

Draft Northern Territory Climate Change Response: Towards 2050

Response to public consultation

July 2020

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1. Introduction

The Northern Territory Government released the draft 'Northern Territory Climate Change Response: Towards 2050' (the Response) in late 2019. The Response built on a previous Climate Change Discussion Paper and outlined the Government's approach to addressing climate risk and harnessing the potential opportunities associated with the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The draft Response identified three overarching policy objectives:

1. Facilitate the growth of renewables to diversify and strengthen the Territory economy and enable new industries.
2. Build on existing initiatives across the Northern Territory to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across all sectors, in line with a long-term aspirational target of net zero emissions by 2050.
3. Proactively respond to the impacts of climate change.

The purpose of consultation on the draft Response was to facilitate community and stakeholder input on addressing the challenge of climate change, and to inform development of a final strategy. The consultation process included targeted stakeholder meetings across the Territory, a formal request for written submissions, and an online survey through the 'Have your say' website. Consultation closed on 31 October 2019.

A broad range of stakeholders offered considerable feedback on the draft Response. This included:

- 110 people completed the online survey (open-ended questions) on the 'Have Your Say' website
- 44 written submissions from individuals, land councils, local government, environmental and community organisations and industry groups
- 103 pre-filled submissions from members of the Environment Centre NT and the Arid Lands Environment Centre
- over 50 people attending stakeholder engagement sessions
- 2 300 visits to the 'Have Your Say' website.

2. Consultation outcomes

While the feedback was varied, there was clear support for action on climate change and the protection of the Territory's environment for future generations.

Feedback has been categorised into the following broad subject areas and is discussed further below:

- a climate change policy for the NT
- reducing emissions
- increasing renewable energy
- adapting to climate change impacts
- empowering Territorians to respond to climate change.

2.1. A climate change policy for the NT

All submissions strongly supported the Northern Territory Government taking action to mitigate and adapt to the risks and impacts associated with climate change. This included respondents calling for urgent action to respond to the changing climate; immediate and significant action by the Government to reduce GHG emissions; assurance the Government's climate change strategy will be best practice, whole-of-government, with clear timeframes, governance and evaluation, and based on economic data and expert advice; and establishment of an independent climate advisory body/council to oversee progress. Respondents also sought a better understanding of local impacts in order to inform adaptation efforts.

Other respondents detailed the action they are already taking to reduce their household's GHG emissions, their environmental footprint and how they are living more sustainably. However most of these respondents stated they felt their efforts would be useless if hydraulic fracturing was to go ahead due to the significant increase in GHG emissions produced by the industry.

Some respondents expressed their anxiety about climate change and the impacts it will have on liveability and livelihoods in certain areas of the Territory, now and into the future, especially since the climate had already begun to change.

Respondents also identified a need to support urban and remote communities and businesses to adapt, build resilience and participate in the transition to a zero emissions economy. Some respondents suggested the development of a robust adaptation strategy, informed by place-based research to address the changes already affecting the NT. Respondents suggested the strategy needed to include the development of an adaptation plan for remote communities and homelands, informed by place-based research into climate change impacts.

The majority of respondents supported achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Some respondents called for immediate action, including reaching net-zero emissions within a decade; achieving rapid emissions reductions to avoid the worst climate impacts; while others sought alignment of the target with Australia's target of 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Other respondents stated the target should be legislated and the current 'aspirational' target of net zero emissions by 2050, lacked short term and medium term measurable actions to achieve the target. Additionally, some called for staged emissions reductions commencing this year (2020), with ministerial responsibility by the Territory Government.

Consistently, respondents highlighted the requirement for emissions reductions across all sectors, not only at the household-level.

Many respondents criticised the response for not providing detailed actions, or a 'pathway' to delivering the goals contained in the Response.

2.1.1. Response

The Response provides a policy framework to enable the Territory Government to respond proactively to climate change risk, reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the economy, and wherever possible, optimise the opportunities and benefits for Territorians, the economy, and the Territory's natural systems.

The Response establishes a responsive and agile framework; one which recognises the rapid speed at which technological solutions are being developed.

The Territory Government has established the Office of Climate Change and the Office of Sustainable Energy to coordinate the implementation of the Climate Change Response and renewable energy policy

across Government. These Offices are responsible for developing the implementation strategies and facilitating the actions needed to make a difference to the Territory's emissions and build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The Territory Government's role is to lead by example and to send a signal to industry, investors, and the community that the Territory Government is serious about addressing climate change and unlocking the social, economic, and environmental benefits. To facilitate this, the Territory Government will embed climate change considerations across decision-making. Government will focus on establishing the settings and mechanisms to enable Territorians and Territory businesses to continue to reduce GHG emissions and adapt to the impacts by being responsive and agile to climate risk. The Territory Government will continue to advocate for Commonwealth and coordinated national action on GHG emissions reductions and adaptation to climate impacts.

