



Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
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20 November 2024

To the Committee,

**Preliminary submission to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia's
Inquiry into Energy, Food and Water Security**

The Central Land Council (CLC) welcomes the Committee's inquiry into energy, food and water security. These matters are critical to the wellbeing of our constituents, and to the sustainability and wellbeing of remote Aboriginal communities across northern Australia.

Through our directly elected representative Council of 90 community delegates, the CLC represents the interests and aspirations of approximately 20,000 traditional owners and other Aboriginal people resident in our region. We advocate for our people on a wide range of land-based, economic and socio-political issues to ensure that our families can continue to survive and thrive on their land. Our region covers 780,000 km² (an area almost the same size as NSW) in the southern half of the NT.

In the context of intersecting and compounding impacts of a changing climate and cost of living crisis, energy, food and water security cannot be separated and we welcome an inquiry that is considering these issues together. We urge the Committee to do so in a strategic and coordinated manner. It is not only availability of energy, food and water, but accessibility and affordability that are essential to security for our remote communities. Addressing the unacceptable levels of poverty experienced by remote Aboriginal communities must therefore be a key element of any strategy to improve energy, food and water security and we provide key recommendations to the Committee in this vein.

We provide this preliminary submission with the intent of informing the Committee's upcoming interim report. We also refer the Committee to the following CLC submissions provided as attachments:

- Senate Select Committee's Inquiry into the Cost of Living (2024) (Inquiry website, [sub. no. 184](#))
- National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities ([CLC website](#))
- First Nations Clean Energy Strategy ([CLC website](#))
- DCCEEW - Draft Principles of a National Water Agreement (2024) ([CLC website](#))
- Productivity National Water Reform (2024) ([CLC website](#))
- Case Study (2022): The Struggle for Good Quality Drinking Water in Alpururulam.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters in further detail. Please contact Policy manager Georgia Stewart, Georgia.Stewart@clc.org.au to arrange a meeting or for further information.

Yours sincerely,

Les Turner

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Central Land Council Preliminary Submission Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia's inquiry into Energy, Food and Water Security

1. Context: climate change and cost of living in remote Aboriginal communities in the NT

Energy, food and water security in Central Australia are fundamentally impacted by the increasing and compounding impacts of climate change and the cost of living crisis.

In Central Australia we are already experiencing – and can expect to increasingly experience – hotter temperatures, more intense heatwaves, harsher and more frequent fire weather, longer periods in drought, more erratic rainfall and aquifer recharge, an increase in the likelihood of major flood events, drier soils, increased evapotranspiration, and increased risk of erosion.¹ These conditions put increasing pressure on energy, food and water security while also increasing the dangers when these systems fail.

Extreme temperatures put pressure on energy systems and household energy bills to keep people, food and medicine cool in poorly insulated houses.² Flooding events make dirt roads and even the Stuart Highway at times impassable, disrupting food, medicine and other essential supplies to communities, sometimes for weeks at a time.³ Climate change will put more pressure on community water supplies as people seek to stay cool and hydrated while water security and quality of aquifers which we rely on for 90% of our drinking water supply, become increasingly uncertain. All of our communities already fail to meet the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines for quality and all but one of the communities within CLC region are at high, very high or extreme risk rating in relation to drinking water security.⁴

These impacts and related ecological decline are felt deeply by Aboriginal people whose physical, emotional and spiritual health are intimately connected with the health of Country. Social inequities also compound vulnerabilities. In remote communities throughout Central Australia Aboriginal people already experience unparalleled levels of income poverty,⁵ inadequate housing,⁶ water scarcity,⁷

¹ CSIRO (2020) Climate Change in the Northern Territory: State of the science and climate change impacts; Australian Security Leaders Climate Group (2024) Too Hot to Handle? The Scorching Reality of Australia's Climate-Security Failure, ([weblink](#))

² "Bodies start to cook": poor housing in remote communities puts lives at risk in northern Australia heatwave', C. Kelly, The Guardian, 8 December 2022 ([weblink](#))

³ Dick, Samantha (2023) Flooding leaves NT community of Lajamanu with dwindling food supplies, ABC News 11 Mar 2023 ([weblink](#)); Wuth, Robyn (2023) Remote communities evacuated as heavy rains and floods hit Northern Territory, National Indigenous Times, 2 March 2023 ([weblink](#))

⁴ CLC 2020 Submission on National Water Reform.

