



# Darwin City Council About Council

## The role of Council

### Councils and the Northern Territory

The Darwin City Council is one of six municipal councils in the Northern Territory. The other five are Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Palmerston and Litchfield. Jabiru and Nhulunbuy are currently special purpose towns. A system of community government councils provides local government services to smaller Northern Territory towns and communities. Councils form part of local government, which is the third sphere of government alongside the federal and state/territory governments.

### A Brief History

The history of local government in the Territory began in 1874 when the Palmerston District Council was established. At that time Darwin was called Palmerston. The Palmerston District Council was replaced in 1915 by the Darwin Town Council, which operated until 1937, when it was abolished at its own request.

The Corporation of the Municipality of Darwin was inaugurated in 1957 and the Darwin Municipality was formally declared the new 'City of Darwin' in 1959. Darwin remained the sole Territory centre with some degree of local self-government for 14 years.

In 1973 the Northern Territory Local Government Association (NTLGA) was formed with initial membership from the Darwin and Alice Springs Councils. Since then it has expanded its membership and has become affiliated with the Australian Local Government Association.

The Northern Territory Community Government Association (NTCGA) and the Northern Territory Local Government Association (NTLGA) amalgamated in June 1992 and are now known as the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT).

LGANT's aim is the development of a strong local government in the Northern Territory. Its prime functions include representing the views of local government, lobbying for funding and improved legislation, providing employee relations advice to member councils, encouraging and supporting local government best practice, providing member councils with up-to-date information on local government issues, contributing at the national level to the work of the Australian Local Government Association and generally promoting local government in the Northern Territory.

### Council's Legislative Powers

Under the Local Government Act councils are authorised to make by-laws governing the management of their individual areas. These by-laws must be valid and appropriate as they are local laws for local people and communities, rather than temporary solutions to minor problems.

### The Role of Council

The role of the Darwin City Council is to provide public services, make wise decisions in the interests of the community in a balanced way for the greatest benefit, to initiate, coordinate and serve as a catalyst for local effort, and to represent the community in the state/territory and national contexts. A council is responsible for providing services for the wellbeing of people within its community. It forms policies for the area, and by exercising its statutory powers, decides upon the level of rates and how council funds are spent.

Councils have a service provision and a regulatory role, and the ability to take up community causes and concerns. Councils also play a planning and coordinating role and provide an avenue for community participation. Community participation is important and the Darwin City Council encourages individuals, groups and delegations to contact the Council to question, to provide input and to express their views.

A council is a body corporate composed of Elected Members (Aldermen) and is headed by a Mayor or President. This body is charged with 'the peace, order and good government of its council area and has the control and management of that good government.' (Local Government Act Section 120).

### The Make-up of Council

Twelve Aldermen serve on the Darwin City Council. There are four Electoral Districts or Wards within the Darwin Municipality, and each Ward returns three Aldermen at an election held every four years. The four Wards in the Darwin Municipality are Chan, Lyons, Richardson and Waters. The Lord Mayor is elected at large by the whole community, making a total of 13 members on the Council.

The Lord Mayor is leader of the Council, presiding over all Ordinary Council meetings. The staff carry out the policies and decisions made by Council. There are currently some 290 employees of the Darwin City Council.

### Who Can Stand for Election?

Anyone can stand for election regardless of qualifications, religion, sex, race or employment. Anyone eligible to vote at Northern Territory elections can stand for nomination in any Ward in their own council area. This is providing that s/he is not an undischarged bankrupt, under a sentence of imprisonment of 12 months or more, an officer, employee or auditor of the council, or otherwise disqualified from holding office under Section 9 of the Act.

The Aldermen vote on all issues brought before Council and carry out the duties of representing the electors. It is important to be aware of your three Ward Aldermen and to use them to take your concerns to and discuss community problems and solutions.

### The Lord Mayor

The Lord Mayor is the head of the elected council and is regarded as the first citizen of the City.

The full title is 'The Right Worshipful, the Lord Mayor of Darwin' and is addressed as 'My Dear Lord Mayor' in correspondence and 'Lord Mayor' in person.

