Healthy Environment, Strong Economy

A Territory Labor Policy Paper
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Introduction

Our unique natural environment is one of our greatest assets and sets the Territory apart from the rest of the world.

Our environment provides the foundation for the world’s oldest continuous human culture and the health and wellbeing of many Indigenous Territorians.

Our environment provides the basis for our fantastic outdoor lifestyle.

Our environment underpins our economy, from tourism to primary industry to our art and creative industries and our resources sector.

Our environment provides a wealth of opportunity for our research community who, by unlocking and understanding it, can create jobs and can make an important contribution to better understanding the ecosystems we all rely on.

Territory Labor understands that a healthy and intact ecosystem is the key to a sustainable economy, healthy and safe communities and ensuring future generations can experience the natural beauty and wonder the Territory has to offer.

Protected biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem are keys to a happy, healthy and prosperous community.

It’s also crucial to ensuring young Territorians get the best start in life.

Protecting the environment is smart economic and social policy.

That’s why Labor in Government fought so hard to protect the Territory’s unique natural environment.

And it’s why a future Territory Labor Government will do so again.

Michael Gunner
Territory Labor Leader
Labor’s Record
In Government Labor:

- Supported an environmentally sustainable future;
- Introduced Water Allocation Planning, a comprehensive water planning program to sustainably manage water resources, protect water dependent ecosystems and drive regional development to ensure sustainable water use for our future, and funded Central Australian Waterwise Rebates;
- Supported Territorians with Energysmart rebates to encourage energy efficiency and save money on power bills;
- Implemented Cash for Containers to clean up our parks, waterways and streets and put money back in Territorians’ pockets;
- Implemented the ban on single use plastic bags, which is reducing waste and litter in our environment;
- Developed and implemented a comprehensive Northern Territory Climate Change policy; and
- Worked in partnership through Alice Solar City and supported community organisations with solar power systems as part of our Solar Champions initiative.

Supported our great Territory lifestyle:

- Improved the health of our Harbour, including enhanced compliance efforts, doubled penalties for pollution, improved research and monitoring, protecting mangroves and closing the Larrakeyah outfall;
- Declared two new national parks at the Gulf of Carpentaria and Limmen National Park and recreational fishing friendly Limmen Bight Marine Park adding an additional one million hectares to the Parks estate;
- Put in place the science, planning and tough controls necessary to protect the Daly River;
- Introduced Territory Ecolink, which saw a tripling to nearly 20% of the area of the Territory managed for conservation; and
- Awarded more than $5.8 million in Environment and community climate change grants to community groups to manage weeds in remote locations, maintain wildlife rescue call out services, encourage recycling, establish community gardens, protect threatened species and reduce the impacts of feral animals.

Supported sustainable development and jobs:

- Established, resourced and expanded the powers of the Territory’s first independent Environment Protection Authority, which was opposed by the CLP;
- Put in place land clearing guidelines which has significantly reduced land clearing rates so that there is no broad scale clearing of native vegetation;
- Introduced Joint Management at 27 Territory Parks, which ensured that the values and views of the local traditional owners are considered in all aspects of park operations and decision making; and
- Ensured there are now more Rangers on the ground than ever before through supporting the establishment or operation of indigenous ranger groups.
CLP’s Record

In contrast the CLPs record includes:

- Water policy which ignores science, over allocates water, gives water to their mates without a transparent process;

- Allowing major infrastructure projects like Port Melville to proceed without even the most basic environmental assessment process;

- Defunding important environment groups like Environment Centre Northern Territory (ECNT) and Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC);

- Refusing to prosecute illegal land clearing in sensitive catchment areas;

- Scrapping climate change policy; and

The CLPs appalling environmental record has seen public trust in the Government’s ability and willingness to protect the environment hit an all-time low.

Not only is this damaging our unique environment, it has damaged business confidence and investor certainty, destroyed trust in Government processes and cost the Territory jobs.

Labor will restore trust and confidence in Government to protect the environment while providing a simple and efficient regulatory regime that encourages sustainable development, jobs and growth.
Labor Values
Territory Labor’s approach to protecting the environment will be informed by the following principles.

**Restoring trust and certainty**
Territorians deserve a robust, clear and transparent set of rules for protecting the environment. It gives the community the confidence needed for development to occur and it provides certainty for businesses looking to invest in the Territory and create jobs.

**Consultation and inclusiveness**
Territorians must have a say and meaningful avenues for their voices to be heard regarding important environmental issues. The impacts of development must be discussed openly and rigorously assessed before decisions to proceed are taken. Indigenous Territorians must have a seat at the table, particularly when decisions are being made about development on their land, but also be treated as a partner in large scale plans to develop the Northern Territory.

