



CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL

Submission on the NT Parks Masterplan 2022-2052

September 2022

Contents

Recommendations	3
About the Central Land Council	13
Introduction	14
1. Overall feedback on the draft Masterplan	17
1.1 Strengthening respect for and inclusion of Aboriginal people	17
1.3 Threats to our parks.....	20
1.4 Resourcing.....	22
1.5 Monitoring and accountability.....	25
1.6 Comments on discrete themes.....	26
Theme 2: Living cultural values and heritage	26
Theme 4: Recreational futures	29
Theme 5: Tourism	30
Theme 6: Aboriginal economic development.....	31
Theme 8: Growing the parks estate.....	34
Theme 9: Park access	35
2. Ways forward for joint management	36
2.1 Governance	37
Additional actions to strengthen governance	40
2.2 Resourcing.....	45
2.3 Review.....	48
Conclusion.....	51
Appendix A. Territory obligations under the TPWC Act and Park leases.....	52
Appendix B. Objectives of the Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum	57
Appendix C. Case study: Employment on the Yeperenye trail	58
Appendix D. Case study: <i>Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) Anangu Employment Pathways Plan 2020-2025</i>	60

Recommendations

Part 1: Overall feedback on the draft Masterplan

Strengthening respect for and inclusion of Aboriginal people

Recommendation 1

The final Masterplan should more explicitly and substantially acknowledge Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the parks estate, and their rights and interests in the management of the parks estate. Respect, inclusion and celebration of Aboriginal people, their knowledge and culture should be enshrined throughout the document and embedded in the Northern Territory Government's way-of-working with traditional owners in respect to Park management into the future.

Recommendation 2

The final Masterplan should acknowledge joint management and the role of traditional owners as foundational to all aspects of park management. This could be better reflected in the structure of the plan.

Alignment with existing commitments

Recommendation 3

The final Masterplan and approach to its implementation should explicitly reflect the Northern Territory Government's existing commitments to Aboriginal people, including commitments under the *National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap* four Priority Reforms and relevant socio-economic targets, *Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy 2019-2029*, *Northern Territory Public Sector Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy 2021-2025*, and the *Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan (2019)*.

Recommendation 4

Relevant actions within the Masterplan, in particular relating to joint management, should be reflected in the Northern Territory's implementation plans for Closing the Gap and reported on in the Northern Territory's Closing the Gap annual report.

Threats to our parks

Recommendation 5

The final Masterplan should provide an honest appraisal of the threats and challenges to the health and future of our parks, specifically acknowledging the evidence of biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse and the threats posed by climate change.

Recommendation 6

The final Masterplan should include a clear goal to reverse biodiversity decline and stop extinctions, with associated short, medium and long-term targets, and a clear action to develop targeted and adequately resourced strategies to address specific threats. This should be a priority action.

Recommendation 7

To support ongoing, proactive management of the risks and threats to parks, the Northern Territory Government commit to regular public reporting on the State of our Parks.

Recommendation 8

The Northern Territory Government provide detailed performance information to traditional owners of jointly managed parks so they can effectively participate in joint management.

Resourcing

Recommendation 9

The Northern Territory Government must urgently address the serious under-resourcing of our Parks and commit to long-term investment that is adequate to support the effective management and sustained health of the Parks estate. This should include an immediate commitment in the 2023-24 NT Budget to a significant increase in the Parks budget over the next 10 years.

Recommendation 10

Any proposals to apply new revenue models are subject to the legal rights of Aboriginal people through legislation and existing lease agreements and must be developed in close consultation with joint management partners and their Land Councils, and native title holders.

Recommendation 11

Information on DEPWS' budget and expenditure should be shared with joint management partners to support their active participation in planning and decision-making.

Monitoring and accountability

Recommendation 12

The mechanisms for planning, monitoring and accountability for the implementation of the Masterplan should be substantially strengthened. This should include the requirement for DEPWS to develop action plans (for example, three or five-yearly) over the lifetime of the Masterplan, and for the Minister for Parks to table in Parliament progress reports against these plans (suggested annually). This timing could align with the publication of reports on the State of our Parks.

Recommendation 13

The timeframes for key actions must be brought forward, in particular the timeframes for stabilising and improving the trajectory of species decline, and increasing representation of Aboriginal people and specifically traditional owners at all levels of the Parks workforce, in line with the Territory Government's commitments in the park leases. The timeframes could align with the cycle of action planning so that the steps towards the achievement of those targets are clearly laid out.

Recommendation 14

Some actions should be revised to provide greater coherence and clarity in terms of their relationship to the relevant goals and targets. All actions should be consistent in style and demonstrate 'SMART' principle (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

Theme 2: Living cultural values and heritage

Recommendation 15

The final Masterplan include commitment to the development of cultural management plans with traditional owners and Land Councils for each park, either as part of joint management processes for jointly managed parks, or in consultation with traditional owners and Land Councils for other parks.

Recommendation 16

Any systems for storing cultural information must be developed with traditional owners are part of joint management processes.

Recommendation 17

That Parks works closely with Land Councils, Joint Management Committees and traditional owners to prioritise and increase protection for sacred sites on the park estate.

Recommendation 18

Parks work closely with Land Councils, Joint Management Committees and traditional owners to develop and implement a cultural induction training package for Parks staff for all jointly managed parks within 12 months of the Masterplan being finalised.

Recommendation 19

Further actions should be included in the final Masterplan (and adequately resourced) that enable Aboriginal people to maintain and teach traditional cultural knowledge and practices on country within the parks estate.

Theme 4: Recreational futures

Recommendation 20

The final Masterplan should commit to work, in consultation with traditional owners, to improve safety awareness and safety infrastructure, within the parks estates. This includes establishing more rest areas along the trails with water, shade and emergency communications.

Theme 5: Tourism

Recommendation 21

Consistent with obligations of the Northern Territory Government in park leases, the final Masterplan should include a clear commitment and supporting actions to promote among visitors to, employees and commercial operators in our parks knowledge, understanding and respect for Aboriginal people, their knowledge and culture.

Theme 6: Aboriginal economic development

Recommendation 22

The Northern Territory Government work with traditional owners and their land councils to develop an Indigenous Employment and Training Strategy within the next 12 months and that this strategy is appropriately resourced.

Recommendation 23

The final Masterplan affirm support for the establishment of new Community Living Areas on the parks estate, including to support the participation of traditional owners in tourism businesses and other enterprises on their parks.

Theme 8: Growing the parks estate

Recommendation 24

The Northern Territory Government work with the Central Land Council and traditional owners to investigate the inclusion of Elpare Umbagnama in the Yeperenye Nature Park.

Recommendation 25

Traditional owners and their land councils must be involved with any work by government to consider the possible application of and parameters for private park ownership models in the Northern Territory.

Theme 9: Park access

Recommendation 26

Restrictions on access within parks are to be managed in accordance with cultural management plans developed with traditional owners and Land Councils.

Part 2: Ways forward for Joint Management

Governance

Recommendation 27

The Northern Territory should work with the Central Land Council (CLC) to, within the next six months, review and finalise the Joint Management Agreement and establish the necessary governance structures to support the improved operation of joint management over the long-term.

The central aim of the new governance arrangements should be to empower and support traditional owners to take an active role in planning, oversight and decision-making at both an operational and strategic level, as equal partners under legislation.

The arrangements should include regional groups that provide a forum for cooperative and strategic management of regional issues with appropriate decision-makers within Parks, as well as a Territory-level forum that provides traditional owners with a direct voice to the Minister and senior Parks staff on key strategic and operational issues concerning the joint management of parks in the NT.

The governance arrangements must be adequately resourced by government.

Additional actions to strengthen governance

Building relationships

Recommendation 28

The commitment to supporting country camps for Parks staff, traditional owners and Land Council staff be updated to provide for *at least* annual camps for all jointly managed parks and reserves and that this is resourced appropriately.

Joint Management Committee meetings

Recommendation 29

That the Northern Territory Government commit to improved governance and administrative practice in relation to Joint Management Committee meetings, including ensuring the involvement of traditional owners in the development of meeting agenda, the timely provision of meeting papers to all committee members, the routine recording of minutes and review of actions, and working within each committee to ensure Aboriginal governance and decision-making processes are adequately respected in the approach to meetings.

Monitoring and evaluation

Recommendation 30

The Northern Territory Government work with traditional owners and land councils to develop and implement a participatory monitoring and evaluation framework for joint management and dedicate the appropriate resources to support this critical function.

Recommendation 31

Actions are identified and implemented to strengthen monitoring and accountability for the delivery of joint management plans. This should include:

- a) Ensuring actions within joint management plans are constructed as SMART goals to support monitoring and accountability. While this requires more thought at the planning stage, it is more likely to lead to the delivery of that action.
- b) Making it standard practice to review joint management plans at all Joint Management Committee meetings. This will highlight where positive outcomes have been achieved, and where more work is needed.
- c) Develop a process/framework that allows Joint Management Committee members to see how their park is performing over the lifetime of the plan.

Two-way capacity-building

Recommendation 32

The final Masterplan commit to funding and delivering two-way governance training and capacity-building for joint management partners. This should include:

- a) Annual two-way governance training for joint management partners (Parks staff and traditional owners) to increase their understanding of and skill in cross-cultural decision-making, running good meetings, and other aspects of good governance. Training for new Joint Management Committees should be a priority.
- b) Work between Parks, traditional owners and Land Councils to develop an induction package for Committee members, to help them understand their role, rights and responsibilities, and an overarching Joint Management Governance Toolkit within 12 months.

Key elements of the toolkit should include setting an agenda, running a good meeting, the role of the Chair, terms of reference and code of conduct for committee members, two-way governance, understanding budgets/money story for the park, conflict resolution, making decisions, and succession planning.

Data sharing

Recommendation 33

That the Northern Territory Government commit within the next 12 months to working with Land Councils to develop a formal data sharing agreement relating to joint management, in line the *National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data at the Regional Level*.

The agreement should increase transparency regarding:

1. Funding available for park operations and management
2. Aboriginal employment, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing numbers and percentage at officer and executive levels, and casual employment under the flexible employment program or equivalent.
3. Park operations, including tourism figures and other agreed operational information and key indicators (such as that used to inform the 2014 Parks Report Cards).
4. Other data as agreed between Land Councils and the Northern Territory Government.

The CLC suggests the agreement should establish:

- a) Provision of accessible disaggregated data at the park level to inform discussions with traditional owners and joint management committee members.
- b) Bi-annual data sharing as per required reporting arrangements for Land Councils.
- c) Arrangements for the use and sharing of provided data.
- d) Appropriate data management storage.

Resourcing

Recommendation 34

Recognising the impact of underfunding on the capacity of joint management partners to meet their legislative obligations under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976 (TPWCA)*, and the instrumental contribution of effective joint management to supporting the aspirations of traditional owners and long-term health and attraction of the Parks estate, that the Northern Territory deliver a significant and sustained increase in funding in joint management arrangements.

This funding should include:

1. A comprehensive review of joint management operations to date (see recommendation 33).
2. Sufficient staffing levels for both Parks and Wildlife and within the Central Land Council. This should be informed by a review of staffing levels (see Recommendation 35 below), however, at a minimum, CLC suggests that the funding should provide for:
 - i) An increase in senior staffing numbers across the Central, Eastern and Barkly districts, including reinstating T5 and T4 ranger positions.

- ii) An increase in the number of entry level ranger positions across Central Australia, including roles dedicated for Aboriginal employment, boosting capacity for on-ground management as well as supporting greater opportunities for Aboriginal people, including traditional owners, to enter the Parks workforce.
 - iii) An increase in the number of planning officers in Central Australia and the Barkly.
 - iv) Sufficient staffing to equip the Land Councils to meet their obligations in supporting Traditional Owners as joint management partners.
3. Commitments in the Masterplan¹ to stronger joint management governance arrangements as proposed in recommendation 26.
4. More regular joint management committee meetings and other planning meetings (e.g. fire planning).
5. Commitments in the Masterplan² to providing more time for Traditional Owners to spend time on Country, including i) regular opportunities for Traditional Owners and their families to spend time on Country, supporting cultural obligations to Country and intergenerational knowledge transfer, and ii) on-country camps for Parks and Wildlife staff, Traditional Owners and Land Council Staff to contribute to strong relationships and two-way management of Country. These should be *at least* annual.
6. Two-way governance training and capacity-building as outlined in recommendation 30.

¹ *Theme 3: Joint management in Partnership with Traditional Owners, 'What We Will Do':* 'Establish regional governance arrangements to strengthen Traditional Owner decision-making and facilitate direct communication between Traditional Owners and elected government representatives' – noting CLC recommends the final Masterplan includes commitments to more regular Joint management Committee meetings, supported by an increase in staffing and financial resources, as part of the commitment to stronger, more effective governance arrangements.

² *Theme 3: Joint management in Partnership with Traditional Owners, 'What We Will Do':* "Create regular opportunities for Traditional Owners and their families to spend more time on country to support cultural knowledge transference" and "Support annual country camps on all jointly managed parks and reserves to allow Parks and Wildlife staff, Traditional Owners and Land Council staff to spend more time working together on natural and cultural resource management programs." (p.22)

Review

Recommendation 35

That the Northern Territory Government commit to, within the next 12 months, undertaking a review of the operation of joint management arrangements to date, with the intent to inform improved operation into the future.

