Final Report

De-risking Phase II: NT Through Sustainable Development Precincts

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Peer Review Statement

The CRCNA recognises the value of knowledge exchange and the importance of objective peer review. It is committed to encouraging and supporting its research teams in this regard.

The authors confirm that this document has been provided to CRCNA and project representatives for review.

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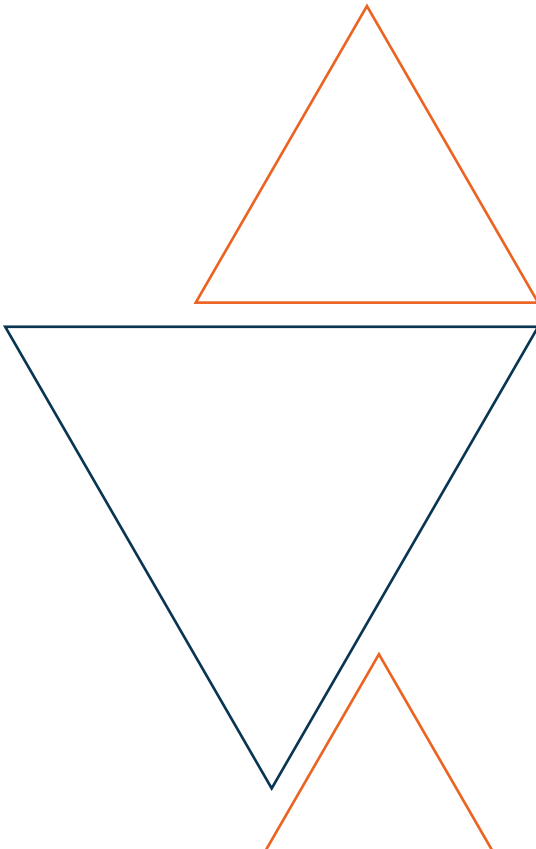
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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CDU	Charles Darwin University
CRCNA	Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DAF	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Northern Territory)
DDRF	Douglas Daly Research Farm
DLI	Department of Logistics and Infrastructure (Northern Territory)
DLPE	Department of Lands, Planning and Environment (Northern Territory)
DRMAC	Daly River Management Advisory Committee
DTBAR	Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations (Northern Territory)
EPBC	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Commonwealth)
DCCEEW	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (Commonwealth)
GL	Gigalitres
Ha	Hectares
JCU	James Cook University
MCA	Multi criteria analysis
NAMF	Northern Australia Ministerial Forum
NAUA	Northern Australia University Alliance
NESP	National Environmental Science Program
NLC	Northern Land Council
NT	Northern Territory
NTCA	Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association
NT Farmers	Northern Territory Farmers Association
ONA	Office of Northern Australia
RDANT	Regional Development Australia Northern Territory
SDP	Sustainable Development Precinct
TRaCK	Tropical Rivers and Catchments Knowledge research consortium
WABSI	Western Australian Biodiversity Science Institute

Definitions

Economic Strategy	NT Government's Rebuilding the Economy: Northern Territory Economic Strategy 2025
Phase I	De-risking, brokering and prioritising agricultural development in the Northern Territory by NAJA Business Consulting Services
Phase II	De-risking Phase II: NT Through Sustainable Development Precincts
Regional Plan	Development of a regional economic development plan that forms its own policy settings and enables economic development and protects important environmental and cultural assets
The project	De-risking Phase II: NT Through Sustainable Development Precincts



L to R: Jim Turnour, James Cook University, Anthony Curro, CRCNA, Nicole Paas, Northern Territory Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Allan Dale, CRCNA at Oolloo Crossing, Douglas Daly

Project Participants

The project team would like to thank the project participants for their invaluable contributions, time and commitment throughout the duration of this project. Their active engagement, feedback and willingness to collaborate have been essential in driving meaningful progress and ensuring the project's recommendations are informed by a broad range of perspectives and across sector insights.

- Northern Territory Government agencies
- Charles Darwin University (CDU)
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
- Douglas Daly property owners
- Environment Centre NT (ECNT)
- James Cook University (JCU)
- Northern Land Council (NLC)
- Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA)
- Northern Territory Farmers Association
- Regional Development Australia NT (RDANT)

"Now is the time to establish a system of agricultural economic development planning in the Northern Territory."



Foreword

Northern Australia has always presented vast and unique opportunities that have long been recognised but remain largely unrealised. Policy makers have highlighted the complexities of developing Northern Australia, including the opportunities it presents and the accompanying challenges that exist.

Now is the time to establish a system of agricultural economic development planning in the Northern Territory (NT). This will enable a new policy system to be developed; which acknowledges the reality that Australia's agricultural landscape is diverse; that the challenges of developing agriculture in the NT are unique; and that a one-size-fits-all approach to policy does not promote sustainable agricultural development in the North.

This will likely entail place-based and purpose-built policies that recognise the potential of each jurisdiction, their regions, and industries. The introduction of nature repair and carbon markets provides a timely opportunity to rethink how we approach land development and advance sustainable agriculture in Northern Australia

Territory landscapes, with their mosaic approach to agriculture, means that not every part of the landscape will – or should, ever – be developed. With only 0.22 percent of land cleared for agricultural production (DLPE, 2024), and two distinct climate zones, the NT is far from comparable to other states and territories in Australia. Road infrastructure and conditions in the NT are also highly variable and through the Top End's wet season, road conditions and closures are subject to rapid change. Despite this, the NT's successes and challenges continue to be benchmarked against the other states.

In developing this report, we have found ourselves in a desirable position: engaging with the regulators responsible for implementing and overseeing the system, while walking alongside the farmers who experience its impacts firsthand. These farmers know their land intimately and steward it with a deep sense of responsibility. However, it has become clear that the current system does not always operate in the best interests of the land, nor those who care for it.

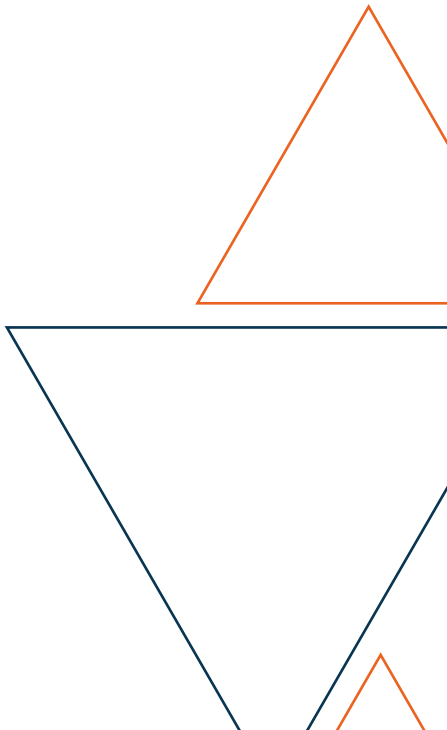
The voices and interests of Aboriginal Territorians must also be central to this conversation. Around 48% of the NT is tenured as inalienable Aboriginal freehold land, including around 80% of the NT's coastline (NTG, 2025), which is managed under trust in accordance with the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976*. As a significant land holder and with strong cultural history, Aboriginal people can provide deep knowledge of the land that can strengthen agricultural development outcomes.

The diversity of Aboriginal knowledge and interests need to be fully considered. Ongoing inclusion in the process of land development policy can also foster opportunities of genuine Aboriginal-led economic development on Aboriginal land.

By bringing agricultural producers, Traditional Owners and government agencies together, we can make genuine progress towards better regional economic, environmental and social outcomes.

The CRCNA Phase I report, published in 2020, identified the key challenges facing the NT agriculture industry, and specifically the Douglas Daly region in the Top End. This report (Phase II) builds on this work and outlines a clear and achievable pathway for regional economic development in agriculture - one that trusts both farmers, regulators, and Aboriginal Territorians to deliver appropriate outcomes. It must strike the right balance between protecting environmental and cultural values while enabling sustainable economic growth.

Through delivery of this report by the NT Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, it has become evident that there is a need for both wider stakeholder facilitation and substantive policy thinking and reforms beyond the current frameworks that reside in the Northern Territory. Agricultural producers must be part of the conversation, as must regulators, but they cannot and should not carry this burden alone. Policy development must involve all stakeholders to ensure it is fair, considered and equitable. Industry bodies have an important role to play, but impartial facilitation is critical. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, through a dedicated land and industry development function, has assumed the role of guiding these processes — delivering outcomes that are balanced, robust, and in the best interests of the Northern Territory.



Executive Summary

The CRCNA De-risking *Phase II: NT Through Sustainable Development* Project is a collaboration between the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) Industry Development team, CRCNA, James Cook University (JCU), and other Northern Territory Government agencies.

The Northern Territory-focused project is part of a wider collaboration between the CRCNA and the Northern Territory (NT), Queensland (QLD) and Western Australia (WA) governments to enable knowledge sharing and collaborative approaches to support sustainable agricultural development across Northern Australia.

This project is also the extension of the 'De-risking, *Brokering and Prioritising Agricultural Development* in the Northern Territory' project completed by NAJA Business Consulting Services (Phase I). The Phase I report explored barriers to agricultural development in the following areas:

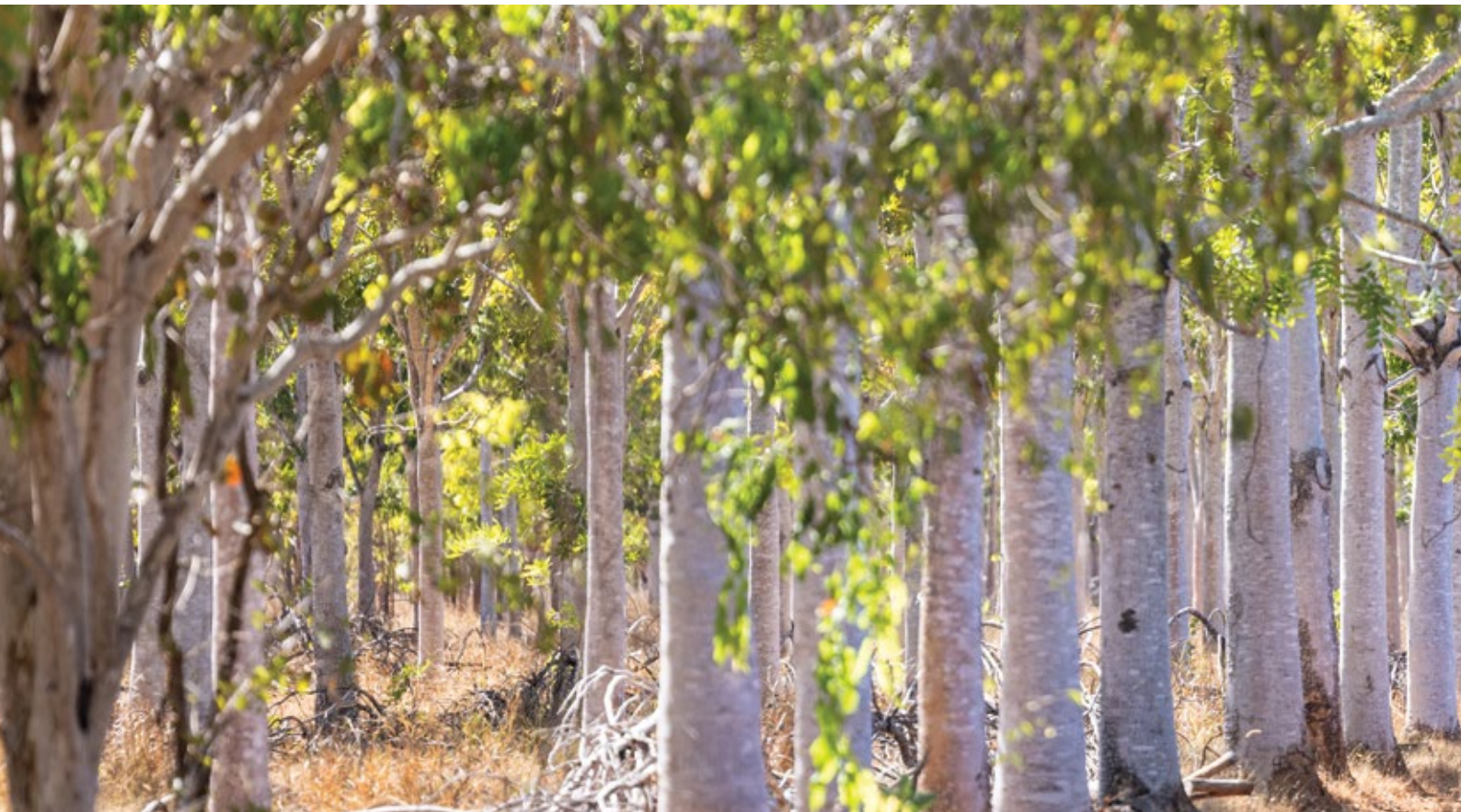
- Complex land tenure arrangements
- Limited understanding of water availability and soil suitability
- Secure water rights and water infrastructure
- Transport and communications infrastructure
- Supportive regulatory environment
- Supportive investment environment

