



## Final Report

# Jurisdiction Report - Northern Territory

## National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation

Prepared for  
*Environment Australia*  
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in association with

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What is the National Vegetation Framework?

In June 1998, ANZECC agreed to the development and implementation of the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation (National Vegetation Framework). The intention of this policy initiative was to provide a unified, multilateral forum through which to pursue improvements to native vegetation management and monitoring.<sup>1</sup>

In February 1999, ANZECC Standing Committee on Conservation (SCC) agreed that it would be appropriate to engage an independent consultant to conduct a preliminary assessment of the jurisdictions against the draft National Vegetation Framework. A report was subsequently produced - "Native Vegetation National Overview" - which documented the key challenges for vegetation management and monitoring within each jurisdiction.

For the purpose of the NVF, eight jurisdictions were identified in Australia comprising the 7 states and territories, and the Commonwealth. Following endorsement of the NVF and the jurisdiction interim Draft Work Plans by ANZECC in December 1999, each jurisdiction continued preparation of an interim Draft Work Plan that is considered to be the principal means of implementing the National Vegetation Framework. The Draft Work Plans identified the vegetation management and monitoring activities, time frames for when each activity was to occur, responsibility for implementation of the activities and indicators for measurement of success.

The native vegetation outcomes being sought in the Framework are:<sup>2</sup>

- a reversal in the long-term decline in the extent and quality of Australia's native vegetation cover by:
  - conserving native vegetation, and substantially reducing land clearing;
  - conserving Australia's biodiversity; and
  - restoring, by means of substantially increased revegetation, the environmental values and productive capacity of Australia's degraded land and water;
- conservation and, where appropriate, restoration of native vegetation to maintain and enhance biodiversity, protect water quality and conserve soil resources, including on private managed land for agriculture, forestry and urban development;
- retention and enhancement of biodiversity and native vegetation at both regional and national levels; and
- an improvement in the condition of existing native vegetation.

The more specific vegetation outcomes being sought within the context of integrated natural resource management for the NT Draft Work Plan are described in section 3 below.

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<sup>1</sup> Environment Australia, n.d , *Consultancy Brief*, Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> ANZECC, 1999, National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation, ACT.

At the ANZECC July 2000 meeting it was agreed to publicly release the Draft Work Plans. At the commencement of the evaluation in October 2000, the Commonwealth and ACT had publicly released their final version of the Draft Work Plan, with interim work plans available from other jurisdictions.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Evaluation

At the December 1999 meeting, the ANZEC SCC noted that an independent evaluation of progress against the National Vegetation Framework and the fulfilment of Draft Work Plan Commitments should commence mid 2000, with the report presented to the Council at the December 2000 meeting.

ANZECC identified the purpose of the evaluation was ‘to assess progress against the National Framework for the Monitoring of Australia’s Native Vegetation and fulfilment of the Draft Work Plan commitments’ (that were developed by each jurisdiction). Incorporated into the evaluation process was the additional focus of evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Draft Work Plans for achieving long term sustainable vegetation management. The Terms of Reference for the Evaluation are provided below.

### *Terms of Reference*

#### **A. Assessment of Effectiveness of Draft Work Plans and their Implementation**

1. Assess current vegetation management and monitoring practices in jurisdictions against those set out in the respective Draft Work Plans and against best practice.
2. Assess anticipated long term vegetation management and monitoring outcomes against the Draft Work Plans.
3. Assess progress by jurisdictions in meeting the Draft Work Plan success measures within the identified timeframes.

#### **B. Propose Improvements**

4. Propose improvements to Draft Work Plan management mechanisms that are feasible, practical and relevant to jurisdictions and take into account best practice. Proposed improvements should be within the context of National Framework objectives.
5. Suggest a process for jurisdictions to review and refine Draft Work Plans on a continuing basis, to provide, amongst other things, for improvements in understanding of how best to achieve best practice native vegetation management.

#### **C. Propose suitable ongoing independent evaluation arrangements**

Propose a mechanism and time frame for independent evaluation of Draft Work Plans on an ongoing basis, noting that vegetation management and monitoring activities are to be evaluated against agreed native vegetation outcomes and identified best practice.

**D. Assess progress against the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation**

Evaluate how far actions in Draft Work Plans enable each jurisdiction to achieve the vision and principles underpinning the National Framework especially the national goal to reverse the long-term decline of native vegetation in Australia.

The evaluation examined the performance of the jurisdiction Draft Work Plans, from the release of NVF by ANZECC in December 1999, until September 2000. Our work examined the vegetation management and monitoring activities undertaken by the lead agencies in each jurisdiction that contribute to the progress of the Draft Work Plan.

The review was implemented within a tight time frame to meet the reporting requirements of ANZECC. State agencies were the primary contributor to the NT Draft Work Plan evaluation. Other non-government stakeholders' views were also sought to contribute to the evaluation, but the timetable contributed to a reduced level of interaction by some stakeholders. A list of participants involved in this jurisdiction review is provided in Section 2.3 below.

## 2 Evaluation Approach & Methodology

### 2.1 Evaluation Approach

A central component of the evaluation was to devise an effective method that would allow evaluation of the eight jurisdictions Draft Work Plans in a restricted time frame, while still allowing for jurisdiction input and discussion. The following provides a description of the approach employed for the evaluation, and method used to evaluate the jurisdiction Draft Work Plans.

The approach to the evaluation consisted of the following :

- **Team meeting to confirm evaluation approach** – all members of the team that were leading the evaluation in the various jurisdictions met over a two day period, shortly after signing of the contract. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure an evaluation approach was devised that addressed the Terms of Reference and ensure that all members of the team had an opportunity to input and understand the agreed approach to ensure consistency in data-gathering and familiarity with process.
- **Contact with Jurisdictions** – managers of each Jurisdiction evaluation directly contacted agency stakeholders to inform them of the NVF evaluation process and invite participation. A time for a stakeholder meeting to be undertaken to discuss the Draft Work Plan was confirmed.
- **Pre-meeting Preparation** – Due to time limitations, a preliminary desktop analysis was undertaken by the consultant team, reviewing the NT Draft Work Plan against a number of criteria. This information was circulated to all participants prior to the Draft Work Plan evaluation meeting to allow for stakeholder review.
- **Jurisdiction Meeting** – a jurisdiction meeting was conducted to discuss progress of Draft Work Plan and identify opportunities for improvement. The process used during the meeting is described in Section 2.2.
- **Draft Jurisdiction Report** - the manager for each jurisdiction evaluation prepared a draft report that documented the outcomes from the jurisdiction meeting and included points made during consultation with other stakeholders such as non-Government agencies and select interest groups external to the formal jurisdiction evaluation meeting.
- **Jurisdiction Review** –the draft jurisdiction report was then sent to all participants in the NT Draft Work Plan evaluation meeting for comment.
- **Jurisdiction Final Report** Comments were then incorporated into the NT jurisdiction report and presented to Environment Australia as the Final Jurisdiction Report.

