



Arid
Lands
Environment
Centre



SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Climate Risk Assessment Inquiry

THE NORTHERN AUSTRALIA CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

10 SEPTEMBER 2025



THE ALLIANCE

The Northern Australia Conservation Alliance is a newly formed coalition of peak conservation organisations covering the north of Australia, comprising Environment Centre Northern Territory, Arid Lands Environment Centre, Environs Kimberley and Cairns and Far North Environment Centre.

Our organisations recognise the existential threat posed by climate change to the unparalleled natural and cultural values of northern Australia, and that solutions to this crisis must be led by communities in the north.

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A GLOBAL TREASURE

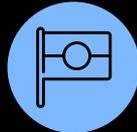
Northern Australia encompasses a third of Australia's landmass, and its cultural and natural heritage is outstanding on a global scale. Northern Australia's coast is in the top 4% of least spoiled coastlines in the world. We have the most extensive, most intact tropical savanna remaining on the planet. Some of the last free-flowing rivers in Australia are in the north. Our landscape includes savanna and rainforest, rivers and wetlands. Indeed, Northern Australia comprises one of the few very large natural areas remaining on Earth, alongside global treasures such as the Amazon rainforests, the Boreal conifer forests of Alaska, and the polar wilderness of Antarctica. Unlike in southern and eastern Australia, our natural places remain largely unspoiled by extractive industry.

Most of Northern Australia's major industries, including tourism, pastoralism and Indigenous economies rely on productive, functioning and healthy natural ecosystems. Our recreation and lifestyle, including fishing and camping, depend on our natural landscapes remaining largely intact.

The First Nations people of the north have passed on their cultural and ecological knowledge, languages and land management skills to countless generations across their homelands, and have continued to do so despite the devastating impacts of colonisation. The health and wellbeing of Country and people are fundamentally connected. Indigenous people have a relational connection to their lands – a responsibility to care for and protect it. Every inch of this country has been known and cared for by Aboriginal people for millennia. Unsurprisingly, in Australia and around the world biodiversity is highest on lands owned and managed by Indigenous People.



OUR VISION



OUR WORLD-CLASS NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN ECOSYSTEMS

are protected, flourishing and managed by First Nations people.



OUR CONSERVATION AGENDA

is embedded in federal institutional, political and legal power structures.



PEOPLE ACROSS AUSTRALIA

identify with and understand the natural and cultural values of northern Australia, and act to protect them.



CLIMATE CHANGE - THE NORTH'S FUTURE IS AT STAKE

The global ecological and cultural treasure of northern Australia described above faces an existential threat from climate change within less than two generations.

Sea level rise in the north could be as much as 40 centimetres, inundating large portions of Australia's northern coastline and hinterland with irreversible environmental impacts, including impacting the resilience of coastal ecosystems (including mangroves) and associated industries such as prawning. Sea level rise will also have profound impacts on First Nations communities (many of which are coastal) and their traditional connections to Country. One study demonstrated that over 50% of First Nations respondents to a survey in Arnhem Land would consider relocating in the future due to climate change.

Recent research found that much of Northern Australia could experience “near unlivable conditions” should global temperatures increase by around 3 degrees, and that this could become a reality within 40 years. These kind of extreme conditions are currently found only in 0.8 percent of the planet, mostly in the Sahara. Research in 2023 mapped regions that are likely to be subject to conditions largely unfit for human habitation, including a significant portion of Australia’s north. CSIRO modelling used by the Climate Council similarly predicts that climate change may make northern Australia unliveable due to extreme heat and humidity, creating wet bulb temperatures of 35 degrees for much of the year (considered the limit for human survival).

A report by the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group synthesising the above research demonstrates that much of northern Australia is projected to be in “near unlivable conditions” at 2.7 degrees of global average warming, demonstrating the risk to Australia’s national security in such a scenario. Of course, the very existence of northern Australia would be put at risk in such a scenario.

