

# NORTHERN TERRITORY BALANCED ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

*Discussion Draft*





# A message from the Chief Minister

---



From our tropical north to our red centre, the Northern Territory is a wonderful place to live. Territorians have a strong cultural identity, rich traditions, and a unique understanding and affinity with our natural environment. Territorians recognise the importance of our environment – we value what we have and we understand it is our responsibility to protect our way of life and our natural environment.

Territorians also value the economic opportunities arising from our natural environment. Many of us earn a living from the land – whether through farming, tourism, working in the large resource or defence sectors, or providing services to the growing number of businesses in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory's landscapes and waterways offer unique visitor experiences and a wide variety of leisure activities. The development and management of our natural and protected areas requires a careful balance.

We want to ensure Territorians are given every opportunity to benefit from our growing prosperity, and recognise that the Northern Territory's development must be sustainable and not at the expense of our natural environment, heritage and lifestyle.

The environment means different things to different people and we want to hear from Territorians about their vision for the environment – now and into the future.

This *Balanced Environment Strategy* outlines our strategic and contemporary approach to the sustainable management of the environment through:

- risk-based regulation of activities
- the use of the best available scientific knowledge to guide our decision making
- strengthening of our regulatory system and making it more efficient and transparent
- the planning of our cities, towns and infrastructure to ensure a balance between development and sustainability is achieved.

We are all responsible for the environment. Government has a responsibility to provide leadership and policy direction for conserving, protecting and managing our environment. Industry has a responsibility for ensuring it has the smallest possible impact on our environment through innovation and the use of new technologies. Territorians have a responsibility to be informed and aware of their collective and individual impact on our environment and respect it.

The Northern Territory Government is committed to consultative engagement that values the contribution of all Territorians. This is an opportunity for everyone to participate in the development of this Strategy to ensure that the conservation and management of our environment is sustainable and balances our environmental, economic and social goals.

We welcome your input into the development of this Balanced Environment Strategy.

Adam Giles MLA



Chief Minister





# Contents

---

A message from the Chief Minister	2
Contents	4
Have your say	5
Our vision	6
Our principles	6
Why our environment matters	7
What are our challenges?	8
Our current context	10
Our framework for a balanced environment	12
We all have a role to play	13
Our goals for a balanced environment	14
Healthy water, catchments and waterways	15
Resilient ecosystems	16
Increased knowledge and understanding	17
Contemporary management practices	18
Environmental responsibility	20
Liveable cities and towns	21
How we will achieve a balanced environment	22
Improving the environmental regulatory system	23
Improving our engagement with the community and industry	24
Strategic planning	25
Demonstrating our commitment by investing in managing our environment	26
Conducting research and building knowledge to enable innovative and adaptive management practices	27



# Have your say

---

This discussion draft of the *Balanced Environment Strategy* has been developed in consultation with all Northern Territory Government departments with responsibility for environment matters in the Northern Territory.

We invite your written comment on this draft Strategy. Your feedback will assist us in developing a final Strategy that is consistent with leading practice and meets the social, cultural, economic and environmental expectations of Territorians.

We would like to hear from you about any element of this Strategy, including:

- our vision for a balanced environment
- the principles that will guide our activities
- the framework to achieve a balanced environment
- the roles of government, industry and the community
- our goals and how we propose to achieve them.

You can provide feedback on this discussion draft by filling out the survey at:

<http://haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/balancedenvironment>

Or you can provide a more detailed comment:

In **writing** to: Balanced Environment Strategy  
Economic and Environment Policy  
Department of the Chief Minister  
GPO Box 4396  
DARWIN NT 0801

By **Email** to: [balancedenvironmentstrategy.dcm@nt.gov.au](mailto:balancedenvironmentstrategy.dcm@nt.gov.au)

The closing date for feedback on this draft Balanced Environment Strategy is **18 March 2016**.

Thank you for taking part in the development of the Balanced Environment Strategy.

## NEXT STEPS

We will consider all feedback received to inform the final Strategy. The final Strategy will be supported by a series of detailed implementation plans. These plans will outline the Northern Territory Government agencies responsible for delivering specific actions identified in the final Strategy, and the monitoring and reporting process to track progress on our environmental goals.



# Our vision

---

**Balancing protection and sustainable use to maintain a healthy and resilient environment**

# Our principles

---

Supporting our vision for a healthy and resilient environment, the following principles will guide our decision-making to responsibly use, manage and safeguard our environment.

