



Homelands Housing and Infrastructure
Program Monitoring and Evaluation
Project – Final Report

Liam Grealy

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Acknowledgment of Country

I would like to acknowledge the Larrakia people, on whose Country this report was drafted. I extend my respect to Larrakia elders past and present, and my gratitude to all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the Northern Territory who participated in this research project. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

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Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program Monitoring and Evaluation Project - Final Report

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Disclaimer

The opinions in this report reflect the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development, members of the project Expert Advisory Group, or other individuals or organisations who have contributed to the research.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations Used in this Report

ABA - Aboriginals Benefit Account
ABE - Aboriginal Business Enterprise
ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCO - Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AHNT - Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory
AINT - Aboriginal Investment Northern Territory
ALRA - Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)
ATSIC - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CLA - Community Living Area
CLC - Central Land Council
COAG - Council of Australian Governments
CTG - Closing the Gap
DCMC - Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet, NT
DIPL - Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, NT
DHLGCD - Department of Housing, Local Government, and Community Development, NT
DIL - Department of Infrastructure and Logistics, NT
EAG - Expert Advisory Group
FFA - Federation Funding Agreement
HEA - Homelands Extras Allowance
HHIP - Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program
HRG - Homelands Reference Group
HSP - Housing Sanitation Program
IES - Indigenous Essential Services
IORS - Ingkerreke Outstation Resource Service
ISAC - Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation
JSC-RHNT - Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing Northern Territory
KCA - Kalano Community Association
LDM - Local Decision Making
LHAC - Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation
Menzies - Menzies School of Health Research
NIAA - National Indigenous Australians Agency
NLC - Northern Land Council
NPARIH - National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing
NPRHNT - National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory
OCOFOH - Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes.
PAWC - Power and Water Corporation
TFHC - Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, NT
UNDRIP - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

Executive Summary

Homelands

The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP) is the first significant investment from the Australian Government into Northern Territory (NT) homelands for a decade. The initial \$100 million over two years, and the follow-up \$120 million over three years, has been welcomed by homelands residents, the homelands sector, and other non-government stakeholders. Converted into the HHIP, this investment has allowed substantive works to be undertaken at homelands across the NT, improving housing and infrastructure.

Homelands are a special feature of the Northern Territory. Homelands infrastructure allows Aboriginal people to develop and maintain strong connections to their cultures and Country. As Chairperson of Aboriginal Housing NT, Alan Mole, stated at a homelands forum in 2025, 'Homelands are deeply embedded in the spiritual and cultural fabric of Aboriginal life. They carry the stories, traditions, songlines, and knowledge passed down through generations of people.' While homelands are diverse - ranging from intermittently occupied settlements of one or two houses located on a pastoral lease to large permanently occupied settlements that, in infrastructural and amenity terms, resemble remote communities - they collectively constitute an important part of the NT's housing system. Homelands provide relief for residents from chronic household crowding and intermittent social tensions at towns and remote communities. In this way, homelands are an important part of the remote housing system and the housing continuum.

It is important to be clear in stating that homelands residents have the right to safe, secure, and habitable housing. Denying people the means to live on their homelands denies the right to self-determination and is inconsistent with Australia's obligations as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Similarly, as the author of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth), the Australian Government continues to have obligations for amenities on ALRA land. The right to housing and functional essential services infrastructure are also reasonable expectations of Australian citizenship, and rights that have been recognised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Alongside the HHIP, the NT Government funds the Homelands Program to the value of about \$40 million per year. Aboriginal Housing NT (2023) has highlighted that this amount has reduced over time, from \$53.6m in 2016 to \$38.6m in 2023, equating to a real reduction across that period of 38 per cent. The Homelands Program supports homelands service providers to deliver emergency housing maintenance services and municipal essential services to funded homelands, alongside a small program for capital works. That program is important for providing basic yet fundamental services to homelands residents and for supporting the ongoing operation of homelands service providers. However, the Homelands Program alone is not sufficient to sustain, let alone replace, homelands housing and infrastructure.

There is thus a strong case for continued substantial government investment for homelands. An audit of homelands housing and infrastructure undertaken in 2022 estimated that approximately \$1.1 billion is required to improve homelands housing and infrastructure to a safe and functional standard. Without indexation, this equates to 27.5 years of HHIP investment at current levels. Even if that were an over-estimate - while noting that the standard specified by the audit emphasised safety rather than the higher minimum requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act 1999 (NT) - it is a point-in-time assessment that does not account for the life-cycle asset replacement that should occur across that period. In other words, the case for continued investment is also a case for investment scaled up significantly from current levels.

This Final Report is an output of the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program Monitoring and Evaluation Project. Menzies School of Health Research was commissioned by the NT Government and the project was undertaken from July 2023 to September 2025. While the HHIP was extended for three years (2024-2027), this project has predominantly focused on the initial HHIP funding agreement (2022-24) and program. In practical terms, however, the original FFA Schedule for Homelands was not signed by the Australian and NT Governments until March-April 2023 - nine months into the initial two years. This has contributed to delays in the completion of projects awarded under the original FFA Schedule, beyond the length of that Schedule and its subordinate grant agreements. This Final Report has attempted to capture the progress of such projects up until its submission.

The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program

Following the Australian Government investment, the HHIP was established by the NT Government within the Remote Housing Programs section of the then Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (now the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development). Although the HHIP is a new program, it has been effective in managing substantial investment to administer a large number of housing and infrastructure projects across the NT. Across the two years of this monitoring and evaluation project, it is evident that the HHIP team has worked respectfully and in good faith with the homelands sector and other non-government stakeholders. This has included demonstrating flexibility in working with service providers to revise project timelines and meet shared goals. Program design and processes have been revised based on feedback from the sector and through this monitoring and evaluation project, with efforts made to continuously improve. A wide range of housing and infrastructure projects have been delivered, providing substantial improvements to amenities at homelands. Homelands present a challenging service delivery landscape for all parties, and NT Government public servants have worked diligently through the HHIP to deliver projects on time and to a high standard in partnership with homelands services providers.

This monitoring and evaluation project was not designed to assess the HHIP against the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Nonetheless, the HHIP has been informed by and attempted to operate according to Closing the Gap's four priority reforms. While the language of Closing the Gap is widely integrated across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and programs, there are few examples of programs that have effectively

operationalised those priority reforms. In broad terms, regarding priority reform one, the HHIP has been governed by the formal partnership and shared decision-making mechanism of the Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing Northern Territory (JSC-RHNT). Non-government members of the JSC-RHNT - the four NT land councils and the peak body Aboriginal Housing NT - have contributed to program design and decision-making related to the distribution of HHIP funds. The HHIP has sought to build the Aboriginal community controlled sector (priority reform two), prioritising the award of projects to Aboriginal Business Enterprises (ABEs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). The approach of the HHIP team has demonstrated attempts to transform government organisations (priority reform three), delivering services in partnership with ACCOs and consistently engaging with ACCOs and homelands residents in their communities. Finally, the HHIP has published program information, such as its regional plans and project completion reports, providing the sector with substantial information about the program, consistent with priority reform four.

Such broad achievement in relation to the priority reforms does not mean that there are not opportunities to improve HHIP design and implementation. Despite the involvement of non-government JSC-RHNT members in decision-making about HHIP funding, sector stakeholders have conveyed that more transparency is desired regarding how processes to select specific homelands projects have been carried out. Homelands service providers have expressed that when grant agreements are awarded, there is insufficient time to undertake thorough consultations with homelands residents, if they are also to meet completion timelines. Various parties have noted that across funded projects there is a wide range of funding allocated for similar work, such as the cost of a housing refurbishment, that is not adequately explained by differences in geographic remoteness and associated costs. Service providers have described 'hidden costs' required by projects that were initially unclear as requirements and which have required organisational capital to subsidise project outcomes, such as the provision of temporary accommodation for residents and its maintenance. More seriously, ACCOs have identified instances of poor work undertaken by other HHIP-contracted service providers which they have been required to remediate through their ongoing work under the Homelands Program. This evaluation does not consider any of these issues to be systemic, but suggests there is an opportunity to refine administrative processes through the next stage of HHIP delivery.

The HHIP has also provided an opportunity for homelands service providers contracted to deliver HHIP projects to demonstrate and build their capacity to deliver large-scale capital works. The case studies presented later in this Final Report describe the substantial outputs of projects delivered by the Aboriginal community controlled organisations Kalano Community Association, Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation, and Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation. Such projects have been delivered in service delivery contexts characterised by challenges related to recruitment, subcontractor availability, materials availability and cost, remote access, and environmental factors. Nonetheless, those projects, and projects delivered across the HHIP by Aboriginal community controlled organisations to their member homelands, have delivered substantial improvements to homelands housing and infrastructure, while involving homelands residents in project

design. In this way, the HHIP demonstrates the potential to grow and sustain the ACCO sector in NT remote community and homelands housing, but also the need for continued reliable investment to do so.

It is important to note that certain frustrations with the HHIP are homelands policy issues, rather than program design or implementation issues. In other words, while the HHIP represents renewed government investment in homelands housing and infrastructure, the program has been designed within the constraints of the ongoing failure to clarify a range of homelands policy issues. Many policy issues must be addressed, but most immediate among these is the decades-long unwillingness of governments to fund the construction of new or replacement houses on homelands, including using HHIP funds.

To be clear, given the long-term underfunding of homelands, there are reasonable grounds to direct available funds to refurbish infrastructure to the benefit of existing homelands residents. However, in many cases there has been a desire from homelands residents to use allocated funds to replace existing houses and construct new houses. This evaluation has engaged with many traditional owners who do not understand why this has not been allowed and who have been understandably anxious that their homeland is unlikely to receive future HHIP funding, given the broad need across homelands and the absence of security for ongoing homelands investment. In some cases, despite their initial project proposals, service providers have been required to renovate decades-old tin dwellings. There is a legitimate question about whether that is the most appropriate use of public funds.

In other words, in order for a program to operate effectively, clear policy parameters are required. The Partnership Agreement established by the JSC-RHNT in June 2024 committed those members

to working together through the JSC-RHNT to develop a long-term policy position for homelands within the first two years of this Agreement, including in relation to new and replacement homes. (7.5 c. iv)

Homelands residents continue to experience the infrastructural legacies of long-term government under-funding and neglect. This includes dwellings built decades ago that at the time would not have met building standards, which have come to house multi-generation families. It includes septic tanks sized for household grey water, for dwellings that have since had flush toilets installed and seen residents triple in number. It includes homelands with substantial populations serviced by pit toilets alone. The HHIP has made an effective and substantial start to addressing these issues. It is also clear that policy development and significant ongoing investment is required to support residents to live in homelands with adequate housing and infrastructure.

Final Report Structure

This Final Report represents a project scope designed by the researcher, in consultation with the requirements of the NT Government and informed by feedback from the project Expert Advisory Group (EAG). Broadly, this included a requirement to undertake case studies focused on discrete HHIP projects. The Final Report includes those case studies, focused on HHIP works at Rockhole; Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore; and Gängan; as well as

case studies focused on the NT-wide Water Testing and Supply Program and the Housing Sanitation Program. The five case study chapters are preceded by this Executive Summary and an introductory chapter outlining the background to the HHIP and this monitoring and evaluation project. Chapter Two provides an overview of homelands in the Northern Territory and Chapter Three summarises the monitoring and evaluation approach. Chapter Four provides a descriptive overview of the HHIP's implementation and Chapter Five provides an overview of HHIP outputs. The case studies that follow - Chapters Six to Ten - provide detailed examinations of specific HHIP projects, including project outputs but with extensive consideration given to the contexts in which such projects have been delivered. This is important, as outside of the NT homelands sector there is limited understanding of the challenges and costs associated with delivering and maintaining homelands housing and infrastructure.

This Final Report includes 39 recommendations that are developed cumulatively at the end of each chapter. These are listed in full following the Conclusion and re-presented in Table 39 identifying the specific party to which each recommendation is addressed.

1. Introduction

1.1 HHIP Background

In October 2022, the Australian Government announced \$100 million in funding to be expended on urgent works at Northern Territory (NT) homelands. This was the first major funding commitment to homelands made by the Australian Government since 2012. It constituted a significant investment in homelands, given the NT Government otherwise provides about \$40 million per annum in grant funding for the delivery of housing maintenance, essential services, and municipal services at homelands through its Homelands Program. In 2024, as part of a \$4 billion remote housing package, a further \$120 million over three years was committed to homelands by the Australian Government.

The NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development (DHLGCD) is responsible for administering this total \$220 million investment through the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP). The original intention of the HHIP schedule was for the program to commence in July 2022 and for works to be concluded by June 2024. However, the FFA Schedule 'Restoring Funds for Northern Territory Homelands' was only signed by both governments on 6 April 2023, nine months into the specified period. Delays in the distribution of Australian Government funding to the NT Government delayed the selection of HHIP projects and the award of contracts to service providers. As relates to the 2022-24 agreement, the revised goal to award all program funds by March 2024 was established.

The HHIP has involved the delivery of housing and essential services infrastructure upgrades at selected NT homelands, as well as NT-wide subprograms focused on fire and electrical safety, water testing and supply, and household sanitation for a larger number of homelands.

The HHIP Implementation Plan specified the following program objectives:

- Undertaking immediate and urgent works to homelands such as;
 - Urgent housing and supporting infrastructure upgrades
 - Upgrades to essential service and municipal infrastructure such as dumps, internal roads, water and power
- Improving living conditions for people living on homelands
- Supporting local decision making, through stakeholder engagement and regional planning
- Building the capacity of the homelands service sector
- Identifying priority projects in each region that can be completed through the HHIP in 2023/24 or through alternative funding streams, should funding become available.
- Ensuring that works are prioritised to align with the Healthy Living Practices (HLPs). (NTG 2023a, 6)

The HHIP Implementation Plan also lists the following program outcomes:

- Houses on homelands are upgraded and provide safe and healthy environments for residents
- Homelands supporting infrastructure is upgraded with a prioritisation of issues that relate to the 9 HLPs
- Development of regional plans, which identify key regional priority projects that can be completed through the HHIP in 2023/24 or through alternative funding streams, should funding become available
- That the homelands service sector capacity is improved and supported through enhanced training, skill development, and greater project delivery experience. (NTG 2023a, 7)

Improvements to the housing and essential services infrastructure at homelands and outstations hold significant potential to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal residents of homelands. Supporting Aboriginal residents to live on country that is significant to their families and culture is an important outcome that warrants ongoing government investment.

1.2 HHIP Monitoring and Evaluation Project

This Final Report summarises a project that has monitored and evaluated the activities, outputs, and outcomes of housing and infrastructure works at homelands under the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP). The project has included an examination of the administrative processes involved in program delivery, as well as of the impact of the program on the state of housing and essential services infrastructure at selected homelands. It has aimed to describe the impact of the HHIP on homelands housing and infrastructural amenity, including how this impacts homelands residents.

The monitoring and evaluation project has considered the effectiveness of program aims and processes, including the contributions of DHLGCD, the Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing Northern Territory (JSC-RHNT), land councils, and Aboriginal Housing NT to priority setting and regional planning. I have relied, where possible, on government documents and data collected through project delivery, to minimise intrusion on homelands residents and to maximise the benefit and impact of this data. However, I have also worked closely with relevant Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs), including through the project Expert Advisory Group (EAG), and homelands residents, to maximise the input from and potential benefits for the Aboriginal people most directly affected by this investment.

This monitoring and evaluation project was commissioned by the then Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC) NT because the HHIP is based on the first significant Australian Government investment into homelands since 2012. As such, the project presented an opportunity to demonstrate the return on investment of that funding,

on behalf of demonstrating the need for ongoing homelands funding support. To some extent, the aim to demonstrate this return on investment has informed the sorts of projects that have been funded by the HHIP – there has been an emphasis on larger projects in fewer homelands in an attempt to show more dramatic changes, as compared with distributing the funding more evenly across the NT’s funded homelands.

A developmental approach to monitoring and evaluation was undertaken in this project. This means that rather than simply providing this Final Report at the conclusion of the evaluation period, I have instead sought to engage with the HHIP as it has been implemented. This has involved ongoing discussions with rights holders, program administrators, and other stakeholders across the program. Appendix 1 provides a key point summary of feedback related to HHIP progress presented to the Department and the EAG in April 2024. Draft case studies were shared first with partnering ACCOs, regarding discrete HHIP projects, then with the NT Government and the EAG. A draft Final Report was shared with the NT Government and the EAG for feedback in July 2025.

The research has aimed:

- To monitor project delivery and provide timely feedback on program implementation.
- To identify and collate project data and undertake analysis of discrete housing and infrastructure upgrade projects delivered under the HHIP.
- To identify and collate project data and undertake analysis of NT-wide subprograms to improve fire and electrical safety, water testing and supply, and sanitation at homelands.
- To describe and analyse the governance of this homelands housing and infrastructure investment, including grant agreements for service providers, reporting, and data collection.
- To observe and describe decision-making processes related to the prioritisation of HHIP projects, including consultation workshops with land councils and homelands residents.
- To identify enabling factors and barriers to improving the standard of homelands housing, essential services, and municipal services infrastructure.
- To describe and analyse the impacts of homelands investment on housing, infrastructure, and for homelands residents, including the extent to which there has been an improvement in living conditions in homelands through HHIP works.
- To demonstrate the cost of improving homelands housing and infrastructure, to inform future funding requirements.
- To provide recommendations on areas of improvement, through consultation with homelands residents, homelands services providers, land councils, and other stakeholders.
- To analyse the overall framework and approach for commitment of the initial \$100 million allocated to the Northern Territory through the Federation Funding Agreement (FFA) Schedule for the delivery of urgent housing and essential infrastructure on NT homelands.

Taking an ethnographic approach, this project has aimed to add lived detail of homelands services administration and delivery to the collective understanding of the HHIP, and to housing and infrastructure policy literature more broadly. It has done so by including the perspectives of policy makers, program implementers, and homelands residents. The ethnographic approach adds detail to the successes and failures of a major government program that is otherwise described in general and abstracted terms in program documentation and reporting. Such successes and failures are not equally distributed across homelands and this study has investigated reasons for particular outcomes in specific contexts.

Through developing a deeper understanding of the processes of attending to existing homelands housing and infrastructure, I am hopeful that relevant Ministers, policy makers, and other key decision-makers will be informed by the research in their future decision-making. The potential benefits of this research to the wider community are two-fold: first, the wider community may benefit from increased understanding of the infrastructural issues facing homelands; second, this research aims to support the ability of traditional owners to remain on their country, as desired, through the provision of adequate resources to sustain remote livelihoods.

2. Homelands in the Northern Territory

2.1 Overview of NT Homelands

In the Northern Territory (NT), there are 18 gazetted towns and 73 prescribed remote Indigenous communities. In addition, there are about 400 funded homelands – also known as outstations – across the NT. Population data is approximate, based on a one-to-two-yearly occupancy survey undertaken by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development (DHLGCD) rather than drawn from Australian Bureau of Statistics census data only or from tenancy agreements, as at remote communities. On this basis, about 6000-7000 residents live at NT homelands, while many thousands more have cultural links to homelands and visit them intermittently (see Appendix 2). Such figures are difficult to verify, with one public servant claiming ‘something that I’ve known for some time is the continuous depopulation of homelands. . . When you go back into the history of homelands and the original return to Country, there was a much larger population then’ (S5). This view is contested within the homelands sector, with stakeholders consistently suggesting that population data is underestimated (AHNT 2025).

Homelands are the outcome of the homelands and outstations movement that began in the late 1960s. Such settlements are typically situated on their inhabitants’ ancestral country and are testament to the resistance and endurance of First Nations peoples in settler colonial Australia (Peterson and Myers 2016). One land council employee reflected, ‘you think back to homelands from decades ago and how important they were, the difference homelands made to people’s lives, to social cohesion’ (S10). Migration to homelands was supported in 1973 by the creation of ‘Establishment grants’ by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, for ‘groups with a commitment to moving to homelands centres’. The majority of homelands are located on Aboriginal Land, as defined by the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth), as well as on Community Living Areas, excised from pastoral leases, and on parcels of land within national parks. Assets – such as houses, bores, generators, and so on – at homelands are typically owned by the relevant Aboriginal Land Trust. Homelands are not leased by the NT Government and as such homelands housing is not included within the NT’s public housing system. This point is made consistently by governments, with one NT Government public servant stating:

There’s a common misconception from residents that housing at homelands is owned by government and is government housing, when it’s not. It’s owned by communities via the land trust, by and large. And the government’s role is as a contributor towards upkeep of houses and municipal central services. (S2)

This conception of government acting as a ‘contributor’ to services at homelands is consistently reiterated by public servants.

The HHIP delivered projects to a significant minority of the total ‘funded homelands’ in the NT. Funded homelands receive financial support from the NT Government because they have met various eligibility criteria, including that they:

- Have a potable water supply in operating condition
- Have a functional power supply
- Have safe and secure housing
- Are accessible
- Are the principal place of residence for homelands residents, and
- Are or will be supported by a recognised homelands service provider. (NTG 2023a)

In the 2018-19 financial year, 386 of about 600 total homelands were funded in accordance with the criteria above (NTG 2021). In 2024, there were 394 funded homelands (Grealy 2024). As capital is often required to re/establish potable water and functional power supplies, it is difficult for an unfunded homeland to meet the criteria to qualify for ongoing funding. An increase in the number of funded homelands does not increase the total allocation to the Homelands Program, meaning less funding is awarded per funded dwelling.

Table 1 shows the distribution of funded dwellings at homelands by NT land council region as of 2023.

Land Council Region	Sub-region	Funded Dwellings
Northern Land Council		789
	Borroloola/Barkly	89
	Ngukurr	77
	West Arnhem	150
	Darwin/Daly	156
	East Arnhem	225
	Katherine	21
	VRD	71
Central Land Council		620
	Barkly	183
	Central	437
Anindilyakwa Land Council		47
Tiwi Land Council		19
Total		1475

Table 1. Funding dwellings by land council region

Table 2 lists the NT homelands with a population of fifty individuals or more, based on 2023 and 2021 occupancy survey data. Most of the larger homelands have experienced a population increase from 2021 to 2023. Note that there are sometimes significant differences between population statistics drawn from the occupancy survey and the Australian Census.

For example, the population estimate made by the 2021 Census for Rockhole, 170 (ID No. 57), is much higher than the number specified by the 2021 occupancy survey, 132.

ID No.	Homeland	Population (2023 Occupancy Survey)	Population (2021 Occupancy Survey if applicable)
45	Baniyala	146	100
46	Arawerr	129	102
52	Dhalinybuy	117	94
56	Arlparra	110	59
57	Rockhole	108	132
63	Malkala	97	71
67	Atheley	88	87
76	Gilwi	86	N/A
79	Emu Point	85	72
82	Wandawuy	84	84
83	Manmoyi	81	N/A
85	Mapurru	81	64
88	Gāngan	78	54
91	Yathalamarra	77	59
92	Mamadawerre	75	N/A
93	Marlinja	68	N/A
94	Orrtipa-Thurra	62	60
100	Perrederr	61	N/A
101	Mungkarta	55	55
102	Gamardi	55	N/A
106	Ji-Marda	55	50
118	Wudapuli	54	N/A
121	Garrthalala	54	N/A
133	Itchy Koo Park	52	N/A
139	Atneltyey	51	N/A
146	Artekerre	51	N/A
147	Bolkdjam	50	N/A
149	Muruning	50	N/A
154	Ji-Malawa	50	N/A

Table 2. Homelands with a population of fifty individuals or higher

In May 2022, the then Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC) commissioned an engineering consultancy to complete an independent audit of the state of housing, essential services (water, power, sewerage), and municipal services (dump and internal roads) at NT homelands. Based on assessments made at 100 occupied homelands

including 666 dwellings, the audit sought to establish a baseline of homelands housing and infrastructure. As one public servant described, 'the purpose of that audit was to get some baseline data, and a shared understanding for land councils, Australian Government and the NT Government, and Aboriginal Housing NT' (S2). The audit sought to identify assets, assess their condition, provide cost estimates to make improvements, and provide advice on regional needs. Twenty homelands were visited in each of the NT Government's five regions, by a team of consultant surveyors.

As of July 2025, the audit report has not been published. This has frustrated stakeholders across the sector, with one public servant stating, 'I think the audit should be a public document. . . We haven't been able to leverage off the audit findings as much as I'd have liked' (S1). Nonetheless, it has been cited publicly and is broadly discussed in the homelands sector that the audit estimated a total \$1.1 billion is required to upgrade homelands to levels that meet requirements for safe occupancy (AHNT 2025). The audit identified major challenges associated with housing quality, electricity supplies, water supplies, sanitation infrastructure, and municipal assets. One public servant stated that 'The standard of houses, some of them I wouldn't call houses' (S3). While a land council employee described that we hear [from council members] that electrical wires are exposed and they're actually daily in fear of their kids being electrocuted, of ceiling fans falling in. We know that floorboards are missing. They're actually dangerous to live in and people kind of live daily with that stress. (S10)

Regarding homelands housing, there is need to improve electrical safety and fire protection, to ensure the availability of bathroom, toilet, and laundry facilities, and to ensure functional food storage and preparation areas are provided. Electricity supplies require repairs and upgrades to solar and generator control systems, the provision of hybrid generator and solar supply systems, and the replacement of solar battery banks. Reliable drinking water requires the creation of new and secondary bores and tanks, repairs of existing pumps and tanks to prevent overflow, and the replacement of failing tanks and support structures. Regarding homelands sanitation, there is a need to pump out existing septic systems, replace damaged lids, and clean and repair leech drains. Finally, common issues relating to municipal assets identified by the audit include the need to clean existing waste pits and build new ones, to undertake internal road grading, and to provide solar street lighting throughout homelands. Public servants advised that issues identified by the audit were central to informing the priorities of the HHIP.

The issue of homelands infrastructure is currently most relevant to Target 9B of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Target 9B aims that:

- By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:
 - within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard
 - in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town (including if the household might be classified for other purposes as a part of a discrete settlement such as a "town camp" or "town based reserve".)

It is not the case that the standard of housing and essential services at most homelands is comparable to housing and essential services available at gazetted towns in the NT. The question of 'relevant jurisdictional standard' is a more complicated one, with the jurisdiction of the Northern Territory fragmented in terms of what standards for buildings, water quality, and so on, apply where. In broad terms, the jurisdictional standards that apply in NT towns do not typically apply, nor are they met, at homelands. Although it was established in 2020, governments have thus far made little progress to develop policy related to Target 9B.

2.2 The Homelands Movement

The important Blanchard Report (Commonwealth of Australia 1987) defined 'homeland centres/outstations' as 'small decentralised communities of close kin, established by the movement of Aboriginal people to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them' (xiii). Anthropologist Jon Altman (2013) describes that while the category may be singular, homelands are remarkably diverse, suggesting that most

are populated by small family groups, but some number more than a hundred people. Some are occupied year-round, others seasonally or rarely . . . The key commonality is that their residents have made a determined choice to actively engage with their land. (77)

Fred Myers and Nicolas Peterson (2016) frame outstations as 'life projects', to emphasise the pursuit by Indigenous people on homelands of both independence from the state and market and the pursuit of place-based knowledge and obligations. In this way, the establishment and continuance of homelands represents an important exercise in First Nations sovereignty. As an anonymised 'Pitjantjatjara person' quoted in the Blanchard report stated, 'We want to live in our own place, Aborigines only . . . This is our place. Our fathers and grandfathers hunted here' (Commonwealth of Australia 1987, xxxv).

This commitment to culture and Country continues to underpin the appeal of homelands today, even while such places demonstrate wide diversity. For example, to take two homelands considered in detail in this report, the recently established Anpanaye includes four dwellings and is located about 60 kilometres north of Alice Springs, just off the Stuart Highway. Alternatively, Gāṅgaṅ includes 13 dwellings for a population of about 80 people and is accessible by a 3.5 hour journey along a 4WD track from the East Arnhem town of Nhulunbuy. One public servant commented that travelling to such remote homelands 'allows me to appreciate what the contract is up against, the logistics that are involved' (S11). The broad definitions offered for homelands also underpin a servicing challenge for governments. As the NT Government (2020) Review of the Homelands Policy noted:

the fact of broad diversity in the types of locations identified as Homelands is a consequence of an approach that loosely focuses on the expressed rights of a people, rather than the specific attributes of a place, with wide reaching implications for resourcing that has tended towards inequity and inefficiency in resource allocation. (5)

One public servant noted that, as compared to remote communities, 'it's not defensible that homelands have people, 70 to 150 people, living on a homeland with really appalling infrastructure' (S1).

From the late 1960s, Australian Government policy shifted from assimilation to Aboriginal self-determination (Greal 2025; Habibis et al. 2019). In the NT especially, self-determination involved a significant emphasis on returning to Country, through the establishment of land rights under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) (ALRA) and support of the emerging homelands movement (Altman 2017). Over 50 per cent of the NT is Aboriginal land granted to traditional owners as inalienable freehold title under the ALRA and administered by land councils. Supported by the combined work of the Australian Government Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), land councils, and new Aboriginal corporations, housing associations, and homelands resource centres, housing and essential services infrastructures was often built on land from which First Nations people had been forcibly removed generations before.

2.3 Homelands Policy, 2007-2025

Australian and NT Government Commitments to Homelands

In June 2007, the Australian Government announced the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, better known as 'The Intervention'. The Memorandum of Understanding Between the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government Indigenous Housing, Accommodation and Related Services September 2007 (hereafter MoU) outlined housing and infrastructure funding following the Intervention. Housing repairs and upgrades required the transfer of existing assets from communities 'to publicly owned Territory Housing on the completion of the repairs and upgrades' (clause 19). The MoU outlined \$414.2 million in new Australian Government funding for construction, repairs, and upgrades of housing in 73 remote Aboriginal communities under the subsequently announced Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP). The funding was contingent on the basis that the NT Government: 'take over responsibility for the delivery of services to outstations', among other things (clause 5). The MoU was explicit in withdrawing direct responsibility of the Australian Government for Indigenous housing, municipal, and essential services infrastructure (clause 6), and it proscribed the use of Commonwealth funding for constructing houses on homelands (outstations) (clause 17). Dismantling the Indigenous community-controlled housing sector and its replacement by a public housing model was an explicit goal (clause 9; Porter 2009; Greal 2022).

Although the funding roles played by the Australian and NT Governments have never been fully separated so far as homelands are concerned, broadly, up until 2007, the Australian Government was chiefly responsible for funding housing and infrastructure on homelands. Stakeholders consistently expressed that the Australian Government retains responsibility for

homelands, with one respondent noting that 'while they've got responsibility through the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, the Commonwealth are on the hook' (S7). Despite this, the 2007 MoU was a fundamental reconfiguration of the relationship between governments, with the NT Government compelled to accept Australian Government funding for remote communities despite restrictions on homelands expenditure. The reconfiguration of land tenure through the compulsory acquisition of remote community leases and the associated direction of funds to larger remote communities effectively privatised assets on homelands, with housing the communal property of traditional owners or a land trust if located on Aboriginal land (Kerins 2009).

At the Australian Government level, Greg Marks (2015) identifies the importance of the 2008 National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), established by the former Council of Australian Governments (COAG), as a homelands policy by another name. 'Priority for enhanced infrastructural support and service provision should be to larger and more economically sustainable communities', the NIRA clarified. The NIRA committed governments to 'Facilitating voluntary mobility by individuals and families to areas where better education and job opportunities exist, with higher standards of services' (COAG 2009; Marks 2015). This signalled a policy retreat from the Australian Government regarding homelands even as it committed in 2012 under the 'Stronger Futures' policy to provide the NT Government with \$206 million over ten years for homelands essential and municipal services (Commonwealth of Australia 2012). Three years later, in the 2015 Australian Government budget, this was converted to a one-off payment of \$155 million to the NT Government to take 'full fiscal responsibility for the servicing of homelands', cashing out from the 10-year funding agreement (NT Government 2020, 1; Schubert 2015).

Across this period until the establishment of the HHIP, the Australian Government had effectively withdrawn support for NT homelands housing and infrastructure, despite some involvement in outback power systems and grant administration of ABA funding.¹ Following the 2007 MoU, the provision of 'walk-away money' in 2012 (cashed out in 2015) consolidated this arrangement, with no contemporary agreement guaranteeing future Australian Government contributions to NT homelands. As it stands, the Northern Territory Homelands Program contributes grant funding towards services for eligible homelands, however funding eligibility depends on the criteria described above. The NT Government does not itself typically fund the construction of new housing on homelands. In sum, no new houses are provided without leases that clearly establish liability for ongoing maintenance. This is not true of assets broadly, with governments more willing to fund water infrastructure or power systems. At the same time, no new leases are sought by either the Australian or NT

¹ The Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) was established under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth). The ABA is funded by the Australian Government according to the value of royalties generated from mining on Aboriginal Land in the NT. The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) formerly managed the ABA grants process, but this was superseded in 2023 by the newly formed Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation (NTAIC), rebranded as Aboriginal Investment NT (AINT) in 2024. Respondents have noted that many of these grant-funded projects remain outstanding.

governments for homelands. The decision to not build new houses on homelands has been an explicit NTG policy since its 2015 'Homelands - A Shared Responsibility' policy, which stated that 'The Northern Territory Government has no immediate plans to build new houses on homelands or establish new homelands' (2).

More recently, the ambiguity and contestation over responsibilities for homelands housing and essential services infrastructure has continued. Following the NT Government's response to its 2020 Homelands Review (below), then NT Minister for Remote Housing Chansey Paech authored a letter to his Commonwealth counterpart, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt. Noting 'the urgent need for new housing', Paech suggested that either the National Agreement for Remote Housing Northern Territory be amended to include new housing for homelands or, alternately, a new national agreement for homelands housing be established. In response to the Review, the Australian Government was definitive: 'State and territory governments are responsible for housing', said a spokesperson for Minister Wyatt (Garrick 2021; Ashton 2021).

This ambiguity and contestation over responsibilities at homelands prompts the consistent use by stakeholders of the claim that there is a 'policy vacuum' for homelands (Grealy 2024a). Appendix 3 reproduces a table published in Grealy (2022) that provides an overview of key governmental developments related to homelands policy and the distribution of responsibilities of housing and infrastructure.

Given the recent history outlined above, the \$100 million funding investment by the Australian Government for homelands, and the subsequent \$120 million, is all the more significant. However, this homelands funding, and the FFA Schedules through which it is delivered, has not sought to clarify a range of homelands policy issues. In this way, it was characterised by one land council employee as a 'gift', invested in homelands by way of the homelands sector, the JSC-RHNT, the NT Government, and the Australian Government, without clarifying any ongoing responsibilities. Regarding the investment, that respondent highlighted that

There's actually no statement by either government about their policy intent and the framework that sits around the investment. . . . There's been no overt acceptance of what - if they're responsible - what are they responsible for, and how are they going to deliver it. There's a real vacuum of accountability on this. (S12).

Another non-government stakeholder suggested that rather than a vacuum, what exists in the form of sporadic investment without clarifying ongoing responsibilities is 'a palliative policy. . . . The conditions for people on their homelands have been allowed to decline. It's doing nothing to support people to stay there or thrive there' (S8).

NT Government Review of the Homelands Policy

In 2018, the NT Government sought submissions for an independent review of the 2015 Homelands Policy and Programs, commissioning the Review of the Homelands Policy the following year. The review sought to consider, as priorities:

- the definition of and eligibility criteria for homelands
- the existing funded grants programs (listed in Table 3 below)
- the existing model of service delivery
- opportunities to fund the construction of new houses
- the identification of economic development opportunities for specific homelands
- the potential to reclassify large homelands as gazetted remote communities
- policy issues related to water supply and quality, and
- policy issues related to energy supply at funded homelands. (NTG 2020, 2-3)

The Review received 18 submissions from homelands services providers and other stakeholders. Collectively, these submissions identified shared themes that included: a lack of clarity and transparency in homelands policies and service provision; the requirement for new housing and upgrades to existing stock; and the need for consolidation of existing grant programs to streamline compliance (NTG 2020, 3-4).

In the 2019-20 financial year, homelands were funded through five grant programs. Table 3 lists those programs and their funding allocations. The 2020 Review recommended that the MES, HMS, Homelands Jobs, and HEA grant programs be combined into a single grant, in order to allow service providers to redirect efforts from oversight and reporting towards homelands outcomes.

Grant Program	2019-20 Funding Allocation
Municipal and Essential Services (MES)	\$14.934 million
Housing Maintenance Services (HMS)	\$6.715 million
Homelands Jobs	\$6.0 million
MES Special Purposes Grants (MESSPG)	\$5.823 million
Homelands Extras Allowance (HEA)	\$2.548 million
Total	\$36.02 million

Table 3. 2019-20 Distribution of expenditure on homelands by NT Government grants

In its 'Initial Response' to the Review, the NT Government (2020) committed to establishing a new body involving Aboriginal land councils and the Australian Government 'to engage and co-design a long-term vision for homelands, including a holistic Homelands Policy framework' (3). It also committed to combining the specified grants above into a single grant to streamline the funding program (7). In 2021, the NT Government established the Advisory Committee on Homelands to provide strategic advice on homelands, including Aboriginal Housing NT, the Land Councils, and the Australian Government as members. This was eventually disbanded and replaced by a homelands working group under the JSC-RHNT. The homelands working group has only met occasionally since it was established (Grealy et al. 2025) and was a consistent point of frustration for respondents. One land council employee stated that

Government says for decisions to be made we need to be at the negotiating table. We don't even have a negotiating table for homelands because the [JSC-RHNT] working group hasn't met to do that work to put up to the JSC to be negotiated. (S10)

From the other side, governments expressed the need for shared decision making to progress homelands policy issues, with one public servant stating

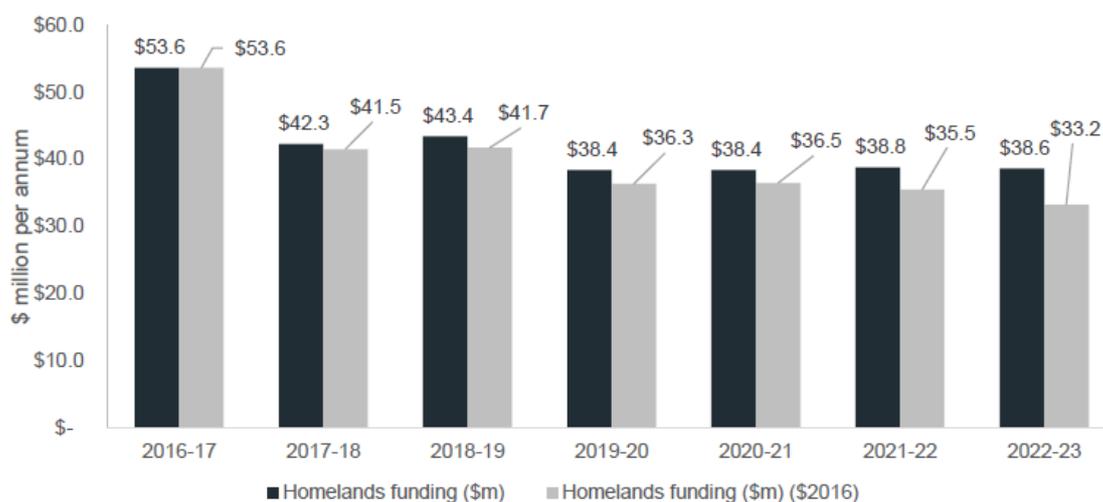
Our view is that homelands are a shared responsibility, they're not government's assets, they're the land trust's assets in most cases. So, land councils on behalf of residents, and residents, we want to know how they want to best manage homelands. That should be, if we're going to have any success in this space, it needs to be underpinned by land council and residents' wishes about what they want. (S2)

On the matter of new homelands housing, in its Initial Response to the Review in 2020 the NT Government acknowledged its ongoing maintenance obligations but did not engage with the question of new construction (Garrick 2021).

2.4 The Homelands Program 2023-2025

The 2023-2025 Homelands Program Guidelines (NTG 2023b) describe the main components of the 'business-as-usual' services provided by the NT Government to homelands. That is, the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program is delivered in addition to the ongoing Homelands Program, which is allocated about \$40 million per annum. AHNT (2023) highlight that this amount has been reduced over time, from \$53.6 million in 2016 to \$38.6 million in 2023, equating to a real reduction across that period of 38 per cent (Figure 1).

Figure 2: NT Government homelands funding, 2016-17 to 2022-23, Actual dollars and \$2016



Notes: Converted to \$2016 using the Consumer Price Index.

Source: AHNT 2023, p.10.

Figure 1. NT Government homelands funding, 2016-17 to 2022-23 (AHNT 2025)

Under the Homelands Program, grant funding is provided to contracted service providers for the provision of housing, municipal services, and essential services. These services are typically funded collectively through a single grant for each location, calculated based on the

number of funded dwellings, with weighting sometimes also given to remoteness and access to water and power supplies. A contracted service provider is required to establish a service delivery plan (SDP) for each funded location, which should be developed with residents, re-confirmed every twelve months, and which outlines services to be delivered subject to available budget. Contracted service providers are also required to record works completed in a maintenance log, to maintain an infrastructure and equipment register, and to develop and maintain an emergency plan. Service providers include Aboriginal corporations, Aboriginal Business Enterprises (ABEs), regional councils, and for-profit businesses.

Under the Homelands Program, Municipal and Essential Services (MES) are generally concerned with the operational costs and ongoing repairs and maintenance of existing infrastructure, rather than the installation of new amenities. The NT Government describes that

Essential service activities are primarily concerned with the operation and maintenance of electricity supplies, water supplies and sanitation systems.

Municipal service activities are primarily concerned with road and aerodrome maintenance, waste disposal, landscaping and dust control in common areas, firebreaks, animal control, environmental health activities and other municipal services. (NTG 2023b, 6)

Similarly, Housing Maintenance Services (HMS) aim to resolve life threatening electrical, gas, fire, and structural safety issues within 48 hours, as well as provide routine repairs and maintenance on housing (NTG 2023b, 9). The Guidelines refer to Healthabitat's Nine Healthy Living Practices as a way to prioritise house maintenance works.

Alongside the Homelands Program sits the Homelands Capital Program (NTG 2023c). The Homelands Capital Program provides funding for the purchase and construction of capital infrastructure and equipment that support the delivery of housing, municipal, and essential services at homelands. Emergency grants for unforeseen and urgent projects may also be made, where those works are considered essential to the health and safety of homelands residents. Grants range from \$10,000 to \$300,000 and are allocated via an annual application process until funds are exhausted. Works related to major essential services are prioritised, such as infrastructure (e.g. bore pump or community solar system) that provides services to an entire homeland or multiple houses.

In addition to the approximately \$40m the NT Government allocates annually to its Homelands Program (including about \$6m allocated to the Capital Program)², occasional one-off projects are also funded. In 2021-22 and 2022-23, this included:

- \$1.5 million for urgent works at Fossil Head and Kudantiga homelands in the West Daly region
- \$1.7 million for housing and essential services upgrades of the Emu Point homeland, following a 2021 election commitment
- \$5.2 million for upgrades across two Utopia homelands.

² In 2021-22, the Homelands Grant Program provided \$39.3m in grants to 39 service providers for the delivery of municipal and essential services at 395 funded homelands.

Following the establishment of the FFA Schedule for NT homelands, it was necessary to establish the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program to develop processes for and administer the delivery of projects using that funding. Two years into the HHIP's operation, and following a second round of project allocation related to the 2024-27 extension, there is an opportunity to consider whether the HHIP should remain as a stand-alone program alongside the Homelands Program. While some NT Government public servants work exclusively within either the HHIP or the Homelands Program, technical staff in particular work across the two programs, which are also located within the same section of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development. Contracted service providers are often engaging with both programs for works and services at the same homelands. A review could help to determine whether there are potential internal efficiencies to be gained and administrative burden to be reduced through the consolidation of the homelands programs.

Recommendations

1. The Australian Government should commit funding to guarantee the continuation of the HHIP in line with the remote housing investment package until 2034, to address homelands housing and infrastructure requirements and provide surety to the homelands sector.
2. The JSC-RHNT should develop a plan for addressing infrastructural shortcomings at homelands with regard to Closing the Gap Target 9B.
3. The JSC-RHNT should develop policy for homelands housing and infrastructure that clarifies the ongoing responsibilities of key parties for investment and servicing.
4. The JSC-RHNT should review the ongoing separation of the HHIP and the Homelands Program to consider the potential administrative benefits of their consolidation into a singular homelands program.
5. The NT Government should index the funding allocated to the Homelands Program, to cease the real reduction in funds for ongoing homelands housing and MES services, which undermines the standard of homelands infrastructure and the potential impact of the HHIP.

3. Evaluation Approach

3.1 Aims

This project has aimed to monitor and evaluate the activities, outputs, and outcomes of the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP). It has examined the impacts of the HHIP on housing and essential services infrastructure at funded homelands in the NT, as it is delivered through:

- Housing and essential services infrastructure refurbishment works
- Subprograms focused on fire and electrical safety, water testing and supply, and household sanitation.

At the direction of the then Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC), I represented the aims outlined in Chapter 1 in the following data matrix (Table 4).

Research Aim	To monitor project delivery and provide real time feedback on any observed issues and successes.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	All project data	Menzies	Ongoing; bi-monthly meetings	In-person discussion with TFHC staff	Hold bi-monthly meetings between Menzies and TFHC and phone calls as required.
Research Aim	Identify and collate project data and undertake quantitative and qualitative analysis of discrete housing and infrastructure upgrade projects delivered under the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	Discrete rapid response and comprehensive project data	Menzies; TFHC	Ongoing	Case studies	Visit up to five sites where projects are being delivered
Research Aim	Identify and collate project data and undertake quantitative and qualitative analysis of Territory-wide programs to improve sanitation, water supply, and electrical safety at homelands.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator

	Territory-wide program data for electrical safety, water, and sanitation programs	Menzies; TFHC	Ongoing	Case studies	Examine data supplied by TFHC related to Territory-wide programs
Research Aim	To describe and analyse governance arrangements for this homelands housing and infrastructure investment, including contracts for service providers, reporting, and data collection.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	Documentation related to discrete homelands projects; interviews with service providers	Menzies; TFHC	Ongoing	Case studies; Final Report	Engage with representative bodies and service providers to discuss governance arrangements
Research Aim	To identify enabling factors and barriers to improving the standard of homelands housing, essential services, and municipal services infrastructure.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	Interviews with staff of NT Government, representative organisations, service providers, homelands residents	Menzies	Ongoing	Case studies	Engage with all HHIP stakeholders to understand various perspectives of program success, as well as enabling factors and barriers
Research Aim	To describe and analyse the impacts of homelands investment on housing, infrastructure, and for homelands residents.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	Documentation related to discrete homelands projects; interviews with service	Menzies; TFHC	Ongoing	Case studies; Final Report	Engage with service providers and homelands residents to discuss program impacts on housing and

	providers and homelands residents				infrastructure at selected homelands
Research Aim	To determine the extent to which there has been an improvement in living conditions in homelands as a result of HHIP works.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	Documentation related to discrete homelands projects; interviews with service providers and homelands residents	Menzies; TFHC	Ongoing	Case studies; Final Report	Engage with service providers and homelands residents to discuss impacts of living conditions in relation to HHIP works.
Research Aim	To demonstrate the cost of improving homelands housing and infrastructure, to inform future funding requirements.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	Data related to whole program costs, individual projects, and Territory-wide programs	Menzies; TFHC	Ongoing	Final Report	Provide an overview of program costs and outputs.
Research Aim	To provide recommendations on areas of improvement, through consultation with residents, land councils, and other stakeholders.				
	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	Interviews with representative organisations and service providers; Expert Advisory Group meetings	Menzies; Expert Advisory Group	Ongoing	JSC-RHNT Presentation	Provide a Final Report including recommendations to inform ongoing homelands investment and governance
Research Aim	To provide a critical analysis of the overall methodology and framework for commitment of the \$100 million allocated to the Territory through the Federation Funding Agreement for the delivery of urgent housing and essential infrastructure on Northern Territory Homelands.				

	Data source	Responsible party	Timing	Analysis	Target / indicator
	All project data	Menzies	Ongoing	Final Report	Provide Draft Final Report by May 2025

Table 4. Evaluation data matrix

The Department also asked Menzies to consider developing various indicators to assess the impact of the HHIP investment, informed by the Federation Funding Agreement and Quarterly Program Delivery Reports. I have undertaken this project according to the position that the program should be evaluated, first, with regard to the purported aims and targets that it sets for itself, as a form of immanent critique. Beyond this approach, this monitoring and evaluation project has sought to consider the following indices of program output, where relevant data has been available:

- Coverage, including the total number and proportion of homelands subject to housing and infrastructure upgrades, and additional repairs
- Procurement, including the proportion of Aboriginal Business Enterprises and Aboriginal community controlled corporations contracted to deliver works
- House condition, including the extent and type of works completed at houses and the number of houses subject to project works
- The impact of program investment on householder satisfaction and wellbeing, as conveyed by homelands residents
- Water security, including work associated with domestic and community-level water supply and distribution infrastructure
- Sanitation amenity, including the increase and improved function of sanitation systems, including toilets and septic systems
- Electrical safety, including the number of houses subject to a certification of compliance in relation to improvement in household electrical infrastructure, and
- Other areas of HHIP investment, including power systems, civil infrastructure, community amenities delivered through discrete projects.

3.2 Approach

The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program Monitoring and Evaluation Project (Project number 2023-4674) was given full approval by the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on the 20th of October 2023. This process included assessment by the Qualitative Ethics Subcommittee and the Aboriginal Ethics Subcommittee (AESC), which advises the main committee on issues relating to research specifically involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Documentation submitted to the HREC included a study protocol, participant information sheets and consent forms, a recruitment letter, a project flyer, and sample questions for both housing and policy professionals and householders. Annual progress reports have been submitted to the HREC as required.

This project adopted a mixed-methods approach. This approach was taken to involve multiple stakeholders in the research process, the interpretation of findings, and the translation of findings into policy recommendations and practice reforms. It was informed by the establishment of, and ongoing consultation with, the Expert Advisory Group (below).

I undertook individual and group interviews with NT Government public servants, representative Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal community controlled organisation staff, and homelands residents. Interviews took place at regional centres, such as Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, and Alice Springs, and during field trips to various locations receiving homelands upgrades. The location of these visits was determined in 2023 and 2024 in consultation with the Department, the Expert Advisory Group, relevant Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and representatives of individual homelands.

Participants were purposively sampled to ensure they came from a range of backgrounds and settings. Recruitment of potential participants into the study was facilitated through the contracted partnership with the NT Government, the involvement of the EAG, and with support from land councils and contracted service organisations (using a Project Flyer). Regarding homelands residents, recruitment typically began by presenting the research to the board or a relevant housing committee of the local homelands services organisation. Such presentations included an overview of the HHIP projects happening in the region serviced by that homelands service provider and the purpose of the monitoring and evaluation project. In that context, I shared project contact details and an invitation to homelands residents to be involved in the research, explaining what this entailed and supplying a participant information sheet. Subsequent preliminary discussion occurred by phone, including directions to engage with other relevant traditional owners, or an invitation to visit a homeland where a project was underway or had been completed. Interviews were typically held face-to-face.

Regarding the site-specific case studies (Chapters six to eight), I presented to the board of Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation in Alice Springs in November 2023, to summarise the research and gain the appropriate permissions to undertake research on projects Ingkerreke was delivering. I presented to the board of Kalano Community Association in November 2023 and to Kalano's Rockhole group at Rockhole in January 2024 for the same reasons. Finally, I presented to the housing and infrastructure subcommittee of Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation in February 2024, in order to summarise the project and seek permissions to examine the project works at Gangan.

The project sought to engage with all Aboriginal community controlled organisations that were contracted to deliver projects under the initial HHIP funding. Interviews with all parties continued until data saturation occurred. Interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants' consent and returned to participants to check the accuracy of transcription. Notes and interview transcripts were coded and analysed to identify emergent themes. Where possible, I also observed relevant service delivery and meetings in situ.

Interviews and fieldwork were supplemented by analysis of policy and program documents, historical literature on homelands formation and governance, archival files, relevant reports and audits, and program data related to works undertaken at both discrete projects and as part of the Territory-wide fire and electrical safety, water testing and supply, and sanitation programs.