The Phase II Project aims to answer the central research question:

"How can improved prioritisation and planning practice support new Sustainable Development Precincts in the Northern Territory?"

To address the central research question, the project focussed on establishing a sustainable agriculture development precinct with clearly defined outcomes aimed at overcoming the barriers identified in the Phase I report.

As the project evolved, a clear development pathway emerged, highlighting the necessity of a robust planning framework supported by policy that enables economic growth. This framework must also ensure water security, comprehensive land resource mapping, integrated transport and communications infrastructure, and provisions for future expansion, all while preserving vital environmental and cultural values.



The Douglas Daly region was selected as the case study area to advance research, focused on improving planning practices for agricultural development, as it is recognised as one of the most prospective agricultural regions in the NT. The case study presents an overview of the region's historical context, water and soil resource information, and identifies the key challenges that face agricultural development progression in the region.

While previous coordination efforts have been fragmented and have not unlocked the regions full potential, the current context presents a unique opportunity. The region's unzoned status and absence of a local government authority allows for the creation of a tailored, regional planning framework. This flexibility, if strategically harnessed, can enable coordinated growth, maintain agility in responding to local needs, and create a more attractive environment for investment. However, aging road infrastructure remains a limiting factor, underscoring the need for a comprehensive planning approach that supports infrastructure renewal and long-term regional connectivity.

To guide solutions, this report presents a set of recommendations designed to strike a balance between environmental and cultural values and sustainable economic development. These recommendations are informed by extensive collaboration with local farmers, industry and other key stakeholders, whose contributions have been integral throughout the case study process.

The report proposes the development of a regional economic development planning framework for the Douglas Daly region to support informed policy decisions and enable coordinated development in the absence of a statutory planning instrument.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen the central development function within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to advance economic growth in agriculture.
2. Develop a strategic framework outlining the core components of a regional economic development plan tailored to the Douglas Daly region, linking with regional economic development plans under the NT Government's Economic Strategy.
3. Through ongoing implementation of Recommendation 2 (above), utilise the Douglas Daly region as the best practice benchmark for ongoing regional planning for agriculture.
4. Advocate for targeted infrastructure upgrades within the Douglas Daly region to support long-term development.
5. Establish the Douglas Daly Research Farm (DDRF) as a sustainable and best practice research and development (R&D) facility.
6. Invest in the capacity building for Traditional Owners to ensure inclusive and culturally responsive development.

Further detail and proposed pathways for implementation are outlined in the Recommendations section of the report.

This planning framework will complement proposed regional economic development planning, a strategic initiative under the NT Government's *Rebuilding the Economy: Northern Territory Economic Strategy 2025* (Economic Strategy), intended to unlock regional growth.



Introduction

The Northern Territory (NT) remains largely undeveloped in terms of agricultural development, with only 0.22 percent of its land cleared for agricultural production and just 0.3 percent cleared for infrastructure such as major townships and roads (DLPE, 2024).

Yet, its potential for agricultural expansion is considerable, with significant opportunities to grow a sustainable and prosperous agricultural sector that can unlock regional economic potential.

Recognising this opportunity, the NT Government's 2025 *Rebuilding the Economy: Northern Territory Economic Strategy 2025* positions agriculture as a strategic priority sector for driving regional growth. Agriculture is a large contributor to regional economic growth through the farming industry and associated support and logistics services.

However, development in the NT is increasingly contested, with strong advocacy to keep the landscapes intact and undeveloped. This report aims to outline clear pathways that balance economic opportunity and preservation of environmental and cultural values, guided by input from both the community and industry.

Delivered in partnership with the CRCNA, this report outlines the findings of the Phase II *De-risking the NT through Sustainable Development Precincts* project. It builds on the outcomes of Phase I and aligns with broader national efforts to coordinate growth across Northern Australia.

DAF, in its role as an industry facilitator, is uniquely positioned to drive sector growth as the conduit between farmers, industry and Aboriginal Territorians, helping to unlock opportunities that enable inclusive, regionally led growth. Strategically, DAF's Industry Development team brings broad knowledge and skills in land development, project facilitation, market development, economic analysis and planning. This capability, coupled with DAF's facilitation role, makes it an effective enabler of growth.

The NT's agricultural industry is currently valued at $1.4 billion and is projected to reach around

$2 billion by the end of the decade. Without the implementation of the actions and recommendations outlined in this report, the agricultural industry may continue to see growth but not at the levels required to support regional economic growth outcomes within the NT.

There is also an immense opportunity for Aboriginal Territorians to drive self-determined agricultural development and enterprise on their land, fostering economic empowerment, employment, training and skills for Aboriginal Territorians on country.

While statutory planning has been completed in urban centres, regional planning is limited and is not within the jurisdiction of local government. This report presents a framework to address that gap and build coordinated, sustainable, and regionally led agricultural development across the NT.

The potential economic value of this planning framework will be significant in the NT.

The implementation of the framework will boost economic growth and attract further investment by creating a more attractive and predictable investment environment. A well-structured planning framework will lead to increased productivity within the region, job creation, and a more resilient economy.



$1.4B

Current value of the NT agricultural industry — projected to grow to $2 billion by 2030



0.22%

of NT land is cleared for agricultural production (DLPE, 2024)

Approach

To support the objectives of this report, a comprehensive program of research and collaboration was undertaken. These activities resulted in a suite of publications and findings that collectively inform the recommendations presented.

Through research collaboration with the project participants the team developed the following:

- **Appendix A: Best Practice in Precinct Planning**

  Outline the features and principles integral to the successful development of a sustainable precinct model.

- **Appendix B: Multi Criteria Analysis**

  Develop a framework for assessment of assets that could form a defined precinct area and assess the opportunities to determine the priority case study area.

- **Appendix C: Douglas Daly Case Study**

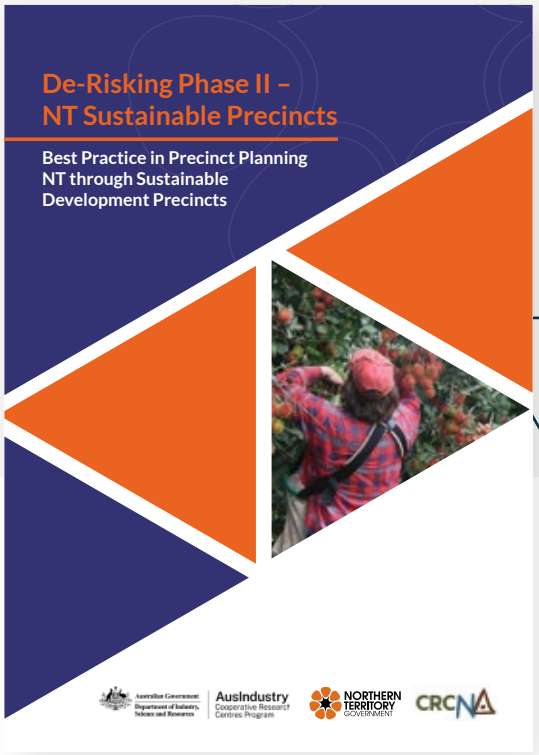
  Provides an overview of the Douglas Daly region, including its development history and future opportunities for agricultural growth and diversification.

In addition to internal project outputs, further research was undertaken in collaboration with the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) and CRCNA that align with the case study region and agricultural de-risking efforts. These research partnerships supported deeper analysis of planning challenges and opportunities in the case study region, resulting in the following supporting studies:

- **Appendix D: Supporting Regional Planning in Northern Australia: A scoping study**
- **Appendix E: Strengthening regional planning and development assessment in the Douglas Daly region of the Northern Territory: Analysis Report**
- **Appendix F: Strengthening regional planning and development assessment in the Douglas Daly region of the Northern Territory: Solutions Report**

Together, these resources provide a robust foundation for advancing regional planning and de-risking agricultural development in the NT.

"These resources provide a robust foundation for advancing regional planning and de-risking agricultural development in the NT.



Best Practice in Precinct Planning

Successful regional development is underpinned by effective strategic planning, to ensure that growth is sustainable, efficient and well-integrated.

Well-planned precincts foster connectivity, encourage multi sector investment, and provide essential services that cater to evolving needs. Without strategic planning, growth can become fragmented, leading to inefficiencies, environmental degradation, and missed economic potential.

Currently, regional planning outside of the town areas of Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield, Katherine and Alice Springs is limited. This has highlighted the need for a specific precinct-based planning model to support economic growth sectors to provide certainty for investors and a framework that preserves environmental and cultural values.

To address this, the Best Practice in Precinct Planning approach at **Appendix A** was developed during the initial stages of the project to support the identification of Sustainable Development Precincts (SDP).

The SDP concept applies a master planning methodology to identify and activate precinct parameters for development potential that are investment-ready and suited to diversified agricultural development.

Integral features of a SDP include:

- suitable soils and availability of water
- proximity to transport and logistics corridors
- compatibility with environmental and cultural values
- existing or planned infrastructure (e.g. communications, power, accommodation, workforce access, markets)
- readiness to support both large and small-scale development
- ease of access to existing business or supporting services

The NT's landscape characteristics do not provide the opportunity for large-scale, contiguous agricultural development and is more suited to a strategic development approach. To reflect this, precincts were identified surrounding established communities with supporting infrastructure. Northern area precincts have a smaller extent than the southern regions due to the ability to intensify. The precinct areas are diverse with an existing mix of land uses and zonings and include potential brownfield and greenfield development sites.

