How will your party commit to supporting a bright recreational fishing future?

A questionnaire for political parties to help inform Territory fishers about the policies that impact their fishing and support the NT’s world-class recreational fisheries. Prepared by the Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the Northern Territory Inc.
2020 NT Election:

**HOW WILL YOUR PARTY COMMIT TO SUPPORTING A BRIGHT RECREATIONAL FISHING FUTURE?**

**WORLD-CLASS RECREATIONAL FISHING**

The Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the Northern Territory (AFANT) is the peak body representing recreational fishers in the NT. The Northern Territory hosts a range of world-class recreational fisheries, from metre-long Barramundi caught during the post-monsoon run-off, to frenetic dry season pelagic fishing at purpose built offshore artificial reefs, we have it all. For thousands of Territorians fishing is an important part of their culture, social life and well-being. Life in the NT is simply unimaginable without excellent fishing experiences close to home.

Our fisheries support a range of social, cultural, and economic benefits for Territory individuals, families, and businesses. In addition to the 30,000 locals who go fishing each year, the Northern Territory welcomes tens of thousands of visitors who travel to the Top End just go fishing. Sustainable, inclusive, and world-class; NT recreational fishing contributes millions of dollars to our local economy annually.

The NT’s enviable position as Australia’s top fishing location is not only a tourism drawcard, but a lifestyle beacon attracting people to make the NT their home. Initially supported by a healthy environment and proportionally small population, it is essential that policy-makers and those contending to lead the Territory, fully understand that a bright fishing future is far from guaranteed. Great fishing is dependent on a range of policy settings and investment decisions. These include sound and participatory fisheries management, access to fishing grounds, infrastructure development and maintenance, environmental protection, water resource governance, and sufficient funding for community groups, projects and inclusive activities.

**AFANT’S ROLE AND THE ANSWERS TO OUR POLICY QUESTIONS**

With thousands of members and 30,000 constituents from all walks of life, at AFANT we understand there is no “typical” recreational fisher. There are, however, a range of values and policy matters that are essential to supporting NT fisheries and to ensure high quality fishing experiences are maintained into the future. It is our approach to put the following policy concerns and questions to the major parties contesting the 2020 Northern Territory Election. Once we have received responses, we will collate them and produce communications to deliver the answers to our members and the broader fishing community. In addition to publication of comparative tables, we commit to making the complete responses received available on our webpage. Priority policies marked with “🎣” may be additionally presented in a highlighted yes/no table.

We are undertaking this process to ensure political parties are aware of the policies needed to support recreational fishing, as well as to help inform recreational fishers where each party stands on the issues important to their fishing future. We will never tell people how to vote and we are committed to working with any future Government to ensure that our shared vision for a bright fishing future becomes a reality.

Complete responses are required by COB Monday, August 3, otherwise “no response received” will be listed.
KEY POLICY PRIORITIES FOR RESPONSE

1. Fisheries Management

Great fishing depends on effective and equitable fisheries management, allocation, planning and compliance. The NT already has many well managed fisheries, with contemporary Management Frameworks (plans for the fishery) and Harvest Strategies (pre-agreed decision-rules) in place, or under development. Management Advisory Committees (MACs) with members from the recreational, commercial, fishing tourism and Indigenous sectors have been tasked with developing and recommending frameworks and strategies, as well as overseeing their implementation and review. There is, however, more work to be done to improve management and compliance, and to improve resource sharing to optimise the return to the Northern Territory community, especially through recreational fishing.

1.1 Management Advisory Committees

Sound management processes must continue to inform stakeholders and include all sectors in fisheries resource governance structures and decision making.

Q: Will your party commit to appointing Management Advisory Committees with members from the recreational, commercial, fishing tourism and Indigenous Traditional fishing sectors to oversee the planning and implementation of all fishery Management Frameworks and Harvest Strategies?

