



Report Card 2014

About the park

Litchfield National Park, 120 km south of Darwin, is an iconic Northern Territory attraction. It received over 329 000 visitors in 2014, making it one of our most visited national parks. The park is renowned for spectacular waterfalls, swimming and opportunities to experience the rugged landscapes of the Top End.

Encompassing the Tabletop and Tableland ranges and parts of the Reynolds, Finnis and Adelaide Rivers drainage basins, the 145 600 hectare park is an ancient landscape. It has been shaped by water features and numerous waterfalls cascade from the sandstone plateau of the Tabletop Range.

Litchfield National Park provides significant recreation and tourism opportunities of Territory importance, thanks to its proximity to Darwin, range of activities (including swimming, walking, camping, four-wheel driving, extended bushwalking) and facilities ranging from highly developed to natural.

NT parks and reserves have been assessed and classified for their visitor and biodiversity values. Litchfield National Park is rated as one of the Territory's most valuable parks and is classified as a Class 1 Visitor park and a Class 1 Biodiversity park.

By the numbers in 2014

145 000	hectares
329 000	visitors
9	rangers
16 100	hectares per ranger
36 600	visitors per ranger



The most significant changes in the past 2 years

- The expansion of gamba grass and wildfires fuelled by this weed have become a serious threat to the long term safety of visitors and the integrity of the natural values of the park.
- Gamba grass has become established on the Tabletop Plateau, which is rapidly becoming unmanageable.
- Two acts of arson were responsible for burning half the park in a single year (2013).
- Indicators for operational performance suggest positive improvement across the board over the past 2 years.
- Visitor facilities have been improved with significant investment of \$3.5million over the past 2 years. This included building the Wangi Falls Centre, upgrading lookouts at Wangi Falls and Florence Falls, constructing a concrete walking path from Buley Rockhole to Florence Falls and upgrading toilet facilities at Florence Falls.

The most important actions in the next 2 years

- Control the spread of gamba grass to establish bigger and wider strategic fire breaks and prevent the spread of gamba grass into visitor areas and important habitats.
- Establish a gamba grass eradication zone to protect the Tabletop Plateau's visitor assets and the most important natural values of Litchfield National Park.
- Conduct 5-yearly flora and fauna surveys in 2015 with the assistance of scientists and experts from other agencies.

How to interpret our tables

Situation	
	Great with no need to improve
	Acceptable with room to improve
	Unacceptable with improvement needed
	Critical with improvement urgent

Trend	
↑	Improving
↔	Stable / No change
↓	Declining
N/A	Not rated / Not applicable
✓	Occurred / In place
✗	Did not occur / Not in place
?	Unknown



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Planning for the park

A 4-5 year Visitor Experience Development Plan has been prepared for the park. The plan aims to enhance the visitors' experience of the park.

A draft plan of management is being prepared. It is hoped the final plan will be tabled in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly in late 2015.

An integrated conservation strategy is being developed for the park. The strategy will set clear goals and actions to monitor efforts to reduce the impact of fire, feral animals and weeds on the health of flora and fauna in the park. The strategy will be the basis of future report cards.

Rangers use annual operational action plans to assist them to manage fires, weeds and feral animals and to support visitor enjoyment of the park.

Managing for visitor safety and enjoyment

Litchfield National Park is one of the most important tourism parks in the Northern Territory and is the second most-visited park in the Northern Territory. The average number of visitors has been increasing in recent years: 329 000 people visited the park in 2014. Visitor satisfaction with the park is also increasing. In recent surveys (January 2013), 94% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience. Litchfield National Park has also received positive feedback through online rating service TripAdvisor.

Florence Falls and Buley Rockhole received the highest proportions of park visitors with 96% of people visiting Florence Falls and 82% visiting Buley Rockhole. Important changes in 2013–14 included banning glass and working with media and police to curb 'anti-social behaviour' over the Easter and ANZAC Day long weekends. This has helped attract families back to the park.

Visitors have benefited directly and indirectly from emergency response training of rangers, a new cleaning contract and reduced staff turnover. Visitor surveys and visitor monitoring calibrations were also completed in 2013.