Where available, using simple descriptive statistical analyses, I summarised data routinely collected by the Department related to expenditure and outputs under the HHIP. I also worked with Kalano, Ingkerreke, and Laynhapuy to collate data summarising the outputs related to their respective projects, according to metrics that each deemed relevant. I have also sought to represent data concerning larger housing and infrastructure upgrade projects and the Territory-wide subprograms focused on fire and electrical safety, water testing and supply, and housing sanitation.

3.3 Expert Advisory Group

This project established an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) with representatives from Aboriginal community controlled organisations involved in the HHIP. This approach followed that taken in the 'Healthy Homes Monitoring and Evaluation Project' (Grealy et al. 2023). Member organisations were selected by invitation, according to their experience as homelands services providers or their membership in the Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing NT (JSC-RHNT). I sought to include members representing regions across the NT and with experience providing services to both homelands and remote community housing.

The following organisations agreed to participate as members in the Project Expert Advisory Group:

- Aboriginal Housing NT
- Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation
- Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation
- Central Land Council
- Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation
- Kalano Community Association
- Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation
- Ngaliwurru-Wuli Aboriginal Corporation
- Northern Land Council
- Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation

A number of the EAG Group member organisations have a direct role in the delivery of homelands services. This applied experience has informed my understanding of what is involved in service delivery under the HHIP and the Homelands Program. Similarly, other EAG members participate as members of the JSC-RHNT and in this capacity are able to provide information and advice on the wider policy context.

Three formal meetings of the EAG were held across the project, supplemented by more regular videoconference, phone calls, and in-person meetings with individual members. The EAG held its first collective meeting in October 2023. This meeting involved endorsement of the Terms of Reference for the EAG, drafted by the researcher. It also involved establishing a list of prospective sites that the EAG considered appropriate to be considered in the research, based on the schedule of projects and the interests of EAG members. Subsequent EAG meetings were held in July 2024 and June 2025. These meetings discussed in-progress research, such as draft case studies.

3.4 Case Study Selection

The Department requested that Menzies organise the HHIP Monitoring and Evaluation Project in terms of case studies examining project works at individual locations. Those case studies have sought to examine the works delivered, the delivery process, and the impacts for homelands residents.

Menzies agreed to examine housing and infrastructure investment at up to five sites where HHIP works have been (and continue to be) delivered. These sites were to include a combination of locations where rapid response investment was made in the 2022-2023 year, and sites determined by regional work plans to be subject to a comprehensive response later in the 2023-2024 year. To mitigate the risk of diminishing returns by producing case studies exclusively focused on homelands-specific HHIP projects, I decided to also include among the case studies analyses of two of the Territory-wide programs, specifically the Water Testing and Supply Program and the Housing Sanitation Program. Collectively, this provides representation of homelands refurbishment projects, including the diversity of such projects, and works at homelands that were not subject to project-specific investment through the HHIP.

The process of case study selection involved the following steps:

- 1) The Department and the four land councils undertook bespoke decision-making processes to determine projects to be delivered in the comprehensive works package;
- 2) The Department procured contractors to deliver individual projects under the rapid response and comprehensive works packages;
- 3) The Expert Advisory Group considered specific projects to be included within the monitoring and evaluation project;
- 4) Following Expert Advisory Group recommendations, I consulted with representatives of specific homelands receiving HHIP works to determine whether they were interested in participating in the research.

In selecting case studies, I have aimed to select homelands distributed across the NT, with varying sizes and degrees of remoteness, and where EAG members are involved in project delivery. Under the original \$100 million investment, the HHIP was structured across two years with expenditure weighted to the second year, and split between discrete location-

specific projects and Territory-wide initiatives focused on fire and electrical safety, water testing and supply, and housing sanitation. This monitoring and evaluation project has examined works at a small number of locations which, while project expenditure has prioritised specific local needs, have involved housing and infrastructural issues common across homelands in the NT. The Territory-wide Water Testing and Supply Program and Housing Sanitation Program have been undertaken regionally, and thus provide broader data on the typical condition of specific infrastructure at homelands. The involvement of ACCOs contracted as service providers under the HHIP, and as members of the Expert Advisory Group, also expands the generalisability of the analyses beyond specific sites.

3.5 Materials

Documents and Data

The project is informed by a review of policies, reviews, historical reports, and academic literature related to homelands in the Northern Territory and Australia. The Department has also provided a wide range of documents. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Federation Funding Agreement – Restoring Funding for Northern Territory Homelands
- The Homelands Program Guidelines 2023-25 and Homelands Capital Program Guidelines 2023-25
- The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program Implementation Plan, which includes: Appendix B – Grant guidelines template – Electrical and fire safety program; Appendix D – Grant guidelines template – Housing sanitation program, and; Appendix F – List of funded NT Homelands
- Central Land Council, Northern Land Council, and Aboriginal Housing NT Priority Project Lists
- One-page overviews of prospective projects in the Central Land Council and Northern Land Council regions
- Regional Work Plans for the Central Land Council and Northern Land Council Regions
- HHIP Project Updates – Spreadsheet Overview of Current Project Statuses
- A Combined Panel Capability Assessment of prospective service providers under the HHIP
- The HHIP Risk Assessment Report
- Departmental Quarterly Reports to the JSC-RHNT
- The Service Level Agreement between the Department and the former NT Office of Water Security relating to the Water Testing and Supply Program

The project also draws on documentation related to specific projects delivered under the HHIP. This includes Capital Grant Funding Agreements, Grant Variations, Project Plans, Project Scopes, Schedules, Completion Reports, and so on. Kalano, Ingkerreke, and Laynhapuy have all been very supportive of the research, sharing relevant project documents and helping to contextualise the information therein.

The quantitative data represented in Chapter Five was drawn from the Department's HHIP 'Hive', which is the software system used to track the program's progress. This system is used to generate the data represented in quarterly reports to the JSC-RHNT. The Hive data was also supplemented by analysis based on reporting documents from contracted service providers, such as progress overviews and invoicing.

Interviews

Prospective participants for semi-structured interviews were approached for their relevance to the HHIP, aiming to generate insights across various locations and scales: household, community, and organisation. This included public servants that design policy and manage key datasets, senior staff in government and service provider organisations, homelands maintenance and housing officers, homelands residents, and key professionals with historical knowledge of the Indigenous housing and homelands services sectors. Care was taken to ensure that all categories of participants included Indigenous participants where possible.

Relevant public servants were predominantly located in the NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development (formerly Territory Families Housing and Communities), and in particular the Remote Housing Programs section, but were also located in the NT Department of Logistics and Infrastructure, and within the Australian Government. Public servants within these sections hold various levels of seniority, with different responsibilities relating to the HHIP. In order to improve the program, it is necessary to examine the practices of government systems and staff involved in the program's administrative processes that govern the delivery of specific housing and infrastructure projects. Interviews with public servants, as well as with employees of peak bodies and Aboriginal land councils explored: how Aboriginal housing priorities are perceived; how homelands services provision is planned for, budgeted, and administered; how challenges are experienced at the community level and what solutions are proffered; past attempts to design and construct functional housing and adequate services at homelands; the limitations of existing approaches; and future policy, economic, and environmental challenges.

In the project design phase, the Department emphasised the NT Government's desire to hear feedback on the HHIP from homelands residents and homelands service providers. This is represented in Chapter Four and the case study chapters (Chapters Six to Eight). The perspectives of homelands residents are necessary to understand both the processes by which projects have been delivered and the impacts, positive or otherwise, of housing and infrastructural upgrades at homelands. In this regard, substantive topics covered in interviews included:

- The significance of homelands and government investment in homelands to residents' cultural connection and wellbeing
- The impact of housing upgrades on householders' abilities to enact critical healthy living practices, such as washing, washing clothes and bedding, removing wastewater, and storing, cooking, and preparing food
- The impact of housing upgrades on householders' perceptions of safety and security

- The impact of community infrastructure upgrades, such as roads, pavements, and streetlights, on residents' mobility and perceptions of safety
- The impact of improvements to electrical safety, domestic water infrastructure, and septic systems on householders' access to and experience of their homelands
- The impact of HHIP works on community services, such as health clinics
- Homelands residents' experiences of consultation and program delivery processes, and whether infrastructural provision takes into consideration or meets the needs of specific homelands and residents (e.g. related to age or disability)
- Homelands residents and service organisations perceptions of ongoing investment and infrastructural needs
- Any impacts of HHIP works on nearby communities and neighbouring homelands, for instance temporary and extended mobility.

Figure 2 provides a visual overview of the interviews undertaken for this research, divided by stakeholder category. A total of 82 individuals participated in research interviews. A total 62 interviews were undertaken with eight individuals interviewed on more than one occasion. The categories used to distinguish interviewees include Government (n=10), ACCO (n=19), Land Council (n=5), Homelands resident (n=45), and Other (n=3). Informal consultation occurred throughout the length of the project, in particular with public servants, ACCO staff, and members of the EAG.

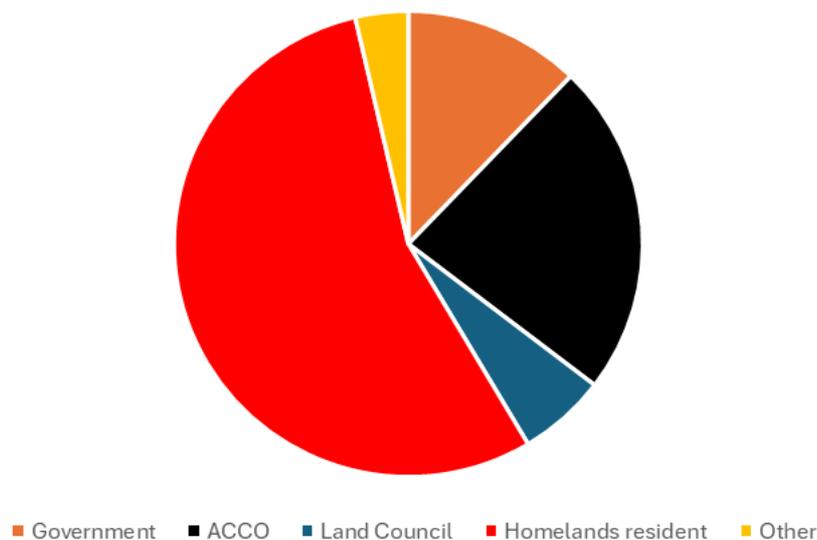


Figure 2. Interviews divided by category

Recommendations

6. The NT Government should continue to fund the independent monitoring and evaluation of the HHIP by Menzies School of Health Research.

4. HHIP Administration

4.1 Federation Funding Agreement

The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP) is funded by the Australian Government through a Federation Funding Agreement (FFA) Schedule with the NT Government. Restoring Funding for Northern Territory Homelands specified an estimated financial contribution of \$100 million across the 2022-24 period, made by the Australian Government to the NT Government to 'support the delivery of urgent housing and essential infrastructure on Northern Territory Homelands'. While respondents noted the significance of this funding, they also highlighted that greater investment is required: 'Look, 100 million's not a lot of money given what has been identified for existing infrastructure in the audit' (S6). The FFA Schedule outlined that it was 'expected to expire by 30 June 2024'. Of the \$100 million, \$25 million was allocated to the 2022-23 financial year and \$75 million was allocated to 2023-24.

The FFA Schedule outlined conditions upon which the Australian Government investment was made contingent, including that the Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing Northern Territory (JSC-RHNT) inform the delivery and monitoring of the HHIP. The JSC-RHNT includes the following members: Australian Government; Northern Territory Government; Northern Land Council; Central Land Council; Tiwi Land Council; Anindilyakwa Land Council; and Aboriginal Housing NT (see Grealy et al. 2025, Chapter three). The former Advisory Committee on Homelands was replaced by the Homelands Working Group of the JSC-RHNT to discuss general homelands policy issues. The JSC-RHNT meets quarterly and is the main forum for monitoring the implementation of the HHIP. The FFA Schedule stipulated additional conditions associated with the HHIP including the development of a program implementation plan, a program risk plan, and regional work plans, developed in consultation with land councils. The NT Government was also obliged to continue its regular Homelands Program, providing \$38.6m per annum in grant funding to homelands.

The key mechanism to report HHIP progress to the JSC-RHNT is specified by the FFA Schedule as the quarterly summary report. Along with updates on the regional work plans, the quarterly reports are supposed to provide the following information:

- Project status information for the reporting period, and across the Program for all works, including outcomes of acquisition processes
- Progress to deliver works in each homelands cluster
- Progress of the Northern Territory wide initiatives
- Expenditure to date across each homelands cluster and initiatives
- Engagement of Aboriginal Business Enterprises
- Schedule performance and corrective actions, if required
- Risks and issues, and corrective actions, if required. (FFA, Attachment B)

Across the course of this monitoring and evaluation project, JSC-RHNT members have not expressed any dissatisfaction regarding the quarterly reporting of the HHIP to JSC-RHNT meetings. More than most government-funded housing programs, the non-government JSC-RHNT members are involved in decision-making about project selection in the HHIP, so are otherwise updated about the program outside of quarterly reporting requirements.

The FFA Schedule's 'Table 2: Performance requirements, reporting and payment summary' outlines the broad performance milestones for the NT Government to meet by specific dates to receive partial payments of the total \$100 million. Despite the agreement referring to the two years of the HHIP as 2022-23 and 2023-24, the agreement was signed by the Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney on 18 March 2023 and by the NT Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Selena Uibo on the 6 April 2023. HHIP progress thereafter has reflected this initial delay in finalising the agreement.

4.2 Distribution of Funding

The FFA Schedule specified the distribution of \$100 million across the two years of the HHIP, with \$25 million allocated to 2022-23 and \$75 million allocated to 2023-24. These financial year periods and their associated funding allocations became known as the 'Rapid Response' and 'Comprehensive Response' respectively. Two options for the distribution of funding within these periods were considered. Under Option 1, a significant proportion of total funds would be allocated to a small number of housing and infrastructure projects at selected homelands, with some remaining funds allocated to 'NT wide initiatives to improve water, power and sanitation for all homelands'. Under Option 2, the funds would be distributed evenly among existing funded homelands. Ultimately, the JSC-RHNT determined to proceed with Option 1. Fewer homelands would receive project works. However, the works undertaken at selected homelands would be more substantial. This provided an opportunity, JSC-RHNT members have conveyed, to better demonstrate the return on investment under the HHIP, on behalf of making a case for continued funding for housing and infrastructure upgrades at NT homelands.

Given the time pressure to commence works following delays with finalising the FFA Schedule, projects under the Rapid Response (ostensibly 2022-23) were selected by the NT Government. These projects were selected according to the following investment principles, which were endorsed by the JSC-RHNT:

- Homelands with a population over 50 persons (including the clustering of smaller connected homelands)
- Housing and infrastructure that is in average/poor condition and requires investment beyond regular repairs and maintenance
- Homelands with existing access to education, and other services
- Homelands within proximity of a regional community - in recognition that homelands can reduce pressure on housing and other resources
- Works that respond to key Homelands Housing and Infrastructure audit findings.

\$19,450,000 was divided among the four land council regions and allocated to the following projects:

- Anindilyakwa Land Council Region, \$1,000,000 for projects at: Bardalumba, Mawulyumanja (Thompson Bay), Akwalirrumanja (Four Mile), and Yedikba (Emerald River)
- Tiwi Land Council Region, \$250,000 for a project at Paru
- Central Land Council Region, \$11,700,000 for projects at: M'bunghara, Town Bore, Utily, and the Utopia homelands (Arparra and Inkwelaye)
- Northern Land Council Region, \$6,500,000 for a project at Rockhole.

Regarding the NT-wide initiatives, \$4.3 million was allocated that year to the Fire and Electrical Safety Program, the Water Testing and Supply Program, and the Housing Sanitation Program. By November 2023, all 14 projects receiving Rapid Response funds had executed grant agreements, with delivery of works having commenced.

For the Comprehensive Response (ostensibly year 2023-24), a total \$54,000,000 was divided among the four land council regions according to the relative number of funded dwellings in those regions (see Table 1). The funding allocation for the Comprehensive Response was as follows:

- Anindilyakwa Land Council Region: \$1,620,000
- Tiwi Land Council Region: \$540,000
- Central Land Council Region: \$22,680,000
- Northern Land Council Region: \$29,160,000 (Figure 3)

Another \$10,000,000 was allocated to the NT-wide subprograms under the Comprehensive Response (2023-24). By November 2023, ten projects under the Comprehensive Response had financial agreements executed.

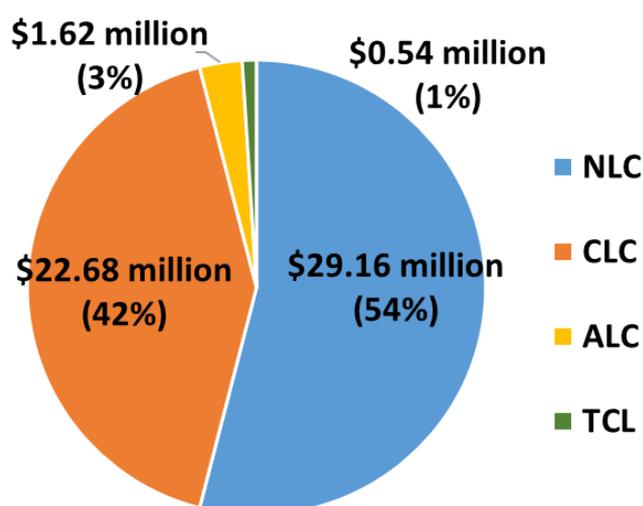


Figure 3. Comprehensive Response funding (\$54m) by land council region

Funding was allocated to the NT-wide subprograms in an attempt to expand the footprint of the HHIP beyond those homelands selected for discrete project works. This sought to recognise the wider need for housing and infrastructural upgrades across NT homelands, within the funding constraints set by the HHIP. As one public servant noted, 'We wanted to make sure we still had some money available to support all homelands, because the reality is that at all homelands there will be cases where there's emergency works that are required' (S3). The focus of the NT-wide subprograms has been to improve the basic components of housing and essential services infrastructure at a larger number of homelands dwellings, focusing on fire and electrical safety, water infrastructure, and sanitation systems. More detail about the Water Testing and Supply Program and the Household Sanitation Program is available in Chapters nine and ten.

Consistent with priority reform one of Closing the Gap, but more significantly the substantial role played by the JSC-RHNT in monitoring the delivery of remote housing programs in the NT, the HHIP sought to share decision-making regarding aspects of program design and the distribution of program funding. This involved working with the four NT land councils to determine the selection of HHIP projects in their respective regions under the Comprehensive Response.

The various land councils adopted different approaches regarding their involvement in the distribution of funding allocated for HHIP projects in their regions. The Regional Plan for the NLC region specified that alongside the principles agreed to by the JSC-RHNT, which informed the allocation of Rapid Response funds, additional NLC principles informing funding allocations were:

- Works are not to be covered by any other funding agreement or project; and
- Funds are to be distributed across the seven NLC regions directly to Service Providers who have the capability and capacity to undertake the works. The regional distribution will be based on the number of serviced homelands in each region. (NTG 2023, 8)

In relation to 2023-24 Comprehensive Response funding, the Northern Land Council elected not to be involved in direct decision-making about the allocation of funds, meaning that projects were prioritised and selected by the Department, with the NLC playing an advisory role. This followed a solicitation process whereby existing homelands service providers submitted prospective priority projects at the homelands they service. Projects were selected that prioritised the upgrade of existing housing and essential services infrastructure, over requests for assets such as vehicles or community amenities such as storage sheds. As described above, priority was also given to projects that sought to upgrade larger numbers of houses, to establish some economy of scale and demonstrate program impact.

In the Tiwi region, the Tiwi Land Council selected one project, which effectively extended the initial project at Paru selected through the Rapid Response, which was already being delivered by Tiwi Regional Council. At the Groote Archipelago, projects were selected by the Anindilyakwa Land Council, informed by discussion with Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation.

The Central Land Council chose to take a more involved approach in decision-making about the allocation of Comprehensive Response funds. At the end of July 2023, the CLC Policy team convened a two-day workshop with the CLC's Homelands Reference Group (HRG). The HRG was comprised of nine members, each representing one of the CLC's nine regions, and drawn from its 90-member council. At that workshop, the HRG was presented with a long list of priority projects, which had been compiled through data sourced and consultation undertaken by the commissioned audit in 2022, Departmental technical officer site visits, AHNT project officer site visits, and CLC consultation. Projects were presented as 'one-pagers', summarising proposed works and estimated costs at specific homelands by CLC region, as well as whether those homelands had received Aboriginal Business Account (ABA) funding and whether those works were complete. Additional on-the-ground information was provided by HRG members within the workshop, (as compared to information available via the NT Government's Bushtel website) such as whether specific homelands were currently occupied and by how many people. The HRG was guided by decision-making principles endorsed by the CLC Executive. The CLC Regional Plan outlined that 'To support informed decision-making, Homelands Reference Group members were provided with:

- Terms of reference and an agreed process for managing conflict of interest
- Clear advice on the timelines for decision-making and final decision-making authority
- Requirements by the Commonwealth and NT Government in relation to the expenditure, including that the investment is for funded homelands only, for substantial work to fix housing and essential infrastructure, and not for new houses (unless a dwelling is Beyond Economic Repair)
- Advice on the scale of funding available now relative to need across the region
- Clear information about how the 'pipeline' priority list of Priority Projects was developed
- Suggested principles that could inform prioritisation, and advantages and disadvantages of the different options
- Sufficient time to make their decision. (NTG 2023, 8)

The CLC's HRG was presented with a list of prospective projects at 61 homelands, with an estimated cost of \$63.01 million. From this, the HRG was required to select projects valued at no more than the allocated \$22.58 million for Comprehensive Response works in the CLC region. In undertaking this difficult task, the CLC policy team supported a discussion about prioritising projects. It suggested that factors which might be considered in the process included whether:

- A homeland had missed out on Aboriginal Business Account (ABA) funding in a recent round of investment
- Homelands with dwellings in very bad or unsafe condition should be prioritised
- CLC regions with more homelands should receive a greater proportion of funds
- Homelands with greater populations should be prioritised
- Homelands in proximity to one another should be selected to achieve economy of scale
- Homelands services providers will be able to manage the projects selected.

Through the discussion, another principle that was important to HRG members was that some funding was allocated to homelands in each of the CLC regions. This is evident in the resulting distribution in Table 6 below. The original list of prospective projects at 61 funded homelands did not include any homelands in the CLC's regions 3 and 4. The result was that projects in those regions were identified during the workshop, based on NT Government data, and selected by the HRG for HHIP funding.

Feedback from participants involved in the CLC workshop was largely positive regarding the participatory nature of representative and shared decision-making. One frustration was that it was not clear why a list of 61 potential projects was provided, rather than an overview of each of the homelands in the CLC region and potential works at each. This process was repeated in 2024 following the announcement of the additional \$120 million in HHIP funding for the period 2024-27. In that instance, a three-day workshop was held and participants were provided with more comprehensive information about prospective projects across a much higher proportion of CLC funded homelands.

It should be noted that while such mechanisms to involve Aboriginal representative organisations and their members in decisions about program delivery and funding allocation are important for increasing Aboriginal-controlled governance in the remote housing system, they are not without risk for participants. The involvement of land councils in such decisions opens them to criticism from homelands service providers about project selection, where those organisations typically have a more detailed understanding of the infrastructural needs in their member homelands. More significantly, HRG members are presented with an impossible task, asked to select a handful of projects from a large number of meritorious options. As one land council employee noted, 'that's the reality of delivering services to the most impoverished people in Australia' (S12). Where such individuals must return to their communities accountable for those decisions, albeit decisions that are made collectively, this is a significant burden to carry for a sitting fee.

Outside this decision-making mechanism, homelands service providers have indicated they would appreciate additional information regarding how decisions are made to prioritise projects. In some instances - and this is true across both the CLC and NLC regions - homelands service providers have expressed surprise and frustration at the selection of specific projects over others, given their broad awareness of the relative state of infrastructure across the homelands they service. One service provider expressed frustration that while they had been directed to prioritise prospective projects, the projects that were awarded included the selection of those deemed low priority. Similarly, one ACCO CEO suggested that

the process should be as transparent as possible, as we should know - there should be a set of criteria or guidelines on how or why outstations are being picked. So it gives us an opportunity to give feedback to our residents as well.
(S18)

Clear communication regarding the mechanism by which funding allocation decisions are made is important, especially where homelands service providers are asked to submit recommendations and scopes for prospective projects. This is necessary for service providers

to complete that task with some consideration of the criteria against which those submissions will be judged.

It is also important that the HHIP give consideration to the role played by the presence of high-functioning service providers in determining where HHIP funding is distributed. It is clear that the absence of an effective homelands service provider has been detrimental to the award of projects at homelands serviced by such organisations. On behalf of ensuring that project funds are expended effectively and in a timely manner, it is reasonable to direct funding to homelands where a reliable homelands service provider, or an alternative contractor, is capable to deliver those works. However, where existing service providers are under-performing, this should not detrimentally impact the residents of homelands deserving of project works, where housing and essential services infrastructure may be in an especially poor state due to ongoing poor service provision. It is important that the relative need of housing and infrastructural works at specific homelands is prioritised in future decision-making about HHIP funding distribution, and that the program works to find solutions to deliver projects at the homelands with the worst housing and infrastructure.

4.3 Regional Plans

One condition of the FFA Schedule was that the NT Government engage the four NT land councils to inform and monitor the HHIP investment, including by supporting the development of regional work plans. Attachment C to the FFA Schedule anticipated that five regional work plans would identify key investment priorities and anticipated costings across the five NT Government regions: Central Australia; Barkly; Big Rivers; Top End; and East Arnhem. The regional plans would provide an overview of existing homelands and the condition of housing and infrastructure, the costs of upgrades, any specific regional issues (such as water stress), and other homelands projects underway. Informed by regional consultation, the plans would aim to provide a 'Summary of priorities identified by regional consultation led by Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory' (FFA, Attachment C).

From the program support costs component of the overall HHIP budget, the NT Government funded Aboriginal Housing NT to establish three project officer positions to assist in the development of regional plans, in consultation with government, land councils, homelands services providers, and residents. This role was relatively short-lived and regional plans were instead developed by the NT Government with the NLC and CLC.

Each of the regional plans list existing service providers among the key stakeholders in the respective Central Land Council and Northern Land Council regions. This list is reproduced here as Table 5, identifying the region(s) where each homelands service provider operates.

Homelands Service Provider	Region
Arramwelke Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
AUS Projects NT Pty Ltd	Central Land Council, Northern Land Council

Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation	Northern Land Council
Deltareef Pty Ltd	Northern Land Council
Demed Aboriginal Corporation	Northern Land Council
Dice (AUST) Pty Ltd	Northern Land Council
Dinybulu Regional Services Pty Ltd	Northern Land Council
Far Northern Contractors Pty Ltd	Central Land Council, Northern Land Council
Ilpurla Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation	Northern Land Council
Kalano Community Association Inc	Northern Land Council
Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation	Northern Land Council
Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Indigenous Corporation	Northern Land Council
MacDonnell Regional Council	Central Land Council
Marthakal Homelands and Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation	Northern Land Council
Milingimbi and Outstations Progress Resources Aboriginal Corporation	Northern Land Council
Murin Association Inc	Northern Land Council
Ngaliwurru-Wuli Association	Central Land Council, Northern Land Council
Ngurratjuta Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
Numbulwar Homelands Council Association Inc	Northern Land Council
Roper Gulf Regional Council	Northern Land Council
Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
Thangkenharengge Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
Victoria Daly Regional Council	Northern Land Council
Warddeken Land Management	Northern Land Council
Warnbi Aboriginal Corporation - Kakadu	Northern Land Council
West Daly Regional Council	Northern Land Council
Yapa Kurlangu Ngurrara Aboriginal Corporation	Central Land Council
Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation	Northern Land Council

Table 5. Homelands service providers listed in regional plans, by region

There was no expectation that regional plans would be produced for the Anindilyakwa Land Council and Tiwi Land Council regions. The FFA Schedule recognised that those regions have unique housing arrangements and that the requirement to produce such a plan would place an administrative burden on those smaller land councils. Nonetheless, in June 2025, regional plans for all four land council regions related to the HHIP 2024-27 were tabled at the JSC-RHNT and published thereafter. Regarding the 2022-24 period, rather than producing plans that reflected the NT Government's five regions, two regional plans were drafted by the NT Government, in partnership with the land councils and AHNT, representing each of the

Central Land Council and Northern Land Council regions. The process for the development of regional plans, and the decision-making related to HHIP projects on which those plans were based, is represented in Figure 4.

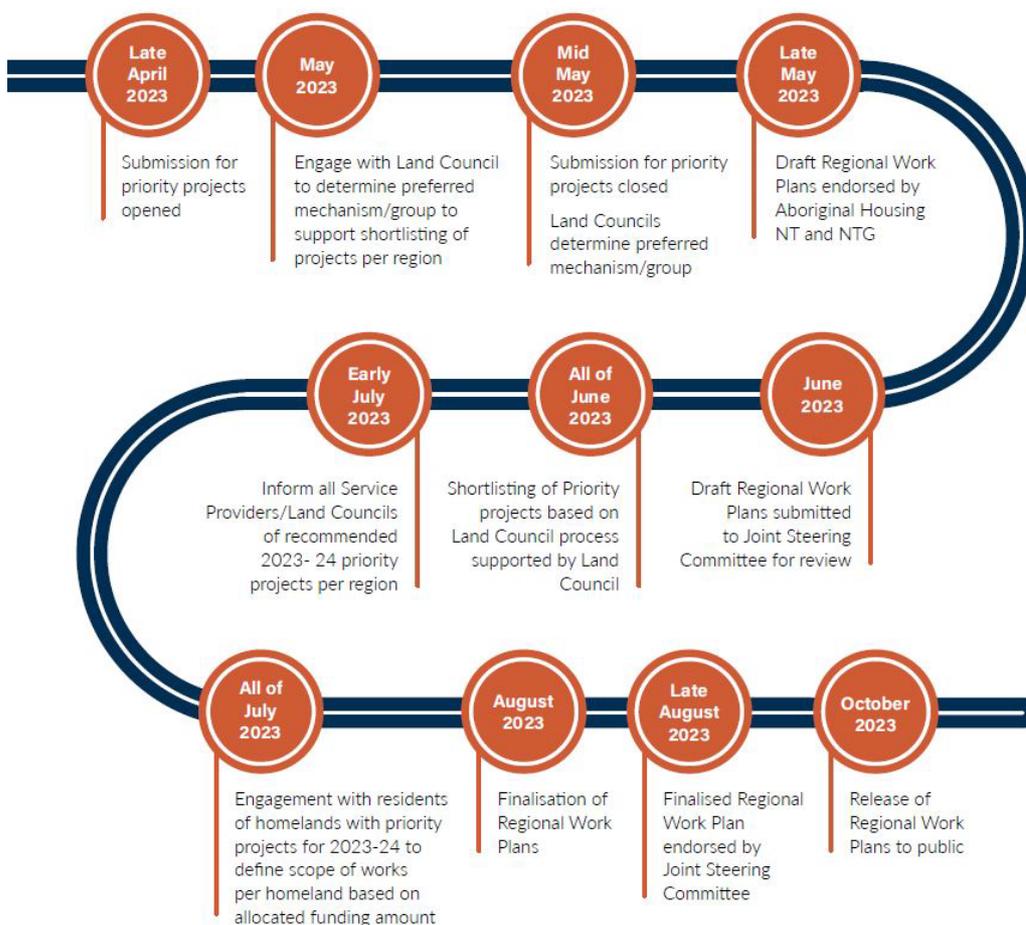


Figure 4. Timeline for the development of regional work plans

The regional work plan for the Central Land Council region stated that ‘As at July 2023, there are 158 homelands eligible for funding under the NT Government’s Homelands Services Program in the CLC Region. Most dwellings on homelands are decades old, as is the supporting infrastructure’ (NTG 2023d, 6). Table 6 lists the ‘Priority Projects for 2023-24’ in the Central Land Council region, among which was distributed a total \$22,680,000. Note that the ‘work description’ included in the regional plan is not reproduced here, as this was a general description published prior to scoping individual projects by contracted service providers, which through that process were subject to change. As one public servant noted, ‘scoping does not occur until we’ve had the community consult, and scoping occurs with the resident there, because we need the resident to sit there and say what’s important to them’ (S3). Broadly, project works specified included upgrades to housing and essential infrastructure, housing maintenance, installation of solar systems, and upgrades to power and solar infrastructure.

CLC Region	Homelands	Funds
1 - Alice Springs	Burt Creek and Anpanaye	\$2,300,000
	Corkwood Bore	\$1,350,000
	Iwupataka Land Trust (Itchy Koo Park and Twenpe C)	\$350,000
	Tjuwanpa (cluster of nine homelands)	\$350,000
2 - South West	Sandy Bore	\$400,000
	Yulara Pulka	\$150,000
3 - North West	Brumby Plains	\$300,000
4 - Western	Blackwater	\$1,000,000
5 - Tennant Creek	Mungkarta	\$3,575,000
	Nguyarramini	\$860,000
7 - Eastern Plenty	Irrerlirre	\$3,900,000
	Mulga Bore and Angula	\$4,000,000
8 - Central	Adelaide Bore	\$2,100,000
	Arrunge, 10 Mile, and Pulardi	\$600,000
	Petyale and Ileparratye	\$1,435,000

Table 6. Comprehensive Response (2023-24) funding to CLC region projects

*Note that no projects were allocated within CLC Region 6 - Eastern Sandover on the grounds that \$12.45m had already been allocated to projects at Utopia, including through HHIP Rapid Response funds.

Table 7 lists the 'Priority Projects for 2023-24' in the Northern Land Council region, among which was distributed a total \$29,160,000. Project works specified included housing and essential infrastructure upgrades, upgrades to power stations, repairs to existing bores and water tanks, and the supply of new lights. Both the CLC and NLC regional plans also listed 'Potential Future Projects', including a work description and the funds required, as identified through the consultation process. At the time, this was intended as a useful list for indicating prospective projects should further funding become available. However, it was interpreted by some service providers and homelands residents as indicating the prioritisation of those projects, which was not the case, as further decision-making processes were required following subsequent investment. This list was removed from later regional plans.

NLC Region	Homelands	Funds
1 - Borroloola/Barkly	Wogyala	\$2,600,000
2 - Ngukurr	Andanangki, Alharrgan, Waldnarr, Wuyagiba, Yimidarra, and Marrkalawa	\$2,925,000
3 - West Arnhem	Ji-Bena	\$1,800,000
	Mamadawerre and Manmoyi	\$3,500,000
4 - Darwin/Daly	Bulgul	\$3,100,000
5 - East Arnhem	Ngangalala	\$3,500,000

	Gan Gan	\$4,000,000
	Mapurru	\$3,580,000
	Langarra	\$1,540,000
7 - Victoria River District	Myatt	\$2,625,000

Table 7. Comprehensive Response (2023-24) funding to NLC region projects

* Note that no projects were allocated within NLC Region 6 - Katherine on the grounds that \$6.5m had already been allocated to the project at Rockhole through Rapid Response funds.

4.4 Capability Assessment, Procurement, Delivery

In early 2023, the Department led a Panel Capability Assessment process of homelands services providers, to inform their eligibility to be contracted for HHIP works. The following criteria were considered essential for a service provider to meet in order to be considered for HHIP project contracts:

- Contractor Accreditation Limited (CAL) registration
- Demonstrated performance and experience in the delivery of housing and infrastructure upgrades (>\$1m) in remote contexts
- Capacity to oversee HHIP projects within the next 18 months, based on internal staffing, relevant skills and expertise and appropriate governance and risk policies and resources
- Compliant with the terms of existing funding agreements related to homelands services
- Compliant with the conditions of their organisation registration.

A total 40 homelands service providers were contacted, of which 20 met all requirements, four did not meet requirements, and 16 did not respond or participate. Participation involved self-assessment in relation to the above criteria (related to CAL registration, past performance, capacity, and timeliness), followed by panel assessment including Department and CLC employees.

The implication of meeting those requirements was that those providers could be contracted directly to deliver HHIP works at homelands they are otherwise responsible for through the Homelands Program. Practically, depending on the budget of specific projects, additional assurances were required by the Department, such as project plans that accounted for potential wet season delays, MoUs with preferred contractors, and information about other major contractors that could impact on HHIP progress. In other cases, HHIP works would be released for Expression of Interest (EOI), with service providers that did not meet all requirements under the Panel Capability Assessment still eligible to apply to deliver those projects (See Appendix E of the HHIP Implementation guidelines). One public servant noted that they

don't want to see EOIs, in a perfect world. I want to see our [existing homelands] service providers do all the works. That's how you get them to the next level,

because if they can do these construction works, then they can do anything within the service provider realm. (S3)

A non-government stakeholder highlighted that the amount of construction work available had nonetheless placed capacity limitations on homelands service providers:

I think that the existing service provider cohort is at capacity in a lot of places and hasn't been able to take on additional new works. And so, what I think that's done is forced the Territory government to go to an EOI process, where they are able to engage contractors reasonably efficiently, getting the money flowing fairly quickly, rather than through a procurement process, which can take months. (S7)

Assured funding for homelands, delivered within an explicit homelands policy framework, will allow homelands services providers to grow strategically to meet ongoing project opportunities.

The Department also procured an independent consultant to support the development of a HHIP risk development strategy, a requirement under the FFA Schedule (1d). An initial workshop involving the HHIP team drafted existing risks, controls, and mitigation strategies. The risks identified were as follows:

- Adequacy of the program team's capacity and capability (Workforce)
- Adequacy of contractors' capacity and organisational maturity (Operational)
- Program scope creep (Operational)
- Access to communities (Operational)
- Adequacy of works identification and scoping (Operational)
- Changes in the construction industry (Operational)
- Effectiveness and efficiency of grants management systems and processes (Operational)
- Effectiveness and efficiency of program reporting (Operational)
- Effectiveness of communication with stakeholders (Communication)
- Complexity of the political landscape (Political)
- Ability to deliver the program within budget (Financial)
- Effectiveness of project governance (Governance)

For each risk, contributing factors and potential consequences were identified, along with existing mitigation strategies and further risk treatments. The HHIP risk development strategy was submitted for approval to the JSC-RHNT in November 2023.

Homelands service providers described how a number of these risks had proved to be challenges to project delivery under the HHIP. As one land council employee noted of service providers, 'I think a lot of them actually run on the smell of an oily rag. . . It's actually only a part sector really, because it's only part funded' (S12). Despite such perceptions and the limited operational funding available to homelands services providers, such organisations predominantly delivered HHIP projects to budget and within time. Service providers expressed frustration that despite the injection of project funding, there was inadequate time to consult for project delivery. One maintenance officer described that 'there's no allowance for consultation in this space. There has been no consultation with

landowners, and for us to commit the works that we're going to do - you don't just turn up at someone's place and dig up their yard' (S21). An ACCO CEO claimed similarly that

There's absolutely zero consultation allowed in this space with people on the ground, which is really concerning given that it's the NTG and a [land council] led process . . . Yet for this project in particular there's absolutely zero resourcing provided to the service providers, there's no time, there's no understanding around the fact that you are walking into somebody's house, or multiple people's houses, often they're different families, in a very short amount of time to do a whole lot of things, and that's the first they've seen it, is when people rock up to do work. (S22)

Stakeholders reported that delays in the finalisation of national funding agreements and the determinations about the distribution of funding across specific regions were not always followed by revised completion dates in grant agreements. This placed additional pressure on service providers to deliver projects on time. This situation disadvantages homelands service providers, as compared to non-Indigenous independent contractors, where the former are accountable to boards of directors comprised of traditional owners, and aim to operate in ways that prioritise the deliberation and direction of homelands residents.

The Department established funding agreements with service providers either by going direct to existing homelands services providers to establish a grant agreement or advertising an expression of interest. Table 8 shows the 37 projects established under the HHIP for the years 2022-24, the location of those projects, the service provider contracted, and the means by which funding was made available. The table shows that 13 of the total 37 projects (a further project was contracted in April 2025) were awarded through an expression of interest process, eight of which related to the NT-wide subprograms. Twenty-three of the 28 projects concerning housing and infrastructure upgrades at homelands were awarded through grant agreements with existing homelands service providers. The Water Testing and Supply Program was funded through a service level agreement with the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Resources (see Chapter nine).

Package	Project	Location/ Output	Land Council Region	Process	Service Provider
Rapid Works Priority Homeland Projects	1	Bardalumba Bay (stage one) Mawulyumania (Thompson Bay) Akwalirrumania (Four Mile) Yedikba (Emerald River)	ALC	Grant Agreement	Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation
	2	Paru (stage one)	TLC	Grant Agreement	Tiwi Islands Regional Council
	3	M'bunghara Town Bore Utily	CLC	Expression of Interest	Bullant Building

	4	Utopia Homelands (Includes \$7.25M from 2023-2024 program)	CLC	Grant Agreement	Aboriginal Enterprises Australia
	5	Rockhole	NLC	Grant Agreement	Kalano Community Association Incorporated
Rapid Works NT-wide Initiatives	6	Housing Fire and Electrical Safety (Big Rivers)	NLC, CLC	Expression of Interest	Aboriginal Enterprises Australia
	7	Housing Fire and Electrical Safety (Barkly)	NLC, CLC	Expression of Interest	DICE (AUST) Pty Ltd
	8	Housing Fire and Electrical Safety (Central Australia)	CLC	Expression of Interest	Aboriginal Enterprises Australia
	9	Housing Sanitation Program (Top End)	NLC, TLC	Expression of Interest	Quality Plumbing & Building Contractors
	10	Housing Sanitation Program (Arnhem)	NLC, ALC	Expression of Interest	Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation
	11	Housing Sanitation Program (Big Rivers)	NLC, CLC	Expression of Interest	Aboriginal Enterprises Australia
	12	Housing Sanitation Program (Barkly)	NLC, CLC	Expression of Interest	Barkly Plumbing Services
	13	Housing Sanitation Program (Central Australia)	CLC	Expression of Interest	Aboriginal Enterprises Australia
	14	Water Testing and Supply Program	NLC, CLC	Service Level Agreement	Dept. Environment Parks & Water Resources
	Comprehensive Works Regional Work Plan Approach (\$54M)	15	Paru (stage two)	CLC	Grant Agreement
16		Bardalumba Bay (stage two) Little Paradise Malkala	ALC	Grant Agreement	Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation

	17	<u>Numbulwar Cluster Homelands</u> Andanangki Alharrgan Waldnarr Wuyagiba Yimidarra Marrkalawa Wumajbarr Yilla	NLC	Expression of Interest	Northern Building and Property Services Pty Ltd
	18	Wogyala	NLC	Grant Agreement	Aboriginal Enterprises Australia
	19	Ji-Bena	NLC	Grant Agreement	Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation
	20	Mamadawerre Manmoyi	NLC	Grant Agreement	Demed Aboriginal Corporation
	21	Bulgul	NLC	Grant Agreement	Yilli Rreung Housing Aboriginal Corporation
	22	Ngangalala	NLC	Grant Agreement	Dinybulu Regional Services (MOU Bukmak Constructions)
	23	Gan Gan	NLC	Grant Agreement	Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation
	24	Mapurru	NLC	Grant Agreement	Marthakal Homelands and Resource Centre Aboriginal Corp.
	25	Langarra	NLC	Grant Agreement	Milingimbi and Outstations Progress Resource Aboriginal Corp.
	26	Myatt	NLC	Expression of Interest	DICE (AUST) Pty Ltd
	27	Burt Creek/Anpanaye Corkwood Bore	CLC	Grant Agreement	Ingkerreke Outstations Resource Services Aboriginal Corporation (MOU Nicholl Construction)
	28	Itchy Koo Park (House 8) Twenpe C (House 1, 2, 3 & 6)	CLC	Grant Agreement	Ingkerreke Outstations Resource Services Aboriginal Corporation

		Sandy Bore Yulara Pulka			
29		Rutjingka Outstation (Tjuwanpa Homelands)	CLC	Grant Agreement	Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation
30		Irrerlirre	CLC	Grant Agreement	Ingkerreke Outstations Resource Services Aboriginal Corporation (MOU Harvey Developments)
31		Mulga Bore Angula	CLC	Expression of Interest	Bullant Building
32		<u>Anmatyerr West Cluster</u> Arrunge 10 Mile Outstation Pulardi	CLC	Grant Agreement	Yapa-Kurlungu Ngurraru Aboriginal Corp.
33		Blackwater	CLC	Grant Agreement	Bullant Building
34		Mungkarta	CLC	Expression of Interest	Barkly Plumbing Services
35		Nguyarramini	CLC	Grant Agreement	Far Northern*
36		Brumby Plains	CLC	Grant Agreement	Ngaliwurru-Wuli Aboriginal Corporation
37		Petyale Ileparratye Adelaide Bore	CLC	Grant Agreement	Aboriginal Enterprises Australia
38		Water Infrastructure Upgrades Barkly**	CLC	Grant Agreement	Territory Water Solutions

Table 8. HHIP projects awarded, 2022-24

*This agreement was terminated in 2025 and was replaced with an agreement with Barkly Plumbing Services

**This agreement was established in April 2025

Where an open grant selection process was involved, panels included representatives from the Department and an independent representative, often a land council employee. Weighted assessment criteria were used to select service providers, including: past performance (15%); capacity (20%); timelines (10%); risk management (10%); service delivery model (25%); and local development and value for territory (20%). The HHIP procurement

approach outlined that where an EOI is created, the provision of services by ABEs would be preferred in line with the Aboriginal Economic Participation Framework 2022-2032 and the Buy Local Plan. However, stakeholder feedback from the homelands sector suggested that specific weighting should be given to whether or not an applicant is an Aboriginal community controlled corporation. Concern was expressed that the injection of homelands funding, alongside the capacity limitations of existing providers, was opening the sector to non-Indigenous contractors: 'for the Territory [Government], they probably see that as having the added benefit of expanding their service provider base, or the contractors that are available that they can go to for service delivery' (S7).

Recommendations

7. Regarding future determinations over the distribution of funding, the JSC-RHNT should communicate to the homelands sector the principles, criteria, and, where possible, the processes that will underpin the selection of specific HHIP or capital works projects.
8. The NT Government should continue to fund NT-wide infrastructure subprograms through the HHIP.
9. The NT Government should survey homelands services providers for feedback on existing procurement processes, such as how grant agreements can better support homelands consultation and how assessment criteria can prioritise ACCOs for homelands contracts.
10. The JSC-RHNT should consider how the relative need of homelands for housing and infrastructural works can be factored into decision-making about HHIP funding distribution, so as not to disadvantage residents at homelands serviced by less effective providers.

5. HHIP Outputs

As of July 2025, the HHIP is operating within the period governed by the 2024-27 FFA Schedule. This monitoring and evaluation project is concerned with the 2022-24 period and the data that follows relates to work undertaken within that period and under that FFA Schedule. DHLGCD granted the Menzies researcher access to the program data system. What follows is drawn from executive reports, dashboard summaries, delivery reports, and lot data.

As of 3 March 2025, a total \$63,000,406 had been expended by the NT Government for HHIP projects identified by the 2022-24 program. By 30 July 2025, a total \$74,653,434 had been expended under the 2022-24 program. This related to 38 HHIP projects that were being delivered across a total 318 homelands.

Notably, despite the extensive consultation and engagement work undertaken by the HHIP team, no data was collected about the types or quantity of engagement undertaken by HHIP staff to support the delivery of specific projects. While it is common to hear criticisms of government programs governing remote Australia from afar, HHIP staff worked hard to engage with ACCOs and homelands residents in the contexts where projects were being delivered. There is potential to collect basic information about this work completed under the program, such as relates to community consultations, individual house consultations, house handover visits and compliance checks, and project completion events.

5.1 Housing upgrade projects

The broad coverage of the HHIP across NT homelands has been underpinned by the NT-wide subprograms for fire and electrical safety, sanitation, and water testing and supply. There are 58 homelands where 28 substantive homelands upgrade projects have been delivered or are continuing. These projects relate to 298 houses. As of December 2024, works had been completed at 30 homelands and at 152 houses. As of July 2025, works had been completed at 34 homelands and at 190 houses. Figure 5 shows the number of homelands and houses where works have been completed since the commencement of the program.

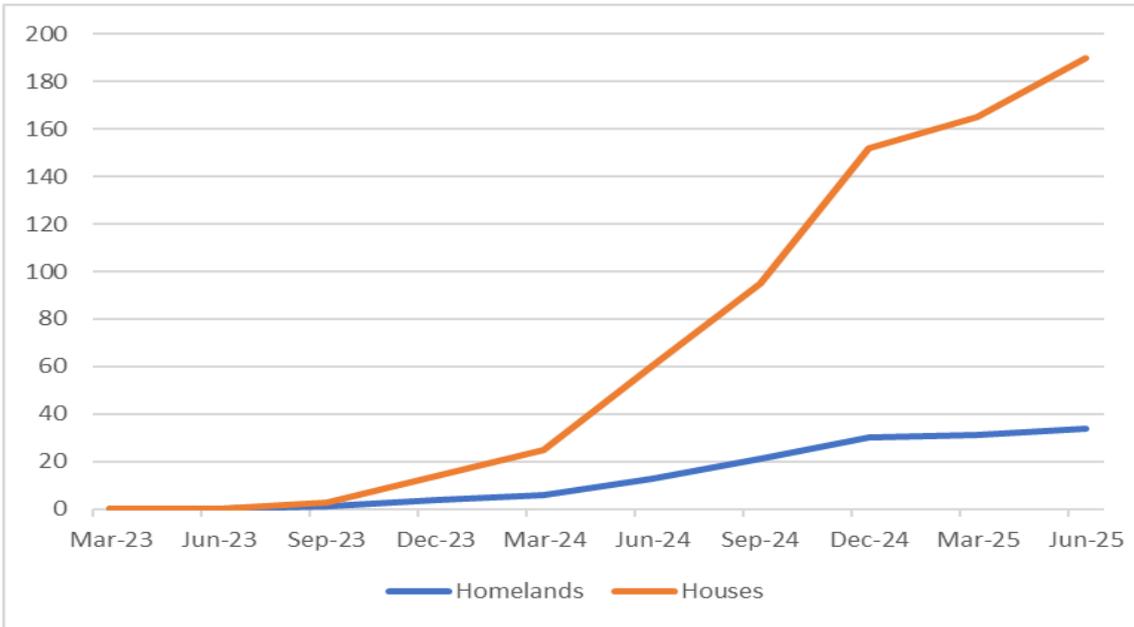
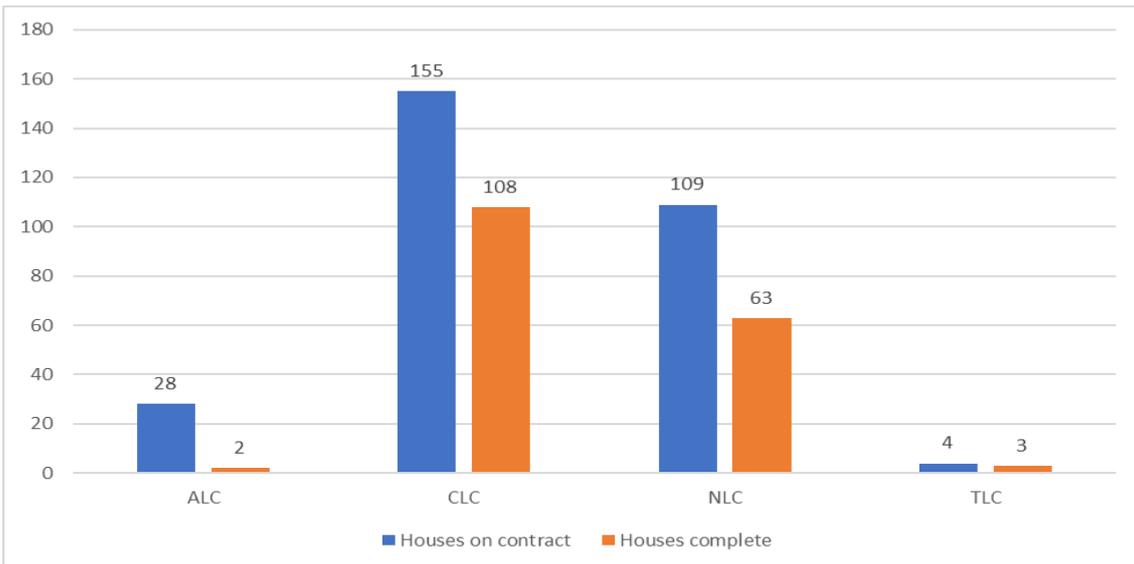


Figure 5. Homelands and houses with completed HHIP works over time

Figure 6 distinguishes the progress of homelands upgrades projects by land council region, showing the number of houses contracted for works and the number of those houses where works have been completed, as of July 2025.³



³ Note that there is a discrepancy between the total number of houses completed when represented across the land council regions (n=176) and the total number of houses completed across the program (n=190). The difference relates to differentiated accounting of 'houses completed' within the system, which refers both to houses that have been upgraded and handed over to residents and houses that have been practically completed but are yet to have handovers occur (the larger figure).