1. **Balance** – environmental, social and economic factors will be integrated into decision-making.
2. **Stewardship** – we all have a role in the responsible management of our environment.
3. **Strategic planning** – defining our long-term goals and systematically planning how to achieve them.
4. **Engagement** – consultative and inclusive decision-making.
5. **Intergenerational equity** – we are all custodians of our environment. The present generation works to maintain or enhance the health, diversity and productivity of the environment for the benefit of future generations.
6. **Transparency** – information on decisions and reasoning are clearly communicated.
7. **Evidence-based** – decision-making that is informed by credible scientific data.
8. **Polluter pays** – the costs of environmental pollution is the responsibility of the polluter.
9. **Leadership** – government will lead by example through effective management and monitoring of government projects and government assets.



# Why our environment matters

---

Home to one per cent of Australia's population, the Northern Territory is exciting, beautiful and vibrant. Territorians enjoy a friendly, relaxed lifestyle where our way of life responds to our climate and unique natural environment.

Whether it is on land or water, or in our urban and remote areas, enjoying the outdoor lifestyle is a huge part of our identity, and our experiences are heightened by the Northern Territory's rich natural environment.

The Northern Territory's spectacular landscapes, unique wildlife and diverse ecosystems captivate tourists and locals alike. The world's largest intact tropical savannah ecosystem is found in the Territory, along with one of the world's last networks of free flowing tropical rivers. Our wildlife and endemic species are globally significant, and the Territory is home to the world's largest shallow tropical marine ecosystem.

Our enviable lifestyle and economic prosperity are heavily dependent on our environment. The Northern Territory economy is centred on resource-based industries like mining and pastoralism, and our vibrant tourism industry is built upon iconic destinations and nature-based experiences.

For a significant proportion of the Northern Territory population, the cultural and resource value of the environment runs far deeper than the lifestyle we derive from it. Aboriginal Territorians comprise approximately 30 per cent of the Northern Territory population, and up to 80 per cent of Aboriginal Territorians live in remote or very remote communities on Aboriginal land. Many remote communities enjoy a unique, culturally rich lifestyle and a strong spiritual and cultural connection to traditional lands.

The government recognises the wealth of traditional knowledge and Aboriginal people's understanding of the environment. We are committed to engaging with Aboriginal Territorians to collaborate as we build our knowledge to ensure our environmental management policies are developed in collaboration with all Territorians, including one of the oldest living cultures in the world.

Every Territorian should have a chance at a comfortable, safe and prosperous life. A healthy and resilient environment that is accessible to Territorians provides considerable benefits for our physical, spiritual and psychological wellbeing.

We all have a role in maintaining a healthy and resilient environment. We all have a responsibility to have the smallest possible environmental footprint, to use our water and energy efficiently, to manage our waste effectively and to use our natural resources sustainably.

Working together, we can ensure that future generations have the same opportunities to benefit from living in the Northern Territory that we all enjoy today.



# What are our challenges?

---

**Environmental challenges facing Territorians are not new and are not unique to the Northern Territory. Our ability to modify and adapt our behaviours and to learn from the lessons of others in order to avoid, manage and mitigate risks to our environment is an advantage.**

## **CLIMATE AND NATURAL EVENTS**

While extreme weather events such as cyclones are outside our control, we can manage the risk to our coastline from rising sea levels and the risk of floods from heavy rainfall or storm surges through careful monitoring of our coastlines and river systems, and by strategically planning our towns and cities.

## **USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

The government regulates allocation of our precious water supplies to maintain important ecosystems and our land clearing guidelines minimise habitat loss. As increased demand is placed on our water and land resources, an appropriate balance between allocation and use is fundamentally important. We are exploring options for more innovative and efficient large scale agricultural and aquaculture development to supply growing markets and improve the use of our natural resources.

## **PESTS, WEEDS AND WILDFIRE**

About 80 introduced animal species have established significant wild populations on mainland Australia and some of these have become major environmental and agricultural pests. In the Northern Territory there are currently 18 mammal species and 51 bird species that have been declared as feral species.

Weeds can be a symptom and a cause of land degradation and negatively impact land users and land managers through the effect they may have on environmental, cultural, social or economic values placed on the land.

While wildfire conditions can be predicted in broad terms, it is often difficult to be certain of the location or frequency of wildfire events, and the resources required to effectively manage different wildfire scenarios.