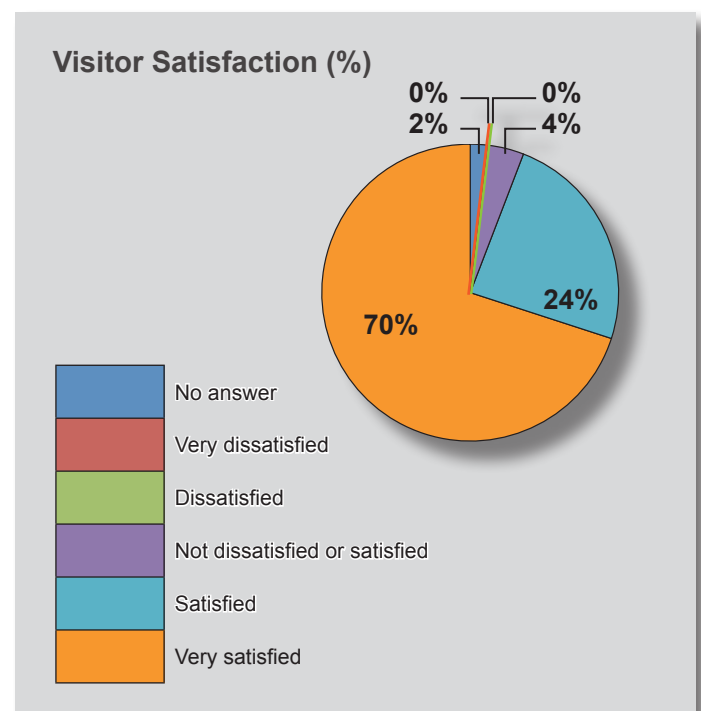
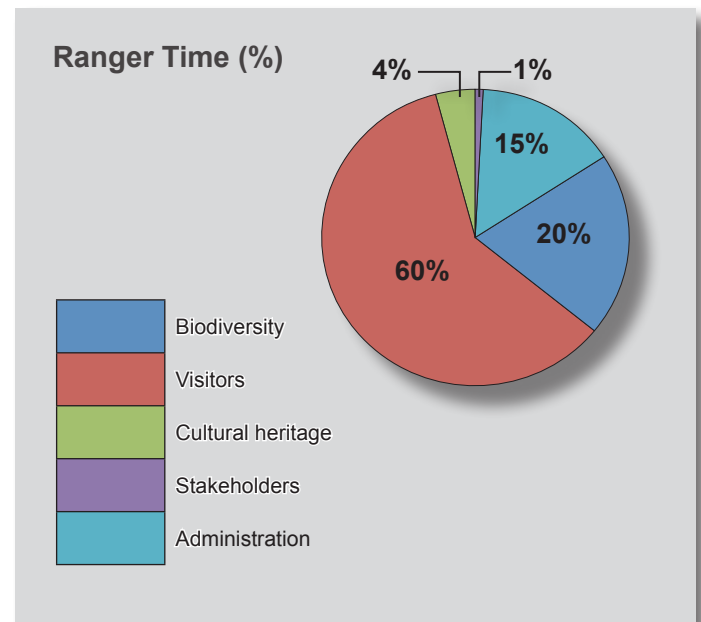
In the past 2 years nearly \$3.5 million worth of new work was completed including:

- construction of the Wangi Falls Centre (\$2.5 million)
- upgrades to lookouts at Wangi Falls and Florence Falls (\$30 000)
- construction of a concrete walking path from Buley Rockhole to Florence Falls (\$800 000)
- upgrade to toilet facilities at Florence Falls (\$100 000).

Works planned for the next 2 years include construction of new toilets at Buley Rockhole and walkway bridges at Cascades.

How is ranger time invested in park programs?

In 2013–14 there were 9 full time rangers working at Litchfield National Park. They are responsible for managing the park, including protecting the park's biodiversity and cultural values, overseeing visitor facilities and activities and carrying out some administrative functions. The rangers also have an important role in engaging with stakeholders and working with the interests of the broader community.

