



Northern
Territory
Government

DEPARTMENT OF LAND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Annual Report

2012-13



Purpose of the Report

This Annual Report provides a record of the Department of Land Resource Management's achievements for the 2012-13 financial year.

Pursuant to Section 28 of the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*, the report aims to inform Parliament, Territorians, and other stakeholders of:

- the primary functions and responsibilities of the Agency;
- significant activities undertaken during the year highlighting specific achievements against budget outputs; and
- the Agency's fiscal management and performance.

Target Audience

The Annual Report provides information to numerous target audiences on the Agency's activities and achievements for the 2012-13 financial year. It is tabled in the Northern Territory's Legislative Assembly primarily as an accounting and reporting mechanism for the Agency's respective Minister to the Parliament. The Annual Report is a finalisation of the Agency's achievements, income and financial expenditure from the Northern Territory Mini Budget 2012.

The Agency works in partnership with the Northern Territory community to provide advice and support for the sustainable development of the Northern Territory's land and water, and conservation of its unique native flora and fauna.

This Annual Report provides a summary of the range of Agency services and activities undertaken. This Annual Report also formally acknowledges the achievements carried out by Agency employees. It provides another source of information for Northern Territory Government employees and tax payers about the full scope of the Agency programs that may not be fully appreciated from the perspective of individual workplaces.

This Annual Report provides information for other government agencies and the wider public about the range of activities undertaken by the Agency, the purpose of these activities and how successful they are.

Willem Westra van Holthe
Minister for Land Resource Management

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Dear Minister

I am pleased to present you with the Annual Report of the Department of Land Resource Management for the financial year 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013.

The report describes the performance and key achievements of each of the Department's Output Groups as required by Section 28 of the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*.

With regard to my duties as Accountable Office, pursuant to Section 13 of the *Financial Management Act*, and Section 131 of the *Information Act*, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the system of internal control and audit provide reasonable assurance that:

- a) proper records of all transactions affecting the Agency are kept and that employees under my control observe the provisions of the *Financial Management Act*, its regulations and applicable Treasurer's Directions;
- b) procedures within the Agency afford proper internal control and a current description of such procedures is recorded in the accounting and property manual which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Financial Management Act*;
- c) no indication of fraud, malpractice, major breach of legislation or delegation, major error in omission from the accounts and records exists;
- d) in accordance with Section 15 of the *Financial Management Act*, the results of internal audits have been reported to me and are in accordance with the Treasurer's Directions;
- e) the financial statements included in the Annual Report have been prepared from proper accounts and records and are in accordance with Treasurer's Directions;
- f) all Employment Instructions issued by the Commissioner for Public Employment have been satisfied; and
- g) in respect of my responsibility pursuant to Section 131 of the *Information Act*, I advise that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the Department has implemented processes to achieve compliance with the archives and record management provisions as prescribed in Part 9 of the *Information Act*.

Yours sincerely



Rod Applegate
Chief Executive

7 October 2013

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SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Department of Land Resource Management was formed in September 2012 following a change of Government. The change in Government also produced subsequent changes in the machinery of Government, which dissolved the former Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) to form new agencies:

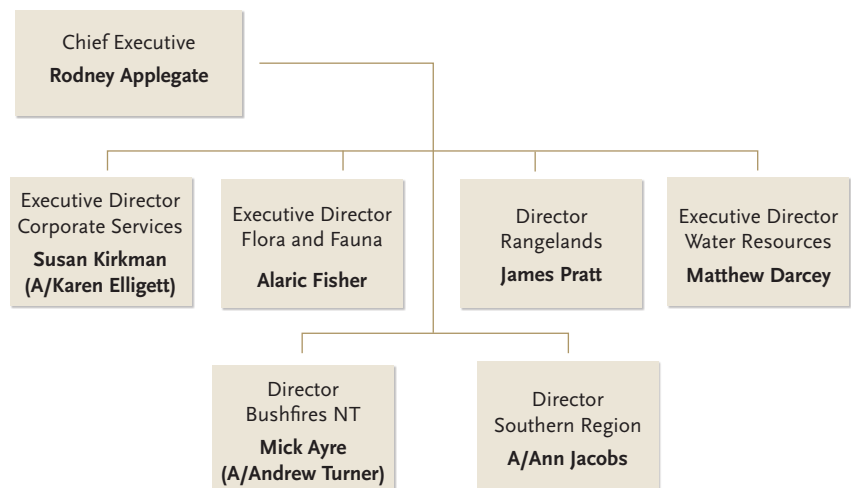
- Department of Land Resource Management;
- Department of Sport and Recreation;
- Department of Arts and Museums;
- Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory; and
- Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment (Environment added).

