



# DEVELOPING A NORTHERN TERRITORY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS PLANNING POLICY

## *Discussion Paper*



## Acknowledgement

*The Northern Territory Government respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of this country and recognises their continuing connection to the land, water and community on which we work, live and meet.*

*We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures, their Ancestors and Elders past and present, and all the leaders of today and future generations.*

*Please note: while we use the term 'Aboriginal', we respectfully acknowledge that it is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander people.*

*Image: Sunset over floodplain, Top End NT*







# ACRONYMS

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AAPA	Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority
CUG	Compact Urban Growth Policy
DoD	Department of Defence
NT	Northern Territory
NTG	Northern Territory Government
NTPC	Northern Territory Planning Commission
PSA	Planning scheme amendment
SPP	Strategic planning policy
SDPP	Strategic Directions Planning Policy
SLUP	Strategic land use plan
TFHC	Territory Families, Housing and Communities



*Image: Tennant Creek*



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*Image: Aerial photo Darwin peninsula looking towards Sadgroves Creek*



# FOREWORD

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Strategic planning is central to the Northern Territory (NT) land use and development planning system and is a key component of the NT Planning Scheme 2020 (Planning Scheme). The strategic planning framework comprises both strategic planning policies and strategic land use plans developed under the guidance of the NT Planning Commission.

The strategic planning framework plays a key role in the system of processes that helps to ensure an appropriate balance is achieved between the often competing needs of sustaining economic development, maintaining adequate land supply, ensuring that available land is used in an efficient manner and the protection of the NT's assets (including our cultural heritage, natural resources and environment).

Unlike building plans that are prepared to specify exactly how a finite construction task will be completed, strategic land use plans and policies, are living documents. Made with direct involvement of affected communities and other stakeholders, the strategic framework can evolve to respond to changing circumstances. Agreed principles and objectives articulated in strategic land use plans and policies help ensure consistent, coordinated and transparent decisions. Without this strategic approach there is a risk that decisions about land use will be made on the basis of expediency.

The current strategic framework, contained within part 2 of the NT Planning Scheme focuses on the Greater Darwin region, and the towns of Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and 23 other major remote towns and regional communities across the NT. The land area covered is a small proportion of the NT's landmass but it is home to approximately 87% of the NT's population.

This Discussion Paper will inform the development of a Strategic Directions Planning Policy that will guide future policy approaches to land use and development within the current Strategic Framework under the Planning Scheme, and may guide policies and decisions across the entire Territory. The Planning Commission has been fortunate to have worked with the community on the development of many strategic land use plans. This discussion paper seeks to recognise and build on what the community has previously communicated. It also provides background on the NT's social, economic and environmental context and, from this starting point, outlines some initial thoughts on future goals and measures to influence patterns of development across the NT into the future.

The draft Planning Policy will build upon the existing strategic framework that currently exists under the Planning Scheme and point the way to build flourishing and resilient communities that are in touch with their shared location and history, and are adapted to the emerging challenges of climate change.

I encourage everyone with an interest in the Territory's future to contribute to the development of this Policy

Dr David Ritchie, Chairman  
Northern Territory Planning Commission





# Part 1

## Introduction

**Strategic planning is a key component of the Northern Territory (NT) land-use and development planning system as established by the purpose and objectives of the *Planning Act 1999* (Planning Act) - see inset.**

Strategic planning aims to help achieve the environmental, economic and social aspirations of our communities by providing a long-term framework for future growth, land use change and built-form outcomes. Through policies and spatial plans, it sets out where, why and how development can be accommodated now and into the future.

Over time, the NT has established a robust strategic planning framework, which focuses on the Darwin region; the centres of Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek; as well as 23 'major remote towns and other areas'. It has been developed through conversations with the community and is underpinned by technical investigations, research and evaluation. This integrated approach helps inform decisions to enable the responsible use of land and resources and the efficient provision of infrastructure.

The NT's interconnected and diverse network of communities is separated by vast distances that stretch from the wet-dry tropics of the Top End to the arid centre of Australia. Our strategic framework aims to reflect and celebrate this context through a place-based policy environment that is responsive to specific local characteristics, needs and aspirations.

There is a general expectation that the liveability and cohesiveness of our cities, towns and communities will continue to improve. Similarly, it is expected that the quality and availability of residential housing will improve also. The NT has its own unique set of local circumstances to respond to in order to meet these cumulative expectations, along with more global challenges such as a changing climate and resource scarcity.

The NT Planning Commission (NTPC) has identified the need for an overarching Strategic Directions Planning Policy (SDPP) to set the stage to meet these expectations and to provide direction on how the objectives of the Planning Act are to be achieved. The Strategic Directions Planning Policy will build on the important work undertaken to date and provide a sound basis for the continued integration and coordination of land use planning and development across the NT at both regional and local scales.

This discussion paper has been prepared by Lands Planning within the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics under the guidance of the NTPC to inform the development of the high-level SDPP. We are interested in your feedback so that we can shape a set of planning directions that respond to Territorians' aspirations and promote a prosperous, sustainable, liveable and resilient future.



## **Purpose and objectives of the Planning Act**

The purpose of the Planning Act is to establish a system to facilitate planning for the orderly use and development of land to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) to ensure that strategic planning is applied to planning schemes and implemented in individual planning decisions
- (b) to ensure that strategic planning reflects the wishes and needs of the community
- (c) to ensure that appropriate public consultation and input are included in the formulation of planning schemes and the making of decisions under planning schemes
- (d) to ensure that the planning system is clear, comprehensive, effective, efficient and accessible to the community
- (e) to promote the sustainable development of land
- (f) to promote the responsible use of land and water resources to limit the adverse effects of development on ecological processes
- (g) to maintain the health of the natural environment and ecological processes
- (h) to protect the quality of life of future generations
- (i) to assist the provision of public utilities, infrastructure and facilities for the benefit of the community
- (j) to promote the good design of buildings and other works that respects the amenity of the locality
- (k) to assist the conservation and enhancement of places, areas, buildings, other works and landforms that are of cultural, aesthetic, architectural or historical value
- (l) to respect and encourage fair and open decision making and public access to processes for review of planning-related decisions.

## PURPOSE OF SDPP

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The proposed SDPP is being developed to provide high-level direction on promoting the objectives of the *Planning Act* and those contained in Part 2 of the NT Planning Scheme 2020 (planning scheme) relating to the role of the strategic framework in order to:

- protect the quality of life of future generations
- maintain the health of the natural environment and ecological processes
- assist the provision of public utilities, infrastructure and facilities for the benefit of the community
- promote the sustainable development of land
- promote the good design of buildings and other works that respects the amenity of the locality
- assist the conservation and enhancement of places, areas, buildings, other works and landforms that are of cultural, aesthetic, architectural or historical value.

Developed in an integrated manner, it will also:

- represent a shared Territory-wide vision that reflects the long-term needs and wishes of the community, industry and government
- provide a high-level planning policy setting to guide policies and spatial plans delivered through the strategic framework
- promote coordination between stakeholders who have an interest in land use and development across NT wide, regional and local contexts
- provide a land use planning context for other NTG agencies to inform their own strategic policy frameworks or projects.

It cannot:

- repeat or contradict the requirements of the *Planning Act* or those of other Acts
- apply retrospectively to overturn or adjust historic decisions
- address detailed design, or other specific matters, that are typically addressed through lower levels of the strategic planning framework and development requirements.



# SCOPE

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The SDPP will inform the on-going delivery of the strategic framework contained within the planning scheme and will be considered in the:

- creation of new strategic land use plans and strategic policies
- review of existing strategic land use plans and strategic policies.

The SDPP may also:

- be used in the consideration of planning scheme amendments where there is no applicable strategic land use plan or where the strategic land use plan does not provide guidance on a particular issue
- inform the ongoing refinement of and development of new statutory planning controls contained in the NT Planning Scheme.

As the proposed SDPP provides guidance about the government's aspirations underpinning land use and development planning, it may be used to inform a range of NTG planning projects that extend beyond the areas specifically covered by the planning scheme.

In accordance with the objectives of the *Planning Act*, the SDPP is being developed with the help of the community, industry and the government to ensure that:

- strategic planning reflects the wishes and needs of the community
- appropriate public consultation and input is included in the formulation of planning schemes.

# Part 2

## Northern Territory context

The NT's population of around 252,500<sup>1</sup> accounts for about 1% of the Australian population. Geographically, the NT is the third largest jurisdiction in terms of land mass, with the majority residing in the greater Darwin region. The remainder is concentrated in the townships of Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek and also further dispersed over remote and very remote areas.

*Image: MacDonnell Ranges*



Settlement by non-Aboriginal people began in the late 19th century - at least 30 years later than in other parts of Australia. This late start and the necessity for high levels of government investment have had a defining effect on the NT, along with other themes that provide an important background to contemporary planning and development in the NT:

- For the first 100 years, the NT was governed from afar: firstly, by South Australia and then from 1911 by the Commonwealth. Given that nearly all investment in the NT was by governments with competing priorities, the development of physical infrastructure was slow and linked to external strategic concerns.

This changed with self-government in 1978 but also with the creation of local government councils, which occurred slightly earlier (1950s-70s), enabling Territorians the opportunity to better contribute to the future of their communities.

- Aboriginal people have suffered dispossession throughout Australia as a result of colonisation. The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* was the first attempt by an Australian government to legally recognise the Aboriginal system of land ownership. This Act has resulted in almost 50% of the NT being returned to Aboriginal people. Today Aboriginal people remain as the main stable intergenerational population of the NT.
- Prior to World War II, few people ventured into the Territory. The bombing of Darwin in 1942, and the perceived threat of invasion prompted the substantial build-up of defence forces and for most Australians, focussed attention on the NT for the first time. Infrastructure across the NT as well as the towns of Katherine and Alice Springs were transformed as a result of efforts to protect the north and the wider continent.
- Post-war population growth saw rapid suburban development in all the major centres, with Darwin finally achieving city status in 1959<sup>2</sup>. Soon after, in 1964, the first Town Planning Ordinance dealing with town planning schemes came into operation, providing a statutory land use control framework. Until this time, lease conditions had been relied upon to manage the use of land.
- The recent history of the NT has been punctuated by a number of catastrophic events, including major cyclones in 1897, 1937, 1974 and 2018, along with others where the damage was not so extensive. Destructive floods have severely damaged Alice Springs, Katherine and a number of remote communities. These impactful events have erased many of our early buildings, displaced people and led to building construction reforms.

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<sup>1</sup> NTG, *NT Economy – Population June quarter, 2023*

<sup>2</sup> Harris, P & Welke, A, *Punkahs and Pith Helmets: Good Principles of Tropical House Design, (Darwin)*, 15

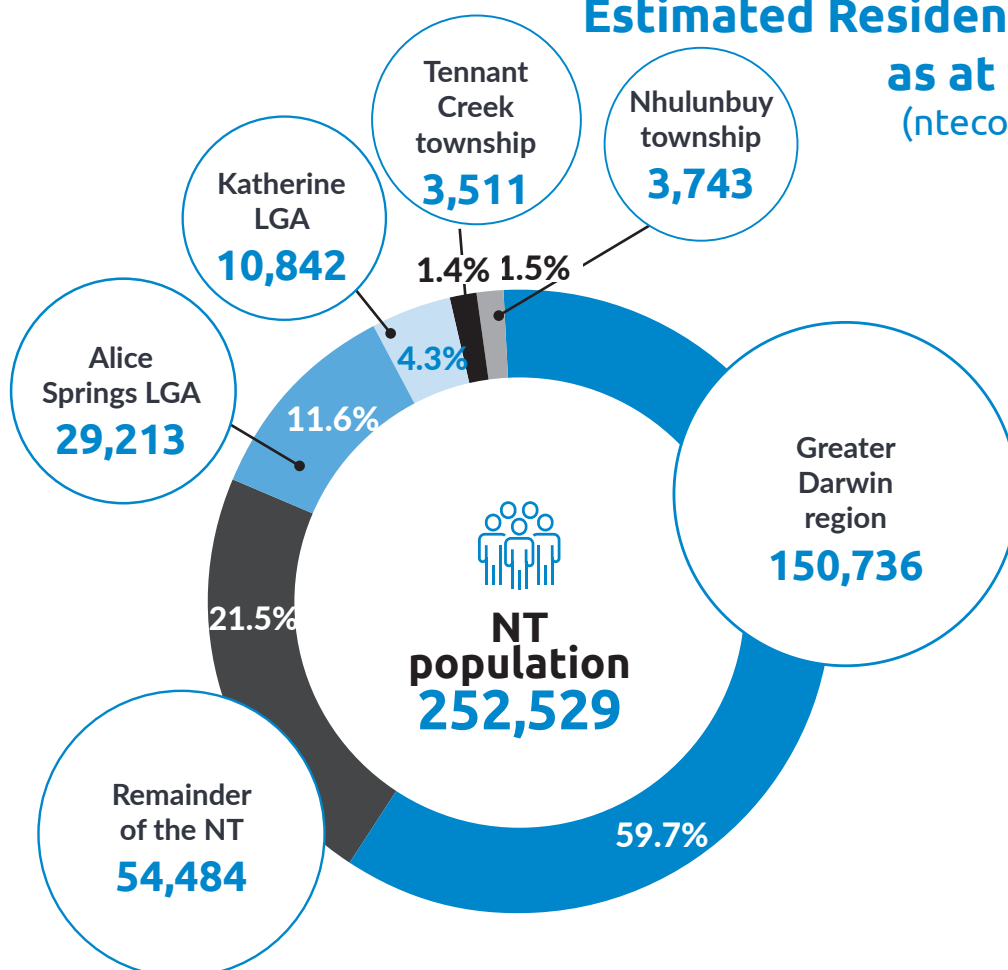
Today the structure of the Territory's economy reflects its wealth of natural resources, strategic defence location, tourism attractions, and relatively large government and community services sector. Anticipated future major projects seek to respond to global tailwinds around geopolitics and building our defences, energy transition, supply chain security and the response to climate change.

Relative to other jurisdictions, the NT's population is characterised by its young age profile. It is culturally and linguistically diverse. People now come to the NT seeking adventure, work, career progression or to escape the cooler weather experienced in other areas of Australia. A large public service, defence personnel, and fly in and out workers means that the NT's population is constantly changing. Of those that do stay, a large percentage choose to leave the NT when they retire.

With aspirations for future growth of the NT's population and economy, services and infrastructure will be expanded, and business, tourism, trade, education, health, recreation and other opportunities will be increased, as too will the liveability of our communities. For remote and very remote communities – which are characterised by small populations, long distances by road to population centres and poor access to services – there are distinct challenges to consider.

Strategic land use planning will play an important role in achieving these aspirations, providing a framework to guide future growth of the NT over the longer term whilst protecting those aspects Territorians hold dear. Other strategic policy frameworks across the NTG will continue to complement this work, and key efforts of other agencies are identified in inset boxes throughout this discussion paper.

## NT Regional & Major Townships Estimated Resident Population as at 30 June 2023 (nteconomy.nt.gov.au)<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> NTG, NT economy – population, June quarter, 2023





*Image: Katherine East Neighbourhood Centre subdivision works*



# Part 3

## Land use planning in the NT

**The NT is unique in comparison to the states of Australia in that land use and development planning is the responsibility of the NTG, rather than of local government.**

In the NT, this system is set up through the *Planning Act* and *Planning Regulations 2000*, which explain:

- how (and what) planning rules are made and changed
- who makes planning decisions
- what the penalties are for breaking planning rules.

