

COASTAL AND MARINE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

NORTHERN TERRITORY - 2019-2029

Our coasts and seas



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Background

The Northern Territory has an extensive coastline and diverse marine environments. These relatively undisturbed environments are unique, both nationally and globally. The seas and coasts are enormously important to all Territorians, as a source of economic benefit, for recreation, for the maintenance of customary practices and local Aboriginal community livelihoods, and as an integral part of our identity and lifestyle.

With increasing levels of competition for, and pressures on, our coastal and marine resources, a strategic approach to managing the multiple interests has never been more important to the Northern Territory than it is now. Maintaining healthy coastal and marine environments, while embracing new economic opportunities and ensuring sustainable development and use by all Territorians, requires careful planning incorporating the best available science, a collaborative approach, and a sense of shared responsibility.

The Northern Territory Coastal and Marine Management Strategy (the Strategy) outlines the vision for managing our coasts and seas, the broader environmental, economic and social objectives that managers must achieve, as well as a way to plan, prioritise and invest in management initiatives.

The Strategy has been developed with assistance and contributions by a broad cross-section of Territorians representing government (Territory and local), land councils, industry, conservation, recreation, academia and natural resource management.



Photo: Aude Mayans/Tourism NT

Northern Territory context

The Territory's coast and seas are unique. The coastline extends for 10,953km, including 887 islands, and our coastal waters cover over 72,000km². Our coasts and seas provide benefits to many user groups, as well as having multiple values for the broader Northern Territory community.

Aboriginal rights and interests in the coasts and seas

The coast and seas are culturally important for Aboriginal Territorians and their rights and interests in the coasts and seas provide a means to realise economic, cultural and social aspirations.

Aboriginal people own and manage 78% of the Northern Territory coastline through inalienable Aboriginal freehold granted under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, with a further 12% subject to outstanding land claims, conferring a high degree of control over access and use. Importantly, the High Court of Australia handed down a decision (known as the Blue Mud Bay decision) that confirms that waters overlaying Aboriginal land are no different from the land itself, and permission of the Traditional Owners is required to access the waters overlying granted Aboriginal land, including the intertidal zone.

The majority of the remainder of the Northern Territory's coast and intertidal areas are, or are likely to be, subject to non-exclusive native title determinations, which provide for access and use rights in coexistence with other interests.

Aboriginal ownership and rights in the coast and intertidal zone of the Northern Territory provides an important context for the Strategy and its implementation. While these rights do not diminish legislative and management obligations by others and responsible stewardship by all, they guide and influence any management regimes proposed to ensure Traditional Owners' decisions and rights are recognised.



Photo: Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation



Photo: Tourism NT/Tom Laurence

Government

The Northern Territory Government has significant tenure and management responsibility for the coastline through its statutory obligations for managing planning, fisheries, ports and shipping, parks and reserves, biodiversity, shipwrecks and underwater cultural heritage, marine pollution, environmental assessment, mining, pipelines and sacred sites. Under specific agreements with the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government also provides day to day management of activities out to the limits of the exclusive economic zone that extends beyond the Northern Territory's jurisdictional limits (e.g. some fisheries).

Australian Government legislation is also relevant to the management of Territory coast and seas including threatened species and environmental protection, fisheries management, shipping, border protection and marine pollution.

Environment

The Northern Territory is considered to have one of the world's most intact marine and coastal environments. Important breeding, nursery and feeding areas for many species of fish, marine turtles, shorebirds, seabirds, waterbirds, dolphins, dugong, sawfish, sea snakes, seahorses, sharks and rays as well as a myriad of other species occur throughout the Territory's coast and seas. Many species depend upon both inshore and offshore areas at different stages of their life cycle requiring an integrated approach to management.

Economy

Industries such as fishing and aquaculture, oil and gas, and tourism rely on our coast and seas, and there are many potential economic opportunities from carefully managed development of our coastal and marine environments. Commercial fishing activity occurs across 15 different wild harvest fisheries in both inshore and offshore areas. Cruise ships visit Darwin and explore the remote regions of the Territory, including visits to Aboriginal communities. Ports are critical to the Northern Territory economy, as they are an important node in export and import supply chains. Many remote communities rely on barge landings to import freight, especially during the wet season.

