

2024 NT ELECTION:



Policies
2024-28

How are NT political parties committing to support a bright recreational fishing future?

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HOW ARE NT POLITICAL PARTIES COMMITTING TO SUPPORT 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 world-class recreational fisheries, from metre-long barramundi caught during the run-off, to explosive dry season pelagic fishing, we have it all. Recreational fishing is a major tourism drawcard, and for tens of thousands of Territorians fishing is an intrinsic part of their culture, social life, and well-being. Beyond being a significant contributor to the Territory’s economy, with thousands of jobs spread across a range of occupations, quality fishing is also a key reason why many people choose to live, work, and stay in the NT. With over 30% of men and women actively participating, great fishing is an essential component of liveability for many Territorians.

Thanks to deliberate policy settings, strategic investments, and careful planning for the future, the NT enjoys an enviable position as Australia’s top fishing jurisdiction. Our fishing is a lifestyle beacon, attracting people to make the NT their home. This will continue to be an essential component to help deliver and retain the workforce the Territory needs to grow other key industries. Yet, recreational fishing is also a major industry in its own right. Recreational fishing provides social, cultural, and economic benefits for Territory individuals, families, and businesses. In addition to the 60,000 adult locals who go fishing each year, the Northern Territory welcomes scores of visitors who travel to the Top End just to fish. Sustainable, inclusive, and world-class; NT recreational fishing contributed \$270 million dollars to Territory GDP in 2019 and supported 2,500 full time jobs, making it a key industry for Territory jobs. We will need the support of the NT Government to reach our target of a \$500M recreational fishing industry by 2030.

It is essential that policymakers contending to lead the Territory fully understand that a bright fishing future is far from guaranteed. Excellent fishing is dependent on a range of policy settings, investment decisions, responses to challenges and changing situations (both local and external), and sometimes requires decisive commitments to trade-offs. The key needs of our sector include sound, responsive, and participatory fisheries management; clear and enduring access to fishing grounds; strategic infrastructure development and regular maintenance; environmental protection; best practice water resource governance; and sufficient funding for community groups, projects, and inclusive activities.

AFANT’S ROLE AND THE ANSWERS TO OUR POLICY QUESTIONS

We are pleased to have secured significant support for many of the key policy questions raised in the [AFANT 2024 Election Policy Questionnaire](#). The responses received have been collated and entered as direct quotes, written by the parties, into the tables of this document. Where single answers related to multiple questions, we have indicated this in square brackets, and where no discernable answer was provided this has also been indicated in square brackets. The full responses received from [Labor](#) and [CLP](#) are available on our website. A policy paper was also received from the [NT Greens](#), and this can also be found on our website.

Recreational fishers are Territorians of all ages and come from a diverse range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. With thousands of members, and with 60,000 adult Territorians going fishing each year, at AFANT we understand there is no “typical” recreational fisher. There are, however, a range of values and policy decisions that will be essential to support abundant fisheries and to ensure the high-quality fishing that is required to sustain economic growth in our industry and community liveability; the quality of life of Territorians into the future. This is why we put the following policy concerns and questions to the major parties contesting the 2024 Northern Territory election.

We undertook this process to ensure that political parties would be fully aware of the policies and investments required to support recreational fishing, and to help inform the 60,000 adult Territorians who fish, as well as our industry members, where each party stands on the issues important to their lifestyle, industry, and 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.



1. NT Barramundi Fishery reform – the phase out of commercial gillnets



Reform of the Barramundi fishery is a major policy issue in need of resolution. The NT is famous for the best barramundi fishing in the world. This iconic status is no lucky accident. The NT's intact ecosystems, our free-flowing rivers, and vast connected floodplains and wetlands are the engine rooms of our productive barra fisheries. Yet, it is also the recent decades of fisheries management reforms that took barramundi from being just "sustainable", to being the abundant stocks that today underpin the NT's most popular and profitable fishery. It is entirely uncontroversial to highlight the fact that the barramundi fishery is the backbone of our valuable recreational fishing industry, with barramundi being the number one target species for local fishers, and by far the single biggest drawcard for fishing tourists who visit from interstate and overseas.

Unfortunately, over recent years, uncertainty over the future value and social benefits that flow from this fishery has significantly increased. This came as a result of commercial gillnet fishers losing access to the more remote waters where up to 50% of their catch came from. This in turn, had the effect of shifting too much netting effort into the remaining open catchments like the Daly and Roper Rivers, places that are very important for recreational fishing. There is simply too much net and not enough water to suitably set them without impacting other stakeholders.

