



# ARALUEN NEWS

September 2023

**Robyn LAMBLEY MLA** *Member for ARALUEN*

## Welcome

### Dear Residents,

The most exciting community news in recent times is the inception of a new local Alice Springs newspaper called the "Centralian Today".

News Corp scrapped the full publication of the Centralian Advocate over three years ago and ever since many have felt disconnected and deprived of local information. Back in late 2021 I called a Public Meeting to try to resurrect a local newspaper.

This meeting was quite well attended but what became very clear was that starting a new local newspaper was going to take specific skillsets, expertise and significant financial backing, none of which were going to be easy to come by.

In late 2022 the interstate group that have since started the Centralian Today reached out to many people in Alice Springs seeking our thoughts on the viability and need for a newspaper. I am pleased to say the rest is history.

I am so thankful that the Directors and private owners of the Centralian Today have backed Alice Springs. The first few editions of the Centralian Today have been fantastic. The cost of the paper is a reasonable \$4.

After the loss of the Centralian Advocate I undertook to provide more regular editions of the Araluen News to at least inform people on events in NT politics and Parliament. I will continue to produce regular editions of the Araluen News as it seems people value this content.

Information is power, and empowering people to make informed decisions in the democratic process hopefully results in better Government.

Enjoy spring in the desert!

*Robyn*

## QANTAS and Alice Springs

Alice Springs has certainly copped a raw deal from Qantas over the past few years with literally thousands of seats cut from services in and out of town and airfares set at an all-time premium. This has contributed to the 20-30% drop in tourism in Central Australia in the past 12 months.

It seems that all the schmoozing, nice negotiations and back-slapping between NT Ministers and the "former" Qantas CEO, Allan Joyce, has never paid any dividends for Alice Springs.

And to hear that Joyce has departed our national carrier with a \$26m handshake and that Qantas made a \$1.7 billion profit in 2022/23 really does add salt into the wound.

The new female Qantas CEO has a public relations nightmare to sort out. In theory this might be the perfect time to swoop in and negotiate a better deal from Qantas for Centralians.

Qantas has always shaped our lifestyle in Alice Springs, either making us or breaking us, with their tough pricing and reductions to our flight schedules. The pain of Qantas cutting the direct Perth – Alice Springs flight is still being felt by many. The halcyon days of a direct Qantas flight between Broome and Alice Springs seems like a lifetime ago.

It seems unethical and un-Australian that we should be held at the mercy of their relentless pursuit of profit and self-indulgence.

Whilst an open market economy and small Government generally sit comfortably with me, like most Australians I find this extreme profiteering of Qantas deeply offensive.



## Upcoming Events

**NEWLAND PARK ROAD SAFETY CENTRE**

**FREE EVENT**

**FAMILY FUN DAY**

Saturday 16 September  
9am - 1pm  
36 Newland St Gillen

Practise safe riding  
Bring your bike & helmet or use ours  
Hector the Road Safety Cat

Free sausage sizzle  
Lots of kids activities

roadsafety.nt.gov.au

**BACK IN MY DAY**

**BRADSHAW PRIMARY SCHOOL 2023 PERFORMANCE**

THURSDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER

TICKETS AT THE DOOR  
\$5 PER PERSON \$10 FAMILY

DOORS OPEN 6PM  
6.15PM START

MARIAN CENTRE  
OLSH SADADEEN

## August Parliament Sitings Update



The last sittings of the NT Parliament were held in the final week of August 2023. The three pieces of legislation passed were very minor, barely worth a mention. But the proceedings were dominated by debate and questions on crime. The biggest petition in the history of the NT Parliament was tabled during the July sittings with more than 26,000 people calling for tougher laws on Crime. This was in response to the brutal and unprovoked murders of two young people in Darwin earlier this year. The NT Labor Government have only allowed 2 of the 24 petitions tabled in Parliament over the past three years to go on to be debated. Due to the massive public uproar over crime in Darwin the Government was forced into allowing a full debate on this petition with each member given 10 minutes to talk. Under this Labor Government petitions are only allowed to be debated for a total of 16 minutes, with only 4 speakers allowed to talk for just a few minutes each. Under extraordinary public pressure, including three huge public rallies in Darwin, the Government relented and allowed this crime petition to be debated for several hours.

Parliament next sits in mid-October for 2 weeks, that is two lots of three days (17-19th October & 24-26th October)



## Another Skate Park for Alice Springs

The idea of another Skate Park for Alice Springs has been around for more than 5 years. Back in 2018 Council flagged the idea of putting a skate facility in Newland Park, adjacent to the Gillen Club. Most residents were not generally in favour of the proposal due to concerns around a potential increase in anti-social behaviour. Fast forward to 2022, the Town Council has resurrected the concept of a new Skate Park at Newland, but as a "Family" Park. And whilst there seems to be more support for this new concept, many residents still remain concerned that such facilities could attract more social problems in a part of town with already high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

With the current Skate Park, adjacent to the Town Pool, looking tired and neglected, questions have been raised as to why we need another Skate Park and what Council intends to do with the current skate park. Unless the Council commits to long term funding to properly maintain the new skate park and provide security, it is reasonable to assume this new park could end up in the same state as the existing skate park. The new plans for Newland Park include an 1800sqm skate park, a toilet block, fitness area, playground, a half court and a dog park. As the matter stands there will be a further round of consultation in October 2023, which will include completed 3D designs so residents can see in greater detail how the proposed plans will look. The Mayor has stated the new facilities will cost between \$6-8 million. Council is yet to identify the source of this funding.