Q: Will your party commit to maintaining a Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee?
1.2 Barramundi Fishery Reform

The NT Barramundi fishery is arguably one of Australia’s most celebrated recreational fisheries. High quality fishing experiences are supported through strong recreational sector custodianship, with high levels of catch and release/ selective harvest being commonly practiced. Current management includes extensive river and coastal commercial netting closures, recreational size and possession limits, special Fish Management Zones to support trophy fisheries in the Daly and Mary catchments, and an ongoing 20-year citizen science tagging partnership between NT Fisheries and AFANT.

Despite its iconic status, the optimal social, cultural, and economic returns from the Barramundi fishery to the NT community are arguably yet to be realised. The fishery remains vulnerable to localised depletion, as well as periodic decline due to environmental impacts. AFANT considers that the management plan/framework needs a contemporary review and redesign, along with the development of a Harvest Strategy. These actions are essential to ensure optimal fishery performance in key recreational fishing catchments. Consideration should also be given to implementing zoning in the fishery in accordance with stock-structures and fishery sector objectives. The introduction of Total Allowable Commercial Catch limits (TACC) and individual quotas, as well as facilitating the integration of environmental variables into management decisions, should be evaluated as part of the new framework and harvest strategy.

Q: Will your party commit to appointing a Management Advisory Committee (with members from the recreational, commercial, fishing tourism and Indigenous Traditional fishing sectors) to review the Barramundi Fishery, and to oversee the development and implementation of a new Barramundi Management Framework, and Harvest Strategy (as described above)?

1.3 Shoal Bay Mud Crabbing

The recreational fishing sector accounts for less than 10% of all Mud Crabs caught in the NT, yet 40% of the Darwin-based recreational catch comes from within the confines of Shoal Bay, making this area the most significant location for recreational crabbing in the NT. Conversely, the commercial catch from Shoal Bay is negligible, with only a handful of days fished there since 2009 (most of the commercial catch comes from the Gulf of Carpentaria and, to a lesser extent, Bynoe Harbour). Nevertheless, there is concern that commercial effort could transfer into Shoal Bay, putting recreational crabbing experiences and equity of access to the fishery at risk. An MoU between AFANT and the NT Seafood Council to prevent commercial effort shift into Shoal Bay expired in 2019 and has not been renewed.

In 2017, at the request of the Minister for Primary Industries and Resources, the Mud Crab Fishery Management Advisory Committee considered whether Shoal Bay should be allocated for recreational crabbing only. In 2018, in line with the NT Fisheries Resource Sharing Framework, AFANT prepared a proposal for the MAC to consider formally allocating access to Shoal Bay for recreational, Indigenous Traditional and fishing tourism crabbing only. The MAC did not reach consensus, with differing views presented to the Minister. The next step is to appoint an expert technical panel to formally assess this proposal and to make a recommendation to the Minister.

Q: Will your party instruct the appointment of an expert technical panel to consider the AFANT proposal to ensure equitable resource access, by allocating Shoal Bay crabbing to the recreational, Indigenous Traditional and fishing tourism sectors?
1.4 Research and Monitoring

Sound fisheries management should be supported by timely and relevant data. This must include performance, harvest, social and economic data that is collected at the appropriate scale. While the Darwin region Boat Ramp Surveys have been ongoing for several years, the NT-wide Recreational Fishing Survey which concluded in 2019, was the first such comprehensive survey since 2009-10. In order to be relevant, these surveys should be repeated at least every 5 years.

Q: Will your party commit to ensuring adequate funding for NT Fisheries to conduct ongoing annual recreational fishing research at the appropriate scale, as well as a repetition of the full NT Recreational Fishing Survey to commence in 2024?

1.5 Fishery Closure Areas

Ensuring reliable access to fishing areas is a key focus for AFANT. Areas should only be closed for fisheries management as part of a carefully considered response to ensure sustainability, to address a clearly identified threat, or to support equity of access. In 2015, in response to severely declining Jewfish and Golden snapper stocks, AFANT supported the introduction of several Reef Fish Protection Areas. It was agreed and announced at the time that these closure areas were to be reviewed after five years. With 2020 marking five years since implementation, it is now essential that a participatory review is held to evaluate and make recommendations for the future of the Reef Fish Protection Areas.