There is now unacceptable pressure from commercial barramundi gillnetting (actual and potential) on key recreational, tourism and Traditional fishing areas. Systems including the Daly River and Roper River now face 10-year high commercial fishing effort and this would be even higher if emergency regulations were not rushed in at the beginning of the 2024 fishing season, following pressure from AFANT and the NTGFIA. Barramundi gillnetting is being phased out on the east coast of Queensland by 2027 and new net-free zones have already been established on the QLD side of the Gulf of Carpentaria. So, not only is the future of our world-class recreational barramundi fishing under threat, but our main competitor for fishing tourism and lifestyle is undergoing major reform. This is especially problematic as the NT's main competitive advantage for fishing tourism is our abundant barramundi stocks.



The NT's status as the best place to fish for barra in the country, and the main fishery underpinning the NT's fishing lifestyle has become uncertain, this is despite being over three years into a formal review process. A policy response, setting a clear future for the management of the fishery is required from whichever party forms Government at the 2024 NT election, with future jobs and the economic growth of our sector, as well as Territory liveability at stake.

NT Barramundi Fishery reform – the phase out of commercial gillnets

		
<p>1. NT Barramundi Fishery Reform</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to genuine fishery reform and phase out gillnetting for barramundi over the next term of government? (We envisage this to include establishing a new, gillnet-free, strictly quota limited commercial fishery in partnership with Traditional Owners & Aboriginal fishing stakeholders. Putting premium barra on menus)</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government led the way in announcing a plan to phase out Gillnets by 2028 in the Barramundi fishery. In the breakthrough announcement Eva Lawler committed \$15 million of new money for these buybacks. Whilst the plan has been opposed by the NT Seafood Council and others, Eva Lawler has committed to working with all stakeholders to develop a sustainable socially responsible Barramundi Fishery that offers the best recreational experience in the country whilst still providing fresh wild caught barra to Territorians. Whilst this announcement was half-heartedly matched by the CLP, they have provided no dollars, no details and have shown no real plan. Only a Lawler Labor Government can be trusted to deliver the best possible recreational fishing experience for Territorians by banning gillnets.</p>	<p>The iconic barramundi is undoubtedly at the centre of the success of our recreational fishing industry. For Territorians and tourists alike, the species is highly sought after. It is our firm commitment that barramundi stocks must be protected and remain abundant. We take the concerns of recreational fishers, commercial fishing and traditional owners very seriously. This is why in recent weeks we have made significant commitments in this area. On 18 June 2024, we committed to phasing out the use of gillnets and if elected, we will work closely with industry to find a fair and equitable solution, within four years. I have attached a copy of the media release for your reference. Our team will always safeguard our lifestyle. In our view, it is unfortunate that the government has let the situation deteriorate to this point and we recognise that it requires urgent action, explicit policy direction and resourcing.</p>

2. Fisheries Management

The NT's great recreational fishing is dependent on effective and inclusive fisheries management, allocation, planning, and compliance. The NT has many well managed fisheries, with contemporary Management Frameworks (plans for the fishery) and Harvest Strategies (pre-agreed decision-rules) in place, or under active development. Yet, there is ongoing work to be done to improve management and compliance, as well as to calibrate resource sharing in ways that optimises economic and social returns to the Northern Territory community.

		
<p>2.1 Management Advisory Committees</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to appointing Management Advisory Committees with members from the recreational, commercial, fishing tourism, and Indigenous fishing sectors to oversee the planning, implementation and review of all fishery Management Frameworks and Harvest Strategies?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>We commit to appointing a Fisheries Management Advisory Committee to oversee the planning, implementation and review of all fishery management frameworks and harvest strategies.</p>
<p>Q: Will your party commit to maintaining a Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee?</p>	<p>Yes, a re-elected Lawler Labor Government will maintain the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee</p>	<p>We also commit to maintaining a Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee.</p>
<p>2.2 Research and monitoring</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to ensuring adequate funding for NT Fisheries (estimated at an additional \$1.5M over 2 years) to conduct a repetition of the NT-wide Recreational Fishing Survey?</p>	<p>We agree an effective survey of recreational fishers is required and look forward to working with AFANT on developing the best way to do this during the next term.</p>	<p>The NT-wide Recreational Fishing Survey is a valuable resource and continue to be funded.</p>