## National Aboriginal Art Gallery Update

In the August "Araluen News" I noted that the proposed National Aboriginal Art Gallery for Alice Springs unusually and perhaps unnecessarily, had two Directors, costing Territorians more than \$600K per year in salary packages alone. Interestingly on 30 August 2023 the Minister for Arts and Culture, Chansey Paech, announced that one of the Directors, Ms Puklowski, would be moving on to another job and that the sole Director of the Gallery would be Ms Sera Bray. Minister Paech also announced that construction of the Gallery will commence in the first quarter of 2024. The National Aboriginal Art Gallery was first announced and funded by the former CLP NT Government in June 2016. There has been next to no progress in this space for over 7 years.

## New NTG Knife Crime Strategy does not cut it!

In response to enormous public outcry the Attorney-General announced a new "Knife Crime Reduction Strategy" on 28 August 2023, which surprisingly included no legislative changes.

The strategy includes; locking up knives in shops to prevent theft; culturally appropriate awareness and educational campaigns; extra safety and de-escalation training for retail and hospitality workers; and police led action on weapon detection and prevention of knife crime.

This new strategy has been viewed by many as insufficient and not meeting community expectations and concerns about safety. The government also has been accused of passing the responsibility (and cost) of community safety onto businesses and retail staff, instead of strengthening laws which could be enforced by Police.





The Auditor General (AG) is the only NT Government agency that is specifically chartered with scrutinising Government spending. Our AG is Mrs Julie Crisp who has been in the role for 9 years and does an excellent job.

She will conclude her 10 year contract in 2024. Her latest report was tabled in the August Parliamentary Sittings covering January to July 2023 and shines a light on areas of concern with the NT Government. Some interesting revelations include:

\*Batchelor College have failed to meet their financial reporting requirements for several years mainly due to a very high staff turnover in the most senior positions. This meant that the AG could not provide a qualified assessment of their books. Whilst Batchelor is still operating, the educational institution has been the subject of multiple inquiries, including an ICAC inquiry, in recent times. It is clear that Batchelor College needs considerable assistance to get their financial position in order to the standard required.

\*The AG found that one unnamed NT Government agency paid for a consultant to prepare "Order of Australia Medal" nominations for its board members, past and present, all at the tax payer's expense. This really does not pass the pub test and the agency concerned needs to be held to account.

\*The AG also identified the NT Department of the Attorney General and Justice as continuing to be slack in their corporate governance. She described "weaknesses" in internal controls in this agency that could lead to a higher risk of "fraud and / or error occurring".

\* The Auditor General found "small samples of procurement transactions continue to demonstrate non-compliance with mandatory across-Government procurement requirements". NT Government procurement is an area that needs constant independent scrutiny to ensure absolute fairness.



Neighbourhood Watch used to be a very grassroots organisation consisting only of well-meaning volunteers who tirelessly joined forces in streets and communities around Australia, providing eyes and ears to keep their patch safe.

The concept of Safe Houses was introduced by Neighbourhood Watch back in the 1980's to act as a refuge for people feeling unsafe or under threat.

Neighbourhood Watch is now a very different organisation to what some of us may remember but it still has the same powerful mantra, to help keep people safe.

In the NT, Neighbourhood Watch is funded exclusively by the NT Police. Their work entirely complements the role of our Police. Neighbourhood Watch NT currently provides;

- \*Seniors Safety Advice & Personal Training;
- \*Scams and Cyber Security Advice;
- \*Community Connects programs;
- \*Home and Personal Security Advice;
- \*Safety education for kids programs.

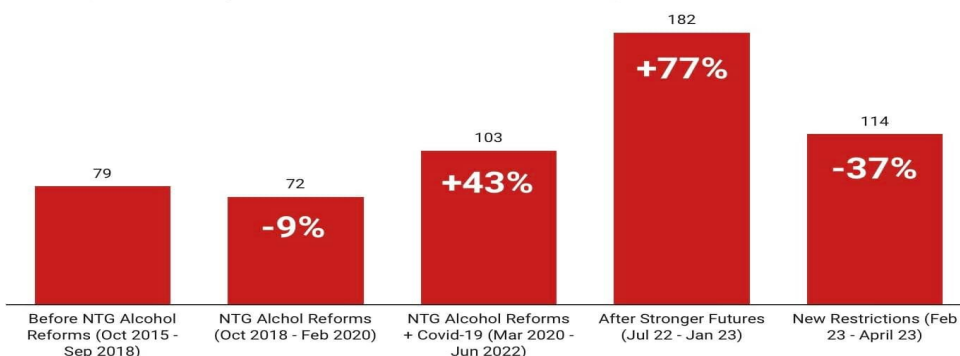
What they achieve is a true credit to their team of dedicated staff and volunteers.