The NT Planning Scheme is the 'rule book' for land use and development in the NT<sup>4</sup>, it does the following:

- describes how land use may change to meet future needs through the strategic framework
- identifies factors and risks that could affect land use through overlays - eg flooding
- sets controls that allow, prohibit or put conditions on land use
- provides guidance to help consent authorities make decisions

- states the level of flexibility allowed for decisions about development applications.

The scheme covers the whole of the NT, except for Jabiru, which has the Jabiru Town Plan.

The strategic framework, contained within the part 2 of the planning scheme however has a focus on the Darwin Region; the centres of Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek as well as 23 'major remote towns and other areas'.

**The proposed SDPP will sit within part 2 of the NT Planning Scheme, relating to the strategic framework.**

<sup>4</sup> Jabiru has its own town plan



## WHAT IS STRATEGIC PLANNING?

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The process of strategic land use planning in the NT is led by the NTPC, and any resultant plan or policy is ultimately approved by the minister responsible for the *Planning Act*.

It is an integrated process that involves extensive community and stakeholder consultation, including engagement with service authorities and local government – see fig 1. Underpinned by technical investigations (environmental, transport, social infrastructure, economic etc.), it informs where, what and why growth will occur, now and in the future.

Whilst the NT covers over 1,300,000 square kilometres and would seem to have boundless land for future growth, it is subject to many factors that limit and influence where growth can occur. These include (but are not limited to):

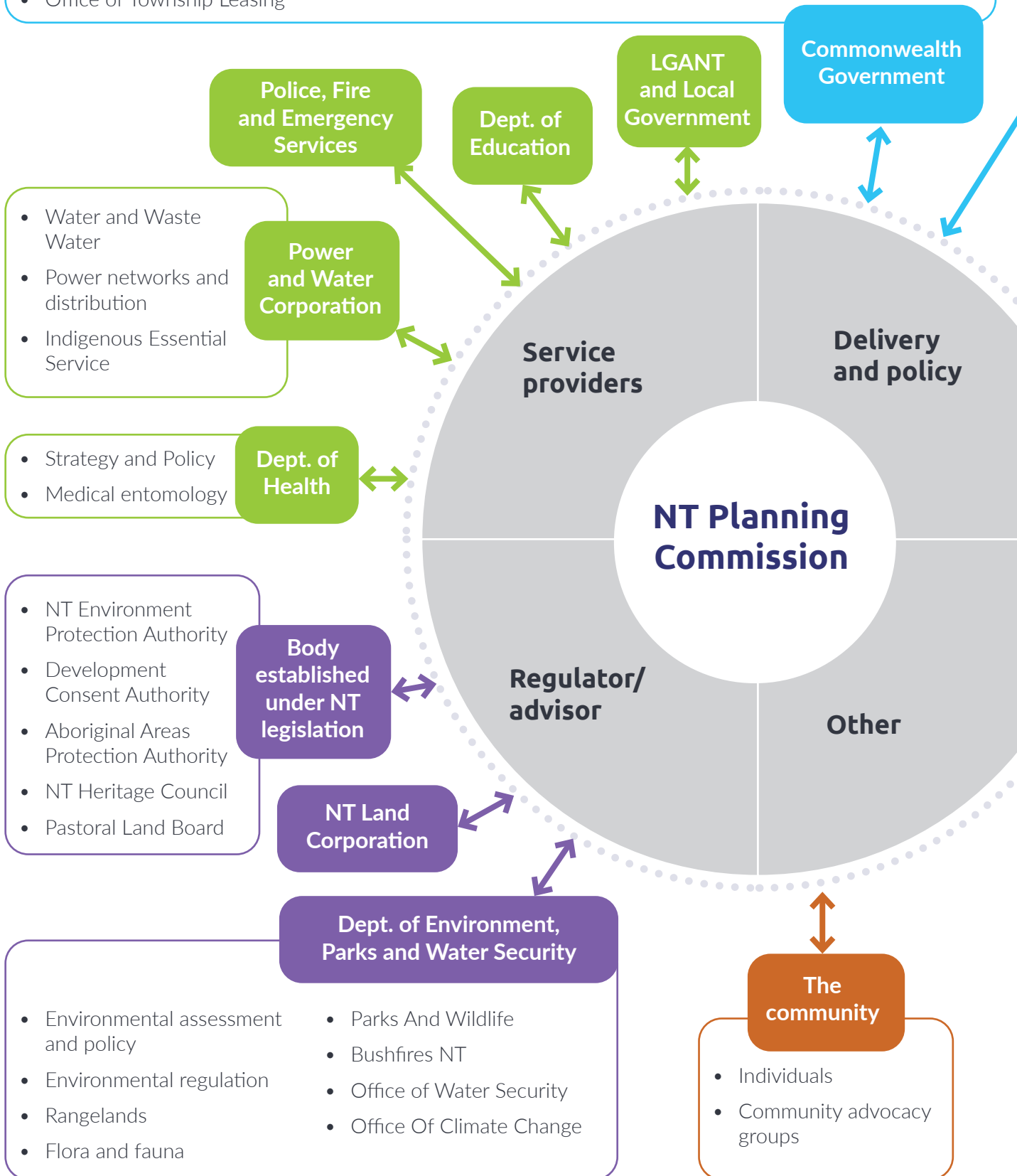
- **environmental considerations:** environmental values and biodiversity of a region, including threatened species and natural resources
- **heritage considerations:** heritage places and objects, inclusive of Aboriginal and Macassan archaeological places and objects, and sacred sites
- **tenure considerations:** native title, pastoral leases, freehold and Crown land tenure arrangements
- **land suitability considerations:** riverine flooding, storm surge, biting insects, soil characteristics, water resources, topography, high horticultural value, water catchment etc.

Strategic planning provides a framework to manage these considerations as it identifies land to meet growth, demand and specific needs for housing, jobs and services. Strategic planning can bring people together to address land use and development aspirations in their community, and it enables government to work together to deliver equitable and efficient solutions for housing, transport, infrastructure, industry, food production and more.

Strategic planning is an integral and important formative step in the development of the NT. It is the precursor to many other steps that can bring land to market, enable land development and land use change undertaken by public and private entities.

In relation to the preparation of land for development, in particular entry-level land, the NT (along with the ACT) is different to the states in that it has a greater level of control over development, given that a significant portion of land for future development is Crown land as opposed to other locations where it is primarily in private ownership.

- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Department of Defence
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
- Office of Township Leasing





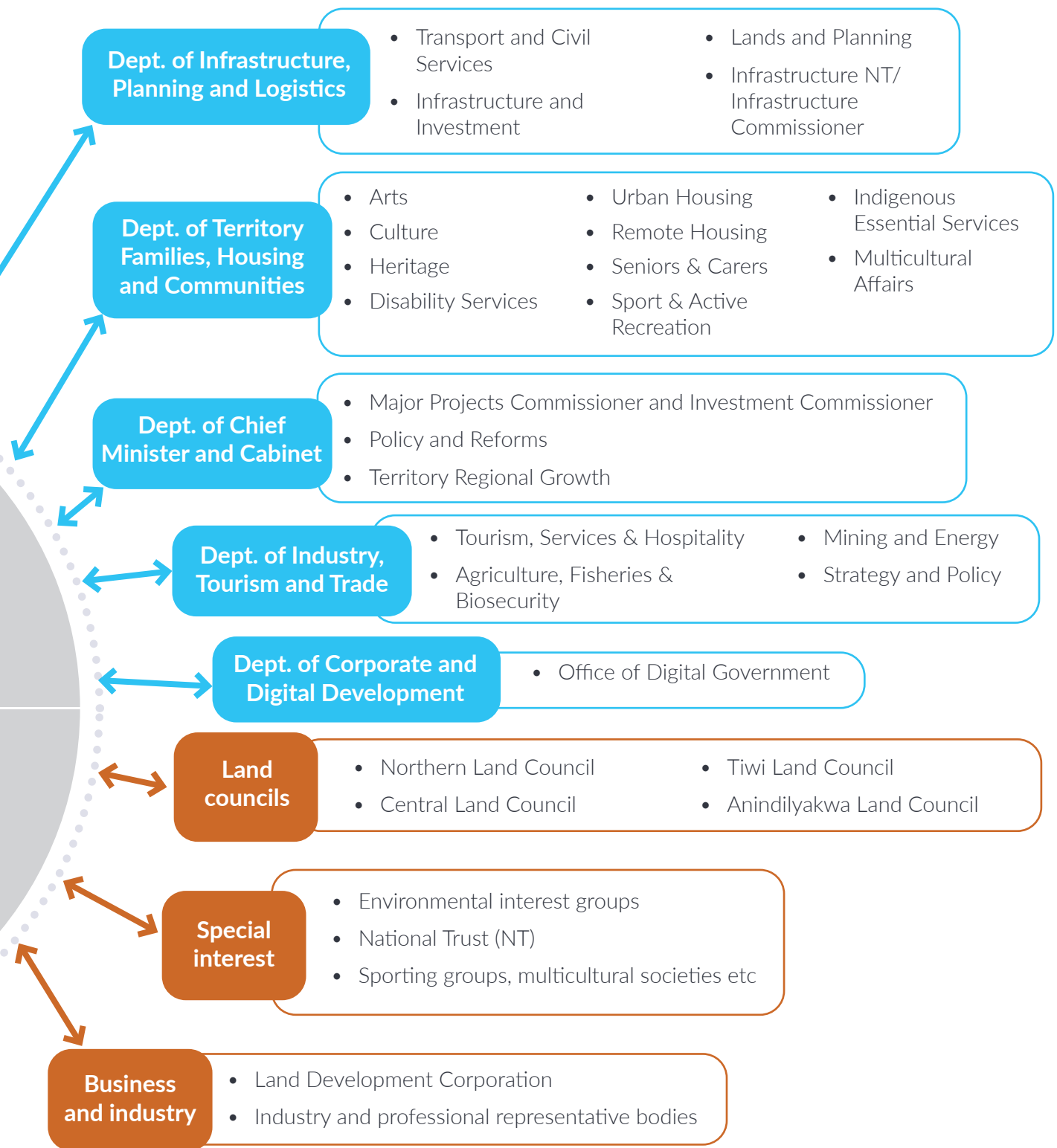


Figure 1

## Some of the stakeholders involved in strategic planning in the NT.

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

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In the NT, the strategic framework is contained within part 2 of the NT Planning Scheme and consists of 2 main components:

## Strategic planning policies (SPP)

SPPs are generally prepared to address or advance a particular issue. They are used to inform and guide the preparation or amendments to strategic land use plans and may assist determine development applications where there is no strategic land use plan applicable.

The NT currently has one SPP, that being the Compact Urban Growth Policy (CUG). The CUG aims to create compact and mixed-use settlements around activity centres and public transport nodes.

*The proposed SDPP will be the highest-order strategic planning policy*

## Strategic land use plans (SLUP)

SLUPs are a hierarchy of spatial plans and documents that establish the vision and intended outcomes for future land use and development in the NT at differing scales: regional, subregional and area.

There are 48 SLUPs in the current hierarchy (refer to Appendix A). The land area covered by these plans represents a small proportion of the NT's landmass, but collectively, it is home to over 87% of the NT's population - the majority of which reside in the greater Darwin region. The remainder is concentrated in the larger regional centres of Alice Springs and Katherine as well as Tennant Creek and 23 major remote towns and regional communities.



# HOW IS THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK USED?

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The Minister for Planning considers SLUP and SPP when making changes to the planning scheme, such as:

- introducing a new area plan
- rezoning land
- changing development requirements.

The Development Consent Authority and the minister consider these plans and policies when interpreting the planning rules. This is essential for making decisions about certain development permit applications.

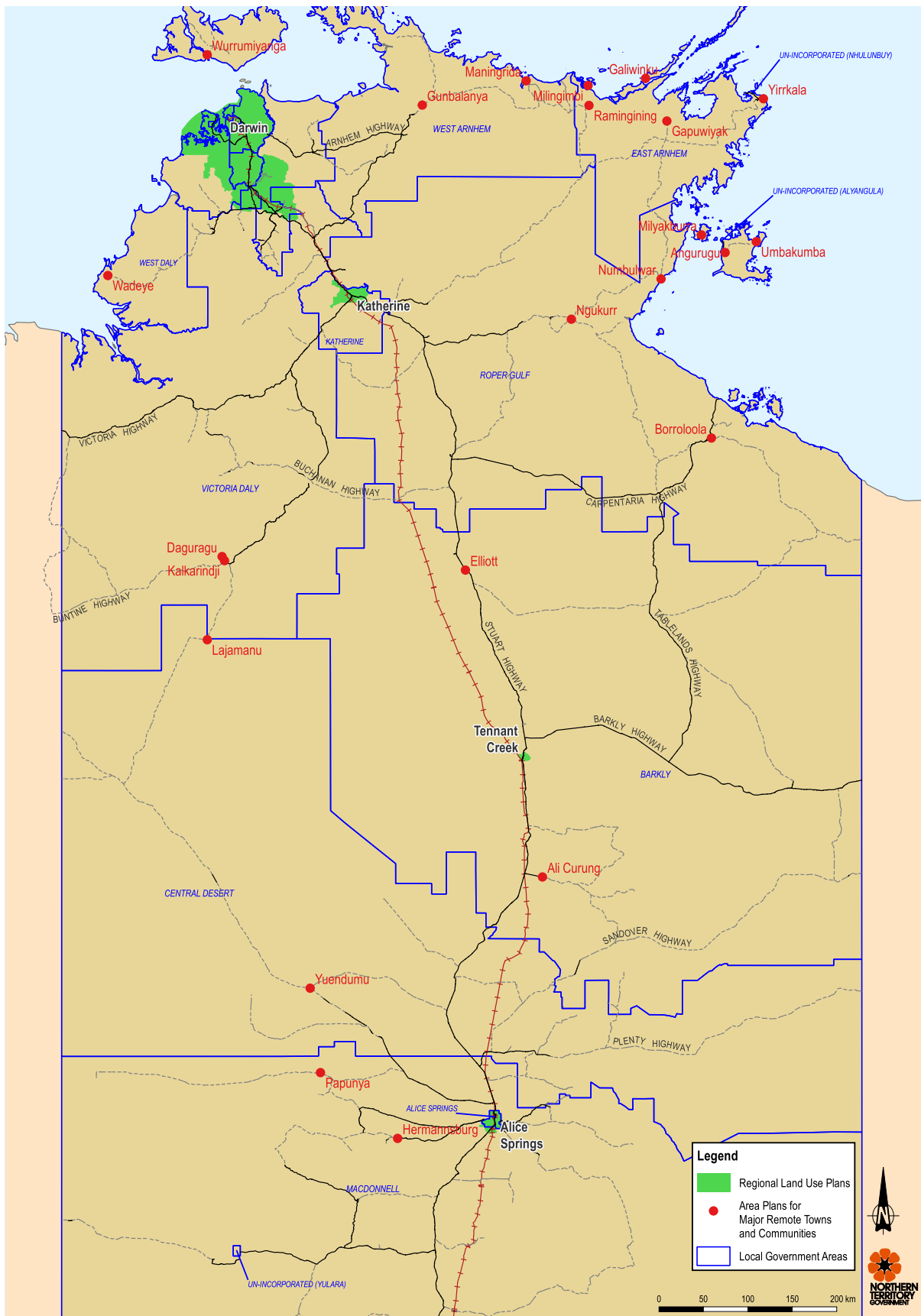


Figure 2: Areas currently subject to the strategic framework shown in context with existing local government councils. Notwithstanding, the Northern Territory Planning Scheme 2020 covers the whole of the NT, except for Jabiru, which has the Jabiru Town Plan.