Figure 6. HHIP refurbishment works – houses contracted and completed

As of March 2025, a total \$56,121,250 had been expended in relation to homelands upgrade projects (i.e. not NT-wide subprograms). As of July 2025, a total \$66,500,200 had been expended in relation to homelands upgrade projects under the 2022-24 program. The total budgeted expenditure for those homelands upgrade projects was \$85,050,000. Table 9 represents the expenditure to date by land council region.

Land Council Region	Expenditure to March 2025	Expenditure to July 2025	Budgeted Expenditure July 2025
Anindilyakwa Land Council	\$1,286,000	\$1,286,000	\$2,620,000
Central Land Council	\$31,493,250	\$35,821,700	\$43,640,000
Northern Land Council	\$22,660,000	\$28,710,500	\$38,000,000
Tiwi Land Council	\$682,000	\$682,000	\$790,000
All	\$56,121,250	\$66,500,200	\$85,050,000

Table 9. Homelands upgrade project expenditure by land council region

5.2 NT-wide Subprograms

The NT-wide subprograms have achieved broader coverage of homelands. Consideration of the Water Testing and Supply subprogram is largely limited to the case study focusing on that initiative specifically (Chapter Nine). Table 10 provides an overview of the impact of the Fire and Electrical Safety and the Housing Sanitation subprograms.

	Fire and Electrical Safety	Sanitation
Number of homelands impacted	189	255
Number of houses inspected*	689	973
Number of urgent repairs completed**	724	1035

Table 10. Coverage and impact of NT-wide subprograms

*Includes inspections with no internal access but not multiple visits

**In correspondence, the Department has defined urgent repairs as 'Necessary improvements that must be addressed quickly due to a high priority or a significant threat to safety, functionality, or the ability to operate effectively'.

Figure 7 provides an overview of the expenditure to March 2025 for the NT-wide Fire and Electrical Safety subprogram.⁴ Expenditure has been differentiated to consider the costs directly associated with repairs and costs associated with mobilisation to undertake works (e.g. travel, labour, and administration costs associated with the subcontractor). In Figure 7, there is no data for the Top End and Arnhem regions because HHIP contracts were not awarded for the Fire and Electrical Safety subprogram for those regions, as similar work had already been undertaken in those regions prior to the HHIP's commencement. The significant proportion of total expenditure attributed in the Barkly region to mobilisation costs, as compared to repairs, related to the contractor being located in Darwin.

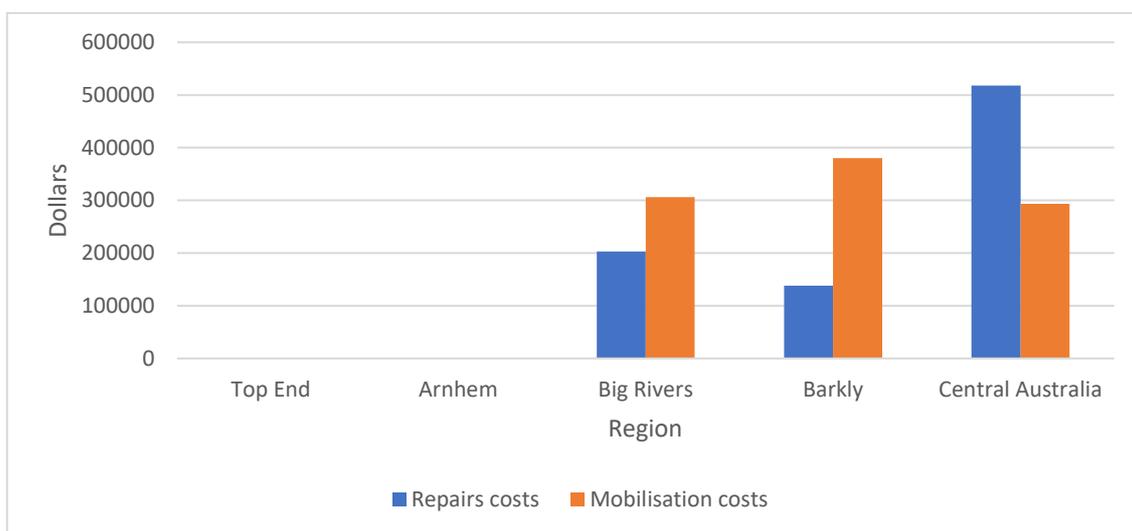


Figure 7. Fire and Electrical Safety Subprogram Expenditure to March 2025

Figure 8 provides an overview of the expenditure to March 2025 for the Housing Sanitation subprogram. There is significant difference across the NT Government regions between the proportion of total expenditure attributed to mobilisation costs. For total expenditure reported by contracted service providers under the Housing Sanitation subprogram (\$3,813,040), 35.4 per cent (\$1,350,090) was attributed to mobilisation costs. In the Big Rivers region, mobilisation accounted for 48.5 per cent of the total costs and in the Top End region for 56.7 per cent. However, in the Arnhem region, mobilisation accounted for only 8.2 per cent of the total costs. To some extent, this reflects that in the Arnhem region, the contractor is the regular contracted service provider under the Homelands Program and visited homelands where it was known that works were required. In the Top End and Big Rivers regions, the contractor visited a high number of homelands with less information about the required works and with more access issues.

⁴ As of July 2025, expenditure data is represented differently in the HHIP 'Hive' system than its previous format and it is not possible to provide updated expenditure figures that differentiate between repair and mobilisation costs.

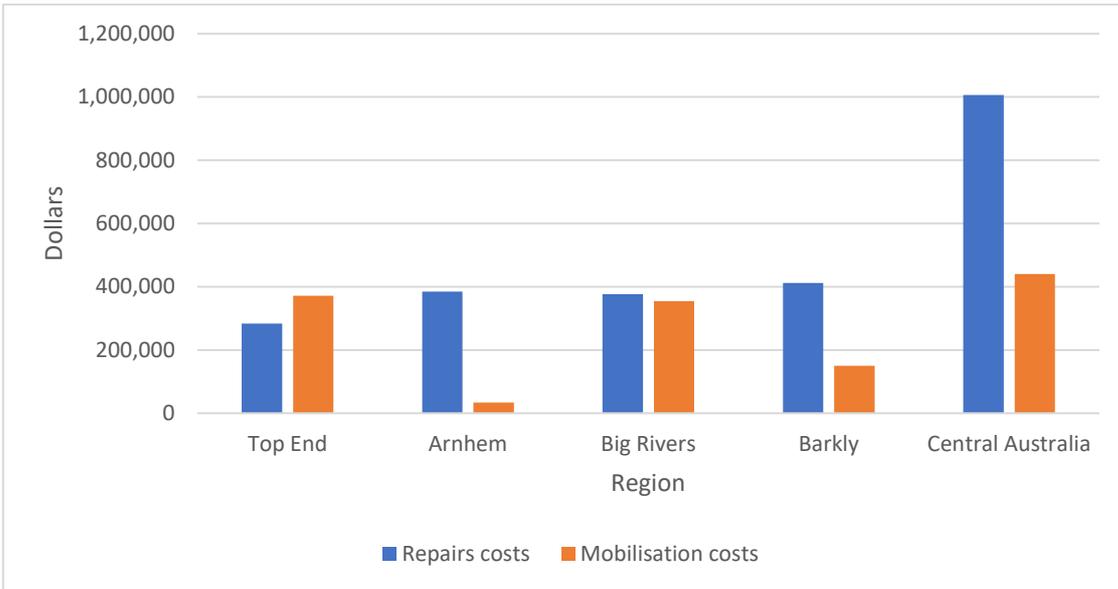


Figure 8. Sanitation Subprogram Expenditure to March 2025

Figure 9 provides an overview of the total expenditure under each of the NT-wide subprograms to July 2025, as compared to the expenditure budgeted in grant agreements for those subprograms. The Fire and Electrical Safety subprogram budgeted \$2,910,000 and has expended \$2,766,000; the Water Testing and Supply subprogram budgeted \$2,025,000 and has expended \$466,734; and the Housing Sanitation subprogram budgeted \$5,640,000 and has expended \$4,920,500.

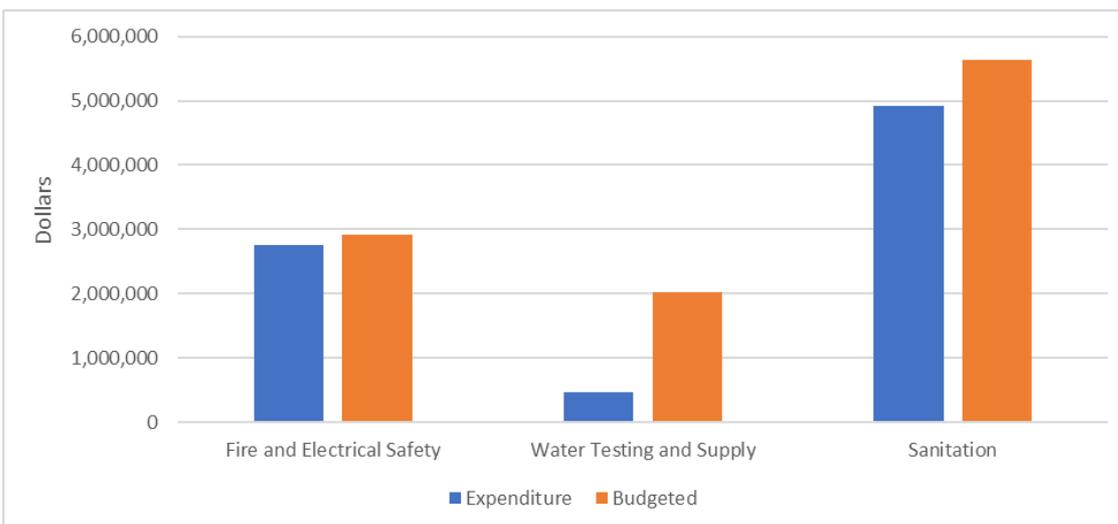


Figure 9. Budgeted and actual expenditure under the HHIP subprograms

5.3 Grant Agreements

Across the HHIP, a total 39 funding agreements have been awarded for works in the 2022-24 period, for both housing projects and NT-wide subprograms.⁵ A majority of funding agreements have been established as a grant agreement (n=24), while 14 contracts were established through an expression of interest process. One service level agreement was established in relation to the NT-wide Water Testing and Supply subprogram. The distribution of funding agreements by type is represented in Figure 10.

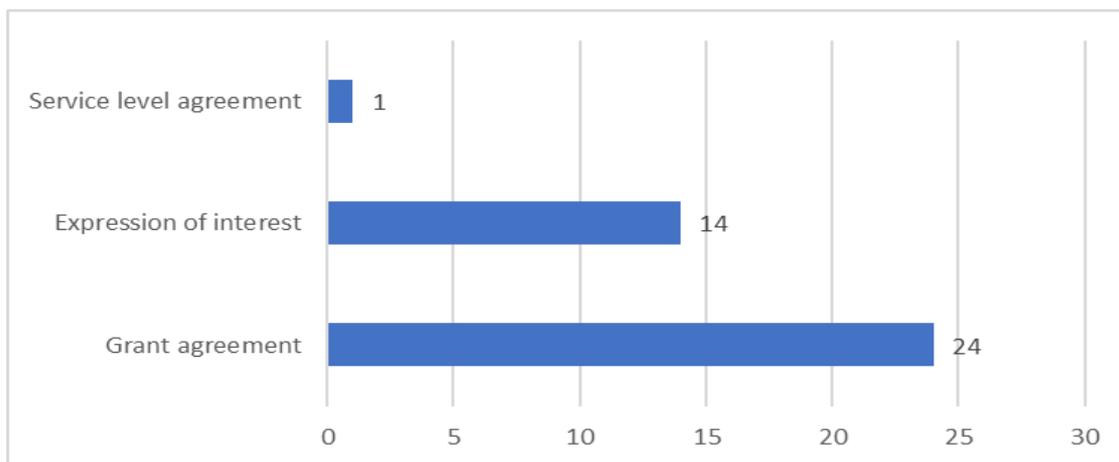


Figure 10. Distribution of HHIP funding agreements by type

Funding agreements under the HHIP had a total value of \$95,525,000.⁶ This amount approximately constitutes the total value of the FFA Schedule for Homelands that underpins the HHIP, less the 5 per cent held by the NT Government to cover program management and related costs. Figure 11 shows the distribution of funding agreements awarded to Aboriginal Business Enterprises (ABEs) and non-ABEs across the HHIP. Figure 12 shows the combined value of funding agreements awarded to ABEs (\$71,459,500) and non-ABEs (\$24,065,500).

⁵ Note that two grant agreements were awarded for housing and infrastructure upgrades at Nguyarramini. An agreement with Far Northern Contractors was terminated in January 2025, with \$86,000 expended, and a new agreement was established with Barkly Plumbing Services in March 2025, for \$959,000.

⁶ Note that this was \$95,000,000 until an additional contract valued at \$525,000 was awarded to Territory Water Solutions in April 2025 to undertake water infrastructure upgrades in the Barkly region.

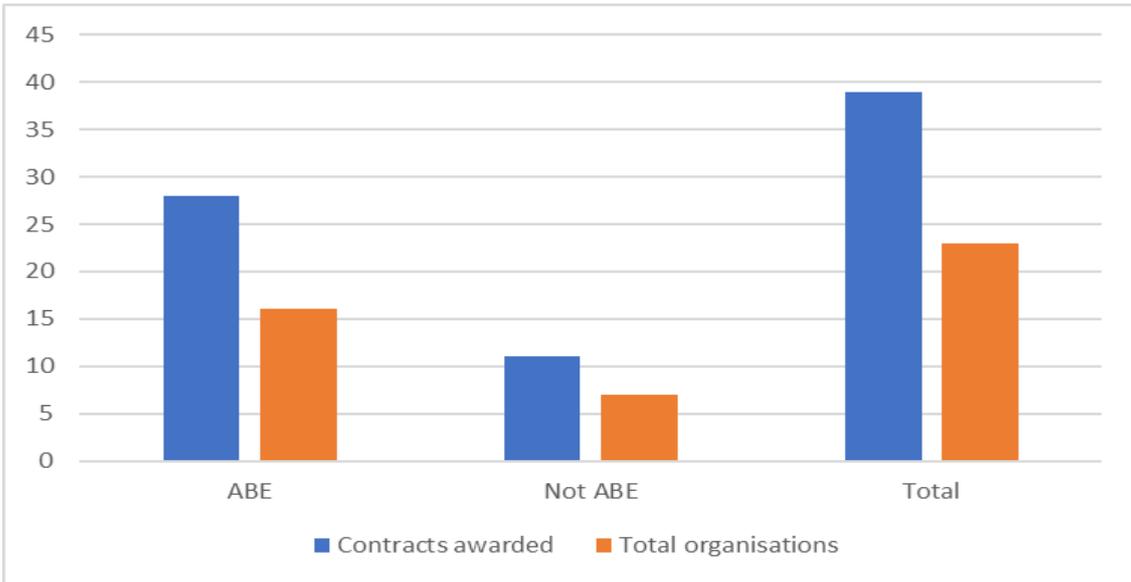


Figure 11. HHIP funding agreements established with ABEs and non-ABEs

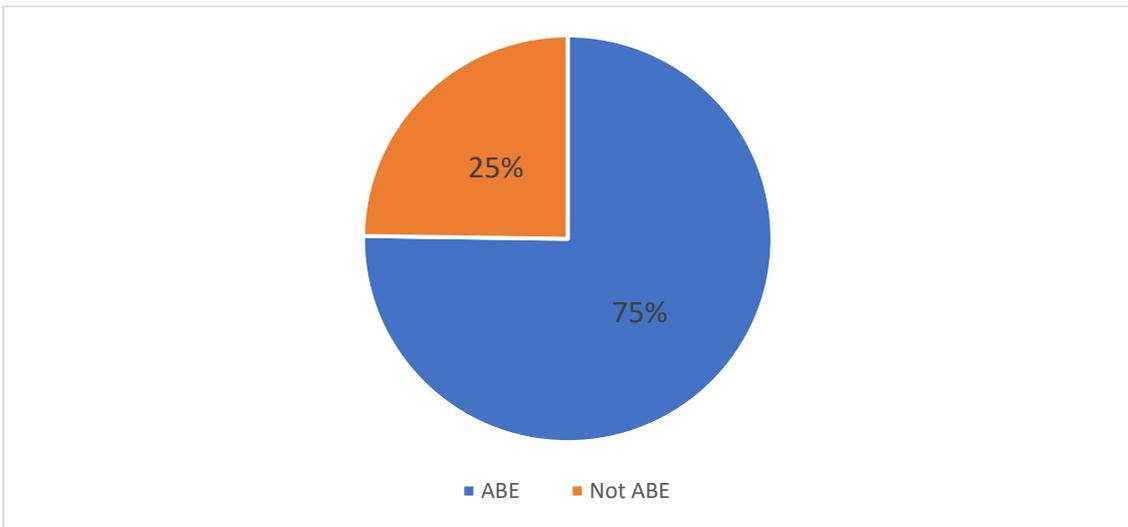


Figure 12. Proportional value of HHIP funding awarded to ABEs and non-ABEs

For homelands services providers, the distinction between Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal Business Enterprises is an important one. Figure 13 divides Aboriginal Business Enterprises - the typical categorisation used by the NT Government - into ACCOs and not-ACCO ABEs to represent the distribution of total funds across those categories of organisation.⁷

⁷ This includes the categorisation of Tiwi Regional Council as a not-ACCO ABE. This follows the position to not categorise regional councils as ACCOs, which is contested by some

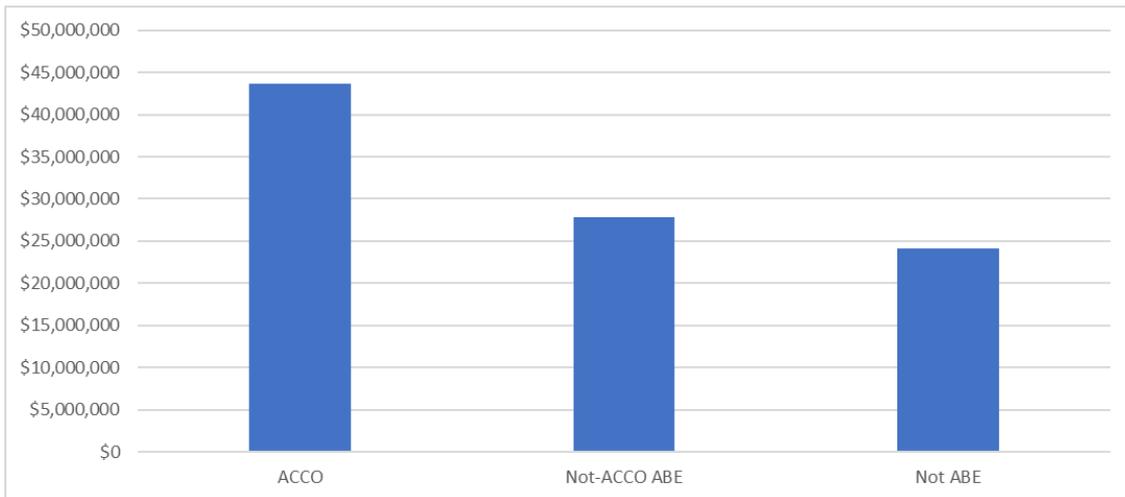


Figure 13. HHIP funding awarded to ACCOs, non-ACCO ABEs, and non-ABEs

In early project overview documents, \$5 million was specified as to be distributed across the NT-wide Fire and Electrical, Sanitation, and Water Testing and Supply subprograms under the Comprehensive Works period (2023-24), the first NT-wide funding agreements having been established during the Rapid Response period (2022-23). While a proportion of this funding was used to increase the value of funding agreements related to sanitation works (a total \$750,000 across three agreements), the remainder (a total \$4,250,000) was distributed across another six existing agreements related to specific homelands projects. It is not clear why those specific projects were awarded additional funding over others, or by what process. An additional \$525,000 was used to contract Territory Water Services to deliver water infrastructure upgrades in the Barkly region, drawn from the underspend in the original allocation to the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Resources.

Chapters Six to Ten provide detailed case studies of projects delivered through the HHIP, including three homelands specific projects and two of the NT-wide subprograms.

5.4 Infrastructure Improvements

In March 2025, the Menzies researcher sought to represent the total non-housing infrastructural improvements made at homelands through the HHIP (this is also attempted in the case study chapters). However, at that time the relevant information was not accessible via the HHIP data management system. As of July 2025, it is evident that the HHIP team has made efforts to capture the infrastructural capital works and upgrades achieved through the HHIP. This is important because specific projects are focused on community infrastructure rather than housing upgrades (for example the construction of solar farms at Mamadawerre

regional councils, in particular by citing the role played by their Local Authorities (see Grealy et al. 2025).

and Manmoyi), and housing refurbishments are only worthwhile if the related community infrastructure supports functional housing.

Table 11 represents the categories used by the HHIP to track infrastructure projects under the program, alongside the number of contracts in which such infrastructure projects are being undertaken, and the associated contract value. Based on a broader understanding of the HHIP, this data is incomplete (for example, drawing on the case studies, the figures below do not capture the upgrade to the power system at Burt Creek or the road upgrades at Gāngan). Nonetheless, the table is included here as indicative of the good intent to track infrastructural improvements at homelands. There is potential to refine these categories to provide greater detail to stakeholders about the infrastructural impacts of the HHIP. This will be useful to key stakeholders to progress thinking related to Closing the Gap Target 9B.

Infrastructure Category	Number of Contracts	Total Contract Value
Improved road drainage and widen	2	\$1,024,266
Install new solar lighting	1	\$24,000
Repair/replace sanitation holding tank	1	\$45,000
Solar farm project	2	\$3,500,000
Tanks/tank stands	3	\$280,991
Transitional accommodation	2	\$183,007
Upgrade power supply	5	\$205,800
Water infrastructure	2	\$0

Table 11. Infrastructural improvements under the HHIP

Recommendations

11. Consistent with Closing the Gap Priority Reform Three, the HHIP should collect data on the homelands consultation and engagement work it undertakes for program implementation.
12. The HHIP should consider how to reduce mobilisation expenditure under NT-wide subprogram grant agreements, including by splitting regional contracts to allow multiple existing homelands services providers to deliver works.
13. The HHIP should increase transparency over the distribution of unallocated funds to specific projects, given the broader HHIP efforts to share decision-making about program funding distribution.
14. The JSC-RHNT should agree to minimum and desirable proportions of HHIP funds to be allocated to ACCOs, consistent with the purpose of Closing the Gap Priority Reform Two.
15. The HHIP should include distinctions between ACCOs and ABEs in its reporting on procurement, in order to ensure clarity about its impact on strengthening the Aboriginal community controlled sector.

16. The HHIP should continue to develop its collection and categorisation of data related to the total non-housing infrastructure projects delivered under the program, on behalf of improving broader understanding regarding the importance of investing in non-housing infrastructure.

6. Rockhole Project Case Study

6.1 Introduction

This case study was submitted in November 2024 as a milestone under the agreement (NS23-0110) between Menzies School of Health Research and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development (DHLGCD), then the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC), for the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP) Monitoring and Evaluation Project.

The selection of Rockhole as a case study for this project was approved by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG). Project funding was awarded to Rockhole as part of the HHIP's first year, or 'Rapid Response'. In order to undertake research at Rockhole, the researcher visited Kalano Community Association in October 2023, presented via videolink to the Kalano Council in December 2024, and presented in-person at a Rockhole community meeting in January 2024. In March 2024, the researcher visited Katherine and Rockhole and undertook interviews with householders and Kalano staff members. The researcher returned to Rockhole for follow-up interviews with householders in September 2024. Analysis of the project is also based on documents provided by Kalano and the NT Government. This case study has been approved by Kalano for publication.

6.2 Rockhole Project

Project works at Rockhole were awarded on 18 May 2023 under grant agreement HHIP2500001. Works commenced from 1 September 2023 and were completed in March 2025. Kalano Community Association was contracted to deliver housing upgrades and civil works (elsewhere described as housing, municipal, and essential services upgrades) to the value of \$6,500,000 (excl. GST).

The Rockhole Program was funded through the \$25 million allocated to the first year of the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP), the 'Rapid Response (2022-23)'. Rockhole satisfied the criteria for Rapid Response project selection endorsed by the Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing NT (JSC-RHNT). The population is greater than 50 persons, housing and infrastructure was in average/poor condition and required investment beyond regular repairs and maintenance, and Rockhole's proximity to the town of Katherine underpins its access to education and other services. Rockhole was not included in AECOM's (2022) Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Audit. The Regional Plan for the Northern Land Council (NLC) Region outlines that no projects were selected for 'Comprehensive Funding (2023-24)' in the NLC's Katherine Region (Region 6), given the significant allocation of Rapid Response funds to the Rockhole Project (NT Government 2023d).

6.3 Rockhole Community

Rockhole (Community ID 642) is located on Florina Rd approximately 13 kilometres west of Katherine, sitting to the north of and backing onto the Katherine River. Rockhole community is located on Lot number 1533 (Katherine) in an area of 14 hectares (3900 square metres) that is subject to a Crown Lease in Perpetuity, held by Kalano Community Association Inc. (Figure 14). This land tenure arrangement is unusual for homelands, which are more typically located on Aboriginal Land as defined by the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA), with land owned by an Aboriginal land trust. It is not typical of homelands that a lease would be held by a service organisation such as Kalano. One Kalano staff member emphasised that government distinctions about community type and their associated funding implications are artificial in relation to resident needs: 'whether you're an outstation, a town camp or a homeland [you] all have the same needs: homes, infrastructure, roads, water, power, sewerage' (S26).

This tenure arrangement is a byproduct of the history of Rockhole community. This history also underpins the contemporary presence of Rockhole community members affiliated with a range of tribes and family groups, unlike some smaller homelands that are more closely affiliated with a single family group. From 1918, prohibited area ordinances restricted Aboriginal people's access to Katherine town between sunrise and sunset and only if engaged in specific commercial activities. This contributed to the establishment of camps outside of town inhabited by people employed on peanut and vegetable farms, at Manbulloo Station, and at various other pastoral properties in the vicinity. Following the Japanese air raids on Darwin and Katherine in 1942, local Aboriginal people were subject to a period of forced internment at army camps and compounds during World War II (Merlan 1998).

Following World War II, in 1947, an experimental military farm located to the southwest of Katherine was taken over by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). Aboriginal people located at semi-permanent camps along the Katherine River were employed on the farm, the main purpose of which was the development of regionally appropriate crops. Francesa Merlan writes that 'Aboriginal labor was used for clearing, planting, driving, various forms of crop testing, and experimentation; and, of course, where there was a white staff, there was also considerable demand for domestic labor, housekeeping, and child minding' (1998, 37). Jawoyn, Wardaman, Dagoman, and Aboriginal workers affiliated with other tribes were initially transported to the farm from their camps, until a residential camp was established at the CSIRO farm. In the mid-1960s there was estimated to be up to two hundred inhabitants at the camp, including workers, their families, and extended family members visiting town for hospital services and other reasons. Merlan writes that at the CSIRO camp, 'Families lived in temporary housing with verandahs out front and created their own cooking areas outside the houses. There were pit toilets. The houses were about three hundred yards away from the bosses' houses' (1998, 40). Merlan's sources recount that, following the Social Welfare Ordinance of 1964 and its

legalisation of alcohol consumption for Aboriginal people, violent incidents increased and a number of significant figures died. In the early 1970s, Merlan writes that former CSIRO resident Steven Watson led other camp residents 'to Rockhole, which was to be a nondrinking camp' (1998, 41). The establishment of Kalano Association in 1974, and its provision of social services and later houses, likely contributed to the ongoing permanence of camps as communities, such as at Rockhole.

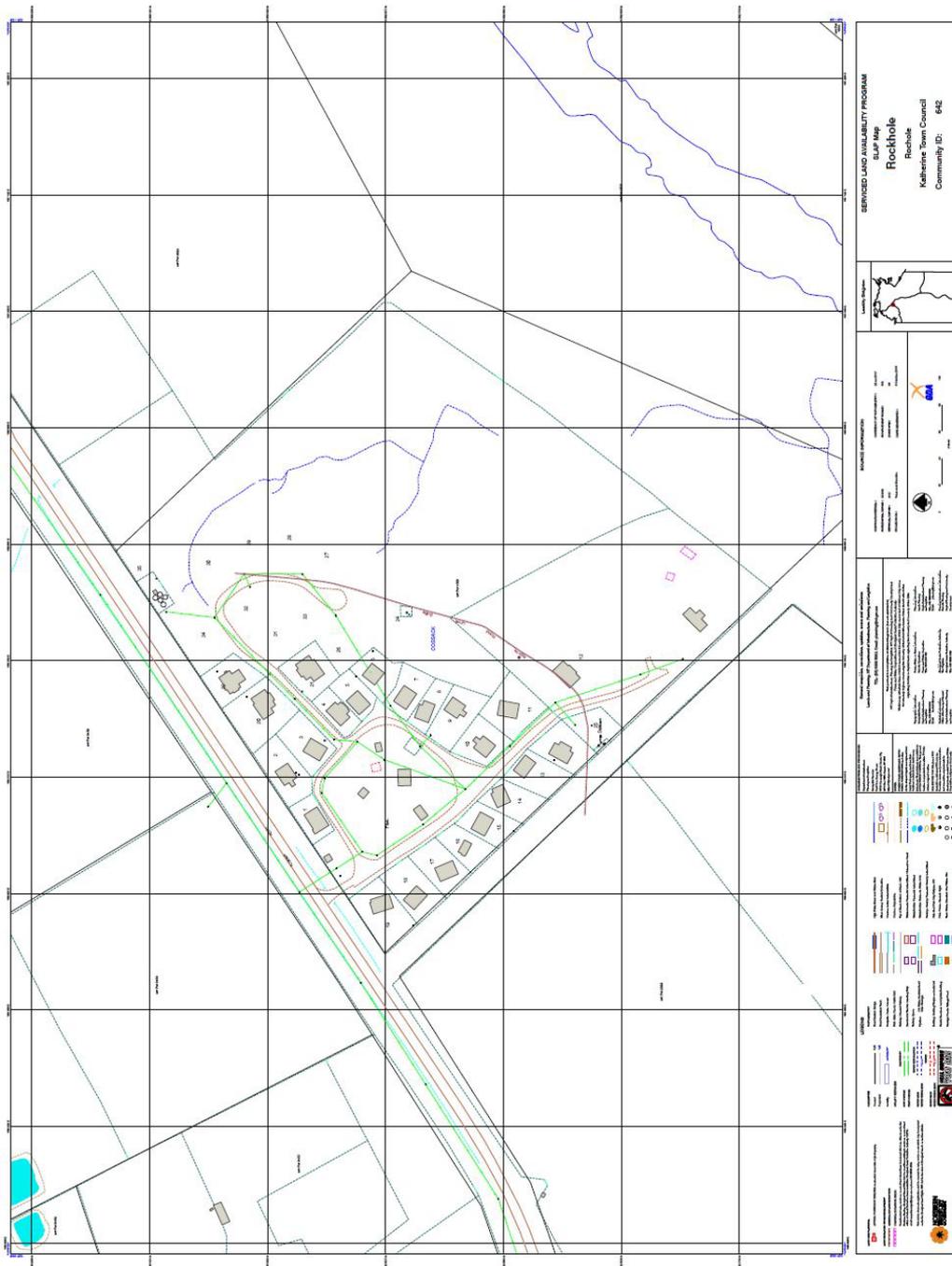


Figure 14. Rockhole Serviced Land Availability Program (SLAP) Map

Following the establishment of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act in 1976, a traditional land claim was lodged on 31 March 1978 to various unalienated Crown land in and surrounding Katherine. This provoked a government response to extend Town Planning Regulations to encompass 4690 kilometres squared, increased from Katherine's existing size of 33 kilometres squared. Regulations made in July 1979 reduced Katherine to a size of 650 kilometres squared (Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1988). The land claim related to five parcels of land, of which Rockhole was Area 3 (Figure 15). At 1985, Rockhole (Lot 1533) sat on a 14 hectare site subject to a special purpose lease held by the ADC on behalf of the Kalano Community Association (Loveday and Lea 1983, 123). In a 1988 report, the Aboriginal Land Commissioner noted that 'At the time the claim was lodged, [Areas 2 and 3] were outside the boundaries of Katherine town. As a result of the alterations to the boundary in 1978 and 1979, both parcels are now within the town boundary' (Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1988, 1). The Aboriginal Land Commissioner ruled in 1983 that because these parcels of land were located within the town boundary they did not satisfy ALRA's definition of unalienated Crown Land. This determination was quickly overturned by the High Court. However, 'The claimants then requested that Area 3 no longer be considered as part of inquiry but dealt with separately and later on its own. That request was granted' (1). The site of the Catfish Dreaming (see Merlan 1998, 216-226), located near Rockhole, was granted as inalienable freehold land under ALRA to the Jawoyn in 1993 (Gibson 1999).

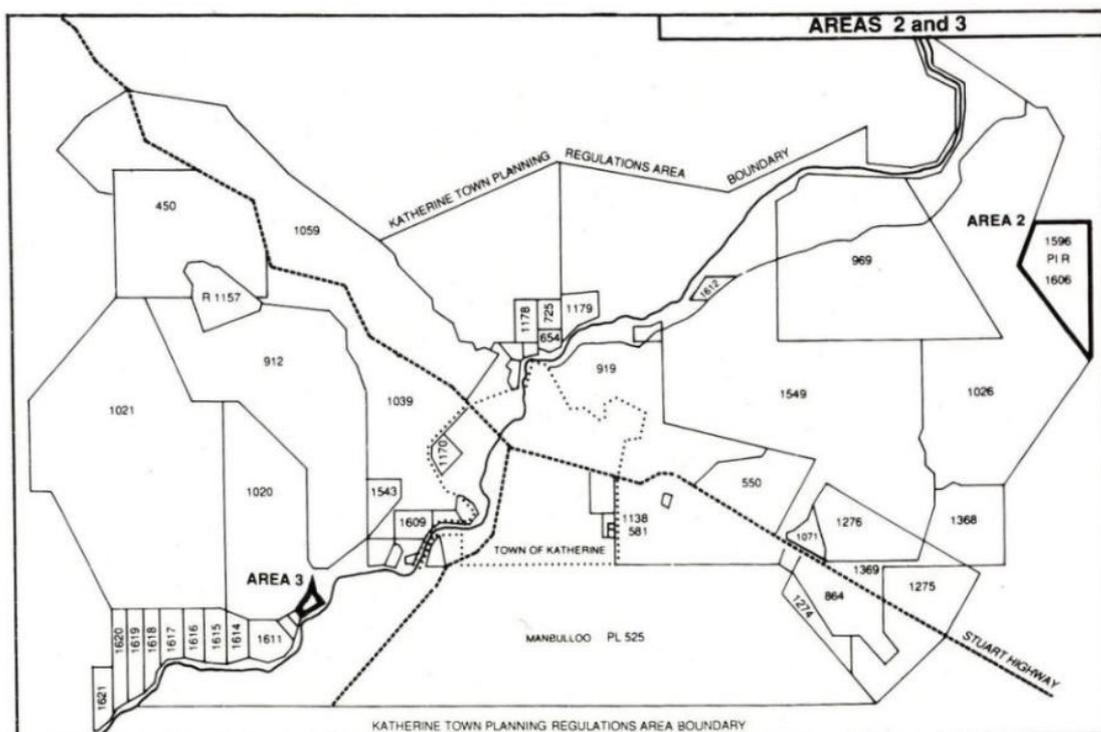


Figure 15. Jawoyn (Katherine area) Land Claim Areas 2 and 3

In 1994, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) survey found the Rockhole population to comprise 150 people (Gibson 1999, 14). Today, population

estimates vary, from 108 persons in the Homelands Service Provider Report in 2023, to 145 in the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census population data for 2021.⁸ Based on ABS Census data (ABS 2021a), which is notably incomplete, 100 per cent of residents are Indigenous, and the median age of residents is 23 years old, compared to the NT median age of 33 years old. This includes 44 children under 15 years of age and only three adults 65 years or older. The average household size is 5.7 persons, compared to 2.8 persons across the NT, and the average number of persons per bedrooms is 2.2, compared to 1.0 across the NT. Based on crowding measures, the proportion of dwellings that required one or more additional bedrooms to accommodate residents was 81 per cent. For Rockhole residents, the proportion of individuals not in the labour force (15 years or older) was 87 per cent of the total population in 2021, compared to 58.3 per cent across the NT. Relatedly, the median total personal weekly income at Rockhole was \$229, compared to \$936 across the NT (Figure 16). Such severe, widespread, and longstanding poverty has direct impacts on householder capacity to contribute to the ongoing good function of their houses.

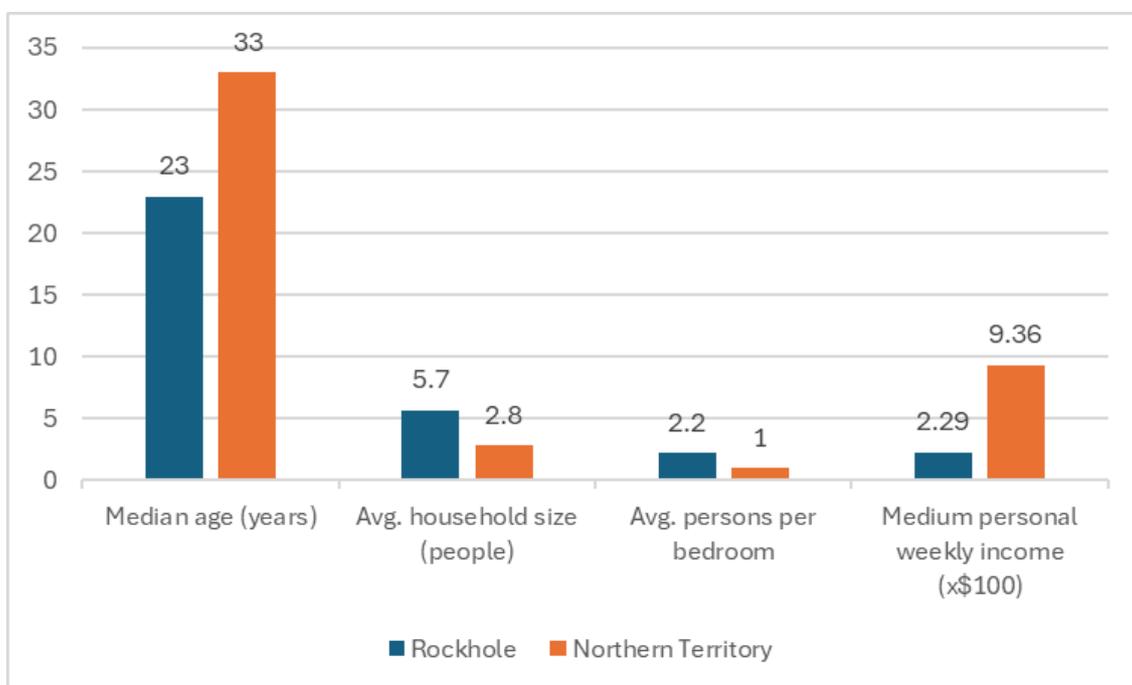


Figure 16. Rockhole demographics as compared to the Northern Territory

6.4 Rockhole Housing and Infrastructure

Rockhole assumed nation-wide media attention in November 2021 when it and the nearby remote community of Binjari were subject to strict lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. One resident noted that, despite explicit regulations, ‘we couldn’t even sit outside

⁸ Note that there are differences between the figures provided on Bushtel that cite ABS Census 2021 data, and the ABS Census 2021 data provided in the Rockhole Census Community Profile (Area Code ILOC70500504).

because police were telling people to go indoors.’ Nine cases of COVID-19 were initially detected at Binjari, across the Katherine River, with the outbreak representing the first serious encroachments of COVID-19 into NT Aboriginal communities (Vivien 2021). Residents of both communities were officially only allowed to leave their houses and yards for emergencies or medical treatment, with media reports describing houses as overcrowded and requiring repairs. In one article, resident Mr Rogers stated that neighbours refer to his house as ‘the one with the broken fence’ and that at least eight people lived there, mostly sleeping on the living room floor (Ashton 2021). Mr Rogers, a dialysis patient, noted that most houses in Rockhole were built around 1982, stating ‘We don’t know who to talk to now about getting a new house, a big house, houses with four or five rooms you know’ (Ashton 2021). Other reports highlighted the thermal performance of housing in Aboriginal communities surrounding Katherine, and the related issues of householder energy insecurity and power disconnections, with temperatures reaching 40 degrees Celsius during the hard lockdown (Ashton and Bardon 2021). Outside of this coverage, a good news story in 2014 described that in 2013, local Aboriginal health service Wurli Wurlinjang invited Indigenous Hip Hop Projects (IHHP) to collaborate with Rockhole community members to produce the music video ‘Rockhole’. The resulting work ‘Rockhole’ won awards for Community Clip of the Year Award and the People’s Choice at the National Indigenous Media Awards in 2014 (Moodie 2014).⁹

More recently, the ABC digital story ‘Out of Sight’ (Chorley and Vivien 2022) was critical of the state of housing at Rockhole, including its role in exacerbating the health vulnerabilities of residents. Resident Evelyn Andrews was quoted as stating that ‘These were the same houses built when the elders were living here, and there’s been no change’ (Chorley and Vivien 2022). Resident Jason Brown described living with ten people in a two-bedroom house with unreliable cooling. In the article Kalano CEO Alan Mole provided a blunt assessment of Rockhole houses – ‘“They’re shoeboxes”, he says’ – noting no new houses had been built for at least 20 years’ (Chorley and Vivien 2022). Similarly, in a 2016 submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps, former Kalano CEO Graham Castine noted that ‘The last “new” houses constructed on Kalano land [including at Rockhole], for its members, was during the Commonwealth Government’s ACHIP program – a good 12-15 years ago’ (Kalano 2016).

Following the period described above, during which Rockhole was established as a permanent camp, Peter Loveday and John P. Lea estimated that by 1985 the Aboriginal population in Katherine was about 1000 people, with 350-400 people located across the various camps, including ‘Gorge, Myilly Brumby, Binjara, Rockhole, Meatworks and Transient’ (1985, xvi, spelling as in original). Loveday and Lea summarise the state of the camps at the time as follows: ‘In all the present camps, the conditions are so basic that they can only be described as primitive and some border on the insanitary. They are often overcrowded and the facilities are overloaded. The residents are deeply dissatisfied’ (1985, xx). This was not atypical of the period. Four years earlier, Elspeth Young, drawing on community profiles

⁹ ‘Rockhole’ video with Indigenous Hip Hop Projects:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHuhMSyJTFo&ab_channel=IndigenousHipHopProjects

developed by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, wrote that 'Almost 80 per cent of all outstation structures were either classified as being traditional (windbreaks, bush material humpies) or improvised (humpies made of canvas, corrugated iron and other materials in addition to brushwood and timber)' (1981, 74).

A 1987 Katherine Town Council report described the town as one in crisis, with one third of its population living in poverty (Bauman 2001). In their 1984 survey of Aboriginal residents of Katherine, Loveday and Lea summarise that 'Residents - over half - prefer to live in town in houses mixed up with non-Aboriginal residents; only a minority prefer group Aboriginal housing. But residents of camps prefer to live on their own out of town at the cost of putting up with inferior and very unsatisfactory dwellings. They like being on their own, being quiet and away from drunks' (1985, xvii). At Rockhole in 1985, there were an estimated 6.6 residents on average across 13 households subject to Loveday and Lea's survey (1985, 4) (Figure 17). They note that 'people at Rockhole are "waiting", some in the hope that their part of the Jawoyn land claim will succeed, enabling them to move out to Edith River and set up permanent dwellings there while others wait in the hope of a place in town' (30). Houses at Rockhole in the mid-1980s included prefabricated huts with one room and a verandah, made of corrugated iron (Figure 18). Loveday and Lea write that the houses 'are nonetheless little more than bush shacks, so described by the Aborigines who live in them and find them unbearably hot in the daytime' (1985, 161). At this time, Rockhole also had an alcohol rehabilitation centre which included a lock-up garage and a community shed (Loveday and Lea 1985, 78). A decommissioned structure of the former alcohol rehabilitation centre remains unused and uninhabitable in the southwest corner of Rockhole.



Plate 4: Rockhole Camp. A general view of the main camp, taken from the Alcohol Rehabilitation centre on lower ground, nearer to the river. The shade trees in this plate are typical of all camps except transient.

Figure 17. A view of Rockhole Camp (Loveday and Lea 1985)

According to the NT Government's current regional breakdown, Rockhole is located in the Big Rivers region. The Big Rivers region is home to 78 funded homelands including 275 funded houses. A significant majority of these houses are metal clad (80 per cent), and most of those elevated (62 per cent), with block/brick houses comprising another 10 per cent; by comparison, most houses at Rockhole are constructed from blockwork. AECOM's Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Audit, completed in 2022, inspected 113 houses in the Big Rivers region and assessed 13 per cent as in good condition, 17 per cent as fair, 36 per cent as average, six per cent as poor, and 27 per cent as beyond economic repair. Common issues identified with houses include worn external and internal walls and roofing, poor condition of timber benchtops, damaged concrete footings, rusted metal beams, calcification of pipework and tapware, damaged house fixtures, power issues, and so on. Electricity is primarily supplied to Big Rivers' homelands by hybrid solar/diesel systems with backup/storage battery banks; Rockhole, given its proximity to Katherine, is connected to town power. These discrete power systems include solar arrays, generator and battery storage sheds, and diesel storage tanks. Water is sourced primarily from ground bores (including at Rockhole), delivered to elevated tanks, with some communities using river water. Drop toilets, septic tanks, and leach systems are noted as requiring pump-outs and repairs. Other common issues identified by the AECOM audit include the need for clearing of vegetation for fire breaks, the installation of additional solar street lighting, and waste disposal areas reaching capacity.



Plate 15: Rockhole Camp. A hut at the alcohol rehabilitation section of the camp. Other huts are smaller. Beds and bedding can be seen in the right foreground, and the cooking area on concrete blocks on the extreme right.

Figure 18. A Rockhole 'hut', mid-1980s (Loveday and Lea 1985)

As of 2025, there are 22 funded houses at Rockhole. Kalano's Infrastructure and Equipment Register (IER) describes the condition of the 22 houses at Rockhole as 'poor' (one house is described as 'fair'). The 'Approximate replacement / repair / upgrade cost' is estimated in the IER at \$400,000-500,000 per house (Figure 19)



Figure 19. House at Rockhole in March 2024, prior to refurbishment

This is the same number of houses specified in Kalano's 2016 submission to the Public Accounts Committee's Inquiry into Repairs and Maintenance on Town Camps. That submission, referring to housing stock located across Rockhole, Miali Brumby, and Geyulkgan stated that 'A considerable number of these housing units are in a poor state of repair and two remain uninhabitable because of their run down state' (Kalano 2016). That submission cited the following challenges to the success of Kalano's housing program:

- Overcrowding and homelessness
- A large backlog of repairs and maintenance
- A slow refurbishment and upgrade program
- A number of rental arrears
- The condition of some housing being uninhabitable
- Lack of land availability for the construction of new accommodation units with the Katherine township and its environs, and
- The high costs of repairs, services, and materials (Kalano 2016, 2).

Kalano argued that the age of housing and the repairs backlog underpin the relative efficacy of the existing repairs and maintenance program: 'The initial request for repair is just the tip of the iceberg. Aging plumbing, wiring and fittings contribute to making the building safe and suitable for habitation. The hardware is or has worn out' (Kalano 2016, 3). Kalano meets the cost of water and sewerage services for householders with some charges to householders associated with excess water use.

6.5 Kalano Community Association Inc.

Kalano Community Association Inc. is an Aboriginal owned, operated, and community-led organisation. It began in 1975 as a small organisation that sought to support a largely unaccommodated Aboriginal population living in camps and makeshift conditions surrounding Katherine, such as at Rockhole. The continuing existence of Kalano for five decades, working under many NT and Australian Governments with widely varying commitments to supporting Aboriginal housing, is a major factor in any housing gains that have been made for local householders. Kalano's key commitment is stated as follows:

We are committed to ensuring our communities have access to appropriate services in an equitable and culturally sensitive manner, develop and maintain accountability to its members and funding providers and meet our legal and corporate obligations. We will look [to] our own community for employment, development and work opportunities, and engage in a dialogue with its communities and members to ensure the direction of the Association is in line with community expressed aspirations. (Kalano 2024)

For almost 50 years, Kalano has created and managed programs designed to address housing availability, employment and economic activity, and health and social needs for its member population, while advocating on behalf of members to governments on a range of issues. As at 2024, Kalano runs Venndale Rehabilitation Centre, a 12-week residential rehabilitation program; a community development program (CDP), with placements in Kalano's essential services and housing repairs and maintenance teams; and business enterprises including The Mechanics of Kalano Community Association. Community services managed by Kalano include the Kalano Community Patrol; acting as a registered provider under the National Disability Support Scheme (NDIS); the Commonwealth Home Support Program, providing home and community support for elderly residents; municipal and essential services; and housing services. The HHIP works led to the establishment of a two-person HHIP team that sits alongside the housing repairs and maintenance team. Kalano estimates that across the total 73 houses it manages the approximate housing population is 1130 people, underpinning an average person to house ratio of 15 to 1 (Kalano 2024).

As an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, Kalano is governed by councilors that are elected every two years by members of their communities. The Kalano council is made up of the following councilors: Miali Brumby (four positions); Rockhole (four positions); Geyulkgan (two positions); Jodetluk (two positions); town of Katherine (four positions). Council meetings are held every three months while community specific meetings are held monthly, with some interruptions related to council elections and Kalano Council Annual General Meetings.

6.6 Past and Ongoing Housing Works at Rockhole

In order to understand the impact of the HHIP Program at Rockhole, it is necessary to understand the content and the extent of other housing works delivered to the community in recent years. This section demonstrates the significance of the \$6.5 million project works at Rockhole, relative to ongoing housing works.