The key purpose of precinct planning is to provide de-risked land that is investment-ready and suitable for purpose. An evidence-based approach underpins the SDP framework, combining technical land and water assessments with economic viability analysis.

Ideally, planned precincts would be released to market with:

- land parcels sized for development and market
- tenure suitable for development for the relevant industries
- land zoned suitably for development for the relevant industries
- suitable and available water resources
- specific soil suitability studies
- environmental approvals in place prior to land release
- Native Title approvals in place prior to land release
- Aboriginal land claims (including any nearby beds and banks) finalised
- land clearing permits approved
- infrastructure (water, energy, communication) that is reliable and suitable for use
- all-weather road access
- supply chain opportunities for access to market
- community infrastructure
- available workforce
- acknowledgment and consideration for areas of cultural and environmental significance.

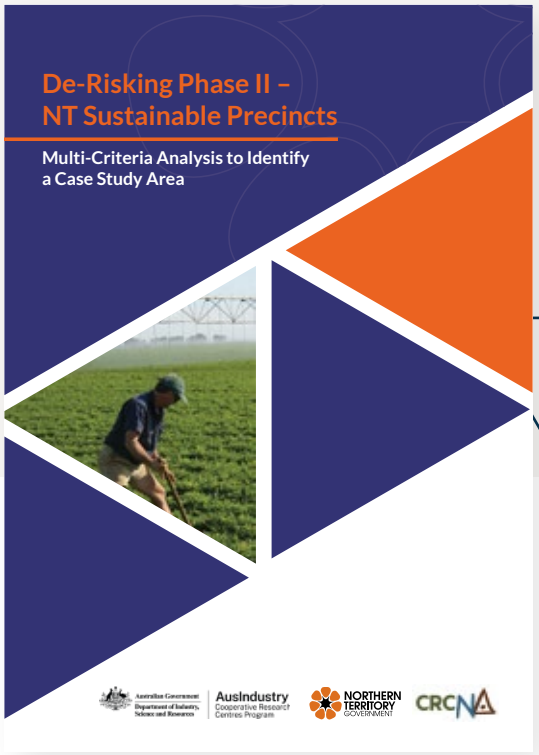
The SDP model creates the potential for agricultural development on private, pastoral, Crown and Aboriginal land through government assistance for investors. This assistance will provide a clear pathway through regulatory processes.

Key issues that will determine the success of the SDP model were raised in the Phase I report and have been identified as issues that will need to be addressed as part of this program of ongoing work.

As precinct planning progresses, these practices will evolve, with the case study area serving as a pilot to refine and scale the SDP model. By identifying and activating strategically located, investment-ready land, SDPs provide a platform for balanced, sustainable development that ensures a sensible approach to development while protecting environmental and cultural values.

"The key purpose of precinct planning is to provide de-risked land that is investment-ready and suitable for purpose."





Multi-Criteria Analysis

The Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) at **Appendix B** was developed based on the principles of the Sustainable Development Precinct (SDP) model to identify a priority region for piloting improved planning and sustainable agricultural development. Its aim was to build a robust evidence base to inform the selection of a significant case study area that could demonstrate best practice in precinct planning.

Government agencies collaborated to develop the assessment criteria. DLPE were integral throughout the research phase, providing technical expertise, data and analysis through extensive mapping of the land soil types, agricultural suitability assessments, and water resources mapping. The analysis considered various completed studies, such as:

- land use planning
- soil and land resources
- Historical Mapping the Future program
- vegetation
- water resources
- water allocation planning
- biodiversity
- sacred sites

Priority assessment criteria

Three criteria were identified as essential to enable successful and sustainable agricultural development:

- Soil quality and volume/area – suitable soil is the vital foundation for vegetation and agriculture, supporting the security of food, animal feed, fuel, natural fibres and a range of ecosystem functions. Without good soils, farming efforts can be futile.
- Water availability – irrigated agricultural production requires access to quality water. Without it, agribusiness is limited to dryland or livestock production.
- Logistics routes for all weather access – reliable logistical routes are critical for the timely delivery of agricultural products in good condition. The same is true for the provision of goods and services to the farming site and surrounding community.

"Without good soils, farming efforts can be futile."

Supporting assessment criteria

Additional factors were considered to determine the most viable area to undertake the case study location:

- Land suitable for agricultural development – relative to the priority criteria of water and soil studies that specifically identify areas suitable for development, this land may form a mosaic structure across the greater region and ideally have sufficient supply/area to support agricultural activities.
- Land tenure – private, Crown, pastoral and Aboriginal land
- Existing infrastructure (power, water, roads and communications) – the presence of amenities already at or around the site typically reduces both expenditure and level of work required to create investment-ready land and indicates the existence of some form of established community nearby.
- Market opportunities – depending on the location and type of agricultural product the opportunity varies significantly between crops and regions. This is especially the case with horticulture where early seasonal maturity provides a market premium. While the NT is close to Southeast Asian markets, there are numerous supply chain considerations to be overcome.
- Workforce availability or attraction potential – attracting, housing, and retaining workers depends on access to established communities that offer social and financial benefits.

Precinct identification

Eleven precinct areas were identified through the multi-criteria analysis, based on priority assessment criteria and supporting assessment criteria. These include both established and prospective precincts, highlighting ongoing sustainable development opportunities in existing precincts.

Further opportunities for agricultural development may exist outside of these precinct areas.

The below table provides the areas identified, and whether it is an existing or new precinct:

Precinct Location	Existing/Future
Barkly	Future
Douglas Daly	Existing
Gunn Point Agricultural Precinct	Existing
Katherine	Existing
Lambells Lagoon Horticultural Precinct	Existing
Larrimah Agricultural Precinct	Existing
Marrakai Heights	Future
Marrakai Downs	Future
Mataranka	Existing
Western Davenport	Existing
Wildman Agriculture Precinct	Existing

Table 1 - Identified precinct areas

Case Study Selection

Following a comprehensive evidence-based multi-criteria analysis, the Douglas Daly region was selected as the case study area to pilot improved planning and support the sustainable growth of agriculture in the NT.

The Douglas Daly is the most extensively studied region in the NT from an agricultural perspective, however a comprehensive assessment of its development potential has not been fully consolidated. This lack of integration further justified the region's selection as a focus for best practice planning to determine the development potential of the region alongside environmental and cultural values.

The decision was also influenced by a combination of deteriorating infrastructure, suitable soils that are not under agricultural production and the clear needs identified within the local community.



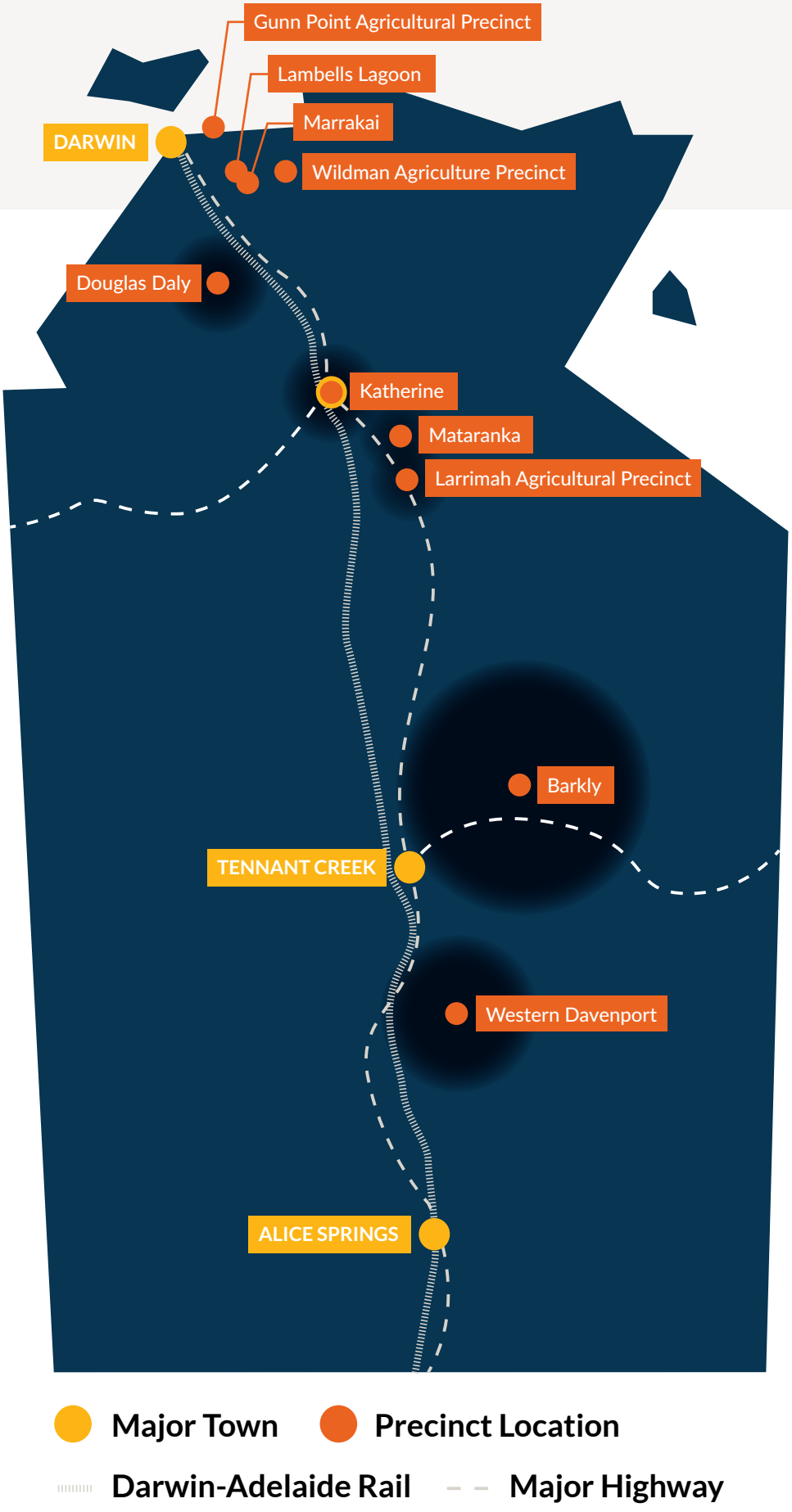
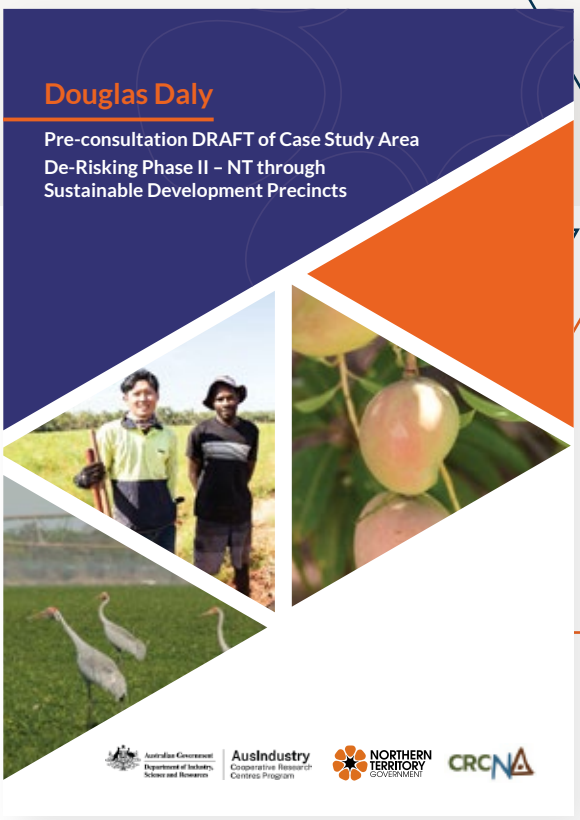


Figure 1 – NT Precinct Map

Case Study Area: Douglas Daly region



The purpose of the Douglas Daly case study is to provide a comprehensive foundation for strategic planning and stakeholder engagement within the region. It provides a comprehensive overview of the region's history, development, current land uses, natural resource availability, and environmental and cultural significance.

