



Nature Protections Survey Results

**The Territory's nature,
it's worth protecting**

**Stakeholder and community
perceptions about increased
protections for nature in the
Northern Territory**

Kakadu savanna. Glen Walker

The Environment Centre NT has canvassed the community and key stakeholders about the need for improved nature protections in the NT.

We had extraordinarily high engagement on this issue with over 600 Territorians spending nearly 200 hours completing our nature protections survey. The results are compelling: Territorians know that the nature they love is at great risk and they want politicians to stand up and do something about it.

It is clear from the strong engagement we had through this survey that Territorians truly love the NT's unique nature and do not believe it is protected adequately. People understand that our precious wildlife and ecosystems are under increasing pressure and they know that the NT is a laggard when it comes to strong environmental regulation. The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia without native vegetation laws – specific legislation to manage habitat loss from tree clearing. Broadscale tree clearing is recognised as the leading cause of biodiversity loss in Australia and around the world. Broadscale tree clearing is increasing in the Northern Territory and we do not have an adequate regulatory framework in place to properly manage this threat.

“

93% of respondents believe it is important that the NT enacts best-practice legal protections, like a new Biodiversity Act or Nature Laws. But not only do Territorians want real action from the government on this issue, they also want their voices to be heard. The Environment Centre NT is calling for cross-party support and a commitment to best-practice nature laws by the next Territory election in August 2024.”



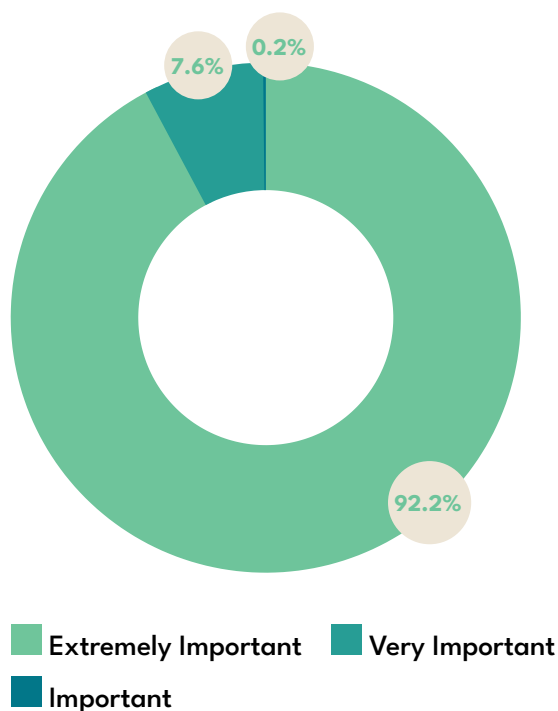
SURVEY SNAPSHOT

- ◆ ECNT ran the survey over the months of July and August 2022
- ◆ ECNT used the QualtricsXM platform for the online survey to ensure high data integrity utilising reCaptcha technology, bot detection and prevention of multiple submissions
- ◆ The survey link was shared on social media and a survey link QR code advertised on posters at the Darwin Show (21, 22, 23 July) and at Parap and Palmerston weekend markets
- ◆ A random draw prize was used to encourage broad community participation, which was a \$1,000 voucher for a family pass for a Sea Darwin turtle tour
- ◆ A total of 624 responses were recorded
- ◆ In the data clean up, 10 responses did not complete the survey or were identified as potential bots and were deleted
- ◆ The majority of respondents were current residents of the NT (526); with the majority of current residents (396) having lived in the NT for more than 10 years.
- ◆ The survey had overall very high response quality, with participants taking on average 12 minutes to complete the 14 questions.

[illegible]

Q2. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE TERRITORY'S WILDLIFE AND NATURAL AND CULTURAL VALUES TO YOU?

Respondents chose a rating from '0' (Not at all important) to '10' (Extremely Important). No respondent chose a rating less than '6' - all respondents clearly rated the wildlife and natural and cultural values of the NT as being of significant importance to them.



488
RESPONDENTS
RATED THESE
VALUES AS
'EXTREMELY
IMPORTANT'

*Bush Stone Curlew,
Alexander Dudley*



WHAT RESPONDENTS VALUE THE MOST ABOUT NT NATURE

“The wonderful bird life that is right at our doorstep. People travel all over to visit the NT to see the wildlife we take for granted”

“It's home. That's what home feels and looks like.”

