



2023/24

# ANNUAL REPORT



Aboriginal Areas  
Protection Authority  
*protecting sacred sites across the territory*



Anbangbang Rock Shelter, NT

Cover image: Johnny Djuwararr at Howard Island, East Arnhem NT

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Authority acknowledges and pays respect to the custodians of country across the Northern Territory and honours their enduring and powerful connection to this land and its waters. We thank all First Nation's people with whom we work and collaborate to protect sacred sites for all Territorians.

### DISCLAIMER

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers and viewers should be aware that this material may contain images or names of deceased persons.

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### ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY

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Darwin NT 0801

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

1 October 2024

Dear Minister

I have the pleasure to submit to you, in accordance with section 14(1) of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989*, the annual report of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

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

Yours sincerely

Bobby Nunggumajbarr  
Chairperson  
1 October 2024

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

1 October 2024

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) for the financial year 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, in accordance with the Treasurers Direction R2.1.6. Pursuant to the *Financial Management Act 1995* and *Information Act 2002*, and Treasurer's Directions, I advise that to the best of my knowledge and belief.

- a) proper records of all transactions affecting the Authority are kept, and employees under my control observe the provisions of the *Financial Management Act*, the Financial Management Regulations and Treasurer's Directions;
- b) procedures within the Authority afford proper internal control, and a current description of such procedures is recorded in the accounting and property manual, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Financial Management Act*;
- c) no indication of fraud, malpractice, major breach of legislation or delegation, major error in or omission from the accounts and records exists;
- d) in accordance with the requirements of section 15 of the *Financial Management Act*, the internal audit capacity available to the Authority is adequate, and the results of internal audits have been reported to me;
- e) the financial statements included in the annual report have been prepared from proper accounts and records and are in accordance with Treasurer's Directions; and
- f) the Authority is working in compliance with the *Information Act 2002*.

Yours sincerely

Dr Benedict Scamبارy  
Chief Executive Officer  
1 October 2024

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# INTRODUCTION

## ROLE AND FUNCTION

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) is a statutory authority that was established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* (Sacred Sites Act). It is responsible for overseeing the protection of sacred sites in the Northern Territory.

Aboriginal sacred sites are places within the landscape that have special meaning or significance under Aboriginal tradition. Hills, rocks, waterholes, trees, plains, lakes, billabongs and other natural features can be sacred sites.

Sacred sites derive their status from their association with particular aspects of Aboriginal social and cultural tradition. This body of tradition is mainly concerned with the activities of ancestral beings, collectively known as 'Dreamings' whose travels across the land and sea are believed to have created the physical and social world that people now inhabit.

## PURPOSE OF THE ANNUAL REPORT

This is an annual report on the administration and operation of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) for the 2023–24 financial year.

The annual report includes the Authority’s financial statements and displays compliance with standards of internal control in accordance with the reporting requirements of the *Financial Management Act 1995*, the Treasurer’s Directions and the policies of the Northern Territory Government.

The annual report also provides the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and the public with an account of the Authority’s performance, responsibilities, activities and business direction for the year ahead.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

This annual report is for our various range of stakeholders: the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, Aboriginal custodians, government agencies, the Northern Territory public and land users across the Northern Territory.



### CUSTODIAN VALUES

- Traditional Law
- Knowledge

### AUTHORITY GUIDING VALUES

- Two Laws
- Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989
- Independence
- Integrity

### CLIENT VALUES

- Legal Certainty
- Advice



Gunlom Falls, NT



# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

MR BOBBY NUNGGUMAJBARR

**This has been a strong year for the Authority.**

**In December 2023, the AAPA board and I travelled to the High Court in Canberra. We were appealing the NT Supreme Court decision that the Director of National Parks (DNP) had crown immunity from offences under the Sacred Sites Act.**

**The matter began when the DNP conducted works on the Gunlom Falls sacred site within the Kakadu National Park without authorisation from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.**

Kakadu is an important place for the whole nation, and Gunlom Falls is a very sacred place for Jawoyn Wurrkubarr people. It is important that Aboriginal people know their sites are safe. No one should be above the law.

On 8 May 2024, the High Court unanimously ruled in favour of the Authority and found the DNP could be prosecuted. This was a proud day for Traditional Owners and custodians who have fought hard to be heard and it clearly shows that the sacred sites laws in the Northern Territory are the strongest in the country. We thank the Northern Land Council for their support in this case.

Now the matter is back in the NT Local Court and we hope it will be resolved soon.

Late last year also saw the great loss of my brother Dr Bush-Blanasi.

Dr Bush-Blanasi was a proud Mayili and Yolngu man, raised in the Wugularr community (Beswick) of Katherine Region. He will forever

be remembered for leading the Northern Land Council and dedicating his life to serving Aboriginal communities in the Top End. He tirelessly fought on behalf of Aboriginal people, especially during the COVID pandemic where he played a vital leadership role ensuring that remote communities were kept safe and protected. It was an honour to see my brother recognised for his hard work and be awarded an honorary doctorate and the Northern Territory Australia of the Year in 2023. His leadership, wisdom and passion will be sorely missed.

Sadly, we have also had to say goodbye this year to a number of custodians who have worked closely with the Authority. On behalf of staff and the board, I would like to acknowledge the passing of these custodians and pay tribute to their important involvement in the protection of sacred sites.

The staff at the Authority have had a busy year and I thank them for their hard work. The Authority is so important in ensuring Aboriginal people can protect their sacred sites right across the Territory as land and water use changes. The work you do has a huge impact, so thank you.

**Bobby Nungumajbarr**  
Chairman



MS VALERIE MARTIN

## DEPUTY CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

**It has been a pleasure to be re-appointed as Deputy Chairman of the Authority Board.**

**The Board is passionate about the work it does in protecting sacred sites. The job of the Board is often testing and requires its members to make tough decisions about how best to protect sacred sites.**

In the reporting period, the Authority registered 38 sacred sites spanning across the Territory including sites in Pellew Islands - Yanyuwa-Marra Country (around West Island), McArthur River Pastoral Lease and Tennant Creek Hinterland. This takes the Authority's total number of registered sacred sites to 2248.

While all sacred sites are protected in the Northern Territory, registering a sacred site establishes its status with comprehensive information required by law, and results in more effective conditions within Authority Certificates. Custodians have asked us to register many sites and the Board and I are focused on ways we can increase the number of sacred site registrations with the help of Land Councils, ranger groups and other custodians. It is a big job.

For more than 40 years, the Authority has protected sacred sites by providing guidance to developers, but the Board remains concerned about rapidly changing land use in the NT,

particularly on pastoral land. The independent, expert processes of the Authority offer not only clear guidance on how to work alongside sacred sites, but give legal protection against prosecution, and can help prevent reputational damage, project delays and extra cost. We encourage all land-users in the Territory to engage with us.

The Authority also continues to show its support for small business, not-for-profit and community activities this year by providing full or partial waivers of our fees for seven projects which included Marlinja Community Solar Project, Langarra Airstrip upgrade and Diminin Wadeye Cemetery upgrades.

This year, AAPA staff travelled more than 55,000 kilometres around the NT. The Board attended meetings in three locations including Darwin, Tennant Creek and in Canberra. I want to thank all members of the Board and AAPA staff for their continued hard work.

**Valerie Martin**  
Deputy Chairman





## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT



DR BENEDICT SCAMBARY

**This year the importance of working with the Northern Territory's Aboriginal custodians through the long-established and clear-cut processes of the Authority has been repeatedly highlighted.**

The Northern Territory is unique in Australia in having a strong, independent and Aboriginal-led system to protect sacred sites whilst supporting development. If landholders and developers use the Authority's services, they can have confidence that any works they undertake will not endanger sites. If the services of the Authority are not used, or are undermined, then there is a very real risk of damage to sacred sites and prosecution.

The World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park is Aboriginal land, leased back to the Commonwealth and jointly managed by National Parks and Aboriginal Traditional Owners. It contains many important sacred sites, including Gunlom Falls, which Aboriginal custodians have shared with visitors for many years. If National Parks had followed the guidance of an Authority Certificate at Gunlom Falls in Kakadu National Park, then a new walkway could have been built without disrupting the sacred site. Instead they decided to fight the Authority in court, claiming crown immunity from the NT Sacred Sites Act.

While this year the constitutional matter was finally resolved in the High Court, with a unanimous decision in favour of the Authority, and the Director of National Parks has publicly apologised and announced an intention to plead guilty, the matter has still not been resolved in the Local Court, and Gunlom Falls is still not open. It has been a very long, distressing road for custodians that could have been easily avoided by working with the Authority.

We also sadly have a number of other prosecutions underway where again, if the Authority had been engaged and its guidance followed then the projects could have proceeded without damage to sacred sites.

Developers in the Territory have at their disposal an effective, respected sacred site framework that delivers clear, consistent advice and provides certainty for investment, but only if they use it. I am pleased to say many do.

The Authority has issued 83 Authority Certificates this year for projects across the Northern Territory, including Berrimah Freight Terminal Expansion project, Rum Jungle Rehabilitation project, Marlinja Community Solar Project and the Darwin Pipeline Duplication project.

We particularly welcome our ongoing engagement with major projects such as the proposed Adelaide River Off-Stream Water Storage (AROWS). AROWS will be located 5km north of Lake Bennett, adjacent to Adelaide River, and the Authority has been working with the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics (DIPL) and the Power and Water Corporation (PWC) to achieve practical solutions to custodian concerns.

Similarly, we are also in regular communication with SunCable in relation to their Australia-Asia Power Link project. The Australia-Asia Power Link Project aims to generate renewable energy in the Northern Territory, to be supplied to customers in Australia and Singapore. The scale of the project involves a significant deployment of resources by the Authority including research and consultation with custodians across the length of the project.

The Authority has also recently launched a revitalised AAPA website. The updated site explains the work of the Authority and assists land-users to access our services, including how to request information and apply for Authority Certificates. It is also home to our annual reports, submissions and media releases, and is frequently updated with sacred sites news from across the country.

The Authority is also continuing work on a multi-year project to develop an improved integrated sacred site database. This will safeguard the record of sacred sites in the NT, streamline internal processes, and simplify and enhance the client experience. We are also in discussion with other regulatory agencies, such as the Pastoral Land Board and the NT Environment Protection Authority, to improve the alignment of regulatory frameworks, and to ensure greater clarity for developers about the protection of Aboriginal cultural values in the landscape.

I would like to thank the Board and the staff of the Authority for their continued hard work and dedication. For a small organisation, we have achieved so much over the last 12 months to deliver sacred site protection alongside complex and changing land and water use.

Dr Benedict Scamبارy  
Chief Executive Officer

## REMEMBERING MS RAELENE SILVERTON 1944-2024

Mrs Silverton was a senior custodian for the lands around the Waterhouse Range, Central Australia.

Mrs Silverton was a board member of the Authority from 1992 to 1999 and provided a strong voice for the protection of sacred sites.

The Authority is grateful for the knowledge and advice she shared with us over the years.



# OUR ORGANISATION

*“The Authority is a regulatory body that operates at the interface of strong Aboriginal law and statutory law in the Northern Territory”.*

- Dr Benedict Scambray, CEO



Berry Springs, NT

## OUR HISTORY

**The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority has existed in several forms for 46 years. Our history is entwined with the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Aboriginal Land Rights Act)* the legislation that gives the Northern Territory the power to pass laws for the protection of sacred sites. That Act provides a foundation for the Sacred Sites Act.**

When the Northern Territory achieved self-government in 1978, one of the first pieces of legislation to be introduced into the new Legislative Assembly was the *Aboriginal Sacred Sites (NT) Bill 1978*. This became law in November 1978 and led to the establishment of a permanent Aboriginal Sacred Sites Authority a year later, which was the precursor to today's Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

The new law was significant in its recognition of Aboriginal culture by empowering Aboriginal people to protect their sites of cultural significance and allowing their sites to be recorded, registered and protected in the context of development.

Under the law, it became an offence to enter, remain on, carry out works on, or desecrate sacred sites anywhere in the NT. Other enduring aspects of today's legal protection were also established at that point, including a Board largely made up of Aboriginal custodians nominated by the Northern Territory's Aboriginal Land Councils, and a clear definition of a sacred site.

The early years brought some controversy between the Authority, the government and developers. The general public had little understanding of sacred sites and their meaning and importance to Aboriginal people. However, under the strong leadership of senior Aboriginal chairpeople, including the late Mr Raphael Aputimi OAM and Mr Wenten Rubuntja AM, the Authority worked hard to bridge this gap by engaging with government and developers to negotiate workable solutions.

Throughout the 1980s, there were numerous proposals to amend the *Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1978 (NT)*. In 1988, due to concerns around the Act, the NT Government introduced the Aboriginal Areas Protection Bill (NT) in an attempt to strike a more effective balance between protecting sacred sites and supporting development in the NT.

The government continued negotiations with the Authority and Land Councils over amendments to the sacred sites legislation, which led to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act (1989) and the establishment of the current Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

Under the legislation the Authority is recognised as the expert body for identifying and consulting with Aboriginal custodians and for issuing Authority Certificates. All Authority Certificates reflect consultation with custodians about development plans and set out clear conditions under which work can proceed near sacred sites. While Authority Certificates are voluntary, they give developers, businesses and individuals certainty about how to protect sacred sites.

The Sacred Sites Act also greatly strengthened the penalty provisions for entering, working on or desecrating a sacred site, and all sites registered by the Authority were now to be considered *prima facie* sacred sites. The legislation also extended protection to sites located within the sea or other bodies of water.

In 2019, following the acceptance of all 135 recommendations of the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory, the *Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016* were amended so that Authority Certificates must be obtained as part of all environmental management plans (EMPs) for hydraulic fracturing projects. Additionally, the Authority must be given a copy of any hydraulic fracturing applications and the opportunity to consult with custodians and provide comments to the relevant decision maker.

These changes have placed the Authority into the regulatory regime and approvals process for all onshore petroleum activities in the NT. The benefit for proponents and stakeholders alike is that the streamlined process reduces the risk of delays and duplication of work and ensures sacred sites are adequately considered for all hydraulic fracturing projects.

### AAPA BOARD CHAIRS

**1979 – 1982**

RAPHAEL APUATIMI OAM

**1982 – 1985**

WENTEN RUBUNTJA AM

**1986 – 1997**

MUSSOLINI HARVEY AM

**1997 – 2007**

ROY HAMMER

**2007 – 2009**

MILLIWANGA SANDY

**2009 – 2015**

BERNARD ABBOTT

**2015-2016**

JENNY INMULUGULU

**2016 – 2019**

PHILIP WILYUKA

**2019 –  
CURRENT**

BOBBY  
NUNNGUMAJBARR

# KEY SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE AUTHORITY

Under the *Northern Territory Sacred Sites Act 1989*, the *Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA)* is responsible for overseeing the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites on land and sea across the whole of Australia's Northern Territory.

Primarily AAPA protects sacred sites by:

- Recording and maintaining of the register of sacred sites in the Northern Territory, and providing information to the public.
- Issuing Authority Certificates, which set out the conditions by which work can proceed on and around sacred sites.

## AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

Anyone proposing to use or work on land in the Northern Territory may apply to the Authority for an Authority Certificate to cover their proposed activities.

We issue these Certificates based on consultations with custodians, and the Certificates include clear conditions on what can and cannot be done in and around sacred sites.

An Authority Certificate provides a defence against prosecution in relation to the works or uses covered by the Authority Certificate, if the applicant complies with any conditions imposed to protect sacred sites.

While Authority Certificates are voluntary, with the exception of regulated activities under the *Petroleum (Environment) Regulations Act 2016 (NT)*, prior to

Ministerial approval of an Environmental Management Plan for that activity, they are an effective risk management tool for developers because they indicate where sacred sites are and how to work in and around them. This helps prevent desecration of a sacred site, which can lead to prosecution, reputational damage, project delays and extra cost.

## REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Members of the public can seek advice on sacred sites by requesting access to the register of sacred sites. AAPA provides abstracts of records on where sacred sites are known to exist, so they are not inadvertently damaged.

These abstracts give information at a point in time on the sacred sites that are likely to be at risk if works are carried out without seeking more detailed information. AAPA might advise that works should not be carried out on these sacred sites without an Authority Certificate and that any development proposals must take into account the sacred site's existence.

## THE REGISTRATION OF ABORIGINAL SACRED SITES

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

AAPA then conducts anthropological research, including consulting with Aboriginal custodians and reviewing the register for any historical information that may be available on the proposed sacred site to determine the site's location, boundaries and significance in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. Landowners are given an opportunity to comment on the proposed registration before it's presented to the Authority Board.

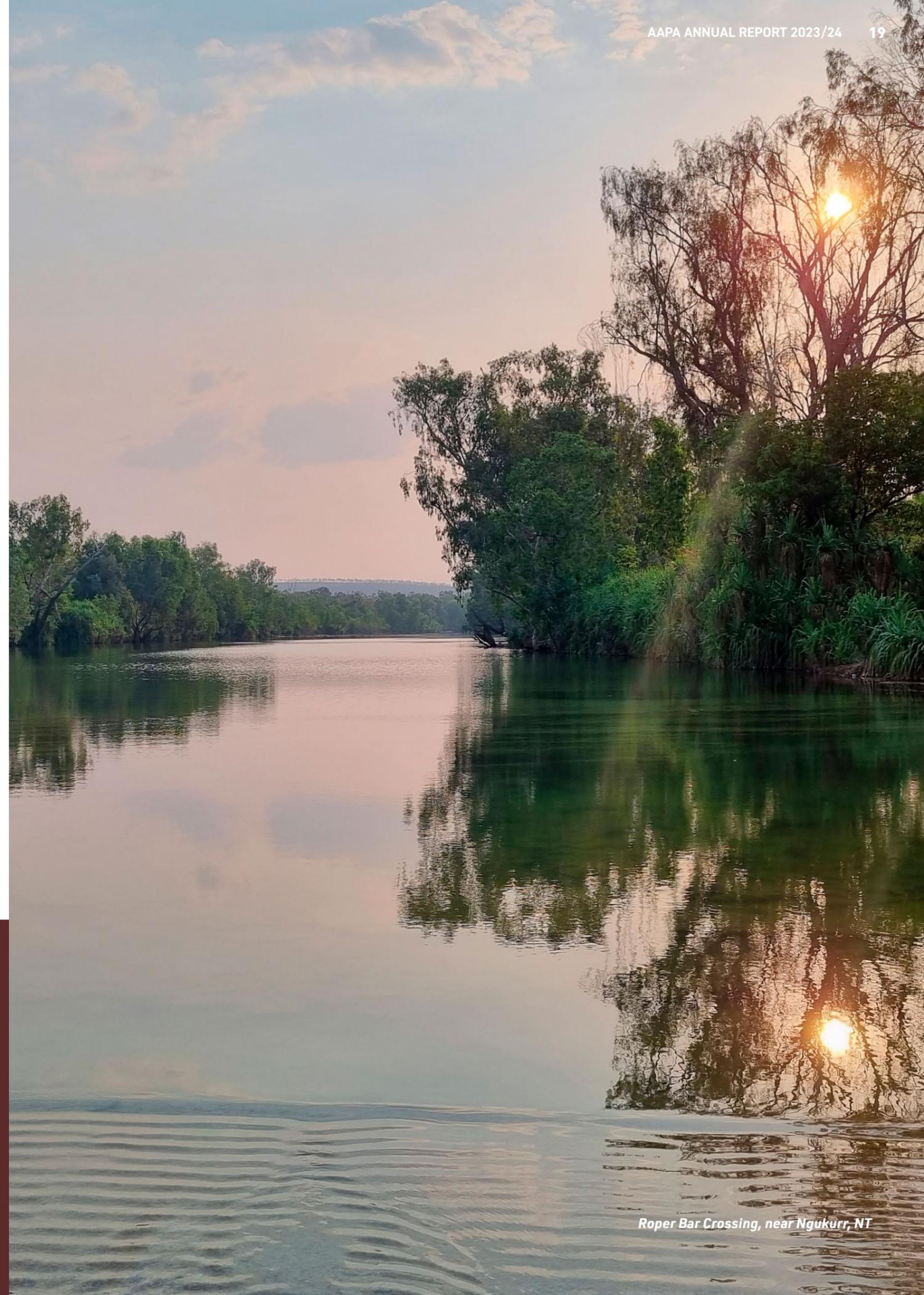
In accordance with the Sacred Sites Act, staff present a report on that information to the Authority board for registration approval.