In addition to assessing the effectiveness of the individual closures as management tools, the review will help to ensure that recreational fishers can have confidence that time-limited management decisions will be reviewed as promised. A timely and inclusive review is also essential if spatial closures are to receive fair consideration as potential management tools, should a future need arise.

Q: Will your party commit to ensuring a comprehensive review of the current Reef Fish Protection Areas to assess their effectiveness and need beyond 2020? Will you commit to ensuring that any future spatial closures will only be implemented if governed by predetermined research and management plans, as well as set periods for review involving key stakeholders?
2. Recreational Fishing Infrastructure & Fishery Development

In the most recent term of Government, $50M was pledged to support recreational fishing in the NT, with most funding allocated to delivering important infrastructure and development projects as prioritised by the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC). Key projects delivered included a new boat ramp at Shady Camp and the Territory’s largest purpose-built Artificial Reef and FAD program. Several identified projects like Point Stuart public access, a new land-based fishing platform, and carpark improvements for the Dundee and Daly River ramps require an ongoing commitment to the announced funds, in order to ensure future delivery. Additionally, commitment to a number of existing and future infrastructure needs, including maintenance, is critical to ensure that the NT can maintain its status as the best place to fish in Australia.

2.1 Dundee Boat Ramp 🎣🎣

The Dundee boat ramp was constructed in 2016 at a cost of $4.8M. It is the most popular boat ramp outside of Darwin and is one of the most important fishing tourism facilities. The ramp provides access to the Fog Bay (Finniss) Barramundi fishery and high-quality offshore fishing for reef fish, billfish, and other pelagic species. Despite being billed at the time as an “all-tide” boat ramp, sediment buildup inside the launching basin requires ongoing maintenance and the ramp has been periodically unusable on tides below 3.5m - 4m. A 12-month study into the sediment buildup and possible mitigation/maintenance interventions was commissioned in early 2019.

It has become clear to AFANT that the Dundee boat ramp is not an all-tide facility and it appears unlikely to be feasible to have an all-tide boat ramp in the current location. It is, however, essential for the current boat ramp and rock groyne to be improved to minimise the collection of sediment inside the launching basin and for a maintenance regime to ensure an optimised service level (closer to 2.5m). Additional enhancements to this facility would include pedestrianising the rock groyne to provide fishing access for land based fishers, and installing a landing/pontoon to enable safer loading and unloading of passengers, especially for less agile fishers and for fishing tour industry clients.

Q: Will your party commit to investing in capital works and maintenance to ensure an optimal service level is achieved at the Dundee Boat Ramp? Will your party commit to pedestrianising the rock groyne and installing a pontoon for the safe loading and unloading of passengers, including tourists?

2.2 Point Stuart 🎣🎣

An essential part of the NT fishing experience is getting away from it all. Therefore it is important to avoid having too many fishers crowding into the same area, competing for the same fish and infrastructure. Given the constrained nature of available road and civil infrastructure that provides access to fishing locations (when compared to other jurisdictions), opening new locations to public access is an essential part of maintaining and improving fishing for locals, as well as diversifying the fishing tourism experiences on offer. Point Stuart offers a rare opportunity, with certainty of tenure of the coastal strip being well established. AFANT have been supportive of improved access to Point Stuart since 2015 and this project was prioritised by the RFAC. Improved access involves the realignment of the final section of the boat ramp track to a newly acquired public easement, as well as the staged upgrade of the Point Stuart road. The NT Government released a tender for design, investigation and documentation in June 2020.
Once completed, the project will improve access to the waters of Finke Bay and Chambers Bay, providing an alternative access point to areas such as, Love Creek, Carmor Creek and the Wildman River. There are also excellent natural reefs that support Jewfish and Snapper fisheries in the area, and it is an ideal location to launch for a longer-range adventure. It is envisaged that this development will alleviate some demand on the boat ramp at Shady Camp.

Q: Will your party commit to realigning the road the Point Stuart boat ramp to establish to public access, as well as committing to the complete or staged upgrade of the Point Stuart Road?