From this foundation, the project aims to investigate, co-design, and collaborate with stakeholders to uncover key strengths, opportunities, and challenges within the region and the broader NT agricultural sector.

The central objective is to stimulate growth and support expansion for existing landowners, especially in areas with potential for further agricultural development and diversification. By highlighting the role of sustainable precinct models, the case study also explores how such approaches can deliver meaningful benefits to landowners and contribute to broader regional advancement.

Prepared in advance of the stakeholder engagement phase, the case study informed discussions by presenting relevant context and enabling participants to share their preferences, limitations, and lived experiences. These insights focus on unlocking opportunities for land use that can strengthen and guide long-term development in the Douglas Daly region and across the NT.

The Region

The Douglas Daly region is well known for agricultural production and has evolved since its initial development for horticulture in the 1980s. From the early cropping era to cattle grazing and assorted horticulture, the district has progressed to become one of the NT's key valuable agricultural production areas.

Early development, led by the former Agricultural Development and Marketing Authority (ADMA) in the 1980s established project farms focused on broadacre grain cropping under strict lease conditions. Infrastructure such as on-farm facilities and grain depots were established, but limited market access, unsuitable farming practices, and isolation led many early farmers to exit the region.

A second stage of land release known as Stray Creek in the early 2000s introduced several freehold parcels with mandated development conditions to encourage investment and growth.

While cattle production remains the prominent industry, Douglas Daly has become a diversified agricultural region with other enterprises emerging. Surrounding pastoral properties have expanded operations past cattle production and diversified in various horticulture projects.

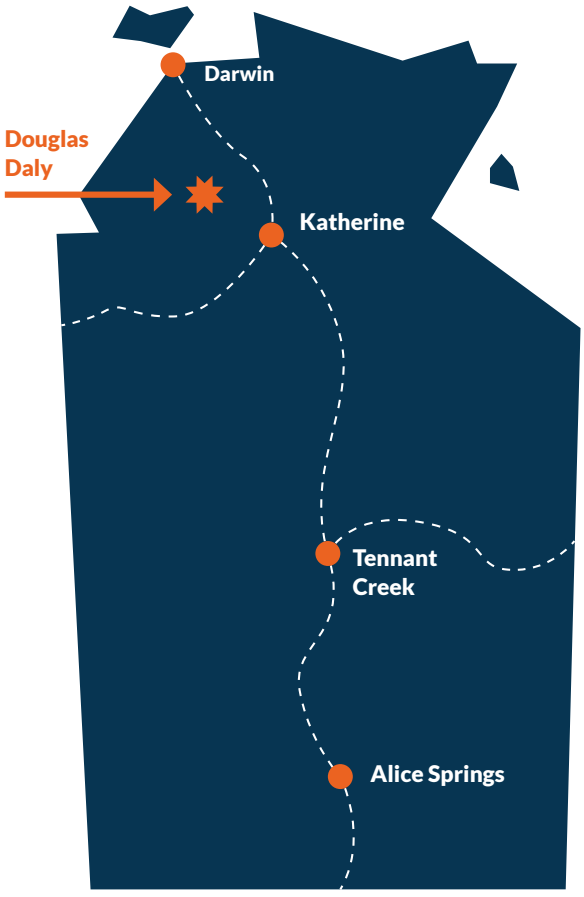


Figure 2 – Douglas Daly locality map

Tenure

The Douglas Daly case study area features a mix of land tenures, including freehold, pastoral leasehold, and Aboriginal land trusts.

The most prominent land use across the freehold properties is cattle production on improved pastures alongside a variety of other agricultural enterprises, such as hay, fodder and forestry (African mahogany and sandalwood), and intensive horticulture including melons, pumpkins, turf and cotton.

Surrounding pastoral leases include Douglas, Douglas West, Douglas River, Jindare, Claravale, Dorisvale, Tipperary East and Tipperary West Stations. Adjacent to these are the Upper Daly Aboriginal Land Trust and Wagiman Aboriginal Land Trust, with a number of Section 19 grazing leases to adjoining landowners.

The Douglas Daly Research Farm (DDRF) spanning 3,100 hectares, supports research and extension activities focused on beef production, fodder crops, and agricultural diversification.

With about 2,500 hectares of cleared land, DDRF conducts trials on agricultural systems, irrigated cropping, and cattle performance including crossbreeding and rotational grazing strategies.

Infrastructure

The region's road network includes both sealed and unsealed surfaces. Many unsealed roads are in poor condition and pose access challenges even during the dry season, highlighting the need for targeted upgrades to improve year-round connectivity. Telecommunications coverage is limited, and while some areas have mains electricity, most properties still rely on generators for power.

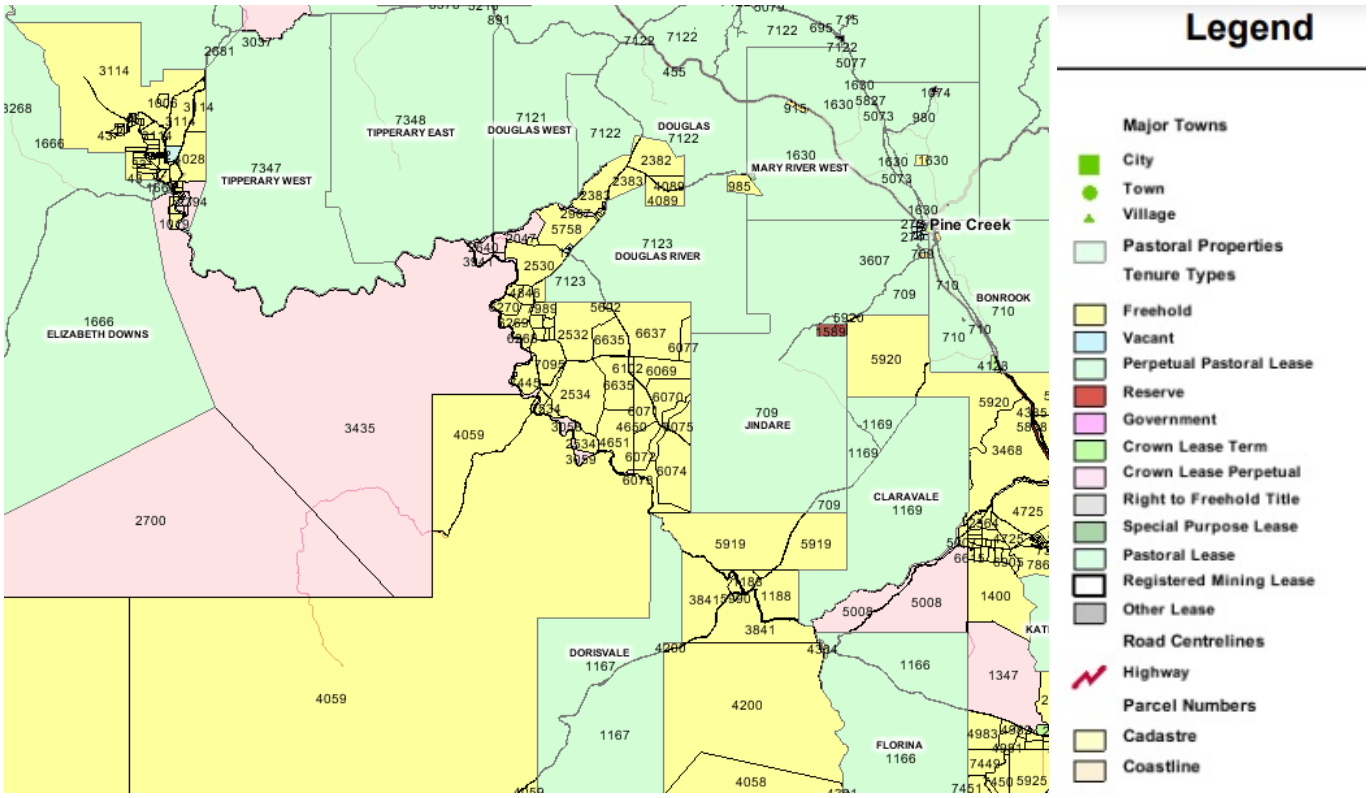


Figure 3 – Land tenure type map

Water

The region relies heavily on water sourced from both groundwater and surface water systems.

The Oolloo Dolostone aquifer, a key karstic formation within the Daly groundwater basin, underpins agricultural production by providing a reliable, high-quality water supply with low salinity and strong yields.

The groundwater aquifer sustains dry season flows in the Daly River, one of northern Australia's few large perennial river systems known for its ecological and cultural importance.

The Oolloo Dolostone Water Allocation Plan 2019-2029 guides the sustainable management of the aquifer, balancing environmental, cultural, and consumptive needs while enabling water trading within the plan area.

An Aboriginal Water Reserve is also within this framework, reserving a portion of the consumptive pool for exclusive use or trade by eligible Aboriginal landholders. The reserve and broader allocations are reviewed regularly to ensure long-term water security and equitable access.

