

Barkly Regional Deal

Position Paper – Barkly Regional Deal Governance Review

1. Acknowledgement and Community Statement

1.1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the Barkly Regional Deal is being discussed and implemented. Specifically, we acknowledge the Warumungu, Warlpiri and Warlmanpa peoples of the central Barkly, Mudburra and Jingili peoples in the northwest, Wakaya, Wambaya and Waanyi peoples in the northeast and the Alyawarr, Anmatyerr and Kaytetye peoples in the southern part of the Barkly. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and are committed to placing the needs and interests of Aboriginal peoples from the Barkly region at the centre of our work.

1.2 ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY STATEMENT: We acknowledge those who have settled on our land, introducing other languages, cultures and having their own histories; developing our lands to accommodate the demands of Australian society; providing the benefits that this development has to offer. Past developments have been undertaken without our involvement and consultation or understanding of our needs. We invite all levels of Government, business, service providers and the communities throughout the Barkly region to work with and involve us in the planning and delivery of social, cultural and economic activities to ensure the opportunities which arise are for the benefit of the Barkly region.

2. Preamble

The focus of this paper is to detail the position of the Barkly Regional Deal (BRD) Governance Table on the findings and recommendations from the recent BRD Governance Review and outline the community led vision for the future of the BRD. A series of workshops were held in September 2025 to determine a collective plan in terms of Governance, leadership, decision making and delivery. This plan brings into play the critical role the National Agreement on Closing the Gap has in achieving a future that addresses the power balance in the region and enables genuine partnerships with Government that can contribute to measurable social outcomes in the Barkly.

3. Background and context

3.1 BACKGROUND: The Barkly Regional Deal was born in response to a tragic incident that occurred in one of the Barkly communities in 2018. Community members called on the Government to provide support to address ongoing, systemically driven complex poverty and social issues that are entrenched across the region. Families and communities continue to live with trauma and dysfunction and there is an intense and urgent need to do things differently now. The BRD is a commitment from the three levels of Government and is a mechanism to support economic, social and community development in the region by delivering on 28 initiatives over a 10-year period. The BRD uses a collective impact approach and is guided by the Governance Table consisting of the three levels of Government and representatives from the community and NGO sector.

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3.2 GOVERNANCE REVIEW: In 2025 a Governance Review of the BRD was undertaken by an external consultant which aimed to; *Ensure the Governance of the Deal continues to evolve in alignment with **community aspirations and strategic outcomes**; Provide a clear staged roadmap for delivering more **culturally grounded, accountable, and effective Governance**; Initiate **structural reform grounded in self-determination and regional aspirations**, and, embed lasting **Governance transformation in the Barkly region** for generations to come—rooted in trust, accountability, and community control.* The community, NGO sector and Governance Table held a series of workshops to address the recommendations made. Our collective position on the recommendations is detailed in section 6. Our plan for the future is detailed in section 4.

4. Our future

4.1 OUR FUTURE: The Aboriginal and NGO sector have determined the following actions as key to a sustainable, community led future that contributes to improved social outcomes in the Barkly. We note that, in line with our current vision statement, this work is for all Barkly families and communities and supports us to have strong communities and families together determining our future and thriving in both worlds. A Governance Strategy Working Group has been formed and is providing guidance and direction on the transition work focussing on the following:

- 4.1.1 We will transition to an independent Backbone organisation** with a primarily Aboriginal Board and elevate the Backbone to a regional body, working with and supporting existing leadership structures and representing all Barkly communities.
- 4.1.2 We will reform our Governance to a regionally relevant structure** that elevates and builds capability of Aboriginal leadership. This structure transitions the current Governance table to a Partnership Table where Government will meet us in the ‘middle space’ for shared decision making and delivery of initiatives.
- 4.1.3 We will work with communities to develop a community led Regional Development Agenda** which will expand on our five existing community priorities, build on the good work the BRD has achieved so far and responds to community need and aspiration.
- 4.1.4 We will build community led decision making processes and mechanisms** into all of the above. We will develop a roadmap and timeline for implementation as we continue to operate as business as usual within the current BRD structures for the next 6-12 months.

4.2 STATEMENT OF INTENT: In 2018 the three tiers of government signed a BRD Statement of Intent which committed to ‘*recognising the vision and aspiration of the Barkly Community*’ by; Working together to design and implement the BRD; Placing local priorities at the centre and supporting local Aboriginal leadership. Community representatives were not signatories to this original Statement of Intent, nor to the Statement of Recommitment in 2021, and to date, community have not had input into regional investment decisions. We are calling for a new **Statement of Commitment** to be signed with community as key signatories as detailed in section 7.

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5. Closing the Gap

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG) agreement was officially signed in 2020, after the signing of the BRD. Our vision for the future and the ways of working we are seeking to establish are grounded in the four Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Actions supporting the CTG priority reforms are detailed in the below (Table 5.0).

