.

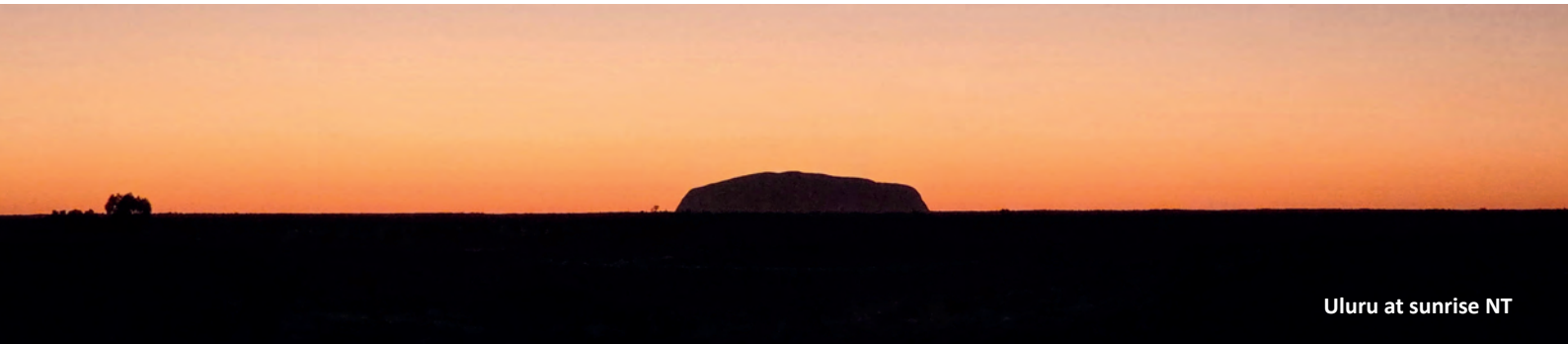
Together, these teams support the Authority's statutory responsibilities, including consultation with Aboriginal custodians, sacred site registration, Authority Certificates, compliance and investigations, corporate services, governance and strategic planning.

# COMMITTEES

The Authority has established a number of internal committees and advisory groups to support effective governance, risk management and organisational performance.

These include the Audit and Risk Committee and the Information and Communications Technology Change Advisory Board.

The committees provide advice and oversight in their respective areas and support the Chief Executive Officer and Executive Management Group in the effective administration of the Authority.



**Uluru at sunrise NT**

# MEMEBERS OF THE AUTHORITY BOARD 2025-26



**MR BOBBY NUNGGUMAJBARR**
Chairman

Region: Roper Basin
First appointed: 29 September 2015
Re-appointed: 16 March 2026
First appointed Chair: 18 March 2019

Mr Bobby Nunggumajbarr is a senior Nunggubuyu man from Numbulwar in south-east Arnhem Land. He has had a long career in public administration, serving on the Yugul Mangi Community Government Council and the Roper Gulf Shire. He was the Senior Project Officer at the Northern Land Council's Ngukurr office for over 15 years. Widely respected for his knowledge and leadership, he has been the elected Chairman of the Board since 2019.



**MS LORRAINE JONES**
Deputy Chairman

Region: Victoria River Basin
First appointed: 24 August 2021
Re-appointed: 16 March 2026
First appointed Deputy Chair: 28 November 2024

Ms Lorraine Jones is a community leader, cross-cultural trainer, and traditional owner from Timber Creek. She represents the Victoria River District on the Northern Land Council (NLC) Executive Council. Ms Jones is also the Deputy Chair of the Bradshaw Liaison Committee and board member of the Bradshaw and Timber Creek Contracting and Resource Company.



**MR ANDREW BUSH**

Region: Tiwi Islands
First appointed: 16 March 2026

Mr Andrew Bush is a proud Yimpinari Traditional Owner whose country, Goose Creek on Melville Island, is known for its abundant geese and crocodiles.

Mr Bush holds appointments on multiple boards, including the Aboriginal Sea Company, Tiwi Land Council, Tiwi Regional Council, Tiwi Enterprises, Tiwi Education Board, and Tiwi Training and Employment Board. He is highly regarded for his dedication to Tiwi employment, cultural practices, and community advocacy.



**MS VALERIE MARTIN**

Region: Yuendumu Hinterland
First appointed: 2 August 2016
Re-appointed: 11 May 2023

Ms Valerie Martin is a senior Warlpiri woman from Yuendumu. She represents the Tanami region on the Central Land Council Executive Council. Ms Martin is also deputy chair of Pintupi Anmatyerre Warlpiri Media, and a director for Imparja Television, Warlpiri Media Aboriginal Corporation and the Yapa Kurlangu Ngurrara Aboriginal Corporation. She is also an interpreter with the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS). Ms Martin served as the AAPA Deputy Chairperson from 2016 to 2024.



**MS ELIZABETH JOSHUA**

Region: Roper Basin
First appointed: 16 March 2026

Ms Elizabeth Joshua is an elected Northern Land Council (NLC) Full Council member representing the Southeast Arnhem region (specifically the Ngukurr/Numbulwar area), advocating on behalf of Traditional Owners in land rights, land use agreements, cultural heritage, and related statutory decisions under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. Her role contributes to the NLC's strategic direction and governance across the Top End, ensuring community-based input from Southeast Arnhem in land and sea country management and development matters.



**MS ROSEANNE ELLIS**

Region: Alice Springs
First appointed: 26 February 2026

Ms Ellis speaks Central Arrernte, Warlpiri and English and has been a Central Land Council delegate since 2000 and an executive committee member from 2022-2025.

Ms Ellis chairs the Amoonguna Health Board, is a director of the Ilmwernekenhe Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, and is a member of the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory. She is on the board of directors at the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, overseeing clinics in communities.



**MS JENNIFER YANTARRNGA**

Region: Arnhem Land East
First appointed: 24 August 2021
Re-appointed: 25 August 2024

Ms Jennifer Yantarrnga is a respected elder of the Yantarrnga Clan of Umbakumba, Groote Eylandt. Ms Yantarrnga is heavily involved in general community liaison and is a strong conduit between the Anindilyakwa Land and Sea Rangers and the Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC) Head Office. She collaborates in joint initiatives with stakeholders in relation to the ALC Anthropology Unit, and Anindilyakwa intellectual property and cultural knowledge protection.



**MR CHRISTOPHER NEADE**

Region: Barkly Central
First appointed: 2 November 2021
Re-appointed: 16 March 2026

Mr Christopher Neade is a Waanyi man from the Barkly Tablelands and lives in Elliot. He was elected to the Northern Land Council in 2016. Mr Neade studied in Mt Isa before starting work on cattle stations throughout the Barkly region. He is a Local Authority Member with the Barkly Regional Council and an advocate for development opportunities in the Barkly and to ensure Aboriginal people are treated with fairness and respect.



**MR GEOFFREY MATTHEWS**

Region: VRD/Barkly West
First appointed: 11 May 2023

Mr Geoffrey Matthews was born on Mount Doreen Station and worked as a grader operator for the Wulaign Outstation Resource Centre in Lajamanu. He also worked as an Aboriginal community police officer for ten years, and was a liaison officer for the Central Land Council's anthropology team. He is a currently a CLC executive member and is president of the Wulaign Homelands Council Aboriginal Corporation. Mr Matthews speaks Warlpiri, Jaru and English.



**MR DOUGLAS MULTA**

Region: Hermannsburg Hinterland
First appointed: 26 June 2025

Mr Douglas Multa is an Executive member of the Central Land Council and a senior Luritja man from Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff) and is the Chair of Ikuntji's store corporation. Mr Multa is a former stockman and is currently working with the Central Land Council's community development projects. Mr Multa is an active member of the Ikuntji Community Council.



**MR MARK COFFEY**

Government appointment
First appointed: 2 October 2025

Over four decades in the Northern Territory, Mark Coffey has dedicated his career to supporting regional and remote Australia, drawing on extensive experience across policing, government, and community leadership.

As a senior executive in the Australian Public Service, he led Indigenous Affairs and the Office of Northern Australia.
Mark is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and a recipient of the Public Service Medal, awarded in 2020 for his contributions.



**MS RACHEL PERKINS**
Resigned on 29 September 2025



**MR E . PORTAMINNI**
Deceased September 2025

# AAPA FAREWELLS JENNY INMULUGULU AFTER 20 YEARS SERVICE ON THE BOARD



The Chairman, Board, Chief Executive Officer and staff of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority extend their sincere thanks to Jenny Inmulugulu, who attended her final Board meeting in March 2026 after 20 years of service as a member of the Authority Board.

Ms Inmulugulu is a Traditional Owner from Warruwi on South Goulburn Island and has been a respected advocate for the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites throughout her time on the Board. She was first appointed in April 2006 and served as Deputy Chair between 2008 and 2012.

Over two decades of service, Ms Inmulugulu contributed to the protection of sacred sites across the Northern Territory through periods of significant organisational, legislative and community change. Her knowledge, cultural authority and practical insight have made a lasting contribution to the Authority and its work.

As a senior woman for her clan, Ms Inmulugulu has provided wisdom, leadership and guidance to successive Boards, staff and custodians. While her presence on the Board will be greatly missed, we know she will continue to be a strong voice for culture and the protection of Country.

Reflecting on her 20 years of service, Ms Inmulugulu said:

*"Protecting sacred sites and caring for Country has been profoundly important to me and to our culture.*

*I have greatly valued the opportunity to work with my fellow Board members and the dedicated staff of AAPA to safeguard sacred sites across the Northern Territory. It has been an honour to contribute to this important responsibility."*

The Authority thanks Ms Inmulugulu for her extraordinary contribution and wishes her all the very best for the future.

Croker Island, NT

# REMEMBERING MR E. PORTAMINNI

The Chairman, Board, Chief Executive Officer and staff of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority acknowledge with great sadness the passing of Board Member E. Portaminni.

Mr Portaminni was a respected Tiwi Elder, educator and community leader who dedicated much of his life to preserving and sharing Tiwi language, culture and traditional knowledge. For more than 35 years, he worked with Tiwi students, passing on cultural knowledge and strengthening connections to Country and community.

Mr Portaminni also served as Chair of Tarntipi Homelands Aboriginal Corporation and, together with his family, operated Tarntipi Bush Camp, providing cultural education and training opportunities for visitors to the Tiwi Islands. He was a valued member of the Tiwi Land Council, representing the Wurankuwu clan and contributing to the protection and management of Tiwi land and culture.

Although his time on the Authority Board was brief, Mr Portaminni brought valuable cultural knowledge, wisdom and insight to the Authority's work. His contribution reflected a lifelong commitment to protecting Country, maintaining culture and supporting future generations.

The Authority extends its condolences to Mr Portaminni's family, community and fellow Tiwi people. His contribution to the protection of culture, Country and sacred sites will be remembered with great respect.

**Fish Trap, Wurrumiyanga, Tiwi Islands NT**



# PERFORMANCE REPORT



# PROTECTION OF SACRED SITES

The protection of Aboriginal sacred sites is the Authority's primary statutory function.

The Authority's performance is measured through a range of indicators, including the number of Authority Certificate applications processed, requests for information completed, sacred sites recorded and registered, and compliance activities undertaken. These measures provide insight into the Authority's workload, efficiency and effectiveness in delivering its responsibilities under the Scared Sites Act.

The Authority also monitors the timeliness of service delivery, including the time taken to process Authority Certificate applications and requests for information. The quality of decision-making is reflected in a range of measures, including statutory appeals and stakeholder confidence in the Authority's processes and services.

In carrying out its responsibilities, the Authority works with Aboriginal custodians, government agencies, landholders, industry proponents and community organisations across the Northern Territory. Through the provision of information, consultation, sacred site registration and Authority Certificates, the Authority assists proponents to identify and avoid impacts to sacred sites, supports informed decision-making and provides greater certainty regarding sacred site constraints.

The Authority's performance measures also demonstrate its capacity to respond to changing development activity across the Territory, manage increasing demand for services and maintain confidence in the legislative framework that protects sacred sites for present and future generations.



Thin trees and ant mounds, Kakadu, NT

# Key services provided by the Authority

The Authority serves a diverse range of clients, including Aboriginal custodians, government agencies, resource companies, infrastructure providers, landholders and community organisations. Its role is to administer the Northern Territory's sacred sites protection regime by protecting sacred sites while supporting the responsible use and development of land.

The Authority's key services include:

- maintaining records and information relating to sacred sites;
- issuing Authority Certificates;
- registering sacred sites; and
- providing submissions and comments on matters that may affect sacred sites.

## Abstracts of Records

An Abstract of Records provides information regarding sacred sites that have been recorded or registered by the Authority within a specified area. It may assist proponents to identify known sacred site constraints, understand where known sacred sites are located and undertake an informed risk assessment during project planning.

While an Abstract of Records may provide valuable information regarding known sacred site constraints, the existence of a sacred site is a question of fact and is not dependent upon whether a site has been recorded or registered by the Authority. Accordingly, there may be sacred sites within an area that are not identified in an Abstract of Records.

An Abstract of Records and an Authority Certificate serve different purposes. An Abstract of Records provides information regarding known sacred site constraints. It does not assess a proposed activity or determine whether work may proceed.

## Authority Certificates

Through the Authority Certificate process, the Authority consults with relevant Aboriginal custodians and assesses the relationship between a proposed activity and any sacred site constraints affecting the area. The process may identify conditions under which an activity can proceed without there being a substantive risk of damage to, or interference with, a sacred site.

Authority Certificates provide proponents with greater certainty regarding sacred site constraints associated with a proposal and the circumstances in which an activity may lawfully proceed.

An Authority Certificate may also be issued where an agreement has been reached between the applicant and the relevant Aboriginal custodians. Such agreements are negotiated independently between the applicant and custodians, usually through the relevant Land Council.

Where an agreement has been reached, the Authority Certificate is issued in accordance with that agreement and may include conditions reflecting activities that custodians have agreed may proceed notwithstanding damage to, or interference with, a sacred site.

While Authority Certificates are not mandatory under the Act, except in relation to certain petroleum activities, they provide an effective mechanism for identifying and avoiding impacts to sacred sites. An Authority Certificate may also afford a defence to prosecution under section 34(1) of the Act, provided its conditions are complied with.

## Sacred Site Registration

Custodians of Aboriginal sacred sites may apply to have their sites registered under Part III, Division 2 of the Sacred Sites Act.

The Authority conducts anthropological research to determine a site's location, boundaries and significance in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. This includes consultation with Aboriginal custodians and a review of historical information held by the Authority.

Landowners are provided with an opportunity to comment before an application is considered by the Authority Board.

In accordance with the Sacred Sites Act, staff present a report to the Authority Board, which determines whether a site should be registered.

## Submissions and Comments

The Authority provides submissions and comments on matters that may affect sacred sites or the operation of the sacred sites protection regime.

This includes submissions on discussion papers, consultation processes and proposed reforms, as well as comments provided to government agencies and statutory decision-makers, including Environmental Management Plans, the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority, Development Assessment Services, the Pastoral Land Board and Crown Land Estate.

During 2025-26, the Authority provided comments on 5 Environmental Management Plans and 18 Environment Protection Authority matters, contributing a total of 104 comments and submissions across a range of planning, environmental, heritage and land-use matters.

# PERFORMANCE SUMMARY FOR 2025-26

**The Authority registered**

**5 sacred sites**

during Authority board meetings.

**43% of the Authority Certificates**

were issued within less than 6 months

**The Authority completed**

**1188 requests for information**

from the Authority's records.

Authority staff and consultants spent

**839 combined days in the field**

The Authority issued

**119 Authority Certificates**

for projects across the Northern Territory, including the Alice Springs Golf Club Water Bore Project, Central Land Council Office Extension in Alice Springs and Inpex Offshore Pipeline.

**Total fees waivered**

**$263,603**

# AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

## Quantity

In 2025-26, the Authority received 173 Authority Certificate applications. A total of 119 Authority Certificates were issued for projects across the NT, and 54 applications were withdrawn.

## Issued Authority Certificates

The 119 Authority Certficates issued by the Authority in 2025-26 is an increase from last years total of 94.

**Withdrawn Authority Certificates**

The 54 applications withdrawn by applicants in 2025-26 is an increase from the 49 applications withdrawn in 2024-25.

Of the 54 withdrawn applications, 12 were withdrawn by the Commonwealth Government and Mining Industry. The other main user group that withdrew their applications included Private Individuals or Companies.

## Refused Authority Certificates

In this reporting period, the Authority did not refuse any Authority Certificate applications.

# REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

An Abstract of Records provides information regarding sacred sites that have been recorded or registered by the Authority within a specified area. It may assist proponents to identify known sacred site constraints, understand where known sacred sites are located and undertake an informed risk assessment during project planning.

While the Abstract of Records may provide valuable information regarding known sacred site constraints, the existence of a sacred site is a question of fact and is not dependent upon whether a site has been recorded or registered by the Authority. Accordingly, there may be sacred sites within an area that are not identified in an Abstract of Records.

In 2025-26 the Authority completed 1188 requests for information.

| Key Performance Indicator (KPI) | Actual 2020-21 | Actual 2021-22 | Actual 2022-23 | Actual 2023-24 | Actual 2024-25 | Actual 2025-26 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Authority Certificates issued | 111 | 92 | 131 | 83 | 94 | 119 |
| Average time between receiving Authority Certificate application and completing service | 130 days | 135 days | 144 days | 125 days | 120 days | 151 days |
| Average time between receiving request for information and completing service | 2.53 days | 1.9 days | 2.2 days | 3.2 days | 2.4 days | 3.1 days |
| Requests for information completed | 971 | 896 | 873 | 926 | 1015 | 1188 |
| Statutory appeals | 1 appeal (ongoing from 2018-19 | 0 | 0 | 2 appeals | 0 | 0 |

**Figure 1:** Key performance indicator



Billabong, South East of Maningrida, NT

# AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES ACROSS THE TERRITORY

During 2025-26, the Authority issued Authority Certificates for a diverse range of projects across the Northern Territory. These projects spanned infrastructure, telecommunications, tourism, community development, government services, petroleum activities, mining and Aboriginal community enterprises. Examples included:

## Infrastructure and Government Projects

The Authority supported a range of significant infrastructure and public projects through the issuance of Authority Certificates, including:

- Territory Energy Link;
- Wadeye Township Development;
- Twin Falls Carpark;
- Manngarre Rainforest Walk;
- Kakadu National Park infrastructure projects;
- Ross Park School upgrades; and
- Alice Springs Schwarz Crescent / Stuart Highway intersection upgrades.

## Mining, Exploration, Oil and Gas

The Authority issued 15 Authority Certificates relating to mining activities and a further 16 Authority Certificates relating to petroleum and oil and gas activities.