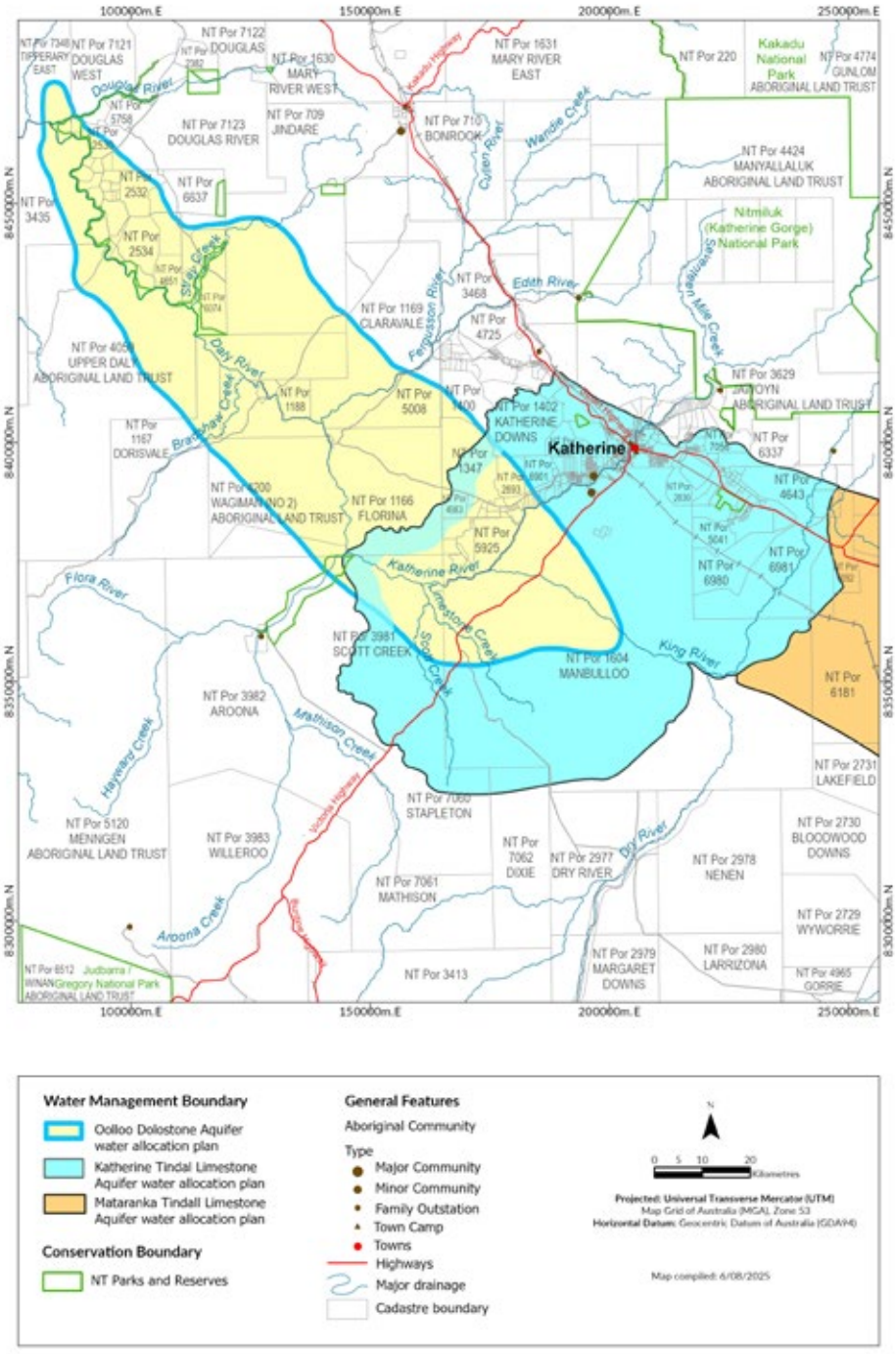


Figure 4 – Oolloo Dolostone Aquifer Water Allocation Plan Boundary map

Source: Oolloo Dolostone Aquifer Water Allocation Plan 2019-2029.

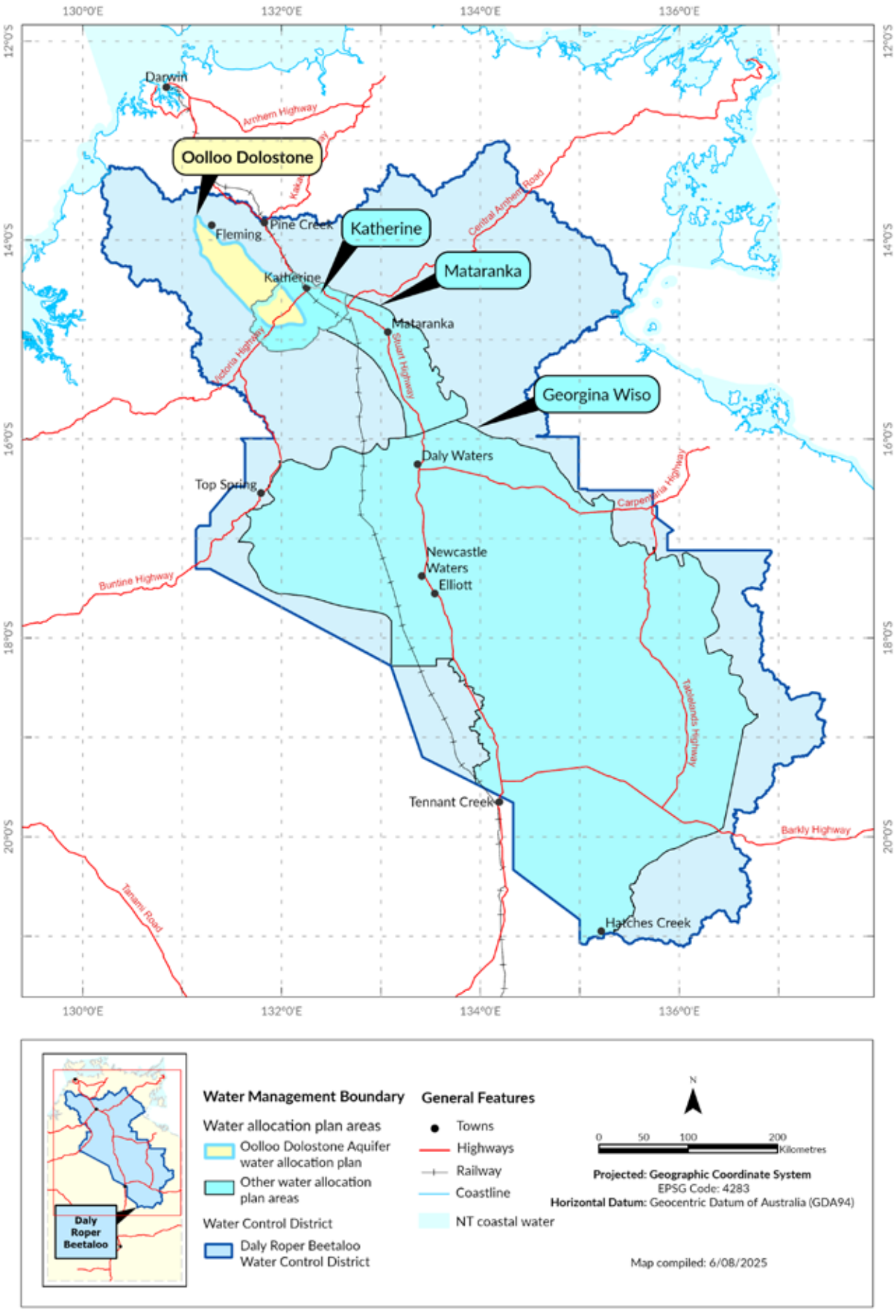
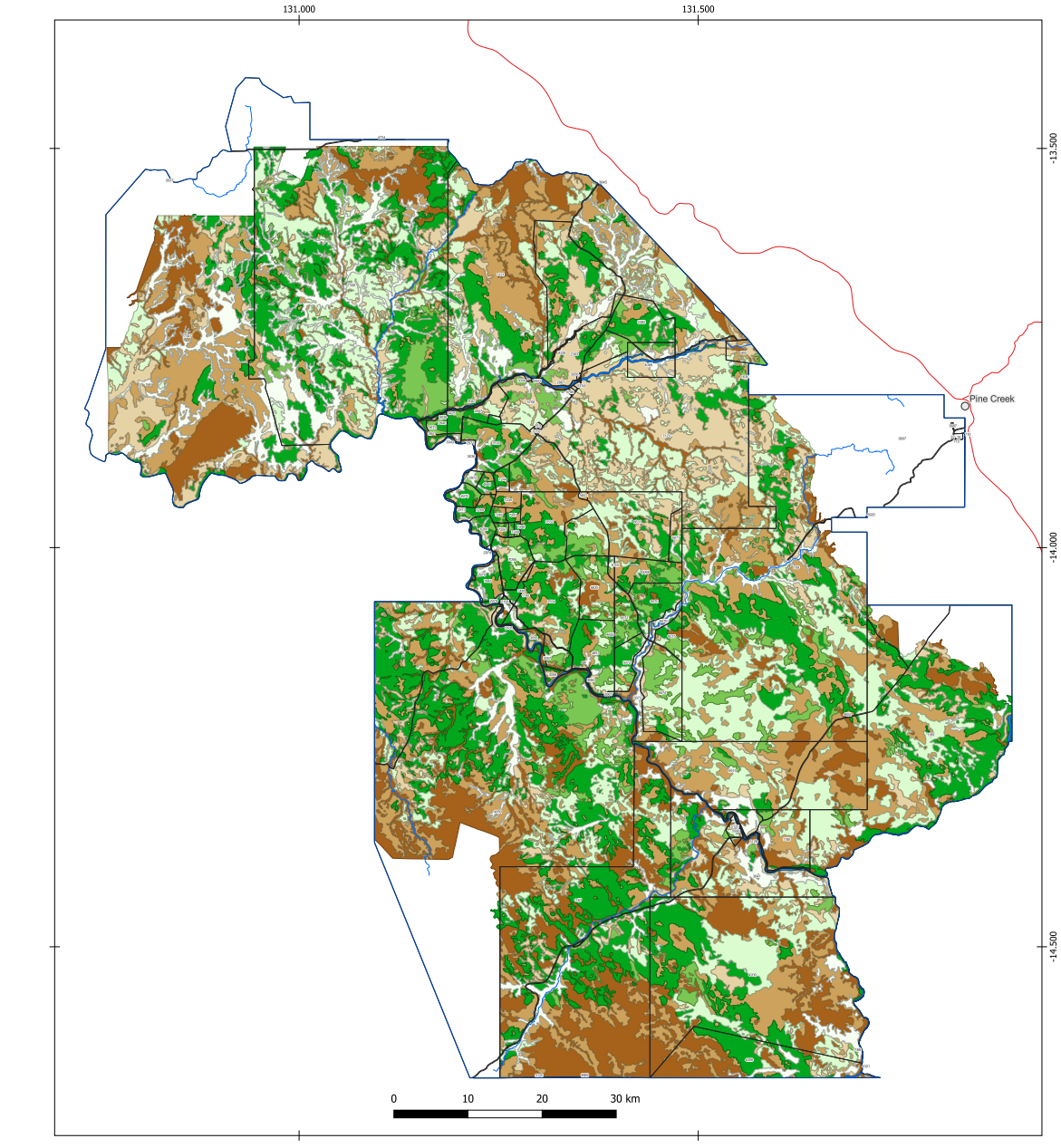


Figure 5 – Oolloo Dolostone Aquifer plan area in the Daly Roper Beetaloo Water Control District map

Source: Oolloo Dolostone Aquifer Water Allocation Plan 2019-2029.

Soil

The dominant land systems in the region are Blain soils of various sub-classifications. Blaine soils are typically deep sandy red Kandosols. They are characterised by being highly siliceous at the surface, earthy, increasing to clay loam subsoil. Though low in fertility and water-holding capacity, these well-drained, moderately acidic soils are well-suited to overhead irrigation and have demonstrated strong productivity for broadacre cropping and horticulture in the Top End.