⁵ Francis Markham (2023) Submission to the *Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia* ([weblink](#)).

⁶ Quilty, S. et al (2022) 'Climate, housing, energy and Indigenous health: a call to action', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 217(1):9-12; 'NT refuses to adopt new 7 Start Energy Efficiency standards for homes', Health Habitat, 2 September 2022 ([weblink](#)); Northern Territory Government Residential building and energy efficiency ([weblink](#)).

⁷ 'Aboriginal communities in remote NT sent bottled water after new research into fluoride exposure' ABC News 1 Nov 2024 ([weblink](#)); Central Land Council, 2023, Central Land Council Submission to Productivity Commission on National Water Reform, 15 Feb 2024 ([weblink](#)); 'Indigenous Yuelamu community facing water crisis as aquifer dries up' ABC News 14 May 2022 ([weblink](#)); Too hot for humans? First Nations people fear becoming Australia's first climate refugees' The Guardian, 18 Dec 2019 ([weblink](#)); Howey, K. & Grealay, L. Drinking water security: the neglected dimension of Australian water reform. *Australas. J. Water Resources* 1–10 (2021), Beavan, Katrina 2019, 'Yuendumu in Central Australia at 'severe risk' of running out of water', ABC News, 13 Aug



extreme energy poverty,⁸ and a lack of basic infrastructure⁹ and health and other services.¹⁰

It is important to emphasise here just how severely the impacts of the Australia-wide cost of living crisis are felt by Aboriginal residents of remote communities – particularly in the NT. The poverty rate in remote NT communities is more than 60 per cent – the worst in the country.¹¹ The submission by Dr Francis Markham to the *Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia* presented a stark picture of the economic reality for Aboriginal people in the NT. Based on Census data, 50-75 per cent of Aboriginal households in remote NT are living below the poverty line.¹²

Even more concerning, this situation is not improving. Figure 2 below shows the change in Indigenous income poverty rates between 2016 and 2021. While in most parts of the country, Indigenous poverty rates are decreasing (albeit to a small degree), in remote NT, the poverty rates have escalated significantly – rising between 10-13 percentage points from 2016 to 2021:

Figure 1: Indigenous income poverty rates 2021

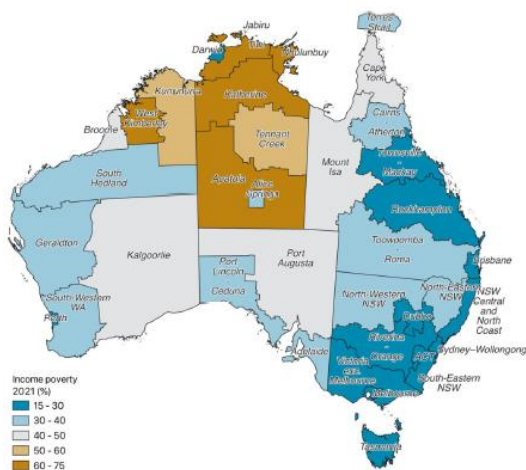
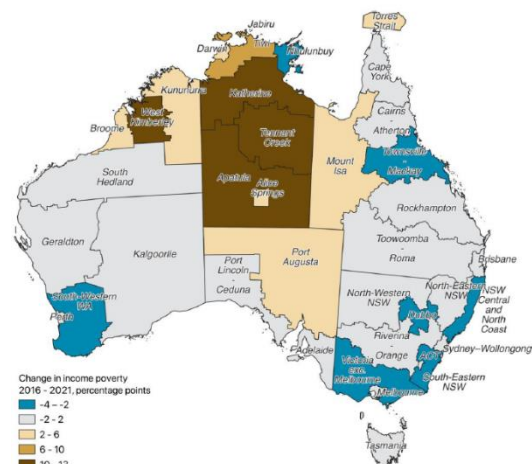