Priority Reform	Supporting action
<p>1. Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making</p>	<p>1.1 We aim to reform the power imbalance that has enabled Government to set the direction and made little space for community aspirations. We will adjust our Governance structure to place Aboriginal leadership in decision making roles and Government as enablers to shared decision making.</p> <p>1.2 We invite Government partners to meet us at an intergovernmental partnership table to enable shared decision making and delivery of priorities. The Partnership Table will evolve from the current Governance Table structure.</p> <p>1.3 We will work to achieve the conditions for the Stronger Places Stronger People (SPSP) Enhanced Model and work with the Department of Social Services to undertake shared decision making.</p> <p>1.4 We are seeking a commitment from Government to work with us to determine a formal Partnership Agreement to drive community led outcomes on CTG.</p> <p>1.5 We will continue to seek further partnerships with Government as determined by our governance structure that supports our vision for the future. This may include working with Empowered Communities Leadership and NIAA to express our interest in becoming an Empowered Communities region.</p> <p>1.6 We will design a regionally relevant process for local and joint decision making which acknowledges the voice of First Nations people.</p>
<p>2. Building the Community-controlled Sector</p>	<p>2.1 We will strengthen the ACCO sector through bringing together existing leadership structures and ACCOs to create a regionally relevant Governance structure that acts as a voice for the region.</p> <p>2.2 We will prioritise building capability within the ACCO sector for strong, effective organisational leadership in the region.</p> <p>2.3 We urge the three tiers of Government to support our vision to transition the Backbone team to a strong ACCO that leads political advocacy and reform to tackle complex social issues and is positioned to attract diverse investment opportunities.</p> <p>2.4 We will work with community to determine our own Community Led Regional Development Agenda that builds upon the five existing community identified priorities and the good work that has been done through the BRD.</p>

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	<p>2.5 We urge Government to invest in and build the community-controlled sector who are delivering essential services in the region. ACCOs are critical in ensuring the sustainability and success of the current BRD initiatives.</p>
<p>3. Transforming Government Organisations</p>	<p>3.1 We seek commitment from the three tiers of Government to sign a Statement of Commitment that community are also signatories to (see section 6). This is an important step in addressing the current power imbalance and Government recognising Community as equal partners.</p> <p>3.2 Our new Governance structure places Aboriginal leadership overseeing Backbone work and regional strategy development. We work together with Government at the Partnership Table in an inclusive (not top down) approach.</p> <p>3.3 Historically, developments have been undertaken without involving the Aboriginal community appropriately or understanding our needs. We are creating an environment where Government works in true partnership with us and hold themselves accountable for action and reporting on the CTG targets.</p> <p>3.4 We bring lived experience of being disadvantaged by Government structures and policy. Our plan offers Government the opportunity to work with us in a way that will improve the experience and safety of mainstream institutions for Aboriginal people.</p>
<p>4. Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level</p>	<p>4.1 To date the focus has been on the BRD delivering on the 28 initiatives. There has been a gap in terms of measuring contribution to social outcomes at a regional level. Our Statement of Commitment calls for government to commit to action that contributes to measurable social outcomes. We urge Government work with us to provide data necessary for us to collectively measure progress on social outcomes.</p> <p>4.2 We urge Government to engage thoroughly in our current monitoring and evaluation work through participation in the Measuring Change Working Group, endorsing our Barkly Data Sovereignty protocols and entering into data sharing agreements that support regular data collection and reporting against selected indicators.</p> <p>4.3 A community led Regional Development Agenda, once complete, will include indicators and measures that are relevant to Barkly families and communities. Access to Government held data and information will allow the tracking of regional progress towards outcomes.</p>
<p><i>Table 5.0 Supporting Actions – CTG Priority Reforms</i></p>	

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6. Findings and Recommendations from the Governance Review

The collective position of the Governance Table on the findings and recommendations from the recent Governance Review are detailed below. We disagree with both proposed stages of the review. The Governance Table do support some features of the recommendations and agree to these **with changes**.

- 6.1 We DO NOT support the suggested Project Management Methodology (PMM) review.** We agree that the Governance Table will identify the ‘lessons learnt’ from the delivery of the finalised BRD initiatives and apply these lessons learnt to the project management approach for delivery of the remaining initiatives. We do not support engaging an external consultant for this.
- 6.2 We DO NOT support the development of a Wumpurrani Cultural Advisory Panel.** Cultural authority and governance will be a feature embedded in our redesigned, regionally relevant governance structure. There is no need for an additional panel.
- 6.3 We DO NOT support retaining the core membership structure of the Governance Table.** We are redesigning a Governance structure that elevates Aboriginal Leadership to decision making roles. The Governance Table will evolve into an intergovernmental Partnership Table where Government will partner with us to enable shared decision making and delivery of priorities.
- 6.4 We DO NOT support introducing a Governance tool kit.** Resources will be developed in house and as required to support the emerging Governance structure. We do not support engaging an external consultant for this work.
- 6.5 We DO NOT support launching a new Executive Group and Advisory Panels.** No new groups will be developed. The Governance structure will be redesigned and the current Admin group has been adjusted to reflect its original intention and membership. Terms of Reference have been developed.
- 6.6 We DO support formalising delegations of authority across parties in due course.** This will be done as the new Governance structure emerges and the Admin group is adjusted.
- 6.7 We DO support reviewing the Governance Table structure.** This is being done as part of our redesign of our Regional Governance model. The Governance Table will evolve into an intergovernmental Partnership Table where Government will meet us to enable shared decision making and delivery of priorities supporting CTG priority reforms 1 and 2.
- 6.8 We DO support the Backbone Team providing integrated support and change management.** The Backbone will have a shift in focus as part of our redesign of our Regional Governance model and its shift to become an independent incorporated body which will elevate its purpose from being primarily a secretariat to being a voice for all of the region that will lead political advocacy and reform under the direction of the Board.

