



Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory: Implementation approach for the Food Security Measure

The Australian Government is publishing this Implementation Plan (IP) because it is committed to working with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, their representatives and leaders to effectively implement Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory measures.

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory

The Australian Government has made a 10 year commitment to work with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to build strong, independent lives, where communities, families and children are safe and healthy. Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory is a \$3.4 billion investment and responds directly to what Aboriginal people told the Government is important to them. The Australian Government will work with Aboriginal people in both large and small communities to support local jobs, tackle alcohol abuse and encourage children to go to school, as well as provide basic services, including health, education and police. The Australian Government will talk to Aboriginal people in each community about how best to deliver services under Stronger Futures, providing Aboriginal people with more responsibility for services within their own community.

The Australian Government will support Aboriginal organisations to deliver services under Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory and all services will be expected to employ Aboriginal people wherever possible.

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory food security measure

The food security measure is one part of the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory approach to address the serious levels of social and economic disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Access to fresh and healthy food in Aboriginal communities remains a significant problem, including because of the remoteness of communities and the distance from main distribution centres and major towns.

The Stronger Futures food security measure continues the benefits of improved food security through community stores licensing over a wider area of the Northern Territory.

What is the objective of this measure?

The objective of this measure is stated in the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* which came into effect on 16 July 2012.

The objective is “to enable special measures to be taken for the purpose of promoting food security for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory”. In particular the Australian Government’s intention is to enhance the contribution made by community stores in the Northern Territory to achieving food security for Aboriginal communities.

By ‘food security’ we mean a reasonable ongoing level of access to a range of food, drink or grocery items that are reasonably priced, safe and of sufficient quantity and quality to meet nutritional and related household needs.

A cornerstone of good health is good nutrition, and to have good nutrition you need access to shops that sell good food. Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have told the Australian Government very clearly and often that they want community stores licensing to continue.

In the community stores evaluation and the 2011 Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory consultations, Aboriginal people told the Australian Government how stores had improved since the introduction of licensing. The Northern Territory Government’s stores survey reinforced that there has been a significant improvement in the quality and availability of healthy, fresh, good quality food.

Over ninety stores are now licensed. Stores have also been given support to improve management and to improve their infrastructure. As a result of licensing and support many stores have better storage, refrigeration, weatherproofed buildings, safe and adequate shelving, improved customer service, and are on a sounder financial footing. They are becoming better, safer and more sustainable places to shop.

High prices in remote areas are a challenge. There is no simple solution to these issues. However, good management is critical to improving the quality and affordability of food available at community stores. Licensing has encouraged better management of stores.

Key elements of the measure

The Stronger Futures food security measure comprises a range of elements that are either legislatively based or are to be delivered as programs or services with funding provided by the Commonwealth.

The two key elements are legislation providing for community stores licensing in a food security area, and funding support to licensed community stores to deliver improved food security to people living in remote Northern Territory communities.

Community stores licensing legislation

The Stronger Futures legislation continues the community stores licensing scheme but with changes to expand the food security area, introduce a broader range of compliance tools and reduce the compliance burden on business, without impacting on food security outcomes. The licensing scheme applies to the whole of the Northern Territory as the food security area, except those towns or regions that the Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Affairs has prescribed in the rules as being excluded. Areas excluded from the food security area, such as Darwin and Alice Springs, have a sufficient level of competition, higher levels of consumer awareness and ongoing access to a reasonable range of food and groceries without additional licensing.

The licensing scheme requires that a store in a food security area may need to hold a community store licence where that store is an “important source of food, drink or grocery items for an Aboriginal community”.

Funding support

Complementing the licensing scheme in the legislation, the Australian Government has a program of grant funding to support licensed community stores, or stores that may need to hold a licence, to meet the food security needs of the communities that they service. The grant program is called Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory – Food Security – Strengthening Remote Stores.

The Australian Government has allocated \$13.4 million over ten years to assist store owners and operators in the Northern Territory to meet acceptable standards for community stores licensing including in regard to the range, quantity and quality of goods, facilitate efficient food storage and preparation of healthy takeaway meals, and improve the governance and financial integrity of their operations.

Table 1: Food security – Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory – Food Security – Strengthening Remote Stores grant funding

Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Total
Australian Govt Funding (\$m)(rounded)	1.4	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.8	13.4*

*Note: The total of \$13.4 million is rounded up from \$13.38 million

Activities that support the strengthening of the remote stores measure under the Food Security component have two elements: (1) for store owners and operators (program guidelines are at this link <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/indigenous-australians/grants-funding/stronger-futures-in-the-northern-territory-food-security-strengthening-remote-stores-applications-for-funding-from-store-owners-and-operators-in-the-northern-territory-now-open>), and (2) for service providers that provide goods and services to owners and operators at this link <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/indigenous-australians/grants-funding/stronger-futures-in->

[the-northern-territory-food-security-strengthening-remote-stores-funding-guidelines-food-security-service-providers.](#)

Funded activities will usually fit within one or more of the following categories:

- effective solutions to food security – delivery of project(s) that provide effective solutions to food security issues;
- governance support – capacity building through the provision of governance support and/or training to key stakeholders involved in the operations of a community store;
- retail mentoring – provision of retail mentoring and/or training that will support the sustainable operation of the store;
- emergency repairs and maintenance – provision of funding to assist with emergency repairs and maintenance issues that could jeopardise food security; and
- minor infrastructure upgrades – provision of funding to support minor infrastructure upgrades that will enhance food security for a community.