2.3 Land Based Fishing 🎣

While excellent river and offshore fishing experiences are available to Darwin’s boat fishers; productive, safe, and accessible for all abilities, land-based fishing locations are lacking, when compared to other capital cities. Big tides, crocodiles, stingers, private land, and unproductive accessible areas impact the likelihood of families and individuals enjoying their fishing. In a 2017 survey of almost 350 land-based fishers, 82% of respondents told AFANT they would fish more often if more or improved land-based fishing platforms were on offer. In addition to building new land-based fishing platforms, fishing experiences can also be enhanced though upgrades, including the installation of artificial reef modules within casting range of existing structures.

Q: Will your party commit to developing a new safe and accessible land-based fishing platform in the Darwin region?

Q: Will your party commit to enhancing existing land-based fishing locations?

2.4 Artificial Reef and FAD Program

Purpose built Artificial Reefs and Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) have been deployed in the waters off the coast of the greater Darwin region. The reef structures provide fish habitat and together with the FAD’s, are designed to offer accessible, high quality, sustainable fishing experiences for reef fish and pelagic fish (like trevally and queenfish). It is essential that the deployed reefs are monitored and if deemed successful, plans should be made to expand the program to ensure that quality fishing experiences are accessible to more fishers, so that existing reefs are not overfished.

Q: Will your party commit to evaluating the recently deployed reefs and FAD’s with a view to maintaining and expanding the program if it is shown to be successful?
2.5 Fish Stocking

The Manton Dam and suburban lakes are stocked annually with barramundi in order to maintain safe and accessible recreational fisheries in locations where natural recruitment of barramundi does not occur. The fish are bred from suitable broodstock with local genetics, at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre. Australia’s best stocking programs are regularly evaluated, and the fisheries to be stocked are guided by a plan of management, with clear objectives.

Q: Will your party commit to continuing the Barramundi stocking program, including at new locations should they be identified as suitable?

3. Recreational Fishing Sector & Community Support

The Northern Territory recreational fishing community is rich, diverse, and inclusive. From Katherine to King Ash Bay, from Groote Eylandt to Dundee, and everywhere in between, Territorians are proudly committed to their fishing clubs. Clubs are more than just a place to talk fishing or to compete, they are place of social support and one of the best ways for new residents and novice fishers to learn from the Top End’s best fishers. In addition, thousands of club members, individual members and the broader fishing community are represented by us, the Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the NT. It is our role to ensure that the recreational fishing sector is professionally represented in fisheries management, and that our community has the capacity to have meaningful input across the range of policies, developments and issues that impact our sector. Despite the thousands of volunteer hours at our clubs and associations, some Government support is critical to the health of our vibrant community.

3.1 AFANT Funding for Representation and Citizen Science 🎣

The Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the Northern Territory is the peak body representing recreational fishers in the NT, and this year we celebrate 40 years of proudly working to ensure excellent fishing, for everyone. There is no doubt that the incredible fisheries the NT enjoys today are, in many ways, attributed to the tireless work of our staff and especially, our volunteers who have engaged constructively with NT Governments over the last four decades.

AFANT is governed by a community elected volunteer committee, and our staff strive to ensure recreational fishers are represented professionally to all levels of government, as well as to private sector interests. Our core funding is provided by the Northern Territory Government and is specifically for AFANT to formally participate in fisheries management processes, to communicate with fishers, and represent the community to departments and Ministers. This funding also supports our 20-year citizen science program, focused on tagging barramundi in conjunction with NT Fisheries researchers. However, despite the critical role that AFANT plays, the increased demands on our time following the Blue Mud Bay decision, and the increasing professionalism of our organisation; our core funding in real terms has gone backwards significantly. First reduced in 2006, our current funding is exactly the same as it was in 2009; which when adjusted for CPI, is equivalent to a reduction of over 23%, or a shortfall of over $41,000 annually.
Community participation in fishery resource management is essential to equitable outcomes, yet there is no self-funded recreational fishing peak body in Australia, with all successful peak bodies funded principally through consolidated or specific government revenue. While AFANT has worked hard to diversify our income and restructure our operations, there are limited ways we can bring the required capacity to our core functions. For example, while we have been successful in securing some additional funds for specific projects, these are always tied to additional deliverables that do not directly support operational duties. Without the decline in our core funding being directly addressed, our ability to retain suitable professional staff, and fulfil our obligations to the community and NTG are now under serious threat.

