

# 1. Introduction

## Purpose and Role of the Plan

The Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for the Northern Territory, *Sustaining our resources – people, country and enterprises*, is a comprehensive strategy to use and conserve the Territory's natural resources. The Plan describes their current condition, forms of use, threats to their integrity and responses to those threats.

Our natural resources are divided into five assets:

- Terrestrial biodiversity;
- Land;
- Inland waters;
- Coastal and marine; and
- Community, NRM institutions and knowledge.

While the Plan acknowledges that 'community' is not conventionally seen as a natural resource, it recognises that vibrant, healthy communities working in Territory landscapes make irreplaceable contributions to the maintenance of healthy country and healthy resources.

In framing this Plan, the Landcare Council of the NT was influenced by some special features of Territory society and the relationships that people have with landscape and natural resources. We were especially conscious of contemporary patterns of land tenure and resource allocation. At the same time, we were equally conscious of the strong attachment of many people to particular places, livelihoods and lifestyles, many of which lie outside the Australian mainstream.

Aboriginal people have communal ownership over nearly half of the NT land area and of about 85% of its coastline. These areas are used in a variety of ways, but there is a widespread and active customary

economy based on using native plants and animals. In many places this customary economy continues to provide a large part of total income.

The dominant mainstream land use is pastoralism, which is based on large, mostly leasehold properties. People in the pastoral industry come from all sectors of NT society. Many properties are family-owned and, especially in the Centre, have been run by the same family for generations. Increasingly, however, pastoral properties are coming under the ownership of large corporations.

Many Aboriginal people with experience in the pastoral industry value their history in it and take pride in the lifestyle and the skills they have developed through 'working the cattle'. They may seek to establish or re-establish pastoralism on their lands, often in combination with customary activity and other commercial uses, including tourism.

The Plan necessarily has a strong focus on these dominant land uses and the challenges they create. In many cases, the human and financial resources to manage huge, sparsely-populated landscapes and seascapes are very limited. Finding creative ways to support individuals and groups of land and sea managers so that they are well-equipped to protect assets valued by the wider regional, national and international communities has been accepted as a fundamental obligation of LCNT and the co-investing governments.

***This plan will be the first Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan developed for the whole of the NT, based on meeting specific targets.***

Productive investment of the funds made available through the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) will require that we foster effective partnerships among all those committed to high standards of resource management. In addition to making the best possible use of their effort and commitment, we also seek ways to apply their often extraordinarily detailed understanding of the components of natural systems, the ways they function and the ways human actions and resource use influence their condition. Building arrangements to make the best use of this knowledge is particularly challenging because for many of the Aboriginal participants with the greatest knowledge, English will be a second or more remote language.

But the Plan is about much more than recognising and solving problems. We also recognise extraordinary opportunities to set new standards in natural resource management because we can devote less effort to remediation and focus on building new approaches and the capacity to apply them in key sectors of the NT community. Avoiding the need to correct mistakes is a key emphasis.

Recognising the special needs of the regions does not mean that the interests of other community sectors are downplayed. Those working directly on the land or sea also depend on support from the whole of the Territory. The Plan has also been strongly influenced by those who are committed to the conservation of biological diversity and the maintenance of high standards of environmental management.

Consistent with the obligation to foster the engagement of all sectors of the Territory community, *Sustaining our resources – people, country and enterprises* is guided by this vision:

*The diverse cultural knowledge systems of Territorians will be valued and contribute equally to the management of our unique*

*and largely intact land and seascapes to sustain their rich biodiversity and the economies and lifestyles they support.*

The Landcare Council of the Northern Territory (LCNT) is the regional body set up by the Northern Territory Government to deliver funding from the second phase of the Australian Government's NHT and NAP programs. LCNT has representatives from the pastoral, fisheries, mining, horticultural and agricultural industries and from Aboriginal and community environmental organisations. It is responsible for developing this Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan and the Regional Investment Strategy (see Appendix 1).

Once they are accredited, these documents will provide the framework through which proposals may be developed for access to investment funding from the NHT, NAP, National Action Plans and the NT Government over the next three years (see Chapter 8). This plan is also the first INRM Plan that is based on meeting specific targets and as such will be an important part of a larger process to focus investments in NRM for the future.

