

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REGIONAL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

BIG RIVERS REGION

31 August 2008

INTRODUCTION:

This Local Government Regional Management Plan (RMP) for the Big Rivers Region is a statutory instrument under part 3.1 of the new Local Government Act 2008 (NT).

It comes into effect on 1 July 2008 and has a term of 4 years.

The local government bodies covered by terms of this plan are:

- i) Katherine Town Council [By agreement]
- ii) Victoria Daly Shire Council
- iii) Roper Gulf Shire Council

The Plan is set out in five sections.

Background provides an overview of the local government reform.

Section A sets out the opportunities and challenges for local government service delivery in the region.

Section B provides an overview of the regulatory and planning framework for local government in the region.

Section C sets out existing and potential cooperative arrangements between local governments within the region and between local governments and other organisations and agencies with interests in the region.

Section D identifies core local government services and specifies the locations within each shire where core services must be delivered.
(This section does not apply to municipal councils.)

BACKGROUND:

1. New Local Government

In October 2006, the Minister for Local Government announced that the Northern Territory Government had decided to introduce a new framework of local government that involves the incorporation of the vast majority of the Territory. There will be five municipal councils and 11 shire councils.

A detailed Implementation Plan to enable the establishment of the shire councils by 1 July 2008 was adopted and the Government released 'indicative' shire boundaries for public consultation in January 2007.

The Minister established a Local Government Advisory Board, with an independent chair, and provided the Board with terms of reference to advise him directly on all major issues relating to the establishment and operation of the shires, the legislative changes to provide for the reform, and, the development of regional management plans.

A Transition Committee was also established for each shire area to enable local input into the shire boundaries, ward boundaries, governance and representative issues and the development of the shire plan. Each current local government council within the area was given membership on the Transition Committee.

Amendments were made to the *Local Government Act* and the *Associations Act* in August 2007 to assist the smooth transition to the new shires. The Minister was provided with the power to make re-structuring orders. Local government bodies that had been incorporated under the *Associations Act* were converted to the *Local Government Act*, while still retaining their corporate identities, funding and assets until 1 July 2008.

The Minister subsequently made re-structuring orders to establish 'prospective' shires and defer council elections by gazettal on 17 October 2007. The transition of the Association councils also occurred by gazettal on the same date.

2. Local Government Act

The new Local Government Act 2008 (the new Act), to provide for the local government reforms, was tabled at the February 2008 Sittings of the Legislative Assembly and passed on 8 May 2008. At Part 3.1, Section 16 of the new Act there is a requirement that a regional management plan be developed for each of the three regions described in Schedule 1.

A RMP is primarily the product of consultation between interested councils in the region and between those councils and the Agency (the Department with responsibility to administer the Act). In this case the responsible Agency is the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport (DLGHS). A municipal council

may participate in the consultation regarding the RMP for its region but is not obliged to do so.

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) may also participate in consultation regarding each RMP.

The new Act requires that RMPs address particular matters. They are to include a description of the challenges and opportunities for local government within the region; address the administrative and regulatory framework for local government service delivery; list any existing or potential cooperative arrangements involving local government in the region, either among councils themselves or with other bodies; and, identify core local government services and the communities to which they must be delivered by the shire councils.

The new Act specifically provides for a RMP to include the joint management of facilities by councils, such as a regional cemetery or regional waste management facility. Cooperative arrangements, with regards to resource sharing and development at a regional level, are intended to provide service delivery efficiencies, including the benefits of economies of scale. They are also to facilitate engagement with governments and the private sector in the development of the region.

An RMP is to operate for a term of 4 years, when it is to be replaced by a revised Plan. A draft of a new RMP, reflecting the results of consultation, must be published on the Agency's website at least 4 months before it is due for commencement.

As part of the consultation process a notice is published on the Agency's website and in a newspaper circulating generally throughout the Northern Territory inviting written representations regarding the draft RMP, within a period (at least 1 month) specified in the notice, from interested persons. The draft regional management plan and the notice inviting written representations must also be published on the website of any councils whose area is within the relevant region.

