

# Draft Darwin Harbour Strategy Consultation Summary

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## 1. Overview

The draft Darwin Harbour Strategy 2019-2024 was released for public consultation on the Have Your Say website in December 2019, with feedback closing on 28 February 2020.

Seven responses were received through the Have Your Say website. A separate formal submission was received from Keep Top End Coasts Healthy (KTECH) and a further 176 responses were received in the form of a form letter which was largely based on the KTECH submission.

## 2. Have Your Say

There were 7 responses received through the Have Your Say Feedback.

While there was general support for the strategy and its purpose there was wide-ranging views on the draft.

Some feedback was critical of the fact that the draft neglected to address the widespread community opposition to development of the harbour, such as that incurred with the development of both the Darwin LNG and Ichthys gas plants. There was a desire for the Strategy to guide reform for a more regulated framework for decision making associated with developments ie land management and planning decisions.

While other feedback was that there was too much of a focus on development pressures being negative rather than taking a more balanced approach for how development can benefit the Darwin economy more broadly.

In response to questions about the Values; Goals; Objectives and Outcomes contained in the draft Strategy the following was provided:

- The values in the draft Strategy were not clearly defined;
- That economic value should not be considered of equal importance to the natural environment; citing the short term economic benefits and the longer term adverse economic and environmental impacts associated with the Inpex development;
- That there needs to be greater assurance that the objectives can be compatible and that economic activity will not further degrade environmental values, which could be done through enhancing the environmental objectives and developing a clear pathway to regulatory reform;
- More harbour activation for economic, social and tourism benefit should be a goal and that more community consultation be undertaken as to how the community wants to see the harbour activated for other uses beyond those already identified.

In response to questions associated with implementation of the strategy the following feedback was provided:

- Implementation plan should include a clear plan of major reforms; protection of all remaining mangroves and rare ecosystems; planning for buffers and connectivity; informed by strategic environmental assessment and integrated catchment management under an independent authority;
  - That the implementation plan provide clear direction for those both within and outside of government and allowing those experienced/qualified to guide toward common-sense decisions; more fairly representing all stakeholders and provide an outcome with more realistic expectations void of political trends or policy.
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Other general feedback included:

- Population figures are considered to be overinflated;
- A more detailed map to assist the reader easily identify where specific developments in the harbour are being undertaken;
- The need for discussion on potential for future sand mining in the Darwin Harbour (this comment indicates that ban on dredging has had impacts on the ability to undertake sand mining activities);
- Further and broader consultation should be undertaken to capture views and goals of all those who use the harbour;
- Ensuring that development opportunities for locations such as Mandorah and Wagit beach be considered.

### 3. Submission by Keep Top End Coasts Healthy

Keep Top End Coasts Healthy (KTECH) is an alliance of environment groups including Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS), the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Environment Centre of the NT (ECNT).

The submission provided commentary on:

(a) Proposed values of the Darwin Harbour being:

- Reefs and beaches
- Estuarine waters
- Tidal Flats and mangrove forests
- Seagrass meadows
- Culture
- Recreation and leisure
- Tourism
- Fisheries
- A Working Harbour
- Conservation

(b) Identified threats to the health of the harbour through urbanisation and industrialisation, specifically:

- Expansion of East Arm Wharf
- Dredging in the harbour
- Middle Arm industrial development
- Air Pollution around Darwin Harbour
- Urban development in the Darwin region
- Clearing the mangrove forest
- Darwin Harbour water pollution
- Introduced marine pests
- Cultural impact
- Disappearing dolphins

The submission comments that development in and around the harbour through poor land use planning and management has led to the clearing of native vegetation including mangroves; habitat destruction; and contaminants, nutrients and sediments including oil spills, sewage and toxins discharging into the harbour having further negative impact on the health of the harbour.

The submission addresses each of the above threats in more detail and offers suggestions to mitigating these threats which are explored in more detail below.

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- (c) The submission comments that there have been a number of isolated strategies in the past that have lacked a direction and an overarching plan or adequate funding or implementation.

