

ENGAGEMENT

Environmental grants

The department provides funding through the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority for community-based projects to help reduce impacts on the environment. There are three grant types:

- school grants
- project grants
- Container Deposit Scheme infrastructure grants.

In 2016–17, \$992 169 was distributed across the Territory to fund projects such as:

- Operational grants to support the Arid Lands Environment Centre, the Environmental Defenders Office NT Inc and the Environment Centre NT Inc
- Upgrade fencing and waste management at a number of landfill sites managed by regional councils and organisations including the Coomalie Community Government Council, DEMED Aboriginal Corporation, Roper Gulf Regional Council, Victoria Daly Regional Council and West Arnhem Regional Council
- Motor Trades Association (NT) Inc – Territory end-of-life tyres study
- RecyclingNearYou website and hotline information service, promoting and improving recycling programs in the Northern Territory
- Planet Ark Environmental Foundation
- One-off funding for organisations to buy equipment or infrastructure for establishing Container Deposit Scheme collection depots or points.

Show Circuit

The NT Show Circuit is a major event attended by thousands of Territorians each year. The show circuit begins at the Fred's Pass Show in May and then travels to Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Darwin in July.

The department has been involved in the NT Show Circuit for many years as part of our strong commitment to engage with local community. The show display provides the opportunity for the department to engage with the community and communicate key initiatives and directions.

The former Department of Land and Resource Management in July 2016 had a presence at the Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine regional shows; and was part of the whole of government display at the Darwin show.

Department stand at the Freds Pass Show, May 2017

Staff were very busy at the Freds Pass Show weekend in May 2017 answering questions on topics such as weeds, water, environment, flora and fauna, bushfires mitigation, and land clearing.

The department marquee was very colourful with activities for young and old. Some of the great attractions were the gamba action vehicle (GAV), cabomba boat, live weed display, feral cat and quoll display, giveaways, weed sprayer raffle and Bushfires NT colouring and Lego photo competition.

Ray Nicholls was awarded the Bushfires NT Long and Meritorious Service Medal at the Freds Pass Show. Ray is captain of both the Cox Peninsula Volunteer Bushfire Brigade and the Training Brigade. Ray was presented the award by the Litchfield Mayor, Maree Bredhaur, for his many years of tireless effort and dedication as a volunteer.



Photo: The department's display at Fred's Pass Show.

National Committee for Land Use and Management Information

In early June 2017, the department hosted the National Committee for Land Use and Management Information (NCLUMI). The committee comprises a consortium of Australian and state government partners and promotes the development of nationally consistent land use information. It is chaired by Jason Hill, Director of Land Assessment, Rangelands Division. Land use mapping underpins land use planning, economic modelling and forecasting, biosecurity, water resource management and aquatic health, agricultural development, environmental modelling and management of biodiversity risks.

The first day of the meeting was an open session for government and industry representatives, followed by jurisdictional updates from across Australia and discussion around improving national guidelines. The second day involved a field tour of the Darwin area and the third day was on future work plans.

An extra 40 people attended the open session with representatives of government and industry, with presentations from North Australia Development Office, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources and department staff. They outlined the importance of land use mapping for national reporting but also locally in the Territory. The department's presentation was an opportunity to showcase our Territory-wide collaborative land use mapping project. The feedback from attendees was very positive.

The three-day meeting also allowed interstate representatives to gain a better understanding of land use issues in the Darwin rural area, including changes to groundwater and gamba grass management, tropical fruit horticulture, barramundi farming on the Adelaide River and conservation at Fogg Dam.



Photo: Grant Staben (Project Leader - Land Use Mapping) gives an overview to interstate and Australian Government colleagues on the app form he designed for land use mapping field work.

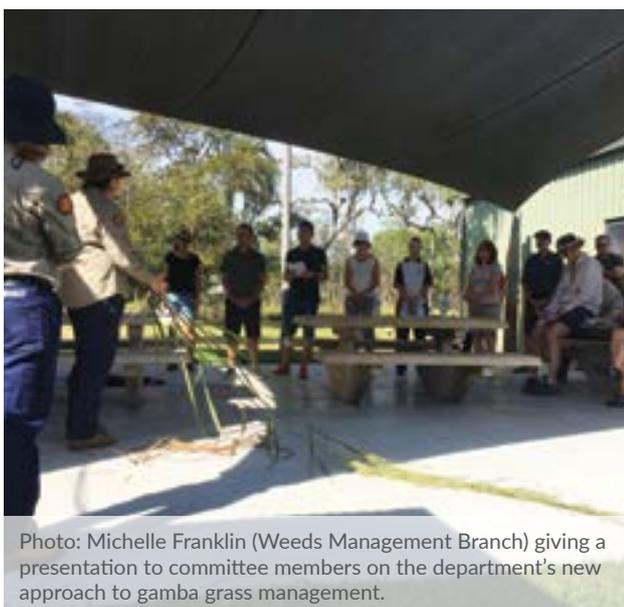


Photo: Michelle Franklin (Weeds Management Branch) giving a presentation to committee members on the department's new approach to gamba grass management.