**Q:** Will your party commit to increasing AFANT’s core funding for professional participation in fisheries management, sector representation and coordination of citizen science programs by at least the 23% that has been eroded by CPI?

### 3.2 NT Recreational Fishing Grants Program 🎣

The Northern Territory Government’s Recreational Fishing Grants Program (NTRFG) provides crucial funds for community events and projects. Funded initiatives include the Buddy Boats Day, Gone Fishing Day, and kids fishing clinics (like the Junior Barra Classic), as well as investment in community facilities and infrastructure, and fisher-led research and custodianship projects like fish tagging, fish habitat and capacity building. Dedicated fishing grants programs operate in the NT, NSW, Vic and WA, and breathe life into the needs and priorities as identified by recreational fishing communities.

This program is essential to support a diverse, capable, and inclusive recreational fishing sector. Additionally, each dollar committed through the NTRFG program leverages significant supporting co-investments of cash and in-kind contributions, sponsorship, generous contractor discounts and volunteer labour; meaning that NTRFG projects and events not only support our community, they provide services at excellent value to the Northern Territory Government. A review of this program could help to determine whether essential events like the Darwin Boat Show and the NT Recreational Fishing Awards could also be supported through this fund in the future.

**Q:** Will your party commit to continuing the NT Recreational Fishing Grants program over the next four years? If so, how much annual funding will you allocate? And will you commit to including AFANT in a review of the current program to ensure guidelines are optimised to meet community need and to provide value?
4. Access to Fishing Locations

While the Northern Territory can proudly boast some of the best fishing in the country, access to many prime coastal and inland fishing locations is less developed and considerably more tenuous than enjoyed by fishers in the rest of Australia. Uncertainty over access relates to several key factors, including a comparatively small number of accessible coastal towns or cities outside of Darwin. This is compounded by there being few working examples of public access routes being registered in accordance with Pastoral Land Act. Perhaps most significantly, there has also been failure to reach agreements with the Traditional Owners of many NT waters since the 2008 Blue Mud Bay decision of the High Court.

AFANT supports the formal recognition of Traditional Ownership in accordance with the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act. We believe there are considerable unexplored opportunities for fishers and Traditional Owners to mutually benefit from agreed certainty of access. While long-term fishing access agreements covering several of the NT’s most socially significant waters have been negotiated between the NTG and Traditional Owners, improving access to private and Aboriginal lands and waters remains a key priority for the recreational fishing sector.

4.1 Long Term Access for Recreational Fishing to Aboriginal Owned Waters

AFANT has been constructively engaged in direct Blue Mud Bay negotiations between the Northern Land Council, NTG and other parties since 2017. We are proud of our role in together achieving the Heads of Agreement signed at Nitmiluk in June 2019. There is still much work to be done in order to deliver on the Heads of Agreement, including ensuring that relevant Traditional Owners have an opportunity to consider an offer for a long-term access agreement to allow recreational fishers to visit and fish in their waters.

Will your party commit to ensuring that long term access agreements are put before Traditional Owners (in accordance with due statutory processes) for consideration? And that the benefits offered by the NTG in exchange for the agreements will be reviewed for adequacy, and be improved if necessary?

4.2 Support for Access Across Pastoral Land

Object D of the NT Pastoral Land Act is “to provide reasonable access for the public across pastoral land to waters and places of public interest” and section 79 sets out the process, to regulate public access; in doing so it assumes pastoralists would have by now nominated an Access Route to perennial waters. This object of the Act, however, remains largely unfulfilled. There are scant examples of Access Routes being declared, and for the most part, requests for access are managed on an ad hoc basis, despite these rights being established in legislation. AFANT is currently engaged in a first of its kind project that aims to establish a fenced and nominated Access Route across pastoral land to the Katherine River.
AFANT understands that there are some legitimate challenges that must be addressed to provide reliable access to waters overlying or adjoining pastoral land. However, many of these challenges can be reasonably overcome should there be suitable will on the part of the NTG to support negotiations between AFANT and Pastoralists, as well as to assist with some essential infrastructure needs.