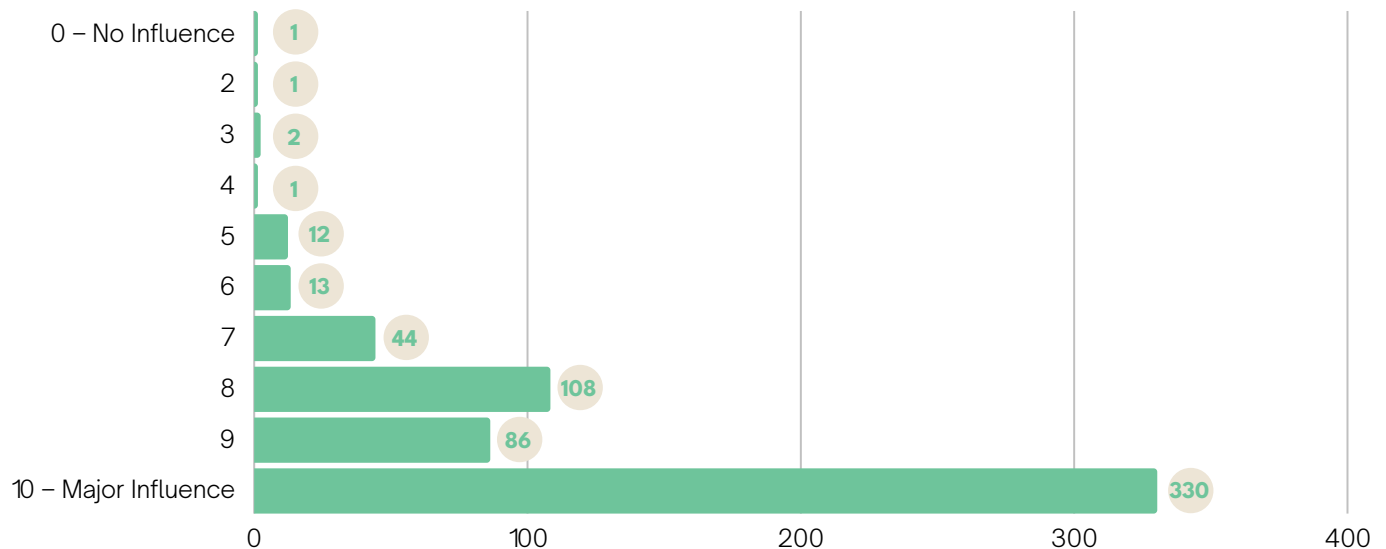
“My connection to country is vital”

“That the Territory remains unique. I say no turning it into any other city.”

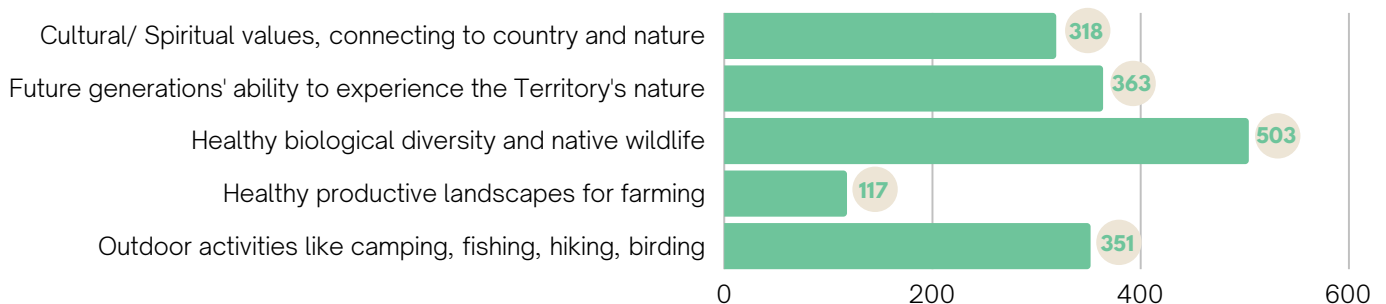
“Our politicians want to turn our iconic territory into just another city. We don't need to follow like sheep. Darwin needs to be unique, to have a reason for people to visit. They won't want to visit a place like everywhere else but hotter. Our unique natural environment needs to be valued

Q3. HOW MUCH DO THE TERRITORY'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL VALUES INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO LIVE AND STAY OR WORK IN THE NT?

Respondents ranked how strongly the NT's nature influenced their decision to stay in the Territory. 327 rated nature as 'A major influence' to stay in the NT. The majority of all respondents (521) rated '8' or higher on a scale from '0' (no influence) to '10' (a major influence to stay in the NT).



Q4. IN TERMS OF THE TERRITORY'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL VALUES, WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU? CHOOSE UP TO THREE ANSWERS.



“The dry season, Litchfield Park, Kakadu, Berry Springs, the bicycle and walk ways, the people, and the indigenous culture.”