Through clear statements of goals, LCNT also seeks to attract private investment funds for much more strategic and integrated NRM across the Northern Territory.

## **Guiding Principles**

The LCNT has agreed to three fundamental principles to guide the Plan:

- it should promote and support ecologically sustainable development;
- it should apply the precautionary principle in the absence of sound data on which to base planning decisions; and
- it should promote and support adaptive management.

LCNT also recognises as important to successful NRM in the Territory:

- preventing degradation of our relatively intact ecosystems is much more strategic and economically feasible than investing in the repair of degraded systems in the future;
- valuing local knowledge, including Aboriginal, pastoral and other resource users alongside formal scientific knowledge is critical in improving our management of natural resources;
- maintaining vibrant, healthy communities across the NT is vital to achieving sound natural resource management outcomes;
- investing in developing sustainable enterprises and local economies is particularly critical in the NT to enable people to remain on country;
- finding new collaborative approaches to NRM that acknowledge differences in belief systems, values and knowledge systems of various land owners and manages needs greater emphasis;
- customary economies based on subsistence are an important land use and need to be supported within NRM planning frameworks in the same way as other production systems; and
- developing integrated approaches to NRM, including review of legislation and policy, can make a major contribution to improvement in environments and natural resource management in the Territory.

***This Plan proposes priority areas and activities to be funded from NHT, NAP and other government programs and through industry***

## **Basis for the Plan**

### ***Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM)***

INRM is a holistic approach to environmental and natural resource management that recognises that land, sea, coasts, freshwater systems, their biodiversity, their people and associated land uses are interconnected. INRM also recognises the need for policies, legislation and management programs to be developed to allow cross-institutional, cross-border, cross-cultural and multi-threat-based approaches to NRM.

### ***Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)***

The National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development defines ESD as: 'Using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased'.

Key aspects of ESD include:

- integrating economic and environmental goals in policies and activities;
- properly valuing our environmental assets and services;
- providing for equity within and between generations;
- dealing cautiously with assessing risk and planning to avoid irreversible change; and
- recognising the global dimension of the way we work in our environment.

### ***The Precautionary Principle***

The precautionary principle requires an approach to planning that errs on the side of caution in making decisions where there is little or no sound information about the baseline condition of a resource or about the likely impact of a development or use of that resource.

### ***Adaptive management***

This assumes that often knowledge about management of the environment and natural resources is incomplete or imperfect and therefore requires the manager to adopt the best known course of action and monitor rigorously and evaluate progress to modify and improve management actions where necessary. This model assumes that the learning from these projects is shared, so that all land managers can benefit from implementing improved management approaches and that irreversible actions should not be taken.

In mid-2003, the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments signed a Bilateral Agreement for delivering the Framework for the Extension of the National Heritage Trust, in which they agreed to jointly invest in natural resource management. While the range of projects and activities that could be undertaken is virtually limitless, the source of funding is not. This plan proposes priorities for protecting the Territory's biodiversity, ensuring sustainable resource use, ensuring sustainable local and regional economies, improving understanding of the resources and the environment and building the skills of the community so people can actively engage in INRM planning and activities.

Ultimately, the plan aims to refine understanding and foster agreement about where in future we concentrate our efforts for managing the Territory's natural resources.

The Natural Heritage Trust has identified three overarching objectives that need to be reflected in all INRM Plans across Australia. These three objectives form the basis of all NHT investments:

- biodiversity conservation;
- sustainable use of resources; and
- capacity building and institutional change.

A set of National Outcomes and Ten Matters for Target (Table 1.1 at end of this chapter)

have also been agreed under the Bilateral Agreement. The Matters for Target represent the minimum set of issues that must be addressed in every INRM Plan. All regions are required to undertake an initial assessment of all Matters for Target and then set Resource Condition Targets for all Matters that are relevant to them.

Targets are the core requirement for INRM plans to be accredited. They reflect the agreed natural resource condition that the Territory community is prepared to accept or aspire to and they will be objective measures of progress in putting the Plan into action. In essence, Targets must be S.M.A.R.T. – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-conscious.

The three types of targets for Regional INRM plans are:

- *Aspirational Targets*: long term (50+ years) visionary wishes for the Territory;
- *Resource Condition Targets*: specific, achievable and measurable goals detailing the desired resource condition to be achieved over a 10-20 year period; and
- *Management Action Targets*: set over a 1-5 year period to help reach the Resource Condition targets.