The *Northern Territory Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016* require Authority Certificates to be obtained for petroleum activities. During the year, 11 Certificates were issued in accordance with the Petroleum Regulations, including projects involving Imperial Oil and Gas Pty Ltd, Onshore Energy APT Management Services Pty Ltd and INPEX Operations Australia Pty Ltd.

Mining, exploration, oil and gas activities accounted for approximately 13 per cent of all Authority Certificates issued during 2025-26.

## Aboriginal Community Projects and Enterprises

The Authority also issued Certificates supporting projects developed by Aboriginal organisations and communities across the Territory.

Examples included:

- Katherine West Health Board Aboriginal Corporation Staff Accommodation House and Health Centre, Yarralin; and
- Thamarrurr Development Corporation Wadeye Aged Care Facility.

These projects demonstrate the diverse range of activities supported through the Authority Certificate process and the important role Authority Certificates play in helping proponents identify and avoid impacts to sacred sites while supporting the responsible use and development of land.

**Figure 2:** Number of Authority Certificates issued, withdrawn and refused from 2020 to 2026.

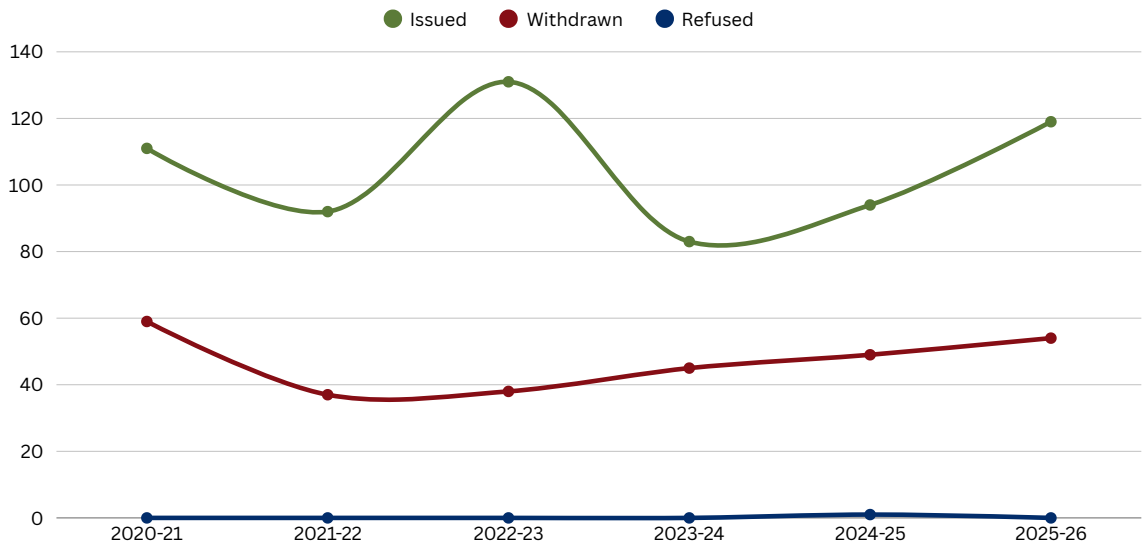



**Figure 3:** Number of days to issue an Authority Certificate

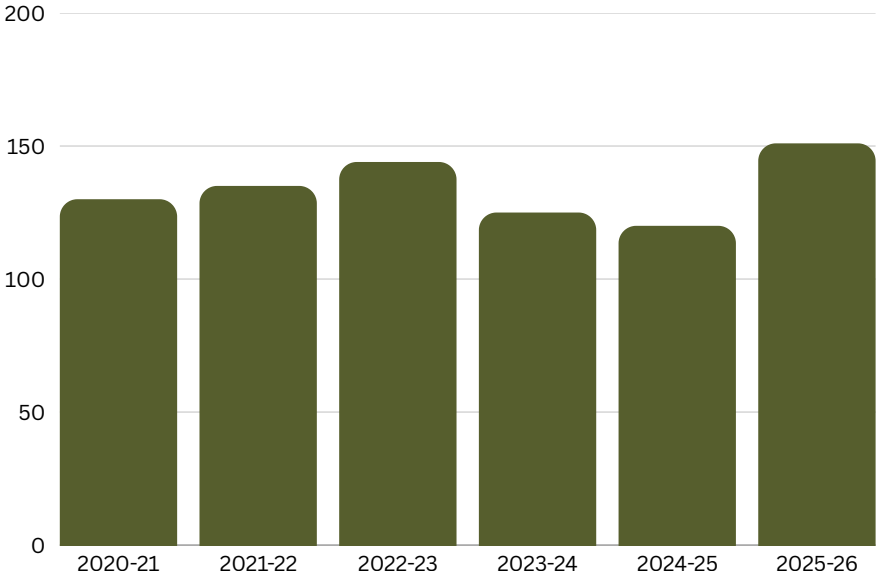



**Figure 4:** Number of months to issue Authority Certificates in 2025-26

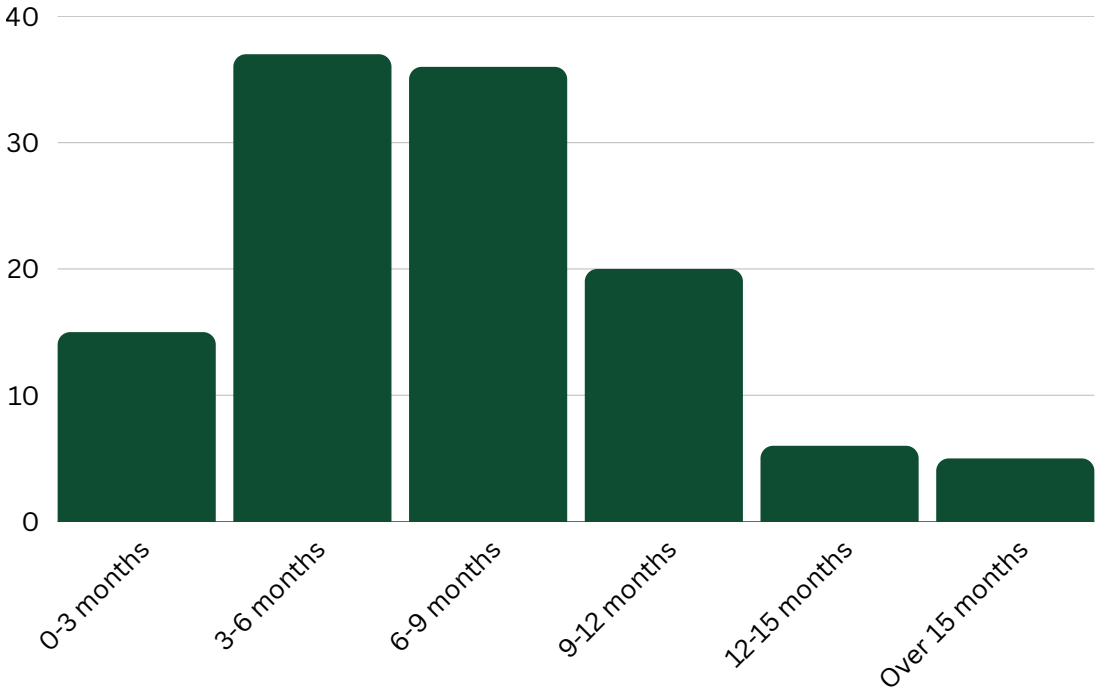


**Figure 5:** Regional trend – Authority Certificate issued and region area

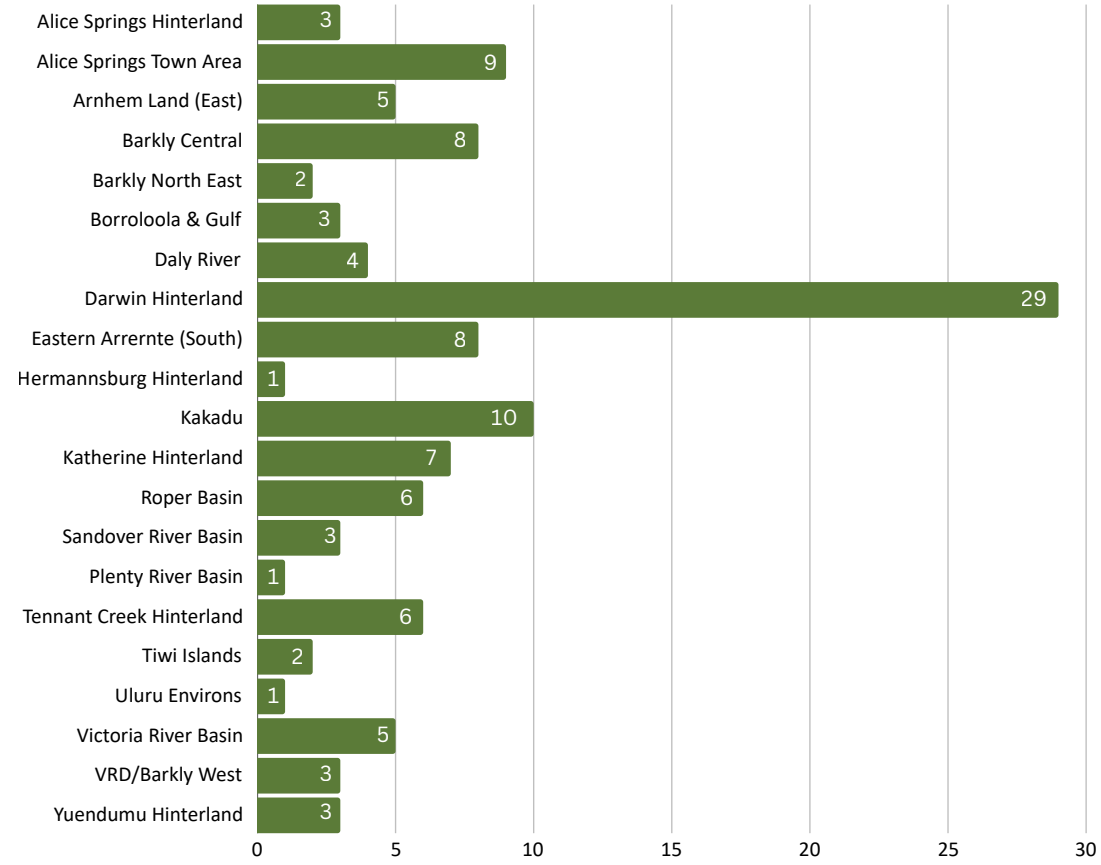



**Figure 6: Authority** Certificate User Groups

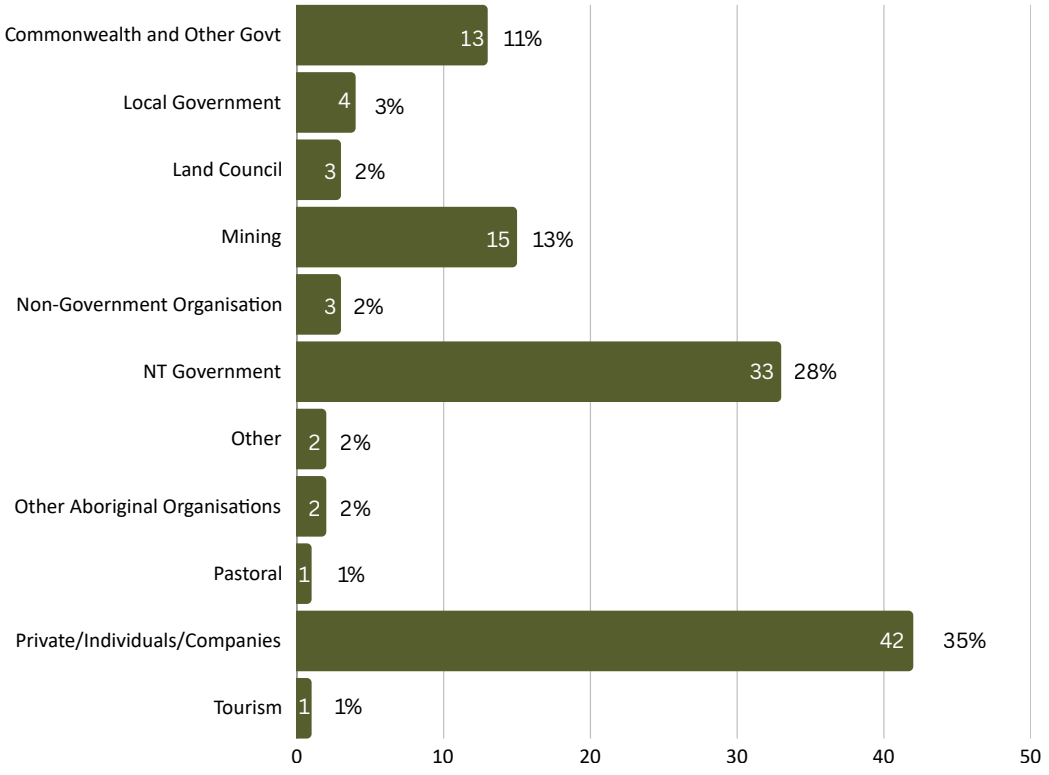
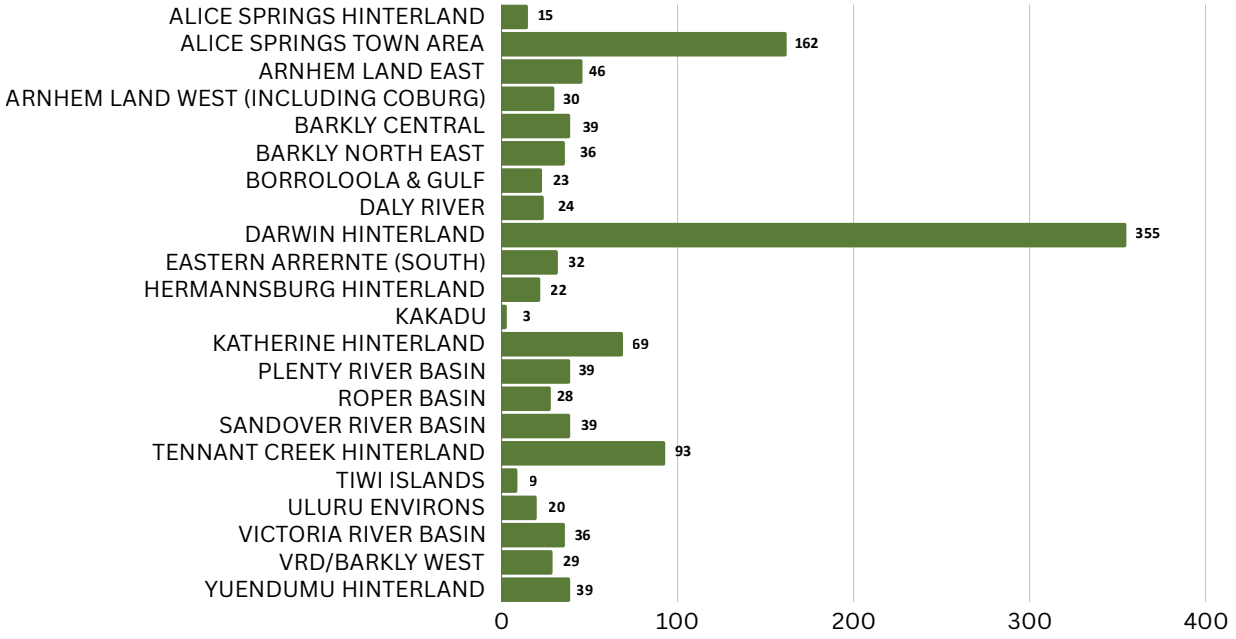


**Figure 7:** Requests for Information by region




# REGISTRATION OF SACRED SITES

Aboriginal sacred sites are vital to the cultural heritage of the Northern Territory. They are an intrinsic part of a continuing body of practices and beliefs emanating from Aboriginal laws and traditions, and their preservation is important for all Australians.

While all sacred sites are protected in the Northern Territory, registering a sacred site establishes its status with comprehensive documentation.

Registration of a sacred site by the Board of the Authority is considered as Prime Jacie proof in court of law that a place is indeed a sacred site. The detailed information held by the Authority on registered sacred sites also results in more effective conditions within Authority Certificates.

Recorded sites are sacred sites that have been made known to the Authority from a variety of sources. In some cases the Authority has not been able to fully assess the information regarding recorded sites, nor have these sites been fully mapped. These sacred sites are still protected by the Sacred Sites Act.

The Authority manages the protection of sacred sites through:

- Responding to requests for sacred site protection from custodians, including the recording and documenting of sacred site information, registration of sacred sites, the provision of related protection measures and the keeping of confidential sacred site records.
- Making available for public inspection the Register of Sacred Sites, the Authority Certificate register and other sacred sites records.
- Responding to applications for Authority Certificates, carrying out research and surveys, and consulting with Aboriginal custodians to determine the constraints, if any, imposed on proposed works on or use of land by the protection of sacred sites.
- Enforcing the Sacred Sites Act, including prosecuting offences against the Sacred Sites Act.

**Quantity**

- The Authority registered 5 sacred sites in 2025-26. Sacred sites are registered at the Authority Board meetings which occurs at least four times a year.
- The Authority recorded 198 sacred sites through fieldwork in this reporting period.
- A total of 839 days were spent undertaking fieldwork.

In total, the Authority has 2,274 registered sacred sites and 11,910 recorded sacred sites in its database, bringing the total number of documented sacred sites in the Northern Territory to 14,184 in 2025-26.



Robinson River, NT

# COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

The Authority promotes compliance with the Sacred Sites Act through education, engagement, monitoring and enforcement activities. The Authority investigates reports of potential sacred site damage and administers a range of offence provisions under the Act.

It is an offence to unlawfully enter or remain on a sacred site, carry out works on a sacred site, desecrate a sacred site, or contravene the conditions of an Authority Certificate.

The Authority's Compliance Unit supports both voluntary compliance and enforcement action where required. Its functions include:

- promoting awareness of obligations under the Sacred Sites Act;
- supporting compliance with Authority Certificate conditions;
- monitoring and auditing compliance with Authority Certificates;
- responding to and investigating reports of alleged offences;
- undertaking compliance and enforcement activities where appropriate; and
- prosecuting offences under the Sacred Sites Act.

The Authority's primary objective is the protection of sacred sites through early engagement, informed decision-making and voluntary compliance. Enforcement action remains an important mechanism for maintaining confidence in the sacred sites protection regime and addressing serious or unlawful conduct where it occurs.



**Ilparpa Claypans, Alice Springs NT**

# Joint Prosecution Protects Significant Sacred Site at Putyenge

## The Authority and the Department of Mines and Energy against Scott Smith and Kimberley Smith

In January 2026, the Northern Territory Local Court finalised a significant joint prosecution by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) and the Department of Mines and Energy (DME), resulting in the conviction of Mrs Kimberley Smith for offences under the Sacred Sites Act and the *Mineral Titles Act 2010.* The charges against Mr Scott Smith were withdrawn due to serious health issues.

