



MEDIA RELEASE – 27 July, 2016

## **New Report Finds History Of Failure To Prevent Damage To Top End Coasts**

Inadequate safeguards and poor decision-making has exposed the Top End's coasts and waterways to permanent damage from polluting and unregulated development, an analysis of government planning laws and decisions and has found.

The analysis, commissioned by the Keep Top End Coasts Healthy alliance, focused on the decisions of NT governments over the past decade. It established a systemic failure to regulate industry and a pattern of irresponsible planning decisions that have led to the approval of highly destructive developments. The analysis was carried out by the by the Environmental Defenders Office Northern Territory (EDONT).

“Almost all of the NT's environmental laws require overhauling. The most pertinent example of the failure of the current regime of laws is the major marine supply base on Port Melville that was constructed without an environmental assessment,” the EDONT analysis states.

As a result, permanent damage to the NT coasts is evident and escalating, such as the destruction of essential mangrove systems, toxic pollution in Darwin Harbour and reports of declining fish stocks, lead author and Principal Lawyer of the EDONT David Morris said.

“Other examples of failures of responsible planning decisions include the Redbank Copper Mine and McArthur River Mine, which the Territory government approved using special legislation despite Supreme Court concerns it was unlawful,” Mr Morris said.

A detailed plan is now urgently needed to manage current and future threats and adequately safeguard the coasts and waterways, said Jacqueline Taylor of the Australian Marine Conservation Society and Keep Top End Coasts Health alliance.

“The next Territory government must act to put in place long term measures that secure and sustain our coasts and waterways. Providing leadership at this critical time would reflect the wishes of the community for action that supports and enhances the Territory's enviable lifestyle,” Ms Taylor said.

The EDONT analysis recommended several important measures to reduce and manage threats to the coasts and waterways, including:

- A complete overhaul of environmental assessment laws.
- A prohibition on the clearing of mangroves.
- The incorporation of requirements in legislation for opportunity for public participation in decision-making.
- The implementation of the concept of Ecologically Sustainable Development into government policy, planning and legislation.
- The development of legislative mechanisms to assess and plan for cumulative

impacts, including the impacts of climate change.

- The incorporation of requirements in legislation that mandate independent science and the public release of key environmental management documents and data.

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