



ARALUEN NEWS

April 2026

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Welcome

Dear Residents,

The Chinese Year of the Horse has bolted out of the gate — and what a frisky start to 2026 it has been. February brought a flurry of political news: the unexpected resignation of the Greens Member for Nightcliff, a by-election returning a new Labor member, and the controversial appointment of a new NT Administrator.

The natural world captured our attention entirely. The most breathtaking events this season have been our extraordinary desert Monsoon — one that lingered and delighted for weeks. Eighteen days of rain, two flash floods in February, and then another full flow of the Todd on 17th March. While a flowing river is always joyful, the flooding caused considerable damage along its banks and the distress to affected residents and businesses cannot be overstated.

Alice Springs now faces the biggest Buffel Grass season many of us can remember. As things dry out, bushfires will become a serious concern — not to mention the inevitable swarms of very friendly flies. Simply part of life in our desert paradise.

Our bush roads are the most pressing concern. Virtually every road in Central Australia has been significantly damaged by this prolonged summer drenching. The NT Government must urgently secure Commonwealth funding to address this backlog. Outback road construction costs are now approximately \$1.5 million per kilometre.

The Middle East conflict is being felt by all Australians, but Centralians feel it more acutely. Astronomical fuel costs are flowing into everything we buy, pushing our already above-average cost of living even higher. The impact on tourism is the elephant in the room. Will international tourists come to Central Australia?

Perhaps now is the right time to look inward and celebrate what is on our own doorstep — Parrtjima, fabAlice, the Folk Festival, the Alice Springs Cup. We are truly spoilt for choice.

Happy Autumn,

25% Off Red Centre Holidays

The NT Government have launched another campaign to attract tourists to the NT.

This includes 25% off accommodation, tours, experiences and unlimited kilometre car hire when you book through Tourism Central Australia's website or Visitor Information Centres in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek or Yulara.

Available until 3 June 2026 or until sold out. Travel valid through to 30 June 2027.



The Melanka Site: Another Plan, Another Flop!

On 2 March 2026, developers abandoned plans to build 144 apartments on the long-empty Gap Road site across from KFC. For anyone who has watched Alice Springs over the past two decades, the news was grimly familiar — another approved development, another retreat, another year of a vacant block serving as our CBD's most visible symbol of stalled potential.

The Melanka Lodge opened in 1971 as accommodation for government workers. After privatisation it became a popular backpacker hostel, before being sold in 2006 to Gilligan's Group, who demolished the buildings in 2008 — right as the Global Financial Crisis hit — and sold the cleared site. The Ainsworth family tried twice after acquiring it in 2009, gaining approvals in 2010 and 2014 for projects as ambitious as three eight-storey towers and 261 dwellings. Both times, they walked away.

In 2024, a consortium including Michael Sitzler and Centrecorp purchased the site and proposed up to 174 apartments, backed by the NT Labor Government's Regional Accommodation Project. After community opposition the plan was scaled back to 144 units. Planning Minister Josh Burgoyne approved it in early 2025, declaring the era of "nothing but talk" was over. It wasn't. Centrecorp CEO Randle Walker confirmed the project was dead, citing financial feasibility — the development couldn't deliver an adequate return. Attempts to attract private investment failed, and the NT Government declined to increase its stake.

This is the third approval granted since 2008 — and the third time nothing has been built. The block has sat vacant for 17 years. Each failure raises the same question: can development economics in Alice Springs ever stack up without a fundamentally different model of public investment?

FACT

Flood Mitigation

Currently the NT Government has committed \$4.9m to Flood Mitigation in Alice Springs – this includes \$2m for a "feasibility study" into an overpass through Heavitree Gap and work on our drainage system. There has been no extension to Flood Mitigation measures in Alice Springs for over a decade.



The design concept for the new Gap Youth Centre due to commence construction later this year.



What is the role of “Protocol” in Government?

Most Territorians will never deal with the NT Government’s Protocol unit directly — but its work shapes the formal life of our community more than many people realise. From state funerals to visiting dignitaries, from Australia Day honours to the swearing-in of a new Administrator, Protocol is the quiet machinery behind the Territory’s official ceremonies.

Protocol is a specialist unit within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, managing official ceremonial and diplomatic functions to ensure formal occasions are conducted with appropriate dignity and order. Its core business includes state funerals, swearing-in ceremonies for the Administrator and incoming ministers, and commemorations such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

Protocol works closely with Government House on official dinners, receptions, and formal calls — managing invitations, guest lists, seating, and protocols of precedence. When heads of state, ambassadors, or parliamentary delegations visit, Protocol manages the offi-

cial program and ensures the NT presents itself well on the national and international stage.

