



**NTCOSS Submission to the Northern Territory Government's Climate Change Response:  
Towards 2050**

October 2019

## **NORTHERN TERRITORY COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE INC (NTCOSS)**

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Territory Government's Climate Change Response: Towards 2050.

NTCOSS is a peak body for the social and community service sector in the Northern Territory (NT), and an advocate for social justice on behalf of the people and communities who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage. The community sector in the NT is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations that work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. The community sector plays a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Territorians and in building safe and healthy communities by providing services that enable people to access and participate in health services, education, employment, economic development, and family and community life.

NTCOSS' vision is for a 'fair, inclusive and sustainable NT where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from all aspects of social, cultural and economic life'. NTCOSS' mission is to 'promote an awareness and understanding of social issues through the NT community and to strive towards the development of an equitable and just society'.

## Climate change, poverty and disadvantage

NTCOSS represents and advocates for those community members in the Northern Territory who are affected by poverty and disadvantage. They are the people and groups within our society that are the most vulnerable to effects by external factors and events outside of their control and who also have the least agency to withstand the influences on their life and advocate for better outcomes for themselves. Knowing this, we need to recognise that it is the people who are experiencing the most poverty and disadvantage in the Northern Territory that are also the most affected by climate change and then, in turn, by the subsequent response from Government.

Climate change is already affecting people experiencing poverty and disadvantage and its effects will increase each year. There are a number of impacts from climate change, including an increase in extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, fires and cyclones, increases in extremes of temperature, including hotter mean average temperatures and a higher number of hotter days and a decline in available drinking water all affect people experiencing poverty and disadvantage disproportionately.

People experiencing poverty and disadvantage are more likely to live in areas that are the most affected by climate change and are much less likely to have the resources available to them to mitigate these effects. For example, they may be unable to run air-conditioning, lack the financial resources to move to an area less affected by a form of climate change, be unable to take out insurance or afford to install solar energy to obtain cheaper power.

They are also the most likely to experience personal circumstances such as homelessness, remoteness and poverty that make them the most vulnerable to climate change.

The Northern Territory has the highest rates of people experiencing homelessness in Australia,<sup>1</sup> meaning there is a substantial population of people who have very limited access to shelter and physical security in the case of more frequently occurring extreme weather events and larger variations in temperature.

The Northern Territory also experiences the deepest poverty rates, with nearly 45 per cent of Aboriginal households living below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup> As a result, there are a high number of households who do not have the resources or capacity to take preventative measures against climate change, and who, with proper intervention and targeted support, are not well placed to manage the effects of climate change, or benefit from the move to a renewable economy.

The Northern Territory is also the most sparsely populated jurisdiction in Australia with nearly 40 per cent dispersed over remote and very remote areas, and up to 80 per cent of the Aboriginal population residing in those areas.<sup>3</sup> These remote areas are exposed to the most extreme climate events and

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016 <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0>

<sup>2</sup> Land Rights News – Northern Edition in School of Regulation and Global Governance, 2017, 'Deepening Indigenous poverty in the Northern Territory', Australian National University <http://regnet.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/7002/deepening-indigenous-poverty-northern-territory>

<sup>3</sup> Northern Territory Government, 'Northern Territory Economy,' accessed October 2019 <https://nteconomy.nt.gov.au/population>

fluctuations and due to their remoteness often lack access to resources and supports that may mitigate extreme weather events.

The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of people in rental accommodation at 42 per cent,<sup>4</sup> making it far more difficult for people renting or living in public housing to invest in solar energy on their premises and reduce their energy costs. In addition, people who are renting have less security in maintaining their accommodation status or being able to carry out actions to the premises they live in to mitigate climate effects.

Even within these vulnerable groups and those experiencing poverty and disadvantage are sub-groups of people who are even more likely to be affected and lack agency to respond, including infants and young people and older Australians.

This combination of high homelessness, high rates of poverty, a widely dispersed population and a large proportion of renters, mean that the Northern Territory's population -- and especially those most likely to be experiencing poverty and disadvantage -- is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

As a result, having established that climate change disproportionately affects people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, we must prioritise equity and reducing disadvantage as a priority as we undertake mitigation and transition planning.

## Climate Change, Renewables and Opportunities for Communities

The Climate Change Response: Towards 2050 sets out a vision for a future where renewables play an ever-increasing role in the Northern Territory's energy mix. As solar, wind, battery and other types of renewable energy projects are established, there must be a clear blueprint for how these projects will benefit local communities and benefit individuals who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. We urge the Government to create a clear plan to ensure the benefits and windfalls of the transition to clean energy are shared equally and recommend that this is carried out through legislation to move fair climate change mitigation and renewable energy generation beyond political cycles.

## Our recommendations

To ensure an equitable clean energy future and a fair response to climate change, NTCOSS asks the Northern Territory Government to:

1. Within the next six months, legislate targets of 100 per cent renewables by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050, supported by interim targets and clear action plans, with strong accountability mechanisms to achieve rapid decarbonisation across all industries and sectors.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2018, 'Northern Territory's high proportion of renters stand in the way of hitting renewable energy targets,' accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-23/northern-territory-solar-renewable-energy-renters-roadmap-power/10464656>

2. Immediately lead the way with the reduction in emissions from Government operations, and embedding the consideration of climate change impacts and adaptation needs into government decision-making, including all policy, budget, procurement and capital works decisions.
3. Provide incentives for private, public housing and social landlords to improve energy and water efficiency.
4. Develop initiatives that protect water supply and quality.
5. Invest in retrofitting public housing to reduce energy costs and facilitate access to low cost energy efficient household goods.
6. Ensure access to information, education and workshops to enable households to take control of their energy and water usage, including increasing the ability of tenants to advocate to landlords to report damage that may contribute to higher living costs.
7. Lead the clean energy transition through public investment in renewable energy supply and infrastructure, including supporting a just transition for workers and communities affected by the transition from gas and diesel power generation to clean energy. Implement an equitable clean energy and low-carbon growth strategy to ensure that all Territorians have the opportunity to share in the economic benefits of transition. This includes ensuring jobs and income from new large-scale renewables projects flow to local communities, providing opportunities for community-owned and operated energy projects, and supporting workforce development in ecologically sustainable industries.
8. Support communities to lead their own solutions. This requires listening to communities to understand how they are experiencing climate change, recognising traditional knowledge, ensuring the climate change response is informed by the experience and expertise of local communities, and resourcing locally-driven solutions.
9. Lead adaptation planning, in partnership with communities, to address the unavoidable impacts of climate change that are already affecting our communities, including extreme heat, drought and more extreme weather events like cyclones and bushfires, prioritising planning with remote Aboriginal communities who are experiencing the impacts first and worst.
10. Build the climate resilience of our communities by continuing to address the existing vulnerabilities that exacerbate climate change impacts, including through healthcare, climate resilient housing, access to adequate and potable water, infrastructure, food security and economic opportunities on country.
11. Engage with the community and across all sectors – including across all levels of government, with business and industry, and with the non-government sector – throughout the development and implementation of the Government's response.
12. That the Northern Territory Government prioritise the development of joint economic development opportunities with remote Aboriginal people that focus on renewable energy generation, enabling a move away from extraction of fossil fuels that pose known risks in terms of enhanced production of greenhouse gases.