“The uniqueness”

“Beautiful, undeveloped, healthy, natural landscapes”

“Landscape, trees, nature and clean water without heavy industrialization and resultant pollution”

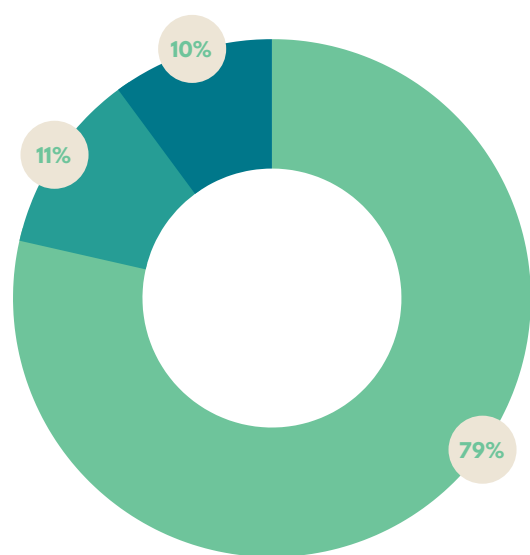
“The land/country. Our bushlands/native plants. It's home to me and the native wildlife. This is what makes us the NT”

“That it is so unique, special and one of few relatively intact places to see wildlife in Australia”

“I feel like the Territory is still wild when you get out of Darwin, we haven't ruined the environment yet”.

Q5. DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT VALUES FROM THE PREVIOUS QUESTION ARE ADEQUATELY PROTECTED IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS TO ENJOY?

Respondents overwhelmingly do not believe that the natural and cultural values of the NT are adequately protected. Many respondents chose to provide their own text answer to this question - 183 additional responses were written by participants outlining their key concerns and experiences.



■ Probably not ■ Umm, I'm not sure
■ Yes, I think so



Jess Bolton



183 ADDITIONAL TEXT RESPONSES WERE RECEIVED FOR THIS QUESTION.

“Very little discussion with the community about ecological impacts of land clearing for “development” eg Lee Point housing development”

“Mining, fracking and land clearance for housing seem to override protection of special places”

“No. Environmental regulation in the NT is not strong enough”.

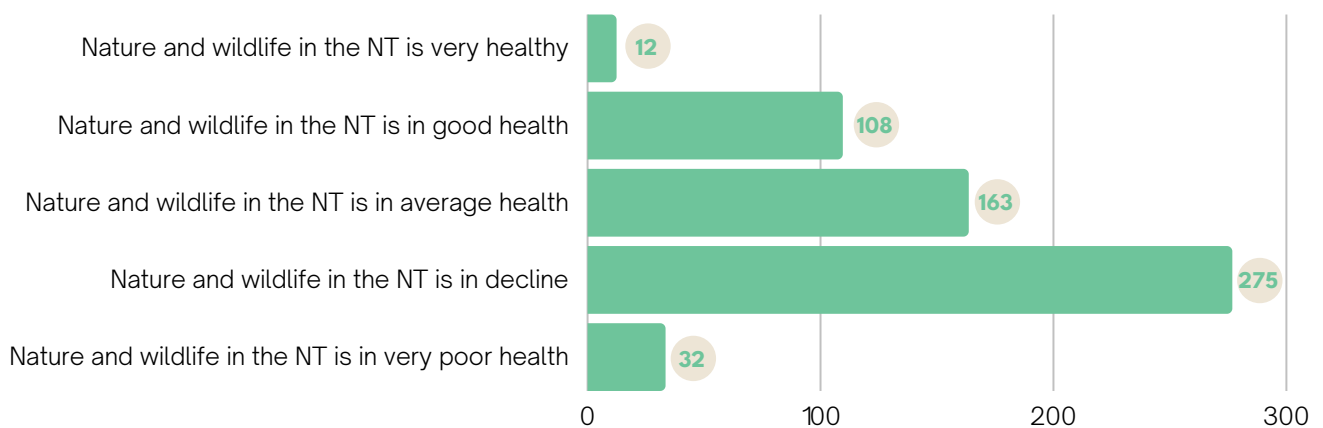
“The economy and development are prioritised over the environment. The government doesn't seem to be genuinely interested in protecting the environment for future generations due to their progress on fracking”.

“Having lived here for 50 years we have seen that even if laws are made to protect the environment, and that is not always the case, there are too many cases of insufficient follow up regulation and lawbreakers are seldom adequately punished.”

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES: WHAT ARE THE THREATS IMPACTING THE TERRITORY'S NATURE?

