

OUR PLAN FOR A BALANCED ENVIRONMENT

HEALTHY WATERWAYS, CATCHMENTS
AND GROUNDWATER SYSTEMS

RESILIENT MARINE, AQUATIC AND
TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS

CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT
PRACTICES

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE
AND UNDERSTANDING

ENVIRONMENTAL
RESPONSIBILITY

LIVEABLE CITIES
AND TOWNS





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Chief Minister's Message



The environment plays a very special role in the lives of Territorians. We recognise the importance of conserving the natural environment for its beauty and intrinsic value, as well as for promoting the health and wellbeing of Territorians, providing recreational and tourism opportunities, enhancing our identity and culture, and stimulating social and community connectivity.

We want to ensure Territorians are given every opportunity to benefit from our growing prosperity, and it is therefore important that the Northern Territory's development is sustainable and not at the expense of our natural environment, culture and lifestyle.

Government has a responsibility to provide leadership and policy direction to conserve, protect and manage 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 the natural environment. Collectively, we share a responsibility to protect the environment for our future generations.

This *Balanced Environment Strategy* outlines our overarching strategic and contemporary approach to the sustainable management of the environment. It is not intended to provide a prescriptive or detailed management approach, but rather to guide our policy and decision-making into the future. This plan will guide the direction and priorities of government through an implementation framework, which will ensure the Strategy's goals, aims and actions are achieved.

It is clear that Territorians are passionate about the environment. It is with great pleasure that I release the *Balanced Environment Strategy*. This strategy will help to protect and conserve our spectacular environment, both now and into the future.



Adam Giles MLA
Chief Minister



The Northern Territory Environment

The Northern Territory environment is spectacular, unique and diverse. It supports elements of our exceptional lifestyle, our dynamic economy, our distinctive culture, and our health and wellbeing. We all have a role to play in maintaining a healthy and resilient environment and it is important that we work collectively to reduce our environmental footprint, to use our resources efficiently and sustainably, to manage our waste effectively, and to repair any past environmental damage. With a strong environment, the Northern Territory's future social, economic and environmental future is very positive.

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.

Our opportunity



The Northern Territory enjoys a rich array of natural resources, from abundant and diverse wildlife, through to robust fish stocks, intact and fertile land, vibrant plant communities, and healthy harbours and waterways. We have the opportunity to ensure the long-term health and wellbeing of our natural environment by adopting a strategic direction focused on investing in our enablers. These enablers are focused on delivering strong environmental outcomes for the Northern Territory by reforming our assessment and approvals system, ensuring effective strategic planning approaches are adopted, engaging with our community and our stakeholders, investing in our environment, and driving innovative adaptive management practices. Collectively, these will promote the long term viability of our environment.

Our vision

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 enable us to responsibly use, manage and safeguard our environment.

1. **Balance** – we will balance environmental, social and economic factors in our decision-making.
2. **Stewardship** – we will work together to manage our environment responsibly and ethically.
3. **Strategic planning** – we will define our goals and systematically plan how we will achieve them.
4. **Engagement** – we will engage in consultative and inclusive decision-making.
5. **Intergenerational equity** – we recognise our role as custodians of the environment and as such we will work together to maintain and enhance the health, diversity and productivity of the environment for the benefit of future generations.
6. **Transparency** – we will ensure decisions are clearly communicated to all stakeholders.
7. **Evidence-based** – we will use robust scientific data to support our decision-making.
8. **Polluter pays** – we will ensure that the cost and responsibility for environmental damage sits with the responsible party.
9. **Leadership** – Government will lead by example through effective management and monitoring of government projects and government assets, and establishing appropriate legislation and regulations.



Our goals



HEALTHY WATERWAYS, CATCHMENTS AND GROUNDWATER SYSTEMS

The Northern Territory's waterways and catchments are an integral part of our lifestyle and economy. These waterways and catchments are used for a variety of purposes (recreation, agriculture, industry, and as a significant source of food and water for Indigenous people), each with different and competing demands.