Protocol also administers NT-level honours and local arrangements for Australian honours ceremonies, advises on the correct use of NT and Australian flags, and provides guidance on Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country practices at official functions.

For Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is particularly relevant around parliamentary occasions: the opening of a new Assembly, condolence arrangements, and hosting official visitors at Parliament House. It operates largely out of public view, but underpins the formal life of our institutions.

The cost of operating “Protocol” is hidden deeply in the Dept of Chief Minister and Cabinet, impossible to discern. Suffice to say that no function or event is cheap to run. I will let readers work out for themselves the cost to Territorians of the countless Protocol events put on, primarily in Darwin, throughout the year.

How Is a State Funeral Determined in the NT?

The recent passing of a prominent Territorian raises a question many people have never had cause to consider: who decides whether someone receives a state funeral, and what does that actually mean?

The Northern Territory has no standalone legislation governing state funerals — no checklist, no automatic entitlement, no formal published criteria. It is an executive decision resting with the Chief Minister, made on advice from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, taking into account the person’s contribution to the Territory and the wishes of the family.

A state funeral is typically accorded to former Chief Ministers, former Administrators and Members of the Legislative Assembly who have given distinguished service. Beyond that, the Chief Minister has broad discretion to recognise any Territorian who has made an exceptional contribution to public life. The family must consent — a state funeral is offered, not imposed.

In practice it includes government meeting the costs of the ceremony, flags flown at half-mast on NT Government buildings, and a formal service at a significant venue. In the Legislative Assembly, a condolence motion allows Members to pay tribute on behalf of their constituents — a tradition that reflects the deep personal ties of public life in a small jurisdiction.

The NT’s approach reflects something broader about how our community operates. Decisions that elsewhere might be governed by elaborate protocols are here handled with personal care and flexibility. That informality is not a weakness. But it means the community relies on the good judgment of those in the Chief Minister’s office to ensure these honours are accorded appropriately and consistently.

Why Wasn’t I Invited? How Government Functions and Guest Lists Work.

You might have heard or indeed been invited to — a government dinner, an official opening, a ceremony at Government House. The same faces seem to appear. The question I’m often asked — How do people get invited to these publicly funded events?

Not all government functions are the same. A formal dinner at Government House for a visiting dignitary is very different to the opening of a community facility. Some events are genuinely public. Others are formal occasions where the guest list is limited to people with a specific role or connection to the purpose of the gathering.

Australia has a formal Order of Precedence — a ranked list of official positions that determines who is invited to the most formal government functions. At NT functions this flows from the Administrator, through to the Chief Minister, the Speaker, Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly, senior judges, agency heads, mayors, down through military, police, and religious leaders. These people are invited because they hold an official role, not because of who they are personally.

Beyond that standing base, additional guests are chosen based on the specific occasion — health professionals for a medical facility opening, business leaders for a trade reception. Venue capacity is real, and even people who might legitimately expect an invitation sometimes miss out.

Invitations to some publicly funded functions are extended on a primarily political basis by the government and the opposition. As an Independent Member of Parliament, I am not invited to these more politically aligned functions. Fortunately, I do not lose sleep over it — but I know others genuinely anguish over being overlooked.

If you lead an organisation or have made a significant contribution to the Territory, make yourself known to your local Member. Many events — Australia Day ceremonies, citizenship ceremonies, Anzac Day — are open to everyone. You do not need an invitation to be part of the Territory’s official life. If you feel your community, your organisation or you personally are consistently overlooked, raise it with your local Member, or your local NT Minister.



BIG DAY OUT IN HARMONY

May 30, 2026

Photo Gallery



Bills Passed in March 2026

Electrical Safety Amendment Bill

This Bill amends the Electrical Safety Act 2022 to permanently exempt certain low-risk electrical work from the requirement to issue a certificate of compliance.

Sentencing Amendment (Murder) Bill

This Bill amends the Sentencing Act 1995 to introduce mandatory minimum non-parole period of 25 years prison for the murder of a current or former partner, except in exceptional circumstances. The amendment increases the existing standard non-parole period of 20 years and places intimate partner murder alongside other categories of

serious offending under Territory law.

Bail Amendment Bill

This Bill amends the Bail Act to clarify its provisions apply to both adults and young people, and to all relevant courts, including the Youth Justice Court. The amendment addresses legal uncertainty identified in recent court proceedings.

Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Amendment (Licensing) Bill

This Bill amends the Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Act 1991 to extend and standardise licence terms for commercial passenger vehicle operators. It allows existing licence holders to apply for or renew

licences for periods of 12, 24 or 36 months, replacing shorter impractical licence terms.