# OUR STAKEHOLDERS

The Authority serves a diverse range of stakeholders:

- Northern Territory and Australian Government agencies
- Aboriginal custodians and Traditional Owners
- Industry groups (including tourism, mining and pastoral industry)
- The Defence Force
- Land Councils
- Local Governments and Shires
- Communication network companies
- Environmental Managers (including Aboriginal rangers)
- Private and non-government organisations who use land across the Territory.

The Authority strives to meet the needs of all stakeholders in protecting sacred sites.



Roper Bar Crossing, near Ngukurr, NT



## GIFT TO THE AUTHORITY

This year the Authority was honoured to receive a beautiful artwork by Gaypalani Wanambi etched onto the back of an old Authority 'protected trees' aluminium sign. It now hangs proudly in the Authority foyer as part of a broader installation of historic signage.

The work is about Wuyal – the ancestral sugarbag man. He is an important ancestor of the Marrakulu clan of northeast Arnhem Land. The etching represents the journey of Wuyal where he named important sites and animals.

The piece refers to the continuation of Marrakulu culture through dance, song and ceremonies, which are still performed by the current generations who have inherited the knowledge, culture and understanding from ancestral figures like Wuyal.

Throughout the Northern Territory, sacred trees are prominent features of sacred sites in the narratives of many, many custodian groups, and are associated with ancestral figures and Dreamtime stories.

*Protected Trees by Gaypalani Wanambi Artwork*

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027



**Aboriginal Areas  
Protection Authority**  
*protecting sacred sites across the territory*

## 2024 TO 2027 STRATEGIC PLAN

### MISSION STATEMENT

Protecting sacred sites across the Territory

### GOAL

#### Raise Community Awareness

Grow community awareness of the importance of Aboriginal sacred sites across the Northern Territory

#### Elevate the Client Experience

Optimise processes to achieve greater efficiencies and legal certainty

#### Grow our Expertise

Grow our expertise to drive our strategic priorities

#### Build Digital Connectivity

Deliver digital platforms to streamline and enhance the AAPA experience for all users

### OUTCOME

Increased community and stakeholder awareness

Delivery of consistent service that meets client and stakeholder expectations through development of a streamlined service delivery model

A high performing workforce with the requisite specialist expertise

Tailored digital platforms that are secure and responsive to the changing context of Aboriginal Sacred site protection

### OUR VALUES

**Custodian Values** Traditional Law and Knowledge

**Authority Guiding Values** Two Laws, Sacred Sites Act, Independence and Integrity

**Client Values** Legal Certainty, Advice.



## ORGANISATION HIGHLIGHTS IN 2023-24

The Authority registered  
**38 sacred sites**  
during Authority Board Meetings

**44%** of the  
**Authority Certificates**  
issued were within 3 months

The Authority completed  
**940 requests for information**  
from the Authority's records

Authority staff and consultants spent  
**424 days in the field**

The Authority issued  
**83 Authority Certificates**

The Authority subsidised  
community projects to the value of  
**\$134,302**

# GOVERNANCE

*"As leaders in our communities, we offer expertise, guidance and advice to sacred sites and broader cultural issues"*

- Mr Bobby Nunggumajbarr



AAPA Board members at the 139th AAPA Board Meeting in Tennant Creek, NT

**The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority board comprises 12 members. Ten of those members are custodians nominated by Northern Territory land councils in equal numbers: five males and five females. Two members are nominated by the Northern Territory Government.**

The Administrator of the Northern Territory appoints members by notice in the Northern Territory Government Gazette.

The Administrator also appoints Aboriginal members as the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the board, who must be of opposite gender, based on nominations from the Authority Board members.

To fill vacancies for Aboriginal custodian members of the board, the land councils are requested to nominate a panel of twice the number of custodians of the relevant gender.

## AUTHORITY BOARD MEETINGS

Under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989, the Authority generally meets four times each calendar year.

In the 2023-24 financial year, the Chairman called the following meetings:

139th board meeting	29-30 August 2023	Tennant Creek
140th board meeting	10 December 2023	Canberra
141st board meeting	19-20th March 2024	Darwin



AAPA Board members, CEO outside High Court of Australia in Canberra

# ABORIGINAL AREAS PROTECTION AUTHORITY BOARD



**MR BOBBY NUNGGUMAJBARR**  
Chairman

Region: Roper Basin  
First appointed: 29 September 2015  
Date re-appointed: 2 November 2021

Mr Bobby Nunggumajbarr is a senior Nunggubuyu man from Numbulwar in south-eastern Arnhem Land. He has had a long and distinguished career in public administration and has held various positions on the Yugul Mangi Community Government Council in Ngukurr and the Roper Gulf Shire. Until recently, he was the Senior Project Officer in charge of the Northern Land Council's Ngukurr office, a role he held for more than 15 years. Mr Nunggumajbarr is widely respected for his knowledge and authority in Ngukurr and is highly regarded as a community facilitator. Mr Nunggumajbarr is the elected Chairman of the board since 2019.



**MS VALERIE MARTIN**  
Deputy Chairman

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

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



**MS BARBARA SHAW**

Region: Alice Springs Hinterland  
First appointed: 27 March 2019  
Date re-appointed: 1 June 2022

Ms Barbara Shaw is the inaugural chair of the NT Aboriginal Investment Corporation. She is also Deputy Chair of the Central Land Council, and Executive Member. Ms Shaw is a youth worker in Alice Springs and has been co-chair of the Aboriginal Housing NT, co-ordinator of the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group and a former engagement officer with the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.



**MR CHRISTOPHER NEADE**

Region: Barkly Central  
Date appointed: 2 November 2021

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



**MS JENNIFER YANTARRNGA**

Region: Arnhem Land East  
Date appointed: 24 August 2021

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



**MS LORRAINE JONES**

Region: Victoria River Basin  
Date appointed: 24 August 2021

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



**MR NEVILLE PETRICK**

Region: Plenty River Basin  
First appointed: 27 March 2019  
Date re-appointed: 1 June 2022

Mr Neville Petrick is from McDonald Downs in the Northern Territory and is the Executive Council representative on the Central Land Council for the Eastern Plenty region. He speaks Alyawarr, Arrernte and English.



**MS JENNY INMULUGULU**

Region: Arnhem Land West  
First appointed: 26 April 2006  
Date re-appointed: 2 November 2021

Ms Jenny Inmulugulu is a traditional owner of Warruwi community on South Goulburn Island. She has been a member of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority since 2006 and served as Deputy Chairman from 2008 to 2012. Ms Inmulugulu is a member of the Northern Land Council. As a senior woman for her clan, she is a strong advocate for her community, with a focus on youth engagement and business enterprises.



**MR WALTER KERINAUIA JUNIOR**

Region: Tiwi Islands  
First appointed: 31 August 2015  
Date re-appointed: 24 August 2021

Mr Walter Kerinauia Junior is from the Mantiyupwi clan group and is one of the senior 'culture men' on the Tiwi Islands. He is a past member of the Tiwi Islands Regional Council/Tiwi Islands Land Council and past Director of Mantiyupwi Pty Ltd. Mr Kerinauia Junior has been the long-time Trustee of the Mantiyupwi land-owning group, which takes in southern parts of both Bathurst and Melville islands.



**MR GEOFFREY MATTHEWS**

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

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



**MS AMY DENNISON**

Government Appointment  
First appointed: 13 July 2021

Ms Amy Dennison is the Executive Director of the Environment Regulation Division in the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security. She was the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority for around 10 months during 2019-2020. Ms Dennison completed a Master of Public Administration as a Fulbright Scholar from the Harvard Kennedy School in 2019.



**MR NIGEL BROWNE**

Government Appointment  
First appointed: 13 July 2021

Mr Nigel Browne is a descendent of the Larrakia and Wulna peoples. He has held the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Larrakia Development Corporation since 2013, and is a Director with The Healing Foundation. Mr Browne is also a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

# AUTHORITY OPERATIONS

## PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNANCE

The Authority's governance framework aims to ensure the Authority carries out its functions effectively, efficiently and in line with its responsibilities under the Sacred Sites Act.

This includes:

- effective human resources management practices;
- quality control for data and outputs;
- developing risk management strategies; and
- planning and developing a strategic plan.

## HOW THE AUTHORITY IS GOVERNED

The primary policy and decision-making body is the Authority (the Board), established under section 5 of the Sacred Sites Act. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is appointed by the Administrator, and is charged with carrying out the decisions of the Authority.

All other Authority staff are employed directly by the Authority, under section 17 of the Sacred Sites Act.

Section 19 provides for the Authority to delegate certain powers or functions. The CEO holds some of these delegations and is responsible for the Authority's overall operation. The CEO also exercises responsibilities under the *Financial Management Act 1995*.

## HOW THE AUTHORITY IS MANAGED

The CEO maintains overall responsibility for the Authority's day-to-day operation.

To ensure the smooth functioning of the office, the CEO chairs weekly Executive Management Group meetings and fortnightly staff meetings. Each operational group also meets regularly to ensure the effective flow of information.

The Authority's operational groups are Research, Corporate Services, and Policy and Governance.

# ORGANISATIONAL CHART



Mount Doreen Ruins NT

# LEGISLATION AND POLICY

## COMMONWEALTH AND NORTHERN TERRITORY LAWS

The establishment of the Sacred Sites Act by the Northern Territory Government was enabled by section 73 of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976*, which gives the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly power to enact laws:

*'73(1)(a) laws providing for the protection of, and the prevention of the desecration of, sacred sites in the Northern Territory, including sacred sites on Aboriginal land, and, in particular, laws regulating or authorising the entry of persons on those sites, but so that any such laws shall provide for the right of Aboriginals to have access to those sites in accordance with Aboriginal tradition and shall take into account the wishes of Aboriginals relating to the extent to which those sites should be protected.'*

*The Sacred Sites Act was passed under this power to establish procedures for the protection and registration of sacred sites and the avoidance of sacred sites in the development and use of land.*

*The protection of sacred sites in the NT is furthermore aided by section 69 of the Land Rights Act, which broadly prohibits entry and remaining on any land in the Northern Territory that is a sacred site, unless a law of the Northern Territory specifies otherwise.*

## ABORIGINAL SACRED SITE PROTECTION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Aboriginal sacred sites are recognised and protected as an integral part of Northern Territory and Australian cultural heritage under both the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* and the *Sacred Sites Act*

Both Acts define a sacred site as:

**'...a site that is sacred to Aboriginals or is otherwise of significance according to Aboriginal tradition...'**

## LANDOWNERS AND DEVELOPERS

The Authority strives to achieve practical outcomes in its operations by balancing the interests of sacred site custodians, landowners and developers, whilst always protecting sacred sites.

As the use and development of land evolves, alongside onshore gas and other mining activities, there is increasing need for the Authority to develop sophisticated responses to ensure the ongoing protection of sacred sites.

Landowners and developers have certain rights under the Sacred Sites Act:

- Section 28 provides the opportunity for landowners to make representations on the prospective registration of a sacred site.
- Section 44 explicitly deals with landowners' rights to use land comprised in a sacred site consistent with the protection of sacred sites. Authority Certificates provide a legal instrument to accommodate such land use.
- Under section 48A, if the application of the Sacred Sites Act in a particular case would result in an acquisition of property other than on just terms, then the person affected is entitled to such compensation as a court may decide.

As well as protecting the fabric of sacred sites in the context of land ownership and development, the Sacred Sites Act provides for Aboriginal people to have access to sacred sites 'in accordance with Aboriginal tradition'.

In accordance with the Sacred Sites Act, all sacred sites are protected regardless of underlying land title, registration status or whether they are known to the Authority.

The specific sections of the Sacred Sites Act relevant to the protection of sacred sites are sections 33 (unauthorised entry), 34 (unauthorised works or uses) and 35 (desecration), which sets out the various offences in relation to sacred sites.

## RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER NORTHERN TERRITORY HERITAGE LEGISLATION

Section 128 (2)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2011* states that the Heritage Council must include a representative of the Authority. Mr Robert Pocock, Director Aboriginal Justice Unit, Department of the Attorney General and Justice serves as the Authority's representative.

## EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT GROUP

The Authority's Executive Management Group comprises of senior managers from the organisation's operational areas and is chaired by the CEO.

The purpose of the EMG is to provide the CEO with advice and support about a range of strategic and operational matters. The group's key functions include monitoring the organisation's performance, setting the Authority's strategic direction and priorities, implementing the strategic plan and addressing critical issues facing the organisation.

During the 2023-2024 financial year, the EMG members were:

- Dr Ben Scambary, Chief Executive Officer
- Cameron McInerney, Director, Policy and Governance
- Nicola Jackson, Director, Corporate Services
- Shannon Tchia, Director, Research
- Jitendra Kumarage, Acting Director Research

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) CHANGE ADVISORY BOARD

The role of this board is to improve the efficiency of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority's ICT systems and to foster an environment for the free exchange of ideas within the Authority. The board's responsibilities include:

- review of business cases, project plans, software upgrades for ICT initiatives and investment decisions
- provide leadership, resources and champion the approved ICT projects and changes
- report on ICT projects to the Authority's EMG on an as needs basis
- increase the awareness of staff regarding ICT processes, policies and standards and any upcoming ICT changes and projects

The members of the ICT Change Advisory Board were the CEO, Corporate Services Director, Registrar, Client Services Manager, Research Manager, Alice Springs Office Manager, Senior Business Officer, Director Policy and Governance and Systems and Information Manager.

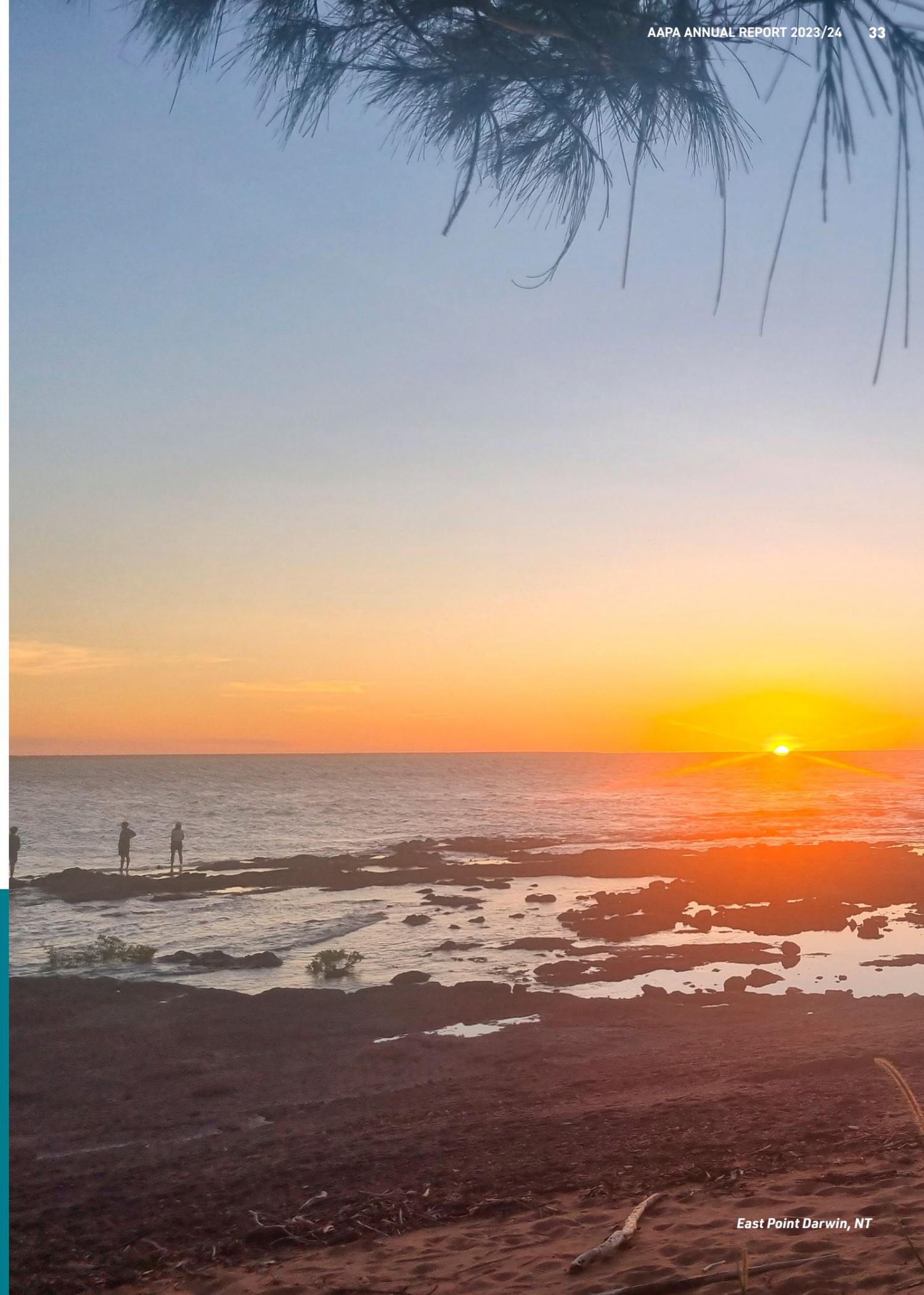
## COMMITTEES

### AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to provide independent assurance and assistance to the CEO on the effectiveness of the Authority's audit, risk management and internal control processes, to assist the CEO achieve their external accountability and legislative compliance responsibilities and therefore improving the Authority's governance arrangements.

The committee will undertake the following functions:

- Monitor strategic, reputational, corporate and operational risk management and the adequacy of the internal controls established to manage identified risks;
- Monitor the adequacy of the Authority's internal control environment and review the adequacy of policies, practices, and procedures in relation to their contribution to, and impact on, the Authority's internal control environment.
- Monitor the internal audit function (including development and implementation of the internal audit plan, coordination of audit programs, monitoring of internal audit findings, including managements responses to, and implementation of the audit recommendations)
- Monitor the Northern Territory Auditor-General's audit program; audit findings, including reports to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and the Authority's responses to, and implementation of the audit recommendations.
- Review the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements prior to their approval by the CEO; and
- Within the context of the committee's purpose, undertake any other functions determined from time to time by the CEO.



# PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

## NOTABLE AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

### INFRASTRUCTURE

The Authority supported the infrastructure and investment priorities of the Northern Territory and Federal Government by issuing Certificates for:

- Kakadu National Park radio repair works
- Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project
- Manton Dam Geo-spatial and Geo-scientific Earth Monitoring Ground Station
- Gapuwiyak Barge Landing, Fuel Storage and Transfer Facility
- Jim Jim Ranger Station Water Supply
- Larapinta Trail Construction

### MINING/EXPLORATION & OIL AND GAS

The Authority issued 13 Authority Certificates to ensure the protection of sacred sites within mining, oil and gas works throughout the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory's *Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016* stipulate an Authority Certificate must be obtained for petroleum activities. Four Certificates were issued in accordance with the Petroleum Regulations including Tamboran Shenandoah, Nolans Rare Earth Project and Mereenie Field Clearance.

Mining and exploration only equated 16% of all Authority Certificates issued in 2023-24. It translated to 26% or \$0.858M of revenue.

## WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

### ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS AND ENTERPRISES

The Authority works with and supports a wide range of Aboriginal organisations and projects.

This year, the Authority issued three certificates to Groote Holdings Aboriginal Corporation for Little Paradise Infrastructure Development, Trepang Project and a Worker Accommodation Camp.

Certificates were also issued to the Milingimbi Outstations Progress and Resource Aboriginal Corporation for the Langarra Airstrip upgrades. A certificate was issued to Original Power for the Marlinja Community Solar Project and AAPA provided a certificate for the Melanka Accelerated Accommodation.

### LAND COUNCILS

- The Authority works with and supports the local Land Councils in the Northern Territory and their projects.
- This year, the Authority issued a certificate to the Northern Land Council for Diminin Wadeye Cemetery Upgrades and a certificate to Anindilyakwa Land Council for a services corridor from Milyakburra to Bickerton College.

## COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

### PRESENTATIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS

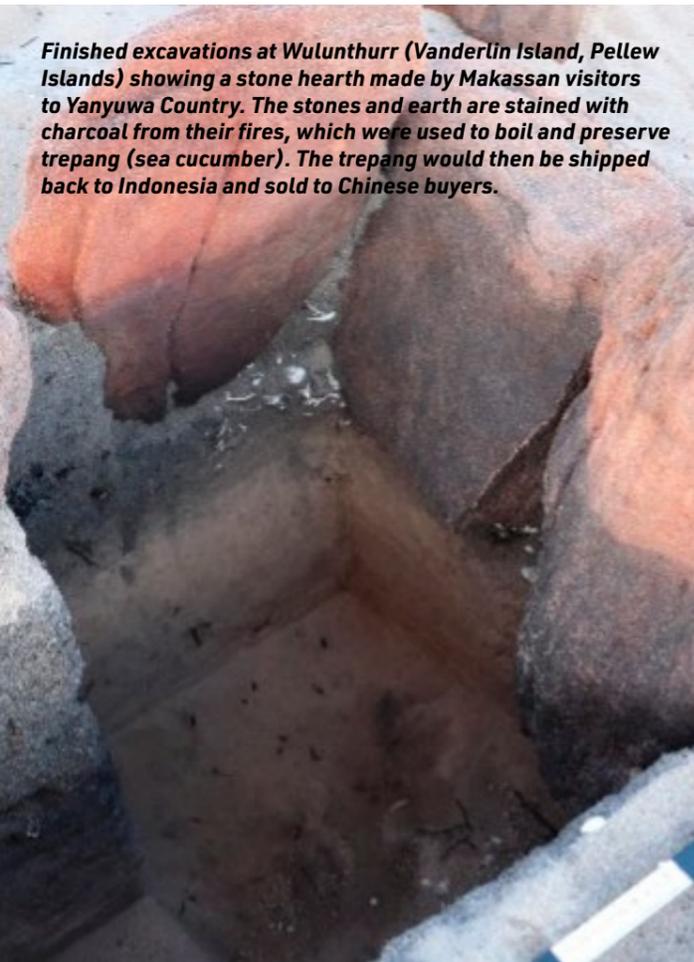
In 2023-2024 the Authority delivered presentations to various industry holders:

- Central Land Council Executive Management
- Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation
- Water Justice Hub
- Pastoral Land Board
- Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics

Two of the Authority's board members spoke at the 'Water Justice Hub Forum' and presented on Sacred Site Protections.



*The dig in progress at Jalabuwaja (Harney Island, Pellew Islands). Right to left: li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers Shaun Evans and Shade Evans, Monash University archaeologist Robert Skelly.*



*Finished excavations at Wulunthurr (Vanderlin Island, Pellew Islands) showing a stone hearth made by Makassan visitors to Yanyuwa Country. The stones and earth are stained with charcoal from their fires, which were used to boil and preserve trepang (sea cucumber). The trepang would then be shipped back to Indonesia and sold to Chinese buyers.*

## YANYUWA MAKASSAN PLACES ARCHAEOLOGY RESEARCH PROJECT

In July 2024, AAPA supported an archaeological research project coordinated by the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit in Borrooloola. The project is a partnership between Yanyuwa Families and Monash University researchers. They are investigating the history of Makassan (Indonesian) sailing visits to Yanyuwa Country.

Indonesian fishers came from the 1750s (or maybe earlier) to harvest sea cucumber (trepang) and worked closely with Aboriginal people.

Today, there are many Makassan sites across the Top End. All that remains of these places are stone arrangements (the remains of hearths used to boil and preserve the trepang) and pieces of pottery, metal and glass.

The research team is working to learn more about these sites in the Pellew Islands (Southwest Gulf of Carpentaria). When did the Makassans first visit Yanyuwa Country? What did these relationships look like?

In 2024, the team excavated at two stone arrangements. Learning on Country, students from the Borrooloola School helped dig and learned about how archaeology works. They will get carbon dates from pieces of charcoal from the hearths to find out how old they are. The project will continue in 2025–2028, with funding from the Australian Government.



*Scenic shot near Oanpelli, NT*

# MEDIA

Over the past year, the Authority has continued to engage with the media about the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites across the Northern Territory.

The High Court case relating to works at Gunlom Falls in Kakadu National Park saw the AAPA Board and traditional custodians travel to Canberra at the end of 2023. This resulted in substantial local and national media including on 7.30, the Guardian, and news.com.

Further media followed, including the NT News and the ABC Law Report, when the High Court unanimously found that the Director of National Parks could be prosecuted under the NT Sacred Sites Act.

Other ongoing prosecutions that have generated media interest include a joint prosecution with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade relating to the alleged unauthorised removal of turquoise from within a sacred site, and a prosecution against

the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics for alleged damage to sacred trees near the community of Arlparra.

The Authority was also drawn into the media ahead of the 2024 Territory Day celebrations, when it was wrongly stated that Aboriginal custodians and the Authority had forced the fireworks at Mindil Beach to be relocated. Mindil Beach is a registered sacred site of utmost significance to Larrakia people and a place that is celebrated by the Darwin community. The Authority did not provide any advice recommending Territory Day celebrations be moved from Mindil Beach.

In addition, the Authority provided media comment on issues such as the Defence Housing Australia development at Lee Point, and the management of sacred sites within Alice Springs.

In 2023-24 the Authority distributed seven media releases.



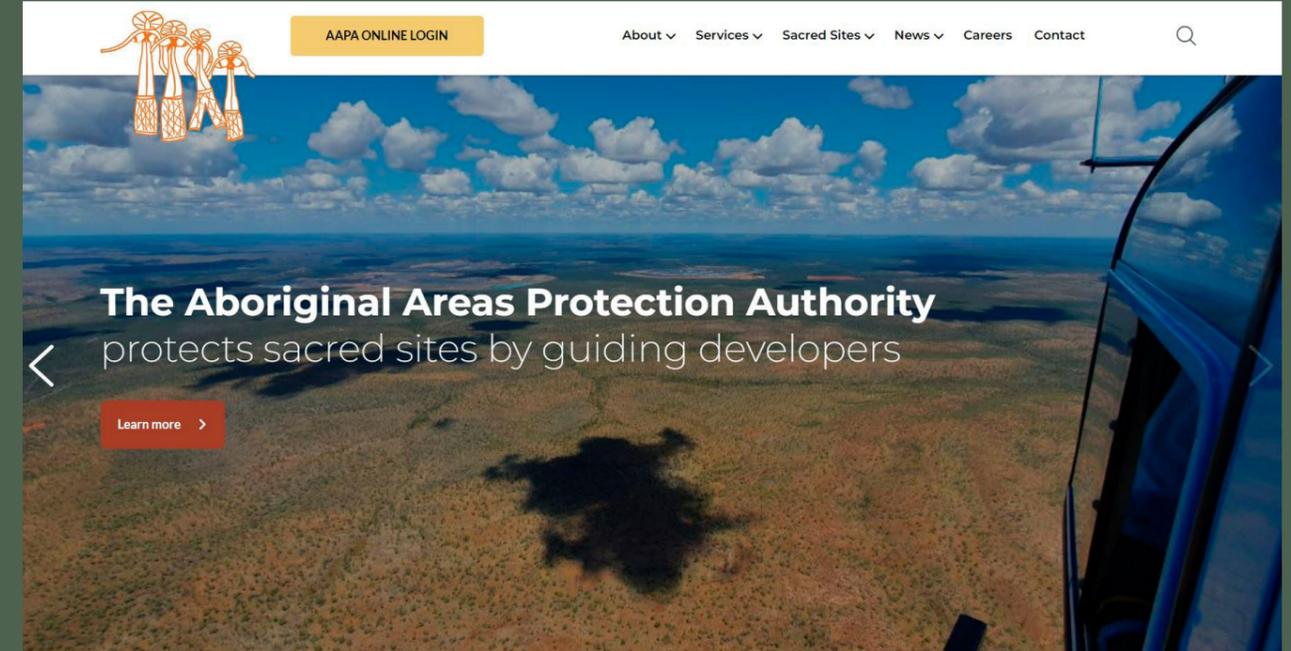
NT News front page, December 11, 2023

## LANDMARK RULING OVER KAKADU DAMAGE

# High court rules parks director 'not immune'



NT News Article on High Court decision



AAPA Website Homepage

## AAPA WEBSITE

At the end of 2023, the Authority launched a revitalised AAPA website: [www.aapant.org.au](http://www.aapant.org.au)

The revised site is designed to explain the work of the Authority and facilitate the use of its services. It provides clear-cut information about what sacred sites are, what they mean for development and how to apply for Authority Certificates. It also includes a Careers tab to highlight the jobs that are currently available within the Authority, and is frequently updated with sacred sites news from across the country.

Casuarina Coastal Reserve, NT



## SUBMISSIONS AND COMMENTS

The Authority has provided written submissions on topics that that would benefit from consideration of potential impacts on Aboriginal Sacred Sites. This includes discussion papers, consultation plans and submissions through the Northern Territory Government Have Your Say page.

The Authority provides comments for Environmental Management Plans (EMP), Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and provides comment to Development Assessment Services (DAS), the Pastoral Land Board (PLB) and to the Pastoral Assessment team.

In 2023-24, the Authority provided comment on eight EMP's and 12 EPA's.

In 2023-24, the Authority made a total of 109 comments.

The Authority has also provided input on eight submissions which include;

- Proposed changes to the Casuarina Coastal Reserve
- Future National Water Agreement discussion paper
- Kuyunba Conservation Reserve Draft Management Plan
- Mac Clark Conservation Reserve Draft Management Plan
- Santos Barossa Production Operations Activity – preliminary consultation
- Consultation requirements under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Environment) Regulations
- Draft Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan
- Draft Mataranka Water Allocation Plan

## SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS

### ADELAIDE RIVER OFF-STREAM WATER STORAGE (AROWS)

The proposed AROWS project will be located 5km north of Lake Bennett, adjacent to Adelaide River. The Authority has been working with the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics (DIPL) and Power and Water Corporation (PWC) in relation to the AROWS projects, to ensure the expanded AROWS project area does not adversely impact sacred sites.

### THE AUSTRALIA – ASIA POWER LINK PROJECT

The Australia - Asia Power Link Project aims to generate renewable energy in the Northern Territory, to be supplied to customers in Australia, Singapore and other Asian markets.

The Authority is in regular communication with the proponent in relation to their project and the requirements of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989*. The scale of the project involves a significant deployment of resources by AAPA including for research purposes and for consultation with custodians across the length of the project.



Howard Island, East Arnhem, NT

Adelaide River, NT

# PERFORMANCE REPORT

## PROTECTION OF SACRED SITES

**The Authority's overall performance in a financial year is quantified by the requests for information (of registers and other archives) and the number, size and complexity of Authority Certificate applications issued.**

Timeliness is assessed by the average number of days between acceptance of costs for Authority Certificate applications or requests for information and the issuing of those requests.

Quality is reflected in the number of statutory appeals on Authority decisions under part III, division 3 of the Sacred Sites Act or section 9 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 (Cth)*.

The Authority reports against agreed performance measures as part of its output performance. These performance measures provide an indication of the Authority's current workload and performance.

### OUTPUT GROUP:

Provide statutory services for the protection and registration of sacred sites and the avoidance of sacred sites in the economic development and use of land.

### OUTCOME:

Enhanced relations between Aboriginal custodians and the wider Territory community by increasing the level of certainty when identifying constraints, if any, on land and sea use proposals from the existence of sacred sites.

## AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

Anyone proposing to use or work on land in the Northern Territory may apply to the Authority for an Authority Certificate to cover their proposed activities.

Authority Certificates are based on consultations with custodians, which define clear conditions on what can and cannot be done in and around sacred sites.

An Authority Certificate provides a defence against prosecution if the applicant complies with conditions imposed to protect sacred sites.

While Authority Certificates are voluntary (except for onshore petroleum activities), they are an effective risk management tool for developers because they indicate where sacred sites are and how to work in and around them. This helps prevent desecration of the site, which can lead to prosecution, project delays and reputational damage.

## QUANTITY

In 2023-24, the Authority received 158 Authority Certificate applications. A total of 83 Authority Certificates were issued for projects across the NT, and 45 applications were withdrawn.

## ISSUED AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

The 83 Authority Certificates issued by the Authority in 2023-24 is a decrease from last year's total of 131 but comparable to previous years.

Figure 1: Key performance indicator

Key performance Indicator	Actual 2020-21	Actual 2021-22	Actual 2022-23	Target 2023-24	Actual 2023-24
Authority Certificates issued	111	92	131	100	83
Requests for information completed	971	896	873	800	940
Average time between receiving Authority Certificate application and completing service	130 days	135 days	144 days	≤120 days	125 days
Average time between receiving request for information and completing service	2.53 days	1.9 days	2.2 days	≤3days	3.2 days
Statutory appeals	1 appeal (ongoing from 2018-19)	0	0	<1%	2 appeals

## WITHDRAWN AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

The 45 applications withdrawn by applicants in 2023-24 is a minor increase from the 38 applications withdrawn in 2022-23.

Of the 45 withdrawn applications, two were withdrawn by Telstra. The other main user groups that withdrew their applications included the Department of Defence, IGO Limited and Spinnaker Resources Pty Limited.

## REFUSED AUTHORITY CERTIFICATES

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

Figure 2: Number of Authority Certificates received, issued, withdrawn and refused from 2020 to 2024

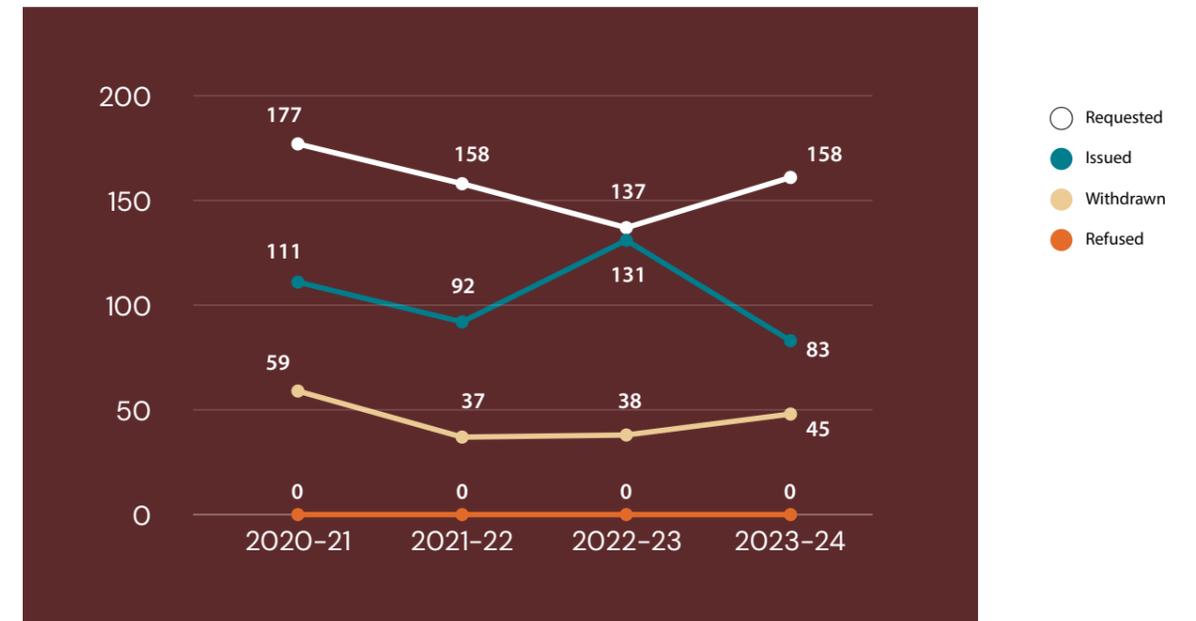
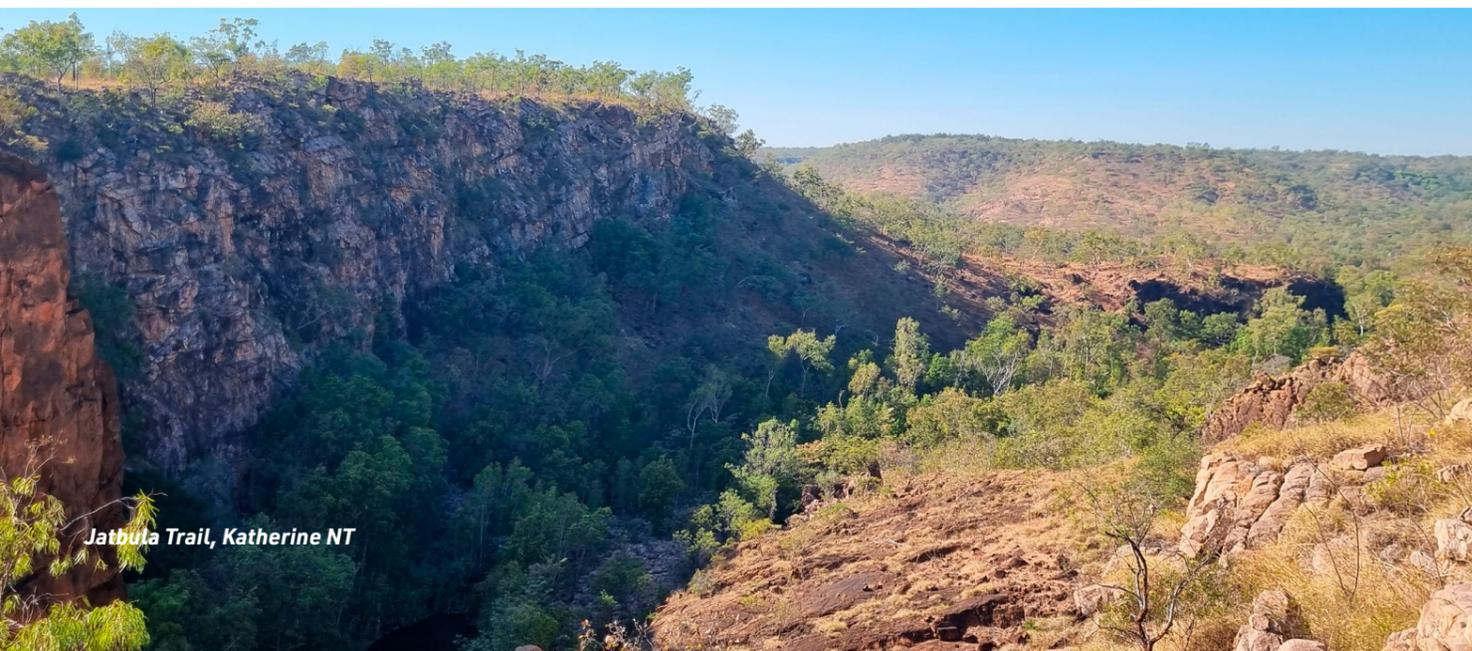
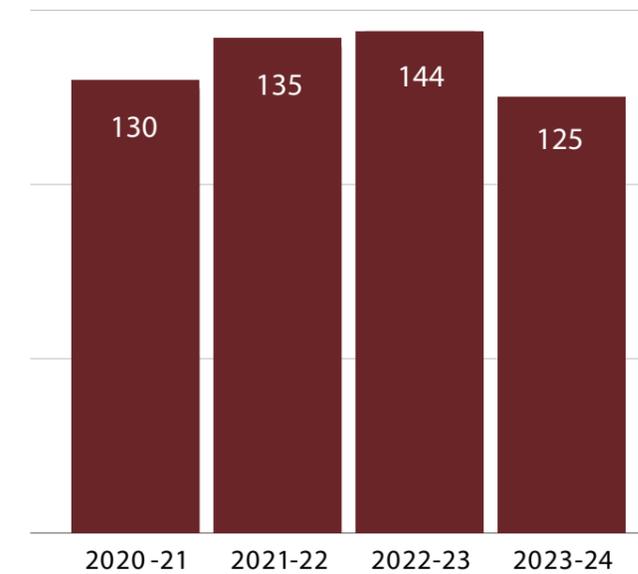
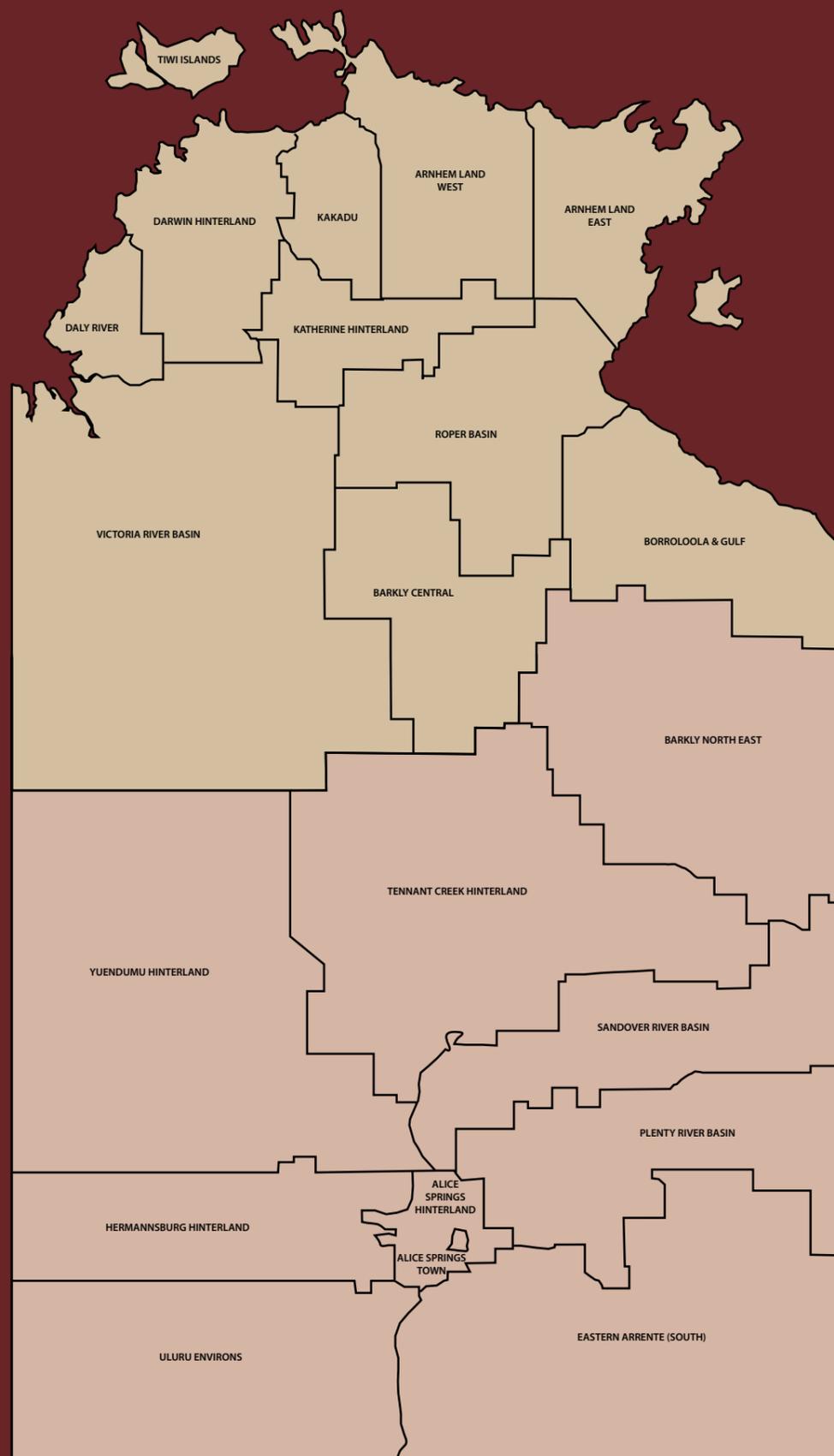