The CLC considers that this review should encompass:

- i) A review of the operation of joint management against the objectives and principles of joint management as described in the TPWC Act (s25AB and s25AC), with a particular focus on the degree to which existing operations have supported equity in the partnership, institutional support and capacity-building for Traditional Owners, and valuing and incorporation of Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision-making processes.
- ii) A review of Joint management planning processes and the plans themselves against the requirements detailed in the TPWC Act (Division 4).
- iii) An audit of compliance with joint management plans.
- iv) An audit of the NT Government's compliance with leases and Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) in the context of joint management arrangements.
- v) A review of all planning and operational staffing levels and their adequacy to support the delivery of joint management objectives.
- vi) Specific objectives determined by Traditional Owners representatives, to ensure the review reflects their values and priorities.

The Terms of Reference must have the input of and be agreed to by traditional owners and their land councils.

The review be undertaken by an independent expert advisory panel, with traditional owners and their land councils having a majority say in determining the appointments.

The findings and recommendations of the review should be made public and the Northern Territory Government should commit to addressing the recommendations of the review within 6 months.

Undertaking the review should not preclude immediate action on recommendations 27 to 34 above in relation to governance and resourcing.

About the Central Land Council

The CLC is a Commonwealth corporate entity established under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 ('ALRA'), with statutory responsibilities for Aboriginal land acquisition and land management in the southern half of the Northern Territory. The CLC is also a Native Title Representative Body established under the Native Title Act 1993 ('NTA').

Pursuant to ALRA, more than 50% of the NT and more than 85% of the NT coastline is now held by Aboriginal Land Trusts on behalf of traditional owners. A further 253,886 square kilometres of land and water is also held under native title.

Of the 780,000 km² of land covered by the CLC region, more than half (417,318 km²) is Aboriginal land under the ALRA. In addition, rights have been asserted and won under the NTA, and traditional owners unable to claim land under the ALRA have succeeded in obtaining rights to small areas known as Community Living Areas, under NT legislation.

Through its elected representative Council of 90 community delegates, the CLC represents the interests and aspirations of approximately 20,000 traditional landowners and other Aboriginal people resident in its region. We advocate for our people on a wide range of land-based and socio-political issues to ensure that our families can continue to survive and thrive on their land.

Pertinent to this submission, of the 85 NT parks and reserves³, 33 are subject to formal joint management with Aboriginal traditional owners under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* (TPWC Act).⁴ In the CLC region, traditional owners hold Aboriginal freehold or NT parks freehold title to 16 of these parks and have leased them back to the NT Government, jointly managing them with the NT Parks and Wildlife Commission (Parks). The other four parks are jointly managed under Indigenous Land Use Agreements registered with the National Native Title Tribunal. The CLC has statutory consultative and representative functions in respect to the joint management of 20 of these parks (13 of which have completed Joint Management Plans) and has facilitated traditional owner participation in joint management since the arrangements were negotiated with the Northern Territory Government in 2004.

³ Includes two marine parks

⁴ S25AO(1) of the TPWC ACT, pursuant to s23(2) of ALRA.

Introduction

The Central Land Council (CLC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the draft NT Parks Masterplan 2022-2052. Considering the critical importance of our parks and the threats they face, the development of a long-term strategic plan for their management is welcome and well overdue.

Of central concern to the CLC is the place of Aboriginal people within the Masterplan. As acknowledged in the 2021 State of the Environment report, Indigenous knowledge and sustainable cultural practice are key to environmental management.⁵ Under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* (TPWC Act), traditional owners are *equal partners* in the joint management of 33 of the 85 NT parks and reserves. Enabling Aboriginal stewardship of Country, including through the effective operation of joint management, is foundational to the good management and long-term health of our parks, and should therefore be a central and foundational focus of the Masterplan.

The Northern Territory Government's lack of engagement with Aboriginal people, and specifically traditional owners as joint management partners, in the development of the Masterplan is therefore both disappointing and concerning. This failure goes against the Northern Territory Government's commitment to partnership and shared decision-making with Aboriginal people under the Closing the Gap Agreement, and, fundamentally, the government's commitment that joint management provide for an equal partnership between government and traditional owners in the management of parks on Aboriginal land.⁶ Moreover, it is a missed opportunity on the part of the Northern Territory Government to ensure this three decade-long plan is informed by the experience, expertise and wisdom of those who know this country best.

In the absence of adequate government engagement, the CLC has drawn on its own consultations with traditional owners to inform our comments and recommendations for the draft Masterplan. This feedback was gathered through consultation with 68 traditional owners from 17 parks in the CLC region during the CLC Joint Management Forum held over three days at Ross River in November 2021, and a follow-up day held in Alice Springs in December 2021.⁷

Facilitated by the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) Aboriginal Governance and Management Program (AGMP), the forum provided space for reflective and evaluative discussions among traditional owners, and between traditional owners and Parks staff, that provided qualitative and quantitative feedback regarding what is and isn't working well in joint management. The views elicited from traditional owners at the forum have directly informed this submission and are captured throughout.⁸

⁵ Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (2022) Australia State of the Environment Report 2021, Chapter: Indigenous, Key Findings ([weblink](#))

⁶ Priority Reform 1: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making, National Agreement on Closing the Gap, July 2022 ([weblink](#))

⁷ The three-day forum at Ross River (9-11 November 2021) was attended by 40 traditional owners representing 17 parks and reserves; and 48 traditional owners (20 of whom attended at Ross River) from 17 parks, plus 14 staff from Parks attended the day in Alice Springs (12 December 2021).

⁸ See Appendix B for the objectives of the forum. The full report prepared by AGMP has been provided to DEPWS.



Traditional owners participating in the CLC Joint Management Forum at Ross River, November 2021



Discussions at the CLC Joint Management Forum at Ross River, November 2021

A key message from the forum was that despite challenges, there continues to be strong support for and pride in joint management among traditional owners. They want to continue to work with the Northern Territory Government to improve current arrangements and truly realise the potential of joint management to contribute to the health of country, strength of culture, and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people on their land. However, to achieve this, significant changes are needed to ways of working at an operational and senior governance level, and this needs to be supported by a significant and sustained increase in investment for joint management. Without such changes, the operation of joint management arrangements will continue to fall short of its objectives and principles outlined in the TPWC Act, and the obligations of the Territory Government under park leases (see **Appendix A**).

While the CLC has significant concerns about the government's process for developing the Masterplan and substantial recommendations to improve the draft (as outlined in this submission), we nevertheless affirm the importance of the development of a comprehensive plan that will guide the good management of our parks into the future. We look forward to working with the Northern Territory Government as the plan is finalised, and continuing to work together to support its implementation.

Structure of this submission

This submission provides:

1. Recommendations on the overall direction and key elements of the draft Masterplan.
2. Specific recommendations with respect to joint management.

1. Overall feedback on the draft Masterplan

1.1 Strengthening respect for and inclusion of Aboriginal people

Aboriginal people are the original and continuing custodians of the land which forms the Parks estate. Their knowledge and practices have sustained the health of country for tens of thousands of years. Thirty-three of the 85 parks and reserves that form the estate are on Aboriginal land, and under legislation, traditional owners are equal partners with the Northern Territory Government in the joint management of these parks.

Despite this, the CLC is not aware of any attempt by the Northern Territory Government to directly engage traditional owners in the development of the Masterplan, nor was the government's general approach to consultation (primarily written and web-based)⁹ conducive to the participation of traditional owners. At a minimum, CLC expects that the Northern Territory Government would have sought and prioritised feedback from each of their Joint Management Committees, as well as including feedback from traditional owners of those parks where joint management has yet to officially commence. Yet no such action was taken.

Traditional owners have directly expressed their disappointment to CLC about the lack of consultation and their concern that the Northern Territory Government is rushing the development of a 30-year plan that directly impacts their future partnership.

"Parks should have come and talked to us before this plan, they should have come and talked to us here in Alice Springs."

Traditional Owner, Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

The absence of traditional owners' voices in the development of the draft Masterplan is clear. While some references are made within the document to Aboriginal people's connection to and care for country, and the value of traditional ecological knowledge and practices (cited below), the CLC considers that more can be done to adequately embed respect for and inclusion of Aboriginal people, their knowledge and culture in the final Masterplan, and – more importantly – the Northern Territory Government's way of working with traditional owners with respect to Park management into the future. By way of comparison, consider the extent to which Indigenous people, their knowledge and culture are embedded within the most recent Australian State of the Environment report. Reflecting the extensive contributions of Indigenous authors, the report substantially elevates Indigenous world views, the expertise of Indigenous people, and the role of Indigenous people in caring for country.

⁹ See NT Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (2022) Northern Territory Parks 2022-2052 Masterplan Consultation Summary ([weblink](#))

We note there is some encouraging wording within the draft Masterplan, specifically on pages 12 and 21, that acknowledges the ongoing connection of Aboriginal people to their country and the essential role of traditional owners, their knowledge and management practices in sustaining the health of the parks estate.¹⁰ We concur with the government’s acknowledgement here that “two-way management (...) will be essential to protect biodiversity and mitigate threatening processes” and that “traditional and western knowledge practices are required to successfully manage our estate to a high standard.”¹¹

Opportunities to further strengthen acknowledgement of Aboriginal people in the Masterplan include:

- Acknowledging Aboriginal custodianship in the Foreword.
- Revising the vision statement to explicitly refer to working in partnership with Aboriginal people in the ongoing management of the parks estate.
- Revising the principles to:
 - Explicitly acknowledge Aboriginal people’s ongoing connection to and care for country.
 - Clearly articulate the value of and respect for Indigenous knowledge and the Northern Territory Government’s commitment to a two-way approach in all aspects of Park management.
 - Enshrine the position of traditional owners and explicitly affirm traditional owners as equal partners in jointly managed parks.

There could also be much clearer reference throughout the document to Aboriginal leadership of and/or involvement in actions (e.g. in relation to research and the development of culturally-based economic opportunities).

Recommendation 1

The final Masterplan should more explicitly and substantially acknowledge Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the parks estate, and their rights and interests in the management of the parks estate. Respect, inclusion and celebration of Aboriginal people, their knowledge and culture should be enshrined throughout the document and embedded in the Northern Territory Government’s way-of-working with traditional owners in respect to Park management into the future.

Specifically with respect to joint management, this should be acknowledged in the plan as foundational to park management. It is currently treated as a discrete theme, rather than acknowledging its interconnection with all aspects of park management (i.e. natural biodiversity values, Aboriginal economic development, and tourism and recreational futures).

¹⁰ Page 12 of draft Masterplan, and reinforced on page 21.

¹¹ Pages 12 and 21 of draft Masterplan.

Recommendation 2

The final Masterplan should acknowledge joint management and the role of traditional owners as foundational to all aspects of park management. This could be better reflected in the structure of the plan.

1.2 Alignment with existing commitments

Section 2 of this submission outlines CLC's concerns about the extent to which the operation of joint management is falling short of the Northern Territory Government's commitments to joint management under the TPWC Act and legal obligations under park leases.

In addition, the CLC suggests that further work be undertaken to explicitly demonstrate how the Masterplan and the approach to its implementation align to the Northern Territory Government's key policy commitments to Aboriginal people, in particular the *National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap* four Priority Reforms and relevant socio-economic targets.¹² We note in particular the government's commitment under the agreement to formal partnerships and shared decision-making (Priority Reform 1), transforming government organisations (Priority Reform 2), shared access to data at the regional level (Priority Reform 4), and to maintaining Aboriginal people's distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their lands and waters (outcome/target 15).

As noted in the introduction, the government's approach to the development of the Masterplan has fallen well short of these commitments. The CLC hopes that commitments made in the final Masterplan will provide confidence that Parks, and the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS) as a whole, are committed to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal people, including traditional owners through joint management arrangements, from this point on.

Additional relevant strategies that should be referenced in the final Masterplan include *Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy 2019-2029*, *Northern Territory Public Sector Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy 2021-2025*, and the *Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan (2019)*.

Recommendation 3

The final Masterplan and approach to its implementation should explicitly reflect the Northern Territory Government's existing commitments to Aboriginal people, including commitments under the *National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap* four Priority Reforms and relevant socio-economic targets, *Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy 2019-2029*, *Northern Territory Public Sector Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy 2021-2025*, and the *Aboriginal Land and Sea Action Plan (2019)*.

¹² The priority reforms are: Priority Reform 1: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making, Priority Reform 2: Building the Community-Controlled Sector, Priority Reform 3: Transforming Government Organisations, Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data at the Regional Level, and relevant socio-economic targets relate to Outcome 8: Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities, and Outcome 15: People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual and economic relationship with their land and waters.

Recommendation 4

Relevant actions within the Masterplan, in particular relating to joint management, should be reflected in the Northern Territory's implementation plans for Closing the Gap and reported on in the Northern Territory's Closing the Gap annual report.

1.3 Threats to our parks

Following millennia of sustainable management by Aboriginal people, what was once a thriving managed landscape across the Northern Territory is now suffering the effects of around two centuries of non-Indigenous settlement, pastoralism, mining and other land use.

As a number of other stakeholders have submitted, CLC is very concerned that the draft Masterplan makes scant mention of the significant threats facing our parks, namely the evidence of ecosystem collapse and biodiversity decline, and the increasing and compounding impacts of climate change.

While it is positive to have a plan that provides a long-term vision for our parks, as currently written, it lacks the urgency required to address the very real threats to the health of our parks. The health of our parks is the foundation on which all other objectives in the plan rely.