# Part 4

## Themes and topics

It is envisaged that the SDPP will focus on 5 related core themes, each with accompanying sub-themes. These themes build on the objectives of the *Planning Act* and the range of considerations set out in the 'purpose of the strategic framework' contained within Part 2 of the NT Planning Scheme. They relate to matters of importance to land use and development in the NT.

A set of strategic directions will underpin each sub-theme to provide guidance and to facilitate integrated decision-making across all spheres of land use planning and development. It is intended that the development and review of the NT's strategic framework will take account of and give effect to these directions.

Whilst the sub-themes are presented separately, they are not mutually exclusive. Many are interconnected and together share many common aspirations. Delivering on one policy direction can potentially deliver on other policy directions.

There are many different settlement patterns, varied levels of service, varied amounts of land suitable and available for development, and varying demand characteristics across the NT, regional, remote and local contexts. These will need to be considered when applying the SDPP.

## Respect & Protect

- Heritage & Sacred Sites
- Natural Environment & Ecological Processes
- Natural Resources



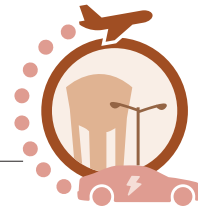
## Liveable

- Land Supply & Housing Diversity
- Social Infrastructure
- Aboriginal Communities
- Good Design



## Connected & Efficient

- Transport
- Essential Services & Utilities



## Prosperous & Productive

- Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing
- Industry
- Activity Centres & Employment Lands
- Tourism



## Resilient & Responsive

- Natural Disasters & Climate Change
- Defence



Do the range of themes and subthemes capture the 'big picture' land use and development considerations in the NT?

Would you expect to see anything else?





*Image: Outbuilding, Barrow Creek Telegraph Station*



# Respect & Protect

Promote the sustainable use of resources and the protection of heritage assets, the natural environment and ecological processes.





### HERITAGE & SACRED SITES

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The NT has a rich natural and cultural heritage, which speaks to survival and cultural achievement in a sometimes-challenging environment. This heritage enriches our sense of place and identity and gives context to where we are now. Protecting our heritage can yield social, economic and environmental returns and enables it to be appreciated by future generations.

The overwhelming proportion of heritage places relate to the occupation of the NT by Aboriginal peoples over the last 65,000 years and the value of this heritage - which includes rock art, engravings, burial grounds, stone arrangements and shell middens - has long been recognised and protected.<sup>5</sup> It also includes sacred sites, which are places within the landscape that have special meaning or significance under Aboriginal tradition. Evidence of visits by Macassan people along the coast also forms part of the NT's valued heritage.

More recently, the need to protect the built heritage of the last 150 years has been recognised<sup>6</sup>. This includes places and objects that provide a reminder of phases in our history since colonisation, including war and conflict, mining and exploration, transport and telecommunication evolution, policing, education, migration and many more. Sadly, however, the bombing associated with World War II, the early makeshift nature of construction and cyclones have resulted in the loss of many buildings and/or structures that predate the 1970s. Components of the natural environment also form part of the NT's heritage.

#### Role of planning

In the NT, there are a range of laws in place to protect heritage and culture - see 'Other key resources' inset. Together these laws create a system for recognising and protecting the cultural values of an area, including Aboriginal traditional land rights, interests and cultural values; sacred sites; geographic features with Aboriginal names; as well as places and objects of heritage significance to the Aboriginal and/or general community. In this context, the planning system provides a supporting role in the protection of the NT's heritage and sacred sites.

To avoid or better manage any potential adverse impacts resulting from land use or development, it is important that the potential for sacred sites and heritage places is considered early in the strategic planning process. To achieve this, all SLUPs are developed in consultation with the Heritage Branch, Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) and those that may have a particular interest in or associations with an area. This is particularly important as Aboriginal heritage places, objects and sacred sites are protected by law regardless of whether they have or have not been previously identified.

In developing SLUPs, the NTPC will acknowledge the heritage context of an area, include the location of known heritage places and integrate the advice of relevant heritage advisory bodies in order to set the stage for positive heritage outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> See: The Native & Historic Objects and Areas Preservation Ordinance (1955-1961)  
<sup>6</sup> Heritage Conservation Act (1996) and now Heritage Act (2011)

## What we know from other planning projects

We know Territorians cherish their unique cultural heritage, and we understand the need to protect and conserve it. Strengthening reference to heritage assets in SLUPs has been advocated to clearly establish the importance of our past and living culture in the ongoing development of the NT.

Many have also shown a strong interest in safeguarding and celebrating the unique character of some of the NT's older suburbs. Responding to local character is explored in the section relating to 'Good design'.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

Conserve places and objects of heritage significance and sacred sites for the benefit of current and future generations.

### Suggested policy statements:

- Recognise the value that communities place on heritage and also the positive contribution that heritage places make to community identity and sense of place.
- Identify and provide for the protection and ongoing appreciation of cultural values (including Aboriginal cultural values, and the NT's natural and built heritage values).  
*NOTE: Publishing or sharing abstracts of information or certificate information from AAPA requires its approval.*
- Recognise and respect that Aboriginal people are the custodians of their cultural heritage, and support Aboriginal people's continued cultural identification with such places.
- Respect the context, scale, character and significance of a heritage place through quality and sensitive design responses in new development.
- Enable the innovative adaptive reuse of heritage places so that they can continue to be used, conserved and appreciated.
- Foster an improved sense of awareness, appreciation and stewardship, where sensitivities allow, to help people better understand the significance of heritage places and objectives.



**Do you agree that this policy approach is appropriate to guide future strategic policies and land use plans with respect to heritage and sacred sites?**

### Other key resources

- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 (Cth)*
- *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*
- *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*
- *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018 (Cth)*
- *Environment Protection Act 2019 (NT)*
- *Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 (NT)*
- *Heritage Act 2011 (NT)*





# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES

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The NT occupies approximately 18% of Australia's land mass and covers a large range of natural environments and climatic regions, with highly valued landscapes, a rich array of natural resources, diverse ecosystems and a unique range of native flora and fauna, some of national and global significance.

The natural environment sustains all forms of life. It provides essential ecosystems that supply oxygen, clean air and water, enable pollination of plants and many other ecosystem services. It provides a spectacular backdrop for tourism and recreation, as well as a range of opportunities for primary and renewable energy production. The NT's land and seas are also central to Aboriginal Territorians' lives and wellbeing and are fundamental to their spiritual beliefs.

The needs of settlement, industry and agriculture all place pressure on our natural environment. As we plan for future growth, the protection and wise management of our natural environment is critical to maintain our values, lifestyles and livelihoods now and into the future.

Even within urban areas, increasing habitat opportunities in parks and private gardens can support local native plant and wildlife species, contributing to biodiversity outcomes. In the NT, it is not uncommon to see frilled-neck lizards in a local park or a bush stone-curlew nesting on a road verge. Large flocks of budgerigars are known to transform the Red Centre into a cloud of green and gold. This connection to nature can enhance our wellbeing and make a place more appealing for residents and visitors alike.

## Role of planning

In the NT, matters that may have a significant impact on the environment are managed through a range of environmental policies and legislation. Complementary pollution, waste and water control legislation, and that for the establishment and management of NT parks, also exists outside the planning system.

Land use and development directly and indirectly impacts on the natural environment, and hence protecting the natural environment and ecological processes is an important consideration in strategic planning. In identifying land for growth and development, strategic planning will avoid areas of significant environmental value based on the advice of environmental agencies.

Strategic planning can make significant contributions to collective efforts to achieve positive environmental outcomes. Taking a regional-scale approach can reduce cumulative impacts from individual development decisions and aid in the long-term survival of biodiversity values. It can also develop strategies to avoid habitat fragmentation and to maintain native wildlife corridors.

Strategic planning can facilitate land use patterns that respond to natural features, including topography, waterways and areas of native vegetation to maintain the essential character of the NT and its role in sustaining NT life. Planning also considers whether land is capable of accommodating development. Soil acidity, erosion, soil salinity, water logging, potential for flooding (both storm tide and riverine), biting insects, sink holes and land contamination all influence where growth can occur in the NT.

Water-efficient greening initiatives through planning policy can also help tackle urban environmental challenges, such as the heat island effect and stormwater management. It can reduce energy consumption for cooling and heating whilst also contributing to biodiversity conservation.

## What we have heard from other planning projects

Territorians highly value the natural environment and its contribution to our quality of life, economy, wellbeing and character. Many in our community advocate for the protection and conservation of the natural environment, promoting an approach whereby it is seen as an opportunity rather than as a constraint.

Protecting areas of native vegetation (and the flora and fauna it contains) and encouraging the uptake of renewable energy, water-wise initiatives and sustainable building methods are being advocated to relieve pressure on our natural systems.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Protect the health and integrity of the Territory's unique natural environment in order to support biodiversity and its life-supporting functions.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Recognise and foster the essential role played by the natural environment in sustaining every aspect of NT life.

- Support the conservation, protection and management of:
  - threatened species as defined under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* and significant species
  - environmentally significant or sensitive vegetation communities such as rainforest, vine thicket, closed forest, sandsheet heath or riparian vegetation
  - native remnant vegetation to enhance soil and land quality, water quality, biodiversity, fauna habitat, and landscape amenity values and ecosystem function.
- Avoid, minimise, manage and/or offset on-site and off-site impacts of land use and development on the natural environment and ecological processes, as appropriate, for the scale of the impact and the nature of the surrounding environment.
- Have regard to the capability of land to accommodate land use and development, including but not limited to acidity, erosion, soil salinity, water logging, potential for flooding (both storm tide and riverine), biting insects and sink holes.
- Foster habitat connectivity through the protection and retention of waterways and native vegetation corridors.
- Foster biodiversity in settlements by creating opportunities for habitat



What do you value most about the NT's natural environment?

Are the proposed directions relevant and appropriate?

### Other key resources

- *EPBC Act 1999 (Cth)*
- *Environment Protection Act 2019 (NT)*
- *Waste and Pollution Control Act 1998 (NT)*
- *Water Act 1992 (NT)*
- *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976 (NT)*
- *Weed Management Act 2001 (NT)*
- *NT Land Clearing Guidelines*



# NATURAL RESOURCES

The NT's natural environment contains many natural resources that are critical in how and where we decide to live, do business and grow our industries. Finite natural resources must be carefully managed for current and future generations.

Water is a critical natural resource. As too are soils, sand, gravels and rock (construction materials), mineral resources, gas and petroleum. By their very nature, natural resources flow across both physical and managerial boundaries and are not easily compartmentalised.

Until now, our sparse population and relatively low level of development of land and industry have meant that water has, by and large, been made available<sup>7</sup>. However, as climate change impacts become more apparent and aspirations for population and economic growth progress, we will see an increased demand on our water resources, making water security issues more prominent.

Responsibility for water policy and legislation is largely the responsibility of the NTG, spread across a number of departments and entities, each with its own legislation, remit and accountable minister. Water resource management is the responsibility of DEPWS Water Resources Division under the *Water Act 1992*. The Office of Water Security (also within DEPWS) coordinates cross-government policy.

Virtually all construction in the NT depends on adequate and affordable construction materials. Their protection, as well as the protection of other natural resources, is necessary for future economic development and self-sufficiency in the NT. Extractive and mining activities are regulated via various mining titles issued under the *Mineral Titles Act 2010 (NT)*.

## Role of planning

Strategic land use planning contributes to the protection and management of water resources by firstly identifying the location of natural water sources, including aquifers and surface water catchments, in land use plans. It also considers associated infrastructure and options for future water supplies.

A land use policy framework is then implemented to help protect these important water supply resources from development or land uses that may compromise the quality of drinking water. It also seeks to ensure that developments can be serviced by a sustainable water source (water tanks, bores or reticulation).

An integrated approach between local government, NTG departments and other entities seeks to ensure developments have appropriate wastewater, stormwater and groundwater management infrastructure and contribute towards the management of water quality. Water-sensitive urban design, maximising surface permeability and using vegetation to intercept runoff are also advocated to help manage the ongoing impacts of stormwater runoff.

Like water resources, extractive mineral resources are mapped where known in SLUPs to avoid and/or minimise encroachment from incompatible development on these resources and associated extractive industry operations. Separation distances are also promoted to manage interfaces and limit impacts on other land uses. Strategies also advocate for rehabilitation post mining.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security, *NT Strategic Water Plan Directions Paper 2021*



## What we know from other planning projects

We know in the NT the availability of water resources is governed by the monsoon and regional geology. In the Top End, wet season rains feed large river systems and regional and local groundwater storages, and can result in widespread flooding. In Central Australia, the presence of extensive underground aquifers has allowed settlement and development in an otherwise mostly arid environment. Ensuring an adequate and sustainable water supply is available to support existing and planned development is critical as too is supporting measures to enable the better and more efficient use of water.

Extractive and mining resources are limited to locations where geological processes have occurred creating resources that meet strict specifications for the development and construction industry. Industry has told us these resources need to be located close to market, with supporting haulage routes and with appropriate separation distances to sensitive land uses.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Contribute to the protection and management of the Northern Territory's natural resources to support economic growth, our quality of life and the natural environment now and into the future.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Recognise water has significant value to communities, supporting prosperity, amenity, liveability, health, spirituality and customary values.
- Identify areas containing valuable natural resources, including water resources and basic raw materials, so that they can be considered in the earliest stages of the planning process.

- Ensure an adequate and sustainable water supply is available to support future growth and planned development.
- Protect surface and groundwater catchments and recharge areas from land use and development that may compromise the quality and quantity of drinking water or water with environmental or cultural values.
- Integrate whole-of-water cycle water management in cities, towns and communities using water-sensitive design, stormwater management, recycled water and groundwater replenishment.
- Promote improved environmental management, repair and rehabilitation associated with extractive and mining activities.
- Avoid and/or minimise development encroaching on known extractive resources so that intended land uses are not compromised.



Is this policy approach appropriate to guide future strategic policies and land use plans with respect to natural resources?

What else would you expect to see?

### Other key resources

- EPBC Act 1999 (Cth)
- Water Act 1992 (NT)
- Environment Protection Act 2019 (NT)
- Mineral Titles Act 2010 (NT)
- Territory Water Plan (NT)
- Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan (NT)
- NT Infrastructure Plan and Pipeline 2022





*Image: Darwin Waterfront*



# Liveable

Enable diverse housing options and integrate planning for community facilities and services to foster a more connected, resilient and supported society.







## LAND SUPPLY AND HOUSING DIVERSITY

Housing is fundamental to individual, family and community wellbeing. Having a home that is safe, secure and affordable is vital for one's dignity, for privacy and for creating a sense of stability. It also provides the foundation for people to connect with and participate in their community<sup>8</sup>.

The timely preparation and servicing of land to be available for development is a central issue for the NT's growth and to address existing housing demand. We need to plan not just in our cities but also in our most remote areas, and across the housing continuum from homelessness, transient support and crisis accommodation to social housing, affordable rentals and various home ownership options.

In the NT, the residential land market has been subjected to peaks and troughs influenced by major projects and other economic drivers influenced by activity external to our economy. Planning ahead is therefore critical for there to be a sufficient supply of serviced land available in the right places at the right time to meet population and economic growth.