6.9 We DO support recruiting members through a transparent nomination process.

An Expression of Interest process is being developed by the Governance Strategy Working Group.

6.10 We DO support the change to a Lean Executive Group. This will be in the form of the Admin Group downsizing to four Government representatives and four community representatives

7. Statement of Commitment

We agree that as an immediate action we require a Statement of Commitment to be signed. This will succeed the current Statement of Intent (2018) and the Statement of Recommitment (2021). The Statement of Commitment is a necessary agreement to have in place as we work towards a formal Partnership Agreement. Our expectation is that Ministers will be engaged in conversation with us about a new Statement of Commitment.

The existing Statements are signed by the three tiers of Government **excluding signatories from the community**. The new Statement of Commitment should be signed by three Government delegates and three community representatives as follows:

- Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm
- Hon Minister Steven Edgington
- Barkly Regional Council Mayor Sid Vashist
- Delegate of the Aboriginal Corporations Leadership Group, Pat Brahim
- Delegate of the Barkly Aboriginal Alliance, Mervyn Franey
- Delegate of Patta Native Title Body, Michael Jones

The Governance Table have discussed and agree that the Statement of Commitment should address the following points (Table 7.0):

<p>1. Support for Aboriginal Voice</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable Barkly communities and leaders to share decision making authority • Our actions must contribute to measurable social outcomes • Recognise regionally relevant Aboriginal Governance structures • Embed mechanisms in planning that include Homeland and remote community perspectives • Support the development of a community led Regional Development Agenda through ongoing funding and resourcing
<p>2. Commitment to new ways of working</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge lessons learnt through delivery of the previous initiatives and commit to improved project management for remaining initiatives • Government are enablers through supporting the design of shared decision-making structures and meeting us at a Partnership Table focussed on delivery of community priorities

- Government will include community in determining representation at the Partnership Table that enables decision making and transformation
- Government demonstrates accountability as enablers of the Closing the Gap Outcomes and Priority Reforms by providing access to data and information at a regional level
- Through BRD initiative 14, **Government Investment Service System Reform (GISSR)**, Government use available levers and policy platforms to mobilise investment and reform that support existing agreed community priorities of: *Learning in both worlds, safe kids and youth, self-determination and meaningful jobs, strong culture and wellbeing and quality services*

3. Ongoing prioritisation of social reform

- Address overcrowding and increasing the supply of housing
- Strengthen family functioning and wellbeing
- Improve education and training outcomes
- Strengthen community safety
- Improve the collaboration, coordination and accountability of services across the region
- Recognise the important role Aboriginal business plays in contributing to economic participation and social outcomes and commit to supporting this through procurement and tender processes

8. Our ask of Government

The BRD structures (Backbone team, Governance Table and Admin Group) will continue to operate business as usual for the next 12 months as we continue to detail our investment strategy and implementation plan. We ask for commitment to the following:

- 8.1 Ministers to engage with us around the resigning of the **Statement of Commitment**
- 8.2 Support our **transition plan** as outlined in this paper and commit to working alongside us
- 8.3 Work with the community and NGO sector to identify and allow **appropriate representation** on the Partnership Table
- 8.4 Provide adequate **resourcing to the Backbone** team through existing and new funding
- 8.5 Commit to accountability and actioning the **Closing the Gap priority reforms** as outlined in this paper
- 8.6 Utilise **appropriate levers** through the relevant government agencies to facilitate relationships and enable the delivery of our priorities as per our regional investment strategy (in development) e.g. Justice reinvestment, Empowered Communities
- 8.7 Continue to share with us guidance on **how to engage with government** to maximise the value of our partnership
- 8.8 Commit to working together to address our community priorities through joint planning and delivery on BRD initiative 14 **Government Investment Service System reform (GISSR)**.

9. Conclusion

Our plan for the future is strategic, bold and necessary. With four years remaining of the current BRD it is essential we start our trajectory to independence, regional governance, ground up priority setting and shared decision making now. Our leaders and the region are ready and we call on government as our partners to walk beside us through this transition process and help us build on the good work that has been achieved so far through the BRD.

We commit to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to strengthen our relationships, identify opportunities and deliver sustainable outcomes through a process based on mutual respect, understanding and acceptance of our differences (BRD Aboriginal Community Statement). We invite all levels of government to be part of this opportunity for regional transformation and self-determination with us.