Greg Owens from NT Farmers did a fantastic job of leading the field tour and causing interstate hunger pains during a visit to the Humpty Doo Barramundi farm on the second day.

Interstate representatives also provided excellent feedback on the venue, the field tour and our great dry season weather.



Photo: (L-R) Campbell Elliott, Tahnee Thompson, Bill Bright, Susan King.

Edith Farms Volunteer Bushfires Brigade AGM

In February 2017, weed officers attended the Edith Farms Volunteer Bushfires Brigade AGM to talk about plans to protect their area from the devastating impacts of gamba grass.

Members were pleased to hear about the upcoming aerial survey work, which would help determine the current gamba distribution and enable better planning for protection of their community, infrastructure and natural landscape.



Photo: Savannas Regional Bushfires Committee meeting.

Savannas Regional Bushfires Committee

The first meeting of the Savannas Regional Committee appointed under the *Bushfires Management Act* was held in Katherine in March 2017. The new committee reflects a diversity of stakeholders representing most major land uses. The meeting focussed on the new *Bushfires Management Act*; a discussion about the roles and responsibilities of the committee and governance; and an introduction to the regional bushfire management risk planning process.



Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the Northern Territory (AFANT) AGM

AFANT invited the Weed Management Branch to attend its AGM on Sunday 3 April 2017. Weed officers attended and set up a small stall to discuss weed issues related to fishing. *Salvinia* was the main talking point, with many AFANT members showing interest in weeds related to Four Mile Hole in Kakadu along with other weeds such as *cabomba* and *sagittaria* that can impact on fishing in the Top End.



Photo: (L-R) Tahnee Thompson, Tammy Smart, Nathan Mills, David Hooper.

NT Cattlemen’s Association 2017 AGM and Conference

The NT Cattlemen’s Association AGM and Conference was held on 31 March 2017. The department partnered with the Department of Primary Industry and Resources and the Department of Business, Trade and Innovation to sponsor the conference. The display focussed on the services and programs our department delivers across the Northern Territory.



Photo: Roni Opden, Weeds Management Branch.



Girraween Primary School Field Day Weeds Stand

Weed officers attended the Girraween Primary School Field Day and were very well received with their weeds stand. Many children and their parents were excited by the stand, which allowed us to speak about weeds and the problems they cause.

2016 Territory Natural Resource Management Conference

This year's conference theme 'Shaping the future of NRM' focussed on innovative practices and collaborative projects to showcase and encourage real NRM change. Our staff attended as speakers and contributed to the poster presentations on the following topics:

Parkinsonia Biological Control

Monitoring parkinsonia health to better document impacts of management – Poster by Louis Elliott and Bert Lukitsch, Weed Management Branch.

Improving bushfire management planning in the Northern Territory – Mark Gardener, Bushfires NT

As part of National Bushfires Mitigation Program, Bushfires NT is piloting a project to improve how stakeholders work together to reduce risk of wildfire through better planning, mitigation and suppression. Tools include a transparent planning framework that contextualises where each stakeholder fits; developing risk-based tools to prioritise mitigation; standardised planning templates; and support for operational staff, volunteer brigades and landowners. The mitigation program in the Top End is used to demonstrate how planning processes are strengthening partnerships and improving fire management outcomes.

Fish Tracks: Tracking barramundi in the Roper River – Peter Dostine, Aquatic Health Water Resources

Increased demand for water resources from expanding agriculture in northern Australia will affect natural flow regimes of spring-fed rivers, including the Daly and Roper rivers. Sustainable development of water resources will require information on the relationships between river flow and the ecology of key aquatic species to ensure the ecological requirements of these species are not compromised. The Roper River fish movement study will document and model movement responses of barramundi in relation to intra- and inter-annual variation in flow. This information can be used to develop environmental flow recommendations. Incorporating the results of this project into environmental planning processes will achieve improved conservation outcomes for a range of fish species and riverine ecosystems more generally.