Symbol	Class	Class Description
	A	Arable with few or slight limitations.
	B	Arable with slight to moderate limitations.
	BW	Land with seasonal waterlogging and/or inundation limitations but possibly has pasture potential.
	C	Marginally arable suited to permanent improved pastures given minimal soil disturbance at establishment.
	CW	Land with seasonal waterlogging and/or inundation limitations.
	D	Non-arable, marginal country potentially suitable for rough native pasture grazing or surface-established semi-improved pastures at low stocking rates.
	E	Non-agricultural or at best rough grazing of native pasture.
	Water Body	Water Body

Figure 6 – Soil classification map

Conservation areas

The region contains several conservation areas that protect key sections of the Douglas and Daly Rivers systems. These include the Douglas River/Daly River Esplanade, Stray Creek, Tjuwaliyn (Douglas) Hot Springs, Butterfly Gorge Nature Park, and Umbrawarra Gorge Nature Park.

The Daly River middle reaches are declared a conservation site of national significance with stretches flowing through the Tipperary and Fish River pastoral properties.

Flora and fauna

The region supports diverse flora and fauna, including several threatened species. The Daly River hosts eight of the Northern Territory's nine species of freshwater turtle species, notably the pig nosed turtle which is an internationally significant species. The river is also home to two nationally threatened elasmobranchs: the critically endangered freshwater whipray and the vulnerable freshwater sawfish. Additionally, the Daly River is a popular recreational fishery, particularly known for barramundi.

Heritage

The region includes several NT declared heritage sites of historical significance.

- Fenton Airfield, a former WWII bomber base located on Douglas Station and accessible via Oolloo Road.
- B24-D Liberator wreck "Nothing Sacred" The crash site of the "Nothing Sacred" is located on Douglas West Station, around 4.8km northwest of the Heritage listed WWII Fenton Airfield.

Douglas Station also features historic gold mining sites. Other WWII history in the greater area includes the nearby Adelaide River War Cemetery which is a Commonwealth heritage listed site.



Stakeholder Engagement

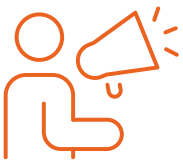
Stakeholder insights are essential for shaping strategies that promote meaningful development in Douglas Daly and across the NT. The consultation throughout the project engaged residents and industry stakeholders in the Douglas Daly region through key questions and projected outcomes.



Objectives

The objectives of the stakeholder engagement and co-design process were to:

- Seek input and generate ideas from stakeholders on the case study area identified, with the goal to identify the strengths, opportunities and challenges across the region and broader NT agricultural industry
- Pursue input from stakeholders on best practice precinct planning
- Establish relationships with key stakeholders to inform future decision making
- Validate concepts
- Build confidence and trust in the department, through implementing a transparent consultation process.



Approach

In line with the stakeholder engagement plan, stakeholders were asked open ended questions through individual semi-structured interviews.

Stakeholders were provided with:

- Engagement questions specific to their involvement and knowledge of the agricultural sector. i.e. industry or grower
- The draft Douglas Daly pre-consultation case study document including data on the region, its history, the lands current uses, natural resources, and opportunities and constraints.

Stakeholders were asked to provide input and feedback on the draft case study document and given the opportunity to share their experiences through the stakeholder questions, to assist in affecting change. The intent of the engagement was to create a research and action plan with key priority outcomes to support emerging issues facing the region in a precinct development context.

Stakeholders

Internal (NT Government)	External
• Chief Minister and Cabinet • Chief Minister and Cabinet – Strategic Aboriginal Policy • DLPE – Rangelands Division • DLPE – Office of Water Security • DTBAR – Opportunity Activation • DLI – Planning • DLI – Land Development	• Douglas Daly property owners/lessees • NT Farmers Association • NT Cattlemen's Association • Northern Land Council • Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation • Environment Centre NT • Charles Darwin University • Other key stakeholders as required

Table 2 - Stakeholders

Process

Stakeholder engagement was undertaken as per the engagement plan formulated with the DAF Communications Team to ensure the engagement met the requirements of the project milestones, while ensuring government policies and procedures were adhered to.

Internal engagement with other NT Government agencies was completed through a Precinct Steering Committee as well as separate conversations with relevant stakeholders.

Stage 1

Stage 1 of external stakeholder engagement commenced in November 2022, which included key industry bodies:

- Regional Development Australia Northern Territory (RDANT),
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO),
- NT Farmers Association,
- Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) and
- Environment Centre NT (ECNT).

Stage 2

Stage 2 consultation commenced in July 2023, with on-property meetings held with Douglas Daly growers. DAF Industry Development representatives were accompanied by a representative from NT Farmers Association for these introductions. These conversations provided further insight into the opportunities and limitations of the region and the NT's agriculture industry in general. Growers were also provided the opportunity to provide general feedback on the Douglas Daly Research Farm (DDRF) and how it can be best utilised to benefit the needs of the region, growers and industry.

Stage 2 also included engagement with the Northern Land Council (NLC), which focused on agricultural development and regional planning to facilitate economic opportunities on indigenous land.



Feedback

Various perspectives from the different Government, industry and grower stakeholder groups identified the strengths, opportunities and limitations across the case study region and broader NT agricultural industry. The Industry Development Team received tangible confirmation that this project holds very real potential for affecting change.

A summary of common themes throughout the stakeholder engagement were:

- social licence surrounding agriculture
- unclear regulatory processes
- market access and availability
- need for infrastructure upgrades
- building a sense of community
- environmental sensitivities
- pace of agricultural development

Participants provided feedback on the fundamentals of a sustainable development precinct.

Stage 2 Douglas Daly grower engagement summary:

Douglas Daly region
General comments about the region
• Tourism has decreased with the closure of the Hot Springs • Properties in region are mainly used for finishing cattle (final stage of beef production) rather than breeding • Crown land grain silo site – presents an opportunity and could be used to store fertiliser
General comments about own property/properties
• Considering how they can become carbon neutral to meet targets
What are the opportunities and how do they present themselves in a precinct area?
• Service industries could visit • Health care – the Adelaide River clinic used to send a nurse out to visit which is no longer
What would you like to see in the region?
Increase in tourism • More families return to the region • How could this be incentivised with current land values
What do you see as the current issues facing agricultural development in the Northern Territory?
• Timeframes - agriculture takes years to develop and water licences needs to consider this with monitoring and future plans • Uncertainty for growers – changing agendas and government staff turnover • Trust for the regulator - Hesitant to tell anyone anything as it may get taken off them
What new research programs would you like to see at the Research Farm?
• Cotton rotation crops and their sustainability • Research that is useful to growers in the region • Other crops such as fodder and fibre • Would like to see the irrigation infrastructure used for research purposes rather than commercial operations • Pilot a mapping project for the region – riparian areas, biodiversity etc.

Opportunities and limitations

What opportunities have you considered?

- Higher value horticulture eg. bananas and melons
- Agritourism
- Opportunities on Aboriginal land

What are the limitations you face?

- Road network inferior to support high value horticulture
- Closest fuel is 80km away
- Transport – not enough trucks
- Infrastructure - bridge across Daly River at Oolloo crossing to access Upper Daly ALT land
- Markets

Regulatory Processes

Are the guidelines and requirements of processes clear from the outset?

- No, unclear whether some crops are considered a pastoral use

Water

- Have had their water allocation reduced under the 'use it or lose it' provision – future plans and time to develop not considered by Water Resources

What are the current challenges of water trading?

- Unclear who to contact for the Special Aboriginal Water Reserve

What benefits, if any, do you see in the use of a water trading platform?

- Identifying who is interested in trading and their contact details

Infrastructure

What would you prioritise as future essential infrastructure and how does it look?

- Roads
  - » Some of the road network is dirt without a gravel base and closed to heavy vehicles
  - » Connector road to Katherine
- Communications
  - » Mobile connectivity across the region
  - » Benefits more than just agriculture

Table 3 – Stakeholder engagement summary

Outcomes

The semi-structured interviews proved to be effective in producing perspectives of participants understandings, motivations and long-term aspirations for the region. These conversations also played a critical role in shaping key recommendations to guide the project's implementation phase while ensuring alignment with the overarching research question

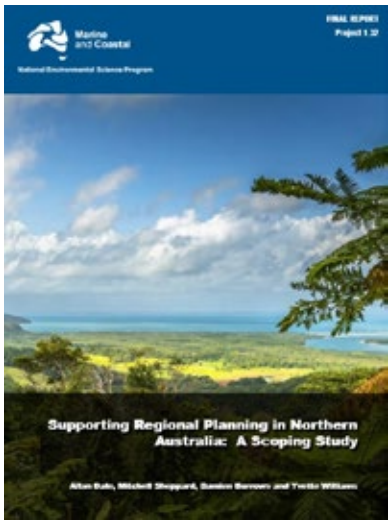
Alignment with the NESP

This project leveraged further investment through the National Environmental Sciences Program (NESP) Marine and Coastal Hub under the 2021 Research Plan. The Hub engaged the Cairns Institute, James Cook University (JCU) and TropWATER (JCU) to deliver the study in partnership with the Resilient Landscapes Hub and the CRCNA.

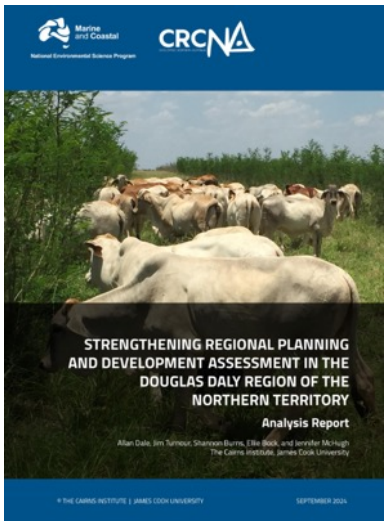
NESP project reports focussed on the Douglas Daly region include:

- Project 1.32: Supporting Regional Planning in Northern Australia: A scoping study
- Project 3.1: Planning for Ecologically Sustainable Development in Northern Australia, exploring three key regions in the north including Western Australia's Pilbara region, Queensland's Gilbert River District, and the Douglas Daly region in the NT.

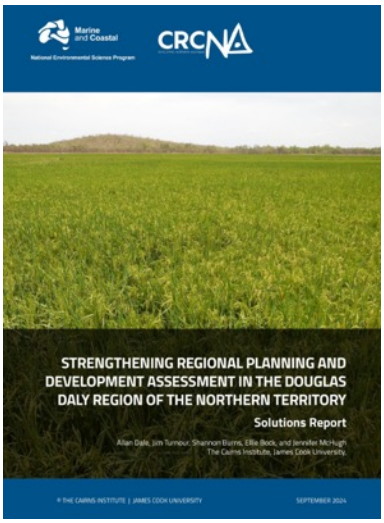
The following NESP project reports are included as appendices:



Appendix D



Appendix E



Appendix F

These NESP project reports recognise the prosperity of Northern Australian communities rests on the expansion of current industries and new enterprises. It underscores that effective economic development must integrate people, economy, and environment considerations to achieve lasting outcomes.

By analysing regional planning processes and practices across Northern Australia, the reports provided a better understanding of the challenges and obstacles and recommended a way forward. They examined current planning frameworks, interviewed stakeholders with specific interests, identified information deficits, assessed data storage and access issues, and reviewed planning case studies.

