

Darwin Sub Aqua Club
GPO Box 1461
Darwin NT 0801
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NT Coastal and Marine Management Strategy
PO Box 496
Palmerston NT 0832
marinecoastal.strategy@nt.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

The Darwin Sub Aqua Club is a non-profit organisation that was established in 1959 to promote diving in and around the Darwin area. We are pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the Coastal and Marine Management Strategy's discussion paper.

Since its establishment, the club has been involved in the creation of artificial reefs and the location of several wrecks. Club members, some of whom have been diving in the Territory for more than 35 years, have assisted the Northern Territory Government's heritage branch with several wreck surveys in and around Darwin. The club has also been active in promoting recreational diving in Darwin. Our local dive sites include WWII and Cyclone Tracy wrecks, sunken planes, artificial reefs and wrecks, and coral bommies.

Scuba diving unlocks a new world rarely seen by Territorians. Life beneath the waves is colourful, dynamic and beautiful. In the Top End we are privileged to dive in some of the last, near-pristine tropical waters on the planet. These waters are unique, a very rich mix of seagrasses, corals, rocky reefs and sandy and muddy seabeds that act as feeding, breeding and refuge areas for many threatened species including turtles, dugong and dolphins, and iconic big fish like the barramundi and jewfish.

Diving underwater gives us a direct experience of marine life and a perspective that drives us to ensure it is protected from the growing threats we face in the Territory, including most recently, coral bleaching. Without healthy coasts and seas, tourism will suffer, as the dive sector has experienced in Darwin Harbour.

In the 1980s, there were at least three dive shops and up to ten dive tour operators reliant on the good health of the Darwin Harbour. But industrial development, most recently the development of the Inpex LPG processing plant, has led to significant reduction in water quality and visibility. Development of the processing facilities at Bladin Point has involved dredging of almost 17 million cubic metres of sediments in the East Arm and dumping them in the middle of the harbour. Pipeline laying and pile driving have added to the problem.

The loss of water quality and recreational overfishing (there is no commercial fishing in the harbour) has seen major reductions in fish inside the harbour. Once we would likely see schools of 20-30 jewfish, whereas today we are lucky to see one or two individuals in a year.

Darwin Harbour has the majority of WWII wrecks, but no-one will get to see them because of the decline in diving due to poor water quality. Heritage-listed wrecks have also been badly damaged by the anchors of recreational fishing boats.

Dive tourism can be a significant generator of tourism dollars and jobs, but in the Darwin Harbour it has suffered due to poor coastal and marine management. Other water sports such as

sailing and skiing are also impacted by the lack of promotion due to the constant barrage of information about the crocodile threat. This and poor water quality has turned people away from water sports like these. If this continues, it will impact the Territory lifestyle and economy.

The Coastal and Marine Management Strategy needs to ensure that other areas do not suffer the same fate as Darwin Harbour, and encourage management practices that improve its water quality. We would also like the strategy and implementation plan to support:

- the expansion of the territory's marine parks network with the inclusion of marine national park zones. The scientific consensus is that marine national parks are the best way to protect marine life and also help build the resilience of coastal and marine habitats to climate change. Marine parks, especially the marine national park zones, are the preferred destination for divers as they deliver the best experience. New marine parks would have the potential to expand tourism in the region
- heritage wreck sites better protected from anchor damage by recreational fishers
- measures to improve the water quality of Darwin Harbour
- improved baseline studies, monitoring, impact assessment and regulation of industry impacts which affect water quality, such as dredging and trans-shipping.

Yours faithfully

Grant Treloar
Secretary
Darwin Sub aqua club
darwinsubaquaclub@gmail.com