NORTHERN TERRITORY CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION INC.

Advancing and protecting the interests of cattle producers in the Northern Territory

*Member - National Farmers' Federation*

**To: Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development**

**Via email at: LGLaw.CMC@nt.gov.au**

**Re: Legislative Amendments to the Local Government Act 2019**

The Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Legislative Amendments to the Local Government Act 2019 (the "Act"). As the representative body for 95% of pastoralists across the Northern Territory (NT), we advocate on behalf of landholders responsible for managing more than 45% of the Territory and an industry that continues to underpin regional economies, national food security, and long-standing environmental stewardship across some of Australia's most remote landscapes.

We write in response to the Discussion Paper on the 2025 Amendments to the Local Government Act 2019, particularly Part B Chapter 6 regarding proposed changes to conditional rating applied to pastoral land across the Northern Territory. As the peak representative body for Northern Territory pastoralists, the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) wishes to express its serious concerns with the proposed changes and the implications it carries for our members and the Northern Territory.

It is important to note that primary producers are currently facing an exceptionally challenging operating environment. With inflationary pressures across our extended supply chains, the compounding costs of meeting evolving environmental responsibilities, and the demands of delivering food and fibre at a national and global scale, the burden on pastoral businesses is significant.

The NTCA supports the existing conditional rating system, which serves an essential function in recognising the unique economic, geographic, and service realities of pastoral operations. Primary producers are not only foundational to the Territory's economy, they are also critical contributors to Australia's food security and climate change goals. The pastoral industry delivers significant value to remote and regional communities while placing minimal demand on local services. Unlike other sectors, our workforce is based almost entirely on-station, and our members invest heavily in self-

sufficiency, constructing and maintaining their own infrastructure, including roads, utilities, and accommodation. This is particularly evident in the management of remote roads. The reality is that local government stewardship of road infrastructure in many parts of the NT has been so inadequate for so long that pastoralist's have either taken on the responsibility for road maintenance themselves or continued to operate regardless, which significantly hinders business operations and is an immense safety risk to all road users. The condition of rural and remote roads has diminished so dramatically that the NTCA in partnership with relevant stakeholders has spent considerable funds for a private company to assess and deliver solutions for the maintenance of remote roads. Whilst this is a function that arguably sits within local government, pastoralist's have acted in their self-sufficient nature and taken the initiative.

The authority to determine rates for conditionally rateable land must remain solely with the appropriate Minister. This responsibility should not be delegated to local councils. As highlighted in the Interim report into local government sustainability, councils continue to face significant challenges in attracting and retaining suitably qualified personnel. Given these limitations, councils cannot be relied upon to exercise discretion over conditional rating, particularly where it affects key industries. This authority must remain with the Minister, who is supported by experienced and appropriately qualified advisors. These advisors possess the necessary insight into broader contextual factors affecting pastoralists, including international market pressures, food security, geopolitical considerations, and complex regulatory impacts on supply chains. Under the current framework, the Minister retains the discretion to implement conditional rating and, importantly, has exercised restraint in doing so, reflecting the prudence and broader understanding required in such determinations.

We are particularly concerned by the notion that pastoralists should bear increased costs due to local government budget pressures which is not an acceptable rationale. Further, the assertion that local governments provide services that attract and retain workers in pastoral, mining, and petroleum industries is incorrect. Pastoral businesses retain staff because of their own investments in workplace conditions, infrastructure, and community, not because of local government services, which in most cases are rarely utilised, if at all.

The NTCA and its members strongly oppose any further increases to pastoral rates. Any further increase to local government rates on pastoral properties, particularly following three consecutive

years of substantial rate increases would be inequitable. We do not support your efforts to use our industry as a financial stopgap for systemic funding shortfalls and poor financial management in local government.

Sincerely,

Romy Carey

Chief Executive Officer

Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association