

LGANT submission to the Aviation Green Paper

Local Government Association of the Northern Territory

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) is the peak voice of local government in the NT, representing 16 of the 17 councils. Membership consists of four municipal, three shire and nine regional councils, and one associate member.

LGANT provides leadership, support, representation, and advocacy on behalf of our member councils for the benefit of their communities.

LGANT is the only local government association in Australia that is a signatory to Closing the Gap. Something we are proud of.

Local government in the NT

Local government, the sphere of government closest to the community, look after matters close to our homes including local roads, street signage, lighting, footpaths, parking, cycle ways, parks and playgrounds, sporting fields and swimming pools, pet control, land and coast care programs, libraries, waste management, and community programs such as child and aged care – and in some places, provide Centrelink and Australia Post services.

The local government sector in the NT collectively employs around 3,000 people and is often the largest employer of Aboriginal people in remote and regional areas. The 2022 Australian Local Government Workforce Skills and Capability Survey NT Report confirmed the NT has the highest proportion of Aboriginal employees in the local government sector nationally.

Local government councils make other significant contributions to the NT economy including collectively managing and controlling assets and infrastructure valued at \$2.6 billion, over 13,000 kilometres of roads, and receiving and expending over \$505 million in the NT annually.

Unfortunately, regional councils' revenue in the NT is restricted due to limited rate bases and grants received often being tied so they don't have the capacity to absorb additional Closing the Gap initiatives or major reforms from within.

Importance of aviation in the NT

LGANT's submission will not delve deeply into the importance of the aviation sector – we all know it's crucial and can't be understated.

LGANT would like to note however, the importance of aviation to the NT in regard to intra-Territory connectivity (eg. regional and remote communities, including islands, over vast distances) and the role it plays in social and economic development and supporting community safety, particularly during the annual wet season.

This includes, but is not limited to, the delivery of supplies and mail by aircraft, medical and disaster evacuations by air, transporting of residents into service centres such as Darwin and Alice Springs, and workers into communities, mine sites, and cattle stations, and tourists into remote tourism hotspots.

This importance is demonstrated by the number of aircraft movements per head of population, which according to the ISAC 2019 NT's Aviation Insight, is the highest for the NT. The same report states that 4% of aircraft registered in Australia are registered in the NT – a significant amount given the NT accounts for just 1% of Australia's population.

The NT Government's Infrastructure Plan and Pipeline 2022 states that in addition to the Darwin International Airport and regional airports (Alice Springs, Katherine Gove/Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek and Groote Eylandt), there are hundreds of aerodromes and airstrips in the NT, with over 90 locations supported by the Regional Aviation Access Program. The Program provides weekly air transport service for passengers, educational materials, medicines, fresh foods and other urgent supplies to communities in remote and isolated areas of Australia. The NT Government manages approximately 70 regional and remote aerodromes throughout the NT.

Requests of the Aviation White Paper

In considering the proposed priorities of the Aviation White Paper, and in the context of Closing the Gap outcomes, LGANT requests it addresses the need for:

- increased funding for sealing of remote aerodromes to enable all weather access, better safety and less maintenance.
- increased funding for supporting equipment and infrastructure such as lighting (eg. pilot remote activation systems), firefighting equipment, vehicles for Aerodrome Reporting Officers, and tractors for maintenance.
- airstrip maintenance contractual arrangements to consider the increased costs of general airside maintenance (eg. the equipment required and/or contracting of vegetation management such as grass slashing and tree lopping) and the additional constraints of delivering these services in remote areas.

LGANT also request the White Paper prioritise and commit funding to:

- the upgrade of the Batchelor airstrip to act as a back-up in case of emergency events or immobilisation of Darwin's airport; and
- the upgrade of the drainage culvert running beneath Katherine Civilian Airport's Taxiway Echo.

The Katherine Civilian Airport, adjacent to RAAF Base Tindal, is owned by the Australian Government's Department of Defence and is leased to Katherine Town Council under an operational lease agreement. The runway and taxiways remain under the control of the Department of Defence.

An unrated drainage culvert that runs beneath Taxiway Echo at the Katherine Civilian Airport limits the Maximum Take Off Weight (MTOW) of aircraft to a conservative 22,500 kg. This significantly reduces the commercial air transport capability of

aircraft, restricting aeromedical, counter-disaster and emergency management operations, as well as opportunities for economic growth, including domestic and global freight and passenger transport markets and large-scale industry development.

Requests have been fielded for larger charter aircraft to land and utilise the Katherine Civilian Airport but these have had to be refused due to this culvert limitation. This also means the airport is limited in use in cases of flights being diverted from Darwin's Airport.

Conclusion

LGANT and our member councils look forward to working with the Australian Government on this important policy piece.