

Northern Territory **PARKS** 2022-52 **MASTERPLAN**

What You Thought

Consultation Summary Paper

Department of
ENVIRONMENT, PARKS AND WATER SECURITY





IMAGE: Cutta Cutta Caves

THE PARKS MASTERPLAN 2022-2052

The Northern Territory Parks Masterplan 2022-2052 is a comprehensive strategy for Territory parks and reserves. It will provide assurance to Territorians and the wider Australian and international community who respect and value the rich natural and cultural assets on offer throughout the Territory. The Parks Masterplan will be shaped by public feedback and provide the strategic direction for the parks system over the next 30 years by establishing a vision for the management of our parks and reserves and providing goals and measurable targets for a series of key themes.

We should be thinking about protected areas in perpetuity. Fostering a long term vision for the Territory's parks and reserves will guide us in safeguarding our precious places, enabling future generations to be inspired by the nature and culture of our parks.

The future of Territory parks and reserves is a shared responsibility and our parks belong to our people. For these reasons it was considered essential that we asked what people want from their parks. An initial phase of consultation has been wide-ranging with viewpoints of community and stakeholder groups and individuals gathered from across the Territory through a consultation paper, surveys and face to face consultation with particular special interest groups.

In 2021 the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS) drafted a [consultation paper](#) to generate ideas, views and discussion to support the development of the 30 year Masterplan. This paper was intentionally open in its invitation for ideas and options for consideration for inclusion in a final plan. The consultation paper was accompanied by a structured survey for respondents to complete on the Northern Territory Government 'Have your Say' website. People were also encouraged to respond in writing or via email. The consultation process was advertised on social media and media releases were made about the process to generate interest.

A Parks Masterplan will provide long term certainty and purpose to park management, along with improved certainty for Traditional Owners, Territorians and potential investors.

The Territory Economic Reconstruction's final report (TERC report) recognises our parks as the backbone of the tourism industry, and a key component for the Territory's economic comeback. TERC recommended implementing a 10 year plan to further activate Territory parks. While the Masterplan must have a focus on economic objectives, it must also consider and set a clear direction for social, environmental and cultural outcomes.

In developing a Parks Masterplan we seek genuine engagement with Territorians and key stakeholders. To do that we wanted to hear what the community want from their parks and reserves.

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

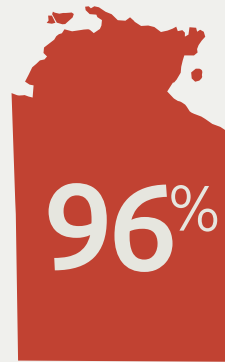
The response of the Northern Territory community to the requests for feedback have been extraordinarily positive. The level of engagement and the number of responses is extremely high compared to similar consultative processes carried out by a Territory Government. The exposure across social media was very high with 39 597 people viewing either the Facebook posts about the Masterplan process or the website.

The fact that so many people checked in on the process and then a significant proportion went on to provide thoughtful, passionate and well researched submissions is a compelling indicator of how important Territory parks and reserves are to the community of the Territory and more broadly.

Thank you for your feedback

39,597

PEOPLE VIEWED EITHER
THE FACEBOOK POSTS
OR THE WEBSITE.



96% OF SURVEY
RESPONDENTS
WERE
TERRITORIANS



426

EMAIL SUBMISSIONS



1,291

VISITS TO THE TERRITORY PARKS
MASTERPLAN HAVE YOUR SAY PAGE

171

RESPONSES TO THE HAVE YOUR SAY
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Targeted consultation with Aboriginal Traditional Owners, partners and peak stakeholder bodies

KEY MESSAGES

Overall, respondents indicated they care deeply about Territory parks and reserves, shown both by the time and effort put in by so many people to respond to the call for feedback and by the nature of the responses made.

People want their parks to stay and they want the biodiversity and cultural values respected and protected. There is strong support for joint management, however people feel it can be made better.

People want more parks, and they want more access to those that we already have. But, importantly, they wish to see the natural qualities of our parks and reserves preserved when considering development for tourism or recreational access and have encouraged a balanced approach to commercial use of the park estate.



IMAGE: Casuarina Coastal Reserve.

SUMMARISED RESULTS

The remainder of this document provides a summary of community feedback. The results are summarised to align with the structure of the initial [consultation document](#). Their order does not reflect any degree of importance placed on any one theme.

Joint Management

The majority of responses indicated that there is strong support for Joint Management; however, there needs to be improvement to get it working as it should.

Most people suggested that at the end of the current lease terms, Joint Management arrangements should be renegotiated to be retained as they are, or improved.

The most commonly stated suggestions for improving on Joint Management were to provide more say to Traditional Owners, work towards developing common goals, provide training and education to all parties and provide more jobs for Traditional Owners.

THE PARKS AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY MANAGE 85 AREAS AS PARKS AND RESERVES

33 ARE SUBJECT TO FORMAL JOINT MANAGEMENT WITH ABORIGINAL TRADITIONAL OWNERS.

CONSULTATION WITH JOINT MANAGEMENT OWNERS IS CONTINUING.