The Response has been revised to acknowledge that work is required to ensure that the net zero emissions target is achieved and to drive action on reducing emissions, while responding and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

The Response has also been revised to more clearly articulate the overall objectives for the Territory in addressing the impacts of climate change. These objectives relate to:

1. delivering net zero emissions by 2050
2. building a more resilient Territory (through response and adaptation initiatives)
3. unlocking opportunities to realise a low carbon future
4. informing and involving Territorians in responding to climate change.

The Territory Government will develop a series of time-bound action plans to identify the priority actions that will be taken to implement the Response. These documents will provide ensure the objectives identified in the Response are achieved.

2.2. Reducing emissions

The majority of respondents were clear that the Territory's emissions need to reduce; with respondents outlining many avenues to reduce the Territory's emissions.

These included encouraging lower emissions transport options such as increasing the uptake of private, government and public electric vehicles, and encouraging higher use of public transport or riding bicycles. Some respondents suggested that subsidies and other incentives should be implemented to facilitate an increased uptake and use of electric vehicles.

There were also many calls to reduce land clearing. Responses varied with some respondents seeking better policies to ensure land clearing applications are assessed against their total GHG emissions and stating that carbon offset programs should be implemented to address emissions from this sector. Other respondents called on the Territory to stop land clearing, protect and regenerate country through reforestation.

Additionally, respondents stated collaboration between the Territory and local governments and funding grants for non-government organisations to increase land management, protect biodiversity and ecosystems was important to address climate change at a local level;

Many respondents recognised that national action is required and called on the Territory Government to commit to a national strategy for reducing emissions; with some respondents stating that national policy is required to avoid the potential for duplication and inconsistency.

Respondents also recognised the importance of promoting changes to human behaviour and lifestyles to lower emissions.

Many respondents also sought a ban on hydraulic fracturing. Overall, these respondents were concerned about the amount of GHG emissions the industry will create, the impact on water resources, and the effect on valuable and significant areas in the Territory.

Some feedback highlighted concern that the Territory Government is relying on jobs in the hydraulic fracturing industry, stating that prioritising employment opportunities in low-carbon and renewable energy sectors should be the focus. There was also concern hydraulic fracturing would profit corporate investors at the expense of Territorians' way of life and destruction of ecosystems and human health.

Some respondents claimed that lifting the moratorium on hydraulic fracturing was in conflict with, and incompatible with, the Territory responding to climate change and implementing offset programs.

2.2.1. Response

Approximately 2.5% of the Territory's annual emissions are attributable to land clearing, although the Territory Government acknowledges that single land clearing events can result in significant emissions (CSIRO, 2019).

The regulation of land clearing not only provides Government with an opportunity to manage emissions, but more broadly ensures the protection and maintenance of biodiversity and ecosystems and seeks to avoid erosion and loss of topsoil.

To improve the Territory's management of land clearing, the Territory Government has committed to introducing reforms to the Territory's environmental regulatory framework. This work will be pursued over the coming years.

In addition, the Territory Government will develop an emissions reduction strategy, a policy for managing emissions from new projects and an offsets framework as part of its implementation of the Response.

The Territory Government is already taking steps to encourage lower emissions transport options, including the installation of publicly available electric vehicle charging stations on major transport routes across the Northern Territory and expansion of the bicycle path network. It will continue to explore additional opportunities to promote lower emissions transport through the delivery of the electric vehicle strategy.

The Territory Government has accepted all 135 recommendations from the 'Independent Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing in the Northern Territory'. This includes recommendation 9.8, which states that the NT and Australian Government seek to ensure there is no net increase in the lifecycle emissions emitted in Australia from any onshore shale gas produced in the NT. The NT Government is continuing to work with the Australian Government on this matter.

The Government is actively pursuing economic opportunities across a wide range of sectors to diversify the Territory economy. Land management, renewable energy and resource extraction activities all have a role to play in a diversified economy that supports the future well-being of Territorians.

2.3. Increasing renewable energy

Overwhelmingly, respondents supported increasing renewable energy, identifying renewable energy and battery storage as central to achieving reduced emissions. Some respondents called for a legislated target of 100% renewable energy by 2030 – an increase on the Territory’s existing policy target of 50%.

Other respondents outlined the importance of the renewable energy sector to create jobs, transition towards a low-carbon economy including growing low-carbon jobs, reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and contribute to reducing GHG emissions.