The Corporate Services Division of the former NRETAS was moved into the Department of Land Resource Management and a shared services arrangement was established to support each of the four new agencies including:

- Department of Land Resource Management;
- Department of Sport and Recreation;
- Department of Arts and Museums; and
- Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory.

The 2012-13 budget as published in Budget Paper 3 in May 2012, was revised to align with the change in Government and machinery of Government in the form of a mini-budget which was delivered in September 2012. The mini-budget also set out the new Governments' priorities.

Organisational Chart



Strategic Objectives

Our Vision:

The Northern Territory's land and water resources are used appropriately for economic development and the well being of all Territorians.

Our Purpose:

Provide advice and support for the sustainable development of the Northern Territory's land and water, and conservation of its unique native flora and fauna.

Strategic Objectives

Goal 1: *The capacity and capability of the Northern Territory's natural resource assets are assessed, and outcomes of use and management, monitored.*

Strategies:

- Increase the knowledge and understanding of ground and surface water systems, land resources and native flora and fauna.
- Implement robust monitoring systems to track the health of the Territory's biodiversity.
- Address the decline in small mammals.
- Work with Aboriginal elders and custodians to conserve biocultural knowledge of the Territory's flora and fauna, and promote its application in natural resource management.
- Monitor and report on the health of Darwin Harbour and inland waterways as part of their continued or expanded use.
- Monitor condition of the Territory's rangelands.

Goal 2: *Enable economic growth through the allocation of natural resource assets for best and sustainable use.*

Strategies:

- Develop a Northern Territory strategy to address the use, allocation and management of water.
- Manage competing demands for water and land resources for sustainable development.
- Determine potential for agricultural development through the collection and assessment of land, soil, vegetation and water information.
- Ensure the impacts on the natural resources are within acceptable limits in the allocation and use of land for development purposes.
- Identify and promote economic opportunities through the sustainable use of wildfire.
- Support the pastoral estate through contemporary legislation to drive economic growth.



“Enable economic growth through the allocation of natural resource assets...”



Goal 3: *Threats to natural resources and regional communities are managed through shared responsibilities and partnerships.*

Strategies:

- Provide extension services to assist landholders in the sustainable use of natural resources.
- Manage the impacts of feral animals and weeds on productive and natural systems.
- Facilitate greater industry capacity and action to mitigate impacts at development sites.
- Build community capacity to mitigate the increased risk of bushfire in the rural urban interface caused by the proliferation of grassy weeds.
- Progress a strategic approach to manage the increased risk of bushfire in the rural urban interface caused by the proliferation of weeds.
- Promote partnerships between Government agencies to develop threat management plans.
- Provision of flood advice in consultation with other agencies for major 'at risk' communities.

Goal 4: *An organisation with the capacity and capability to deliver effective services.*

Strategies:

- Inspire and support a workplace culture that is collaborative, respectful and accountable.
- Build and enhance our strategic leadership across the agency.
- Deliver an effective shared corporate service.
- Provide a safe working environment and use of safe practices in both office and field operations.
- Continue to improve business processes and continue to streamline key internal systems.
- Develop an integrated NT NRM information system that is accessible to internal and external clients.
- Ensure legislation and policy is contemporary and adequate to deal with the challenges of delivering sustainable development.

