



Joint Position Statement of The Climate Justice Alliance NT in response to the National Climate Risk Assessment

Introduction

The National Climate Risk Assessment (NCRA) delivers the nation's first comprehensive climate risk assessment. Released in September 2025, the NCRA was conducted by the Australian Climate Service, a partnership of the Bureau of Meteorology, CSIRO, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and Geoscience Australia. The NCRA maps climate risks across all Australian states and territories, identifying 63 nationally significant risks, and providing insight into how these climate risks are impacting - and will continue to impact - different sectors and regions across Australia. It is specifically about the risk associated with climate change, rather than an environmental assessment.

The Climate Justice Alliance NT, a collective of organisations from key sectors including health, housing, social services, land councils, environment, law, research, and the arts, was formed in 2019 in response to the lack of a coordinated response to climate change in the Northern Territory. While many services and organisations are increasingly understanding how climate change is already affecting our communities, the Climate Justice Alliance has been the only organisation dedicated solely to networking, knowledge sharing, advocacy, and capacity building within the climate justice space in the NT. At the same time, the Alliance collates and builds upon the collective knowledge, wisdom, and lived experience already present at the grassroots right across the Territory.

This document is the Climate Justice Alliance's formal response to this critical, long-awaited piece of comprehensive research. The Northern Territory, and our communities, are identified throughout the NCRA as being particularly impacted by climate change, and we have a unique opportunity to provide valuable insights into the unfolding reality of the climate crisis, from the ground.

What the NCRA says about the Northern Territory

Throughout 272 pages of risk assessment, along with several accompanying technical reports, the Northern Territory features prominently and consistently within high-risk categories including threats to environment, community, culture, economy, health, industry, and infrastructure.

In short, the NCRA's assessment for the Northern Territory is that climate change-driven environmental impacts including extreme weather and environmental change will:

- increase existing inequalities
- put added pressure on infrastructure including housing and supply chains,
- impact the economy including small business, tourism, and the workforce,
- and will place an added burden on water resources, energy infrastructure, and household budgets.

Many of these impacts can be observed already, and the NCRA points to a much more serious situation by 2050. Adaptation measures are critically important and urgently required.

Several large-scale impacts not singled out within the Northern Territory, but projected to impact wider Australia including the NT, include direct risk to human life as a result of extreme weather including heatwaves, increased prevalence of tropical disease, pressure on social systems and community wellbeing, impacts upon primary industry, and threats to national security.

Position statement

The Climate Justice Alliance NT welcomes the findings of the NCRA, which shine a spotlight on many of the climate change-fuelled risks we are already seeing play out on the ground. We can attest to these impacts in real time - for example, we know that extreme heat is placing additional stress on energy systems, and locally-led adaptation measures are being developed out of necessity. In remote communities across the NPY lands, local air conditioning installers are having to ensure that new units are installed in shaded positions to avoid the impacts of extreme heat, which has been resulting in unit failure. Similarly, Purple House have had several instances where water temperatures have been too high to be able to deliver life saving dialysis on Country. In these instances they have had to change their operation hours to deliver dialysis in the early morning, requiring dialysis nurses to start their day at 4am when the water is cooler to get dialysis done before the day heats up. This is not sustainable for their operations.

Energy insecurity, with high household power costs and lengthy system outages means remote communities experience regular disruptive electricity disconnection. For this reason, the work of community-led Aboriginal organisation Original Power has been critically important across the Territory in transitioning to renewable energy sources and establishing microgrids to ensure remote communities have access to power. NTCOSS, which convenes the NT Utilities Network, reports that energy hardship in the NT is exacerbated by climate change. Particularly in periods of extreme heat, households struggle to stay connected to power and have few, if any, options to keep cool. And Aboriginal organisations including the Central Land Council (CLC) and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory (AMSANT), as well as NGO Jesuit Social Services, have long been calling out the need for action around the impact of extreme weather on communities. Food and medicine spoilage as a result of power outages, and the inability to replenish stocks when roads and freight lines are impacted by extreme weather, is a very serious concern for communities

right across the Territory. Loss and lack of food and medicine is a direct threat to human life, and it is particularly concerning that the NCRA points to these two commodities in particular as being of specific concern into the future.

Many of these issues will be exacerbated with just 1.5 degrees of warming, and yet scientists are currently warning that we may have already passed this threshold. We wholeheartedly welcome the NCRA's calls for community based climate adaptation planning. The need for urgent, coordinated, locally-led action has never been greater, and while organisations on the ground are working beyond their remit to adapt to climate change out of necessity, the Northern Territory has a critical need for support, resourcing, funding, and additional capacity, as the NCRA highlights. However, many of our colleagues across the Territory, including the Environment Centre NT (ECNT) and the Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC), are deeply concerned that the inaction from government will effectively leave the Northern Territory and particularly the Top End uninhabitable'; a sentiment that is only reinforced by the lack of action in light of the multiple, severe impacts facing the Top End including rising sea levels, housing that cannot stand up to climate hazards, and increases in wet-bulb temperatures which will leave the Top End uninhabitable by 2070. It is difficult to imagine how communities in the north will survive, let alone thrive, without an urgent, coordinated, locally-led response.