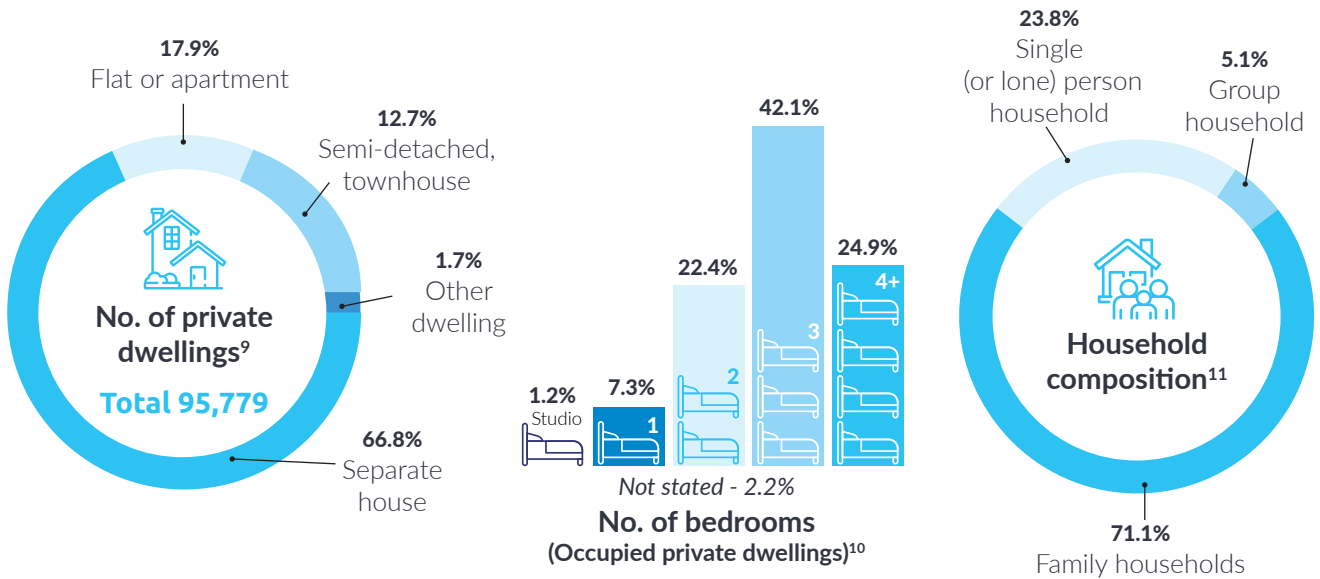
Historically, urban land release in the NT has primarily occurred through the development and sale of government-owned land (Crown land). Prior to 1980, the NTG was the landowner, infrastructure provider, land developer and, in the majority of cases, the builder. In the last 40 years, the NTG has generally relinquished its role as the land developer and house builder; however, it has continued to fund district infrastructure (through its capital works program) to support the development of Crown land, enabling private developers to undertake internal subdivision works and builders to build homes.

As we strive for population growth and seek to reduce barriers to accessing secure housing, it is important that a diverse range of resilient housing options are available to cater for different incomes as well as cultural, workforce, household and stage-of-life needs, as well as personal aspirations and lifestyle choices.



*Image: Housing under development - Zuccoli, Palmerston*

## NT Housing Quick Stats



### Government housing portfolio managed by TFHC<sup>13</sup>

**11,159**

social housing dwellings

**395**

affordable rental dwellings



### Public housing waiting list<sup>12</sup>

**9,303**

applicants



### Tenure type (Occupied private dwellings)<sup>14</sup>

**NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**VS**

**AUSTRALIA**

Tenure Type	Percentage
Owned	46%
Rented	47.6%
Other	4.2%
Not stated	2.2%

Tenure Type	Percentage
Owned	66%
Rented	30.6%
Other	2%
Not stated	1.5%

<sup>8</sup> Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, NT Housing Strategy 2020-2025

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2021 Census All persons QuickStats. Any discrepancies between totals and sums of components are due to rounding.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> As at June 2023, statistic provided by Department of Territory, Families, Housing and Communities

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2021 Census All persons QuickStats. Any discrepancies between totals and sums of components are due to rounding.



## Role of planning

Strategic planning has a major role in ensuring there is sufficient capacity for growth to meet current and future housing needs, determining 'where' growth can be accommodated and enabling housing choice.

In the NT, population growth has predominantly been accommodated in low-density urban suburbs or on rural lots of 2 ha - 8 ha. The current NT planning system supports the continued demand for this low-density product and designates 'growth areas' that are, or will be, close to services and amenities as well as social and physical infrastructure (i.e. essential services and utilities and transport).

As our population continues to grow and diversify, the need to achieve a more compact urban form has become an increasingly prominent influence on the NT's land use structure. This approach makes more efficient use of land and existing infrastructure systems, reduces the need to clear areas of natural vegetation to accommodate growth, optimises the use of shared public spaces, encourages walkable neighbourhoods and cultivates social connections. Opportunities to increase residential densities, however, must not be to the detriment of the valued character of our older suburbs.

Planning for housing must consider the types of housing required to respond to demographic changes, needs (i.e. age and household composition) and aspirations. In the NT, housing choice is facilitated through enabling a range of lot sizes and dwelling types, student accommodation and care facilities. Compact housing, either on small lots or in apartments, can support social and affordable housing outcomes in areas with connections to services and amenities. It can also support those Territorians wishing to age in place (i.e. age in their existing communities). This is particularly relevant as the NT has the fastest population growth rate of seniors aged 65 years and older in Australia.<sup>15</sup>

Strategic planning can also set the stage to facilitate other outcomes. How we plan our settlements determines how far we must travel to access services, how dependant we are on private cars and how connected we are to others. It can also influence built-form outcomes. Subdivision, site and building design that considers lot orientation, solar access, shade, cross ventilation and trees/vegetation cover can improve the thermal performance of housing, resulting in a home remaining comfortable and efficient for longer without mechanical heating or cooling. Policy can also encourage built-form outcomes that create or enhance an area's character.

## What we know from other planning projects

We have heard a range of views with regard to the design and location of new subdivision and housing products. We understand that many Territorians continue to aspire to traditional single detached houses in urban areas or rural lots. However, affordability and contemporary living expectations are encouraging some in the community to consider alternatives such as apartment living or smaller lot housing.

We have heard lot sizes need to be more aligned with contemporary living choices and as a mechanism to enable housing affordability. Conversely, some Territorians have expressed concern that compact growth does not respect the NT's character or values. Climate-responsive design and landscaping have been advocated to improve comfort and performance.

<sup>15</sup> NTG, Northern NT Seniors Policy 2021-2026



## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Support the delivery of well-serviced land and the provision of housing diversity and choice that enables population growth and responds to the needs and aspirations of our current and future communities.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Identify land for housing to meet the projected demand where it will optimise and make good use of existing and planned infrastructure, services, employment opportunities, public open space, active transport (i.e. walking and cycling networks) and public transport (where available) to support liveable neighbourhoods.
- Provide for diversity and choice in the size and type of housing to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes and to respond to community need and aspirations, particularly considering the needs of:
  - an ageing population
  - people living with a disability
  - people who require social and/or affordable housing
  - students and key-worker accommodation.
- Encourage the creation of neighbourhoods and/or precincts with a distinctive character that creates an identifiable sense of place for each community.
- Enable housing choice and services to support Aboriginal communities and to help sustain connections to family, kin and country through housing that is responsive to lifestyle and traditional family groupings.
- Support mixed-use and higher residential densities in the most accessible locations to reduce the need to travel, encourage non-car modes of travel and to help create attractive, high-amenity urban centres.



If you could improve one thing about housing in the NT, what would it be?

The type of dwelling?  
The location?  
Its style?  
What is nearby?

Are there additional directions you think should be included in the policy?

### Other key resources

- Compact Urban Growth Policy (NT)
- Population Growth Strategy 2018-2028 (NT)
- 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan (AU)
- Smart Cities Plan (AU)
- A Home for all Territorians – the Northern Territory Housing Strategy 2020-2025
- Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes (NT)



## SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Social infrastructure is essential to the wellbeing of Territorians. It supports the critical government services of health, education, emergency management, justice and public safety. Social infrastructure also supports our quality of life through the provision of aged and disability care, sporting facilities, arts, childcare, culture and recreation opportunities.

While jobs are the main reason people come to the NT from elsewhere, many other factors help attract people to the NT and encourage them to stay. The provision of social infrastructure can enhance liveability and can influence people across all life stages in choosing where to settle.

The provision of social infrastructure seeks to provide support and a strong foundation for all Territorians, but for remote and very remote communities – which are characterised by small populations, long distances by road to population centres and poor access to services – there are distinct challenges that are difficult to overcome.

As our population steadily increases and our demographics change, more social infrastructure will be needed to deliver services and opportunities. For example, our ageing population, which is experiencing increasingly complex and chronic conditions, means more hospital beds and specialty health care are needed<sup>16</sup>. As more suburbs are built, more water-wise parks and reserves will be required to provide recreation opportunities.

Planning can create a policy environment to support the creation of liveable communities with a well-planned network of social infrastructure that is accessible and inclusive to all. This policy environment can work alongside other governmental efforts to enable service expansion and innovation, underpin long-term prosperity and make the NT an attractive place to live.

### Role of planning

The planning framework sets the stage for the provision of sufficient, equitably distributed and accessible education, health, recreation, sporting and cultural facilities (and more) by a range of parties. This may include local government, NTG, or private or not-for-profit organisations.

A critical first aspect of this work is developing an understanding of the likely future size and characteristics of the population. Variables such as age, ethnicity and sport and recreation 'participation rates' are important as they can paint a picture of utilisation trends and ultimately land use requirements for items such as places of worship, schools, community-use halls, youth-friendly spaces or new sporting and recreational facilities.

Building on this understanding, planning identifies suitably located and sufficient land to meet the anticipated demand. For example, ensuring emergency services, justice and public safety services can cover new growth areas within achievable response times is vital to maximise public safety. In established areas, it must consider legacy infrastructure and its capacity to support any planned growth.

Whilst car travel is convenient for some trips and often the only option in rural and remote areas, social infrastructure is ideally planned to be accessible by walking, cycling or public transport rather than having to depend on private car travel. Co-locating compatible uses and sharing of spaces is also advocated in strategic planning to maximise efficiencies amongst services and travel networks. It can also enhance opportunities for sports participation, physical activity, wellbeing, community interaction and cohesion<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> NTG, NT Health Strategic Plan 2023-2028

<sup>17</sup> Heart Foundation, Healthy Active by Design

## What we know from other planning projects

The community values and relies on social infrastructure. Over the years, many suggestions have been offered to maximise utilisation and improve functionality. Mixed-use and co-located facilities integrated with sustainable transport networks, the application of the principles of 'crime prevention through environmental design' and the need for shady, climate-resilient spaces were all raised in this respect.

We know growing migrant communities are creating a greater need for space for cultural celebrations and places for worship, particularly in Darwin/Palmerston and in the regional areas of Alice Springs and Katherine. We also know our climate is changing, with heat and extreme weather increasing risks to vulnerable cohorts and impacting our comfort and engagement with the outdoors, which needs to be taken into account in future policy development.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Support Territorians to enjoy a healthy, safe, connected and fulfilled quality of life by planning social infrastructure to be accessible, adaptable to evolving needs and to maximise efficient land use and infrastructure.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Plan for a sufficient supply of strategically located and serviced land for social infrastructure facilities to meet population growth, demographic change and the evolving needs of the community.
- Maximise the use of existing well-located social infrastructure, including the re-use and multi-use of sites, to meet the changing needs of the community.
- Promote the location of social infrastructure near public and active transport networks (where available) and close to, or highly accessible from, residential areas.
- Facilitate the co-location of compatible facilities to maximise joint use and minimise duplication of facilities and infrastructure.
- Enable the shared use and management of facilities to maximise community access to and utilisation of social infrastructure.
- Protect social infrastructure from land use conflict by limiting the encroachment or intensification of surrounding incompatible use and development.



What does a liveable community look and feel like to Territorians?

Do these outcomes reflect what you would expect to see in the policy?

### Other key resources

- NT Social Outcomes Framework
- NT Seniors Policy 2021-2026
- NT Sport and Active Recreation – Strategic Plan 2021-25
- NT Creative Industries Strategy 2020-2024
- NT Disability Strategy 2022-2032
- Multicultural Policy for the NT 2020-25
- NT Youth Strategy 2023-2033





## ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Aboriginal people have owned and occupied land in the NT for over 65,000 years. Aboriginal Territorians' relationship to land and water remains fundamental to their identity and way of life, with many continuing to speak ancestral languages and follow traditional culture practices<sup>18</sup>.

Today Aboriginal Territorians represent 30% of the NT's population and a much higher proportion of the population (74%) of the NT's remote communities<sup>19</sup>. Aboriginal Territorians are significant landowners and custodians of the NT's land and coastline (see inset). Much of the balance is likely to be subject to native title rights.

In addition to the 23 major remote towns and other areas subject to a specific strategic land use plan under the planning scheme, there are around 96 remote Aboriginal communities along with more than 600 outstations/homelands. There are many more that have not been recorded, and there are new ones coming on every year.

Homelands can be permanent or semi-permanent (seasonal) communities, whilst others are sites of cultural importance. These major remote towns and communities fall under the administrative jurisdiction of 9 regional local government councils. In addition, the traditional Aboriginal owners and other Aboriginal residents of these communities are represented by the 4 land councils established under the *Land Rights Act*.

There are distinct challenges for providing amenities, infrastructure and services in remote and very remote communities, which are characterised by small populations and long distances by road to population centres. Some Top End communities are isolated by floodwaters for a good part of the year and rely on coastal shipping, barge landing facilities and air services.

Town camps are Aboriginal communities located in or adjacent to urban centres across the NT. In addition to providing permanent housing options for many Aboriginal people and their families, town camps support mobility for Aboriginal people across the NT, which is a necessary way of life. In remote areas, public housing accounts for almost all homes. Despite the relative size of the social housing system in the NT, there remains a critical undersupply. Many homes are overcrowded<sup>20</sup>.

Closing the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is one of the NT's most important priorities. Existing commitments under Closing the Gap and the *NT Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy*, coupled with work already underway through various investment packages, reflects the readiness of both government and community to forge towards meaningful reconciliation and engagement.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Housing and Community Development. *Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy*.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance. *NT Economy - Population*

<sup>20</sup> A Home for all Territorians Northern Territory Housing Strategy 2020-2025





*Image: Gunbalanya housing under construction*





## Role of planning

The imperatives established by the *Planning Act* are particularly relevant to Aboriginal communities that are covered by the scheme, in particular that strategic planning reflects the wishes and needs of the community. Strategic Planning can ensure that affected Aboriginal people are engaged in the process of planning for their community in a manner that allows time to consider alternatives and to reach consensus on critical decisions.

This approach is consistent with the NTG's commitment to local decision-making processes, which embodies the spirit and substance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for working with Aboriginal communities and the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)<sup>21</sup>.

The Strategic Framework, under part 2 of the NT Planning Scheme, includes area plans for 23 'major remote towns and other areas'. These area plans were developed under a previous growth town initiative in concert with Aboriginal people and land councils. They are essentially 'town layout plans' designed to accommodate the future and aspirational needs of the community, to assist to coordinate infrastructure and to guide the development of land in each community accordingly.

NOTE: Whilst many remote communities in the NT are not currently subject to legislated land planning requirements, community land use plans have been developed for 50 other NT remote communities on unzoned land<sup>22</sup>. Community land use plans have no statutory control but aim to coordinate land use and development.



