

10 Walker St  
Nightcliff NT 2018  
2 March 2018

NT Coastal and Marine Management Strategy  
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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Coastal and Marine Management Discussion Paper

As the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) representative for the NT Coastal and Marine Management Strategy Partnership Group I welcome this opportunity to comment on the Coastal and Marine Management Strategy Discussion Paper, the precursor to the strategy and its implementation plan.

LGANT comprises five municipal councils, three shires, nine regional councils and an associate that have 150 elected members, 3200 employees and 245,000 constituents. Most of the bodies we represent have coastal boundaries in the Top End and so the future of coastal and marine planning and management is of great interest to them. Outside of Darwin, the populations of regional councils largely reside in coastal Indigenous communities.

As the peak organisation for local government in the Northern Territory, LGANT provides a broad-based research and policy development service for members in response to local, Territory and national issues including changes to proposed for legislation.

### **Emerging threats**

LGANT works to support strong communities, culture, economy and lifestyle, each of which require healthy environments, including that of coasts and seas. But local councils are observing threats to the Top End's coasts and seas that include localised overfishing, water pollution, excessive water extraction, the impacts of legacy and operational mines, pest invasions and inadequate fire management. Future port developments and the possibility of seabed mining could bring further unwanted environmental changes.

### **Integrating coastal and marine planning**

Local councils are very aware that the provisions of the Northern Territory Planning Scheme and the associated statutory zoning plans end at the shoreline. This means that the future health of coastal and marine environments is at the mercy of an ad-hoc and piecemeal planning and management framework that is based on industry sectors and separate pieces of legislation. What the Top End needs is an integrated framework that serves the Territory's 21<sup>st</sup>-century needs.

### **The importance of science**

When announcing its election commitment to a Coastal and Marine Management Strategy, NT Labor emphasised that it would be a science-based strategy. While science is not our area of expertise, we acknowledge its critical importance, allied with Traditional ecological knowledge, to ensure effective and appropriate decision making, especially in the planning and management of coasts and seas. The Coastal and Marine Management Strategy should be underpinned by key scientific principles of Ecological Sustainable Development, the Precautionary Principle, and take into account Cumulative Impacts.

### **Adapting to climate change**

The impacts of climate change are of great concern to local government. In 2010, LGANT conducted climate change risk assessments for six councils along the Top End's northern coast: Coomalie, Belyuen, Wageit, Tiwi Islands, West Arnhem and East Arnhem. These assessments revealed that climate change was already impacting on coastal communities with increases in sea level causing the erosion of beaches.

The LGANT would like to see climate change adaptation as a key outcome in the implementation plan of the Coastal and Marine Management Strategy, but in the discussion paper it only

receives passing mention, is excluded from the guiding principles and mentioned only once in the long-term outcomes. The Territory needs a robust Coastal Climate Adaptation Policy that responds to the major issues facing coastal communities. The 2009 policy had only one action regarding coastal adaptation to climate change, reducing saltwater intrusion in the Mary River wetlands.

### **Safeguarding our coasts with increased protection**

The Territory is very fortunate to have near-pristine tropical waters, some of the last of their kind in the world. This has been more through good luck than good management, with low population growth and limited economic development minimising the impacts on coastal and marine environments.

The scientific consensus is that marine national parks are one of the best ways to protect coastal and marine biodiversity, along with broader coastal and marine spatial planning. Establishing new, jointly managed marine parks with marine national park zones inside them will be positive for Indigenous communities in terms of environmental, cultural and social outcomes. These marine parks would also serve to attract tourism to regional areas of the NT, bringing much needed economic activity and jobs. Unspoilt natural landscapes and wildlife interactions are a key drawcard for the growing high-end tourism market.

### **Planning and management of saltwater country**

An expansion of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) into marine waters would add to the benefits already flowing from IPAs into Indigenous communities, including improved health and self-esteem, new jobs and the transfer of Indigenous ecological knowledge. Saltwater country plans, and the establishment of Indigenous protected areas and ranger groups, has greatly improved saltwater country management by protecting habitats, strengthening culture, knowledge, Indigenous enterprise and regional economic development, and providing greater certainty for other coastal and marine resource users. The plans have also placed coastal Indigenous communities at the forefront of marine and coastal planning, protection and management processes.

A good place to start developing coastal and marine spatial planning would be by working with Traditional Owners on the development and implementation of new Indigenous Protected Area management plans for saltwater country.

### **Supporting the NT fishing lifestyle**

Recreational fishing is an important contributor to regional economies. In 2009–10 it was estimated that Territorians spent \$51 million supporting their recreational fishing, about \$1500 each. Visiting recreational fishers spend around \$26 million, and this includes expenditure on fishing stays in places like the Tiwi Islands, western and central Arnhem Land and the Daly River region. About 70% of recreational fishing occurs in regional areas including King Ash Bay, the Daly and Roper rivers and Dundee Beach, Groote Eylandt and in Arnhem Land.

Recreational fishing relies on healthy coast and seas, and the economies of Indigenous coastal communities are boosted by the expenditure of fishers. The Coastal and Marine Management Strategy should therefore promote recreational fishing values, including maintaining the health of the outdoors environment and with appropriate access and infrastructure; recreational zones would be one way to achieve this. The best recreational fishing is found in those part of the Top End coasts and seas where there is greater protection and better management i.e. Coburg Marine Park and Indigenous Protected Areas.

Yours sincerely,



Alderman Robin Knox

LGANT representative on NT Coastal and Marine Management Strategy Partnership Group