The main ongoing project listed for Rockhole on the NT Government website Bushtel is the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program project. Alongside this, Wurli-Wurlinjang Aboriginal Corporation is contracted by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to deliver an Alcohol and Other Drugs Program, and Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation is contracted by NIAA to deliver a Working on Country program. A number of projects listed on Bushtel as finished have contracted Kalano through the NT Government's Homelands Capital Program. These include the following projects:

- Purchase three new ride-on mowers, approval date 1/9/2022, \$73,458.00 (HCP2200056)
- Pest control in Myali Brumby, Rockhole, and Walpiri [Geyulkgan] houses to treat cockroaches, German roaches, spiders, ants, and mice, approval date 1/9/2022, \$39,046.00 (HCP2200061)
- Replacement of the old septic tanks with new, stronger, sealed concrete tanks, approval date 30/11/2021, \$407,121.00 (CAP2100021)
- Housing upgrades consisting of electrical switchboard upgrade, remove and replace damaged kitchen cupboards, sinks and tapware, replace damaged security screens for windows and doors and veranda extensions, approval date 30/11/2021, \$362,225.00 (CAP2100102)

The Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) Homelands Project has also funded capital works projects at homelands. The ABA Homelands Project was an ABA Beneficial Grants Program that ran from 2018-2020 and that sought to benefit existing NT homelands. Eligibility for individual homelands required that the homeland be regularly used and maintained for habitation or cultural purposes, that the homeland be engaged with a Community Development Program (CDP) provider (or demonstrate potential to become involved), and that the homeland not be connected to the NT Power and Water Corporation's Indigenous Essential Services water and electricity networks if funding is sought for water and electricity services. Land Councils were involved in consultation with homelands for potential projects, and an ABA Advisory Committee would recommend projects to be approved by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs. ABA Homelands Project funding could not be used for the creation of homelands, new housing or house upgrades/repairs, new infrastructure to support access to a homeland, new buildings or building upgrades that support an existing community function or enterprise, vehicles and machinery for non-commercial use, direct support for existing local enterprises, and ongoing operational costs for newly installed infrastructure. Eligible activities included new and upgraded essential services infrastructure, upgrades to infrastructure that provides access to homelands, new/upgraded communications infrastructure, new and upgraded community infrastructure, and training and capacity development for infrastructure use and maintenance. In November 2022, a new process managed by the Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation (NTAIC, now Aboriginal Investment NT) replaced existing ABA arrangements under which NIAA (and

previous to NIAA the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet) distributed project funds. Respondents have noted that many projects awarded under the ABA Homelands Project remain outstanding.

Kalano was awarded the following projects related to Rockhole (alongside other projects related to its main offices and at Katherine) under the ABA Homelands Project:

- Truck / garbage compactor - Purchase of a garbage truck/compactor to provide garbage removal services for three remote Indigenous communities and for the applicant's buildings and facilities (August 2019)
- The purchase of a new thirty-four seater bus - Purchase of a vehicle to enable Kalano to meet the transport demands of clients from Katherine and five surrounding communities (August 2020)
- Replacement of ride-on mowers - New ride-on mowers to provide upkeep services to Katherine communities (October 2022)

This information is based on the ABA Homelands Project Outcomes tables, which do not include project dollar values.

Rockhole is funded for Housing, Municipal, and Essential Services under the NT Government's Homelands Program to the value of \$348,656 for the year 2023-24 (Bushtel). Kalano Community Association is the contracted service provider. Following the NT Government's 2019-20 Review of the Homelands Policy, funding is now provided in this single Housing, Municipal, and Essential Services allocation (rather than via multiple subprogram allocations) (NT Government 2021). The total NT Government Homelands Program budget (less the proportion allocated to the Homelands Capital Program) is divided by the number of supported dwellings at funded homelands, with some adjustments made for remoteness. In Rockhole's case, this equates to approximately \$15,848 per dwelling per annum, inclusive of all housing, municipal, and essential services costs. The Homelands Program Guidelines specify that up to 20 per cent of this funding can be allocated to administration costs and up to 40 per cent can be allocated to wages. As is the case in most NT regions, because Kalano is contracted to deliver services to multiple communities and there is cross-subsidisation of services (such as through the employment of a shared maintenance officer or the use of equipment that services multiple communities), it can be difficult to accurately determine expenditure at individual communities, or at individual houses. For example, Kalano's financial reporting information does not distinguish expenditure by community, nor is it obliged to. Given the reforms to the Homelands Program's funding allocation model, it is also difficult to compare historical financial reporting data with contemporary allocations and reporting. A Maintenance Log, completed and submitted by Kalano, provides the Department with a summary of total per annum HMS expenditure and total Municipal and Essential Services Expenditure.

In 2022, Kalano was also funded by the NT Government through a capital grant funding agreement to undertake housing upgrades at Rockhole, executed 20 January 2022. This work was valued at \$362,225.00 and was directed to the following activities:

- Electrical switchboard upgrades and replacing damaged light switches and GPOs
- Removing and replacing damaged kitchen cupboards, sinks and tapware

- Replacing damaged security screens for windows and doors
- Veranda extensions to provide a better standard of living for community members.

These works were selected for their relationship to improving household safety, and for meeting not-for-profit company Healthabitat's 'Healthy Living Practices' (HLPs) focused on the ability to store, prepare and cook food, the reduction of negative effects associated with animals and vermin and dust, and the reduction of the negative impacts of crowding. Project completion documents are not available.

6.7 HHIP Project at Rockhole

The NT Government and Kalano Community Association executed a grant agreement for project works under the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program on 18 May 2023. The total value of the project was \$6,500,000 (excl. GST), paid as \$1,950,000 in 2022-23 and as \$4,550,000 in 2023-24, with the latter amount paid at the delivery of various milestones. These milestones could have been more closely associated with specific project stages or delivered works, however this has also provided some freedom for Kalano to order project works as required. For example, milestones set at December 2023 and March 2024 for \$1,625,000 and \$1,300,000 respectively are both described as 'Payment subject to approval of the project plan outlining the further scope of works and quotes'.

Project Overview

The Capital Grant Funding Agreement outlines that 'Works will consist of:

- Housing upgrades to 22 houses
- Internal road upgrade
 - Additional works required to improve road drainage (currently flowing into housing lots)
 - Widen and stabilise existing roads up to 4 metres to allow school bus to turn around area
- Install hard stand driveways across all houses
- Repair/replace holding tank at Sanitation Station, three in place with two currently in operation
- Homelands Solar Lighting, in particular central space
- A Homelands ID Sign (similar to entry at Miali Brumby), [which] has a map of the Homeland and sets out the Homeland Rules for members and visitors.'

The project objective 'aims to improve the living conditions in homelands and to undertake repairs and maintenance of houses and undertake capital and infrastructure works for homelands for that purpose, in accordance with the Northern Territory Government standard specifications, ensuring that residents of the communities have access to safe, secure and quality housing suitable for their needs'. The contract cites Healthabitat's nine Healthy Living Practices (HLPs) and directs that the project should focus first on ensuring the safety of houses and second on upgrades that will improve the functionality of health hardware to support HLPs. The contracted service provider, Kalano, is required to provide quarterly

progress reports, completion reports, and to engage in performance reporting prior to submitting a tax invoice for payment by the NT Government.

The original project plan produced by Kalano in June 2023 expands the list of works included in the grant agreement. The project plan included the following works:

- Community engagement (one-on-one consultant with householder-community meetings)
- Housing upgrades to 22 houses
- Add extra bedroom where applicable
- Internal road upgrade including curbing and guttering
- Additional works required to improve road drainage (currently flowing into housing lots)
- Widen and stabilise existing roads to allow school bus to turn around
- Install hard stand driveways across all houses
- Repair/replace holding tank at Sanitation Station
- Homelands Solar Lighting, in particular [at] central space
- A Homelands ID Sign (similar to entry at Miali Brumby, mapping Homelands and setting out the Homeland Rules for members and visitors)
- Provide (lease or purchase) alternative accommodation for the tenants whilst renovations/upgrades are in progress
- Lease or purchase bathroom and laundry facilities whilst renovations/upgrades are in progress
- Install bollards around community park
- Repair upgrade existing community shed
- Extension to community meeting shed (includes power points - fans and lighting)
- Community laundry facilities
- Community footpaths where applicable
- Extension of basketball court
- Overgrown tree/vegetation grooming where they interfere with services.

Table 12 reproduces figures from Kalano's initial project cost estimate analysis. These figures were early cost estimates and subject to pricing revisions from subcontractors. Of the total allocated funding for HHIP projects (in this case \$6,500,000), up to 15 per cent can be allocated to an administration fee. The initially costed \$900,000 administration fee in this case produced a deficit of about \$570,000. This projected deficit was addressed by revising the project scope and reducing the administration fee (Table 12).

The description below identifies that, for budgetary reasons, not all of the works listed above could be delivered. Works that have been removed from the original project plan include the repair/replacement of the holding tank at the sanitation station, the upgrade to the community shed, and community laundry facilities. On the other hand, under initial cost estimates driveway cross-overs were to be constructed without extending driveways into lots, however the employment of a different builder allowed the cost savings to support driveway extensions. To be clear, the purpose of representing the original project plan against the revised works to be delivered is not to infer some shortcoming of the contractor or their

subcontractors. Rather, the revisions indicate the significant costs of housing and infrastructure upgrades at homelands and that, while \$6.5m is a significant project budget, the funding provided is not sufficient to undertake a comprehensive housing and infrastructural upgrade.

Project component	Estimated Cost
House refurbishments (x22)	\$3,366,902.00
Miscellaneous variations 10% of total	\$336,690.20
Civil works	\$1,300,000.00
Demountables (temporary accommodation)	\$530,000.00
Design and mapping	\$120,000.00
Kalano housing team involvement	\$20,000.00
Plumbing and electrical pre works	\$50,000.00
Driveways option	\$170,000.00
External decorations option	\$330,000.00
Total	\$6,223,592.20

Table 12. Initial project cost estimate analysis

Individual timelines were established for the property refurbishment, infrastructure works, and homelands solar lighting works. Factors identified as presenting a high risk of impacting project delivery included material supply delay, contractor capacity, and reduced access to homelands due to cultural business and weather events. Kalano was required to manage challenges associated with each of these risks over the course of project delivery.

A separate scope of works was developed for the Rockhole internal road upgrade and drainage works. This scope divided the road network into six sections, with descriptions of each section provided alongside specific upgrade requirements (Figure 20). For example, Section 3 (approximate length - 118m): 'Existing road is broken away at edges and is approximately 3.6 to 3.9m in width. Upgrade to box out shoulders and reform with FCR as for section 1 and 2. Prime all new work and potholes and crossings. Seal to 5m as for Section 1.' The solar lighting works were incorporated into the scope of works for this road and infrastructure upgrade, given their location at the bus shelter and along the internal community road.

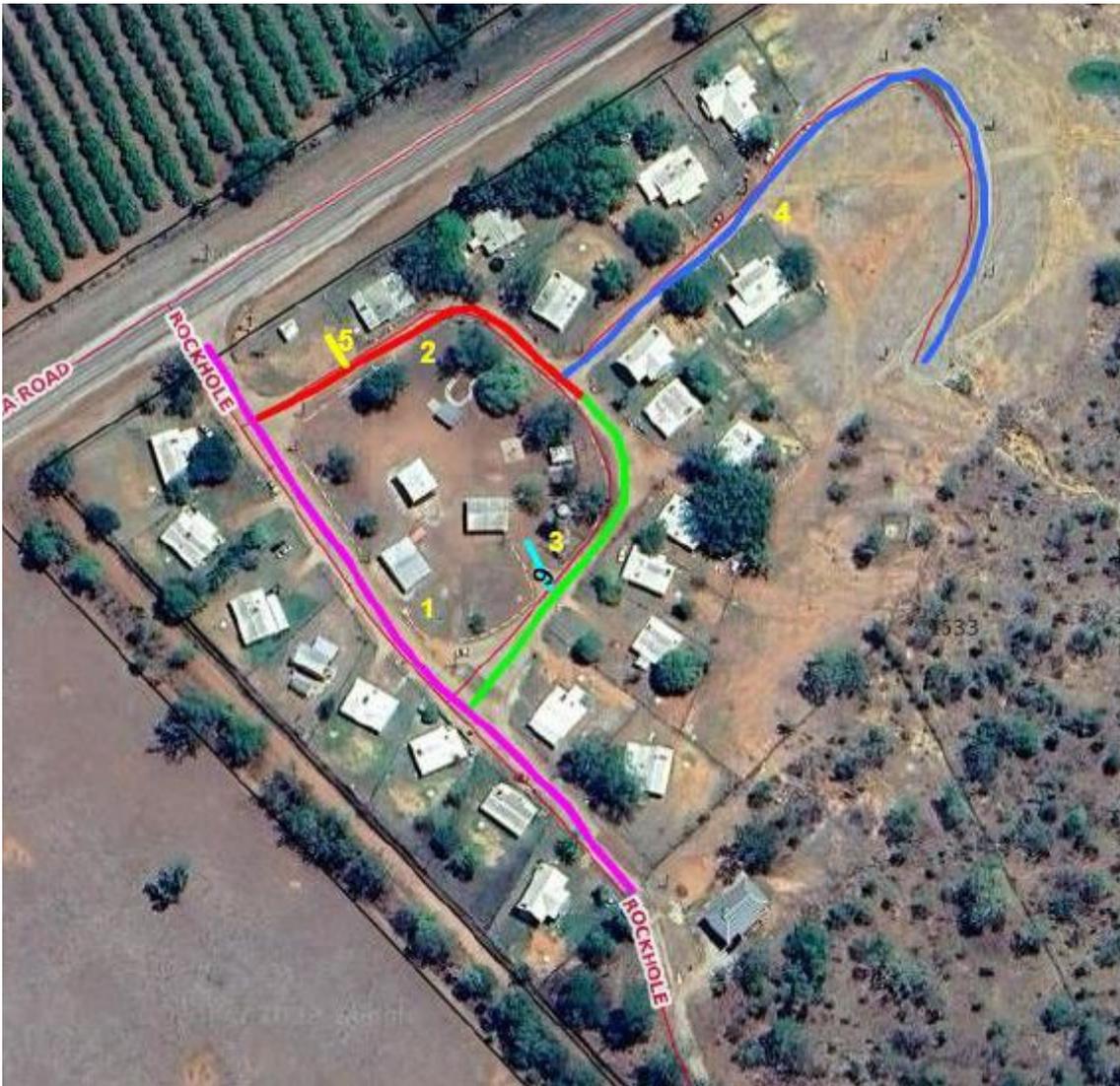


Figure 20. Rockhole roadworks by section, aerial view

A final scope of works for the housing upgrades was drafted in September 2023. This included a floorplan of each house and detailed instructions for each room related to the upgrade works required. Appendix 4 includes the scope of works related to House 7 as an example, noting there has been variation in works provided at each house. Project works intended to construct an additional 16 bedrooms across the existing housing stock. Two elevated properties were not identified to receive new bedrooms due to financial and structural constraints, and four existing three-bedroom properties were also not identified to receive additional bedrooms.

Consultation and Planning

The HHIP funding allocation and broad project scope was outlined by Kalano staff at Kalano Council meetings and at Rockhole Community meetings. Householder consultations

regarding project works began in June 2023 and ran for about one month through July. Kalano project staff inspected each property to make an initial assessment of required upgrades. They also met with householders from each property to discuss issues with their house and householders' desires for project works. This process occurred prior to more detailed scoping – including engineering drawings and ground penetrating radar reports – undertaken by various subcontractors at each house and surrounding areas. Kalano staff noted that this was an ongoing consultation process with residents: 'When [residents] have questions, most of them when we are on site, they are keen to find out what's happening next or who's going to be next on the list. Or sometimes "Hey, I missed out on that information [about desired upgrades] when we talked to you last time. Can you add this to your list?"' (S28). One resident described the process as follows: 'Kalano came around asking us what we want and what we need in the house. Then we start seeing contractors coming through, asking the same thing, what we want, what we need' (S30) .

Most householders interviewed acknowledged the engagement process undertaken by Kalano staff, including discussions about what they wanted updated or replaced in their homes. Many residents living in two- or three-bedroom houses expressed the desire for additional bedrooms, noting the need for privacy for growing children and for young adults and their new families living in multi-generational households. 'I need two more [bedrooms]. Because I need a room and a room for my grandchildren' (S33). 'We've got family of our own and our family got their own family' (S29). 'We got family coming and going and kids that need their own room. . . I can't be keeping them out in the lounge, they need a room for themselves' (S29). On the significant impacts of household crowding, one Kalano staff member stated that 'If you've got decent housing and you haven't got the overcrowding and the other problems that go with it, then your health improves, education improves. All of those things that come with having a good functioning house' (S26).

Another common description from residents of the shortcoming of existing houses related to bathrooms, including in instances where wet areas are separated from the main house with access via a verandah: 'Sometimes it comes up, when you have shower, the water. . . And the toilet, old seat, and blocked sometimes' (S33). 'No hot water. I haven't got hot water system, they took it out' (S33). While houses with separate wet areas were designed to protect against the encroachment of water into living areas during hardware failures, the siting of houses can produce privacy issues for residents. A number of householders also described their old kitchens as providing a very rudimentary level of amenity and the need for kitchen upgrades: 'We don't have cupboards, just a shelf like that' (S33). Some residents, especially in smaller houses, described the small size of internal living areas, which is an aspect of housing renovations that is not typically attended to in remote community housing refurbishments, due to the cost of expanding existing slabs and the emphasis on additional bedrooms to reduce overcrowding as it is commonly understood. As one resident described, 'My rooms are too small, my house is narrow, my toilet is outside, my shower is outside. . . I'm not satisfied. . . Room is so closed. Lounge is so narrow. I just wanted a space of my own' (S37).

Based on the community consultation process, Kalano scheduled housing refurbishment works to prioritise four households in which residents are dialysis patients. Following upgrades to these priority houses, refurbishment works generally proceeded in numerical house order from lowest to highest, with some variations related to contractor availability. Some residents indicated they understood an approximate time when their house was scheduled for refurbishment while others were more unsure. Residents were typically notified shortly before housing upgrades were due to commence on their house. Kalano provided a shipping container at each lot that householders were able to lock belongings in for the duration of the works, taking any other belongings to the available temporary accommodation.

Temporary Accommodation

Instances in recent years where the NT Government has funded housing construction and upgrades and there has not been adequate alternative accommodation for residents during project works have prompted a strong emphasis on ensuring that temporary (also called transitional) accommodation is available prior to initiating housing upgrades. At Rockhole, prior to the commencement of housing refurbishment works, Kalano secured temporary accommodation capable of housing four households.

There are no vacant houses at Rockhole that might have been refurbished and used as temporary accommodation, as might be the case at other homelands. At the time Kalano was looking to purchase temporary accommodation there was a relative shortage of stock in the NT, related to high ongoing rates of construction and the purchase of significant stock by the NT Government in relation to flooding at Nitjpurru (Pigeon Hole) and Kalkarindji. Kalano was quoted \$1.7 million for standard demountable accommodation from a leading Darwin supplier. As represented in Figure 21, Kalano eventually purchased separate bedroom and kitchen/bathroom demountable units that could be configured together. These were purchased from the companies Contemporary Living Solutions and Affordable and Easy Homes, who worked in partnership for this project. The arrangement in Figure 21 includes two two-bedroom units and a central unit that combines the kitchen and bathroom. Each room is air-conditioned. The units have been installed on bespoke chassis to conform with regulations in building control areas and in order that the units can be moved following the HHIP project. The verandahs, flashing, and eaves were separately constructed and installed to adjoin with the demountables.



Figure 21. Temporary accommodation at Rockhole

The temporary accommodation was located at Rockhole to the northeast of existing housing, at an area where future houses could be built. Nonetheless, preparing the sites for households to move in was a significant undertaking and expense. The demountables were connected to an existing wastewater line and units were connected to mains power. Washing lines were set-up adjacent to the units.

Residents provided positive feedback about the temporary accommodation and the process involved in vacating their properties during housing refurbishments. In most cases there were more bedrooms available in the temporary accommodation than in houses prior to refurbishment. All bedrooms in the temporary accommodation had air conditioning, and residents were not subject to prepayment meters for electricity consumption as they would be at home. Figure 21 shows that the elevated accommodation could provide a challenge for individuals with impaired mobility and that the ground became muddy during heavy rains in early 2024. However, there are apparently no individuals at Rockhole with a physical disability that would preclude them using the stairs to this temporary accommodation, and residents were generally positive about the short turn-around time for the refurbishment works to their houses, averaging about four weeks (excluding additional bedroom construction). Following feedback from residents, Kalano installed railings on the verandahs of the temporary accommodation.

As of March 2024, quarterly reports showed a total \$470,142.57 had been charged for the supply and transportation of the 12 demountables (three demountables per temporary accommodation for one household), including their installation on chassis suitable for 3x6m demountables and the fabrication of fold-out roofs and verandahs. The total cost for the temporary accommodation units purchased by Kalano was just under \$750,000. This included costs associated with the units themselves, building the chassis, transportation and

installation, constructing the verandahs, and railings (but excluding post-construction repair and maintenance costs). Kalano separately allocated funds for any damage and associated repair to the units. The cost of purchasing these units was similar to quotes received for leasing comparable accommodation for the life of the project. Kalano made the decision to purchase the units, but was advised by the NT Government that because the organisation would become the owner of those assets it could not use HHIP project funds for this purpose. Additional plumbing and electrical site establishment works related to the temporary accommodation were also funded by Kalano, separate to the HHIP project. In this instance, Kalano was fortunate in having access to alternative finance to purchase the units, recognising their potential value as an ongoing resource during refurbishment works rather than leasing for a similar price. This is not necessarily the case at other homelands where there is no vacant house that can be refurbished to use as temporary accommodation during a house upgrade project. In such instances, the NT Government should consider submissions by service providers about the relative value of leasing temporary accommodation units or purchasing these outright.

Subcontracting Arrangements

Kalano subcontracted four companies to undertake building refurbishment works across the 22 houses and another to build additional bedroom extensions. Five companies were originally to be contracted for building refurbishment works but one withdrew due to alternative commitments. The intent of contracting multiple companies for housing refurbishments was to increase the likelihood that multiple houses could be refurbished simultaneously and with short turn-around times, thus maximising the use of the temporary accommodation and meeting project milestones and timelines. This approach necessitated temporary accommodation for multiple households.

At the end of March 2024, Kalano had completed the housing refurbishment works for six houses, with works at another two houses underway. The housing refurbishment works were completed in January 2025 and the project completed by March 2025. Kalano used its own detailed assessments of houses to provide subcontractors with a basis on which to quote works. While not an open scope, Kalano provided leeway for contractors to identify alternative approaches to aspects of the refurbishment process, following detailed inspections once householders had vacated properties, such as regarding light fixtures and the potential need to rewire sections of the house. Budget was allocated by Kalano for such variations. At March 2024, only one bedroom addition had been completed and this section of the project was subject to significant delay due to contractor availability. This work requires a building license and there is a smaller pool of available contractors in Katherine able to complete the bedroom extension work. The gap between residents returning home following housing refurbishments and the bedroom additions caused confusion for some residents about what appeared to be unfinished areas of the house, but which were to be replaced through the additional bedroom construction (for example broken window screens or incomplete painting on walls that were to be replaced through the construction of the extra bedroom).

Given the competition associated with securing contractors to deliver constructions works, Kalano used a significant portion of their initial grant payment to secure companies to deliver works. One company contracted was an Aboriginal community controlled organisation however it was unable to deliver the works on time due to competing commitments and ultimately withdrew from the project. The remaining subcontracted companies were not Aboriginal community controlled organisations or Aboriginal Business Enterprises (ABEs) but Kalano required that all of these companies report Aboriginal employment data. All of the contracted companies under HHIP are required to report Aboriginal employment data in quarterly reporting to the DHLGCD.

Community Infrastructure Works

As of March 2024, Kalano had completed two quarterly project reports, in October 2023 and January 2024. In October 2023, no housing upgrades were completed but \$970,276.00 had been expended on the internal road and stormwater upgrade works. Figure 22 shows the remediation of three drains. At drain 1, a rocklined spillway was constructed to increase the volume of the swale drain. At drain 2, the SEP was cleaned, new pipe installed, and the size and daylighting of the swale drain was increased. At drain 3, in Lot 14, the front yard was reshaped and a swale drain was dug alongside the fence line of Lots 13 and 14. Pooling of water at drain 2 required rectification. Further work at drain 3 was considered, however at that stage the cleaning undertaken, along with the addition of chamfered grooves to the entryway and widening the spillway, had been sufficient for good function.



Figure 22. Rockhole Drain Remediation Works October 2023

Footpaths were constructed throughout the community, which did not previously have them (Figure 23). Footpaths now extend along the front of the houses on the west side of the community and through the central park area. Residents were positive about the new footpaths and the roadworks undertaken: 'It's a lot better [for my car]' (S29). Unfortunately, Rockhole's roads have been poorly located on ground that is often higher than adjacent housing, causing consistent challenges related to rainwater runoff. Residents stated that the roads were wider and that they were less likely to damage their vehicles, now that they had been resurfaced and potholes had been repaired. However, some residents questioned why driveway crossovers had been constructed from footpaths to the entry of their lots, but not continued into the lot as hardstand driveways. Driveway extensions were ultimately delivered using project funds. Residents noted the value of the bollards that were installed surrounding the central oval area, to direct traffic and protect residents using that area.



Figure 23. New footpath (left), improved road and bollards around oval area (right)

The Quarterly Report submitted January 2024 indicated the installation of four solar streetlights, including adjacent to the bus stop at the entry to the community. Residents were

universally positive about the solar streetlights, which they noted continued to function during electrical outages, and otherwise provided significant additional light in community areas. Residents noted that the lights allowed them to see children moving through and playing on the outskirts of the community, and in general increased their sense of safety: 'You can now see the road properly. And we need more lights, because it's dark. . . You can see kids too, when they're walking around in the dark' (S80). A common comment was to highlight the potential to install further solar streetlights around the community. Some residents noted that they had expected additional lights to be installed: 'They said they'd put one here for me [outside the front of the lot] but they never did' (S37). Kalano noted that each light costs approximately \$10,000 so the locations of the four lights were selectively made given budget constraints.

Residents were also universally positive about the improvements made to the basketball court (Figure 24). The slab was widened to increase the available playing space, and the backboard was replaced. One of the new solar lights provides light to the court, allowing it to be used in the evenings, when temperatures have cooled down. Residents noted that this was not only being utilised by children but also by adults: 'The adults are using it. Everyone, we all sometimes, we go with the kids, it's boring at home, we go with the kids' (S32).



Figure 24. Expanded basketball court and solar light

Housing Upgrades

Householders at Rockhole were generally very positive about the housing refurbishment works delivered. As one resident noted, 'We've waited for so many years for things to happen in this community. And now it's happening so I'm very happy' (S29). The works undertaken at Rockhole provided residents with confidence that they would be able to remain living in a community that provided various social advantages. One resident noted, 'It's nice [at

Rockhole]. It's green. No kids going into town. It's safe for the younger kids. Town and other places, it's not safe for them. . . Kids just sit and play here. It's a quiet place' (S32) Another stated, 'I feel comfortable [at Rockhole]. Quiet. Away from town. I had young siblings so I'd rather them be here at Rockhole than in town' (S29).

Appendix 4 has been included to provide an overview of the house refurbishment works typically undertaken, rather than reproducing this summary room by room, noting that works have varied from house to house. This document is extracted from the larger scope of works developed by Kalano, provided to contractors for quoting, and which provided the basis for refurbishment and extension works delivered by subcontractors. As noted above, because this scoping document was developed while residents were living in each property, minor differences exist between scoped and delivered works, following detailed investigations by contractors and in relation to project rescoping for budgetary reasons.

Figure 25 shows House 7 which was the first to have refurbishment works completed. At the time of the photograph, the additional bedroom was still to be constructed. The Room to Breathe subprogram of the NT Government's Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes. remote housing program provided a reference point for Kalano's approach to the Rockhole HHIP project, in terms of providing additional bedrooms to respond to crowding. In this instance, the addition of a new bedroom has required using existing verandah space, due to the costs of expanding the existing slab and replicating this approach across the community.



Figure 25. Refurbished house, additional bedroom to come at back left

House refurbishments have provided an opportunity for Kalano to move numerous box air conditioners that had been incorrectly installed by householders to correctly install these in walls if there was space available or in windows with appropriate supports. Split system air conditioning units have been installed throughout the houses of priority householders (i.e.

dialysis patients). Elsewhere, one split system air conditioner was added in the main indoor living area of each house. Residents are able to purchase additional air conditioners for other rooms which Kalano will install for free upon request.

The refurbishments have significantly increased the amenity of kitchens, which in many cases were very rudimentary. One resident noted that in their old kitchen there was one shelf, 'But now we got four or five shelves. And a cupboard you can open, close, and lock it' (S30). The inclusion of additional shelves, lockable pantries, and stainless-steel benchtops, along with the flushing of sinks and replacement of pipework, increase the capacity of householders to enact healthy living practice (HLP) number 4, 'Improving nutrition, the ability to store, prepare, and cook food'. Similarly, residents noted that many laundries have had shelves installed for the first time. Plumbing work undertaken in bathrooms and laundries, and the replacement of hardware such as shower heads, taps, floor tiles, sink tables, toilet bowls and sinks, and lighting should support householders to enact HLPs 1 'Washing people', 2 'Washing clothed and bedding', and 3 'Removing wastewater safely'.

In most instances, the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (DLI), formerly the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (DIPL), standard specification for small building works has provided a starting point for hardware considerations but the selection of materials has also been informed by recommendations from subcontractors experienced in construction in the region. Ceramic tiles have typically been used rather than terracotta tiles, for cost saving and to reduce water incursions, and stainless steel kitchen and bathroom benches and shelves have replaced old timber benches. Locksets have been added to new kitchen pantry cupboards to provide an option to protect foodstuffs and medicines. Following consultations with residents, including feedback that taps were often difficult to shut-off, alternative tapware was used for improved ease of use. Entry doors were widened to 920mm accessibility doors to accommodate potential future accessibility requirements. Similarly, some houses with 100-150mm drops between rooms were levelled to improve accessibility throughout the house. Curtain rods and hooks have been added throughout properties.

One resident described the condition of their house, prior to refurbishment works, as follows:

All the windows is wrecked. And door couldn't close properly. . . Anyone could just walk through. . . Bathroom, when people had shower, the water run down to the toilet and sort of make it slippery. . . [In the kitchen] that sink goes up all the time. And that tap at the back of the laundry, when we tighten it up it still leaks and that. . . And we had all the switches hanging down. (S32)

Another resident, whose house refurbishment at the time of our conversation was scheduled for a couple of months' time said of a completed refurbishment across the street, 'It's lovely. It's really nice inside. I can't wait for my house to be done' (S29). Referring to another housing upgrade program, a Kalano staff member noted one of the more immeasurable benefits associated with housing work: 'The lift and the morale in the community just went high, sky high. And you see communities start to take more pride in their houses, you see them take more pride in their yards, more pride in the community itself' (S26).

6.8 Rockhole Project Outputs

The works undertaken at Rockhole have been extensive. This case study provides description of the context and the processes by which Kalano has delivered housing renovation and refurbishment works, along with related infrastructure works. Table 13 below provides a summary of the outputs achieved through this discrete HHIP project. This table has been developed through discussion between Menzies and Kalano with data supplied by Kalano. It is designed to summarise the overall impact of the project. The table is not based on Kalano's reporting obligations under the HHIP, nor particular outputs specified in the grant agreement with the NT Government. It is similarly important to note that such outputs should be carefully contextualised before any comparison is made between them and the outputs of a HHIP project in another context, where specific factors related to the condition of housing and infrastructure, relative remoteness, the availability of subcontractors, and the priorities of householders will inform project outputs.

Houses	Item	Number
	Houses worked on	22
	Bedrooms added	17
	Bedrooms refurbished (excl. bedrooms added)	60
	Bathrooms added	0
	Bathrooms refurbished (excl. bathrooms added)	25
	Kitchens refurbished and cleaned	22
	Houses with new tiling	22
	Air conditioners added	45
	Enclosed veranda areas created	8
Sanitation	Item	Number
	Septic tank service	22
Power	Item	Number
	Property rewires and grounding to ensure compliance	22
Community Amenity	Item	
	Footpaths and crossovers laid	
	Driveways installed	
	Road widening, bitumen, and resealing (2.14km)	
	Road drainage upgrades	
	Basketball half court extension	
	Solar light installation (x4)	
	Existing mains street light upgrades	

Table 13. Project outputs: Rockhole

Table 14 provides an overview of the project expenditure by general works category.

Expenditure area	Amount
House refurbishments and renovations	\$4,673,867.46
Temporary accommodation	\$550,906.58
Civil works (roads, footpaths, driveways, drainage)	\$1,001,000.00
Solar lights	\$40,000.00
Basketball court	\$15,000.00
Arboreal and landscaping works	\$24,255.00
Skip bin fees	\$13,583.44
Relocation of containers	\$3,565.70
Snagging*	\$250,000.00
Total	\$6,572,178.18

Table 14. Project expenditure by category

*Snagging in this instance refers to costs predominantly associated with cleaning and repairs and maintenance of temporary accommodation

6.9 Ongoing Considerations and Works outside Project Scope

The discussion above has shown the significance of the \$6.5 million investment in Rockhole. This amount should be compared to the more limited funding available for ongoing repairs and maintenance, essential services, and municipal services works, and other one-off grants that Kalano has managed to secure through the Homelands Capital Program or elsewhere. Nonetheless, given the long-term absence of significant investment at Rockhole, this HHIP project funding is inevitably limited in terms of what it can achieve.

New Houses

Chief among the items not supported through the HHIP is new houses. Respondents suggested that no new houses had been built at Rockhole since the turn of the millennium and very few refurbishments or extensions had been undertaken. One Kalano staff member described the houses as 'Well, prior to the renovations, [the houses were in] very, very poor condition. The houses are poorly designed. They're small and well and truly overdue for upgrades, extra bedrooms. And even new housing. New housing is paramount in the community. We haven't had any new houses in 20-plus years' (S26). One resident noted that

It's just all the same houses been here, over the years since I grew up in Katherine and we used to come here when we were kids and these houses . . . especially them ones over that side, my sister's house had a big open shutters. It wasn't a window, it was just a big shutters. And it was only a two-bedroom house. And still two-bedroom you know. . . . We really need more houses you know. Binjari's got lovely new houses there. . . . We need to have more houses because

we've got family of our own, and they having their own little family, so we need more houses here at Rockhole. It's just not enough. (S29)

Another resident stated: 'Renovation, it's just a big clean-up. . . Everything is not in its right place, where you want it to be, where you know it's meant to be' (S37).

Given budget constraints, the HHIP housing refurbishment and extension works have not typically made significant reconfigurations to existing floor plans, meaning some residents continue to live in housing that is not typical of contemporary building and design standards, with regard to living area size and internal wet areas. Some residents expressed concerns about cracks in external walls of old houses. The HHIP refurbishments and extensions, while welcomed by householders, have not increased the total housing stock, which many specified as a priority of future expenditure, to alleviate crowding pressures on existing multi-family, multi-generational households. Unlike many communities of a similar size, Rockhole does have available lots for building new houses. Some land servicing works would be required prior to construction. At the house level, residents expressed a desire for replacement fencing, which Kalano is planning to provide with funds separate to the HHIP project: 'because I've got dogs, you know, and I don't like my dogs running and chasing other dogs and might turn around and start biting people, you know' (S29).

Community Infrastructure

Available HHIP funds did not allow for upgrades made to the existing wastewater system, which is decades old and of an unusual design. Wastewater from most houses is distributed towards the southwest corner of the community via three shared lines, from which point it runs along the river side of the Rockhole allotment to eventually reach the holding tanks at the northeast corner. Sewerage from one house and the temporary accommodation is distributed using a separate pump and along a separate line directly east to the holding tank. The HHIP works, in particular the installation of temporary accommodation, has prompted some investigation about the location of reticulated wastewater infrastructure. There is a strong case to be made for upgrading the existing wastewater system, especially if housing refurbishments increase the community population and/or funding is found for additional housing.

Multiple residents expressed a desire that the existing community ablutions block located next to the basketball court be upgraded. This is typically locked but made available during events such as community meetings. Residents indicated that as well as being quite old - 'We can't disrespect our people when they come into Rockhole . . . We got visitors that comes at Rockhole' (S37) - a community laundry facility would be useful for visitors and when domestic laundering facilities were unavailable. As noted above, residents were universally positive about the impact of the solar lights, and many expressed that additional lights be installed around the community. One resident also noted that street lights at the entry to the community, along Florina Rd, as is evident at the turn-off to Binjari on the Victoria Highway, would increase the safety of residents at the community entrance.

Planning for the Future

As HHIP funding is awarded through a one-off grant agreement, and as this is the first significant funding to be awarded to this and other homelands for a long period, there is an absence of any framing strategy or policy that position HHIP works in relation to ongoing housing and community infrastructure needs. That is, the limited funding available under the ongoing Homelands Program and the one-off nature of other grants discourages an approach that might address longer-term community needs. As one Kalano staff member noted, 'We know, and government knows, that [the HHIP project is] only a small thing to start [compared] to what's required to make massive improvements to Aboriginal housing' (S26). Given that there has been a second FFA Schedule to fund homelands housing improvements for a further three years, there is potential for one-off projects to be complemented by broader planning work undertaken for homelands. This would include housing development plans, asset management plans, and municipal service plans.

Recommendations

17. The HHIP should develop clear guidelines related to the requirement to provide temporary accommodation during HHIP housing refurbishment projects, the funds available to support temporary accommodation, and, depending on funding used, the ownership of these assets at the conclusion of HHIP projects.
18. The JSC-RHNT should consider whether minimum targets be set for the HHIP with regard to contracting ABEs or ACCOs for housing refurbishment projects, and/or for Aboriginal employment under the subcontracting arrangements established by contracted service providers.
19. The JSC-RHNT should consider how to support the development of community planning for homelands, in order to better accommodate discrete and ad hoc investments by governments and residents.
20. ACCOs delivering HHIP projects should consider how the reduction of verandah space through the addition of bedrooms on existing slabs can be mitigated by the construction of additional outdoor living spaces.

7. Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore Project Case Study

7.1 Introduction

This case study was submitted as a milestone under the agreement between Menzies and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development (DHLGCD) for the HHIP Monitoring and Evaluation Project. By May 2025, HHIP works at Anpanaye were complete, and close to completion at Burt Creek and Corkwood Bore. As of July 2025, two house refurbishments remain to be completed at each of Burt Creek and Corkwood Bore to close out the project.

The selection of Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore as a case study was approved by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) established for the research project. Project funding was awarded to Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation as part of the HHIP's second year, or 'Comprehensive Response'. In order to undertake research at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore, the researcher visited Alice Springs in December 2023 to present at a meeting of Ingkerreke's board of directors. In April 2024, the researcher visited Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore to undertake preliminary interviews with residents, prior to project works commencing. The researcher returned in July 2024 following project commencement to view early works and undertake further interviews with homelands residents and Ingkerreke staff members. The researcher returned again in November 2024 following the completion of some project works, prior to the submission of the draft case study, and again in March 2025 and July 2025 to view the progress of works and undertake further interviews. Analysis of project progress is also based on documents provided by Ingkerreke and the NT Government. This case study has been approved by Ingkerreke for publication.

7.2 Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore Project

Ingkerreke was awarded three projects under the HHIP. Project works at Irrerlirre were contracted on 10 December 2023 under grant agreement HHIPC00009. Project works at Iwupataka, Sandy Bore, and Yulara Pulka were contracted on 11 December 2023 under grant agreement HHIPC00003. Project works at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore were

contracted on 11 December 2023 under grant agreement HHIPC00011. The value of these grant agreements was \$3,900,000, \$900,000, and \$3,650,000 respectively (value excludes GST). An additional \$1,050,000 was invested by DHLGCD into the project under HHIPC00003 for expanded works at the Iwupataka Land Trust (Twenpe C). This case study is focused on the project works at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore. Housing works commenced at those homelands in June 2024 and were completed at Anpanaye in December 2024. By July 2025, most works are completed at Burt Creek and Corkwood, with final works anticipated for completion by August 2025.

The Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore project was funded through the \$75 million allocated to the second year of the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP), the 'Comprehensive Response (2023-24)'. Of this funding, \$3.75 million was attributed to program administration, \$10 million to NT-wide subprograms focused on fire and electricity safety, water supply, and sanitation, \$54 million to homelands housing and infrastructure projects, and \$7.25 million to housing and infrastructure upgrades at Utopia homelands. Of the \$54 million, \$22,670,000 was allocated to the Central Land Council (CLC) region, based on the proportionate number of funded dwellings in the region (this figure does not include the additional funding allocated to works at Utopia homelands).

The project at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore was recommended by the Central Land Council's Homelands Reference Group in a process supported by CLC staff in August 2023. This process is described in Chapter four of this Final Report. Briefly, in order to determine the distribution of finite funds the CLC's Homelands Reference Group considered a range of criteria, including occupancy, the condition of infrastructure, and the distribution of funding across the CLC's nine regions. This project represents a grouping of homelands from CLC Region 1. In some HHIP documentation, two distinct projects are represented, such as in the Regional Plan for the CLC Region (Table 15), while these were combined into one capital funding grant agreement.

Homeland	Work Description	Funds Required
Burt Creek and Anpanaye Cluster	Upgrades to Housing and Essential Infrastructure; 2 projects - housing upgrades to 10 funded dwellings.	\$2,300,000
Corkwood Bore	Upgrades to housing; housing upgrades to 9 funded dwellings	\$1,350,000

Table 15. Project as represented in the HHIP Regional Plan for the CLC Region

7.3 Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore Communities

Burt Creek (also known as Rice's Camp and Yambah-Mpweringe; Community ID 713) is located 600 metres to the west of the Stuart Highway about 58 kilometres north of Alice Springs. The Mpweringe-Arnapipe Aboriginal Land Trust was established pursuant to section

4 of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 to hold an estate in fee simple for an area of 53 square kilometres, or 5333 hectares. The specific land relates to Northern Territory Portions 3807, 3808, and 3809. This is part of the former North South Stock Route, the slim section of Crown land that was not granted to pastoral lease and was thus able to be claimed as Aboriginal Land under the ALRA (Figure 26) Anpanaye is a separate settlement on the same land trust land, located about three kilometres further north and to the west of the Stuart Highway. Anpanaye is a recently established settlement and it is not differentiated from Burt Creek on the NT Government website Bushtel; residents will similarly sometimes refer to it as Burt Creek. There are six funded dwellings at Burt Creek and another four funded dwellings at Anpanaye (Figure 27). The total population specified by Bushtel is 37 people.

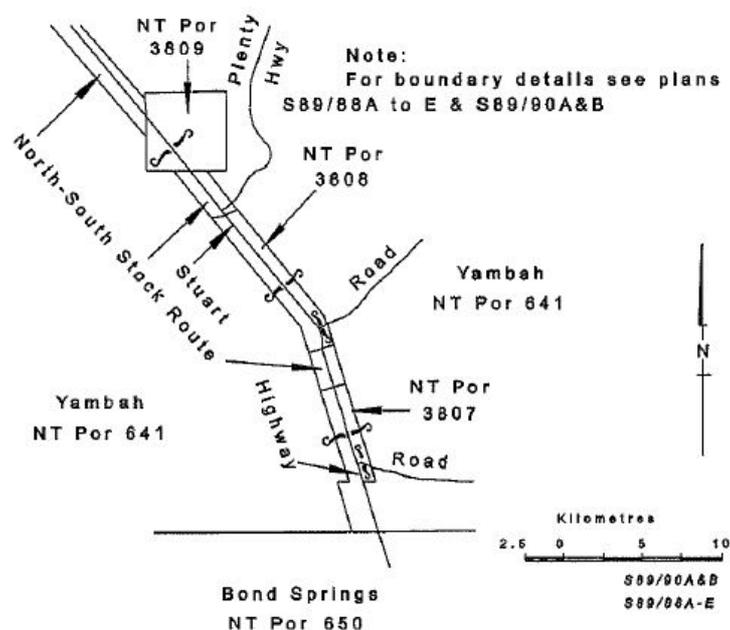


Figure 26. Mweringe-Arnapipe Aboriginal Land Trust Land

Corkwood Bore (also known as Morris Dam and Aulperenge; Community ID 1009) is located south of The Garden Road/Arltunga Tourist Drive, about seven kilometres east of the Stuart Highway and about 50 kilometres north of Alice Springs. The Arnapipe Aboriginal Land Trust was established pursuant to section 4 of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 to hold an estate in fee simple for an area of about 50 hectares. The specific land relates to Northern Territory Portion 05624 of the parent parcel NT Portion 00641. The title was handed over on 6 December 2002 as an Aboriginal Living Area exchanged for land occupied by railway. Eight houses are spread out across the large area represented in Figure 28. The total population specified by Bushtel is 36 people.

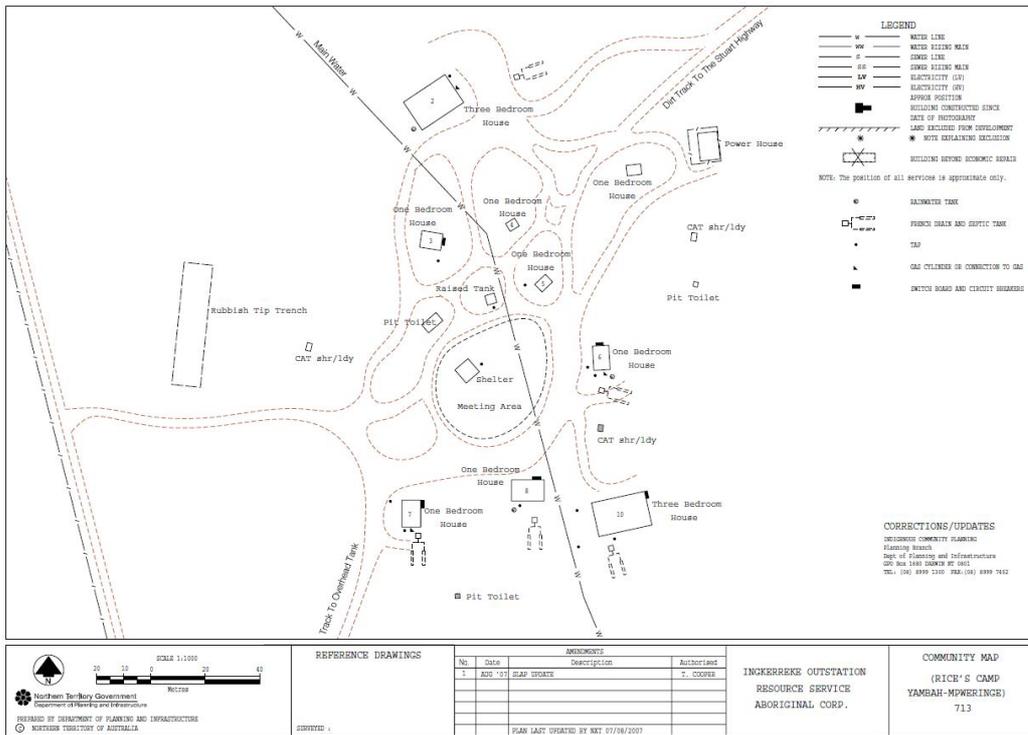


Figure 27. Burt Creek Serviced Land Availability Program (SLAP) Map



Figure 28. Arnapipe Land Trust Land, Corkwood Bore

The Mpweringe-Arnapipe Outstation Council was formed in January 1984 to represent five families seeking excisions on the Yambah Pastoral Lease. As far back as 1987, title or a formal

leasehold was necessary to secure tenure and establish homelands settlements: 'Department of Aboriginal Affairs Guidelines on outstations state that homeland centres should not be provided with fixed assets unless the group has title to the site or the formal consent of the owner' ('The Blanchard Report', Commonwealth of Australia 1987, 163). The Blanchard Report noted that while most homelands had been able to secure tenure through the ALRA, difficulties exist in the Northern Territory for groups wishing to return to their homelands on non-Aboriginal owned pastoral properties in obtaining community-living area excisions from these properties' (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1987, 164). Long after the 1973 Gibb Report investigated the situation of Aboriginal people on pastoral properties and recommended that 'land be obtained by excision' 'to enable Aborigines to preserve traditional cultural ties and obligations and to provide the community with a measure of autonomy' (Gibb 1973, 49)¹⁰, the (widely criticised) NT Guidelines on Excisions were introduced following consultation with the NT Cattlemen's Association (established 1984) in 1985 (Joint Parliamentary Committee 1986). Rather than supporting traditional owners to access land under pastoral lease through excisions, the NT Government created obstacles:

Through self government (Northern Territory (Self Government) Act 1978), the residential rights for Aborigines with "traditional" ties to land under pastoral leases, and who were not ordinarily resident, was removed in the Crown Lands Amendment Act (No. 2) 1985. . . . Regarding excisions, the Northern Territory Government introduced the Community Living Areas Bill toward the end of 1983. The Bill disallowed excision claims on the basis of "traditional ownership", and was concerned with providing secure tenure to those ordinarily resident on pastoral leases. The Bill was a matter of considerable controversy between the Commonwealth and the Territory. (Mitchell 1989a, 38)

In October 1989, eligibility criteria were revised under the guidelines to include groups with historical residential associations to land under pastoral lease (Mitchell 1989a, 39).

The Mpweringe-Arnapipe Outstation Council (MAOC) included traditional owner families affiliated with four Aboriginal estates: Mpweringe (Rice family), Yambah (McMillan family), Arnapipe (Turner family), and Alkupitja (Lynch family). The Yambah-Mpweringe Aboriginal Corporation represented the Rice family. A summary history of the Yambah excision negotiations stated that 'The Rices and McMillans shared a common stock route campsite at Burt Creek for a year and a half before both groups left that area following a tragedy' (Ingkerreke 1989, 1, 13). The Rice family returned to a site one kilometre north of the old camp in 1989. Similarly, it describes that 'The Arnapipe Aboriginal Corporation represents the Turner Family. However, the Lynch (Southern Branch) and Palmer families (incorporated as the Apmwerre and Artheckerre Aboriginal Corporations) are also identified with the "estate", and all seek an area or areas south of the Mpweringe-Arnapipe traditional boundary, which is Harry Creek' (Ingkerreke 1989, 1). Members of all of the families moved from Alice Springs in 1984 to live at permanently or intermittently inhabited camps along the stock route, 'under frequently very trying conditions, without essential services' (Ingkerreke

¹⁰ In 1974, the Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner (Woodward) suggested such excisions should be granted through a special purpose lease (Woodward 1974).

1989, 4). In 1989, 'Of about the 100 Ingkerreke day to day clients (who, at some time or all the time in the course of the year, cash their social security cheques at Tangentyere, so as to pay for the water deliveries), about 60 are associated with the Yambah stock route camps' (Ingkerreke 1989, 5). From 1984 to 1987, Ingkerreke carted water for these outstation camps in recycled fuel drums, and from 1987 a CLC grant provided pumping equipment and overhead tanks to be installed at two camps.

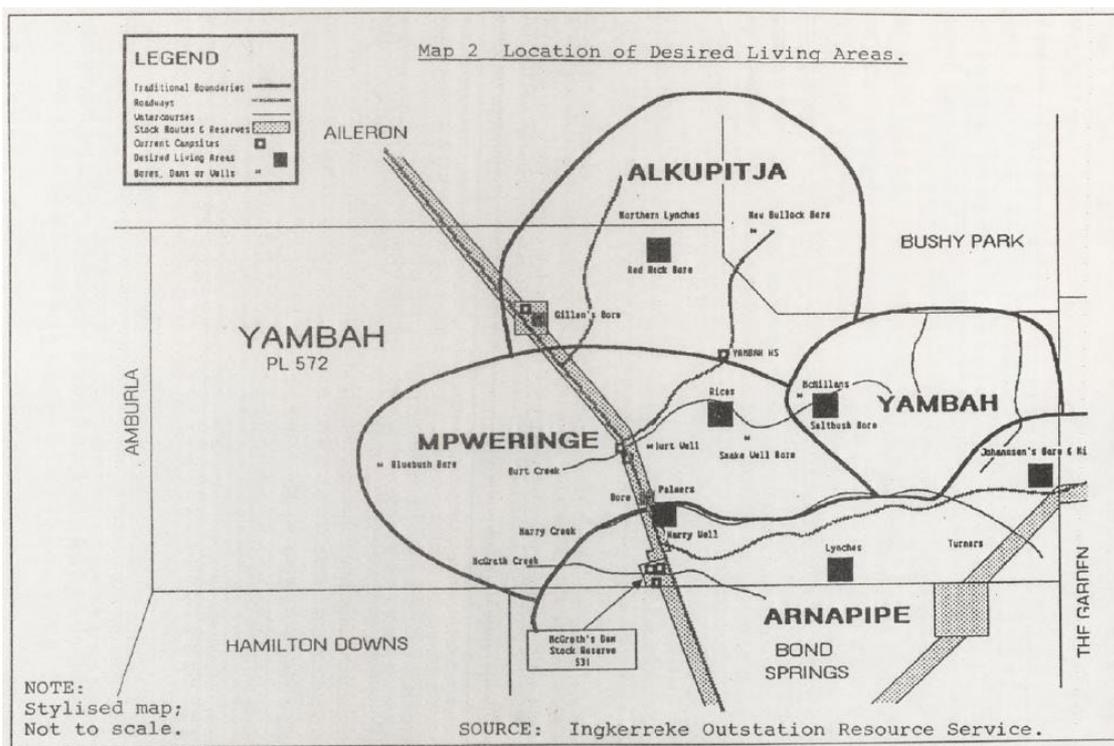


Figure 29. Location of desired living areas of MAOC (IORS n.d)

Housing at the camps in 1989 was described as follows:

All the camps commenced using tents, some of which lasted nearly 3 years of unbroken occupancy, accommodating up to 6 adults and children. Funds available to these communities under the Town Campers Assistance Program, which at the time allowed for the erection of temporary shelters on untenured land, and on outstations, were used to put up some 10 tin sheds and 3 bush shower/laundry facilities on the Yambah outstations. . . . The minimum shortfall in housing for the 5 camps is recently counted at 10 units (single room tin sheds), and 2 shower/laundry units. The majority of the Rices are still living in tents. (Mitchell 1989b, 6)

During consultation for this project, residents advised that at least one tin shed dwelling occupied today was an original dwelling constructed at Burt Creek, despite it being moved from one community site to another. Similarly, one tin dwelling at Corkwood Bore is in part comprised of a shed that was moved from a different location when the community was relocated two decades ago.