### 2.2 Evaluation method

A consistent approach was employed in each jurisdiction meeting to address the Terms of Reference. Each section is briefly described below.

#### *Session A Review Draft Work Plan against Key Challenges*

Key Challenges were identified for each jurisdiction in the Dore Report. As these were developed prior to the Draft Work Plans, they were presumed to be drivers for the Draft Work Plan Actions. Therefore, to determine the effectiveness of the Draft Work Plans, the Actions were reviewed to determine how well they address the challenges. A matrix

was prepared that compared NT key challenges with Draft Work Plan actions and level of influence. For each Management and Monitoring Mechanism (MMM), a rating was given for the level of influence each action could have in addressing the Key Challenge for that mechanism.

Following discussions with the primary NT Draft Work Plan contact, the draft matrix was presented at the Jurisdiction meeting and revised for its validity and for the individual and collective impact of the action(s) in addressing all the key challenges listed for the Jurisdiction. Modifications to the list of Actions was made to increase the beneficial impact on the Key Challenges and applicability of the Key Challenges for their current relevance to the achievement of the outcomes listed in the NVF. Where Key Challenges have become less relevant – i.e. they have been addressed or the program has moved in a different direction; the need for contributing actions was reviewed. Where new challenges were identified these were incorporated into the Draft Work Plan.

### ***Session B. Assessment of Draft Work Plan Success Measures***

In order to evaluate Draft Work Plan progress, quantification of achievements was provided against the Success Measures (or Performance Indicators) for each Draft Work Plan activity. For each listed Success Measure, quantified information on the achievement to date was provided by the jurisdiction and further discussed during the evaluation meeting. If no progress was made, this was also noted and discussed during the meeting (what was the reason for lack of progress, what needed to change etc.) Where performance indicators were deemed inappropriate, these were reviewed and amended during the evaluation meeting.

### ***Session C Appropriateness of Draft Work Plan Activities against the NVF Management and Monitoring Outcomes***

Our initial reading of the NVF, the Dore report and the individual Draft Work Plans suggested that the relationship between the management mechanisms in the Draft Work Plans and the Key Challenges is generally straightforward. However the relationship with the Desired Outcomes in the NVF was less so.

Our approach to assessing this relationship was to test how well the individual actions in the Draft Work Plans contributed to the Desired Outcomes using another matrix.

Each action for each Management and Monitoring Mechanism (listed across the X-axis) was assessed in regards to contribution to the NVF Desired Outcome, listed on the Y-axis. The rating criteria used in Section A (High/Medium/Low Influence) was applied in Section C.

Recognising that a desktop assessment was undertaken subjectively, and relying on limited information, the jurisdiction evaluation meeting was used to review the matrix for its validity and the implications for achievement of the NVF outcomes. The jurisdiction meeting was then used to modify the list of Actions to improve contribution to the achievement of the NVF Desired Outcomes where necessary.

### ***Session D Best Management Practices***

A key criteria of the Terms of Reference was to determine if and how Best Management Practices (BMP) are being applied when undertaking vegetation Management and Monitoring Mechanisms and Activities in each jurisdiction.

The National Vegetation Framework identifies a range of BMPs against the seven Management and Monitoring Mechanisms. Due to the time limitations associated with the evaluation, the URS/Griffin nrm team nominated one Management and Monitoring Mechanism per jurisdiction that will be investigated in depth from a Best Management Practice perspective during the jurisdiction meeting, rather than the entire set of MMM's. This process will, across the jurisdictions, address the range of BMPs identified in the ANZECC framework for the nominated mechanism, and be reported as a Case Study in the relevant jurisdiction report.

For NT, the BMP of Monitoring and evaluation was used as the Case Study example. The ANZECC framework BMPs were used as the main guide to discuss monitoring and evaluation during the NT meeting. This information was then compiled into a 'snap shot' of BMP for inclusion into the Jurisdiction report.

### ***Session E Visioning - evaluation of overall progress and likely long term impact of the National Vegetation Framework***

This session in the Jurisdiction evaluation meeting looked collectively at the Visions in the Draft Work Plans to assess how effectively the mechanisms being implemented now, will achieve those Visions in future. Plausible process methods were used for this assessment. In using plausible process, you work back from a major goal or vision to identify what would be needed now to achieve the goal or vision within anticipated timeframes.

For instance, if an overall goal is to better integrate management of native vegetation management, you might expect the work plans to include management and monitoring measures which will effectively support integrated management. If an overall goal is to attain a net gain in extent and quality of native vegetation, then the work plans ought to include measures which are likely to have the effect of controlling clearing and/or compensating with equivalent plantings within the anticipated timeframe of the Framework.

From this type of assessment, number of key indicators of overall progress were identified and analysed to evaluate the likely long-term impact of the National Vegetation Framework.

## **2.3 NT Workshop**

The workshop was attended by:

1. Rod Applegate (Director Resource Management DLPE)
2. Wayne Mollah (Director Policy DPIF)
3. David Lawson (Acting Director P&W)
4. Brian Walsh (Director Resource Management DPIF)

The review team met with vegetation managers from key NT agencies in Darwin for a half-day workshop on 17 October 2000. Preliminary assessments of the draft NT Draft Work Plan against key challenges, desired outcomes and success measures were circulated for comment prior to the workshop. These, together with an assessment of progress against NVF longer-term goals, and a case study of vegetation monitoring and evaluation, formed the core agenda for the workshop.

## 3 NT Draft Work Plan Output

### 3.1 Setting the Scene

In the NT some 48% of the land area is under pastoral (leasehold) tenure and pastoral grazing land use systems. Historically, with the exception of rainfed cropping developments dating back to the 1970's, clearing in this estate has been minimal. In more recent times, small parcels in the higher rainfall areas have been cleared for horticultural development. This latter clearing as well as development for urban and peri urban uses in the minor freehold areas, represents a very small component of the total landcover estate. (BRS Australian Land Cover Change 2000 highlighted only 6940 hectares were cleared in NT between 1990 and 1995 for agricultural purposes and a further 9550 ha was cleared for infrastructure development and urban expansion.). Clearing rates since 1995 have been somewhere in the order of 3,000-4,000 ha pa. Over 99% of the NT remains dominated by its original vegetation. The primary concern at the present time is with the condition of parts of this estate. Condition is now recognised as one of the primary attributes associated with sustaining the productivity of the NT pastoral lands.