Figure 3: Number of days to issue an Authority Certificate



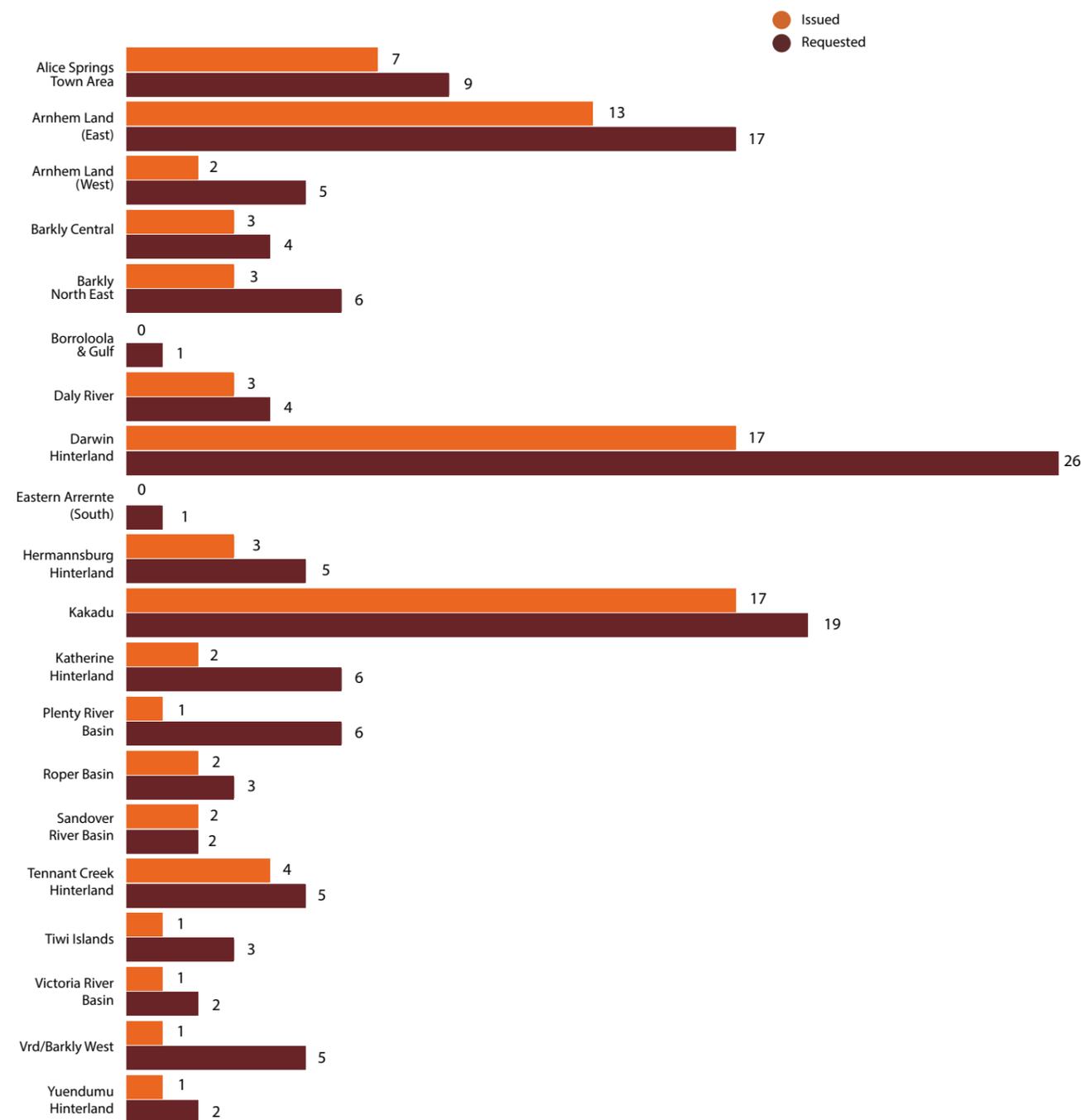
Jatbula Trail, Katherine NT



## REGIONAL PICTURE

In 2023-24, the highest demand for Authority Certificates were in the regions of the Darwin Hinterland (26), Kakadu (19) and Arnhem Land (East) (17).

**Figure 4:** Authority Certificate issued (83) and requested (131) user group



### SERVICE USERS

The NT Government was issued the largest number of Authority Certificates in 2023-24 and represents 33% of all certificates. The government's public works include in the infrastructure and planning, tourism-related activities, roadworks and natural resource management in both urban and regional areas across the NT. The second largest demand came from private individuals/companies with 19% or 16 certificates issued.

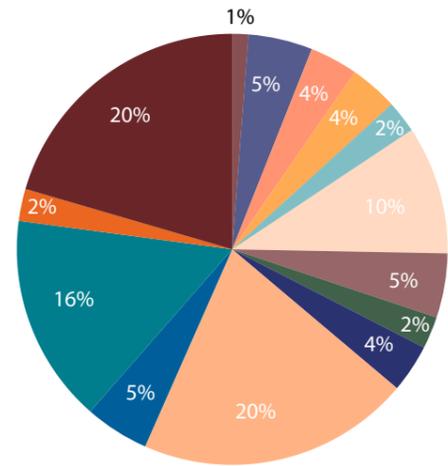


Figure 5: Issued certificate Project types

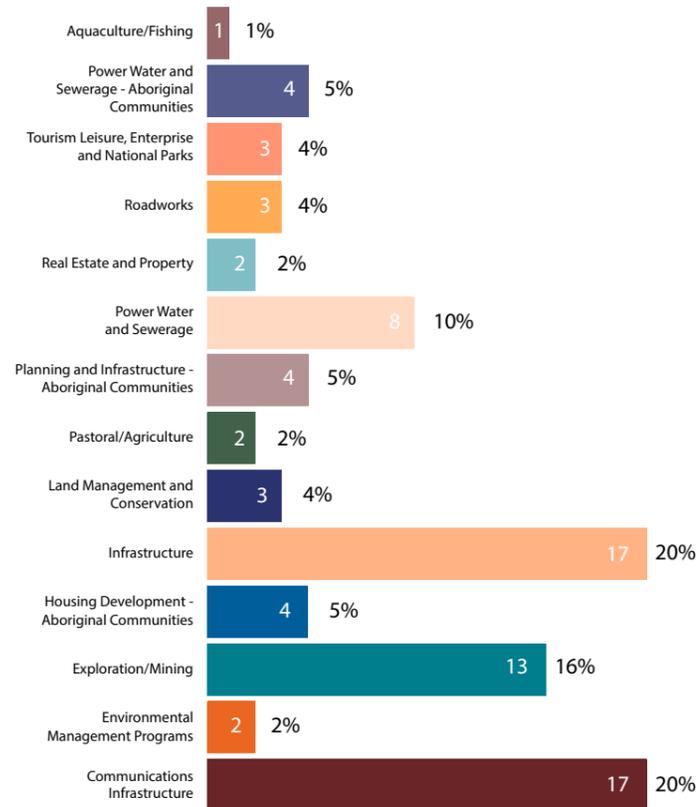


Figure 6: Issued Certificate User group

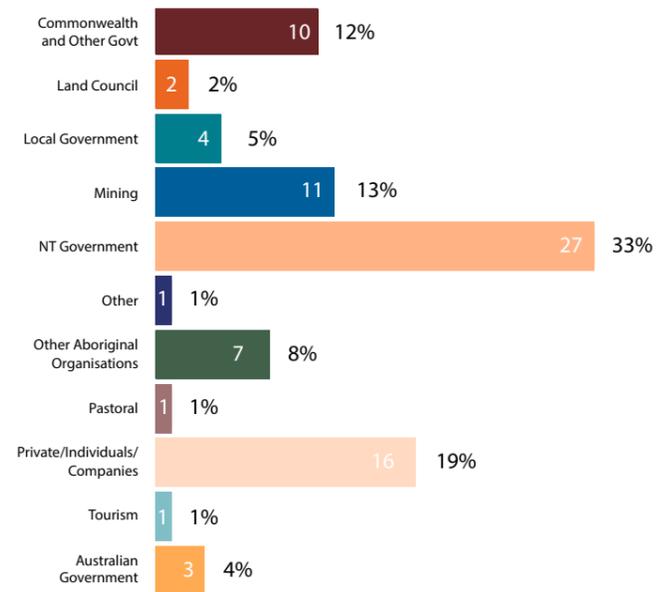


Figure 7: Average days to issue

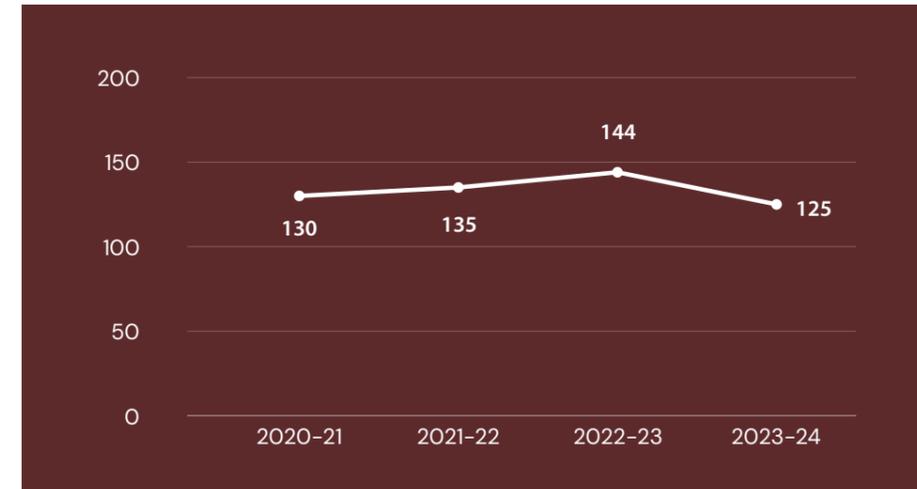


Figure 8: Days to issue by project type

Row Labels	Count of Timeframe						Grand Total
	0-3 months	3-6 months	6-9 months	9-12 months	12-15 months	15-18 months	
Aquaculture / Fishing	1						1
Communications Infrastructure	8	8	1				17
Environmental Management Programs	1		1				2
Exploration / Mining	7	3		2	1		13
Housing Development - Aboriginal Communities	3				1		4
Infrastructure	6	9		1	1		17
Land Management and Conservation	2		1				3
Pastoral / Agriculture		1				1	2
Planning and Infrastructure - Aboriginal Communities	1	3					4
Power Water and Sewerage	3	5					8
Power Water and Sewerage - Aboriginal Communities	2	1	1				4
Real Estate and Property	2						2
Roadworks		1	2				3
Tourism Leisure, Enterprise and National Parks	1		2				3
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>83</b>

# REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

## QUANTITY

In 2023-24, the Authority received and responded to 940 requests for information from the Register of Sacred Sites.

Most requests were for an abstract of the Authority's records. Other requests were for inspections of the Authority Certificate Register and the inspection of the Register of Sacred Sites and other requests.

Since 2020, the Authority has seen a sharp rise in the demand for Requests for Information, with the requests jumping from 873 in 2022-23 to 940 in this reporting period.



Jawoyn lady - Rock Art, Western Arnhem Land NT

The increase in demand continues to be a positive sign that proponents value this service as a way of providing preliminary information about sacred sites on areas of land. However some proponents may be relying on requests for information (particularly abstract of records) to plan their projects rather than obtaining an Authority Certificate.

An Abstract of records issued by the Authority is not a conclusive statement about the extent of sacred sites in that subject area. The Abstract of records is for general information purposes only and should not be relied upon persons undertaking land clearing activities. Relying on Abstract of records for works increases the risk of damage to sacred sites which also increases the corporate reputation risk and possible prosecution, fines or even jail time.

**Figure 9:** Types and numbers of requests for information between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024

User group	Requests for information completed			
	2020 -21	2021 -22	2022 -23	2023 -24
Commonwealth and Other Govt	134	118	159	59
Land Council	60	39	35	54
Local Government	17	2	8	18
Mining	42	51	54	208
Non-Government Organisation	356	412	419	14
NT Government	305	251	160	198
Other	56	22	28	89
Other Aboriginal Organisations	10	6	11	24
Pastoral				35
Private/Individuals/Companies				236
Tourism				6
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>				<b>940</b>

## REGIONAL PICTURE

**Figure 10:** Requests for information by region.

ALICE SPRINGS HINTERLAND	14	DARWIN HINTERLAND	216	TENNANT CREEK HINTERLAND	57
ALICE SPRINGS TOWN AREA	106	EASTERN ARRERNTJE (SOUTH)	44	TIWI ISLANDS	16
ARNHEM LAND EAST	44	HERMANNSBURG HINTERLAND	28	ULURU ENVIRONS	13
ARNHEM LAND WEST (INCLUDING COBURG)	42	KAKADU	14	VICTORIA RIVER BASIN	37
BARKLY CENTRAL	10	KATHERINE HINTERLAND	57	VRD/BARKLY WEST	21
BARKLY NORTH EAST	47	PLENTY RIVER BASIN	47	YUENDUMU HINTERLAND	43
BORROLOOLA & GULF	29	ROPER BASIN	21	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>940</b>
DALY RIVER	12	SANDOVER RIVER BASIN	22		

## SERVICE USERS AND PROJECT TYPES

The three main groups requesting information are private individuals/companies (228), Mining (207) and the NT Government (196)

**Figure 11:** Types of Requests for information between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2023

**Figure 11:** Types of Requests for Information

Abstract of Records	869
Inspection of Authority Certificate Register	53
Inspection of Sacred Sites Register	7
Other	11
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>926</b>



Palm Trees, Darwin Botanical Gardens NT



AAPA staff member - drone survey for site boundary mapping - near Mount Todd, NT

## REGISTERED SACRED SITES

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

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

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

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

The Authority manages the protection of sacred sites through:

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

### QUANTITY

The Authority registered

**38 sacred sites in 2023-24**

Sacred sites are registered at Authority board meetings which occur four times per year.

The Authority recorded

**111 sacred sites**

through fieldwork in this reporting period.

Over

**55,000km**

have been travelled by vehicle by AAPA staff.

In total the Authority has 2248 registered sacred sites and 11,574 recorded sacred sites in its database, bringing the total number of documented sacred sites in the Northern Territory to

**13,822 in 2023-24**

# COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

The Authority investigates sacred site damage concerns and enforces a number of offence provisions under the Sacred Sites Act. It is an offence to enter onto a sacred site, carry out work on a sacred site, desecrate a sacred site, or contravene the conditions of an Authority Certificate.

Compliance encompasses all aspects of the Authority's work that contributes to conformity with the Sacred Sites Act. The Authority has a dedicated Compliance Unit that is established to:

- work with stakeholders in the public and private sector to engage with the Authority Certificate process and voluntarily comply with the conditions set out in any Authority Certificates issued;
- audit proponents to ensure conditions in Authority Certificates are being followed;
- respond to and investigate complaints about damage to sacred sites;
- prosecute offences against the Sacred Sites Act; and
- support custodian access to sacred sites.

## FIELDTRIPS

In the 2023-24 financial year, the Compliance Unit undertook 8 fieldtrips across the NT to investigate allegations of damage to sacred sites and obtain further evidence in support of the Authority's current prosecutions.

### IN 2023-24, THE AUTHORITY

RECEIVED  
**29** alleged site damage reports

**20** investigations completed

### AT THE END OF THE 2023-24 FINANCIAL YEAR

**12** cases were under investigation

**57** days were spent in the field



Rosie McRobie travelling on Air Charter out field, NT



Yalangbara sunset, NT

# OUR PEOPLE

## 2023-24 SNAPSHOT

Our **full-time** equivalent staff numbers were **31.62** in 2023-24 compared to **33.44** in 2022-23.

Our **headcount of staff** was **37** in 2023-24 compared to **38** in 2022-23.

**68%** of the workforce were **female** in 2023-24 compared to **64%** in 2022-23.

The **median age** of staff was **42** in 2023-24 which is consistent to 2022-23.

**53%** of our staff were **aged between** 25 and 44 in 2023-24 compared to **58%** in 2022-23.

**73%** of our staff were ongoing **permanent** employees in 2023-24 compared to **59%** in 2022-23

**9%** of our staff identified as **Indigenous** in 2023-24 compared to **13%** in 2022-23

**20%** of our staff identified as being from a **culturally and linguistically** diverse background in 2023-24 compared to **21%** in 2022-23.

**0%** of our staff identified as having a **disability** in 2023-24, which is consistent with 2022-23.

**67%** of the workforce has worked for the **Authority** (including NTG service where applicable) for less than **five years**.

**27%** of the workforce has worked for the **Authority** (including NTG service where applicable) for more than five years, and **one staff member** has worked for the Authority for more than 30 years.

**30%** of our staff had **flexible work** agreements in place and a further **20%** work part time or casual

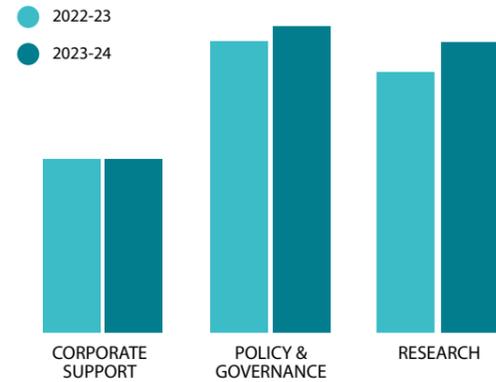
**\$52,025** was spent in 2023-24 compared to **\$49,499** in 2022-23 on training and **development** for our staff.

