

Planning approaches in the Northern Territory

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Planning system

The planning framework for the Northern Territory (NT) is set out in the planning laws, which include the *Planning Act* and *Planning Regulations*. The laws provide for appropriate and orderly planning and control of the use and development of land (including land covered by water) by establishing the structure and content of the NT Planning Scheme and the mechanism of consultation on proposals, decision making, appeals, regulation and enforcement.

The administration of the planning laws is the responsibility of the Minister. The Minister, along with the Development Consent Authority (DCA), are the two main decision makers in the NT planning system. The NT planning system also relies on input from other stakeholders, including the community.

The Minister makes all decisions in relation to proposals to amend the Planning Scheme, including the introduction of strategic land-use plans, planning policy and changes to zones or development assessment rules.

The DCA considers applications on zoned land for development that require approval while the Minister is the authority for applications on zoned coastal land outside of DCA responsibility. Of the seven divisions of the DCA in the NT, only Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Litchfield divisions make decisions on proposals involving the coastline.

The NT Planning Commission does not make decisions on any applications but as an advisory body to the Minister it is responsible for consulting on and preparing integrated strategic land-use plans, guidelines and assessment criteria for the Minister to consider for inclusion in the NT Planning Scheme.

Local Councils are responsible for municipal services and infrastructure including maintenance of the portion of the coastline that is under Council ownership. Local Councils do not make decisions on planning proposals, however the laws require that local councils are provided with the opportunity to make a submission on planning proposals on zoned land in their local government area.

Climate challenges

It is recognised that sea-level rise induced by climate change is a significant risk to future development in coastal areas in the Northern Territory, and that cyclones pose a significant risk to coastal communities. Therefore, planning plays a significant role in development within coastal areas (i.e. land affected by coastal processes) where mangroves may be affected, coastal landfill and/or dredging is anticipated, or where storm surge may be a factor.

Mangroves The majority of mangroves within Darwin Harbour are within Zone CN (Conservation), where most development is prohibited. Whilst there are other areas outside of Darwin Harbour that have zoning such as remote communities, much of the NT coastline is unzoned so planning rules do not apply (except in relation to clearing of native vegetation including mangroves).

Coastal landfill Planning consent is required for excavation and/or filling of land within coastal areas if in a zone other than CN (Conservation). Applications for excavation and filling of coastal land are usually lodged in relation to commercial boat ramps, berthing facilities or coast protection purposes but there are others as well. The planning assessment process does not consider the impact of the proposed development on the surrounding environment or coastal processes unless these will result in a diminished amenity or are identified as being of concern to another agency.

Dredging Planning consent is required for dredging within Darwin Harbour and is largely informed by the environmental assessment process under the *Environmental Assessment Act*.

Storm surge Planning regulates development in relation to hazards from cyclones and storm surge. Clause 6.14 of the Planning Scheme seeks to ensure that development in coastal areas is appropriate having regard to impact of cyclones and associated storm surge. The clause is triggered by mapping which include a (~0.8 m) sea-level rise to 2100.

Key planning policies/strategies

Clause 6.14 of the NT Planning Scheme – Land Subject to Flooding and Storm Surge: https://nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/272099/nt-planning-scheme-part-4.pdf

Draft Coastal and Marine Management Strategy (under development).

Key planning legislation

NT Planning Act and Planning Regulations: <https://transport.nt.gov.au/lands-and-planning/building/planning-legislation>

Northern Territory Planning Scheme: <https://nt.gov.au/property/building-and-development/northern-territory-planning-scheme>.

Other relevant information

Storm surge mapping and related information: <https://secure.nt.gov.au/prepare-for-an-emergency/cyclones/storm-surge>.

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Also in CoastAdapt

[Coastal climate impacts and responses in the Darwin Region](#)

[See sea-level rise threats to the Darwin Region](#)



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