

Saying 'Yes' to Business



Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce
Supplementary Report – May 2025

Contents

1. About the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce	3
1.1. The Taskforce engaged widely to identify reforms	3
1.2. A focus on small businesses	4
Case Study - Land clearing approvals	5
Case Study - Special events approvals.....	7
1.3. A focus on Northern Territory Government regulation.....	7
2. The Taskforce's Key Findings.....	8
3. Applying a risk-based approach to regulation.....	9
3.1. Reducing compliance requirements.....	10
3.1.1. Proposed reforms.....	11
3.2. Reducing regulatory touchpoints	12
3.2.1. Proposed reforms.....	13
Case study - Road access approvals	14
3.3. Enabling delegation and discretion.....	14
3.3.1. Proposed reforms.....	15
4. Fostering a regulatory culture that promotes business activity and certainty	15
4.1. Increasing regulatory certainty	16
Case Study - Mining approvals	17
4.1.1. Proposed reforms.....	18
4.2. Driving system improvements	19
4.2.1. Proposed reforms.....	20
4.3. Delivering effective regulatory stewardship.....	20
4.3.1. Proposed reforms.....	21
Appendix A: Taskforce Recommendations	22
Theme 1: Applying a risk-based approach to regulation	22
Theme 2: Fostering a regulatory culture that promotes business activity and certainty.....	32
Appendix B: Chamber of Commerce – Industry Engagement Summary.....	43
Appendix C: List of consultations	45

1. About the Approvals Fast Track Taskforce

The Approvals Fast-Track Taskforce (Taskforce) was established by the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, the Hon Lia Finocchiaro MLA, on 27 November 2024.

The Taskforce members were:

- Mark Garraway (Chair), former Property Council of Australia NT President.
- Rebecca Bullen, Owner of Stone House, Charlie's of Darwin, and Darwin Distilling Co.
- Michael Buckley, Director of M+J Builders.
- Andrew Dalglish, Owner of Foxalicious Fruit.
- Stuart Kenny, Managing Director of Territory Instruments.
- Hermanus Louw, Director of Louw Group.
- Dan Richards, CEO of Humpty Doo Barramundi
- Tony Smith, Director of NT Link (until February 2025).

The Taskforce was established to provide expert advice and recommendations to the Northern Territory Government on how it could achieve its commitment to cut timeframes for regulatory approvals by 50% and table legislation in Parliament to remove unnecessary and burdensome regulations.

The Taskforce was asked to consider the barriers caused by:

- **regulatory policy:** to ensure compliance requirements imposed on businesses by legal and policy frameworks are fit for purpose.
- **regulatory practice:** to ensure that effective systems, processes, guidelines, organisational culture and capability are in place to apply regulation in a proportionate way.

The Taskforce had six months to report back to Government. Procurement processes were out of scope of the review.

1.1. The Taskforce engaged widely to identify reforms

Given the nature of this rapid review, the Taskforce focussed on areas of reform that would benefit the greatest number of businesses. It set up the following five subcommittees to focus its investigations:

- **Aquaculture and agriculture** – which examined reforms to approvals for water extraction and land clearing, environmental regulations, regulation of waste management and discharge, and other matters that affect primary producers.
- **Building and planning** – which examined reforms relating to land, planning and building. This included the National Construction Code, the *Building Act 1993* and Building Regulations 1993, the *Planning Act 1999* and Planning Regulations 2000, the NT Planning Scheme, construction and building licensing, management and practices, and other matters relating to construction, property development and property ownership.
- **Regulatory practice** – which considered how to achieve cultural transformation within government departments to improve efficiency, foster collaboration, and increase stakeholder confidence. This included promoting a shift from a purely compliance to a facilitative role, fostering creativity, adaptability and economic growth.

- **Small business** – which examined the unique challenges faced by small businesses, and potential reforms to reduce the regulatory and compliance burden for small businesses.
- **Building on existing analysis and initiatives** – which undertook a thorough review of government and external consultancy reports on reducing red tape from the past three years. The objective of this subcommittee was to identify efficiencies, streamline processes and enhance governance practices based on recommendations that have gone unimplemented.

The Taskforce engaged widely with peak bodies and businesses across industries to discuss their experiences of unnecessary and frustrating regulatory processes that have impeded their ability to get on with their business. The Taskforce also met with senior representatives from the key regulatory agencies to better understand their regulatory footprint and potential areas for reform.

The Taskforce developed four case studies of businesses that have recently gone through an approvals process in the Territory to draw out real world impacts of delays in approvals and of facing regulation that is not fit for purpose. These case studies are presented throughout this report.

Through industry consultation and these cases studies, the Taskforce heard about many regulatory issues faced by business in the Territory. This report provides an initial set of recommendations that the Taskforce was able to consider in the 6-month timeframe, including specific reform proposals relating to the focus areas of each subcommittee. It provides a mix of immediate, medium-term and systemic reforms for Government to implement (Attachment A provides these reforms in detail).

The Taskforce notes there is additional reform that could be undertaken and encourages government to ask agencies to look at additional improvements that could be made.

1.2. A focus on small businesses

In the Northern Territory economy, sole traders, micro-enterprises (1-4 employees) and small businesses (5-19 employees) – collectively termed “small businesses” in this report – make up 96% of all registered businesses.¹ The Taskforce has largely focused on the regulatory barriers faced by small businesses in order to identify changes that would benefit the greatest number of businesses and improve regulatory approval processes across a range of industries.

Northern Territory small businesses are primarily in services industries, which includes a wide range of sectors (box 1.1). The Taskforce has reviewed and recommended reforms relating to the property, building and construction industries; hospitality, retail, food and beverage services; and transport and motor vehicle services. These sectors cover roughly 9000 small businesses. Reforms were also considered for the approximately 650 small businesses in the agriculture and aquaculture sectors across the Territory.

Small businesses face several issues that are unique to them. Regulatory burden has a greater impact on small businesses compared to larger businesses, due to the following issues:

- **Compliance costs** – Small businesses face higher compliance cost burdens than larger businesses as an overall percentage of their gross revenue. This is due to lower sales turnover and limited scalability, especially for small businesses that are engaged in the service industry. The time and resources required to manage legal, financial, administrative and regulatory compliance detract from the focus on core business activities.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 8165.0 Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits (June 2024).

- **Human resources and time** – Small businesses are limited in resources, time and personnel. They undertake the regulatory and compliance processes themselves due to those limitations. As a result, it can take a small business longer to go through the regulatory process, as they often require more assistance to understand and complete processes which can lead to increased frustration for all parties.
- **Skills and experience** – Some small businesses are run by people who may be new to operating a business or engaging with regulatory processes. This can create significant obstacles for those businesses to undertake regulatory approval processes and can often lead to challenges due to unnecessarily complex regulatory processes.
- **Commercial feasibility** – A standardised regulatory system stops small businesses from both starting and growing. A multi thousand-dollar government application process, where engaging professionals is the expected norm, is a significant investment hurdle that will negatively impact the commercial feasibility of most small businesses.
- **Staff attraction and retention** - The Territory struggles to attract the skills needed due to the current low rate of population growth. Small businesses face the challenge to compete for talent in a very tight labour market.