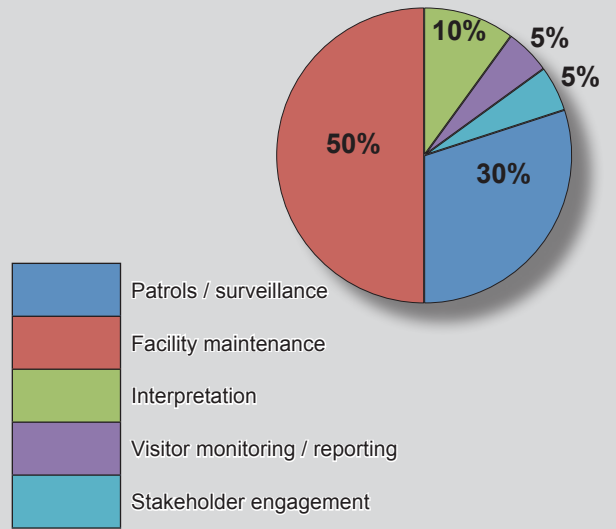


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Ranger Time - Visitor Programs (%)



Visitor management at a glance

The park has an annual action plan to support visitor safety and enjoyment	✓
The achievement of high priority actions stated in the annual visitor action plan (%)	> 90%
The capacity of the park's ranger team to manage visitor programs effectively	↑
Knowledge of visitor numbers, profiles, behaviours, expectations and satisfaction levels	↑
Change in the level of knowledge of visitors numbers, profiles, behaviours, expectations and satisfaction in the past 2 years	↑
Estimated visitor satisfaction with access, facilities and services	↑



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Engaging with the community

Rangers enjoy a high level of engagement and input from community and stakeholders to manage Litchfield National Park. There is frequent communication with neighbours with good collaboration particularly in planning and addressing wildfires and weeds that threaten neighbouring properties.

Rangers have initiated a marked increase in public interpretation in recent years, including 2 new interpretative Territory Parks Alive presentations. In 2012, a total of 79 presentations were provided to 1617 visitors. In 2013 this increased to 116 presentations provided to 2756 visitors. Territory Parks Alive presentations include:

- Termites Unearthed, a guided walk through the termite mounds
- Litchfield: a Taste of the Top End, a slideshow held at Wangi Campground
- A Culture Revealed, a guided talk from a local Indigenous guide about the importance of country, held at Wangi Falls Centre
- Hardship and Heartbreak, a guided walk highlighting the harsh and remote life of the mining pioneers at Bamboo Creek Tin Mine.

Rangers also arranged public events including mountain bike rides across the Tabletop Plateau.

In 2013 Aboriginal custodian Joan Growden presented a Territory Parks Alive guided walk for the first time. Joan has been enthusiastically involved in the newly opened art centre and Territory Parks Alive presentations since the opening of the Wangi Falls Centre, introducing visitors to the importance of country, sites of significance, the various uses of plants and Aboriginal history.

In 2015 park staff will be seeking input from stakeholders and the community for the draft plan of management for the park.

Community and stakeholder engagement at a glance

Level of engagement and support from the community / stakeholders



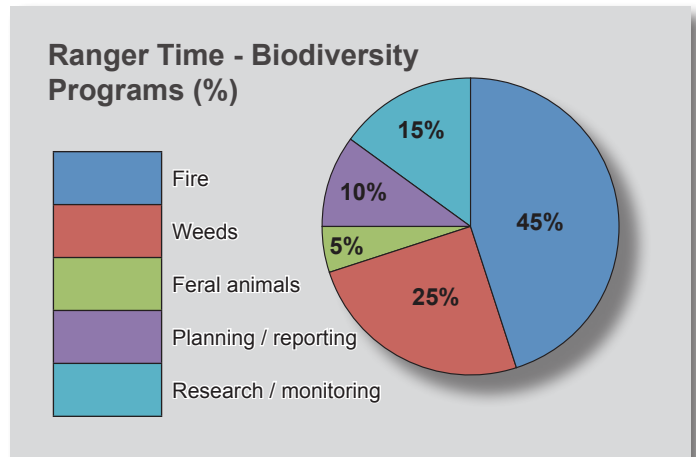
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Knowledge of the park's flora and fauna

The park is as a premier conservation reserve for its high biodiversity and large number of species of conservation value. It has an important role in protecting a broad representation of Top End plants and animals in a region that is developing rapidly. The high species diversity is due to the variety of habitats including sandstone plateaus, undisturbed remnant rainforests, upland swamps and black soil plains.

Biodiversity and aerial gamba grass surveys were undertaken to look at the distribution of the weed and enable rangers to better target fire management. Rangers carried out biannual fire monitoring of set sites in collaboration with Bushfires NT and Charles Darwin University scientists. The park has attracted a great deal of scientific interest, with a number of areas researched including the park's entomology, limnology, termites and stream geomorphology.