By focusing on three key northern regions of Queensland's Gilbert River District, the Northern Territory's Douglas Daly, and Western Australia's Pilbara, the projects were able to identify critical barriers within current regional planning frameworks and practices. Despite their unique contexts, each region faces similar tensions between diverse economic development drivers, the protection of fragile ecosystems, and the pursuit of strong Aboriginal governance, cultural preservation, and livelihood aspirations across the landscape.

In the Douglas Daly region, tensions between all three of these legitimate aspirations are long standing and significant. Here, these tensions have long led to suggestions that a more regionalised, engaged and evidence-based approach might be needed to support planning, development assessment and nature positive investment decisions.



Project 1.32: Supporting Regional Planning in Northern Australia: A scoping study

Australia's Northern development agenda is being shaped by major policy reforms such as updates to the EPBC Act and the National Water Initiative and by the rise of Nature Positive market opportunities. These shifts underscore a national commitment to balancing economic growth with ecosystem stewardship and social wellbeing.

In the Northern Territory, there is a clear economic imperative to expand and diversify agriculture. Much of the Territory's most productive land also supports high biodiversity and rich cultural values, creating an inherent tension between development and conservation. Despite a decade of prioritising growth and recognizing these trade-offs, planning systems have not kept pace: few tools exist for rigorous trade-off analysis or integrated decision-making across sectors.

To fill this gap, the project's analysis phase probed the current regional planning and development assessment system in the Douglas Daly region. By cataloguing its strengths and weaknesses, we have laid the groundwork for fresh, evidence-driven approaches that can better harmonize economic, environmental and cultural objectives.

Project 3.1 Strengthening Regional Planning and Development Assessment in the Douglas Daly Region of the Northern Territory

Analysis Report

The Analysis Report examines how the Douglas Daly catchment's regional planning and development assessment system can better support ecologically sustainable growth. It begins by mapping the existing governance framework through a literature review.

The Douglas Daly is one of the few places in the NT where collective approaches to planning to achieve an appropriate balance between development and the environment have been attempted.

The NT Government established the Daly River Management Advisory Committee in 2006 to develop options for the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources within the catchment. The goal of DRMAC was to promote the highest standards of management of land, water and other resources in the region 'so that the important values people associate with the Daly River are protected' (DRMAC 2009). The independently chaired DRMAC structure advised on the

development of an adaptive management decision-making framework to allow balancing of the needs of catchment development and conservation, with a particular focus on vegetation clearing and water resource management. The membership of DRMAC included representatives from traditional landowners, production, tourism, recreation and conservation sectors and government (DRMAC 2009). The process was also strongly supported by a range of innovative and integrated science projects from the Tropical Rivers and Catchments Knowledge research consortium (TRaCK).

To enhance the depth of the literature analysis, this independent study was facilitated external to the Northern Territory Government. It engaged eight key NTG agencies involved in regional planning and development decision-making across the Douglas Daly region, its broader catchment and across multiple industry sectors. Focusing initially on these agencies was a strategic step toward fostering early government buy-in and laying the groundwork for a more innovative and collaborative planning approach.

The following questions were explored:

- What do you think are the key features of the regional planning and development assessment system in the Douglas Daly region?
- What role do you and your institution play in that system?
- What aspects of regional planning and development assessment system in the Douglas Daly region are currently working well?
- What parts of the system need improvement?
- What are your priority views about how the system can be strengthened?

All interviews were conducted under formal ethics approval and aimed to explore agency specific perspectives, responsibilities and constraints. These insights were further enriched through informal conversations with a range of community groups, industry representatives, and Traditional Owner organisations, helping to contextualise the institutional viewpoints within broader, on-the-ground realities.

Findings reveal that, despite strong high-level policy support for northern development, practical challenges are stalling both economic opportunities and the protection of biodiversity and cultural values. The report highlights enduring tensions between agricultural expansion, ecosystem conservation and Aboriginal land aspirations, and shows that current assessment laws and processes often struggle to balance these equally legitimate goals.

Stakeholders identified several core weaknesses in the current planning and development system: it is overly complex, siloed and poorly integrated, decisions often lack robust scientific underpinning, workforce capacity is stretched, and tenure and regulatory arrangements can be confusing. Regional infrastructure gaps (roads, communications) and short assessment timeframes further hinder progress, as do the absence of reliable collective-action mechanisms, functional offset frameworks, clear policy delivery systems and accessible finance, including for Traditional Owner engagement.



To strengthen the system, respondents prioritised establishing visionary, collaborative decision-making structures and investing in governance capacity across Traditional Owner groups, government planners and local communities. They called for ongoing scientific mapping, modelling and data-integration programs; place-based approaches to biodiversity and carbon offsets; whole-catchment water and bio-regional planning; as well as strategic investments in infrastructure, local supply chains and sustainable-farming demonstration projects. Complementary measures include third-party facilitation of trade-offs, rigorous resource-demand mapping and unwavering adherence to agreed policy frameworks.

The above findings suggest that there is a significant need for more knowledge-based and engaged trade-off analysis over these key tensions between development, water availability, cultural values, vegetation management and estuarine and marine health. Trade-off analysis thinking, however, has been previously attempted through the auspices of previous DRMAC arrangements in the Douglas Daly. Several interview participants deeply valued the opportunity for science-based, whole of community and inter-sectoral dialogue during the period that DRMAC was in operation. However, others lamented a lack of mechanisms to keep the member parties accountable to outcomes of the process. Others suggested the process may have been unsustainable, as it was instituted for a relatively narrow advisory purpose.

Overwhelmingly, however, most participants independently suggested the need for visionary and early approaches to reinvigorating collaborative decision-making for sustainable development in the catchment. This suggests there is a strong appetite for the establishment of a durable, well facilitated and evidence-based collaborative planning framework to both determine a shared vision and the key strategic interventions needed to secure this vision over time.

Solutions Report

Leveraging the insights and analytical groundwork of the Analysis Report, the Solutions Report developed targeted recommendations to strengthen the regional planning and development assessment framework for landscape-scale outcomes in the Douglas Daly catchment. The recommendations will underpin future negotiations to advance these improvements and foster shared decision-making. This collaborative process will also guide the prioritisation of continued research partnerships and support from the NT Government and CRCNA beyond the final report of this project.

The Solutions Report was developed closely with the NT Government agencies, the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), the National Environmental Sciences Program (NESP) Marine and Coastal Hub and the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA).

To progress from problem identification to solutions, a workshop of key agencies was held in April 2024, alongside additional informal discussions with key catchment stakeholders. These processes contributed to the identification and road-testing of the proposed solutions.

The key potential and suggested solutions revolve around the establishment of the necessary pre-conditions of success for new approaches to integrated regional planning and development assessment within the Douglas Daly region based on the previous governance systems analysis.

The key focus of the next steps include:

- building cross-governmental and regional consensus about appropriate models for development within the region;
- ground truth the potential of these conceptual models as a foundation for evidence based trade-off analysis, and the integration of Commonwealth supported bio-regional planning and water allocation planning; and
- build long-term local institutional capacity for the sustainable development of agriculture, tourism and land management businesses and their associated communities in the region. This could include attracting new and evolving ecosystem service markets and offset management through the landscape-scale delivery of conservation works.

Drawing on the Analysis Report's identification of critical weaknesses within the regional planning system that undermine sustainable development in the Douglas Daly, we have outlined a preliminary suite of potential systemic interventions for improving the health of the regional governance system. These systemic pathways are intended to guide the establishment of a durable partnership framework toward more integrated, resilient and effective regional planning outcomes.

Potential systemic interventions include:

- a cohesive investment in Aboriginal nation building and country-based strategic planning
- establishing an Integrated Agricultural Research and Development Hub
- collective approaches to managing trade-offs between development potential and biodiversity risks
- progression of a pilot bioregional planning approach
- trialling new approaches to ecosystem service market and offset framing

These priorities will inform the development of a longer-term collaborative approach between NT Government agencies, the Australian Government, Land Councils and Traditional Owners, industry, conservation sector and community stakeholders and the CRCNA and NESP Hubs.

The report at **Appendix F** unpacks the proposed solutions in more detail.

NESP Recommendation

The NESP project reports explored priorities for more regionally-based approaches to improving the system of planning and development decision-making in the Douglas Daly and the project paid collective attention to the Douglas Daly because it remains one of the most prospective regions for agricultural development in the NT, primarily due to the availability of water, relatively secure land tenures, and the availability of cleared or plantation land for development.

Despite this, the region also retains high biodiversity and cultural values. While development could happen with relatively low environmental and cultural impacts, if poorly managed, development equally could result in poor environmental, cultural, social and economic outcomes for the region. Equally, a continued focus on sticking with lower value outcomes arising from agriculture, on the other hand, will perpetuate the limited economic opportunities available for people in the Douglas Daly region.

The next step forward involves NT Government agencies, CRCNA, WABSI and NESP (in collaboration with all key agencies and community and industry stakeholders) in progressing the further co-design, development and implementation of these potential solutions outlined above through one or several emerging investment opportunities.

These include:

- working closely with the Office of Northern Australia (ONA) to explore the progression of this region as a priority for improved regional planning reforms linked to current regional planning reforms under the EPBC review and the refresh of the Developing Northern Australia Whitepaper Action Plan. This might involve directly pinning the approach developed within the priority work areas being established through revamped arrangements servicing the Northern Australian Ministerial Forum (NAMF); and/or
- progressing a cohesive proposal under the Australian Government's current Innovation Precincts funding arrangements; and/or
- a prioritised and enhanced approach to improved regional planning under usual NT Government budgetary processes; and/or
- longer-term inclusion of investment in these potential solutions as innovative approaches to be developed under any future NESP or CRCNA-related programs.

Even at a modest level, the cost of such an approach could be as little as $1.5 million per annum for at least a five-year trial period. The benefit returned, however, would far outweigh this through improved agricultural production, enhanced social benefits and enhanced environmental management.

It is anticipated that the steps considered above will enable a strong, long-term and collaborative approach to resolving these problems through growing partnerships between the Australian Government, the NT Government and key stakeholders with an interest in the Douglas Daly.



Recommendations

These recommendations were co-designed with industry partners and key stakeholders, also drawing on NESP's findings around agricultural de-risking and more efficient development approvals in the case study region.

Implementing these recommendations will require sustained investment and coordinated collaboration across the Australian and NT Governments, Traditional Owner groups, and industry.

Recommended action	Responsible entity and partners	Proposed implementation
Recommendation 1		
Strengthen the central development function within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to advance economic growth in agriculture.	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries	Through collaboration across NT and Australian Government agencies and with key industry stakeholders, efforts will be coordinated to ensure alignment of priorities, streamline regulatory processes, and leverage combined expertise and resources.
Recommendation 2		
Develop a strategic framework outlining the core components of a regional economic development plan for the Douglas Daly region, linking with regional economic development plans under the NT Government's Economic Strategy. Core components will include: • Road, communications, power, water, community and social infrastructure • Land resource assessments • Water resource assessments • Flood study • Environmental and heritage values • Cultural values	NT Government Australian Government Industry Traditional Owners	Secure support both financial and in-kind from the NT and Australian Governments or other available sources to initiate implementation. Establish a working group with representation from NT Government, industry and Traditional Owners to complete the following: • Gap analysis: Identify gaps in existing technical studies and where new or updated data may be required. • Inform policy: Establish policy and regulatory frameworks that encourage sustainable and considered regional development. • Cultural story: Identify and protect cultural values. • Identify growth areas: Recognise further development opportunities and growth within the region. • Infrastructure planning: Inform and integrate land use with transport, utilities, community and social infrastructure. • Natural resource management: Develop an aligned regional conservation works program.