Figure 30. Yambah Stockroute, protest camp, McGrath's Dam (Mitchell 1989a)

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) does not collect statistics at the individual homeland level in this region and instead provides statistics for 'Ingkerreke Outstations' (ABS 2021b). Based on this broader ABS data, there are 189 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in 62 households across Ingkerreke homelands, at an average of 2.9 people per household. The median age is 32 years old and the median household income is \$762 per week. Respondents have suggested this is likely to be a low estimate of the homelands population. Over 60 percent of respondents specified that Indigenous languages are used at home. Respondents' top responses to Indigenous languages were Arrernte (25.9%), Alyawarr (21.2%), Eastern Arrernte (7.9%), Arandic, nfd (4.2%), and Western Arrarnta (3.2%). Regarding labour force participation, 9.9 per cent of respondents aged 15 years and over were participating in the labour force, 65.2 per cent were not, and 20.6 per cent of respondents did not specify.

7.4 Housing and Infrastructure

There are ten funded dwellings at Burt Creek (including Anpanaye) and nine funded dwellings at Corkwood Bore under the NT Government's Homelands Program. The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Audit commissioned by the then Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities and completed by AECOM in 2022 visited both Burt Creek and Corkwood Bore. In the Central Australian region there are 133 funded

homelands including 492 funded houses.¹¹ A majority of houses in the region are block/brick construction (61 per cent) with the next most common construction type ground tin (25 per cent). Of a total 133 houses inspected by AECOM in the Central Australia region, 11 per cent were in good condition, 41 per cent in fair condition, 43 per cent in average condition, and six per cent were deemed beyond economic repair. Hybrid power systems with backup battery banks is the primary mode of household electricity, with a smaller number of homelands powered by three-phase overhead power lines. Residents accessed drinking water through both ground bores and rainwater tanks. AECOM noted that 40 per cent of the homelands require filtration systems due to poor bore water quality (2022, 34). Septic systems are the most common mode of waste management, with the audit noting that many of these require pump-out and cleaning, as well as the reinstatement of leach draining.

More specific to the communities at hand, the AECOM audit noted that at Burt Creek residents relied on water tanks at each dwelling which were in good condition, while the bore was in poor condition. However, other accounts have noted the bore is in reasonable condition and has been in ongoing good function, with household tanks only supplementing houses with additional drinking water. The audit highlighted the presence of solar street lighting in fair condition, but that more lighting is needed around housing, the power station, and the water tank. Dwellings are variously steel frame metal and block constructions. Numerous issues relating to the poor function of housing health hardware were described, including poor water pressure due to mineral build-up, exposed insulation, rust build-up on pipework, heaters that do not work during heavy rain, mesh absent from screen doors, damaged light switches and power points, rusted and warped fans, missing smoke alarms, damaged light fittings, missing floor tiles, cracked downpipes, and water tanks inadequate for family size. The laundry pictured in Figure 31 was assessed by the AECOM audit as 'good (appearance)' and 'fair (function)'. Description was not provided for dwellings or infrastructure at Anpanaye.



Figure 31. Tin dwelling at Burt Creek (AECOM 2022)

At Corkwood Bore, the AECOM audit noted that residents stated the water is of good quality but it was unable to find the bore(s). Houses have individual solar systems and septic systems were deemed to be in good condition. Most houses have metal ceiling construction and sheet metal roofs, and have water tanks and solar hot water systems. Similar health hardware

¹¹ This is a regional division used by the NT Government that is separate to the schema used by the Central Land Council.

issues were identified including broken stoves, broken screen doors, blocked pipes due to mineral buildup, and an absence of insulation and heating. Houses were predominantly constructed from blockwork on concrete slab with steel frames.

Of note at Corkwood Bore are the seven Bushlight Household Renewable Energy (RE) Systems installed at houses between November 2003 and April 2004 (Figure 32). Such systems were installed because of the dispersed locations of houses at Corkwood Bore, meaning that a centrally located community power system was deemed unviable. At the point at which consultation with householders was being undertaken by Bushlight regarding these systems, residents were yet to move into these new houses at Corkwood Bore, with the relocation due to the 'Alice to Darwin' railway line taking place in early 2004. At the prior Harry Creek location, the main source of energy was a diesel generator, an asset owned by Ingkerreke, along with four small DC RE systems. Solar arrays are roof-mounted and equipment and battery enclosures are located on southern verandahs. Bushlight described that the systems were designed to prioritise essential energy consumption, powering 'non-critical appliances via "discretionary" circuits and critical appliances via "essential" circuits. To ensure continuous power to critical appliances', power to discretionary circuits is cut when the battery charge drops below a predefined level' (Bushlight 2005, 3). Systems were designed for specific household demographics (e.g. single male, family) which over time have been subject to change, in some cases putting additional pressure on those systems.



Figure 32. Corkwood Bore house with Bushlight Household RE System

7.5 Ingkerreke Homelands Aboriginal Corporation

Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation (formerly Ingkerreke Outstations Resource Services Aboriginal Corporation) was established in 1985 by traditional owners of country to the north of Alice Springs. It is incorporated (ICN 347) under the Corporations (Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 by the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) and categorised as a large corporation. At its establishment, the founding members' aim 'was to ensure that Aboriginal people were provided with support services enabling them to maintain a healthy and sustainable lifestyle on their homelands' (Ingkerreke 2024). Its five original objectives were: self-determination; self-management; self-reliance; decentralisation from town camps to homelands; decentralisation of resources and services (Mitchell 1989a, 74). Today, 'Ingkerreke's mission is to provide services that will enable Aboriginal people to continue to reside on their homelands' (Ingkerreke 2024).



Figure 33. Ingkerreke homelands services footprint

Ingkerreke translates as 'all together' and the organisational motto is 'Together we are stronger'. Ingkerreke's twelve founding homelands include the following:

- Yamba-Mpweringe (Burt Creek)
- Aulperenge (Corkwood Bore)
- Alkupitja (Gillen Bore)
- Were-Therre (Hamilton Downs)
- Artekerre (Harry Creek)
- Aluralkwe (Little Well)
- Undoolya (Mount Undoolya)
- Arnapipe (Sandy Bore)
- Athenge-Lhere (16 Mile)
- Akngwirrwelte (Snake Well)
- Pwayne (William's Well)
- Apmwerre (Blacktank Bore)

These founding member homelands are represented in pink in Figure 33. Figure 33 represents in blue the more than 55 homelands to which Ingkerreke provides services today. This indicates a much larger service footprint, reaching to Irrerlirre to the northeast and Yulara Pulka to the southwest of Alice Springs.

Ingkerreke delivers a range of services to its member homelands and currently receives grants related to housing services, municipal services, essential services, and infrastructure projects. In the financial year to 30 June 2023, Ingkerreke had a total income of \$14,762,507 including total grants of \$12,312,210 (Ingkerreke 2023). Total current assets were valued at \$7,746,204 and total current liabilities were valued at \$4,578,382. Housing services provided by Ingkerreke include immediate, urgent, and planned repairs and maintenance. Municipal and essential services include road maintenance, waste disposal, animal control, environmental health and management, and the provision of electricity, drinking water, and wastewater disposal services. Infrastructure projects relate to a range of hardware required at homelands, such as pipelines, bores, solar systems, and reticulation. In addition to funding through the NT Government's Homelands Program, Ingkerreke has delivered projects funded through the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) and subcontracted by the Central Land Council. In the financial year to 30 June 2023, Ingkerreke had 20 employees.

Ingkerreke is governed by a board of directors drawn from the 12 founding homelands that meet at least four times a year and delegate authority to the CEO (Ingkerreke 2020). The directors 'not only have extensive personal histories living on remote homelands in Central Australia, but they also have experience and expertise in diverse industries such as pastoralism, education & training, community services, Aboriginal art and maintaining Aboriginal languages' (Ingkerreke 2024). Membership is limited to up to three nominated people from each of the 12 founding homelands.

7.6 Past and Ongoing Housing Works at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore

To understand the impact of the HHIP project at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore, it is necessary to understand the content and extent of other housing and infrastructure works delivered to those homelands in recent years. This section demonstrates the significance of the \$3.65 million HHIP works, relative to prior funded projects and ongoing works under the Homelands Program.

Bushtel does not distinguish between Anpanaye and Burt Creek, with the former recently established homeland situated on the same land trust. The single completed project listed by Bushtel for Burt Creek includes the purchase of two ride-on mowers by Ingkerreke in 2022

(HCP2200119, \$106,786).¹² Ongoing projects/grants include the HHIP works and a project named 'Performance of native title representative body functions title funding agreement' for which the Central Land Council is contracted by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (GA177367-V7, \$12,125,944). This project is not homeland specific and relates to 'Strategic activities that focus on getting Indigenous Australians into work, fostering Indigenous business and assisting Indigenous people to generate economic and social benefits from effective use of their land, particularly in remote areas'. The Bushtel page for Corkwood Bore lists two finished projects. The first had DHLGCD (at the time TFHC) contract Ingkerreke in 2022 to supply and install a new 1450AHC100 BAE premium gel battery (HCP2200068, \$18,095) and the second had NIAA contract Ingkerreke in 2023 to deliver homelands upgrades at Arterkerre (Harry Creek West) and Corkwood Bore (GA282135, \$442,444.20). Ongoing projects/grants include the HHIP works and the same project listed for Burt Creek, titled 'Performance of native title representative body functions title funding agreement'.

Ingkerreke was awarded the following project related to Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore under the ABA Homelands Project:

Installation of playgrounds on five outstations (Gillen Bore North, Gillen Bore South, Burt Creek, Sandy Bore, Corkwood Bore) - This proposal is to purchase and install playground equipment in five outstations north of Alice Springs.

Installing playground equipment in these five outstations will provide safe areas for the children to play and socialise (February 2018).

Ingkerreke was awarded approximately nine other projects under the ABA Homelands Project but for other homelands. These included works related to: the installation of playgrounds; the installation of a shed to be used by visitors as a community centre; the establishment of a community workshop and purchase of a tractor; the installation of a hybrid power system; a building renovation; infrastructural upgrades; and the construction of an insulated liveable shed, including an ablution block, kitchen, and rainwater tank. This information is based on the ABA Homelands Project Outcomes tables, which do not include project dollar values. Separate to the ABA Homelands Project, the Burt Creek community-owned power system has received repairs and maintenance through the NIAA-funded Outback Power Program, while similar funding has not gone to Corkwood Bore. A 2023 Homeland Inspection Report undertaken by DHLGCD notes that Anpanaye recently received an ABA-funded solar hybrid system and that residents share fuel costs.

The Central Land Council's Community Development Program (formerly Community Development Unit) also delivers projects at homelands, including where it is contracted to do so by traditional owners using community lease money, NT Parks rent money, or other

¹² Ingkerreke noted that these ride-on mowers were purchased to support service provision across Ingkerreke's serviced homelands rather than at Burt Creek specifically. This could indicate an issue with how grants are represented on Bushtel, if it is the case that grants need to be attributed to a specific homeland rather than to a service provider. If this is the case, there is potential for this reporting to cause confusion amongst residents at a particular homeland about the location and ownership of specific assets.

income. Community Development Program Monitoring Reports, published up to the year 2019-20, refer to the following projects at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore:

- Burt Creek Meeting Place Upgrade - An NT Parks funded project (Native Gap) that subcontracted Ingkerreke Outstations Resources Aboriginal Corporation (CLC 2021)
- Anpanaye Outstation Infrastructure - An NT Parks funded project (Native Gap) that subcontracted Ingkerreke Outstations Resources Aboriginal Corporation (CLC 2021)
- Burt Creek Sport Infrastructure - An NT Parks funded project (Native Gap) that subcontracted Ingkerreke Outstations Resources Aboriginal Corporation (CLC 2017)
- Burt Creek Laundry Block - An NT Parks funded project (Native Gap) that subcontracted Ingkerreke Commercial (CLC 2017)
- Burt Creek Recreation - An NT Parks funded project (Native Gap) that subcontracted Ingkerreke Outstations Resources Aboriginal Corporation (CLC 2017)¹³

Burt Creek (including Anpanaye) is funded for Housing, Municipal, and Essential Services under the NT Government's Homelands Program to the value of \$179,230 for ten funded dwellings. Corkwood Bore is funded for HMES under the same program to the value of \$161,307 for nine funded dwellings. Ingkerreke is the contracted service provider in both instances. This equates to \$17,923 per funded dwelling per annum, inclusive of all housing, municipal, and essential services costs.

7.7 HHIP Project at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore

A single capital grant funding agreement (HHIPC00011) was prepared for project works at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore. The funding amount for this project was \$3,650,000 (excl. GST), with works to be undertaken on 18 houses. Ingkerreke, as the contracted service provider, has been required to submit to DHLGCD project scoping documents, monthly and quarterly progress reports, completion reports, and financial reporting. Although subject to a single capital grant funding agreement, this section will consider works at individual homelands in turn, as a clearer representation of project timelines and relative progress.

Corkwood Bore

The scope of works for Corkwood Bore describes a plan to upgrade eight houses. Upgrades were also planned for stand-alone solar systems, with an emphasis on battery replacement. Initial plans for transitional accommodation included the use of House 5, with works commencing at this property while it was vacant. The scope also outlined plans to upgrade

¹³ This list is the result of downloading the available Community Development Unit monitoring reports and searching those reports for Burt Creek, Anpanaye, Corkwood Bore, and Aulperenge. Project files are not publicly available.

the community mechanics' shed for use as transitional accommodation, including the installation of a bedroom, kitchenette, ablutions block, and septic system, at an estimated total cost of \$128,060. At the conclusion of the project, the expectation is that this building will provide increased amenity as office space with ablutions.

The planned house upgrades at Corkwood Bore are consistent across the properties, subject to minor variations based on house condition and need. House 8 is the exception, which is the only non-blockwork structure. In line with ongoing policy determinations by the Australian and NT Governments related to replacement housing on homelands, works at this property were significantly delayed until later in the project. Scoped housing upgrades include the following works:

- The removal of household furniture for storage in supplied shipping containers
- Deep cleaning of external surfaces and painting of walls, doors, and trim
- The installation of new locks to external doors and of external doors as required
- The installation of ceiling insulation
- The replacement and servicing of windows
- Yard cleaning
- Deep cleaning of internal surfaces and internal painting
- Skim grinding of floors to remove epoxy paint
- The installation of tiling throughout houses, including tile skirting
- Sealing of wall-floor junctions
- Heavy duty cleaning of wet areas and stainless steel basins
- The installation of new curtain rails and door stops
- Electrical works, including new GPOs, light switches and fittings, new ceiling fans, smoke alarms, certificate of compliance (COC) check, and earthing checks
- Plumbing works including the replacement of garden taps, toilet suites, tapware, and shower rose, the servicing of solar hot water systems, and allowance for gas certification compliance.

Across the Corkwood Bore works, \$128,060 was budgeted for transitional housing works at the mechanics' shed, \$100,000 was budgeted for solar upgrades, \$10,444 was budgeted for minor septic works, and \$852,013 was allocated for house refurbishments across eight properties.¹⁴

A separate application was developed by Ingkerreke for House 8, which it identified as 'the only Shed house at Corkwood Bore' and 'currently overcrowded'. At one visit, this included at least one family living inside the house, one on the verandah, and an older man with a physical disability in a makeshift shelter in the yard. The application stated that 'The structural condition of the house is not certain and would require assessment from [an] engineer. Concrete floor is majorly out of level, ridge beam appears to be bent' (see Figure 34). The existing bedrooms are not sufficiently insulated and are therefore not fit for habitation in [Central Australia's] hard temperature ranges.' One resident pointed at the front door and

¹⁴ The inclusion of Corkwood Bore for housing upgrades involved the directive from DHLGCD to budget for works that would in other funded homelands be addressed through the NT-wide Housing Sanitation Program contracts.

noted, 'There's big gaps under the doors. The cold air is getting in. It's freezing' (S58). Ingkerreke's application estimated that with an additional \$450,000 it would be able to demolish the existing structure and construct a four-bedroom replacement house.



Figure 34. Proposal for replacement house at Corkwood Bore

As of November 2024 there were three completion reports uploaded to the HHIP website for Houses 2, 5, and 7.¹⁵ By March 2025, six completion reports were available, including for Houses 3, 4, and 6. Completion reports summarise that those works were undertaken in July through December 2024 for an average of eight weeks at each house. As of July 2025, works had commenced and were continuing at House 1, with works to follow at House 8 following the completion of works at Burt Creek. The renovation to House 8 required the development of a third project plan by Ingkerreke, to reach agreement with the householder, and following delays related to the potential replacement of that house. Delays also related to the availability of the transitional accommodation (the renovated mechanic's shed). Ingkerreke has undertaken extensive consultation in both instances to progress housing refurbishments.

Across these works, 25 per cent of the labour hours recorded were completed by Aboriginal staff and/or subcontractors. Ingkerreke conveyed the challenge of securing reliable subcontractors: 'There's so much money, and so few trades. Everyone's stretched . . . And there's so much work available. So there's difficulty in finding reliable trades at a reasonable price' (S52). Visiting Corkwood Bore in November 2024, it was evident that works had been completed at six houses and the transitional accommodation at the mechanics' shed. The works undertaken were similar across the houses, with minor differences between houses represented under 'Additional works' (as listed in the completion reports) and, for example, in relation to the number of doors, privacy locks, and vandal guards installed. Household power systems have been serviced, with one system replaced entirely, the batteries in two other systems replaced, and the best remaining batteries redistributed. Residents noted their appreciation of tiling throughout houses that had previously had concrete floors and of the installation of cupboards in bedrooms: 'They done a good job. . . I'm pretty happy with the job' (S61). The HHIP allowed for the improvement of past projects funded under the Homelands Extras Allowance that had been limited in their scope, such as sealing and

¹⁵ See: <https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/housing-and-homelessness/homelands-housing-and-infrastructure-program/central-land-council>

installing lights in an attached room being used as an art studio: 'only had enough money for the room last time' (S61).

Table 16 provides a summary of the works undertaken at these houses distinguished by work area. Appendix 5 provides the before and after photographs from the completion report for one of the Corkwood Bore properties. Project scope documents estimated an average total cost across the three houses of \$91,403 per house.

Works Area	List of Works
External works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remove furniture and store in shipping container - Heavy clean external surfaces - Paint the external walls, doors, and trims - Fit new barrels to rekey external doors, keyed alike - Install 1 external door, vandal guard, and lock and 2 new screen doors with triple locks and buildout frames - Replace 3 windows and service the rest (as required) - Yard clean
Internal works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heavy clean internally - Skim grind floor to remove epoxy floor paint - Tile throughout, including tile skirt - Paint throughout, including walls ceilings, doors, and trim - Seal wall floor junction, metal cornice panel rib junction for painting - Heavy duty clean wet areas and stainless basins - Fit new curtain hooks throughout - Fit new door stops throughout - Install privacy locks and vandal guards - Fit new 2000mm long curtain rod to shower - Insulate ceiling - Final trade clean
Electrical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Install/allow for new GPOs, light switches, light fittings internal and external - Install/allow for new ceiling fans - Retain some fittings if acceptable condition, i.e. external weatherproof GPOs - Install 2 new smoke alarms - Undertake electrical COC check - Check earthing of electrical
Plumbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Replace 2 garden taps external - Replace toilet suite - New tapware where required - Service existing taps if in acceptable condition - Allow for a solar hot water service. - Allow for a gas certification compliance - Replace rainwater tap over kitchen - Fit new shower rose

Additional works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supply and install new gas stove - Supply and fit new linen cupboard doors. - New stainless steel shelve to kitchen. - Supply and install metal clad wind break 2 panels
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Table 16. Summary of completed works at Corkwood Bore

Anpanaye

The scope of works for Anpanaye described plans to extend four existing properties to include two additional bedrooms each. Three of these four properties would in addition receive a bathroom. Prior to HHIP works, the four existing houses at Anpanaye were single room Stratco sheds with attached outdoor kitchens. These were constructed recently and were in good condition. The dwellings were nonetheless basic structures. As one householder noted, 'We freeze in winter and we boil in summer in those sheds' (S71).

One of these buildings (House 1) had an adjacent ablutions block, with plans specifying how it would be incorporated into the expanded house footprint. Householders advised that of the two existing ablutions blocks only one had functional hot water and that 'The kids line up when they're here for a hot shower' (S71). They noted that functional wet areas attached to the existing dwellings were their first priority for the works: 'We just need the basics. We should have the basics' (S81). Full septic systems were required at these dwellings with plans outlining that these would be constructed for Houses 2, 3, and 4. Householders also identified additional bedrooms and the enclosure of outdoor kitchens as key priorities. In addition to the house extensions, works at Anpanaye were scoped to include reinstating the function of the old Burt Creek bore RN015635 in order to run a five kilometre water line to the Anpanaye overhead tanks.

The house extensions at Anpanaye have included the following works, subject to differences across the properties in response to householder requests:

- The installation of a gable roof structure in between the existing shed and ablutions block (House 1 only)
- The addition of two bedrooms and a corridor to the existing ablutions block (House 1 only)
- The installation of a box gutter at the intersection of new and existing roof lines
- The addition of new bathrooms (Houses 2, 3, 4)
- Extensions that will take the form of an insulated metal stud wall clad in metal design with Bondor roofs
- The installation of bulk installation in the ceilings of existing sheds (walls are already insulated with Air Cell)
- Tiling throughout the extensions
- The enclosure of existing verandahs to create internal kitchens
- The installation of a new kitchen (House 1 only)
- The installation of split-system air conditioners
- Electrical fit-outs to the new extensions and enclosed verandahs

- Plumbing works to the new kitchen and kitchen renovations
- The installation of new septic systems (Houses 2, 3, 4) including distribution pits, 2x25m Atlantis boxes and pump out points, wrapping Atlantis boxes in geofabric to prevent sand leeching and blockages, and bollards and gatik lids.

Figure 35 shows an example extension, expanding the existing internal living area and undercover verandah/kitchen through the addition of two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a septic system. The 'Plumbing including septic and bathroom fit out' works is a major expense for this project, budgeted at \$65,599 for each of Houses 2, 3, and 4. Approximately \$90,000 per house was budgeted for the remainder of the extension works. Approximately \$5,000 was budgeted for transitional accommodation, in the form of caravan park accommodation in Alice Springs, where Anpanaye residents mostly work.

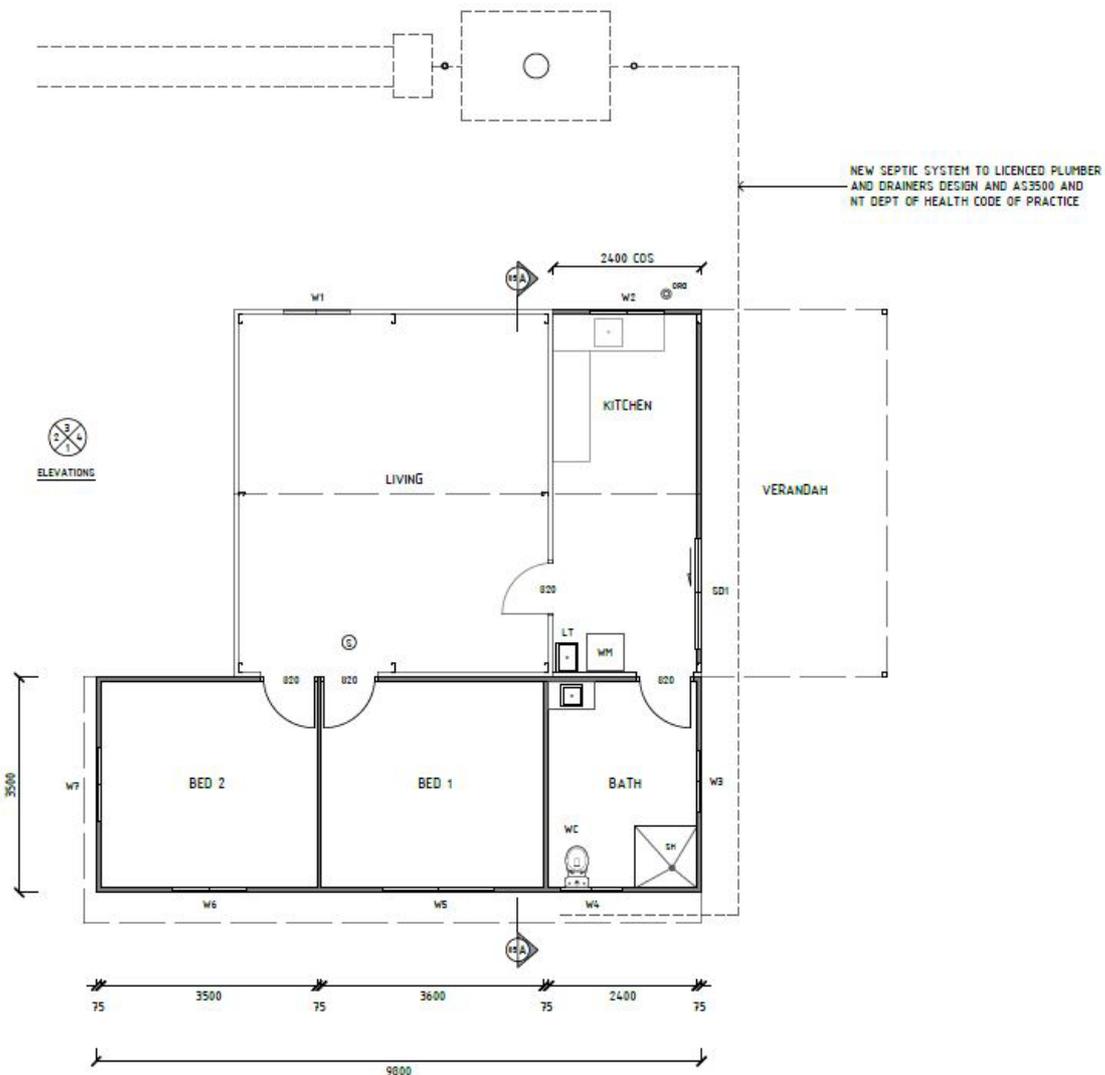


Figure 35. Anpanaye house extension drawing

By July 2024, the construction of slabs for shed extensions had commenced. By November, works had progressed significantly. Renovated houses were handed over to residents in December 2024. Ingkerreke procured the services of the tradesperson who originally constructed the sheds. At House 1, the existing verandah area was enclosed and part of the existing front wall removed to enclose the kitchen and create a living/dining space. An interior wall was added to create a bedroom in the original shed area. A large extension was constructed on the western side of the building that connects the existing ablutions block to the existing shed via an internal corridor, with two large bedrooms attached (Figure 36)



Figure 36. Renovated house incorporating existing external ablutions

At Houses 2, 3, and 4, the existing verandah/outdoor kitchen area was enclosed to extend the floor space, part of an interior wall was removed to open the space, and extensions including a bathroom/laundry and two bedrooms were constructed off the existing sheds. One resident stated that ‘The add-ons are great. It’s a plus, it’s a bonus’ (S71).

Residents have had extensive ongoing input into the designs, with one resident noting that ‘Ingkerreke has been good, flexible with us’ (S61). Another resident noted, ‘They don’t always get it right, but who gets it right the first time? The important thing is the back and forth’ (S71). One respondent noted that ‘every single house has had [resident] design changes’ (S51) and another respondent was keen to differentiate the process from the approach taken in remote community housing:

There is some value in giving some individual choice. I think there is a bit of a sentiment that it should all be terracotta tiles. And it should be five colour choices [for external painting] . . .

These are people’s houses. Government doesn’t own these houses. And it does add to people’s pride in their houses. (S52)

At House 2, the extension was built off the north side of the dwelling to accommodate an existing car port. At House 4, a lower ceiling was added at the householder’s request to

decrease the energy used for mechanical cooling. Sliding or swinging front doors reflect householder preference. Tiles in living areas and bathrooms have been selected by householders and show much more variety in size, shape, and material than what is typically evident in remote community housing. Insulation has been added to the wall extensions and in the ceilings and the expectation is that the dwellings should now operate at a high thermal function. Additional concrete slab was constructed at the entrance of House 3 to replace the outdoor living area lost by extending the internal dwelling space (Figure 37).



Figure 37. Completed renovation at Anpanaye

The infrastructure upgrade works at Anpanaye include the household septic tanks described above and the connection of Anpanaye to bore water. To this point, Anpanaye has relied on water deliveries made by Ingkerreke and it is possibly the only homeland funded under the HHIP that receives carted water as a matter of course.¹⁶ As one respondent noted, connecting the housing upgrades to the need to improve water infrastructure, 'It's not sustainable to put in septic systems for each dwelling if there's no [bore] water' (S51). Similarly, the option to tap into the current Burt Creek bore was not pursued due to the risk that it would place additional demand pressure on that system. Investigation of various options in the vicinity determined that the old Burt Creek Bore RN015636, located to the south of the Burt Creek homeland, was the best option to supply Anpanaye with bore water (see Figure 38). This investigation noted that the local geology is generally unfavorable for aquifer development and that 'there have been 3 bores drilled within 5km of Anpanaye of up to 100m depth, all dry.' Investigations included testing of samples for potability analysis by the company Intertek, which deemed the water suitable for human consumption in relation to the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (while exhibiting high turbidity and hardness results and a significant prevalence of iron).

¹⁶ A 2023 Homeland Inspection Report by DHLGCD notes that water delivery for three weeks costs \$800.



Figure 38. Old Burt Creek bore prior to refurbishment and connection to Anpanaye

By November 2024, this bore had been connected to Anpanaye. This required the installation of a five kilometre water line from the bore to Anpanaye's overhead tank. This line is made of 50mm blue line poly with electro-weld joiners, installed with little bedding sand given the local sandy soil. Ingkerreke used its chain digger to dig the trench for installation. In addition to the line, the old Burt Creek bore has been supplied with a six-module fixed solar pumping system kit, a SQF2.5-2N pump, a pressure cut-off system, a manifold with non-return valve, test tap, and stop valve, and a double acting float installed in the tank. A fence was constructed to enclose the refurbished bore. By December 2024, an inflammable galvanised standpipe running up to the tank had also been installed. The budgeted cost of the bore works was \$100,624, however the works were completed for approximately \$95,000. The commercial rate quoted to Ingkerreke was about \$100,000 per kilometre, at a total cost of approximately \$500,000. At this stage, at the direction of residents, the intention is to fill the large water tank at Anpanaye with bore water, with the smaller tank to be supplied in an ad hoc way with carted drinking water as required.

Burt Creek

There are six dwellings at Burt Creek, two of which are masonry houses. The other four are metal frame 'tin sheds' (three two-bedroom and one three-bedroom) likely built and/or relocated in 1996 ('Ingkerreke IER 2024') (Figure 39). Respondents consistently stated that 'If we had to look at the homeland that will be most difficult it will probably be Burt Creek, because of the amount of improvised dwellings, tin sheds, very basic tin sheds' (S51). These structures were described as 'never designed with any idea of habitability' (S52), 'pretty grim and in major need of work' (S51) and as having received partial upgrades on multiple

occasions over time: 'Over time, they've had just little bits of work done on them, through different people. So everything internally is probably different between each one of those sheds, depending on what money was available at the time' (S51). One respondent described that 'The way they started was just this, a tin shed. We built on a verandah, added the kitchen. And then there's been an additional verandah built on. So over time, these things have just been built out' (S52).



Figure 39. Tin shed dwelling at Burt Creek

The HHIP is the latest instance of partial remedy for the state of Burt Creek housing, recognised as such by householders: 'One of the big things that did come out of scoping was "Why are you fixing up these sheds? We grew up in these sheds forty years ago, and they're still sheds"' (S51). The demand for a more fulsome housing intervention is grounded by householders in relation to crowding: 'One of these tin sheds you've got a huge extended family living in it. Mother, father, daughter, boyfriend, three kids. And it's a two-room tin shed' (S51); 'family growth, too overcrowded in these little sheds' (S65). Householders also pointed out the condition of those dwellings: 'One of these [buildings] doesn't have a toilet at all. No toilet, no septic' (S52); 'When it comes to winter, it's really cold in the tin sheds' (S55). Residents expressed frustration at renovations happening in other homelands where they considered houses to be vacant or only intermittently occupied, while significant crowding was experienced at Burt Creek. As head contractor, Ingkerreke has been restricted in what it is able to do by both the available budget and the policy restrictions on new and replacement housing, stating that 'If we had more money these [sheds] would have been replaced, it wouldn't be upgrades' (S?). One respondent noted that

We're doing what we can with the money available to make it habitable, more habitable than it currently is. And we're trying to stick with the principles of the [National Construction Code] with the works that we do and designing to those ideas. But equally you're working with an existing building that's not fit. (S52)

As outlined above, it is worth noting that while the HHIP investment is significant, it is not the only project funding that has contributed to homelands housing since the Australian Government previously invested in homelands. To take an example of a single dwelling at Burt Creek, a total \$23,400 was awarded over a four-year period under the NT Government Homelands Extras Allowance (HEA) scheme (2016-17 \$9000; 2018-19 \$7200; 2019-20 \$7200). This funding supported works including the upgrade of the electrical system, the installation of new windows and insulation, painting, floor leveling, the partial enclosure of the verandah, and the installation of a kitchenette with stove and grey water drain. Figure 40 and Figure 41 show the condition of a house at Burt Creek prior to and following a range of recent works undertaken through the HEA scheme



Figure 40. Burt Creek tin dwelling prior to HEA upgrades



Figure 41. Burt Creek tin shed dwelling after Homelands Extras Allowance upgrades

Scopes to upgrade existing dwellings at Burt Creek have prioritised the addition of bedrooms, incorporating existing ablutions into the main dwellings, adding insulation, and general improvements. Respondents described that the initial one-page scopes for works provided by the NT Government required revision through consultation with householders: 'A lot of those line items didn't really fit with resident wishes' (S52). On the other hand, while Ingerreke staff noted that a long scoping consultation process had taken place, 'everyone was pretty clear about their wishes. Two extra bedrooms, [and] incorporating the ablutions' (S52). Of the four existing tin shed dwellings, each of which has a basic floor plan with two or three bedrooms and a kitchen that opens into a living space, one has no bathroom, while two have external ablution blocks and one has an internal bathroom, all of which are additions made in the past decade. For the three structures with existing ablutions, the general plan scoped was to provide two additional bedrooms off the living area, to enclose the existing verandah, and to relocate the external ablutions blocks so that these could be entered from the verandahs.

Figure 42 and Figure 43 show the existing floor plan of the tin shed dwellings (with existing ablutions) at Burt Creek and the floor plan under the scoped renovation. At the tin shed dwellings with no ablutions, the scope anticipated similar works with the addition of a new bathroom constructed within the footprint of the existing verandah area. Notably, to conform with NCC requirements, the ceiling height of the bedroom extensions will be significantly higher (2600mm internal) than the existing building height (2070mm under the verandah beam). At the two masonry houses, scoped works align with those undertaken at houses at Corkwood Bore. Table 17 provides a summary of scoped works at the tin shed dwellings, which were allocated an average budget of \$150,000 per dwelling.

Works Area	List of Works
Additions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 extra bedrooms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Install additional exit/entry o Extend with 'Metal as Anything' roof structure (a free-standing engineered gable roof structure) and Bondor walls o Extend verandah to suit (will require sleep out to suit) - Spin existing ablutions block and incorporate into structure to allow for internal access. - Refresh ablutions block: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o New door o Paint o Tile floors o New plumbing fittings and fixtures o Square under shower bath.
Internal works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tile - Paint internal and external - Wardrobes to bedrooms - Refresh electrical: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Change damaged electrical fittings o Install smoke alarms o Install 1x2.5kw split system - Refresh plumbing as required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Service Solar HWS (if installed TBC) o Run hot water line to sink - Heavy clean kitchen benches and add storage doors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Lockable pantry storage - Replace windows and security screens as required - Replace doors (as required) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Install new lock sets (keyed alike) and vandal guards. - Insulate and line walls where required.
External works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 300mm mow strip - Rainwater tank, guttering and first flush - Yard clean

Table 17. Overview of scoped works for tin shed dwellings at Burt Creek

As of November 2024, work had progressed on the two masonry houses. By March 2025, the renovation to the first tin dwelling was underway (Figure 44). As of May 2025, renovations at one of the tin dwellings were complete, with the final housing works anticipated to be completed by August 2025. Figure 45 shows one of the completed housing renovations at Burt Creek.



Figure 44. In-process extension at Burt Creek, March 2025



Figure 45. Renovated dwelling at Burt Creek, July 2025

In addition to the house extensions, the HHIP project will include a refurbishment of the community laundry (lining and tiling the building and installing an industrial Maytag washing machine). An existing shed will also be lined and have windows and benches added to be used as a woodworking shed. Residents have indicated that the playground will also be fenced however this work is likely to be undertaken by another program, such as via ABA funding. As of November 2024, a new power system, including new batteries and solar array, was nearing completion at Burt Creek (Figure 46), at a cost of about \$250,000. An additional string of batteries was installed in this system in the second quarter of 2025.



Figure 46. New solar array at Burt Creek

At Burt Creek, transitional accommodation has included the use of an old house located to the north of the community that has been upgraded through the HHIP program. One respondent stated that 'There's an old house [at Burt Creek] that isn't funded, that we're hoping to do some work on and use as transitional accommodation and that will bring it back up to a standard so that we can apply to have it brought back into the homelands program' (S51). This shed has been upgraded to a two-bedroom dwelling with bathroom and kitchenette. As of November 2024, it was occupied by a family whose house was receiving upgrade works while another household moved in with family while works were taking place. As of March 2025, it was occupied by young single men. Ingkerreke has recently purchased a crane truck and demountable accommodation that provides an additional option for transitional accommodation while renovations are undertaken at this and other projects. The purchase of the demountable accommodation has been possible for Ingkerreke because of the reasonable expectation that it would receive further HHIP works under the 2024-27 program (which it has done). Without that likelihood, the purchase (or indeed rent) of demountable accommodation is currently prohibitive in the NT, and a range of other solutions for transitional accommodation have been pursued (e.g. upgrading a vacant shed, upgrading a mechanics' shed, using a vacant property where allowed by residents, caravan park accommodation). One respondent noted the challenge of accessing mainstream holiday accommodation stating that 'caravan parks don't want our mob anymore' (S51)

Ingkerreke also provided an additional scope for works for Burt Creek as part of the second round of applications for HHIP funding (2024-2027), underpinned by the updated FFA Schedule 'Restoring funding for Northern Territory Homelands' signed by the Australian and NT Governments. Although the FFA Schedule ultimately makes it very unlikely that new or replacement housing will be funded under the HHIP, service providers were advised prior to this Schedule being finalised that this may be possible. In some cases where projects were in their early stages, and the original policy and budget had precluded scoping for replacement houses, service providers submitted proposals to replace existing structures. In this case, Ingkerreke identified that Burt Creek had four tin shed dwellings in major need of replacement. The scope stated that 'The sheds were not designed to be habitable spaces:

noncompliant ceiling heights, noncompliant light and ventilation, external ablutions do not comply with circulation and disability access requirements'. Ingkerreke noted that in addition to the \$150,000 already allocated to each of the four sheds, a further \$450,000 per dwelling (to a total \$600,000 per dwelling) would be required to replace those dwellings with new houses. Prior to the publication of the FFA Schedule in July 2024, the Burt Creek project was delayed on the possibility that replacement housing would be allowed and additional money might be accessed. This was a difficult situation for service providers, their subcontractors, and homelands householders across the NT. As one service provider staff member noted, 'It's difficult to explain to people without getting their hopes up that [we are] trying to access money to replace houses, but there's no guarantee' (S51).

7.8 Summary of Works

The works undertaken in the Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore project have been extensive. The above case study provides description of the context and the processes by which Ingkerreke has delivered housing renovation and refurbishment works, along with related infrastructure works. Table 18 below provides a summary of the outputs achieved through this discrete HHIP project. This table has been developed through discussion between Menzies and Ingkerreke, with data supplied by Ingkerreke. It is designed to summarise the impact of the project. The table is not based on Ingkerreke's reporting obligations under the HHIP, nor particular outputs specified in grant agreements with the NT Government. It is similarly important to note that such outputs should be carefully contextualised before any comparison is made between them and the outputs of a HHIP project in another context, where specific factors related to the condition of housing and infrastructure, relative remoteness, the availability of subcontractors, and the priorities of householders will inform project outputs.

Houses	Item	Number
	Houses worked on	18
	Bedrooms added	16
	Bedrooms refurbished (excl. bedrooms added)	37
	Bathrooms added	4
	Bathrooms refurbished (excl. bathrooms added)	17
	Toilets (WC) refurbished (excl. bathrooms refurbished)	7
	Kitchens replaced (new kitchen installed)	9
	Kitchens refurbished/cleaned	9
	Houses with new tiling	9
	Air conditioners added	10
	Enclosed veranda areas created	6
	Transitional housing upgraded and retained by community	2
Sanitation	Item	Number
	New septic system installed	4

	Septic system received upgrade works (E.g., new Gatik lids, bollards, etc.)	4
	Septic tank pumped out and camera inspected	15
Water	Item	
	Bore refurbished and equipped with solar bore pump (Anpanaye)	
	Bore compound fence installed (Anpanaye)	
	Distribution system installed (5km blue poly pipe with welded joints, Anpanaye)	
Power	Item	
	New standalone (single house) system installed (Corkwood Bore)	
	Household power system upgraded (x6, Corkwood Bore)	
	Community power station upgrade of 69 kWh to provide each house with 20kWh of power each day (Burt Creek)	
Community Amenity	Item	
	Community laundry refurbished (Burt Creek)	
	Woodworking shed upgraded (Burt Creek)	
	Removal of pit toilets and disconnection and disposal of derelict ablution blocks (Burt Creek)	
	Mechanic's shed upgraded (Corkwood Bore)	

Table 18. Project outputs: Anpanaye, Burt Creek, Corkwood Bore

Table 19 provides an overview of the project expenditure by general works category.

Expenditure area	Amount
House refurbishments and renovations	\$2,220,246.29
Sanitation	\$326,599.00
Water infrastructure	\$94,141.40
Power infrastructure	\$328,100.00
Community amenity	\$133,413.31
Administrative cost/Project management fees	\$547,500.00
Total	\$3,650,000.00

Table 19. Project expenditure by category

7.9 Ongoing Considerations

The discussion above has shown the significant impact of the \$3,650,000 investment at Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore. This amount should be compared to the more limited funding for ongoing repairs and maintenance, essential services, and municipal services, and one-off grants that Ingkerreke has managed to secure through the Homelands Capital Program and elsewhere. Given the long-term absence of significant investment by governments at these homelands, the impact of the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program funding is limited by contract and budget constraints. Ingkerreke has noted that it

has saved money where possible, including the deep cleaning, rather than replacement, of some kitchens at homelands housing. Similarly, correspondence surrounding scoping noted that all homelands require better formed access roads, which has not been possible to address within this project.

In addition to the improvements at housing across the three homelands, this HHIP project will achieve significant increases to the amenity of various community infrastructure. This includes further accommodation at the mechanics' shed at Corkwood Bore and in the refurbished dwelling to the north of Burt Creek, which residents have suggested could be used as visitors' or single men's quarters. Burt Creek has a new power system, which has increased the total energy available to residents before they are required to use expensive diesel fuel, and planned works will refurbish the community laundry and the woodworking shed. Anpanaye is now connected to bore water, reducing residents' ongoing reliance on paying for carted water. For Ingkerreke, the purchase of demountable accommodation should reduce costs and simplify the logistics of future housing refurbishment projects at communities with limited additional available accommodation.

The significant achievements that Ingkerreke has been able to deliver in this project are nonetheless curtailed by larger policy determinations. In April 2024, the former NT Minister for Remote Housing and Homelands gave indications at an Aboriginal housing conference in Alice Springs that the NT Government would support new housing on homelands. Despite this, the FFA Schedule published in July and which funds the HHIP, ultimately includes the following text in its Additional terms:

6. This Schedule does not support the delivery of new or replacement houses on homelands, noting further work is underway by the JSC to inform housing arrangements for homelands on expiry of this Schedule. If Regional Work Plans identify any houses that require urgent replacing, the JSC may consider their inclusion.

At this point in time, there have been no instances of house replacements approved by the JSC-RHNT. To make such a determination, as a discretionary exception at the level of the JSC-RHNT, may also be inconsistent with the decision-making process established through the HHIP, where in the CLC region the CLC Homelands Reference Group has determined the distribution of funds for projects, according to the understanding and constraint that replacement houses will not be funded.

At Burt Creek, one resident stated that 'It's a good thing that they're renovating the houses but it will still be overcrowded you know?' (S55). Another noted that the non-replacement of tin shed dwellings is simply 'unacceptable. It's unacceptable' (S53). Another resident argued with clarity that 'We don't want these houses renovated. We need new houses. I have a teenage son. He's living in there - two-bedroom shed. That's not okay' (S57). Residents described that their parents grew up in the same tin sheds that their children have been born into. One stated succinctly, 'We just need new houses' (S57).

The housing refurbishments at Burt Creek, as in other contexts, will make a substantial positive impact for householders. But residents use history as their guide to recognise that it

is unlikely that further government funding for housing works at their community will become available anytime soon, given the extensive need across homelands broadly. The demand from homelands residents to replace tin shed dwellings is a reasonable one. However, at this stage, service providers are not able to replace houses under HHIP contracts, and the HHIP program itself cannot award funding contrary to the terms of the FFA Schedule. The outcome that tin sheds are being refurbished rather than replaced is a failure of homelands policy rather than the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program and it continues the long-term policy failure to properly attribute responsibilities for homelands housing outlined in Appendix 3. Regarding homelands in the Northern Territory, it is common to hear that there is no homelands policy or that homelands is 'a policy void' (Grealy 2024a). But the new FFA Schedule has established a policy that the HHIP will not fund replacement houses. This case study offers material to suggest that this position be reviewed, not at the level of exceptional cases considered by the JSC-RHNT, but as a matter of principle. The failure to do so risks that one legacy of the HHIP is the renovation of generations-old tin sheds with the expectation that these will house homelands residents for generations to come.

Recommendations

21. The Australian and NT Governments must as a matter of urgency provide their support for the construction of new and replacement houses on homelands, in order to avoid the continuing renovation of inadequate tin dwellings using HHIP funds.
22. The JSC-RHNT should agree to a new budget appropriation from the Australian and NT Governments to support the construction of new and replacement housing on homelands, to avoid drawing on existing homelands funding for this purpose.

8. Gäṅgaṅ Project Case Study

8.1 Introduction

The selection of Gäṅgaṅ as a case study was approved by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) established for the research project. Project funding was awarded to Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation as part of the HHIP's second year, or 'Comprehensive Response'. In order to undertake research at Gäṅgaṅ the researcher presented via Teams at a meeting of Laynhapuy's Housing and Infrastructure Subcommittee in February 2024. In October 2024, the researcher visited Yirrkala and Gäṅgaṅ to undertake interviews with residents, following scoping and some initial civil works. Return visits by the researcher were deferred in accordance with delays in project delivery, which were partly attributable to wet season rains stretching into May 2025 and associated flooding on access roads. The researcher sought and received an extension to the HHIP Monitoring and Evaluation Project contract to accommodate the delays and capture project progress. Analysis of project progress is also based on documents provided by Laynhapuy and the NT Government. As of September 2025, HHIP works at Gäṅgaṅ are ongoing. This case study has been approved by Laynhapuy for publication.

8.2 Gäṅgaṅ Project

Laynhapuy was awarded one project under the HHIP 2022-24 funding round. Project works at Gäṅgaṅ were contracted on 7 December 2023 under grant agreement HHIPN00003, which specified a practical completion date of 31 December 2024. The value of this grant agreement was \$4,000,000 (excluding GST) for works at 13 funded houses and essential services infrastructure. Project works commenced at Gäṅgaṅ in July 2024 and are ongoing in July 2025, anticipated for completion by December 2025.

The Gäṅgaṅ project was funded through the \$75 million allocated to the second year of the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP), the 'Comprehensive Response (2023-24)'. Of this funding, \$3.75 million was attributed to program administration, \$10 million to NT-wide subprograms focused on fire and electricity safety, water supply, and sanitation, \$54 million to homelands housing and infrastructure projects, and \$7.25 million to housing and infrastructure upgrades at Utopia homelands. Of the \$54 million, \$29.16 million was allocated to the Northern Land Council region, based on the proportionate number of funded dwellings in the region.

The project at Gäṅgaṅ was recommended by Laynhapuy and the Northern Land Council in a process supported by NT Government public servants in late 2023. This process is described elsewhere in this Final Report. Briefly, in order to determine the distribution of finite funds the NLC sought a list of priority projects from existing homelands services providers. Projects

were selected based on service provider and NLC recommendations. These projects were listed in the Regional Plan for the NLC region and demonstrate an attempt to distribute projects across the NLC’s seven sub-regions. Four projects were selected in Region 5, East Arnhem, including at Ngangalala, Mapurru, Langarra, and Gäṅgaṅ (Table 27).

Homeland	Work Description	Funds Required
Gäṅgaṅ	Upgrades to housing and essential infrastructure, including: Upgrades to existing power station and water supply	\$4,000,000

Table 20. Project as represented in the HHIP Regional Plan for the NLC Region

8.3 Gäṅgaṅ Community

Gäṅgaṅ (community ID 498) is located 206 kilometres by road south-west of Yirrkala in East Arnhem land. It is a stable inland riverside community located on the ancestral lands of the Dhalwaṅu clan. Gäṅgaṅ was one of the first homelands to be established during the homelands and outstations movement and remains one of the largest of the approximately 30 Laynhapuy homelands. Many original residents of the homeland had lived at larger regional missions through the 1960s and sought to leave Nhulunbuy following the establishment by Nabalco of the nearby bauxite mine (Marika-Mununggiraj et al. 1990; Barber 2008), establishing a first settlement in 1970 to the west of and closer to the river than the current settlement - ‘Back in the past we used to live down the river, in small bark huts and all that’ (S49). This movement pre-dated the official self-determination era of Australian federal politics. For Frances Morphy and Howard Morphy (2016):

The development of outstations in eastern Arnhem Land allowed Yolṅu to re-
 replace a regional system of relationships (Gurruṯu) that had been disrupted in
 the early decades of the twentieth century as the region came increasingly under
 Australian Government control. (303)

In 2009, Dhalwaṅu leader Dr Gawirrin Gumana, a major litigant in the Blue Mud Bay case decided by the Federal Court, stated the following about the importance of homelands:

We want to stay on our land. We have our culture, we have our law, we have our
 land rights, we have our painting and carving, we have our stories from old
 people, not only my people, but all Dhuwa and Yirritja, we are not making this
 up. (AHRC 2009)

Elsewhere, in Barber (2008), Dr Gumana explains the importance of establishing stable homelands for Yolṅu to live and die on country:

Because my father was always moving around, to Rose River, and to Yirrkala, and
 to Groote Eylandt. I felt sorry for him and I felt I wanted to be establishing
 something here [at Gäṅgaṅ] for my father. He was getting old and if he died,
 he’d be here, in the country. This country is a madayin [restricted or sacred law]
 place and also ceremony ground, ceremony place and also story, fully of story
 this country. That’s what I was thinking. (154)

Similar sentiments about the importance of homelands were expressed consistently by Gängaṅ residents during consultations for this project. One traditional owner described that

Our people were moving from the mainstream to the homelands, the homelands movement, they moved back to the Country, and they decided to live here.