The final version of an RMP is to be published on the Agency's website and relevant council websites.

The new Act provides that a Plan may be amended by agreement between the Agency and the councils in the region at any time during its term.

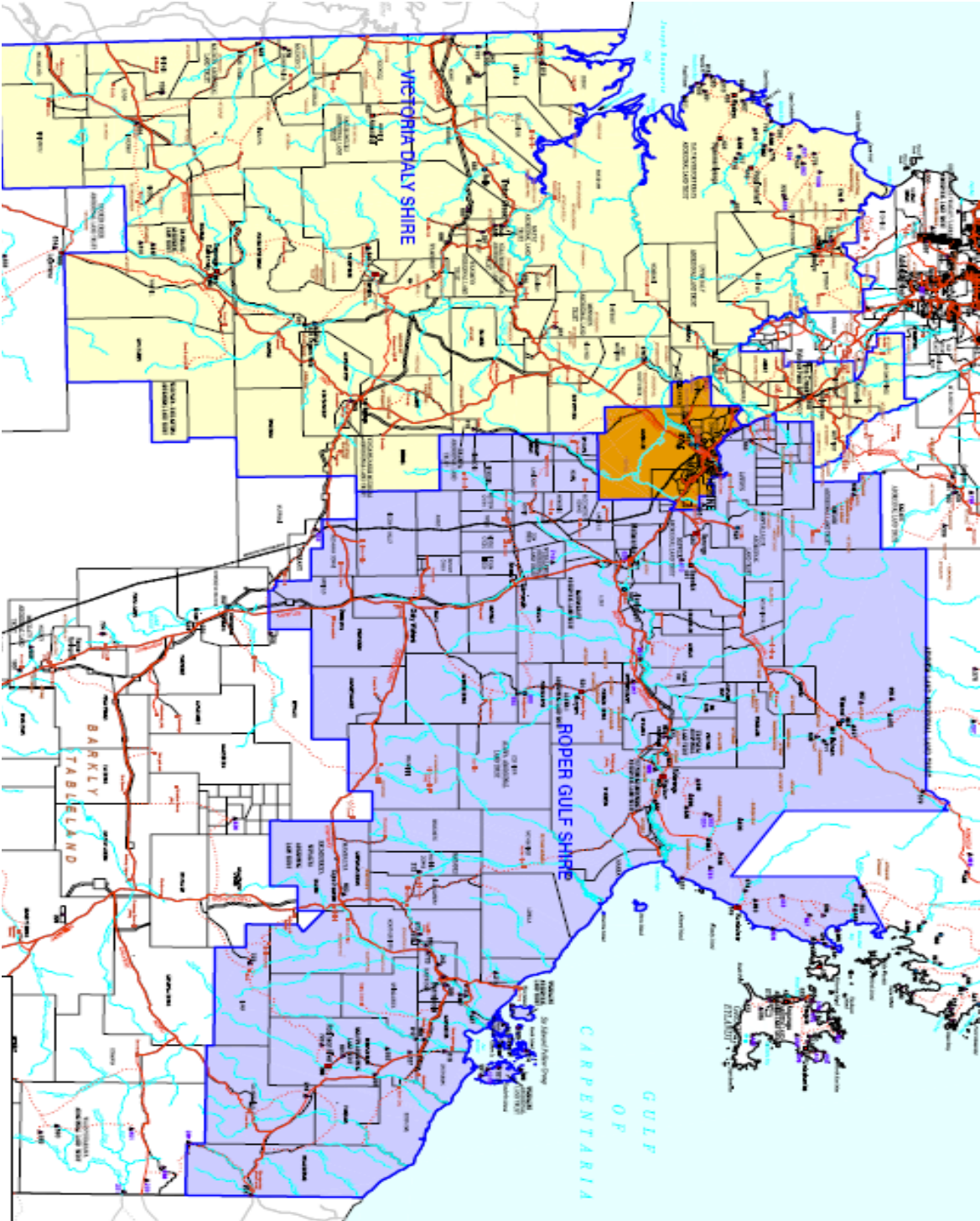
The Agency is to report annually to the Minister for Local Government on the performance of councils as measured against the relevant RMP. The report is to consider the manner in which the councils have responded to the challenges and opportunities for local government in the region. It will discuss the status and outcomes of cooperative arrangements identified in the plan. The report will also comment on the delivery of core local government services to prescribed communities.