The role of the Lord Mayor is to:

- preside at all meetings of the Council to coordinate the debates and the passage of business;
- be the main spokesperson to express Council's views to the community;
- be ex officio, a member of each standing committee of Council;
- exercise authority in those matters specified in the

- Local Government Act, regulations or by Council;
- be the chief negotiator for the Council in the area of inter-governmental relations;
- keep the Aldermen and Chief Executive Officer informed of any important issues likely to affect the functioning of Council;
- consult with the Chief Executive Officer on matters of management, administration, legal procedure and protocol;
- represent Council at various social and other functions within and without of the City;
- act as 'ambassador-at-large' for Council and the City; and
- keep in touch with public opinion.

## Council Meetings

There are two Ordinary Council meetings each month. The main meeting is on the last Tuesday of each month at 5.00pm. Introduced in July 2001, a second Ordinary Council meeting is held in the first half of each month. This meeting is designed to deal with public safety, corporate governance issues and public delegations. Agendas for these meetings are made publicly available through Council's four public libraries: at Casuarina, Karama, Darwin City and Nightcliff, and at Customer Services in the Civic Centre. These papers are usually available on the Monday morning before each meeting. Council welcomes anybody at its Ordinary Council meetings, and anyone can ask questions at the main meeting if these are put in writing and provided to the Chief Executive Officer's office by 12 noon the working day before the main meeting.

If the person asking the question is in attendance at the meeting the question is answered publicly and the person will be invited to seek clarification of any points raised in the answer. If not in attendance the answers are forwarded in writing the next day.

Council also holds Open Forum sessions before each main Ordinary Council meeting to encourage greater community interaction and provide the opportunity for informal discussion. The Open Forum sessions, that go from 4.00pm-4.30pm, are chaired by the Lord Mayor and everyone is welcome. You do not need to advise of your intention to attend. After the Open Forum you are then more than welcome to stay on for the Council meeting. Agendas for Ordinary Council meetings are available in the Public Gallery.

## Council Committees

Council's standing committees meet before each Ordinary Council meeting to discuss matters in detail and make recommendations to Council. Information regarding these meetings can be obtained from your Alderman or the chairperson of each standing committee.

Community problems for Council's consideration are brought to the attention of these committees for detailed discussion and community input before going to Council. The more informal atmosphere in the Council committee room enables a more relaxed 'round-the-table' discussion and makes it possible to hear the views of community spokespersons.

The chairpersons of the committees can advise how best to approach Council on specific matters and offer guidance regarding the provision of the most appropriate information. Individuals and groups are often

invited to Council committee meetings to put their views and express their concerns.

## Services Provided

Council services include road building & maintenance, tree planting, maintenance of council-owned parks, gardens, ovals and cemeteries, rubbish collection, waste management, recycling facilities, traffic control, city beautification, mosquito control, street lighting, community halls and the services of four public libraries and three public swimming pools.

Council provides nine off-street carparks including multi-level undercover West Lane Carpark in the heart of the city shopping area. Community services include the work of the Regulatory Services Officers, a facilitative role for children, youth and the aged, Aboriginal and ethnic affairs input, an access advisory role, the Darwin Entertainment Centre, a Fun Bus for children, Fun in the Parks during school holidays, animal liaison and dog control, and animal education.

## Management, Operation & Funding

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the implementation of Council decisions and the general management of Council functions. Darwin City Council operates under the provisions of the Northern Territory Local Government Act 1993, as amended.

Funding for the Darwin City Council comes in the form of rates, federal government grants, Northern Territory government grants, and fees and charges associated with refuse collection, dogs, parking and permits. Council has about 25,500 rateable properties and a budget in the order of \$43.9m.

## Community Input

Council is keen to have as much community input and two-way communication as possible and there is, of course, a lot of community input through the full range of Council committees.

In addition to Tech/corporate services, Community Services, Corporate Services and Town Planning standing committees, there are also the following committees and groups:

- Arts and Cultural Development Advisory Committee
- CBD Car Parking Advisory Committee
- Darwin Youth Advisory Committee
- Disability Advisory Committee
- Gardens Oval Advisory Committee
- Sister Cities Community Committees for Ambon, Anchorage, Haikou, Kalymnos and Milikapiti, and a steering committee investigating the possibility for the Darwin/Japan sister city relationship
- Sister Cities Management Community
- Thorak Regional Cemetery Committee.