The matter concerned unlawful excavation activities at the historic Tosca Mine on Ammaroo Station, approximately 250 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs in the Authority's Central Region. In June and August 2022, Mrs Smith engaged machinery operators and arranged for a 25-tonne excavator to enter the site and remove substantial quantities of turquoise without the required mining approvals or an Authority Certificate. The turquoise was subsequently offered for sale in Australia, the United States and China. The excavation work caused significant damage to the registered sacred site Putyenge, a site of cultural importance to Traditional Custodians.

Putyenge is part of a broader sacred landscape that holds deep spiritual, cultural and historical significance for the site's custodian Aboriginal groups. The turquoise deposits at the site form part of the sacred site's cultural story and are intrinsically connected to the ancestral narratives, law and traditions that continue to be maintained by Traditional Owners.

As recognised during the proceedings, the turquoise was not simply a mineral resource but an important element of the sacred site's cultural identity and meaning. AAPA Chairman Bobby Nunggumajbarr noted that the turquoise "was part of the story of that place", highlighting the profound cultural loss caused by its removal.

Following a joint investigation and prosecution by AAPA and DME, Mrs Smith pleaded guilty to one count of working on a sacred site contrary to section 34 of the Sacred Sites Act and two counts of breaching an exploration licence contrary to section 147 of the Mineral Titles Act. She was convicted and sentenced to four months imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, for the Sacred Sites Act offence.

This marked the first time a custodial sentence had been imposed for an offence under the Sacred Sites Act. Mrs Smith was also fined $28,000 for the Mineral Titles Act offences and prohibited from entering the Northern Territory for 18 months.

The outcome represents an important milestone in the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites and demonstrates the effectiveness of collaborative regulatory action between AAPA and DME. The successful prosecution reinforced the principle that sacred sites are afforded legal protection regardless of whether activities are undertaken for commercial gain and highlighted the serious consequences that can result from unauthorised works on culturally significant places.

This was also the first joint prosecution undertaken by AAPA and DME and serves as a strong reminder of the importance of obtaining the appropriate approvals, including an Authority Certificate, before undertaking activities that may affect Aboriginal sacred sites.

# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENTS TO LAND ACCESS

Section 47(1) of the Sacred Sites Act permits the Authority to authorise access across land where necessary for the performance of functions or exercise of powers under the Act. This includes access required to undertake sacred site clearances as part of the Authority Certificate process.

During the reporting period, the Authority reviewed and refined its land access processes to improve transparency, communication and stakeholder understanding. As part of this work, the Authority updated its section 47 Land Access Notice template to provide landowners with clearer information about the purpose of the proposed access, the areas to be visited and the intended means and routes of access.

The Authority has also refined its operational approach to conducting sacred site clearances. Greater consideration is now given to whether visits to sites in the vicinity of the proposed project area are necessary to appropriately identify and assess sacred site constraints.

Authority staff and consultants have also been reminded of the importance of complying with reasonable access protocols requested by landowners and occupiers wherever practicable.

These improvements are intended to strengthen communication with landowners, support efficient field operations and ensure the Authority continues to perform its statutory functions effectively while respecting the rights and interests of landholders.

The Sacred Sites Act protects sacred sites throughout the Northern Territory, regardless of land tenure, registration status or whether a site is known to the Authority. The Act also recognises the right of Aboriginal people to access sacred sites in accordance with Aboriginal tradition.

Sections 33, 34 and 35 of the Sacred Sites Act create offences relating to unauthorised entry onto sacred sites, unauthorised works or uses involving sacred sites, and the desecration of sacred sites.



# COMPLIANCE FIELD TRIPS AND INVESTIGATIONS

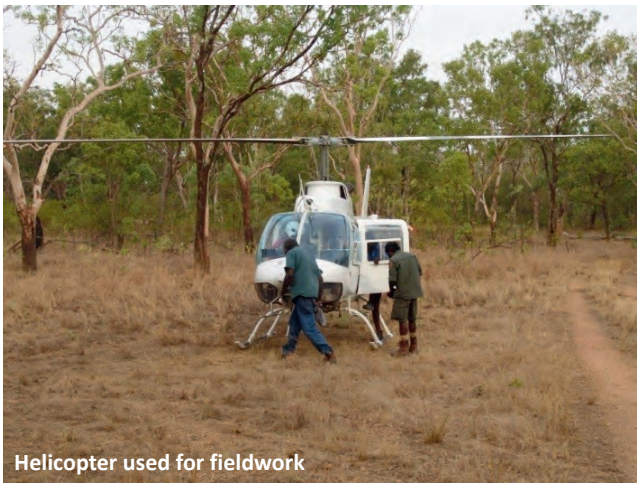
During 2025-26, the Authority's Compliance Unit received approximately 25 complaints relating to alleged damage to, or interference with, sacred sites.

In response, the Compliance Unit undertook three major field investigations across the Northern Territory to assess allegations of potential offending and gather evidence relevant to the Authority's compliance and enforcement functions.

Field investigations are an important component of the Authority's compliance activities. They assist the Authority to assess allegations of damage, engage directly with custodians and other stakeholders, and determine whether further action is required under the Sacred Sites Act.

During 2025-26, the Authority commenced two new prosecutions and successfully concluded one prosecution. The offender was fined and sentenced to a term of imprisonment of four months, suspended for 18 months on the condition that no further offence punishable by imprisonment be committed and that the offender not enter or be present in the Northern Territory during that period.

The Authority remains committed to promoting voluntary compliance with the Sacred Sites Act while taking enforcement action where necessary to protect sacred sites and maintain confidence in the Territory's sacred sites protection regime.



Helicopter used for fieldwork



Pot Hole



GPS recording by AAPA staff

# AUDITS AND INTERNAL REVIEWS

During 2025–26, the Authority commenced a program of audits and internal reviews aimed at strengthening governance, internal controls, compliance and financial management.

Activities commenced during the year included:

- Remote Travel Policy Review;
- Travel Audit;
- Swipe Card Audit;
- Authority Certificate Cost Estimates vs Actuals Audit; and
- End-of-Year Financial Reporting Review.

These activities support the Authority's commitment to sound governance, accountability and continuous improvement.



Cahills Crossing NT



Simpsons Gap, NT

# PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES



Custodian Charlie Mangulda at Croker Island, NT

# MAJOR PROJECTS

To support the delivery of large and complex projects involving significant numbers of Authority Certificate applications across multiple locations, the Authority implemented a project-based delivery model.

The 2025-26 financial year represents the first full year of operation of this model.

The model enables project proponents to provide targeted funding to support additional operational capacity where substantial project workloads would otherwise place pressure on the Authority's existing resources. This includes additional capability across anthropology, project management and corporate services.

During the year, project-specific funding arrangements supported the delivery of several major projects, including the Telstra Aura Network Project, Territory Energy Link and Kakadu Infrastructure Projects.

The approach ensured that Authority Certificates could be issued within project timeframes while maintaining the integrity of the Authority's statutory processes and continuing to deliver services to applicants outside those projects.

The model has demonstrated the Authority's capacity to respond to significant project-driven demand while maintaining effective protection of sacred sites and supporting major development activity across the Territory.

Of the 119 Authority Certificates issued during 2025-26, 30 (25 per cent) were delivered through the project model.
As a result of its success, the model is attracting increasing interest from other major project proponents.

While the model has proven effective, the Authority continues to consider how its organisational structure, workforce and systems may need to evolve to support future growth in demand. This is particularly important given the temporary nature of many major projects and the need to ensure that organisational capability remains sustainable over the longer term.

The Authority remains committed to maintaining an operating model that is responsive, efficient and financially sustainable while continuing to fulfil its statutory responsibilities under the Sacred Sites Act.



# TELSTRA AURA NETWORK PROJECT

Telstra's Aura Network project is a major telecommunications infrastructure initiative involving the construction of a high-capacity national transmission fibre network across significant areas of the Northern Territory.

The scale and geographic reach of the project required multiple Authority Certificates under the Sacred Sites Act, together with extensive consultation and assessment activities.

The project was one of the first major projects delivered under the Authority's project-based delivery model. A project-specific funding arrangement enabled the Authority to allocate additional anthropology, project management and corporate services resources to the project without affecting service delivery to other applicants.

This approach ensured that Authority Certificate applications could be assessed within project timeframes while maintaining the integrity of the Authority's statutory processes and decision-making framework.

The project demonstrated the capacity of the Sacred Sites Act to facilitate major infrastructure development while protecting sacred sites. Through the Authority Certificate process, sacred site constraints were identified and considered during project planning, enabling works to proceed in a manner that avoided or appropriately managed impacts to sacred sites.

The project also demonstrated the value of early engagement and careful planning. By identifying sacred site constraints at an early stage, proponents were able to make informed decisions regarding project design, alignment and delivery.

Importantly, the project highlighted the Authority's ability to respond to significant demand associated with large-scale infrastructure projects while continuing to provide services to Aboriginal custodians, government agencies, community organisations and other proponents across the Territory.

The successful delivery of the Aura Network project provides a practical example of how the sacred sites protection regime can support both the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage and the delivery of major infrastructure projects that provide broader benefits to Territorians.

Steven Worrall, Chief Executive Officer of Telstra Digital Infrastructure, said:

> *"From the outset, Telstra's engagement with AAPA was founded on a shared commitment to respecting Country and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage while delivering essential digital infrastructure for Territorians and all Australians. Through open communication, early planning and a collaborative approach, we were able to progress the Aura Network while ensuring sacred sites were protected and limiting impacts to Country. The collaboration demonstrates that major infrastructure projects can be delivered responsibly when there is mutual trust, respect and a genuine commitment to working together."*





Sea Ranger Boat, Yanyuwa Country NT

# STAKEHOLDER AND OTHER ENGAGEMENT



Limmen Southern Lost City NT

# NORTHERN TERRITORY CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

During 2025-26, AAPA continued to strengthen its relationship with the Northern Territory cattle industry through direct engagement with members of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA).

As part of this effort, AAPA staff attended all four NTCA branch meetings held across the Territory in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs during October and November 2025. These meetings provided an important opportunity for pastoralists and industry representatives to engage directly with AAPA staff, learn more about the Authority's role in protecting Aboriginal sacred sites and gain a better understanding of the Authority's statutory functions, Authority Certificate processes and services.

Through open discussion and practical information sharing, AAPA staff responded to questions, addressed concerns and provided greater clarity about how sacred site protection can be considered alongside pastoral operations and development activities. The meetings also provided an opportunity for the Authority to hear directly from industry stakeholders about operational challenges and emerging issues, helping to strengthen communication and mutual understanding.

Importantly, feedback received during these meetings identified opportunities for improvement. Concerns raised regarding landowner notification practices, property access arrangements and fieldwork activities were carefully considered and informed refinements to the Authority's section 47 land access notice process. The Authority also reinforced requirements for staff and consultants undertaking fieldwork on pastoral properties to comply with workplace health and safety and biosecurity obligations, recognising the operational requirements of pastoral enterprises.

The engagement demonstrated the value of direct stakeholder consultation and the Authority's willingness to listen, learn and refine its practices where appropriate. It also reinforced the importance of face-to-face engagement in building trusted relationships across the Territory.

Reflecting on the engagement, Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association Chief Executive Officer Romy Carey noted:

> *"The NTCA appreciated AAPA's participation in four of our 2025 branch meetings across the Northern Territory. The discussions gave members a valuable opportunity to better understand AAPA's role and processes, while raising practical concerns about landowner notification, property access and activities undertaken on pastoral land. We were particularly pleased to see this feedback carefully considered and reflected in practical improvements, and we look forward to continuing this positive and important engagement between AAPA and the pastoral industry."*

Through engagement with organisations such as the NTCA, the Authority continues to promote awareness of the Sacred Sites Act, support informed decision-making and strengthen relationships with those who use and manage land across the Northern Territory.




**AAPA staff attending the Cattlemans Association Conference**

# LAND COUNCILS

The Authority works closely with the Northern Territory's Land Councils in support of their statutory functions and projects.

During 2025-26, Authority Certificates were issued to the Northern Land Council for the Watjen Kurabek Bore Construction Project and to the Central Land Council for the Council Office Extension in Alice Springs.

During the year, the Authority continued to work with Land Councils to improve understanding and operation of the section 22(1)(b) pathway under the Sacred Sites Act. A particular focus was placed on strengthening relationships with the Central Land Council and Northern Land Council through constructive discussions aimed at improving coordination, reducing duplication and supporting efficient outcomes for custodians and proponents.

These discussions recognised the distinct statutory functions of each organisation while reinforcing a shared commitment to the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites and effective service delivery.

Throughout the year, the Authority and Land Councils engaged in detailed discussions regarding Authority Certificate processes, sacred site clearances and opportunities to improve information sharing. This included consideration of site, spatial, consultation and project information to support informed and timely decision-making while maintaining confidentiality and legislative safeguards.

The Authority also strengthened engagement with Land Councils through meetings, presentations and relationship-building activities. These discussions reinforced the importance of clear communication, reciprocal information sharing and early collaboration in relation to sacred site registrations, Authority Certificates and emerging projects.

The Authority's work depends upon Aboriginal custodians who continue to share their knowledge and participate in consultations to ensure sacred sites can be identified and protected for future generations. Their willingness to engage with the Authority and contribute their knowledge remains fundamental to the effective operation of the sacred sites protection regime.

The Authority considers this work an important investment in long-term relationships with Land Councils. By fostering cooperation, trusted communication channels and practical solutions, the Authority and Land Councils are better positioned to support custodians, proponents and communities while ensuring sacred site protection remains effective, efficient and responsive.

# COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

Community and stakeholder engagement remains an important part of the Authority's work. Through presentations, conferences and industry forums, the Authority promotes awareness of the sacred sites protection regime, explains its statutory functions and provides information about Authority Certificates, sacred site registration and compliance obligations.

During 2025-26, the Authority delivered presentations to a diverse range of stakeholders, including:

- Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association;
- Australian Anthropological Society Conference;
- Local Government Association of the Northern Territory;
- Annual Geoscience Exploration Seminar; and
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Conference.

These engagements provided valuable opportunities to share information, respond to questions and strengthen understanding of the Authority's role in protecting sacred sites across the Northern Territory.



Mary River NT

# HERITAGE CHAIRS AND OFFICIALS OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

On 16 and 17 October 2025, the Chief Executive Officer and Deputy Chairman attended the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand forum in Melbourne.

The forum brings together heritage agencies and government officials from across Australia and New Zealand to discuss issues affecting the protection and management of cultural heritage. This was the second meeting attended by the Authority since becoming a member of the network.

Each jurisdiction provided a report on key developments, legislative reforms, emerging challenges and significant projects. The forum provided an opportunity to share experiences, learn from other jurisdictions and discuss practical approaches to protecting cultural heritage in diverse legal and operational environments.

Participation in the forum assists the Authority to remain informed about national developments in cultural heritage management and provides opportunities to build relationships with counterpart agencies across Australia and New Zealand.

The Heritage Council of the Northern Territory also participated in the forum.

The next meeting is scheduled to be held in Tasmania in November 2026.

# HERITAGE COUNCIL

Ms Lorraine Jones, Deputy Chairman of the Authority, currently serves as the Authority's representative on the Heritage Council until November 2027.

Through this role, the Authority contributes to broader discussions about the protection and management of the Northern Territory's cultural heritage. The representation also supports ongoing collaboration between the Authority and the Heritage Council on matters where Aboriginal cultural heritage, sacred sites and heritage protection intersect.



**AAPA Staff member with custodians reviewing maps**



# OUR PEOPLE

# 2025-26 SNAPSHOT

The Authority's people are central to the effective administration of the Sacred Sites Act. During 2025-26, the Authority continued to strengthen workforce capability through targeted recruitment, professional development and organisational improvements designed to support growing demand for services.

The Authority maintained a skilled and diverse workforce while increasing the proportion of ongoing employees, improving Aboriginal employment outcomes and investing in staff development and wellbeing.

The Authority entered a period of organisational renewal and capability building, with increased investment in training, stronger Aboriginal representation, a more stable permanent workforce and ongoing efforts to position the organisation for future growth in demand.

**KEY STATISTICS**

- Our **full-time** equivalent (FTE) workforce increased to **39.02** in 2025-26 compared to 37.29 in 2024-25.
- Our **headcount** decreased from **44** staff to **43** in in 2025-26.
- **16%** of our staff identified as **Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander** in 2025-26 compared to 10**%** in 2024-25.
- **63%** of the workforce were **female** in 2025-26 compared to **66%** in 2024-25.
- The **median age** of staff was **43** in 2025-26, unchanged from 2024-25.
- 50**%** of our staff were **aged between 25 and 44** in 2025-26 compared to 49**%** in 2024-25.
- 75**%** of our staff were ongoing **permanent** employees in 2025-26 compared to 68**%** in 2024-25.
- 70% of the workforce has **worked for the Authority** (including NTG service where applicable) for **less than five years**
- 30% of the workforce has **worked for the Authority** (including NTG service where applicable) for **more than five years**, and one staff member has worked for the Authority for more than 25 years.
- 55% of our staff were employed in the **professional** (47%) or **technical** streams (8%).
- 43% of our staff had a **flexible work agreement** in place and a further **15%** work **part-time** or **casual**.
- **$25,406** was spent in 2025-26 compared to $22,564 in 2024-25 on **training and development** for our staff.
- $**12,768** was spent on providing 67 individual **support services** for staff.



AAPA staff in the Alice Springs Office

## STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

The Authority continues to invest in workforce capability and leadership development to ensure staff are well equipped to meet current and future organisational needs.

During 2025-26:

- Sheetal Sharma, Information Systems Unit, successfully completed the Emerging Leaders Program; and
- Reva Gupta, Corporate Services, successfully completed the Foundations of Public Sector Governance Program.

These achievements reflect the Authority's commitment to professional development and building organisational capability across all areas of the business.




**Sheetal Sharma and Commissioner for Public Employment**



**Reva Gupta with her certificate**

# PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN CULTURAL EVENTS

Participation in cultural events provides an important opportunity for Authority staff to engage with communities, celebrate Aboriginal culture and strengthen understanding of the cultural context in which the Authority performs its functions.

During 2025-26, staff participated in a range of cultural recognition events across the Northern Territory. In July 2025, the Authority hosted its inaugural stall at the NAIDOC Week event Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud and Proud. The event provided an opportunity to engage directly with community members, promote awareness of the Authority's role and discuss the importance of protecting Aboriginal sacred sites.

Staff also participated in the annual NAIDOC march through Darwin and attended the 2026 Barunga Festival. These events provided valuable opportunities to celebrate Aboriginal culture, connect with communities and strengthen relationships with stakeholders from across the Territory.