Figure 2: Change in Indigenous income poverty rates 2016-2021



Source: Dr Francis Markham, submission to the *Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia*, p.6-7 ([weblink](#))

This is exacerbated by the fact that remote Aboriginal communities also experience the highest costs of living in the country. In another analysis, Dr Markham estimates that the relative cost of living in remote Indigenous communities is 138.8 per cent of capital cities.¹³ That is, people in remote communities – the vast majority of whom are Aboriginal – are paying around 39 per cent more for the

⁸ Households with high electricity use located in the central climate zones have been shown to have a one in three chance of a same-day electricity disconnection on very hot or very cold days, see Longden, T. et al (2022) 'Energy insecurity during temperature extremes in remote Australia', *Nature Energy*, Vol. 7 (p.43-54) ([weblink](#)); White, L. et al. (2024) 'Geographies of regulatory disparity underlying Australia's energy transition', *Nature Energy*, Vol. 9 (p.92-105) ([weblink](#))

⁹ Central Land Council submission to the Northern Territory Infrastructure Audit (2022) ([weblink](#))

¹⁰ 'Too hot, heading south: how climate change may drive one-third of doctors out of the NT', S. Quilty and C. Pendrey, ANU, 12 April 2021 ([weblink](#))

¹¹ Altman, J. (2018) Land Rights News, Northern Edition, December 2018.

¹² submission by Dr Francis Markham to the *inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia*, ([weblink](#))

¹³ Dr Francis Markham, 'The poor pay more: Why the Remote Area Allowance needs urgent attention', 12 February 2024, published by the Australian National University Tax and Transfer Policy Institute ([weblink](#))



basics.

These pressures in everyday life relate to energy bills and food prices (see more below), a rent scheme based on bedrooms rather than income,¹⁴ some of the highest fuel prices in the country¹⁵ and lack of affordable public transport options; which together result in extreme financial hardship.

The effects of this poverty are pervasive and profound: Aboriginal people's health and living circumstances in the NT are the worst in the country across almost every indicator. The social challenges experienced in our region are a direct consequence of this inequality.

Poverty alleviation should be a first order priority. To this end, the CLC has been calling for an increase to the Remote Area Allowance (RAA) for many years in addition to the necessary increase to all income support payments. The RAA is a supplementary payment paid to income support recipients, introduced in 1984 to help compensate for the higher cost of living in remote regions (acknowledging that those individuals did not benefit or benefit fully from the Zone Tax Offset).

Two-thirds of recipients of the RAA are First Nations people.¹⁶ More than half of recipients live in the NT, followed by WA and QLD.¹⁷ Estimates cited above show that the cost of living is around 39 per cent higher in remote parts of Australia, compared to capital cities.¹⁸ However the RAA payment rate is only \$9.10 per week for single people, \$15.60 per week for couples (combined) and \$3.65 per week per child.¹⁹ The payment is not indexed, and has only increased twice (by a total of \$4.20 for a single person) since it was first introduced – the last increase was in 2000.²⁰

The payment is categorically failing to adequately account for the higher cost of living in remote Australia, and is exacerbating the already unacceptably high rates of income poverty experienced by Aboriginal communities – with direct consequences for energy and food security as a result of this policy neglect.

A number of recent reports to government have highlighted the strong case for increasing the RAA. This includes the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee's 2024 Report to Government²¹; the Productivity Commission's 2024 Inequality Snapshot²²; and the final report of the Senate Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty in Australia²³ (2024).

¹⁴ See CLC Submission on Cost of Living in remote Northern Territory, April 2024

¹⁵ MyFuel NT ([weblink](#)) See for example, Docker River (post code 0870)

¹⁶ Productivity Commission (2020) Study Report: Remote area tax concessions and payments, p.44 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/remote-tax/report#>

¹⁷ Ibid, p.21.

