

## Fact Sheet

# Township Leasing

The Australian Government is interested in talking with Traditional Owners and community members about the home ownership and economic opportunities that township leasing can help deliver.

### What is township leasing?

A township lease is a voluntary, long-term lease over the whole of a community.

A township lease is usually 99 years in length, and typically the lease is held by the Executive Director of Township Leasing, a statutory office holder who is independent of government.

Traditional Owners keep ownership of the land.

The township lease covers the entire township area and can include vacant land for future development.

The Executive Director:

- administers the land and works closely with Traditional Owners through a Consultative Forum
- holds the township lease or 'head lease'
- issues and manages subleases while Traditional Owners receive rent payments
- makes sure anyone occupying the land now, or in the future, has a formal agreement in place and pays rent

Traditional Owners consent to the rules of the township lease and the Executive Director administers the township lease obeying the rules.

Traditional Owners no longer say 'yes' or 'no' to every sublease and development through their Land Council.

Traditional Owners can decide to be on a Consultative Forum about land use and development.

Under a township lease, people are clear on who the Traditional Owners are that advise the Executive Director and people are clear that the Executive Director is the land administrator.

A different model of township leasing, where a community entity holds the township lease rather than the Executive Director, is currently being worked on for the community of Gunyangara. This can provide a model for other communities who wish to administer a township lease in future.

### Who is the Executive Director?

The Executive Director is a statutory office holder, independent of Government.

The Executive Director and their staff (The Office of Township Leasing) have offices in Darwin and Canberra. They work in communities regularly and have strong working relationships with Traditional Owner groups.

Visit the website of the [Office of Township Leasing](#) for more information.

## Why should Traditional Owners think about township leasing?

Over the past few years, Traditional Owners, Land Councils and Government have worked together on improving land tenure arrangements in remote Northern Territory communities.

Leasing is now more common and rent is being paid to Traditional Owners.

Traditional Owners can continue to work with their Land Council on leasing.

However, for larger communities, Traditional Owners also have the option of township leasing.

Under a township lease, the Executive Director must formalise land arrangements and takes a local focus to strengthen and streamline land administration which can attract outside investment.

A township lease can help with home ownership and with getting more businesses and jobs to come to communities. Subleases can be used for home or business loans.

Traditional Owners can receive advance rent payments to help them boost or kick start local economic development activities.



## Township leases in the Tiwi and Groote regions

The Executive Director already holds township leases on the Tiwi Islands at Wurrumiyanga, Milikapiti and Wurankuwu, and around Groote Eylandt at Angurugu, Umbakumba and Milyakburra.

There have been good outcomes in these communities including the establishment of Traditional Owner trusts and business arms, retail outlets, accommodation facilities, and home ownership for Tiwi families.



Home owners at Wurrumiyanga

## What are the steps in a township lease negotiation?

Traditional Owners can sign a Statement of Commitment with the Australian Government – this is an agreement to *talk about* a township lease in good faith.

Traditional Owners and the Land Council then consider a proposal from the Australian Government on the rules of the township lease.

The negotiations can take several months and involve discussions between Traditional Owners, the community, the Land Council and the Government.

If Traditional Owners are comfortable to go ahead with the township lease, the Land Council then asks for formal approvals necessary under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, including Traditional Owner consent.

The final step is the signing of the township lease by the Land Trust, the Land Council and the Executive Director. Then the township lease starts.



Groote Consultative Forum

## What is the role of Traditional Owners in township leasing?

Traditional Owners participate in negotiations and say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the proposed township lease.

If they say ‘yes’, Traditional Owners can decide to be members of a Consultative Forum group once the township lease starts.

The Consultative Forum meets regularly to discuss how the township lease is running (including formal reviews) and local economic development opportunities.

The Executive Director discusses with the Consultative Forum land use and forward planning for land development.

All subleases are discussed by the Consultative Forum.

Importantly, Traditional Owners:

- remain the custodians of cultural heritage of the land
- can use advance rent payments for home ownership and business opportunities.

## How can I find out more?

If you are a Traditional Owner and you are interested in a township lease you can:

- talk with your Government Engagement Coordinator or Indigenous Engagement Officer
- talk with your Land Council
- call your local Indigenous Coordination Centre on 1800 079 098 or Nhulunbuy ICC on 1800 079 098
- visit the website of the [Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet](#)

The Australian Government can visit your community and hold an information meeting to talk about township leasing in more detail.



Piliyamyirra shop at Wurrumiyanga