The types of activities which could be funded under this measure could range from purchase and installation of a freezer, projects to improve the food supply chain and training for Aboriginal people to gain skills in food service and preparation so that they can work in their local community store or takeaway.

Funding will generally not be provided for loans; the set-up of a business; purchase of land; retrospective costs; costs incurred in the preparation of a funding application or related documentation; major construction/capital works; or activities for which other Commonwealth, State, Territory or local government bodies have primary responsibility.

Further details on eligibility for this funding and the activities on which it can be spent are available in the program guidelines which have been published on the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) website at the links above.

Store owners and operators, and relevant service providers, interested in applying for funding can contact the Community Stores Unit in the FaHCSIA Northern Territory State Office on 1800 108 891 or by email to community.stores@fahcsia.gov.au.

Links to other programs and activities that support food security in remote Aboriginal communities

The Australian Government has a range of initiatives that are directed at improving food security in remote Aboriginal communities and the Stronger Futures food security measure builds on these. Two key initiatives are Outback Stores Pty Limited and the Aboriginals Benefit Account community stores infrastructure project.

Outback Stores

Outback Stores Pty Ltd (Outback Stores) provides retail services to stores in remote Indigenous communities. Outback Stores aims to build long-term relationships with

the communities it works with, use effective retail practices to manage stores and provide reliable supplies of safe, healthy and affordable food.

Outback Stores was set up in 2006 in response to a need for functional and viable retail stores that were able to guarantee a secure, continuous supply of safe and healthy food and keep local jobs in remote communities.

Outback Stores is an Australian Government owned company with an independent board of directors. The company is engaged by store owners to manage a store on a fee-for-service basis. This means profits from the stores are returned to the community.

Outback Stores is an integral element of the Australian Government's commitment to ensuring food security for remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Its retail services can assist stores to meet the requirements of the Stronger Futures licensing regime. Outback Stores offers a team of experienced supermarket managers supported by operational procedures, training, and an experienced board of directors, quality purchasing and a strong commitment to four key goals to:

- ensure remote Indigenous communities have access to constant and affordable food supplies, in the same way people in cities can buy food in a supermarket;
- provide fresh fruit, vegetables and nutritious food and drinks to improve the health of people living in remote communities;
- ensure stores are properly managed and, where population size permits, become commercially successful so they don't need more government support; and
- increase Indigenous employment opportunities through local recruitment and training.

Aboriginals Benefit Account community stores infrastructure project

The Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) community stores infrastructure project is a partnership between the Australian Government and the Aboriginals Benefit Account Advisory Committee (ABAAC) to improve access to quality and affordable food for Aboriginal people in remote Northern Territory communities.

The ABA community stores infrastructure project will provide new purpose-built or upgraded community stores and store manager accommodation in 18 remote Northern Territory communities that have been assessed as high priority by a panel of experts appointed by the ABAAC.

This project provides significant investment in infrastructure to ensure that:

- stores have good, healthy food available to people living in remote Northern Territory communities;
- stores have purpose built infrastructure which will support effective retail practices and minimise operating costs; and
- store manager housing is of an acceptable standard to help attract quality store management.

Funding of \$55.8 million has been approved for the project, which will provide for 10 new stores and eight refurbishments of existing stores, as well as upgrades to or construction of 13 houses for store managers.

The ABA has adopted a strategic approach in allocating funding for the initiative. Criteria for participation includes that stores be licensed in accordance with *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012* community store licensing provisions; that the store businesses are owned by community Indigenous corporations; and that land tenure for the stores and store manager housing is secured via long-term leasing arrangements.

Poor store infrastructure can lead to significant stock wastage; high electricity and maintenance costs, with associated flow-on costs to store customers; and limited capacity to carry adequate stock levels in periods when road access to the community is not possible. Further, poor staff accommodation can result in high turnover of store managers or difficulty in attracting people with the right skills and experience to manage a store. The ABA community stores infrastructure project aims to enhance food security in the 18 project communities by improving infrastructure, leading to an increase in the quality and quantity of food available to community members and the retention of capable store managers.

The communities that will receive funding for store infrastructure under the ABA community store infrastructure project are Areyonga, Barunga, Beswick, Bulla, Bulman, Canteen Creek, Engawala, Epenarra, Gunbalanya, Haasts Bluff, Jilkminggan, Milikapiti, Papunya, Peppimenarti, Pirlangimpi, Timber Creek, Willowra and Yuendumu.

Expected outputs and outcomes

Outputs

It is expected that licensed community stores will meet acceptable standards for community stores licensing, including in regard to the range, quantity and quality of goods and the retail, governance and financial integrity of their operation. It is expected improvements in this output will continue over the ten years' duration of the measure.