Source: <https://www.aslclg.org/reports/too-hot-to-handle/>

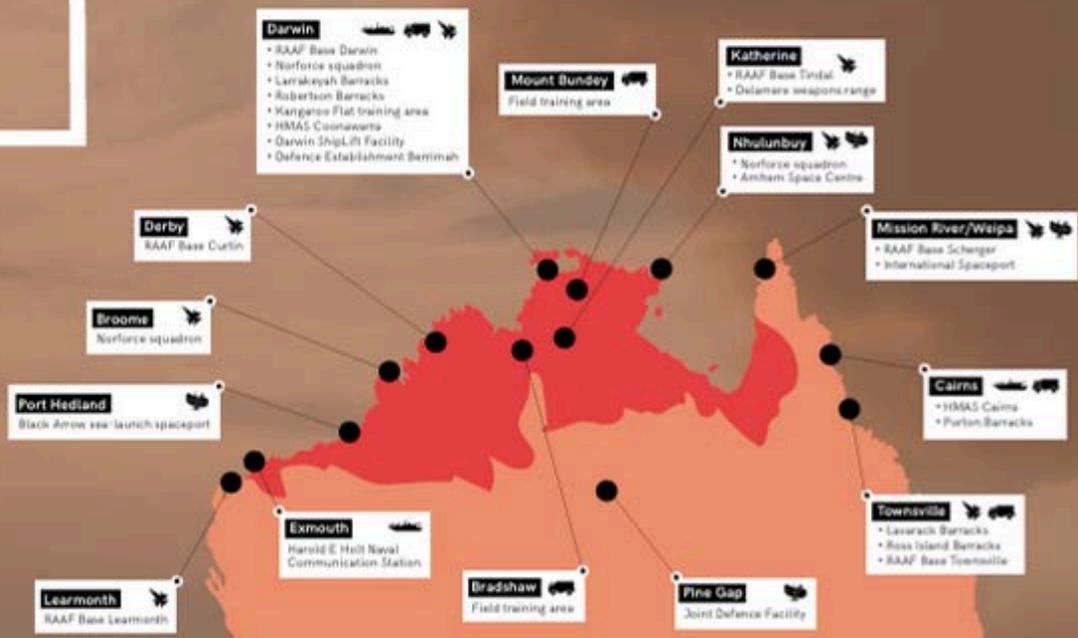
NORTHERN EXPOSURE CLIMATE SECURITY

Northern Australia's defence facilities in the zone of 'near unlivable' conditions at 2.7°C global average warming

AUSTRALIAN SECURITY LEADERS CLIMATE GROUP

Climate change is a major security threat. The Australian Government is giving priority to the development of northern Australia, including fossil fuel energy resources, regional trade expansion, indigenous affairs and increased military presence in line with the Defence Strategic Review realignment.

But has the government fully considered the impacts of global warming on the future viability and liveability of that region? This question should be answered as a matter of urgency before irrevocable security commitments are made and substantial defense resources misallocated.



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In many ways, we are already living this reality.

Towns like Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia's Kimberley region are already, by global measures, too hot for the vast majority of the Nation's population to live in. The current 67 days a year over 40°C will seem comfortable compared to the projected seven and a half months of this heat by century's end.

In Far North Queensland, the December 2023 flooding that followed ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper caused widespread damage across the Barron River delta. Intense rainfall led to record-high river levels, damaging 941 properties, displacing over 100 people, and disrupting essential services. Recovery was further strained by a heatwave that followed the flood.

Western Australia's worst ever flooding event in January 2023 in the Fitzroy Valley left hundreds homeless, caused a billion dollars' worth of damage and is what climate scientists predicted for the North. These kinds of events are projected to worsen with a heating climate and much higher intensity rainfall events - for every 1°C of warming, the air can hold 7% more water.

Central Australia has just sweltered through one of its hottest years on record. The period from 1 December 2024 to 10 March 2025 comprised the hottest 100 days in the recorded history of Mpartnwe Alice Springs, with an average maximum temperature of 39.6°C for nearly 3.5 months. Medical experts believe climate-related deaths are already increasing in Central Australia but are largely unrecorded. Floods across the Northern Territory in 2023 and 2024 led to hundreds being evacuated to Darwin from remote communities like Borroloola and Pigeon Hole, with housing destroyed and people stranded from their homes for months.

The human, environmental and economic costs of failing to act on climate change, and to appropriately plan for its impacts, are incalculable in northern Australia.



A CLIMATE SACRIFICE ZONE

Despite the above projections, vast new sources of methane, which induces climate change, are being opened with support from governments. Western Australia and the Northern Territory are the only two jurisdictions in Australia whose emissions are increasing, this due primarily to the extraction, processing and export of fossil fuels in the north. The Northern Territory's Beetaloo and Barossa Basins, and the Kimberley's Canning and offshore Browse Basins, have the potential to release global-scale emissions of carbon dioxide and methane, yet governments are either chaperoning them through or actively funding projects with hundreds of millions in taxpayer subsidies (such as the [Middle Arm gas and petrochemical hub](#)). As made clear by the [International Energy Agency](#) and IPCC, such projects are incompatible with a safe climate and a future for northern Australia.

