

## **Tiwi Pathways to Regional Governance**

### **Our DREAM- Our FUTURE**

Thank you for asking us to speak to you. I am here as the President of Tiwi Islands Local Government and the Chairman of the Nguiu Community Management Board on Bathurst Island. The Tiwi Islands are north of Darwin with the larger island, Melville Island, being Australia's second largest offshore island after Tasmania. Our people, the Tiwi people, have lived on these islands for more than 12,000 years and today we are still a proud and independent people who want to be responsible for our own future. Tiwi means 'we are the one' and throughout history, we have seen ourselves as one people with our own traditional laws and culture.

Tiwi leaders have talked about the kind of modern government we want for many years. As the Tiwi Islands Local Government constitution states, we want to 'develop a regional governing body to manage the internal affairs of the Tiwi Islands with the capacity over time to coordinate and administer service delivery, promote sustainable development, and negotiate arrangements responsive to the needs of the Tiwi people'.

Before the formation of TILG, there were four separate community government councils managing the affairs of each of our communities with a number of other authorities governing training, health and lands. The Tiwi people did not have any say or control about how these bodies were set up. The Tiwi Land Council was the only organisation representative of all communities and those wise Tiwi leaders first saw the need for one regional governing body where Tiwi People could make their own decisions.

I liken this to the creation of one LARGE SHIP that will take the Tiwi people into the future. Our dream is to have one ship with one rudder, a strong modern engine and a crew that works together to make our journey into the future smooth and fast.

When Tiwi Islands Local Government was formed in 2001, it was set up to be the framework for a future regional governing body with half of its membership nominated by the Tiwi Land Council as the traditional landowners and half selected from our Skin Groups in the communities. Two years later, we are struggling to move forward because we still have so many separate ships around us, calling for their own engines and crews and travelling in different directions.

We still have the

- Tiwi Land Council.
- Tiwi Health Board.
- Tiwi Island Training and Employment Board
- Tiwi Islands Local Government.

- Catholic Education Office
- NT Department of Education
- Bathurst Island Housing Association.
- Milikapiti Housing Association.
- Several other community organisations operating commercial businesses such as Clubs and Stores.

All of these have their own rules, managers and visions for the future. Many Council Members of Tiwi Islands Local Government are also on the board of two or more of these organisations and we get very confused by the different directions given by the non-Tiwi captains or managers of these organisations. Our population on the Tiwi Islands is less than 2,500 and we believe that all these organisations should form part of one ship.

The Tiwi Land Council submission put to government by our people 4 or 5 years ago put forward the idea of a government with the Ministers or Leaders of the regional government taking various portfolios such as Employment and Training, Health and Land Management. We still think this is a good idea and all the existing organisations should be made to come together to form the crew of one Tiwi ship. The crew of our ship would still include the Tiwi leaders of the organisations that currently run training, land management, community and works services. The big difference would be that we would have one engine and one rudder so that we can travel in one direction. We also want all the crew members to be on board our ship in the Tiwis and not giving directions from their offices in Darwin. This Regional Tiwi Government would become the engine of our ship giving direction to the crew of Tiwi people. As the elected President of the Tiwi Islands, I look forward to being the captain of this great ship.