Budget Highlights 2012-13

The Agency's services and output deliverables, as a Northern Territory Government Public Sector organisation, are framed each year through the Budget Paper. The 2012-13 budget as published in Budget Paper 3 in May 2012, was revised with a mini-budget to align with the changes in Government. The Mini Budget was delivered in September 2012 and set out the new Government's priorities.

The below are the budget highlights for the Agency throughout the reporting period:

- \$0.1 million for wildfire suppression activities.
- \$0.8 million for monitoring and research activities in Darwin Harbour.
- \$0.65 million to reduce feral camel impacts
- \$0.5 million to support the Pastoral Land Board and rangelands monitoring program.
- \$0.48 million for weed management extension services across regional area of the Territory to assist pastoralists in controlling weed incursions and infestations.

Agency Achievements in 2012-13

The Agency's key achievements in 2012-13 are detailed below:

- Exceeded target number of 250 for volunteer and stakeholder training in 2012-13 for Bushfires NT. During 2012-13 363 people completing accredited training in fire fighting (258), working safely around aircraft (12) and wildfire awareness (93).
- Updated flood maps for Rapid Creek, based on the recently revised Rapid Creek Flood Study and data obtained during the Cyclone Carlos flood event. The Agency also assisted the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment with the Rapid Creek Flood Mitigation Investigation and Flood Damage Study.
- Re-established the Territory Government's rangeland monitoring program of the pastoral estate by utilising the \$400 000 increase in funding from the December Mini-Budget. This resulted in the recruitment of four new staff and a rigorous assessment of 27 pastoral properties predominantly in the Barkly and Southern Alice Springs district.

Under the Territory's Financial Management Framework each government agency is funded by output groups as stated in the annual budget papers.

A description, key deliverables and achievements for each of the Agency's five Output Groups are detailed below:



Output group: Flora and Fauna

Scientific assessment and monitoring of the Territory's native flora and fauna, and delivery of policy advice and support relating to their conservation, management and sustainable use.

Key Deliverables	2012-13 Mini budget	2012-13 Estimate	2012-13 Actual	2013-14 Budget
Number of spatial biodiversity records for the Territory	1 675 415	1 675 415	1 675 400	1 859 000
Number of biodiversity information requests met	2 270	2 270	2 250	2 300
Number of active inventory, monitoring and applied research programs	35	35	35	35
Number of management programs in place for sustainable wildlife use	6	6	6	7

Key Achievements

- Continued the broad-scale control of feral camels across Central Australia, with more than 65000 animals removed by aerial culling since the program commenced in 2010.
- Monitored the health of key biodiversity assets in Darwin Harbour, including a collaborative program with INPEX to intensively monitor dolphin populations using photographic mark-recapture.
- Implemented a major research project under the National Environmental Research Program to understand the impacts of feral cats on native wildlife and work with land managers to reduce these.

Output group: Rangelands

Scientific assessment and monitoring of the Territory's land and delivery of extension services, policy advice, and regulation of use and threats to land resources.

Key Deliverables	2012-13 Mini budget	2012-13 Estimate	2012-13 Actual	2013-14 Budget
Percentage of pastoral estate monitored in the year	9%	9%	10.78%	12%
Land clearing applications assessed	11	11	13 ¹	11
Area of land receiving weed extensions services (000km ²)	179	179	184	260
Land development proposals assessed	230	230	249 ²	270
Percentage of the Territory's land capability and resources assessed in the year	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	5%

Explanatory Notes to the Table

1. These are land clearing applications received for unzoned freehold land under the *Planning Act* and land clearing applications on the pastoral estate under the *Pastoral Land Act*. The number of applications assessed is determined by the quantity of applications submitted by proponents and is therefore difficult to accurately predict.
2. Land development proposals assessed include: Development Applications under the *Planning Act*; Mining Extraction Licences under the *Minerals Titles Act*; and Notice of Intent under the *NT Environmental Assessment Act*. The number of development proposals assessed is determined by the quantity of development proposals received and is therefore difficult to accurately predict.