Agricultural development is likely to continue at relatively low levels in the Territory pastoral lands. Where the NT can establish and demonstrate a major comparative advantage for specific forms of agricultural development, areas of suited soils and climates can be expected to experience some pressure for increased rates of land clearing. The NT however differs dramatically from many of the southern states as well as large parts of coastal and central Queensland in that the majority of this pressure will be within the leasehold land estate and not in the freehold estate. (Less than 3% of land in NT is freehold although 42% is aboriginal freehold as determined by the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*).

The balance of the NT is tenured largely under various forms of Aboriginal Freehold title and is managed for either traditional or pastoral purposes (42%). Formal reserves and parks account for less than 5% of the land area.

### 3.2 Linking the Draft Work Plan with Key Challenges

This part of the evaluation assessed the impact of the Draft Work Plan actions on the key challenges as identified in the stocktake report<sup>3</sup>. A reasonably strong relationship between the actions and key challenges was expected because the key challenges were a major driver in the formulation of the Work plans.

Table 1 outlines the results of the assessment. Table 1 was reviewed during the workshop and amended as required.

In most instances, key challenges are met by Work plan actions that are likely to have a direct relationship and high impact. Particular strengths are in the Planning and Assessment and Monitoring and Evaluation categories. Nine of the 19 key challenges do not have actions linked to them that are likely to have a high impact and a direct

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<sup>3</sup> Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

relationship. This largely reflects current and evolving priorities. Updates to the key challenges and changes in priorities in cases where challenges have been met, are discussed in the following sections.

### 3.2.1 Roles and Responsibility of Government

The NT has a single tier system of government with respect to natural resource management issues. At the Territory wide level, the core agencies of DLPE, PWCNT and DPIF carry most of the regulatory and advisory functions administered under a number of Acts:

- *Pastoral Land Act (1996)* which deals largely with the pastoral leasehold lands.
- *Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act (1995)*.
- *Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (1998)*.

The lowest tier of government is local government, which deals mainly with municipal and urban provision of services. In a regulatory sense, the Territory line agencies are responsible for strategic policy settings and for the majority of the implementation that results from these settings.

Co-ordination of the core agencies occurs via a CEO level Land Resources and Environment Sub Committee, which in turn is supported as needed by interagency technical advisory groups on a project/program/issues basis.

The three key line agencies have legislative powers over all land in the NT irrespective of tenure although Land Councils contend that such legislation may not apply to land granted Aboriginal freehold title under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

The primary challenges in the NT at the Roles and Responsibilities levels of the Framework would appear to lie in the following general areas:

- Obtaining, maintaining and or developing the capacity and structures to respond to increasing pressures for land development in those areas which demonstrate a comparative advantage for development. In the current environment of small scale incremental land development associated with the horticulture industry and urban/peri urban development, the capacity of the exiting structures to manage this process is unlikely to be seriously tested to the extent experienced by other states.
- Fostering and developing viable partnership arrangements with the Land Councils for the management of land use and development issues within the Aboriginal estate lands.

At a general level, the Territory wide response to these challenges focuses on:

- A process driven by Natural Resource Management Plans which integrate the mandates, interests and responsibilities of all levels of government within a largely non regulatory setting.
- A process of specific biosurveys and related activities in priority biogeographical regions, aimed at obtaining adequate data for specific management outcomes that cannot be otherwise obtained from existing data sets.
- Property Management Planning at the lease level.
- Overarching monitoring and evaluation for condition and extent assessment.

Some of these initiatives are relatively new undertakings and could be subject to resource limitations<sup>4</sup>. Priorities will be set in areas facing pressure.

### 3.2.2 Planning and Assessment

The Territory has three major spatial inventories supporting planning and assessment:

- Vegetation mapping based on the National Forest Inventory (NFI) methods at a scale of 1:1,000,000.
- Land Systems/Land Unit mapping at scales of between 1:250,000 and 1:100,000.
- Biosurveys within key areas at more detailed scales.

The vegetation surveys continue to be undertaken in priority regions to refine scale of assessment. , Land System mapping covers about 80% of the NT, Land Unit mapping is over priority regions and continues to be undertaken as resources allow, and biosurveys are currently under way for five sub (Sturt, Daly Basin, Tiwi Island and Arafura).

With the exception of the Biosurveys, these data sets provide a useful inventory of vegetation and land types at scales that are relevant to broadscale planning within the NT. The Biosurveys at bioregional scales provide far more refined data for areas under more intense land use pressure or areas of particular biodiversity concern.

As in all jurisdictions, the challenge facing the Territory with these data sets is the lack of definition of condition at useable planning scales in the Land Systems/Land Unit mapping. (It is noteworthy that the Land Unit based approach is not too dissimilar to the Queensland Regional Ecosystem mapping taxonomy – with the exception that the RE are mapped so as to allow the extent of clearing to be used as a definition of conservation status.)

In the short to medium term, this challenge is not seen as a critical limitation to NT achieving Framework goals. Clearing per se is not a major current threat to the extent aspect of conservation status of vegetation communities. Provided that the more detailed biosurveys continue to target locations, sub regions and regions where clearing is likely to be a threat in the medium and short term, the existing gaps in the inventory system should not be a major limitation to Planning and Assessment.

Planning Initiatives also have a multi tier approach. It is proposed that Regional Natural Resource Management Plans (which address vegetation as well as land use, land degradation outcomes) are to be prepared. The Katherine Daly and Darwin areas of most intense land use pressure are proposed for the next two years. Underneath this tier is a program of Property Level Management Plans.

Apart from existing requirements under the various acts of the NT, there is no regulatory or legislative requirement for either of these two levels of planning. Land clearing

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<sup>4</sup> A broadly similar approach in Queensland based on regional planning and property level vegetation management plans which has a regulatory base (as opposed to the NT non regulatory approach) is believed to require a four to five fold increase in field level staff alone. The NT monitoring and evaluation program to date has been supported by various CRC as well as the NT agencies, but needs to be expanded from its current pilot area/research base to the remainder of the Territory.

guidelines have been prepared in conformity with the existing Acts<sup>5</sup> and it is anticipated that both the NRM and PMP process will result in codes of best practice for land management (including vegetation).

The challenges facing the Territory in this approach to planning are:

- Where biosurvey data are available in support of the NRM and PMP, outcomes from the planning process are more likely to reflect vegetation management priorities as reflected in the Framework.
- Where monitoring and evaluation data sets are available ( 5 yearly feral animal surveys, regular near real time fire monitoring, regional land condition monitoring), condition status of NT landscape (eg weeds and pests as well as cover) the likelihood of enhanced outcomes, particularly from PMP at the leasehold level, will be highest.
- At both the PMP and NRM level, obtaining a consensus on land management outcomes across all tenures and custodians is arguably a major challenge in the absence of clear regulatory mandate.