Biodiversity management at a glance	
Knowledge of the park's species and communities	↑
Change in the level of knowledge of the park's species and communities over the past 2 years	↑



Managing fire

Wildfire poses the greatest threat to Litchfield National Park. Due to unseasonably dry conditions, fires carried further and burnt hotter than in previous years. The 2013 fire season saw 90% of the park burnt, well above the target of 40%. Of this, 45% was burnt early Dry season and 45% late Dry season 2014.

Fortunately no lives, infrastructure or assets were lost to wildfire and the majority of fire-sensitive communities were protected. The results from early season prescribed aerial burns in late April and May 2013 were patchy and the burns failed to provide adequate breaks.

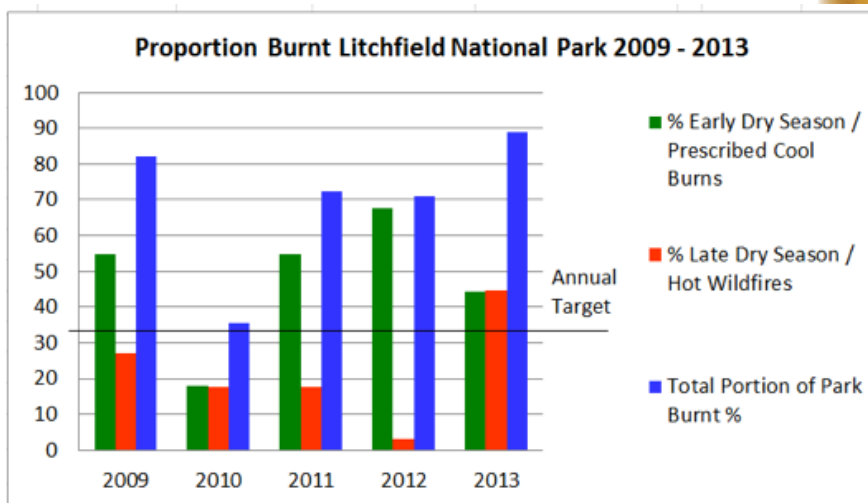
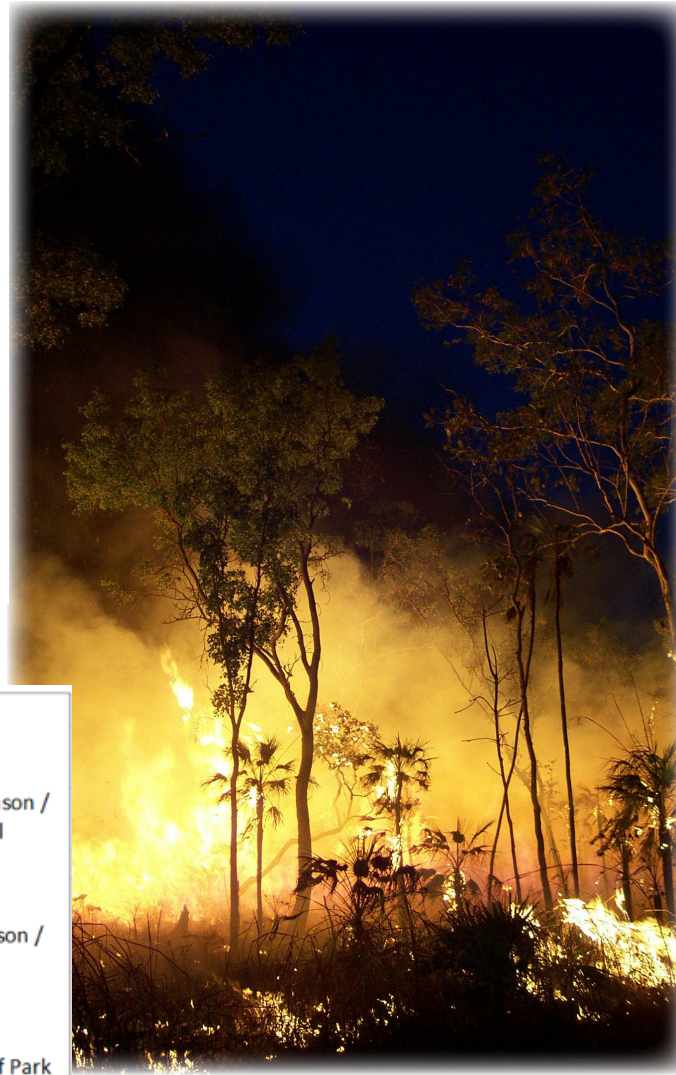
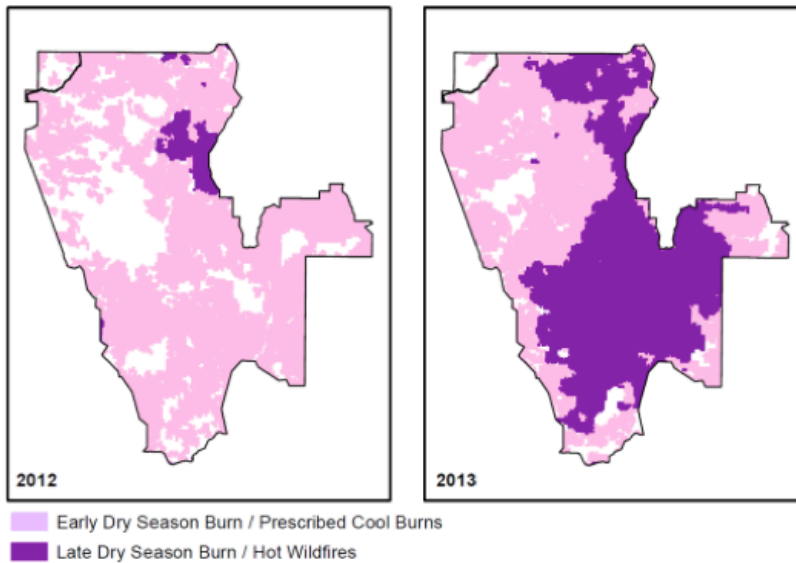
In July 2013 arsonists deliberately lit several fires along Litchfield Park Road, contributing to 20% of the early Dry season burn total. In August 2013, fires were lit along Litchfield Park Road and Reynolds River Track on days of catastrophic fire conditions. They continued burning for 3 to 4 weeks resulting in 45% of the park being burnt. Ultimately these acts of arson were responsible for all the late Dry season fires and half the total park burn for 2013.