Working with land owners and community groups, the government continually updates its programs to ensure the effective management of weeds, feral animals and wildfire.



## GROWING POPULATION

As the Northern Territory's population grows, an additional challenge is to manage community expectations for a thriving economy where Territorians have access to education, healthcare and social infrastructure.

Increasing urban density will accommodate a growing population without reducing open space and increasing urban sprawl, but the compromise is that we will be living closer together.

## WASTE

We are committed to working with industry to improve environmental management practices, including the enforcement of regulation regarding the correct disposal of waste and hazardous material. The establishment of recycling centres and places to treat solid waste and waste water are generally market driven economic decisions, however the government is keen to investigate opportunities for treating our waste as a resource.

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The development of new roads and urban expansion can fragment and encroach on threatened species habitats; however this can be managed through the identification of areas of high environmental value for protection from disturbance. This has the potential to remove barriers for development outside the protected areas. The Northern Territory's regulation provides for the declaration of essential habitat in an area that, on its own or together with another area, is an essential habitat for the survival of wildlife generally or a species of wildlife.

We will take a strategic approach to land use and planning to ensure that our built environment:

- encourages local businesses and entrepreneurship; attracts people to live here; and provides affordable housing, travel, access to job opportunities, and equitable facilities and services
- strikes the right balance with natural ecosystems and improves health, social and cultural wellbeing.

We will use the best available science and evidence to guide our decisions; we will establish more robust and efficient regulatory frameworks; and we will engage with the community, industry, business and experts to ensure we have the right frameworks and processes in place to address current and future pressures on the environment.

By ensuring our development is ecologically sustainable - that the social benefits are enduring and the environmental costs minimised - the development of the Northern Territory can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.



# Our current context

---

The Northern Territory Government's *Framing the Future* strategic plan sets the foundation for the Territory's future. The strategic plan is based on four key objectives of a *Prosperous Economy, Strong Society, Confident Culture, and a Balanced Environment*.

The draft Balanced Environment Strategy establishes a pathway for government to achieve its objectives and outlines our goals and aims to deliver our vision for a balanced environment.

The draft Strategy is complemented by a number of other government initiatives including the development of the Northern Territory's first water discussion paper, *Our Water Future*, a Biosecurity Strategy, the Economic Development Strategy and the Oil and Gas Industry Development Strategy. These initiatives all include a strong focus on effective management of our environment.

The Northern Territory Planning Scheme includes principles for sustainable development and environmental management, and our Land Use Planning processes provide an opportunity for public comment on plans to proactively manage anticipated growth. Our area plans and land use plans set the strategic framework for integrating land use, transport and infrastructure planning in order to deliver more sustainable and cost-effective outcomes for the community, with consideration for environmental and heritage values.

Modelled on the original system established by the Commonwealth Government before the introduction of its *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*; the Northern Territory's environmental regulatory system has not been substantially amended since its creation over thirty years ago.

We need to balance the Northern Territory's economic development and the sustainable use of our natural resources. We need to improve our regulatory system. The community needs to trust that the Northern Territory's environmental management system is transparent in its decision-making, and capable of managing the potential environmental impacts from projects and development. Industry needs a system that provides an attractive operating environment by providing certainty to project proponents through transparent, consistent and timely decision-making.

With this in mind, in November 2014, Dr Allan Hawke AC was commissioned to conduct a review into the Northern Territory's environmental assessment and approval processes to present options to reform the regulatory system so its operation reflects contemporary values and is guided by the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

---

The Northern Territory covers about one sixth of the Australian continent with an area of 1.35 million km<sup>2</sup> which is equal to the combined areas of France, Spain and Italy.

---

Government has considered Dr Hawke's report and in recognition of concerns raised by the community and industry about the capacity of the current system to manage the risks to the environment from increased development, the report has been publicly released to provide an opportunity for the community to engage with government on the way forward. Government has committed to significant reform of the regulatory system that provides:

- certainty for major project proponents by providing a 'single front door' through the system
- testing and accrediting project legislation and agency procedures by the Minister for the Environment in consultation with the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA)
- the establishment of the Minister for the Environment as the decision-maker for projects not subject to approval by an accredited approval process
- transparent public reporting by proponents on compliance with their environmental obligations
- strengthened audit and compliance role for the NT EPA
- the Minister for the Environment to give proponents and the community certainty by publishing policies and procedures
- clarity in the roles and responsibilities of government agencies and the NT EPA in the system.

