

Northern Territory Remote Stores Issues and Response Guide 2025



Ltyentye Apurte Santa Teresa

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To promote and enhance security of access to food, drink and grocery items for residents of remote Aboriginal communities.

Context

The Administrative Arrangements Order gives responsibility for:

- Food security via [Part 7A of the Food Act 2004](#) to NT Health and,
- Essential goods and services via the [Essential Goods and Services Act 1981](#) to the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations (DTBAR).

One of the Food Act's objectives is, "to promote and enhance security of access to food, drink and grocery items for residents of remote Aboriginal communities", with Food Security defined as the "ongoing access to a range of food, drink and grocery items".

The [Essential Goods and Services Act 1981](#) gives powers to the Administrator to declare there is a shortage of goods or services and provides powers to the Minister to take action to alleviate these.

Under the [Emergency Management Act 2013](#), the Territory Emergency Plan allocates the responsibility for the Critical Goods and Services functional group to DTBAR.

There has been confusion as to the delineation of roles between local responses, NT Health and DTBAR. This document will outline different scenarios and proposed frameworks for responses.

Emergency Management

Governance arrangements in response to, and recovery from, emergency events are shared between NT Police Force and the NT Fire and Emergency Services (response) and the CMC (recovery coordination).

Three Tier Systems

The NT uses a three tier system of Local, Regional and Territory plans. Each of these has a committee or council established to manage and implement the specific plan. The EM framework has its legislative basis in the [Emergency Management Act 2013](#) (The Act). Overarching policy is specified in the Territory Emergency Plan (TEP).



Yirrkala Community Store

Framework

The table below summarises three scenario types with examples.

- Localised issues with sufficient local capacity to resolve (i.e. access to food from the store has been disrupted).
- Localised or regional issues which the communities effected do not have the capacity to resolve themselves.
- An event commences which is significant enough that an emergency is declared.

Localised Issue	Multi-Agency Response Required	Territory Emergency Plan Activated
Localised issue with local capacity to resolve.	NT Health to Coordinate	DTBAR/Critical Goods Functional Group lead.
1. Declared Community Store food security issue arises. 2. Locally verify issue. 3. Notify Remote Stores Program (generic email). 4. Rectify issue (Agency/ Stakeholder BAU e.g.) - <u>Utilities</u> (i.e. power or water failure) – PWC - <u>Unrest</u> – Police/CMC/ DHLGCD/Traditional Owners/Community Patrolling/Safety Group - <u>Operational</u> (e.g. staffing, supply chain, structural issues, equipment failure) – Store Manager/DLI 5. If required form a local key stakeholder working group or meeting of the Local Emergency Committee. 6. If issue can't be resolved locally, contact NT Remote Stores Program.	1. Declared Store Food Security issue arises. 2. Locally verify issue. 3. Notify Remote Stores Program (generic email). 4. Understand local response/ efforts. 5. Issue escalated due to increased scope, complexity and duration. 6. NT Remote Stores Program to identify relevant NTG stakeholders. 7. Coordinate a small working group to discuss issue and solutions with stakeholders. 8. Determine NTG agency best placed to lead response and be the NTG point of contact with the store. 9. Brief Up 10. Implement Solution/Rectify Issue. 11. Monitor, revise plan as needed, cease group when resolved.	Food security issue arises during declared emergency event or prolonged isolation causes food security issues during the wet season. 1. Issue directed to Critical Goods and Services functional group (led by DTBAR) during declared emergency event. 2. Critical Goods and Services work with store, IMT and other stakeholders to resolve issue. 3. NT Health Remote Stores team provides support to Critical Goods and Services if required. 4. Issues outside of declared emergency but during wet season referred to DTBAR. 5. If issue to do with prolonged isolation and require freight assistance, DTBAR works with store to resolve. 6. All other issues referred to relevant agencies with DTBAR providing support if required.
Power Failure Pirlangimpi and Community Tension Ali Curung	Barge Service Wadeye and Management Company withdrawal	Northern Region Flood Event 2023 (Kalkarindji, Daguragu, Nitjpurru)

¹ CMC coordinate multi-agency risk assessment and response as per regionally specific Remote Worker Safety Plans).