<sup>21</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/2016/10/free-prior-and-informed-consent-an-indigenous-peoples-right-and-a-good-practice-for-local-communities-fao/>

<sup>22</sup> BushTel is a central point for information about the remote communities of the Northern Territory, their people and cultural and historical influences. BushTel aims to enhance planning and informed decision making.



## What we know from other planning projects

We understand that connection to 'country' is crucial to the lives of Aboriginal Territorians - spiritually, physically, socially and culturally. We have heard concern with regard to the housing backlog, overcrowding, particularly in remote settings, and the need for the planning framework to enable housing diversity and processes that do not delay responsible agencies in delivering housing on the ground.

In order to develop a responsive policy environment, we appreciate that engagement with Aboriginal Territorians must be undertaken in a manner that increases mutual understanding and enables communities to influence decisions that affect their lives.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*To collaboratively plan for the orderly and coordinated development of Aboriginal communities (where appropriate) to help facilitate connection to homelands and cultural areas surrounding larger communities, resilience, opportunity and improved wellbeing.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Respect the history, knowledge of country, contribution and continuing connection of Aboriginal people to land and water.
- Create culturally safe processes to help Aboriginal people reach their aspirations with regard to land use and development opportunities in their communities.
- Enable Aboriginal people to impart their traditional knowledge and values to inform land use planning.
- Support broader reforms that increase social and economic opportunities and improve the lives of Aboriginal communities throughout urban, regional and remote centres.
- Assist in the timely delivery of appropriate housing and infrastructure that responds to the needs of Aboriginal communities.



### Other key resources

- *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976 (Cth)*
- *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*
- Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy 2019-2029 (NT)
- Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy (NT)
- Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan (NT)
- Town Camps Reform Framework 2019-2024 (NT)
- Local Decision-Making Framework Policy (NT)



## GOOD DESIGN

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The way buildings and the spaces around them are designed can have a strong influence on the way people value and engage with a space. When done well, it can foster a sense of place and stewardship. Good design can help enhance the perception of a place, its amenity and in turn help attract investment, new residents and visitors.

The benefits of good design should endure well beyond the shorter timeframes of fashion or trend, and while there is certainly a visual component to design, it is more than just a matter of aesthetics or taste. Rather, good design is derived from a range of complementary foundational considerations, including functionality, response to context, response to climate, contribution to place, inclusivity, sustainability and helping to make the community feel safer.

As the NT continues to compete with other jurisdictions to attract and retain both people and investment, the pursuit, awareness and expression of 'good design' is becoming increasingly important. Good design can help create desirable, enduring places that become a positive legacy for future generations.

### Role of planning

Historically in the NT, the planning system has focused on getting the right mix of land uses in a location and setting minimum standards for the design of new development. In 2020, the inclusion of an objective in the *Planning Act* relating to the promotion of 'good design of buildings and other works' embedded the consideration of good design in the planning process.

Planning has a role to help foster a culture of good design in buildings, subdivisions and urban spaces, acknowledging the broad diversity of conditions between the wet-dry tropical Top End and arid Central Australia. It is applicable to all scales and includes the broad layout of streets and open space and the collective location of public and private buildings on their site. It can also influence the composition of some architectural and landscape components.

Planning can foster good design through a number of forms, from policy statements and guidelines as well as the setting of direct statutory controls. However, there is no one solution or universal answer to good design as an infinite number of responses can occur for any one place.

Good, context-responsive design can be encouraged through planning documents that articulate the value of local features, aspirations and objectives along with how new development can respond to these in both existing or new places. Many of these parameters also help to support important but difficult to quantify objectives, such as the need for passive surveillance, visual interest and activation. It can seek to celebrate existing valued character of an area or forge a new character where growth or land use change is anticipated.

## What we know from other planning projects

People value different aspects of the places where they live, work or relax and opinions differ on what makes a place great. However, we have heard many common themes relating to the design of our settlements.

We want to safeguard and celebrate the distinctive character of our older suburbs. We want our streets to be walkable and safe. We want attractive, inclusive public spaces that are green and offer more shade. We want quality buildings and suburbs that collectively create a sense of place and respond to local climate.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Promote the value of good design to enable new development to positively contribute to the public and private realm and supports community wellbeing and quality of life.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Respond to local climate conditions and embrace climate-sensitive design to improve resilience, reduce urban heat and reduce reliance on mechanical heating and cooling.

- Respect the existing distinctive character and/or desired future character of a local area (or part thereof).
- Respond to and integrate with the local setting and natural features, including topography, waterways and native vegetation.
- Contribute to an interconnected network of green infrastructure, linking tree canopy, open space, native vegetation and waterways to support a place's broader character and ecological context.
- Provide for connection and the integration of street networks and pedestrian and bicycle paths to make places easy and safe to navigate and move through.
- Incorporate design principles to reduce opportunities for crime and improve community perceptions about safety.
- Promote the creation of places that cater for the various needs and abilities of the community and encourage social interaction and cultural activities.
- Contribute to the vibrancy and activation of the public realm.
- Encourage resource-efficient design that helps work towards the transition to a circular economy.
- Interpret any known cultural or historical themes to ensure that as change occurs, a site's heritage value/s remains accessible and is sustained.



Can you describe what aspects of your area's character you value?  
Are there any other aspects of good design we need to consider when developing the policy?

**The combination of built and landscape elements can contribute to the general look and feel of an area, often creating a distinct character.**

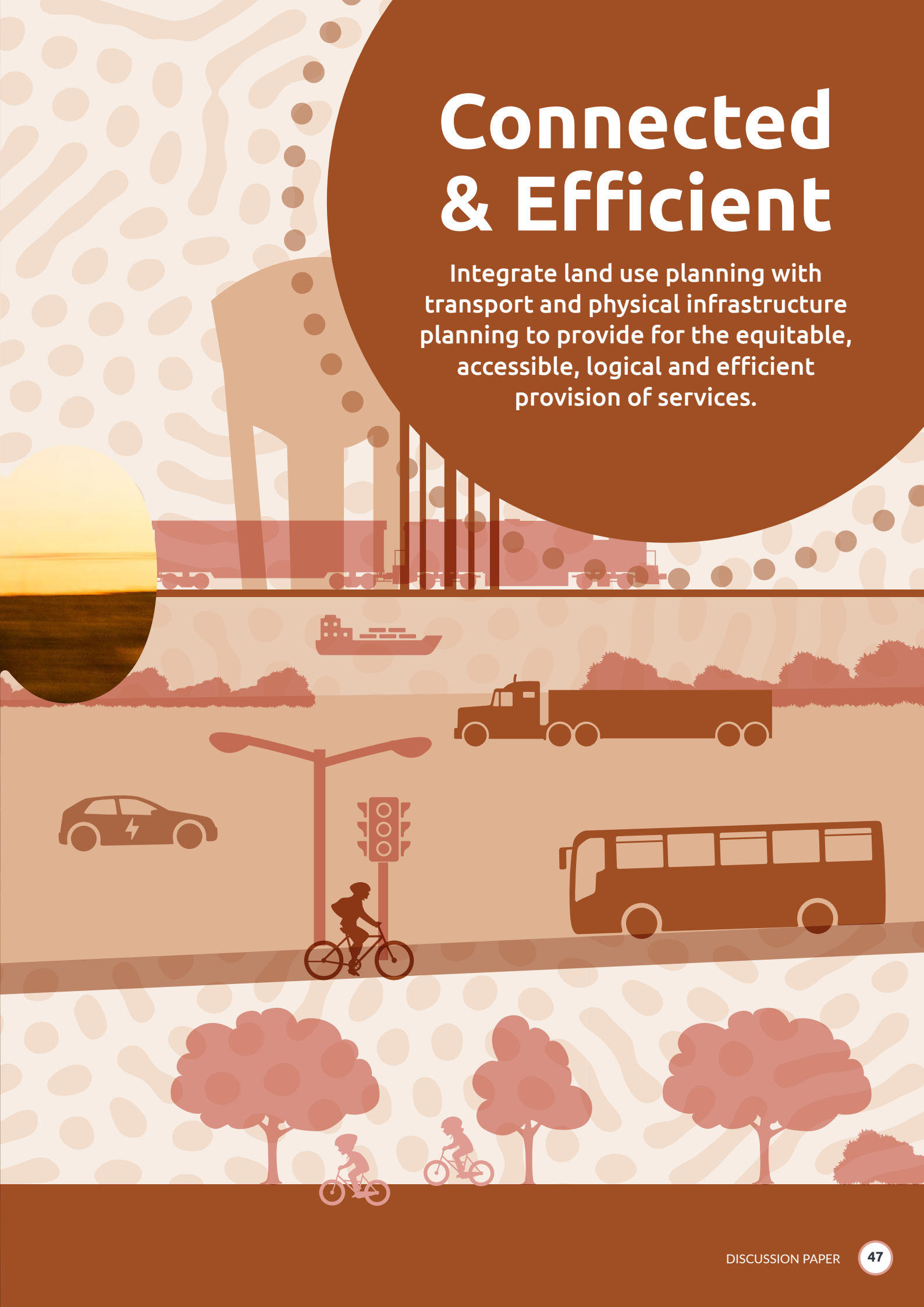




*Image: Road train, Stuart Highway*

# Connected & Efficient

Integrate land use planning with transport and physical infrastructure planning to provide for the equitable, accessible, logical and efficient provision of services.





## TRANSPORT

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Transport networks play a fundamental role in the dynamics and success of our settlements, underpinning a range of social, environmental and economic outcomes. They connect Territorians to services, activities, each other, Australia and the world. They also provide critical linkages for defence, moving commodities and attracting visitors.

Like most Australian cities, the NT has developed as a relatively low-density, car-dependant place. Given our sheer size and extreme climate, private and commercial vehicles are anticipated to be the primary mode of transport in the short-, medium- and, most likely, longer term. However, ensuring the transport network provides a range of sustainable transport options - such as walking, cycling and public transport (where population densities allow) - is important to lower emissions and to help foster more active and healthy communities.

Considerable distances separate our population centres from each other and from the rest of Australia, creating a significant reliance on our road, rail, air and sea supply chains. Life in many remote coastal communities functions around a weekly barge schedule, while fresh fruit and vegetables in urban supermarkets are quickly in short supply if rail or road connections fail. Our industries rely on efficient freight and logistics networks to remain competitive with and provide access to international and domestic markets.

The NT's transport and logistics networks are not currently constrained by congestion and the first and last mile logistics and freight management issues encountered in other states. As the population and the economy grows and diversifies, the NT's freight task and logistics requirements will continue to grow and change. Improving network reliability, resilience and enabling supporting infrastructure to meet demand is essential to deliver services (particularly in remote areas), connect businesses to markets and reduce the cost of living<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> NTG, Territory-wide Logistics Master Plan 2020



Integrate land use planning with transport and physical infrastructure planning to provide for the equitable, accessible, logical and efficient provision of services.



*Image: Cyclists commuting, Darwin city*



## Role of planning

The transport system is complex, with a mix of roles and responsibilities between the NTG, local governments and private operators. The NTG manages and maintains the arterial road network, while local governments manage the local road network. Integrated land use and transport planning is fundamental to align the efforts of all stakeholders, optimise efficiencies, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support mode change to lower-emission forms of transport.

The way different land use activities are distributed or concentrated, separated or mixed has a profound, cumulative effect on our daily behaviours as individuals and as communities. The land use structure across the NT provides a framework to enable higher-density residential development within a comfortable walking distance of a public transport route and an activity centre, where commercial and community facilities are available. Facilitating a large residential population in a concentrated area provides opportunities to be less dependent on the private car, to support public transport and to promote cycling and walking.

Integrating transport and future land use is also fundamental to protect future strategic transport corridors (freight, passenger and public transport) as well as supporting transport terminals, warehouses and distribution centres. Strategic land use plans for Darwin identifying future growth may increase the viability of introducing new modes of public transport in the longer term, including the potential for bus rapid transit or light rail. In response, the planning framework identifies and safeguards land required to facilitate an arterial transport corridor should it be required in the future.

Planning can also protect transport networks from encroachment by incompatible land uses that could limit their operation or prevent expansion. For example, land use planning can prevent the zoning of land for sensitive land uses surrounding airports and aerodromes to prevent possible constraints on airport operations and negative impacts on community amenity due to the effects of aircraft noise. Safeguarding aviation operations through land use and development planning is also necessary (i.e. preventing taller structures that might intrude on operational airspace).

Consideration must also be given to road safety and the transport-related impacts on the safety, resilience and vibrancy of our communities. Transport corridors and facilities (such as car parks) that enhance, rather than detract from, a local environment and improve connectivity are key considerations in the strategic planning process.



*Image: Freight train, Alice Springs to Darwin railway*

## What we know from other planning projects

We know that more people cycle in a typical week in the NT (per capita) than in any other state. We have heard more participation in these transport modes can be encouraged through efforts focused on improving the experience through safety, shade and improved connectivity.

We understand technical innovation in transport is also changing patterns of mobility, accessibility and travel with bike share, personal mobility devices and electric vehicles all evolving in the NT. It is important that strategic planners monitor shifting transport demand in order to support future travel behaviour change.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Integrate land use and transport planning to provide a safe, reliable and sustainable network that connects people and places and supports continuing economic growth.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Facilitate an efficient, logical and safe transport network that is integrated across the NT to conveniently connect people, places, goods, businesses and markets.

- Identify and protect strategic transport infrastructure (corridors and nodes) for passenger and freight movements to allow for logical upgrades, network extensions and intensification.
- Protect strategic transport infrastructure (corridors and nodes) from encroachment by incompatible land use and development that may impact their operation or expansion.
- Improve safety outcomes by ensuring aviation safety requirements are recognised in strategic planning processes.
- Promote mixed-use and medium- to high-density development within a comfortable walking distance of frequent public transport networks to reduce reliance on private vehicles.
- Support a choice of sustainable transport modes, including public transport, walking and cycling, to facilitate a reduced reliance on private vehicle travel and promote active, healthy communities.
- Advocate for the appropriate management of car parking provision to support a modal shift in town centre areas.
- Promote neighbourhoods, main streets and regional and town centres where place and people are given greater priority compared to vehicles.
- Minimise negative transport-related impacts on communities and the environment.
- Promote the greening of key transport corridors and car parks to support amenity and reduce the heat island effect.



### Other key resources

- National Airports Safeguarding Framework (AU)
- Electric Vehicle Strategy 2021-26 (NT)
- Darwin Regional Transport Plan 2018
- Territory-Wide Logistics Master Plan (NT)
- 10-Year Infrastructure Plan 2019-2028 (NT)
- Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998 (Cth)
- Compact Urban Growth Policy (NT)



# ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND UTILITIES

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The NT has a far-reaching network of essential services and utilities, including stormwater, water, sewerage, energy and telecommunications across urban, rural and remote settings. These networks are critical to the liveability of our settlements and the prosperity of economic endeavours. Investing in the right infrastructure, in the right place at the right time is critical to unlock the NT's potential and facilitate sustainable growth over the longer term.

The pace of technological change, growing consumer expectations and a changing climate are affecting the way service providers do business and how governments plan for the future. Renewable energy, transitioning to a low carbon future, embracing the circular economy and enabling faster, affordable and accessible telecommunications are all opportunities that are expected to change how and where these services are provided.