Bellyache Bush Management in the Daly River Catchment – Brad Sauer and Rowena Eastick, Weed Management Branch

A project to manage bellyache bush (*Jatropha gossypifolia*), which covers an estimated 12 000 hectares in the upper Daly River catchment, commenced in 2012. The project aimed to protect the Daly River from negative production and biodiversity impacts caused by bellyache bush through a collaborative, adaptive and integrated management approach. A stakeholder group was established to enable collaboration, planning and implementation across tenures.

Integrated management methods applied included foliar, basal barking and cut-stumping in conjunction with aerial herbicide application, burning and stock exclusion. Burning and aerial spraying has resulted in improved access to bellyache bush infested areas; however, an integrated management approach remains critical. There have been many learnings and challenges; most recently a flood event has necessitated complete review of the project activities.

Let's Collaborate: Eradicating Prickly Acacia in the NT – Nathan Mills, Weed Management Branch

Prickly acacia (*Vachellia nilotica*) is a highly invasive woody weed that covers over 6.6 million hectares throughout Australia. Established infestations on the Barkly and Victoria River districts threatened to reduce the productivity of these iconic grazing lands. Collaboration between government and non-government organisations has significantly reduced the impact of prickly acacia in these areas.

Innovative and collaborative projects have provided an opportunity to increase awareness within Aboriginal ranger groups to control prickly acacia on their country. A devoted project officer will help continue to build capacity of landholders and develop catchment based multi-tenure management plans for prickly acacia, with the aim to eradicate prickly acacia from the Northern Territory.

Coastal and Marine Management Strategy - Tony Griffiths, Flora and Fauna Division

The NT Government has committed to developing a Coastal and Marine Management Strategy that will ensure the health and viability of our coast and seas, support their use by Territorians for recreational and cultural purposes, manage growing demand for our natural resources and foster sustainable industry. The strategy will cover the next 10 years, be based on extensive consultation, and is due to be finalised in 2018.

Removal of the 15L exemption in the Darwin Rural Area

The exemption from licensing under the *Water Act* applying to water bores pumping 15 litres per second or less in Darwin Rural Water Control District was revoked in 2016–17. Groundwater extraction for uses other than rural stock and domestic purposes now requires a licence and metering, which will assist in sustainable use of groundwater resources in the region.

Communication activities included:

- pop-up information booths at Coolalinga and Howard Springs shops
- information stalls at Coolalinga markets
- community meetings at Berry Springs and Humpty Doo
- industry meetings
- more than 200 people visited the 'bore central' public information office for advice
- social media, radio and the department website
- information packs
- advertising in the Rural Weekly newspaper over a five-month period
- advertising in the NT News
- advertising on all major radio stations.

Darwin Rural Groundwater Watch

The Water Resources Division undertakes routine groundwater monitoring of 96 monitoring bores across the Darwin rural area. At the end of each wet season (and again on October 31 of each year), data from representative bores is used to report on groundwater levels, their recharge response and to predict groundwater levels at the end of the dry season across eight districts in the Darwin rural area.

Communication activities included:

- roadside signs – updated monthly with the levels and predictions
- hydrographs – updated monthly on the department website and social media
- monthly editorials in the Rural Weekly newspaper
- digital screens at MLA offices
- groundwater animation – groundwater and the water cycle, know your bore and what rural residents can do
- monthly public notices in the NT News
- information packs.



A Water Resources digital display screen.

CONSULTATION

Progress on Strategic Aboriginal (Water) Reserves

Water Resources commenced stakeholder consultations into the policy options for Strategic Aboriginal (Water) Reserves with the release of a discussion paper in March 2017.

A Strategic Aboriginal (Water) Reserve is a reserved volume of water from the consumptive pool within a water allocation plan area, which is set aside for exclusive access by Aboriginal landowners to use or trade. The rationale for introducing Strategic Aboriginal (Water) Reserves is to provide Aboriginal landowners with increased opportunity to access water resources for economic development.

Consultation included:

- targeted consultation with traditional owners in water planning areas throughout the Northern Territory
- presentations provided and consultation undertaken with members at Water Advisory Committee meetings (Alice Springs, Ti Tree, Ooloo, Katherine and Howard Springs)
- consultation with land councils, North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance and Aboriginal corporations
- targeted consultation with major non-Aboriginal stakeholder groups, including industry, public water supply, water advisory committees, interest groups, researchers and other experts.

A draft Strategic Aboriginal (Water) Reserves policy informed by stakeholder feedback has been prepared for government consideration.