<p>2.3 Shoal Bay mud crabs</p> <p>Q: Will your party help to ensure equitable access to mud crabs, either by allocating access for crabbing in Shoal Bay to the recreational, tourism and Traditional harvest sectors, or otherwise ensuring the appointment of an expert technical panel to review the issue?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government will continue to work with all stakeholders in the Mud Crab Fishery as we work to create fair and equitable access across the Fishery.</p>	<p>It is clear that a failure in leadership by the current government has not resolved a range of issues regarding access to barramundi and mud crabs and the CLP will appoint an expert technical panel to resolve any outstanding issues.</p>
<p>2.4 Investing in behavioural change</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to additional dedicated funding for a campaign of behavioural change (to be delivered by NT Fisheries in partnership with AFANT and NTGFIA) to address catch and release fishing for reef fish and help reduce mortality of golden snapper and other reef fish from recreational and tourism fishing?</p>	<p>Outcome 4 of the Recreational Fishing Development Plan (RFDP) is 'A Capable and Confident Sector'. In recent days the Lawler Labor Government has committed \$400,000 to develop and promote Codes of Best Practice for Recreational Fishers and Fishing Tour Operators, including education campaigns around reef fishing and Golden Snapper mortality.</p>	<p>It is hugely concerning that golden snapper stocks may have reached unsustainable levels. This species is much loved and must be protected for future generations. We commit to allocating dedicated funding to ensure a robust campaign as behaviour change supports a better understanding of how we can reduce mortality rates.</p>
<p>2.5 Innovative approaches to fishery productivity/recovery</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit \$1M to trial habitat enhancement/reef building in closed areas, and assess the effectiveness of this strategy to support reef fish recovery in the greater Darwin region?</p>	<p>In a recent announcement the Lawler Labor Government has committed to \$2 million over 2 years for the creation of a new Artificial Reef Program. This program will focus on expansion of the inshore artificial reef network. Stage one will deliver new fishing locations in the Darwin region, in closer proximity to boat launching facilities to ensure accessibility to smaller vessels. This will help deliver Outcome 3 of the RFDP - 'Fishing Opportunities for Everyone'</p>	<p>As part of our commitment to ensuring sustainable levels of golden snapper we commit to following best practice to ensure we have additional productive fish habitats. This may include trial habitat enhancement and rebuilding of habitats.</p>

<p>2.6 Fisheries Policy & NT Fisheries Act review</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to continuing to develop a fisheries policy that incorporates key specific recreational fishing objectives, prior to commencing a formal review of the Fisheries Act?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government recognise the importance of a vibrant Recreational Fishing sector not just for its economic value but also for its contribution to our great Territory lifestyle. Territory Labor support a holistic view when developing a Fishing Policy, recreational fishing objectives will be considered as part of this process. This will be developed prior to the formal review of the Fisheries Act.</p>	<p>We commit to the development of a fisheries policy which includes clearly stated recreational fishing objectives prior to commencing any review of the Fisheries Act.</p>
<p>2.7 Fisheries compliance</p> <p>Q: Does your party commit to maintaining a dedicated compliance unit within NT Fisheries, and will you review their resourcing for adequacy and increase their capacity if required?</p>	<p>Yes, Labor commit to maintaining the compliance unit along with a review of future requirements.</p>	<p>Enforcement of our fisheries is critically important to ensuring sustainability of for future generations. We know that under this government our police have felt unsupported and due to high rates of crime they have been stretched to their limits. By driving down the high rates of crime through stronger laws and giving our police better powers, we will not only drive down crime, but ensure police can go back to doing proactive policing which includes in our fisheries. On top of this, we commit to a dedicated and appropriately resourced Compliance Unit within NT Fisheries to ensure that Territorians have confidence in the way fisheries are managed.</p>

3. Recreational fishing infrastructure & fishery development

The NT’s great recreational fishing is dependent on effective and inclusive fisheries management, allocation, planning, and compliance. The NT has many well managed fisheries, with contemporary Management Frameworks (plans for the fishery) and Harvest Strategies (pre-agreed decision-rules) in place, or under active development. Yet, there is ongoing work to be done to improve management and compliance, as well as to calibrate resource sharing in ways that optimises economic and social returns to the Northern Territory community.

		
<p>3.1 NT Recreational Fishing Development Plan 2023-33</p> <p>Q: Will your party continue to acknowledge, and work to deliver the objectives of the NT Recreational Fishing Development Plan 2023-33?</p>	<p>Yes. The RFDP 2023-2033 is the document that will guide the future development of the recreational fishing sector and a Lawler Labor Government will continue to work to deliver the four key outcomes.</p>	<p>We acknowledge and will work towards delivering the objectives of the NT Recreational Fishing Development Plan (NTRFDP) 2023–33.</p>
<p>3.2 Land-based fishing</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to seeing through the community consultation, design, and construction of the jetty for land-based fishing at East Point (Dudley Point), or otherwise at another suitable location in Darwin?</p>	<p>Public consultation was conducted and closed on 2 July. The results of the survey are being analysed and decision to progress Dudley Point to the next stage will be made in the near future.</p>	<p>Land-based fishing is also critically important to ensure that all Territorians have access to this iconic part of our lifestyle. You only need to look to the jetty at Elizabeth River Bridge which was built during our previous government to see how popular and important this access has been, particularly for families. We are very focused on increasing all-abilities access at land-based fishing locations. This is why we have committed to building better fishing infrastructure.</p>