A set of actions also accompany each management action target and outline the tasks required to meet the targets (see Diagram 1.1 at the end of this chapter for an overview of the planning framework).

***All Territorians need to engage in the development and implementation of this Plan to achieve sustainable and integrated natural resource management***

## Process for developing the Plan

Community engagement and participation have been critical in the development of the INRM Plan. We would like to acknowledge some of the unavoidable constraints to getting comprehensive community input into the plan:

- a relatively short planning timeframe; and
- the logistical difficulty of trying to engage and involve all stakeholders in developing the plan.

Consultation with Aboriginal and other remote communities was undertaken primarily through input from Land Councils and through Regional and Indigenous Land Management Facilitators and land management organisations. It was unfortunately not possible within these timeframes to visit all remote communities within the Territory.

Whilst the consultation process was not perfect, it did allow for the identification of key NRM issues whilst highlighting the way forward for NRM in the Territory. Future consultation will continue to further these achievements, leading to an even stronger strategy for NRM in the NT.

The first public consultation phase for developing the Plan ran for approximately 12 weeks and involved:

- reviewing existing NRM plans and strategies to identify major issues, including successes, failures and gaps and developing a framework to guide the rest of the planning process;
- releasing a community information paper in early July 2004, based on information from previous community NRM consultations, to canvas the divergent views of the NT's environment and to encourage Territorians to try and work towards a shared vision for INRM;

- advertising the initial community workshops and the public exhibition phase in local newspapers and newsletters and sending brochures and letters to identified stakeholders;
- holding 32 public workshops across the Territory to discuss the values of our natural resources, the threats to these resources and potential strategies to manage these;
- holding eight technical workshops on specific issues to ensure the scientific validity of management targets;
- developing a website for up to date information on the INRM planning process, containing reference documents for the draft plan, links to other relevant sites, public meeting times and on-line community feedback forums;
- incorporating information gathered from both the community and technical workshops into the Plan and associated appendices; and reviewing an early draft through an independent Technical Review Panel.

Community Consultation Round 2 – The Draft INRM Plan, involved:

- 12 public open house meetings were held in regional centres and remote regions of the Northern Territory to present the draft INRM Plan;
- Ministerial Launch of public exhibition of draft INRM Plan;
- Advertising the public exhibition phase and open house meetings in local newspapers;
- Local Radio – Chairman LCNT was interviewed on the Country Hour
- Draft INRM Plan Availability in the format of hard copy, CD or off the webpage;
- Website – updated regularly
- Feedback on the plan was done by :
  - INRM Submission form, reply paid envelopes available

- own format
- return by fax, email, web submission, post
- the 1800 208 239 hotline

In Round 3, workshops were held to discuss the Regional Investment Strategy:

- Public Meetings were held in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs to present the structure and make up of the RIS. LCNT Chairman sent a letter to all stakeholders outlining the purpose of the RIS
- Public meetings were advertised widely in NT and regional papers
- Stakeholders were advised of the RIS meetings through the Facilitator newsletter and email networks
- RIS public meeting dates were publicised on the website
- Presentations from the RIS public meetings were posted on the website
- LCNT Chairman posted a letter on the website updating RIS process.

Appendix 2 contains full details of the community consultation and engagement process. We have built into the Plan a base for ongoing improvement in the quality of future consultation and engagement.

Under the Bilateral Agreement, the development of the NT's INRM Plan requires that our region has liaised with surrounding regions to ensure that each region's INRM Plan is compatible with the other. The Territory is bordered by five Natural Resource Management regions: Southern Gulf, Desert Channels, SA Arid Lands, Aboriginal Lands and Rangelands (WA). As of February 2005 consultation with each of these regions showed that their Plans were compatible with and complementary to the NT INRM Plan's outcomes.

## How to read this Plan

This Plan details key elements for INRM planning in the Territory. The main documents have been kept short to improve readability. More detailed and supporting information is provided in the appendices, which include descriptions of assets and threats and rationales for the Resource Condition Targets and the Management Action Targets, and in the Maps section.

The NHT process has defined 56 regions Australia-wide, with the Northern Territory being unique in having only one region declared within its borders. To avoid confusion over references to 'the NT region' as defined in the NHT process, this Plan refers to 'the Territory' or 'the NT'. The term 'region' will be confined to areas within the NT.