KTECH considers that there is not enough focus in the Strategy on the impacts of climate change which will have an impact on all ecosystems and activities and that addressing the impacts of climate change should be a guiding principle.

The submission also raised concerns that under Goal 5 'Sustainable Development' that there is too much focus on economic values and that this goal should be more balanced suggesting that there be more focus on 'ecologically sustainable development' (ESD). They make further comment that consideration should be given to the value associated with ecological services (such as mangrove forest buffering against storm surge and rising tides), and suggest that ESD be made more explicit in the outcomes.

KTECH welcomes the transition of the Darwin Harbour Report Card to a more integrated reporting basis and suggests that the Strategy and any implementation plan be guided by the report card.

KTECH strongly advocates for an adequately resourced implementation plan.

In summary KTECH recommends the Strategy:

1. Include explicit reference to the new NT Coastal and Marine Management Strategy to ensure integration in the implementation of the two strategies, ensuring a proactive approach to management and protection is taken in Darwin Harbour;
2. Insert a 'guiding principle' addressing the impacts of climate change which is impacting natural, cultural, social and economic values of the Harbour;
3. Though the Strategy references the importance of mangroves and the threats from climate change, it does not reflect the commitment to develop a Strategy to 'protect vital habitats like mangroves which are under threat from climate change' in the draft's 'Goals, objectives and outcomes'. This must be rectified;
4. Due to urgency, conduct a Strategic Environmental Assessment of Middle Arm as a priority ahead of the welcome commitment to conduct a Harbour-wide strategic assessment;
5. Develop and implement an integrated and harbour-wide Dredge Management Plan;
6. Ensure that the impact on the environment and the cultural, recreational and social assets and values are well offset by industry investment;
7. Ecological Sustainable Development be made more explicit in the outcomes at Goal 5.;
8. Establish an implementation plan that includes
  - best-practice monitoring and adaptive management, measurable objectives with indicators, targets and timelines and the agencies responsible for achieving them;
  - working with the Larrakia people in the planning, management and protection of Darwin Harbour;
  - further community consultation;
  - an implementation, monitoring and reporting and adaptive management framework;
  - clear governance and accountability arrangements and partnership development;
  - adequate resourcing;
  - review and evaluation mechanisms.

## 4. Form Letter

176 copies of a form letter primarily reinforcing the recommendations of the KTECH submission were received in the DHAC email inbox (this includes those received after the closing date for the Have your Say feedback on 28 February 2020). AMCS has subsequently advised that there were a total of 316 copies of the form letter and one more personalised response submitted prior to this date sent. We have acknowledged AMCS advice.

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## 5. Conclusion and Next Steps

A large share of the feedback was associated with implementation of the Strategy.

The Strategy represents the first component in a two-phased approach. Phase 1 was the revision and development of the Darwin Harbour Strategy including its vision, goals, key objectives and outcomes identified through consultation with stakeholders and the community. The second phase is the development of actions and priority projects to implement goals, key objectives and outcomes of the Strategy.

The Strategy emphasises the implementation of the actions and priority projects will ensure ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders, including the broader community, to ensure the community values of cultural, environmental, recreational and economic are protected and enhanced.

Amendments to the Strategy were made to accommodate many of the comments made including making the values and the purpose clearer, capturing the impacts of climate change into guiding principles and consistent application of Ecological Sustainable Development.

A number of comments were received in respect of advancing or restricting particular industries or projects, however the role of the Strategy is not to canvas individual potential development opportunities, but rather outlines a management approach to ensure the protection of Darwin Harbour in assessment of any future development. This approach has been reinforced in the Strategy.

Several comments were received requesting to address more fully threats to the health of the harbour such as impacts of climate change and waste, these were already outlined in Appendix 1 to the Strategy, it is proposed that this approach will be retained in the final Strategy.

It is proposed the Strategy will be released and identification and commencement of actions and priority projects will occur from 2020-21.

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