**\$9,118** was spent on providing **29** individual **support services** for staff.

# WORKFORCE PROFILE

The Authority's workforce in 2023-24 decreased by 1.51 full time equivalent (FTE) staff to 31.93, compared to 33.44 in 2022-23. This decrease was primarily due to several short-term positions that assisted in fast tracking major project Authority Certificate applications coming to an end. The Authority has experienced challenges with recruiting to Alice Springs based positions over the last two years however, in April 2024 the Anthropology Manager position was successfully filled. The recruitment to these specialist positions has been highly challenging however, the Authority continues to run recruitment actions for anthropology officers to re-establish the Alice Springs based team.

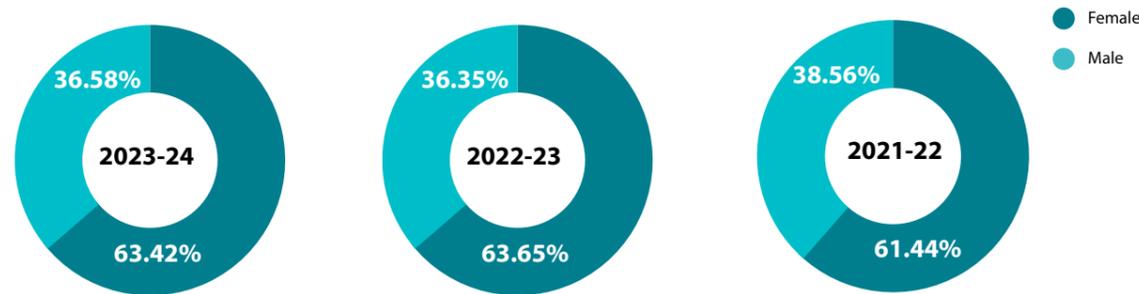
Figure 12: Full Time Equivalent (FTE) by Financial Year



# GENDER COMPARISON

For 2023-24 females made up 63.42% of the Authority's employees. Over the last three years, there has been minor gender adjustments with males decreasing by almost 2% since 2021-22.

Figure 13: Staffing by Gender and Age Group (excluding Board Members)



# EMPLOYEES BY AGE AND GENDER

In 2023-24, the median age of employees was 42 which demonstrates a gradual ageing in the workforce over the last six years with the median age growing from 39 in 2018-19. As at 30 June 2024, 58% of the female workforce was between 15-44 and 50% of males were aged between 45 and over.

Figure 14: Staffing by Gender and Age Group (excluding Board Members)

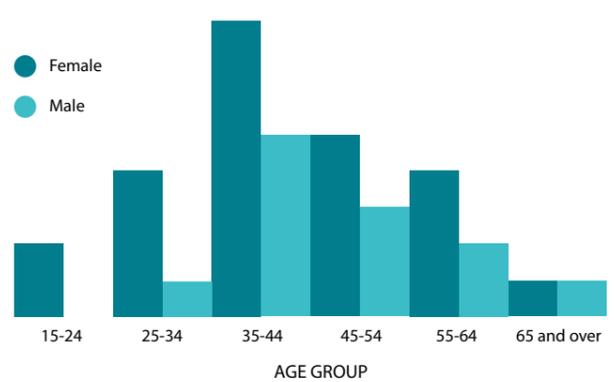
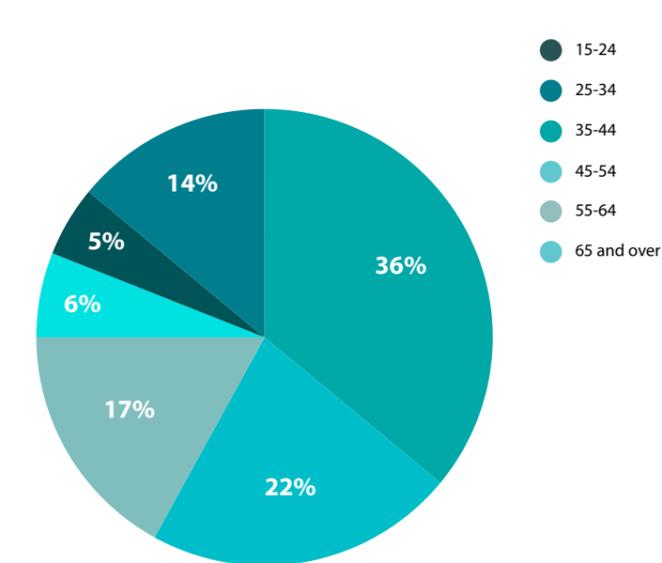


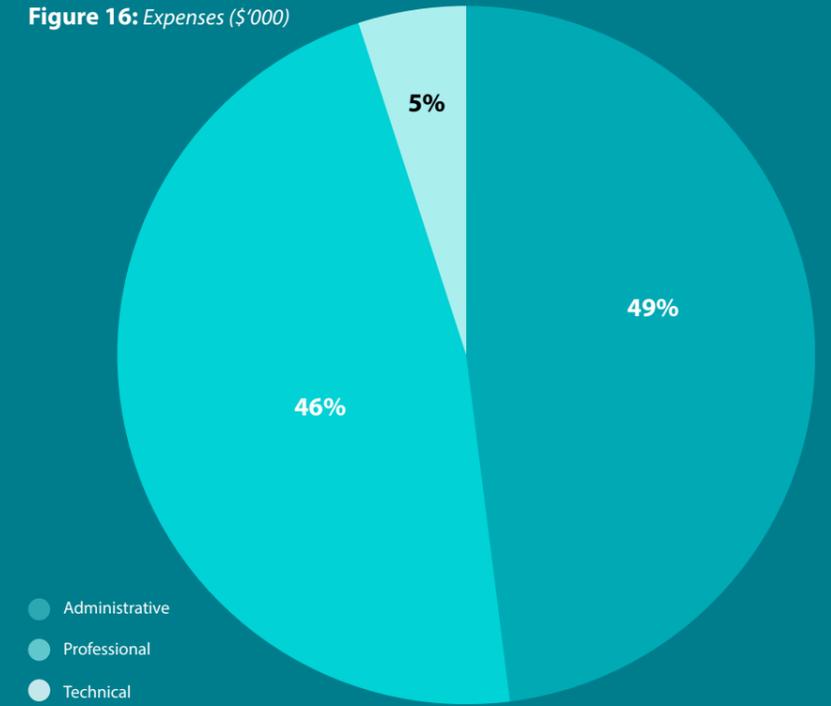
Figure 15: Staffing by Age Group (excluding Board Members)



# EMPLOYEES BY STREAM

In 2023-24, the administrative stream employed 49% of the workforce which is a minor increase of 1% from the previous year. The professional stream decreased by 1% to 46%. Of staff within the professional stream, 65% were anthropologists in research-based positions this is a 7% reduction to active anthropology roles and can be related back to vacancies in Alice Springs. The technical stream stayed consistent at 5%. Overall the split between employment streams was fairly consistent with the previous year with only minor fluctuations.

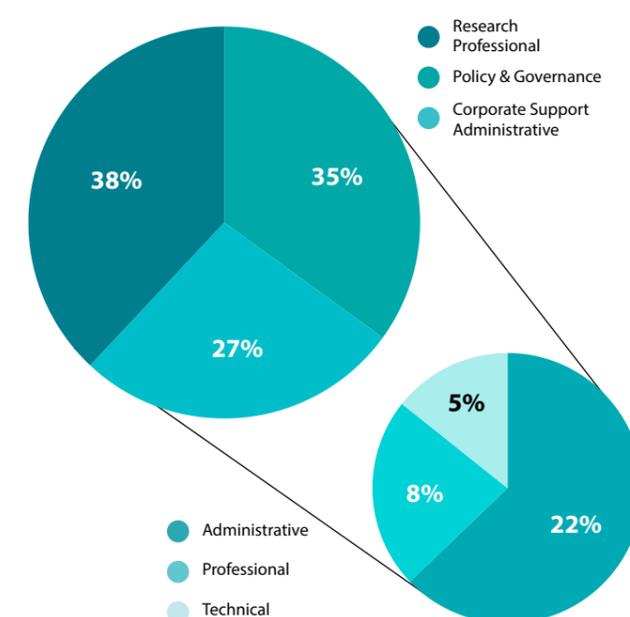
Figure 16: Expenses (\$'000)



# EMPLOYEES BY UNIT

In comparison to last financial year there has been minimal changes to the employment by work unit and stream. The Research unit undertakes the Authority's anthropological services and solely employees within the professional stream. The Policy and Governance unit which also manages the technical services and compliance functions of the Authority, is the only mixed stream unit employing 22% administrative, 8% professional and 5% technical. The Corporate Support unit is entirely made up of administrative personnel, is the smallest unit and consists of the Chief Executive Officer and the Corporate Services functions.

Figure 17: Employee by Work and by Stream



# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

In 2023-24, there were six new commencements and twelve separations, of which eight were resignations and four contracts ceasing. Of the six new commencements, three were permanent appointments.

Ten recruitment actions were advertised in 2023-24 with seven of these having successful outcomes. Of the three unsuccessful recruitment rounds, two were unable to identify a suitable applicant with the relevant skills knowledge and experience required for the role(s). Recruitment to positions has been exceptionally difficult especially to professional stream anthropological positions. One recruitment action was cancelled due to changes required in the job description. This was later readvertised with a successful outcome.

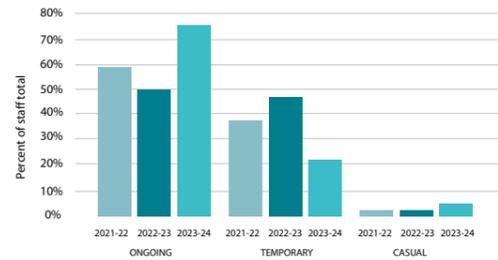
All positions are advertised under special measures.

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Separations	13	9	12
Commencements	13	17	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>18</b>

## EMPLOYMENT TYPES

The Authority has returned to similar employment types as reported in 2020-21. Over the past three financial years, the Authority has had a higher than usual rate of temporary employees. This is due to a number of positions directly related to funding programs with a life-cycle of two years which has ceased in 2023-24.

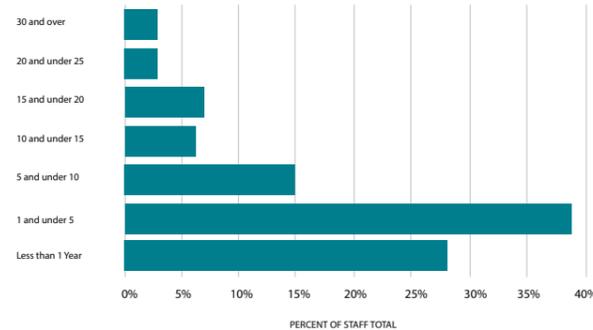
Figure 18: Employment type by year



## RETENTION

In 2023-24, 67% of the workforce had been employed by the Authority for less than five years which is a minor decrease to the last reporting period and is consistent with the short-term project and funding based positions. This year 19% of the workforce had been employed by the Authority for 10 years or more, which is a slight increase to last financial year even with a long servicing staff member departing the Authority.

Figure 19: Years of Service

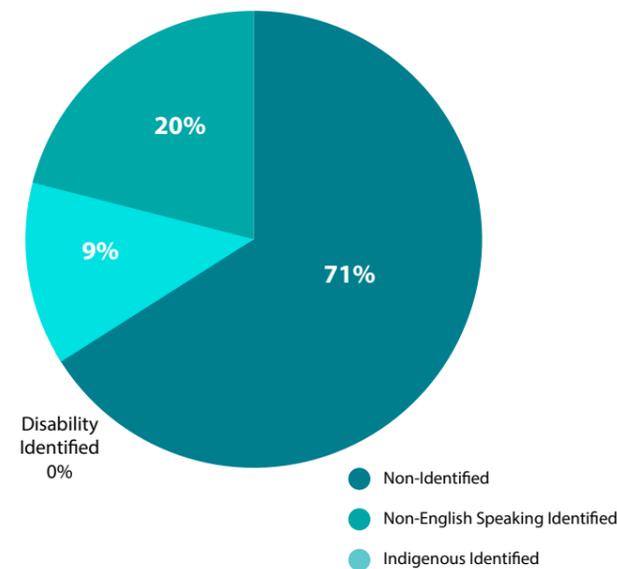


## DIVERSITY

The Authority is committed to the principles of inclusion, equity and diversity. Overall, this year the percentage of staff identifying as Indigenous decreased from 13% to 9% and has now decreased three years in a row which is something the Authority is highly conscious of. The percentage of staff identifying as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background decreased from 21% to 20%. The percentage of staff that identified as having a disability remained at 0% for the sixth year in a row. In 2023-24 the Authority continued to mandate the special measures principles to increase Aboriginal employment however, it has been noted that Aboriginal applicants for positions are a rarity. In 2023-24 there continued to be negligible Aboriginal applicants for professional stream roles which was the majority of recruitment actions in 2023-24. This can be largely attributed to the focus on recruiting for anthropologist related positions which traditionally receive no Aboriginal applicants. The one non-professional stream position advertised in 2023-24 successfully recruited an Aboriginal applicant.

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

Figure 20: Workforce Diversity

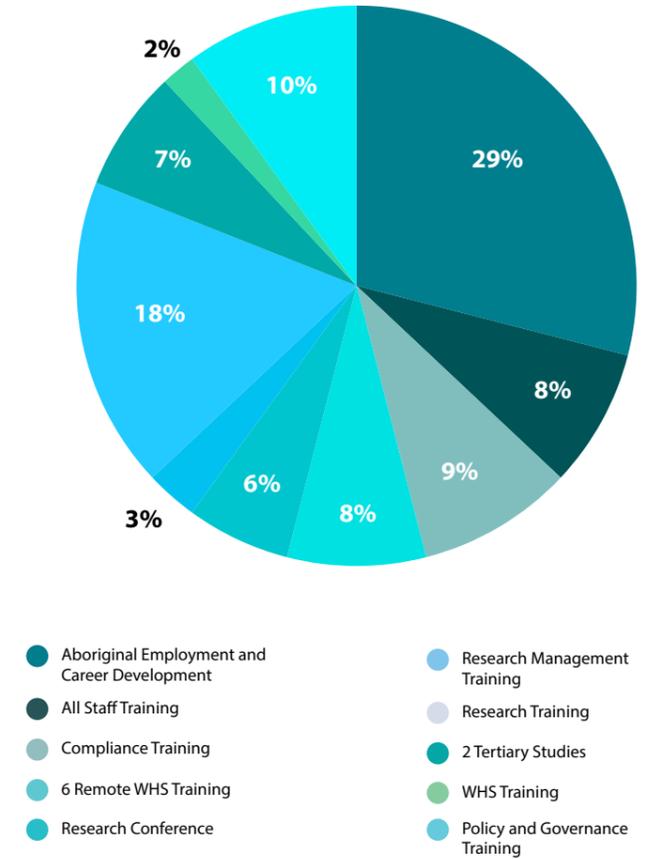


## TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2023-24, training and development continued to be heavily invested in with \$52,000 spent on a range of programs, the largest training and development budget for the Authority. \$15,000 (or 29%) was spent on Aboriginal Employment and Career Development training. This includes supporting an employee through the Kigaruk and Lookrukin Aboriginal Leadership and Development Program which will provide her with a Diploma of Leadership and Management. The Authority focused investment on the Study Assistance program for three staff to undertake tertiary qualifications. Further support was provided for staff to general corporate training in recruitment, management and project management.

Over \$5,000 was invested in work health and safety (WHS) training, in topics such as remote first aid and four-wheel-drive defensive driving, for research officers as well as other staff that undertake remote travel. This training helps ensure the safety of our staff travelling in remote areas. All staff that undertake remote fieldwork or travel regularly are encouraged to attend refresher training every year prior to the peak-travel season and regular safety and call in procedures are refreshed with staff and consultants to ensure consistent safety practices are in place.

Figure 21: Training and Development Investment



## AURORA PROJECT INTERNSHIPS

In 2023-24, the Authority hosted one Aurora Project intern who assisted in a policy and governance project. In 2023-24 the Authority did not host any anthropology interns due to high workloads and a lack of time that could be dedicated to support an intern. In future years where possible, the Authority will continue hosting interns to provide a supportive and mentoring environment. The Authority has previously benefitted by such internships and a number of previous anthropology interns have returned to the Authority for future employment.

## STUDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS

Three requests from Authority employees for study assistance were supported in 2023-24. One staff member continued their studies for a Bachelor of Accounting, one completed the requirements of a Bachelor of Business and a third graduated with a Masters in Information Technology – Cyber Security.



## STAFF PROFILE

### MRS KAYE ESPARAGOZA-ADAMS

#### *System and Information Manager*

Kaye commenced working at the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in August 2018 and manages a small team of three in the Information Systems Unit.

The Information System Unit supports the Authority with several ICT services including desktop and office automation requests, TRM support, record digitisation, the Authority's Intranet and Internet website maintenance and providing business systems support to staff.

Originally from the Philippines, Kaye finished her degree and relocated to Singapore where she worked for 7 years as an IT Professional and in 2007 moved to Darwin where she has resided ever since.

Kaye studied Computer Science at University and has been working in the ICT field for more than 25 years. Supported by the AAPA Study Assistance program, in late 2023, Kaye completed her Masters in IT and Cyber Security and graduated in April 2024.

Kaye also received the NEC Award for the Highest Academic Achievement for a local female student in Information Technology in 2023 at Charles Darwin University (CDU) and was one of the founding members of the CDU Cyber Security Club.

Kaye enjoys working at the Authority because of the positive relationships she has with her team and the end users.



## STAFF PROFILE

### MR JOHN DOOLEY

#### *Anthropologist*

Commencing at the Authority in April 2023, John Dooley works as an Anthropologist spending most of his time consulting with Aboriginal custodians about areas where applicants want to develop projects. These consultations involve a lot of prior research and organisation before John undertakes his field work and he does this to ensure he is ready to understand the instructions of custodians so he is able to develop his research report that accurately reflects the instructions custodians have given him.

John spends most of his time in areas around the Big River Region including working with custodians from Roper River, Bulman, Katherine township and Kakadu.

John enjoys working closely with these custodians but also getting to do work in other parts of the Northern Territory where he can work with different people and see different country.

Prior to working with the Authority, John worked in hospitality in NSW for many years until he returned to university part time as he

was interested in studying culture, history and politics. John loved his anthropology subjects so much that he put all his efforts in to making a career as an anthropologist and was lucky to secure an internship with the Northern Land Council in 2017 where he worked in Nhulunbuy.

John has received a Bachelor of International and Global Studies at the University of Sydney, majoring in Anthropology and Political Science. John then went on to completing a Masters in Development Studies with an Anthropology focus at the same University. John has also studied many languages and can speak Indonesian and the main language of Timor-Leste 'Tetum'

John stays motivated by contributing to projects with custodians and his colleagues and seeing them come to completion which creates opportunities for community development and ensuring protections and positive outcomes for country and culture.



## STAFF PROFILE

### MS LAURI TURNER

#### *Data Integrity Officer, Research*

Lauri Turner started working at the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in March 2023 after graduating from a double major in zoology and anthropology in 2022.

Lauri works as a Data Integrity Officer, which involves assisting the Research team through desktop research, and helping to ensure that the information gathered during fieldwork is entered into the Authority's records accurately.

Lauri relocated to Darwin from Western Australia specifically to take up a position with the Authority and found that the Authority is filled with great people, doing work that is incredibly meaningful.

A big part of why Lauri enjoys working for the Authority so much is the opportunity it provides for learning about the significance of country and sacred sites from a First Nations perspective, and knowing how important the Authority and the Sacred Sites Act are for the protection of such important places.

Lauri particularly enjoys assisting with the registration of sacred sites, as it is very rewarding to know that those sites then have full protection under the Act.

A particular highlight for Lauri and her husband, since moving to the Territory, was getting to attend Barunga Festival. It was such a well-run festival, and so special to be welcomed into the community and onto the country as guests.

## MILESTONE

### DR SOPHIE CREIGHTON – FAREWELL AFTER 16 YEARS OF SERVICE

Sophie commenced with the Authority in September of 2008 as a Research Officer in Alice Springs undertaking anthropological fieldwork throughout Central Australia including consulting with Aboriginal people of Alice Springs, town camps and remote communities of Central Australia for a wide range of major development projects. In 2012 Sophie stepped into the Alice Springs Anthropology Manager position where she transformed and documented the Authority research methodology to ensure consistency and rigour in the work that is produced. The anthropology research methodology is still used today and has been consistently refined over the years.