### 3.2.3 The Reserves System

The Territory Work Plan recognises that the Reserves system in the NT is minimal and not comprehensive. The primary concern is the small number of bioregions with representative cover of vegetation and landscapes.

Expanding the reserve system cover (by tenure changes) poses major challenges in the Territory. Resources for such an initiative are extremely limited and the broadscale nature of some of systems would require large areas to be reserved.

The NT Parks masterplan outlines a strategy for developing a CAR system of Reserves. The focus of its implementation is on areas that are likely to be subjected to development or contain unusual ecological communities. Recent acquisitions around Shoal Bay and Owen Springs highlight this approach. The Territory has the regulatory power under the PWC Act to declare areas as Essential Habitat for conservation purposes. This is a recent amendment to the Act and has not been used to date. The PWCNT is also pursuing off reserve conservation initiatives where biodiversity issues are of concern.

The approach to augment the on reserve with off reserve multiple land use outcomes is primarily based on conservation agreements with individual community land custodians. The NRM and PMP process is seen as a particularly powerful vehicle for negotiating such outcomes. The ultimate success of this approach in Framework terms is predicated largely on the NRM and PMP process.

### 3.2.4 Communication and Capacity Building

Across Australia, extension and community education initiatives are resourced via core activities within agencies as well as by programs funded under Landcare and NHT. As in other jurisdictions, there is concern in the NT about the short-term nature of the non-core programs and their sustainability once funding for ends.

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<sup>5</sup> These guidelines are similar in scope to the recently promulgated Qld Land Clearing Codes for Leasehold and Freehold land)

The PMP process is a core activity within the Territory agencies. Notwithstanding the issue of resourcing for this activity, the integration of other community based programs into the PMP and NRM process will be critical to the long term capacity building and communication in the NT. Extension services in the Territory are currently under internal review. Implicit in the NRM and PMP process is a need for increased resources for the extension and implementation aspects.

### 3.2.5 Incentives

The NVF concept of market based incentive schemes for promoting conservation, is seen as being of limited utility across much of the Territory land use systems. Operating margins are so low and tenuous within the commercial pastoral sector of the rangeland that reducing costs of production (and to a lesser extent unit productivity increases) are the major driving factors in the industry. This feature of the Territory rangeland pastoral system partly accounts for the low levels of intensification and hence, clearing based land development, compared with other parts of Australia. Within this broad context, conservation initiatives that involve limited financial incentive and or significant financial cost/risk for the pastoralist are unlikely to be seen as viable.

This does not mean that programs with a conservation outcome will not result in enhanced adoption at the property level. The Territory already operates schemes such as land swaps and assistance with fencing, water access and feral pests control under a cost sharing arrangement with landholders. The current pilot rangeland monitoring and evaluation program is also seen as providing critical feed back to land owners on rangeland condition and productivity issues as well as conservation information. The NT Government through its Bushfire Council supports volunteer rural Bushfire brigades to manage wildfire in the landscape and provides cost share programs to control feral animals and major weeds. These are tangible incentive programs that work.

This dual support and monitoring based approach to incentives does require a broader operating framework if changes to a dual conservation/production based ethic of land and vegetation management is to be widely adopted. In the absence of a defined regulatory process, the NRM and PMP process again is seen as being critical to achieving these outcomes. These 'new' initiatives will need to be resourced, and expansion of monitoring and evaluation of rangeland from their current pilot foci will be required.

### 3.2.6 Regulatory Mechanisms

A number of regulatory mechanisms are available to the Territory agencies. Land clearing per se is specifically controlled via the Pastoral Land Act (1996) and the Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act (1995) can be used to control clearing in specific non pastoral land. Land clearing guidelines, with upper limits on slope and protection of riparian areas as well as critical habitats, have recently been promulgated. Land clearing in the small peri urban freehold area is controlled under the Planning Act (1999), which requires assessment and permission for clearing of more than 50% of an area.

Quite apart from these powers, provisions exist for declaring species as *Protected* or *Specially Protected*. At this point in time, however, there is no provision for declaring ecological communities as worthy of protection from land clearing. It is possible that the biosurveys, NRM and PMP process will identify areas, which on the basis of their

community status should be protected from clearing. However, a specific classification based on ecological communities is currently not in place.

The Territory is confident that the existing regulatory framework, as it relates to clearing and vegetation management, is suited to current conditions and development pressures. With the prevailing low levels of broadscale clearing (resulting from the low intensity of most land use systems in the pastoral lands), and a relatively intact vegetation cover, the NT focus is on NRM and PMP planning processes in priority areas, backed ultimately by legislative land use controls. In the event that pressures increase leading to a likelihood of significantly increased clearing, the Territory will review the status of the regulatory arrangements in relation to clearing across all tenures.

This approach, in terms of NVF outcomes, can only be evaluated once the outputs from the NRM and PMP processes are available. If these outputs show an implemented acceptance of ecological community as a basis for sustainable conservation and land use outcomes, and this is associated with enhanced off reserve conservation outcomes, then Framework objectives in so far as extent of vegetation land cover will be obtained. Such an evaluation is unlikely to be feasible in less than 3 to 5 years.

### **3.2.7 Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Territory uses remote sensing with benchmarking (ground truthing) and qualitative information from landholders for vegetation cover and condition mapping. This two tier system of supervised classification of Landsat TM cover using ground based monitoring sites has been developed to a pilot phase in the Ord Victoria and Sturt Plateau areas as a part of the National Land and Water Resources Audit Rangeland Monitoring Implementation project<sup>6</sup> and a project under the Tropical Savannas CRC.

While the broad methodology is similar to that used for SLATS in Queensland, the detailed methodology of the proposed NT system reflects the NT focus on rangeland condition assessment (cover, biomass, seasonal change, recovery processes) as opposed to the overt extent aspects targeted under SLATS. In this sense the NT system has a number of potential advantages over SLATS for rangeland vegetation management.

The proposed system is not without its challenges, but the potential benefits are substantial, particularly if the assessments can be used within the NRM and PMP process as planning and education awareness tools.

The major challenges appear to be:

- Extending the coverage to a Territory wide cover and validating the methodology within the full range of Territory natural resource environments.
- Resources for the above.

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<sup>6</sup> A range of agencies including CSIRO, NT, Qld and WA Line Agencies implemented this project.