Because they have been hearing lots of stories about their fathers, their grandfathers, of why homelands is important, to us, to the Yolṅu people. . . .

They decided to build this community, for themselves, in the homelands, to keep the young people here. (S50)

Many residents described the benefits of living at homelands - 'Living here is more stable. We find it more like home' (S46) - and compared life at Gängaṅ to the social challenges of proximate remote communities and towns. The story of Gängaṅ's establishment as a homeland was described as a matter of pride:

They built very old houses, like traditional houses, out of the bark. Then they built tin houses here, and our family members, all our uncles they were involved in that project, they were building the houses. Getting all the sheets, the iron, and they get the timber from the bush. (S50)

But this origin story was also shared pointedly to demonstrate the capacity of Gängaṅ residents to both work on and direct the HHIP project: 'We want to be able to work with the government. But they need to be listening. Because we know what's best' (S46). Another traditional owner emphasised, 'We're here. We're not going back to the mainstream. This is where we belong. Whatever decision we are making here, needs to be heard, needs to be taken on, needs to be supported.' (S50)

Gängaṅ is well known as the site of the Gängaṅ massacre circa 1911 (Ryan et al. 2024; other writing dates the event later, Verren 2013). Men of two clan groups were at a private ceremony site while women and children collected food nearby when a party of mounted police approached the camp on horses and murdered over 25 men, women, and children ('a conservative estimate', Ryan et al. 2024). Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu described the event as follows:

At Gan Gan these men on horseback performed their duties and killed an entire clan group - men, women and children. They shot them out and killed them in any way they could so that they could take the land. These men on horseback then rode to Birany Birany and killed many of our Yarrwidi Gumatj, the saltwater people who cared for the great ceremonies at Birany Birany. There are few places in our lives as sacred as Gan Gan - from its fresh waters all things come - and Birany Birany. (Yunupingu 2016)

The story goes that Bill Harney, who led the attack, returned to Gängaṅ the following year to collect the skulls of his murdered victims, which he sold to museums in southern cities (Verren 2013).

Gängaṅ is located on Aboriginal Land held as inalienable freehold title as defined by the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976. Specifically, Gängaṅ is located on land held communally with freehold resting with the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Land Trust, which since 30 May 1980 has held two deeds of grant over land in Arnhem land, corresponding to the area formerly comprising the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve. The community is

accessible via light aircraft or an unsealed road (approximately four hours from Yirrkala) that is subject to flooding throughout and following the wet season. Proximate homelands include Banyala to the southeast and Wandawuy to the east.



Figure 47. Gänḡaḡ from above

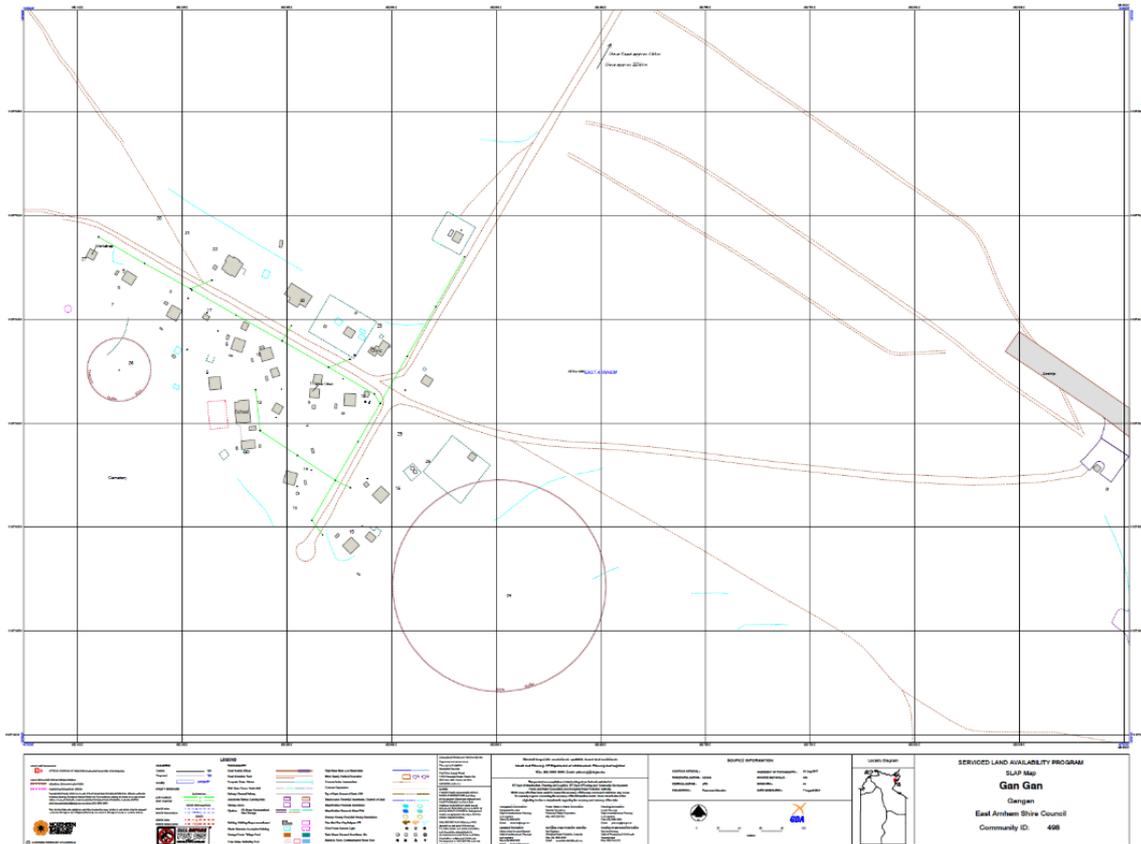


Figure 48. Gänḡaḡ Serviced Land Availability Program (SLAP) Map

As of 2024-25, there are 13 funded dwellings at Gängaṅ. The Homelands Program occupancy survey reports a population of 78 people, as specified by Bushtel. Alternative studies specify a population of 103 people, with about 30 living in Yirrkala who would choose to live at the homeland if appropriate housing were available (O'Bryan et al. 2024, 72). Social services at Gängaṅ, such as the clinic, shop, ranger base, school, and pre-school, are locally managed and intermittently staffed by Laynhapuy and other agencies during the week. Figure 48 is a serviced land availability program map that represents the location of housing and associated infrastructure at Gängaṅ.

Based on ABS Census data (ABS 2021c), Gängaṅ has an estimated population of 82 people, of whom 100 per cent are Indigenous (Yolŋu) and all of whom use an Australian Indigenous language at home.¹⁷ This includes Yolŋu Matha dialects, primarily Dhay-yi, along with Dhuwal and Dhuwaya dialects. The median age of residents is 21 years old, compared to the NT median age of 33 years old. This includes 15 children under 15 years of age and no adults 65 years or older. The average household size is 6.3 persons, compared to 2.8 persons across the NT, and the average number of persons per bedroom is 1.9, compared to 1.0 across the NT. Based on crowding measures, the proportion of dwellings that require one or more additional bedrooms to accommodate residents was 75 per cent in 2021. For Gängaṅ residents, there is a labour force participation rate of 21 per cent, with 40 of 63 persons aged 15 years and over not in the labour force. Relatedly, the median total personal weekly income at Gängaṅ is \$355, compared to \$936 across the NT.

8.4 Housing and Infrastructure

In the East Arnhem region of northern Australia there are 65 funded homelands including 295 funded houses. Most of the houses in the region are metal-clad (either ground tin or elevated tin houses) with a small number of block/brick houses. The 2022 Homelands Audit inspected 139 funded dwellings and determined that 2 per cent of those were in good condition, 16 per cent were in fair condition, 44 per cent were average, 21 per cent were poor, and 16 per cent were deemed beyond economic repair. Rust damage, especially to floor steel members, was identified as a common issue, with replacements required to prevent floors collapsing. Across East Arnhem homelands, housing and services are predominantly powered by hybrid power systems (comprised of generators, solar arrays, generator/battery storage sheds, and a diesel storage tank), however diesel generators remain common. Water is predominantly sourced from ground bores, with some water infrastructure (bores, tanks) requiring the removal of vegetation, the addition of security fencing, and replacement pipework. The audit noted consistent issues with the maintenance of septic systems, including irregular pump-outs of septic tanks, cracked concrete access lids,

¹⁷ As at other homelands, population estimates for Gängaṅ vary widely. The Homelands Audit undertaken in September 2022 specified an estimated population of 97 while the Fulcrum survey undertaken by the Homelands Services Group in November 2022 specified a population estimate at visit of 50. Residents describe a population of about 100 people, and that family members living elsewhere would move to Gängaṅ if housing was available.

and the need for newly constructed leach pits. Many homelands were identified as requiring new waste disposal areas, with capacity reached or soon to be reached. Featherstone et al. (2023, 2024) describe the digital communication challenges at Gängaṅ (including no 4G as of 2023 and no fixed internet service in any household), on behalf of identifying local infrastructure needs and developing a community digital inclusion plan. In an assessment of Laynhapuy homelands housing, the authors describe that 'nearly all the respondents in this study aspire to improved educational services and infrastructure, aged care and health, access to shops, land and sea management and associated development, security of land tenure arrangements, cultural tourism and art' (O'Bryan et al. 2024, 1).

The Gängaṅ project budget of \$4m is based on the one-page overview of Gängaṅ prepared by the NT Government and based on the 2022 Homelands Audit, which visited Gängaṅ in September 2022. That overview identified 15 occupied dwellings of which 13 are funded dwellings, describing homes as 'a mix of improvised add-on, ground level and stumped metal-clad dwellings.' It recommended

upgrade works in the immediate interest of safety, [as] buildings and structures do not meet any Building Code. Several have external ablutions in poor condition and previous poor workmanship is noted at inspection. Recommend priority works to improve tenants' immediate comfort and safety levels. A near-future housing part replacement plan needs to be developed.

That one-page overview specifies that power is drawn from a diesel generator with plans to convert this to a solar hybrid system, and that water supply is sound but the tank storage lacks flow control, resulting in water wastage. It identifies an urgent need for community road network upgrades, including the addition of swale drains to prevent run-off into dwellings, and that landfill management is poor despite effective rubbish collection.

Other documentation provides similar assessments of Gängaṅ housing. The Fulcrum report undertaken by the Homelands Services Group in 2022 identifies 13 funded dwellings, ranging from 'good' to 'fair' condition. Most of these dwellings have external ablution blocks, some of which are not connected to power, with obvious limitations for residents' ability to wash themselves and clothes and bedding. A range of electrical, plumbing, and carpentry maintenance issues are identified, including the following indicative examples: deck lights requiring fixing; holes in deck; damaged louvre galleries; kitchen trap leaking; leaking roof; external door and one ablution door require replacement; front door lock key missing; replace damaged floor with compressed fibro; fly wire requires replacement (Figure 49). This assessment also includes residents' comments, such as requests for larger sinks, shelves in kitchens, and the enclosure of a verandah to prevent dogs entering the premises. Laynhapuy documentation identifies twelve of the funded dwellings as in fair condition and one as beyond economic repair, as compared to housing across the Laynhapuy homelands, where 6 per cent of dwellings are classified as in poor condition, 50 per cent as fair, and 42 per cent as good condition (O'Bryan et al. 2024, 27). Laynhapuy's Infrastructure and Equipment Register specifies that 11 dwellings at Gängaṅ were built in 1990 (likely an approximate date), with one built in 2004 and one built in 2018. Of the 13 dwellings, three have two bedrooms, two have three bedrooms, and eight have four bedrooms. Only four of these dwellings have

internal flush toilets, with the other dwellings having access to flush toilets in external ablution blocks, external pit toilets, or a community ablutions block.

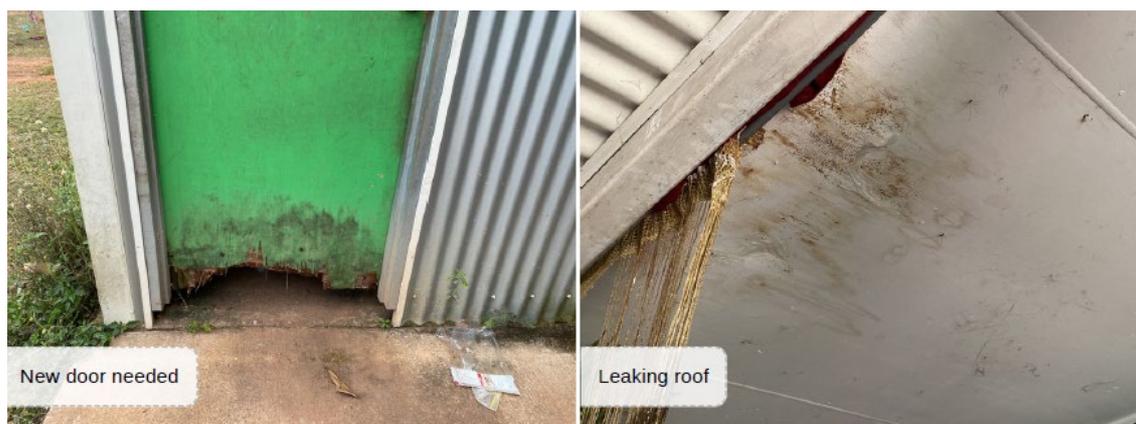


Figure 49. Maintenance identified by NT Government at Gängan housing

Residents of Gängan described a range of issues related to their houses. One resident noted that 'For us, we mostly worry about the power. . . When we use all this power, everything shut the power off' (S40). Residents highlighted that 'The kitchen is small', that their house had 'No laundry, no toilet' (S48), and that 'We don't have an oven' (S49), and expressed a desire for fencing, because 'I don't like buffalo to come in' (S43). Residents identified issues with rainwater intrusion - 'Every time it rains, the rain goes through that brick, and it's all flooded. All the way to our room' (S42) - as well as with poor thermal performance - '[Insulation is] not in the walls, [where the verandah has been filled in]. Very hot' (S44). Many residents expressed issues with overcrowding, including the need to 'Put an extra room [in]' and that 'We don't want to squish' (S41), noting the cultural and safety issues associated with external bathrooms - 'We need privacy' (S40). One resident described that 'Sometimes it's very hard, when you have crowded family in one house. One toilet and one shower, it's very hard', highlighting that 'We wanted another extension room, a lounge room, just for kids to play games, watch TV, and when there is sorry business going on, family, we can put them in the other rooms' (S49). The issue of overcrowding was often connected to the inability of family elsewhere returning to live at Gängan, as one traditional owner noted:

There's more people away from us, that want to come back this way. If there was a place for them to stay. This is how we feel, when we have a home, we feel secure ourself. Because we feel comfortable, we feel secure in our own house. . .

We can feel secure and confident, and really happy to have our own house (S50).

Crowding and housing quality were also connected by residents to poor health outcomes - 'Some of our family members have health problems, and therefore we need good houses' (S50).

Gängan residents expressed a wide range of aspirations for their houses and the HHIP project, including that the issues described above be addressed. One parent described that he wanted to see 'Change. The kids are going to be excited for this house' (S40). Other residents specified desires for new gardens (S49), for accommodation to house visiting family (S50), and to keep old infrastructure, such as external bathrooms - 'I told him, I want to keep

that one. For a spare toilet. For example, when we have a funeral, or something special, people can use it. It's still a handy thing' (S44). Others expressed their anticipation of participating in direct employment related to project works: 'I would like to do some more training on the building site. . . To do some more work on the homeland, to prove ourself to be what we can be' (S44). Residents were aware of the limitations of project funding and policy restrictions, as outlined in the following:

The concern that I have, if only the government would have given us more than four million [dollars]. They should have given us more. These repairs and work on the houses is only repairing the houses. Not new houses. We have problems in Gängan, overcrowding as well, and that brings in other health issues as well. (S46)

8.5 Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation

Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation supports approximately 1100 residents, as well as visitors, at 30 homelands across northeast Arnhem Land. In the early 1970s the Uniting Church ceded the administration of Yirrkala and its outstations to the Dhanbul Association, incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1963 (NT), and as homelands grew there was a need for an organisation dedicated to them (Morphy 2008). Laynhapuy was established in 1985 to assist newly formed homelands that had been established by Yolŋu people from 1970 onwards. In doing so, Yolŋu cleared remote airstrips and constructed houses from local timber. The vision provided by senior Yolŋu for Laynhapuy's implementation is the following:

To determine our own future, to manage our own affairs, to become self-sufficient so that the homeland mala (clans) can continue to live in peace and harmony. (Laynhapuy 2025)

Today, Laynhapuy is a member-based organisation that supports homelands through a range of in-house services, including:

- Yirrkala Rangers, set-up following the establishment of an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) in 2006 in order to care for land and sea country within the Laynhapuy IPA
- Health Services, via Laynhapuy Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, which is the sole provider of primary health care in 20 East Arnhem homelands
- Community Services, including aged care and the Laynha Youth Program
- Homeland Services, including housing and infrastructure maintenance and municipal and essential services, and
- Ganybu Housing Aboriginal Corporation, established in 2017 as a wholly owned entity of Laynhapuy to operate as a construction business, with the Ganybu strategic alliance established thereafter.

Across these services, Laynhapuy employs about 160 staff, with 60 per cent based on homelands (Laynhapuy 2024). In the 2023-24 financial year, Laynhapuy's total revenue exceeded \$29m.

The homelands services team includes over 30 employees, 70 per cent of which are Yolŋu (Laynhapuy 2025). This includes 'project managers and Yolŋu supervisors, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, a Yolŋu group [of] trades laborers and assistants, Yolŋu transport and logistics driver, and a small civil works/MES team' (Laynhapuy 2025). This team is primarily funded by the NT Government's Homelands Program but also undertakes work on a fee-for-service basis and has received funding from the Aboriginals Benefit Account and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. Housing services include carpentry, plumbing, and electrical services to homelands houses, as well as construction of community amenities such as training centres. The municipal and essential services undertaken are wide-ranging, including:

- Power generation inclusive of reticulation systems, including diesel generator systems and various solar systems
- Rubbish collection and disposal
- Sewage infrastructure maintenance
- Dog control inclusive of Gove veterinary visits
- Road maintenance and drainage inclusive of fire breaks
- Parks and gardens maintenance
- Water infrastructure maintenance inclusive of solar bores, tanks, and general homeland requirements, and
- Airstrip maintenance and upgrades. (Laynhapuy 2025)

The Homelands Services team also coordinates freight logistics across the homelands and delivers diesel and opal fuel to support MES activities.

Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation was registered by ORIC in 2012 under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006 and had previously operated as an association. Laynhapuy is governed by a board of nine members, including two non-member directors. Three ward malas, or steering committees, were established by the Yirralka Rangers to facilitate representation across the homelands, with each of the Laynhapuyngu, Djalkarripuyngu, and Miyarrkapuyngu wards represented on the Laynhapuy board (Laynhapuy 2021). Laynhapuy was a foundation partner to the Djalkarripuyngu Local Decision Making (LDM) Agreement, signed 30 July 2022, which related to nine homelands including Gängan, and which outlined specific housing aspirations including government co-investment in homelands housing (Djalkarripuyngu 2022).

Of note at Laynhapuy is the establishment of a Housing and Infrastructure Subcommittee, comprised of three members of the Laynhapuy board and three residents of serviced homelands, along with representatives from Laynhapuy Health, Aged Care, and Yirralka Rangers. The dual purposes of the Subcommittee are to support Laynhapuy's strategic focus for housing and infrastructure and to advocate for all homelands and residents. Practically, the Subcommittee advises the Homelands Services team on matters relating to capital grants, housing and MES works, and housing and infrastructure research projects on homelands (Laynhapuy n.d.). For the Gängan project, a project working group was established involving three Gängan residents, each of whom spoke positively of the group and the way it had

facilitated communication with Laynhapuy staff. Laynhapuy consults and seeks approval from the project working group on all project decisions.

8.6 Past and Ongoing Housing Work at Gāngan

To understand the impact of the HHIP project at Gāngan it is necessary to understand the content and extent of other housing and infrastructure works delivered there in recent years. This section demonstrates the significance of the \$4m HHIP project, relative to the smaller scale of prior projects and ongoing housing works through the Homelands Program.

Bushtel only lists eight finished projects and grants at Gāngan, including (erroneously) the HHIP project. Two of these relate to Indigenous health services, while the remaining five have been delivered through Laynhapuy via the Homelands Capital Program. Table 21 shows those projects, which included work ranging from roof replacement, bore replacement, and sanitation works. Although the grant agreements are associated with Gāngan on Bushtel, the projects included works at a range of homelands serviced by Laynhapuy. For example, funding under CAP2100189 supported the provision of effluent designated areas at five homelands, while CAP2100156 included funds for roof replacements at Houses 8 and 9 at Gāngan. Acknowledging this, the total funds attributed to these works via the Homelands Capital Program in this two-year period, \$1,227,745, is relatively insignificant compared to the HHIP investment.

Project name	Project ID	Funding source	Value
Roof replacement for nine houses	HCP2200043	Homelands capital program 22/23	\$250,581
Maintenance of houses in various communities	HCP2200058	Homelands capital program 22/23	\$162,351
Replacement of bore pumps and associated solar panels, panel frames, and storage tanks	CAP2100069	Homelands capital program 21/22	\$180,100
Replacement of roofs to houses	CAP2100156	Homelands capital program 21/22	\$330,386
Providing effluent designated areas	CAP2100189	Homelands capital program 21/22	\$304,327

Table 21. Prior housing and infrastructure projects at Gāngan

The Homelands Program funds Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation to deliver housing, municipal, and essential services at Gāngan to the value of \$240,812 (2024-25). This equates to approximately \$18,524 per dwelling per annum, inclusive of all housing, municipal, and essential services costs. Laynhapuy is represented as reporting that increasing 'construction costs coupled with a systematic decrease in maintenance funding makes

improvement of dwelling conditions extremely difficult' (O'Bryan et al. 2024, 2). This is consistent with the reduction in real funds available in the Homelands Program, as identified by AHNT (2023). Nonetheless, a detailed Service Delivery Plan (SDP) outlines the extensive works scheduled at Gängaṅ under this program, relative to the funding available. Table 22 reproduces housing (i.e. not MES) specific work outlined in Laynhapuy's SDP. This indicates a planned and reactive approach to repair and maintenance that prioritises key trade works and healthy living practices.

Municipal and Essential Services	Estimated timeframe	Service provider additional information
Housing		
Carpentry		
Conduct housing repair and maintenance work	Half year - February, August	Laynhapuy conduct maintenance audits along with reports from Homelands residents logged into our system around repairs required on individual housing.
Deliver planned carpentry works	Half year - February, August	Planned and reactive works are completed onsite and reported back to Laynhapuy for additional works requiring attention at next service visits.
Electrical		
Conduct electrical maintenance audit of dwellings	Half year	Laynhapuy conduct maintenance audits along with reports from Homelands residents logged into our system around repairs required on individual housing. To be completed Morningside Electrical contractor during their scheduled HMS visits to Homelands.
Check RDC, fire alarms and earth stake connections	Half year	Planned and reactive works are completed onsite by Morningside Electrical and reported back to Laynhapuy for additional works requiring attention at next service visits unless otherwise urgent and require immediate attention. Minimum number of visits will change as price increases continue to rise.
Deliver planned electrical works	Half year	
Plumbing		
Conduct plumbing audit of dwellings and septic systems		Laynhapuy conduct maintenance audits along with reports from Homelands residents logged into our system around repairs required on individual housing,
Deliver planned plumbing works including hot water systems, waste		Planned and reactive works are completed onsite by GT plumbing and reported back to Laynhapuy for additional works requiring attention at next service visits unless otherwise urgent and require immediate attention.

water, septs and drainage		Minimum number of visits will change as price increases continue to rise.
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Table 22. Homelands housing work by trade

Laynhapuy's Infrastructure and Equipment register provides an inventory of infrastructure across all of its member homelands. Non-dwelling infrastructure is listed in Table 23 below.

Infrastructure category	Number of items
Ablution block	13
Absorption trench	1
Access road	1
Airstrip	1
Bore casing	2
Bore headworks	2
Effluent disposal area	1
Electrical controls	1
Electrical reticulation	1
Fencing	1
Firebreak	1
Internal roads	1
Other (Basketball court, tractor, outstation grounds, trailer)	4
Other buildings	9
Pit toilets	1
Pressure pump	1
Rubbish tip	1
Septic tank	9
Solar panels	2
Submersible bore	2
Tank stand	1

Table 23. Non-dwelling infrastructure at Gängan

8.7 HHIP Project at Gängan

Project Scope

Project works at Gängan were contracted on 7 December 2023 under grant agreement HHIPN00003. The value of this grant agreement was \$4,000,000 (excluding GST) for works at 13 funded houses and essential services infrastructure. Table 24 shows the Gängan project budget breakdown as of January 2025. Consultation costs relate to structural engineering fees (\$43,000), scoping visits and quoting services by the builder, hydraulic engineering

consultant fees, electrical scoping visits, and consultation fees paid to a traditional owner facilitating community consultation.

Breakdown	Estimate (Excl. GST)
Construction related expenses (85%)	
A - Consultant costs	\$67,400.00
B - Temporary accommodation, mobilisation and demobilisation	\$213,236.59
B - Contractors' camp mobilisation and demobilisation	\$122,337.15
B - Relocation of Lot 262 demountable	\$152,691.82
C - Community works	\$143,600.00
D - Employment	\$129,973.32
House works (Total)	\$2449,818.86
Subtotal	\$3,279,057.74
Contingency	\$120,942.26
Admin related expenses (15%)	
Admin	\$600,000.00
Total (Excl. GST)	\$4,000,000.00

Table 24. Gāngan project budget

The budget attributed to individual dwellings ranges from \$75,569.80 to \$249,480.58, at an average of \$188,447.60 per dwelling. Table 25 shows the distribution of budgeted funds for Gāngan housing by trade area.

Trade area	Estimate (Excl. GST)
Carpentry (all houses)	\$940,603.38
Plumbing (all houses)	\$299,776.40
Painting (12 houses)	\$376,330.47
Electrical (all houses)	\$431,588.70
Roof works (5 houses)	\$166,267.24
Structural works (4 houses)	\$126,182.67
Bathroom pod (1 house)	\$97,570.00
Hot water unit replacement (1 house)	\$11,500.00
Total	\$2,449,818.86

Table 25. Gāngan project house budget by trade area

Laynhapuy produced detailed architectural drawings specifying the scope of works for each dwelling, as well as a detailed schedule of finishes, fixtures, and fittings. Figure 50 represents one of many drawings prepared for each house, the 'Proposed floor plan typical house' that

applied to nine of the 13 houses, presented here as an example of the detailed scoping undertaken.

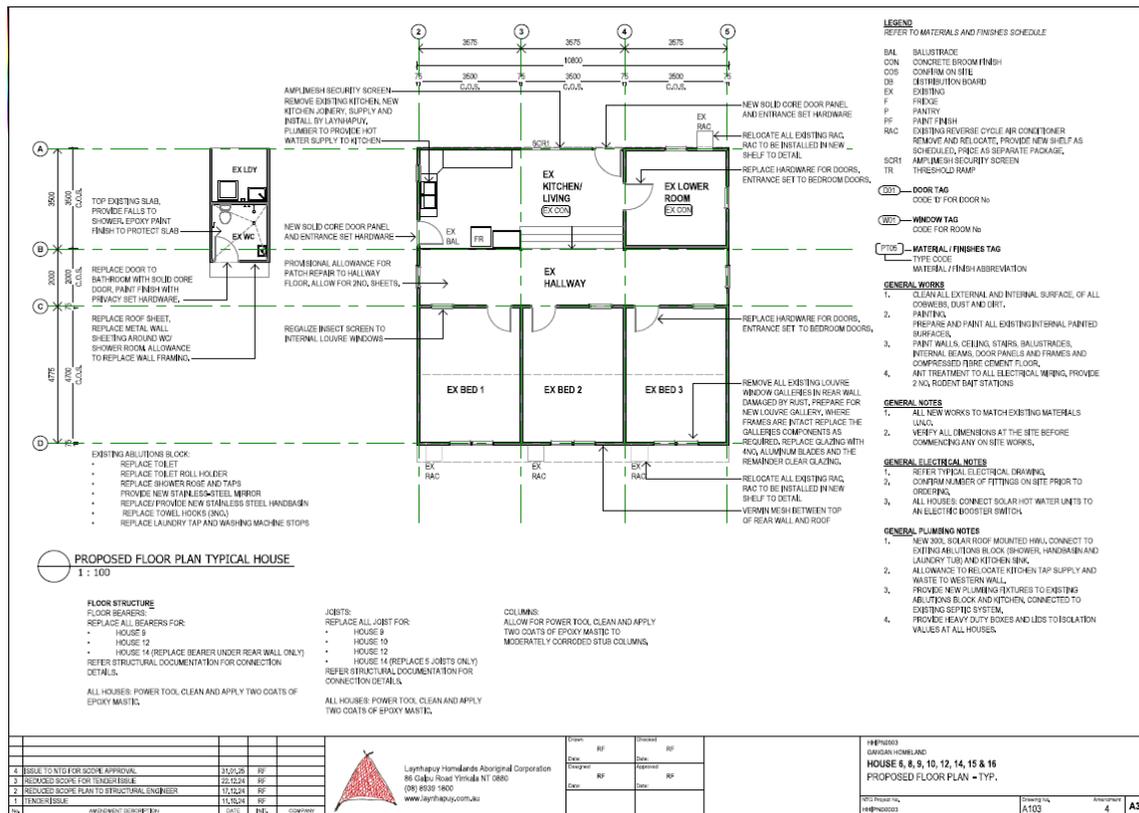


Figure 50. Example drawing, proposed floor plan typical house

Temporary accommodation was scoped to accommodate two households at a time of up to eight people per household, including ablutions, laundry, and cooking facilities. Residents expressed their desire to remain in Gänggan during the project, however there are no suitable buildings available in the community for this purpose and the only public ablutions block acts as the amenities for one dwelling without a bathroom. A number of temporary accommodation options were investigated, with Laynhapuy ultimately purchasing: two second-hand accommodation containers (two air-conditioned bedrooms each), one new three-bathroom ablutions container; one new site office for the contractors' camp (including a kitchenette, shower, and toilet); and five containers for residents to store personal belongings. In addition, Laynhapuy will relocate an existing demountable it owns from Yirrkala to Gänggan. The contractors' camp will include a site office and ablutions, with community members expressing their preference that it be located to the east of the main community.

Work to Date

Laynhapuy commenced community consultation for project works at Gäṅgaṅ in February 2024. Project documents outline that the Laynhapuy project team undertake community consultation in accordance with IAp2 guidelines and the Australian Indigenous Design Charter. Those specify that consultation should be:

- Community specific, ensuring respect for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture by following local community cultural protocols, and involve
- Deep listening, ensuring respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviours for effective communication and that courteous interaction is practiced.

In February 2024, a community meeting was held at Gäṅgaṅ, attended by the three Project Working Group members and the NT Government's HHIP team, to discuss a range of community-based project works, options for transitional accommodation, and the consultation process for house-specific works (Figure 51). In February and March of that year, initial meetings were held at each dwelling, during which the Laynhapuy operations manager, a project working group member, and another Laynhapuy employee and Gäṅgaṅ resident worked with the family of each dwelling to undertake a functionality and wellbeing assessment, an overcrowding assessment, a health hardware assessment, and a discussion of the impact of visitors. Service connection and building and structural condition were subject to a visual assessment. An initial measure-up and sketch of each house was used to co-design repairs and additions with householders.



Figure 51. Participatory map from community meeting

In April 2024, sanitation inspections were undertaken of all septic systems and septic tanks were pumped out by the plumbing contractor, identifying the need for new septic tanks and

absorption beds at two houses. Following the initial meetings with residents, a scoping site visit was undertaken with a civil and structural engineer and the preferred building contractor in May 2024, alongside the planning of the temporary accommodation and the contractors' camp. The inspection determined that significant structural repairs are needed to the subfloor framing of four houses and that five houses require a partial or full roof replacement. During that visit, a number of other inspections were undertaken, including of the internal road, existing trees, the existing office, and the shed. It was determined that the office was beyond economic repair and that it be demolished, that an arborist be engaged to trim the trees posing a risk to houses and electrical infrastructure, and that the road has several significant washouts requiring rectification.

In June, Laynhapuy facilitated 'White Card' - (CPCWHS1001 - Prepare to work safely in the construction industry) - training at Gängan, which was delivered by East Arnhem Land Consulting and Training, as the registered training organisation, with the cost covered by the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA). This followed a request from homeland residents for the training in order to participate in the project works. Four Gängan residents participated in the training and Laynhapuy has worked with the head contractor to establish an employment model for their participation in project works. Table 24 above indicates the budget allocation to facilitate a process whereby Laynhapuy directly employs the local construction team to undertake painting, the installation of doors and hardware, and minor plumbing repairs under the supervision of the head contractor. Ahead of the delivery of HHIP project works, the Laynhapuy HMS and MES teams assisted with site preparation at Gängan. This included preparing the existing shed for temporary accommodation (kitchen), removing dilapidated pit toilets from the community, assisting residents with the removal of hard rubbish, and clearing up rubbish around and under houses ahead of construction.

In July 2024, Laynhapuy finalised the purchase of the temporary accommodation, ablutions, and site office to facilitate the project, as well as finalised scoping of mobilisation and demobilisation of the temporary accommodation and the contractors' camp. Scoping site visits were undertaken by an electrical contractor and for the civil works, and septic systems were replaced at two houses (including separate 4000L septic tanks and absorption beds for grey water and black water at each house, Figure 52). In August 2024, scoping site visits were undertaken by a plumbing contractor and a second electrical contractor (the first having cited capacity issues), which identified necessary works listed in Table 26. A community meeting was also held in August to update residents on upcoming works, with civil works commencing that month, including on the internal road and drainage, the community rubbish dump, and building pads.



Figure 52. Septic system replacement at Gängan

Works identified by plumbing and electrical inspections	
Plumbing	Electrical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a hot water supply to the kitchen sink in all houses except two houses • Provide a tempering valve to all solar hot water units • Connect all solar hot water units to an electric booster switch • Replace 180L solar hot water units at one house. Provide a new 180L solar hot water unit at one house, which currently has no hot water supply • Review weak supply from solar hot water unit at two houses • Relocate hot water unit from ablution block to main house for two houses • Provide new plumbing fixtures to the upgraded ablutions and kitchen • Provide bollards and new lids to septic tanks where required • Provide heavy duty boxes and lids to isolation valves at all houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New cabling and wiring to AS3000 and AS3008 • Supply and install new D10 distribution boards • Inspect and replace (if required) earthing system to AS3000 • Replace all DGPO socket outlets and light switches • Replace all oyster lights, batten lights and fans • New photoelectric smoke alarms • New GPO for box AC unit on separate circuit with isolator switch • New GPO for bench stove top on separate circuit • Rectify installation of exposed cabling under house • Provide electrical supply to existing hot water for booster

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a water meter to one house to monitor water use to the new septic system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEP Shed - upgrade switchboard to include additional circuits for temporary accommodation and ablutions containers • Upgrade pole lighting to ceremony area • Connect public toilet to power (if funds available) • Disconnect power to existing office
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Table 26. Work identified by plumbing and electrical inspections

In September 2024 the civil works continued, including the demolition of the existing office. Civil works included: repairs, formation, and compaction including gravel resheeting of the existing east-west and north-south roads (Figure 53); the formalisation of a drainage network; the preparation of building pads for the temporary accommodation and the contractors' camp; the demolition of the existing office; the push, tidy, and capping of the existing dump, which was at capacity; and the construction of a new dump (noting the cost of the new dump was funded by Laynhapuy separately to the HHIP project). The scopes for temporary accommodation, the contractors' camp, and for aborist works were also approved.



Figure 53. East-west road before and during civil works

In October 2024, the temporary accommodation, contractors camp, and demountable were delivered to Gäṅgaṅ. The temporary accommodation was installed and connected and the contractors' camp solar system was also installed. Scopes for eight houses were finalised for quoting by the contractor. In November, the aborist works were completed, septic works for the temporary accommodation was completed, and further White Card and Hand and Power Tools (RIISAM203E) training was delivered at Gäṅgaṅ, with 11 residents undertaking this round of White Card training and eight residents undertaking the tools training. Across November to December 2024, quoting was undertaken by the contractor, with initial pricing provided to Laynhapuy, and a revised scope of works was delivered by Laynhapuy to the contractor as part of the tender negotiation. At that stage, a progress report anticipated that 'Over the wet season the contractor will complete a bulk order of construction material for the project and pending weather and road restrictions the contractor will deliver the materials to Gäṅgaṅ. The contractor will aim to commence internal painting of the houses during the wet season.'

A full scope of works was provided by Laynhapuy to the NT Government HHIP team on 31 January 2025. Approval for works was received for all 13 houses on 20 February 2025. In March 2025, the head contractor signed a construction contract for the project works and commenced procurement of materials. Also in March, employment contracts for Gängan residents were formalised, with those residents expected to undertake first aid training in May, to be delivered by ALPA. Commencement of house-related works on site were pending weather and access conditions.

A Revised Approach

In May 2025, the Laynhapuy Board of Directors made the decision to revise Laynhapuy's approach to the HHIP project. Laynhapuy continues to manage the Gängan project directly, but has outsourced the services of MV Project Management to project manage the remaining works in place of the former operations manager and project manager. MV Project Management will also project manage the 2024-27 HHIP projects selected at Garthalala (\$5,800,000) and Baniyala (\$3,090,000). Despite this reconfiguration of project management, the intention is to continue the housing works at Gängan as they had been scoped and contracted up to that point.

At the beginning of July 2025, the road into Gängan was graded, having suffered significant damage during rains that continued into May, providing vehicle access to the homeland. The impact of the rains on road access had impacted the ability of the head contractor to deliver materials to Gängan to commence housing works.

By the end of September 2025, three house refurbishments had been completed at Gängan, with residents moving back in. Two more house refurbishments were underway, indicative of the approach to follow, with temporary accommodation available for two households at a time. Four local residents have been involved in the recent housing refurbishment works. This has included working alongside the carpentry team, undertaking cleaning of houses in preparation of refurbishment works, operating civil machinery to clear scrubs and trees, supporting household relocations to temporary accommodation, and painting works. Gängan residents participating in the refurbishment works have been supervised by the head contractor and trade contractors while being paid directly by Laynhapuy. The expectation for the project remains that all housing refurbishments will be completed by the end of 2025.

8.8 Ongoing Considerations

Of the in-depth case studies considered in this Final Report, the Gängan project demonstrates most clearly the challenges of delivering housing and infrastructure projects at remote homelands. The delays in homelands access by road related to ongoing wet weather are not atypical and provide a constant challenge for homelands service providers working in Arnhem Land. Similarly, the difficulties of delivering any homelands housing project are exacerbated for homelands service providers located outside the major centres of Darwin and Alice Springs. There is a limited market of available trades companies where work

requires subcontractors. And, in Laynhapuy's case, given its location at Yirrkala, the cost for materials is at a premium, given they must be barged in to Nhulunbuy before they are transported to project sites.

Laynhapuy has worked hard to progress the HHIP project at Gäṅgaṅ and expects to complete works by December 2025, while simultaneously commencing scoping for HHIP projects at Garthalala and Baniyala. The time taken to commence housing works in part reflects the careful approach taken by Laynhapuy to consult with homelands residents about their desires for the project. The progress of this consultation was undermined by the second round of HHIP funding, and the ambiguity generated about whether or not new or replacement housing would be supported by that funding, leading project managers and householders to propose more extensive works for Gäṅgaṅ than were originally approved. That issue aside, the approach taken to careful community engagement in this project is emblematic of what is often aspired to in reference to the importance of genuine co-design with remote residents. It is notable that such processes take time. As such, it is important that HHIP contract management remains flexible in accommodating revised timelines for project delivery. The best way to facilitate this is to establish Australian and NT funding agreements that are longer than two or three years, as such agreements create cascading time pressures throughout the sector and undermine local decision making.

Recommendations

23. AHNT should develop recommended guidelines for best practice consultation by service providers with homelands residents, to inform ongoing consultation in the HHIP and related programs.
24. The Australian Government should provide specified funding for homelands access roads, to mitigate the detrimental impact of poor access roads on projects attending to homelands housing and infrastructure.
25. Future homelands funding agreements established between the Australian and NT Governments should be longer than three years, and in the present context should align with the 2024-34 funding timeframe for remote community housing.

9. Water Testing and Supply Program Case Study

9.1 Background to the NT-wide Water Program

Under the 'Restoring Funding for Northern Territory Homelands' Schedule to the Federation Funding Agreement - Affordable Housing, Community Services and Other, Attachment A specifies the distribution of Australian Government funding across project stages and outputs. Under the Rapid Response Works funding allocated for 2022-23, \$4.3 million was allocated for Northern Territory-wide initiatives including: a housing fire and electrical safety program; a water testing and supply program; and a housing sanitation program. Under the Comprehensive Works package established for 2023-24, \$10 million was allocated for the continuation of these three programs. \$1.5 million was allocated to the Water Testing and Supply Program across the two years of HHIP funding.

Given that the majority of funding under the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP) was allocated to housing and infrastructure upgrades at specific homelands, the purpose of the NT-wide initiatives was to have a wider geographical impact. Rather than the major refurbishments and upgrades undertaken at selected homelands, the NT-wide initiatives have sought to increase the function of housing and related infrastructure across NT homelands with reference to Healthabitat's healthy living practices (HLPs). Early documents outlined that works would be delivered across all funded homelands (approximately 400), with regions to be prioritised based on their respective water security risks.

9.2 Water Infrastructure at NT Homelands

The 1987 report published by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs (the 'Blanchard Review'), described the then contemporary provision of infrastructure and essential services to homelands, including those related to water. The Review cited a prior Central Land Council survey of 24 homelands surrounding Yuendumu, Lajamanu, and Haasts Bluff that showed 19 lacked adequate water supplies (1987, 173). Other research at the time defined 'an adequate standard of facilities, based on Aboriginal expectations of basic requirements' as including 'a bore, equipped with at least a hand pump', finding that 80 per cent of the outstations surveyed had substandard facilities (1987, 174). Department of Aboriginal Affairs statistics from 1983 for homelands across Australia indicated that 'of 357 homeland centres and other small communities, only 132 . . . had

adequate quantities of water of good quality' (1987, 175). The Blanchard Review recommended that:

- Newly establishing homeland groups be provided with a basic water supply sufficient to allow them to demonstrate a commitment to their homeland centres; and
- Priority be given to providing all permanent homeland centres with adequate quantities of good quality water, with more extensive reticulation being undertaken where housing and ablution facilities are provided. (original emphasis, 1987, 179)

This is consistent with Davis and Brikké's (1995) characterisation of sustainability for small water supply systems, which require all of environmental, technical, and social sustainability. For governments and private stakeholders involved in water management, economic considerations are also central to system sustainability.

In 2012, under the Stronger Futures package, the Australian Government agreed to provide the NT Government \$206 million to support the servicing of homelands, to be paid at \$20 million per year over ten years. The NT Government led by Chief Minister Adam Giles cashed out the remainder of this investment in 2015 and the NT Government subsequently established its Homelands Program with a funding envelope of \$53.6 million. In 2024, the annual budget of the Homelands Program was \$38.6 million.

At the point at which the NT Government cashed out the Stronger Futures funding related to homelands, it had limited information regarding the condition of assets on homelands and the unfunded liability to bring those assets to standards approximating NT towns or remote communities. In May 2022, the Advisory Committee on Homelands – established in 2021 and subsequently transformed into the JSC-RHNT Homelands Working Group – commissioned an independent audit to assess the condition of housing, essential services, and municipal services assets at homelands. The objectives of the audit were to identify physical assets, assess their condition against standards and specifications, provide cost estimates to fix assets, and advise on homelands asset needs by region. The audit attended 100 homelands, assessed homelands housing and infrastructure, and provided cost estimates to improve homelands housing and infrastructure. At this point in time, the audit has not been approved for public release.

Broadly, available records indicate that homelands water infrastructure issues are consistent across NT Government regions with some variation. Water at homelands is predominantly sourced from ground bores (approximately 314 funded homelands receive drinking water from bores), supplemented by rainwater tanks and pumped surface water (river or soak). Water is typically delivered at a suitable pressure to elevated water tanks, some of which require repair. Many tanks overflow, leading to rust and corrosion of elevated structures, and require buoy systems to be installed. Bores are powered by either of a dedicated solar or generator system, some of which require attention, especially regarding external conduits and solar array switchboards. Many bores, as well as water tanks, require new fencing or fencing repairs, and many require the clearing of vegetation to reduce fire risk and damage to infrastructure. Attention is also required to pipework connecting bores and tanks. In the Top End region in particular, more bores may be required to meet existing demand. Secondary water sources for homelands are typically undetermined and homelands

residents in some instances have to minimise water use due to service limitations and also rely on service providers to cart water to homelands. Water filtration systems could be installed at homelands to address poor water quality and the identification of a secondary bore source at homelands would help to address water security issues. In some contexts, especially in Central Australia, water is unsuitable for consumption due to high material levels.

The audit informed the approach taken by the NT-wide Water Testing and Supply Program to assess the condition of existing infrastructure and determine potential improvements that could be made to mitigate water insecurity.

9.3 Water Protections and Services at NT Homelands

In the independent Review of the Homelands Policy commissioned by the then Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities in 2018, water is predominantly considered for its significance as a factor underpinning eligibility for homelands funding, given the importance of access to potable water and adequate water distribution infrastructure for homelands' viability. It states that recent policy has adopted the position that 'effective community water management plans must be in place to understand and mitigate the risks to water security and ensure that Homelands have a continuous supply', while noting that only around 25 per cent of funded homelands have a water management plan in place (TFHC 2020, 8). The Review states that 'it is accepted that further prescription is required to establish how water security is defined and the extent to which Government is responsible for ensuring continuity of supply where local water availability is limited or water is contaminated' (2020, 8). With respect to the definition of homelands and funding eligibility criteria, the Review recommended that

Recommendation 5. A Homeland must have an adequate potable water supply for its occupants, as identified in the water management plan for that location. For Homelands being added to the program, funding will not be available to establish a new water source locally (where the existing source of water is no longer available or becomes contaminated and unusable). (2020, 9)

Submissions to the Review identified a range of issues related to water potability, infrastructure, and management. A submission from the Central Land Council highlighted the importance of water management plans in which homelands residents are involved in water management. It stated

A sustainable future for water supplies in remote areas depends on community water management plans that are created and enacted by residents in cooperation with service providers. Little effort is made by service providers to build the capacity of community members to manage risk to their supplies, despite willingness and skills of many outstation residents. (CLC 2019, 18; see Beard 2006; Grey-Gardner 2008)

Similarly, Ingkerreke Outstations Resource Services highlighted that delivery of water to homelands from regional centres is unsustainable and that 'residents must learn the risks and benefits over the different sources of water available on their outstation, so that they can make appropriate choices to maintain their health' (2019, 3). The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Association noted in their submission that 'Caution needs to be taken about water quality as this responsibility does not seem to be assumed by anyone' (2019, 4). Member for Nhulunbuy, Yingiya Guyula (2019), stated that 'Many homelands require a second backup bore and water quality should be tested regularly to ensure communities have access to good water'.

The NT Government response to Recommendation 5 stated above was as follows:

The NT Government will continue developing a long-term comprehensive sustainable water strategy to ensure all Territorians have access to water for drinking, for agriculture and for economic opportunities. The strategy will be informed by extensive community consultation including engagement with Land Councils and Aboriginal Territorians. (2021, 7)

Work developed in this regard was represented in the Territory Water Plan (Office of Water Security 2023, 16), including the first priority area of 'Safety - Provide safe and secure drinking water for all Territorians'. Related priority actions include the passing of new safe drinking water legislation and improved water outcomes for homelands.

At this point in time, NT remote communities and homelands are not guaranteed minimum standards for drinking water (see Grealy and Howey 2020; Howey and Grealy 2021). The NT's Water Supply and Sewerage Services Act 2000 (WSSSA) requires that providers of 'water supply services' in specified 'water supply licence areas' are licensed by the regulator, the NT Utilities Commission. The government-owned Power and Water Corporation (PAWC) is the sole licensee under the WSSSA and requirements are imposed on PAWC through the legislation, its licence, and a standardised customer contract. Under the WSSSA, the Minister can specify minimum drinking water standards for PAWC to meet, with similar powers available in the Water Act 1992 (S73) and the Public and Environmental Health Act 2011 (S133). Rather than establish such standards, the utility provider and the NT Department of Health have established a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that describes criteria for the safe treatment of water, water testing regimes, responses to public health incidents, public reporting, and so on. The unenforceable MoU concedes that 'no minimum standards for drinking water have been set', but that the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines 'will be used as the peak reference' for water quality (Department of Health 2011: clause 4). The MoU also allows for the Department to vary the water quality criteria drawn from the Guidelines 'in specific circumstances ... as long as public health is not compromised' (2011: clause 4).