Case Study - Land clearing approvals

The Taskforce heard about several businesses that have faced difficulties with land clearing approvals processes. This included a longstanding NT fruit farmer, who sought approval to clear around 60% of newly acquired land in a property next to their established farm. While the business had gone through several land clearing applications in the past, their most recent applications faced considerable delays – one of which took over nine months to resolve.

The business faced several **issues in communicating with the department**. The applicant felt like the department drip fed information about their application instead of facilitating the business through the approvals process. The business owner also felt the department lacked an understanding of the difficulty in navigating through the process for applicants who speak English as a second language.

The business owner found the application process overly **complex and disproportionate** to the activity for which they were seeking approval. While the department offers facilitation supports to applicants, it does not appear this opportunity was utilised in this case. The department strongly urged the applicant to hire a consultant to help complete the application. The business felt this was an unjustified expense given they had significant experience in land clearing, and just wanted clearer direction and instructions about the approvals process.

The **application timeframes** on the surface appear **unreasonably lengthy and unpredictable**, imposing significant challenges and additional stress on businesses to manage seasonal clearing and staffing.

Box 1.1 Reforms were considered across key sectors

Building and construction

Building and construction are critical industries for the Northern Territory economy. These industries are significant local employers, and a key enabler for the development of public, private and industry-specific infrastructure.

This sector includes, but is not limited to:

- 342 housing construction businesses (of which 94% are small businesses)
- 159 non-residential building construction businesses (of which 93% are small businesses)
- 52 road and bridge construction businesses (of which 85% are small businesses)
- 83 heavy and civil engineering construction businesses (of which 92% are small businesses).

Hospitality

The hospitality industry plays an important role in creating an enjoyable lifestyle for Territorians.

The hospitality sector includes, but is not limited to:

- 243 cafes and restaurants (of which 82% are small businesses)
- 274 takeaway food services (of which 94% are small businesses)
- 51 pubs, taverns and bars (of which 54% are small businesses)
- 39 catering services (of which 90% are small businesses)
- 38 clubs providing hospitality (of which 66% are small businesses)

Agriculture and aquaculture

Agriculture and aquaculture are foundational industries in the Northern Territory, utilising a significant portion of the Territory's landmass. These industries provide important employment opportunities in regional and remote areas, through the jobs provided on stations and farms and in fisheries and aquaculture facilities, as well as indirect employment through supply chains and services.

The agriculture and aquaculture sector broadly includes:

- 245 horticulture businesses, including fruit, vegetable and nursery production (of which 96% are small businesses)
- 25 broadacre cropping businesses (of which 100% are small businesses)
- 329 beef cattle farming businesses (of which 94% are small businesses)
- 15 other livestock farming businesses (of which 100% are small businesses)
- 70 aquaculture and fisheries businesses (of which 100% are small businesses).

Case Study - Special events approvals

The Taskforce heard from a Darwin-based hospitality business owner who wanted to hold a special event that would activate business and community activity in one of Darwin city's laneways. Engagement with the NT Government and the City of Darwin on this event began in November 2023. Despite best efforts from the business, the event has not been able to proceed

The business experienced a **lack of clarity** in the regulatory process, with **no clear frameworks or guidelines** to facilitate approvals to hold events, despite specific policies in place to 'revitalise laneways and walkways' in the Darwin CBD. Adding to the confusion were the interactions and different processes under both the NT Government and City of Darwin.

Without assistance to facilitate the activation of city spaces, the applicant faced a **complex set of application processes** with up to 14 different application documents, creating a significant administrative burden.

Outdated systems and processes further added to cost and timeframes. For example, online systems could not be saved mid-process and there were advertising requirements that still required the use of print media.

Finally, the **costs associated** with parts of the application process caused significant challenges in holding the event. The applicant was required to undertake a traffic management plan, which was estimated to cost around \$2500. There was no provision available to consider a risk-based approach to managing this requirement, including the fact that bollards were permanently in place. This cost is a significant financial barrier for small or medium sized events (with less than 1500 attendees).

1.3. A focus on Northern Territory Government regulation

The Taskforce has focused on regulation and approvals processes that are overseen by NT Government agencies. It was clear from stakeholder feedback that many of these processes can be complicated by the interaction between the Territory, Federal and Local Governments in approving activity – particularly around lands, planning and environmental regulation. There are strong concerns from certain industries of heavy-handed interventions from Federal Government agencies that increase costs and delays to the process.

While it is important that the different levels of governments work together to streamline their regulatory frameworks where possible, the Taskforce has not spent time investigating improvements to Federal and Local Government regulatory frameworks.

2. The Taskforce's Key Findings

The NT has the second highest proportion of public sector employment compared to total employment, behind only the Australian Capital Territory.² Public sector employment has grown faster than Gross Territory Product (GTP) growth over the past five years. Despite this, we do not experience more effective and timely approvals processes.

Industry and businesses consistently raised issues with the Taskforce about their experience in dealing with NT Government regulations and approval processes. These included:

- **Communication issues** – Business and industry face frequent communication issues from government, including inconsistent information, 'drip-feeding' of advice and unclear expectations.
- **Overly complex processes** – Regulatory processes are overly complex and challenging, often requiring professional consultants to navigate. Adding to this issue is the lack of clarity and guidance from departments on how to navigate these processes.
- **Uncertain and lengthy timeframes** – Timeframes in approval processes are highly variable, lengthy and unpredictable, causing project delays and real-world financial impacts.
- **Over regulation of low risk** – Low-risk projects or developments are regulated at the same level as those with higher risk profiles, resulting in over regulation without any clear community benefit.
- **The risk-averse culture of government departments** – Government officials seem to have few incentives to manage risks and work with businesses to overcome regulatory hurdles. The public sector needs to start saying 'yes' and enabling projects and developments to grow the economy.
- **Outdated systems and processes** – Many government systems and processes, particularly those that business and industry interface with, are not contemporary or user-friendly. This can add time and delays to the application process.

Based on these issues, two main themes emerged that cut across a wide range of reform recommendations: applying a risk-based approach to regulation rather than a one-size fits all approach; and fostering a regulatory culture that promotes business activity and certainty.

These two themes create a clear framework for reducing approval timeframes by addressing the formal system of legislation, regulation and policy, and the way in which regulators apply it.