Environmental regulatory reform

There is a recognised need for substantial reform of the Northern Territory's environment protection framework, particularly in relation to environmental impact assessment and approvals. Reforms are critical to achieving a robust regulatory system the community will trust to ensure the Territory's ecologically sustainable development, while encouraging industry investment and economic growth.

Government has committed to substantial reforms as part of its Healthy Environment, Strong Economy policy platform. There is a need to deliver on these commitments in a timely manner in order to generate trust and confidence in government and any changes to the environmental management framework.

The Environmental Regulatory Reform Discussion Paper released in May 2017 provides a snapshot of the reform process for environmental impact assessment and project approvals.

Draft Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan

The current Western Davenport Water Allocation Plan was declared in 2011. In accordance with the *Water Act*, a review of the plan formally commenced in early 2016.

A consultation process involving stakeholders, landowners and interested parties commenced in April 2016. A draft plan has been prepared for public comment.

The technical report that has informed the development of the draft plan is available on the department's website. All feedback received from stakeholders will contribute to the finalisation of the plan.

Aboriginal Ranger Grants Program

The Northern Territory Government is implementing a new policy initiative – ‘Protecting Country, Creating Jobs’, which seeks to support Aboriginal rangers to protect the environment and create jobs.

This will be achieved through a capital grants program for Aboriginal ranger groups to help purchase essential items, with funding of \$4.1 million over two years. It will also establish a Land Management and Conservation Fund to improve conservation practices on Aboriginal land, with funding of \$2 million per annum from 2017–18.

A discussion paper described the context for the grant program and sought input from Aboriginal ranger groups and other stakeholders about land and sea management problems, methods of addressing those problems and how the grants program could be structured to achieve such outcomes. An Aboriginal Land Management Advisory Group was also formed with a range of highly experienced people in the Aboriginal land management sector, and this group provided crucial advice in the development of the guidelines for the grant program.

Review of statutory weed management plans

In accordance with the *Weeds Management Act*, the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources commenced a review of the weed management plans for:

- bellyache bush (*Jatropha gossypifolia*), 2013
- mimosa (*Mimosa pigra*), 2013
- gamba grass (*Andropogon gayanus*), 2014.

All landowners, managers and users are required to control declared weeds on their land in accordance with the *Weeds Management Act*. They have a legal obligation to manage bellyache bush, mimosa and gamba grass per the requirements of these plans.

Landowners and occupiers were encouraged to provide feedback on the plans, which were developed in 2010 and reviewed in 2013 and 2014, with extensive stakeholder consultation. The plans form part of a strategic approach to bellyache bush, mimosa and gamba grass management in the Northern Territory. They describe on-ground management requirements that can be enforced under the *Weeds Management Act*.

A questionnaire was developed to assist in reviewing these plans.

Bellyache bush, mimosa and gamba grass are all declared weeds in the Northern Territory with split declaration of:

- Class A (to be eradicated)
- Class B (growth and spread to be controlled)
- Class C (not to be introduced into the Northern Territory).

GRANT PROGRAMS

The department provides one-off special-purpose grants. The grants are distributed under an agreement that the purpose of each grant and the reporting process for confirming that the funded objective has been achieved.

A full list of the grants administered by the department is detailed at Appendix 3.

PARTNERSHIPS

Recipient	Purpose	Amount
Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation	Contribution to the Larrakia Nation, which, along with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, supports funding for Aboriginal traineeships relating to work on Darwin Harbour.	\$170 000
Geoscience Australia	Study to determine the economic and environmental viability of the Ord Stage 3 Irrigation Scheme, which will construct irrigation channels from the Ord Irrigation Scheme into the Northern Territory.	\$96 807
Jacobs	Managed Aquifer Recharge study to assess scope to convert excess water flows of the wet season to supply or augment irrigation projects in the dry season.	\$335 000

SPONSORSHIPS

During 2016–17, the department sponsored:

- NT Cattlemen's Association Conference – \$10 000
- Waste Recycling Industry Association NT WRINT Conference – \$3 000
- Charles Darwin University Barbara Singer Scholarship – \$3 000
- PFAS Summit (per and polyfluorinated alkyl substances) – \$225
- Charles Darwin University, Department of Land Resource Management Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement in the Bachelor of Environmental Science – \$250
- NT Natural Resource Management Sponsorship 2016 – \$3 000
- Australian Marine Science Conference – Connections through Shallow Seas – \$6 000
- Conoco-Phillips Science Experience – \$1 000