Society and Culture

The majority of the Territory's population live on or close to the coast and our outdoor and active lifestyle is underpinned by it. Territorians enjoy the natural beauty and uniqueness of our coasts and seas. Recreational fishing is synonymous with the Territory lifestyle. Over 80% of recreational fishing activity occurs in marine waters, primarily estuaries, followed by inshore and offshore waters. Our maritime heritage is rich and diverse and includes Aboriginal occupation of the coastline, evidence of visits by the Makassan people who sailed from present-day Indonesia, shipwrecks, submerged aircraft and submarines, lighthouses and wharves built during European settlement.



Challenges and opportunities

The Northern Territory Government recognises that our coast and seas face a range of challenges to manage the risk of cumulative impacts, to increase economic development, better position Aboriginal landowners in the management of the coastal zone and reduce conflict among user groups.

Management of the Territory's coast and seas is currently characterised by a suite of legislative arrangements delivered by multiple government agencies, statutory authorities and other land and sea management frameworks. Throughout the consultation process in developing the Strategy, there was a consistent view that current management was constrained by a lack of coordination among government agencies, Traditional Owners and user groups. More integrated planning and management of our coast and seas is necessary to improve the environmental outcomes and economic opportunities for Territorians.

Recognising the rights and interests of Aboriginal Territorians in the management of the use and access to the coastal and marine environment, including its natural resources and the maintenance of customary practices, is essential to achieving their economic and social aspirations. However, it is often difficult for Aboriginal people in regional and remote communities to engage in management and policy decision processes, including changes to laws and practices

that directly affect their rights and obligations. Providing a consultative planning framework that enables Aboriginal people to engage in these areas is critical to the future management of the Territory's coast and seas.

Importantly, Aboriginal sea ranger groups are already involved in managing our coast and seas in areas such as biosecurity, fisheries monitoring and compliance, threatened species protection and cultural heritage. Over 40% of the Territory's coastline is currently managed as Indigenous Protected Areas, which are voluntarily declared as a protected area for biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation. Supporting Aboriginal sea rangers in their mission is a key part of maintaining a healthy and productive marine environment.

Currently, information on the values and condition of the Territory's coast and seas is either lacking or not easily accessible. Acquiring a better understanding of current and emerging threats will enable the development of management approaches that protect our values and ensure the community has confidence in the health of our coast and seas. Building our capability and capacity to undertake research to fill these knowledge gaps and prioritise management actions to conserve these values and support economic development are required.



Photo: Shaana McNaught/Tourism NT



Photo: Aude Mayans/Tourism NT

The Strategy framework – integrated management

The challenges and opportunities described above illustrate the need for an integrated management approach that:

- addresses knowledge gaps
- builds on and complements these existing initiatives
- maximises engagement and participation across all government and community interests

Integrated management of the coastal and marine environment requires the informed participation and cooperation of all stakeholders to assess the societal goals in a given region, and to take actions towards meeting these objectives. This necessarily must include all relevant land owners, government agencies, industry and community groups. Planning regions and legislative scope need to be defined. An appropriate governance approach needs to be established, and effective engagement and participatory processes need to be developed.

Marine spatial planning is a useful tool that has been employed effectively elsewhere to support the development of robust integrated management of coastal and marine environments. It covers the full cycle of information collection, planning, decision-making, management and monitoring. It uses a broad range of information to support decision making and informed participation and cooperation of all stakeholders to assess the common goals in coastal and marine areas, and to make decisions and take actions towards meeting these objectives.

Importantly, marine spatial planning incorporates adaptive management, which is a procedure for implementing management while learning about which actions are most effective at achieving specified objectives, then refining on-ground management decisions for ecological, social and/or economic outcomes. Compared to other regions the coasts and seas of the Northern Territory have relatively low levels of development and resource use, and baseline knowledge is also relatively limited. These circumstances provide an opportunity for Marine Spatial Planning to be a highly effective tool for

achieving integrated management of our coastal and marine environment.