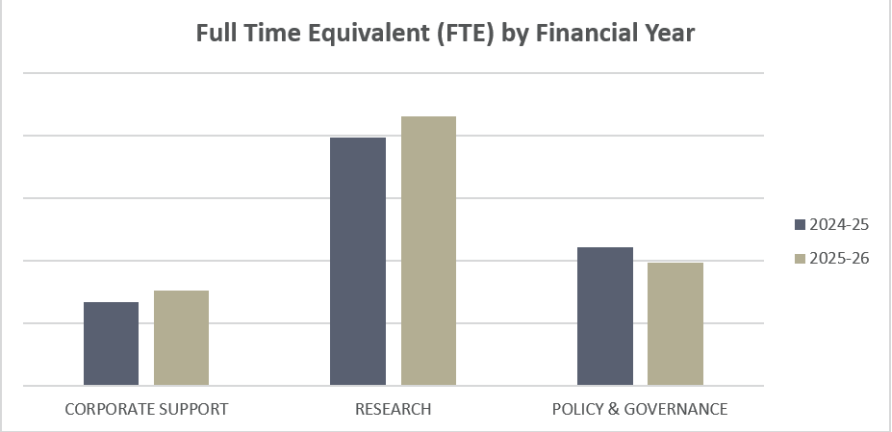
**Barunga Festival 2026**




**NAIDOC Stall 2025**

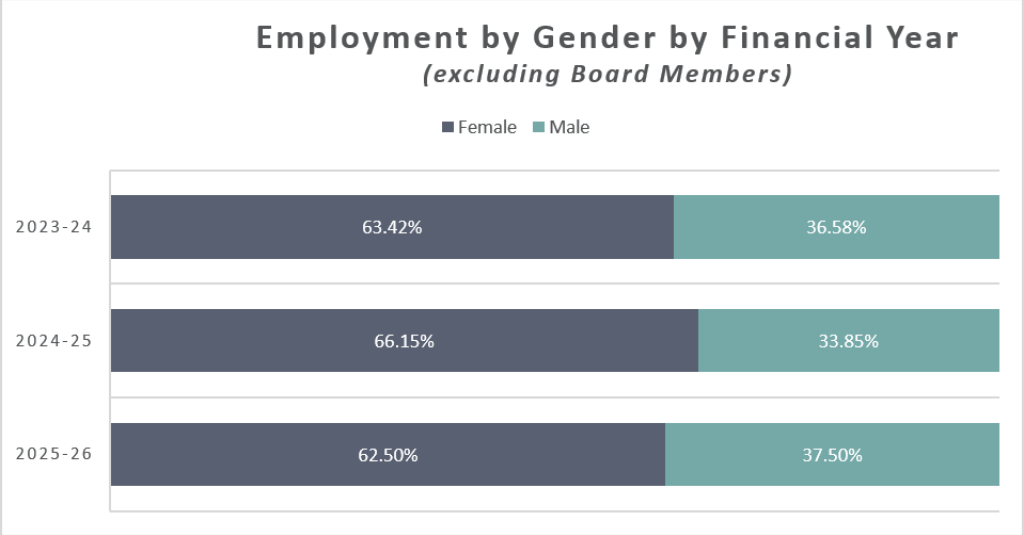
# WORKFORCE PROFILE

The Authority's workforce in 2025-2026 increased by 1.73 full time equivalent (FTE) staff to 39.02, compared to 37.29 in the prior year. This increase was primarily due to the commencement of several short-term positions that are externally funded for a 12-month period.



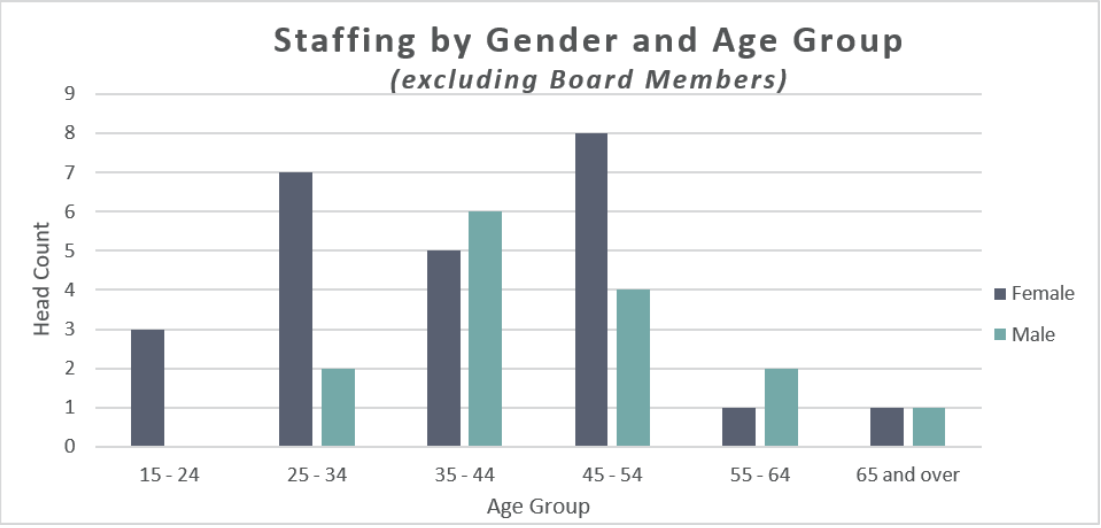

## Gender Comparison

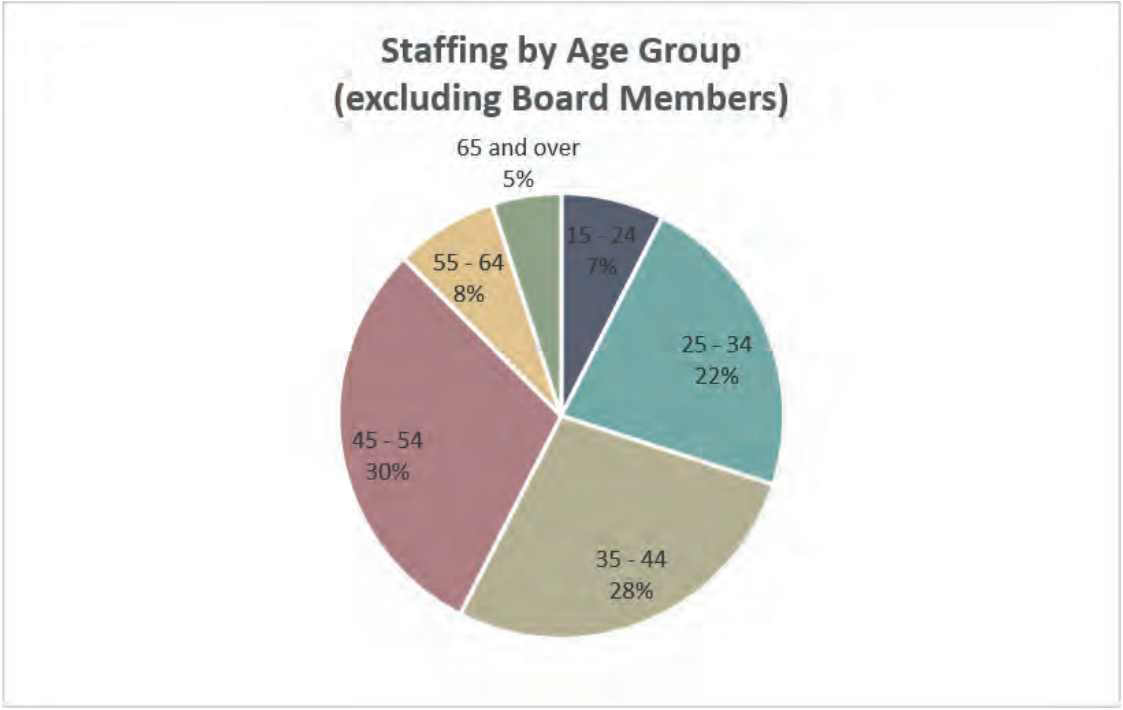
For 2025-2026 females made up 62.50% of the Authority's employees. There has been increase in males by 3.65% after the decrease of last three years.




## Employees by age and gender

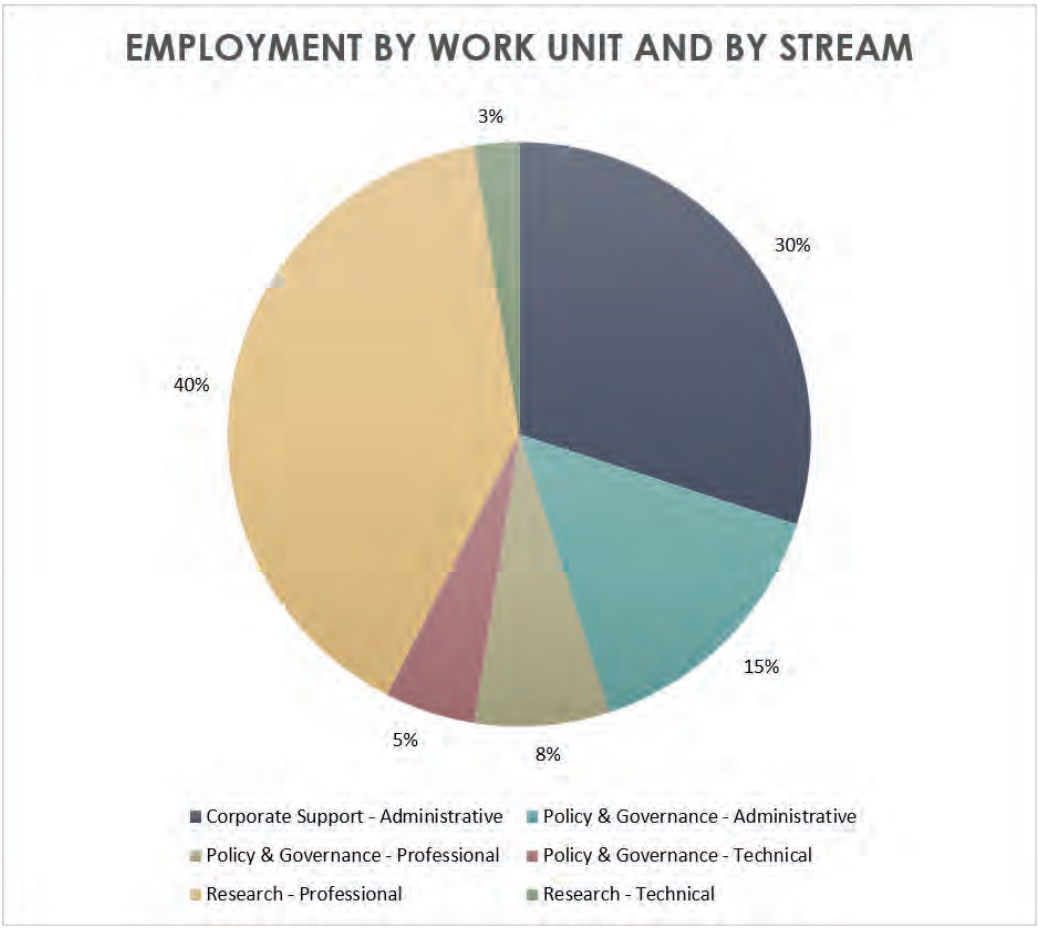
In 2025-26, the median age of employees was 43 which demonstrates a gradual ageing in the workforce over the last six years with the median age growing from 38 in 2019-120. At 30 June 2025, 60% of the female workforce was between 15-44 and 28% of males were aged between 45 and over.





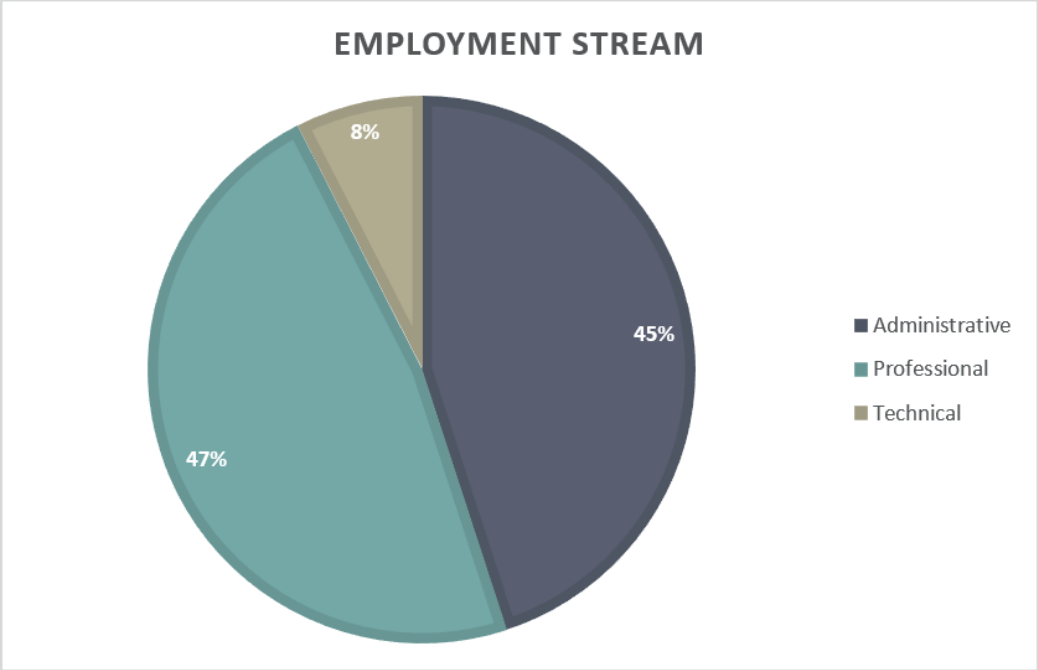

## Employees by unit

In comparison to last financial year there has been minimal changes to the employment by work unit and stream. The Research unit undertakes the Authority's anthropological services and most employees are within the professional stream with 3% employed under technical stream. The Policy and Governance unit which also manages the technical services and compliance functions of the Authority, made up 28% of the Authority with 15% administrative, 8% professional and 5% technical. The Corporate Support unit is entirely made up of administrative personnel and consists of the Chief Executive Officer and the Corporate Services functions.



## Employees by stream

In 2025-26, the administrative stream employed 45% of the workforce which is a increase of 6% from the previous year. The professional stream decreased from 54% to 47%. The technical stream increased from 7% to 8%.




## Recruitment and retention

In 2025-26, there were 23 new commencements and 31 separations, of which 26 were resignations and 5 were transfers to different agencies.Of the 23 new commencements, 5 were permanent appointments.

28 recruitment actions were undertaken in 2025-26 with 20 of these having successful outcomes. Of the 8 remaining recruitment rounds, 6 were unable to identify a suitable applicant with the relevant skills knowledge and experience required for the role(s). Two recruitment actions are still under the process of finalisation.

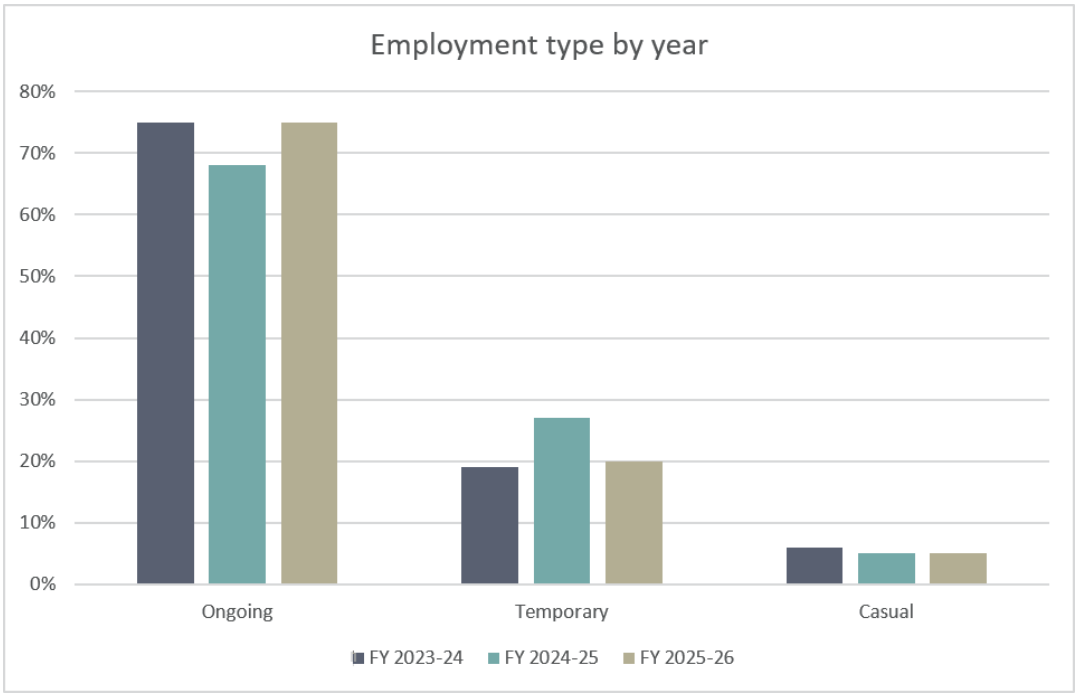
All positions are advertised under special measures.

### Recruitment and retention

| | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | 2025-26 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Separations | 12 | 8 | 31 |
| Commencements | 6 | 16 | 23 |
| **Total** | **18** | **24** | **54** |

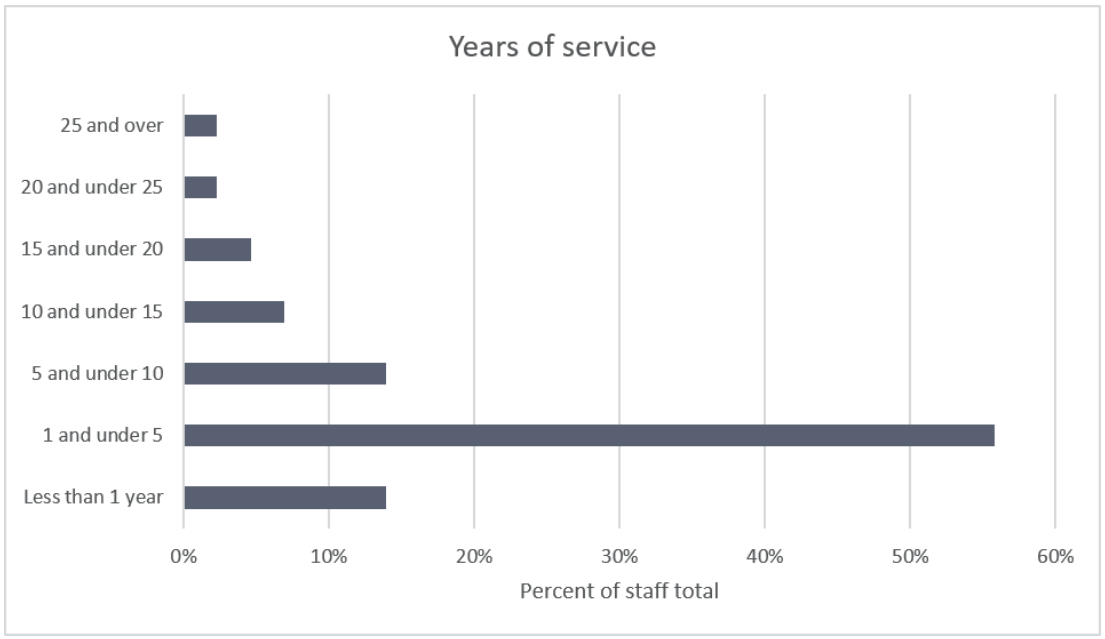
## Employment types

The Authority has seen a decrease in temporary contract employees in 2025-26 due to the cessation of external funding for eleven positions to work through the significant projects of 2026. Three funding agreements were negotiated with two being for the 2025 calendar year and the third for 2025 and 2026. There is increase of 7% ongoing employment due to finalisation of new vacancies that the Authority was working to fill in the 2025-26 financial year.