The NT's relatively small population base, climatic extremes, demanding geography and the vast distances that separate settlements from each other and from the rest of Australia present unique challenges in delivering such services. Effective integration and consideration of infrastructure provision in the early stages of land use planning is therefore important as decisions made now cannot be easily reversed and will influence social, environmental and economic outcomes for decades to come. It will also allow for the long lead times required for 'regional' and 'sub-regional'-level infrastructure to be planned efficiently.

## Role of planning

Like elsewhere in Australia, in the NT, the delivery of essential services and utilities is managed by a combination of public and private entities. The planning system plays an important role in coordinating the provision of such infrastructure by determining 'where' and 'why' growth (residential, industrial and commercial) will occur in strategic land use plans, based on demand profiling, demographics and trends. This work then informs other agencies and entities to plan for future network upgrades and/or expansions.

Strategic planning must consider the capacity and availability of existing service infrastructure (including water source security and quality) along with broader government sequencing priorities when planning for growth. Building on this understanding, sufficient and appropriately located land is set aside in SLUPs to accommodate future essential services and utilities. This also includes land required for transmission corridors that connect sources to market or disposal (i.e. water, sewerage, energy, telecommunications).

Cost advantages can be achieved when leveraging off existing infrastructure networks. However, in delivering such services, economies of scale are not always achievable in the NT where investment is required across a vast area and often over multiple and small development fronts. Notwithstanding, where possible, strategic planning seeks to facilitate the consolidation of activities in locations close to existing services and utilities where there is or will be capacity.

Land use controls applied through the planning framework also aim to protect the future operational integrity of the infrastructure and the amenity of nearby communities through a variety of mechanisms. This includes separating incompatible land uses and the use of buffers to provide distance from any potential adverse impacts, such as odour and emissions.

## What we know from other planning projects

We know that some of the NT's infrastructure is ageing and that whilst there is some capacity within local suburban reticulation networks, investment into power, water and sewer infrastructure headworks is necessary in places to achieve more compact urban growth outcomes, rural expansion and industrial development.

We understand that land demands for new energy sources will be significant for generation and transmission. The planning framework needs to be cognisant of major projects in the resource industry so that the opportunities generated by them is supported by appropriately planned infrastructure, such as land for workers accommodation and supporting infrastructure.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Integrate land use and infrastructure planning to support the safe, sustainable and coordinated provision of essential service infrastructure and utilities that meet the needs of the community, business and industry.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Pursue settlement patterns that make the most efficient and effective use of existing and planned infrastructure.
- Identify and protect strategically located land and associated corridors to accommodate essential services and utilities to meet existing and future service needs for water, gas, electricity, sewerage and telecommunications infrastructure, and waste management and resource recovery facilities.
- Safeguard existing and future essential services infrastructure sites and corridors from sensitive or incompatible land uses that would compromise their security or future operational integrity.
- Facilitate the development of renewable energy facilities to support the reduction of carbon emissions while minimising any potential impact upon the environment, natural landscape, cultural values and urban areas.
- Protect public health and safety and the natural environment from potential adverse impacts that may arise from essential service infrastructure and utilities.
- Promote the principles of the circular economy to enhance resource efficiency and prevent waste.
- Facilitate the provision of telecommunications infrastructure to increase the digital capability and connectivity across the NT whilst managing amenity impacts.



Do you agree that this policy approach is appropriate to guide future strategic policies and land use plans with respect to essential services and utilities?

### Other key resources

- Climate Change Response: Towards 2050 (NT)
- Telecommunications Act 1997 (Cth)
- Waste Management and Pollution Control Act 1998 (NT)
- Water Act 1992 (NT)
- Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2027 (NT)
- Territory Water Plan



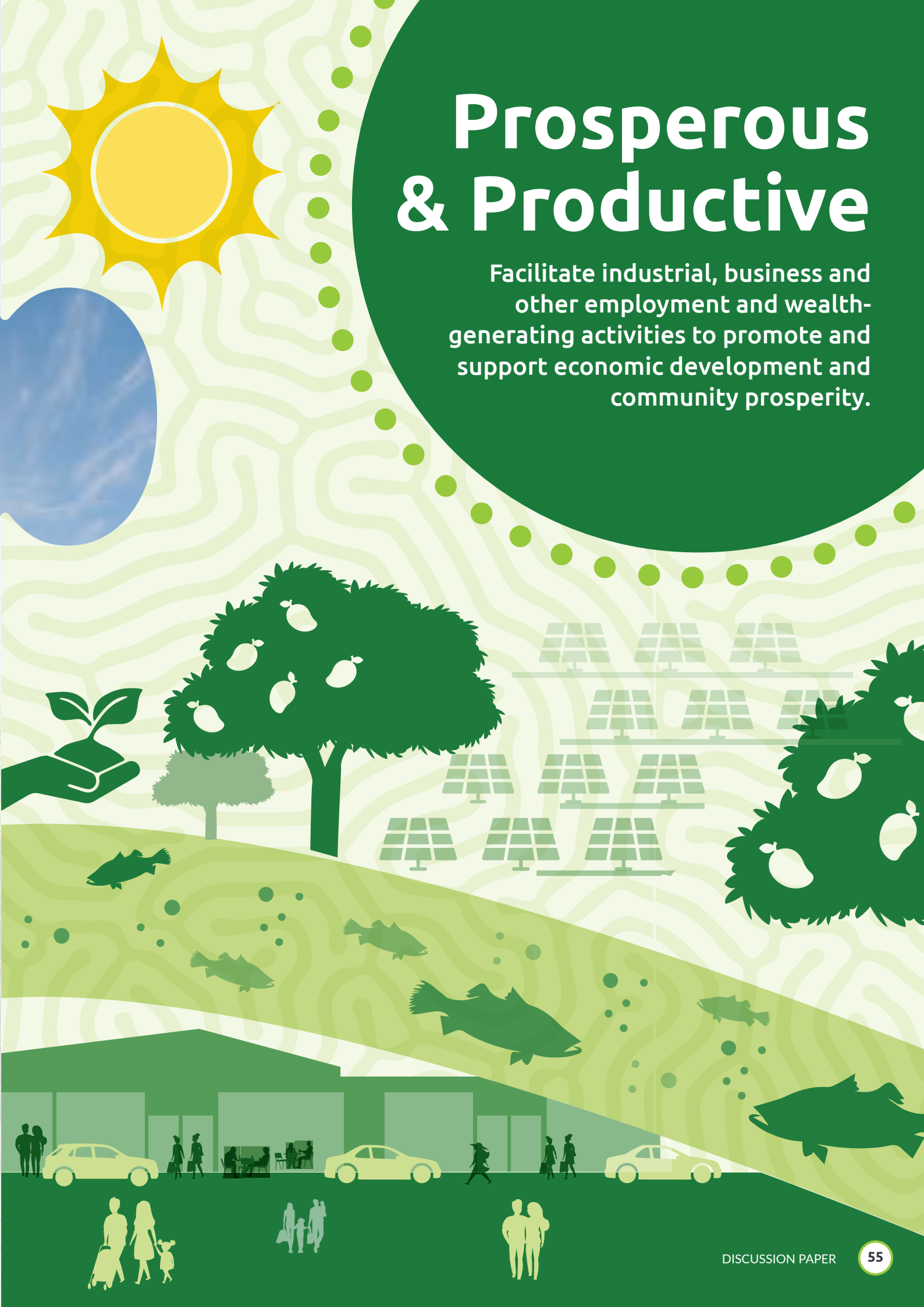


*Image: Mango orchard, Darwin region*



# Prosperous & Productive

Facilitate industrial, business and other employment and wealth-generating activities to promote and support economic development and community prosperity.





## AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING

Agriculture, forestry and fishing are a significant source of economic activity in the NT and are often the lifeblood of regional and remote communities. They also influence and interact with other sectors of the economy, including retail and wholesale trade, manufacturing, transport and tourism.

Cattle production is the NT's major agribusiness industry, with pastoral leases covering almost 45% of the NT's land area. Mangoes are a major horticultural crop. Other crops include a broad range of tropical fruit, nuts, broad-acre crops, vegetables and more.

Plantation forestry is becoming an increasingly important industry and is currently the second largest production land user in the NT after cattle grazing. Aquaculture in the NT is primarily related to pearls and barramundi, with a small contribution from aquarium fish and spirulina production. Commercial crocodile farming has achieved commercial success, with raw skins and meat a mainstay of the industry.

The allure of living in a rural setting (particularly for those parcels in close proximity to urban settlements), water scarcity, climate change and market events can place pressure on agricultural and horticultural land. If not managed carefully, this pressure can give rise to land use conflict, result in the permanent loss of productive land and impact on ecological processes and consequences for our food security.

### What we know from other planning projects

We know a growing population drives food and fibre demands and that despite some local food production, most of the food we eat travels a significant distance to get to our plates. We know the planning framework needs to support efforts to secure a higher level of food security.

Stakeholders have expressed the need to recognise horticultural potential at both a national scale and local level - the latter enabling production on smaller rural blocks. Encroachment by rural living land uses and managing land use conflicts have also been raised as priorities.



*Image: Cattle in yard*

## Role of planning

In the NT, the majority of agricultural and forestry occurs on unzoned land and is generally managed through legislation outside the planning system. The role of strategic planning, therefore, is to identify and protect land suitable for agricultural, aquacultural and horticultural production within a limited area of zoned land.

The terrain, climate, soil properties and availability of water are all factors that influence where agricultural and horticultural activities can occur and flourish. Land capable of supporting agricultural and horticultural activity is a relatively rare resource in the area covered by the strategic framework, being found in the Darwin and Katherine regions and a handful of major remote towns.

The limited extent of this land resource warrants identification and protection to maximise future opportunities, particularly when considered in the context of a changing climate, the need for food security and potential expansion of domestic and offshore markets.

Policy that prevents the conversion of suitable land to other uses is important as once land is converted to other uses, it is unlikely to return to agricultural or horticultural production. Preventing the fragmentation of land and minimising encroachment from incompatible uses that may give rise to land use conflicts is also important.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Protect agricultural, aquaculture and horticultural land so that it is available to support the growth of the sector and food security.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Identify and protect land with agricultural, aquaculture and/or horticultural potential.
- Protect agricultural, aquaculture and horticultural activities from encroachment of incompatible uses that may impact their operation.

- Protect agricultural, aquaculture and horticultural activities from:
  - encroachment of incompatible or sensitive uses that may impact their operation
  - new land uses that may present biosecurity risks

by locating new development in areas that avoid or minimise potential for conflict through the provision of adequate separation areas or other measures.

- Avoid fragmentation of agricultural, aquaculture and horticultural land that may limit future production.
- Facilitate the provision of infrastructure and services necessary to support a strong agriculture industry and associated agricultural supply chains.



Do you have a particular interest in agriculture, forestry or aquaculture?

What would you expect to see in a high-level planning policy in relation to these land uses?

### Other key resources

- EPBC Act (Cth)
- Water Act 1992 (NT)
- Pastoral Land Act 1992 (NT)
- Environment Protection Act 2019 (NT)
- Waste Management and Pollution Control Act 1998 (NT)
- Agribusiness Strategy
- Biosecurity Act 2015





## INDUSTRY

Industrial areas and land uses involve a diverse range of activities including manufacturing, assembling, packaging, altering, repairing and renovating to name a few. They are critical to local, regional, NT and national economies and are a significant generator of employment.

Our traditional industry sectors will continue to add to the NT's growth and provide for the local needs of residents and businesses. It is important to plan for a steady supply of land to meet the needs of this industry to prevent increases to the cost of living and the loss of economic development opportunities.

The NT's strategic position as a gateway to Asia, its role as a key defence hub and diversity of mineral, gas, petroleum, renewable energy and agricultural resources provides opportunities that underpin aspirations for future economic growth. Global commitments to net zero emissions by mid-century are increasing the demand for carbon-neutral products and supply chains, with renewable energy expected to reduce dependency on carbon-based energy over time.

The likely future land use requirements (across 'exploration', generation and transmission) of these emerging industries has the potential to have a significant land use footprint and may place pressure on existing infrastructure and surrounding environments. Integrated planning that makes the most of our extensive existing infrastructure networks and considers capacity constraints is necessary to create the enabling environment and encourage private sector investment, whilst also protecting the natural environment and the amenity of nearby communities.

### Role of planning

The identification of adequate land to provide for future major strategic, general and light industry development is a core component of the strategic planning process in the NT. Capacity for future expansion and access to suitable water resources, infrastructure, regional and international transport networks and labour all underpin productivity, efficiency and competitiveness.

Understanding the differences between industry types is key so that appropriate locations are identified and to protect the long-term interests of both operators and surrounding communities. For example, major strategic and general industries often require separation from other land uses due to the anticipated range of potential offsite impacts. Proximity to ports and other strategic transport networks is often paramount for these industries. Light industries (low-impact industries such as printers, furniture making and commercial bakeries) are often smaller enterprises and often need to locate in proximity to their customers near urban areas.

A range of emissions and other impacts can be generated by industrial activities, which can influence health, environmental and amenity outcomes. This may be as a result of a single activity or the cumulative effect of impacts from a number of industrial activities. Matters that may have a significant impact on the environment and potentially cause pollution resulting in environmental harm, or that involve dangerous goods, are primarily managed through separate environmental legislation outside the planning system.

Notwithstanding, strategic planning has a role to play to support environmental protection regulation and to avoid the potential impacts from industry impacting sensitive land uses, residences, schools etc. Buffers or land use transitions between industrial and sensitive land uses are a key mechanism to protect the health and wellbeing of humans and amenity values from the impacts of industrial activities.

## What we know from other planning projects

All tiers of government and the private sector have a role to play in owning, financing, building, operating or regulating industry. These stakeholders have highlighted that enabling infrastructure supported by the right policy and regulatory settings is critical to enable investment, diversification and growth.

Understandably, concerns regarding potential off-site impacts and/or safety risks from industrial land uses (traffic, noise, natural environment etc.) are raised at all stages of the planning process with regard to industry.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Facilitate industry innovation and growth in strategic locations whilst avoiding, mitigating or managing potential risks to the health and amenity of people and the environment.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Plan for a sufficient supply of strategically located and serviced land to allow future industry growth and/or expansion.
- Prevent conflict and encroachment between industrial and sensitive land uses through land use separation in order to protect:
  - an industrial area's long-term operation, efficiency and growth
  - the health and amenity of people and the natural environment.
- Understand and respond to the evolving nature of the mining and renewable energy industry.
- Plan for the establishment of new sustainable development precincts, including associated infrastructure and transmission corridors, designed with key sustainability principles, including:
  - contribution to net zero emissions
  - efficient water use
  - circular economy principles.
- Safeguard existing industrial areas that provide an ongoing economic, urban servicing or employment contribution to local communities, regions and/or the NT.
- Promote co-location of like uses to minimise the potential impact area.
- Provide a land use transition between industrial and sensitive land uses.
- Enable compatible land uses that provide a convenience, service or support role to industrial areas.



Are these policy directions appropriate and reflective of the NT's needs?

### Other key resources

- EPBC Act 1999 (Cth)
- Water Act 1992 (NT)
- Dangerous Goods Act 1998
- Environment Protection Act 2019 (NT)
- Waste Management and Pollution Control Act 1998 (NT)
- Land Use Separation Guidelines (NT)



### ACTIVITY CENTRES & EMPLOYMENT LANDS

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Activity centres are places where people can shop, work, meet, relax and, in some instances, live. They range in size and form, depending on their role, and are ideally well-serviced by public and active transport options (if available). 'Employment lands' are also areas of economic activity, but they tend to focus on specific themes such as universities, major health campuses, port and airports.