TASKFORCE'S FRAMEWORK TO REDUCE APPROVAL TIMEFRAMES	
1. Applying a risk-based approach to regulation	2. Fostering a regulatory culture that promotes business activity and certainty
A risk-based approach ensures that compliance is fit-for-purpose, and that risks to the community are managed in an efficient and effective manner.	A risk-based approach alone will not drive change. Improving culture across the public sector is a critical enabler for reducing approval times.
To achieve this, priority focuses are:	To achieve this, priority focuses are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing compliance requirements - Reducing touchpoints with regulatory processes - Enabling delegation and discretion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing regulatory certainty - Driving system improvements - Delivering effective regulatory stewardship
These two ideas create a framework to reduce approval timeframes by addressing both red tape (legislation, regulation) and beige tape (culture, process).	

2. Darwin Major Business Group, Over the Horizon Opportunities Report (March 2025).

This report provides an initial set of reforms that the Taskforce was able to consider in the 6-month timeframe. It provides a mix of immediate, medium-term and systemic reforms for Government to implement.

Priority	Time frame
Immediate priorities	Implement over the next 12 months
Medium term	Implement over the next three years
Systematic change	Longer-term whole-of-government reforms are required

3. Applying a risk-based approach to regulation

A risk-based approach to regulation targets regulatory resources towards higher-risk activities, where non-compliance would create a greater risk for the community.

A risk-based regulatory system involves the following linked concepts:

1. Assessing risks to the community, i.e. risks to health, safety, the environment, and financial wellbeing;
2. Assessing the existing regulatory burden on private sector businesses and the impact this has on the economy; and
3. Developing a decision-making framework and procedures to prioritise regulatory activities that allow for the efficient use of resources based upon risk.

Targeting regulation and resources towards higher-risk activities reduces the regulatory burden for businesses which undertake low-risk activities. This approach creates a balance between protecting the community from potential hazards, promoting efficient government services and use of resources, and reducing costs for businesses.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states that a risk-based approach to regulation means that when a government takes regulatory action, it “should be proportionate, targeted and based on an assessment of the nature and magnitude of the risks and of the likelihood that regulation will be successful in reducing the risks”.³

Poorly designed regulation that has no clear benefit in managing risks to the community can stifle growth and innovation by making it too difficult and costly for businesses to start up and operate.

The benefits of a risk-based regulatory system are that it:

- Facilitates effective use of limited public sector resources to better manage risks to the community
- Improves alignment of strategic and operational objectives between departments and the NT Government

3. [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Risk and Regulatory Policy: Improving the Governance of Risk \(2010\) 16.](#)

- Improves risk awareness and understanding by government agencies and internal accountability for outcomes
- Speeds up economic development and economic growth by reducing the 'cost of doing business' in the Territory and improving business confidence and investment certainty.

While there are promising examples of Australian jurisdictions moving towards risk-based regulatory systems, its use in the Northern Territory appears more limited. NT Government departments appear to use risk-based assessments primarily to determine fee levels rather than to assess how regulatory approval processes should apply to different activities. This is true, for example, in food and liquor licensing.

The Taskforce encourages the NT Government to apply a risk-based regulatory approach more broadly so that compliance requirements are fit-for-purpose, and that risks to the community are managed in an efficient and effective manner.

3.1. Reducing compliance requirements

Regulatory approvals processes can require businesses to undertake multiple complex, costly and time-consuming activities before they can get on with their business activity. Overly complex compliance requirements can force some businesses to engage external consultants and prepare large numbers of documents to support their applications.

Businesses also face ongoing compliance costs to monitor risk factors or indicators linked with their approvals. This can require preparing detailed reports, which in some instances do not get effectively used by the regulator to make decisions.

Without a risk-based approach, the costs of compliance are borne consistently across all businesses, regardless of the risks they impose. This means that the same process applies to businesses seeking to undertake low-risk activities, like a small residential build, to those seeking to undertake high-risk activities, like developing a 20-storey office building. While some requirements may differ across these applications, businesses can face the same documentation requirements that are more relevant to the high-risk activity, which often entails engaging professional consultants and results in high costs.

The first step in applying a risk-based regulatory approach is to remove compliance requirements for low-risk activities that would raise minimal community concerns due to the nature or scale of risk posed. This will have the greatest impact in reducing the complexity and cost of regulatory approvals processes for businesses. It will ensure that regulatory frameworks are fit for purpose and do not unnecessarily add costs on businesses.

Reducing compliance requirements for low-risk activities will speed up regulatory approvals across the board, focusing effort on high-risk compliance. It strikes a balance between community expectation that significant risks are managed and ensuring the timely approval of activity that will bring community benefits in the form of jobs and economic growth.

3.1.1. Proposed reforms

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government focus on these immediate priorities for reform:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Immediate priorities (within 12 months)	
1. Adjust regulatory triggers so that low-risk construction projects are not captured by high compliance costs.	1A. Amend the trigger point for Work Health Safety Management Plans (WHSMP) to \$800,000. 1B. Increase the Fidelity Fund Certificate minimum construction cost trigger to ensure the Fund covers appropriate works. 1C. Amend Working at Height limits to remove unnecessary regulatory burden on local builders.
2. Simplify regulatory processes that apply to low-risk activities.	2A. Develop a truncated and simplified process for rezoning land that is identified for densification under an area plan. 2B. Establish a risk-based framework for liquor licensing and exempt low-risk activities from public interest and community impact tests. 2C. Develop a risk-based approach to categorise low-risk traffic and road activities, including clear guidelines on what qualifies as low risk. 2D. Develop a risk-based approach to waste discharge activities in NT waterways. 2E. Review the application of Merit Assessable Uses across all zoning categories to convert low risk developments to Permitted Use. 2F. Develop a pre-approved list of Place Names to streamline process for industry. 2G. Remove “in person” training requirement for construction workers as part of the White Card process. 2H. Simplify the water licensing regime into 2 tiers and improve the guidance and application processes. 2I. Development of a published Chemical Risk Register.
3. Remove unnecessary public notification and consultation for low-risk activities.	3A. Streamline planning approvals by declaring classes of assets that no longer require public consultation. 3B. Review risk criteria and standard conditions applying to exploration activities and extractive operations to streamline approval processes for an increased number of projects. 3C. Establish a risk-based framework for planning approvals and exempt low-risk development from requirements regarding public notification requirements. 3D. Establish a risk-based framework for liquor licence authorities and exempt low-risk authorities from public notification requirements.

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government consider the following reform over the next three years:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Medium term (within next three years)	
4. Expand the application of risk-based regulatory policies.	4A. Work with industry to identify opportunities to take a risk-based approach to mining regulation. 4B. Prioritise the implementation of a new Minerals Titles Legislative and Regulatory Regime. 4C. Expand the application of risk-based regulatory policies to all approval processes within the next three years.