Key Achievements

- Finalised the amendment of the *Pastoral Land Act* for non-pastoral use provisions, which will allow pastoral lease holders greater opportunity to diversify their income stream outside of cattle production. The legislative amendments are expected to be passed in the Legislative Assembly in October 2013.
- Commenced development of the Agency's new land information management system that will be operational in 2014. This system will capture, in a spatial environment, land capability information used by the Agency in making comment to relevant assessment and consent authorities for specific land use requirements.
- Published the mapping and description of the largest single land resource assessment project undertaken in the Northern Territory, comprising the landscapes, soil, vegetation and pastures of approximately 75 000km² of land tenure in the Victoria River District. This mapping information identifies the region is composed of diverse landscapes but to a large extent is composed of grassland basalt plains and alluvial plains essential for grazing native landscapes. It has been provided to 23 pastoral leases and various Aboriginal land trusts and is also publicly available.



“Working with Indigenous elders and communities to preserve and utilise Indigenous biocultural knowledge...”

Output group: Water Resources

Scientific assessment and monitoring of the Territory's water resources, allocation of this resource for sustainable use and delivery of flood forecasting services.

Key Deliverables	2012-13 Mini budget	2012-13 Estimate	2012-13 Actual	2013-14 Budget
Proportion of the Territory assessed for ground water availability	7%	7%	7%	8.5%
Proportion of the Territory assessed for surface water availability	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%	5.9%
River, coastal regions and communities covered by flood risk mapping	24	24	15 ¹	25
Proportion of licensed groundwater use covered by current water allocation plans	77%	77%	60% ²	86%
Annual report cards on aquatic health of Darwin published	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Explanatory notes to the Table

1. Storm surge maps for Gulf Communities were scheduled for completion by end of 2012-13, however, a minor correction was made to storm surge levels which delayed mapping. This impacted the actual figures for the river, coastal regions and communities covered by flood risk mapping.
2. The proportion of licensed groundwater use covered by current water allocation plans varied due to draft allocation plans for Ooloo, Tindall Limestone Aquifer, Mataranka and Alice Springs not being completed as expected within the 2012-2013 reporting period. It is anticipated that these plans, along with the NT Great Artesian Basin Water Allocation Plan, will be declared within the 2013-2014 reporting period.

Key Achievements

- Continued water allocation planning in the Territory and developed associated assessment and monitoring programs to improve understanding and knowledge of water resources and inland aquatic ecosystems, and to guide their management. In recent months, the Department has progressed the development of the Ooloo Water Allocation Plan to ensure Daly River remains in pristine condition and that development in the region is ecologically sustainable.
- Implemented a high priority monitoring program in Darwin Harbour. This included the release of the Darwin Region 2012 Report Card in February 2013, which highlighted the excellent health of Darwin Harbour.

- Assisted the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment with:
 1. Review of the Potential Flood Damage Study Report for Rapid Creek
 2. Review of Rapid Creek Flood Mitigation analyses
 3. Provision of technical expertise for Lorikeet Court and Knuckey Lagoon Flood Study
 4. Review of Gulf Storm Surge Analyses

The Department also provided the latest Alice Springs Flood Maps to Police and Emergency Services.

Output group: Bushfires

Supporting landholders in the management and mitigation of wildfire and assisting volunteer brigades in fire mitigation and suppression outside the Territory's urban centres.

Key Deliverables	2012-13 Mini budget	2012-13 Estimate	2012-13 Actual	2013-14 Budget
Number of property inspection conducted annually for firebreak compliance	5000	5000	5494 ¹	5000
Percentage of strategic firebreaks completed across the Territory annually	90%	90%	90%	100%
The number of trained volunterr brigade member firefighters	490	490	505	490
The total area of the Territory affected by wildfire	11%	11%	14.6% ²	12%

Explanatory notes to the Table

1. The increased number of property inspections stems from two influences. Firstly, the increased number of land titles in the Darwin peri-urban area due to new residential and rural living subdivisions coming on line. Secondly, there was also an increased emphasis on block inspections in the Katherine area during this period.
2. The total area of the Territory affected by wildfire varies significantly with seasonal conditions. Wildfire in the Top End and Savanna areas tend to remain relatively stable due to the more consistent seasonal conditions and fuel loads. Central Australia experiences much greater fluctuation in fuel loads year to year. In 2012-13, the area affected by wildfire in the Top End was a little above average, while higher than average fuel loads in Central Australia led to a greater divergence from the long term average in area affected by wildfire.