**Table 1 : Actions rated against key challenges**

Key Challenge	Management and monitoring mechanism			
	High influence	Medium influence	Low influence	No influence
<b>4.2 Planning and Assessment</b>				
<b>Filling the gaps in the vegetation inventory in priority order</b>	Action 4.2.2 (2.2)			
<b>Finding the resources for biosurvey activities including fungi, algae and invertebrates</b>	Action 4.2.4 (2.4)			
<b>Developing and applying an integrated approach to NRM and incorporating vegetation management in this approach</b>	Action 4.2.6 (2.6)- more info on specific veg targets as NRM/PMP process is developed			
<b>4.4 Reserves system</b>				
<b>Boosting the existing NT reserve system</b>	Action 4.3.2 (3.2) NT Parks Masterplan guiding this towards CAR.			
<b>Establishing effective joint management plans in those areas that are not adequately represented in the formal reserve system</b>	Action 4.3.4 (3.4) not achieved as yet			
<b>Fostering a greater community awareness of the need to maintain biodiversity outside the formal reserve system</b>	PWCNT community education program supported by regional NRM/ PMP process			
<b>4.4 Communication and capacity building</b>				
<b>Achieving greater coordination and integration of extension efforts amongst agencies</b>	All agencies have extension services and these are under review			
<b>Changing attitudes to the role of native vegetation on farms and along rivers and streams- introducing the concept of duty of care</b>		Action 4.4.4 (4.4) Action 4.4.7 (4.7)	Action 4.4.3 (4.3)	
<b>Finding the resources needed for extension activities</b>	Extension System currently under review			
<b>Convincing funding agencies of the critical need for R&amp;D</b>		Action 4.4.6 (4.6)		
<b>4.5 Incentives</b>				

Key Challenge	Management and monitoring mechanism			
	High influence	Medium influence	Low influence	No influence
Finding a basis on which practical market based incentive schemes can be developed to suit the NT		Action 4.5.2 (5.2)		
Developing markets and promoting industries, especially among Aboriginal communities, that encourage sustainable utilisation of wood products, such as sandalwood and mallee	This is promoted through the NT Sustainable Use Strategy for Wildlife			
<b>4.6 Regulatory mechanisms</b>				
Shifting from a threatened species focus to a threatened ecological communities focus	The NT's Strategy for the Conservation of Threatened Species and Ecological Communities in the NT of Aust. Provides the focus			
Ensuring that existing legislation is consistently applied across all tenures.	Action 4.6.2 (6.2)			
Managing increasing pressure to clear land in the Darwin region	Action 4.6.2 (6.2)			
Developing and implementing codes of practice guidelines that are effective in bringing about appropriate management of native vegetation		Land Clearing Guidelines		
<b>4.7 Monitoring and evaluation</b>				
Extending the monitoring coverage across the NT	Action 4.7.2 (7.2) limited by resources			
Developing a process to prioritise and coordinate monitoring efforts	NRM process			
Ensuring that monitoring data are accessible and fed back to management (adaptive systems)	4.7.3 (7.3) in progress for VRD and Barkly			

### 3.3 Measuring Draft Work Plan Success

In this section of the evaluation, the NT agencies were asked to nominate levels of achievement against the success measures identified in the Work Plan. These were then reviewed during the workshop. The workshop also provided an opportunity to update and amend the success measures. The revised success measures are outlined in Annex 1.

All of the activities in the NT Work Plan are included in the current Territory budget papers and are either current or will be addressed in the near future. Particular areas of progress include:

- Development of an integrated NRM methodology and its implementation in key areas such as the Darwin and Douglas Daly regions.
- Development and piloting of a rangelands condition monitoring system in VRD and Barkly Tablelands.
- Reserves –although resourcing issues are significant progress is being made with new Park acquisitions. On-reserves vegetation outcomes are being tackled through management plans. There is an emphasis on off-reserve outcomes- ie protecting native vegetation under pastoral leasehold and Aboriginal land tenure.

Some categories of the Work Plan are seen to be of lower priority in the Territory. These are:

- Market based incentives -as outlined in the NVF are very difficult to apply cost effectively in the Territory because of the low profitability of rural industries, the extensive nature of the problems (fire, ferals and weeds) and the size of holdings.
- Vegetation Management Plans - The NT will manage vegetation as part of the landscape through regional NRM Plans or Park Management Plans.

### 3.4 Linking Draft Work Plan outputs with National Vegetation Framework Desired Outcomes

The NVF desired outcomes are set out in Annex 3. The NT actions were rated against the NVF desired outcomes according to how direct the relationship is likely to be, and the likely level of impact. Initial ratings by the review team were discussed during the workshop. The revised ratings are provided in Table 2.

The ratings highlighted strengths and apparent gaps in the way the Draft Work Plan addresses the desired outcomes. The strengths in the NT actions are in:

#### **Desired outcomes:**

- Biodiversity.
- Natural and cultural heritage.
- Land productivity.
- Sustainable land use.

### 3.4.1 Strengths

#### **Biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage**

With the exception of the peri urban and largely freehold areas around Darwin, broadscale land clearing is not a current major threat to biodiversity. The vegetation resources of the NT is largely intact in terms of extent primarily for the following reasons:

- the high risk averse nature of the pastoral sector which has discouraged intensification of the industry by pasture improvement;
- the relatively low penetration of pasture improvement and arable cropping into areas south of the Daly system;
- the long standing recognition of the semi arid rangelands as an important base for the pastoral industry; and
- the large areas under various forms of Aboriginal tenure.

The threats to biodiversity generally reside with pastoral land management (grazing pressure), fire management and weeds – the threats are largely land use systems based as opposed to land development based. Land clearing will continue in the Territory where comparative advantages for intensification can be demonstrated.

In this context, the broad thrust of the NT Work Plan, based around NRM strategies and rangeland assessment monitoring and property planning, will contribute positively to biodiversity outcomes, and the contribution will be significant if these processes result in sustainable management of the core threats – fire, weeds and pests.

The NT conducts routine bushfire monitoring and fosters community involvement through the volunteer Bushfire Brigades. It also has initiated major feral control program in the VRD under the PWC and Pastoral Lands Acts.

#### **Land Productivity and Sustainable Land Use**

For the NT, these outcomes have a differing context to other states. Issues related to groundwater recharge, landscape salt balances, degradation of within stream pathways and exploitation of water resources are of lesser importance than sustaining the low intensity rangeland pastoral land use system. The focus is on rangeland management outcomes.

In the absence of broadscale land clearing, the problems of the southern states are simply either not present or are not at a stage where pre-emptive or remedial measures directed at the problem are required. It is, however, noteworthy that the land clearing guidelines do require buffering of streams and that the slope limits for clearing are more strenuous than those in some other states. This is largely driven from a soil conservation concern.