The evidence of ecosystem collapse and biodiversity decline is alarming. The western-central arid zone ecosystem, covering the CLC region, is undergoing ecological collapse.¹³ Central Australia is at the forefront of the mammalian extinction globally: of the 34 mammals that have been lost in Australia since colonisation (roughly the same number as the world combined over the last 200 years), 10 of these were from Central Australia.¹⁴ In total, there are 141 species of fauna threatened in the Northern Territory, 46 of which are either endangered or critically endangered – that is, facing very or extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.¹⁵ 84 species of flora are threatened, including 26 that are either endangered or critically endangered.¹⁶

The extent of weeds, particularly buffel grass, across parks in the CLC region was an issue of significant concern raised by traditional owners at the CLC Joint Management Forum last year.

“The weeds are still growing. Not enough being done to fix it”

Traditional Owner, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

The impacts of climate change are similarly alarming, and are compounding the threats to our already fragile ecosystems. In Central Australia we are already experiencing – and can expect to increasingly experience – hotter temperatures, more intense heatwaves, harsher and more frequent fire weather, longer periods in drought, more erratic rainfall and aquifer recharge, an increase in the likelihood of

¹³ Bergstrom, D, Wienecke, B, van den Hoff, J, Hughes, L, Lindenmayer, D, Ainsworth, T, Baker, C, Bland, L, Bowman, D, Brooks, S, and Canadell, J. 2021. Combating ecosystem collapse from the tropics to the Antarctic. *Global change biology*, 27(9), pp.1692-1703, see p.1693-4.

¹⁴ Foley, M. (2020) 'Why is Australia a global leader in wildlife extinctions?', *Sydney Morning Herald*; Morton, A. (2021) 'Australia confirms extinction of 13 more species, including first reptile since colonisation', *The Guardian*.

¹⁵ Northern Territory Government 2022, 'Threatened animals' ([website](#))

¹⁶ Northern Territory Government 2022, 'Threatened plants' ([website](#))

major flood events, drier soils, increased evapotranspiration, and increased risk of erosion.¹⁷ Under these conditions, without significant and sustained effort, and adequate resourcing, the ecological decline across Central Australia and the rest of the Northern Territory will only accelerate. These impacts are felt deeply by Aboriginal people whose physical, emotional and spiritual health are intimately connected with the health of Country.

Despite these stark facts and their implications, the draft Masterplan is almost silent on the reality of these threats. Given the Masterplan is the overarching document to guide management of our parks for the next three decades, this is very concerning and must be rectified in the final Masterplan.

We note the overwhelming response to the government's initial consultation paper that the Northern Territory's parks and reserves should be the cornerstone of our biodiversity conservation efforts.¹⁸ The CLC affirms this and echoes the point put forward by many others and made earlier in this submission that the health of our parks underpins all other values and potential uses.

In this context, it is positive to see a rebalancing of priorities between the original Consultation Paper and the draft Masterplan to prioritise the protection of natural biodiversity values and living cultural values and heritage. This should be maintained and strengthened in the final plan, and reflected in a substantial strengthening of commitments to protecting the health of our parks.

While it is positive to see a target of zero extinctions¹⁹, the timeframes for this target proposed in the draft Masterplan (*thirty years into the future*²⁰) do not reflect the urgency of the task at hand, nor does the draft Masterplan provide a framework to ensure this goal will be met.²¹ The timeframes need to be brought forward, supported by short, medium and long-term targets to slow and reverse these threats, and a clear action to develop targeted and adequately resourced strategies to address specific threats.²²

Recommendation 5

The final Masterplan should provide an honest appraisal of the threats and challenges to the health and future of our parks, specifically acknowledging the evidence of biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse and the threats posed by climate change.

Recommendation 6

The final Masterplan should include a clear goal to reverse biodiversity decline and stop extinctions, with associated short, medium and long-term targets, and a clear action to develop targeted and adequately resourced strategies to address specific threats. This should be a priority action.

¹⁷ CSIRO (2020) Climate Change in the Northern Territory: State of the science and climate change impacts

¹⁸ NT Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (2022) Public Submissions report on the Northern Territory Parks Masterplan 2022-2052 Consultation Paper

¹⁹ Page 15 of the draft Masterplan

²⁰ i.e. 'By 2040, the trajectory of threatened species decline has stabilised and improved within parks' and 'By 2052, there are zero extinctions of native wildlife within the parks estate'

²¹ See for example [NSW Parks' Zero Extinction Framework](#)

²² i.e. those outlined under 'What we will do' on page 14 of the draft Masterplan

As acknowledged in draft Masterplan²³ and evidenced clearly in part two of this submission, Parks can do better to incorporate Aboriginal ecological knowledge and practice into land and sea management. Actions to address the threats to our parks should be informed by two-way approaches that integrate Indigenous and western knowledge and practices.

The CLC supports the proposals to develop ten-year Plans of Management, five-year Integrated Country Strategies and Annual Action Plans for all parks and reserves. The draft Masterplan notes that the development of these plans will integrate Aboriginal, scientific and local knowledge. This needs to be strengthened to specifically commit to the active involvement of traditional owners through Joint Management Committees in the development of those plans for parks under joint management.

For transparency and accountability, progress on managing the risks and threats to our parks should be reported on publicly. The CLC recommends that the Northern Territory Government commit to regular (for example, three or five-yearly) public reporting on the State of our Parks. In addition, detailed performance information should be provided to traditional owners of jointly managed parks so they can effectively participate in joint management. CLC notes that the completion of a biodiversity baseline assessment²⁴ should not hold up the provision of available information to both the public and traditional owners.

Recommendation 7

To support ongoing, proactive management of the risks and threats to parks, the Northern Territory Government commit to regular public reporting on the State of our Parks.

Recommendation 8

The Northern Territory Government provide detailed performance information to traditional owners of jointly managed parks so they can effectively participate in joint management.

1.4 Resourcing

Our parks are the face of the Northern Territory. They are a major drawcard for the approximately one million visitors to the Northern Territory every year, who contributed almost \$2 billion to the Northern Territory's economy in the past year.²⁵ 'World class nature and wildlife' is the second most important factor to potential international tourists when considering a holiday in Australia.²⁶ From 18 'destination brand values' indicating how strongly domestic travellers agreed that the brand values were describing a holiday in the NT, 'nature and wildlife' ranked number two, behind 'being vast and a place for open spaces'.²⁷ Tourism NT lists the Northern Territory's rich Aboriginal culture as the

²³ Page 21

²⁴ Action under Theme 1: Natural Biodiversity Values, p. 14 and p.15.

²⁵ Data to the year ending March 2022, from Tourism NT (2022) Northern Territory Combined Snapshot Year Ending March 2022 ([weblink](#)). Data from Tourism NT shows that more than half of visitors to the NT in 2019 (not only those whose primary reason for travel was a holiday) visited at least one of our 80 national parks and reserves (source: Tourism NT (2019) *National Parks 2019* Factsheet, p.1 ([weblink](#))).

²⁶ Tourism NT (2019) *National Parks 2019* Factsheet, p.2 ([weblink](#))

²⁷ Ibid.

number one reason to visit the Northern Territory, with the experience of the Australian outback and ‘otherworldly landscapes’ third and fourth.²⁸

Yet while our parks and Aboriginal people and culture are used extensively in tourism marketing, the Northern Territory Government is failing to make adequate investment to either support the health of the parks, or support the role of traditional owners in caring for this country.

Particularly in the context of the threats outlined above, it is essential to acknowledge the extent to which under-resourcing of our parks is seriously constraining the ability of the Northern Territory Government and joint management partners to effectively manage and ensure the sustained health of the Parks estate.²⁹

While the draft Masterplan discusses the level and security of funding in general terms, there is no commitment to increase government funding to the level required to support the objectives articulated in the plan. The closest reference to any commitment is a target to have improved funding for joint management via ‘revenue models’ in *five years’ time (2027)*.³⁰

Although it is difficult to clearly ascertain changes to the Parks budget from publicly available data, the experience of traditional owners as joint management partners (as evidenced below), as well as information from the 2014 park report cards published by Parks,³¹ is indicative of under-resourcing, showing the clear constraints on Parks rangers to undertake essential land management work protecting natural and cultural values, as well as planning, reporting and research – with visitor and tourism management dominating their time.

The report card for Tjoritja National Park shows that only 20 per cent of ranger time was spent on biodiversity programs – compared to 30 per cent of time related to tourism (‘Visitors’). When broken down further, it shows that only 5 per cent of ranger time was spent managing weeds, 2 per cent was spent managing feral animals, and 1 per cent on fire management. 10 percent was spent on planning and reporting, and 2 per cent on research and monitoring.³² In Watarrka, tourism consumed even more of rangers’ time (43 per cent), with 5 percent on weeds, 4 per cent spent on feral animals and 3 per cent on fire management. Three per cent of time was spent on planning and reporting, and *zero percent* on research and monitoring.³³ We note that these figures are for the more popular parks in Central Australia with (relatively) higher staffing levels.

The ability of Parks rangers to dedicate time to essential land management work is likely to have decreased since 2014. Data provided to CLC by DEPWS in 2021 indicates a 35 per cent decline in Central Australian staff numbers since 2014, compared to 13 per cent decline for the rest of the NT. As staff numbers have declined, the pressures on our parks have only increased, with rising visitor numbers³⁴ and the challenges of managing accelerating threats of fire, weeds and feral animals described above.

²⁸ <https://northernterritory.com/> ‘The ten best reasons to visit the Northern Territory’ ([weblink](#))

²⁹ See ‘Our Vision’, page 10 of the draft Masterplan.

³⁰ Page 23

³¹ See <https://depws.nt.gov.au/consultation-publications/parks-and-wildlife-publications/park-report-cards>

³² Northern Territory Government (2014) Tjoritja/West MacDonnell National Park Report Card 2014

³³ Northern Territory Government (2014) Watarrka National Park Report Card 2014

³⁴ See NT DEPWS Park visitor data, showing increase in visitor numbers from 2016-2019 (with a dip in 2020 attributable to COVID-19 travel restrictions) ([online](#))

The strain placed on Parks staff through under-resourcing is acknowledged by traditional owners:

“Parks need more staff. Too much work for one person, they need help.”

“More staff (Indigenous rangers and TOs) to help, as it’s too big a job.”

Traditional Owners at the CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum, talking about the challenges for Parks staff managing weeds and feral animals

While the introduction of the Parks Pass will provide some boost to Parks revenue, the CLC does not consider it appropriate to be reliant on uncertain revenue opportunities to manage the parks estate and properly implement joint management. A significant and sustained increase to the Parks budget is needed. We note also that other proposed revenue opportunities through the provision of ecosystem services, such as biodiversity and carbon offsets, are subject to the legal rights of Aboriginal people through legislation and existing lease agreements. These opportunities must be explored in close consultation with joint management partners and their land councils, and native title holders.

As the draft Masterplan acknowledges, the Northern Territory’s parks and reserves are vital to the Territory’s future.³⁵ They need to be funded accordingly.

Recommendation 9

The Northern Territory Government must urgently address the serious under-resourcing of our Parks and commit to long-term investment that is adequate to support the effective management and sustained health of the Parks estate. This should include an immediate commitment in the 2023-24 NT Budget to a significant increase in the Parks budget over the next 10 years.

Recommendation 10

Any proposals to apply new revenue models are subject to the legal rights of Aboriginal people through legislation and existing lease agreements and must be developed in close consultation with joint management partners and their Land Councils, and native title holders.

It is important that joint management partners are provided with the information they need in relation to resourcing to actively participate in planning and decision-making for their parks. Traditional owners want more transparency around the money story for their parks and should be empowered to actively participate in park budgeting and planning for jointly managed parks.

Recommendation 11

Information on DEPWS’ budget and expenditure should be shared with joint management partners to support their active participation in planning and decision-making.

³⁵ Page 5

Further discussion on the importance of data sharing in the context of joint management is provided in section 2 below, as is further detail on the resourcing requirements to support the effective operation of joint management.

1.5 Monitoring and accountability

It is positive to see measurable, time-bound targets included in the draft Masterplan. However, the CLC considers there is still substantial work to be done to ensure a robust framework for planning, monitoring and accountability for the implementation of the Masterplan. As the plan spans three decades, it is essential to embed regular planning, monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure we remain on-track over the life of the plan. This must include regular, detailed reporting to joint management partners.

In addition, timeframes for the achievement of key objectives need to be brought forward. As noted above, it is not acceptable to wait thirty years to determine whether we have met the goal of achieving zero extinctions of native wildlife within the parks estate.³⁶ Nor is it acceptable to wait until 2052 to achieve 50 per cent Aboriginal representation in the park ranger workforce³⁷ – particularly given the existing requirement within park leases that the Northern Territory Government “actively seek to achieve at the earliest practicable opportunity that the majority of permanent employment positions in the Park are held by suitably qualified relevant Aboriginal people [traditional owners].”³⁸

Many of the timeframes seem arbitrary and/or lacking in ambition and commitment. For example, why is it that Parks proposes to wait until 2052 for Aboriginal people to be managing key cultural sites across the parks estate,³⁹ five years (until 2027) for improved funding for joint management,⁴⁰ until 2030 to determine Traditional Owners’ aspirations for long-term joint management arrangements, and until 2052 for long-term joint management arrangements to be settled?⁴¹ If there is a basis for these timeframes, the necessary interim steps need to be articulated with a framework in place for monitoring progress towards them.