Park development and infrastructure

A majority of respondents believe it is important to open up new areas of parks and establish major infrastructure such as power and roads.

Support for opening up and establishing infrastructure was based on allowing for greater access resulting in increased tourism and recreation outcomes and spreading the load on existing sites.

A strong preference was shown for new development to be balanced with looking after country, and for infrastructure to be kept simple and low key.

Limmen National Park and Litchfield National Park were the most commonly identified parks where a new road would present significant tourism and recreation opportunities on the parks estate.

No preference could be established regarding where existing infrastructure development could be leveraged to provide increased access to the parks estate.

The majority of respondents did not agree that extending managed power and water into the parks estate for the purposes of establishing intensive tourism developments should occur. The reason given for this result was the preference to keep Parks and Reserves pristine and infrastructure simple and unobtrusive.

The park most commonly listed as being well serviced and suitable for more intensive development was Litchfield National Park. The next most common was Nitmiluk National Park (including both the Gorge and Leliyn sites), followed by Watarrka National Park.

Park expansion

Very strong support was shown for expanding the park estate in the Northern Territory. A commonly stated qualification was that Traditional Owners would need to agree to any expansion proposal.

Overwhelmingly, people stated that they believed that the parks estate should be expanded for the protection of biodiversity. However, there was general support for the idea that priorities should balance the requirements of biodiversity protection, recreation and tourism.

When asked if the concept of privately owned National Parks should be explored in the Northern Territory, the majority of respondents expressed concern. Feedback on why there was limited support for this model of expansion suggested that people perceived the question to relate to the existing park estate with the most common responses being that National Parks are a public asset and they should stay that way.

Some responses favoured exploring the idea of privately owned National Parks thoroughly before developing a new framework that would allow for them.

Park Consolidation

A slim majority of respondents stated that the park estate should not be rationalised; however, further comment on the question suggests that people didn't understand what rationalisation meant or would require more information about what it might mean to give an affirmative response.

Similarly a majority of respondents, when asked if there are areas that should not be a park or reserve, answered no. Common reasons for this response were that all parks and reserves are valuable, they have been selected for valid reasons and should remain protected areas.

Very strong support was provided for Parks and Wildlife Rangers confining their management efforts to those areas that are managed for national park and reserve-related purposes where their focus should be on core functions such as the conservation of biodiversity.

There was little support for the idea that some parks and reserves may have other more productive purposes and should be turned over to those uses.

There was a predominant sentiment that rationalisation should not be occurring just to save costs or to make money from land sales.



IMAGE: Judbarra/Gregory National Park.

10 year Activation Plan

Most people agreed that the list of tourism-orientated park activation proposals provided in the consultation paper was appropriate.

Multiple suggestions were made regarding where recreation priorities exist on the park estate including mountain bike trails, multiday walking trails, revitalising existing recreation nodes, and increasing opportunities for people to take calculated risks such as rock climbing.

Overwhelming support was provided for the idea that people prefer to visit sites where swimming is an option.

Litchfield National Park, including multiple sites on the park, was the most commonly listed park that respondents thought needed significant refreshment, followed by Tjuwaliyn (Douglas Daly) and various sites in the East and West MacDonnell National Parks.

No clear indication of support for private sector investment in park infrastructure was returned by respondents, with a mixture of strongly opposed or in favour. Opposition to private investment is based on the potential for conflicts of interest, exclusivity and a lack of equity.



IMAGE: Wangi Falls Litchfield National Park

Recreational Futures

A slim majority of responses stated that there were not enough short walks on the park estate. Those respondents who thought there were enough short walks reflected the view that existing walks need to be better maintained and promoted with supporting maps and information.

An overwhelming majority believe that the management of parks and reserves should be linked with health and wellbeing outcomes.

Respondents stated that a healthy environment is always associated with better mental and physical health. Healthy country equals healthy people, especially for indigenous communities. People with a disability require access to parks as this enables health and wellbeing outcomes.

A majority of respondents believe that infrastructure to improve access to the park estate for people with a disability should be a priority when considering developments and improvements.

Examples of projects on how to link health and wellbeing outcomes to support park and reserve management included establishing more playgrounds and functional fitness areas, equipment on sidewalks, bike tracks completely sealed, more wild spaces opened up, not confining everyone to the tourist circuits, more short walks, retreats and get-a-ways, better park design, infrastructure and creating incentives to go hiking like fishing competitions.

The most commonly listed ways provided by respondents to connect the whole Territory community with parks and reserves were to continue to improve the access to parks and reserves, to increase the diversity of the recreational offerings available and to advertise and educate the public about what the estate has to offer.