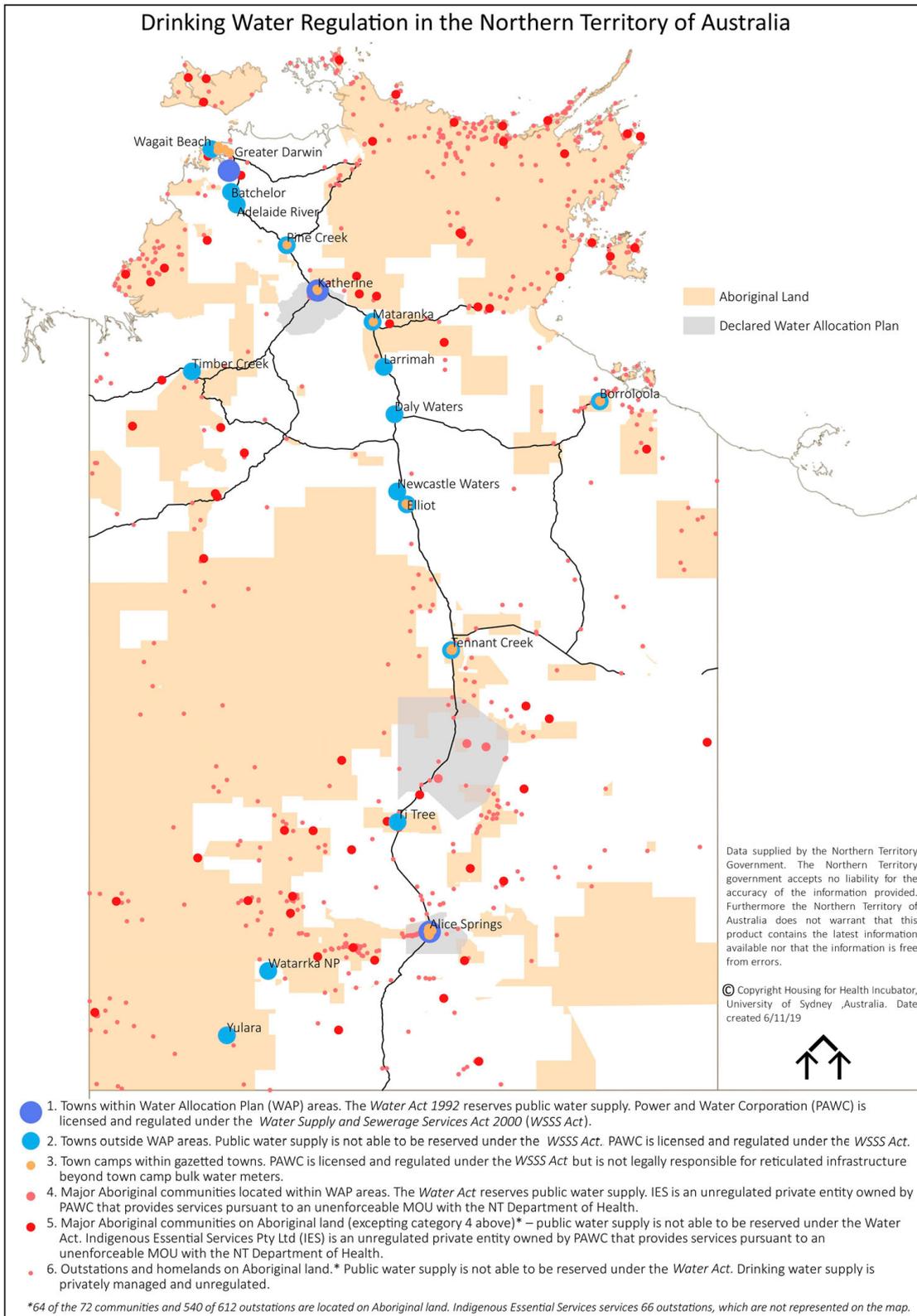


Figure 54. Drinking water regulation in the NT (Grealy and Howey 2020, 348)

The limited and unenforceable protections that do exist for drinking water are not available across the Northern Territory, which is fragmented into jurisdictions with distinct protection regimes (Figure 54, Grealy and Howey 2020). The WSSSA only applies in water supply licence areas, which include 18 towns where the majority of the NT’s non-Indigenous population lives, but not remote communities or homelands. Remote communities and a proportion of homelands (approximately 79) are serviced by Indigenous Essential Services (IES), a not-for-profit subsidiary of PAWC that owns utility assets and is responsible for service provision in remote communities. Unlike PAWC, IES is a private proprietary limited company with no legislation mandating licensing or service standards, nor is it overseen by the Utilities Commission. The standards, duties, accountability, and transparency mechanisms specified in the WSSSA, PAWC’s licence, and its customer contract do not apply to IES. The MoU between the Department of Health and PAWC does exist as one framework for governing remote community drinking water, although it is unenforceable. From a legal perspective, public water supply is not guaranteed under the Water Act and drinking water supply is privately managed and unregulated. The author and Kirsty Howey (2020) describe this as a racialised archipelago of water governance in the Northern Territory, while Erin O’Donnell et al. (2022) describe a hydrological frontier, ‘where water governance has institutionalised regulatory spaces of inclusion and exclusion that entrench and (re)produce inequities and insecurities in water access’ (59).

This absence of minimum legal protections for drinking water does not mean homelands water is not subject to management nor that it would necessarily fail to meet standards specified within the ADWG. Only empirical assessments could determine such water supply and quality issues. The Homelands Program supports the delivery of housing, municipal, and essential services to funded homelands. A homeland’s funded status implies that it has met the funding eligibility criteria, which include that it must have a sustainable, potable water supply and that it must have a water supply in operating condition. To remain funded, a homeland must also ‘have a service provider, recognised under the Homelands Program, willing to undertake the responsibility for servicing the homeland and be able to deliver services in a safe environment’ (TFHC 2023, 3). Under the Homelands Program, a contracted service provider should develop a Service Delivery Plan for each funded location in consultation with residents, reconfirming the SDP every 12 months. Table 27 outlines the scope of responsibilities related to homelands water (excluding household water services, such as plumbing) that are attributed to the homelands service provider under a Service Delivery Plan. In the Homelands Program Guidelines, these are listed under the broader category of municipal and essential services, which also includes power systems, sewerage and septic systems, grounds maintenance, waste disposal, internal roads, airstrips, and environmental (e.g., animal control and dust prevention).

Category	Outcome	Scope
Water System	Provide a safe and reliable water supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspect, repair and maintain water supply infrastructure to ensure system is operational and working as intended to achieve the specified outcomes.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all compounds and areas around infrastructure are clean and clear of vegetation to reduce risk of fire and structural damage. • Ensure fences and gates around water infrastructure are secure. • Inspect for and repair any water leaks in infrastructure and at houses. • Ensure water reticulation where possible is buried to a safe depth to reduce risk of damage. • Ensure active and unused bores are correctly sealed to prevent contamination. <p><u>Callout/emergency</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service providers are required to attend and restore services to water systems within two weeks of being informed of disruption of services. If this cannot be achieved, TFHC must be informed.
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Table 27. Service providers' water system responsibilities (NTG 2023, 6-7)

Within specific service delivery plans, information about water system management can be quite general. Table 28 reproduces an example of water-specific commitments in one SDP.

Municipal and Essential Services - Water	Homeland/Outstation Commitment
Inspect repair and maintain water supply infrastructure	Report leaks and bore/pump issues
Inspect bores and clear vegetation inside and around compound	Run pump if required in overcast weather as required to fill water tank.

Table 28. Indicative water services specified in a service delivery plan

Beyond such information represented in SDPs, a homeland may also have a specific water management plan. The development of homelands-specific water management plans is not an obligation of the contracted service provider under any funding agreement with the NT Government. Where water management plans have been developed, this process is likely to have been undertaken by homelands residents in consultation with the community development arm of a land council or another third party consultant, rather than by the service provider itself, though it may be shared with the service provider to inform their work. One stakeholder identified that at many homelands there are numerous issues related to water infrastructure, including that

there is no monitoring of how much water was coming out and how much water might be used in relation to the source. And then the location and management of septic systems, the number of exposed bores in terms of holes in bore casing, and then the potential contamination once the water was actually out of the ground, so poorly managed tanks and things like that. And then things like elevated tanks, switchboards that aren't locked which can potentially cause or are very high risk for injury. (S78)

9.4 The Water Testing and Supply Program

The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program Implementation Plan describes that the Water Testing and Supply Program will be undertaken by the NT Office of Water Security, which is located in the former Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS, now the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment). The NT-wide subprogram 'will see inspections and repairs to water supply infrastructure in select NT regions based on an assessment of risk and need' (2023, 9). A Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the former Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC, now the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Community Development) and the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS) was finalised in August 2023. The services listed included the following: 1. preparation of a PMP [Project Management Plan]; 2. water resources desktop investigation; 3. physically locate existing bores and infrastructure; 4. bore diagnosis and review; 5. reporting in relation to 1-4 above; and 6. education. The program was understood to supplement works undertaken by the NT Government's business-as-usual Homelands Program, and is also referred to as the 'Groundwater Assessment Program'. TFHC required that DEPWS identify groundwater bore sources under extreme and high water security risk, ensure baseline data is obtained on homeland bores, and advise on the replacement, rehabilitation or drilling of new bores to overcome water security stress and infrastructure failure (SLA 2023, Appendix 2).¹⁸

The five target areas of the program, as outlined in the SLA, are quoted here in full:

1. To identify all outstation and Homelands water sources that are high risk, ensuring baseline data is obtained, monitored and reported through a scheduled program
2. To identify outstation water infrastructure specifically groundwater bores that are high risk of failure or outstations where increasing populations permanent or flexible are causing water security stress or where the bore infrastructure has reached end of life
3. Replace, rehabilitate or drill new bores to assist with overcoming water security stress and infrastructure failure. Investigate and drill new bores where the supply has previously been surface water
4. To disseminate water information and operational procedures, with assistance to service providers and community residents to develop water operations plans to ensure an adequate and well managed supply
5. To establish risk-based water operations planning as a requirement for each outstation water supply. Identify any breaches of the Water Act within the Northern Territory declared Water Control Districts and undertake remedial works to correct the water supply. (SLA 2023, 2)

¹⁸ Note that the Technical Note prepared by the Water Resources Division is explicit in stating that 'The project excludes drilling and bore maintenance services' (DLPE 2024, 8).

The SLA acknowledges that due to limited existing information on the location and condition of homelands bores cost estimates could vary significantly. The SLA specifies that 'A minimum of 48 identified Homelands by the Department (TFHC) located in the Barkly Region will remain as the agreed starting priority' and that 'Drilling and bore maintenance services and associated service fees will be agreed in a separate SLA before proceeding'.

Under the Project Management Plan, the water program was renamed as the Groundwater Security Assessment and the number of targeted homelands was reduced to 40. A total \$1 million was made available by TFHC to DEPWS for the project. Figure 55 shows the homelands identified by TFHC for inclusion in the water program. The combined estimated population of these homelands is 655 people. One of the specified homelands (Hingston Place) is connected to Tennant Creek mains water, rather than drawing groundwater through a bore, resulting in its exclusion from this work.

The 40 specified Barkly homelands are otherwise serviced by Far Northern Contractors, AUS Projects, Thangkenhareng Aboriginal Corporation, and Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation. These homelands fall outside the footprint of service by PAWC and IES. The objectives of the Groundwater Security Assessment were revised from those above to the following:

1. To locate, identify and evaluate bore water supply bores
2. To capture baseline data from water supply bores
3. Assess bore infrastructure and identify those under extreme and/or high water security risk
4. Advise on the replacement, rehabilitation or drilling of new bores (as required) to assist with overcoming water security stress and infrastructure failure
5. To provide information to inform key stakeholders on the current status of bore water supply infrastructure using a risk based assessment.¹⁹

That is, the program revised its focus to assess the condition of bores from one that might also include the replacement, rehabilitation, and drilling of new bores. The choice to focus on homelands in the Barkly region recognised that region as especially reliant on groundwater and as subject to water supply limitations, as compared with other northern regions of the NT. Undertaking the project for TFHC contributes to DEPWS achieving priority action 4 under the Territory Water Plan, which is improved water outcomes for homelands (Office of Water Security 2023, 27).

¹⁹ The Technical Note prepared by Water Resources included minor differences to this text, as follows:

1. Locate, identify and evaluate water supply bores (production bores)
2. Capture baseline data from water supply bores (including water quality if bore equipped)
3. Assess bore casing and identify those under high water security risk
4. Advise on the replacement, rehabilitation or drilling of new bores (as required) to assist with overcoming water security stress and infrastructure failure
5. Provide information to inform key stakeholders on the current status of water supply infrastructure such as leaks and potential contamination. (DLPE 2024, 7)

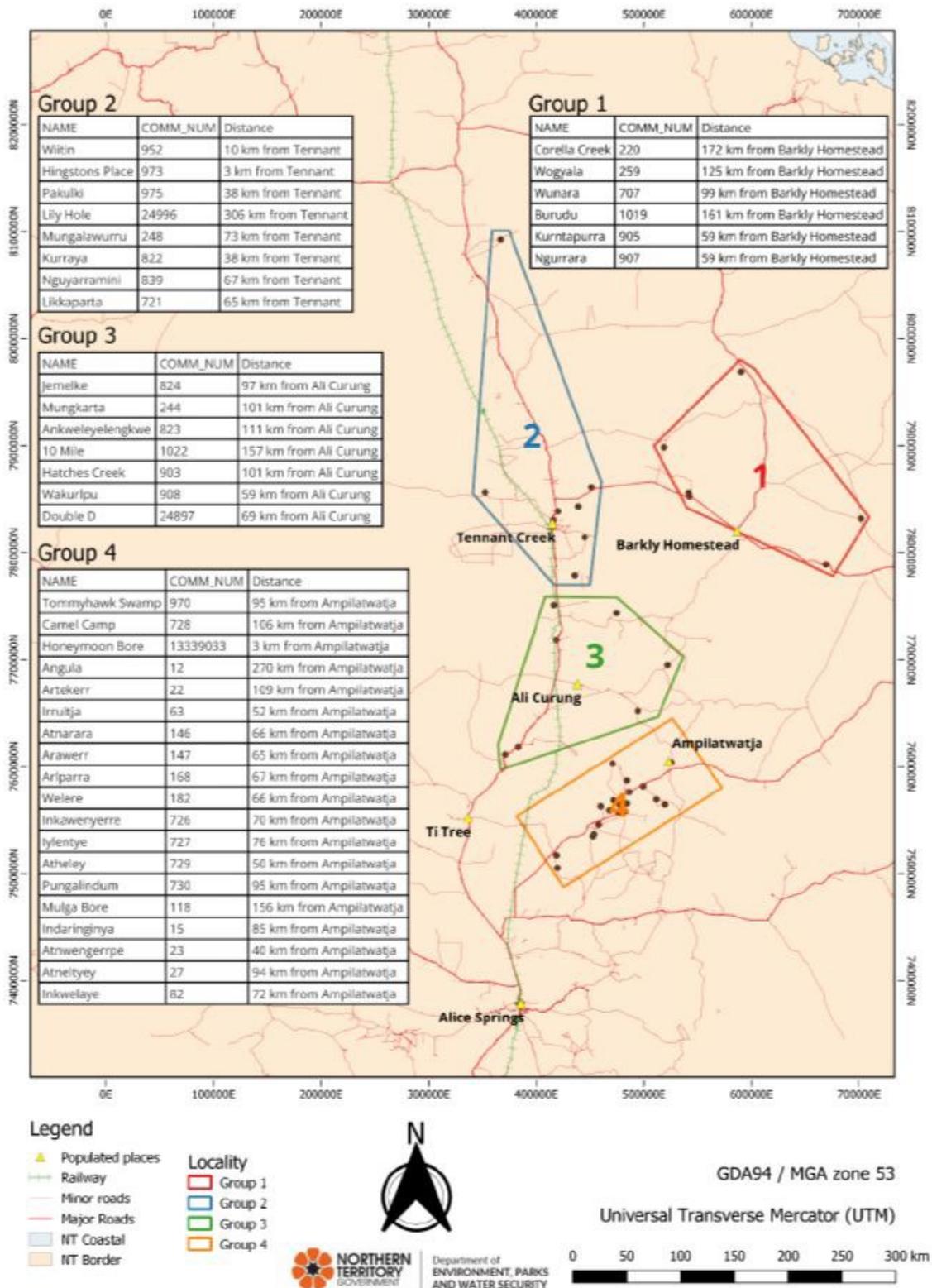


Figure 55. TFHC Identified Homelands for program inclusion (PMP Appendix A)

Figure 56 shows the various types of assessments expected to be undertaken in the program. The PMP notes that ‘field activities will primarily focus on locating and auditing the surficial condition of the groundwater bore and water associated infrastructure’ (PMP 2023, 24). This approach is expected to produce a range of outcomes, including:

1. Improved understanding of potential issues relating to bore condition, specifically deteriorated bore headworks, casing or water infrastructure; including silted and/or blocked bores
2. Improved understanding of potential issues relating to bore construction, specifically, casing age and type, annulus backfill materials, constructed depth and bore location
3. Improved understanding of bore water supply security, specifically the number of bores and presence of redundancy bores in comparison to population of Homeland (water demand), including targeted aquifer unit
4. Improved understanding of source water quality
5. Improved understanding of potential issues relating to sustainable bore yields, specifically, available pumping test data and recommended pump settings. (PMP 2023, 10)

#	Type of Assessment	Assessment Method	Assessment Outcome
1	Visual inspection	Site walkover, photos and consultation (field survey), Sanitary Inspection of bores	Data collection relating to bore infrastructure condition and water associated infrastructure
2	Water level	Depth to water (dip tape)	Water level data collection
3	Total depth ¹	Total depth (dip tape)	Inspect for potential blockages and/or silting up
4	Groundwater sample ²	Groundwater quality (sample via bore tap)	Baseline data collection aligning with ADWG (2011).
5	Elevation survey ³	Elevation survey (easting, northing and elevation)	Acquire geospatial data

1. Will not be able to take total depth measurement if pump is installed in bore.

2. Water sample will require an operational pump setup and associated infrastructure (i.e. sampling tap). When multiple bores supply one homeland.

3. Elevation survey will require appropriate site conditions to conduct survey.

Figure 56. Water Bore Assessment Plan (PMP, Appendix B)

The risk to water security at any particular homeland is produced through the interaction of a number of factors, such as the population, related water demand, the number of bores and their yield, reticulated water infrastructure, water quality, and the aquifer type. Figure 57 shows various criteria that are considered through the bore audits and their associated escalation criteria that could determine an overall assessment of ‘urgent’, ‘moderate-high’, or ‘urgent’ for the water infrastructure at a specific homeland.

Escalation Criteria	Criteria Description
Casing age is expired	Steel casing > 40 years age PVC casing > 60 years age
Deteriorated bore condition	Excessive rust, damage, corrosion, outdated.
Deteriorated water infrastructure	Excessive rust, damage, corrosion, outdated.
No redundancy/backup bore	Only one bore allocated to homeland.
Poor water quality	Exceedance of any health related criteria (ADWG 2011)
Reduced productivity / yield	Bore blocked (foreign objects) or silted up.
Reduced water level (reduced aquifer storage)	Moderate to significant water level reduction.
Inadequate water supply infrastructure	Insufficient storage volume in tank, power supply, pipework
High water demand	Water demand exceeds supply.
Bore location	Bore location not desirable.
Incorrect pump settings	Incorrect pump intake depth, pump rate, pump type.

Figure 57. Criteria description for water bores (PMP 2023, 18)

9.5 Groundwater Security Assessment Work

It has been difficult to access information and data related to the 'NT-wide Water Testing and Supply Program'. On 4 February 2025, Menzies received a draft Technical Note prepared by the Water Resources Division of DEPWS (now DLPE) and a selection of homeland-specific Water Safety Plans prepared by consultancy Ekistica. The difficulty in accessing relevant materials to monitor and evaluate this area of the program was apparently related to delays in the inspections work being undertaken by DEPWS, which itself reflected that department's staff resourcing limitations. Recognising the difficulty of mobilising government staff to undertake this work and that similar work was already underway at some Barkly homelands, DEPWS subcontracted the engineering firm Ekistica to complete assessments at some homelands specified by the HHIP. The scope of that work expanded under Ekistica to include some water quality testing.

The Technical Note prepared by the Water Resources Division of the now-Department of Lands, Planning and Environment (DLPE) summarised the work undertaken as the Groundwater Security Assessment. Table 29 was produced by the Water Resources Division and provides an overview of the major work components undertaken. This includes the establishment of a service level agreement and project plan, a desktop review, a field bore audit, a bore review, and final reporting.

Item	Description	Responsibility
Service level agreement (SLA) and project plan	Agreement between TFHC and Water Resources (DEPWS) in an SLA. The SLA will outline the terms and conditions for the delivery of the required works (Milestone 1)	Water Resources
Desktop review	Review of government databases and reports (including statement of bores, technical reports, technical notes, water chemistry) (Milestone 2).	Water Resources
Field bore audit	Bore audits including field form, photos, elevation survey, water sample (physical chemistry, metals and radiological) and water level (Milestone 2)	Water Resources
Bore review	Review of data collated and collected from desktop review and field bore audit. Interpretation of data and application of priority level for Homelands based on criteria such as, historical pumping test data, bore condition, bore construction, groundwater resource, water quality, water demand, and number of bores (Milestone 2)	Water Resources and TFHC
Final reporting	Delivery of results and final report (Milestone 3)	Water Resources

Table 29. Groundwater Security Assessment project activities (DLPE 2024, 12)

The Technical Note describes that the Water Resources Division became aware of work commissioned by Urupuntja Aboriginal Corporation (UAC) in the same region, UAC having commissioned the engineering consultancy Ekistica to develop Water Safety Plans for 21 homelands in the Barkly region. 19 of those homelands were already specified in the Groundwater Security Assessment and the Water Resources Division commissioned Ekistica to develop plans for an additional seven homelands. A total 26 Water Safety Plans were thus developed, in addition to the groundwater security assessments at 39 homelands.

The Technical Note describes the lack of information about what are understood as community-owned assets, highlighting that ‘most Homelands have not been visited from a water source supply perspective since the bore infrastructure was drilled some 4-50 years ago’ (DLPE 2024, 13). As such, the assessments were circumscribed to specific criteria ‘to keep this project and assessment simple and outcome oriented’ (DLPE 2024, 13). The risk ratings and associated recommendations are thus described as being based on the following considerations: bore casing age; flow rates; surface protection (or ingress); distances from potential sources of contamination; water demand; and water quality.

The Water Resources Division (WRD) recognised that as a bore ages, the likelihood of interruption to water supply increases. The bore’s failure could relate to one or more of casing degradation, headworks issues, or distribution system failures. The categorisation used to assess the likelihood of bore failure due to age is: low, for bores aged 0-24 years; medium, 25-39 years; and high, 40 or more years. The WRD also considered flow rates as

important for determining the capacity of the bore to meet demand. A pumping test was used to assess bore function and three yield types are specified in the Technical Note:

- Airlift yield - a measured yield/flow rate where water comes out the top of the borehole while a large compressor blows air into the bottom of the borehole lifting water out
- Recommended flow rate - a recommended flow rate from a pumping test. Usually coupled with a pump depth setting
- Actual flow rate - actual flow rate when bore is operational and usually available on chart at the production bore compound. (DLPE 2024, 14)

Bores were also assessed according to the Langelier Saturation Index (LSI). The LSI assesses the potential for scaling or corrosion within water distribution systems, providing a positive, neutral, or negative LSI. As WRD describe, 'A positive LSI suggests a higher risk of scale formation, which can clog pipes, reduce system efficiency, and damage infrastructure', while 'a negative LSI points to corrosive water, which can degrade metal pipes and release harmful substances into the water' (2024, 14). Assessments also considered the distance or buffer between bores and potential sources of contamination, such as dwellings or livestock, noting the limited available data on groundwater flow directions and gradients. One of three risk ratings was assigned: low, 200 or more metres; medium, 100-200 metres; high, 0-100 metres. Similarly, a risk rating was assigned based on the homeland's population, as an index of likely demand, and excluding specific assessment of relevant factors such as storage capacity. The risk categories were: low, less than 20 people; medium, 20-100 people; and high, 100 or more people. WRD noted that a full water quality assessment was beyond the scope of this project, but flagged the importance of both salinity and hardness when considering the citing of new bores.

Table 30 provides a deidentified example of the data collected for a specific homeland through this process, where information was relatively complete.

Example Homeland Assessment	
Estimated # houses	2
Estimated population	6
Bore status	Primary bore
Bore casing	Steel
Bore age	49
Bore age risk rating (years)	High
Surface casing condition	Fair
Actual flow rate (L/S)	0.3 L/S at 42 mBGL
Bore testing assessment	Airlift yield: 1 L/s Pumping test in 1996, recommended flow rate 0.3 L/s at 42 mBGL
Pumping test required (Y/N)	N
WQ issues ADWG 2011 Health (Y/N)	Y (Uranium)
LSI	0.31
LSI Indication	Slight scale forming and corrosive

Estimated distance from dwellings / septic / cattle yard (metres)	1400
Buffer zone risk rating (metres)	Low
Recommendation	Drill new bore but assess source due to chronic WQ issue; pumping test on new bore

Table 30. Example Groundwater Security Assessment for anonymised homeland

Twenty-six of the 39 homelands included in this Barkly Groundwater Security Assessment have had specific Water Safety Plans developed for them by Ekistica, using the Community Water Planner Field Guide (CWPFPG) methodology. The CWPFPG methodology applies a risk management approach to water supplies that is consistent with the Framework for the Management of Drinking Water Quality in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. This involves four steps: discover the water supply; identify hazards and management activities; asset management register; and, identify roles and responsibilities. The Water Resources Division states that these WSPs 'will aid in providing a consistent and sustainable approach for the management of water infrastructure within the Utopia Homelands (21 included in the Utopia scope [established between Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation and Ekistica]), including maintenance, operations, emergency scenarios and future works' (2024, 25). Homeland-specific WSPs include a summary of priority works for improving water safety and sustainability - identifying needs such as replacing and repairing bore valves and collars, water quality testing, the installation of hot water systems, increasing water storage capacity, and so on - as well as an asset register and management plan, and a risk register. WSPs also include physical resources to support water management for each homeland - such as a water infrastructure map and a water system schematic - to be retained in community by a nominated Water Safety Team member.

The Water Resources Division noted at the conclusion of the Groundwater Security Assessment process that the work undertaken provided a basic assessment of groundwater infrastructure, to operate as a guide for further assessment, in particular regarding water quality. Six of the 39 homelands surveyed were found to have production bore casings over 40 years old that require immediate rectification. A number of bores require urgent surface cementing around the wellhead to protect against contamination via ingress from surface runoff. Eight homelands bores are located within 100 metres of potential contamination sources. A further 22 homelands require pumping tests to determine recommended flow rates. Further assessment is required to determine homelands water quality. However, based on the collection and laboratory analysis undertaken in the Groundwater Security Assessment, three homelands were found to have acute water quality issues and 11 homelands to have chronic water quality issues.

9.6 Ongoing Homelands Water Infrastructure Work Through the HHIP

The original Water Testing and Supply Program envisioned as an NT-wide subprogram under the HHIP was subject to a series of program design revisions. Two revisions are of significance. First, under the first two years of HHIP funding, the application of the program has been limited to 40 homelands in the Barkly region. The Barkly was appropriately determined due to widespread water security concerns. At the scale of 40 homelands, the Groundwater Security Assessment work-to-date is effectively a regional pilot, exploring how to best assess homelands water infrastructure and future challenges. Second, the program work has been limited to assessment of water infrastructure, and some water quality assessment, rather than the original intention to also improve bores and related infrastructure. Building on Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation's commissioning of Ekistica to develop water management plans, the project also provides examples of engaging with homelands residents to assess their existing water systems, identify required improvements, and develop plans for their ongoing management. This approach could be generalised, subject to available funding and third party expertise, and emphasising the need to invest in the infrastructure that is being subject to community management planning. Of key importance is clarifying how those items identified thus far in assessments as high risk and requiring attention as soon as possible will be addressed through refurbishment or replacement. One respondent identified that a more effective homelands water infrastructure program would adopt an approach focused on key immediate priorities: 'Seal the bores, seal the tanks, lids on tanks, fix the septic system' (S77).

By February 2025, grant funding guidelines had been developed by DHLGCD for funding related to a 'Water Infrastructure Upgrade - Barkly' grant. This grant round opened to expressions of interest on 7 January 2025 and closed on 28 January 2025. The project will allocate funding for the improvement of water infrastructure at 35 homelands across the Barkly region, with a budget of up to \$15,000 (including GST) allocated to works at each homeland.²⁰ The guidelines specify that works should be guided by the Minimum Construction Requirements for Water Bores in Australia as well as the National Indigenous Housing Guide (specifically B4.1 Quality of drinking water and C1.2 Water quantity and demand management). The scope of works specifies that water infrastructure will be assessed in homelands to determine improvement works required, but also that minor capital and repair works should be carried out, up to the value of \$15,000 per homeland. For works beyond this value, reports should be compiled outlining the required major capital works and an estimated cost. Appendix 6 reproduces 'Schedule 1 - Scope of Works' from the grant guidelines.

After significant delay, Barkly Plumbing Services was awarded this grant. While an initial timeline anticipated works to be completed by 30 June 2025, delays in the award of the contract mean that as of June 2025, there has been limited work undertaken on the ground to date. In the meantime, there is also an intention to release a second EOI for grant funding for homelands water infrastructure assessment and repair in Central Australia.

²⁰ The 35 homelands specified in the grant guidelines correspond to those involved in the prior assessment work, except for Murrarji (Bushtel ID 858). It is not clear why 35 homelands are specified rather than to 40 addressed in the prior work.

Recommendations

26. The NT Government should recommit to pursuing the establishment of a Safe Drinking Water Act to guarantee minimum drinking water protections for all Territorians.
27. The HHIP should continue to fund a subprogram focused on groundwater security assessment and infrastructure refurbishment at homelands and consider whether this be expanded through greater investment to impact all NT Government regions.
28. The Homelands Program should clarify the obligation of homelands service providers to develop homelands-specific water management plans (beyond service delivery plans) and ensure funding is provided to complete this work.
29. The Homelands Program should develop resources to support homelands service providers to develop water management plans with homelands residents.
30. The HHIP and the Homelands Program should clarify a process by which assessments of high risk to groundwater security determined through the HHIP or other government assessments generate practical works undertaken at homelands to improve water security.
31. The JSC-RHNT should consider whether providing secondary bores for homelands should be established as a priority for existing funding and, if so, under what conditions a secondary bore should be provided.

10. Housing Sanitation Program Case Study

10.1 Background to the Housing Sanitation Program

Under the 'Restoring Funding for Northern Territory Homelands' Schedule to the Federation Funding Agreement – Affordable Housing, Community Services and Other, Attachment A specifies the distribution of Australian Government funding across project stages and outputs. Under the Rapid Response Works funding allocated for 2022-23, \$4.3 million was allocated for Northern Territory-wide initiatives including: a housing fire and electrical safety program; a water testing and supply program; and a housing sanitation program. Under the Comprehensive Works package established for 2023-24, \$10 million was allocated for the continuation of these three programs. \$4,890,000 was initially allocated to the Housing Sanitation Program across the two years of HHIP funding, revised through contract variations to \$5,640,000.

Given that the majority of funding under the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program (HHIP) was allocated to housing and infrastructure upgrades at specific projects, the purpose of the NT-wide initiatives was to have a broader impact. Rather than the major refurbishments and upgrades undertaken at selected homelands, the NT-wide initiatives have sought to increase the function of housing across NT homelands with reference to Healthabitat's healthy living practices (HLPs). Early documents outlined that works would be delivered across all funded homelands (approximately 400).

10.2 Sanitation Infrastructure and Services at NT Homelands

In the Blanchard Review of 1987, it was noted that 'The provision of ablution facilities to homeland centres is minimal' (Commonwealth of Australia 1987, 191; also see Moss 1994). Similarly, it described that 'Few homeland centres are provided with adequate forms of sewage disposal'. The inconsistent provision of high-quality water and sanitation services at remote communities and homelands is a significant health factor for residents, contributing to the total disability adjusted years in the Global Burden of Disease Study (Bailie et al. 2004; Satur and Robertson 2020). The Blanchard Review described the ventilation improved pit (VIP) toilet developed by the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) as one which 'has eliminated the problems caused by water-borne systems and made the toilet relatively

simply [sic] to install and maintain' (194). Many of these toilets – once deemed innovative but now demonstrably inadequate – can be found across homelands today (Figure 58).



Figure 58. Ventilation improved pit (VIP) toilet in Central Australian homeland

Three decades after the Blanchard Review, CAT (2016) published its own review of homelands assets, an exercise funded by the Australian and NT governments that aimed 'to get an up-to-date picture of the state of infrastructure and people's access to services in Homelands/Outstations across the NT' (8). The review was extensive, visiting 401 of the 630 identified NT homelands between January and August 2015 and sought both to identify the infrastructure and services available to homelands communities and the ability of those assets to meet community needs. Sanitation ('sewerage') infrastructure was assessed in terms of the following criteria: safe, accessible, available, operable, and maintained. CAT described that 'A sewerage service collects, transfers, treats and disposes of all community wastewater' and that 'The system may include pit toilets, composting toilets, septic tanks, aerated treatment systems, leach drains, transfer pumps (and associated energy source), control devices, pipework, access points and ancillary components' (36). Some homelands may be connected to larger town systems, but most are discrete to the community. CAT found across its review that 999 homelands houses (56 per cent) had septic systems, 141 (8 per cent) were connected to reticulated sewerage systems, 378 (21 per cent) had other systems including composting toilets or pit toilets, and 221 (13 per cent) had no sewerage system. The latter category was mostly comprised of improvised dwellings or houses that used communal ablution blocks. Figure 59 is reproduced from the CAT report and indicates the distribution of sewerage systems by type. Of the homelands surveyed by CAT, 329 (82 per cent) had a sewerage system connected to houses and buildings, 274 (68 per cent) had systems classified as safe, and 279 (70 per cent) had systems classified as maintained. CAT reported that 'Safety concerns included blockages, overflows, and broken or missing septic lids' (2016, 38).

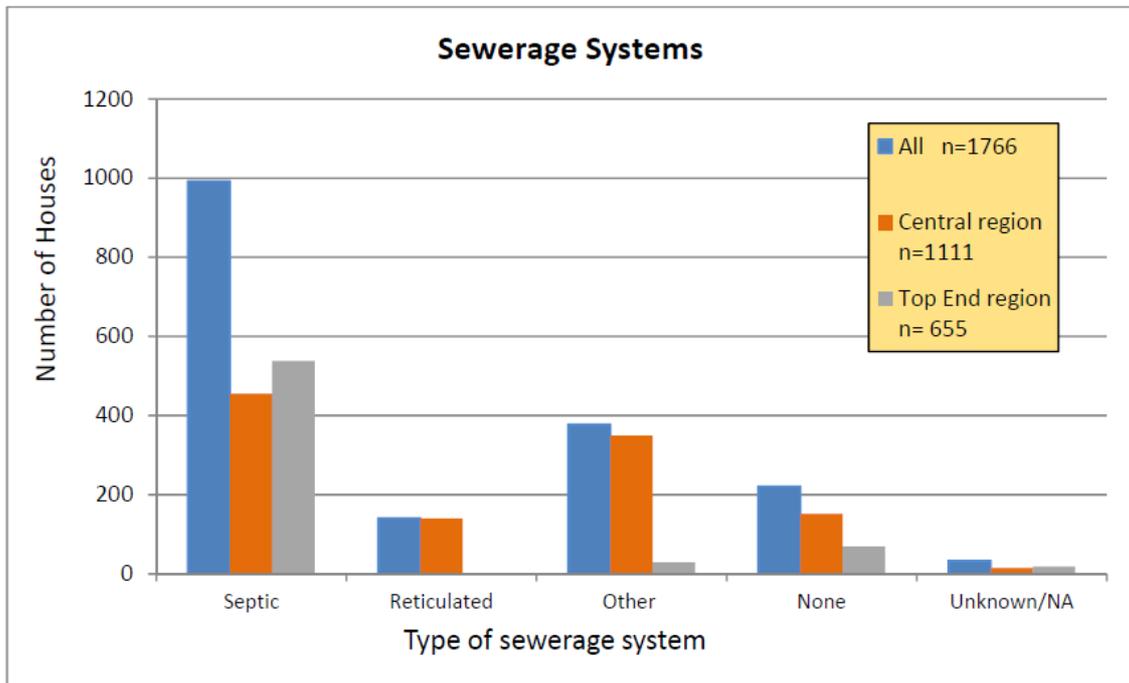


Figure 59. Houses by type of sewerage system for black water only (CAT 2016)

In May 2022, the Advisory Committee on Homelands – established in 2021 and subsequently transformed into the JSC-RHNT Homelands Working Group – commissioned an independent audit to assess the condition of housing, essential services, and municipal services assets at homelands. The objectives of the audit were to identify physical assets, assess their condition against standards and specifications, provide cost estimates to fix assets, and advise on homelands asset needs by region. The audit attended 100 homelands, assessed homelands housing and infrastructure, and provided cost estimates to improve homelands housing and infrastructure. At this point in time, the audit has not been approved for public release.

Based on available records, there are issues across NT homelands with septic systems, communal ablution blocks, and drop toilets. At some homelands cracked or collapsed septic concrete lids provide a health and safety issue for residents. Where communal ablution blocks exist, these sometimes lack functional lighting and are insecure, compromising their safe use at night. There is a need in some contexts for the replacement of service pit lids and for concrete slabs to be provided over pits. In addition, drop toilets, septic tanks, leach systems, and pipe work should be pumped, cleared, and repaired or replaced. There is a strong argument to ensure that contracted service providers establish a regular pump-out schedule for septic systems.

The commissioned audit preceded the death of a toddler in April 2023 after falling into a septic tank at the remote community of Mt Liebig. In the subsequent coronial inquest, the local school principal described that the lid, once replaced, ‘spun like a coin and opened up again’ (Kazakov 2024). The death followed a plumbing audit in 2019 at Mt Liebig, including at the relevant house, that identified that household septic systems were in poor condition and non-compliant with the NT Department of Health code of practice for on-site wastewater

management. NT WorkSafe had also previously issued a warning to commercial businesses to secure septic tank lids, after two incidents in 2021 and 2022 where a toddler and a four-year old child fell into septic tanks with unsecured lids at Katherine and in the Barkly region respectively. The NT WorkSafe warning stated that 'Unsecured or fragile septic tank lids are a major hazard if access to the lid is not limited or controlled' (Anderson 2023). Under the NT Government's Healthy Homes remote housing maintenance program, the condition assessment tool (CAT) designed to be used to assess house condition contained references to the state of septic infrastructure (i.e. assessors to designate an appearance and function rating to 'sewer', 'septic pump out', 'leach septic', 'aerated septic', 'septic lid', and 'ORG', along with 'material/comments'). However, few contracted service providers completed such CAT assessments and it was difficult to determine the sanitation works that were generated by CAT assessments (Grealy et al. 2023).²¹ In the coronial inquest in 2024, the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure identified that a preventive maintenance program for septic tanks was underway and that a septic tank replacement program would commence in late 2024 (Pillarisetty 2024).²² The HHIP housing sanitation program was established within this broader context and it is reasonable to assume that septic tanks at homelands have been subject to similarly inconsistent maintenance and investment as at remote communities.

10.3 Septic Tanks and Septic Maintenance in the NT

A septic tank is an onsite wastewater management system typically used when a property is not connected to a town or community sewerage system. The NT Government provides the following description of how a septic tank works:

1. Wastewater passes through the septic tank.
2. Heavier solids sink to the bottom.
3. Bacteria breaks down the solids and changes it to sludge.
4. The sludge builds up in the bottom of the septic tank.
5. Grease and oil float to the surface to form a crust over the liquid (scum).
6. The remaining liquid (effluent) flows from the tank into the drainage beds or trenches.
7. The liquid soaks into the surrounding soil. (NT Government 2025)

Figure 60 shows how a septic tank works to receive household wastewater and distribute clarified liquid, or 'primary treated effluent', into soil away from a property. Septic systems may have one or two tanks that combine or separate domestic black and grey water. Because the water treatment increases in efficacy the longer the water remains in the tank, in contexts

²¹ The Department of Health (2020b) Guidance Notes for Wastewater Management state that 'If a septic tank is under a maintenance contract, regular assessment (every 1 to 3 years) of the sludge and scum layers must be part of the maintenance agreement' (42).

²² This evaluation has been unable to locate any information related to such programs at remote communities.

of household crowding and high water use, it can be preferable to install large or separate black and grey water tanks.

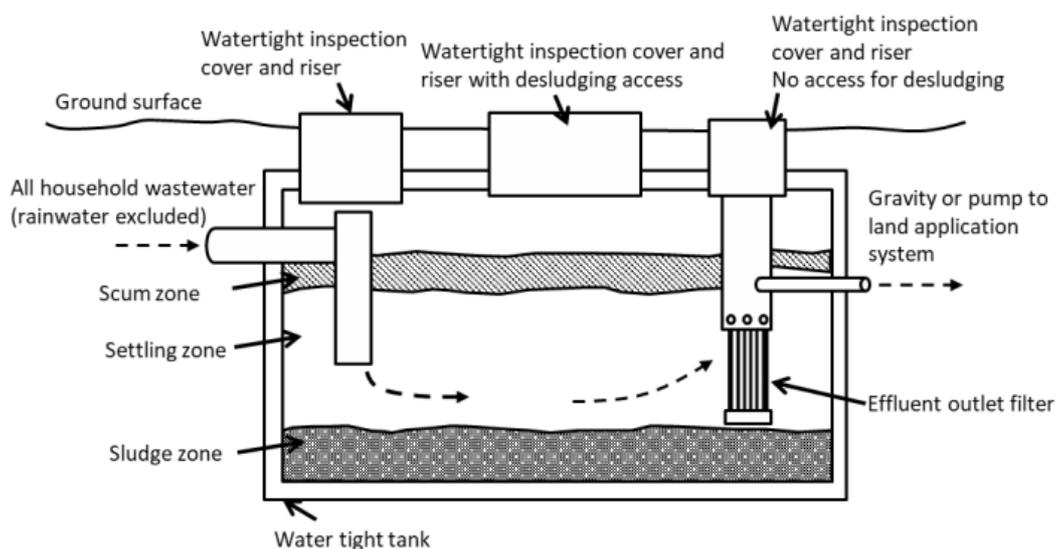


Figure 60. How a septic tank works (Department of Health 2020a, 23)

The NT Government makes the following recommendations to property owners with septic tanks for septic tank maintenance:

- Regularly maintain the land application area - cut and remove any overgrown grass.
- Get your septic tank cleaned out by a listed waste handler every three to five years to prevent build-up.
- Build a diversion drain up-slope to prevent stormwater entering the land acquisition area.
- Ensure your septic tank is well sealed - this will stop rodents and mosquitoes from entering.
- Save water - the less water you use, the drier the land application area will be.
- Check your household products are suitable for your septic tank.
- Get your grease trap cleaned out (if installed) every three months.
- Know the location and layout of your septic tank and land.
- Keep a record of pumping, inspections and other maintenance. (NT Government 2025)

Over time, a septic tank can accumulate sludge and scum to an extent that it reduces the tank's effective volume and undermines the separation process. Without the proper separation of solids and grease and oils, the pipes and surrounding drainage beds/absorption trenches can become clogged. Regular desludging (pump outs of the septage) of septic tanks by a licensed liquid waste contractor supports the ongoing good function of the system. Recommendations for desludging often specify a period of every three to five years, depending on household size and use (Ballina Shire Council 2017b). The desludging process should not involve washing or disinfecting the tank and a residue of

sludge should remain in the tank to encourage bacterial action to recommence, with the tank refilled with water to reduce odors and maintain plumbing fixtures.

There are numerous standards that relate to septic maintenance. In the NT, Schedule 2 of the Waste Management and Pollution Control (Administration) Regulations 1998 specifies 'Sewage sludge and residues including nightsoil and septic tank sludge' as a listed waste. The Public Health (Night-Soil, Garbage, Cesspits, Wells and Water) Regulations 2011 specify legal requirements for the maintenance of septic tanks (S28B) and the disposal of night-soil (S17, including effluent discharge from a septic tank, which must be disposed at a night-soil depot established by the Territory or other place approved by the NT Chief Health Officer).²³ The NT Government's Standard Specification for Small Building Works V20.0 states that onsite wastewater management systems must comply with the 'AS/NZS 1547:2012 Onsite domestic wastewater management' standard and that reference should be made to the Code of Practice for On-site Wastewater Management which is referred to in the Public and Environmental Health Regulations 2014.²⁴ AS/NZS 1547:2012 provides requirements for treatment units and land application systems involved in onsite domestic wastewater management, including performance statements about the overall design and management, guidance on system design, requirements for construction and operation, and specific details on systems.

The requirements of those various laws, regulations, and standards are represented in the NT Department of Health's (2020a) Code of Practice for Wastewater Management (Code) and the Guidance Notes for Wastewater Management (Department of Health 2020b). The Code is a prescribed code under the Public and Environmental Health Regulations 2014 and an adopted code under the Building Regulations 1993, while the Guidance Notes is not a prescribed Code but outlines best practices for wastewater management. The Guidance Notes state that 'The sludge and scum need to be pumped-out [of a septic tank] with a vacuum suction system when their combined thickness equals 50% of the operational depth of the tank' (42). It also states that 'Where the operator is engaged on a commercial or fee for service basis, a Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) - Environment Protection Licence (EPL) or authorisation to operate without ELP is required' (43). The options for waste disposal include transport to a Power and Water Corporation regulation trade waste management facility (in Palmerston, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Alice Springs), a land application to a regional council landfill, and a land application to a private property. Disposal of septage on Crown Land is not permitted.

²³ Under the Public Health (Night-Soil, Garbage, Cesspits, Wells and Water) Regulations 2011, night-soil is defined as including 'all human excrementitious or faecal matter, human urine and matters mixed with both or either of them and includes an effluent discharge from a septic tank, chemical closet or other apparatus used for the treatment of night-soil.'

²⁴ Also of note is 'AS/NZS 1546.1:2008 Septic tanks', which specifies performance requirements and criteria, technical means of compliance, and test specifications for the manufacture of septic tanks and their fittings for domestic wastewater treatment.

Under the NT Government's Homelands Program, service providers receive funding for housing maintenance services that includes sanitation infrastructure. Notably, while eligibility conditions for a funded homeland include the need for a suitable water supply, an operating power supply, and safe and secure housing, there is no specified requirement concerning sanitation. Contracted homelands service providers deliver a range of services related to wastewater and septic systems, outlined in the Guidelines to the Homelands Program and reproduced in Table 31. Reference is also made in those Guidelines to Healthabitat's healthy living practices, in particular HLP 3 Removing wastewater safely.

Category	Outcome	Scope
Sewerage and septic systems	<p>Sewage disposal systems are to be constructed, located, maintained and operated so as to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent direct and indirect contact between people and infectious organisms. Minimise the risk of contamination of drinking water supplies, food crops or other supplies. Prevent the breeding of mosquitoes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspect, repair and maintain sewerage and septic infrastructure to ensure system is operational and working as intended. Ensure all compounds and areas around infrastructure are clean and clear of vegetation to reduce risk of fire and structural damage. Ensure septic tanks are secure and there is no risk of accidental access. Identify any maintenance or repairs required at the next maintenance visit. <p>Callout/emergency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service providers are required to attend and restore services to the sewerage or septic system within two weeks of being informed of disruption of services. If this cannot be achieved TFHC must be informed.

Table 31. Sanitation services under the Homelands Program

Under the Homelands Program, contracted service providers are required to develop a service delivery plan (SDP) in collaboration with homelands residents that specifies the services delivered in that homeland. Table 32 reproduces the relevant sections of one homeland resource centre's SDP as this relates to sanitation. In this instance, the contracted service provider subcontracts some services related to septic systems to a third party.

Municipal and Essential Services	Homeland/Outstation Commitment
Effluent disposal	
Inspect, repair and maintain septic and sewerage infrastructure	Report blocked or broken septic issues to service provider
Pump out maintain septic/pit toilets as required	Keep septic clear of vehicles and rubbish
Clear vegetation and hard waste from around septic systems	

Table 32. Example service delivery plan for sanitation services

10.4 The HHIP Housing Sanitation Program (HSP)

A fact sheet for the HHIP Housing Sanitation Program (HSP) states that it will supplement the existing Homelands Grants Program and ensure 'the integrity of waste water infrastructure by repairing and upgrading housing waste water management systems and reducing the potential risk of any failures', with works guided by the National Indigenous Housing Guide, relevant NT Health guidelines, and nationally accepted waste water management practices.

The HHIP Implementation Plan, and Appendix D Housing Sanitation Program - Top End Region (NTG 2023a), also states that the Housing Sanitation Program will contribute to the following outcomes:

- Community members have the opportunity and are encouraged to participate and contribute within their community.
- Overall quality of effluent waste infrastructure in the Homelands is improved.
- Employment and training opportunities for local residents.
- The use of local businesses to deliver goods and services through potential subcontracting arrangements is maximised. (NTG 2023, 5)

Although there may be other justifications, the regional approach to procurement under the Housing Sanitation Program is inconsistent with providing opportunities to community members to participate in sanitation maintenance under the HHIP.

Works delivered under the HSP are required to comply with the Standard Specification for Small Building Works V20.0, the National Indigenous Housing Guide, the NT Code of Practice for Wastewater Management - July 2014, all relevant AS/NZS standards including AS/NZS 1547:2000, and NT public health (night soil, garbage, cesspits, wells and water) regulations. The outcomes aimed for by the HSP are as follows:

- Provide safe, functional, compliant and certified septic and sewer infrastructure for each home in each homeland.
- Ensure that all septic and sewer infrastructure is inspected, cleaned, maintained, documented, certified, functional and compliant.
- Ensure that all and any minor issues identified during the assessment process are resolved at and during the assessment process, satisfactorily. (NTG 2023a, 43)

In practice, certification occurs where replacement of infrastructure takes place under the HHIP, rather than for existing infrastructure. In that sense, the first listed outcome is pursued where the program has sufficient funds to provide new infrastructure.

Scopes of works are specified in executed grant agreements and are specific to each contract. However, at the general level, the scope of works is as follows:

- Undertake a full end-to-end wastewater and effluent management assessment and provide a comprehensive written report.
- Carry out camera inspections of the septic and sewage infrastructure.

- In conjunction with TFHC, identify and arrange minor repairs and maintenance of all current infrastructure, as deemed necessary, urgent and immediate, make safe, secure and functional.
- Urgent, immediate and predominantly minor works only should fall into this maintenance category and would be undertaken at or during the time of the assessment.
- Septic tanks are required to be pumped at the time of the initial assessment/inspection to enable the system and tank to be fully, properly, and adequately assessed for integrity.
- Follow and adhere to all night soil disposal regulations.
- Detail all major works within each homeland together with an estimate of rectification works and costs. (NTG 2023a, 6-7)

One organisation was contracted for each of the NT Government's five regions to deliver works under the Housing Sanitation Program. Applicants were assessed according to the following criteria and weightings: past performance (15%); capacity (20%); timeliness (10%); risk management (10%); service delivery model (25%); local development and value for territory (20%). The selected companies and the value of their respective contracts are listed below in Table 33. The original expectation was that all works would be completed by 30 June 2024, with revised anticipated completion dates below following the award of contracts.

Output and Region	Contractor	Award date	Grant number	Works commence	Anticipated completion	Funding value
Housing Sanitation Program (Top End)	Quality Plumbing & Building Contractors	7/6/2023	HSPTE00004	7/17/2023	9/1/2024	\$730,000
Housing Sanitation Program (Arnhem)	Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation	13/6/2023	HSPEA00004	8/31/2023	31/10/2024	\$1,000,000
Housing Sanitation Program (Big Rivers)	AUS Projects NT	7/6/2023	HSPBR00002	8/14/2023	30/9/2023	\$875,000
Housing Sanitation Program (Barkly)	Barkly Plumbing Services	13/6/2023	HSPB00003	7/13/2023	30/6/2024	\$785,000
Housing Sanitation Program (Central Australia)	AUS Projects NT	7/6/2023	HSPCA00002	10/1/2023	30/6/2024	\$1,500,000

Table 33. HHIP sanitation funding agreements by region

Table 34 shows the total value of funding awarded under the Housing Sanitation Program, as of March 2025, including variations made to funding agreements in the Top End, Arnhem, and Barkly regions. Original funding agreements were established in the rapid response period and a remaining \$5 million was distributed across funding agreements in the comprehensive funding period (year 2) of 2023-24 HHIP works (including to homeland-specific projects). The total funding granted to the Housing Sanitation Program following variations was \$5,640,000. Variations to original grant agreements were made following the inspection of a proportion of homelands sanitation systems in those regions and the estimated remaining works across the region. Required completion dates of those contracts were extended until 31 December 2024.

Output and Region	Contractor	Variation (Y/N)	Original value	Value after variation
Housing Sanitation Program (Top End)	Quality Plumbing & Building Contractors	Y	\$730,000	\$835,500
Housing Sanitation Program (Arnhem)	Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation	Y	\$1,000,000	\$1,269,500
Housing Sanitation Program (Big Rivers)	AUS Projects NT	N	\$875,000	\$875,000
Housing Sanitation Program (Barkly)	Barkly Plumbing Services	Y	\$785,000	\$1,160,000
Housing Sanitation Program (Central Australia)	AUS Projects NT	N	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000

Table 34. HHIP sanitation funding awarded including variations

The number of funded homelands and the number of total houses of these respective funding agreements was varied. For example, the total number of funded homelands identified for HSP works in the Top End region was 70, including 228 funded houses. Table 35 provides an overview of the number of homelands and funded houses by region that were funded for works under the HSP. DHLGCD provided contracted service providers with a HSP template to use to track their works and the cost breakdown by house (Appendix 7).