It is important to note that rangers observed wildfires in August and September 2013 frequently burning through country that had previously been burnt. In some places fire was seen three times within the season. Rangers observed that the extent of successive early season prescribed burns is possibly having a negative effect on the open forest habitats of the Tabletop Plateau. Rangers have been making efforts to minimise burning in these habitats.

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LITCHFIELD NATIONAL PARK FIRESCAR MAPPING 2012-2013



Fire management at a glance

% of prescribed burns implemented 98%	2012 total park burnt 74% 2013 total park burnt 90% (target <40%)
The park has an annual action plan for fire management that directs annual fire action	✓
The achievement of high priority actions in the annual fire action plan (%)	> 90%
The capacity of the park's ranger team to manage fire programs effectively	↑
The level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by wildfire this year / now	↑
The trend in level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by wildfire in recent years	↑

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Managing weeds

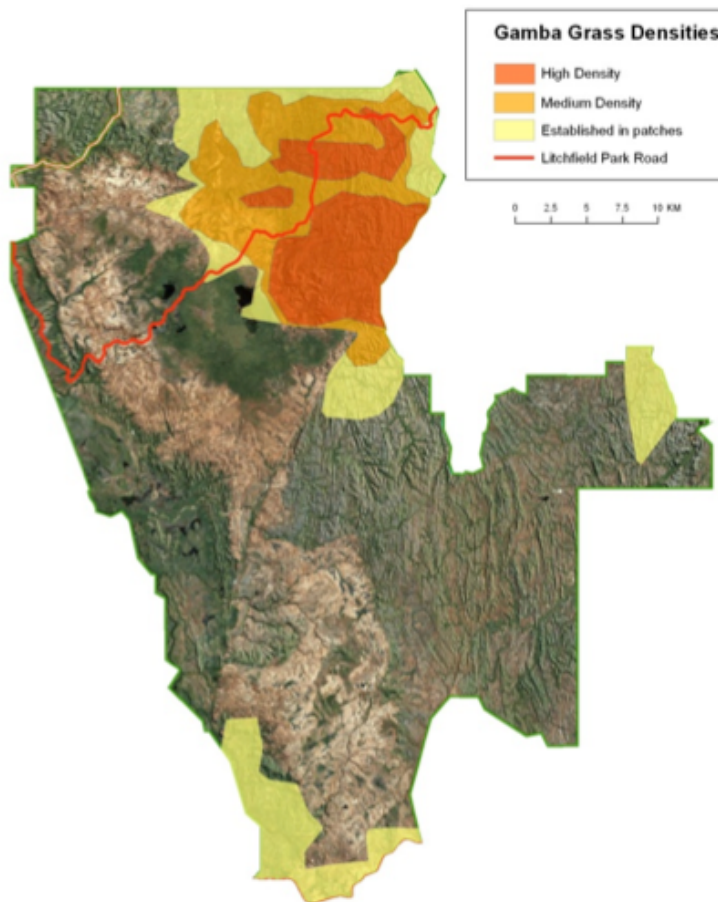
Gamba grass is a serious threat to the long term safety of visitors and the integrity of Litchfield National Park. Large portions of the park are infested with gamba and mission grass. Both grasses dramatically fuel wildfires by increasing the frequency, intensity and size of wildfires.

