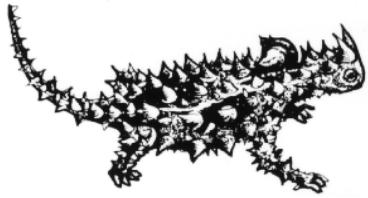


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Planning for a vibrant future: ALEC submission on the Northern Territory Planning Discussion Paper

The Arid Lands Environment Centre is the primary community environmental organisation servicing the people and lands of central Australia. For over 37 years ALEC has advocated for the ecologically sustainable development of the arid lands. The economy of the NT is based on its significant natural assets and this should be acknowledged in future land use planning.

Planning for a Vibrant future is one consultation document within a comprehensive package of reform for the planning system. It is a high-level values document that does not outline specific technical or regulatory changes.

It is worth noting from the outset that it is not clear how the various planning reforms interact or what the view is for progressing the vibrant planning document. Planning for a Vibrant future was light on detail and vague on implementation. To encourage meaningful participation it would be valuable to clarify the purpose of this reform process, specifically how it will relate with guidelines, regulations and process on the ground.

Climate Change

Planning for the future of the NT should incorporate key environmental projections that are likely to shape lifestyles over the coming decades. It is concerning to note that climate change was not mentioned once in the planning document. This represents both a missed opportunity and a threat to balanced and healthy planning.

Current scientific projections suggest there will be profound environmental changes to the NT including increased frequency of extreme temperature events, increasing magnitude of extreme weather events, humidity and drought. Planning should be developed and progressed according to best practice climate change mitigation and adaptation policy. Unless climate adaptation is factored into the vision for the future, there is a significant risk that a changing climate will make the NT less attractive and cause further emigration.

It is absolutely vital that the vision for planning in the Territory acknowledges the reality of climate change and considers the opportunities of using planning as a tool of climate mitigation and adaptation. The NT Government is in the process of developing a climate change framework policy. It would be important for this process to consider the importance of planning to remain mindful of its place in the context of an emerging climate change policy.

Ecologically sustainable development

The Territory will only be able to progress towards a vibrant future if ecologically sustainable development (ESD) is considered at the foundation of planning process and regulation. ESD provides that the needs of future generations should be considered when allocating resources, including the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.

ESD should also provide for public participation in planning. This means meaningful engagement as opposed to tokenistic consultation. People often express being ignored and left out of decision making processes. There is a real sense of political neglect in the red centre where it is perceived that decisions are made in the North, by the North for the North. Decision making processes should be centred in the space they are regulating. This means moving towards more localised decision making structures.