<p>Q: Will your party commit to building new, safe, and accessible land-based fishing platforms in the Darwin region (e.g. at Buffalo Creek, Channel Island, and Deck Chair Cinema/lower esplanade)?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government is committed to exploring options for land based fishing, however, the two projects at Dundee and Dudley Point are the current priorities, once completed other options will be investigated.</p>	<p>[see above]</p>
<p>Q: Will your party commit to investigate, and if feasible, develop opportunities for croc-safe, seasonal, land-based fishing infrastructure in regional locations such as the Katherine River and Mary River?</p>	<p>A re-elected Labor Government will investigate potential land based fishing infrastructure in suitable regional locations.</p>	<p>[no response provided]</p>
<p>3.3 Artificial reefs & reef building</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to developing an updated 'Artificial Fish Habitat Policy' as outlined in the NTRFDP, and will you implement a new \$4M Artificial Reef Network Program to support enhanced fishing opportunities in the greater Darwin region?</p>	<p>In a recent announcement the Lawler Labor Government has committed to \$2 million over 2 years for the creation of a new Artificial Reef Program. This program will focus on expansion of the inshore artificial reef network. Stage one will deliver new fishing locations in the Darwin region, in closer proximity to boat launching facilities to ensure accessibility to smaller vessels. This will help deliver Outcome 3 of the RFDP - 'Fishing Opportunities for Everyone'</p>	<p>We commit to developing and updating the Artificial Fish Habitat policy as outlined in the NTRFDP, and to implement a new Artificial Reef Network Program to support enhanced fishing opportunities in the Greater Darwin region.</p>

]3.4 Upgrades at boat ramps

Q: Will your party commit funding to improve boat ramps through the installation of amenities including toilets, pontoons, fishing cleaning tables, CCTV, shades, or similar, as informed by community consultation and RFAC prioritisation? And how much funding will your party commit to this program over the next 4 years?

In Budget 2024, the Lawler Labor Government unveiled a \$19.8 million investment in recreational fishing infrastructure. This includes funding new land based opportunities at Dudley Point and in Dundee and will continue to support the recreational fishing sector with improvements to existing boat ramps.

Safety at our boat ramps is also of paramount importance, and all-access means more Territorians can enjoy this unique part of our lifestyle. Amenities at our boat ramps also provide greater opportunity for more Territorians to enjoy recreational fishing in safety and comfort. On 4 July 2024, we announced our Better Boat Ramps policy (refer attached media release) which commits to major upgrades for two of the Territory's most popular boat ramps: Corroboree and East Arm. These upgrades will improve safety and accessibility.

We will also upgrade other existing boat ramps including the installation of lighting, better car parking and disability access. We look forward to having the opportunity to work with Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC) to prioritise the rollout of improved boat ramps and amenities.

<p>3.5 Key infrastructure – a Darwin Region Fishing Strategy</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to working with AFANT, NTGFIA and RFAC to develop and then commence implementing a Darwin Region Recreational Fishing Strategy? (key developments may include projects like upgrading/ sealing access to Saltwater Arm / Leaders Creek, redeveloping the Conacher Street (Ski Club) boat ramp, maintaining, and enhancing facilities at Finniss River Fresh (Hardcastle) and Bynoe Harbour boat ramps).</p>	<p>Absolutely, the Lawler Labor Government is committed to the success of the RFDP and will develop a Darwin Region Recreational Fishing Strategy under Outcome 3 'Fishing Opportunities for everyone'</p>	<p>We commit to working with AFANT, NT Guided Fishing Industry Association (NTFFIA) and RFAC to develop and implement a Darwin Region Recreational Fishing Strategy.</p>
<p>Q: How much funding will your party commit to invest in the delivery of infrastructure in the Darwin Region Recreational Fishing Strategy during the next term of government?</p>	<p>In Budget 2024, the Lawler Labor Government announced a \$19.8 million investment in recreational fishing infrastructure. This includes funding new land based opportunities at Dudley Point and in Dundee and will continue to support the recreational fishing sector with improvements to existing boat ramps.</p>	<p>[No response provided]</p>