Agency responsibilities in relation to food security

Agency	Responsibilities
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)	- To enable agricultural producers to grow their business and the industry. It also underpins our reputation as a supplier of safe and quality agricultural produce through scientific research, strong biosecurity practices and compliance of animal welfare legislation.
Department of Business, Trade and Asian Relations (DTBAR)	- Supports the activation of industry and business, attracts investment and drives growth to sustain a vibrant Territory economy and lifestyle. - Under the Territory emergency plan this agency has responsibility for the critical goods and services group. This group works with internal and external stakeholders to assure the supply of critical goods and services following a disaster or an emergency event. - Depending upon the emergency, this may include the supply of food, groceries, ice, bottled gas, cleaning products, building/hardware supplies, camping equipment and bank services. - Responsible agency for the Essential Goods and Services Act 1981.
Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet (DCMC)	- Plays a critical role across government, coordinating whole of government responses to emerging issues, shares a leadership role in emergency management and recovery, and has the convening power to bring together other agencies.
Department of Housing, Local Government and Community Development (DHLGCD)	- A multi-functional human services and community-focused agency that works to provide responsive, safe and quality services and programs that empower communities and improve social outcomes for Territorians. - It administers or supports the following areas: remote and urban social, affordable and community housing; provision of funding for essential services for remote communities and homelands.
Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (DLI)	- Works with the community, business and government partners to facilitate efficient, safe and agile infrastructure solutions for all Territorians, and the maintenance of critical supply chain Infrastructure
NT Health	- Works with individuals, families, the community, Aboriginal health organisations and stakeholders to provide high quality, evidence-based, patient-centred care. Responsible for the Food Act 2004, Environmental Health, Remote Stores Program and regulator of drinking water.
NT Police Force (NTPF)	- Promote community safety and works closely with community groups and other government agencies in helping to address issues relating to crime and other anti-social behaviour.

Case studies

Localised Issues/Localised Response

Pirlangimpi community loss of power September 2025

- Power Station Fire: The Pirlangimpi Power Station was gutted by fire on the night of 20 September, resulting in a total loss of power;
- Power and Water Corporation (PWC) established an Incident Management Team (IMT) to respond cohesively at the local level as a non-declared emergency.
- The store and health clinic ran on backup generators (fuel supplied by PWC).
- Telstra connected a backup generator for their communications tower to allow EFTPOS facilities at the store to function.
- Temporary generators for the community organised, supplied and activated by PWC within the week.
- NTG provided community members with support for cooking facilities, food vouchers and a hot meal per day until community wide power was available.
- Whilst there was no community wide power the Store donated food, Tiwi Islands Regional Council provided staff and hardware and provided community cooking to ensure residents were fed daily.



Pirlangimpi Community Store



Pirlangimpi Community Store



Ali Curung Outback Stores - Mirnirri Store - Photo by Outback Store

Ali Curung community violence 2025

- October - Community tensions escalated, break-ins at the store and manager's house, remote worker safety and store operations effected. Store provider believed community leaders were taking actions. Safety of staff/limited services due reducing capability.
- September - Store closed for 2 days due to break-ins, and going security issues.
- Many residents left to go to Tennant Creek to be able to buy food. It was reported that due to limited operations of store leading to food shortages.
- Potential for spillover into regional centre and other communities should food supplies be further disrupted.
- 'Community Safety Action Plan' meetings between key agencies on community, led by CMC to problem solve appropriate solution to ensure store could remain open.

Multi-Agency Response

Wadeye Barge Service – Market failure

- 20 August 2025 Murin Association announced that they would be discontinuing the Wadeye barge service as of 1 September 2025, due to cost increases.
- In recognition that the sourcing of a barge provider would need facilitation by Government, discussions immediately commenced between NT Government and the National Indigenous Australians Agency and key local stakeholders as to how to find a sustainable, long-term freight solution for the region.
- 1 September 2025 an Expression of Interest (EOI) was released by the NT Government calling for experienced operators to provide regular freight barge services from Darwin to Wadeye.
- The NT Government facilitated the receipt, consideration, discussion and negotiations for a new barge service commercial agreement.
- 3 November 2025 the Top End Barge Service announced its commencement of the service on 18 November 2025.

Territory Emergency Plan Activated

- All Declared Emergencies in the NT.



Wadeye community

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