The NCRA highlights the fact that climate change is playing out in different, unique ways across different locations. While the Top End is facing one set of circumstances, Central Australia provides a key case study that decision-makers should engage with to better understand what building adaptive capacity looks like, in a context where there is high exposure to climate hazards, but also diverse sectors and stakeholders that are already working in this space, and who are leading innovative solutions to complex problems. Given the strength of the work being undertaken in the region across health, housing, energy, social services and environment, Central Australia is ideally positioned as a case study for Federal Government climate adaptation planning prioritisation. Support and funding for remote and very remote climate adaptation planning is an essential priority. There is a wealth of collective knowledge and lived experience present in communities and organisations right across the Territory which is underpinning unique and locally-informed adaptation measures, and we already have all the pieces in place for a locally-coordinated response in Central Australia.

Asks

The Climate Justice Alliance calls on government at all levels to:

- Urgently invest in and support community-based climate adaptation planning, particularly for Aboriginal communities who are most at risk
- Support Federal Government prioritisation in funding climate adaptation planning case studies in Central Australia, the Barkly, and the Top End
- Reinstate net zero and renewable energy targets in the Northern Territory
- Enact Original Power's call for exemptions to electricity disconnections once temperatures reach 40 degrees
- Enact the National Adaptation Plan, which accompanies the NCRA
- Ensure that Commonwealth funding for housing comes with the condition that new builds must meet 7 star energy efficient building standards
- Retrofit low income housing to improve thermal performance

The National Climate Risk Assessment: The details

Extreme weather and environmental change

Communities across the Northern Territory are among those at highest risk of climate hazards anywhere in Australia, including heatwaves, flooding, cyclones, and bushfires (p. 44). Aboriginal communities across the NT are among those communities most at risk from rising temperatures, with northern Australia seeing the highest increases in the number of severe or extreme heatwaves (p. 167). Across the Territory, a concerning 70.2% of the population live in communities at high (26.5%) or very high (43.7%) risk from climate hazards (p. 55). The NT is at greatest risk of rising sea levels across all Australian jurisdictions (p. 53), and forested areas of the NT are among those areas projected to see the largest increases in fire risk days (p. 211).

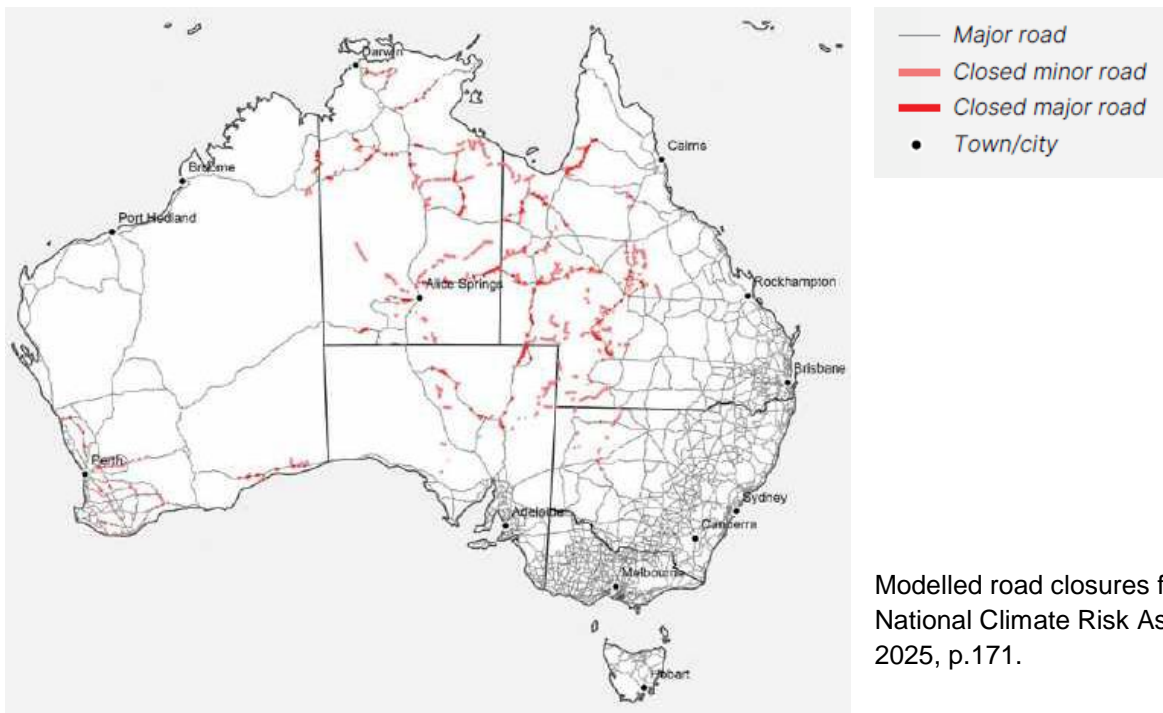
Increasing existing inequalities

The NCRA acknowledges that 'increases in extreme heat are compounding existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities, such as low income and high poverty rates' (p. 44). These impacts are most felt in Aboriginal communities, as well as older populations. By 2050, the increasing severity and frequency of extreme weather events, coupled with increased pressure on water security, will exacerbate these inequalities (p. 44). A high proportion of aged care services are in high-risk areas across the NT, further increasing the vulnerability of older populations (p. 64).