Demand for water resources will continue to grow. Ensuring people, businesses and the environment have access to sufficient and quality water resources is critical for the Territory's social, economic and environmental future. This can be achieved by establishing long-term research and monitoring programs to better understand and manage our water, educating and promoting water efficiency and innovation, adopting efficient, innovative and proven waste water management approaches, and ensuring transparent decision making in relation to water licensing and allocations.



RESILIENT MARINE, AQUATIC AND TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS

Economically and socially, people derive extensive food, water, recreation and cultural benefits from our ecosystems. However, development, resource intensive industries, and climate variation are impacting the flow of ecosystem services on a large scale. Strategies are needed to help us understand and protect these ecosystem services to ensure that our diverse natural land and seascapes and high biodiversity values continue to be enjoyed by current and future generations.

The government is committed to adaptive, innovative and sustainable environmental management practices to safeguard the resilience of our ecosystems. It is important that we continue to plan and monitor our progress through robust data collection, while taking action to reduce the impacts caused by invasive species, diseases and wildfire, and to promote the recovery of threatened species and ecosystems. This will be aided by clear public reporting, and strong collaboration with our partners.

OUR AIMS

- The health of our waterways, catchments and groundwater systems are maintained or improved to support environmental, social, cultural and economic values.
- Sufficient water is available to ensure the health of natural ecosystems, while meeting economic and social needs.
- Strong partnerships are established to facilitate innovative approaches to waste water management for the ongoing health of our environment.
- A culture of responsible water stewardship is adopted throughout the Northern Territory.
- Innovation in water management is promoted, which is based on sound data and best practice.

- Natural systems are stronger and more resilient and can respond to threats and pressures.
- Marine, aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity is better understood, protected and valued.
- Biodiversity is protected; with at risk species and populations stabilised or recovered.
- Indigenous traditional knowledge about biodiversity conservation is embraced.



CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Territorians are the benefactors and custodians of extensive cultural and natural resources. It is crucial that we recognise our role as caretakers of the environment and that we look after our natural resources for the good of future generations.

Contemporary, leading and adaptive management of our natural resources balances the needs of the environment with economic opportunities. We face a range of challenges and these require a modern approach to environmental management and protection.

The government will work to reform our legislation and regulatory processes to ensure these reflect contemporary approaches and practices. We will build our knowledge and apply this to enable the Territory to adopt innovative and adaptive management systems. Further, such systems must be supported by appropriate education, compliance and enforcement processes, therefore ensuring adoption of best practices for development, management, rehabilitation and remediation in the Northern Territory.

- Progressive and innovative approaches are adopted to protect the natural environment against threats, including climatic variability.
- The Northern Territory is aligned with national and international standards and principles for environmental protection.
- Climate adaptation strategies are flexible and responsive to new information.



INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Enhancing our knowledge and understanding of the natural environment is critical for enabling implementation of effective and adaptable management programs and for promoting community stewardship and engagement.

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 and to manage risk. It is also important that we engage with Indigenous custodians, industry, research institutions, and across all levels of government to gain the best possible understanding of these systems, while also improving efficiencies, streamlining approaches, prioritising research needs, and ensuring coordination of environmental research and data.

In addition to implementing robust data collection methods, it is crucial that this information is transparent, clearly communicated and accessible to the community. Increased transparency will enhance community engagement and stewardship, while facilitating improved awareness of the issues and threats facing our natural environment.

- Sound scientific data is collected and collated to inform decision-making and policy.
- Collaborations are formed to encourage data sharing across all levels of government, expert bodies, industry and Indigenous communities.
- Scientific evidence is utilised to produce strategic approaches to unprecedented or unpredictable threats to natural resources, biodiversity and the environment.
- Information is transparent and readily available to the Northern Territory community.
- The knowledge and actions of external experts, land care groups, landholders and members of the community are welcomed.



ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

We are all custodians of our environment and, as such, we all have a responsibility to manage our use of natural resources, and to reduce our impacts on the environment.