The new Act requires that the Minister table the Agency's report before the Legislative Assembly within 6 sitting days after receiving it.

There are 3 Regional Management Plans that will cover the Northern Region, Big Rivers Region and Central Australian Region of the Northern Territory.

It should be noted that the first RMPs are relatively rudimentary. The RMPs will be further developed once the new shires come into full effect.

3. Map of Big Rivers Region



SECTION A: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY

1. Challenges and opportunities for local government working cooperatively in a regional context

General

The new Shires have the challenge of delivering services to residents in scattered communities across regional and remote areas of the Northern Territory, sharing different cultural backgrounds and languages, and where, in most cases, people are living in circumstances of severe social and economic disadvantage.

Local governments have the challenge of meeting community expectations for the delivery of an increasing range of services, particularly environmental and community services. An added consideration primarily faced by Municipal Councils is maintenance of ageing physical infrastructure to ensure it remains in good working order.

The development of cooperative relationships between local government councils within a region, and between councils and other organisations and agencies with interests in the region, will increase the ability to provide more efficient services, achieve economies of scale and attract additional resources to the region.

Resource sharing opportunities for local governments include the sharing of human resources, such as staff with specialised expertise, and of physical assets, such as buildings, workshops, plant and equipment where this is practical and cost efficient.

Cooperation between local governments will provide the power base to effectively lobby and influence government policy, develop regional services funding submissions and to negotiate major projects with public agencies and private interests to achieve regional development outcomes.

Successful outcomes resulting from shared cooperative strategies will assist in building a culture of regional cooperation that will drive the development of future alliances and partnerships.

Big Rivers Region Specific

Particular Opportunities for the Roper Gulf and Victoria Daly Shire include:

- The generation of sufficient rate-based, self-generated and government funds to meet service delivery needs.
- Long term financial sustainability through financial management supported by regular and accurate financial reporting.

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- Utilisation of a regional approach to targeted programs e.g. Community development, economic development, sport and recreation, aged care, waste management and housing.
 - Maximum utilisation of current assets including buildings, workshops, plant and equipment.
 - Introduction of a centralised business information and communication system with scalable software of a high industry standard, enabling data and information essential to operations to be collected internally and externally, analysed and delivered across the region at the appropriate level. It should also incorporate centralised administrative systems and processes.
 - Increased staff accountability through the utilisation of performance based contracts and performance management and monitoring tools.
 - Improved service delivery to the region through stable management, the sharing of resources, meeting set standards and ensuring it is clearly linked to priority outcomes.
 - Strong and developing leadership.
 - Stable presence in key community locations.
 - Improved ability to influence government policy.
 - Utilisation of the considerable strength of a cooperative region to vastly improve its ability to influence government policy and negotiate with industry.
 - Improved Indigenous training and employment outcomes through the application of best practice models/programs.
 - Significant scope to outsource service delivery to Indigenous, small and medium businesses, for example parks and gardens, rubbish collection or guest house operations.
 - Development of effective alliances and partnerships to ensure stakeholders' needs are identified, projects are targeted and commitment is secured
 - More extensive and effective support for business development through the engagement of Business Development Officers by the Shire, with pooled Australian Government and Northern Territory Government funds.
 - Prioritisation of projects within and between program areas with decision making tools and processes to ensure the right mix of initiatives to achieve regional goals and objectives.
 - Creation of a better future for the people of the region through youth development programs, festivals and events, community facilities, parks, gardens and other services.

Particular challenges for the Roper Gulf and Victoria Daly Shires include:

- The employment and training of Indigenous people providing services. Barriers include literacy/numeracy levels, language, existing capacity and experience.
- The viability of service delivery to non-council homelands if Homeland Resource Centres do not effectively adapt to new funding and Shire service delivery models.
- Recruitment and retention of staff.
- Unforeseen impacts of decisions made by the Australian Government relating to the Emergency response.