In 2016 Sophie relocated to Darwin as Director of Research where she was an instrumental member of the Executive Management Group and played a crucial role in shaping the strategic direction of the organisation's research agenda and providing expert advice with an astute awareness of the extended political agendas. She oversaw a team of 23 anthropologists, geographic information systems specialists, researchers, and client services staff, and specialist consultants and effectively managed the inputs and outputs of the organisation within strict key performance indicators. Throughout her years at AAPA Sophie provided essential training for authority staff and ongoing specialist anthropology training for researchers. Sophie innovated to adapt record keeping systems for the safe storage of Indigenous knowledge and worked closely with IT and GIS experts to advance

mapping, research reporting and project management as integrated systems through the use of new technologies.

Sophie has played a key role in the Authority providing thorough, frank and fearless advice and guidance to the Chief Executive Officer and the Authority Board, creating a cohesion across the entire Authority that has enhanced not only the outputs of the organisation but also grown the knowledge and 'buy in' to the organisation's vision and fundamental principles. Sophie's client outreach with a focus on understanding industry needs earned her the trust of stakeholders and her public speaking and workshops focussed on raising the profile of the Authority and educating others about Authority processes for the protection of sacred sites. Sophie's pragmatic approach to complex problem solving, ability to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes through respectful relationships and passion for sacred site and cultural heritage are just some of the things the Authority will miss.

In 2024 Sophie's son, Jed was accepted into the University of Melbourne and she made the decision to move to support him in this monumental transition. Sophie is now focussed on both creative and strategic projects as an independent consultant and her work regularly brings her back to the Territory and the remote communities with whom she has long-standing relationships. We wish Sophie and Jed all the very best in this next adventure.



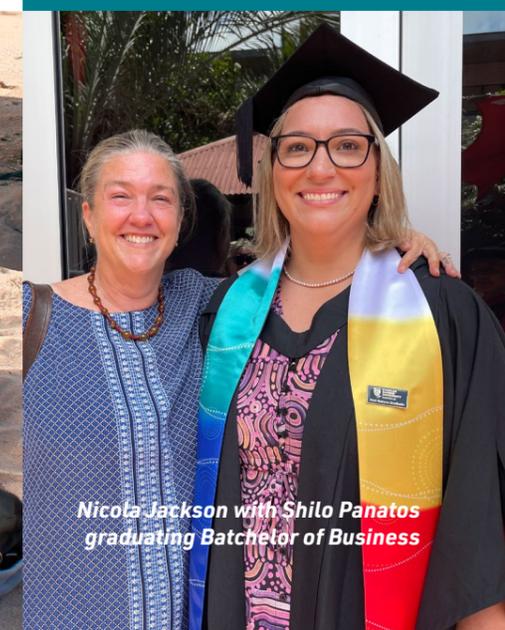
*Kaye Esparagoza-Adams  
graduating April 2024*

## STAFFING HIGHLIGHTS

- Kaye Esparagoza-Adams, Systems Information Manager (pictured above) completed her Masters in IT (Cyber Security). Kaye was supported through the Study Assistance Program.
- Shilo Panatos, Senior Business Officer completed her Bachelor of Business. Shilo started her tertiary studies in 2019 and has been supported through the Study Assistance Program.



*Dr Sophie Creighton with Custodian Mangatjay Yunupingu on Yirrkala main beach*



*Nicola Jackson with Shilo Panatos  
graduating Bachelor of Business*



Jodie Peckham, Ambre Higgins (past employee), Tiahne Clake at NAIDOC 2023 stall - July 2023



Stall at NAIDOC - July 2023



Staff member at the AAPA stall, Barunga Festival



AAPA merchandise, Barunga Festival

## CULTURAL EVENTS

### CULTURAL EVENTS

Staff participated in a number of cultural recognition events this year. In July 2023, the Authority held its inaugural stall at the For Our Elders NAIDOC event. Staff were able to engage with the community to showcase the work of the Authority and the importance of protecting sacred sites. In May 2024 all Authority staff participated in a Reconciliation Week cook up, staff were enthusiastic to share in meals ranging from curried sausages, bully beef, kangaroo and nummus.

Staff also participated in the 1967 Referendum anniversary celebration that recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being recognised as part of the Australian population and states and territories could create their own policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by hosting a staff quiz on important events leading up to the Referendum.

In June 2024, the Chief Executive Officer and four staff of the Authority attended two days of the Barunga Festival to network with stakeholders and further spread information regarding the work we do. The Authority set up a stall and handed out brochures and various Authority merchandise.

## WELLBEING AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

### WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The Authority has always maintained a commitment to flexible work arrangements for staff and recognises the benefits of providing a balanced working environment that supports family and other responsibilities. The benefits not only support our productivity but promote a supportive work environment.

In 2023-24, eight staff were employed on a part-time basis due to family and lifestyle commitments. A further 11 staff, although working full time, had flexible workplace arrangements to vary their standard working hours. This means that 60% of our workforce are employed under flexible working arrangements, whether that be part-time employment or a variation of the standard working hours, a 6% decrease from the previous year.

### PEOPLE MATTER SURVEY RESULTS – 6 MONTH UPDATE

In 2023, 86% of all Authority Staff participated in the People Matter Survey in which three focus areas for improvement were found:

1. Improve performance feedback discussions at all levels and with a particular focus on managers providing regular performance and career pathway discussions with a clear criteria to assess performance;
2. Improve decision making timeframes and feedback loops from senior management and
3. Health and wellbeing of staff are important to the Authority and strategies to improve the workplace culture and support are required to help staff manage their health and wellbeing.

In response to the 2023 People Matter Survey the Authority commenced working towards implementing and health and wellbeing program. This program to date has provided staff with a training opportunity to learn more about stress management and participate in three meditation sessions.

### FLU VACCINATION PROGRAM

The Authority utilised the whole-of-government flu vaccination program in Darwin and Alice Springs. Where staff were unable to participate in this program the Authority reimbursed staff for the costs they incurred. Approximately 40% of staff accessed this program.

### CHRISTMAS CLOSEDOWN

In 2023-24, the Authority closed its doors over the Christmas period. This enabled staff to have a break between Christmas and New Year. Staff accessed recreation leave during this period.

### EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Authority continued to promote the Employee Assistance Program in 2023-24 and encouraged staff and family members to access the free and confidential counselling service through the whole-of-government contract.

In 2023-24, staff and family members participated in 29 individual, confidential counselling sessions.

### HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In response to the 2023 People Matter Survey the Authority commenced working towards implementing and health and wellbeing program. This program to date has provided staff with a training opportunity to learn more about stress management and participate in three meditation sessions.

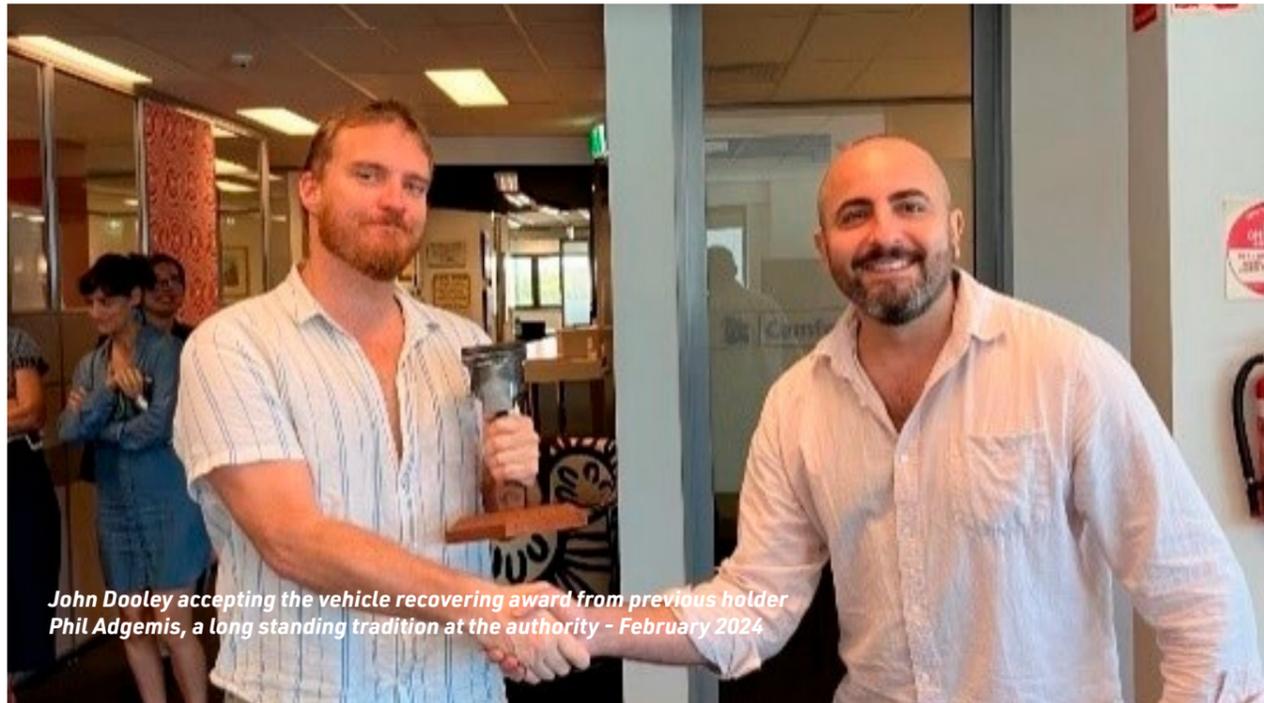
# WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Authority is committed to ensuring the safety of all our staff, whether they are travelling remotely on are in the office. In 2022-23 remote travel and staff welfare continued to be recognised as the highest organisational risk. To mitigate this risk, a rigorous call-in process is in place as well as regular remote first aid and four-wheel-drive defensive driving training for all new and ongoing staff who travel remotely. In addition, all new research officers are inducted through a number of joint fieldwork trips to ensure they are confident with remote travel and safety processes.

Two incidences occurred that a recovery was required in 2023-24, one being a vehicle maintenance issue in remote Daly River region and the other was a result of the vehicle becoming stuck in a boggy environment in the Katherine region. Both staff members were safely recovered in the same day of the emergency response and adhered to all safety protocols in place to ensure their safety.

## WORKPLACE INCIDENTS

There were no new workers' compensation claims in 2023-24.



John Dooley accepting the vehicle recovering award from previous holder Phil Adgemis, a long standing tradition at the authority - February 2024



Henry Nunggumajbarr (custodian) and John Dooley replacing tyre - May 2024



Bogged vehicle near Katherine, NT



John Dooley's vehicle bog during fieldwork in Katherine - February 2024, NT

# ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

**More than ever, climate change is at the forefront of global attention, as increases in extreme weather, temperature and other climatic events impact populations worldwide. The Authority, where possible minimises and avoids adverse effects on the environment for the benefit of current and future generations.**

Custodians continue to highlight the vulnerability of their sacred sites and cultural landscapes within which they occur. Late season bushfires, heavy rainfall causing flooding and hotter than usual temperatures are having significant impacts on landscape systems and sacred sites – many of which are trees, rocks, species of vegetation or waterways.

In the 2022 CSIRO State of the Climate report, it explains how Australia's climate has warmed on average by  $1.47 \pm 0.24$  °C since national records began in 1910. All of the Northern Territory (NT) has warmed since 1910. Average annual temperature has increased by 1.5°C since 1910 and the number of days with dangerous weather conditions for bushfires has increased in nearly all locations of the NT.

In response to these challenges, the Authority is developing its internal knowledge to assess impacts on sacred sites and to set adequate conditions for their protection. The Authority works with custodians to identify and protect sacred sites at risk.

The Authority is also increasing its communication with the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority and the Department of

Environment, Parks and Water Security by making regular comments and submissions to ensure that they consider environmental impacts on sacred sites and broader Aboriginal cultural values that are embedded in NT landscapes.

## GREENHOUSE GAS OPERATIONAL EMISSIONS

The NT Government released its Climate Change Response: Towards 2050 in 2020, establishing an NT economy-wide target of net zero greenhouse gas emission by 2050.

The NT Government adopted the NT Government Operational Emissions Framework (the Framework) in October 2023, which elaborates on that commitment by establishing an emissions target for NT Government operations and the parameters for accounting and reporting against that target.

The Framework sets a target for 2030 to reduce the NT Government's operational greenhouse gas emissions by 47% compared with 2021 emissions.

## THE AUTHORITY IN THE COMMUNITY

The Authority values the importance of giving back to the community by supporting small business, community organisations and activities. In 2023-24, the Authority supported seven applicants which included the Northern Land Council, Power and Water and Milingimbi Outstations Progress and Resource Aboriginal Corporation by providing full or partial waivers of charges for Authority Certificates.

The total costs of these waivers were \$134,302 representing 4.4% of the Authority's self-generated income for 2023-34. These projects include: Marlinja Community Solar Project, Langarra Airstrip upgrade and Diminin Wadey Cemetery upgrades.

The Authority supported Gunlom Mustering and their activities to employ local Aboriginal people to install temporary mustering yards at several places and to repair existing tracks within Kakadu National Park by waiving their application fees.

The Authority also supported the well known Henley on Todd not-for profit community event in Alice Springs by waiving their application fees.

# FINANCIALS

Pellew Islands,  
Yanyuwa Country NT



## END OF FINANCIAL YEAR POSITION

2023-24 was a good performing year for the Authority which saw the continuation of a sustainable demand for services as major projects continue. The Authority made a surplus budget position of \$0.349 million and delivered 83 Authority Certificates.

## BUDGET MOVEMENTS

At the commencement of 2023-24 the original goods and services income budget was \$2.5 million. During the year it was evident that this would be a productive year and the budget was adjusted to \$3 million. This adjustment also increased our goods and services expense budget by \$0.5 million to \$1.968 million to assist in Anthropological consultant expenses, custodian payment framework adjustment and high court legal expenses for the Gunlom matter. The Authority also increased the depreciation budget by \$67,000 to \$96,000 to factor in the office upgrades that were depreciated in line with the office lease.

## INCOME

The Authority is funded by a combination of Northern Territory Government appropriation, goods and services income, and services provided free of charge by the Department of Corporate and Digital Development (DCDD). The chart below illustrates the relative value of each income category. The income for 2023-24 was \$0.41 million above budget, \$0.281 million in goods and services revenue and \$0.13 million in free of charge services by DCDD. Income generated through the issuing on Authority Certificates equates to 39% of the Authority income for 2023-24. These figures are exclusive of Central Holding Authority revenue generated through the application fees for Requests for Information and requests for Authority Certificates.

Figure 22: Income received (\$'000)

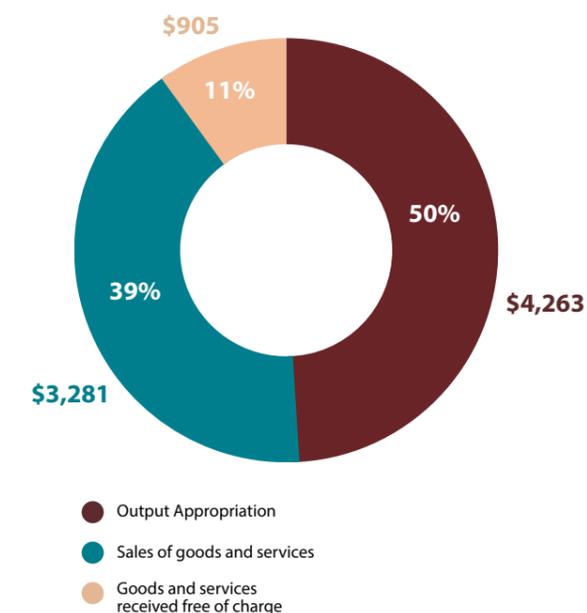
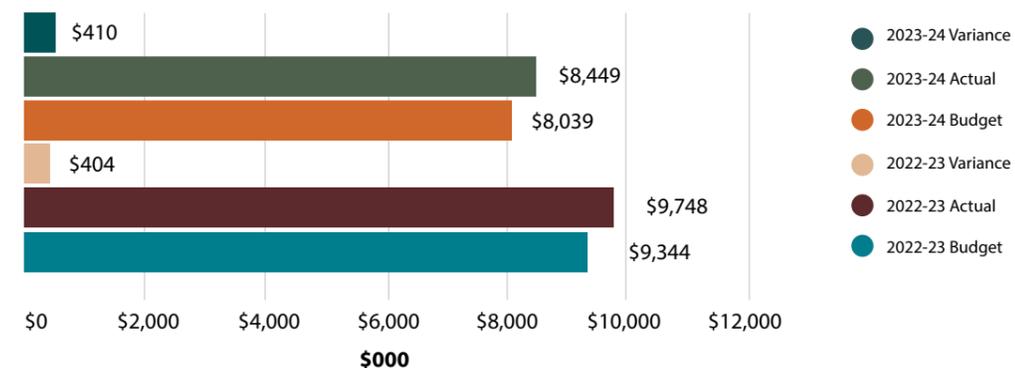
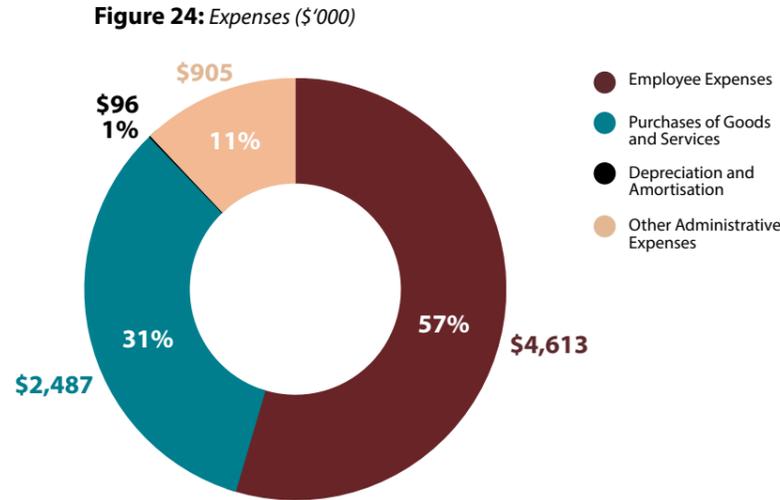


Figure 23: Total income – budget versus actual (\$'000)



## EXPENDITURE

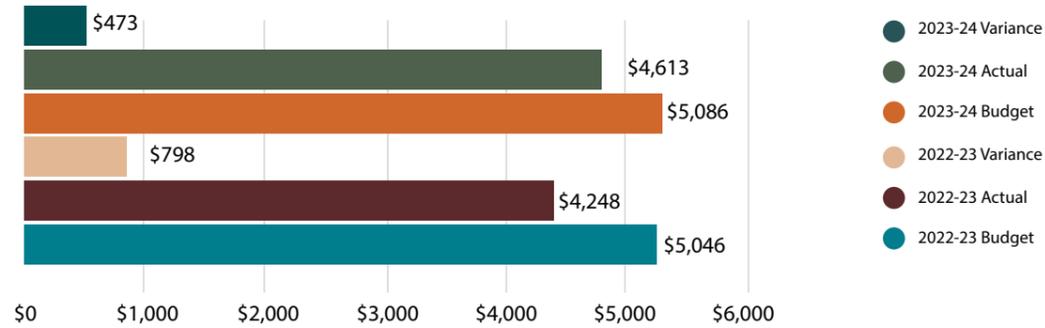
Total expenditure is made up of four broad categories: employees, purchase of goods and services, depreciation and other administrative expenses (DCDD charges). In 2023-24, although personnel continued to be the largest expense for the Authority at \$4.613 million, it was below budget by \$0.473 million due to vacancies throughout the year of hard to fill professional positions in Alice Springs.



## EMPLOYEE EXPENDITURE

During 2023-24, there were a number of vacancies throughout the year predominantly due to hard to fill professional stream positions in anthropology in the Alice Springs region resulting in a budget underspend of \$0.473 million. Additional funding of \$0.922 million in employee expenses was also provided through output appropriation in 2023-24 to support the personnel increase of seven positions which was the final year of the two year funding for the fast tracking of major development projects.