### 3.4.2 Less relevant outcomes

Some of the NVF Outcomes lack associated high impact activities in the NT Work Plan. The specific reasons are discussed below. The outcomes lacking in high impact activities are:

#### Desired outcomes:

- Hydrology
- Soil and water resources
- Climate change

#### Hydrology

- The NVF desired outcomes for hydrology relate exclusively to control of salinity and protection of water catchments. These issues have significantly higher profile in the southern jurisdictions, where they are primary drivers for vegetation management. They are not important drivers for vegetation management in the NT.

#### Soil and water resources

- The NT Draft Work Plan includes activities to protect soil and water resources in the context of overall NRM. However, the Desired Outcomes in the NVF refer much more explicitly to southern issues (riparian degradation, salinity) than to NT soil and water issues. Wetland management in the NT for example is more about managing weeds, feral animals and seawater incursions, than protection of native vegetation.

#### Climate change

- The NT is not a major greenhouse gas contributor through clearing.

**Table 2 : Assessing Draft Work Plan Actions against NVF Desired Outcomes**

Desired outcome from NVF	Management and monitoring mechanisms													
	4.2 Planning & Assessment			4.3 Reserves		4.4 Communication & capacity building				4.5 Incentives	4.6 Regulatory		4.7 Monitoring & evaluation	
	4.2.2	4.2.4	4.2.6	4.3.2	4.3.4	4.4.3	4.4.4	4.4.5	4.4.6	4.5.2	4.6.2	4.6.3	4.7.2	4.7.3
<b>Biodiversity</b>	M	M	M	H	H	M	M	M	H	M	H	M	M	M
<b>Soil and water resources</b>	L	L	M	M	M	L	M	L	M	L	M	L	M	M
<b>Hydrology</b>	L	L	M	L	L	L	M	L	M	L	M	L	L	L
<b>Land productivity</b>	M	L	H	H	H	M	M	M	H	H	M	L	M	M
<b>Sustainable land use</b>	L	M	M	H	H	M	L	M	M	H	H	M	L	L
<b>Natural and cultural heritage</b>	M	M	M	H	H	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	L	M
<b>Indigenous peoples</b>	L	M	M	H	H	L	M	L	M	M	M	L	M	M
<b>Climate change</b>	M	L	L	M	M	L	L	L	M	L	M	M	M	L

### 3.5 Evaluating Overall Progress and Long Term Impact

The overall long-term impact of the NT Draft Work Plan was assessed against the long-term goals of the NVF using plausible process indicators (Table 3). Progress against these indicators was discussed and recorded during the workshop. The outcomes are summarised in Table 3.

The Territory situation differs from other jurisdictions in that the threats to biodiversity in particular and sustainability in general Territory wide do not arise from clearing, except in a small number of relatively confined areas. The Territory approach, therefore, is to apply its limited resources to target the areas at risk (either high-pressure zones or highly valued habitat) while using less intensive means to protect the condition of vegetation in the extensive pastoral and Aboriginal lands (where cover is not under threat). The approach is largely non-regulatory, although existing legislation does provide the mandate to control land use (Pastoral Land Act 1996) and land degradation (Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act 1995).

In the high impact areas, planning and monitoring systems are being developed for sustainable use of natural resources of which vegetation is a major component. The 3 agencies work with landholders to manage the major threats to vegetation (fire, feral and weeds) via a range of programs.

The extent to which these measures will ultimately protect native vegetation and thereby meet the NVF vision and goals will become more evident as they are more widely implemented. However, it is fair to say that good processes are in place to achieve these goals and that these seem to be appropriately matched to current levels of threat. If threats escalate, the Territory agencies are well placed to respond and the major limitation to their response will be resource levels.

The Territory also differs from the rest of Australia in the very large proportion of the area under a basically intact native vegetation cover (only around 1% of the Territory has been cleared). Consequently, there is little interest in revegetation or restoration except in a few high value degraded riparian sites. Restoration is not seen as an effective way of investing limited vegetation management resources in the Territory. More emphasis is placed on protecting the remaining (considerable) native vegetation cover because this is considered to be a more cost-effective way to meet biodiversity, land productivity and other objectives.

**Table 3 : Progress against long term NVF goals**

<b>NVF Vision</b>	<b>Plausible process indicators</b>	<b>Comments on Progress</b>
A reversal in the long term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation	Planning undertaken. Quality (ie condition) is considered the main process indicator in NT as the current extent of native vegetation is not considered as under serious threat at a Territory wide level	Legislation and administrative systems are in place across all tenures to regulate clearing of remnant vegetation under various Acts. Land Clearing Guidelines have been issued and freehold land clearing is restricted to 50% of area. Monitoring, NRM Management, Biosurvey and Property Planning processes currently being developed beyond pilot stages for addressing extent/quality and management issues
	Plans resourced and being implemented	Additional resources are required to progress quickly from the present pilot planning and monitoring stages.
	People with knowledge and skills required	Extension staffing levels currently under review.
	Monitoring and evaluation of all aspects leading to revision of plans	GIS/RS and information management support and collaborative working relationships from landowners to researchers are in place and tested at the pilot level. Systems are in place for assessing and monitoring rangeland conditions. Subject to resourcing these would form a key element of planning.
<b>Goals</b>		
Conservation and where appropriate, restoration of native vegetation to maintain and enhance biodiversity, protect water quality and conserve soil resources, including on private land managed for agriculture, forestry and urban development	Native vegetation is protected by effective clearing controls on all land Regulatory processes in place for protection of high value areas.	The criteria for protection have been legislated for all tenures. The legislative protection would be reviewed if threats to native vegetation began to escalate.
	Programs in place to restore, where appropriate, native vegetation to maintain/enhance biodiversity and protect land and water resources on private all land Restoration plans per se not seen as high priority. Focus is on feral animal and weed control within leasehold pastoral estate via working relationships with pastoralists.	Restoration is not a priority for NT per se. The emphasis is on protection of RV.

NVF Vision	Plausible process indicators	Comments on Progress
	Programs and measures in place to encourage development and adoption of best management practices for native vegetation management in agricultural, forest and urban enterprises	NRM and PMP are expected to achieve this, along with extension and R&D programs. No direct incentive schemes have been identified although cost sharing of feral control does occur.
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation quantity and geographic extent	State of the art monitoring and information management systems are in place at a pilot level but requires further funding to become fully operational.
Retention and enhancement of biodiversity and native vegetation at both regional and national levels	Appropriate environment protection policies and measures are in place to protect biodiversity at regional and national levels	National level regulatory systems are in place. Regional level planning and regulatory systems will be developed through the NRM and Biosurvey processes.
	Biodiversity and native vegetation targets are set and measures are in place to achieve those targets at both regional and national levels	Targets are set in the NT Parks Masterplan, the Strategy for Threatened Species and Ecological Communities, and the Wetlands Strategy.
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation biodiversity	This is done at Rangeland unit (basically Land Unit) using RS techniques. As well as routine fire and feral monitoring programs.
An improvement in the condition of existing native vegetation	Policies and programs are in place to manage native vegetation to conserve condition as well as cover- through duty of care; native vegetation covenants, partnerships etc	Duty of care expressed in codes of practice- with greater potential impact on leasehold land. No cohesive program but some site based programs to conserve condition.
	Policies and programs are in place to restore native vegetation quality where appropriate	Restoration is not a high priority.
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation quality	Yes the focus of the Rangeland Monitoring is on condition – versus the Qld approach of extent. Requires expansion across all of Territory