Q: Will your party commit to supporting AFANT and relevant pastoralists to investigate, negotiate and develop suitable access routes in accordance with the *NT Pastoral Land Act*, including through a fund to support essential infrastructure at priority locations?

### 5. Water Management, Planning & Governance

Many of the Northern Territory’s most important recreational fisheries are dependent on the sustainable management of community-owned surface and groundwater resources. Iconic barramundi fisheries, within the Daly, Roper, Mary and Adelaide river catchments, and the foodwebs that support them, are vulnerable to the overuse of groundwater. Potential disruption to ecosystem connectivity through the building of dams, especially on-stream dams, remains a constant threat to key fisheries and must be mitigated through careful and considered planning.

It is understood that the future water needs for Darwin, the Darwin Rural Area and agricultural/horticultural industries will likely require the development of water resources, including improved storage. However, it is essential that ill-informed, often unsolicited proposals from southern state politicians are rebuffed in favour of community-informed policy that recognises and prioritises environmental needs and seeks to ensure optimal social and economic benefit while causing minimal environmental impact.
5.1 Community Participation in Water Planning

Over the past four years AFANT representatives have diligently participated in Water Advisory Committees tasked with the review, development, and implementation of Water Allocation Plans. As is the case for fisheries, water resources are community-owned assets and it is essential that community and environmental perspectives and knowledge is fully integrated into the water planning processes.

AFANT are proud to have contributed to the new water allocation plans for the Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer and the Katherine-Tindall Limestone Aquifer. The latter plan has since ensured that, for the first time, Announced Annual Allocations (extraction entitlements) were appropriately reduced in accordance with environmental flow targets for the Katherine River in 2020. With other area plans still in development (including Howard and Mataranka), and with existing plans due for review over the next term of Government, the ongoing role of Water Advisory Committees is as relevant and important as ever.

Q: Will your party commit to ensuring that Water Allocation Plans are overseen by Water Advisory Committees comprised of community, industry, and environmental stakeholder representatives?

5.2 Precautionary Water Planning and Funding for Research

A key challenge for effective and sustainable water allocation planning is understanding the needs of the environments that are dependent on natural water resources. Ideally, water allocation plans should be informed by specific scientific research into the environmental requirements of the plan area. Where this direct research has not yet been conducted, it is essential that a lack of information is not used as an excuse for failing to ensure adequate water is made available for the environment.

Currently, the NT Water Allocation Planning Framework specifies that for Top End rivers, 80 per cent of flow is to be allocated as water for the environment, and that extraction for consumptive uses will not exceed 20 per cent of flow at any time, unless informed by directly relevant research. For Top End aquifers, the framework similarly specifies that at least 80 per cent of annual recharge be allocated as water for the environment and that extraction for consumptive uses will not exceed 20 per cent. Collectively, the limits described are referred to as the “80/20 rule”.

While containing a provision to protect modelled river flow, the Katherine-Tindall Limestone Aquifer water allocation plan is inconsistent with the Water Allocation Planning Framework because the Estimated Sustainable Yield (ESY) available for extraction is neither less than 20% of annual recharge, nor is the limit informed by directly relevant research.

Q: Will your party commit to maintaining the “80/20 Rule” for the management of rivers and aquifers, in water allocation planning in the Top End?

Q: Will your party commit to completing the relevant research required to set an Estimated Sustainable Yield for the Katherine Aquifer that is based upon research into the environmental needs prior to the review of the plan scheduled to commence in 2023?
Several studies have identified predicted shortfalls in the future water availability for Darwin and Top End agriculture. The ideological, pro-development approach to water resource development (as is espoused by southern politicians from time to time) threatens many of the outdoor and fishing activities that Territorians value most. Territory water infrastructure planning must include the Territory community and industries; not only those that stand to benefit from new dams or diversions, but those which are most likely to suffer as a result.