¹⁸ Dr Francis Markham, 'The poor pay more: Why the Remote Area Allowance needs urgent attention', 12 February 2024, published by the Australian National University Tax and Transfer Policy Institute ([weblink](#))

¹⁹ Australian Government Social Security Guide: 5.2.6.30 RAA – May 1984 to present date ([weblink](#))

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The EIAC noted that "the case for an immediate increase in the Remote Area Allowance (RAA) seems particularly strong. EIAC Report to Government 2024, Recommendation 4, p.10 ([weblink](#))

²² The Productivity Commission observed that RAA "has not kept pace with rising living costs", Productivity Commission 2024 Inequality Snapshot, p.28 ([weblink](#))

²³ The Senate Committee recommended "that the Australian Government consider asking the EIAC to review the adequacy of RAA with the view to set an adequate rate of payment to address the higher costs of living in remote Australia, and to consider appropriate indexation arrangements." (Recommendation 7, p.68) ([weblink](#))



Recommendation 1: The Australian Government substantially increase the Remote Area Allowance to appropriately account for the higher cost of living in remote areas and set appropriate ongoing indexation arrangements.

Recommendation 2: The Australian Government permanently and adequately increase Jobseeker and all other income support payments to keep people out of poverty, and provide for ongoing indexation of all payments.

A second key strategy for poverty alleviation in remote communities must be job creation. To this end, the CLC has strongly welcomed the introduction of the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program that will create up to 3,000 jobs across Australia. However, with close to 40,000 people on the CDP caseload (around 80 per cent of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and more than half of whom live in northern Australia) significantly more ambition is required. The Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) *Fair Work and Strong Communities* proposal recommended a Remote Jobs Fund sufficient to fund at least 12,000 part-time jobs across Australia.

Recommendation 3: The Australian Government invest in more community-led job creation in remote communities and continue to work with the First Nations Reference Group and other stakeholders to implement the new Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program – increasing investment over time in order to make a substantial difference to closing the employment gap.

The success of the program will require strong Aboriginal-led governance and a parallel focus on:

- 1) significantly improving the quality of employment support provided to people in remote communities who are looking for work as part of a new remote employment service;
- 2) improving access to and the quality of training in remote communities;
- 3) providing access to high quality, appropriately tailored enterprise support in remote communities; and
- 4) improving access to, appropriateness of and quality of Centrelink service provision in remote communities.

Thirdly, poverty reduction must be taken seriously. The CLC urges decisive and ambitious action by the Australian Government to address poverty across the country, and particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Recommendation 4: The Australian Government develop national poverty reduction targets and measures. The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee should be tasked with monitoring progress against these targets and publicly reporting on this, including reporting on the levels of income poverty experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, nationally, by states and territory, and by remoteness.

For further detail, please see the CLC's submission to the Senate Select Committee's Inquiry into the Cost of Living at **Attachment A**.



2. Energy security

Energy poverty in remote communities in the Northern Territory is unacceptably high. Unlike almost everywhere else in the country, remote households in the NT (the majority of which are Aboriginal) pay for their power using prepayment electricity meters. This means when money runs out, so does the power. And reflecting the low incomes across our region, it is not surprise that our constituents are struggling to keep the power on: to keep cool in summer and stay warm in winter (in an increasingly extreme climate), to refrigerate food and medicines, run the washing machine, keep the lights on to do homework and spend time inside in the evenings.

A study that analysed prepayment meter data taken from 3,300 households in 28 remote Aboriginal communities showed that almost all households (91 per cent) experienced at least one disconnection during the year. Almost three quarters (74 per cent) had their power disconnected more than 10 times. Households with high electricity use located in the central climate zones (i.e. within the CLC region) had a one in three chance of a same-day disconnection on very hot or very cold days.²⁴ The impact of such frequent disconnections on people's health and wellbeing, and the social and economic lives of communities are significant, and at times extreme.²⁵

A lack of mandatory disconnection reporting in remote NT communities masks the extreme energy insecurity experienced by a majority of remote Aboriginal households. Despite the evidence, the NT Government has failed to take any action to address this and other significant regulatory disparities experienced by remote energy consumers.²⁶

Recommendation 5: Improve the ability to track levels of energy insecurity experienced by remote residents through:

- a) A national database to actively monitor and measure levels of energy protections for households across the country; and
- b) Adoption by all jurisdictions of mandatory electricity disconnection reporting.