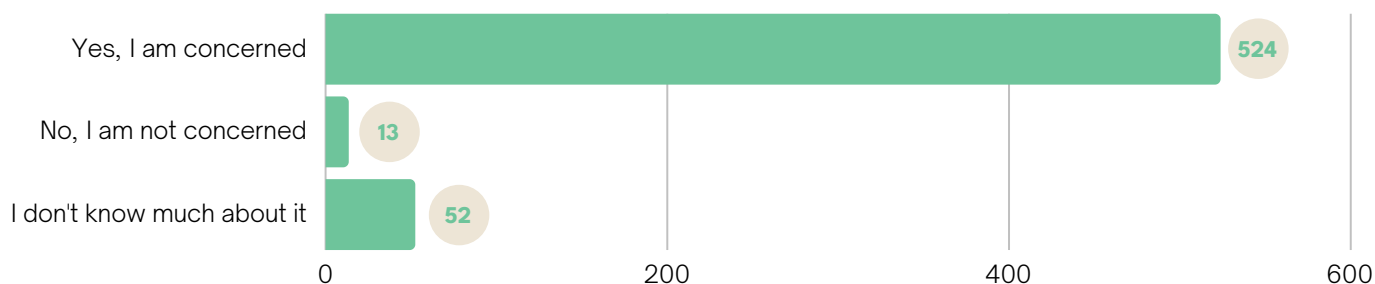
Q6. OVERALL, HOW HEALTHY DO YOU FEEL THE TERRITORY'S NATURE IS RIGHT NOW?

Almost half of all respondents (275) believe the NT's environment is in decline. 27% believe the NT's environment is in average health and 5% believe it is in very poor health. Less than 20% of respondents believe nature and wildlife in the NT is in good health.

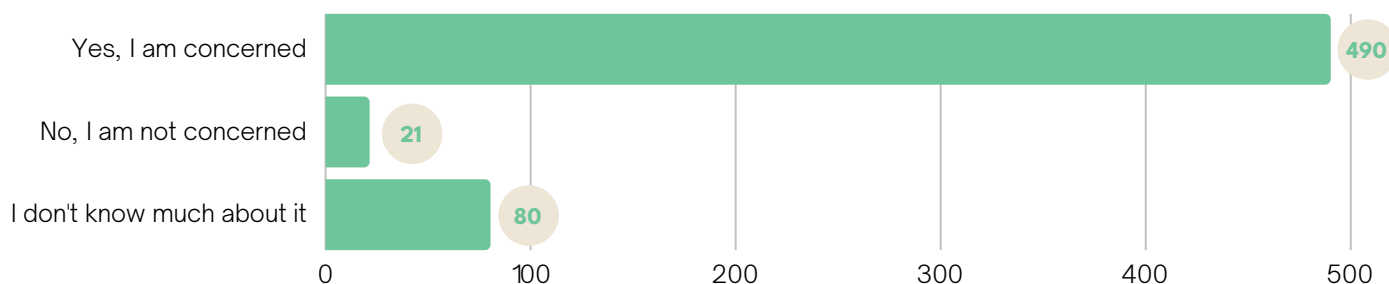


Glenn Walker

Q7. ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT BROADSCALE TREE CLEARING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY?



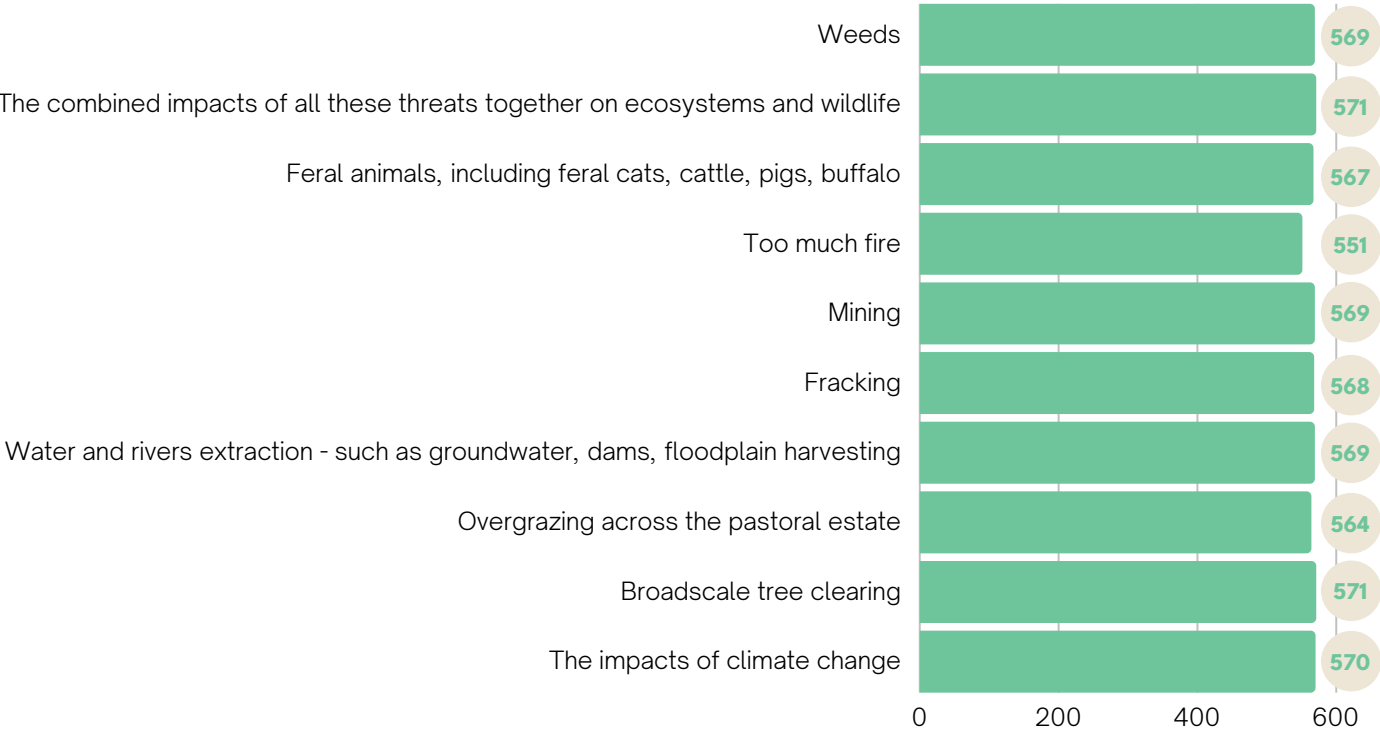
Q8. ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COTTON INDUSTRY IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY?