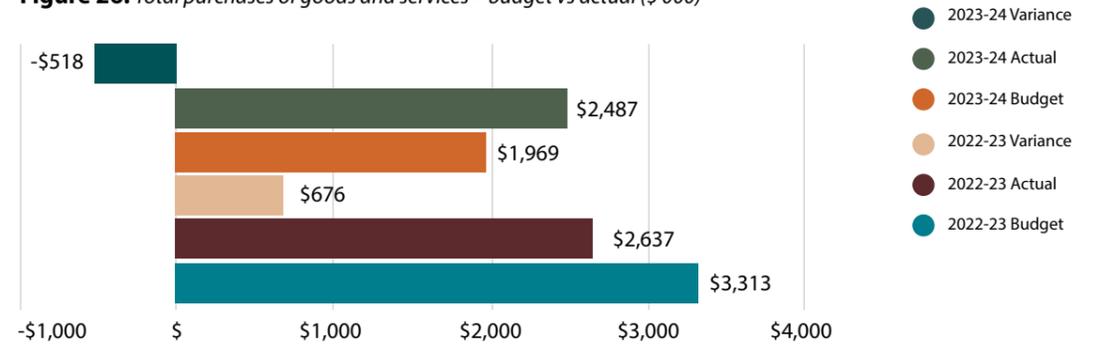
**Figure 25: Total Employee Expenditure - Budget Versus Actual (\$000)**



## GOODS AND SERVICES EXPENDITURE

Goods and services costs were over budget by \$0.518 million. This was offset by a surplus in self-generated income of \$0.5 million and \$0.473 million in personnel expenses. The deficit goods and services expenditure result is due to the requirement to engage specialist anthropological consultants to meet the demand for services and priority timeframes, increased legal expenses due to the Gunlom High Court case and increase to Custodian payment framework.

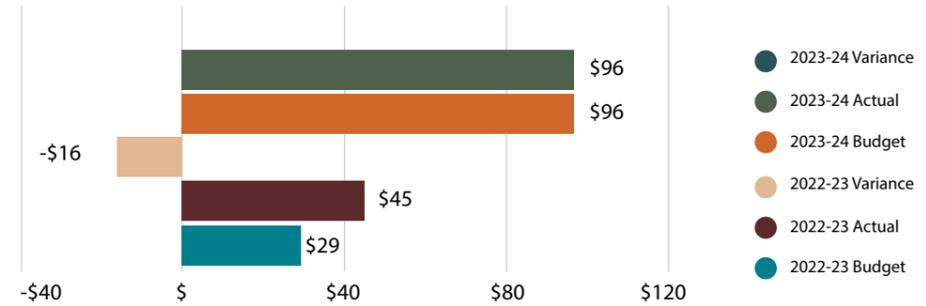
**Figure 26: Total purchases of goods and services – budget vs actual (\$'000)**



## DEPRECIATION AND AMORTISATION

The depreciation and amortisation expenses were in line with the adjusted budget for 2023-24. These expenses were higher than previous years due to an office upgrade that was recognised as an asset in June 2023. Due to the building lease expiring in December of 2023, the depreciation rate and expected end of life was aligned to this rather than the standard 10-year depreciation schedule.

**Figure 26: Total depreciation and amortisation – budget versus actual (\$'000)**



## FINANCIAL STATEMENT OVERVIEW FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

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

The Authority continued in 2023-24 to see a sustainable demand for services as major projects from 2022-23 progressed. The Authority achieved \$3.281 million in self-generated revenue and an overall surplus budget position of \$0.349 million. This year saw the transition from mining and exploration Authority Certificates applications dominating the year to infrastructure including communications, power, water and sewage infrastructure (60%) generating \$1.53 million or 47% of self-generated revenue. Although mining and exploration only equated to 16% of all Authority Certificates issued in 2023-24 it translated to 26% or \$0.858 million of revenue.

The Authority received its final year of additional output appropriation of \$1.027 million to assist in the fast tracking of sacred site clearances to support major projects and the economic reform agenda set by the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission. The success of this investment is evident through the issuing of 83 Authority Certificates and generating \$3.281 million in revenue.

In 2023-24 the Authority commenced the year with a baseline self-generated income budget of \$2.5 million. This was increased to \$3 million based on projected performance and the additional \$0.5 million was allocated to the purchase of goods and services to accommodate the expected increase in Custodian payments due to a review of the Custodian payment framework, the continuation of engaging consultant anthropologists and the expected increased legal fees due to the ongoing High Court matter of AAPA v Director of National Parks.

Overall, the Authority increased its purchase of goods and services budget from \$1.468 million to \$1.969 million however, the Authority exceeded this budget by \$0.518 million. The over expenditure predominantly related to Authority Certificate expenses for consultants and custodians (\$0.33 million), vehicle maintenance and repairs (\$0.05 million) and upgrades to the Authority website and independent database risk assessment (\$0.05 million).

Employee expenses continued to be the largest expense to the Authority of \$4.613 million in 2023-24. However, due to the ongoing recruitment challenges in professional stream positions primarily in anthropology in the Alice Springs region, the Authority again experienced a \$0.473 million surplus budget position. The surplus funds offset the purchase of goods and services excess budget.

2023-24 was again a highly successful year for the Authority, the unanimous High Court of Australia ruling confirmed the strength of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* against the Director of National Parks and continuing to achieve a surplus budget outcome of \$0.349 million.

## CERTIFICATION OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

We certify that the attached financial statements for the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority have been prepared based on proper accounts and records in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and with the requirements as prescribed in the *Financial Management Act 1995* and Treasurer's Directions.

We further state that the information set out in the comprehensive operating statement, balance sheet, statement of changes in equity, cash flow statement, and notes to and forming part of the financial statements, presents fairly the financial performance and cash flows for the year ended 30 June 2024 and the financial position on that date.

At the time of signing, we are not aware of any circumstances that would render the particulars included in the financial statements misleading or inaccurate.



Dr Benedict Scambary  
Chief Executive Officer  
30 August 2024



Ms Nicola Jackson  
Director Corporate Services  
30 August 2024

## COMPREHENSIVE OPERATING STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

		2024	2023
	Note	\$000	\$000
<b>INCOME</b>			
Appropriation	4		
Output		4,263	4,767
Sales of goods and services	5	3,281	4,037
Goods and services received free of charge	6	905	944
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	3	<b>8,449</b>	<b>9,748</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Employee benefits expense	7	4,613	4,248
Administrative expenses			
Property management		81	33
Purchases of goods and services	8	2,406	2,603
Depreciation and amortisation	13,14	96	45
Other administrative expenses <sup>1</sup>		905	944
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	3	<b>8,101</b>	<b>7,874</b>
<b>NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>		<b>349</b>	<b>1,875</b>
<b>COMPREHENSIVE RESULT</b>		<b>349</b>	<b>1,875</b>

<sup>1</sup>Includes DCDD service charges and DIPL repairs and maintenance service charges.

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

## BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2024

		2024	2023
	Note	\$000	\$000
<b>ASSETS</b>			
<b>Current assets</b>			
Cash and deposits	10	2,209	5,544
Receivables	12	234	463
<b>Total current assets</b>		<b>2,443</b>	<b>6,006</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>			
Property, plant and equipment	13	10	85
Intangibles	14	1	22
<b>Total non-current assets</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>2,454</b>	<b>6,113</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>			
<b>Current liabilities</b>			
Payables	15	220	251
Provisions	16	455	365
Other liabilities	17	0	66
<b>Total current liabilities</b>		<b>675</b>	<b>682</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		<b>1,779</b>	<b>5,431</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>			
Capital		(2,379)	1,621
Accumulated funds		4,159	3,810
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>		<b>1,779</b>	<b>5,431</b>

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

## STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	Equity at 1 July	Comprehensive result	Transactions with owners in their capacity as owners	Equity at 30 June
	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000
<b>2024</b>				
<b>Accumulated funds</b>	(3,805)	(349)	0	(4,154)
Transfers from reserves	(5)	0	0	(5)
	(3,810)	(349)	0	(4,159)
<b>Capital – transactions with owners</b>				
Equity injections				
Capital appropriation	(564)	0	0	(564)
Equity transfers in	(1,195)	0	0	(1,195)
Other equity injections	(57)	0	0	(57)
Equity withdrawals				
Capital withdrawal	195	0	4,000	4,195
	(1,621)	0	4,000	2,379
<b>Total equity at end of financial year</b>	<b>(5,431)</b>	<b>(349)</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>(1,779)</b>
<b>2023</b>				
<b>Accumulated funds</b>	(1,903)	(1,875)	0	(3,805)
Transfers from reserves	(5)	0	0	(5)
	(1,935)	(1,875)	0	(3,810)
<b>Capital – transactions with owners</b>				
Equity injections				
Capital appropriation	(564)	0	0	(564)
Equity transfers in	(1,195)	0	0	(1,915)
Other equity injections	(57)	0	0	(57)
Equity withdrawals				
Capital withdrawal	195	0	0	195
	(1,621)	0	0	(1,621)
<b>Total equity at end of financial year</b>	<b>(3,556)</b>	<b>(1,875)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(5,431)</b>

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

## CASH FLOW STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	2024	2023
Note	\$000	\$000
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>		
<b>Operating receipts</b>		
Appropriation received		
Output	4,263	4,767
Receipts from sales of goods and services	3,635	3,824
<b>Total operating receipts</b>	<b>7,898</b>	<b>8,591</b>
<b>Operating payments</b>		
Payments to employees	(4,520)	(4,270)
Payments for goods and services	(2,712)	(2,713)
<b>Total operating payments</b>	<b>(7,232)</b>	<b>(6,984)</b>
<b>Net cash from/(used in) operating activities</b>	<b>11 665</b>	<b>1,607</b>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES</b>		
<b>Investing payments</b>		
Purchases of non-financial assets	0	(79)
<b>Total investing payments</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(79)</b>
<b>Net cash from/(used in) investing activities</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(79)</b>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES</b>		
<b>Financing payments</b>		
Equity withdrawals	(4,000)	0
<b>Total financing payments</b>	<b>(4,000)</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Net cash from/(used in) financing activities</b>	<b>11 (4,000)</b>	<b>0</b>
Net increase/(decrease) in cash held	(3,335)	1,528
Cash at beginning of financial year	5,544	4,015
<b>CASH AT END OF FINANCIAL YEAR</b>	<b>10 2,209</b>	<b>5,544</b>

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

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## 1. OBJECTIVES AND FUNDING

The Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (the Authority) is an independent statutory authority established under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 (NT)*. The Authority is responsible for overseeing the protection of Aboriginal sacred sites on land and sea across the Northern Territory and recognising and respecting the interests of Custodians of sacred sites, landowners and developers for the benefit of all Territorians.

Additional information in relation to the Authority and its principal activities may be found in the introduction of the annual report.

The Authority receives a level of appropriation from the Northern Territory Government and generates goods and services income derived from providing Authority Certificates to clients in order to maintain its operations. Employee expenses of \$4.613 million continued to be the largest expense accounting for 57% of total expenditure.

The Authority achieved a surplus of \$0.349 million and accomplished \$3.281 million in goods and services revenue. This revenue was the outcome of 83 Authority Certificates being issued in 2023-24 with 25% of issued Authority Certificates relating to infrastructure projects, communications infrastructure (20%), exploration and mining (16%), and water and sewage works (14%).

2023-24 continued to experience a slight increase in demand for services compared to 2021-22 and previous years, noting 2022-23 was a significant year for major projects. The Authority managed the continuation of this influx and major project applications transferring to the 2023-24 year through the engagement of anthropological consultants. In 2023-24, 28 Authority Certificates were issued through the contracting of 13 anthropological consultants costing the Authority \$0.485 million and generating \$1.338 million in revenue, 41% of total revenue.

2023-24 also saw an increase in Authority Board meeting costs with a Board Meeting held in Tennant Creek and another in Canberra to attend the High Court matter of AAPA v Director of National Parks. The Authority Board costs increased by \$41,282 to \$208,030 compared to \$166,748 in 2022-23 due to a Board member being hospitalised in Canberra during a board meeting and requiring to be medically transported back to Darwin for care.

Legal costs (\$0.195 million) also continued to be high in 2023-24 due to several prosecutions. Most of the legal expenses pertained to the High Court matter of AAPA v Director of National Parks with a total of \$0.156 million was spent in legal fees alone in 2023-24. This resulted in a unanimous ruling that was delivered on 8 May 2024 by the full bench of the High Court of Australia in favour of the Authority. The ruling confirmed that the Director of National Parks does not hold crown immunity by extension of the Commonwealth Government and therefore can be prosecuted for damage to a sacred site in the Northern Territory. This has been an ongoing legal matter since 2019 in the Local and Supreme Courts of the Northern Territory and on 29 May 2024 continued back to the Local Court of the Northern Territory to continue the prosecution for damage to the Gunlom Falls sacred site at Kakadu National Park.

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

## 2. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

### a) Statement of compliance

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Financial Management Act 1995* and related Treasurer's Directions. The *Financial Management Act 1995* requires the Authority to prepare financial statements for the year ended 30 June based on the form determined by the Treasurer. The form of the Authority financial statements should include:

1. a certification of the financial statements
2. a comprehensive operating statement
3. a balance sheet
4. a statement of changes in equity
5. a cash flow statement and
6. applicable explanatory notes to the financial statements.

### b) Basis of accounting

The financial statements have been prepared using the accrual basis of accounting, which recognises the effect of financial transactions and events when they occur, rather than when cash is paid out or received. As part of the preparation of the financial statements, all intra agency transactions and balances have been eliminated.

Except where stated, the financial statements have also been prepared in accordance with the historical cost convention.

The form of the Authority financial statements is also consistent with the requirements of Australian accounting standards. The effects of all relevant new and revised standards and interpretations issued by the Australian Accounting Standards Board (AASB) that are effective for the current annual reporting period have been evaluated.

**Standards and interpretations effective from 2023-24 financial year**  
Several amendments and interpretations have been issued that apply to the current reporting period but are considered to have no or minimal impact on public sector reporting.

### Standards and interpretations issued but not yet effective

No Australian accounting standards have been adopted early for 2023-24 financial year.

Several amendments interpretations have been issued that apply to future reporting periods but are considered to have no or minimal impact on public sector reporting.

### c) Agency and Territory items

The financial statements of the Authority include income, expenses, assets, liabilities and equity over which the Authority has control (agency items) and is able to utilise to further its own objectives. Certain items, while managed by the Authority, are administered, and recorded by the Territory rather than the Authority (Territory items). Territory items are recognised and recorded in the Central Holding Authority as discussed below.

### Central Holding Authority

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

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

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

The Central Holding Authority recognises and records all Territory items, and as such, these items are not included in the Authority's financial statements. However, as the Authority is accountable for certain Territory items managed on behalf of government, these items have been separately disclosed in Note 24 – Schedule of administered Territory items.

### d) Comparatives

Where necessary, comparative information for the 2022-23 financial year has been reclassified to provide consistency with current year disclosures.

### e) Presentation and rounding of amounts

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

### f) Changes in accounting policies

There have been no changes to accounting policies adopted in 2023-24 financial year as a result of management decisions.

### g) Accounting judgments and estimates

Judgments and estimates that have significant effects on the financial statements are disclosed in the relevant notes to the financial statements.

There were no material changes adopted during 2023-24.

### h) Contributions by and distributions to government

The Authority may receive contributions from government where the government is acting as owner of the Authority. Conversely, the Authority may make distributions to government. In accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1995* and Treasurer's Directions, certain types of contributions and distributions, including those relating to administrative restructures, have been designated as contributions by, and distributions to, government. These designated contributions and distributions are treated by the agency as adjustments to equity.

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

### 3. COMPREHENSIVE OPERATING STATEMENT BY OUTPUT GROUP

	Note	Protection of Sacred Sites		Corporate and Shared Services		Total	
		2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023
		\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000
<b>INCOME</b>							
Appropriation	4						
Output		3,410	3,814	853	953	4,263	4,767
Sales of goods and services	5	3,281	4,037	0	0	3,281	4,037
Goods and services received free of charge	6	724	755	181	189	905	944
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b>7,415</b>	<b>8,606</b>	<b>1,034</b>	<b>1,142</b>	<b>8,449</b>	<b>9,748</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>							
Employee expenses	7	3,720	3,457	893	791	4,613	4,248
Administrative expenses							
Property management		5	3	77	30	81	33
Purchases of goods and services	8	1,919	2,014	487	589	2,406	2,603
Depreciation and amortisation	13,14	77	36	19	9	96	45
Other administrative expenses <sup>1</sup>		724	755	181	189	905	944
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>6,445</b>	<b>6,265</b>	<b>1,657</b>	<b>1,608</b>	<b>8,101</b>	<b>7,873</b>
<b>NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>		<b>9,70</b>	<b>2,341</b>	<b>(623)</b>	<b>(466)</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>1,875</b>
<b>COMPREHENSIVE RESULT</b>		<b>970</b>	<b>2,341</b>	<b>(623)</b>	<b>(466)</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>1,875</b>

<sup>1</sup>Includes DCDD service charges and DIPL repairs and maintenance service charges.

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

### 4. APPROPRIATION

Appropriation recorded in the operating statement includes output appropriation and commonwealth appropriation received for the delivery of services.

	2024			2023		
	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000
	Revenue from contracts with customers	Other	Total	Revenue from contracts with customers	Other	Total
Output	0	4,263	4,263	0	4,767	4,767
<b>Total appropriation in the operating statement</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,263</b>	<b>4,263</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,767</b>	<b>4,767</b>

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

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

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

## 5. SALES OF GOODS AND SERVICES

	2024			2023		
	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000
	Revenue from contracts with customers	Other	Total	Revenue from contracts with customers	Other	Total
Other goods and services revenue	2,050	1,231	3,281	2,855	1,182	4,037
<b>Total sales of goods and services</b>	<b>2,050</b>	<b>1,231</b>	<b>3,281</b>	<b>2,855</b>	<b>1,182</b>	<b>4,037</b>

### Rendering of services

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

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

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Type of good and service:</b>		
Service delivery	3,281	4,037
<b>Total revenue from contracts with customers</b>	<b>3,281</b>	<b>4,037</b>
<b>Type of customer:</b>		
Commonwealth Government	295	228
State and territory governments	1,248	1,209
Non-government entities	1,737	2,601
<b>Total revenue from contracts with customers</b>	<b>3,281</b>	<b>4,037</b>
<b>Timing of transfer of goods and services:</b>		
Overtime		
Point in time	3,281	4,037
<b>Total revenue from contracts with customers</b>	<b>3,281</b>	<b>4,037</b>

## 6. GOODS AND SERVICES RECEIVED FREE OF CHARGE

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
Corporate and information services	901	941
Repairs and maintenance	4	3
<b>Total goods and services received free of charge</b>	<b>905</b>	<b>944</b>

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

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

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

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

## 7. EMPLOYEE BENEFITS EXPENSE

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
Salaries and wages	3,907	3,608
Superannuation expenses	446	402
Fringe benefits tax	20	19
Payroll tax	239	221
<b>Total employee benefits expense</b>	<b>4,613</b>	<b>4,248</b>

The number of full-time equivalent employees for 2023-24 was 31.93 (2022-23: 33.44).

Salaries and wages are recognised in the reporting period when the employee renders services to the Territory Government. It includes recreation leave, labour hire costs, allowances and other benefits, which are recognised in the reporting period when employees are entitled to the benefit or when incurred. Noting Long Service Leave is not recognised as all funding for this entitlement is held and expended through the Central Holding Authority.

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

## 8. PURCHASES OF GOODS AND SERVICES

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
The net surplus/(deficit) has been arrived at after charging the following expenses:		
<b>Goods and services expenses:</b>		
Custodian Consultation	301	204
Consultants (majority Anthropological)	592	873
Information Technology Consultants	135	255
Media Consultant	0	9
<b>Consultants<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1,028</b>	<b>1,341</b>
Advertising <sup>2</sup>	1	1
Marketing and Promotion <sup>3</sup>	26	3
Document Production	17	15
Legal Expenses <sup>4</sup>	194	100
Recruitment <sup>5</sup>	4	13
Training and Study	53	50
Official Duty Fares <sup>6</sup>	178	191
Travel Allowance	37	36
Information Technology Charges and Communications	238	240
Motor Vehicle Expenses <sup>7</sup>	234	238
Authority Board <sup>8</sup>	145	144
Relocation	7	7
Other	243	223
<b>Total purchases of goods and services</b>	<b>2,405</b>	<b>2,602</b>

1. Includes marketing, promotion, and IT consultants.

2. Does not include recruitment related advertising or advertising for marketing and promotion.

3. Includes advertising for marketing and promotion but excludes marketing and promotion consultants' expenses, which are incorporated in the consultants' category.

4. Includes legal fees, claim and settlement costs.

5. Includes recruitment-related advertising costs.

6. Includes helicopter charters for land surveys

7. The Authority maintains a fleet of 4WD vehicles due to the requirement for staff to travel to remote and regional locations.