Local Government Legislation Amendment (Code of Conduct and Other Matters) Bill

This Bill amends the Local Government Act 2019 as part of the second tranche of local government reforms. It repeals the existing councillor conduct framework and introduces a new tiered code of conduct system, for repeated serious misconduct.

**Next NT Legislative Assembly
Sitting Dates 2026**
May 5, 6, 7
May 12, 13, 14
June 9, 10, 11 (Budget Estimates)
June 15, 16, 17, 18 (Budget Estimates)

Bills Introduced in March 2026 for debate in May

Criminal Procedure Legislation Amendment Bill

This Bill introduces a number of practical reforms aimed at improving the efficiency of the criminal justice system, including supporting earlier resolution of matters through additional opportunities for guilty pleas, enabling some cases to proceed more directly to the Supreme Court, and expanding the range of matters that can be finalised in the Local Court. It also increases the use of audiovisual appearances and reduces the need for victims, particularly in domestic violence matters, to attend court multiple times, helping to reduce delays and improve how matters are managed through the courts.

Firearms Amendment Bill

This Bill updates the Territory's firearms framework to streamline administrative processes while strengthening regulatory controls. It extends licence durations to 10 years and allows licences to remain in force while renewal applications are being assessed. The Bill also introduces additional reporting requirements, new offences relating to digital firearm blueprints, and greater flexibility for the Commissioner to impose or vary licence conditions, supporting lawful use while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

Heritage Amendment Bill

This Bill updates the heritage system to improve clarity and timeliness. It refines definitions for archaeological places and objects, introduces earlier screening of nominations, and sets clearer timeframes for assessments. It also replaces automatic provisional protections to strengthen consultation requirements, including with Aboriginal stakeholders, and updates the structure and operation of the Heritage Council.

Liquor Legislation Amendment (Fast Track Approvals) Bill

This Bill implements a more proportionate, risk-based approach to liquor licensing by reducing regulatory requirements for low-risk applications while retaining full assessment processes for higher-risk proposals. It also extends Responsible Service of Alcohol certification periods and streamlines approval processes for minor venue changes, reducing unnecessary regulatory burden while maintaining existing community safeguards.

Mineral Titles Legislation Amendment Bill

This Bill delivers significant updates to the mining framework, including introducing new tenure types for small-scale mining and fossicking, extending exploration licence renewals from two to six years, and removing rigid reduction requirements in favour of project-based timelines. It simplifies applica-

tion and reporting processes, clarifies land access and consent, and strengthens alignment with environmental regulation.

Pipelines and Petroleum Legislation Amendment (Industry Development) Bill

This Bill modernises the Territory's energy legislation by expanding the types of substances that can be transported through pipelines to include carbon dioxide and hydrogen, and updating licensing, land access and regulatory processes.

Racing and Wagering Amendment Bill

This Bill reforms the governance of the racing and wagering industry by establishing a single controlling body, Racing NT, for all racing codes, separating wagering regulation, and introducing strengthened governance measures. The changes are designed to improve structure and accountability and the of the industry.

FACT — 2026 NT BUDGET

The NT Budget will be delivered on Tuesday 5th May by NT Treasurer, Bill Yan. This is the second full Budget of this CLP Government. It will be impacted by the 7 major weather events the NT has experienced this summer, and the additional fiscal pressures caused by the war in the Middle East.

Fuel Prices in the Parliamentary Spotlight

Fuel pricing dominated debate in the NT Legislative Assembly on Wednesday 11 March 2026, with both the government and opposition trading blows over who bears responsibility for the Territory's persistently high prices at the bowser.

The debate was triggered by a motion from the Opposition Leader, who challenged the CLP government to pass its own Fuel Price Disclosure Bill — legislation originally introduced by Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro back in 2022 when she was in opposition, but which has never been brought to a vote.

In response, Treasurer Bill Yan moved an

amended motion, confirming he has written to both the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and local retailers calling for closer scrutiny of pricing behaviour, particularly in the wake of rising global oil prices linked to conflict in the Middle East.

For Alice Springs residents, the figures speak for themselves. At the time of the debate, unleaded petrol in Alice Springs was sitting at approximately \$2.55 per litre — well above Darwin's \$2.30 — while some remote communities across Central Australia were paying as much as \$4 per litre.

The amended motion passed.

Workplace Respect Motion Passed

On Wednesday 11 March 2026, the NT Legislative Assembly passed a motion affirming that bullying, harassment, discrimination, intimidation and misuse of authority have no place in the NT Parliament — including towards Department of the Legislative Assembly staff.