AFANT is strongly opposed to the damming of the Territory’s free-flowing rivers because the cost to our environment, fisheries, and existing social, economic and cultural values are too high. There is, however, an opportunity to embrace participatory planning processes aimed at identifying water resource development that can best address forecast consumptive needs, maximise social, cultural and economic benefits, while minimising impacts on our healthy environments and the values these ecosystems support.

Q: Will your party commit to excluding the possibility of damming the NT’s iconic free flowing rivers?

Q: Will your party commit to formal water infrastructure planning, including off-stream storage, aquifer recharge and other options (such as allowing recreational fishing in dams) that optimise economic return, while minimising environmental, social and cultural impacts?
6. Environmental Protection & Management

The Top End’s status as Australia’s best place to fish is underpinned by the NT’s abundant and intact ecosystems. A bright fishing future and continued Top End way of life is reliant upon economic development that respects, maintains, and even enhances our celebrated natural values. Recent environmental reforms and the recommendations of the Pepper Inquiry have heralded a more robust regulatory and compliance landscape for a range of industries and future projects. While there is always talk about “cutting red and green tape”, streamlining processes must not be code for weakening essential environmental protections, especially those that have been recently reformed in line with best practice. An ongoing commitment to strengthening environmental protection, while maintaining participatory, risk-based management is important to ensure our environment can continue to support exceptional social, cultural and economic values.

6.1 Support for all 135 Recommendations of Pepper Fracking Inquiry

In late 2016, the Northern Territory Government announced a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing of onshore unconventional gas reservoirs pending the findings of a scientific inquiry. Headed by Justice Rachel Pepper, The Independent Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing of Onshore Unconventional Reservoirs in the Northern Territory (Pepper Inquiry) handed down its Final Report to the Northern Territory Government in March 2018. The report made 135 recommendations and stated that if all of the recommendations are implemented “the identified risks associated with any onshore shale gas industry can be mitigated or reduced to an acceptable level, and in some cases, the risks can be eliminated.”

AFANT participated in the Pepper Inquiry by researching, surveying members and making a submission before the panel, in addition to two formal written submissions. Our major concerns have always related to the need to better understand groundwater systems in prospective areas, to protect groundwater resources from contamination, and to avoid areas where aquifers are closely connected to Top End rivers; especially the Roper River. The AFANT CEO is a member of the Onshore Shale Gas Community and Business Reference Group (CBRG) which came about as a recommendation of the Pepper Inquiry. The CBRG is tasked with providing advice to the Northern Territory Government on the implementation plan and its subsequent execution, to ensure that the plan aligns with community and industry expectations.

Q: Will your party commit to implementing all 135 recommendations of the Pepper Inquiry?

Q: Will your party commit to ensuring the CBRG (or a similar group) remains tasked with overseeing the execution of the Implementation Plan?

6.2 A Threat and Risk Based Approach to Marine Parks; No Lock-Outs

The NT’s marine environments are some of the worlds healthiest and most intact ecosystems. Our coastal waters are cared for by Traditional Owners, 30,000 recreational fishers and a broader community who values its conservation and sound management.

Established in 2012, the Limmen Marine Park allows recreational fishing, as regulated by the Department of Primary Industries and Resources. The first Plan of Management was introduced in 2019 and commits to a threat and risk-based approach to future spatial planning within the park. Put simply, this is a commitment to
not ban recreational fishing in the park, and to instead evaluate threatening processes to key park objectives and implement specific actions that address and reduce risks.

The Limmen Marine Park is an example of environmental and resource management maturing in accordance with our unique Territory values and conditions. The plan integrates the culture and aspirations of Traditional Owners and embraces the recreational fishing community. It sets a future management direction that is committed to avoiding the controversy and friction that arbitrary recreational fishing lockouts have caused in a number of eastern and southern states.

Q: Will your party commit to maintaining a no lock-out, threat and risk-based approach to marine park management, including for any new Territory marine parks?