<p>3.6 Key Infrastructure – NT Regional Recreational and Tourism Fishing Development Strategy</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to working with AFANT, NTGFIA, RFAC and other key stakeholders to develop and commence implementing a Regional Recreational and Tourism Fishing Development Strategy? (key investments may include projects such as upgrading the Shady Camp Road, upgrading (or building new) regional boat ramps, Stage 2 of Point Stuart Road, upgrading Woolianna Road, and infrastructure to support business development, etc.)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>We also commit to working with AFANT, NTGFIA, RFAC and other stakeholders to develop and implement an appropriately funded Regional Recreational and Tourism Fishing Development Strategy.</p>
<p>Q: How much funding will your party commit to invest in the delivery of infrastructure in the Regional Recreational and Tourism Fishing Development Strategy during the next term of government?</p>	<p>In Budget 2024, the Lawler Labor Government unveiled a \$19.8 million investment in recreational fishing infrastructure. This includes funding new land based opportunities at Dudley Point and in Dundee and will continue to support the recreational fishing sector with improvements to existing boat ramps.</p>	<p>[See above]</p>
<p>3.7 Fish stocking</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to continuing funding for the NT Fish stocking program and commit to working with AFANT and the RFAC to review fish stocking policy (including investigating stocking new locations, and new species if suitable)?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government just unveiled an additional \$600k to the NT Fish stocking program. The successful program has seen hundreds of thousands of Barramundi released into dams and lakes where natural breeding doesn't occur including Manton Dam, Palmerston Lakes, Rum Jungle and McMinns Lagoon.</p>	<p>Fish stocking presents an exciting opportunity for more Territorians to have an opportunity to catch a barramundi. We have always been drivers of fish stocking in both Manton Dam and suburban lakes like Durack and Gunn over a number of years. We recognise, particularly with our local lakes, that this increases land-based fishing and ensures that people from all economic backgrounds and young people have the opportunity to catch fish in their own backyard.</p>

<p>Q: Will your government investigate the suitability and (if deemed appropriate) a trial stocking of barramundi into Darwin Harbour to potentially support enhanced metropolitan fishing opportunities?</p>	<p>The stocking of large numbers of barramundi into Darwin Harbour needs careful consideration and wider investigation into the impact on existing food sources. Introducing barramundi to closed lakes where natural breeding does not occur has already proven to be successful and will be continued.</p>	<p>On 19 July 2024, we committed to expanding the existing fish stocking program to Darwin Harbour and coastal environments (refer attached media release) and will work with AFANT and RFAC, to identify additional locations and new species of suitable fish.</p>
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4. Access to fishing locations and relationships with landowners

While the Northern Territory proudly boasts 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 about fishing access relates to several key factors, including limited infrastructure and comparatively few accessible coastal towns outside of Darwin. This is compounded by there being few working examples of formal public Access Routes being registered in accordance with *Pastoral Land Act*. Most significantly, close to 90% of the NT coastline and many rivers are Aboriginal freehold land or are expected to be granted as Aboriginal Land. Unfortunately, there has been little recent tangible progress on reaching new agreements for fishing access with the Traditional Owners of rivers or intertidal Sea Country.

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 fishing 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 in the past, there is a great need to improve certainty of access and to progress these matters more promptly.

		
<p>4.1 Long term access for recreational fishing in Aboriginal waters</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to ensuring that long-term recreational fishing access agreements are put before Traditional Owners for consideration in a timely manner? And that the benefits offered by the NTG in exchange for the agreements will be continuously reviewed for adequacy and flexibility, and be improved if necessary?</p>	<p>In a new initiative the Lawler Labor Government has committed \$1 million over two years for the creation of a traditional owner engagement program. This funding agreement is a genuine effort to achieve successful long term recreational fishing access.</p>	<p>Shared access to waterways is critical going forward. The government has dropped the ball on negotiations which is why we will work swiftly and commit to negotiating with traditional owners to provide long-term recreational fishing access agreements that are beneficial for all stakeholders.</p>

<p>4.2 Capacity to build constructive relationships with Traditional Owners and rangers</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to funding liaison officers at AFANT, NTGFIA and NT Fisheries to better engage with land councils, Aboriginal Traditional Owners, and rangers on recreational fishing (\$2M over four years)?</p>	<p>In a new initiative the Lawler Labor Government has committed \$1 million over two years for the creation of a traditional owner engagement program. This funding agreement is a genuine effort to achieve successful long term recreational fishing access.</p>	<p>We understand that there is additional need for liaison officers across a range of areas, and we look forward to the opportunity to finding a pathway forward to build partnerships between land councils, government peak bodies, traditional owners, and rangers.</p>
<p>4.3 Access to waters across pastoral land</p> <p>Q: Does your party confirm ongoing support for Object D of the Pastoral Land Act, and will you commit to establishing a working group with pastoralists, AFANT, DEPWS and NT fisheries, to either inform the development of specific s79 Access Routes, or identify options for legislative reform to enable access routes that can better meet the needs of both pastoralists and fishers?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government supports recreational fishing access on Pastoral Land where agreement can be made with all parties. We commit to working with all stakeholders on a case by case basis where there is desire on all sides.</p>	<p>I can confirm that we will provide ongoing support for object D of the Pastoral Lands Act. Furthermore, we commit to working with Pastoralists and other stakeholders to ensure the needs of pastoralists and fishers are met. Once satisfactory access routes have been identified, we commit to establishing a working group with AFANT and other stakeholders to obtain and improve public access to fishing and camping locations on government land.</p>
<p>Q: Subject to the identification of satisfactory access routes (in conjunction with AFANT and pastoral landowners), will your party commit to providing support to assist with funding the fencing and grading of key new access routes?</p>	<p>All requests for funding will be dealt with on an individual basis as and when they arise.</p>	<p>[No response provided]</p>