3.2. Reducing regulatory touchpoints

Regulatory approvals processes can require businesses to have multiple interactions with government for each activity they undertake. A key concern raised by industry stakeholders is that there are often unnecessary touchpoints with government, with little or no obvious benefits to the community in terms of managing risk.

While regulation can help manage risks, the Taskforce found many examples of regulatory requirements that require frequent (and unnecessary) renewal, that duplicate processes that are already in place, or that are otherwise unnecessary to manage risks. Each interaction with government can be time that a business owner could otherwise spend growing their business. These drain the time and resources of businesses and government and make it harder and more costly to do business in the Territory.

For example, many licence renewal periods could be extended to reduce touchpoints with government, without increasing the risks posed to the community. Frequent touchpoints can have considerable costs on remote and regional Territory businesses, particularly where in-person services or appointments are required – or where online processes are not possible. In extending licence renewals, government agencies could consider bolstering self-reporting requirements and monitoring to focus on capturing those failing to comply with their responsibility rather than imposing costs on the rest.

Applying a risk-based regulatory policy and removing unnecessary regulatory touchpoints will reduce friction points for businesses, speed up regulatory approvals processes, and support the government to prioritise its resources on higher-risk activities. This approach will remove and streamline touchpoints with Government that have little or no community benefit.

3.2.1. Proposed reforms

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government focus on these immediate priorities for reform:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Immediate priorities (within 12 months)	
<p>5. Extend licence renewal periods to reduce unnecessary touchpoints with government.</p>	<p>5A. That NT Government should, as part of implementing the National Firearms Register, work with industry to identify options to allow renewal of commercial (Corporate and Employee) Firearm Licences.</p> <p>5B. Expand the builders' licence renewal periods to 4 years and consider how to streamline and coordinate all building contractor licences into one process with the same validity periods.</p> <p>5C. Extend renewal periods for responsible service certificates from 3 to 5 years.</p> <p>5D. Extend the applicable renewal period for all commercial vehicle licences from 12 months to up to 36 months.</p> <p>5E. Extend the food business registration renewal period to 36 months.</p>
<p>6. Exempt low-risk planning and subdivision activities from disproportionate regulatory processes.</p>	<p>6A. Amending the Planning Regulations to exempt certain Crown Land transactions from requiring subdivision.</p> <p>6B. Establish a risk-based framework for planning approvals and exempt low-risk development requirements from development applications.</p> <p>6C. Exempt existing vacant low-risk commercial/industrial buildings/ areas from non-safety related requirements under the National Construction Code when changing building classification or undertaking renovation works.</p> <p>6D. Undertake a review of the <i>Electrical Safety Act 2024</i> to identify new low-risk electrical works that could be made exempt from needing a Certificate of Compliance (CoC).</p> <p>6E. Amend the Land Clearing Overlays in the NT Planning Scheme to exempt controls or approvals for low-risk activities.</p> <p>6F. Exempt the take of marine and estuary water under a water extraction licence to reflect low-risk profile of activity.</p>
<p>7. Remove regulatory barriers that are forcing businesses to seek new or additional approvals rather than being able to vary their existing approval.</p>	<p>7A. Exempt low-risk buildings from requirements to submit a new planning application for minor changes to the building.</p>

Case study - Road access approvals

The Taskforce heard from a number of businesses that experienced delays in obtaining road access approvals for their projects.

A key issue raised by businesses was that they experienced a lack of **regulatory certainty and consistency** through the approvals process. Proponents felt that requirements and information are not clearly set out at the beginning of the process, which creates a lot of back and forth in communication with departmental officials. The Taskforce heard that information can be 'drip fed' to the applicant, which adds costs and time in revising and re-submitting plans to address new issues raised.

In one case, the Department requested an independent road safety audit be undertaken. The applicant paid thousands of dollars for this audit and complied with its recommendations to address the safety issues raised by the department. Even so, this was not sufficient to gain approval and the proponent was presented with new technical issues to action.

Beyond the direct financial costs felt by proponents, delays can seriously threaten the **viability of a project**. There are financing costs involved in keeping idle capital and labour. Timing is also critical for securing construction workers in a highly competitive market.

3.3. Enabling delegation and discretion

Delegation can increase the number of decision makers within an organisation and reduce bottlenecks in approvals processes. Within government, most approval legislation provides for ministerial delegation of key powers to a department's Chief Executive Officer or to an independent statutory body that fulfills the same function.

By enabling a minister to delegate their powers to a broader range of officers and regulatory decision-makers, delegation can improve government decision-making efficiency and limit potential politicisation of decisions. Delegation is particularly useful in speeding up approval processes for low-risk decisions that do not need to be unnecessarily escalated.

Discretion provides decision makers flexibility to apply judgement in making decisions by considering all the relevant information. Discretion enables regulatory decision makers to focus on achieving outcomes, rather than making decisions based on a pre-determined set of compliance requirements prescribed by policy or legislation. It is a mechanism that provides for greater flexibility in decision making.

While delegation and discretion are important tools in simplifying processes, the Taskforce acknowledges that these do not address the underlying issues in regulation. Delegation can create internal protocols and processes that may lead to inefficiencies and these mechanisms rely on adequate resourcing and capability to be effective. Discretion can also encourage the use of consultants to seek regulatory exemptions, which may lead to higher costs for smaller projects. Inconsistent use of discretion in regulatory decisions can lead to non-uniform outcomes and accusations of bias.

These tools will be effective when implemented alongside Taskforce reforms targeting regulatory culture.

3.3.1. Proposed reforms

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government focus on these immediate priorities for reform:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Immediate priorities (within 12 months)	
8. Increase the use of delegation and discretion for low-risk decisions.	8A. Delegate decisions regarding material alterations to licensed premises, under the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i> . 8B. Determine land clearing applications in select zones (e.g. Agriculture, Horticulture, Rural) within DLPE rather than the Development Consent Authority (DCA).

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government consider the following reform over the next three years:

Recommendation
Medium term (within next three years)
9. Introduce delegation powers in legislation to enable decisions on approvals to be delegated by Ministers and/or CEOs, where appropriate, to public sector employees.

4. Fostering a regulatory culture that promotes business activity and certainty

Implementing a risk-based approach alone will not drive the change necessary to reduce approval times. Changing culture across the public sector is a critical enabler for reducing approval times. The Taskforce heard from many industry stakeholders that often it is not the regulation that creates uncertainty, but the way it is applied by regulators.

Facilitative regulatory practice is about effective regulatory stewardship and oversight to increase regulatory certainty and drive system improvements across government. Public sector employees should consider the benefits of regulation beyond just minimising risk but also to allow business and economic activity for the benefit of the community.

Regulatory practice should support industry and businesses to be established and grow, while managing the risks they present. This will enable the private sector to deliver benefits to the Territory through more private investment, more economic activity, better services and job creation.