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- Provision of sufficient housing for shire staff and sub-contractors for remote based headquarters and operations.
 - Lack of all-weather roads to some mainland communities, and transportation on the island communities of the region. The timely and cost effective transport of Shire staff, contractors and cargo across the region is a continual challenge.
 - Securing ‘ownership’ of fixed and non-fixed assets necessary to provide Shire Council services.
 - Ensuring effective participation and representation of all Shire residents in their respective wards.
 - Successful transition of suitable existing council operations to private businesses.

2. Local government regional profile

Local government regional area:

The Regional Management Plan covers the Local Government areas of:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Katherine Municipality | 7120 km ² |
| • Roper-Gulf Shire | 186,000 km ² |
| • Victoria-Daly Shire | 168,000 km ² |

Big Rivers Region total area: 361,120 km²

Population:

The estimated population of the areas covered by this Regional Management Plan are:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| • Katherine Town Council | 9,030 (Indigenous 26%) |
| • Roper Gulf Shire Council | 7,280 (“ 77%) |
| • Victoria Daly Council | 8,285 (“ 80%) |

Big Rivers Region total population: 24,000

Note: The population figures included in this draft are provided on an interim basis pending the release of final ‘estimated resident population’ figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Northern Territory Treasury (NTT) and DLGHS.

Local Roads:

The total length of local roads for which local government in the Northern Territory is responsible will be expanded. Approximately 8,600 km of local roads that would normally be managed by local government will be transferred from the Department of

Planning and Infrastructure to the shires in a staged, negotiated manner post 1 July 2008.

Currently, local government is responsible for the management of 14,136 km of local roads across the Northern Territory. Councils in the Big Rivers Region were responsible in 2006-07 for the following road lengths:

Katherine Town Council	174.74 km
Roper Gulf Shire Council	975.08 km
Victoria Daly Shire Council	1,100.60 km
LGANT roads (estimate)	64.60 km

Big Rivers Region total roads: 2,315.02 km

Source: Northern Territory Local Government Grants Commission

Council expenditure:

Total local government expenditure in the Big Rivers Region in 2005-06 was approximately \$ 80.49m.

The breakdown of this expenditure for each council area is shown below:

Katherine Town Council	\$ 7.86m
Roper Gulf Shire Council	\$32.95m
Victoria Daly Shire Council	\$39.68m

Big Rivers Region total: \$ 80.49m

Source: Department of Local Government and Housing

ROPER GULF SHIRE COUNCIL		
Headquarters	Administration and Finance Centre	Community Service Delivery Centres
Katherine	Katherine	Borroloola
		Ngukurr
		Barunga
		Wugularr (Beswick)
		Bulman
		Manyallaluk (Eva Valley)
		Numbulwar
		Jilkminggan
		Mataranka
Other communities to receive local government core services: Minyerri; Daly Waters; Larrimah; Local roads serviced throughout shire council		

VICTORIA-DALY SHIRE COUNCIL		
Headquarters	Administration and Finance Centre	Community Service Delivery Centres
Katherine	Katherine	Daly River
		Peppimenarti
		Palumpa
		Wadeye
		Timber Creek
		Yarralin
		Kalkarindji
		Pine Creek
Other communities to receive local government core services: Pidgeon Hole, Kybrook Farm; Local roads serviced throughout shire council		

SECTION B: LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

1. Local government legislative context

The *new Local Government Act 2008* and the Local Government Accounting Regulations, Administration Regulations and Electoral Regulations provide for and regulate local government in the Northern Territory. The Act also provides for Ministerial Guidelines that apply in relation to certain functions of local government.

The Preamble to the *Local Government Act* states that the rights and interests of Indigenous traditional owners, as enshrined in the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976* and the *Native Title Act 1993*, must also be recognised and the delivery of local government services are to be in harmony with those laws.