8. The Authority Board is required to hold a minimum of four meetings per calendar year under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 (NT). In 2023-24 the Board meetings extended to a regional location, Tennant Creek and an interstate location, Canberra to attend the High Court Gunlom Hearing.

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

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

There are no write-offs, waivers, postponements, gifts and ex gratia payments approved under the *Financial Management Act 1995* or other legislation that the Authority administers that need to be documented for 2022-23 or 2023-24.

## 10. CASH AND DEPOSITS

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
Cash on hand	0	1
Cash at bank	2,209	5,543
On call or short-term deposits		
<b>Total cash and deposits</b>	<b>2,209</b>	<b>5,544</b>

For the purposes of the balance sheet and the cash flow statement, cash includes cash on hand, cash at bank and cash equivalents. Cash equivalents are highly liquid short-term investments that are readily convertible to cash. In 2023-24 all petty cash was removed from the Authority operations.

## 11. CASH FLOW RECONCILIATION

### a) Reconciliation of cash

The total of the Authority's 'Cash and deposits' of \$2.209 million recorded in the balance sheet is consistent with that recorded as 'Cash' in the cash flow statement.

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

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Net surplus/deficit</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>1,875</b>
Non-cash items:		
Depreciation and amortisation	96	45
Changes in assets and liabilities:		
Decrease/increase in receivables	228	(111)
Decrease/increase in payables	(31)	104
Decrease/increase in provision for employee benefits	76	(43)
Decrease/increase in other provisions	13	1
Decrease/increase in other liabilities	(66)	(264)
<b>Net cash from/(used in) operating activities</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>1,607</b>

## 12. RECEIVABLES

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Current</b>		
Accounts receivable	113	409
Less: loss allowance	0	0
	<b>113</b>	<b>408</b>
GST receivables	19	12
Prepayments	36	13
Other receivables	66	29
	<b>121</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Total receivables</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>463</b>

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

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

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

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

### Credit risk exposure of receivables

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

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

The loss allowance for receivables at reporting date represents the amount of receivables the Authority estimates is likely to be uncollectible and is considered doubtful. Ageing analysis and reconciliation of loss allowance for receivables as at the reporting date are disclosed below.

Internal receivables reflect amounts owing from entities controlled by the Northern Territory Government such as other agencies, government business divisions and government owned corporations. External receivables reflect amounts owing from third parties which are external to the Northern Territory Government.

### Ageing analysis

	2024				2023			
	Gross receivables	Loss rate	Expected credit losses	Net receivables	Gross receivables	Loss rate	Expected credit losses	Net receivables
	\$000	%	\$000	\$000	\$000	%	\$000	\$000
<b>Internal receivables</b>								
Not overdue	1	0	0	0	43	0	0	0
Overdue for less than 30 days	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overdue for 30 to 60 days	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overdue for more than 60 days	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total internal receivables</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>External receivables</b>								
Not overdue	152	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Overdue for less than 30 days	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overdue for 30 to 60 days	0	0	0	0	67	0	0	0
Overdue for more than 60 days	67	0	0	0	106	0	0	0
<b>Total external receivables</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

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

### Reconciliation of loss allowance for receivables

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Internal receivables</b>		
Opening balance	0	0
Written off during the year	0	0
Recovered during the year	0	0
Increase/decrease in allowance recognised in profit or loss	0	0
<b>Total internal receivables</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>External receivables</b>		
Opening balance	0	0
Written off during the year	0	0
Recovered during the year	0	0
Increase/decrease in allowance recognised in profit or loss	0	0
<b>Total external receivables</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## 13. PROPERTY, PLANT AND EQUIPMENT

### a) Total property, plant and equipment

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Plant and equipment</b>		
At fair value	1,436	1,436
Less: accumulated depreciation	(1,428)	(1,356)
	<b>8</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Computer hardware</b>		
At fair value	17	17
Less: accumulated depreciation	(15)	(12)
	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total property, plant and equipment</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>85</b>

### b) Reconciliation of carrying amount of property, plant and equipment

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

	2024		
	Plant and equipment	Computer Hardware	Total
	\$000	\$000	\$000
<b>Carrying amount as at 1 July</b>	80	5	85
Depreciation/amortisation expense	(72)	(3)	(75)
<b>Carrying amount as at 30 June</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>

	2023		
	Plant and equipment	Computer Hardware	Total
	\$000	\$000	\$000
<b>Carrying amount as at 1 July</b>	22	8	30
Additions	79	0	79
Depreciation/amortisation expense	(21)	(3)	(24)
<b>Carrying amount as at 30 June</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>85</b>

### Acquisitions

Property, plant and equipment are initially recognised at cost.

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

### Complex assets

A physical non-financial asset capable of disaggregation into separate and identifiable significant components which have different useful lives. The components may be replaced during the useful life of the complex asset.

### Revaluations and impairment

#### Revaluation of assets

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

- land
- buildings
- infrastructure assets

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

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

#### Impairment of assets

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

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

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

In certain situations, an impairment loss may subsequently be reversed. Impairment loss may only be reversed only if there has been a change in the assumptions used to determine the asset's recoverable amount. The reversal is limited so that the carrying amount of the asset does not exceed the revised estimate of its recoverable amount, nor exceed the net carrying amount that would have been determined had no impairment loss been recognised for the asset in the prior years. Where an asset is carried at a revalued amount, impairment reversal is recognised in the comprehensive operating statement as income to the extent that an impairment loss was previously recognised in the profit or loss, otherwise, impairment reversal results in an increase in the asset revaluation surplus.

Authority property, plant and equipment assets were assessed for impairment as at 30 June 2024. No impairment adjustments were required as a result of this review.

#### Depreciation and amortisation expense

Items of property, plant and equipment, including buildings but excluding land, have limited useful lives and are depreciated using the straight-line method over their estimated useful lives.

The estimated useful lives for each class of asset are in accordance with the Treasurer's Directions and are determined as follows:

	2024	2023
Plant and Equipment	10 years	10 years
Computer Hardware	5 years	5 years

Assets are depreciated from the date of acquisition or from the time an asset is completed and held ready for use.

## 14. INTANGIBLES

### a) Total intangibles

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Intangibles with a finite useful life</b>		
<b>Computer software</b>		
Gross carrying amount	586	586
Less: accumulated amortisation	(584)	(563)
Carrying amount at 30 June	1	22
<b>Total intangibles</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>22</b>

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

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

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

Intangibles with limited useful lives are amortised using the straight-line method over their estimated useful lives, which reflects the pattern of when expected economic benefits are likely to be realised.

The estimated useful lives for finite intangible assets are determined in accordance with the Treasurer's Directions and are determined as follows:

	2024	2023
Computer software	5 years	5 years

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

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

The Authority's intangible assets were assessed for impairment as at 30 June 2024. No impairment adjustments were required as a result of this review.

### b) Reconciliation of carrying amount of intangibles

	2024	
	Computer software	Total
	\$000	\$000
<b>Intangibles with a finite useful life</b>		
Carrying amount at 1 July	22	22
Amortisation	(21)	(21)
<b>Carrying amount as at 30 June</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

	2023	
	Computer software	Total
	\$000	\$000
<b>Intangibles with a finite useful life</b>		
Carrying amount at 1 July	43	43
Amortisation	(21)	(21)
Revaluation increments/decrements <sup>(a)</sup>		
<b>Carrying amount as at 30 June</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>

## 15. PAYABLES

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
Accounts payable	37	24
Accrued salaries and wages	95	95
Other accrued expenses	88	132
<b>Total deposits held</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>251</b>

Liabilities for accounts payable and other amounts payable are carried at amortised cost, which is the fair value of the consideration to be paid in the future for goods and services received, whether or not billed to the Authority. Accounts payable are normally settled within 20 days from receipt of valid of invoices under \$1 million or 30 days for invoices over \$1 million. Salaries and wages that are expected to be settled wholly within 12 months after the end of the period in which the employees render the service are recognised and measured at the amounts expected to be paid.

## 16. PROVISIONS

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Current</b>		
Employee benefits		
Recreation leave	306	244
Leave loading	62	50
Other employee benefits	2	0
Other provisions	85	71
<b>Total provisions</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>365</b>

### Employee benefits

Provision for employee benefits include wages and salaries and recreation leave accumulated as a result of employees rendering services up to the reporting date. Liabilities arising in respect of recreation leave and other employee benefit liabilities that fall due within 12 months of reporting date are classified as current liabilities and are measured at amounts expected to be paid. All recreation leave is classified as a current liability.

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

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

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

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

## 17. OTHER LIABILITIES

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>Current</b>		
Unearned contract revenue liability	0	66
<b>Total other liabilities</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>66</b>

### Unearned contract revenue liability

Unearned contract revenue liability relate to consideration received in advance from customers in respect of Authority Certificates. Unearned contract revenue liability balances as at 30 June 2024 is nil (balance at 1 July 2023 was \$66,000).

Of the amount included in the unearned contract revenue liability balance as at 1 July 2023, \$66,000 has been recognised as revenue in 2023-24 financial year.

### Superannuation

Employees' superannuation entitlements are provided through the:

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

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

## 18. COMMITMENTS

Commitments represent future obligations or cash outflows that can be reliably measured and arise out of a contractual arrangement and typically binds the Authority to performance conditions. Commitments are not recognised as liabilities on the balance sheet.

Commitments may extend over multiple reporting periods and may result in payment of compensation or return of funds if obligations are breached.

Internal commitments reflect commitments with entities controlled by the Northern Territory Government such as other agencies, government business divisions and government owned corporations. External commitments reflect those to third parties which are external to the Northern Territory Government.

Disclosures in relation to other commitments are detailed below.

### a) Other non-cancellable contract commitments<sup>1</sup>

Non-cancellable contract commitments predominantly comprise anthropological, legal and IT specialist contract. These contracts are expected to be payable as follows:

	2024		2023	
	Internal	External	Internal	External <sup>1</sup>
	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000
Not later than one year	0	293	0	158
Later than one year and not later than five years	0	0	0	48
Later than five years	0	0	0	0
<b>Total other non-cancellable contract commitments (exclusive of GST)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>206</b>
Plus: GST recoverable	0	21	0	20
<b>Total other non-cancellable contract commitments (inclusive of GST)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>226</b>

<sup>1</sup>Excludes capital and lease commitments, but includes maintenance contracts. Also excludes amounts recognised as unearned revenue in the Authority's financial records.

## 19. FAIR VALUE MEASUREMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Level 3** – inputs are unobservable.

The Authority does not recognise any financial assets or liabilities at fair value as these are recognised at amortised cost. The carrying amounts of these financial assets and liabilities approximates their fair value.

## 20. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

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

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

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

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

### a) Categories of financial instruments

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

Fair value through profit or loss	Mandatorily at fair value	Designated at fair value	Amortised cost	Fair value through other comprehensive income	Total
	\$000	\$000		\$000	
<b>2024</b>					
Cash and deposits	0	0	2,209	0	2,209
Receivables <sup>1</sup>	0	0	234	0	234
<b>Total financial assets</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,443</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,443</b>
Payables <sup>1</sup>	0	0	220	0	220
Provisions	0	0	455	0	455
Other Liabilities	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total financial liabilities</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>675</b>
<b>2023</b>					
Cash and deposits	0	0	5,544	0	5,544
Receivables <sup>1</sup>	0	0	463	0	463
<b>Total financial assets</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6,006</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6,006</b>
Payables <sup>1</sup>	0	0	251	0	251
Provisions	0	0	365	0	365
Other Liabilities	0	0	66	0	66
<b>Total financial liabilities</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>682</b>

<sup>1</sup>Total amounts disclosed here exclude statutory amounts, prepaid expenses and accrued contract revenue.

### Categories of financial instruments

#### Financial assets at amortised cost

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Financial liabilities at amortised cost

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

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

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

#### Netting of swap transactions

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

#### Credit risk

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

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

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

Credit risk relating to receivables is disclosed in Note 12.

### Liquidity risk

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

### Market risk

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

### Interest rate risk

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

The Authority is not exposed to interest rate risk as the Authority's financial assets and financial liabilities, with the exception of vehicle leases are non interest bearing. Lease arrangements are established on a fixed interest rate and therefore do not expose the Authority to interest rate risk.

### Sensitivity analysis

#### Price risk

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

## 21. RELATED PARTIES

### i) Related parties

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

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

### ii) Key management personnel (KMP)

Key management personnel of the Authority are those persons having authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the Authority. These include the minister for Arts Culture and Heritage, the Chief Executive Officer and the members of the executive team of the Authority are listed below:

- Nicola Jackson, Director Corporate Services
- Dr Sophie Creighton, Director Research (resigned 1 December 2023)
- Shannon Tchia, Director Research (commenced on 18 July 2023)
- Jitendra Kumarage, Director Research (commenced on 13 May 2023 parental leave back fill)
- Cameron McInerney, Director Policy and Governance

### iii) Remuneration of key management personnel

The details below excludes the salaries and other benefits of minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage as the minister's remunerations and allowances are payable by the Department of the Legislative Assembly and consequently disclosed within the Treasurer's annual financial statements. Long Service Leave paid out has been excluded as this is paid through the Central Holding Authority .

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

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
Short-term benefits	814	558
Post-employment benefits	103	74
Long-term benefits	8	8
Termination benefits	0	0
<b>Total remuneration of key management personnel</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>640</b>

### iv) Related party transactions:

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

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

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

Related party	2024			
	Revenue from related parties	Payments to related parties	Amounts owed by related parties	Amounts owed to related parties
	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000
All Territory Government departments including local councils	1,248	296	25	1

Related party	2023			
	Revenue from related parties	Payments to related parties	Amounts owed by related parties	Amounts owed to related parties
	\$000	\$000	\$000	\$000
All Territory Government departments including local councils	879	438	44	34

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

## 22. CONTINGENT LIABILITIES AND CONTINGENT ASSETS

### a) Contingent liabilities

The Authority had no contingent liabilities as at 30 June 2024 or 30 June 2023.

### b) Contingent assets

The Authority had no contingent assets as at 30 June 2024 or 30 June 2023.

## 23. EVENTS SUBSEQUENT TO BALANCE DATE

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

## 24. SCHEDULE OF ADMINISTERED TERRITORY ITEMS

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

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

The following Territory items are managed by the Authority on behalf of the government and are recorded in the Central Holding Authority (refer to Note 0c).

	2024	2023
	\$000	\$000
<b>TERRITORY INCOME AND EXPENSES</b>		
<b>Income</b>		
Fees from regulatory services	78	152
<b>Total income</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
Central Holding Authority income transferred	78	152
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Territory income less expenses</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## 25. BUDGETARY INFORMATION

The following tables present the variation between the 2023-24 original budgeted financial statements, as reported in 2023-24 Budget Paper No. 3 Agency Budget Statements, and the 2023-24 actual amounts reported in the financial statements, together with explanations for significant variations.

The variations within these tables do not include changes to budgeted appropriations from 2023-24 original budget to 2023-24 final budget. There were no variations to budgeted appropriation for 2023-24 and the only change to the overall budget related to an increase of \$0.5 million to the original budget of sales of goods and services from \$2.5 million to \$3 million. This amount was then expensed against the purchases of goods and services expense budget increasing the budget from 1.468 million to \$1.968 million.

Comprehensive operating statement	2024 Actual	2024 Original budget	Variance	Note
	\$000	\$000	\$000	
<b>INCOME</b>				
Appropriation				
Output	4,262	4,262	0	
Sales of goods and services	3,281	2,500	781	1
Goods and services received free of charge	905	777	128	2
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>8,449</b>	<b>7,539</b>	<b>910</b>	
<b>EXPENSES</b>				
Employee expenses	4,613	5,086	473	3
Administrative expenses				
Purchases of goods and services	2,487	1,468	(1,019)	4
Depreciation and amortisation	96	29	(67)	5
Other administrative expenses	905	777	(128)	2
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>8,101</b>	<b>7,360</b>	<b>(741)</b>	
<b>NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>170</b>	
<b>COMPREHENSIVE RESULT</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>170</b>	

Notes:

The following note descriptions relate to variances greater than 10 per cent or where multiple significant variances have occurred.

1. A continuation of service demand above baseline budget.
2. Reflective of increased DCDD services.
3. Variances in staffing levels throughout 2023-24 and specifically the challenges recruiting to Alice Springs based positions.
4. Continuation of specialist anthropological consultants to meet the demand for services and priority timeframes, increased legal expenses due to the Gunlom High Court case and increase to Custodian payment framework.
5. Continuation of an asset high depreciation rate for a minor office fit out where the depreciation rate aligned to the lease expiry date of December 2023.

Balance Sheet	2024 Actual	2024 Original budget	Variance	Note
	\$000	\$000	\$000	
<b>ASSETS</b>				
<b>Current assets</b>				
Cash and deposits	2,209	4,432	(2,223)	1
Receivables	234	340	(106)	2
Prepayments	0	12	(12)	
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>2,443</b>	<b>4,784</b>	<b>(2,341)</b>	
<b>Non-current assets</b>				
Property, plant and equipment	10	16	(6)	
Intangibles	1	0	1	
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>(5)</b>	
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>2,454</b>	<b>4,800</b>	<b>(2,346)</b>	
<b>LIABILITIES</b>				
<b>Current liabilities</b>				
Payables	220	148	72	3
Provisions	455	408	47	4
Other liabilities	0	330	(330)	5
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>(211)</b>	
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>1,779</b>	<b>3,914</b>	<b>(2,135)</b>	
<b>EQUITY</b>				
Capital	(2,379)	1,621	(4,000)	6
Accumulated funds	4,159	2,114	2,045	
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>1,779</b>	<b>3,914</b>	<b>(2,135)</b>	

Notes:

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

1. Reflective of the slight decrease in revenue compared to the previous year that yielded significant income due to economic growth initiatives.
2. Continuation of strong debtor management practices, also reflective of previous year performance.
3. Due accrued salaries and an anthropological consultant contract.
4. Due to staff transferring to the Authority with excess recreation leave entitlements.
5. No unearned revenue received and carried over to future years.
6. Equity withdrawal processed by the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Cash flow statement	2024 Actual	2024 Original budget	Variance	Note
	\$000	\$000	\$000	
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>				
<b>Operating receipts</b>				
Appropriation				
Output	4,263	4,262	1	
Receipts from sales of goods and services	3,635	2,500	1,135	1
<b>Total operating receipts</b>	<b>7,898</b>	<b>6,762</b>	<b>1,136</b>	
<b>Operating payments</b>				
Payments to employees	4,520	5,086	(566)	2
Payments for goods and services	2,712	1,468	1,244	3
<b>Total operating payments</b>	<b>7,232</b>	<b>6,554</b>	<b>678</b>	
<b>Net cash from/(used in) operating activities</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>457</b>	
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES</b>				
<b>Financing payments</b>				
Equity withdrawals	4,000	0	(4,000)	4
<b>Net cash from/(used in) financing activities</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(4,000)</b>	
Net increase/(decrease) in cash held	(3,335)	208	(3,542)	
Cash at beginning of financial year	5,544	4,224	1,320	
<b>CASH AT END OF FINANCIAL YEAR</b>	<b>2,209</b>	<b>4,432</b>	<b>(2,223)</b>	

## Notes:

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

1. Performance above baseline revenue budget demonstrates a continuation of high demand for services.
2. Variances in staffing levels throughout 2023-24 and specifically the challenges recruiting to Alice Springs based positions.
3. Continuation of specialist anthropological consultants to meet the demand for services and priority timeframes, increased legal expenses due to the Gunlom High Court case and increase to Custodian payment framework.
4. Equity withdrawal processed by the Department of Treasury and Finance.

## 26. BUDGETARY INFORMATION: ADMINISTERED TERRITORY ITEMS

The following table presents the variation between the 2023-24 original budget for administered items as reported in *2023-24 Budget Paper No. 3 Agency Budget Statements* and the 2023-24 actual amounts disclosed in Note 24 of these financial statements together with explanations for significant variations.

Administered Territory items	2024 Actual	2024 Original budget	Variance	Note
	\$000	\$000	\$000	
<b>TERRITORY INCOME AND EXPENSES</b>				
<b>Income</b>				
Fees from regulatory services	78	58	20	1
<b>Total income</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Expenses</b>				
Central Holding Authority income transferred	78	58	20	1
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Territory income less expenses</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	

## Notes:

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

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



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

*- Dr Benedict Scamby*



**Aboriginal Areas  
Protection Authority**  
*protecting sacred sites across the territory*

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