The Taskforce has heard consistent and strong feedback from across all industries that the regulatory culture of key regulators within the NT Government is overly focused on compliance issues, rather than problem solving to allow business activity. Regulators can appear unsupportive of industry and create further barriers for business to gain approvals.

The Business Council of Australia's (BCA) *Regulation Rumble*⁴ report compares and ranks the regulatory systems of Australian jurisdictions. The report analyses jurisdictions' respective planning systems and found that the NT's planning system is restricted by regulatory practice challenges. The Territory ranked fifth in the *certainty* domain and last in the *transparency* domain.

4. Business Council of Australia (BCA), Regulation Rumble 2024, <[Regulation_Rumble_2024.pdf](#)>

Driving improvements in regulatory culture can have significant benefits in promoting business activity and certainty, by:

- reducing barriers for businesses created by obstructive regulatory practice.
- streamlining compliance requirements through clear, transparent decision-making.
- reducing delays caused by poor communication practices.
- improving business confidence and investment certainty by speeding up opportunities for economic development and economic growth.
- streamlining existing regulatory processes.
- supporting industry and proponents to address risks and progress approvals in a timely manner.
- providing clear and simple guidance material for proponents and applicants.
- ensuring that regulatory bodies (including statutory authorities) are fit for purpose, with the right skills and experience to make informed and timely decisions.

4.1. Increasing regulatory certainty

Regulatory certainty refers to businesses feeling secure about the processes they need to undertake to obtain regulatory approvals, meaning that processes are clear and well understood and based on defined criteria and considerations.

Regulatory certainty is essential for business confidence. For a business owner, regulatory processes that are simple to complete and have a clear set of approval criteria, mean they can reasonably estimate and weigh up the resources they need to apply against the likelihood and benefit of an approval.

The Taskforce heard consistently from industry stakeholders that regulatory certainty is a challenge in the Territory. Proponents report that too often it is unclear what is required from them, how long processes will take, and how decisions are reached by regulators.

This lack of certainty has resulted in a challenging businesses environment that has seen private investment outpaced by public investment in the Territory in recent years⁵. The Taskforce heard from multiple key industries that 'beige tape', referring to delays created by Government's regulatory culture, is restricting private investment.

Government needs to act immediately to address this challenge and increase certainty across the NT's regulatory landscape. The reforms outlined below aim to provide proponents with clear guidance when entering approval processes and increase transparency around how and why decisions are made.

5. Department of Treasury and Finance 2024, Economic Growth, <[Economic growth - Northern Territory Economy](#)>.

Case Study - Mining approvals

The Taskforce heard from mining businesses and industry peak bodies about common challenges faced in the mining approvals process.

One operator highlighted their experience in facing **uncertain and lengthy approvals timeframes** that created critical delays for their mining project. The statutory timeframes for the Environmental Impact Statement approval were not met and extended the process by several months. The proponent reported nearly one-year assessment timeframes for mining approvals, which created project uncertainty and impacted the proponent's efforts to attract project investment.

Communication issues also created confusion and project delays. The operator reported to have submitted documents in April 2024 and by March 2025 had only received feedback on half. There appeared to be no clear and agreed understanding between the proponent and the department on what feedback would be provided at different stages in the approval process.

A lack of risk-based assessment in the environmental approvals process led to unnecessary burdens on the project. Standard compliance conditions were applied to the project regardless of the project's specific risk profile. The standard conditions included waste management requirements that are not relevant or applicable to this project. The limited flexibility to consider the project's level of risk when applying conditions added additional compliance burden for the proponent, with limited benefit in terms of risk mitigation and management for the community.

The department have acknowledged that proponents have experienced issues during the transitioning of regulatory arrangements over from another department. They are confident that many of the issues raised in this case study would have been lessened under the new regulatory regime that is risk-based, and outcomes focused. The department is working to develop better engagement with industry to work through regulatory roadblocks.

4.1.1. Proposed reforms

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government focus on these immediate priorities for reform:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Immediate priorities (within 12 months)	
<p>10. Increase confidence and certainty in regulatory approvals through improved guidance on requirements and decision-making frameworks.</p>	<p>10A. Complete the implementation of Harvest Strategies for all NT fisheries and identify ways to improve industry confidence in the decision-making of fisheries management.</p> <p>10B. Update the Development Guidelines for Government Controlled Roads and Performance Design Standards for NT Roads (and related policies) to provide greater certainty and transparency on how road access decisions are made, including transparency on how KPIs for road approvals are determined and monitored.</p> <p>10C. Develop standardised traffic management plans for public events in identified activated spaces.</p> <p>10D. Simplify the process for the transfer of water extraction licences.</p> <p>10E. Introduce application-specific assessment criteria for water extraction licence decisions, to consider whether the applicant intends to clear land and the timeframe for undertaking water extraction.</p> <p>10F. Introduce a new Environmental Code of Practice and supporting processes to reduce approval timeframes for onshore gas.</p> <p>10G. Amend the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016 to remove duplication, improve clarity and enable administrative efficiencies.</p> <p>10H. Review which approvals are subject to third party review and who has the right of third party review in liquor licensing for low-risk authorities.</p> <p>10I. Introduce disqualifying offences in liquor licensing regulations to increase certainty in determining whether applicants are fit and proper.</p>
<p>11. Allow more flexibility in how regulations are applied, which focus on businesses complying with regulatory outcomes rather than specific activities.</p>	<p>11A. Amend the minimum extraction requirement under the Recovery of Unused Water Entitlement Policy from 90% to between 50-75%.</p> <p>11B. Review existing restrictions on lots that are currently restricted to single dwelling development.</p> <p>11C. Undertake a review of minimum lot sizes to ensure Design Codes support the delivery of housing supply.</p> <p>11D. Allow staged approvals for Land Clearing applications on unzoned land under the <i>Planning Act 1999</i>.</p> <p>11E. Establish mining security thresholds aligned to disturbance footprint and works.</p> <p>11F. Review the matters considered when calculating the 10Ha disturbance threshold for low risk exploration activities.</p>

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government consider the following reform over the next three years:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Medium term (within next three years)	
12.	Amend regulations to require all agencies to publish flowcharts of their regulatory decision-making processes and introduce standardised reasons for decisions.
13.	Introduce an optional licence model for demolition service providers to increase certainty for providers and defence contractors.
14.	Complete work to develop a strategic plan for the extraction of construction materials to increase efficiency.
15.	Safeguard small businesses from the impacts of new regulatory changes over the next three years.

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government coordinates a response to achieve the following reform across government agencies:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Systematic change (longer-term whole of government reform)	
16. Strengthen accountability around approval timeframes.	16A. Introduce mandatory approval timeframes across approvals, including for local governments and statutory authorities. 16B. Introduce mechanisms to motivate compliance with approval timeframes, including a requirement to publish agency performance metrics.