The Strategy aims to establish integrated management of our coast and seas over the next 10 years. Initially a set of foundation actions have been identified that focus on establishing governance arrangements, gaining knowledge, improving engagement and consultation processes and developing appropriate management models. The foundation actions are the key building blocks that underpin achieving the objectives and attaining outcomes. These actions will require substantial collaboration and cooperation across land owners, government, industry, and non-government sectors, as well as a strong commitment by communities and individuals. Building on these achievements and the knowledge and experience gained, an evaluation will be undertaken in year 5 of the Strategy to review progress and refine and identify new actions as necessary complete delivery of the Strategy objectives. This staged and adaptable approach will ensure that future action plans are responsive to previous actions and outcomes, and emerging challenges and priorities.

Governance

Integrated management requires effective and transparent governance measures that ensure outcomes are delivered and values are maintained. Clear governance arrangements will promote alignment across government agencies, maximise efficient use of resources and reduce duplication of effort. Importantly communicating information and consulting with relevant stakeholders will facilitate effective engagement and exchange of information.

Governance arrangements are not easily achieved, and the Strategy does not wish to simply impose another layer of bureaucracy on planning and decision-making. Therefore, the first foundation objective is to investigate and develop the best governance arrangements for the integrated management of our coast and seas in the Territory.

The Strategy

Our vision

Our coasts and seas are healthy and productive. Their cultural significance is recognised, and they continue to support our lifestyle and livelihoods.



Photo: Shaana McNaught/Tourism NT

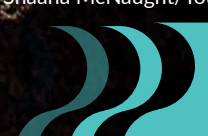




Photo: Bruce Molloy/ Tourism.NT

Purpose

The Strategy sets a 10 year direction for the management and protection of the coastal and marine environments of the Northern Territory and provides guidance to all Territorians and decision makers.

The Coastal and Marine Management Strategy (the Strategy) will recognise the rights and interests of Aboriginal landowners, support the management and conservation of coastal and marine areas, help manage the growing demand for natural resources, and foster sustainable industry for the benefit of the Territory economy.

Principles

To conserve and enhance the value of our coasts and seas, the Strategy identifies the following principles:

- All Territorians have a role in the management of our coasts and seas.
- Ecologically Sustainable Development is fundamental to our livelihood, economy, culture, customary practices of Aboriginal custodians and society.
- Management should seek to maintain the healthy and largely intact nature of the Territory's marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Aboriginal land-owner rights and interests are recognised and communities engaged and supported to participate in decision-making processes.
- A partnership approach to management that identifies common goals, and operates in good faith for the Territory, should be adopted.
- Management must be future-orientated, adaptive and flexible.
- Management decisions should be based on the best available evidence, including scientific, Traditional, community and industry knowledge.