In the NT, early towns were developed around or radiating from a central business/commercial area (activity centre) and generally extended as far as one might comfortably walk, reflecting their establishment prior to the proliferation of the private car. Over time as our population grew, new suburbs were created with a local centre to meet the day-to-day needs of their community. However, from the 1970s, the way people shopped changed dramatically in the NT with the rise of larger sub-regional shopping centres and supermarkets often reducing the viability local centres - the survival of the latter sometimes dependant on diversifying.

Advances in technology and changing consumer patterns are continuing to transform how businesses operate and how consumers engage with them. However, communities still value and rely on the broad range of activity centres for shopping, work and social purposes. This is particularly true in remote areas where delivery timeframes may be slower.

Ultimately, the take up of commercial opportunities depends on the scale and timing of residential growth, the corresponding growth in jobs and the economy and the actions of private landowners. However, forward planning for sufficient and well-located commercial and business development land is critical to attract investment and enable economic and job growth to occur when opportunity presents.

#### Role of planning

Strategic planning provides a framework for the sufficient supply of well-located land to meet the needs of business now and into the future. Specifically, under the NT Planning Scheme, a planned network of 'activity centres' complemented by 'employment lands' aims to provide for distribution of jobs, services and amenities to optimise community benefit and infrastructure efficiencies.

The NT's strategic framework seeks to reinforce an activity centre hierarchy as part of a long-term and integrated approach by public authorities and private stakeholders, whereby centres are the primary places for commerce and retail activity across urban, rural, regional and remote settings. Increasing the level of residential development in and around centres is advocated in the current strategic framework so as many people as possible can benefit from the amalgam of activity and to reduce reliance on the private car.

The availability of car parking and public transport options and quality well-lit and shaded pedestrian/cycle paths has a major influence on the appearance of activity centres and employment lands and how people choose to travel to them. Policies that promote shade, landscaping and lighting of car parks and pathways can reduce the urban heat island effect, ameliorate visual impacts and enhance perceptions of safety.

Urban design requirements set under a planning framework can also help create dynamic, inclusive and resilient spaces that people and businesses want to be part of and reinforce a sense of place. Encouraging active ground floors, providing shelter from the elements and protecting a place's character are all mechanisms that can enhance the overall customer experience and sense of safety.



## What we know from other planning projects

Previous consultation feedback has advocated for improved connectivity between and within commercial centres, quality design outcomes and a high level of visual engagement between those in the street and those within buildings to contribute to a place's vibrancy, identity and safety.

There has been an emphasis nationally to remove barriers to trade, investment and entrepreneurship through simplified and more flexible planning policy and streamlined planning processes. Reforms have been introduced through the NT planning system over the years to assist with this. However, we have also heard concerns that too little control and too much planned commercial growth could impact on businesses in established activity centres.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Enhance the diversity and resilience of activity centres to meet the needs of the community, support economic growth, provide employment opportunities and improve liveability and sense of place.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Establish, distribute and maintain an activity centre hierarchy across the NT that meets different levels of community need and enables employment, goods and services to be accessed efficiently and conveniently by the community.
- The importance of activity centres is reinforced, and the allocation of land for business or commercial use that fractures activity centres is discouraged.
- Sufficient development intensity and appropriate land use mix is provided that supports the intended role and function of the activity centre and to promote activity, productivity and efficient use of infrastructure.
- Increase the density and diversity of housing in and around activity centres to improve land use efficiency, housing variety and increase the critical mass to support activity centres.
- Maximise access to activity centres by walking, cycling and public transport rather than having to depend on access by car in urban areas.
- Maintain and enhance the role of activity centres as a community focus, with engaging shopfronts, sheltered pedestrian footpaths and places for social interaction.
- Capitalise on opportunities to revitalise activity centres in established areas as a catalyst for urban and regional renewal in the surrounding catchment.
- Identify and allocate accessible and well-connected land for employment nodes that provides for the existing and emerging needs of employment sectors.
- Connect and/or co-locate employment nodes with activity centres to unlock synergies between such centres.
- Encourage the co-location of similar uses within existing or future employment lands to facilitate collaboration, shared access to resources and efficient use of infrastructure.



Why do you shop where you do?

Are these directions appropriate?

Are there any additional directions you think should be included in the policy?

### Other key resources

- Compact Urban Growth Policy (NT)
- Population Growth Strategy 2018-2028 (NT)
- 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan (AU)
- Smart Cities Plan (AU)



## TOURISM

Nature-based and cultural tourism are key drawcards for holiday visitors to the NT, with holiday makers attracted to our natural landscapes, rich culture, warm climate and unique visitor experiences. Aboriginal culture is a significant drawcard for a large proportion of international and domestic visitors. These assets are also valued and utilised by Territorians, thereby contributing to broader liveability outcomes.

Tourism activity stretches across multiple industries and ancillary services and includes the journey to, from and within a destination. It can include accommodation (caravan parks, hotels etc), attractions, and facilities and associated infrastructure. Some assets co-exist within urban or regional activity centres. Others may be located in or near places of natural beauty or recreation opportunity.

Tourism in the NT is further enlivened by festivals, sporting events, performing arts, creative industries, museums and art galleries. Having high-quality sporting, arts and cultural infrastructure can strengthen the economy, help grow visitation and enable the hosting of international events. Benefits can flow through tourism activity to many auxiliary service industries, such as the hospitality, food and leisure sectors.

### Role of planning

Strategic planning can facilitate the promotion and development of tourism activities, along with ancillary services and infrastructure, to assist the NT to grow its tourism product in step with identified long-term trends and aspirations.

Strategic planning can help guide the appropriate location of tourism land uses and set aside land to accommodate future tourism growth. As with other land uses, tourism development must be appropriate to the local context and character of a place.

Traffic and noise associated with some tourism activity has the potential to impact upon the amenity of local communities. Preventing encroachment from incompatible land uses and considering potential impacts with nearby sensitive land uses underpin strategic land use planning for tourism. Planning for efficient and safe access to and from a destination also enhances the tourism experience.

Strategic planning can help safeguard those unique and valued attributes within both urban and regional settings so they can continue to attract visitors. Clarity about design expectations for new development and encouraging the co-location of complementary tourism land uses can also be used to strengthen the NT's remarkable tourism assets.



*Image: Katherine Hot Springs*

## What we know from other planning projects

Tourism is a continuously evolving sector. The sharing economy, changing lifestyles, flourishing forms of cultural and creative expression, and technical innovation are changing how the sector operates. Thus, the planning system must be agile to enable appropriate opportunities when they arise.

Strengthening reference to tourism in the strategic framework and identifying opportunities to help guide decisions as to where supporting tourism infrastructure could be located has been raised.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Foster appropriate tourism opportunities and protect the unique social, cultural and natural values underpinning them.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Recognise the importance of nature, culture and adventure-based tourism and recreation to Territorians and international and interstate visitors.
  - Identify and promote the protection of significant tourism assets and their attributes to support the tourism experience.
  - Understand the needs and motivations of tourists and tourism markets and set aside sufficient land to accommodate growth.
- Direct tourism activities to identifiable tourism precincts to enhance the tourist experience, promote opportunities for access by public transport (where available) and reinforce the vibrancy and safety of precincts.
  - Facilitate a range of tourism accommodation and accommodation for workers that supports tourist activities.
  - Locate tourist accommodation (including caravan parks) in areas close to tourism assets with adequate separation from sensitive land uses (i.e. schools, childcare and lower-density dwellings) where appropriate.



Are these policy directions appropriate and reflective of the NT's tourism needs?

### Other key resources

- *Caravan Park Act 2012 (NT)*
- Creative Industries Strategy (NT)
- Tourism Industry Strategy 2030 (NT)
- NT Parks Master Plan 2023-2053
- NT Aboriginal Tourism Strategy 2020-2030





*Image: Roadside bushfire*





# Resilient & Responsive

Build resilient communities, support efforts to mitigate climate change and strengthen our defence capability





# NATURAL HAZARDS & CLIMATE CHANGE

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Natural hazards are an ever-present force shaping and informing where we settle, how we build and how we manage land in the NT. When natural hazards impact what we value or when they intersect with a vulnerable community, they can lead to 'disaster,' leaving a trail of suffering, destruction, disruption and loss.

Our communities are located in a range of settings across the NT. Some are by the coast, some are nestled alongside a river and others are in desert settings. They are exposed to a range of natural hazards, from flooding (storm surge and riverine), cyclones, bushfires, heatwaves, severe storms and earthquakes through to tsunamis. Building a community's long-term resilience to natural hazards is important as our vulnerability to them is likely to increase and magnify as our climate changes.

Whilst the full extent of future climate change impacts in the NT is uncertain, impacts are already being experienced. According to the National Environmental Science Program Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub, the NT will continue to get warmer, tropical cyclones will become less frequent but more intense, heavy rainfall events will become more intense and fire weather will become more frequent and harsher<sup>24</sup>. This means our communities may experience:

- amplified urban heat island effect in built-up areas
- exacerbated impacts from storm surges and flooding
- disruption to services and transportation systems
- damage to infrastructure, property and coastal ecosystems
- impacts to human health and wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable people.

Refer to figures 3 and 4 showing projected sea level data and number of annual average number of days over 35°C as relevant to the NT

Understanding future impacts and consequences of climate change is critical so that our policy platforms and decisions do not expose or inadvertently exacerbate risks to our communities, economy or environment and help our communities adapt and build resilience.

## Role of planning

Building resilience to natural hazards and climate change is a shared responsibility and involves action from all areas of government, with responsibility also lying with individual households, the community and businesses. Strategic land use planning cannot prevent natural hazards or climate change. It can, however, provide a policy framework that reduces our vulnerability to the harmful impacts and supports measures that help address the causes of climate change.

Strategic planning in the NT considers the range of natural hazards early and through its processes to ensure risk-informed settlement patterns. New development can be directed to suitable locations, which avoid or reduce a community's exposure to natural hazards. Impacts of new development on the behaviour of natural hazards (i.e. stormwater) and the needs of emergency responders must also be addressed.

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<sup>24</sup> National Environmental Science Program Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub, *Climate change in the Northern Territory: State of the science and climate change impact*. (NTG, 2020)



Planning has a role to play in mitigating climate change, which means reducing the flow of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Our choices about transportation, building design and land use influence how we move around, how we stay comfortable and how much energy we use in doing so. Promoting compact settlements, active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport can help mitigation efforts by reducing the reliance on private internal combustion engine vehicles for travel.

Strategies that promote a network of green spaces can aid in carbon sequestration, reduce the heat island effect and encourage the passive cooling of buildings and the spaces between them. Enabling new technologies (solar photovoltaics, batteries and electric vehicles) can also assist to reduce emissions.

Planning also has a role to play in adapting to climate change by managing growth to help our communities thrive in the face of future impacts. Knowing that the NT will continue to get warmer, the planning framework can advance policies that promote shade devices, articulation to facilitate breeze flow and networks of green spaces to provide opportunities for trees with their shade and cooling evapotranspiration. Siting and orientating buildings to optimise energy efficiency, whether it may be staying cool in the Top End or both cool and warm in Central Australia, can be facilitated through subdivision design. Collectively, these policy initiatives can help to reduce temperatures within buildings and broader urban areas, supporting healthy and resilient communities.

**Projected sea-level rise under a high emissions pathway for coastal local government areas**

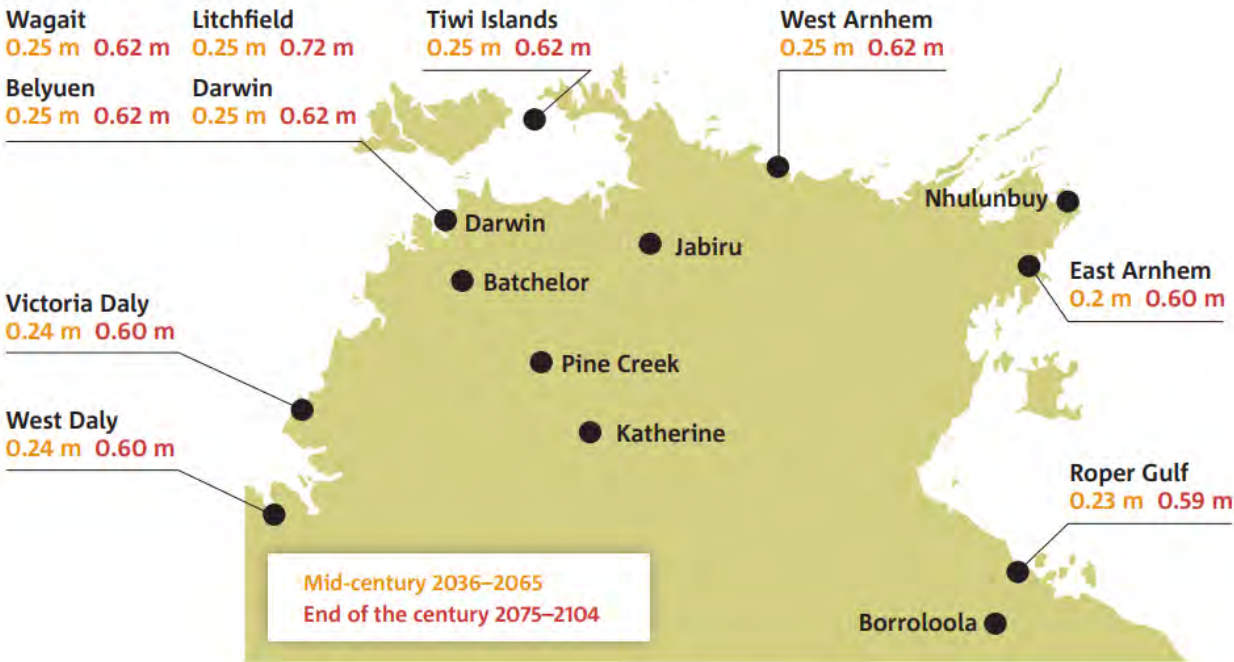


Figure 3: Projected sea-level rise under a high emissions pathway for coastal local government areas. Source: Climate change in the Northern Territory: State of the science and climate change impact (NTG, 2020)



## What we know from other planning projects

Consultation from previous planning projects demonstrates that many Territorians are concerned about climate change, with many advocating for strong policy around mitigation and adaptation so that climate-change risks can have a strong influence on planning decisions. The heat island effect, climate-sensitive design, water efficiency, and solar and passive energy have all been raised for further exploration.