4.4 Access to fishing across government land

Q: Will your party commit to establishing a working group with AFANT and key agencies/bodies to investigate opportunities to improve public access to fishing and camping locations on, or adjacent to, NT managed parks and Crown Land, as well as lands held by the NT Land Corporation and the Conservation Land Corporation?

Yes.



[repeated from 4.3 above] Once satisfactory access routes have been identified, we commit to establishing a working group with AFANT and other stakeholders to obtain and improve public access to fishing and camping locations on government land.

5. Recreational fishing sector & community Support

The Northern Territory’s recreational fishing community is 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 and organisations. Clubs and associations are more than just a place to talk about fishing or to compete, they are places of social support, and one of the best ways for new residents and novice or junior fishers to learn from the Top End’s best.

Thousands of club members, individual members, businesses, and the broader fishing community are represented by us, or otherwise benefit from our work, at 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 across all other policy areas that our great fishing is reliant upon. For a bright fishing future, it is essential that our sector has the capacity to have meaningful, and well-informed input across the range of policies, developments, and the factors that support, or may impact our future.

Despite the thousands of volunteer hours at our clubs and associations, some Government support is critical to the health of our vibrant community, as well as to continue to grow the valuable economic contribution that our sector makes to the Territory and the thousands of jobs it supports.

		
<p>5.1 AFANT funding – community & industry representation</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to maintaining AFANT’s core funding for professional sector representation and coordination of citizen science programs at a minimum of current (23/24) levels plus at least the 12.5% that has been eroded by CPI?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government will commit to funding AFANT for 3 years at \$300k per year to continue your important work.</p>	<p>We are committed to funding AFANT to continue representing the recreational fishing industry and acknowledge that it has been under funded over the last eight years of this government. We look forward to working with AFANT on funding arrangements that better suit the needs of the organisation.</p>

5.2 NT Recreational Fishing Grants Program

Q: Will your party commit to continuing the NT Recreational Fishing Grants program (up to \$500k p.a.) over the next four years? And will you commit to including AFANT and RFAC in a review of the current program to ensure guidelines are optimised to meet community needs and to provide value?

The Labor Government has committed to continue the NT Recreational Fishing Grants program for the next two years, with a review of the scheme thereafter.



We will consider recreational fishing grants as one way that will allow fishing clubs to deliver programs and initiatives to increase the participation of all Territorians in recreational fishing.

6. 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 in the Daly, Roper, Mary and Adelaide River catchments, and the food webs that support them, are vulnerable to the overuse of water. Potential disruption to ecosystem connectivity through the building of dams, especially on-stream dams, also 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 require the development of water resources, including improved storage. For Darwin, the current plan is to return Manton Dam to service while maintaining it as a recreational dam, as well as planning the construction of the Adelaide River Offstream Water Storage (AROWS).

It is also essential that water policy and development remains community-informed and that it recognises and prioritises environmental needs, therefore seeking to ensure optimal social and economic benefit while causing minimal environmental impact.

		
<p>6.1 Community participation in water planning</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to ensuring that Water Allocation Plans are overseen by Water Advisory Committees comprised of community, Traditional Owner, industry, and environmental/academic stakeholder representatives?</p>	<p>As committed within the Territory Water Plan, a Lawler Labor Government is committed to delivering an improved water planning program by 2025. If re-elected, this will include reviewing current plans to ensure they are fit for purpose, meet the requirements of national water policy, community expectations and an environmentally sustainable level of extraction. We are committed to ensuring all water allocation plans are fit for purpose, and doing so in a timely and transparent manner, and are committed to providing greater transparency and governance to water advisory committees in the region. The Territory Water Plan sets out multiple actions pertaining to community engagement and to ensure views and voices of local communities are represented in the water planning process. Progressing this work is a priority to a re-elected Territory Labor Government.</p>	<p>We commit to ensuring that all reviews and new Water Allocation Plans are developed in consultation with Water Advisory Committees that include representation from the community, traditional owners, industry, environmental and researchers.</p>