## Retention

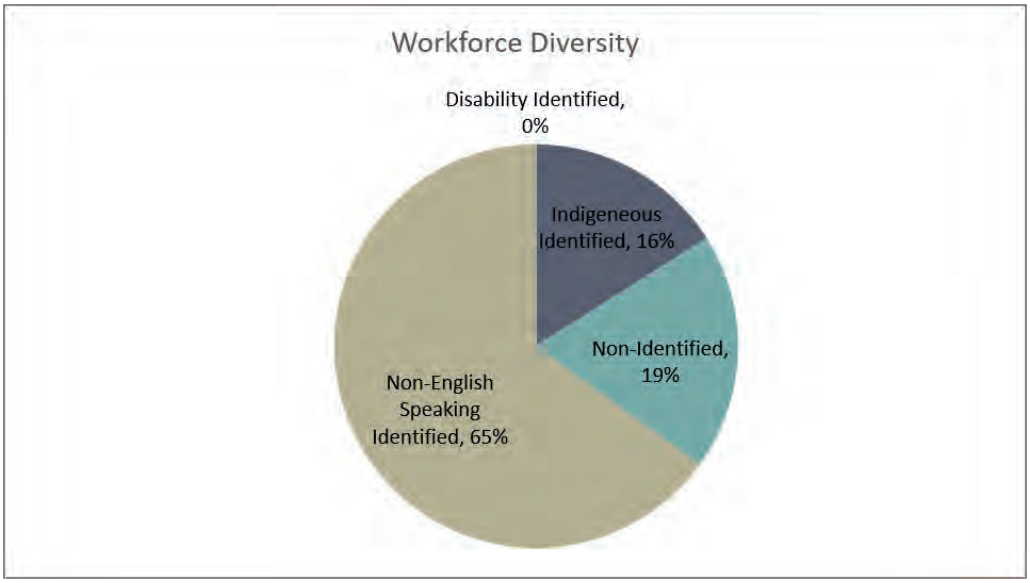
IIn 2025-26, 70% of the workforce had been employed by the Authority for less than five years which is 3% increase to the last reporting period, with 27% of employees having been with the Authority for the short-term project and funding-based positions. This year 16% of the workforce had been employed by the Authority for 10 years or more, which is 3% lower than the prior reporting period.



## Diversity

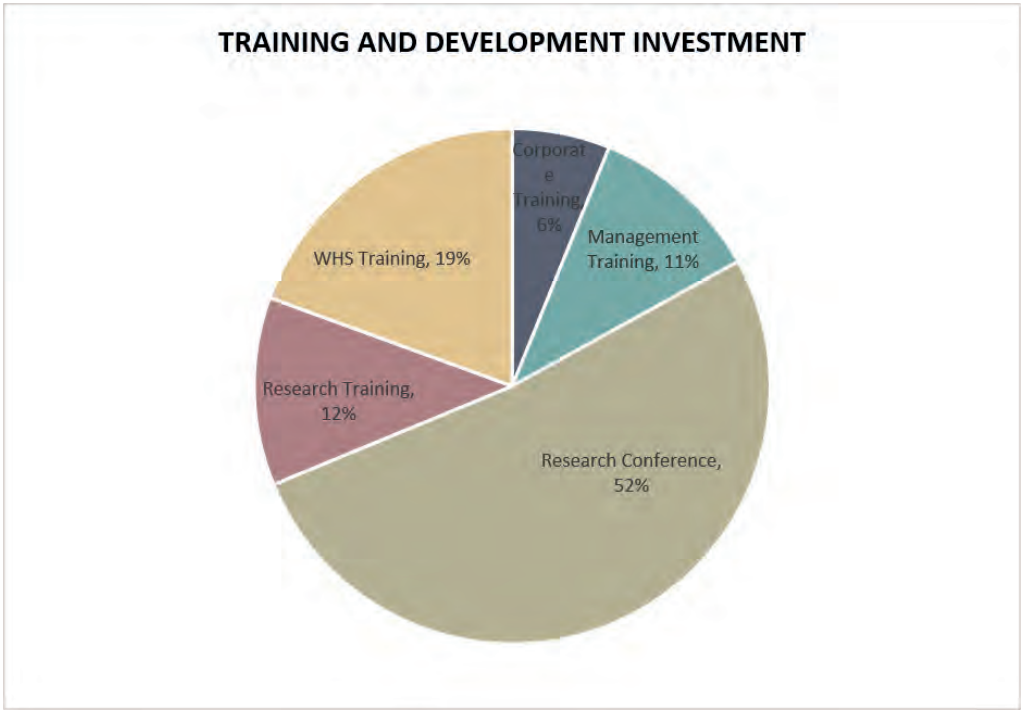
The Authority is committed to the principles of inclusion, equity and diversity. Overall, this year the percentage of staff identifying as Indigenous increased from 10% to 16%. The percentage of staff identifying as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background decreased from 25% to 19%. The percentage of staff that identified as having a disability remained at 0% for the sixth year in a row. In 2025-26 the Authority continued to mandate the special measures principles to increase Aboriginal employment however, it has been noted that Aboriginal applicants for positions are uncommon. In 2025-26 there continued to be negligible Aboriginal applicants for professional stream roles which was the majority of recruitment actions. 7 of the 13 non-professional or technical stream position advertised in 2025-26 successfully recruited an Aboriginal applicant.

The Authority remains committed to increasing its Aboriginal employee numbers and its target of 20%.




## Training and development

In 2025-26, the Authority continued to invest in training and development with $25,406 spent on a range of programs. Over $4,900 was invested in work health and safety (WHS) training, in topics such as remote first aid and four-wheel-drive defensive driving for research officers as well as other staff that undertake remote travel. This training helps ensure the safety of our staff travelling in remote areas. All staff that undertake remote fieldwork or travel regularly are encouraged to attend refresher training every year prior to the peak-travel season and regular safety and call in procedures are refreshed with staff and consultants to ensure consistent safety practices are in place. Over $2,700 was invested in emerging leaders of the Authority to undergo Leadership for New Managers and Emerging Leaders Training programs run through the Department of Corporate Digital Development. The remaining 58% of the expenses were on general corporate training and staff attending the Australian Anthropological Society conference.



# STAFF PROFILES



Davenport Range NT



## Peter Madden
Senior Anthropologist

Peter Madden brings extensive experience, deep cultural understanding and a long-standing commitment to sacred site protection to his role as Senior Anthropology Researcher with the Authority.

Peter first joined the Authority in 2008 and returned in 2024 after several years working in heritage and cultural heritage protection roles elsewhere in Australia. Over the course of his career, he has worked extensively with Aboriginal communities and custodians across northern Australia and has spent more than 13 years living and working in the Northern Territory.

As a Senior Anthropology Researcher, Peter undertakes research and consultations that support Authority Certificate applications. This work involves travelling throughout the Northern Territory, meeting with Aboriginal custodians on Country and consulting about sacred site constraints that may be affected by proposed developments. Through these consultations, Peter helps ensure sacred sites are appropriately identified and protected while supporting informed decision-making regarding land use and development.

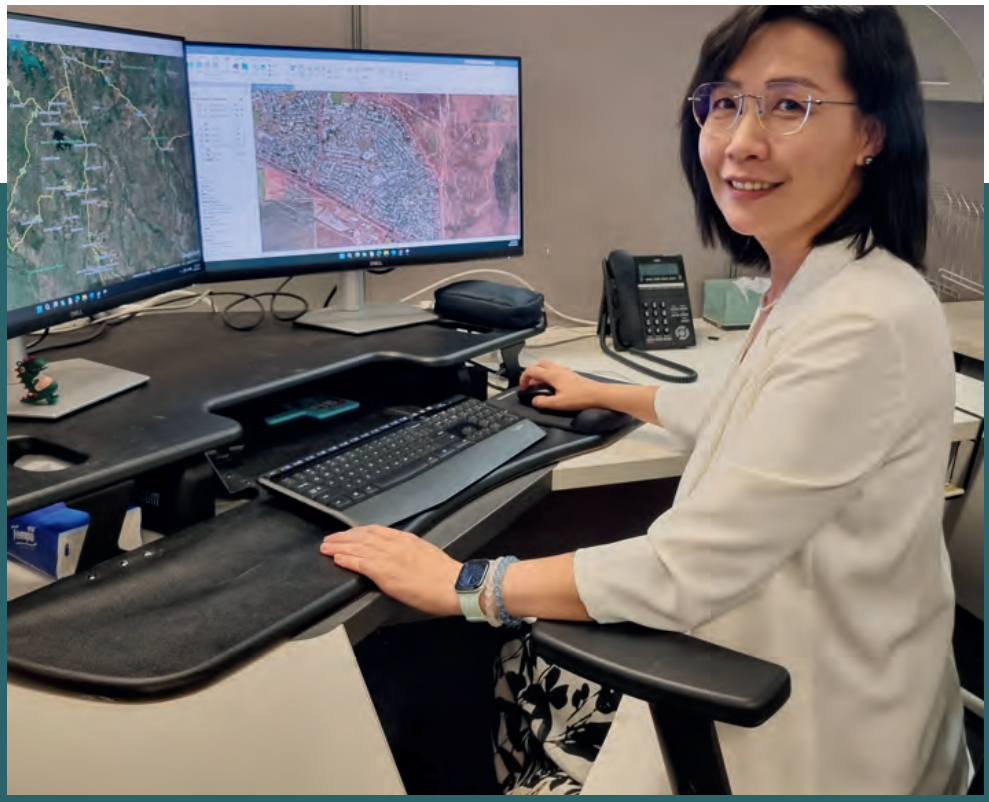
A significant part of Peter's work involves travelling to remote communities and culturally significant locations that are often only accessible by four-wheel drive. He considers it a privilege to spend time on Country with custodians and to be trusted with knowledge about places of deep cultural significance.

What Peter enjoys most about his role is the opportunity to meet people from across the Territory and contribute to the protection of sacred sites in an ever-changing world.

One of Peter's earliest projects with the Authority involved an application to extend a powerline to a remote outstation. Working closely with custodians, he observed how careful planning and consultation allowed the project to proceed while protecting an important sacred site. Seeing that infrastructure still in place today remains a reminder of the practical and lasting impact of the Authority's work.

Peter's favourite quote, from Martin Luther King Jr., is:

> *"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."*



## Baole Yu

Land Information Officer

Baole Yu joined the Authority in March 2025 and has quickly become a valued member of the team, bringing strong expertise in spatial analysis and a collaborative approach to her work. Having arrived in the Northern Territory in 2023, Baole has developed a deep appreciation for the region's unique landscapes and communities, which continue to inspire both her professional and personal journey.

As a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist, Baole supports the Authority's operational and strategic objectives through mapping, spatial data management and analysis. Her work helps ensure spatial information is accurately captured, maintained and applied to support informed decision-making across the organisation. She works closely with colleagues across multiple teams to integrate spatial insights into projects and operational outcomes.

Prior to joining the Authority, Baole worked as a forestry engineer for 10 years, where GIS formed a central part of her professional practice. Her experience in land management and spatial analysis provided a strong foundation for her current role supporting the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites.

In December 2025, Baole achieved a significant personal and professional milestone when she was awarded a PhD in Ecology. Her doctoral studies strengthened her analytical expertise and reinforced her commitment to research-informed practice.

What Baole values most about working at the Authority is its culture of professionalism, kindness and mutual support. She describes the organisation as a welcoming environment where people are encouraged to contribute, learn and grow.

Baole enjoys the opportunity to apply her skills in meaningful ways while continuing to build her career in the Northern Territory. Through her work, she contributes to the management of information that supports the Authority's statutory functions and the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites across the Territory.

Baole approaches both work and life with the philosophy:

> "Do everything with your whole heart and release the outcome to the universe."

She says this reflects her commitment to giving her best while embracing new challenges and opportunities.



## Darren Johnson
Director of Policy and Governance

Darren Johnson joined the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in March 2026, bringing extensive leadership experience and a lifelong connection to the Northern Territory.

A proud Wakaya man, Darren's family comes from the Barkly region near the Queensland border. Having lived and worked across the Territory, including Darwin, Katherine, Jabiru, Pine Creek, Nhulunbuy, Galiwinku, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and his homeland in the Barkly region, he brings a deep understanding of the communities, cultures and landscapes that shape the Northern Territory.

As Director Policy and Governance, Darren leads the Authority's policy, governance, strategic planning and organisational improvement functions. He works closely with the Chief Executive Officer, Board and Executive Management Group to strengthen governance systems, support strategic initiatives and ensure the Authority is well positioned to meet future challenges and opportunities.

A key aspect of Darren's role involves building strong relationships, navigating complex issues and helping deliver practical outcomes that support the Authority's statutory responsibilities.

Before joining the Authority, Darren held a range of senior leadership positions across the Northern Territory Government, including Director Land Tenure Unit; Director Homelands, Outstations and Town Camps; Regional Director Housing for Arafura, Arnhem and Central Australia; Director Community Resilience and Engagement Command with Northern Territory Police; and Director Aboriginal Interpreter Services.

Darren's career has been driven by a commitment to achieving positive outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities. What he values most about working at the Authority is the opportunity to work alongside passionate people dedicated to protecting Aboriginal sacred sites and supporting Aboriginal custodians.

Outside his professional roles, Darren has contributed extensively through community and voluntary leadership positions, including Chairperson of CAAPS Aboriginal Corporation, Director of Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation and Director of YMCA Northern Territory. He currently serves as a Director of Reconciliation Northern Territory and is a member of the Power and Water Reconciliation Action Committee.

A strong advocate for lifelong learning, Darren has completed a Graduate Certificate in Public Sector Management, Diplomas in Contract Management, Project Management and Frontline Management, together with qualifications in training, assessment, administration and electrotechnology.

Darren believes that collaboration, respect and shared purpose are essential to achieving meaningful outcomes. A quote that continues to guide his approach to leadership is:

*"This too shall pass."*

For Darren, it is a reminder to remain grounded in times of success, resilient in times of challenge and focused on the people who ultimately benefit from the work being done.

# PROFFESIONAL DEVELOPMENT




Anzac Hill Lookout, NT

# 2026 AUSTRALIAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY CONFERENCE 10-12 JUNE 2026

In June 2026, members of the Authority's research team attended the Australian Anthropological Society (AAS) Conference in Mparntwe (Alice Springs). The conference was held in Alice Springs for the first time and brought together anthropologists, researchers and practitioners from across Australia to discuss contemporary anthropological research and practice.

The conference theme, Lines, Layers, Depth, explored the cultural, historical, social and environmental dimensions of Mparntwe and Central Australia, providing a valuable opportunity for participants to engage with issues relevant to Aboriginal culture, heritage and applied anthropology.

Six members of the Authority's research team contributed to the conference program, presenting papers on topics including sacred landscapes, spatial and territorial politics, food and culture, the anthropology of emotions and reflections on anthropological practice in Australia.

Participation in the conference enabled staff to strengthen professional networks, engage with current research and explore emerging ideas relevant to the Authority's work. A number of conference sessions focused on applied anthropology, Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage protection, providing valuable insights to support the Authority's ongoing statutory functions.

The Authority values participation in professional forums such as the AAS Conference as part of its commitment to maintaining professional capability and supporting the continuing development of its research staff.



**AAPA Staff presenting at the AAS Conference**



**AAPA Staff attending the AAS Conference in Alice Springs Mparntwe**



Pellew Islands NT

# WELLBEING AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The Authority remains committed to supporting flexible work arrangements that assist staff to balance their professional, family and personal responsibilities. Flexible work arrangements contribute to staff wellbeing, workforce participation and employee retention, while supporting a positive and productive workplace culture.

During 2025-26, four staff members were employed on a part-time basis to accommodate family and lifestyle commitments. A further 17 staff members maintained flexible work arrangements that varied standard working hours.

In total, 43% of the Authority's workforce participated in flexible work arrangements during the year, including part-time work and flexible working hours.

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Authority continued to promote the Employee Assistance Program during 2025-26, providing staff and their immediate family members with access to free and confidential counselling services through the Northern Territory Government's whole-of-government arrangement.

During the reporting period, staff and family members accessed 67 individual counselling sessions.

## FLU VACCINATION PROGRAM

The Authority participated in the Northern Territory Government's annual influenza vaccination program in both Darwin and Alice Springs. Where staff were unable to access the program directly, reimbursement was provided for vaccination costs incurred elsewhere.

During 2025-26, approximately 54% of staff accessed the influenza vaccination program.

## CHRISTMAS CLOSEDOWN

The Authority undertook a Christmas closedown period during 2025-26, enabling staff to take a break between Christmas and New Year. Staff accessed recreation leave during this period.

The Christmas closedown supports employee wellbeing and recognises the importance of providing staff with an opportunity to rest and recharge following a demanding year of service delivery.

# WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Authority is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy workplace for all staff. Given the significant amount of travel required to consult with Aboriginal custodians and undertake fieldwork across remote areas of the Northern Territory, remote travel and staff welfare continued to be recognised as the Authority's highest organisational risk during 2025-26.

To manage this risk, the Authority maintains comprehensive safety protocols, including remote travel procedures, mandatory call-in arrangements and regular training in remote first aid and four-wheel-drive defensive driving. New research staff also participate in supervised fieldwork activities to ensure they are familiar with remote travel requirements, field safety procedures and the Authority's operational practices.

During 2025-26, the Authority continued to review and strengthen its risk management framework for remote travel. This included a review of the Authority's Remote Vehicle Policy and ongoing assessment of vehicle, communication and field safety procedures.

There were three incidents during the reporting period that required vehicle recovery assistance. No staff injuries were reported in connection with these incidents.



Flooding in Darwin

## WORKPLACE INCIDENTS

The Authority remains committed to promoting a strong safety culture and ensuring staff are appropriately supported while undertaking their duties across the Northern Territory.