The government will raise awareness of community and industry participation in sustainable practices, provide advice and facilitate community participation in land management programs, refine enforcement tools to reduce negative impacts on the environment, and promote stewardship for our natural environment. Government is focused on ensuring Territorians are responsible for their actions and that, as environmental stewards, we all ensure that the cost and responsibility of environmental damage is accepted by the responsible party. Collectively, this will reduce our environmental footprint, with benefits for our natural environment over the long term.



LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES, CITIES AND TOWNS

Liveable communities, cities and towns are an important element in maintaining a healthy and prosperous environment. Well planned, healthy, attractive and vibrant towns and cities tend to demonstrate a stronger environment and a healthier population. By ensuring development is balanced and sustainable - that the social benefits are enduring and the environmental costs minimised - the Northern Territory will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The government has a role in promoting planning principles that integrate ecologically sustainable development; encouraging the use of renewable and alternative energy sources; encouraging sustainable use of natural resources; implementing appropriate land use planning principles to protect native habitat and areas of important biodiversity; and strengthening standards and processes for environmental regulation.

OUR AIMS

- Government, industry and the community are knowledgeable, informed and responsible for the protection of the environment.
- The community is an active participant in conservation, waste management, rehabilitation and renewable energy initiatives.
- Sustainable practices and technologies are adopted to increase use of natural renewable energy sources, recycling and reuse.
- Environmental threats and impacts are considered in all planning and development decisions.
- Urban planning and designs promote sustainable practices and minimise impacts on the natural environment.
- Innovative technologies are adopted to increase efficiency and sustainability of our homes and industries.
- Urban designs are adaptable and responsive to current and changing Northern Territory climatic conditions.
- Natural spaces are preserved to nurture community connection with nature.



How we will achieve a balanced environment

The Northern Territory Government has identified five enablers which will create the operating environment the Northern Territory community needs to accomplish our environmental goals. These enablers will optimise our ability to collectively achieve the overall vision of a healthy and resilient environment.



IMPROVING THE ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATORY SYSTEM

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.

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



IMPROVING OUR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY

The government provides services to engage landholders in leading practice management for the sustainable use of resources, which also ensures improved landholder compliance with legislation. We are committed to working with and empowering landholders, industry and the community to support best practice land management outcomes. We are also focused on improving transparency and communication with the community to instill confidence and assurance in the data we use and the decisions we make.

Government recognises that we must all be responsible for our environmental footprint. By building effective relationships with industry, stakeholders and the wider community, we can encourage everyone to take responsibility for environmental outcomes.

ACTIONS WE ARE TAKING TO ACHIEVE THIS...

To achieve an improved environmental regulatory system, government will:

- 1 Work with stakeholders and partners to ensure that projects undertaken in the Northern Territory minimise impacts on the natural environment.
- 2 Support a culture of continuous improvement, therefore ensuring the regulatory system supports best practice, both now and into the future.
- 3 Ensure our legislation reflects our commitment to the environment.
- 4 Facilitate a culture within the public sector which supports a balance between development and environmental protection.
- 5 Develop a coordinated, transparent and consistent approach to environmental protection across all levels of government.
- 6 Streamline and simplify regulatory processes, while maintaining sound assessment practices for the ongoing protection of the environment.

To enhance our engagement with the community and industry, government will:

- 1 Educate and raise awareness within the community to promote environmental knowledge and stewardship.
- 2 Empower and engage the local community through forums and events that promote two-way communication.
- 3 Provide services and support to engage the landholders and the broader community in best practice management for the sustainable use of resources.
- 4 Encourage Territorians to make a difference by adopting measures such as the use of energy efficient building design and technologies, appliances and motor vehicles, recycling, responsible waste disposal and planting native vegetation.
- 5 Forge relationships with industry to encourage project proponents to become owners of environmental outcomes.
- 6 Improve collaboration across all levels of government to ensure consistent and robust risk assessment strategies to address key threats to the environment.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Government is committed to ensuring strategic planning and policy design is based on sound environmental knowledge. Our strategic land use plans identify priority areas for land use and release, with affected stakeholders provided with the opportunity to contribute to the plans through participation in workshops and providing feedback to discussion drafts. Our planning and decision-making processes are transparent and development applications are subject to robust, risk-based environmental assessment and approval processes.