Recommendation 6: Adoption by the NT Government of the National Construction Code 2022 7 star energy efficiency rating for all new housing delivered under the new National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing NT.

Recommendation 7: Adoption by the NT Government of household retrofits/refurbishments through the ten year Remote Housing Partnership Agreement aimed at improving the thermal quality of existing housing and reducing energy consumption.

For further detail, please see the CLC's submission to the Senate Select Committee's Inquiry into the Cost of Living at **Attachment A**.

²⁴ Longden, T. et al (2022) 'Energy insecurity during temperature extremes in remote Australia', *Nature Energy*, Vol. 7 (p.43-54) ([weblink](#))

²⁵ "Bodies start to cook': poor housing in remote communities puts lives at risk in northern Australia heatwave", C. Kelly, *The Guardian*, 8 December 2022 ([weblink](#))

²⁶ White, L. et al (2024) 'Geographies of regulatory disparity underlying Australia's energy transition', *Nature Energy*, Vol 9, (p.92-105) ([weblink](#))



A second key consideration in relation to energy security for remote Aboriginal communities is the accessibility of solar infrastructure. The clean energy transition has the potential to alleviate energy poverty and ease the acute cost of living pressures experienced Aboriginal people in our communities – but only if the appropriate policy and regulatory settings are in place. Currently in the NT, this is not the case.

The CLC's submission to the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy (**Attachment B**) provides further details of the limitations of policies under the previous NT Government with respect to energy security. It makes a range of recommendations regarding:

- Co-investment in solar infrastructure for remote communities within a clear framework for community benefit, including reduced electricity costs for the energy consumer
- Addressing regulatory disparities with respect to access to solar infrastructure
- Support for genuinely community-led clean energy projects

3. Food security

Food insecurity is similarly not a new experience for Aboriginal people living in remote NT communities. Remote Aboriginal residents have long experienced a food system that regularly fails to provide access to food that is affordable, or of sufficient quantity, variety and quality that the rest of Australia enjoys. The evidence of the comparatively high cost of food in remote NT communities has been well documented. As of 2023:

- The actual cost of a Healthy Food Basket in remote stores has been higher than the projected cost each year since 2006;
- The cost difference of a Healthy Food Basket is 40% higher in remote stores than district major supermarkets;
- The costs difference was highest in 2017 when the Healthy Food Basket cost 60% more in remote stores; and
- Since 2000 the price gap for a healthy food basket in remote stores has fluctuated annually but overall has increased by approximately 10%.²⁷

In addition to higher food costs, the situation for remote residents is exacerbated by **high fuel costs**. In reality, many Aboriginal people living remotely remain financially trapped because of the high cost of fuel and the distance they need to travel to gain access to greater variety of more affordable goods. Assuming an average fuel consumption of 12.2 litres per 100 km, a person travelling from Imanpa (diesel \$3.10 per litre on 18 November 2024) to Alice Springs and return to shop will pay at least an extra \$200 for the journey.

In addition, the lack of affordable public transport options for remote community residents compounds this. While some transport options exist between NT remote communities and major centres, there are gaps in the routes and fees are high. There is also no discount rate for Centrelink recipients, including aged pensioners.