4.2. Driving system improvements

The Taskforce has heard from stakeholders that too often approvals are being held up by outdated public sector systems. Systems can often be fragmented, not fit for purpose or lacking the digital sophistication to assist businesses and applicants.

The Taskforce heard from industry stakeholders and government departments that current systems do not support reducing approval timeframes. While some applications are moving to the Territory Services platform, this process needs ramping up. System improvements should firmly be in the realm of business as usual for government, but given the number of issues raised during consultation, the Taskforce has highlighted this a priority reform area.

The Taskforce understands that the upfront costs of investing in systems can be a barrier to improvements being implemented. But Government and agencies need to prioritise resources and funding to improve systems that will support reducing approval timeframes and stimulate business activity.

In the private sector, and especially in relation to small business, time is a crucial resource. Driving system improvements that simplify business interactions with government systems, whether that be procurement, an application or merely a request for information, will reduce burden on business and support local small businesses.

In the short-term, Government should focus on reducing fragmentation and streamlining processes that cut across departments. Other priorities include developing one-stop digital platforms for approvals, enhancing data collection and systems that interface with businesses, and developing a standardised system for data-collection and monitoring of approval timeframes across government.

4.2.1. Proposed reforms

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government focus on these immediate priorities for reform:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Immediate priorities (within 12 months)	
17. Ramp up implementation and use of digital systems across government to streamline interactions for businesses.	17A. Integrate electronic payment of invoices to the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure through NTGPay to reduce payment processing time and enhance contractor experience. 17B. Develop a transport permit system to reduce timeframes for regulatory approvals and enhance user experience.

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government coordinates a response to achieve the following reform across government agencies:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Systematic change (longer-term whole of government reform)	
17 (continued).	17C. Develop a standardised system for data collection, monitoring and reporting on approval timeframes. 17D. Complete the digitisation of all remaining online small business applications forms and renewals.

4.3. Delivering effective regulatory stewardship

The public sector plays an important role in stewardship and oversight of regulatory processes. It is the public sector who have visibility of how the regulatory system is functioning. Effective stewardship includes monitoring, reviewing and reforming processes to facilitate proactive regulatory processes.

Despite the public sector’s role as steward of the system, it is not the public sector that bears the costs when the system is not supporting timely approvals. It is private businesses who bear both the financial and opportunity costs of delayed approvals, and the community do not see the benefits of economic activity materialise.

It is critical that the public sector takes an active role in delivering effective regulatory stewardship through ongoing engagement with industry. Individual regulatory approvals can appear fit for purpose when viewed independently, however the cumulative impacts of regulatory burden placed on a business or activity across all interdependent processes should be considered.

The Taskforce has heard from industry that there are some clear issues that could be addressed in a straightforward manner by government in the short-term. This includes implementing outstanding reforms developed through collaboration with industry such as the ‘Bringing Land to Market’ report and ensuring regulatory oversight bodies have the right membership and skills.

Key reform areas include reviewing existing regulation and legislation to identify more red tape reduction reforms, addressing regulatory blockers and developing a whole-of-government facilitative approach to engaging with industry and businesses.

4.3.1. Proposed reforms

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government focus on these immediate priorities for reform:

Recommendation
Immediate priorities (within 12 months)
18. Finalise implementation of the remaining recommendations from the Bringing Land to Market report within 12 months
19. Ensure decision-making bodies are fit for purpose, by amending legislation for board appointments to require, where practicable, representation of members with practical NT-based industry experience and technical expertise.
20. Establish Water Management Advisory Bodies to provide advice to the Water Controller.

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government consider the following reform over the next three years:

Recommendation
Medium term (within next three years)
21. Conduct a major review of the <i>Local Government Act 2019</i> to identify further reform opportunities to reduce timeframes for local government approvals.

The Taskforce recommends the NT Government coordinate a response to achieve the following reforms across government agencies:

Recommendation	Specific reform proposals
Systematic change (longer-term whole of government reform)	
22. Create a whole-of-government facilitative approach to approvals by strengthening accountability mechanisms around regulatory approvals, and improving the capacity and capability of regulatory officers.	22A. Introduce dedicated “fast-track” planning assessment processes to reduce approval times for low-risk applications. 22B. Mandate outcome-focused KPIs for all agencies, focused on facilitation, not just compliance. 22C. Establish a permanent industry regulatory advisory body, under the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations, to monitor and drive reform. 22D. Conduct regular independent audits of agency approval practices to ensure alignment with legislation. 22E. Amend the Administrative Arrangement Orders to re-establish the small business portfolio with a focus on regulatory reform and advocacy. 22F. Require NT Government Chief Executive Officers to identify and report quarterly on critical skills and capacity gaps across their regulatory functions to ensure capability and capacity is available to support timely regulatory approvals. 22G. Develop and mandate risk management training for technical officers to support balanced, evidence-based risk decisions. Compliance on this should be reported through agency annual reports.

Appendix A: Taskforce Recommendations

Timing Key

No.	Priority	Time frame
1	Immediate priorities	Implement over the next 12 months
2	Medium term	Implement over the next three years
3	Systematic change	Longer-term whole-of-government reforms are required

Theme 1: Applying a risk-based approach to regulation

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
Reducing compliance requirements					
1	Adjust regulatory triggers so that low-risk construction projects are not captured by high compliance costs.	1A. Amend the trigger point for Work Health Safety Management Plans (WHSMP) to \$800,000.	AGD (NT Worksafe)	1	Raising the trigger point from \$500,000 to \$800,000 for when a WHSMP is required under the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulations 2011 will stop smaller and lower-risk construction works being captured by the requirement. These and other provisions under the Act were designed to capture larger construction projects and to provide minimum safety standards on Head Contractors. The trigger point has not kept up to date with cost increases experienced in the construction industry.
		1B. Increase the Fidelity Fund Certificate minimum construction cost trigger to ensure the Fund covers appropriate works.	DLPE	1	Raising the trigger point from \$12,000 to \$25,000 for when a Fidelity Fund Certificate is required for a building permit, under the <i>Building Act 1993</i> , will stop small alterations/extensions to residential buildings being captured by the requirement. The current minimum amount was set in 2012 and was not indexed to keep up with rising construction costs.

