



Environment
Institute of
Australia and
New Zealand

22/07/2020

**Re: Submission to by the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand
To The Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) is pleased to provide a submission to the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission (TERC). We attach a letter sent earlier this year to Chief Minister Michael Gunner with some ideas about how the environmental services sector might contribute to the Territory's long and short-term economic recovery.

In this submission we will:

- Describe EIANZ.
- Describe the Environmental Services Sector.
- Provide a number of suggestions for the commission to consider under five key categories.
- Make suggestions on how we can work together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

The Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand

The Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) is the peak body representing professionals working in environmental science, land management and related professional services such as cultural heritage, legal, community engagement, social scientists, academics and researchers and non-government organisations.

The Environmental Services Sector

The Environmental Services Sector (ESS) is one of the Territory's growth sectors¹ and includes both private and public sectors. The ESS enables all economic development. Every mine, well-head, every road and every port facility is required to undergo an environmental approval. It is the ESS that writes government environmental policy and legislation, ensures that developments conform to this legislation (through environmental assessments) and ensures that any approval conditions are adhered to. It is the ESS that helps developments earn their social licence. The ESS is a key economic enabler.

The ESS is not just about environmental approvals. The sector ensures that our parks are managed correctly, our waterways stay healthy, our fish stocks are not being depleted and our weeds are being managed. It is the ESS that gives the community comfort that environmental issues are being well-managed.

The ESS is also about direct jobs – those working in the sector - and indirect jobs – those that are enabled because of the sector. In this way ESS activities have a significant multiplier effect. The jobs in the ESS are

¹ NT Government's 2017 *Our Economic Future: Northern Territory Economic Development Framework*.



not only urban based, but there are significant regional impacts. A recent Ernst & Young² report found substantial regional economic benefits through modest investments in land care.

Suggestions

We provide some suggestions under five key categories.

1. Strategic focus

The Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission's first report is very clear: recovery of the Territory's medium to long-term economy is largely up to the private sector catalysed by strategic public sector investment.

There is substantial opportunity to de-risk future development from the perspective of both investors and the community. The work currently being undertaken at Middle Arm to understand and then address environmental constraints could be applied to all potential development precincts; such as the Strategic Regional Environment and Baseline Assessment (SREBA) for the on-shore gas industry. A current example is the burgeoning cotton industry, which could be de-risked by a strategic assessment of the industry and then a landscape-scale assessment of areas where this development is/may not be suitable. From the public perspective the investment is small, with much of this work desktop. This type of activity would make the Territory a very attractive place to invest.

In the more immediate timeframe, which may require short-term public investment, are those programs that would support long-term outcomes, sometimes with the addition of regional employment. This might extend from low-skilled or regional labour, to building tourism infrastructure in our national parks, but with a strategic focus on investing in assets that are important to both traditional owners and the tourism industry, as well as building a skilled future remote workforce. It may include jobs with long-term benefits such as managing environmental threats or controlling invasive animals and weeds. It could include habitat restoration to improve land productivity.

2. Attract and retain talent

The Territory's cyclical economy means we attract young professionals who then leave for greener pastures when work dries up. So, rather than just 'growing' the sector, we need to ensure the NT can offer sufficient rewards and a quality lifestyle to retain our human capital and build expertise. This includes sectors such as government, education, the resource sector and professional services all working closely together to nurture junior staff and provide access to meaningful work experience, professional development and careers.

The Government's role would include maximising local opportunities, access to training, acting as broker with potential investors and Australian Government research funding as well as telling a compelling story about the Territory's fragile and precious ecological systems.

Section 3.3 of the NT Government's climate change action plan refers to growing the environmental services sector "from mid-2021". We would suggest that this should be brought forward to use current stimulus measures to grow the sector now.

² An executive summary is available [here](#)

3. Grow the knowledge economy

International education and training is one of the Territory's economic growth sectors. The Territory has a unique resource in Charles Darwin University being one of the few universities based in tropical climates. With the world's fourth largest population just to our north there is significant opportunities to exploit here.

4. Efficient and effective regulations

There is a lot of rhetoric about 'cutting red tape'. While we support the need for an efficient regulatory system, we also advocate for regulatory effectiveness, ie regulation that addresses problems in line with community expectations. Regulation should protect what is important to Territorians. This requires a quality system, with adequate resources, suitably qualified and experienced staff, clear leadership and sound policy to support their work. 'Red tape' has come to be synonymous with everything that delays projects, which covers everything from poor projects to under-resourced systems. We should also acknowledge the substantial improvement in process provided by the Northern Territory Government's recent regulatory reforms and NTEPA's focus on improving process and guidance documents.

An efficient and effective regulatory system would also make proponents aware of their obligations. All too often our sector sees 'short cuts' to approval becoming 'long cuts' because proponents are inexperienced, have unrealistic expectations or disregard community sensitivities.

5. Local is the key

This sector, like others, may experience a downturn as the Covid 19 economic impact is realised. Our fear is that this downturn will lead to the loss of talent in the sector as jobs are lost and people move interstate. This has implications for the Territory: a review of Environmental Impact Statements going back over a decade found that those done by Territory locals were superior to those done elsewhere that, a better product leads to a shorter assessment timeframe³.

The Northern Territory Government has made substantial advances with its 'buy local' campaign, but there are still instances of government contracts going interstate or major project partners not using local consultants when experienced local advice is available. In some cases, we believe this is because interstate companies are unaware of the depth of local knowledge and experience available.

We also would support government helping local companies ensure that their spending has the largest NT benefits by using local suppliers and goods where available.

Working together

We feel our experiences with environmental approvals puts us in the unique position to know how to enable projects that can have the best outcomes for the Territory and the community. We know de-risking projects will achieve the TERC's ambition of being the best place in Australia to invest.

We would be happy to meet with the TERC or government departments to further scope or shortlist particular projects that may interest the commission. In the first instance please contact me at the details below.

³ Pers. Comm. Special Counsel Brad Torgan, Ward Keller Lawyers

Yours Sincerely,



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