To support effective strategic planning, government will:

- 1** Strengthen our strategic decision making so that environmental risks and impacts are appropriately considered when decisions are made.
- 2** Adopt measures to ensure future development is ecologically sustainable.
- 3** Clearly identify environmental conditions and the level of environmental risk associated with development.
- 4** Develop innovative and adaptive management solutions.
- 5** Strengthen long-term strategic land use and planning so that environmental considerations – including threatened species impacts – are taken into account when strategic land use decisions are made.
- 6** Regularly review decisions to assess their contribution towards a balanced environment.



DEMONSTRATING OUR COMMITMENT BY INVESTING IN MANAGING OUR ENVIRONMENT

From weed management to feral animal control, from water allocation plans to land use mapping, government invests in a range of environmental management systems. Government is continuing to support conservation initiatives, and directs resources towards priority environmental programs. These include contemporary fire management regimes, adaptive weed management programs, renewable energy technology in remote communities, eco-tourism and research projects.

Government will continue to support initiatives and direct resources towards priority environmental and conservation programs. Government will also continue investigating opportunities for co-investment and leveraging Commonwealth Government and private sector funding to invest in environmental management programs.

To demonstrate our commitment to managing our environment, government will:

- 1** Continue to invest in high priority environmental projects and programs.
- 2** Leverage industry and public sector capital spending.
- 3** Encourage industry to fund programs aimed at mitigating the residual impacts of operational and development activities.
- 4** Ensure that proponents are able to sufficiently fund and implement effective rehabilitation and remediation programs at the conclusion of works.
- 5** Invest in research to improve our knowledge of the natural environment, while identifying knowledge gaps.
- 6** Collaborate with industry and the community to identify new and novel opportunities to address key challenges and opportunities in remote areas, such as through Desert Knowledge Australia.



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

Government is building on its existing knowledge and expertise through collaboration and partnerships with Traditional Owners, research institutions such as Charles Darwin University, and subject matter organisations including the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology. We are also focused on expanding our environmental baseline data and mapping, which will be achieved 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.

We recognise the need for data to be robust, transparent and accessible. We will continue to work with industry stakeholders, other levels of government and the community to improve data sharing arrangements and to promote two way communications with our partners and stakeholders.

ACTIONS WE ARE TAKING TO ACHIEVE THIS...

To build research and knowledge for innovative and adaptive management practices, government will:

- 1 Continue to expand our environmental baseline data and mapping through targeted research and collaboration with subject matter experts and research organisations.
- 2 Build knowledge through effective collaboration and partnerships with Traditional Owners, research institutions such as Charles Darwin University, and subject matter organisations including the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology.
- 3 Collate scientific evidence and information and apply this information to the planning and management of natural systems across all sectors.
- 4 Ensure agencies have access to the best scientific knowledge available and that policy decisions are based on robust and transparent evidence.
- 5 Ensure land capability assessments are undertaken to enhance our knowledge and understanding of our environment.
- 6 Integrate our knowledge of environmental assets and threats (fire, weeds, feral animals, pollution and nutrient inputs, etc.) to develop strategic and adaptive approaches to managing the environment as a holistic system.

Measuring our progress

We are committed to delivering our vision for a balanced environment – one that balances protection and sustainable use to maintain a healthy and resilient environment.

Government will monitor progress against the Strategy’s goals and actions, through the development of an implementation plan outlining the various activities that are being delivered against this Strategy.

We are committed to a rigorous annual evaluation and reporting process demonstrating success, areas for improvement and actions that will be undertaken to enhance future outcomes.





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DEPARTMENT OF
THE CHIEF MINISTER