Region	Total funded homelands	Total funded dwellings	Funding value	Average funding per dwelling
Top End	70	228	\$730,000	\$3201.75
Arnhem	55	234	\$1,000,000	\$4273.50
Big Rivers	79	270	\$875,000	\$3240.74

Barkly	48	245	\$785,000	\$3204.08
Central Australia	118	462	\$1,500,000	\$3246.75
Total	370	1439	\$4,890,000	\$3398.19

Table 35. Housing Sanitation Program coverage and funding agreement value²⁵

In each of the five NT Government regions, the contracted service provider submitted a project plan for the delivery of services. In the Top End, Quality Plumbing and Building Contractors divided the delivery of works into three sub-regional sectors and stated an intention 'to complete a full investigation of all Homelands and assets sector by sector' (2023, 2). At the time of an initial inspection/assessment, septic tanks were to be pumped and 'Urgent immediate and predominantly minor works only should fall into this maintenance category and would be undertaken at or during the time of the assessment' (3). In the Arnhem region, Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation established an eight-phase project plan with phases 2-7 focused on homelands clustered according to service provider (respectively, Laynhapuy, Anindilyakwa Housing Aboriginal Corporation, Dinybulu Regional Services, Deltareef Gumatj, Milingimbi and Outstations Progress Resource Aboriginal Corporation, Marthakal). Each of those project phases included stages focused on community engagement and consultation; inspection, repair, and scoping; reporting; and undertaking compliance approved works.

In the Big Rivers region, Aboriginal Enterprises Australia (formerly AUS Projects) described that it would undertake full end-to-end wastewater and effluent management system assessments, including camera inspections of septic infrastructure and the pumping of tanks, and arrange minor repairs and maintenance in consultation with the Department. That project plan stated that 'AUS Projects was also successful in the HHIP - Housing Sanitation Program - Central Australia however has made a conscious decision to focus all resources into Big Rivers Region initially, rather than servicing both regions concurrently' (2023, 15). The 79 specified homelands were clustered into nine service regions. While the funding agreement value for that region was \$875,000, the project plan estimated total costs at more than \$1.18m, 'potentially leaving 20 Homelands (96 houses) incomplete under the program' (10).²⁶ In the Barkly, Barkly Plumbing Services provided a work schedule specifying the delivery of works across 48 homelands over 12 months. A letter of variation approved an additional payment of \$412,500 (GST inclusive) to Barkly Plumbing for septic works in the

²⁵ The data in this table has been compiled from various regional grant funding guidelines produced by the Department, where available (Top End and Barkly), and project plans produced by contracted service providers (Arnhem, Big Rivers, Central Australia). Note that in the case of Big Rivers, the project plan states 'an estimated 272 houses' and refers to 79 funded homelands. The table listing those homelands has a total of 74 homelands and 270 funded houses. Similarly, in Central Australia, the plan states 128 homelands for approximately 469 houses but lists 118 homelands and 462 houses. The data drawn from the more detailed lists has been used in the table.

²⁶ While variations were made to funding agreements in the Top End, Arnhem, and Barkly regions, no variation appears to have been granted in response to this cost estimate.

Utopia homelands. In Central Australia, the project plan by Aboriginal Enterprises Australia grouped the 128 specified homelands into nine clusters. The total estimated costs of work for the \$1,500,000 (excl. GST) funding agreement was \$1,669,028.77 (GST unspecified).

10.5 Sanitation Program Work-to-date

Chapter Five of this report provides an overview of the total expenditure under the Housing Sanitation Program. As of June 2024, Quality Plumbing and Building Contractors had visited 76 houses across 17 homelands in the Top End Region since the commencement of the program in July 2023. Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation had visited 134 houses across 28 homelands in the Arnhem region. Aboriginal Enterprises Australia had visited 112 houses across 29 homelands in the Big Rivers region and 310 houses across 89 homelands in the Central Australia region (in contrast to the initial plan to prioritise works in the Big Rivers region). Barkly Plumbing Services had visited 42 houses across 10 homelands in the Barkly region. Cumulatively, this represents 46.7 per cent of the homelands specified under the funding agreements and 46.8 per cent of the houses specified (Table 36). Prior to a shift in focus for the program in the 2024-25 financial year (outlined below), limited additional Housing Sanitation Program work was undertaken that would not be captured in Table 36.

Region	Homelands funded	Homelands visited	Dwellings visited
Top End	70	17	76
Laynhapuy	55	28	134
Big Rivers	79	29	112
Barkly	48	10	42
Central Australia	118	89	310
Total	370	173	674

Table 36. Homelands Sanitation Program coverage as of June 2024

Despite the provision of a standardised reporting template, differences between the approaches taken to reporting housing sanitation program works across the contracted service providers, as well as questions about the completeness of datasets provided, have made analysing program progress challenging. Based on expenditure and reporting data available in March 2025, Table 37 shows the housing sanitation program expenditure to-date by region.²⁷ It identifies a significant total balance remaining across the program, which at the

²⁷ The following notes concern the basis of this table. For the Top End, the most recent monthly report available is for August 2024. This refers to, and figures are calculated in relation to, a budget of \$730,000, rather than the varied amount of \$835,000. For the Big Rivers region, the most recent monthly report available is for June 2024. This refers to a budget of \$875,000. For the Barkly, the most recent monthly report is for August 2024. This refers to, and figures are calculated in relation to, a budget of \$785,000, rather than the varied amount of \$1,160,000. For Central Australia, the most recent monthly report is for August 2024. This refers to a budget of \$1,500,000

level of each funding agreement has typically been rolled into ongoing works by existing contracted service providers.

Region	Funds expended*	Admin fee**	Balance remaining	Total budget
Top End	\$336,377.80	\$146,000 (20%)	\$247,622.20	\$730,000
Laynhapuy	\$426,020.56	\$150,000 (15%)	\$423,979.44	\$1,000,000
Big Rivers	\$469,600.80	\$131,250 (15%)	\$274,149.29	\$875,000
Barkly	\$387,232.68	\$117,750 (15%)	\$280,017.32	\$785,000
Central Australia	\$942,239.21	\$225,000 (15%)	\$332,760.79	\$1,500,000
Total	\$2,561,471.05	\$770,000	\$1,558,529.25	\$4,890,000

Table 37. Housing Sanitation Program expenditure to-date by region

*Excluding service provider's administrative fee

**Admin fee represents the value of the total contract rather than funds actually expended on administrative fees at that point in time.

As of March 2025, expenditure data represented on the HHIP 'Hive' dashboard showed that within the Housing Sanitation Program a total \$2,462,950 was attributed to repair costs, while a total \$1,350,090 was attributed to mobilisation costs. Of the total \$3,813,040 expended under that program by March 2025,²⁸ 35.4 per cent was spent on mobilisation. Figure 61 shows that there is significant variation across the NT Government regions between the proportion of total expenditure attributed to mobilisation costs. The researcher understands that a proportion of the very low attribution of mobilisation costs in the Arnhem region is likely due to a proportion of those costs being cross-subsidised through the simultaneous delivery of services through the Homelands Program.

²⁸ Note the difference between this total expenditure figure via the HHIP 'hive' in March 2025 and the combined total expenditure figures drawn from available expenditure and reporting data sets at the same time (a difference of \$481,568.95). Approximately \$181,467 of this difference is attributable to work undertaken by Laynhapuy Housing Aboriginal Corporation since July 2024, visible in expenditure and reporting data available for July-December 2024. No expenditure and reporting data is available after August 2024 for the other regions

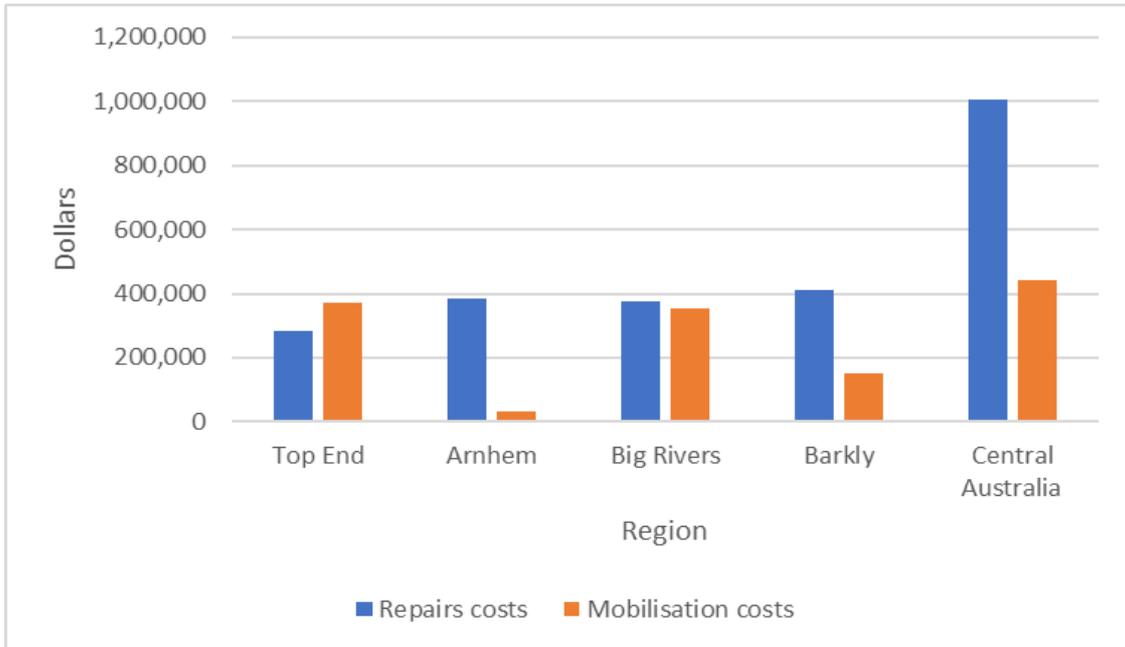


Figure 61. Housing Sanitation Subprogram Expenditure to March 2025

Given the nature of sanitation systems and their repair, as well as the information that subcontracted plumbers would typically supply when completing such work, it is difficult to summarise the outputs of this program based on available reporting. In order to more accurately ascertain the outcomes and potential benefits of sanitation works, contracts and reporting should require the collection of basic information about sanitation works completed. Table 38 provides a suggested template to summarise outputs delivered under the Housing Sanitation Program for each contract. It has not been a requirement for contracted service providers to collate such data, however the NT Government should consider whether such an exercise is useful for demonstrating the outputs and impact of program expenditure, provided this is also deemed achievable by providers.

Item	Number
Homelands visited	
Dwellings inspected (sanitation)	
Septic systems replaced in full	
Septic systems pumped out	
Pit toilets pumped out	
Expenditure	

Table 38. Template for Housing Sanitation Program outputs

Interviews with homelands service providers and other homelands stakeholders have highlighted various issues with the implementation of the Housing Sanitation Program. Some challenges relate to the infrastructural legacies of homelands and their long-term underfunding. For example, some homelands only have pit toilets, so there are no septic tanks to service as expected under the grant agreement. In other homelands, houses are serviced by

small systems that were installed decades ago when there were only pit toilets available in the community. The installation of flush toilets inside houses, as well as increased household crowding, has put significant pressure on those under-sized systems to operate in ways they were not originally designed for or expected to do. The effective result is that waste is distributed quickly into land application areas, some of which are located too close to dwellings, increasing the risk of soil contamination. The Housing Sanitation Program has generated useful information regarding what systems exist where, and their approximate age and condition, to inform any future replacements.

Regarding the delivery of the Housing Sanitation Program, in some cases homelands service providers have stated that no sanitation works have taken place at their member homelands, aside from those provided by them directly through the HHIP and the mainstream homelands program. It is possible that such homelands were scheduled to be audited, and septic tanks/pit toilets pumped out, as part of the Homelands Sanitation Program prior to the program's change in focus, leaving such homelands unattended by the NT-wide subprogram. Service providers expressed frustration at the audit commissioned in 2022 not being published, given the role played by some service providers to facilitate external consultants to undertake that work, and the information the audit could provide about homelands sanitation infrastructure. Homelands service providers indicated that in some instances the regional contractors responsible for the Housing Sanitation Program had failed to properly communicate with homelands residents about the sanitation works, resulting in accessing homelands without appropriate permissions or their inability to access homelands to undertake works.

Stakeholders have also provided the evaluation with evidence of substandard works undertaken for the Homelands Sanitation Program. Figure 62 shows erosion of the backfill surrounding the installation of a new septic tank at a homeland in Central Australia under the Homelands Sanitation Program, which required remediation by the local homelands service provider. In another instance, a stakeholder claimed that a Housing Sanitation Program contractor, to reduce the need to transport and dispose of septage at a regional facility, was returning a high proportion of the waste to septic tanks. Such an approach risks emulsifying the waste so that when it is returned to the septic tank solids and liquids are no longer separated, which increases the likelihood that solid waste finds its way into leach drains, fields, and absorption trenches. This would undermine the effective function of the sanitation system and increase the risk of soil contamination.



Figure 62. Eroded backfill around septic tank

Interviews with homelands service providers also signalled an interest from some to undertake sanitation works directly for their member homelands, rather than an external contractor undertaking works for the region. This option was not allowed for the Housing Sanitation Program contracts awarded for the period 2022-24. It is likely to be more widely supported under the new focus of the program (below).

Although not the focus of this case study, improvements to homelands sanitation infrastructure have been achieved through the HHIP via specific homelands projects. For example, at Ji-Bena, where prior to the HHIP program the community was only serviced by pit toilets, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation delivered a HHIP project that included the installation of two large septic systems to service five funded dwellings. This allowed for the installation of bathrooms with flush toilets. The Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore case study also describes the installation by Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation of sanitation infrastructure at two of the four dwellings at Anpanaye, to increase the amenity of those dwellings and address HLP 3 (Chapter Seven). Similarly, sanitation upgrades were undertaken by Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation at Gäṅgaṅ (Chapter Eight).

10.6 The Future of the Housing Sanitation Program

Under the NT-wide Housing Sanitation Program established for 2022-24, the key practical priorities were to audit the condition of household septic systems, pump-out septic tanks and pit toilets, and 'make safe' systems where there was an immediate risk to health and safety (such as through the replacement of an inspection lid). As this program was implemented, one of the key concerns with this approach for both the HHIP team and homelands service providers was that where audit work was occurring and the need for significant repair and replacement works was being identified, such works were not being addressed by the

program. At the same time, a significant proportion of program funds was being attributed to mobilisation costs (Laynhapuy Housing Aboriginal Corporation in Arnhem Land and, to a lesser extent, Barkly Plumbing in the Barkly were the exceptions to this). The decision was made to shift the direction of the Housing Sanitation Program.

In most cases, by the end of the 2023-24 financial year there were underspends in the funding agreements established with the four service providers in the Housing Sanitation Program. Rather than continue the audit work, it was communicated to service providers that remaining funds should be directed to more significant capital works for projects at homelands identified by the HHIP and Homelands Program teams. Projects delivered in this way have been directed by the technical staff of the Homelands Program team, working in concert with the HHIP team, based on reporting produced through the HHIP and their own assessments. For example, in Laynhapuy's case, the organisation has been provided with a list of eight septic systems that require full replacement at an Arnhem Land homeland. At a cost of approximately \$35,000-45,000 per system, this will expend most of the remaining funds in that contract.

Under the 2024-27 HHIP project overview, there is \$6,000,000 attributed to the NT-wide subprograms (i.e., all of Fire and Electrical Safety, Water Testing and Supply, and Housing Sanitation) across this period. It is expected that \$2 million will be allocated to sanitation works. Once the funds remaining in the 2022-24 funding agreements have been expended in full, it is expected that capital works sanitation projects will be identified by either the Homelands Program technical staff or homelands services providers, and administered through the HHIP. Menzies understands that under the revised Homelands Sanitation Program, projects may be awarded that involve contractors beyond those contracted for the original regional sanitation grant agreements.

There are a few things that should be further clarified in relation to program processes going forward. First, if Housing Sanitation Program funding becomes open to the wider sector, further detail should be developed about the processes involved for any homelands service provider to apply for HHIP funds to undertake sanitation works on the homelands it services, or other homelands. For example, if a homelands service provider identifies a need for the replacement of sanitation systems, is an application for funding made through the Homelands Capital Program grant round, or in an ad hoc way through the HHIP? Second, if such an application process is established and publicised, additional detail should be provided regarding the information and criteria that will be used to distinguish between project applications. This includes whether those criteria will aim to prioritise capital projects, such as septic system replacement, or sanitation maintenance requirements, such as cyclical pump-outs of tanks. Third, if the Housing Sanitation Program shifts to becoming a HHIP-funded capital program for sanitation works, (acknowledging that there is significant need for capital investment in sanitation infrastructure at homelands), are there any implications for the distinct operation of the HHIP and Homelands Program (or, does this suggest an amalgamation of those programs might be desirable)?

The Housing Sanitation Program, as the HHIP program in general, makes consistent reference to Healthabitat's healthy living practices and obliges service providers to meet standards as specified in the National Indigenous Housing Guide (now known as Housing for Health The Guide), along with various other standards. In section 'B3.3 Septic systems + on site waste disposal' of The Guide, a quality control subsection lists considerations that might be adopted to ensure a high standard of works for on-site sanitation systems. There is potential for the recommendations in this list to be included in a systematic way as requirements that must be met for works delivered under homelands sanitation program funding agreements. These relate, among other things, to sanitation system design, consideration of soil types, and supervision of sanitation system construction.

Recommendations

32. The HHIP should continue to deliver a comprehensive program of sanitation audits and septic tank pump-outs at homelands. If not, the consistent pump-out of septic tanks must be ensured by the Homelands Program as a priority.
33. The HHIP should review reporting requirements on behalf of improving data to represent the outputs and impacts of the Housing Sanitation Program.
34. The HHIP should consider how to reduce the proportion of Housing Sanitation Program expenditure committed to mobilisation costs and consider establishing a ceiling for such charges in grant agreements.
35. The HHIP should develop a clear application process and set of assessment criteria through which homelands service providers can identify sanitation works required at their homelands and apply for HHIP funds to address this.
36. In line with principles of local control and work to build the Aboriginal community controlled sector, the HHIP should consider how a greater proportion of Housing Sanitation Program funds can be awarded to ACCOs to deliver works locally.
37. The Homelands Program should develop or commission a resource on appropriate design and specifications for homelands sanitation systems, supporting homelands service providers to make the best infrastructure investments for occupancy, cost, and environmental requirements.
38. The NT Government should fund homelands service providers to develop asset lifecycle plans for homelands sanitation systems, including costing a cyclical maintenance program for household sanitation systems.
39. The JSC-RHNT should develop relevant measures for determining whether homelands sanitation infrastructure meets the Closing the Gap Target 9B.

11. Conclusion

This Final Report to the Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program Monitoring and Evaluation Project has provided detailed description of HHIP program administration and implementation related to the initial two-year Federation Funding Agreement Schedule that underpins it. Substantial work has been undertaken through the HHIP and, where this has occurred, there has been a marked improvement in the standard and function of homelands housing, as well as improvements to some community-level infrastructure.

HHIP coverage of homelands has been significant, with 38 grant agreements established for works at 318 homelands. This includes 28 major projects (predominantly focused on housing refurbishments) for 58 homelands, including 298 houses. An additional 56 grant agreements have been established for housing projects at 110 homelands for the period funded through the 2024-27 FFA Schedule. Building on the situation prior to the commencement of the HHIP, where a small number of capital works projects were commissioned each year through the NT Government's Homelands Program (and most recently the Homelands Capital Program), this is a substantial expansion of homelands investment. In the Northern Territory, there are limits to the capacity of the construction and housing services sector to scale up beyond existing HHIP levels. Nonetheless, a significant majority of funded homelands will not receive housing refurbishment works under the initial five years of the HHIP, including homelands where housing and infrastructure is in a very poor state. This does not reflect a shortcoming of the HHIP in particular. Rather, its limited impact is underpinned by the long-term absence of attention paid to homelands by the Australian Government, and the NT Government's failure to index funding for the Homelands Program to inflation.

Despite the funding shortage for homelands services, homelands service providers work hard to support homelands residents through the maintenance of housing and municipal and essential services infrastructure. The HHIP has provided important opportunities for homelands service providers to undertake capital works projects that support the growth and sustainability of those organisations, and the HHIP has prioritised contracting Aboriginal business enterprises (ABEs) and Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) for those projects. The HHIP Monitoring and Evaluation Project has worked with three ACCOs that have each supported communities in their regions for over four decades. The case studies in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight detail the diligent and skilled work of Kalano Community Association, Ingkerreke Services Aboriginal Corporation, and Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation to scope and deliver housing refurbishment and community infrastructure projects in their homelands. Such outcomes were achieved across numerous other homelands, delivered by ACCOs and with appropriate support from the HHIP team. Despite these major achievements, it is also evident that where homelands are not serviced by high-functioning service providers, they are not only disadvantaged through the quality of day-to-day homelands services but in terms of their likelihood for selection for HHIP projects. Aboriginal Housing NT and the NT Government must continue to work to

build the capacity of less capable homelands service providers, in order that the homelands with the worst infrastructure are properly represented.

The HHIP has made genuine efforts to share decision-making regarding the distribution of program funding, noting that projects undertaken on Aboriginal land should not be determined by governments alone. The approaches taken have varied across land council regions as directed by specific land councils. Broadly, this has allowed traditional owners, and land councils in their statutory representative functions, to influence the selection of homelands for HHIP projects, informed by recommendations made by homelands service providers. Such decision-making processes have allowed for the participation of rights holders and the ground-truthing of government data by them and is consistent with Closing the Gap priority reform one. At the same time, the HHIP indicates the limits to such attempts to share decision-making, where many funding and policy decisions are made in advance and outside of such program-specific mechanisms. For example, FFA schedules have effectively precluded new and replacement housing under the HHIP, despite calls from traditional owners and homelands service providers to have tin dwellings replaced. Similarly, homelands service providers have expressed frustration at decision-making processes, where the criteria for project selection have been opaque and their recommendations for priority projects have not been followed.

Recognising the limited potential impact of a two- (and then five-) year program across almost 400 funded homelands, the HHIP sought to achieve wider coverage and impact through the institution of the three NT-wide subprograms. Two of these - the Water Testing and Supply and Housing Sanitation subprograms - have been considered in detailed case studies in Chapters Nine and Ten. The intention of the NT-wide subprograms is an important one and ongoing HHIP implementation should include investment in NT-wide subprograms. Given the lack of reliable data regarding homelands water and sanitation infrastructure, it is important that ongoing NT-wide work aspires towards more comprehensive records of what exists where, its condition, and required repairs or upgrades. As it stands, the NT-wide water and sanitation subprograms have not achieved the broad coverage initially aspired to. The Water Testing and Supply Program has effectively been a regional bore audit confined to the Barkly. While Housing Sanitation Program contracts were established for all five NT Government regions, many homelands and their septic systems were not audited and the program has pivoted to prioritise capital works. It is important that such programs are implemented according to an ethic of 'no survey without service' and that governments are not simply identifying infrastructural shortcomings but also remedying them. That said, greater coverage is also required to mitigate the likelihood of emergency works at homelands thus far not attended by these programs.

There is potential for a greater proportion of HHIP funding to be dedicated to the NT-wide infrastructure subprograms. Similarly, homelands service providers and residents have consistently highlighted a lack of serviced lots at homelands that are required for the construction of new houses, funded by governments or other sources. Issues with homelands access roads, which have impacted on HHIP project delivery, also indicate the need for greater investment, in order that residents can maximise the benefit of homelands housing

refurbishments. The lack of investment for land servicing and access roads signals the need for the Australian Government in particular to fund the necessary infrastructure to support traditional owners to live on Country, with similar challenges evident in the NT Remote Housing Package 2024-34. It is politically straightforward for governments to fund housing projects but more difficult to fund and publicise land servicing or roads maintenance. Yet these infrastructures are only effective in concert. The HHIP should improve its data collection related to non-housing project outputs and, in doing so, could prompt discussion about Closing the Gap Target 9B, where governments have clearly struggled to conceptualise appropriate standards, let alone work to meet them in remote communities and homelands.

The Partnership Agreement for Remote Housing and Homelands, which ostensibly sits above the FFA Schedule 'Restoring Funding for Northern Territory Homelands', obliges members of the JSC-RHNT to 'commit to working together through the JSC-RHNT to develop a long-term policy position for homelands within the first two years of this Agreement, including in relation to new and replacement homes' (7.5civ). The three-year FFA Schedule for homelands (2024-27), established alongside the much longer FFA Schedule for remote communities, has been justified by the need to clarify various policy issues related to homelands. By 30 June 2026, traditional owners, homelands residents, and homelands service providers should expect greater policy clarity regarding homelands housing and infrastructure than has existed since the Northern Territory was granted self-government in 1978. It is likely that such an agreement will establish criteria for supporting instances where the HHIP can support new or replacement houses on homelands, ideally recognising that the pursuit of 'secure tenure' (or government leasing) is not an obstacle to government investment at homelands, as it has not been for non-housing infrastructure and as it once wasn't for housing. Such agreement is likely to provide satisfactory grounds for the Australian Government to extend funding for the HHIP, which should match the remote housing agreement timeline, until 2034. It should also provide grounds for additional specified funding for new and replacement houses on homelands.

This Final Report argues that policy clarity related to new and replacement houses, among other things, should have been established by the JSC-RHNT prior to the second iteration of the HHIP, commencing July 2024. Looking forward, the resolution of this singular, albeit important, issue will not be an adequate response to the long-term disinterest of governments to properly clarify what they are responsible for and what they are not willing to support at homelands. This lack of policy clarity and related investment has allowed homelands housing and infrastructure to deteriorate to standards that are not acceptable in contemporary Australia and it undermines traditional owners' right to live on Country. It also undermines the delivery of well-intentioned programs delivered responsibly, such as the HHIP. Now is a moment to commit to homelands, not simply through the gifting of ad hoc funding, but through government policy commitments that recognise the importance of homelands to Aboriginal people and culture, and governments' obligations to support this.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been collated from the Final Report above and are listed in order of their appearance. Chapter headings are included below to identify the section of the Final Report from which they are drawn. The recommendations are re-presented in Table 39 to highlight the specific party addressed in each recommendation.

The Final Report should be tabled to the Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing Northern Territory and each of the recommendations considered in turn. An adequate response will require JSC-RHNT members to consult with their ministers and senior public servants, constituents, and member organisations, as well as the broader Aboriginal community controlled housing sector in the NT and homelands residents, to determine which recommendations they support for adoption.

Once this has occurred, the JSC-RHNT, via its Housing and Homelands Working Group, should develop an initial response that outlines consensus position responses to each recommendation. Responses should indicate whether recommendations are supported or not supported. This document should then be developed into an implementation plan that specifies how recommendations will be achieved. This implementation plan and any progress against proposed reforms should be published and regularly updated so that the sector and the general public is made aware of ongoing reform to the HHIP.

Chapter Two. Homelands in the Northern Territory

1. The Australian Government should commit funding to guarantee the continuation of the HHIP in line with the remote housing investment package until 2034, to address homelands housing and infrastructure requirements and provide surety to the homelands sector.
2. The JSC-RHNT should develop a plan for addressing infrastructural shortcomings at homelands with regard to Closing the Gap Target 9B.
3. The JSC-RHNT should develop policy for homelands housing and infrastructure that clarifies the ongoing responsibilities of key parties for investment and servicing.
4. The JSC-RHNT should review the ongoing separation of the HHIP and the Homelands Program to consider the potential administrative benefits of their consolidation into a singular homelands program.
5. The NT Government should index the funding allocated to the Homelands Program, to cease the real reduction in funds for ongoing homelands housing and MES services, which undermines the standard of homelands infrastructure and the potential impact of the HHIP.

Chapter Three. Evaluation Approach

6. The NT Government should continue to fund the independent monitoring and evaluation of the HHIP by Menzies School of Health Research.

Chapter Four. HHIP Administration

7. Regarding future determinations over the distribution of funding, the JSC-RHNT should communicate to the homelands sector the principles, criteria, and, where possible, the processes that will underpin the selection of specific HHIP or capital works projects.
8. The NT Government should continue to fund NT-wide infrastructure subprograms through the HHIP.
9. The NT Government should survey homelands services providers for feedback on existing procurement processes, such as how grant agreements can better support homelands consultation and how assessment criteria can prioritise ACCOs for homelands contracts.
10. The JSC-RHNT should consider how the relative need of homelands for housing and infrastructural works can be factored into decision-making about HHIP funding distribution, so as not to disadvantage residents at homelands serviced by less effective providers.

Chapter Five. HHIP Outputs

11. Consistent with Closing the Gap Priority Reform Three, the HHIP should collect data on the homelands consultation and engagement work it undertakes for program implementation.
12. The HHIP should consider how to reduce mobilisation expenditure under NT-wide subprogram grant agreements, including by splitting regional contracts to allow multiple existing homelands services providers to deliver works.
13. The HHIP should increase transparency over the distribution of unallocated funds to specific projects, given the broader HHIP efforts to share decision-making about program funding distribution.
14. The JSC-RHNT should agree to minimum and desirable proportions of HHIP funds to be allocated to ACCOs, consistent with the purpose of Closing the Gap Priority Reform Two.
15. The HHIP should include distinctions between ACCOs and ABEs in its reporting on procurement, in order to ensure clarity about its impact on strengthening the Aboriginal community controlled sector.
16. The HHIP should continue to develop its collection and categorisation of data related to the total non-housing infrastructure projects delivered under the program, on behalf of improving broader understanding regarding the importance of investing in non-housing infrastructure.

Chapter Six. Rockhole Project Case Study

17. The HHIP should develop clear guidelines related to the requirement to provide temporary accommodation during HHIP housing refurbishment projects, the funds available to support temporary accommodation, and, depending on funding used, the ownership of these assets at the conclusion of HHIP projects.
18. The JSC-RHNT should consider whether minimum targets be set for the HHIP with regard to contracting ABEs or ACCOs for housing refurbishment projects, and/or for Aboriginal employment under the subcontracting arrangements established by contracted service providers.

19. The JSC-RHNT should consider how to support the development of community planning for homelands, in order to better accommodate discrete and ad hoc investments by governments and residents.
20. ACCOs delivering HHIP projects should consider how the reduction of verandah space through the addition of bedrooms on existing slabs can be mitigated by the construction of additional outdoor living spaces.

Chapter Seven. Anpanaye, Burt Creek, and Corkwood Bore Project Case Study

21. The Australian and NT Governments must as a matter of urgency provide their support for the construction of new and replacement houses on homelands, in order to avoid the continuing renovation of inadequate tin dwellings using HHIP funds.
22. The JSC-RHNT should agree to a new budget appropriation from the Australian and NT Governments to support the construction of new and replacement housing on homelands, to avoid drawing on existing homelands funding for this purpose.

Chapter Eight. Gānggaṅ Project Case Study

23. AHNT should develop recommended guidelines for best practice consultation by service providers with homelands residents, to inform ongoing consultation in the HHIP and related programs.
24. The Australian Government should provide specified funding for homelands access roads, to mitigate the detrimental impact of poor access roads on projects attending to homelands housing and infrastructure.
25. Future homelands funding agreements established between the Australian and NT Governments should be longer than three years, and in the present context should align with the 2024-34 funding timeframe for remote community housing.

Chapter Nine. Water Testing and Supply Program Case Study

26. The NT Government should recommit to pursuing the establishment of a Safe Drinking Water Act to guarantee minimum drinking water protections for all Territorians.
27. The HHIP should continue to fund a subprogram focused on groundwater security assessment and infrastructure refurbishment at homelands and consider whether this be expanded through greater investment to impact all NT Government regions.
28. The Homelands Program should clarify the obligation of homelands service providers to develop homelands-specific water management plans (beyond service delivery plans) and ensure funding is provided to complete this work.
29. The Homelands Program should develop resources to support homelands service providers to develop water management plans with homelands residents.
30. The HHIP and the Homelands Programs should clarify a process by which assessments of high risk to groundwater security determined through the HHIP or other government assessments generate practical works undertaken at homelands to improve water security.
31. The JSC-RHNT should consider whether providing secondary bores for homelands should be established as a priority for existing funding and, if so, under what conditions a secondary bore should be provided.

Chapter Ten. Housing Sanitation Program Case Study

32. The HHIP should continue to deliver a comprehensive program of sanitation audits and septic tank pump-outs at homelands. If not, the consistent pump-out of septic tanks must be ensured by the Homelands Program as a priority.
33. The HHIP should review reporting requirements on behalf of improving data to represent the outputs and impacts of the Housing Sanitation Program.
34. The HHIP should consider how to reduce the proportion of Housing Sanitation Program expenditure committed to mobilisation costs and consider establishing a ceiling for such charges in grant agreements.
35. The HHIP should develop a clear application process and set of assessment criteria through which homelands service providers can identify sanitation works required at their homelands and apply for HHIP funds to address this.
36. In line with principles of local control and work to build the Aboriginal community controlled sector, the HHIP should consider how a greater proportion of Housing Sanitation Program funds can be awarded to ACCOs to deliver works locally.
37. The Homelands Program should develop or commission a resource on appropriate design and specifications for homelands sanitation systems, supporting homelands service providers to make the best infrastructure investments for occupancy, cost, and environmental requirements.
38. The NT Government should fund homelands service providers to develop asset lifecycle plans for homelands sanitation systems, including costing a cyclical maintenance program for household sanitation systems.
39. The JSC-RHNT should develop relevant measures for determining whether homelands sanitation infrastructure meets the Closing the Gap Target 9B.

The following table re-presents the recommendations above with regard to each specific party addressed. The purpose of this is to identify the party responsible for implementing each recommendation. A small number of recommendations address more than one party; in those cases, the recommendation is reproduced for each party.

Relevant Party	Recommendation
The Australian Government	<p>1. The Australian Government should commit funding to guarantee the continuation of the HHIP in line with the remote housing investment package until 2034, to address homelands housing and infrastructure requirements and provide surety to the homelands sector.</p> <p>21. The Australian and NT Governments must as a matter of urgency provide their support for the construction of new and replacement houses on homelands, in order to avoid the continuing renovation of inadequate tin dwellings using HHIP funds.</p> <p>24. The Australian Government should provide specified funding for homelands access roads, to mitigate the detrimental impact of poor access roads on projects attending to homelands housing and infrastructure.</p>

	<p>25. Future homelands funding agreements established between the Australian and NT Governments should be longer than three years, and in the present context should align with the 2024-34 funding timeframe for remote community housing.</p>
The Northern Territory Government	<p>5. The NT Government should index the funding allocated to the Homelands Program, to cease the real reduction in funds for ongoing homelands housing and MES services, which undermines the standard of homelands infrastructure and the potential impact of the HHIP.</p> <p>6. The NT Government should continue to fund the independent monitoring and evaluation of the HHIP by Menzies School of Health Research.</p> <p>8. The NT Government should continue to fund NT-wide infrastructure subprograms through the HHIP.</p> <p>9. The NT Government should survey homelands services providers for feedback on existing procurement processes, such as how grant agreements can better support homelands consultation and how assessment criteria can prioritise ACCOs for homelands contracts.</p> <p>21. The Australian and NT Governments must as a matter of urgency provide their support for the construction of new and replacement houses on homelands, in order to avoid the continuing renovation of inadequate tin dwellings using HHIP funds.</p> <p>25. Future homelands funding agreements established between the Australian and NT Governments should be longer than three years, and in the present context should align with the 2024-34 funding timeframe for remote community housing.</p> <p>26. The NT Government should recommit to pursuing the establishment of a Safe Drinking Water Act to guarantee minimum drinking water protections for all Territorians.</p> <p>38. The NT Government should fund homelands service providers to develop asset lifecycle plans for homelands sanitation systems, including costing a cyclical maintenance program for household sanitation systems.</p>
The Joint Steering Committee for Remote Housing NT	<p>2. The JSC-RHNT should develop a plan for addressing infrastructural shortcomings at homelands with regard to Closing the Gap Target 9B.</p> <p>3. The JSC-RHNT should develop policy for homelands housing and infrastructure that clarifies the ongoing responsibilities of key parties for investment and servicing.</p> <p>4. The JSC-RHNT should review the ongoing separation of the HHIP and the Homelands Program to consider the potential administrative benefits of their consolidation into a singular homelands program.</p> <p>7. Regarding future determinations over the distribution of funding, the JSC-RHNT should communicate to the homelands sector the principles, criteria, and, where possible the processes, that will underpin the selection of specific HHIP or capital works projects.</p>

	<p>10. The JSC-RHNT should consider how the relative need of homelands for housing and infrastructural works can be factored into decision-making about HHIP funding distribution, so as not to disadvantage residents at homelands serviced by less effective providers.</p> <p>14. The JSC-RHNT should agree to minimum and desirable proportions of HHIP funds to be allocated to ACCOs, consistent with the purpose of Closing the Gap Priority Reform Two.</p> <p>18. The JSC-RHNT should consider whether minimum targets be set for the HHIP with regard to contracting ABEs or ACCOs for housing refurbishment projects, and/or for Aboriginal employment under the subcontracting arrangements established by contracted service providers.</p> <p>19. The JSC-RHNT should consider how to support the development of community planning for homelands, in order to better accommodate discrete and ad hoc investments by governments and residents.</p> <p>22. The JSC-RHNT should agree to a new budget appropriation from the Australian and NT Governments to support the construction of new and replacement housing on homelands, to avoid drawing on existing homelands funding for this purpose.</p> <p>31. The JSC-RHNT should consider whether providing secondary bores for homelands should be established as a priority for existing funding and, if so, under what conditions a secondary bore should be provided.</p> <p>39. The JSC-RHNT should develop relevant measures for determining whether homelands sanitation infrastructure meets the Closing the Gap Target 9B.</p>
<p>The Homelands Housing and Infrastructure Program</p>	<p>11. Consistent with Closing the Gap Priority Reform Three, the HHIP should collect data on the homelands consultation and engagement work it undertakes for program implementation.</p> <p>12. The HHIP should consider how to reduce mobilisation expenditure under NT-wide subprogram grant agreements, including by splitting regional contracts to allow multiple existing homelands services providers to deliver works.</p> <p>13. The HHIP should increase transparency over the distribution of unallocated funds to specific projects, given the broader HHIP efforts to share decision-making about program funding distribution.</p> <p>15. The HHIP should include distinctions between ACCOs and ABEs in its reporting on procurement, in order to ensure clarity about its impact on strengthening the Aboriginal community controlled sector.</p> <p>16. The HHIP should continue to develop its collection and categorisation of data related to the total non-housing infrastructure projects delivered under the program, on behalf of improving broader understanding regarding the importance of investing in non-housing infrastructure.</p>

	<p>17. The HHIP should develop clear guidelines related to the requirement to provide temporary accommodation during HHIP housing refurbishment projects, the funds available to support temporary accommodation, and, depending on funding used, the ownership of these assets at the conclusion of HHIP projects.</p> <p>27. The HHIP should continue to fund a subprogram focused on groundwater security assessment and infrastructure refurbishment at homelands and consider whether this be expanded through greater investment to impact all NT Government regions.</p> <p>30. The HHIP and the Homelands Programs should clarify a process by which assessments of high risk to groundwater security determined through the HHIP or other government assessments generate practical works undertaken at homelands to improve water security.</p> <p>32. The HHIP should continue to deliver a comprehensive program of sanitation audits and septic tank pump-outs at homelands. If not, the consistent pump-out of septic tanks must be ensured by the Homelands Program as a priority.</p> <p>33. The HHIP should review reporting requirements on behalf of improving data to represent the outputs and impacts of the Housing Sanitation Program.</p> <p>34. The HHIP should consider how to reduce the proportion of Housing Sanitation Program expenditure committed to mobilisation costs and consider establishing a ceiling for such charges in grant agreements.</p> <p>35. The HHIP should develop a clear application process and set of assessment criteria through which homelands service providers can identify sanitation works required at their homelands and apply for HHIP funds to address this.</p> <p>36. In line with principles of local control and work to build the Aboriginal community controlled sector, the HHIP should consider how a greater proportion of Housing Sanitation Program funds can be awarded to ACCOs to deliver works locally.</p>
The Homelands Program	<p>28. The Homelands Program should clarify the obligation of homelands service providers to develop homelands-specific water management plans (beyond service delivery plans) and ensure funding is provided to complete this work.</p> <p>29. The Homelands Program should develop resources to support homelands service providers to develop water management plans with homelands residents.</p> <p>30. The HHIP and the Homelands Programs should clarify a process by which assessments of high risk to groundwater security determined through the HHIP or other government assessments generate practical works undertaken at homelands to improve water security.</p> <p>32. The HHIP should continue to deliver a comprehensive program of sanitation audits and septic tank pump-outs at homelands. If not, the</p>

	<p>consistent pump-out of septic tanks must be ensured by the Homelands Program as a priority.</p> <p>37. The Homelands Program should develop or commission a resource on appropriate design and specifications for homelands sanitation systems, supporting homelands service providers to make the best infrastructure investments for occupancy, cost, and environmental requirements.</p>
Aboriginal Housing NT	<p>23. AHNT should develop recommended guidelines for best practice consultation by service providers with homelands residents, to inform ongoing consultation in the HHIP and related programs.</p>
Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations	<p>20. ACCOs delivering HHIP projects should consider how the reduction of verandah space through the addition of bedrooms on existing slabs can be mitigated by the construction of additional outdoor living spaces.</p>

Table 39. Recommendations and parties responsible for implementation

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Appendices

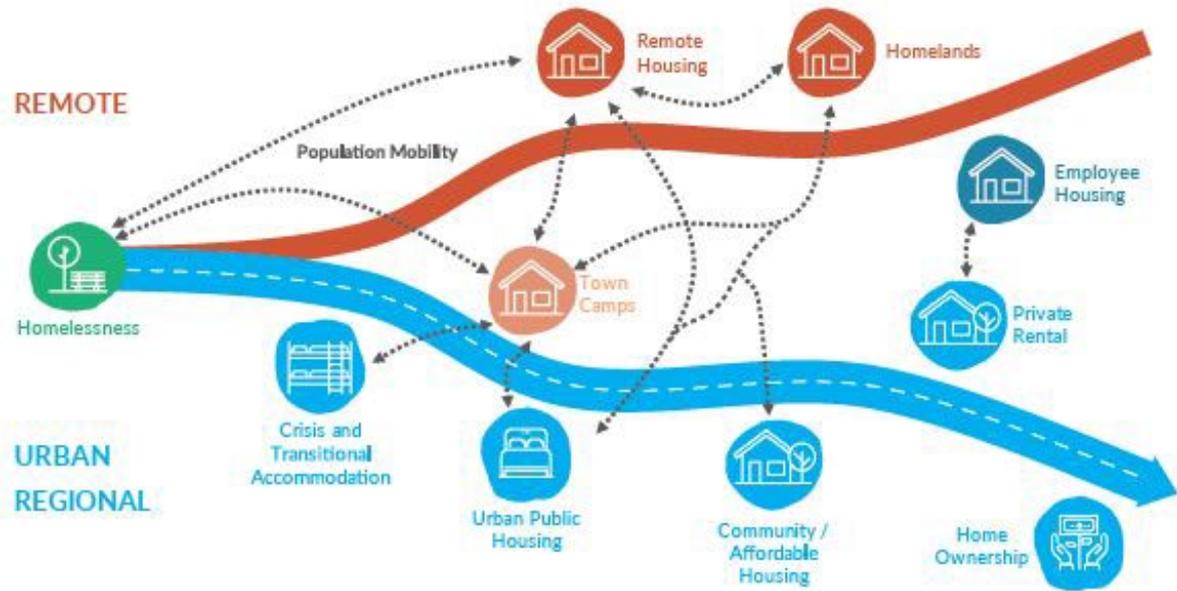
Appendix 1. HHIP In-progress Feedback to Key Program Stakeholders

In April 2024, formal feedback was provided to the then Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities and the project Expert Advisory Group related to the progress of the HHIP under the following themes.

1. The desire and need for new houses on homelands
2. 'A homelands policy vacuum'
3. Upgrading substandard housing assets
4. The relevance of the National Construction Code and other standards
5. Quality of works
6. Decision-making for funding HHIP projects
7. Information and data underpinning funding allocations
8. Priority procurement of Aboriginal community controlled organisations
9. Service provider involvement in further scoping to inform project selection
10. Homeland eligibility for additional funding under new Australian Government investment

Appendix 2. The NT Housing System

Figure 1 - The NT's housing system



Appendix 3. An Historical Overview of Relevant Governmental Arrangements

The following table was originally published in Grealy (2022) 'Slow withdrawal as managed retreat: Dismantling and rebuilding an Indigenous housing sector' and summarises policies and governmental arrangements relevant to the provision of housing and infrastructure on homelands.

Date	Description
1967	A successful referendum is held to change the constitution to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian population and to allow the Commonwealth (Cth) Government to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as for other citizens.
1960s-80s	From the late 1960s, instigating and then supported by legal and institutional reforms (below), Indigenous people begin to move back onto ancestral and other country, establishing homelands and outstations.
1976	The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (ALRA) is established, recognising traditional ownership and occupation of land by Aboriginal people and establishing inalienable freehold title in law.
1978	The Australian Cth Government devolves self-government to the Northern Territory (NT).
1979	An exchange of letters takes place between Cth Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Fred Chaney and NT Chief Minister Paul Everingham regarding responsibility for homelands funding and administration.
1987	The Inquiry into the Aboriginal homelands movement in Australia tables Return to Country: the Aboriginal Homelands Movement in Australia (the Blanchard Report), providing formal recognition of homelands and their significance.
1990	The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is established as a Commonwealth statutory body.
1990	The Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) delivers housing and infrastructure at remote communities and homelands.
1998	Building on Land Rights for the Next Generation: Report of the Review of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (the Reeves Report) is published, calling for controversial reforms to the ALRA.
2004	ATSIC is abolished. CHIP is transferred to the Cth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FACCSIA); a moratorium is placed on CHIP funding for new housing and infrastructure at homelands.
2007	The Living in a Sunburnt Country: Findings of Review of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme (CHIP) report is released in February, critical of CHIP and Indigenous community housing organisations.

2007	The Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle 'Little Children are Sacred' Report is released on 15 June, which is employed by the Cth Government to instigate the Intervention. The National Emergency Response Act 2007 is passed in August, as part of a package of legislation introducing reforms to remote leasing, housing and infrastructure funding, social security payments, and alcohol sale and consumption, among other things.
2007	The Memorandum of Understanding on Indigenous Housing, Accommodation, and Related Services is signed by the Cth and NT Governments in September. The NT Government adopts 'responsibility for the delivery of services to outstations' from 1 July 2008.
2008	The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) establish the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), which includes six 'Closing the Gap' targets.
2008	COAG sign the National Partnership Agreement for Remote Indigenous Housing (2008-2018) in November, guaranteeing Cth Government funding for remote community housing and infrastructure for the following decade.
2008	The NT Department of Housing, Local Governance and Regional Services is contracted by FaHCSIA in December to provide property and tenancy services under 5-year leases in remote communities, established through the Intervention.
2009	The NT Government's 'A Working Future' policy focuses on developing 20 'growth towns' as central service hubs, aiming to 'set a new path for homelands and outstations'. NPARIH funding for new houses is directed to growth towns.
2012	The Stronger Futures Northern Territory legislation is passed, extending many measures established through the Intervention, including leases over remote communities.
2015	The Commonwealth Government makes a one-off payment of \$206m to the NT Government, which will take 'full fiscal responsibility for the servicing of homelands'.
2015	The NT Government's 'Homelands - A Shared Responsibility' policy is published, stating that it 'has no immediate plans to build houses on homelands or establish new homelands'.
2015	A new representative body, Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT), is formed.
2018	The NPARIH (by then the National Partnership on Remote Housing) expires on 30 June.
2018-20	The NT Government undertakes its Review of the Homelands Policy.
2019	The NT Government is awarded \$550m by the Cth Government under the five-year National Partnership Remote Housing Northern Territory (NPRHNT) Agreement.
2020	The NT Government releases its Local Decision Making policy.

2021	An exchange of letters takes place between NT Minister for Remote Housing Chansey Paech and Cth Minister for Indigenous Housing Ken Wyatt regarding funding responsibility for new homelands housing.
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Appendix 4. Example Scope of Works, Rockhole Housing Refurbishment



Property Condition Report: House 1	
<p>General Layout</p>	
<p>Required Maintenance Works</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Environmental Clean ✓ Repaint all internal walls, ceiling, door, door frames and window frames. ✓ Repaint external walls and roof. ✓ Multiple lights (internal and external) not working – inspect and repair. ✓ Inspect Fire Alarms and install where missing. ✓ Install night latch on all doors. ✓ Install curtain hooks in all windows. ✓ Install Crim safe to all windows and door flyscreen to match where missing. 	

<p>10. Living Room</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Replace fly screen – detached from window. ✓ Replace and reinstate fan/light switch. ✓ 2 X air conditioning unit in this room – one on the wall does not work - remove. Another located on the window – to remove and reinstate to the wall. ✓ Few lights do not work – inspect and replace. 	
<p>11. Bedroom 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Install additional wall shelf. ✓ Remove air conditioning from the window and reinstate to the wall. 	
<p>12. Kitchen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Replace shelves with stainless steel. ✓ No lights – reinstate. ✓ Blocked kitchen sink – repairs required. 	
<p>13. Toilet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ No lights – reinstate. ✓ Replace Toilet bowl and sink. ✓ Repair rusty door frames and tiles. ✓ Toilet blockage – requires plumbing repairs. 	

<p>14. Shower</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Shower head, shower taps, and sink taps to be removed and replace with quarter turn hand levers. ✓ Sink tiles to be replaced. ✓ Replace sink table and shelf with stainless steel. 	
<p>15. Laundry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Leaking laundry sink and tap, plumbing repairs required – leakage to outside of the laundry room. ✓ Replace laundry bench top with stainless steel. ✓ There is a gap between flooring and the door – requires a fix. ✓ Replace shelf with stainless steel. Resident has requested for additional shelves in the laundry room. ✓ Lights missing – replace. 	
<p>16. Exterior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Extend veranda towards the back of the house. ✓ Tighten existing clothes line and add extra lines where missing. ✓ Pressure wash/gerni external walls. ✓ Trim overhanging tree branches towards the house ✓ Roof mesh – reinstate. ✓ Lights has no cover. ✓ Rusty support beam – repair/replace. ✓ 2 X additional room to be added to this property. Provide a suitable location plan for an additional bedroom. 	

Appendix 5. Example Before and After Photographs, Corkwood Bore



Visual Progress





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<p>Before:</p> 	<p>After:</p> 
<p>Before:</p> 	<p>After:</p> 
<p>Before:</p> 	<p>After:</p> 



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Insulation Installed:



Insulation Installed:



Appendix 6. Water Infrastructure Upgrades

Schedule 1 - Scope of works

- Note: Not all works will need to be done at each homeland. Works will be dependent on the infrastructure at each homeland.
- Test and carry out bore, pump, manifold maintenance PV check and clean and rising main scour. Where not in place install tap cock and pressure valve on manifold. Check operation of non-return valve and install where one is not present. Where easily accessible install levitators to header tanks. Organise replacement of rising mains as necessary.
- Reaffirm operation of bore including screens, pump depth and sizing, and recharge. Complete new Statement of Bore and submit to Department Lands, Planning and Environment for retention.
- Cap and seal abandoned bores to prevent ground water contamination.
- Flush and clean (chlorinate and disinfect) all bore, pumps, water tanks and water lines.
- Renew missing or incorrect Bore ID tags.
- Install pressure switches on bore pumps.
- For homelands with bores as water source, use appropriate physical and chemical repair methods for bore rejuvenation. The most common solutions include:
 - Airlifting, jetting, and surging
 - Bailing, surging, and swabbing
 - Brushing
 - Ultrasonic treatment
 - Chemical treatment
 - Use of detergents.
- Where not present, construct cement slab of at least 100mm thickness and 2m X 2m around the bore.
- Where not present, construct fencing consisting of 1800mm chain mesh around the bore to prevent damage from cattle.
- Repair water leaks in the homeland.
- Ensure that water tanks must be secured to prevent rodents and bird excrement from entering the tanks. It is important to ensure that the water tanks do not overflow. This can be achieved by either manual water pump shutoff or installation of simple float valves in tank inlets to automate the process. The tank stands must be free from corrosion and high enough to provide head pressure of at least 15psi.
- Assess water supplies to ascertain if all the components listed are in working order and
 - Repair/replace the components that are not working.
 - Provide a list of recommendations to make sure that the larger works (i.e. construction of new tank, tank stand, drilling of new bore etc) are captured.

- Carry out works deemed necessary to make the water supply robust while on site. Cumulative works within each homeland must not exceed \$15,000 (incl GST).
- Ensure that the main from the header tank appears to be suitably buried without visible evidence on the surface.