A small majority of respondents agreed that if new hunting areas were to be established they should be on the park estate and managed by Parks and Wildlife, with the positive arguments that hunting is a tourism drawcard, improves conservation and provides Aboriginal revenue opportunities. The negative responses or those responses that qualified the expansion of hunting, did so on the grounds that they don't support hunting in the Northern Territory due to the requirement for strict ethical protocols, too much scope for illegal activities and a preference that there is no hunting of native species.

Biodiversity Values

A very high level of support was displayed for the view that the park estate should be considered as the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation in the Northern Territory.

A frequently expressed view was that Territory parks should be leading protected area management and a role model for biodiversity conservation.

The majority of respondents highlighted that the balance between biodiversity conservation, recreation and tourism needs to strongly favour biodiversity and protection over development.

Respondents expect that the majority of Parks and Wildlife resources should be allocated to protecting natural values. A common theme to responses was that if nature is what people seek from Territory parks, then protecting enjoyment of it should receive most of the available resources.

When asked what the goal for management of biodiversity values should be, feedback was very clear with a common sentiment that the goal for managing natural biodiversity should be to maintain or improve the biodiversity of areas under parks management to secure them for future generations.

Respondents have a view that there are issues with management of biodiversity values on the park estate, primarily related to resource constraints and the subsequent impact on weed, fire and feral animal control.

'Two-way' management (incorporating Aboriginal and western understanding of biodiversity management) is considered desirable.

A well subscribed group email recommended that zoning of marine parks was essential to the protection of the biodiversity of those parks.

Numerous respondents agreed that there was a need for better research, monitoring and reporting of the biodiversity values of the park estate.

The consultation paper asked for views on how Parks and Wildlife should prepare for climate change on the park estate. The responses were varied in nature; however, they centred on increasing the natural resilience of ecosystems through better management of fire, weeds and feral animals, and increasing the understanding of how ecosystems are likely to respond.

Living Cultural Values and Heritage

When asked what the goal for management of cultural values on the park estate should be, feedback was clear. A common sentiment was that the goals for management should be to respect cultural values, retain those values through expert advice from Aboriginal people and where appropriate share this knowledge with the wider community.

Options provided by respondents for improving the management of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage sites included greater education, limiting access to particularly sensitive sites, asking custodians and also transferring responsibility to custodians, increased community engagement and better resourcing of the activities required for heritage protection. Respondents also reflected that a better understanding of our heritage sites was required.

There is strong support for changing place names to culturally appropriate names in National Parks and reserves.

Aboriginal Economic Development

A slim majority of respondents believe that the Masterplan should prescribe outcomes for Aboriginal economic development with strong support for a well developed policy framework and flexibility for Aboriginal people to decide on their own priorities.

There was general support for developing a list of particular projects that will have short to medium term impacts on Aboriginal economic development, with the stipulations that projects should be co-designed or suggested by Traditional Owners, support the conservation of biodiversity, work for Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife and are suggestions rather than prescriptions.

Multiple recommendations were made for how to turn economic development aspirations for Aboriginal people into reality on parks and reserves.



IMAGE: Exploring Ellery Creek Big Hole. Photo by Jesse Lindemann, Tourism NT

Balancing Commercialisation and Revenue

There is strong support for Parks and Wildlife protecting park revenue sources including funding from NTG sources and self-generated revenue.

People either thought that Parks and Wildlife should attempt to improve their revenue and maintain existing funds, or otherwise be funded adequately and sustainably without having to rely on revenue for funds to manage parks.

A strong view was expressed that commercial use of public assets should result in commercial rates being applied to that use.

There is strong support for Parks and Wildlife to consider limiting access to particular sites if they are being over used or 'loved to death'; however the preference is that the site is managed before this becomes a problem.

There was little support for the idea that there are areas on the park estate that only commercial operators should be provided with access to.

Establishing Partnerships

When asked how we can encourage partners to get involved in managing parks and reserves, varied responses were received. A number of responses stated the importance of cross-Government commitment, investment and support to ensure that the natural and cultural values of Park estates were protected.

Private industry, Clubs and Associations and Volunteer/Community Groups were the focus for other responses, with responders asking for more access for recreational clubs on Parks, grant opportunities for not for profit groups, more resourcing for community groups and clubs to contribute to projects within Park estates.

Respondents stated that Government, industry and the community can improve how we work together to achieve improved management of the park estate, by improving communication, increasing consultation, strengthening outcomes and focusing on biodiversity instead of economic outcomes.

Respondents believe the best way to increase the confidence of nature-based tourism investors is a commitment from the Northern Territory Government to protect biodiversity, provide certainty of leases and contractual arrangements, prioritise ethical tourism, manage tourism impacts well, provide sound regulatory frameworks and ensure continuity of access to sites.

Anything else

Various other recommendations and observations were made by respondents. Statements in this section represent a summary only, due to the diversity of responses.

For more detailed information refer to the Northern Territory Parks Masterplan 2022-2052 Consultation Public Submissions Report, at: <https://haveyoursay.nt.gov.au/parksmasterplan>, to be released in March 2022.



**NORTHERN
TERRITORY**
GOVERNMENT

Department of
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