6.3 A Middle Arm Industrial Precinct Masterplan

Middle Arm has been promoted as Darwin’s next industrial precinct, with recent headlines reporting on projects that range from data hubs and solar energy storage, to fuel refineries and mineral processing plants. New industries and well-paid jobs in Darwin are undoubtably welcomed by all, however, it is essential that these projects, as well as the required land clearing and infrastructure development, do not harm the natural harbour values that Territorians hold dear.

A precinct masterplan is required to set out the key objectives and environmental parameters for sustainably developing the Middle Arm area. The plan should make clear the kinds of industries that are most supported, the commitments to high environmental standards that proponents will need to adhere to and should include a plan for fish-friendly infrastructure development.

Q: Will your party commit to establishing a Middle Arm Precinct Master Plan to guide sustainable development, and will you include community participation in the planning process?

6.4 A Continued Moratorium on Seabed Mining

The current moratorium on seabed mining in NT waters is set to expire in 2021. Seabed mining presents significant risks to our fragile coastal and marine environments. Damage to the coastal and benthic environment puts many existing social, economic, and environmental values at risk. We are calling for a commitment to rule out seabed mining in the Northern Territory.

Q: Will your party commit to maintaining a moratorium, or implementing a total ban on seabed mining?
7. Recreational Fishing Future Promotion & Planning

7.1 Million Dollar Fish

The Million Dollar Fish (MDF) competition is arguably the highest profile fishing event in Australia, with tens of thousands of registered entrants each year. They say imitation is the highest form of flattery, and it is notable that other Australian jurisdictions are now implementing similar, smaller competitions. To keep ahead of the curve and to ensure MDF can continue to lure more locals and interstate visitors to pick up a rod and go barramundi fishing, NTG support is important.

Q: Will your party commit to supporting the Million Dollar Fish competition into the future, including additional funding for NT Fisheries to assist with fish tagging if required?

7.2 World Class Fishery Promotion

As Territorians, we know that some of the best recreational fishing experiences in the world are right on our doorstep. The NT’s iconic recreational barramundi fishery and fishing tour industry are supported by thousands of kilometers of net-free commercial fishing zones, including the Daly, Finniss, Adelaide, Mary, Roper, McArthur, South Alligator, East Alligator and Wildman rivers. Additionally, hundreds of kilometers of coastline, from the Little Finniss, east to, and including the coast of Kadaku are off limits for barramundi netting. Despite these unparalleled net-free barramundi fishing zones, recent, much smaller netting closures in Queensland are perceived to be promoted better than our own.

The Fishery Status Report 2012 estimated the fishing tourism industry’s economic contribution was $26 million per annum, with approximately 80% of this attributable to interstate or overseas visitors. The fishing destination market is a competitive place and fishers are increasingly finding out about the best trending fishing experiences from other fishers, as well as through social and online media. More than ever – perception is everything, and there is a lot at stake.

It is essential that we promote our high-quality barramundi fisheries, including current management, through improved and genuine branding. There are also emerging opportunities to incorporate the NT’s new artificial reef fisheries and our expanding Marlin and Sailfish fisheries into future management-based marketing campaigns.

Q: Will your party commit to investing in the improved promotion of recreational fishing in the NT; including by working with AFANT and the NTGFIA on better ways to brand our unique Barramundi management zones, and emerging fisheries?
7.3 NT Recreational Fishing Development Plan

The recreational fishing sector is diverse and dynamic, and we face a range of future challenges and opportunities. The current NT Recreational Fishing Development Plan comes to an end this year, and it is essential that future development is guided by clear objectives, strategies, and actions. To be appropriately tailored and effective, the development plan must be informed by our community, industry, organisations, and tourism operators.

Strategic planning has evolved significantly in recent times, with new, creative and technological developments paving the way to enable greater participation, as well as to output innovative, time-bound and effective plans. Our community is ready for the challenge, we just need a little support to enable an innovative and inclusive process, befitting the importance of our sector.

Q: Will your party commit to investing in a suitable process to capture community and industry input to guide a new 3-5 year NT Recreational Fishing Development Plan?