<p>6.2 Precautionary water planning</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to maintaining the default Top End “80/20 Rule” for the management of groundwater (and connected dry season surface water), and the default “5% Rule” for wet season surface water in water allocation planning in the Top End?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government has an ongoing commitment to review the Water Act 1992 , which would involve amended/new legislation by 2026. This will provide an opportunity to consider matters such as the role of water advisory committees, the legislative framework for water allocation planning and the possible introduction of legally enforceable caps, amongst other matters. Territory Labor is committed to fostering sustainable practices, contemporary natural resource management, and the responsible and sustainable use of our natural assets, for the long-term benefit of future generations of Territorians.</p>	<p>We commit to maintaining the NT Water Allocation Planning Framework default Top End “80/20 Rule” for the management of groundwater and the wet season default “5% Rule” for surface water in the Top End.</p>
<p>6.3 Water infrastructure development</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to excluding the possibility of damming the NT’s iconic free flowing rivers?</p>	<p>A re-elected Lawler Labor Government will ensure there will be no dams on the Daly or Roper Rivers – a protection we will enact with specific regulations and legally binding measures through reforms to the Water Act and related regulations. The Lawler Labor Government is committed to continuing to implement critical reforms to better protect our natural environment.</p>	<p>Managing water resources is not only important to ensure a safe reliable water supply for Territorians, but it is also critically important for our environment and to ensure healthy ecosystems for the future. I can confirm that we will commit to maintaining recreational fishing in water supply dams and not damming free flowing rivers. Additionally, we commit to the Adelaide River Offstream Water Storage Project, and we will maintain the Darwin Region Water Supply Program Community Reference Group.</p>
<p>Q: Does your party commit to the Adelaide River Offstream Water Storage as the preferred option to meet Darwin’s future water supply needs, and will you maintain the Darwin Region Water Supply Program Community Reference Group to advise government on its development?</p>	<p>The AROWS Project is a current NT major project and is key to the Darwin Region Water Supply Program. This work is currently supported by the Darwin Region Water Supply Program Community Reference Group, and will also be captured by the to be established Adelaide River Water Advisory Committee.</p>	<p>[repeated from above] Additionally, we commit to the Adelaide River Offstream Water Storage Project, and we will maintain the Darwin Region Water Supply Program Community Reference Group.</p>

<p>Q: Will your party commit to maintaining, or including, recreational fishing in water supply dams (like Manton Dam) whenever possible?</p>	<p>Yes. The Lawler Labor Government has committed an additional \$600k to the NT Fish stocking program which includes Manton Dam. This program sees hundreds of thousands of Barramundi released into areas where natural breeding doesn't occur.</p>	<p>[repeated from above] I can confirm that we will commit to maintaining recreational fishing in water supply dams and not damming free flowing rivers.</p>
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7. Environmental protection, management & NT Parks

The Top End’s status as Australia’s best place to go fishing is underpinned by the NT’s abundant and intact ecosystems. A bright fishing future and the liveability and lifestyle benefits it supports are reliant upon economic development that respects, maintains, and even enhances our celebrated natural values and recreational activities.

Recent environmental regulation and resource governance reforms have heralded a more robust regulatory and compliance landscape for a range of industries and future projects. While there is always talk from industry about “cutting red and green tape” and improving the efficiency of approvals, commitments to streamlining processes must not be code for weakening essential environmental protections. This is especially important with regard to the regulations that have only recently been reformed in line with best practice. An ongoing commitment to strengthening environmental protection, while maintaining participatory, risk-based management is important to ensure that our environment can continue to support exceptional social, cultural, and economic values.

		
<p>7.1 A threat and risk-based approach to Marine Parks; No Lockouts</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to maintaining a no arbitrary lock-out, threat and risk-based approach to marine park management, including for any new Territory marine parks?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government remain committed to evidence and science based decision making in the future declaration of marine parks and marine park zoning. Dedicated research on benthic habitats, including seagrass, coral and sponge communities has been conducted by Marra and Yanyuwa people with researchers at CDU and James Cook Universities over the last 4 years. To progress this work the NT Government has signed a Federation Funding Agreement with the Commonwealth Government to develop best practice and effective management area plans for marine parks. The process for developing these plans will see close collaboration between Fisheries and Department of Parks and Wildlife with a commitment to a "whole of government approach" with oversight from the Chief Ministers Department.</p>	<p>Marine parks will be based on science and developed in consultation with stakeholders and traditional owners. There will be no arbitrary lockouts of users.</p>