The core gamba grass infestation along the north-eastern floodplains is not under control and infestations are spreading onto the Tabletop Plateau. The southern part of the park also has infestations. Recent surveys suggest it is unfeasible to manage gamba grass in these areas with current resources. However, efforts will continue to keep gamba grass and mission grass out of visitor areas.

Rangers are awaiting the results of comprehensive surveys evaluating the spread of gamba grass, carried out by Charles Darwin University and the Department of Land Resource Management.

Efforts will then be invested in bigger and wider strategic firebreaks and to prevent the spread of gamba grass into visitor areas and important habitats. Rangers will explore the viability of establishing a gamba grass containment zone to protect the Tabletop Plateau.

The western edge of the park is heavily infested with mission grass along some roadside sections. Mimosa is a problem with infestations in the south of the park throughout the Reynolds River catchment. In 2013 mimosa control in the Reynolds River catchment was contracted out through the Indigenous Employment Program, with excellent results.



Weed management at a glance

The park has an annual action plan for weed management that effectively directs action	✓
The achievement of high priority actions stated in the annual weed action plan (%)	70-90%
Capacity of the park's ranger team to manage weed programs effectively	↔
The level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by weeds this year / now	↑
The trend in level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by weeds in recent years	↑

Managing feral animals

To integrate feral animal control over the wider region, collaborations with neighbours and groups like the Finnis Reynolds Catchment Group have been a priority. As well as opportunistic ground shooting, feral animal management contractors have targeted pigs, buffalo, horses and cattle in priority management areas. In 2012–13 the feral animal contractor removed 27 buffalo, 8 cattle and 9 horses. A new boar trapping program, targeting pigs, was trialled with limited success.

Feral pigs are the most numerous of all feral animals in the park. They occupy all areas where freshwater is available. Pig densities appear to be highest on the Reynolds River lowland country and lowest on and around the northern and southern Tabletop ranges. Feral horses, cattle and buffalo are primarily confined to the southern region of the park. Goats have been spotted in the past in the Tableland creek area. Because this location is so remote, control will be limited to opportunistic sightings. Cats and cane toads are well established; however, there is no effective means of control.

Feral animal management at a glance	
The park has an annual action plan for feral animal management that effectively directs action	✓
The achievement of high priority actions stated in the feral animal action plan (%)	> 90%
Capacity of the park's ranger team to manage feral animal programs effectively	↔
Change in team capacity to manage feral animal programs over the past 2 years	↑
The level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by feral animals this year / now	↔

Managing cultural values

Litchfield National Park encompasses the traditional boundaries of 4 Aboriginal language groups: Werat, Koongurrukun, Waray and Mak Mak Marranungu. The area is of significance to the Aboriginal people, who have an important connection to the land. The park also contains historical values of regional significance that illustrate the development of the Top End pastoral and mining industries, which profoundly affected the culture and lifestyles of local Indigenous people.

Blyth Homestead and Bamboo Creek Tin Mine are listed on the NT Heritage Register for their historical significance. In 2012–13 the Northern Territory Heritage Branch carried out significant improvements to the structural integrity of Blyth Homestead.

Sites of cultural significance to Aboriginal people include several registered sacred sites and a variety of art sites dating back several thousands of years.

Cultural values at a glance	
Knowledge of the park's cultural values	↑
Change in knowledge of cultural values	↑
The park has an annual action plan for cultural heritage that directs action	✓
The extent of high priority actions in the cultural heritage plan achieved (%)	> 90%
Capacity of the team to manage cultural heritage programs effectively	↑