

[Message from ALC CEO Mark Hewitt to staff, 18th November 2021]

I write to you in response to the evolving COVID-19 situation in the Katherine and Robinson River regions.

The ALC is extremely concerned about the virus entering the Groote Archipelago from the mainland, particularly with many people seeking to return from these regions and the high likelihood that the virus has already spread further. The ALC intends to do everything within its power to keep the Groote Archipelago COVID-free. As it stands, we cannot be certain that there are sufficient safeguards and screening measures in place to ensure the safety of our community, particularly at our ports and airports.

Accordingly, the ALC Board today passed a resolution requesting that:

1. All charter flights and ferry services to the Groote Archipelago from the mainland (including from Darwin, Katherine, Numbulwar, Ngukurr and Nhulunbuy but excluding the GEMCO charter) **cease immediately** until Monday, 22nd November at 6.00pm. We have contacted the charter and ferry companies and have cancelled all existing ALC-booked charter and ferry services from the mainland.
2. At this stage, the ferry service or charter flights between Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island can continue in compliance with the CHO directions (e.g. facemasks to be worn at all times), however the Board is requesting that all pilots and captains are fully vaccinated. As of yesterday, no flights can travel directly to Bickerton Island from the mainland (except in an emergency).
3. All passengers (including residents, workers and visitors) on all inbound commercial flights (e.g. Airnorth) travelling from Darwin to Groote Eylandt from tomorrow, Friday 19th November until Monday, 22nd November at 6.00pm must be fully vaccinated and return a negative rapid antigen test prior to boarding. Airnorth is coordinating the rapid antigen tests at Darwin Airport and we understand they have already been in contact with affected travelers. Airnorth is strongly encouraging anyone travelling on these flights to arrive at the airport earlier than usual to allow time for these tests to be undertaken.
4. To the extent possible, we will monitor boats travelling to the Groote Archipelago (including Bickerton Island) from the mainland.

Although there were no new cases recorded in the NT overnight, this is not the time to be complacent and the next few days remain crucial. Per the CHO directions, masks continue to be mandatory in all communities, and we encourage you to promote compliance within the community. Until we are confident that the situation at Katherine and Robinson River is under control, movement in and out of Groote should be limited, and any events or gatherings rescheduled.

If you have any questions, please contact your Manager in the first instance. I thank you for helping us keep our community safe from the spread of COVID-19.