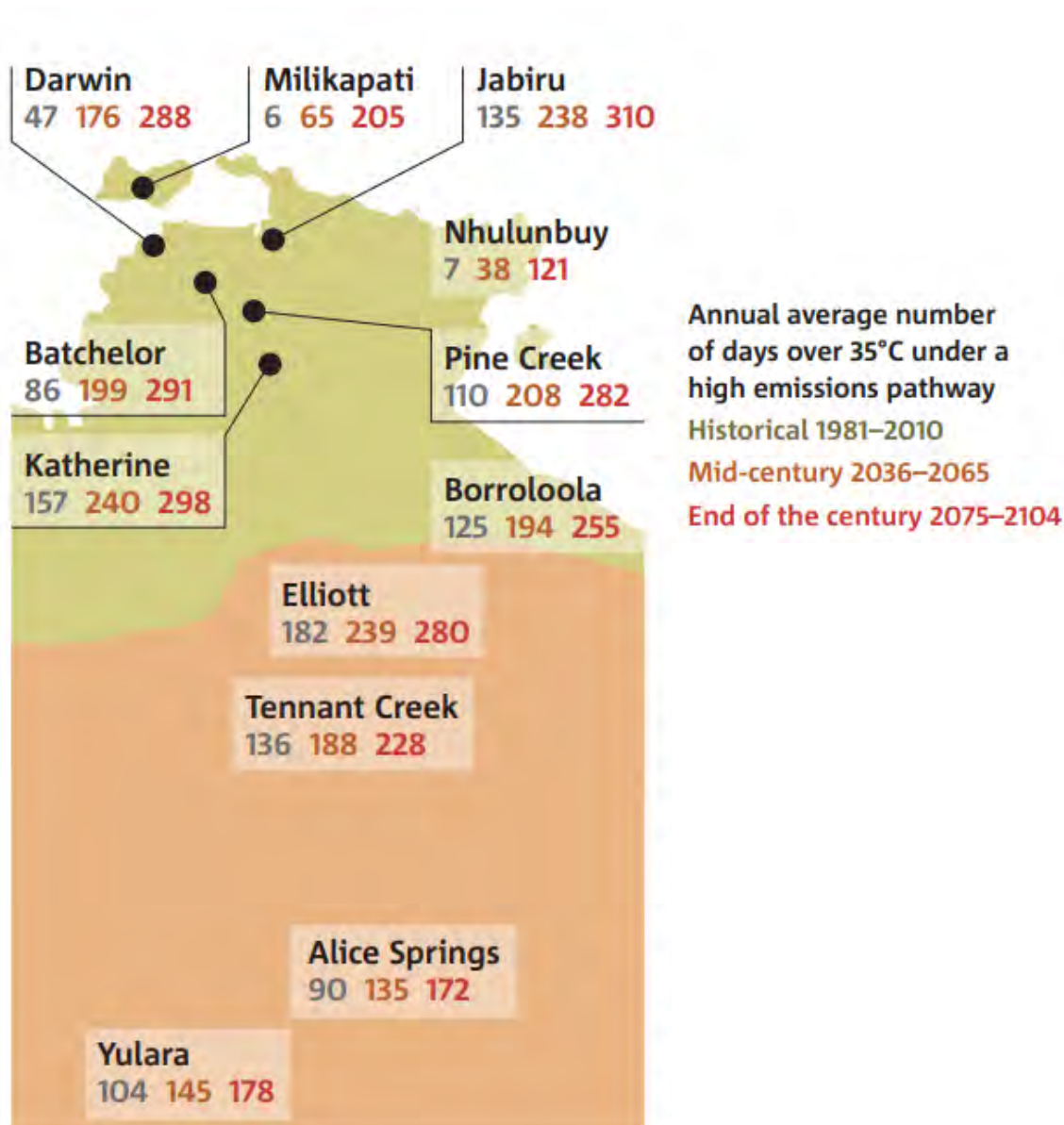


Figure 4: Historic and projected number of annual average number of days over 35°C under a high emissions (RCP8.5) pathway. Source: Climate change in the Northern Territory: State of the science and climate change impact (NTG, 2020)

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Minimise vulnerability and enhance community resilience to the risks associated with natural hazards and the projected impacts of climate change and support the transition to a low-carbon future.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Strategic planning is informed by natural hazard and climate change information and multi-disciplinary expert advice.
- Identify risks from natural hazards and how these may change as a result of climate change and changing land use patterns, including:
  - riverine and storm water flooding
  - sea level rise and storm surge (storm tide flooding)
  - extreme heat
  - bushfires
  - biting insects
  - sinkholes
  - erosion.
- Avoid designating land for purposes that expose people, property and infrastructure to natural hazards that cannot achieve and maintain a level of tolerable risk.
- Minimise the impact of natural hazards and climate change to human life, property and infrastructure and to reduce the cost to the community.
- Support emergency responses by planning subdivision and road layouts, that take into account:
  - achievable response times that maximise public safety
  - the evacuation of vulnerable communities, location of evacuation centres and other community facilities that can assist with the recovery process
  - accessibility for emergency services for fire suppression activity purposes during emergency fire response.
- To minimise impacts of natural disasters, subdivision and development design supports landholders to be proactive in the ongoing management of natural hazards (i.e. maintaining appropriate access tracks and fire breaks).
- Promote development and urban design that supports the transition to a low-carbon future, addresses temperature extremes and is energy and resource efficient, including initiatives such as:
  - retention of existing native vegetation and mature trees
  - greening streets, buildings and open space with native or climate appropriate vegetation
  - climate-sensitive design, including consideration of solar orientation, shading and breeze penetration
  - compact and mixed-use development accessible to high-quality public transport
  - heritage retention and adaptive reuse
  - enabling active and public transport
  - water-sensitive urban design.
- Promote the use of alternative energy generation, including renewable energy.

Think beyond our current climate and consider how it might be in 10, 20 or 50 years from now.



Do you think these directions will help create comfortable and resilient communities for the future?

### Other key resources

- National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (AU)
- Climate Change Response: Towards 2050 (NT)
- *Environment Protection Act 2019* (NT)
- *Emergency Management Act* (NT)
- *Bushfires Management Act 2016* (NT)
- Compact Urban Growth Policy (NT)





### DEFENCE

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Defence's presence in the north is integral to life in the NT, the security of Australia and the stability of our region. The ability of defence and national security agencies to sustain operations in Australia and the Indo-Pacific region requires more than a mere presence in the NT. It also requires infrastructure and industrial capability to be in place to support these operations.

Defence relies on airport, port and road infrastructure throughout the NT to conduct its duties and operations<sup>25</sup>. Major defence sites include RAAF Base Darwin, Larrakeyah Barracks and HMAS Coonawarra in Darwin, Robertson Barracks in Palmerston, RAAF Base Tindal near Katherine and the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap near Alice Springs. Some infrastructure is shared between defence and civilian authorities, including RAAF Base Darwin, which is a joint-user facility with Darwin International Airport.

The NT is also home to significant training areas spread throughout regional and remote areas. Protecting this infrastructure and enhancing the capacity and capability in the NT for defence and security co-operation in the Indo-Pacific region is important to fulfil national security objectives.

### Role of planning

Commonwealth legislation regulates land use and development on major defence sites. Accordingly, the Department of Defence (DoD) is a key stakeholder in strategic land use planning in the NT to make sure incompatible land uses and development are not located in the vicinity of its bases and facilities, as they could impact on its ongoing operations.

For example, areas surrounding airports are likely to be exposed to noise generated by military and civil aircraft. While the airport operators make efforts to minimise noise exposure, aircraft noise cannot be easily modified. This means the location and development of noise-sensitive uses such as dwellings and schools need to be closely managed. Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF) maps provide important information about aircraft noise exposure near defence bases and are used to inform strategic planning and settlement patterns.

Strategic planning must also be mindful of land use activities and built-form outcomes that may disrupt the airspace above and around defence facilities in accordance with the Commonwealth Defence (Areas Control) Regulations. Lighting on land below flight paths and land uses that attract birds have the potential to disrupt airspace to an extent that can affect the safe operation of an airport.

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<sup>25</sup> NTG, NT Defence and National Security Strategy 2018 <https://business.nt.gov.au>

## What we know from other planning projects

We know the NT will continue to be an important defence location. Defence's historical ties are evident in the monuments and landmarks across and between Darwin and Katherine. Defence commemorative events such as Anzac Day bring the entire community together.

We know that defence personnel and their families make up approximately 5% of the NT's total population. Primarily based in Darwin and Katherine, their presence has a positive impact on the local economy, industry, workforce availability and the range of health, education and other social services available in the NT<sup>26</sup>. Making an NT posting an attractive choice, where serving and ex-serving personnel and their families want to live and work, is important to overall defence and national security capability in the north.

## Thoughts for enduring directions

### Suggested policy direction:

*Support the Australian Defence Force in maintaining and expanding its operations in the NT.*

### Suggested policy statements:

- Recognise the socioeconomic benefit from the Defence Force and national security opportunities in the NT.
- Protect Defence Force facilities from the encroachment by incompatible uses and development on surrounding land that may compromise defence operations.
- Acknowledge the important role of defence whilst seeking to manage adverse impacts on community or the realisation of the Strategic Framework.



### Other key resources

- *Defence Act 1903 (Cth)*
- *Defence Force Regulations 2016 (Cth)*
- *Defence Housing Australia Act 1987 (Cth)*
- *Defence Amendment (Defence Aviation Areas) Regulations 2018 (Cth)*
- *Australian Standard 2021:2015 the Australian Noise Exposure Forecast (ANEF)*

<sup>26</sup> NTG, NT Economy - Northern NT Defence

# Part 5

## Have your say

The NTPC encourages interested parties to make a written submission regarding this discussion paper and the range of possible directions.

This feedback will be used to inform the Strategic Directions Planning Policy.

The Planning Commission team is able to meet with you to discuss this paper and the ideas in it in more detail, and we can be contacted on 08 8924 7950.

Closing date for written and survey submissions: 30 June 2024

### Submissions

Submissions can be lodged via the following methods:

Email: [ntpc@nt.gov.au](mailto:ntpc@nt.gov.au)

Mail: NT Planning Commission  
GPO Box 1680  
Darwin NT 0801

Hand delivery: Level 1 Energy House  
18 Cavenagh Street, Darwin

All submissions will be publicly available unless you specifically request otherwise in your submission.

### Have your say

A survey associated with this discussion paper can be found at the following website:

<https://haveyoursay.nt.gov.au>





*Image: Nightcliff beach*



# Appendix A

## Regional land use plans

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Darwin Regional Land Use Plan  
Alice Springs Regional Land Use Plan  
Tennant Creek Land Use Plan  
Katherine Land Use Plan

## Subregional land use plans

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Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan  
Holtze to Elizabeth River Subregional Land Use Plan  
Coomalie Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives  
Finniss Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives

## Darwin region area plans

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Archer Area Plan  
Berrimah Farm Planning Principles and Area Plan  
Berrimah North Planning Principles and Area Plan  
Central Darwin Area Plan  
Central Palmerston Area Plan  
Darwin Inner Suburbs Area Plan  
Darwin Mid Suburbs Area Plan  
Lee Point Planning Principles and Area Plan  
Palmerston Eastern Suburbs Planning Principles and Area Plans  
Coolalinga North Planning Principles and Area Plan  
Holtze Urban Planning Principles and Area Plan  
Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan  
Batchelor Area Plan

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## Katherine region area plans

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Katherine East Area Plan

## Alice Springs region area plans

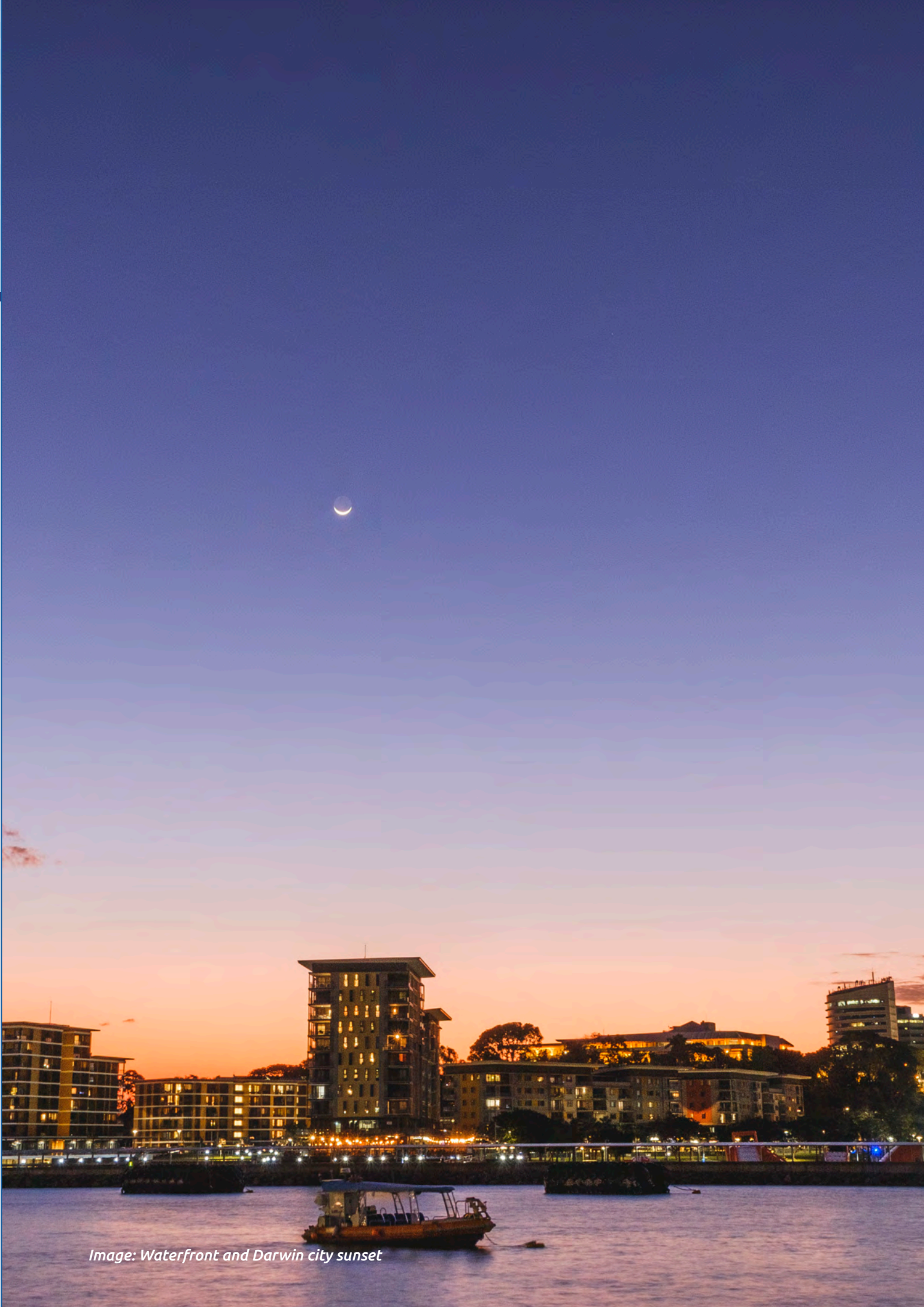
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Arumbera Area Plan  
Central Alice Springs Area Plan  
Kilgariff Area Plan

## 23 major remote towns and other area plans

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Ali Curung Area Plan  
Angurugu Area Plan  
Borrooloola Area Plan  
Daguragu Area Plan  
Elliott Area Plan  
Galiwin'ku Area Plan  
Gapuwiyak Area Plan  
Gunbalanya Area Plan  
Hermannsburg Area Plan  
Kalkarindji Area Plan  
Lajamanu Area Plan  
Maningrida Area Plan  
Milingimbi Area Plan  
Milyakburra Area Plan  
Ngukurr Area Plan  
Numbulwar Area Plan  
Papunya Area Plan  
Ramingining Area Plan  
Umbakumba Area Plan  
Wadeye Area Plan  
Wurrumiyanga Area Plan  
Yirrkala Area Plan  
Yuendumu Area Plan



*Image: Waterfront and Darwin city sunset*





NORTHERN TERRITORY  
**PLANNING  
COMMISSION**

**For more information**

[planningcommission.nt.gov.au](http://planningcommission.nt.gov.au)



[ntpc@nt.gov.au](mailto:ntpc@nt.gov.au)

