

Do you like to elect mayor?

Proposal to change law so that voters no longer get a direct say

Thomas McLean

A proposed change to the Northern Territory's Local Government Act would make it so that councillors – rather than voters – choose their mayor, as the government seeks feedback from the public.

The proposal would affect the councils of Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield, Katherine, Alice Springs and Barkly – about a third of all councils in the NT – that currently elect their mayors via popular vote.

It would essentially bring

mayors closer in line with premiers and prime ministers, who are chosen by their fellow elected members rather than by voters directly.

It would, however, shift the Territory away from its neighbouring jurisdictions – Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia – that elect their mayors directly or use a mix of the two systems.

Instead, the NT would join Victoria and most of New South Wales that rely on councillors to elect their mayors.

There are 11 councils in the

Territory that choose to appoint their mayor at the first meeting of the council.

According to the proposed amendments, the time frame of this would be changed from the first meeting of the council to the fourth to “provide time to build working relationships and assess leadership strengths, without causing excessive delays”.

Local Government Association NT president and Darwin Lord Mayor Kon Vatskalis says the proposed changes – particularly how mayors are

elected – should stay “as they are”.

“This allows local government councils to do what’s best for their community by providing a choice in how they appoint their principal member – whether by the council from within for cultural reasons, or by the community,” he said.

“LGANT would prefer the amendments focus instead on fixing the Code of Conduct framework which the sector has been asking the government to do for two years now.”

Litchfield Council did not re-

spond to questions about whether or not it supported the proposed changes, but it did say it would provide comment “to the department with regards to the amendment”.

City of Palmerston provided a similar response, saying it would review the proposed changes and discuss it in a future council meeting.

Minister for Housing, Local Government and Community Development Steve Edgington said he “invited councils, local government stakeholders and the broader community to

have their say on ... [the] proposed amendments”.

“Our approach to local government reform is measured and grounded in meaningful consultation – driven by what communities want and need, not a one-size-fits-all model,” he said.

Public consultation sessions will begin in Darwin on May 23. Consultation finishes on June 20. You can share your thoughts by completing an online survey or by emailing a formal submission to LGLaw.CMC@nt.gov.au.

TOP END VOLLIE GETS A BUZZ FROM MOVING BEES

Thomas McLean

While the chorus of thousands of humming bees may be an intimidating one for most, Wesley Mackay gets a buzz from it.

In fact, the substation technician for Power and Water's Power Services Darwin team loves bees so much that he offers his time to help relocate native hives from PwC sites and infrastructure across the Top End.

His passion leads him to volunteer hours of his time as a rescue co-ordinator with the Australian Native Bee Association Northern Territory Branch, which has about 10 active members.

Volunteers such as Mr Mackay are being recognised Tuesday as part of World Bee Day, an international day that recognises the vital role bees play in food production and ecosystem health.

Mr Mackay was most recently called to a house in Tiwi to remove a hive that had essentially glued a meter box closed, making it unusable.



The chorus of thousands of humming bees might be an intimidating one for most, but not for Wesley Mackay, a substation technician for Power and Water's Power Services Darwin team. Pictures: Supplied

“The bees were the *Tetragonula mellipes* species, the most common in Darwin,” he said.

“They’re a native stingless bee, so completely harmless, but very important.

“The honey they produce is worth about \$1 a gram, so it’s on the more expensive side.”

Relocation involves gently placing the eggs – known variably as the brood or

larvae – and food stores into a small wooden box, then “vacuuming” the bees into the same box.

This includes both the male bees living inside the hive and the female worker bees as they return home from collecting nectar, pollen, water and propolis at the end of the day.

Each hive contains a single queen, and, according to

PwC, it is crucial that she is included in the relocation because she will be the reason the other bees work to build a new hive in the new location.

In the five years since he began relocating bees, Mr Mackay has relocated countless hives and colonies from water pits, renovated bathrooms, steel tube fences, logs and trees and more.

Mr Mackay said he relocated bees because they were a “crucial part of our ecosystem”.

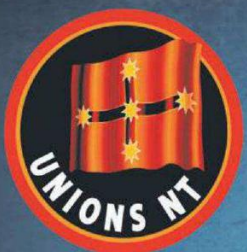
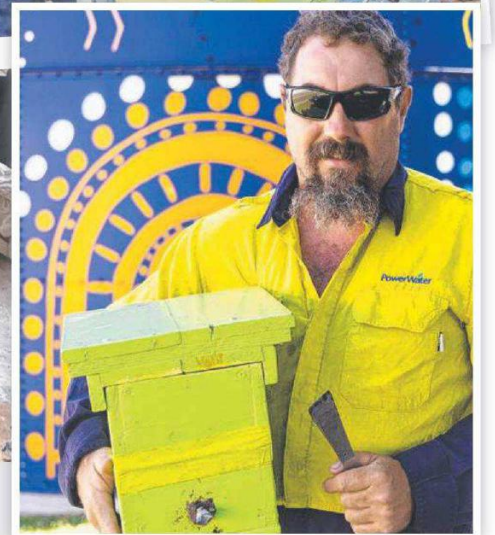
“They are essential for plant reproduction and food production,” he said.

“They’re at constant risk from habitat loss, diseases and pests so, rather than see their hives destroyed, I help relocate them to a safe

place where they can carry on their vital work,” Mr Mackay said.

The theme for World Bee Day 2025 is “Bee inspired by nature to nourish us all”.

To find out more, visit World Bee Day (Australia) – 20 May – Helping Protect our Bees at worldbeeday.org.au



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