The motion, originally moved by the Member for Johnston and amended before passing, acknowledges that all Members have a responsibility to model integrity, dignity and respectful conduct in every setting connected to their role. It recognises that a safe and respectful workplace is not a privilege — it is a basic expectation.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, nutritious food for an active and healthy life. The recent flooding in Central Australia has raised this issue again. The past five years have demonstrated repeatedly that Alice Springs's supply chain cannot be taken for granted. The Stuart Highway—the single sealed road connecting Alice Springs to the south — has been closed by flooding on multiple occasions since 2020. The Adelaide-Darwin railway, the freight alternative when the highway is cut, has been damaged during some of the same events, leaving Alice Springs without either option simultaneously. In January 2022, road and rail were severed at the same time, forcing Woolworths to reroute freight through Mount Isa. In July 2022, a national freight emergency was declared when the rail line was cut at Tarcoola. Further closures followed in December 2022, February 2023, three times in early 2024, and again in February 2026. These events have occurred in every quarter of the year. Supermarkets in Alice Springs typically hold around three to five days of stock. During extended closures, shelves deplete quickly. At the first mention of floods, panic buying strips shelves within hours, leaving the most vulnerable with nothing. Food security in our re-

gion has worsened since COVID, not improved. The most durable solution is infrastructure that does not fail — elevated road bases, improved drainage, and concrete causeways on the Stuart Highway, and flood-resilience works along the Adelaide-Darwin rail corridor. A single rail closure in 2022 along this corridor was estimated to have cost the national economy \$320 million. The cumulative cost of five years of disruptions almost certainly exceeds the cost of the upgrades needed to prevent them. The financial cost of the recent disruption to food supply by flooding is yet to be provided, but with the skyrocketing cost of fuel, we can only assume it will be significant. Is this simply the story of living in the NT and Central Australia, or can we look forward these chronic problems being properly addressed through real planning and investment?

FACT— SOLAR ECLIPSE
 On 22 July 2028, a total solar eclipse will pass directly over Karlu Karlu (Devils Marbles), around 100 km south of Tennant Creek. The path of totality will cross the NT during Australia's dry season, with cloud cover expected to be below 10% — making it one of the best viewing locations on the planet. Start planning now — it's a once-in-a-lifetime event right on our doorstep!

The latest Northern Territory crime statistics were released 20th March, for the month of January 2026 compared to January 2025. The data shows a consistent reduction in crime for Alice Springs — more good news for our community. That said, over the past few months it has felt like law and order has deteriorated somewhat in town. This is not unusual for summer, and we are likely to see that reflected in the statistics for February and March 2026 when they are released in coming months. In the meantime, the trending improvement over the past twelve months is a whole lot better than the years of deterioration we witnessed from 2017 to 2025. I remain optimistic but realistic.

Alice Springs Crime Statistics

January 2025 compared to January 2026

Crime	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	↑/↓
Crime Against the Person			
Homicide & Related Offences	1	0	100%↓
Assault - Total	224	151	33%↓
Assault - Sexual	11	10	9%↓
Other acts endangering persons	33	33	NIL
Crime against the person totals	269	194	28%↓
Crime Against Property			
Domestic Break Ins (including attempted)	69	42	39%↓
Commercial Break Ins (including attempted)	20	15	25%↓
Motor Vehicle Theft	14	5	64%↓
Theft other than MV	76	101	33%↑
Property Damage	149	119	20%↓
Crime against property totals	328	282	14%↓

The offence data was extracted from NT Police SerPro system 02/03/2026

PARRTJIMA
 10-19 APRIL 2026
 ILLUMINATING THE WORLD'S OLDEST LIVING CULTURE

AILERON BUSH WEEKEND
 Friday 3rd - Sunday 5th April 2026

LADBROKES ALICE SPRINGS CUP
 Monday May 4th
 General Entry \$40

Upcoming Events

Community Notices

- Easter Long Weekend**
3 April—6 April
- Aileron Bush Weekend**
3 April—5 April
- Parrtjima—Festival of Light**
10 April—19 April
The Desert Park
- ANZAC Day — 25 April**
6:00am Dawn Service at the Garden Cemetery
10:00am Parade
10:30am ANAZC Hill Service
- Top Half Folk Festival**
1 May— 4 May
Ross River Resort
- May Day — 4 May**
10:00am Bangtail Muster
Alice Springs Cup
Pioneer Park Race Course

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the 54th
TOP HALF FOLK Festival
 1-4 May 2026
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