²⁷ NT Department of Health (2023), 2023 Market Basket Survey Summary Report, p4



This reality underpins the CLC recommendation to review and significantly increase the Remote Area Allowance (**Recommendation 1**) supporting the food security discussion paper potential action “to provide the evidence base for payments to meet the food security needs of people living in remote communities.”²⁸

Following is some feedback from CLC constituents about cost of living challenges in their remote communities collected during 2024:

“Meat costs something like \$52 for two chops. A bottle of [soft] drink costs \$8. Our power card costs like \$50 and that probably lasts four days. To do shopping in town, it costs \$150 in fuel to get to town.”
Atitjere Community resident (215 km from Alice Springs)

“Before, we would walk into the shop with \$150 and come out with a box full of shopping. Now we just come out with a paper bag or something.” Lajamanu Community Resident (560 km from Katherine)

“The biggest impact has come from the power meters. Without consultation the government just came in and put the new meters in, without talking to us. Next minute we are paying double the price. Over one week it used to be \$60 now it’s \$200-\$300 for a week. Come Monday people don’t have any power.”
Lajamanu Community resident

“Some days we go to town too but food –fuel is \$3 per litre. Other people are doing it tough. I see people go to the store there and come back with \$300-400 box of food. That’s a lot for just one box of food. You can get 6, 7 or 8 bags for that much in Alice Springs.. Meat is top of the shelf now yeah—you pay a fortune. But my way we might go and hunt a kangaroo.” Atitjere Community resident.

CLC recommends:

Recommendation 8: Governments develop regional food security strategies that embed principals of Aboriginal community control and Aboriginal employment, training and economic outcomes particularly with respect to local and regional food production projects and enterprises.

Recommendation 9: Implement Recommendation 2. of the 2020 Inquiry into Food Pricing and Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities:

“the Australian Government establish a real-time price monitoring and disclosure mechanism through a point of sale data system across all remote community stores. Such a system should allow for real time information about changes in price and patterns of consumption and supply. The price monitoring system should be reported and made publicly available by the NIAA.”

Recommendation 10: Introduction of a direct to consumer, point of sale subsidy to address financial barriers and increase affordability of essential food, including fruit and vegetables, in remote areas funded by at least a 20% hypothecated tax on sugar (including all sugar-sweetened beverages), to rebalance the high cost of healthy foods against the relative affordability of unhealthy foods.

²⁸ NIAA (2024), National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First nations Communities, P46



Recommendation 11: That store management bodies including Outback Stores are required to work with local communities to develop a community development approach to electing store directors that enables the community as a whole to set broad principles and guidelines for critical store decisions including:

- a. Use of store profits
- b. Proportion of profits allocated to community projects and store price reductions
- c. Director entitlements

Recommendation 12: To ensure homes are suitable for preparing and storing food, the Joint Steering Committee for the new Ten Year Remote Housing partnership agreement must ensure a sufficient proportion of the \$4 billion housing funds are allocated to preventive and cyclical repairs and maintenance of existing housing stock. This is critical to ensuring all houses are able to meet the benchmarks for the nine-healthy living practices designed by Healthabitat and adopted by the Northern Territory Government in its New Housing design guidelines and the Healthy Homes preventative repair and maintenance contracts. Healthy Living Practice 4 is ‘improving nutrition - assessing the ability to prepare and store food, making sure the stove works and improving the functionality of the kitchen.’

Recommendation 13: Advocate for an economy of scale store model increasing collective buying power of small independent or community owned stores passing on lower prices to the community.

For further detail, please see the CLC’s submission to the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities at **Attachment C**.

4. Water security

Drinking water quality and security is essential for the viability, self-determination, and sustainability of Aboriginal communities across the NT. Yet remote Indigenous communities face increasing challenges arising from threats to water resources in the NT and experiencing ongoing and significant challenges in relation to the supply of adequate and safe drinking water. For further detail please see our submission to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water consultation on the draft Principles of a National Water Agreement (2024) at **Attachment D**.

According to the most recent publicly available data from 2022, 63 out of the 72 remote communities in the NT supplied with reticulated water by the government-owned Power and Water Corporation, received water that does not meet the standards of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines in the last reporting year.²⁹ In 2020, all but one remote community in the CLC region was classified as having a high, very high or extreme risk rating in relation to drinking water security.