There were no new workers compensation claims during 2025-26.


AAPA Vehicles out on fieldwork

# PEOPLE MATTER SURVEY

The Authority achieved a strong result in the 2025 People Matter Survey, with 75% of staff participating in the survey (30 of 40 staff).

Overall results reflected positive employee engagement and confidence in the organisation. Eighty-two per cent of survey measures exceeded Northern Territory Public Sector benchmarks, while 54% of measures improved compared with the 2023 survey results.

Employee engagement increased by seven percentage points to 79%, and employee satisfaction reached 81%, ranking amongst the highest results across the Northern Territory Public Sector.

Staff demonstrated a strong connection to the Authority's work and purpose, with all respondents agreeing that their work is important and contributes to the Authority's objectives.

The survey also identified positive improvements in perceptions of manager capability, particularly in relation to support, feedback and leadership behaviours consistent with Northern Territory Public Sector values.

As with all surveys, opportunities for improvement were also identified. Areas of continued focus include executive communication and visibility, the timeliness of information sharing and decision-making, and strengthening expectations regarding workplace conduct and accountability.

The Authority has implemented, and continues to progress, targeted actions in response to staff feedback. This includes regular whole-of-agency staff briefings, enhanced communication processes and initiatives aimed at strengthening organisational performance, engagement and workplace culture.





Alice Springs Macdonnell Ranges NT



# FINANCIAL REPORT



## FINANCIAL STATEMENT OVERVIEW FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) is a statutory authority established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 (NT)* to administer sacred site protection in the Northern Territory.

In 2025-26, The Authority continued to see a high demand for services for large scale projects from 2024-25. This included multiple government Agencies and private companies engaging with the Authority for medium term (12 month) projects to issue certificates in their areas of operations. This spans across major infrastructure and mining explorations as well as national and territory parks and tourism destinations. The Authority achieved $6.828 million in self-generated revenue and an overall surplus budget position of $0.205 million.

This year saw a continuation of infrastructure Authority Certificates applications including communications, power, water and sewage infrastructure (48%) which generated $3.189 million or 51% of self-generated revenue. Mining, oil and gas equated to 13% of all Authority Certificates issued in 2025-26 which translated to 13% or $0.821 million of revenue generated. Tourism equated to 6% of certificates issued which generated $0.234 million or 4% of revenue generated. Aboriginal Community Development represented 8% of certificates issued or 9% ($0.561 million) of revenue generated.

The Authority received output appropriation of $3.323 million to assist in protecting sacred sites across the Northern Territory. The success of this investment is evident through the issuing of 119 Authority Certificates and the generation of $4.482 million in revenue recording 198 sacred sites and registering 5 sacred sites. The Authority also held four Authority Board meetings and successfully prosecuted 1 matter before the local courts and commenced 2 new prosecutions.

The Authority achieved a landmark financial outcome in 2025-26, increasing its self-generated revenue from $4.482 million in 2024-25 to $6.828 million in 2025-26. This represented the highest level of self-generated revenue ever achieved by the Authority, demonstrating sustained growth in demand for the Authority's services and the organisations strong operational performance. The additional $6.828 million generated during the year supported the continued engagement of consultant anthropologists, enabling the Authority to respond to increasing workloads while maintaining its core objective of protecting Aboriginal sacred sites throughout the Northern Territory.

Overall, the Authority increased its purchase of goods and services budget from $2.785 million in 2024-25 to $4.304 million in 2025-26. This over expenditure is predominantly related to Authority Certificate expenses for consultants and custodians ($1.515 million), Desktop (0.2 million) and others miscellaneous expense ($0.214 million).

A significant prosecution outcome was achieved in January 2026 when Mrs Kimberley Smith was convicted in the Northern Territory Local Court for undertaking works on the registered Putyenge Sacred Site at the historic Tosca Mine on Ammaroo Station without an Authority Certificate and without the required mining approvals. The matter was jointly prosecuted by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and the Department of Mining and Energy Mrs Smith recieved a four-month term of imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, was fined $28,000 and prohibited from entering the Northern Territory for 18 months.

This was the first time a person and recieved a custodial sentence for an offence under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989*, representing a landmark outcome for the protection of sacred sites and reinforcing the importance of respecting custodial authority and statutory approval processes.

Employee related costs continued to be the largest expense to the Authority in 2025-26 totaling $5.640 million, However, a minor overspend of $0.257 millon was experienced due to one off seperation payments

2025-26 was again a highly successful year for the Authority, delivering 119 Authority Certificates with a further 106 Authority Certificates underway.

## CERTIFICATION OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

We certify that the attached financial statements for the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority have been prepared based on proper accounts and records in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and with the requirements as prescribed in the *Financial Management Act 1995* and Treasurer's Directions.
We further state that the information set out in the comprehensive operating statement, balance sheet, statement of changes in equity, cash flow statement, and notes to and forming part of the financial statements, presents fairly the financial performance and cash flows for the year ended 30 June 2026 and the financial position on that date.
At the time of signing, we are not aware of any circumstances that would render the particulars included in the financial statements misleading or inaccurate.

Robert Pocock
Chief Executive Officer
31 August 2026

Andrew Harvey
Director Corporate Services
31 August 2026

## COMPREHENSIVE OPERATING STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

| | Note | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | $000 | $000 |
| **INCOME** | | | |
| Appropriation | 4 | | |
| Output | | 3,323 | 3,243 |
| Sales of goods and services | 5 | 6,828 | 4,482 |
| Goods and services received free of charge | 6 | 1,130 | 971 |
| Other income | | 6 | 8 |
| **TOTAL INCOME** | 3 | **11,287** | **8,703** |
| **EXPENSES** | | | |
| Employee benefits expense | 7 | 5,640 | 4,737 |
| Administrative expenses | | | |
| Property management | | 38 | 32 |
| Purchases of goods and services | 8 | 4,266 | 2,753 |
| Depreciation and amortisation | 13,14 | 8 | 11 |
| Other administrative expenses[1] | | 1,130 | 970 |
| **TOTAL EXPENSES** | 3 | **11,082** | **8,504** |
| **NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)** | | **205** | **199** |
| **COMPREHENSIVE RESULT** | | **205** | **199** |

[1] *Includes DCDD service charges and DLI repairs and maintenance service charges.*

*The comprehensive operating statement is to be read in conjunction with the notes to the financial statements.*

## BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2026

| | Note | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | $000 | $000 |
| **ASSETS** | | | |
| **Current assets** | | | |
| Cash and deposits | 10 | 2,096 | 2,426 |
| Receivables | 12 | 1,120 | 770 |
| **Total current assets** | | **3,216** | **3,196** |
| **Non-current assets** | | | |
| Property, plant and equipment | 13, 18 | 13 | 20 |
| Intangibles | 14, 18 | - | - |
| **Total non-current assets** | | **13** | **20** |
| **TOTAL ASSETS** | | **3,229** | **3,216** |
| **LIABILITIES** | | | |
| **Current liabilities** | | | |
| Payables | 15 | 493 | 270 |
| Provisions | 16 | 552 | 449 |
| Other liabilities | 17 | - | 518 |
| **Total current liabilities** | | **1,045** | **1,238** |
| **Total non-current liabilities** | | **-** | **-** |
| **TOTAL LIABILITIES** | | **1,045** | **1,238** |
| **NET ASSETS** | | 2,184 | 1,979 |
| **EQUITY** | | | |
| Capital | | (2,379) | (2,379) |
| Accumulated funds | | 4,563 | 4,358 |
| **TOTAL EQUITY** | | **2,184** | **1,979** |

*The balance sheet is to be read in conjunction with the notes to the financial statements.*

## STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

| | Note | Equity at 1 July | Comprehensive result | Transactions with owners in their capacity as owners | Equity at 30 June |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | $000 | $000 | $000 | $000 |
| **2026** | | | | | |
| Accumulated funds | | (4,353) | (205) | - | (4,558) |
| Transfers from reserves | | (5) | - | - | (5) |
| | | (4,358) | (205) | - | (4,563) |
| **Capital – transactions with owners** | | | | | |
| Equity injections | | | | | |
| Capital appropriation | | (564) | - | - | (564) |
| Equity transfers in | | (1,195) | - | - | (1,195) |
| Other equity injections | | (57) | - | - | (57) |
| Total Equity injections | | (1,816) | - | - | (1,816) |
| Equity withdrawals | | | | | |
| Capital withdrawal[d] | | 4,195 | - | - | 4,195 |
| | | 2,379 | | - | 2,379 |
| **Total Capital – Transactions with owners** | | | | | |
| **Total equity** | | **(1,979)** | **(205)** | - | **(2,184)** |
| **2025** | | | | | |
| Accumulated funds | | (4,154) | (199) | - | (4,353) |
| Transfers from reserves | | (5) | - | - | (5) |
| | | (4,159) | (199) | - | (4,358) |
| **Capital – transactions with owners** | | | | | |
| Equity injections | | | | | |
| Capital appropriation | | (564) | - | - | (564) |
| Equity transfers in | | (1,195) | - | - | (1,195) |
| Other equity injections | | (57) | - | - | (57) |
| **Total equity injections** | | (1,816) | - | - | (1,816) |
| Equity withdrawals | | | | | |
| Capital withdrawal[d] | | 4,195 | - | - | 4,195 |
| **Total Capital – Transactions with owners** | | 2,379 | | - | 2,379 |
| **Total equity** | | **(1,779)** | **(199)** | - | **(1,979)** |

*The statement of changes in equity is to be read in conjunction with the notes to the financial statements.*

## CASH FLOW STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

| | Note | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | $000 | $000 |
| **CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES** | | | |
| Appropriation received | | | |
| Output | 4 | 3,323 | 3,243 |
| Receipts from sales of goods and services | | 6,254 | 4,591 |
| **Total operating receipts** | | **9,577** | **7,834** |
| **Operating payments** | | | |
| Payments to employees | | (5,528) | (4,712) |
| Payments for goods and services | | (4,379) | (2,884) |
| **Total operating payments** | | **(9,907)** | **(7,597)** |
| **Net cash from/(used in) operating activities** | 11 | **(330)** | **237** |
| **CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES** | | | |
| **Investing payments** | | | |
| Purchases of non-financial assets | | - | (20) |
| **Total investing payments** | | **-** | **(20)** |
| **Net cash from/(used in) investing activities** | | **-** | **(20)** |
| **CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES** | | | |
| Equity withdrawals | | - | - |
| **Total financing payments** | | **-** | **-** |
| **Net cash from/(used in) financing activities** | 11 | **-** | **-** |
| Net increase/(decrease) in cash held | | (330) | 217 |
| Cash at beginning of financial year | | 2,426 | 2,209 |
| **CASH AT END OF FINANCIAL YEAR** | 15 | **2,096** | **2,426** |

*The cash flow statement is to be read in conjunction with the notes to the financial statements.*

# INDEX OF NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS


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## 1. OBJECTIVES AND FUNDING

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) is an independent statutory authority established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 (NT)*. The Authority is responsible for overseeing the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites on land and sea across the Northern Territory and recognising and respecting the interests of Custodians of sacred sites, landowners and developers for the benefit of all Territorians. Additional information in relation to the Authority and its principal activities may be found in the introduction of the annual report.

The Authority receives a level of appropriation from the Northern Territory Government and generates goods and services income derived from providing Authority Certificates to clients to maintain its operations. Employee expenses of $5.640 million continued to be the largest expense accounting for 51% of total expenditure.

The Authority achieved a surplus of $0.205 million and accomplished $6.828 million in goods and services revenue. This revenue was the outcome of the issuing of 119 Authority Certificates in 2025-26; breakdown of certificate issued per industry can be found in the financial statement overview of this report.

In 2025-26, 119 Authority Certificates were issued of which, 52 can be attributed to the contracting of 20 anthropological consultants over 45 contracts costing the Authority $1.5 million and generating $2.1 million in revenue, 31% of total revenue.

2025-26 also saw a decrease in Authority Board meeting costs with a decrease in the number of board meetings being held from six to four in 2025-26. The Authority Board costs decreased by $0.129 million to $0.108 million compared to $0.237 million in 2024-25 due to the reduced number of meetings and all meetings being held in Darwin.

Legal costs ($0.177 million) increased slightly (9%) in 2025-26 due to costs associated with regulatory compliance, legal advice, litigation support and other corporate governance matters. Legal expenditure during the year also included costs associated with enforcement and prosecution activities under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act.

For reporting purposes outputs delivered by the Authority are summarised into two output groups. Note 3 provides summarised financial information in the form of a comprehensive operating statement by the output group.

## 2. STATEMENT OF MATERIAL ACCOUNTING POLICY INFORMATION

**a) Statement of compliance**

**i. Compliance framework**

These financial statements are general purpose financial statements and have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Financial Management Act 1995*, related Treasurer's Directions and Australian Accounting Standards and Interpretations issued by the Australian Accounting Standards Board. The *Financial Management Act 1995* requires the Authority to prepare financial statements for the year ended 30 June based on the form determined by the Treasurer. The form of agency financial statements should include:

1) a certification of the financial statements

2) a comprehensive operating statement

3) a balance sheet

4) a statement of changes in equity

5) a cash flow statement; and

6) applicable explanatory notes to the financial statements.

**ii. Standards and interpretations effective from 2025-26 financial year**

Several amendments and interpretations have been issued that apply to the current reporting period but are considered to have no or minimal impact on public sector reporting.

**iii. Standards and interpretations issued but not yet effective**

No Australian accounting standards have been adopted early for 2025-26 financial year.

**b) Agency and Territory items**

The financial statements of the Authority include income, expenses, assets, liabilities and equity over which the Authority has control (agency items) and can utilise to further its own objectives. Certain items, while managed by the Authority, are administered and recorded by the Territory rather than the Authority (Territory items).

Territory items are recognised and recorded in the Central Holding Authority as discussed below.

**Central Holding Authority**

The Central Holding Authority is the 'parent body' that represents the government's ownership interest in government-controlled entities.

The Central Holding Authority also records all Territory items, such as income, expenses, assets and liabilities controlled by the government and managed by agencies on behalf of the government. The main Territory item is Territory income, which includes taxation and royalty revenue, Commonwealth general purpose funding (such as GST revenue), fines, and statutory fees and charges.

The Central Holding Authority also holds certain Territory assets not assigned to agencies as well as certain Territory liabilities that are not practical or effective to assign to individual agencies such as unfunded superannuation and long service leave.

The Central Holding Authority recognises and records all Territory items, and as such, these items are not included in the Authority's financial statements. However, as the Authority is accountable for certain Territory items managed on behalf of government, these items have been separately disclosed in Note 36 – Schedule of administered Territory items.

**c) Presentation and rounding of amounts**

Amounts in the financial statements and notes to the financial statements are presented in Australian dollars and have been rounded to the nearest thousand dollars, with amounts of $500 or less being rounded down to zero. Figures in the financial statements and notes may not equate due to rounding.

**d) Contributions by and distributions to government**

The Authority may receive contributions from government where the government is acting as owner of the Authority. Conversely, the Authority may make distributions to government. In accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1995* and Treasurer's

Directions, certain types of contributions and distributions, including those relating to administrative restructures, have been designated as contributions by, and distributions to, government. These designated contributions and distributions are treated by the Authority as adjustments to equity.

The statement of changes in equity provides additional information in relation to contributions by, and distributions to, government.

## 3. COMPREHENSIVE OPERATING STATEMENT BY OUTPUT GROUP

| | | Protection of Sacred Sites | | Corporate and Shared Services | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Note | 2026 | 2025 | 2026 | 2025 | 2026 | 2025 |
| | | $000 | $000 | $000 | $000 | $000 | $000 |
| **INCOME** | | | | | | | |
| Appropriation | 4 | | | | | | |
| Output | | 2,658 | 2,594 | 665 | 649 | 3,323 | 3,243 |
| Sales of goods and services | 5 | 6,828 | 4,482 | | | 6,828 | 4,482 |
| Goods and services received free of charge | 6 | 904 | 777 | 226 | 194 | 1,130 | 971 |
| Other income | | - | - | 6 | 8 | 6 | 8 |
| **TOTAL INCOME** | | **10,390** | **7,853** | **897** | **851** | **11,287** | **8,704** |
| **EXPENSES** | | | | | | | |
| Employee expenses | 10 | 4,592 | 3,902 | 1,048 | 835 | 5,640 | 4,737 |
| Administrative expenses | | | | | | | |
| Property management | | 5 | 7 | 33 | 25 | 38 | 32 |
| Purchases of goods and services | 11 | 3,813 | 2,345 | 453 | 408 | 4,266 | 2,753 |
| Repairs and maintenance | | | | | | | |
| Depreciation and amortisation | 21,22,23 | - | 2 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 11 |
| Other administrative expenses[1] | | 904 | 777 | 226 | 194 | 1,130 | 971 |
| **TOTAL EXPENSES** | | **9,314** | **7,033** | **1,768** | **1,471** | **11,082** | **8,504** |
| **NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)** | | **1,076** | **820** | **(871)** | **(620)** | **205** | **199** |
| **COMPREHENSIVE RESULT** | | **1,076** | **820** | **(871)** | **(620)** | **205** | **199** |

[1] Includes DCDD service charges and DLI repairs and maintenance service charges.

*This comprehensive operating statement by output group is to be read in conjunction with the notes to the financial statements.*

## 4. APPROPRIATION

| | 2026 | | | 2025 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 Revenue from contracts with customers | $000 Other | $000 Total | $000 Revenue from contracts with customers | $000 Other | $000 Total |
| Output Commonwealth | 0 | 3,323 | 3,323 | 0 | 3,243 | 3,243 |
| **Total appropriation in the operating statement** | **0** | **3,323** | **3,323** | **0** | **3,243** | **3,243** |

Output appropriation is the operating payment to the Authority for the outputs they provide as specified in the *Appropriation Act.* It does not include any allowance for major non-cash costs such as depreciation. Output appropriations do not have sufficiently specific performance obligations and recognised on receipt of funds.

Where appropriation received has an enforceable contract with sufficiently specific performance obligations, the transaction is accounted for under AASB 15 as revenue from contracts with customers. In this case, revenue is recognised as and when goods and or services are transferred to the customer or third-party beneficiary. Otherwise, revenue is recognised when the Authority gains control of the funds.

Appropriations accounted as revenue from contracts with customers have been disaggregated below into categories to enable users of these financial statements to understand the nature, amount, timing and uncertainty of income and cash flows. These categories include a description of the type of product or service line, type of customer and timing of transfer of goods and services.