Stuart Blanch

These two questions elicited the strongest response from the survey - Territorians are clearly concerned about broadscale tree clearing and the establishment of the cotton industry in the NT.

Q9. WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE DIFFERENT THREATS TO THE NT'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE YOU MOST CONCERNED ABOUT?



What this graph shows is that people are aware that many different threatening processes are impacting our natural environment, and they are very worried about all of them!

For this question, participants used sliders to rank how worried they are about each threat from '0' (Not worried) to '10' (very worried). The consistently high ranking demonstrates that people understand the severe negative impacts from each of these threats, and how they interact cumulatively.

The cumulative impacts of all threatening processes, fracking and climate change were ranked by participants as the most worrying, followed by broadscale tree clearing, water and rivers extraction, mining, feral animals, weeds, overgrazing and too much fire.

TOP 5 RANKED THREATS TO THE NT AVERAGE SCORE

The combined impacts of all these threats on ecosystems and wildlife	9.6
Fracking	9.2
The impacts of climate change	9.0
Broadscale tree clearing	8.9
Water and rivers extraction	8.8



*Top End Narblek,
by Jiri Lochman*

Q10. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST THREAT TO NATURE IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY?

To ensure that we captured everyone's knowledge and concerns with regards to threats to the NT's nature, an open text box was provided for participants to describe in their own words what they believed was the biggest threat. We received 556 clear and decisive messages - a word cloud has been derived from these responses and just a few examples are presented below.



“It’s sensitive ecology- easily damaged and impossible to replace”

“Lack of strong regulation by governments due to putting financial interests first”

“Lack of coordinated legislative approach to the environment.”

“The government allowing ,mining fracking tree clearing, cotton and how long it takes to upgrade weed classification”

“Short term vision and people in power compromising the future of our environment for quick economical shortlived gains. Also the readiness of politicians to take gambles with the environment even when we don't fully understand potential future negative impact (e.g. fracking)”

“The never-ending war against Aboriginal sovereignty and land rights”

“Fracking and water extraction. Water is life”.

“Lack of understanding (or maybe will) on the part of governments to curb unsuitable development, or to value future ‘goods’ such as the massive ecotourism market.”

“Destroying habitats, lack of planning and care from the government”

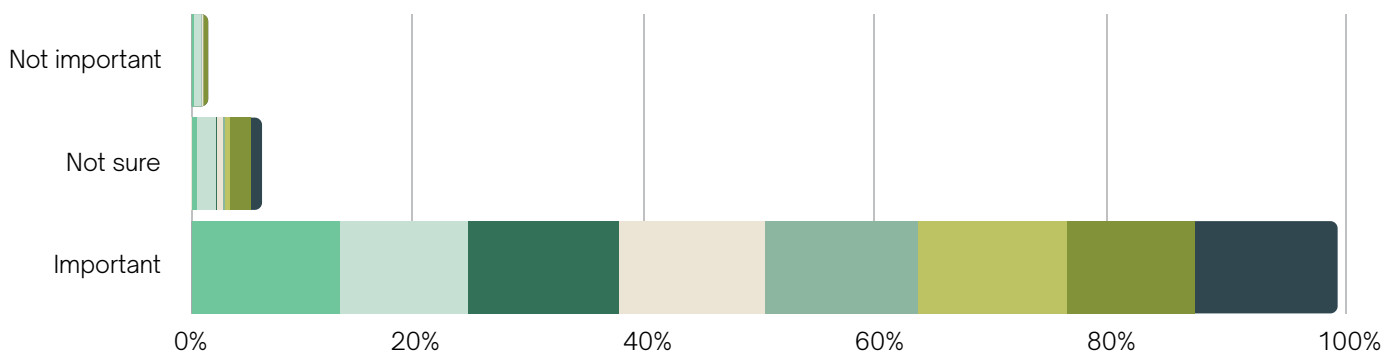
“The fact that we are not informed of what is REALLY being done on our name to the NT”

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES: HOW SHOULD WE IMPROVE PROTECTIONS FOR THE TERRITORY'S NATURE?