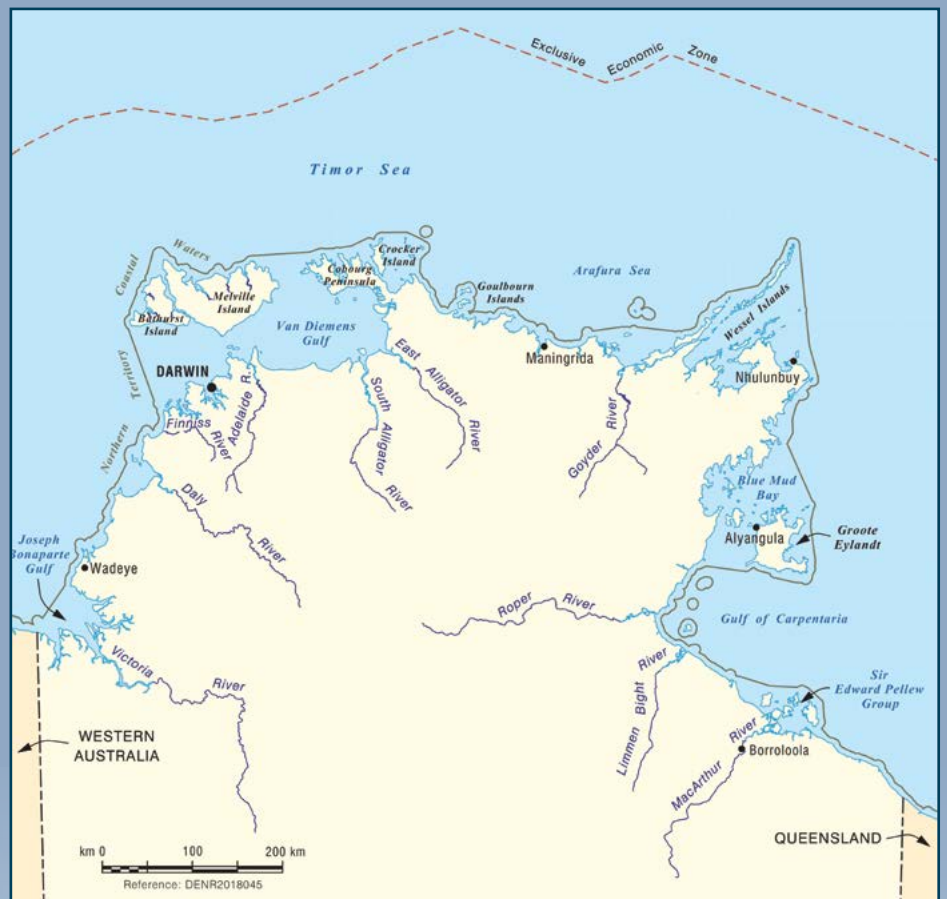
Scope

The Strategy applies to all Northern Territorial coastal and marine areas.

The terrestrial or landward boundary for the Strategy is the extent of marine influence, including coastal processes (such as storm surge).

The marine or seaward boundary is generally the outer limit of Northern Territory's coastal waters (3 nautical miles).

For some management purposes (e.g. Northern Territory fisheries) the seaward boundary extends further into Australian Government jurisdiction.



Map of the area covered by the Coastal and Marine Management Strategy. Northern Territory coastal waters is defined as 3 nautical miles from the coast.



Photo: Shaana McNaught/Tourism NT

Objectives

The following objectives and their overall (10 year) outcomes define the key areas of action needed to achieve the vision and purpose of the Strategy. For each objective, multiple actions are identified and performance measures have been developed to track their progress (Table 1).



Photo: Anindilyakwa Land Council

Objective 1:

work together

The Strategy aims to integrate management of our natural resources for improved outcomes. Integration and informed co-operation among government agencies and with Traditional Owners, industry and the community will lead to improved benefits, including sharing of resources and knowledge, less duplication of effort, stronger and broader relationships and alignment of strategies/actions with community expectations. Importantly, all Territorians should have the opportunity to have a say regarding important issues.

Outcome:

Governments, non-government organisations, Traditional Owners, industry and local communities are using a partnership approach to planning and managing the use of our coastal and marine systems.

Foundation actions:

- 1) Establish a Northern Territory Coastal and Marine Stewardship Group comprised of partners and stakeholders to provide advice on implementation of the Strategy.
- 2) Implement an Integrated Management Framework across the Northern Territory coast and seas to define and establish agreed social, economic and environmental outcomes for each region. This will involve the following steps:
 - define planning regions and legislative scope
 - develop engagement and participatory planning processes, in particular for Traditional Owners Aboriginal land managers in regional and remote areas
 - assess how community involvement and advice can support statutory decision-making
 - test the marine spatial planning framework by conducting an initial trial in one region, then evaluating and refining
- 3) Complete and implement the Limmen Marine Park Management Plan as a local-scale trial of integrated, cooperative management.



Photo: Aude Mayans/Tourism NT

Objective 2:

safeguard our coasts and seas

With ongoing development, growing human population, increased use and a changing climate, our marine and coastal environments are coming under increasing pressure. Balancing many competing needs without damaging the asset base is a challenge for land and sea managers and decision makers.

Regular reporting is the best way to ensure that decision makers, managers and the community are provided with up to date information, allowing them to assess the impact, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and legacy of policies, actions and programs. It is also the simplest way to promote accountability.