Given that the reform of the regulatory system is a central element of the draft Strategy, the results of consultation on the Hawke Report will also inform the development of the final Strategy.





# Our framework for a balanced environment

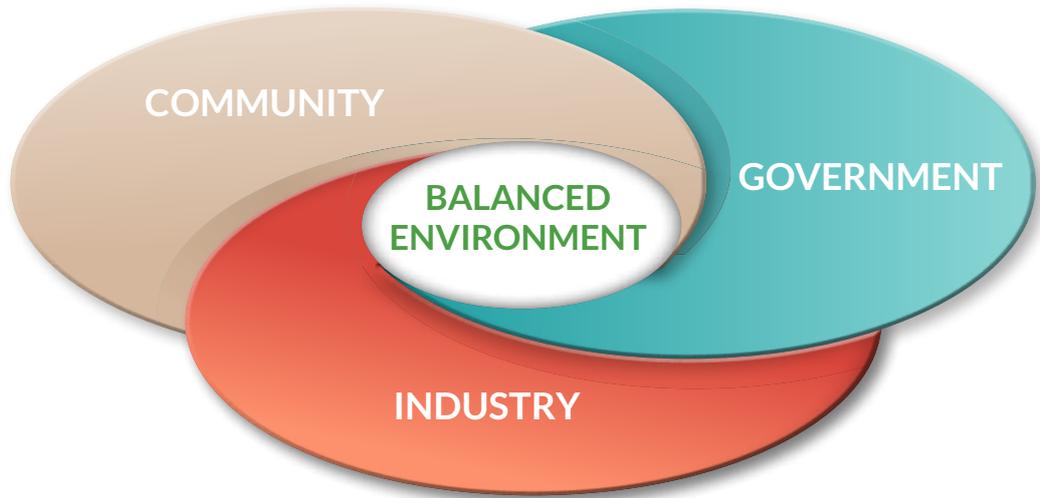
Six goals support our vision for a balanced environment. The Northern Territory Government will provide leadership and implement policies and actions to achieve these goals through five areas of influence.





# We all have a role to play

Everyone has a responsibility in protecting, conserving, sustainably using and enjoying our environment. A balanced environment requires an active partnership between governments, industry and the community.



## COMMUNITY'S ROLE IS TO:

- be accountable for their own actions
- hold industry and government accountable for good environmental practice and management
- get involved and stay informed
- modify behaviours to reduce their impact.

## INDUSTRY'S ROLE IS TO:

- support research and innovation and commit to good environmental practice
- be responsible and accountable and minimise adverse impacts on our natural environment
- commit to good environmental management practices
- keep the community informed about good environmental performance and outcomes
- build its social licence by incorporating healthy environment and community well-being objectives into business practices.

## GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IS TO:

- commit to collaborative strategic planning
- implement robust risk assessment management and audit, monitor and review compliance
- establish and maintain governance systems that support our goals for a balanced environment
- consult and engage stakeholders in decision-making processes and be transparent
- support research and innovation, promote access to information and educate industry and the community
- implement, review and modify environmental management in government business and on government projects to reflect leading practice
- monitor and report on the health of the environment.



# Our goals for a balanced environment

---

# HEALTHY WATER, CATCHMENTS AND WATERWAYS

The Northern Territory's waterways and catchments are an integral part of our lifestyle and economy. Our waterways and catchments are used for a variety of different purposes (leisure, agricultural, environmental) each with different and competing demands. Rainfall varies considerably across the distinct climatic zones from the wet-dry tropical north to the arid central desert region. As a result of the high variability and seasonality for surface waters, year round water use is largely reliant on our extensive groundwater systems. Many of these groundwater basins have large storage capacities and are recharged by rainfall; however their renewable capabilities are often unpredictable.

We are committed to managing the increasing demand on our water resources to protect the integrity of this resource. Management of springs and water holes within our arid climes is of particular importance as they provide environmental refuge, water supplies and strong links to Aboriginal culture and practices. It is essential that the use of our groundwater resources is carefully monitored and adaptive management techniques reviewed and updated.

The Territory's world-class recreational fishing attracts locals and tourists from across the region and around the world. Monitoring and sustainably managing our fish stocks is crucial to ensure future generations are able to enjoy fishing in our unique natural environment. The government manages recreational and commercial fishing in the Northern Territory through the implementation of measures to rebuild 'at risk' stocks to sustainable levels, and through possession and vessel limits designed to sustain the quality of our fishing into the future.