This INRM Plan has been developed in accordance with the criteria and mechanisms defined in the Bilateral Agreement. It:

- Identifies the Territory's natural assets, their condition and any threats and issues with their management;
- Actions focus on addressing the causes not just the symptoms of issues;
- Contains targets to monitor and manage the condition of natural resources;
- Integrates outcomes, the actions of which could be supported from a range of sources (including the NHT extension funds and other government programs);
- Incorporates existing natural resource plans and assists in filling knowledge gaps; and
- Helps educate and inform policy makers and the public about issues confronting the management of the territory's natural resources.

We recognise that not everyone will necessarily want to read the whole Plan and

so we provide a summary of what is in each chapter.

The main document contains nine chapters. This chapter covers the scope and purpose of the Plan, its guiding principles, how it was developed and how it ought to be read. Chapter 2 is an overview of the NT planning area and it provides the necessary context for the discussion on values and management issues in subsequent chapters. Chapters 3 to 7 describe the assets, threats to the assets and the current management arrangements. A set of targets is included in each asset chapter, along with the actions required to achieve them. The three types of targets included in the Plan are aspirational, resource condition and management action targets. They cover four focus areas: resource assessment, planning, on-ground works and capacity building.

Chapter 8 outlines the steps that will be involved in implementing the Plan and the process for reviewing it. Chapter 9 outlines the framework of a monitoring and evaluation strategy, which will allow the progress made in implementing the Plan to be tracked. Further details are provided in a separate 'Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy' document (in preparation).

Further detailed information to support the Plan is provided in the Appendices and we would recommend reading these as supplements to the chapters of the Plan.

*This Plan uses the term 'Aboriginal' inclusively for people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, except when it uses 'Indigenous' to refer to concepts like 'Indigenous knowledge' or 'Indigenous customary harvest', both accepted terms in the general literature. The Plan also draws on concepts of 'country' expressed by Aboriginal people and uses the term to convey land, sea, coastal and freshwater systems and the biodiversity they support.*

**Table 1.1: National Outcomes and Minimum Set of Regional Targets**

National Outcomes	Matters for which Regional Targets must be set
(The national outcomes are aspirational statements about desired national natural resource outcomes).	<b>Resource Condition Matters for Targets</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The impact of salinity on land and water resources is minimised, avoided or reduced.</li> <li>2. Biodiversity and the extent, diversity and condition of native ecosystems are maintained or rehabilitated.</li> <li>3. Populations of significant species and ecological communities are maintained or rehabilitated.</li> <li>4. Ecosystem services and functions are maintained or rehabilitated.</li> <li>5. Surface and groundwater quality is maintained or enhanced.</li> <li>6. The impact of threatening processes on locations and systems, which are critical for conservation of biodiversity, agricultural production, towns, infrastructure and cultural and social values, is avoided or minimised.</li> <li>7. Surface water and groundwater is securely allocated for sustainable production purposes and to support human uses and the environment, within the sustainable capacity of the water resource.</li> <li>8. Sustainable production systems are developed and management practices are in place, which maintain or rehabilitate biodiversity and ecosystem services, maintain or enhance resource quality, maintain productive capacity and prevent and manage degradation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Land salinity.</li> <li>2. Soil condition.</li> <li>3. Native vegetation communities' integrity.</li> <li>4. Inland aquatic ecosystems integrity (rivers and other wetlands).</li> <li>5. Estuarine, coastal and marine habitats integrity.</li> <li>6. Nutrients in aquatic environments.</li> <li>7. Turbidity / suspended particulate matter in aquatic environments.</li> <li>8. Surface water salinity in freshwater aquatic environments.</li> <li>9. Significant native species and ecological communities.</li> <li>10. Ecologically significant invasive species.</li> </ol>
	<b>Management Action Matters for Targets</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical assets identified and protected.</li> <li>2. Water allocation plans developed and implemented.</li> <li>3. Improved land and water management practices adopted.</li> </ol>

**Please note:** This table should be read in conjunction with the National NRM Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and the table describing "National Outcomes, Matters for Target and Performance Indicators (Commonwealth of Australia 2003).

**Diagram 1.1 Planning Framework**