Finally, further work can be done to more clearly demonstrate how the proposed actions relate to the specified goals and targets for each theme. As currently written, some of the actions overlap, and it is unclear what their primary objective is. For example, many of the actions under ‘What we will do’ to *Maintain and improve biodiversity management, Build resilience in species and ecosystems and Apply ‘two-way’ knowledge to inform adaptive management through monitoring and strategic research* overlap, for example, the action to ‘Establish a research program that addresses knowledge gaps to support planning and improve management, with a particular focus on the impacts of climate change and the thresholds that occur in natural systems’ – is this part of the development of a Climate Change Strategy? And how does it relate to the establishment of a Territory parks estate research

³⁶ Page 15

³⁷ Page 33

³⁸ Paragraph 5(g) (Training and Employment) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

³⁹ Page 18

⁴⁰ Page 23

⁴¹ Page 23

prospectus?⁴² In other cases, it is unclear what particular actions mean, for example, ‘Prioritise management and planning to ensure the security of threatened species and ecosystems that only occur within the parks estate’ – *how* will this be done? What does this mean in practice? Will additional resources be allocated to enable this?

Further clarity in terms of the relationship between actions (‘What we will do’), and desired outcomes (goals) and how they will be measured (targets) is needed.

Recommendation 12

The mechanisms for planning, monitoring and accountability for the implementation of the Masterplan should be substantially strengthened. This should include the requirement for DEPWS to develop action plans (for example, three or five-yearly) over the lifetime of the Masterplan, and for the Minister for Parks to table in Parliament progress reports against these plans (suggested annually). This timing could align with the publication of reports on the State of our Parks.

Recommendation 13

The timeframes for key actions must be brought forward, in particular the timeframes for stabilising and improving the trajectory of species decline, and increasing representation of Aboriginal people and specifically traditional owners at all levels of the Parks workforce, in line with the Territory Government’s commitments in the park leases. The timeframes could align with the cycle of action planning so that the steps towards the achievement of those targets are clearly laid out.

Recommendation 14

Some actions should be revised to provide greater coherence and clarity in terms of their relationship to the relevant goals and targets. All actions should be consistent in style and demonstrate ‘SMART’ principle (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

1.6 Comments on discrete themes

Theme 2: Living cultural values and heritage

Approach to management of cultural values and heritage

The CLC commends the acknowledgment within the draft Masterplan of the need to better manage living cultural values and heritage with traditional owners and their representative organisations. Traditional owners are very concerned about the impact on their sacred sites by poor management. Quotes from the CLC Joint Management Forum illustrate the extent of these concerns:

“Parks need to listen more, and put up signs telling people not to swim, as there are some sacred sites, some are men only.”

“People are still going through the fence at Corroborree Rock, ignoring the signs.”

⁴² Page 14

“People always ignore signs to stop drones. Need to ask permission. They can take videos of people but not rock art.”

“Tourists are going off track to find artefacts, gemstones, sacred sites. They are also taking photos when they go off-track.”

“Important to make sure tourists don’t drink or climb on our sacred sites.”

“Visitors taking photos of sacred sites and putting on Facebook and other media. Sharing country without permission.”

“National Parks are sharing photos of sacred sites. TOs don’t have control of what is shared.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

The CLC notes that support for the maintenance of Aboriginal people’s tradition and culture,⁴³ including respecting and promoting the protection of sacred sites and cultural heritage,⁴⁴ putting in place processes for protecting the intellectual and cultural property rights of traditional owners for the protection of sacred sites and for the protection and preservation of places and items of cultural significance⁴⁵ are embedded within the TPWC Act and park leases.

While commending commitment in the draft Masterplan to protect and respect cultural heritage values, the CLC recommends a number of changes within this section. Firstly, there should not be one framework for managing living cultural values and heritage,⁴⁶ but rather Parks should commit to development a framework for each park, in partnership with the traditional owners and Land Council for that park. This is consistent with the requirements for draft joint management plans but should be mandatory for all parks.⁴⁷

Further, rather than specifying that cultural mapping will be an element of a framework, the joint management processes for each park should allow traditional owners to determine the appropriate level of information they wish to share and the method for protecting cultural values. In relation to cultural mapping, the CLC notes that developments on parks within the CLC region require sacred sites clearances which involve traditional owners clearing areas for use in light of the impacts of the particular development.

The CLC emphasises that, with respect to any actions relating to cultural heritage, traditional owners must be central. This is not adequately reflected in the wording or framing within the draft Masterplan and must be rectified in the final plan. Traditional owners must have control over their cultural

⁴³ Clause 6(k) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases and included in TPWC Act s25AE(j) with respect to requirements for Joint Management Plans to include processes for providing for hunting and the use of other sources in the park by Traditional Owners. This is also broadly reflected in the obligation at clause 6(i) of the leases for the Territory to “promote and protect the interests of relevant Aboriginals as a group.”

⁴⁴ Referred to in the required contents of draft Joint Management Plans at TPWC ACT s25AE(3)(b) and at clause 6(j) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases

⁴⁵ Clause 8(b) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁴⁶ As suggested on page 17 of the draft Masterplan

⁴⁷ Section 25AE TPWC Act

information and lead any processes regarding how their sites are managed by Parks. Specifically with respect to the action to develop a 'Cultural Heritage Information Management System',⁴⁸ it is imperative that traditional owners agree to certain information being held and managed by Parks (recognising that managing cultural and sensitive data brings a range of associated challenges). It is also essential that traditional owners have control over accessing cultural information. CLC suggests that the established joint management process is the most appropriate method through which to deal with storing and managing cultural data. The CLC would be happy to have further discussions with DEPWS on these matters.

Recommendation 15

The final Masterplan include commitment to the development of cultural management plans with traditional owners and Land Councils for each park, either as part of joint management processes for jointly managed parks, or in consultation with traditional owners and Land Councils for other parks.

Recommendation 16

Any systems for storing cultural information must be developed with traditional owners are part of joint management processes.

We reiterate that the extensive quotes provided above are illustrative of the deep concern of traditional owners in relation to the protection of their sacred sites. At the forum traditional owners expressed a desire for Parks to place a greater emphasis on protection, including fencing signage and educational initiatives for park rangers and tourists. Traditional owners also would like to run cultural awareness training for rangers, both as part of induction for new staff, and ongoing professional development and collaboration between Parks staff and traditional owners; as part of this, they would like to have more opportunities for cultural sharing with Parks staff on country in an informal setting. To this end, CLC welcomes the commitment in the draft Masterplan to support on-country camps for Parks staff, traditional owners and land councils and recommends that these not be limited to annually (see Recommendation 28 below).⁴⁹

"TOs running cultural awareness for new rangers has worked well, it builds relationships and makes sure that the parks staff understand how to respect culture."

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

Recommendation 17

That Parks works closely with Land Councils, Joint Management Committees and traditional owners to prioritise and increase protection for sacred sites on the park estate.

⁴⁸ Page 17

⁴⁹ Page 22

Recommendation 18

Parks work closely with Land Councils, Joint Management Committees and traditional owners to develop and implement a cultural induction training package for Parks staff for all jointly managed parks within 12 months of the Masterplan being finalised.

Intergenerational cultural knowledge transfer

A significant omission within this section of the plan is any commitment to facilitating intergenerational cultural knowledge transfer. Having the opportunity to spend time on country and pass on knowledge is continually raised as an extremely high priority for traditional owners. As outlined in the report on the CLC Joint Management Forum: “traditional owners value and want to have more Country visits – particularly those that can involve the wider family and community. This is an important aspect of caring for country and intergenerational teaching and learning.”

Yet it is only referenced twice within the draft Masterplan, despite frequent broader reference to the importance of ‘Living cultural values.’ The CLC emphasises that Indigenous cultural knowledge is not just a resource but a priority value that needs nurturing and should be referenced in the document accordingly.

The CLC welcomes the commitment made under the Joint Management theme to “create regular opportunities for traditional owners and their families to spend more time on country to support cultural knowledge transference,”⁵⁰ and recommend that further actions be included in the final Masterplan, and adequately resourced, that enable Aboriginal people to maintain and teach traditional cultural knowledge and practices on country within the parks estate.

Recommendation 19

Further actions should be included in the final Masterplan (and adequately resourced) that enable Aboriginal people to maintain and teach traditional cultural knowledge and practices on country within the parks estate.

Theme 4: Recreational futures

The final Masterplan should acknowledge the contribution of traditional owners to creating and maintaining parks as spaces of recreation and enjoyment. The CLC wishes to highlight in particular the initiative and vision of the traditional owners of the Yeperenye Nature Park who developed and funded the Yeperenye Trail between Emily and Jessie Gaps. While the traditional owners were proud to invest their lease money into this project, they were disappointed that Parks did not provide matched support. Co-contribution from Parks would have been consistent with principles of joint management and reflective of the contribution that these projects make to the enjoyment and attraction of all visitors to the parks.

Additionally under this theme, in the context of the draft Masterplan’s goal for the “steady and managed growth in recreational visitors to parks and reserves”, we note the need to provide commensurate attention to ensuring the safety of visitors and tourists. Traditional owners often

⁵⁰ Draft Masterplan, p.22.

express grave concern about the safety of tourists within parks and would like to see more safety awareness and infrastructure provided by Parks. This includes establishing more rest areas along the trails with water, shade and emergency communications. Traditional owners should be consulted on the development of this infrastructure.

Recommendation 20

The final Masterplan should commit to work, in consultation with traditional owners, to improve safety awareness and safety infrastructure, within the parks estates. This includes establishing more rest areas along the trails with water, shade and emergency communications.

Theme 5: Tourism

Our parks provide a significant and unique opportunity to celebrate and educate the wider community about Aboriginal people, their knowledge and culture. A strong sentiment expressed at the CLC Joint Management Forum was that far more can be done by Parks to make Aboriginal culture visible to and better understood by all those who visit our parks.

“At the parks, it’s all about white people history and white people now.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

We note the obligation of the Northern Territory Government under the park leases to “to use its best endeavours to promote among visitors to, employees and commercial operators in the Park a knowledge and understanding of and respect for the traditions, languages, culture, customs and skills of relevant Aboriginals and to arrange for appropriate instruction in connection with such matters to be given, to the extent it is reasonably practicable, by Aboriginals engaged for the purpose,”⁵¹ as well as to joint work on education and educational activities within the park.⁵²

Actions that support this are entirely absent from the draft Masterplan and this must be rectified.

Traditional owners want more opportunities to celebrate and promote Aboriginal culture and history in parks through signage, cultural centres and other methods. Suggestions were made for example that audio stories could be developed and recorded for tourists to listen to as they travel through a park. The CLC notes that this work must be governed by best practice ICIP policy and through detailed conversations with traditional owners, facilitated by Land Councils.

Recommendation 21

Consistent with obligations of the Northern Territory Government in park leases, the final Masterplan should include a clear commitment and supporting actions to promote among visitors to, employees and commercial operators in our parks knowledge, understanding and respect for Aboriginal people, their knowledge and culture.

⁵¹ Clause 6(p) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases

⁵² Clause 8(c) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

Additional comments in relation to the participation of traditional owners in tourism opportunities are made in response to *Theme 6: Aboriginal Economic Development* below.

Theme 6: Aboriginal economic development

The potential for joint management to support jobs and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people on their country has been central to traditional owners' support for joint management since its inception. The CLC therefore welcomes the commitment in the draft Masterplan to embedding outcomes for Aboriginal economic development in the management of parks and reserves.⁵³

We note that the promotion of commercial and business opportunities for traditional owners is already a requirement of park lease agreements under joint management,⁵⁴ as are extensive provisions relating to the employment and training of traditional owners.⁵⁵ Specifically with respect to employment, the leases require the Northern Territory Government to “actively seek to achieve at the earliest practicable opportunity that majority of permanent employment positions in the Park are held by suitably qualified relevant Aboriginal people [traditional owners].”⁵⁶

Given this requirement, the current Aboriginal employment target for the Park ranger workforce (50 per cent of Park rangers are Aboriginal *by 2052*⁵⁷) is unacceptable. The target needs to be revised to reflect the Northern Territory Government's legal obligation under park leases and be accompanied by a commitment clear and appropriately resourced strategies to achieve this.

Park leases also include a requirement to “develop a training program with traditional owners that supports their skill development in relation to the administration, planning, management and control of parks, and specifically that supports employment pathways to senior ranger positions.”⁵⁸ There are however no actions directed towards training for traditional owners in the draft Masterplan.

With respect to the direct employment of traditional owners on their jointly managed parks, the CLC welcomes the commitment in the draft Masterplan to expand flexible work opportunities and fee-for-service arrangements.⁵⁹ We particularly welcome the commitment to provide a guaranteed annual budget available for flexible employment programs within each park and reserve, and recommend that an additional commitment be made to review, in consultation with traditional owners and Land Councils, the approach to recruiting and on-boarding traditional owners under flexible employment arrangements with a view to reducing the administrative burden.

The high administrative load required to recruit and on-board traditional owners has been a key barrier to employment through the Flexible Employment Program (FEP). In addition, the current approach that funds the FEP through underspend from vacant positions means that far too often there are no available staff to complete the recruitment administration, or – if the administrative hurdle is

⁵³ See page 31

⁵⁴ Clause 6(n) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory's Obligations) and paragraph 6(b) (Commercial and Business Opportunities) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁵⁵ Includes detailed requirements under clause 5 (training and employment) within park leases relating to the implementation of an Aboriginal training program.

⁵⁶ Clause 5(g) (Training and Employment) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁵⁷ Page 33 of draft Masterplan

⁵⁸ Clause 5(g) (Training and Employment) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁵⁹ See page 33

passed – there is no one to supervise FEP employees. Therefore, at the very time employees are needed most, they are unable to be employed.