Key Achievements

- Completed 5,494 property inspections for fire break compliance in accordance with Section 47 of the *Bushfires Act*. 4531 properties (84%) were found to be compliant and a further 617 (11.4%) became compliant after warnings were issued, a total of 95.4% compliance. Action is continuing to achieve compliance amongst the remaining 4.6%.
- Reviewed the Strategic Fire Break Policy and developed a strategic fire break plan for the 2013 fire season in consultation with landholders and other stakeholders. The outcome of this strategy is a coordinated and effective system of strategic breaks providing improved protection for residential, agricultural and environmental assets across the Territory.
- Provided accredited fire fighting training to a further 135 volunteer bushfire brigade members, more than balancing the number of retiring and departing volunteers and bringing the total number of brigade members trained in fire fighting to over 500. Also provided accredited fire-related training for 228 other stakeholders.

Output group: Multi-Agency Services

Provide shared corporate services to four agencies and a government business division. Undertake a wide range of functions to serve the agencies' core corporate needs, including financial services, human resource management, information and communication technology, governance and risk services, and communications and media.

Key Deliverables	2012-13 Mini budget	2012-13 Estimate	2012-13 Actual	2013-14 Budget
Corporate systems administered and managed	21	21	21	21
Corporate training and information sessions delivered	418	418	516 ¹	442
Corporate policies and procedures developed and managed	181	181	217 ²	193

Explanatory notes to the Table

1. The majority of the training delivered is based on user demand. There was additional training held to address TRIM fundamentals.
2. With the formation of the Shared Services arrangement there was a higher than anticipated number of corporate policies and procedures to be developed and/or revised.

Key Achievements

- Successfully restructured the former agency corporate systems to support operational management of the four new agencies.
- Fully implemented the 2012-13 internal audit plans.
- Developed agency governance, risk management and internal audit frameworks.
- Completed the migration of agency business applications from legacy business servers to new equipment. This involved the replacement of 12 existing application servers to 11 new servers and upgrading of supporting operating systems and products for the new environment.

Future Priorities for 2013-14

Below are the 2013-14 Agency future priorities as outlined in the 2013-14 Budget Paper 3:

- Identifying opportunities for agricultural expansion through the strategic assessment and identification of land with suitable soils and sufficient water.
- Monitoring key rivers to ensure early warning and notification of flood risk to communities and government assets, and ensuring new developments on floodplains mitigate flood risk.
- Facilitating new land resource development through water allocation planning that is informed by best practice modelling and monitoring and community consultation.
- Ensuring contemporary natural resource management legislation is applied to the allocation and use of the Territory's land, water, fauna and flora resources.
- Developing an appropriate, sustainable and transparent process for rental of the Territory's estate for pastoral purposes.
- Assisting the Pastoral Land Board to meet its statutory obligations under the *Pastoral Land Act*.
- Providing developers and users of the Territory's natural resources with consistent scientific advice that promotes economic development without compromising the overall health of resources.
- Building community resilience to bushfire through increasing community involvement in fire awareness and mitigation programs, and shared responsibility and improved compliance with fire prevention and mitigation legislation by landholders.
- Progressing a strategic approach to managing increased risk of bushfire and bushfire intensity in the rural urban interface as a result of closer subdivision and weed infestation.
- Delivering policy, strategy and management advice relating to the conservation of the Territory's unique wildlife and ecosystems for the ongoing sustainable development of the Territory.
- Working with Indigenous elders and communities to preserve and utilise Indigenous biocultural knowledge for the conservation of the Territory's flora and fauna.
- Increasing our understanding of the Territory's biodiversity assets and assisting landholders and the community to protect threatened species.
- Promoting economic opportunities through the sustainable use of wildfire.