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		1C. Amend Working at Height limits to remove unnecessary regulatory burden on local builders.	AGD (NT Worksafe)	1	<p>Industry has raised concerns over current regulatory requirements for Working at Height limits. The current NT WorkSafe Working at Heights threshold is 2,100mm and captures all single-storey residential buildings.</p> <p>AGD should work with industry to develop an adjusted working at heights threshold of 3,000mm.</p> <p>This change results in only an adjustment of 90 centimetres. This amendment would bring the NT in line with other jurisdictions, such as QLD who have adopted a commonsense 3,000mm threshold to solve this regulatory burden / issue.</p>
2.	Simplify regulatory processes that apply to low-risk activities.	2A. Develop a truncated and simplified process for rezoning land that is identified for densification under an area plan.	DLPE	1	<p>Area plans are not being used effectively to streamline planning approvals, including for rezoning land that has already been identified for densification under an area plan. This creates duplication in the process for identifying appropriate zoning standards in developing the area plan and the process developers undertake to apply for the land to be rezoned. A streamlined process will reduce duplication in the process for developers.</p>
		2B. Establish a risk-based framework for liquor licensing and exempt low-risk activities from public interest and community impact tests.	DTH	1	<p>When applying for a liquor licence, all applicants are required to complete a public interest and community impact assessment. Industry have noted that this requirement is redundant for activities that pose lower risk to the public.</p> <p>Exempting low-risk activities (or 'authorities') from public interest and community impact requirements under sections 49(1) to (3) of the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i> will better align the process with the risk involved.</p>
		2C. Develop a risk-based approach to categorise low risk traffic and road activities, including clear guidelines on what qualifies as low risk.	DLI	1	<p>The current 'one size fits all' approach to road approvals is impacting timely approvals for low-risk applications. Road access is a precursor to almost all development projects. A delay in approving road access can lead to significant downstream development timeframe blowouts. Developing a risk-based approach and clear guidelines on what requirements an applicant must satisfy, will support improved regulatory practice, reduce approval timeframes and assist proponents in developing applications.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		2D. Develop a risk-based approach to waste discharge activities in NT waterways.	DLPE	1	<p>A Waste Discharge Licence (WDL) is required for certain activities that discharge waste into Northern Territory waterways under the <i>Water Act 1992</i>. An Environment Protection Licence (EPL), issued under the <i>Waste Management and Pollution Control Act 1998</i> (WMPC Act), is required for the collection, transport, storage, treatment and disposal of listed wastes.</p> <p>Currently the lack of a consistent, proportionate approach to setting conditions on aquaculture activities (under an EPL) is placing an unnecessarily heavy burden on the industry and on DLPE officers to ensure compliance. The Department is working with industry to review the current process and introduce a risk-based approach to waste discharge monitoring. This work is supported as it will reduce compliance burden for low-risk activities.</p>
		2E. Review the application of Merit Assessable Uses across all zoning categories to convert low risk developments to Permitted Use.	DLPE	1	<p>The Northern Territory Planning Scheme requires different approvals subject to whether a Use is Merit Assessable or Impact Assessable under that Zoning. If a Use is Permitted, and the development meets all relevant planning / development requirements, a development permit is not required.</p> <p>To streamline approvals for low-risk development activities the Department should undertake a detailed review of all existing Merit Assessable Uses across all zoning categories to consider potential conversion to Permitted Use.</p>
		2F. Develop a pre-approved list of Place Names to streamline process for industry.	DLPE	1	<p>Any development that needs to establish/alter the name of places, roads, parks, natural features and road-based infrastructure such as bridges in the Northern Territory (NT) must seek permission from the Place Names Committee (Committee).</p> <p>The current Place Names Committee process for approving place names is overly burdensome and lengthy for industry. Developing a pre-approved list of Place Names that industry can choose from will significantly simplify and streamline the regulatory process.</p>
		2G. Remove “in person” training requirement for construction workers as part of the White Card process.	AGD (NT WorkSafe)	1	<p>The ‘in-person’ requirement for White Card training is causing delays and challenges for builders and workers. It leads to longer application processing times and higher travel costs. This is especially the case for regional and remote workers trying to access in-person training. Removing the requirement for in person training from the approval process for issuing White Cards for construction workers will streamline the process.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		2H. Simplify the water licensing regime into 2 tiers and improve the guidance and application processes.	DLPE	1	There are currently three tiers of water extraction licences, which are established in policy. Tier 1 represents a lower risk than either Tier 2 or Tier 3. Tier 1 licences are low volumes in areas with water allocation plans. Simplifying the water licensing regime into 2 Tiers will reduce approval timeframes and increase business certainty for low-risk water extraction licences and will ensure the majority of applications (often Tier 1) are assessed appropriately to allow adequate resource management.
		2I. Development of a published Chemical Risk Register.	DLPE	1	The Department should also review and update the web content relating to water licensing regulation, including to provide context on transitional arrangements (i.e. section 71M of the Water Act 1992 relating to licences to take water for exempt activities) and why advertising is not required for some applications. To support industry, the Department should also review and simplify licence application forms for water extraction licences.
					All drilling and hydraulic fracturing Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) include chemical risk assessments as an appendix that can be up to 2000 pages. As there is no material change in the way chemicals are used and managed across the industry and the controls are well-known, this administrative requirement is costly, inefficient and duplicative. There have been many chemicals that have undergone a risk assessment and been approved in the EMPs. A collated register of these chemicals will mean industry will be able to point to the register rather than requiring costly risk assessments undertaken often by consultants.
3.	Remove unnecessary public notification and consultation for low-risk activities.	3A. Streamline planning approvals by declaring classes of assets that no longer require public consultation.	DLPE	1	Public notification is a 28-day process that also attracts a fee to be paid by applicants. If submissions are received, applications often require a public hearing which adds additional time and resourcing. There is an opportunity to 'declare' low-risk classes of (Planning Scheme) amendments, such that they would be exempted from the legislated public notification requirements.
		3B. Review risk criteria and standard conditions applying to exploration activities and extractive operations to streamline approval processes for an increased number of projects.	DLPE	1	Risk criteria and standard conditions for exploration activities and extractive operations were approved under the <i>Environment Protection Act 2019</i> in July 2024. The risk criteria and standard conditions are intended to provide a streamlined approval pathway, that does not require public exhibition, for low-risk activities. The risk criteria and standard conditions should be reviewed to facilitate improved eligibility for these licences for a greater number of lower-risk projects.