Q11. DO YOU THINK THESE STATEMENTS ARE IMPORTANT OR NOT IMPORTANT FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURE IN THE NT?

A total of 574 respondents completed this question, and all eight statements were deemed important for the protection of nature in the NT. The standout issues of importance for people are that the government **really listens to communities and takes public concerns about protecting nature seriously**; that nature protections can be **legally enforced** and that long term **ecological monitoring is used to inform decision making**.

- Local people are represented in decision-making, and communities are involved in planning for their regions
- Ensuring Indigenous knowledge is central to any approach
- That nature protections can be legally enforced
- That climate change impacts are planned for
- That the government really listens to communities, and takes public concerns about protecting nature seriously
- That long term ecological monitoring is prioritised, so we can track changes in the health of nature and wildlife
- That private landholders should have more support (financial or on ground) to care for important natural and cultural values on their properties
- That the NT enacts best-practice legal protections, like a new 'Biodiversity Act' or Nature Laws



Q12. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER IDEAS ABOUT PROTECTING NATURE IN THE NT? OR DO YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT PROTECTIONS FOR NATURE?

A total of 324 respondents chose to provide an additional text answer for this question.

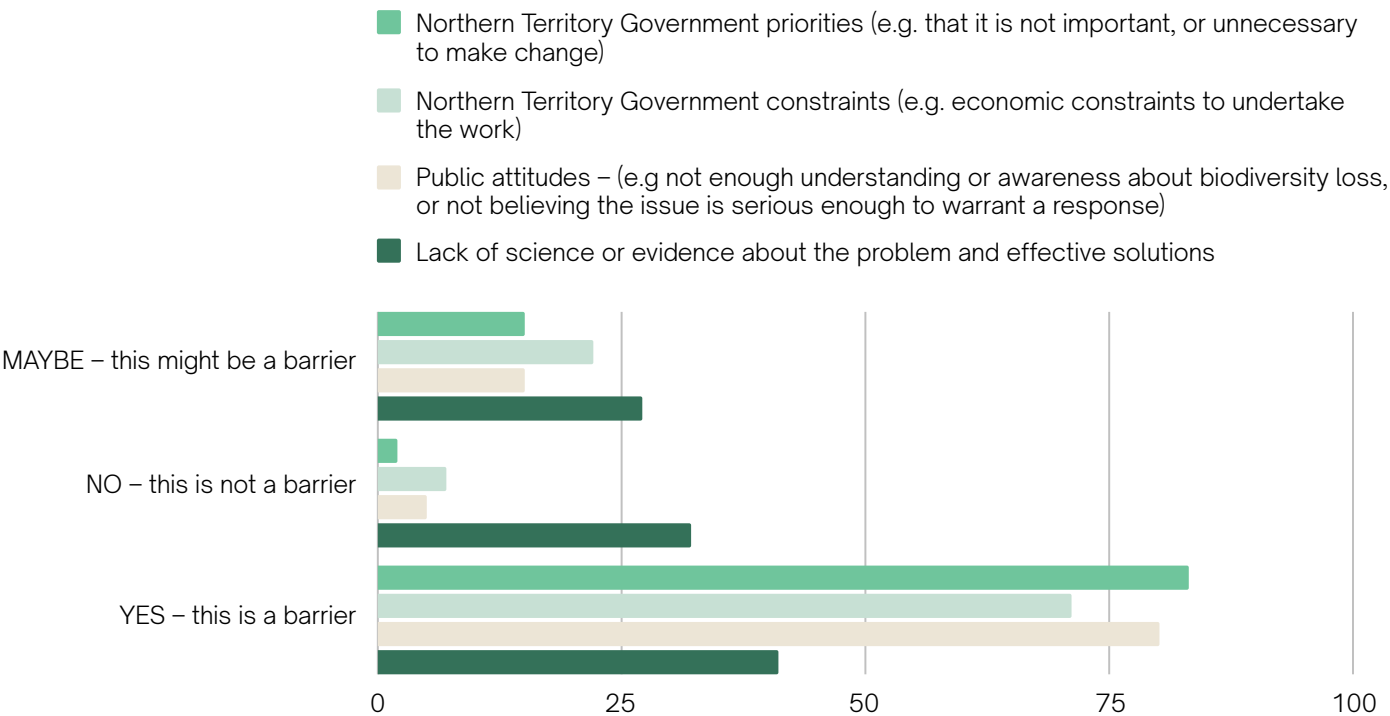
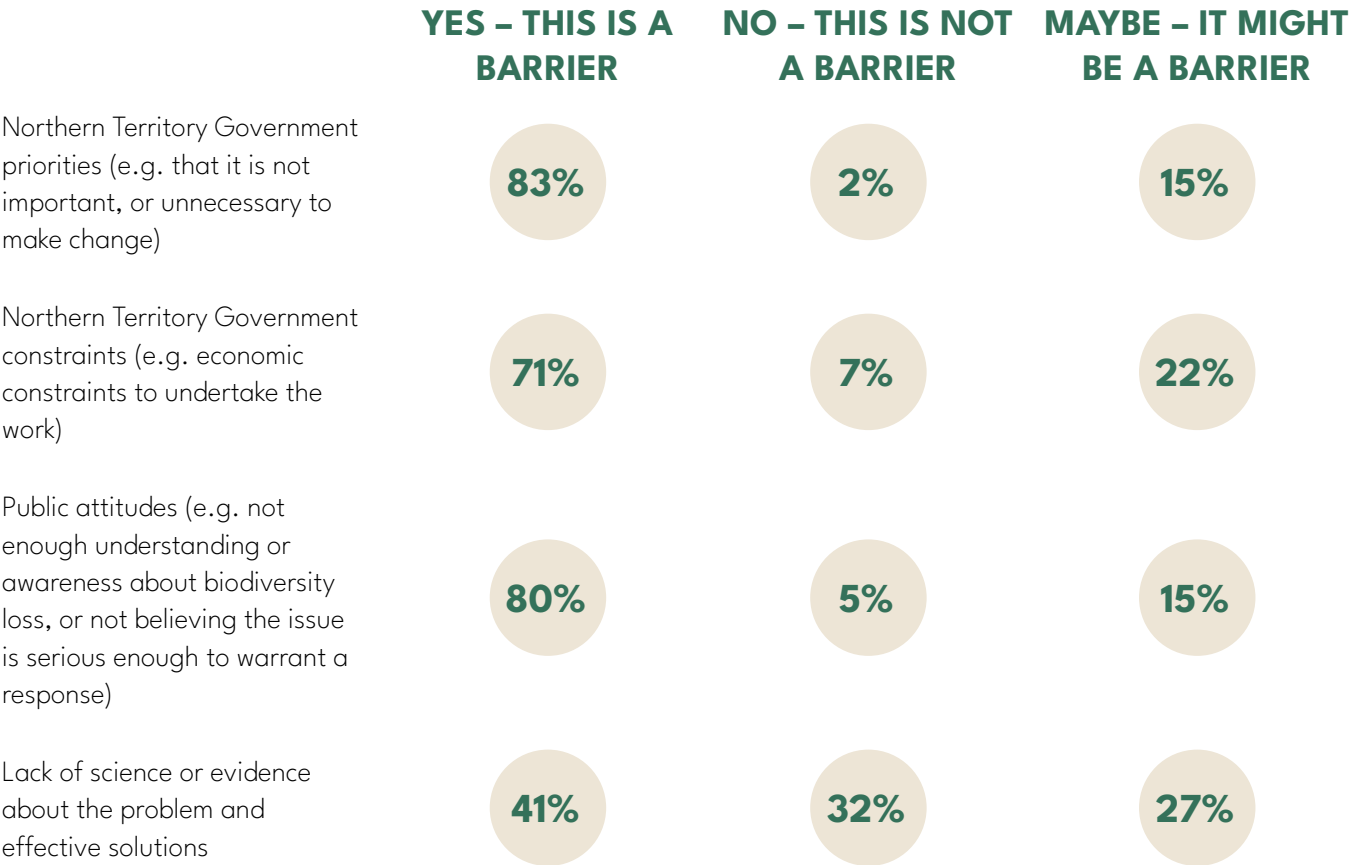
- “Changes to environmental protection so that it protects whole areas of biodiversity systems instead of a few especially named rare animals and plants in isolation.”
- “BAN FRACKING”
- “We need to allow for covenants to be placed on private land too so that owners cannot strip country, have a bash at some primary industry... if it's a failure and walk off leaving the disaster without having to rehab or take any other responsibility.”