Northern Australia risks being turned into a fossil fuel and climate sacrifice zone.

The devastating effects of future heating on biodiversity have yet to be assessed by State, Territory and Commonwealth governments. Northern Australia's tropical savanna, the arid zone ecosystem, the Great Barrier Reef, and the mangroves of the Gulf of Carpentaria all meet the criteria of "[collapsing](#)" ecosystems in Australia. Against this backdrop of ecosystem collapse, destructive wildfires, over grazing, feral pests, weeds, and climate change - now stands intensifying development pressure including massive water extraction, fracking, mining and rapidly increasing deforestation.



SOLUTIONS MUST BE GROUNDED IN CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate change in northern Australia disproportionately impacts First Nations communities, including in the following ways:

- Disconnection from traditions and homelands due to forced relocation and disruption due to climate disasters;
- Exacerbating drinking water insecurity due to increasing temperatures, erratic rainfall, failing and neglected infrastructure and racialised governance regimes;
- Higher temperatures and extreme heat increase heat-related illnesses and exacerbate existing medical conditions;
- Poorly constructed and maintained housing can become dangerously hot and unsafe to live in;
- Energy poverty caused by the inability of households to afford cooling their homes;
- Extreme weather events can cut off communities, or render them uninhabitable for extended periods of time.

Solutions to the climate crisis - including developing climate resilience and effective adaptation and mitigation strategies - must be led by the communities that will be most impacted, including First Nations communities.

AN APPEAL FROM NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

As is clear from the above, northern Australia stands on the frontline of the climate crisis. Our communities are already experiencing the accelerating impacts of extreme heat, cyclones, coastal inundation, biodiversity collapse, and intensifying bushfires. These risks threaten the natural and cultural values of northern Australia, as well as our public health, housing, infrastructure, and the very viability of communities across the north. In this context, the Albanese Government's long-delayed national climate risk assessment is of profound concern to communities in northern Australia.

We write as a coalition of environmental organisations from across northern Australia to appeal directly to the Commonwealth: release the climate risk assessment in full. Australians have the right to know the scale and severity of the risks we collectively face. Keeping this critical information secret undermines public trust, weakens preparedness, and places already vulnerable communities at even greater risk.

The threats facing northern Australia are unique. The Torres Strait is experiencing sea level rise that threatens the very survival of island communities. Across the Top End and Kimberley, we are witnessing unprecedented ecosystem collapse, from mass mangrove die-offs to coral bleaching and the disappearance of culturally significant species. In the interior, extreme heat is intensifying, jeopardising human health and water security. Without transparent access to risk data, communities cannot make informed decisions, and governments cannot be held accountable for developing adequate adaptation plans.

The secrecy surrounding the climate risk assessment is deeply concerning. Climate risk is a matter of democracy, public safety, and intergenerational justice. We urge the Federal Government to immediately:

1. In line with the science, commit to a phase out of fossil fuel exports by 2035, including halting new coal and gas approvals with immediate effect.
2. Release the climate risk assessment in its entirety, with clear accessible communication tailored to northern communities.
3. Commit to an open process for future iterations, including genuine consultation with First Nations peoples and civil society.
4. Align adaptation and mitigation policies with the scientific evidence revealed by the assessment.

THE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE NT

The Environment Centre NT (ECNT) is the peak conservation organisation in the Northern Territory.

Working hand in hand with communities across the Territory, we have courageously and successfully defended our iconic landscapes. We want a positive future for the Northern Territory with abundant nature, a safe climate and just economy that supports community aspirations and wellbeing.

ARID LANDS ENVIRONMENT CENTRE (ALEC)

Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) is Central Australia's peak environmental organisation,

defending Australia's iconic desert country for over 40 years. We are a strong and trusted voice for the protection of arid lands, creatures and communities. We work tirelessly toward our vision: healthy futures for arid lands and people.

ENVIRONS KIMBERLEY

Environs Kimberley is the peak environmental NGO for the Kimberley region in far north-west Australia,

and is dedicated to looking after the health of the land and waters of the region. We do this through advocacy and on-ground cultural and natural resource management projects.

THE CAIRNS AND FAR NORTH ENVIRONMENT CENTRE (CAFNEC)

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) has been advocating for the protection of nature in north Queensland since 1981.

We work to protect the environment by enhancing the capacity of local groups and community members to act for conservation, strengthening networks within FNQ, facilitating region-wide cooperation to identify and coordinate action on issues of regional significance and when necessary, engaging in campaigns that are strategically important for the region.