Various Acts of Parliament of the Northern Territory and the Australian Government also regulate either the delivery of local government services or other essential community services that the shires may deliver on an agency basis. These Acts and associated Regulations establish compliance requirements which must be observed by local governments.

Northern Territory legislation that may impact on the services being delivered by local governments includes the following:

- *Cemeteries Act*
- *Crown Lands Act (Section 79)*
- *Litter Act, Pounds Act*
- *Control of Roads Act*
- *Disasters Act*
- *Liquor Act*
- *Kava Management Act*
- *Community Welfare Act*
- *Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act*
- *Disability Services Act*
- *Weeds Management Act*
- *Environmental Assessment Act*; and the
- *Fire and Emergency Act.*

Australian Government legislation that may impact on the essential community services being delivered by local governments includes the *Family and Community Services Act*, *Aged Care Act* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act*.

2. Local government planning framework

The *new Local Government Act 2008*, at Part 3.2, requires that each council has a municipal or shire plan. This plan is integrally linked with the regional management plan. Together, these plans make up the planning framework for local government at the local and regional level.

The municipal or shire plan is to contain a strategic plan, service delivery plan, annual budget and a long term financial plan. These components of the municipal and shire plan are to be informed by community plans endorsed by local boards and by the advice of any other advisory body established by the council to assist its strategic or operational decision making.

The provisions of Part 3.2 of the new Act require that a council review and revise its municipal or shire plan before 31 July each year. This enables each council to formally consider its service delivery to the community in the light of any current or emerging challenges and opportunities and whether it has the most appropriate administrative and regulatory framework to achieve its service delivery operations.

A council is also required by the new Act to develop a set of performance indicators so that it can assess whether it is achieving the standards of service delivery identified in the municipal or shire plan. The report of this assessment will form a critical part of the council's annual review of the municipal or shire plan.

The structure of a municipal plan will be in accordance with established council practice. The structure of the shire plan will be as adopted by the prospective shire leading up to the commencement of New Local Government on 1 July 2008.

3. Inter-Government Agreement establishing principles to guide Inter-Government relations on Local Government Matters

The Inter-Government Agreement Establishing Principles to Guide Inter-Government Relations on Local Government Matters (the IGA) was signed in April 2006 by the Australian Government, all State and Territory Governments and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). The agreement established the principles to guide the relationship between the three spheres of government and avoid cost shifting onto local government.

The Northern Territory Government and the Northern Territory Local Government Association (LGANT), through the ALGA are both parties to this IGA and are committed to the principles of the IGA in their working relationships.

SECTION C: LOCAL GOVERNMENT COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

A cooperative arrangement includes any formal agreement, alliance, memorandum of understanding, joint venture or partnership that contains agreed ways of local government councils working together or working with other agencies and organisations, both public and private, for particular purposes.

Note: Members of Transition Committees, participating municipal councils and LGANT will have an important consultative role with the Department in the development and negotiation of these cooperative arrangements. Managers of the 'prospective' shires and participating municipal councils will sign off on any agreements successfully negotiated prior to 1 July 2008. These agreements will be identified in the final draft of this RMP.

1. Existing cooperative arrangements entered into by councils in the Big Rivers Region under this Plan

The Shires have a shared Finance and Administration Centre in Katherine providing financial management services including accounts payable, accounts receivable, bank reconciliations, financial reporting; payroll services, asset and facilities accounting, information and records management and information technology.

2. Cooperative arrangements under consideration by councils for negotiation prior to 1 July 2008

a) Resource Sharing

Resource sharing opportunities include:

- The negotiation by the Shires of shared Headquarters that will serve as a focal point for executive management activities.
- The formation of a Local Government Regional Management Group by all councils in the region to develop regional approaches to identified priorities and targeted programs.
- The formation of a working group of Directors responsible for corporate services and community services within the region, to provide advice on the implementation of joint procurement opportunities in the areas of banking, insurance, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and business systems and the joint procurement of other goods and services.