Some responses recommended that the Territory Government prioritise working with Aboriginal landowners to maximise economic development opportunities from participation in the renewable energy industry; and develop a plan for the provision of renewable energy to remote communities and homelands.

Other respondents stated the Territory has one of the best opportunities in the world to harness the sun’s energy to become a renewable energy superpower; and that growing the renewable energy sector could deliver ongoing jobs in remote areas and create opportunities to export power overseas.

Investment in infrastructure to support the growth of the renewable energy sector; incentives to encourage an uptake in battery installation to assist with an increase in voltage on the grid; and developing the hydrogen industry were also raised as options to grow the renewable energy sector.

Strategies to support the uptake and access to affordable clean energy for low-income households, public housing and rentals were also raised.

2.3.1. Response

The Territory Government realises the opportunities associated with renewable energy. It has adopted a target of 50% renewable energy for electricity consumed from grid-connected installations by 2030 as part of its ‘Roadmap to Renewables’ (the renewable energy target).

In addition, the Territory Government is committed to identifying strategies and priorities for increasing renewable energy and access across different economic sectors, including housing.

The Office of Sustainable Energy has been established to lead Government’s delivery of the renewable energy target and to support the development of the renewable energy industry.

The Response has been amended to identify that investment in the renewable energy industry is one policy pathway to deliver emissions reductions and achieve the net zero target. Specific activities that will be pursued by Government to deliver investment in the renewable energy industry will be identified in the Government’s action plans.

2.4. Adapting to climate change impacts

Responses were generally targeted towards reducing emissions and limiting the impacts of climate change. Of those responses that discussed adaptation, building design and management of water resources were raised as key areas of concern and improvement.

Some respondents identified that building and infrastructure design could reduce emissions from the built environment and transport sector and was necessary to assist Territorians to adapt to the impacts of climate change. These submissions identified the importance of passive building and climate considerate design; energy efficient construction and fit out; adoption of the National Construction Code (NCC) to

raise the minimum standard for energy efficiency; and onsite renewable power generation as part of a climate response.

Respondents also raised concerns about the impacts of climate change on water resource quality and availability for both urban and remote communities. Many respondents identified an urgent need to safeguard water resources, providing suggestions ranging from protecting aquifers, recycling water, and reducing water use, to incentivising the installation of rainwater tanks.

2.4.1. Response

The Territory Government is working with the Australian Government, CSIRO and the City of Darwin to build Darwin's resilience to the changed, and changing, climate. The Darwin Living Lab project is a 10 year collaboration that will test and evaluate a range of heat mitigation measures in order to improve urban design for the dry tropics.

The Territory Government undertakes a range of programs designed to improve understanding of water availability and quality, and to monitor impacts on water resources over time. Water allocation planning and requirements for water extraction licences support the sustainable use of the Territory's water resources. Planning and licensing decisions enable the Territory Government to respond to climate variability and change as part of the strategic management of the Territory's water resources. The Territory Government will continue to improve and refine its processes to ensure climate change impacts on water resources are minimised.

The Territory Government is committed to developing a Strategic Water Plan to ensure water security for urban, regional and remote areas and that long-term strategies to meet demand and growth are planned for through innovative water infrastructure and supply solutions.

The Territory Government, through the NT Planning Commission, is also investigating options for climate change responsive planning. These options will seek to ensure the design and development of the built environment occurs in a manner that is contextual and reflective of the natural environment in which it is located.

The Response identifies that building a resilient Territory – a Territory that responds and adapts to the impacts of a changing climate – will enable the Territory to minimise the negative consequences of the impacts while at the same time placing the Territory in the best possible position to turn these challenges into an economic advantage for the Territory. The Government's action plans will provide further detail on the steps that will be taken to achieve a resilient Territory.

2.5. Empowering Territorians to respond to climate change

Overall, most respondents stated that education and awareness raising activities would be essential to help households and businesses reduce emissions and contribute to meeting the target of net zero emissions by 2050.

Other common topics raised by respondents were support for households to install renewable energy and live more sustainably (recycle, reduce water use, compost, be more energy efficient, plant native vegetation); and build community resilience to climate change.

Many respondents called for community consultation and engagement to support communities to drive local decision making to adapt to climate change, suggesting that an encompassing stakeholder strategy needed to be developed. Other respondents highlighted the importance of educating schoolchildren about climate change by embedding a compulsory subject into the curriculum.

2.5.1. Response

The Territory Government is working with experts to develop the 'Climate Change in the Northern Territory: State of the Science and Climate Change Impacts' report. This Report will enable Territorians to gain an overview of climate risks to the Territory and assist them to find ways to adapt appropriately.