## 4 Evaluation of progress against Draft Work Plan Commitments and the National Framework

### 4.1 Assessment of the NT Draft Work Plan and Implementation

The NT Draft Work Plan addresses the majority of key challenges outlined in the 1999 stocktake<sup>7</sup> with actions that are likely to have a high impact. The workshop discussions served to update the NT vegetation management challenges. Challenges will continue to be addressed in the following areas:

- Obtaining, maintaining and or developing the capacity and structures to respond to increasing pressures for land development in those areas which demonstrate a comparative advantage for development. In the current environment of small scale incremental land development associated with the horticulture industry and urban/peri urban development, the capacity of the exiting structures to manage this process is unlikely to be seriously tested to the extent experienced by other states.
- Fostering and developing viable partnership arrangements with the Land Councils for the management of land use and development issues within the Aboriginal estate lands.

At a general level, the Territory wide response to these challenges focuses on:

- A process driven by NRM Plans which integrate the mandates, interests and responsibilities of all levels of government within a largely non regulatory setting.
- A process of specific biosurveys and related activities in priority biogeographical regions, aimed at obtaining adequate data for specific management outcomes that cannot be otherwise obtained from existing data sets.
- Property Management Planning at the lease level.
- Overarching monitoring and evaluation for condition and extent assessment.

Activities over the past 12 months have achieved the following:

- The Territory has a coordinated interagency approach to vegetation management in the context of NRM generally.
- They are gradually updating and refining an excellent vegetation mapping and inventory base (eg Alice Springs mapping completed 2000).
- More detailed biosurveys were carried out in high pressure areas (eg Daly River region biosurvey 2000).
- Regional NRM Plans are being developed for high-pressure areas (ie Darwin 2000 and Douglas/Daly 2001 regions). Vegetation management is a key component in the NRM Plans and allow for identification and protection of vegetation for conservation and biodiversity outcomes within the development zones. More stringent legislative control of clearing is not considered warranted until clearing pressures intensify, and there is a preference in the NT for a stronger focus on consultation, planning and negotiation than on enforcement approaches.

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<sup>7</sup> Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

- Management plans for species of high conservation value were developed and are in place (2).
- The TPWC Act is being amended to facilitate joint management of Aboriginal land and National Parks, thereby enabling NT NRM agencies to cost effectively secure off and on reserve outcomes in vegetation management.
- The extension service is being reviewed.
- Ongoing monitoring of rangeland condition, biomass and fire continues to inform vegetation managers.

## 4.2 Improvements to NT Draft Work Plan

The workshop provided the opportunity to review and update the Draft Work Plan. These amendments will be included in the next draft. They will include updates to challenges and activities, reflecting progress and consequent shifts in priority, as well as a revision of success measures.

The format of the Draft Work Plans does not systematically link actions with NVF outcomes or best practice. In formulating the Draft Work Plans, the actions stem from key challenges but neither are these functionally linked with NVF outcomes or best practice principles. A more direct link is required to ensure that outcomes and best practice influence the actions.

## 4.3 NT Progress against the National Vegetation Framework

The Territory is in the enviable position of retaining a vast area of relatively intact vegetation cover while experiencing low levels of clearing. Pressure for increased clearing is generally confined to a small number of distinct areas. The Territory NRM agencies are well positioned within existing and proposed regulatory, planning and monitoring frameworks to specifically target areas under pressure in pursuit of conservation and biodiversity objectives. The NT Parks masterplan and various biodiversity strategies determine priorities for regional activity. At the same time, they are developing agreements with landholders more generally in relation to vegetation management, and are continually updating their monitoring technology and coverage.

At some point in the future, there may be a requirement to review the regulatory setting and develop more stringent clearing controls across the NT, but Territory agencies are dealing with current challenges through *planning* and *cooperation* rather than *regulatory* approaches. This is largely because:

- They do not perceive a sufficient threat to warrant an upgrade of clearing controls at this particular point in time.
- There is a cultural preference for a more negotiated approach.

## 4.4 Ongoing Independent Evaluation Arrangements

Regular independent evaluation could be an important part of the evaluation process for NVF overall, not least because it enables a consistent review across jurisdictions. An independent evaluation process would be strengthened by:

- Better negotiation and consultation with the key agencies on timeframes and scope.
- Adequate lead times to enable preparation and to facilitate input by busy, senior officers in key agencies.
- Adequate time for review of the outcomes of the independent evaluation.
- Mechanisms to facilitate sharing of experience and knowledge with other jurisdictions in a constructive manner.

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Native vegetation is critically important to the NT. It is an integral part of the Territory production base (extensive pastoral industry, ecotourism etc) and has considerable intrinsic value as part of a wider natural and cultural heritage. But in contrast to other jurisdictions, there is no native vegetation crisis in the NT. Territory NRM agencies, therefore, do not focus specifically on vegetation. They are concerned instead with its management in a broader natural resources context, towards sustainable development goals generally. Territory agencies use their limited resources to specifically target areas of greatest risk, to ensure that conservation and biodiversity goals are built into plans and codes. At the same time, to the extent feasible, they keep an eye on vegetation in the low intensity pasture and Aboriginal lands using a monitoring system that is being tailored to the key issues. The threats in these areas are not from clearing but from fire, weeds and feral animals. Their management does not only concern vegetation, but relates to land resources management generally. Tackling these problems to sustain vegetation condition is a challenge for rural industries and NRM agencies throughout the Territory.

It is in this context, that the NVF principles and goals are perhaps less relevant to the NT than other jurisdictions. The NVF focus on clearing controls, revegetation and restoration, driven largely by biodiversity, salinity and water quality goals is at odds with the Territory context described here. Many of the Desired Outcomes and Best Practice principles outlined in the NVF are lacking in relevance to the NT and, as a consequence, the NVF process is not driving vegetation management in the Territory.

The NT Draft Work Plan reflects Territory priorities in the following aspects:

- A focus on voluntary planning and extension methods versus an enhanced regulatory process. The recent and proposed changes are essentially refinements to existing mandates.
- Multiple use land and vegetation outcomes.