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- The formation of a committee by all councils to develop common by-laws and implementation processes.
 - The development of a regional civil works strategy by all councils, supported by shared engineering and project management expertise.
 - The development of an agreement by all councils on cross boundary service delivery policy and practice.
 - The development of an agreement by all councils for a Regional Arts Strategy.
 - The development of a regional library service by all councils supported by the Katherine Town Library.
 - The development a region-wide domestic and industrial waste management strategy by all councils.
 - The development of an agreement on a regional local government Sport and Recreation Facilities Management Plan by all councils.
 - The development of an agreement between the shires and LGANT, the Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) and DLGHS for the planning and delivery of a community electoral awareness strategy for the October/November 2008 elections.

b) Development

Development opportunities include:

- The development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the shires and the respective Land Council to clarify roles and responsibilities and set out protocols for cooperation and engagement.
- The development of a collaborative approach between the shires and the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development (DBERD), the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) the Indigenous Business Association (IBA), the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations (ORATSIC), Outback Stores, the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) and industry associations to assist the future development of independent businesses currently under the auspice of Local Government.
- The establishment of an agreement by the municipal and shire councils with LGANT and DLGHS regarding governance training and development for elected members.

3. Potential cooperative arrangements to be considered post 1 July 2008

a) Resource Sharing

- All councils to consider participating on a committee to develop consistent by-laws and enforcement policies to administer and regulate local laws (and Australian Government (AG) and Northern Territory Government (NTG) legislation where appropriate), including authorised officers operating outside council boundaries
- The Shires with coastal boundaries in the Northern and Big Rivers Regions to consider investigating opportunities to achieve more efficient and effective sea and air transport services.

b) Development

- Councils to consider developing regional agreements with AG and NTG agencies regarding regional service delivery requirements.

4. The status of undertakings set out in this Plan

The status of undertakings set out in this plan will be reviewed by the agency, in consultation with the councils within the region, on an annual basis. This review will enable the preparation of the annual report, as required by the Act, to be provided annually by the agency to the Minister regarding the performance of councils as measured against this regional management plan.

SECTION D: CORE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND THE LOCATIONS WHERE CORE SERVICES MUST BE DELIVERED

Note: (i) Municipal Councils are not required to identify core local government services in the RMP, however they provide core local government services to all constituents.

(ii) Communities other than those identified in this section will also receive core local government services. However, this is a matter for decision by each Shire and will form part of the Shire Plan. Local roads, for example, will be maintained throughout the entire Shire.

1. Core local government services

Local Infrastructure

Maintenance and Upgrade of Parks, Reserves and Open Spaces
Maintenance and Upgrade of Buildings, Facilities and Fixed Assets
Management of Cemeteries
Lighting for Public Safety, including Street Lighting
Local Road Upgrading and Construction
Local Road Maintenance
Traffic Management on Local Roads
Fleet, Plant and Equipment Maintenance

Local Environment Health

Waste Management (including litter reduction)
Weeds Control and Fire Hazard Reduction in and around community areas
Companion Animal Welfare and Control

Local Civic Services

Library and Cultural Heritage Services
Civic Events
Local Emergency Services

Community Engagement in Local Government

Training and Employment of local people in council operations
Administration of Local Laws
Public and Corporate Relations
Customer Relationship Management, including complaints and responses
Governance: including administration of council meetings, elections and elected member support
Administration of Local Boards, Advisory Bodies and Management Committees

Advocacy and Representation on local and regional issues

Local Government Administration

Financial Management

Revenue Growth

Human Resources

Asset Management

Records Management

Risk Management

Council Planning and Reporting: Strategic, Financial and Service Delivery Planning and Reporting

IT and Communications

2. Locations where core local government services must be delivered by Shires in the Big Rivers Region

Victoria Daly Shire

Daly River

Peppimenarti

Palumpa

Wadeye

Timber Creek

Yarralin

Kalakaringi

Daguragu

Pine Creek

Pidgeon Hole

Kybrook Farm

Roper Gulf Shire

Borrooloola

Ngukurr

Barunga

Wugularr (Beswick)

Bulman

Manyallaluck

Numbulwar

Jilkminggan

Mataranka

Werenbun

Jodetluk

Minyerrri

Daly Waters

Larrimah