Pressure on infrastructure including housing and supply chains

The Northern Territory also distinguishes itself among all other Australian jurisdictions by carrying the highest risk to residential buildings (p. 54). The common standard of infrastructure in remote communities across the Northern Territory is deemed 'low-quality' (p. 49), placing homes at even greater risk from climate hazards. At 1.5 degrees of warming, nearly 20% of homes across the NT will be in high and very high risk areas (p. 54), and high levels of housing stock loss are predicted - many of these homes are in coastal areas and therefore at risk of estuarine flooding and coastal inundation (p. 162). Extreme wind also poses a significant threat to homes across the NT (p. 163).

Transport networks, water supply systems, and energy grids across the Territory are all at serious risk during extreme weather events, compounded by the fact that many regional and remote communities are at the end of long supply chains and attenuated service lines (p. 50). Impacts to transport and supply chains are projected to worsen, with the risk of food and medicine shortages being singled out specifically (p. 160).



Impacts to the economy including small business, tourism, and the workforce

Small businesses face significantly higher risks in the Northern Territory than in other parts of Australia. In addition to the impact of supply chain disruption, 64% of small businesses across the NT are in locations of above-average risk, compared to 16% nationally (p. 54). Insurance is also a serious concern. Commercial buildings are generally not covered by 'actions of the sea', including rising sea levels and coastal erosion, and 43% of commercial structures in the NT - overwhelmingly in Darwin - are in very high-risk areas compared to 9% nationally (p. 65).

The NCRA also identifies risks to forestry as an economic impact - with the largest increase in fire risk days across the country, there are risks to timber stocks, as well as the financial burden of managing and containing fires (pp. 211, 216). The loss of precious carbon sinks as a result of fire in forested areas is also identified as a risk (p. 193). There are also significant risks facing the tourism industry and the outdoor workforce as a result of rising temperatures; by 2061, up to 45 days per year will be too hot for manual labour (p. 107).

By 2050 it is estimated that cyclones could cost \$2.1 billion in disaster recovery costs (p. 110). It is worth noting that the NCRA draws this data from the Colvin Review (2024) which did not consider the cost of floods and bushfires in the NT, which we know both also carry significant costs in temporarily relocating populations, repairing or replacing critical infrastructure, and big financial losses for individuals and families.

Pressure on water resources, energy infrastructure, and household budgets

Water insecurity is a 'very significant risk for remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory' including too much saltwater in coastal communities from rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion, deteriorating quality of water, and loss of fresh groundwater. Sea level rise will also increase flooding risk for coastal roads (p. 64).

The NCRA warns that our energy infrastructure is also under threat from rising temperatures. 'Exposure to prolonged extreme heat can shorten the lifetime of power lines and transformer components... increasing risk of abrupt failure' (p. 158). This is of particular concern, given the reliance on airconditioning to protect human life and wellbeing during extreme heat events.

While climate hazards are extremely costly at all levels of society, households are also facing the added burden of the rapidly rising cost of insurance. 19% of NT households experience affordability stress in relation to rising insurance premiums (p. 108).

Adaptation

Locally-based adaptation is critically important to ensure that communities are in the best possible position, with sufficient resilience and resourcing, to face the increasing risks of climate change. However adaptation action is slow, and the NCRA specifically calls out the Northern Territory for the low number of adaptation actions vs high level of risk (p. 238). Notably, there have been no adaptation actions to report at all in the economy, trade and finance sectors in the NT (p. 238). There are significant regional differences, and the NT has been identified as 'highly likely to require targeted support and resources for adaptation and risk-reduction strategies' (p. 67). The remoteness of many Territory communities means that critical infrastructure is 'highly likely to be compromised'. The NCRA calls for more microgrids, and research into how to strengthen supply chains and make them more resilient in the face of increased threats (p. 67).

Locally-based climate adaptation work in the Northern Territory must engage with the knowledge and lived experience of Aboriginal communities in particular:

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples disproportionately experience the effects of climate change, are more likely to live in housing that is not climate adapted and have a higher burden of poor health compared with national averages. Inclusion in decision-making in connection to caring for Country and the development of climate adaptation strategies, as well as supporting community programs to improve health, has been shown to reduce vulnerability to severe hazards and increase resilience' (p. 68).

Existing disadvantage and socioeconomic vulnerabilities compound the risk associated with climate change, and the NCRA states that 'addressing these contextual vulnerabilities will reduce climate risk in many communities' (p. 68). And while the NT is facing the highest increases in the number of severe or extreme heatwaves, 'social and cultural adaptations' are potentially very effective at protecting human health against extreme heat (p. 167).

Signed:

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