Recommendation 3		
Through ongoing implementation of Recommendation 2 (above), utilise the Douglas Daly region as the best practice benchmark for ongoing regional planning for agriculture.	NT Government Australian Government Industry Traditional Owners	Establish the Douglas Daly region as the leading example that demonstrates the value and impact of effective regional planning for agriculture. Recognise alignment with and inform national policy settings in a Northern Australian context. Replicate and adapt to other regions within the NT to support ongoing regional economic development plans.
Recommendation 4		
Advocate for key enabling infrastructure upgrades within the Douglas Daly region.	NT Government Australian Government Industry	Prepare an Economic Assessment that identifies the economic value and growth potential of the region. Inform priority infrastructure investments based on criteria including economic impact, development potential, and alignment with NT/ national priorities. Advocate and identify infrastructure investment pathways.
Recommendation 5		
Establish the Douglas Daly Research Farm (DDRF) as a sustainable and best practice research and development (R&D) facility.	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Australian Government and other funding bodies Industry	Continue to deliver research and development (R&D) efforts that promote industry development. Strengthen collaborative relationships between DAF, Douglas Daly agricultural producers, and industry representatives and funding bodies to lead the R&D direction and to align activities to the needs of industry and the region. Build capacity and increase adoption of best management practices for sustainable agriculture.
Recommendation 6		
Invest in Traditional Owner capability.	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries NT Government Traditional Owners	Strengthen whole-of-government strategic relationships with Land Councils and Traditional Owners. Support Aboriginal led-economic development within the Douglas Daly region. Foster collaboration and knowledge sharing relating to agriculture.

Implementation of the recommendations

Many of the recommendations have commenced implementation during the project, prior to the completion of this final report. A summary of these implementation activities is provided below.

Recommendation 1

Strengthen the central development function within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to advance economic growth in agriculture.

- DAF have implemented the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan to foster sustainable economic agriculture and fisheries industry growth across all regions.
- This project funded the establishment of the Industry Development team in DAF since the project commenced in 2021.
- The DAF Industry Development team are continuing beyond the project's conclusion due to the project identifying the ongoing requirement of the central development facilitation role and implementation of the recommendations.
- Two Industry Development team members have actively worked on this project from commencement to completion, contributing consistent leadership and expertise.
- These efforts have helped foster cultural change within the NT Government, enhancing understanding and support for agricultural development.
- The Indigenous Pastoral Program, within the DAF Industry Development team, delivers targeted support to increase participation of Aboriginal Territorians in the pastoral industry.
- The Market Development function, within the DAF Industry Development team, has broadened its scope to include emerging opportunities in Nature Repair markets, while also strengthening access to and expansion of traditional market pathways.
- Planning is underway for the future of the team and expansion of its facilitation role moving forward.

Recommendation 2

Develop a strategic framework outlining the core components of a regional economic development plan for the Douglas Daly region, linking with regional economic development plans under the NT Government's Economic Strategy.

- This project, along with the NESP initiatives, has confirmed that regional planning is a critical mechanism to support sustainable growth while protecting environmental and cultural values.
- The DAF Industry Development team have been strategically positioned to lead the process, leveraging its unique ability to collaborate across NT and Australian Governments, industry, Traditional Owners and growers, offering a facilitative role distinct from regulatory bodies.
- Key partners have been identified, and in-principle support has been secured to advance the next phase of work.
- A range of technical studies and data have already been completed and now need to be consolidated into a cohesive knowledge base to guide planning and investment.
- Additional water resource assessments are in progress, including catchment-scale groundwater and surface water flow characterisation to inform water planning and licence decisions
- Engagement with local growers highlighted infrastructure constraints as a key barrier to economic expansion in the region.
- NT Government agencies have reached in-principal consensus on a fit-for-purpose development planning framework tailored to the strategic needs of the Douglas Daly.
- Opportunities to foster Aboriginal economic development have been identified and integrated into broader planning efforts, ensuring inclusive growth and long-term regional resilience.

Recommendation 3

Through ongoing implementation of Recommendation 2, utilise the Douglas Daly region as the best practice benchmark for ongoing regional planning for agriculture.

- Other precincts were identified and prioritised through the multi-criteria analysis process.
- These will be progressed following the completion of Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 4

Advocate for key infrastructure upgrades within the Douglas Daly region.

- Conducted an initial desktop economic assessment to provide an understanding of the potential economic growth and forecast uplift opportunities.
- Collaborated with the NT Farmers Association to access and integrate current regional economic data.
- Identified available funding pathways.
- Identified key infrastructure constraints alongside emerging strategic opportunities.

Recommendation 5

Establish the Douglas Daly Research Farm (DDRF) as a sustainable and best practice research and development (R&D) facility.

- Identified and submitted proposals for relevant funding programs aimed at enhancing the R&D capabilities at DDRF.
- Explored opportunities to incorporate natural asset management and emerging nature repair markets into local agricultural practices.
- Pilot project on the nature repair market underway, with methodologies currently in early development, positioning the region to benefit from early adoption opportunities.
- Formed the Douglas Daly Research Farm Advisory Committee, bringing together local growers to guide research priorities, on-farm practices, and management strategies.
- Secured support from regional growers, reaffirming the critical role of DDRF in driving innovation and productivity in the region.

Recommendation 6

Invest in Traditional Owner capability.

- Established relationships with Land Councils to understand and support their preferred models for long-term, collaborative regional governance.
- Evaluated the feasibility of Indigenous-led development initiatives and provided strategic guidance to progress these opportunities.
- Delivered insights into the region's planning and development landscape, highlighting potential opportunities and emerging large-scale management opportunities to inform a shared regional vision.





Conclusion

Partnering with the CRCNA on this project has proven invaluable. Drawing on their recognised expertise, this project has identified new opportunities and demonstrated how to set the stage for deeper collaboration well beyond this project's formal completion.

This relationship has opened many doors, both strategic and practical and underscored the importance of cross-sector and cross-jurisdictional cooperation in regional development.

Collaboration with Western Australia and Queensland will ensure shared learning across northern Australia, amplifying regional insights, aligning strategies, and presenting a united and pragmatic narrative to the Australian Government.

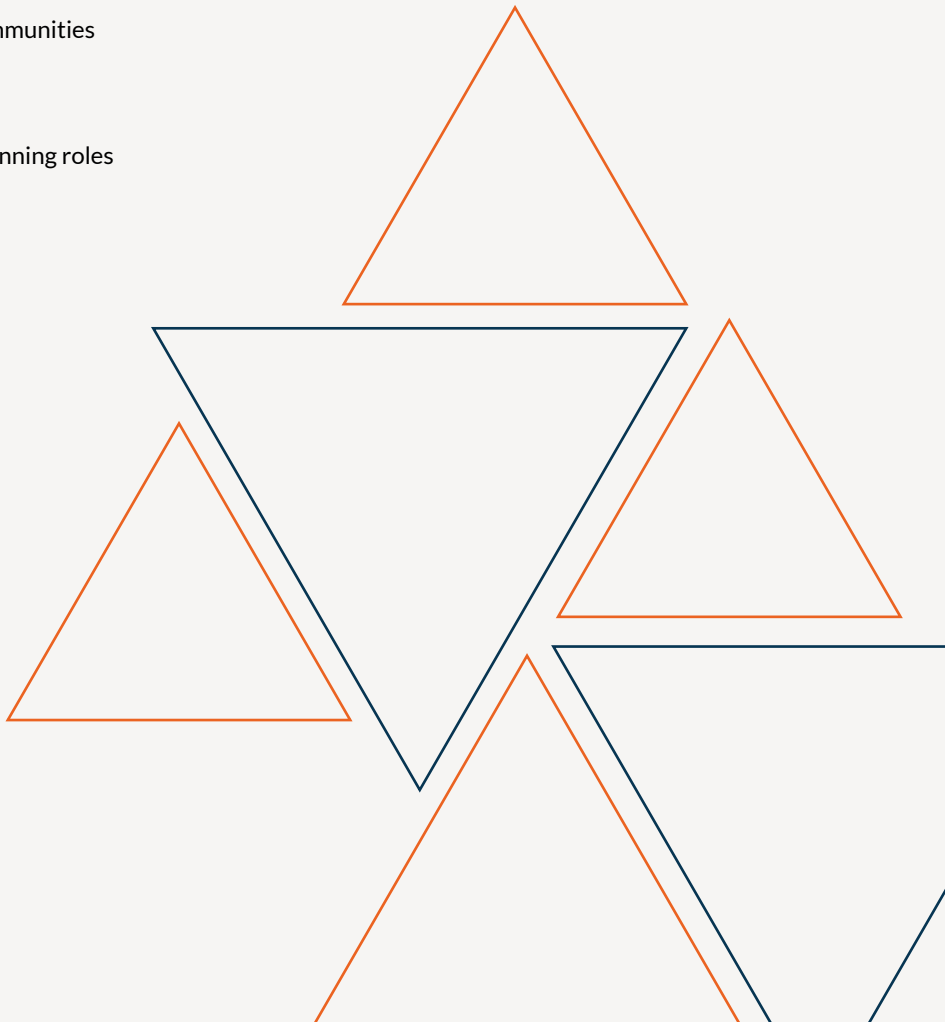
The Northern Territory stands at a pivotal moment; ready to embark on a new phase of economic growth. Realising this growth requires coordination and a forward-looking regional planning approach that:

- Promotes diverse and resilient economic development
- Balances growth with the protection of significant cultural and environmental assets
- Reduces land-use conflicts and enhances certainty for landholders and investors
- Attracts and retains across sector investment
- Provides stability and clarity for businesses, communities and towns
- Supports regional infrastructure planning
- Recognises and empowers local government planning roles

The Douglas Daly case study has balanced aspirations for development while protecting the environment and preserving cultural heritage. It provides a replicable framework for other regions across the NT for best practice economic regional planning.

The framework outlined in this report provides a better planning process for sustainable development in Northern Australia. The framework aligns with National and NT level frameworks to enable a jointly endorsed economic regional plan. A bilateral agreement between the Australian and NT Government using this framework, will achieve sustainable economic development in the Northern Territory.

This report recommends adoption of the framework for economic regional planning, to facilitate secure long term sustainable development, whilst balancing community aspirations, environment protection, and celebrating cultural heritage.



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Appendices

Appendix A: Best Practice in Precinct Planning

Appendix B: Multi Criteria Analysis

Appendix C: Case study: Douglas Daly pre-consultation draft

Appendix D: Supporting Regional Planning in Northern Australia: A scoping study

Appendix E: Strengthening regional planning and development assessment in the Douglas Daly region of the Northern Territory: Analysis Report

Appendix F: Strengthening regional planning and development assessment in the Douglas Daly region of the Northern Territory: Solutions Report




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