## 5. SALES OF GOODS AND SERVICES

| | 2026 | | | 2025 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 Revenue from contracts with customers | $000 Other | $000 Total | $000 Revenue from contracts with customers | $000 Other | $000 Total |
| Sale of goods and service delivery revenue | 6,828 | - | 6,828 | 3,295 | 1,187 | 4,482 |
| **Total sales of goods and services** | **6,828**[1] | **-** | **6,828** | **3,295** | **1,187** | **4,482** |

[1] NOTE: Certain prior year comparative amounts have been reclassified/represented to ensure consistency with the current year's presentation.

### Rendering of services

Revenue from rendering of services is recognised when the Authority satisfies the performance obligation by transferring the promised services. The service the Authority provides is an Authority Certificate that protects sacred sites from damage by setting out conditions for using and carrying out works proposed by a proponent on an area of land and/or sea. These conditions relate to sacred sites in the area or in the vicinity of the proposed works, so that they are not damaged.It is a legal document issued under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* (NT) that indemnifies the holder against prosecution under the Act for damage to sacred sites in the area of the Authority Certificate provided the proposed work or use has been carried out in accordance with the conditions of the Authority Certificate. The Authority typically satisfies its performance obligations once the Authority Certificate conditions have been drafted for delegate approval and all costs have been finalised.

Sales of goods and services accounted as revenue from contracts with customers have been disaggregated below into categories to enable users of these financial statements to understand the nature, amount, timing and uncertainty of income and cash flows. These categories include a description of the type of product or service line, type of customer and timing of transfer of goods and services.

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Type of good and service:** | | |
| Service delivery | 6,828 | 4,482 |
| Other | | |
| **Total revenue from contracts with customers** | **6,828** | **4,482** |
| | | |
| **Type of customer:** | | |
| Commonwealth Government | 534 | 277 |
| State and territory governments | 1,932 | 1,380 |
| Non-government entities | 4,362 | 2,824 |
| **Total revenue from contracts with customers** | 6,828 | 4,482 |
| | | |
| **Timing of transfer of goods and services:** | | |
| Point in time | 6,828 | 4,482 |
| **Total revenue from contracts with customers** | **6,828** | **4,482** |

## 6. GOODS AND SERVICES RECEIVED FREE OF CHARGE

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| Corporate and information services | 1,125 | 962 |
| Repairs and maintenance | 5 | 9 |
| **Total goods and services received free of charge** | **1,130** | **971** |

Resources received free of charge are recognised as revenue when, and only when, a fair value can be reliably determined, and the services would have been purchased if they had not been donated. Use of those resources is recognised as an expense. Resources received free of charge are recorded as either revenue or gains depending on their nature.

Repairs and maintenance expenses incurred on the Authority's assets and costs associated with administration of these expenses are centralised and in the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure on behalf of the Authority, and form part of goods and services received free of charge by the Authority.

In addition, the following corporate services staff and functions are centralised and provided by Department of Corporate and Digital Development on behalf of the Authority and form part of goods and services received free of charge by the Authority:

- financial services including accounts receivable, accounts payable and payroll.
- employment and workforce services.
- information management services.
- procurement services.
- property leasing services.

## 7. EMPLOYEE BENEFITS EXPENSE

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| Salaries and wages | 4,705 | 3,986 |
| Long Service Leave | (1) | - |
| Superannuation expenses | 596 | 489 |
| Fringe benefits tax | 19 | 17 |
| Payroll tax | 321 | 246 |
| **Total employee benefits expense** | **5,640** | **4,737** |

The number of full-time equivalent employees for 2025-26 was 37.29 (2024-25: 31.93).

Salaries and wages are recognised in the reporting period when the employee renders services to the Territory Government. It includes recreation leave, labour hire costs, allowances and other benefits, which are recognised in the reporting period when employees are entitled to the benefit or when incurred.

The recognition and measurement policy for employee benefits is detailed in Note 15: Payables and Note 16: Provisions.

## 8. PURCHASES OF GOODS AND SERVICES

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| The net surplus/(deficit) has been arrived at after charging the following expenses: | | |
| **Goods and services expenses:** | | |
| Custodian Consultation | 746 | 548 |
| Consultants (majority Anthropological) | 2,001 | 700 |
| Information Technology Consultants | 68 | 70 |
| Media Consultant | 0 | 0 |
| Consultants[1] | 2,815 | 1,318 |
| Advertising[2] | 0 | 2 |
| Marketing and promotion[3] | 7 | 19 |
| Document production | 21 | 12 |
| Legal expenses[4] | 177 | 162 |
| Recruitment[5] | 7 | 12 |
| Training and study[6] | 25 | 38 |
| Official duty fares[7] | 316 | 123 |
| Travelling allowance | 34 | 38 |
| Information technology charges and communications | 290 | 243 |
| Motor Vehicle Expenses | 291 | 253 |
| Authority Board[8] | 108 | 237 |
| Relocation | 4 | 14 |
| Other | 171 | 284 |
| **Total purchases of goods and services** | **4,266** | **2,755** |

[1] Includes marketing, promotion and IT consultants.
[2] Does not include recruitment related advertising or advertising for marketing and promotion.
[3] Includes marketing and promotional advertising, excluding consultant expenses reported under Consultants.
[4] Includes legal fees, claim and settlement costs.
[5] Includes recruitment-related advertising costs.
[6] Reduction due to one off commitment to an Aboriginal leadership and development program.
[7] Reduction in air charter expenses (helicopter and less intra territory fares).
[8] Increase due to reduction in remote locality of board meetings.

Purchase of goods and services generally represent the day-to-day running costs incurred in normal operations, including supplies and service costs recognised in the reporting period in which they are incurred.

## 9. WRITE-OFFS, POSTPONEMENTS, WAIVER, GIFTS AND EX GRATIA PAYMENTS

There are no write-offs, waivers, postponements, gifts and ex gratia payments approved under the *Financial Management Act 1995* or other legislation that the Authority administers that need to be documented for 2024-25 or 2025-2026.

## 10. CASH AND DEPOSITS

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| Cash on hand | - | - |
| Cash at bank | 2,096 | 2,426 |
| On call or short-term deposits | - | - |
| **Total cash and deposits** | **2,096** | **2,426** |

For the purposes of the balance sheet and the cash flow statement, cash includes cash on hand, cash at bank and cash equivalents. Cash equivalents are highly liquid short-term investments that are readily convertible to cash.

## 11. CASH FLOW RECONCILIATION

**a) Reconciliation of cash**

The total of Authority 'Cash and deposits' of $2.096 million recorded in the balance sheet is consistent with that recorded as 'Cash' in the cash flow statement.

**Reconciliation of net surplus/deficit to net cash from operating activities**

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Net surplus/deficit** | 205 | 199 |
| *Non-cash items:* | | |
| Depreciation and amortisation | 8 | 11 |
| *Changes in assets and liabilities* | - | - |
| Decrease/increase in receivables | (350) | (536) |
| Decrease/increase in other assets | - | - |
| Decrease/increase in payables | 223 | 50 |
| Decrease/increase in provision for employee benefits | 21 | (12) |
| Decrease/increase in other provisions | 81 | 6 |
| Decrease/increase in other liabilities | -518 | 518 |
| **Net cash from/(used in) operating activities** | **(330)** | **237** |

## 12. RECEIVABLES

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Current** | | |
| Accounts receivable | 1,086 | 454 |
| Less: loss allowance | - | - |
| GST receivables | 26 | (2) |
| Prepayments | 8 | 6 |
| Other receivables | - | 311 |
| **Total receivables** | **1,120** | **770** |

Receivables are initially recognised when the Authority becomes a party to the contractual provisions of the instrument and are measured at fair value less any directly attributable transaction costs. Receivables include contract receivables, accounts receivable, accrued contract revenue and other receivables.

Receivables are subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method, less any impairments.

Accounts receivable and contract receivables are generally settled within 20 days and other receivables within 30 days.

The loss allowance reflects lifetime expected credit losses and represents the amount of receivables the Authority estimates are likely to be uncollectible and are considered doubtful.

**Credit risk exposure of receivables**

Receivables are monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure exposure to bad debts is not significant. The entity applies the simplified approach to measuring expected credit losses. This approach recognises a loss allowance based on lifetime expected credit losses for all accounts receivables, contracts receivables and accrued contract revenue. To measure expected credit losses, receivables have been grouped based on shared risk characteristics and days past due.

In accordance with the provisions of the FMA, receivables are written off when based on demonstrated actions to collect, there is no reasonable expectation of recovery for reasons beyond the Authority's control.

| | 2026 | | | | 2025 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Gross Receivables[b] | Loss rate | Expected credit losses | Net receivables | Gross receivables | Loss rate | Expected credit losses | Net receivables |
| | $000 | % | $000 | $000 | $000 | % | $000 | $000 |
| **Internal receivables** | | | | | | | | |
| Not overdue | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overdue for less than 30 days | 34 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overdue for 30 to 60 days | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overdue for more than 60 days | 186 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total internal receivables** | **220** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **0** |
| **External receivables** | | | | | | | | |
| Not overdue | 325 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 386 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overdue for less than 30 days | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overdue for 30 to 60 days | 236 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overdue for more than 60 days | 305 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 68 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total external receivables** | **866** | **0** | **0** | **0** | **454** | **0** | **0** | **0** |

Total amounts disclosed exclude statutory amounts and prepayments as these do not meet the definition of a financial instrument and therefore will not reconcile the receivables note. It also excludes accrued contract revenue where no loss allowance has been provided.

**Reconciliation of loss allowance for receivables**

| | 2026 $000 | 2025 $000 |
|---|---|---|
| **Internal receivables** | | |
| Opening balance | 0 | 0 |
| Written off during the year | 0 | 0 |
| Recovered during the year | 0 | 0 |
| Increase/decrease in allowance recognised in profit or loss | 0 | 0 |
| **Total internal receivables** | **0** | **0** |
| | | |
| **External receivables** | | |
| Opening balance | 0 | 0 |
| Written off during the year | 0 | 0 |
| Recovered during the year | 0 | 0 |
| Increase/decrease in allowance recognised in profit or loss | 0 | 0 |
| **Total external receivables** | **0** | **0** |

## 13. PROPERTY, PLANT AND EQUIPMENT

### a) Total property, plant and equipment

| | 2026 $000 | 2025 $000 |
|---|---|---|
| **Plant and equipment** | | |
| At fair value | 1,436 | 1,436 |
| Less: accumulated depreciation | (1,436) | (1,432) |
| | - | 4 |
| **Computer Hardware** | | |
| At fair value | 37 | 37 |
| Less: accumulated amortisation | (24) | (20) |
| | 13 | 16 |
| **Total property, plant and equipment** | **13** | **20** |

**Reconciliation of carrying amount of property, plant and equipment**

A reconciliation of the carrying amount of property, plant and equipment at the beginning and end year is set out below:

| **2026** | Plant and equipment | Computer Hardware | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 |
| Carrying amount as at 1 July | 4 | 16 | **20** |
| Additions | - | - | **-** |
| Depreciation/amortisation expense | (4) | (4) | **(8)** |
| **Carrying amount as at 30 June** | **-** | **13**[1] | **13**[1] |

| **2025** | Plant and equipment | Computer Hardware | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 |
| Carrying amount as at 1 July | 8 | 2 | **10** |
| Additions | - | 20 | **20** |
| Depreciation/amortisation expense | (4) | (5) | **(10)** |
| **Carrying amount as at 30 June** | **4** | **16** | **20** |

[1] The carrying amount at 30 June reflects a rounding adjustment arising from the presentation of figures in thousands of dollars.

**Acquisitions**

Property, plant and equipment are initially recognised at cost.

Items of property, plant and equipment with a cost or other value, equal to or greater than $10 000 are recognised in the year of acquisition and depreciated as outlined below. Items of property, plant and equipment below the $10 000 threshold are expensed in the year of acquisition.

Major items of plant and equipment comprising a number of components that have different useful lives are accounted for as separate assets. Individual components may be replaced during the useful life of the complex asset.

**Revaluation of assets**

Subsequent to initial recognition, assets belonging to the following classes of non-financial assets are revalued with sufficient regularity to ensure the carrying amount of these assets does not differ materially from their fair value at reporting date:

- land
- buildings
- infrastructure assets

The above classes of property, plant and equipment include certain new assets initially recognised at cost. Such new assets will continue to be measured at cost, which is deemed to equate to fair value, until the next revaluation for that asset class occurs.

Plant and equipment are stated at historical cost less depreciation, which is deemed to equate to fair value.

**Impairment of assets**

An asset is said to be impaired when the asset's carrying amount exceeds its recoverable amount.

Materially significant non-financial assets are assessed for indicators of impairment annually. If any indicator of impairment exists, the Authority determines the asset's recoverable amount. The asset's recoverable amount is determined as the higher of the asset's current replacement cost and fair value less costs to sell. Any amount by which the asset's carrying amount exceeds the recoverable amount is recorded as an impairment loss.

Impairment losses are recognised in the comprehensive operating statement. They are disclosed as an expense unless the asset is carried at a revalued amount. Where the asset is measured at a revalued amount, the impairment loss is offset against the asset revaluation surplus for that class of asset to the extent an available balance exists in the asset revaluation surplus.

In certain situations, an impairment loss may subsequently be reversed. Impairment loss may only be reversed only if there has been a change in the assumptions used to determine the asset's recoverable amount. The reversal is limited so that the carrying amount of the asset does not exceed the revised estimate of its recoverable amount, nor exceed the net carrying amount that would have been determined had not impairment loss been recognised for the asset in the prior years. Where an asset is carried at a revalued amount, impairment reversal is recognised in the comprehensive operating statement as income to the extent that an impairment loss was previously recognised in the profit or loss, otherwise, impairment reversal results in an increase in the asset revaluation surplus.

Authority property, plant and equipment assets were assessed for impairment as at 30 June 2026. No impairment adjustments were required as a result of this review.

**Depreciation and amortisation expense**

Items of property, plant and equipment, including buildings but excluding land, have limited useful lives and are depreciated using the straight-line method over their estimated useful lives. Assets are depreciated from the date of acquisition or from the time an asset is completed and held ready for use.

The estimated useful lives for each class of asset are in accordance with the Authority's determination as follows:

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| Plant and equipment | 10 years | 10 years |
| Computer Hardware | 5 years | 5 years |

## 14. INTANGIBLES

**a) Total intagibles**

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Intangibles with a finite useful life** | | |
| **Computer software** | | |
| Gross carrying amount | 586 | 586 |
| Less: accumulated amortisation | (586) | (586) |
| Carrying amount at 30 June | 0 | 0 |
| **Total intangibles** | 0 | 0 |

The Authority's intangibles comprise computer software for the Administration, Research and Management System (ARMS) that records, maps and documents sacred sites, genealogies, Aboriginal custodianship and traditional narratives.

The Authority recognises intangible assets only if it is probable that future economic benefits will flow to the Authority and the costs of the asset can be measured reliably. Where an asset is acquired at no or nominal cost, the cost is the fair value as at the date of acquisition.

There is no active market for any of the Authority's intangible assets. As such, intangible assets are subsequently recognised and carried at cost less accumulated amortisation and any accumulated impairment losses.

Intangible assets with finite useful life are assessed for indicators of impairment on an annual basis. If any indicator of impairment exists, the Authority determines the asset's recoverable amount. If the recoverable amount is less than its carrying amount, the carrying amount is reduced to recoverable amount and the reduction is recognised as an impairment loss.

Intangible assets with indefinite useful lives are not amortised but are tested for impairment annually. The assessment of indefinite life is reviewed annually to determine whether the indefinite life continues to be supportable. If not, the change in useful life from indefinite to finite is made on a prospective basis.

The Authority's intangible assets were assessed for impairment as at 30 June 2026. No impairment adjustments were required as a result of this review.

**b) Reconciliation of carrying amount of intangibles**

**2026**

| | Computer software | Total |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Intangibles with a finite useful life** | | |
| Carrying amount at 1 July | - | - |
| Amortisation | - | - |
| **Carrying amount as at 30 June** | **-** | **-** |

**2025**

| | Computer Software | Total |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Intangibles with a finite useful life** | | |
| Carrying amount at 1 July | 1 | 1 |
| Amortisation | (1) | (1) |
| **Carrying amount as at 30 June** | **-** | **-** |

## 15. PAYABLES

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| Accounts payable | 26 | 35 |
| Accrued salaries and wages | 140 | 129 |
| Other accrued expenses | 327 | 106 |
| **Total payables** | **493** | **270** |

Liabilities for accounts payable and other amounts payable are carried at amortised cost, which is the fair value of the consideration to be paid in the future for goods and services received, whether billed to the Authority. Accounts payable are normally settled within 20 days from receipt of valid of invoices under $1 million or 30 days for invoices over $1 million.

Salaries and wages that are expected to be settled wholly within 12 months after the end of the period in which the employees render the service are recognised and measured at the amounts expected to be paid.

## 16. PROVISIONS

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Current** | | |
| *Employee benefits* | | |
| Recreation leave | 314 | 297 |
| Leave loading | 66 | 62 |
| *Other current provisions* | - | - |
| *Other provisions* | 172 | 91 |
| **Total provisions** | **552** | **449** |

**Employee benefits**

Provision for employee benefits include wages and salaries and recreation leave accumulated as a result of employees rendering services up to the reporting date. Liabilities arising in respect of recreation leave and other employee benefit liabilities that fall due within 12 months of reporting date are classified as current liabilities and are measured at amounts expected to be paid. Non-current employee benefit liabilities that fall due after 12 months of the reporting date are measured at present value of estimated future cash flows, calculated using the appropriate government bond rate and taking into consideration expected future salary and wage levels, experience of employee departures and periods of service.

All recreation leave is classified as a current liability.

No provision is made for sick leave, which is non-vesting, as the anticipated pattern of future sick leave to be taken is less than the entitlement accruing in each reporting period.

Employee benefit expenses are recognised on a net basis in respect of the following categories:

- wages and salaries, non-monetary benefits, recreation leave and other leave entitlements
- other types of employee benefits.

As part of the financial management framework, the Central Holding Authority assumes the long service leave liabilities of government agencies, including the Authority and therefore no long service leave liability is recognised within these financial statements.

## 17. OTHER LIABILITIES

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **Current** | | |
| Unearned contract revenue liability | - | 518 |
| **Total other liabilities** | - | 518 |

(a) Unearned revenue relates to Authority Certificate applications that have not been fully realised in accordance with AASB 15

**Superannuation**

Employees' superannuation entitlements are provided through the:

- Northern Territory Government and Public Authorities Superannuation Scheme (NTGPASS)
- Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme (CSS)
- or non-government employee nominated schemes for those employees commencing on or after 10 August 1999.

The Authority makes superannuation contributions on behalf of its employees to the Central Holding Authority or non-government employee-nominated schemes. Superannuation liabilities related to government superannuation schemes are held by the Central Holding Authority and therefore not recognised in Authority financial statements.

## 18. FAIR VALUE MEASUREMENT

Fair value is the price that would be received to sell an asset or paid to transfer a liability in an orderly transaction between market participants at the measurement date.