**Sustainability**
Development must be sustainable for the health of the environment and our economy.

**Responsibility**
We all have a responsibility to leave the environment in the condition we have found it. Future generations have the right to enjoy it as much as we do.

**Science and Innovation**
Science and evidence must be at the centre of all environmental decision making. We need to gather more information, share more information and not ignore data that might be inconvenient.

We need to harness this knowledge, and foster innovative and creative uses of it to better protect the environment and create jobs.

**Restoring integrity and certainty to environmental laws and assessments**
The laws and processes that protect our environment and regulate development should be simple, efficient and effective.

They also need to be transparent and accountable to the community.
Leadership

A Territory Labor Government will provide leadership across Government, the Parliament and the community to ensure awareness of important environment and climate change issues is high, and that action to meet these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities they present has broad community support.

Regulatory Reform

Smart and efficient regulation protects the environment and gives industry the certainty to invest. Without trust and confidence that fair and transparent systems are in place to manage risk, community support for development is eroded and our environment and our economy are weakened.
Commitments
A Labor Government will:

- Transfer all environmental approval, assessment, oversight and enforcement powers to the Department of the Environment and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and properly fund these enforcement bodies to do their jobs;
- Strengthen the powers of the EPA to enforce regulation and punish non-compliance;
- Close the loophole which allows major projects to escape an Environmental Impact Assessment (no repeats of the Port Melville debacle);
- Increase the transparency of mine management plans and environmental management plans;
- Ensure penalties for non-compliance and environmental bonds are appropriate; and
- Ensure carbon pollution is considered when assessing environmental impacts of large developments.

New Environment Protection Act

Labor will transform the Waste Management and Pollution Control (WMPC) Act into a fully functioning Environment Protection Act consistent with national and international experience and tailored to local needs. We will build on existing provisions of WMPC Act to ensure:

- Expanded (risk based) actions and activities requiring approval and licensing - including ports;
- Capacity to address all environmental issues in approval conditions (not just waste and pollution issues);
- Removal of any overlapping environmental approval requirements or practices in other “non-environment” legislation to streamline regulation for industry;
- All Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) to be enforceable as conditions.
- Improved public participation and disclosure in decision making including full disclosure of EMPs and compliance reports from approval or licence holders;
- Environmental provisions of the Mining Management Act to be folded into the new Environment Protection Act with delegated capacity for administration by DME; and
- The removal of the watering down by CLP of Mine Management Plans (MMP) disclosure to the public. Mine Management Plans and annual performance reporting for all Northern Territory mines will be publicly available.

Comprehensive reform of the Environmental Assessment Act

A Territory Labor Government will:

- Introduce mechanisms for matters of Territory significance and desired EPA environmental outcomes to be defined up front as the focal point for environmental assessments - more certainty for industry and the community;
- Create a single, formalised requirement for proponents to prepare referral documents to the EPA - the current regime sees projects fall through the cracks (eg Port Melville) and referral documents have no consistency in format or quality (supposed to be referral by Minister to Minister but this never happens in practice, Notice of Intent referral commonly used has no legal status);
• Publicly disclose all projects referred - new process created for public notification and comment on a referral and the need for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), prior to EPA decision. All referral documents to be made public as part of this process not just the few that require an EIS (as is currently the case). EPA to be obliged to consider comments;
• Make public the outcome of all EPA decisions along with reasoning;
• Introduce a new lower level assessment for projects that need more scrutiny but not an EIS. Amend Public Environment Report (PER) level to ensure this becomes a workable mid-level assessment option; and
• Improve linkages of outcomes between the impact assessment and the expanded approval and licensing arrangements under the new Environment Protection Act. The EPA’s recommendations will have a more direct pathway into setting of conditions.

As part of above reforms Labor will create a new user friendly public portal to make it easier for the community to participate and access environmental decision making.

Decisions made under this new suite of laws will be reviewable / appealable decisions under Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NTCAT).

Supporting important community organisations

Labor recognises and supports the important role community environment groups play in protecting the Territory’s environment.

We also value the role these groups play in giving the voice to community aspirations for better environmental protection and sustainable development.

A Labor Government will:
• Provide NT Environment groups with operational funding for a policy officer. This will enable groups like Environment Centre Northern Territory (ECNT), Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) and the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) to employ policy officers to pro-actively engage with Government policy submissions, committees, community liaison and innovation; and
• Implement a secondment policy for public servants working in environment non-government and stakeholder organisation projects.