This situation plays out on a regular basis, with the end result being that traditional owners' hopes for employment are too often raised, only to be let down. For example, in mid-2021 CLC staff provided assistance to Parks staff to sign up more than 10 casual employees – but as of May 2022, only one has completed any work. There is a general sense among traditional owners that this employment opportunity was not genuine, and the older people have stopped being excited that their grandson or granddaughter is going to start ranger work. Sadly, this is not unusual.

The CLC provides at **Appendix C** a case study of the employment arrangements for Eastern Arrernte traditional owners in the construction of the Yeperenye Trail as an example of genuinely flexible and appropriate employment arrangements that facilitated the participation of more than 33 traditional owners in this new trail.

At an operational level, there is also a lack of investment in building the knowledge and skills to equip traditional owners to participate as fully as possible in land management activities and be engaged through the FEP. Parks frequently informs CLC that traditional owners cannot be involved in many management activities (such as fire management) because they haven't completed the right training. If this is the case, and given that training is an agreed component of the park leases, Parks should be proactively working to resolve these issues and provide the necessary training. Specific training requests from traditional owners include Literacy and Numeracy training for FEP workers, tour guide training, drivers' licences and ranger training.

The CLC notes that of the three focus themes discussed at the CLC Joint Management Forum (Land Management, Empowerment and Two-way Decision-Making, and Employment and Economic Development), Employment and Economic Development received the lowest score from traditional owner participants, with consistent rankings from 'average' through to 'not great'. Traditional owners' calls for more employment and training opportunities were consistent:

“There is no training in reading, writing, IT, park management, certificates, none of it. It's in our leases.”

“They should employ more TOs – we're not going anywhere, it's our Country.”

“We want to see Indigenous rangers working on Country.”

“Employ more Indigenous rangers.”

“More paid work for TOs and young Aboriginal rangers.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

In light of feedback from the CLC Joint Management Forum and consistent with the park lease requirements, the CLC therefore recommends that, as a priority, the Northern Territory Government work with traditional owners and land councils to develop an Indigenous Employment and Training Strategy (noting that the previous *Indigenous Employment Strategy 2014-2017* has lapsed).

This strategy should affirm and enable the Northern Territory Government’s existing legal obligations to traditional owner employment and training under park leases.

Additionally, key issues to be addressed in the strategy include:

- Promoting Aboriginal representation at all levels of the Parks workforce.
- Flexible and appropriate employment arrangements for traditional owners (learning from the limitations of FEP to date).
- Increased provision of appropriately resourced training opportunities for traditional owners.
- Employment strategies that recognise and utilise the unique skill sets of traditional owners, and ensure they are appropriately remunerated for their knowledge and skills.
- Youth employment pathways.
- Increasing the number of female traditional owners working on the parks estate, including targets to increase the number of female rangers.

The CLC suggests that the *Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) Anangu Employment Pathways Plan 2020-2025* is an example of a strong and comprehensive employment strategy that could be learnt from. The CLC worked closely with the Federal Government to develop the plan. We draw attention in particular to the actions within the plan to establish identified positions and work that utilise Anangu knowledge and skills, building flexibility into Australian Public Service roles through casual positions, the facilitation of traineeships and school-to-work transition programs, and a focus on enhancing two-way learning within the staffing group. The recognition of the unique skill set of Anangu staff is a foundational strength of this plan. Further actions within the plan are included at **Appendix D**.

Recommendation 22

The Northern Territory Government work with traditional owners and their land councils to develop an Indigenous Employment and Training Strategy within the next 12 months and that this strategy is appropriately resourced.

With respect to other actions in this section of the plan, the CLC notes that traditional owners speak positively of examples of local Aboriginal businesses being preferred for contract and procurement work, and would like to see more of this happening – it is positive to see an action to align purchasing and contracting policies with the Northern Territory Government’s Aboriginal economic development framework.⁶⁰

Given the commercial and business opportunities for traditional owners under park leases,⁶¹ we are encouraged by commitments in the draft Masterplan to work with traditional owners in jointly managed parks to develop priority projects and potential tourism opportunities.⁶² We note that, linked to the requirements to provide institutional support and capacity building to joint management

⁶⁰ Page 33

⁶¹ Clause 6(n) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) and paragraph 6(b) (Commercial and Business Opportunities) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁶² Page 33 of draft Masterplan

partners (see section 2.1.1 below), traditional owners have suggested that it would be helpful to have the opportunity to visit and learn from successful Aboriginal enterprises in other parks.

In addition, we note that traditional owners have previously requested support from Parks through joint management to set up Community Living Areas (CLAs) on parks to help enable them to participate as employees in tourism ventures or to run their own enterprises, however generally, Parks are not supportive of the establishment of further CLAs when these are suggested by traditional owners. This attitude needs to be reviewed, given the importance of CLAs is enshrined in the TPWC Act, namely, at s25AC(d) which recognises that community living areas in or in close proximity to parks and reserves are an integral part of the natural and cultural resource management of parks and reserves.⁶³

Recommendation 23

The final Masterplan affirm support for the establishment of new Community Living Areas on the parks estate, including to support the participation of traditional owners in tourism businesses and other enterprises on their parks.

Theme 8: Growing the parks estate

If funded and resourced appropriately, CLC supports the extension of the parks estate to protect natural and cultural values, particularly if this extension is matched with a commitment by the Northern Territory Government to increase the involvement of traditional owners in parks that are not under joint management.

With respect to specific extensions, the CLC has been asked by the Yeperenye Joint Management Committee⁶⁴ to recommend to the Northern Territory Government that the sacred site, Elpare Umbagnama (a sand dune located near Jessie Gap), should be included in the park. Traditional owners have been fighting to permanently protect the sand dune since the mid-1980s. The dune was the subject of a 2011 report by the Heritage branch of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sports, but no further action was taken. CLC and traditional owners would like to work closely with the Northern Territory Government to progress this idea.

Recommendation 24

The Northern Territory Government work with the Central Land Council and traditional owners to investigate the inclusion of Elpare Umbagnama in the Yeperenye Nature Park.

Private ownership

As highlighted in DEPWS' summary of feedback on the initial consultation paper on the Masterplan, the majority of respondents expressed concern in relation to the concept of private ownership of national parks. We suggest that this concern isn't adequately addressed in the draft Masterplan.

⁶³ TPWC ACT s25AC(d) (Principles of Joint Management), reiterated in requirements for draft plans at s25AE(3)(g)

⁶⁴ Resolution at December 2021Yeperenye JMC meeting

Traditional owners and their land councils must be involved with any work by government to consider the possible application of and parameters for private park ownership models in the Northern Territory.

Recommendation 25

Traditional owners and their land councils must be involved with any work by government to consider the possible application of and parameters for private park ownership models in the Northern Territory.

Theme 9: Park access

The CLC is very concerned about the comments regarding park access on page 44 of the draft Masterplan regarding the requirement for a declaration from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority before a “site or experience will be considered for closure” when traditional owners have stated that access is inappropriate for cultural reasons. Such a provision does not give adequate recognition or respect to Aboriginal cultural views. It is not consistent with the principles of joint management, which include recognising, valuing and incorporating Aboriginal culture.⁶⁵ It is also inconsistent with the provisions of the leases which require the Territory to respect and promote the protection of sacred sites, cultural heritage and other areas and things of significance to traditional owners, and is likely inconsistent with the NT Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act. The CLC submits that protection of cultural values, including sacred sites, must comply with the leases and be in accordance with the cultural management plans developed with traditional owners, with no requirements for the involvement of AAPA, and that the views of traditional owners must be respected.

Recommendation 26

Restrictions on access within parks are to be managed in accordance with cultural management plans developed with traditional owners and Land Councils.

⁶⁵ Section 25AC TPWC Act

2. Ways forward for joint management

The CLC welcomes directions within the draft Masterplan that suggest a renewed commitment on the part of the Northern Territory Government to joint management. While it is positive to see commitments in the draft Masterplan to strengthening relationships between joint management partners, strengthening governance and enabling genuine involvement of Traditional Owners in (best practice) park management,⁶⁶ the CLC is aware that this would represent a step-change in the way of working to date – and certainly a very different approach to the Northern Territory Government’s process for the development of the Masterplan.

While the Northern Territory can proudly claim to be the first jurisdiction to commence formal joint management arrangements for parks, it is evident that current arrangements are not living up to the original expectations, and far from realising the potential of these arrangements to drive the best possible social, cultural, environmental and economic outcomes. In many instances, joint management is falling well short of the legislated objectives, principles and requirements within the TPWC Act and park leases – evidenced below.

It is important to emphasise that despite its many challenges and disappointments, traditional owners continue to see joint management as a means for them to continue their responsibilities to country, and remain positive about the potential for joint management to achieve good things for country, for culture, for Aboriginal people’s economic empowerment and the wider community.

The high number of traditional owners who attended the CLC Joint Management Forum and their engagement was demonstrative of the importance that traditional owners place on joint management, and their desire to be actively involved in making it a success. While unprecedented flooding prevented the attendance of Parks staff at the first three days of forum,⁶⁷ there was also very good attendance and representation from Parks staff at the follow-up day in Alice Springs – again reflective of the good will and commitment to a positive future for joint management among joint management partners.

Reasons for involvement in joint management

“It’s your responsibility as Traditional Owners.”

“Looking after sacred sites.”

“Looking after land and country.”

“Working together with other TOs to share ideas.”

“Employment, creating jobs.”

“Looking and caring for country for the future.”

“Young and old people working together.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

⁶⁶ See ‘Our goal’ under the theme Joint management in Partnership with Traditional Owners, page 19.

⁶⁷ The road into Ross River Resort was closed from the first day of the forum.

Acknowledging this goodwill, this section identifies key actions that need to be taken if joint management is to deliver on its objectives, namely, actions in relation to governance, resourcing and review.

While noting the significant and urgent need for improvement in the operation of joint management, our feedback and that of traditional owners is offered with a view to working collaboratively with the Northern Territory Government to make changes that can substantially improve its operation for the benefit of traditional owners, our parks and the wider communities.

2.1 Governance

The central objective of joint management is to jointly establish an *equitable partnership* with traditional owners to manage and maintain parks and reserves.⁶⁸ Of note, park leases specify that the Northern Territory Government is obliged to “*take all practicable steps to promote Aboriginal involvement in the administration, management and control of the Park*” (emphasis added).⁶⁹

The establishment of an equitable partnership reflects the core principles of joint management to recognise, value and incorporate Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision-making processes, on the understanding that the best outcomes can be achieved through a two-way approach to land management that uses the combined skills and expertise of both joint management partners.⁷⁰

Yet despite equity being the goal under legislation, traditional owners generally have limited input into strategic or operational planning and decision-making beyond the initial development of joint management plans. Parks and traditional owners generally meet a number of times over a relatively short period to develop the plan, however once a plan is in place, the frequency of meetings reduces significantly – as does traditional owners’ involvement in planning and decision-making.

Traditional owners’ capacity to provide meaningful, strategic input and actively participate in decision-making about the management of their parks is constrained by the infrequency of Joint Management Committee meetings (usually at most once a year⁷¹), the lack of information and data provision by Parks to support informed decision-making, a lack of receptivity on the part of Parks staff to ideas put forward by traditional owners,⁷² and consultation that often feels tokenistic.⁷³

⁶⁸ TPWC ACT s25AB (Objective of Joint Management)

⁶⁹ Clause 6(l) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases. Specific obligations are also enumerated in relation to the involvement of Traditional Owners in recruitment at paragraph 7(b) and (c) (Staffing) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles); involvement in policy and evaluation with respect to their park (paragraph 8(a) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles); and the provision of “all information relating to the operation and management of the Park” (paragraph 8(d) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁷⁰ TPWC ACT s25AC(a)(b) (Principles of Joint Management) and reflected in clause 6(l) and 6(m) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases

⁷¹ Or the case of Chambers Pillar and Rainbow Valley, one shared meeting for multiple parks. In Federal jointly managed parks such as Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park, Parks staff and traditional owners meet regularly at least 4 times per year to maintain the joint management relationship.

⁷² Often on the basis that these proposals are outside the current workplan or annual budget

⁷³ That is, Parks have generated the idea, made their decision, and simply check with traditional owners, or their input is sought on something minor.

“We only hear about things afterwards in the meeting, we want to know before... be involved in the decision-making.”

Traditional Owner at the CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum
(this comment was offered in the context of decisions about shooting camels)

“Parks only come to us [traditional owners] for Yes/No – we’re not involved in the planning and discussion.”

Traditional Owner, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

While a process exists to capture the input of traditional owners once a joint management plan is in place (through the development of a ‘healthy culture plan’), the CLC is only aware of a very small number of these plans that have been finished and/or are being actioned in parks.

Importantly, a key finding from the CLC Joint Management Forum was that when traditional owners are closely involved in the planning process, “this increases their engagement with, and commitment to, joint management overall.”⁷⁴ Yet unfortunately, this level of involvement is the exception, rather than the rule.

Traditional owners’ engagement in the day-to-day management of parks is similarly constrained. Traditional owners highly value making visible contributions to land management and the delivery of joint management plans, for example work such as erosion control, fencing, burning and doing surveys. Yet, at the forum, traditional owners expressed frustration at being excluded from work, from the perspective of the lack of recognition of their knowledge and skills, as well as the missed opportunity to engage traditional owners to assist with jobs (particularly given Parks’ staffing constraints). For example, in the context of the need for more work on weed control, comments included:

“The rangers need to get more help from TOs.”

“A group of TOs can stay on country to help Park Rangers as a paid job.”