## OUR AIMS

- Water allocation plans that protect environmental flows and provide certainty for commercial and residential users.
- A robust monitoring and review framework that tracks the health indicators of waterways and catchments.
- Facilitate access to water supplies and sanitation for all Territorians.
- Effective management of aquatic resources.

## OUR ACTIONS

- Develop, implement and review strategic plans to manage water allocation; improve sewage management; and minimise threats to aquatic and marine biodiversity health.
- Monitor and publish public reports on the health of our waterways; potable water resources and the impacts of resource and other industries on our water resources.
- Work with the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training to investigate managed aquifer recharges as a potential water storage solution.
- Deliver programs to reduce costs for business, industry and the community through the adoption of efficient, innovative and proven water use and waste management technologies.
- Pursue flood and storm surge mitigation options across the Northern Territory.
- Manage the Northern Territory's fish and aquatic resources and support the development of co-management frameworks and community stewardship.



# RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS

The Northern Territory has many distinct ecosystems, from sandy deserts to extensive savannah woodlands. Embedded within the more extensive landscapes are wetlands, river systems, rocky ranges, and rainforest patches each with their own unique flora and fauna.

Ecosystem services - the benefits that people derive from ecosystems, for example food, water, recreational and cultural benefits are an essential and important part of our environment. Human activities, such as development and resource intensive industries are impacting the flow of ecosystem services on a large scale.

The government recognises that its land use and development policies should strive to achieve a balance between sustaining vital ecosystem services and pursuing the worthy goals of economic development.

A well-recognised method of conserving native plants and animals is the development of programs supporting the sustainable use of wildlife to ensure the ongoing viability of a species. Utilising this model, Aboriginal people are able to maintain their traditional use of wildlife and have the option to develop commercial uses on a sustainable basis. In addition, landowners are able to investigate options for enhancing wildlife management through cooperative management agreements.

We will streamline our environmental regulation to reduce ambiguity, duplication and inconsistency and amend the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Act* to accommodate the common assessment method for assessing and listing threatened species, resulting in a single list in each jurisdiction, which is consistent with the best practice standards set by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Maintaining the resilience of our ecosystems is essential to ensure that our diverse natural land and sea scapes and high biodiversity values continue to be enjoyed by current and future generations. The Northern Territory Government is committed to sustainable and adaptive environmental management practices to safeguard the resilience of our ecosystems.

## OUR AIMS

- Risk-based regulatory frameworks to guide identification, assessment, avoidance or mitigation of environmental risks.
- Identify areas of outstanding biodiversity for active conservation management.
- A robust monitoring and review framework that tracks the health of identified ecosystems.

## OUR ACTIONS

- Implement the recommendations of the *Hydraulic Fracturing Inquiry and Review of the Northern Territory Environmental Assessment and Approvals Processes*.
- Develop, implement and review strategic biosecurity plans to protect the environment from negative impacts of pests and diseases.
- Actively engage with Aboriginal people to provide for incorporation of Aboriginal knowledge into environmental policy development.
- Identify and clearly define opportunities for the sustainable use of wildlife, for example, to support Indigenous economic development.
- Develop, implement and review regulation to provide contemporary, leading practice protection of sacred sites and areas of high archaeological and ecological value.
- Develop effective management responses to emerging issues such as the decline of small mammals and protect and help recover populations of threatened species.

# INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Increasing our knowledge of the environment through the application of science, collection of data and continual monitoring provides us with the tools to respond to changing conditions, manage risk and increase our understanding of our environment.

The Northern Territory's vast landscapes are sparsely populated and many aspects of the functioning of the natural environment are not well understood. It is important that government and industry pool their resources in order to access the best available science and the latest data.

Territorians have always had to adapt to our extreme climate; to manage periods of drought and periods of heavy rainfall, and this gives us an advantage in understanding how to mitigate its effects. Using science to improve our understanding of our natural systems will allow us to focus on areas of high conservation value and develop a framework for implementing adaptive management practices that balance risk and use with the capacity of the environment to remain healthy and resilient.

## OUR AIMS

- Partner with the private sector, relevant organisations and expert bodies to collect baseline data.
- Develop and implement adaptive management systems based on credible science and robust data.