Outcomes:

- our coastal and marine environments remain healthy and productive, habitats are intact and functional, and species richness is maintained
- our coastal and marine ecosystems are resilient to climate change
- a regionalised system of science-based marine spatial planning measures to maintain ecosystem function and resilience
- a robust and transparent environmental regulatory regime provides certainty to industry and builds trust in the community that coast and marine values are protected

Foundation actions:

- 1) Identify and map the natural, cultural, social and economic values of our coastal and marine environments.
- 2) Undertake a threat and risk assessment to prioritise management actions and research needs that reduce the risk to the values and fill important knowledge gaps.
- 3) Implement appropriate management programs that reduce risk in areas with high values or competing uses.
- 4) Develop and implement an integrated monitoring program to track and report the condition of natural, cultural, social and economic values of our coastal and marine environments.
- 5) Consider coastal and marine issues in the development and implementation of the Northern Territory Climate Response Strategy.
- 6) Incorporate marine and coastal objectives into environmental protection legislation.
- 7) Complete a regional trial of the marine spatial planning framework.
- 8) Through regional marine spatial planning process, explore and evaluate a range of marine conservation measures, including expanding the existing network of marine protected areas.



Photo: Northern Territory Seafood Council

Objective 3:

foster sustainable industry

Many of the Territory's key industries rely on coastal and marine environments for resources or transport. There are also many opportunities for further development based on our coast and seas to build and strengthen the Territory economy and pursue enterprise initiatives that support local Aboriginal livelihoods and enterprises.

Our coastal waterways and marine environments are highly attractive destinations for tourists.

Aquaculture is a growing industry that has the potential to be an important contributor to the economy and we have fish stocks that have scope for further development. A growing economy will rely on new infrastructure such as ports and barge landings.

The Strategy will operate in conjunction with other Northern Territory Government initiatives to foster sustainable industry based in the coastal and marine zone.

Outcomes:

- Sustainable economic opportunities are recognised, supported and developed.
- Ecosystems and fish stocks are healthy and managed sustainably.
- Coastal Aboriginal communities derive increasing economic and social benefits from their participation in the development and management of sustainable industries.
- Coastal and marine-based tourism enterprises are further developed in a sustainable manner.

Foundation actions:

- 1) Use marine spatial planning to support sustainable economic development and the aspirations of industry and Traditional Owners.
- 2) Undertake surveys of recreational fishing participation, distribution and total catch, and assess sustainable management needs.
- 3) Identify aspirations of, and opportunities for, coastal Aboriginal communities to derive economic and social benefits from their participation in the development and management of sustainable industries, including tourism.
- 4) Initiate a strategic assessment of Darwin Harbour that considers both development opportunities and ecological values.



Photo: Shaana McNaught/Tourism NT

Objective 4:

celebrate our culture and lifestyle

The Northern Territory has much to celebrate with deep cultural roots, a shared maritime history and enviable lifestyle. Aboriginal culture remains strong in the Territory. The Dreamings of Aboriginal landowners and their connection to sea country are significant and continue. Our shared maritime heritage is also rich and diverse.

The majority of the Territory's population live close to the coast and enjoy a wide range of experiences associated with a healthy coastal and marine environment.

Much of the coast is remote and hosts many Aboriginal outstations, with many living in those areas and who rely on their coastal and marine environments to support their livelihoods and continue to maintain customary practices. Recreational fishing is important to the Territory both as a pastime for residents and as a tourist drawcard.

Outcomes:

- connection to sea country by Aboriginal people is recognised and promoted
- the Aboriginal sea country cultural values, land tenure and access rights are understood by the community
- recreational opportunities (including fishing) are maintained and enhanced
- cultural, historical and archaeological assets are protected and appreciated in an inclusive and appropriate manner

Foundation actions:

- 1) Undertake participatory planning with Traditional Owners to identify aspirations and programs that deliver economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits.
- 2) Partner with the Australian Government to support marine Indigenous Protected Areas that conserve environmental and cultural values of our coasts and seas.
- 3) Support and develop initiatives in both education and community settings that promote cultural and social values of the Northern Territory's coast and seas.
- 4) Develop policies and effective regulation to protect and manage the values of cultural, historical and archaeological assets in the coastal and marine environment.



Photo: Professor Richard Lucas/Aberystwyth University in Wales

Objective 5:

build our knowledge

Science and knowledge must inform evidence-based decision-making and evaluation. Improved knowledge builds certainty and promotes innovative and creative approaches to development, sustainable use and environmental protection. It is important that traditional knowledge developed from experience gained over millennia and adapted to the local culture and environment is recognised, valued and used. Having the capacity within the Northern Territory to undertake this research is vital.