“Always make sure there’s a TO around to advise.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

There are some positive examples where traditional owners are actively engaged with Parks in a two-way approach to land management, such as current work at Mac Clark involving monitoring the health of Acacia Peuce and animal trapping, and collaboration between traditional owners, Aputula rangers and Parks’ rangers on addressing erosion. However this level of engagement and collaboration is not the norm.

⁷⁴ Aboriginal Governance and Management Program (2021) Report on the Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum, p.13.

Recommendations are made below in relation to opportunities to strengthen relationships between Parks staff and traditional owners and improve the frequency and operation of Joint Management Committee meetings. However, fundamentally, the effective operation of joint management as a genuine two-way and equitable partnership requires the establishment of governance arrangements that empower traditional owners to participate on an equal footing with parks.

The CLC therefore strongly welcomes the commitment in the draft Masterplan to establishing new governance arrangements that strengthen traditional owner decision-making and facilitate direct communication between traditional owners and elected government representatives.⁷⁵

The need for ongoing dialogue between Parks staff and traditional owners' direct communication to decision-makers was one of the most significant messages from the CLC Joint Management Forum. In addition to regional governance arrangements which facilitate dialogue at the operational level and inter-park sharing, traditional owners have asked for a forum that provides them with direct line of communication to the Minister in relation to joint management:

"We never get to talk to the right people at parks, the big bosses."

"We want to meet with the Minister and senior Parks staff at an annual forum for them to hear what we are saying."

"We can all work tougher to speak up as one voice to make change happen."

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

We draw the Northern Territory Government's attention to the original Joint Management Agreement between the government and the Central Land Council and the Northern Land Council, drafted in 2009 (but not signed), which provides a strong foundation for what these arrangements might look like.

While the agreement requires review and potentially updating, that CLC considers that its basic elements are sound, including providing for regional joint management groups, and the establishment of an NT joint management forum to advise the Minister on planning, policy, resourcing and other issues concerning the joint management of parks in the NT.

CLC emphasises that the creation of such governance arrangements are necessary to deliver on the legislated objective of joint management within the TPWC Act to be an *equitable partnership* (s25AB) and they must be adequately resourced.

Reflecting comments in section 1.1 of this report, they are also consistent with the commitments made by the Northern Territory Government under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, in particular to *Priority Reform 1: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making*. We suggest that the commitments to establishing stronger governance arrangements be included as a priority action in the forthcoming Northern Territory Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.

⁷⁵ Draft Masterplan, p.22

Recommendation 27

The Northern Territory should work with the Central Land Council (CLC) to, within the next six months, review and finalise the Joint Management Agreement and establish the necessary governance structures to support the improved operation of Joint management over the long-term.

The central aim of the new governance arrangements should be to empower and support traditional owners to take an active role in planning, oversight and decision-making at both an operational and strategic level, as equal partners under legislation.

The arrangements should include regional groups that provide a forum for cooperative and strategic management of regional issues with appropriate decision-makers within Parks, as well as a Territory-level forum that provides traditional owners with a direct voice to the Minister and senior Parks staff on key strategic and operational issues concerning the joint management of parks in the NT.

The governance arrangements must be adequately resourced by government.

Additional actions to strengthen governance

Building relationships

The CLC welcomes commitments in the draft Masterplan to improve ways of working together and affirms the importance placed in the plan on strong relationships.⁷⁶ It was evident through experiences shared at the CLC Joint Management Forum that when Parks rangers have good communications with traditional owners and a relationship is built outside meetings, the outcomes are best.

“Lots of small conversations and regular dialogue is needed to prevent big problems later on.”

Traditional Owner, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

As noted in section 1, we support the commitment in the draft plan to supporting country camps for Parks staff, traditional owners and Land Council staff,⁷⁷ and suggest this action be updated to provide for *at least* annual camps for all jointly managed parks and reserves. We also support the action to develop and deliver programs for Parks staff and traditional owners to work together on-country, and the engagement of younger joint management partners in these programs.⁷⁸ These programs need to be developed collaboratively between Parks, traditional owners and their land councils. Both these actions need to be resourced appropriately.

⁷⁶ Reflected in the goals for joint management outlined on page 19 and the actions listed on page 22 of draft Masterplan.

⁷⁷ See page 22 of draft Masterplan

⁷⁸ See page 22 of draft Masterplan

Recommendation 28

The commitment to supporting country camps for Parks staff, traditional owners and Land Council staff be updated to provide for *at least* annual camps for all jointly managed parks and reserves and that this is resourced appropriately.

Joint Management Committee meetings

The CLC notes that traditional owners in our region highly value the opportunity to hold Joint Management Committee meetings on-country and appreciate the efforts Parks goes to in order to facilitate this.⁷⁹ The CLC recommends that the Northern Territory Government continues to prioritise on-country Joint Management Committee meetings.

However the frequency of and approach to Joint Management Committee meetings have a significant impact on the extent to which they facilitate meaningful input by traditional owners. Traditional owners would like to see more frequent meetings and updates from Parks staff:

“More meetings to talk with Parks.”

“More regular check-ins. Not enough updates on the park.”

Traditional owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

Traditional owners want to be involved in developing and reviewing the agenda for meetings, have adequate time to consider issues and consult properly prior to meetings (particularly decision-making meetings), and they want to have adequate time to see meeting minutes recorded and actions reviewed at each meeting.

“No minutes for our meetings – we don’t know what we talked about last time.”

“It’s good to have an agenda early, so we can talk to family about it.”

“We would like to have more information in advance before decision-making meetings.”

“We don’t want Parks to set the agenda and ask us permission, it needs to be the other way round.”

“We want to write the agendas, we want to come up with the ideas and then set the agenda to ask Parks to do it.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

⁷⁹ As noted in the report on the forum, “meetings held on Country are highly valued. Traditional owners value support provided by CLC and Parks to get to meetings.” AGMP (2022) Report on the CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum, p.13.

Improvements can also be made within each Joint Management Committee to make sure meetings take better account of Aboriginal governance and decision-making processes. This includes consideration of committee membership (ensuring the ‘right’ people are present, and consideration of representation of family groups, men and women, young and old), and providing space to address men’s and women’s issues separately. Ultimately, traditional owners have expressed that want meetings to be safe space to have meaningful two-way dialogue, where they are genuinely listened to.

“Walk with us, talk slowly.”

Traditional Owner, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

Recommendation 29

That the Northern Territory Government commit to improved governance and administrative practice in relation to Joint Management Committee meetings, including ensuring the involvement of traditional owners in the development of meeting agenda, the timely provision of meeting papers to all committee members, the routine recording of minutes and review of actions, and working within each committee to ensure Aboriginal governance and decision-making processes are adequately respected in the approach to meetings.

CLC notes that when opportunities arise for planning meetings outside the Joint Management Committee meetings, such as the recent Trepina Gorge and Finke Gorge fire meetings, traditional owners find these very valuable. CLC acknowledges the significant effort made by Parks staff to make these meetings happen.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is a key part of good governance. Yet the monitoring and evaluation of joint management plans is not common practice, both at the committee level or at a regional level. CLC has observed that Parks staff at Joint Management Committee meetings are unsure about whose role it is to monitor the progress of the plans, however traditional owners are clear that they want more routine updates and review of progress towards the agreed goals:

“Parks should report back on progress made at each six month meeting, based on ideas from previous Joint Management meeting.”

Traditional Owner, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

In addition to the action within the draft Masterplan to provide greater traditional owner input into joint management plans,⁸⁰ the CLC recommends that the plan commit to involving traditional owners in the ongoing monitoring and review of plans and their progress. This relates to the provision of adequate data and information to joint management partners – discussed further below.

⁸⁰ See action on page 22 draft Masterplan to “Redesign park joint management plans to provide greater traditional owner input into management directions and more clearly define shared goals for the park or reserve.”

At a broader level, a strong framework for the monitoring and evaluation of joint management needs to be put in place, and appropriate resources allocated to this critical function. The CLC notes existing work undertaken in the early 2000s to design a participatory monitoring and evaluation framework for joint management in the NT and suggests that lessons from this project should inform the design of a new framework.

Recommendation 30

The Northern Territory Government work with traditional owners and land councils to develop and implement a participatory monitoring and evaluation framework for joint management and dedicate the appropriate resources to support this critical function.

Recommendation 31

Actions are identified and implemented to strengthen monitoring and accountability for the delivery of joint management plans. This should include:

- d) Ensuring actions within joint management plans are constructed as SMART goals to support monitoring and accountability. While this requires more thought at the planning stage, it is more likely to lead to the delivery of that action.
- e) Making it standard practice to review joint management plans at all Joint Management Committee meetings. This will highlight where positive outcomes have been achieved, and where more work is needed.
- f) Develop a process/framework that allows Joint Management Committee members to see how their park is performing over the lifetime of the plan.

Two-way capacity-building

Recognising the differential resourcing and power between government and traditional owners, a key principle of joint management enshrined in the TPWC Act is to recognise and address the need for institutional support and capacity building of joint management partners.⁸¹

To date, action by the Northern Territory Government to provide the necessary institutional support and capacity-building to support traditional owners to be equal partners has been extremely limited.

At the CLC Joint Management Forum, traditional owners expressed a strong desire for more training and information to support them in their role as joint management partners. This includes training that helps them better understand their roles and responsibilities as joint management committee members. They want this training to be two-way: reflecting the discussion above, traditional owners would like to see Parks staff equipped with a better understanding of Aboriginal approaches to governance and decision-making.

“Committee members need to know their jobs so they can make a good decision. (There is) no training or courses for committee members.”

⁸¹ TPWC Act s24AC(c) (Principles of Joint Management)

“Governance training for new committees with Parks so they know what they are doing. Two-way learning (for how) to make decision.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

Recommendation 32

The final Masterplan commit to funding and delivering two-way governance training and capacity-building for joint management partners. This should include:

- c) Annual two-way governance training for joint management partners (Parks staff and traditional owners) to increase their understanding of and skill in cross-cultural decision-making, running good meetings, and other aspects of good governance. Training for new Joint Management Committees should be a priority.
- d) Work between Parks, traditional owners and Land Councils to develop an induction package for Committee members, to help them understand their role, rights and responsibilities, and an overarching Joint Management Governance Toolkit within 12 months.

Key elements of the toolkit should include setting an agenda, running a good meeting, the role of the Chair, terms of reference and code of conduct for committee members, two-way governance, understanding budgets/money story for the park, conflict resolution, making decisions, and succession planning.

Data sharing

Finally, the provision of information to traditional owners is an important factor in facilitating an equal partnership. Transparency between joint management partners leads to honest discussions and stronger decisions. The CLC notes that traditional owners valued and appreciated being provided with clear and detailed information at the CLC Joint Management Forum in relation to the operation of parks (such as Parks employment data and FEP expenditure data). For many, this was the first time they had seen this information. The presentation of this data meant that traditional owners were able to contribute to the discussions and provide feedback based on what is *actually happening* rather than broad assumptions or feelings.

We draw attention to the Northern Territory Government’s existing commitment under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to *Priority Reform 4: Shared access to data and information at a regional level* and recommend that this be implemented in the context of joint management arrangements.

Recommendation 33

That the Northern Territory Government commit within the next 12 months to working with Land Councils to develop a formal data sharing agreement relating to joint management, in line the *National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data at the Regional Level*.

The agreement should increase transparency regarding:

- 5. Funding available for park operations and management

6. Aboriginal employment, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing numbers and percentage at officer and executive levels, and casual employment under the flexible employment program or equivalent.
7. Park operations, including tourism figures and other agreed operational information and key indicators (such as that used to inform the 2014 Parks Report Cards).
8. Other data as agreed between Land Councils and the Northern Territory Government.

The CLC suggests the agreement should establish:

- a) Provision of accessible disaggregated data at the park level to inform discussions with traditional owners and joint management committee members.
- b) Bi-annual data sharing as per required reporting arrangements for Land Councils.
- c) Arrangements for the use and sharing of provided data.
- d) Appropriate data management storage.

2.2 Resourcing

While traditional owners still hope joint management can deliver on its original expectations, broadly speaking their expectations of Parks are very low, as joint management has consistently underperformed for many years. There is recognition among traditional owners that underfunding is the primary driver of this.⁸²

“It used to work well, when we signed the leases – but now nothing is happening, no money.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Joint Management Forum

The staffing data cited in section 1.4 above confirms the extent of under-resourcing – the impacts of which on the capacity of joint management partners to fulfil their obligations are significant.

As highlighted on page 12, data from DEPWS shows a 35 per cent decline in Central Australian Parks’ staff numbers since 2014. Anecdotally, this decline may be even more significant at individual ranger stations or districts. Chronic underfunding has been further impacted by more joint management parks coming online as joint management plans have been belatedly delivered.⁸³

In the Central, Eastern and Barkly districts – an area that covers approximately 50 per cent of jointly managed parks in the NT – the CLC estimates that ranger numbers have almost halved in the last 10-15 years, while the number of parks under joint management has increased from 8 to 16.⁸⁴ To illustrate the impossibility of effectively delivering on joint management responsibilities under current staffing arrangements and the pressures on Parks staff: for this region, a single T4 ranger manages 16 jointly managed parks, as well as parks that are not jointly managed. In theory, this ranger should sit on 13 Joint Management Committees. These committees alone suggest a time commitment of 15 to

⁸² At the CLC Joint Management Forum, many traditional owners recalled the initial period of joint management that was accompanied by high levels of funding, staffing and subsequently on-park actions and employment.