## OUR ACTIONS

- Continually review and update regulation to provide clear enforceable obligations for environmental outcomes.
- Continue to progress research and monitoring programs.
- Implement a groundwater study to understand aquifer capacity and deliverability in the Tindall Limestone aquifer.
- Share data across government and with industry to increase baseline data and provide for more robust monitoring.
- Support renewable energy generation and facilitate the implementation of renewable energy projects in remote Aboriginal communities and homelands.
- Implement robust monitoring systems to track the health of the Northern Territory's biodiversity.
- Participate in national monitoring and protection initiatives.
- Improve environmental management and sustainable use and increase our knowledge and understanding through research and innovation.
- Contribute to the development of evidence based national programs and standards for transport emissions reduction.
- Work with Aboriginal elders and custodians to interpret and conserve traditional knowledge of the Northern Territory's flora and fauna and cultural heritage.

# CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Territorians are the benefactors and custodians of extensive cultural and natural resources. Our towns and cities are well planned, supporting current and future growth that incorporates place-based needs and environmental considerations.

Contemporary, leading and adaptive management of our natural resources balances the needs of the environment with economic opportunities. The ongoing challenges of feral animals, weeds, inappropriate fire regimes and changing climatic conditions coupled with investment and infrastructure improvements necessary to support our growing population all require contemporary management practices.

Aboriginal people have an important role in managing our environment. We are committed to ensuring Aboriginal people, their values and culture are part of our land management systems, and that they can derive economic benefits through their involvement in the provision of ecosystem services.

Leading practice includes avoiding, minimising and mitigating environmental impacts of development; is innovative; and is consistent with contemporary knowledge and community expectations. Our continued development will complement our lifestyle without compromising the health of our environmental values.

The Northern Territory Government strives to implement leading practice resource management by ensuring that our decisions are transparent, based on credible science and guided by environmental, social and economic considerations.



© Tourism NT

## OUR AIMS

Develop and implement leading practice sustainable resource management frameworks.

Harness technology, research and innovation to support sustainable development.

Encourage industry to remediate and rehabilitate.

## OUR ACTIONS

- Develop and implement a policy to facilitate and manage environmental offsets for residual environmental impacts of development proposals.
- Develop, implement and review threat management plans to reduce the negative impacts of wildfire, weeds and feral animals on the Northern Territory's landscape.
- Use traditional knowledge and involve Aboriginal people in land management.
- Continue to manage and conserve national parks and reserves and provide periodic 'State of the Parks' reports for our most important parks.
- Provide environmentally sensitive improvements in security and efficiency of water supply and energy demand in communities that have significant constraints.
- Develop strategies to improve water and energy efficiency in government owned and leased assets.
- Facilitate greater industry capacity to avoid, minimise and mitigate negative environmental impacts at development sites.
- Enforce compliance and industry requirements to report results of environmental monitoring.
- Use appropriate enforcement tools to manage unauthorised waste disposal.
- Develop guidelines for managing sustainable development opportunities for national parks and reserves.
- Improve our understanding and capability of the Northern Territory's environment through targeted collection and assessment of land, soil, water and native flora and fauna across the Northern Territory.
- Address waste management systems and minimisation practices.
- Manage our natural resources by reducing resource consumption and waste.





# ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

We are all custodians of our environment; government, business, industry and the community all have a responsibility to manage our use and reduce adverse impacts on our environment.

A key role for government is to ensure effective environmental frameworks are in place and to engage stakeholders as part of a transparent decision-making process. As an environmental regulator, government establishes environmental laws and develops policies and programs to ensure good environmental outcomes.

Business and industry are responsible for ensuring that their operations are ethical and sustainable and do not adversely impact the environment by practicing good environmental management that complies with environmental laws.

Our personal choices and behaviours also impact on the environment. The government is committed to increasing Territorians' understanding of our heritage, natural landscapes and ecosystems, and building awareness of appropriate disposal of waste, recycling programs and the efficient use of our water and energy resources.

## OUR AIMS

- Promote community and industry education about the value of our environmental and cultural heritage.
- Promote community and industry active participation in land management, conservation programs and waste management approaches.

## OUR ACTIONS

- Promote public responsibility and stewardship for living with wildlife.
- Provide education and training opportunities to assist in the sustainable use and reduction of threats on ecosystems.
- Assist land managers and the community to protect threatened and significant species and habitats.
- Work with land managers to mitigate the negative impacts of feral animals.
- Work with the community to develop volunteer programs, opportunities for recreational groups and special interest groups to access and connect to our national parks and reserves.
- Ensure Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority certificates are obtained, and Aboriginal and Land Council agreement is provided prior to approving any development proposals on Aboriginal land.
- Promote public responsibility and support waste management and resource recovery pollution management initiatives and encourage recycling across the Northern Territory.