Outcomes

The expected outcome is the improvement of food security for remote Aboriginal communities over the duration of the measure. In addition it is expected that through this measure the Australian Government will continue to work collaboratively with Aboriginal communities and other key stakeholders to improve food security options and to build the capacity of stores to meet the requirements of the community stores licensing regime and improve the operation and viability of stores.

How will this measure be implemented?

The Community Stores Unit in the Northern Territory State Office of FaHCSIA has been established to administer the food security provisions of the Stronger Futures legislation and to work with key stakeholders in the Northern Territory to improve food security in remote communities including implementation of the funding. Key

stakeholders include stores committees, store owners and managers, suppliers and service providers, other regulatory bodies, Outback Stores and the people living in communities that we are working with to improve food security.

The program guidelines provide more information on the funded elements of this measure and how the funding will be implemented. The program guidelines provide information on how decisions are made about funding to stores and service providers to support the food security objective of this measure. The program guidelines are available at the link provided above.

Stronger Futures Commitment to Aboriginal Service Providers and Aboriginal Employment

Under Stronger Futures, the Australian Government is strongly committed to increasing employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal employment targets and goals are being set for all Stronger Futures measures to encourage government agencies and service providers to invest in employing Aboriginal staff and developing their skills.

The Stronger Futures food security measure will use its funding leverage to help grow this skill base, especially amongst Aboriginal people, over the life of the measure.

Through its administration of the grant program to provide financial assistance to stores, FaHCSIA will seek to identify additional opportunities to increase Aboriginal employment in activities associated with this measure.

In particular, store owners and managers will be assisted to improve Aboriginal employment, including in developing strategies to increase Aboriginal employment and develop the skills of staff, as well as through governance and managerial training on recruitment and selection of staff and on leading and managing people.

Assistance will also be available for training to develop the cultural competency of store owners, managers and other non-Indigenous staff to ensure that stores as workplaces are a safe and positive environment for Aboriginal employees.

FaHCSIA will also seek to ensure that consultants and contractors engaged to provide governance support and skills development for store owners, management committees and store managers have a demonstrated commitment to employing Aboriginal people, either directly in the conduct of their business or in supporting their engagement with Aboriginal communities.

Similarly, contractors engaged to deliver improved community store infrastructure and retail management systems will be expected to employ local Aboriginal people wherever possible, including on a short-term casual basis, to assist in the delivery of projects in communities.

Over time, the Australian Government will work to put in place additional initiatives aimed at achieving an overall raising of skill levels and employment of Aboriginal

employment opportunities. Particular initiatives may include, for example:

- requiring companies engaged to provide services to community stores to have a Reconciliation Action Plan in place that includes strategies for increasing Aboriginal employment in the company – and in the case of larger companies, to demonstrate specifically how they encourage and maximise Aboriginal employment, including through apprentice and graduate intakes; and
- encouraging tertiary education providers in the Northern Territory to support students in relevant courses to gain practical experience in licensed community stores.

Further, FaHCSIA is funded to employ departmental staff to administer the community stores licensing scheme under the food security measure. Consistent with its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy, FaHCSIA will aim to continually improve the attraction, retention and career development of suitably skilled, motivated and committed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Department has a target of increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff it employs to 10.4 per cent of total staff by 2015.

Monitoring and reporting on stores will also include reporting on Indigenous employment in community stores.

Stronger Futures Commitment to Engagement with Aboriginal people as key stakeholders in the food security measure

The Stronger Futures food security measure is a special measure in accordance with the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. Consultation with communities and stores committees on the implementation and any changes to the measure is an important aspect of the implementation of this measure. Seeking comments on the draft of this implementation plan has been one demonstration of the Australian Government's commitment to consult with Aboriginal people.

Evaluation, monitoring and review

The Stronger Futures Evaluation Framework provides the broad conceptual framework for the evaluation of the National Partnership Agreement on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Stronger Futures) and associated Implementation Plans. The framework provides guiding principles to ensure that evaluation is of high quality but flexible and improves ongoing system and program understanding and management for government, participants and stakeholders. The framework supports a co-operative, harmonised and transparent approach with evaluation as a partnership, including Indigenous communities as participants and collaborators in the evaluation process.

As outlined in the Stronger Futures Evaluation Framework, six monthly public reports on progress in implementing the package will be published. Implementation of the food security measure will be reported in the six monthly Stronger Futures Progress Report.

An independent review of Stronger Futures legislation will be undertaken of the first three years of the operation of the Stronger Futures Act. This review will assess the effectiveness of special measures including the food security measure.

Any review of the food security measure by the Implementation Plan owners will be prior to the Stronger Futures mid-term evaluation in 2016-17 and the Stronger Futures outcome evaluation in 2019-20.

This implementation plan will be reviewed in 2016-17 and 2019-20 in line with the evaluation of the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement with regard to progress made in respect of achieving the stated objectives.

Lead agency

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is the lead agency on the implementation of this measure.

Contact and questions

If you have any comments or questions about this plan please email community.stores@fahcsia.gov.au. or phone 1800 108 891.