When measuring fair value, the valuation techniques used maximise the use of relevant observable inputs and minimise the use of unobservable inputs. Unobservable inputs are used to the extent that sufficient relevant and reliable observable inputs are not available for similar assets/liabilities.

Observable inputs are publicly available data relevant to the characteristics of the assets/liabilities being valued. Observable inputs used by the Authority include, but are not limited to, published sales data for land and general office buildings.

Unobservable inputs are data, assumptions and judgments not available publicly but relevant to the characteristics of the assets/liabilities being valued. Such inputs include internal Authority adjustments to observable data to take account of particular and potentially unique characteristics/functionality of assets/liabilities and assessments of physical condition and remaining useful life.

All assets and liabilities for which fair value is measured or disclosed in the financial statements are categorised within the following fair value hierarchy based on the inputs used:

Level 1 – inputs are quoted prices in active markets for identical assets or liabilities

Level 2 – inputs are inputs other than quoted prices included within Level 1 that are observable for the asset or liability, either directly or indirectly.

Level 3 – inputs are unobservable.

## 19. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

A financial instrument is a contract that gives rise to a financial asset of one entity and a financial liability or equity instrument of another entity.

The Authority's financial instruments include cash and deposits; receivables; advances paid; investment in shares; payables; advances received; borrowings and derivatives. It excludes statutory receivables arising from taxes including tax receivables, GST input tax credits recoverable, and fines and penalties, which do not meet the definition of financial instruments as per AASB 132 Financial instruments: Presentation.

The Authority has limited exposure to financial risks as discussed below.

Exposure to interest rate risk, foreign exchange risk, credit risk, price risk and liquidity risk arise in the normal course of activities. The Territory Government's investments, loans and placements, and borrowings are predominantly managed through the Northern Territory Treasury Corporation adopting strategies to minimise the risk. Derivative financial arrangements are also utilised to manage financial risks inherent in the management of these financial instruments. These arrangements include swaps, forward interest rate agreements and other hedging instruments to manage fluctuations in interest or exchange rates.

**a) Categories of financial instruments**

The carrying amounts of the Authority's financial assets and liabilities by category are disclosed in the table below.

| | Category | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | $000 | $000 |
| Cash and deposits | Other | 2,096 | 2,426 |
| Receivables[1] | Amortised cost | 1,120 | 770 |
| **Total financial assets** | | 3,216 | 3,196 |
| | | | |
| Payables[1] | Amortised cost | 493 | 270 |
| Provisions | Amortised cost | 552 | 449 |
| Advances Received | Amortised cost | - | 518 |
| **Total financial liabilities** | | **1,045** | **1,238** |

1 Total amounts disclosed here exclude statutory amounts, prepaid expenses and accrued contract revenue

**Financial assets at amortised cost**

Financial assets categorised at amortised cost are initially recognised at fair value and subsequently measured at amortised cost using the effective interest method, less impairment.

The Authorities financial assets categorised at amortised cost include receivables, advances paid, leases receivables, term deposits and certain debt securities.

**Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income**

The Authority does not have any financial assets under this category.

**Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss**

Financial assets are classified at fair value through profit or loss (FVTPL) are initially and subsequently recognised at fair value with gains or losses recognised in the net result for the year.

The Authority's financial assets categorised at FVTPL include investments in managed unit trusts and certain debt instruments. Unrealised gains in relation to these investments are recognised in other economic flows in the comprehensive operating statement, however realised gains are recognised in the net result.

**Financial liabilities at amortised cost**

Financial liabilities at amortised cost are measured at amortised cost using the effective interest rate method. The Authority's financial liabilities categorised at amortised cost include all accounts payable, deposits held, advances received, lease liabilities and borrowings.

**Financial liabilities at fair value through profit or loss**

The Authority does not have any financial liabilities under this category.

**Netting of swap transactions**

The Authority, from time to time, may facilitate certain structured finance arrangements, where a legally recognised right to set-off financial assets and liabilities exists, and the Territory intends to settle on a net basis. Where these arrangements occur, the revenues and expenses are offset, and the net amount is recognised in the comprehensive operating statement.

**b) Credit risk**

Credit risk is the risk that one party to a financial instrument will cause financial loss for the other party by failing to discharge an obligation.

The Authority has limited credit risk exposure (risk of default). In respect of any dealings with organisations external to government, the Authority has adopted a policy of only dealing with credit-worthy organisations and obtaining sufficient collateral or other security where appropriate, as a means of mitigating the risk of financial loss from defaults.

The carrying amount of financial assets recorded in the financial statements, net of any allowances for losses, represents the Authority's maximum exposure to credit risk without taking account of the value of any collateral or other security obtained.

Credit risk relating to receivables is disclosed in Note 17 and advances paid in Note 19.

**c) Liquidity risk**

Liquidity risk is the risk the Authority will not be able to meet its financial obligations as they fall due. The Authority's approach to managing liquidity is to ensure it will always have sufficient funds to meet its liabilities when they fall due. This is achieved by ensuring minimum levels of cash are held in the Authority bank account to meet various current employee and supplier liabilities. The Authority's exposure to liquidity risk is minimal. Cash injections are available from the Central Holding Authority in the event of one-off extraordinary expenditure items arise that deplete cash to levels that compromise the Authority's ability to meet its financial obligations.

**d) Market risk**

Market risk is the risk the fair value of future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in market prices. It comprises interest rate risk, price risk and currency risk.

### i) Interest rate risk

Interest rate risk is the risk that the fair value or future cash flows of a financial instrument will fluctuate because of changes in market interest rate.

**Sensitivity analysis**

### ii) Price risk

The Authority is not exposed to price risk as it does not hold units in unit trusts.

## 20. RELATED PARTIES

### i) Related parties

The Authority is a government administrative entity and is wholly owned and controlled by the Territory Government. Related parties of the department include:

- the portfolio minister and key management personnel (KMP) because they have authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the department directly.
- close family members of the portfolio minister or KMP including spouses, children and dependents.
- all public sector entities that are controlled and consolidated into the whole of government financial statements.
- any entities controlled or jointly controlled by KMP's or the portfolio minister or controlled or jointly controlled by their close family members.

### ii) Key management personnel (KMP)

Key management personnel of the Authority are those persons having authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the Authority. Key management personnel positions during 2025-26 comprised:

- Chief Executive Officer
- Director Corporate Services
- Director Research
- Director Policy and Governance
- Acting Director Corporate Services
- Acting Director Policy and Governance

### iii) Remuneration of key management personnel

The details below exclude the salaries and other benefits of the minister as the minister's remunerations and allowances are payable by the Department of the Legislative Assembly and consequently disclosed within the Treasurer's annual financial statements.

The aggregate compensation of key management personnel of the Authority is set out below:

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| Short-term benefits | 799 | 775 |
| Post-employment benefits | - | 112 |
| Long-term benefits | 93 | 9 |
| Termination benefits | 145 | - |
| **Total remuneration of key management personnel** | **1,037** | **896** |

**iv) Related party transactions:**

**Transactions with Northern Territory Government-controlled entities**

The Authority's primary ongoing source of funding is received from the Central Holding Authority in the form of output and capital appropriation and on-passed Commonwealth national partnership and specific-purpose payments.

The following table provides quantitative information about related party transactions entered into during the year with all other Northern Territory Government-controlled entities.

**2026**

| Related party | Revenue from related parties | Payments to related parties | Amounts owed by related parties | Amounts owed to related parties |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 | $000 |
| *All NTG Government departments* | 6,916 | 1,975 | 220 | 61 |

**2025**

| Related party | Revenue from related parties | Payments to related parties | Amounts owed by related parties | Amounts owed to related parties |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 | $000 |
| *All Territory Government departments* | 1,201 | 319 | 137 | 4 |

The Authority's transactions with other government entities are not individually significant.

## 21. CONTINGENT LIABILITIES AND CONTINGENT ASSETS

**a) Contingent liabilities**

The Authority had no contingent liabilities as at 30 June 2026 or 30 June 2025.

**b) Contingent assets**

The Authority had no contingent Assets as at 30 June 2026 or 30 June 2025.

## 22. EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO BALANCE DATE

No events have arisen between the end of the financial year and the date of this report that require adjustment to, or disclosure in these financial statements.

## 23. SCHEDULE OF ADMINISTERED TERRITORY ITEMS

In addition to operating revenues controlled and utilised by the Authority to fund its activities that are included in the financial statements, the Authority also acts on behalf of the Territory Government in the management of administered items. These include the application fees for a Request for Information, Sacred Site Register viewing or an Authority Certificate. The authority is unable to use administered items to further its own objectives without authorization.

Administered items are transferred to and reported by the Central Holding Authority, as the parent entity of government. Administered income and expenses are not recognised in the Authority's operating statement but are reported separately in accordance with Australian accounting standards.

The following Territory items are managed by the Authority on behalf of the government and are recorded in the Central Holding Authority (refer to Note 2e).

| | 2026 | 2025 |
|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 |
| **TERRITORY INCOME AND EXPENSES** | | |
| **Income** | | |
| Fees from regulatory services | 177 | 106 |
| **Total income** | 177 | 106 |
| | | |
| **Expenses** | | |
| Central Holding Authority income transferred | 177 | 106 |
| **Total expenses** | 177 | 106 |
| **Territory income less expenses** | **0** | **0** |

## 24. BUDGETARY INFORMATION

The following tables present the variation between the 2025-26 original budgeted financial statements, as reported in *2025-26 Budget Paper No. 3 Agency Budget Statements*, and the 2025-26 actual amounts reported in the financial statements, together with explanations for significant variations.

The variations within these tables do not include changes to budgeted appropriations from 2025-26 original budget to 2025-26 final budget.

| **Comprehensive operating statement** | 2026 Actual | 2026 Original budget | Variance | Note |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 | |
| **INCOME** | | | | |
| Appropriation | | | | |
| Output | 3,323 | 3,323 | 0 | |
| Sales of goods and services | 6,828 | 4,286 | 2,542 | 1 |
| Goods and services received free of charge | 1,130 | 971 | 159 | 2 |
| Other income | 6 | | 6 | |
| **TOTAL INCOME** | **11,287** | **8,580** | **2,707** | |
| | | | | |
| **EXPENSES** | | | | |
| Employee expenses | 5,640 | 5,383 | 257 | 3 |
| Administrative expenses | | | | |
| Purchases of goods and services | 4,304 | 2,018 | 2,286 | 4 |
| Depreciation and amortisation | 8 | 4 | 4 | |
| Other administrative expenses | 1,130 | 971 | 159 | 2 |
| **TOTAL EXPENSES** | 11,082 | 8,376 | 2,706 | |
| **NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)** | **205** | **204** | **1** | |
| **COMPREHENSIVE RESULT** | **205** | **204** | **1** | |

1. A continuation of service demand above baseline budget.
2. Reflective of increased DCDD services.
3. Increase in expenditure due to additional staff required for project teams directly related to increase in self-generated income and backfilling positions affected by maternity leave.
4. Increase in custodian payments and consultants due to an increase in applications.

| Balance Sheet | 2026 Actual | 2026 Original budget | Variance | Note |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 | |
| **ASSETS** | | | | |
| **Current assets** | | | | |
| Cash and deposits | 2,096 | 2,625 | (529) | 1 |
| Receivables | 1,112 | 197 | 915 | 1 |
| Prepayments | 8 | 36 | (28) | |
| Inventories | - | - | - | |
| **Total current assets** | **3,216** | **2,858** | **358** | |
| **Non-current assets** | | | | |
| Property, plant and equipment | 13 | - | 13 | |
| Intangibles | - | - | - | |
| **Total non-current assets** | 13 | - | 13 | |
| **TOTAL ASSETS** | **3,229** | **2,858** | **371** | |
| **LIABILITIES** | | | | |
| **Current liabilities** | | | | |
| Payables | 493 | 220 | 273 | |
| Provisions | 552 | 455 | 97 | 2 |
| Other liabilities | - | - | - | |
| **Total current liabilities** | 1,045 | 675 | 370 | |
| **TOTAL LIABILITIES** | 1,045 | 675 | 370 | |
| **NET ASSETS** | **2,184** | **2,183** | **1** | |
| **EQUITY** | | | | |
| Capital | (2,379) | (2,379) | 0 | |
| Accumulated funds | 4,563 | 4,562 | 1 | |
| **TOTAL EQUITY** | **2,184** | **2,183** | **1** | |

1. Attributed to a significant increase in revenue and timing of invoices issued.
2. Due to staff leave, leave loading and Superannuation accrual.

| Cash flow statement | 2026 Actual | 2026 Original budget | Variance | Note |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 | |
| **CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES** | | | | |
| **Operating receipts** | | | | |
| Appropriation | | | | |
| Output | 3,323 | 3,323 | 0 | |
| Receipts from sales of goods and services | 6,254 | 4,286 | 1,968 | 1 |
| **Total operating receipts** | **9,577** | **7,609** | **1,968** | |
| **Operating payments** | | | | |
| Payments to employees | 5,528 | 5,383 | (145) | 2 |
| Payments for goods and services | 4,379 | 2,018 | (2,361) | 3 |
| **Total operating payments** | **9,907** | **7,401** | **(2,506)** | |
| **Net cash from/(used in) operating activities** | **(330)** | **208** | **(538)** | |
| **CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES** | | | | |
| **Financing payments** | | | | |
| Net increase/(decrease) in cash held | (330) | 208 | (538) | |
| Cash at beginning of financial year | 2,426 | 2,417 | 9 | |
| **CASH AT END OF FINANCIAL YEAR** | **2,096** | **2,625** | **(529)** | |

1. Performance above baseline revenue budget demonstrates a continuation of high demand for services.
2. Increase in expenditure due to one off seperation payment to employee.
3. Continuation of specialist anthrpological consultants to meet the demand for services and priority timeframes, decreased Board costs due to additional board meetings and remote locations.

## 25. BUDGETARY INFORMATION: ADMINISTERED TERRITORY ITEMS

The following table presents the variation between the 2025-26 original budget for administered items as reported in *2025-26 Budget Paper No. 3 Agency Budget Statements* and the 2025-26 actual amounts disclosed in Note 23 of these financial statements together with explanations for significant variations.

| Administered Territory items | 2026 Actual[a] | 2026 Original budget[b] | Variance[c] | Note[d] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $000 | $000 | $000 | |
| **TERRITORY INCOME AND EXPENSES** | | | | |
| **Income** | | | | |
| Fees from regulatory services | 177 | 63 | 114 | 1 |
| Other income | | | | |
| **Total income** | **177** | **63** | **114** | |
| **Expenses** | | | | |
| Central Holding Authority income transferred | 177 | 63 | 114 | 1 |
| **Total expenses** | **177** | **63** | **114** | |
| **Territory income less expenses** | **0** | **0** | **0** | |

The following note descriptions relate to variances greater than 10 per cent have occurred.

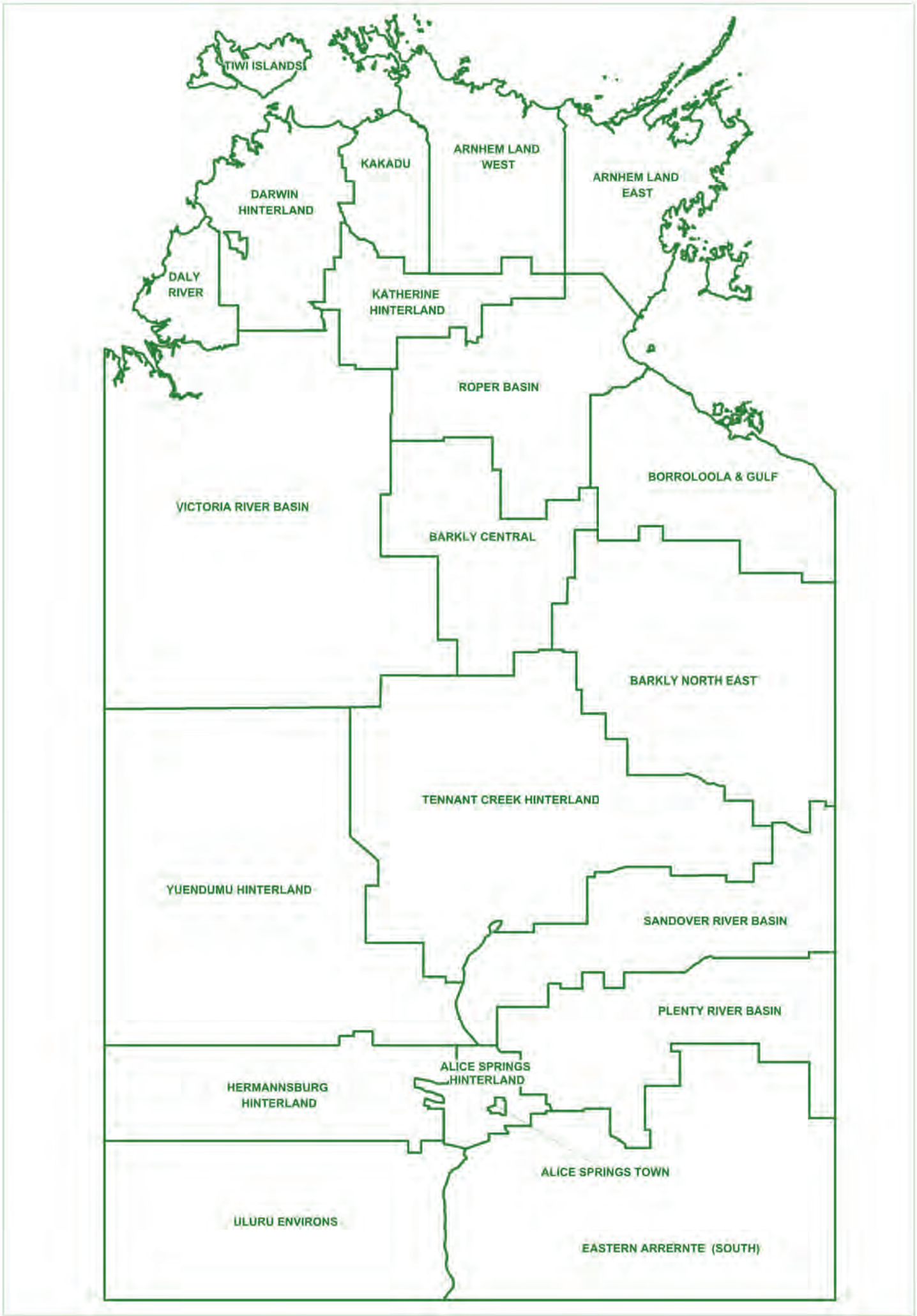
1. The variance reflects businesses increasingly seeking information to determine potential sacred site risks prior to undertaking works or seeking an Authority Certificate.



Limmen Butterfly Falls NT

# AAPA Regions







# Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority


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