The review process provided a good opportunity for revision and updating of the Draft Work Plan prepared by NT for the NVF, to reflect progress and evolving priorities in vegetation management. The Territory agencies will continue to address challenges in native vegetation management as they extend their current pilot approaches to wider implementation stages.

### **Key challenges- are they effectively addressed?**

In most instances, key challenges are met by Work plan actions that are likely to have a direct relationship and high impact. Particular strengths are in the Planning and Assessment and Monitoring and Evaluation categories. Nine of the 19 key challenges do not have actions linked to them that are likely to have a high impact and a direct relationship. This largely reflects current and evolving priorities. Updates to the key challenges and changes in priorities in cases where challenges have been met will be included in the amended Work Plan.

***Recommendation 1 : It is recommended that the NT Draft Work Plan is revised to reflect achievements and evolving priorities in vegetation management.***

### **New challenges**

While effectively meeting many of the challenges raised in the 1999 stocktake<sup>8</sup>, the NT Work Plan points to ongoing challenges and priorities:

- Obtaining, maintaining and or developing the capacity and structures to respond to increasing pressures for land development in those areas which demonstrate a comparative advantage for development. In the current environment of small scale incremental land development associated with the horticulture industry and urban/peri urban development, the capacity of the exiting structures to manage this process is unlikely to be seriously tested to the extent experienced by other jurisdictions.
- Fostering and developing viable partnership arrangements with the Land Councils for the management of land use and development issues within the Aboriginal estate lands.
- Fostering and developing plans and agreements for protecting biodiversity and vegetation condition in the leasehold estate.
- CAR Reserves – resourcing priorities detailed in the NT Parks Masterplan and in priority areas subject to development.

At a general level, the Territory wide response to these challenges focuses on:

- A process driven by National Resource Management Plans which integrate the mandates, interests and responsibilities of all levels of government within a largely non regulatory setting.
- A process of specific biosurveys and related activities in priority biogeographical regions, aimed at obtaining adequate data for specific management outcomes that cannot be otherwise obtained from existing data sets.
- Partnership agreements for joint management of Aboriginal land.
- Property Management Planning at the lease level.
- Overarching monitoring and evaluation for condition and extent assessment.

***Recommendation 2 : It is recommended that the NT Draft Work Plan is revised to update challenges and to incorporate activities to address new challenges.***

### **Progress against success measures**

NT has made considerable progress in many Work Plan activities in 2000. Several success measures were amended or updated during the workshop to reflect achievements or to provide a better basis for measuring progress.

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<sup>8</sup> Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

***Recommendation 3 : It is recommended that the NT Draft Work Plan is updated to include the revised success measures.***

### **Best practice- is it being met?**

The NT Draft Work Plan embodies a number of best practice principles, particularly for Planning and Assessment and Monitoring and Evaluation. Progress towards best practice in other categories, eg Reserves, is being made although is hampered by resource limitations which have, in the instance of reserves, driven a compensatory focus on achieving good biodiversity and other vegetation outcomes in the relatively intact bioregions off-reserve.

Territory agencies contend that many of the best practice principles set out in the NVF do not apply to their situation. It is evident that a number of these principles apply more specifically to southern jurisdictions and that some, for example market incentives, would have little practical application in the NT.

### **NVF desired outcomes- are they being met?**

The NVF process does not drive native vegetation management in NT, and the Draft Work Plan is not a comprehensive representation of all of the activities being implemented in relation to vegetation management in this jurisdiction. This partly reflects the fact that the NVF is new to the scene and is just one element of an evolving government response to sustainable development challenges, including vegetation management. It also stems from a perception that NVF underlying principles and desired outcomes do not apply as readily to northern Australia as they do to southern jurisdictions and that they apply less to the Territory than to northern Australia generally. In particular, the vast intact cover and lack of clearing pressure in the Territory means that management mechanisms are focused on protecting existing vegetation and not on restoration or revegetation. In this context, vegetation cover itself is not under threat generally, but the condition of much of the native vegetation may be. The NT focus, beyond the small areas of high development potential, is on measures to protect *condition*.

***Recommendation 4 : It is recommended that the NVF more specifically reflect the differing circumstances across Australia by including desired outcomes and best practice principles which are relevant to northern Australia in general and to the NT in particular.***

### **Progress towards NVF goals**

The NT Work Plan demonstrates positive progress against the indicators of NVF goals that are seen to be relevant to Territory conditions. The types and range of mechanisms in place or being developed seem to be adequate for current levels of threat and risk. The focus on off-reserve as well as on-reserve outcomes appears to be a measured response to existing resource constraints. Planning and monitoring frameworks in the NT would support a more specific response to vegetation management should threats and risks escalate in future, with resources being the major limitation on this response.

## Glossary

<b>Abbreviation/Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
ANZECC	Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council
BRS	Bureau of Resource Sciences
EA	Environment Australia
MMM	Management and Monitoring Mechanisms
NCS	Nature Conservation Strategy
NRM	National Resource Management
NT	Northern Territory
NVF	National Vegetation Framework
PMP	Property Management Planning
SCC	Standing Committee on Conservation
SLATS	State-wide Landcover and Trees Study
TOR	Terms of Reference
WP	Work Plan

# **Annex**

## **Key Challenges for NT**

## Key Challenge

### 4.2 Planning and Assessment

- Filling the gaps in the vegetation inventory in priority order
- Finding the resources for biosurvey activities including fungi, algae and invertebrates
- Developing and applying an integrated approach to NRM and incorporating vegetation management in this approach

### 4.4 Reserves system

- Boosting the existing NT reserve system
- Establishing effective joint management plans in those areas that are not adequately represented in the formal reserve system
- Fostering a greater community awareness of the need to maintain biodiversity outside the formal reserve system

### 4.4 Communication and capacity building

- Achieving greater coordination and integration of extension efforts amongst agencies
- Changing attitudes to the role of native vegetation on farms and along rivers and streams- introducing the concept of duty of care
- Finding the resources needed for extension activities
- Convincing funding agencies of the critical need for R&D

### 4.5 Incentives

- Finding a basis on which practical market based incentive schemes can be developed to suit the NT
- Developing markets and promoting industries, especially among Aboriginal communities, that encourage sustainable utilisation of wood products, such as sandalwood and mallee

### 4.6 Regulatory mechanisms

- Shifting from a threatened species focus to a threatened ecological communities focus
- Ensuring that existing legislation is consistently applied across all tenures.
- Managing increasing pressure to clear land in the Darwin region
- Developing and implementing codes of practice guidelines that are effective in bringing about appropriate management of native vegetation

### 4.7 Monitoring and evaluation

- Extending the monitoring coverage across the NT
- Developing a process to prioritise and coordinate monitoring efforts
- Ensuring that monitoring data are accessible and fed back to management (adaptive systems)