⁸³ And more late plans are expected to be delivered in the next two years.

⁸⁴ Includes parks currently undergoing planning.

20 weeks annually, including planning and preparation, attendance and follow-up work. Notably, this does not include any other joint management related work, such as working groups, operational meetings in relation to things like burning and permits, or administration associated with the flexible employment program.

Current resourcing is therefore seriously constraining the ability of Parks staff to work in a way that enables the full participation of traditional owners as required under the TPWC Act and park leases.

Not only is under-resourcing impacting the effective operation of joint management in parks where plans are in place, as suggested above, it is contributing to the continued delay in completing joint management plans for a number of parks. CLC notes that the TPWC Act requires that a joint management plan be developed for a park “as soon as practicable” after a joint management park or reserve has been declared.⁸⁵ The reduction in planning staff numbers across Central Australia (by approximately 66 per cent) is contributing to this delay, with Parks often forced to choose between reviewing plans of higher profile parks and choosing to commence joint management in ‘lower profile’ parks. This is without considering other essential joint management components such as the development of Cultural Heritage Management Plans (a requirement of park leases).

Traditional owners from parks where joint management has yet to officially commence were invited to and participated in the CLC Joint Management Forum. They were glad to be given the opportunity but expressed significant frustration that Parks has been unable to commit to developing joint management in their park:

“We need to make a JM Plan [Kuyunba]”

“At Kuyunba we got nothing – no power. No meeting with Parks. Pine Gap tells us to go home when we visit.”

“There are no committees for Kuyunba and Dulcies.”

“Tourists are going off track to find artefacts, gem stones, sacred sites. They are also taking photos when they go off-track [Dulcies].”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Joint Management Forum

While progress is being made on these parks, additional resources need to be dedicated to enable the planning for these parks to be completed.

The chronic under-resourcing of joint management must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Unless there is a significant and sustained increase in funding in joint management arrangements, it is difficult to see how the Northern Territory Government can deliver on its obligations under the TPWC Act and park leases.

⁸⁵ s25AD(1) of the TPWC ACT

Recommendation 34

Recognising the impact of underfunding on the capacity of joint management partners to meet their legislative obligations under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976 (TPWCA)*, and the instrumental contribution of effective joint management to supporting the aspirations of traditional owners and long-term health and attraction of the Parks estate, that the Northern Territory deliver a significant and sustained increase in funding in joint management arrangements.

This funding should include:

1. A comprehensive review of joint management operations to date (see recommendation 33).
2. Sufficient staffing levels for both Parks and Wildlife and within the Central Land Council. This should be informed by a review of staffing levels (see Recommendation 35 below), however, at a minimum, CLC suggests that the funding should provide for:
 - i) An increase in senior staffing numbers across the Central, Eastern and Barkly districts, including reinstating T5 and T4 ranger positions.
 - ii) An increase in the number of entry level ranger positions across Central Australia, including roles dedicated for Aboriginal employment, boosting capacity for on-ground management as well as supporting greater opportunities for Aboriginal people, including traditional owners, to enter the Parks workforce.
 - iii) An increase in the number of planning officers Central Australia and the Barkly.
 - iv) Sufficient staffing to equip the Land Councils to meet their obligations in supporting Traditional Owners as joint management partners.
3. Commitments in the Masterplan⁸⁶ to stronger joint management governance arrangements as proposed in recommendation 26.
4. More regular joint management committee meetings and other planning meetings (e.g. fire planning).
5. Commitments in the Masterplan⁸⁷ to providing more time for Traditional Owners to spend time on Country, including i) regular opportunities for Traditional Owners and their families to spend time on Country, supporting cultural obligations to Country and intergenerational knowledge transfer, and ii) on-country camps for Parks and Wildlife staff, Traditional Owners

⁸⁶ *Theme 3: Joint management in Partnership with Traditional Owners, 'What We Will Do':* 'Establish regional governance arrangements to strengthen Traditional Owner decision-making and facilitate direct communication between Traditional Owners and elected government representatives' – noting CLC recommends the final Masterplan includes commitments to more regular Joint management Committee meetings, supported by an increase in staffing and financial resources, as part of the commitment to stronger, more effective governance arrangements.

⁸⁷ *Theme 3: Joint management in Partnership with Traditional Owners, 'What We Will Do':* "Create regular opportunities for Traditional Owners and their families to spend more time on country to support cultural knowledge transference" and "Support annual country camps on all jointly managed parks and reserves to allow Parks and Wildlife staff, Traditional Owners and Land Council staff to spend more time working together on natural and cultural resource management programs." (p.22)

and Land Council Staff to contribute to strong relationships and two-way management of Country. These should be *at least* annual.

Two-way governance training and capacity-building as outlined in recommendation 30.

The CLC emphasises that for Traditional Owners, their park often holds their most significant cultural sites and is a place where they can feel connected to their country, past, present and future. It is not a place that should be impacted by funding cycles and political will, but rather should be sustained with sufficient and secure funding.

2.3 Review

This submission has highlighted multiple examples of the ways in which the Northern Territory Government is not meeting its commitments to joint management. This includes obligations to:

- **Equitable partnership.** An equitable partnership with Traditional Owners.⁸⁸ Of note, leases specify that the Northern Territory Government is obliged to “take all practicable steps to promote Aboriginal involvement in the administration, management and control of the Park.”⁸⁹
- **Institutional support and capacity building.** With respect to the objective of an equitable partnership, recognise and address the need for institutional support and capacity building of joint management partners.⁹⁰
- **Protecting the health of parks.** A core objective of joint management under the TPWCA is the protection of biological diversity, as part of a comprehensive and *restorative* system of parks and reserves.⁹¹
- **Two-way approach.** Recognise, value and incorporate Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision-making processes, and utilise of the combined land management skills and expertise of both joint management.⁹² This includes requirement under lease agreements for all Parks staff to undertake appropriate cross-cultural training.⁹³
- **Jobs and economic opportunity.** Support jobs and economic opportunities for Traditional Owners on Country within the parks. This includes requirements under the TPWCA that Joint Management Plans contain processes for developing relevant training and employment strategies in relation to the park or reserve,⁹⁴ as well extensive agreement under the leases for the Northern Territory

⁸⁸ TPWC ACT s25AB (Objective of Joint Management)

⁸⁹ Clause 6(l) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases. Specific obligations are also enumerated in relation to the involvement of Traditional Owners in recruitment at paragraph 7(b) and (c) (Staffing) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles); involvement in policy and evaluation with respect to their park (paragraph 8(a) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles); and the provision of “all information relating to the operation and management of the Park” (paragraph 8(d) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁹⁰ TPWC ACT s25AC(c) (Principles of Joint Management)

⁹¹ TPWC ACT s25AB(b) (Objective of Joint Management), and further reflected in the requirements for the contents of draft Joint Management Plans at s25AE(a) and (e)

⁹² TPWC ACT s25AC(a)(b) (Principles of Joint Management) and reflected in clause s 6(l) and 6(m) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases

⁹³ See paragraph 7(e) (Staffing) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁹⁴ TPWC ACT s25AE(3)(f)

Government to support training and employment for Traditional Owners.⁹⁵ The promotion of commercial and business opportunities for Traditional Owners is also enumerated in the lease agreements.⁹⁶

- **Community Living Areas.** Recognising that community living areas in or in close proximity to parks and reserves are an integral part of the natural and cultural resource management of parks and reserves.⁹⁷
- **Supporting tradition and culture.** Support the maintenance of Aboriginal people’s tradition and culture,⁹⁸ including **sacred sites and cultural heritage.** Respect and promote the protection of sacred sites and cultural heritage,⁹⁹ including putting in place processes for protecting the intellectual and cultural property rights of Traditional Owners for the protection of sacred sites and for the protection and preservation of places and items of cultural significance.¹⁰⁰
- **Education.** Embrace the opportunity to provide through parks to grow the community’s knowledge, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal people, their knowledge and culture,¹⁰¹ and joint work on education and educational activities within the park.¹⁰²

For full excerpts of these obligations see **Appendix D.**

The disappointment at the extent to which joint management is falling short of its objectives was palpable and expressed strongly by Traditional Owners at the Joint Management Forum:

“They are always breaking promises. How come they are not following the promises in the lease? Nothing is being achieved.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Joint Management Forum

There has been no formal review of joint management since its inception. Given this, and the identified shortcomings in the operation of joint management to date, the CLC considers it timely and appropriate that a comprehensive review of joint management be undertaken. The CLC considers that this review should encompass:

- i) A review of the operation of joint management against the objectives and principles of joint management as described in the TPWC Act (s25AB and s25AC), with a particular focus on the degree to which existing operations have supported equity in the partnership, institutional

⁹⁵ See clause 6(m) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) and clause 5 (Training and Employment) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁹⁶ Clause 6(n) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) and paragraph 6(b) (Commercial and Business Opportunities) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

⁹⁷ TPWC ACT s25AC(d) (Principles of Joint Management), reiterated in requirements for draft plans at s25AE(3)(g)

⁹⁸ Clause 6(k) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases and included in TPWC ACT s25AE(j) with respect to requirements for Joint Management Plans to include processes for providing for hunting and the use of other sources in the park by Traditional Owners. This is also broadly reflected in the obligation at clause 6(i) of the leases for the Territory to “promote and protect the interests of relevant Aboriginals as a group.”

⁹⁹ Referred to in the required contents of draft Joint Management Plans at TPWC ACT s25AE(3)(b) and at clause 6(j) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases

¹⁰⁰ Clause 8(b) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

¹⁰¹ Clause 6(p) under Part III – Obligations and Conditions (Territory’s Obligations) of leases

¹⁰² Clause 8(c) (Other matters) under the Second Schedule (Joint Management Principles)

support and capacity-building for Traditional Owners, and valuing and incorporation of Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision-making processes.

- ii) A review of joint management planning processes and the plans themselves against the requirements detailed in the TPWC Act (Division 4).
- iii) An audit of compliance with joint management plans.
- iv) An audit of the NT Government's compliance with leases and Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) in the context of joint management arrangements.
- v) A review of all planning and operational staffing levels and their adequacy to support the delivery of joint management objectives.
- vi) Specific objectives determined by Traditional Owners representatives, to ensure the review reflects their values and priorities.

The Terms of Reference must have the input of and be agreed to by traditional owners and their land councils. It should be undertaken by an independent expert advisory panel, with traditional owners and their land councils having a majority say in determining the appointments. The findings and recommendations of the review should be made public and the Northern Territory Government should commit to addressing the recommendations of the review within 6 months.

The review should take into consideration existing evaluations of and literature about the operation of joint management to date, as well as the findings and outcomes of the CLC and NLC Joint management Forums held in 2021 and 2021.

Recommendation 35

That the Northern Territory Government commit to, within the next 12 months, undertaking a review of the operation of joint management arrangements to date, with the intent to inform improved operation into the future.

The CLC considers that this review should encompass:

- i) A review of the operation of joint management against the objectives and principles of joint management as described in the TPWC Act (s25AB and s25AC), with a particular focus on the degree to which existing operations have supported equity in the partnership, institutional support and capacity-building for Traditional Owners, and valuing and incorporation of Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision-making processes.
- ii) A review of joint management planning processes and the plans themselves against the requirements detailed in the TPWC Act (Division 4).
- iii) An audit of compliance with joint management plans.
- iv) An audit of the NT Government's compliance with leases and Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) in the context of joint management arrangements.
- v) A review of all planning and operational staffing levels and their adequacy to support the delivery of joint management objectives.

vi) Specific objectives determined by Traditional Owners representatives, to ensure the review reflects their values and priorities.

The Terms of Reference must have the input of and be agreed to by traditional owners and their land councils.

The review be undertaken by an independent expert advisory panel, with traditional owners and their land councils having a majority say in determining the appointments.

The findings and recommendations of the review should be made public and the Northern Territory Government should commit to addressing the recommendations of the review within 6 months.

Undertaking the review should not preclude immediate action on recommendations 27 to 34 above in relation to governance and resourcing.

Conclusion

Most of the issues and solutions put forward in this submission are not new. And while past strategic documents, park leases and joint management plans have committed to many actions and objectives similar to those outlined in the draft Masterplan, they have not contributed to substantive improvements in the operation of joint management.

“We’re sick of talking, talking. We’ve had a lot of good ideas for how to improve joint management but there is so much staff changes – we are tired of having to keep sharing these ideas. We want action.”

Traditional Owners, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

The CLC reiterates the continued goodwill of traditional owners towards joint management, and acknowledges the ongoing hard work of Parks staff in an environment of extremely constrained resourcing. However, under the current arrangements, joint management is not delivering on its objectives.

The CLC hopes that through a recommitment to partnership and the necessary investment from government, this is the beginning of a much stronger future for joint management. We hope that in 30 years we will look back proudly on the changes implemented through this Masterplan as a turning point to live up to all the joint management promises for the future health and wellbeing of people and of country.

“The next chapter, the next generation is important.”

“Hearing stories and looking at these charts, it’s been a long journey, but we’re getting to a new beginning now.”

Traditional Owner, Traditional Owner, CLC Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

Appendix A. Territory obligations under the TPWC Act and Park leases

This appendix provides relevant excerpts from the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* and lease agreements to highlight the Northern Territory Government's existing commitments to joint management.

Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

25AB Objective of Joint Management

The objective of joint management of a joint management park or reserve is to jointly establish an equitable partnership to manage and maintain the park or reserve as a part of a comprehensive and restorative system of parks and reserves in the Territory and for the following purposes:

- (a) benefiting both the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve and the wider community;
- (b) protecting biological diversity;
- (c) serving visitor and community needs for education and enjoyment.