# LIVEABLE CITIES AND TOWNS

Liveable cities and towns are an important element in maintaining a healthy and prosperous future. Well planned, healthy, attractive and vibrant towns and cities that provide high quality life choices will ensure they remain places that people want to live in, work and visit.

Although Territorians enjoy a unique lifestyle, there are some challenges. We need to continue to provide more affordable housing, deliver safe and open community areas, meet the needs of our growing and ageing population, improve community and social wellbeing and address the increasingly unpredictable Northern Territory climate.

Increasing the density of our cities and towns while maintaining their appeal is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is essential that our strategic urban planning integrates environmental considerations with liveability. Providing residential areas with shops, amenities and services will encourage movement and lead to more walkable, vibrant communities. Open space is a critical component of urban design and increasing the amount of quality, flexible, active open spaces can help offset a lack of private open space that results from increased urban density.

The government has a role in coordinating, planning for, and delivering, cities, towns and communities that are more productive, sustainable and liveable without compromising the natural environment and our quality of life.

## OUR AIMS

- Streamline town planning processes to provide clarity and certainty for development and regulatory decisions.
- Develop and implement adaptive urban planning responses to climatic changes.
- Integrate innovation in planning for the built environment.

## OUR ACTIONS

- Improve the planning and management of our cities and towns by streamlining our planning systems, infrastructure delivery and integrate environmental management practices.
- Streamline town planning processes to reduce duplication in development and building approvals.
- Manage environmental impacts during the design, construction, maintenance and operation of the Northern Territory's transport infrastructure and examine opportunities to improve urban transport options.
- Streamline our administrative processes by improving the efficiency of environmental assessments and planning and building approval processes.
- Increase resilience to extreme weather events through the use of science and research to inform the development of our urban landscape.
- Promote energy efficiency design in residential and commercial developments.
- Pursue flood mitigation options across the Northern Territory.
- Support land use and release across the Northern Territory based on the principles of ecologically sustainable development.
- Champion the benefits of the environment to social wellbeing, in particular healthy landscapes and parks and include these into strategic planning of our cities and towns.
- Introduce recognised standards and processes that have clarity, are valued and are adopted by the community and industry for environmental regulation on: air, noise, waste, pollution, marine environment, chemicals, waste water treatment and land contamination.



How we will achieve a  
balanced environment

---



The government is responsible for developing and implementing a robust and transparent environmental regulatory system to strike the right balance between development and the protection of our environment.

The Northern Territory's environmental assessment and approval system has not been substantially amended since it was established in 1982.

Our regulatory system must be trusted by the community but at the same time create an attractive operating environment for industry by providing certainty to project proponents through transparent, consistent and timely decision-making.

# IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATORY SYSTEM

## WHAT WE DO NOW

The Northern Territory's environmental regulatory system assesses potential environmental impacts of planned developments, and provides for adequate control and mitigation measures to be put in place during development, construction and operation.

While we have strong regulation in place, a legislative review is well underway. We are engaging with the world's best regulators from across the country and around the world to further strengthen and improve our regulatory environment.

## WHAT WE CAN IMPROVE

We committed to significant reform of the regulatory system that provides:

- certainty for major project proponents by providing a 'single front door' through the system
- testing and accrediting project legislation and agency procedures by the Minister for the Environment in consultation with the NT EPA
- the establishment of the Minister for the Environment as the decision-maker for projects not subject to approval by an accredited approval process
- transparent public reporting by proponents on compliance with environmental conditions
- strengthened audit and compliance role for the NT EPA
- the Minister for the Environment to give proponents and the community certainty by publishing policies and procedures
- clarity in the roles and responsibilities of government agencies and the NT EPA in the system.



We are the stewards of our landscapes, waterways and abundant wildlife, and are all responsible for the use and protection of our environment.

The government is committed to:

- Empowering local and regional land management groups by facilitating forums to promote leading practice environmental management
- Effective relationships with industry to encourage project proponents to become owners of environmental outcomes
- Building trust and credibility in the community about its environmental management capabilities.

# IMPROVING OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY

## WHAT WE DO NOW

The government provides services to engage landholders in leading practice management for the sustainable use of resources which also achieves better landholder compliance with legislation.

We are working with community organisations such as Territory Natural Resource Management and Landcare to promote sustainable management of our natural resources.