The Territory Government has also introduced a range of programs designed to assist businesses and individuals to improve energy, water and waste efficiency and deliver cost savings. It has introduced education programs into the Territory's curriculum focussing on renewable energy and waste reduction.

Through its new climate change website, the Territory Government will take steps to consolidate information about the actions Government, industry and the community can take to reduce emissions and adapt to a changing climate.

The Response has been revised to articulate the importance of education and action in achieving the goals of the Response. Further information on the actions Government will take to lead by example and deliver high quality, accessible resources, to assist Territorians to understand and plan for the impacts of climate change will be included in the action plans.

3. The climate change response survey

The climate change response survey was designed to identify what climate change information respondents would like access to, and views on the activities that should be prioritised to reduce emissions and respond to climate risks. In addition to the above themes collated from the overall responses, a summary of the survey feedback is below.

Survey question	Summary of responses
<p>Q 1: What information would you like to access through the Climate Change Response website in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territory Government climate change strategy and implementation plan – integration of health, housing and employment; how hydraulic fracturing emissions will be offset; explanation on how to reduce GHGs • Emissions – government and business' plan to reduce emissions annually tracked; comparison to other jurisdictions; mitigation strategies and suggestions; best practice overview; available grants and initiatives to reduce emissions • Renewable energy – information on solar panels and battery storage; incentives; real time • Offsets – purchased by Territory Government; price per tonne of CO₂e- • Community incentives and opportunities • Waste reduction and recycling – tips to reduce emissions • Jobs – renewable and carbon offsetting industries in the Territory • Information on hydraulic fracturing – including the industry contribution to national emissions

Survey question	Summary of responses
<p>Q 2: What information would you like to access through the Climate Change Response website in relation to managing climate change risk?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting and legislation of emissions targets • Information on climate change – how communities and business can adapt to climate risk in urban and remote settings • Renewables – renewables vs diesel/gas emissions • Economic risks – insight into potential climate disasters; impacts on industries and livelihoods; business risks and adaption; timelines and monitoring • Building design – climate appropriate and passive design • Hydraulic fracturing – how the climate change risks from this industry will be managed • Timeline of targets – risks to not taking action on climate change • Vegetation – reforestation; urban tree planting for cooling • Energy efficiency – localised information to improve energy performance of buildings; grants and funding opportunities for commercial and residential • Environment and species loss due to climate change • Lower emission alternatives – tourism, lifestyle • Transport – support for more use of electric vehicles • Water security • Food security
<p>Q 3: What are the key activities you (or your organisation) would like to see prioritised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, either within your sector or within your home?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to renewables - incentives to help fund batteries • Grow Indigenous carbon industry – support Aboriginal enterprises to market and promote carbon credits • Economy-wide mitigation – regulated polluting industries; legislate reduction in GHG emissions; eco-tourism • Territory Government’s GHG emissions reduction – monitored and reported • Cease fracking • Plant more trees – cooling and carbon capture • Infrastructure – more cycle paths; increase electric car charging stations • Waste reduction • Land management – reforestation
<p>Q 4: What are the key activities you (or your organisation) would like to see prioritised to respond</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislate a target of net zero emissions by 2050 • Legislate a target of 100% renewable energy by 2030

Survey question	Summary of responses
to climate risk, either within your sector or within your home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow the renewable energy industry – increase access and create economic opportunities in remote Aboriginal communities; develop the hydrogen and export industry • Safeguard water and address water shortages • Increase support for Indigenous rangers – to care for country, protect natural environments, monitor impacts and reduce emissions • Energy efficiency – amend building codes to require energy and water efficient design; residential and commercial incentives; develop policies for energy performance across all Territory Government operations • Restore biodiversity • Climate appropriate housing design and adaptation for low-income households • Fund climate change research • Ban fracking • Ongoing community engagement to support communities to implement the climate change strategy, adapt to climate change and reduce GHG emissions

Feedback obtained through the survey has been used to inform changes to the Response and will be used to inform the development of the Territory Government’s new climate change website.

This feedback will be shared across Government to support agencies in developing initiatives to support their stakeholders mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts.

4. Next steps

The consultation demonstrated consistent support for the Territory Government taking action to address the impacts of climate change.

The Territory Government has finalised the ‘Northern Territory Climate Change Response: Towards 2050’ in consideration of the feedback provided. It is committed to developing a series of time-bound action plans to identify the priority actions that will be taken to implement the Response. The first of these documents will provide the foundations for the longer-term planning and actions required to ensure the objectives identified in the Response are achieved, while future documents will ensure the Territory continues to deliver the actions required for an enduring climate change response.