We have attached a detailed published case study (**Attachment E**) about the Alpururulam community’s struggle to gain access to better and safe water. The Case Study was written in 2022. Since water testing began the community has recorded consistent exceedances in the following:

²⁹ Power and Water Corporation 2023, [Drinking water Quality Report 2022-2023](#)



- a) Total dissolved solids – levels in Alpururulam drinking water are 920mg/L. The aesthetic threshold is 600mg/L, but levels greater than 900mg/L are considered by Power and Water to ‘significantly affect taste and may also cause moderate to severe scaling.’³⁰
- b) Hardness - levels in Alpururulam are at 500mg/L, but have been at or above this level since records began. The aesthetic guideline value for hardness is 200mg/L. Levels above 500mg/L may lead to ‘excessive scaling of pipes, taps and fittings, requires more soap to achieve lather and can impact infrastructure and kitchen appliances such as kettles.’³¹
- c) Fluoride - The recommended safe level in Australian drinking water is 0.6 to 1.1 mg/L (National Health and Medical Research Council). This level is set to ensure people living in hotter parts of the country and consuming more water do not exceed safe levels of consumption. When levels exceed 1.5 mg/L the NHMRC recommends dilution to reduce fluoride concentration (this is not possible for groundwater and the only option is to find an alternative water source). The current level of fluoride in Alpururulam is 1.7 mg/L and has been as high as 1.9 mg/L in recent years. A recent US Toxicology Program report (August 2014) has revealed that fluoride levels over 1.5 mg/L have a negative effect on children’s cognitive development. In response the NT Government has commenced supplying free bottled water for children under 12 years while a longer term solution is identified and funds sourced (this is also the case in Nyirpi community where fluoride levels are 1.7 mg/L).

Despite these exceedances the Alpururulam community has struggled for close to 15 years for access to an alternative water source. The attached Case Study describes the complex history of colonisation of water in the NT particularly through the expansion of the pastoral industry as far back as the 1800’s. This aspect of colonisation removed people from their clean water source (the Georgina River) and forced people on to less desirable country with very poor quality. Despite significant efforts by the Alpururulam community and the Central Land Council in recent years to progress a new bore project that would deliver better quality water from Lake Nash Station the Alpururulam community’s fight continues. While ABA funding has been secured with assistance from NIAA the project has stalled over failed land access negotiations with the pastoral lease holders. The findings from the US Toxicology Program of the impacts of high fluoride levels on children’s brain developments add a level of urgency to the need to establish a permanent and safe alternative water supply for community residents.

Without ongoing access to Water Grid funding for remote water infrastructure projects the NT Government will not have the resources to fund the technology and infrastructure needed by this community and the many others across the NT with a range of similar exceedances in their drinking water.

The reasons for the ongoing water insecurity in the NT include the challenges of remoteness and ageing infrastructure, but they are also fundamentally political: exacerbated by regulatory and legislative gaps in protections for remote communities; lack of transparency and accountability in funding and investment decisions; and overall insufficient funds to adequately address the

³⁰ Power and Water, 2022, p.35

³¹ Power and Water 2022, p34.



infrastructure needs of remote communities.

While water governance and management are the responsibility of jurisdictions, the Federal Government can play a key role in overcoming these critical challenges. As mentioned above, the NT Government has successfully applied for funding under the National Water Grid Fund for critical projects in our region. The CLC has provided a support letter for their most recent application and expects to work closely with the NT Government in future proposals to ensure the much needed funding is well directed and based on Closing the Gap priority reforms.

Recommendation 14: The Australian Government to commit to extending National Water Grid Funding to support water infrastructure in remote First Nations communities as a matter of urgency. There quite simply is not enough funding in the NT to address the urgent infrastructure needs in the NT.

Recommendation 15: The Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water to ensure a strong National Water Agreement with clear actions and responsibilities for jurisdictions and mechanisms and transparent public reporting to hold parties to account for their compliance.³².

³² For more information please see CLC's Submission to DCCEEW: Help Shape a National Water Agreement 18 September 2024 – **Attachment D**