Australia is home to less than half a percent of the world's population but has 20 percent of its pokies. The real number of poker machines in Alice Springs clubs, pubs and at Lasseters Casino is not easy to find. There is no cap on the number of poker machines in our two NT Casinos and the Government tends to exclude these Casino Poker Machines from the total count. After some effort to extract this information we can now give you those figures. As at 30 April 2023, Lasseters Hotel Casino has 400 machines, and there are 146 in Alice Springs clubs and pubs. An extra 10 extra poker machines were announced to be added to both Todd Tavern and Gap View Hotel by the Attorney General, Chansey Paech in July 2023. These figures confirm that Alice Springs has the second highest number of poker machines per capita in Australia, just behind Tennant Creek.

### Crime in Alice Springs

The rate of crime in Alice Springs continues to increase at unacceptable levels. Under the current NT Labor Government (from 2016) we have seen Domestic Violence assaults in Alice Springs rise to levels never seen before. During the 7 month period (July 2022 to February 2023) that the "Stronger Future" Alcohol Bans were lifted in the Town Camps and more than 400 Aboriginal living areas across the NT, the rates of Domestic Violence in Alice Springs soared to more than double the rates in 2016. After the alcohol bans were reinstated in February 2023, Domestic Violence rates dropped dramatically but still remained at very levels, as can be seen in the below graph. Alcohol is clearly a major contributing factor to Domestic and Family Violence.

### Average monthly DV assaults in Alice Springs



Source: NT Police Crime Statistics • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

# NT Electoral Commission Bungle 2023 Electoral Redistribution

Quite unbelievably the NT Electoral Commission revealed on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> September that the 7 month process of reviewing and redesigning the new Electoral Boundaries of the NT in preparation for the August 2024 NT General Election have been bungled and that they have to start all over again. The Redistribution of Electoral Boundaries is a highly controversial process prescribed within the NT Electoral Act 2004 and overseen by the NT Electoral Commission (NTEC). It occurs every 4 years approximately 12-18 months out from every 4 year fixed-term NT General Election.



In a press release on Friday afternoon the NTEC revealed they have failed to meet the legal requirements of a NT Electoral Redistribution and the whole process must be redone for the "redistribution to be lawful". The 2023 NT Electoral Redistribution was due to be finalised in mid-September 2023. With the process having to be completely redone this will mean that the final Electoral Boundaries for the 2024 Election will not be finalised until at least March 2024, just a few months out from the NT Election on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2024. This debacle comes in the wake of on-going deterioration of Territorians participating in elections over the past 5 years. Successive local Government, NT and Federal elections have seen stunningly low voter turn outs, particularly amongst Aboriginal people. In some recent elections voter turnout has been less than 50%. In the recent Darwin Local Government bi-election the voter turnout was 48.8%. In the last Federal Election, the Electorate of Lingiari had the lowest voter turnout in the country, in which almost 35% of eligible people did not vote. Obviously if you want to give anyone a voice, you need to get them to the polling booth. The NTEC is a NT Government agency that has been hit with ongoing funding cuts and freezes for many years under the current NT Labor Government. Electoral Commission services in areas outside of Darwin have been dramatically reduced, in some cases completely scrapped. Central Australia no longer has a permanent, full time NTEC presence with several positions cut and the NTEC shop-front closed in January 2020. The democratic process in the NT is in crisis. This should be cause for national concern and outrage. There needs to be an independent inquiry into the NT Electoral Commission and the botching of the 2023 NT Electoral Boundary Redistribution. But even more importantly there needs to be an inquiry into the deteriorating participation in the democratic process in the NT and the lack of funding provided by the NT Government to the NT Electoral Commission to seriously address this shameful problem.

## Chief Minister Breaches "Freedom of the Press"

The NT Labor Government have been black banning a NT online newspaper the "NT Independent" for 4 years. This is despite the NT Independent winning multiple media awards for their cutting edge stories. The NT Government has blocked them from attending Government press conferences and from most Government communications since 2020, claiming the NT Independent is not "reputable".



Chief Minister, Natasha Fyles, was recently asked about her continuing breach of the "Freedom of the Press" at a National Press Club address in Canberra on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023, by ABC senior political correspondent Laura Tingle.

Fyles tried to dismiss the question but clearly the National Press Club value freedom of the press, a fundamental principle of a democracy and their industry. The NT Labor Government have come under national and international criticism for this serious human rights breach. Territorians need to be aware of this unethical conduct by the NT Government.



**Steiner School  
Spring Festival  
Sept 21st 2023,  
5:45pm  
163 Ragonesi Rd**



**We can email you the Araluen News!**  
Just send a simple email with the subject "Araluen News"  
Email: [Electorate.Araluen@nt.gov.au](mailto:Electorate.Araluen@nt.gov.au)  
No message required.