- “I think stronger protection laws would be the most important”
- “Citizen involvement in decision-making through citizen's assemblies & juries; change the rhetoric & government priority from one focused on short term jobs to long term healthy & sustainable communities”
- “What protections for nature? We're losing it - rapidly!”
- “The cost of monitoring and enforcing environmental protection measures on major projects should be an important part of assessing whether any project can go ahead to ensure that proposals aren't just green washed to get approvals and then environmental responsibilities left unchecked.”
- “Greater opportunities for Aboriginal people to have input to decisions”
- “We must protect nature for the wildlife; it is their only home”
- “Both our river and underground water systems. The Daly river is so important place for me and is it truly tragic seeing it's water ways so low as a result of climate and cotton farming.”
- “I think there should be more publicity about fossil fuel donations to Labor and the CLP. I reckon if the public was aware of how much money the fossil fuel industry gives the politicians something might change.”
- “Increasing awareness that everything is connected and what we do to the environment we do to ourselves, our loved ones and future generations”
- “LAND BACK to First Nations people and communities”
- “Fracking is a huge concern, as it cotton irrigation. The NT has so much sun, renewables need to be pushed instead of gas. Funding ranger programs is proven to help in every case too. Ensure fire is managed culturally. Mitigation for climate change which includes keeping water where it is meant to be, not used for cotton growing.”
- “Weaning the NT off pastoralism”
- “Research, and when it is possible, the research should be done by qualified locals”
- “More research on terrestrial invertebrate native fauna - even if not endangered to ensure species composition is maintained across generational time. There are a lot of undescribed species in the NT (ants, katyids, wasps, beetles).”