Outcomes:

- Management of the coastal and marine environment is based on best available knowledge including Traditional Owner knowledge.
- Knowledge gaps are identified and strategically addressed, and information is shared and readily accessible to managers and users.
- Capacity to undertake research to support the management of the coastal and marine environment is developed.

Foundation actions:

- 1) Identify and cost data needs and uses for spatial planning and management.
- 2) Develop and promote the use of coastal and marine atlas for marine spatial planning and decision-making.
- 3) Develop an inventory of knowledge gaps and priorities to reduce uncertainty and support marine spatial planning and decision-making then develop a collaborative research agenda to improve scientific baseline knowledge about coastal and marine values, key ecological processes and impacts and threats to the functioning of these values.
- 4) Establish a Coast and Marine Research Hub with Charles Darwin University and Australian Institute of Marine Science to increase capacity to undertake research to address priority knowledge gaps.



Photo: Northern Territory Seafood Council

Implementation

Key to successful implementation of the Coastal and Marine Management Strategy is ongoing input from a range of voices. This will be facilitated through the establishment of a multi-sectoral Northern Territory Coastal and Marine Stewardship Group. The group will be made up of Traditional Owners, land councils, industry groups, recreational fishing and conservation organisations, natural resource managers and government officials and will be chaired by an independent person. This group will provide advice to government and facilitate engagement between various sectors and the broader community on implementation and review of the Strategy.

Performance measures and timelines for each Strategy objective. After year 5 progress will be evaluated and actions will be revised.

Objective	Milestone	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Review and evaluation of Actions	Yr 6	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	
1. Work together	Governance framework established, Marine Stewardship Group is actively engaged in planning and management of the coast and marine environment.	●											
	Marine spatial planning framework trialled, evaluated and refined.	●	●	●									
	Refined marine spatial planning framework implemented across the Northern Territory.			●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
	Regional community engagement and participatory planning processes, in particular Traditional Owners, are established and are contributing to decision-making in management and planning of coast and marine environments.			●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
	Limmen Marine Park Management Plan completed.	●											
2. Safeguard our coasts and seas	Natural, cultural, social and economic values of our coastal and marine environments have been evaluated and an integrated monitoring program has been developed and implemented to track and report their condition.		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
	Threats to key values are identified, risks assessed and actions for management are prioritised.		●	●	●								
	Through regional marine spatial planning process, exploration and evaluation of a range of marine conservation measures, including expanding the existing network of marine protected areas, commenced.			●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
	A Northern Territory Climate Response Strategy is developed.	●											
	A contemporary environment protection act that explicitly recognises and protects the coast and seas is implemented.		●										
3. Foster sustainable industry	Industry groups are participating in regional advisory processes and are engaged and contributing to decision-making.			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Levels of recreational fishing participation, distribution and total catch assessed and strategies for sustainable management identified.					●							
	Aspirations and opportunities of coastal Aboriginal communities are clearly identified and plans are in place for projects.				●								
	Strategic assessment of Darwin Harbour that considers both development opportunities and ecological values is initiated.			●									
4. Celebrate our culture and lifestyle	Improved community awareness and understanding of Aboriginal sea country cultural values, land tenure and access, and how they are managed.				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Improved support for Traditional Owner management of coastal and sea country, including Indigenous Protected Areas.			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	New opportunities for recreational activities identified and are being assessed for their feasibility, including accessible, safe and well maintained recreational fishing infrastructure.		●										
	Appropriate policies and effective regulation in place to protect and manage the values of cultural, historical and archaeological assets in the coastal and marine environment.			●									
5. Build our knowledge	Information and data needs and uses relevant to the management of the coastal and marine values are understood and costed.			●									
	Improved understanding of baseline values (environmental, social and cultural) and relevant spatial data are available for use by all users through a coastal and marine atlas.			●									
	Information and data collection protocols are in place and access to data rights and responsibilities are clear.		●										
	Knowledge gaps and research priorities related to the management of coastal and marine values are understood.	●											
	Research partnerships established to increase capacity to undertake marine science to address priority knowledge gaps.			●									



Photo: Cruise ship, Darwin Harbour

Credit:Tauri Minogue/Tourism NT