25AC Principles of joint management

The objective is to be achieved by managing the park or reserve in accordance with the following principles:

- (a) recognising, valuing and incorporating Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision-making processes;
- (b) utilising the combined land management skills and expertise of both joint management partners;
- (c) recognising and addressing the need for institutional support and capacity building of the joint management partners;
- (d) recognising that community living areas in or in close proximity to parks and reserves are an integral part of the natural and cultural resource management of parks and reserves;
- (e) involving continuing statutory responsibilities and functions of the Minister with respect to parks and reserves;
- (f) managing parks and reserves may include cooperative management agreements for areas of land outside parks and reserves;
- (g) establishing a process for the consideration of applications for mining and petroleum.

Joint management plans

25AD Preparation of draft plan

- (1) As soon as practicable after a joint management park or reserve has been declared under section 12 or redeclared under section 24, the joint management partners must agree on and together prepare a draft joint management plan for the park or reserve.

25AE Contents of draft plan

- (1) The draft plan for the park or reserve must be consistent with the following:
 - (a) The relevant agreements for the park or reserve
 - (b) The objective stated in 25AB
 - (c) The principles stated in section 25AC
- (2) The draft plan must contain the following:
 - (a) A description of the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve
 - (b) Practicable ways for those owners to work with local conservation officers, including the establishment of executive and other committees where appropriate to ensure the processes referred to in paragraph (c) are adhere to
 - (c) processes for the matters listed in subsection (3).
- (3) The draft plan must contain processes for the following:
 - (a) identifying the natural and cultural values of the park or reserve;
 - (b) managing sites of Aboriginal spiritual or cultural significance in the park or reserve;
 - (c) identifying visitor management issues and developing agreed procedures for dealing with those issues that reflect the interests of the traditional Aboriginal owners and of the other stakeholders in the park or reserve;
 - (d) approving the siting of works and facilities in the park or reserve;
 - (e) identifying management zones in, and management regimes for, the park or reserve;
 - (f) developing relevant training and employment strategies in relation to the park or reserve;
 - (g) establishing community living areas in or in close proximity to the park or reserve as an integral part of the natural and cultural resource management of the park or reserve;
 - (h) dealing with commercial and infrastructure development in the park or reserve, giving preference to the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve;
 - (i) resolving disputes about the management of the park or reserve at the local level and by means that are appropriate to the park or reserve;
 - (j) subject to section 25AJ, providing for hunting and the use of other resources in the park or reserve by the traditional Aboriginal owners in a manner consistent with the effective management of the park or reserve;
 - (k) considering proposals for the conduct of research in or about the park or reserve;
 - (l) considering proposals for the expansion of the park or reserve;
 - (m) dealing with proposals not otherwise dealt with in the draft plan.

Lease agreements

PART III – OBLIGATIONS AND CONDITIONS

Territory's obligations

6. The Territory agrees:

(h) to have regard in the performance of its functions in relation to the Park, to such priorities in allocating financial and other resources as are provided in the Plan of Management or determined from time to time by the Joint Management Partners

(i) to promote and protect the interests of relevant Aboriginals as a group

(j) to respect and to promote the protection of sacred sites, cultural heritage and other areas and things of significance to relevant Aboriginals, and the enforcement of the provisions of the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*

(k) to encourage the maintenance of the Aboriginal tradition of relevant Aboriginals

(l) to take all practicable steps to promote Aboriginal involvement in the administration, management and control of the Park

(m) subject to the Plan of Management, to engage as many relevant Aboriginals as is practicable to provide services in and in relation to the Park, including but not limited to the utilisation of the traditional skills of Aboriginal individuals and groups in the management of the Park;

(n) subject to the Plan of Management, to give preference to the participation of the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park in any commercial activities conducted under the lease

(p) to use its best endeavours to promote among visitors to, employees and commercial operators in the Park a knowledge and understanding of and respect for the traditions, languages, culture, customs and skills of relevant Aboriginals and to arrange for appropriate instruction in connection with such matters to be given, to the extent it is reasonably practicable, by Aboriginals engaged for the purpose;

SECOND SCHEDULE

Joint Management Principles

9. Training and Employment

The Lessee agrees (with the cooperation of the relevant traditional Aboriginal owners):

(a) to implement an Aboriginal training programme the broad objectives of which are agreed with the traditional Aboriginal owners, comprising training in skills relevant to the administration, planning, management and control of parks (“the Aboriginal training programme”).

(b) subject to giving preference to relevant Aboriginals, to use their best endeavours to employ in the Park in positions which are appropriate having regard to qualifications acquired in participation in the Aboriginal training program, all persons who complete a course of the program or, where such positions are not available, to assist in finding comparable employment.

(c) in the Aboriginal training program to offer Ranger training and land management courses up to and including, where appropriate, the levels required for the positions of Senior Ranger or Chief District Ranger or alternatively to provide such training by outside placement.

(d) to employ training officers wherever necessary, and to give due consideration in the employment of such officers to suitably qualified Aboriginal persons having regard to the objective of the parties to maximize Aboriginal employment.

(e) to provide appropriate and reasonable resources (including staff, training facilities and accommodation) for Aboriginal trainees.

(f) in the Aboriginal training programme and in the management of the park to emphasise social and cultural values and land management practices.

(g) to actively seek to achieve that at the earliest practicable opportunity the majority of permanent employment positions in the Park are held by suitably qualified relevant Aboriginals.

(h) to such extent as is practicable, to provide for continuing training in the appropriate skills, including literacy and numeracy, for Aboriginal persons employed in permanent positions in the Park.

(i) to take all practicable steps to make provision for traditional obligations in determining working hours and conditions.

(j) subject to giving preference to relevant Aboriginals, to give preference to Aboriginal people, companies and organisations when issuing leases, licences, contracts, or making available casual or temporary employment subject to any law in force in the Northern Territory.

6. Commercial and business opportunities

(b) The lessee must give preference to the participation of the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve in any commercial activities conducted under the Lease.

7. Staffing

(b) the Lessee agrees to consult with and have regard to the views of the Regional Joint Management Groups, or such agents or representatives of the traditional Aboriginal owners as

may be nominated by the Joint Management Plan concerning the procedures for and the selection and appointment of any permanent staff where the duties and functions of such staff will involve substantial involvement with day to day administration, management or control of the park and in particular shall include a person nominated by the traditional Aboriginal owners on any selection panel appointed in relation to such appointments.

(c) the Lessee agrees that, notwithstanding clause 5, employment of all persons having day to day responsibility in the administration and management of the Park shall be subject to the approval of the traditional Aboriginal owners in accordance with a process set out in the Joint Management Plan.

(e) the Lessee agrees to ensure that from time to time (but no later than six (6) months after commencement of duties of any member of the park staff) each member of the Park staff involved in administration, planning, management and control of the park attends a cross-cultural course the broad objectives of which are agreed by the Joint Management Partners. The Lessee agrees to use its best endeavours to arrange for the cross-cultural course to be carried out, to the extent that it is reasonably practicable, by Aboriginals engaged for that purpose.

8. Other matters

The Joint Management Partners agree that:

(a) the Joint Management Partners shall meet from time to time to formulate written policy in respect of environmental evaluation of proposed developments in the Park. Proposed developments in the Park shall be consistent with any policy formulated under this clause;

(b) the Joint Management Partners will work together to put in place a process for protection for intellectual and cultural property rights of traditional owners for the protection of sacred sites and for the protection and preservation of places and items of cultural significance;

(c) the Joint Management Partners shall formulate a policy for education and educational activities within the Park; and

(d) the Joint Management Partners shall provide each other with access to all information relating to the operation and management of the Park, including research reports sponsored procured or supported by the Territory that are in the possession of the Territory. This clause does not apply to information that would be privileged from production in litigation, would contravene privacy provisions of relevant Territory or Commonwealth laws, would unreasonably invade an individual's privacy, or that is secret or restricted according to Aboriginal tradition.

Appendix B. Objectives of the Central Australian and Barkly Region Joint Management Forum

- **To increase understanding of the role and responsibility of Joint Management Committee members.** Increased agency through increased understanding of member's purpose and authority.
- **To create connections and share information between Joint Management Committees.** Shared learning on what's working, challenges and opportunities across the different sites. Creating connection and cohesion amongst groups.
- **To build relationships and increase understanding between Parks and Joint Management Committees.** Strengthened relationship and understanding of how and why Joint Management seeks to work together.
- **To input directly into the NTG Parks review public consultation process.** To provide a collective voice of the shared issues, concerns, priorities across all committees to be able to feed up to Minister and key decision makers.

Appendix C. Case study: Employment on the Yeperenye trail

Between 2016 and 2021, the traditional owners of the Yeperenye Nature Park led the development of the Yeperenye walking and cycling trail between Emily and Jess Gaps. The project was borne out of a desire by the traditional owners to share their Country by providing more recreation and tourism options in the East MacDonnell ranges.

Traditional owners' partnership with trail-design and construction company Trick Tracks, is an excellent case study in best practice employment models that harness the skills and meet the needs of traditional owners.

Tricky Tracks was initially engaged to design the trail. After seeing their good work, the traditional owner group decided to work with the company to build the trail.

Both Tricky Tracks and traditional owners agreed that employing people from that Country to work on the project was essential. In their project proposal for construction, Tricky Tracks offered to provide one-on-one training to traditional owners, meaning traditional owners' wouldn't need any prior experience to be part of the project.

Tricky Tracks and traditional owners met many times in the lead up to construction to work through the best ways to support traditional owner workers take up this opportunity. During those meetings, with support from CLC, traditional owners and the company worked through solutions to the many worries and foreseeable hurdles to employment. Key elements that made the project a success were:

- **Recruitment.** This turned out to be the easiest part of the process – so many traditional owners wanted to be involved.
- **Accessible employment arrangements.** Tricky Tracks usually employ staff as contractors, requiring them to have their own ABN and insurances. Given most traditional owners workers would not be in a position to meet this criteria, engaging a labour hire company was considered. However the practicalities of getting people 'signed up' exposed that labour hire could create an unnecessary barrier to someone working on a given day if they weren't already known to the labour hire company. Additionally the labour hire company would charge a fee for their services. So, Tricky Tracks decided to change their business structure so they could employ casual workers. In practice this meant that traditional owners could arrive for their first shift and complete the paperwork that morning and be working and getting paid straight away. CLC Employment services and Tangentyere employment services helped with some of this admin, i.e. locating tax file numbers.

In addition, credentials and tickets were not required by Tricky Tracks, including no police checks or working with children checks. Traditional owners were supported to work if they wanted to have a go, the only criteria was that they belonged to the Country.

- **Flexible employment arrangements.** The working group and Tricky Tracks decided it would be best to have a roster system, which did two things: it gave a lot of different people an opportunity to be involved and learn new skills, and it ensured that there was a sufficient pool workers. Over the course of the project 33 traditional owners were trained and worked on the project, this

meant that when people need to drop a shift because of another commitment, there was always someone ready to step in. The flexibility was highly valued by the workers and their families.

- **Cultural Supervisors.** Each day a senior Cultural Supervisor was rostered on in addition to the workers, to oversee the work on Country. The Cultural Supervisors provided cultural knowledge transference to younger traditional owners and confidence to all the workers that they were doing the right thing on the Country. They provided the essential guidance to Tricky Tracks as a company working on the Country. The creation of this role recognised and remunerated the knowledge and expertise of the traditional owners.
- **Clothing and transport.** The traditional owner workers were supported by Tangentyere Employment Services (TES) to get free personal protective gear through job seeker status. TES also helped people get to work each morning by transporting the day's workers and dropping them off at the trail, then picking them up at the end of the day.
- **Meals.** The provision of breakfast and lunch was identified as important. Tricky Tracks decided to provide the daily food needed for workers – which made a huge difference! Working and Cultural Supervisors were given all food and drinks, including tea and coffee breaks any day they were working. People spoke about how valuable this was to the well-being of workers, the site was remote so there was no shop, getting lunches etc. ready in advance would have been a hurdle to many potential workers.
- **Ongoing consultation for engagement and oversight.** During the construction, the project working group met monthly to talk about the trail, and check up on how the relationship between the TOs and Tricky Tracks was going. Everything stayed on track really well due to the regular meetings, it enabled the working group to stay connected to the project and provide invaluable oversight. It also provided an avenue for feedback from/ to the broader community too.

The relationship built between Tricky Tracks and the workers was strong. Tricky Tracks supportive, respectful and flexible approach contributed significantly to the success of the project and the high rate of traditional owner employment.

Appendix D. Case study: *Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) Anangu Employment Pathways Plan 2020-2025*

Case study: *Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) Anangu Employment Pathways Plan 2020-2025*

The CLC worked closely with the Federal Government to develop the *Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park (UKTNP) Anangu Employment Pathways Plan 2020-2025*. Actions within the plan include:

- a) Developing literacy, numeracy and work readiness capacity.
- b) Identified positions or work that utilises Anangu knowledge and skills
- c) Full-time and casual positions within the Australian Public Service
- d) Flexible employment and/or contract work for the provision of park services
- e) Trainee positions;
- f) School-to-work transition programs, such as work experience
- g) On-country work that provides opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer
- h) Mentoring and 'malpa' arrangements in which Anangu and non-Anangu staff exchange knowledge and skills
- i) Governance and leadership, including through the Board and working groups
- j) Commercial tourism associated with the park.