Alexander Dudley




Q13. DO YOU THINK ANY OF THESE ISSUES ARE BARRIERS TO BETTER NATURE PROTECTIONS FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY?

This question presented four issues that are possible barriers or perceived barriers to better nature protections for the NT. Northern Territory Government priorities were considered a barrier in over 80% of responses, followed by public attitudes and Northern Territory Government constraints. Only 41% of respondents considered a lack of science or evidence to be a barrier.



Q14. WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE TERRITORY'S NATURE THAT YOU HAVE SEEN DURING YOUR TIME IN THE NT?

- “Buffel grass fires wiping out camping spots that in my childhood memories were sandy, shaded creek beds with abundant bird life and scatterings of animal tracks. Now these places are choked out hard to access Buffel monocultures or after the ever more often fires are charred earth and smouldering hundred year old gums, hollowed out like chimneys smoking for days afterwards. Pastoralism has a lot to answer for.”
- “I grew up here and there are noticeable changes in weather patterns and heat. There is increased farming on poor soils and overstocking of areas adjacent to rivers that are destroying river banks and systems. I am worried that the NT may not be liveable for my children and also my myself in the coming decades.”
- “The biggest change for me is the lack of diversity in wildlife I have observed in and around our home. It makes me sad that i have to take my kids to the wildlife park to show them animals that used to live in our backyard. That's changed home that's changed how my children experience our home.
- “The destruction of land and clearing of bush lands. I feel sad when I drive around Darwin. Where is our native wildlife going?”
- “Hotter climates. In 2019 there were 45 days over 40 degrees celcius in Katherine. Hot weather makes life more difficult for the whole community, especially people living in remote paces and people with vulernable living situations. This will only get worse unless NTG does more to reduce emissions.”
- “Seeing the disaster of irresponsible mining on the country around Borroloola, appalling that the NT government approved it in the first place. And now fracking! I've lived in the NT for 35 years and the temperatures are over 4 degrees hotter than when I came in the 1980s. We need to treasure and conserve country not keep poisoning it.”
- “During my exploration of bushland across the top end I have noticed the absence of reptiles. I have probably walked around 100km through bushland and have only come across one snake.”
- “Water used to spring out of the ground during the wet, green frogs were everywhere and now I've seen neither for many years. I feel we are losing what makes us special and unique”
- “Lived here for over 30 years and there has been a massive amount of housing being built. Makes me feel sad. Where are all the frilled neck lizards?”
- “Land clearing upsets me the most. I have been here since 1980 and it is upsetting every day to see.”
- “The decline in wildlife over my lifetime (57 years) spent in the Top End. No more wallabies on the back lawn, bandicoots too! No more goannas in the chook house, snake in the roof, and possum up the tree! No more 'Freshwater' in Rapid Creek or quoll in the shed! No more clean scrub and floodplain, just weeds as far as the eye can see! Just scrubbers, buffalo, camels, pigs, toads and did I say weeds! Just nasty holes in the ground left by those from overseas! Who also want our water, to do with it as they please! This is my Territory, our Territory, your Territory!”
- “In my 23 years of living in the NT I have seen serious reduction of marine life in darwin Harbour, dolphin numbers in particular”
- “Now there's less frilly's, less black footed tree rats, more feral cats, more gamba, too much emphasis on making money and not enough on protecting biodiversity.”

A photograph of a savanna woodland. In the foreground, there is a dense field of tall, dry, golden-brown grass. Behind the grass, several trees with green foliage are visible. One tree on the right has a prominent, long, thin, and drooping seed head. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The lighting suggests it is either early morning or late afternoon, with a warm glow on the grass and trees.

*Savanna woodland
with spear grass.
Stuart Blanch*



*Gouldian Finch at Lee Point,
Darwin 2022 by Tobias Akkesson*



The Territory's nature, it's worth protecting

For more information about the
Nature Protections Survey please
contact ECNT Biodiversity Policy
Officer **allana.brown@ecnt.org**