<p>7.2 Fishing at Casuarina Coastal Reserve</p> <p>Q: Does your party commit to maintaining all current fishing access & activities within the Casuarina Coastal National Park?</p>	<p>The declaration of Casuarina National Park will not lead to any additional fishing restrictions.</p>	<p>The Casuarina Coastal Reserve is a valued community recreational asset and we understand the unique fishing opportunities available at the reserve are not readily offered in other parts of Darwin. We commit to maintaining all current fishing access and activities and will consider adding the Buffalo Creek Management Area into the new Casuarina National Park.</p>
<p>Q: Will your party commit to investigate acquiring land from Defence to incorporate the Buffalo Creek Management Area into the new Casuarina National Park during the next term of government?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government will continue to maintain a dialogue regarding the Buffalo Creek Management Area.</p>	<p>We also commit to investigate acquiring land from defence to incorporate the buffalo creek area into the new Casuarina National Park.</p>
<p>7.3 Middle Arm Industrial Precinct – recreational fishing offsets</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to providing recreational fishing offsets to compensate for lost access to creeks due to port development, and habitat damage due to dredging for the Middle Arm Industrial Precinct?</p>	<p>Infrastructure NT is currently developing the draft Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct (MASDP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Program. This will include comprehensive assessment of potential impacts and commitments to protect the environment.</p>	<p>We commit to providing recreational fishing offsets to compensate for the loss of access to creeks and to finding an alternate access point to and from Darwin Harbour and Elizabeth River.</p>

<p>Q: Will your party commit to providing alternative access to and from Darwin Harbour and Elizabeth River, if the final design results in the mouth of the river becoming impassable to recreational vessels for extended periods as has been identified by Government consultation?</p>	<p>Access will remain unaffected for some time as the development of the precinct begins. NT Fisheries and DIPL have begun initial engagement with stakeholders as voluntary offset options are explored. Consultation will continue into the next term as Middle Arm progresses and a Lawler Labor Government will ensure AFANT are comprehensively consulted with regarding any loss of access.</p>	<p>[Repeated from above] We commit to providing recreational fishing offsets to compensate for the loss of access to creeks and to finding an alternate access point to and from Darwin Harbour and Elizabeth River.</p>
<p>7.4 Seabed mining prohibition</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to maintaining a regulatory prohibition on seabed mining in the Northern Territory?</p>	<p>Yes, the NT Labor Government led by introducing the prohibition on seabed mining in 2021 and has no intention to remove the prohibition in the next term of Government.</p>	<p>In accordance with Section 38 of the Environment Protection Act 2019, we commit to maintain prohibition on seabed mining in the Territory.</p>

<p>7.5 Wetland management</p> <p>Q: Will your party commit to reviewing and updating approaches to wetland management (especially in the Mary River system) and invest in updated management and community engagement about seawater level rises and wetland changes?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government understands that protecting the natural environment is integral to protecting the Territory lifestyle. Recently my Government announced our commitment to consult on, and implement the first Biodiversity Strategy for the Northern Territory. The Strategy will provide vision and define objectives for biodiversity conservation across the Territory. It will also identify key drivers of biodiversity loss, and articulate priority management actions across all environments. Wetlands play a vital role in Territory supporting a wide diversity of plants and animals, and will be considered as a part of this strategy. Public consultation on the strategy will commence this year.</p>	<p>We commit to more active control of aquatic weeds. We will also commit to reviewing and updating approaches to wetland management. We will work with all stakeholders to investigate the most appropriate approaches to barrage management.</p>
<p>Q: Will your party work with fishers and landowners to investigate and implement optimised approaches to barrage management, and where applicable, install fish friendly infrastructure (e.g. installing gates or seasonal earthen plugs to let fish pass and prevent mass fish kills as water recedes at the end of the wet season)?</p>	<p>The Lawler Labor Government understands that protecting the natural environment is integral to protecting the Territory lifestyle. Recently my Government announced our commitment to consult on, and implement the first Biodiversity Strategy for the Northern Territory. The Strategy will provide vision and define objectives for biodiversity conservation across the Territory. It will also identify key drivers of biodiversity loss, and articulate priority management actions across all environments. Wetlands play a vital role in Territory supporting a wide diversity of plants and animals, and will be considered as a part of this strategy. Public consultation on the strategy will commence this year.</p>	<p>[Repeated from above] We will work with all stakeholders to investigate the most appropriate approaches to barrage management.</p>

Q: Will your party commit to investigate options for more active control of aquatic weeds, like olive hymenachne in rivers and wetlands like Corroboree Billabong?

The Lawler Labor Government understands that protecting the natural environment is integral to protecting the Territory lifestyle. Recently my Government announced our commitment to consult on, and implement the first Biodiversity Strategy for the Northern Territory. The Strategy will provide vision and define objectives for biodiversity conservation across the Territory. It will also identify key drivers of biodiversity loss, and articulate priority management actions across all environments. Wetlands play a vital role in Territory supporting a wide diversity of plants and animals, and will be considered as a part of this strategy. Public consultation on the strategy will commence this year.

[repeated from above] We commit to more active control of aquatic weeds.