We are improving transparency and consultation in the environmental regulatory process.

## WHAT WE CAN IMPROVE

Every Territorian can make a difference through adopting measures such as the use of energy efficient building design, appliances and motor vehicles, recycling and responsible waste disposal and planting native vegetation to attract native wildlife.

Consultation with the community, business, industry and experts and engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process provides for all views to be considered and clear, sensible and robust regulations to be developed.

We are committed to ensuring our decisions are developed collaboratively and communicated effectively.

We have committed to engage on the detail of implementing the recommendations from the Hawke review into the Northern Territory environmental management system with the community, environment organisations and industry to develop a model which is suitable for the Northern Territory context.



The government is committed to ensuring strategic land use planning and policy design is based upon sound environmental knowledge.

Government will strengthen its strategic decision making approach so that environmental impacts are appropriately considered when decisions are made.

# STRATEGIC PLANNING

---

## WHAT WE DO NOW

Our strategic land use plans identify priority areas for land use and release, with affected stakeholders provided the opportunity to contribute to the plans through participation in workshops and providing feedback to discussion drafts.

Our planning and decision-making processes under the Planning Act are transparent and subject to robust, risk-based environmental assessment.

## WHAT WE CAN IMPROVE

By integrating strategic policy decisions across all agencies with environmental management principles, the government will ensure that development occurs in a balanced manner to reduce impacts on the environment.

We will work with the NT Planning Commission to review, and if necessary amend, the *Planning Act* to ensure that it can facilitate and encourage strategic planning and appropriate consideration of environmental risks as part of the development approval process.

We will ensure land capability assessments are undertaken where appropriate.

We will adopt measures to ensure future development is ecologically sustainable outside planning control areas, including high level bioregional environmental assessments.



From weed management to feral camel control, from water allocation plans to land use mapping, government invests in a range of environmental management systems.

Government will continue to support initiatives and direct its resources towards priority environment and conservation programs.

The government will continue investigating opportunities for co-investment and leveraging Commonwealth and private sector funding to invest in environmental management programs.

# DEMONSTRATING OUR COMMITMENT BY INVESTING IN MANAGING OUR ENVIRONMENT

---

## WHAT WE DO NOW

The government is continuing to support conservation initiatives and direct government resources towards priority environmental programs.

These include contemporary fire management regimes, adaptive weed management programs, renewable energy technology in our remote communities, eco-tourism and research projects so that decisions about managing the environment are made using the best available information.

## WHAT WE CAN IMPROVE

A commitment to improved collaboration across our agencies and across governments will provide for the development of consistent and robust risk assessment strategies to address the threats of weeds, feral animals, wildfire and extreme weather events.

Government will also work with industry to clearly define responsibilities and to develop frameworks for the long term management of projects such as legacy mines and the rehabilitation of mine sites.



In order to develop and implement innovative and adaptive management practices, we first need to know the condition of our environment and the challenges it faces.

The Northern Territory is a vast landscape with many dynamic features, and we have limited detailed knowledge about our ecological systems.

It is essential that our environmental management, and strategic land use and planning systems are adaptive and regularly reviewed and refined.

# CONDUCTING RESEARCH AND BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO ENABLE INNOVATIVE AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

---

## WHAT WE DO NOW

The government is building its knowledge base through effective collaboration and partnerships with Aboriginal Traditional Owners, research institutions such as Charles Darwin University and subject matter organisations including the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology.

An action plan has been developed to gather water data from industry to build on our understanding of aquifer capacity and deliverability.

A \$5 million Darwin Region Water Assessment will be conducted by the CSIRO with funding provided by the Commonwealth to support the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

## WHAT WE CAN IMPROVE

We will continue to expand our environmental baseline data and mapping through targeted research and collaboration with subject matter experts and research organisations.

With knowledge and understanding of the current state of the environment, we can develop innovative and adaptive environmental management solutions.

Through our regulatory processes, proponents can be major sources of data to inform environmental management.

We will improve our data sharing arrangements with the Commonwealth Government.

# HAVE YOUR SAY

To provide feedback on the Balanced Environment Strategy Discussion Draft, please visit [www.haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/balancedenvironment](http://www.haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/balancedenvironment) or email [balancedenvironmentstrategy.dcm@nt.gov.au](mailto:balancedenvironmentstrategy.dcm@nt.gov.au)



© Tourism NT

DEPARTMENT OF  
THE CHIEF MINISTER