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		3C. Establish a risk-based framework for planning approvals and exempt low-risk development from requirements regarding public notification requirements.	DLPE	1	<p>There is currently no risk-based approach to the public notification requirements for planning applications. Exempting and/or streamlining public notification requirements for low-risk uses, under section 47A of the <i>Planning Act 1999</i>, would reduce time and cost burden for low-risk planning approvals.</p> <p>Options to streamline include reducing the notice period to 7 days for low-risk activities and exempting them from requirements for public notification using physical signs.</p>
		3D. Establish a risk-based framework for liquor licence authorities and exempt low-risk authorities from public notification requirements.	DTH	1	<p>As part of the liquor licence application process, an applicant must comply with the mandatory public notice periods regardless of the level of risk of that activity ('or authority'). Exempting low-risk authorities from public notification requirements, under section 57(2) of the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i>, would reduce time and cost burden for low-risk authorities and ensure these requirements are only implemented in appropriate circumstances.</p>
4.	Expand the application of risk-based regulatory policies.	4A. Work with industry to identify opportunities to take a risk-based approach to mining regulation.	DLPE	2	<p>There is broad industry support for government to take a risk-based approach to regulating the mining sector. The Northern Territory Government should direct all Departments involved in regulating mining approvals to work with industry to undertake a review on how to implement a risk-based approach to regulating the sector.</p> <p>This review should consider how regulatory requirements can better align to the risks posed by different activities, depending on the types of minerals being extracted, the extraction methodology, the developmental stage of a project (i.e. explorational development, production, and care and maintenance etc.).</p>
		4B. Prioritise the implementation of a new Mineral Titles Legislative and Regulatory Regime.	DME	2	<p>The <i>Mineral Titles Act 2010</i> and associated regulations have not been significantly amended for over 15 years. There has been a significant review and consultation process to create a new modern and fit for purposes Mineral Titles Act and Regulatory Regime. Government should prioritise the passage of a new Mineral Titles Legislative and Regulatory Regime to increase certainty.</p>
		4C. Expand the application of risk-based regulatory policies to all approval processes within the next three years.	Whole-of-Government	2	<p>Expanding the risk-based model across all regulatory processes within the NT Government can support managing the risks posed by different types of businesses and activities, rather than taking a one-size fits all approach. It allows government to focus compliance and monitoring activities on higher-risk projects and businesses and manage lower-level risks in a proportionate way.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
Reducing regulatory touchpoints					
5.	Extend licence renewal periods to reduce unnecessary touchpoints with government.	5A. That NT Government should, as part of implementing the National Firearms Register, work with industry to identify options to allow renewal of commercial (Corporate and Employee) Firearm Licences.	NT Police	1	<p>The lack of renewal opportunities for commercial firearm licences can cause delays for businesses in the Agriculture and Aquaculture sector. There is also limited information available to businesses on who is an approved training provider for the purposes of firearm safety. This is further adding to delays in obtaining licences.</p> <p>The <i>Firearms Act 1997</i> could provide an option to extend corporate and employee licence renewal periods for a further five years. This will lessen the administrative burden and time delays. Longer licence periods will also provide increased business certainty. This reform should be considered as part of the Government's implementation of the National Firearms Register.</p> <p>The regulator could also consider how it could improve clarity on the list of approved firearm training providers, for example by incorporating a list on Firearm Application Forms.</p>
		5B. Expand builders' licence renewal periods to 4 years and consider how to streamline and coordinate all building contractor licences into one process with the same validity periods.	DTBAR	1	<p>Currently, building practitioners can have up to 4 separate classes of licences, for the construction of residential and commercial buildings, all with different renewal periods. Most builders also hold industry specific licences in addition to their Building Contractor's Licence (such as, plumbing, electrical, advanced tradesman, gas fitter etc.).</p> <p>Expanding builders' licence renewal periods from 2 to 4 years would benefit a significant number of builders in the Territory by reducing administrative burden and reducing regulatory touchpoints.</p> <p>Further benefits could be generated from the Department working with industry to streamline the process for renewing separate licences, by harmonising validity periods (to 4 years) and/or consolidating renewal processes/expiry dates.</p>
		5C. Extend renewal periods for responsible service certificates from 3 to 5 years.	DTH	1	<p>The current renewal period for Responsible service certificates creates unnecessary administrative burden on licenced businesses in managing their employees. Amending section 137(1)(b) of the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i> to extend the renewal period from 3 to 5 years will reduce the renewal cycle and administrative burden for employees and businesses.</p>
		5D. Extend the applicable renewal period for all commercial vehicle licences from 12 months to up to 36 months.	DLI	1	<p>Most commercial vehicle licences have a validity period of 12 months.</p> <p>Changing the applicable renewal period for all commercial vehicle licences under the <i>Commercial Passenger (Road) Transport Act 1991</i> to either 12, 24 or 36 months will improve business confidence for commercial vehicle operators and reduce administrative burden.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		5E. Extend the food business registration renewal period to 36 months.	DoH	1	<p>Currently, food businesses are being requested by the regulator to renew their registration every year. Subject to past business compliance, low-risk food businesses should be provided the option to extend their registration period up to 36 months.</p> <p>This option could apply to food businesses that: represent an operationally low risk to the public; have not received negative compliance or audit results during the previous registration period; and are not planning to substantially change their menu during the renewal period.</p> <p>This would increase business certainty and lessen the administrative compliance burden for food businesses.</p>
6.	Exempt low risk planning and subdivision activities from disproportionate regulatory processes.	6A. Amending the Planning Regulations to exempt certain Crown Land transactions from requiring subdivision.	DLPE	1	<p>This reform would amend the Planning Regulations to exempt certain Crown land transactions from requiring subdivision, including licences granted under the <i>Crown Lands Act 1992</i>, which provide permission to use Crown land, and leases granted for the development of community infrastructure.</p> <p>Exempting low risk planning and subdivision approvals from regulatory processes will reduce the administrative burden, timeframes and costs for many businesses, not-for-profit organisations, community members and the Territory.</p>
		6B. Establish a risk-based framework for planning approvals and exempt low-risk development requirements from development applications.	DLPE	1	<p>There is currently a one-size-fits-all approach for all planning applications, regardless of whether developments are low or high risk. This reform would exempt low-risk development requirements under section 46(3)(b) to (l) of the <i>Planning Act 1999</i>, including requirements to assess merits of the development, land suitability and benefit to public interest.</p> <p>This reduced level of compliance for low-risk developments would reduce administrative burden for applicants and ensure that approvals are not being delayed by the high volume of low-risk approvals requiring the same resourcing and process as higher risk applications.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		6C. Exempt existing vacant low-risk commercial/industrial buildings/areas from non-safety related requirements under the National Construction Code when changing building classification or undertaking renovation works.	DLPE	1	Full compliance with the National Construction Code can significantly undermine commercial feasibility for older vacant buildings. Exemptions should be provided for existing vacant buildings/areas from compliance with disability access (Section D: D1P1), personal hygiene (Section F: F4P1) and energy efficiency requirements (Section J: Parts J1-J9). This exemption should have a sunset period of 5 years to act as a short to medium term incentive mechanism.
		6D. Undertake a review of the <i>Electrical Safety Act 2024</i> to identify new low-risk electrical works that could be made exempt from needing a Certificate of Compliance (CoC).	AGD (NT WorkSafe)	1	<p>An electrical contractor or worker who conducts electrical work must complete a CoC that certifies that the electrical work was tested to be safe from electrical risk and the electrical work complies with the Act and any standards prescribed or adopted by the Electrical Safety Regulations 2024.</p> <p>To balance safety with practicality, the CoC requirements for low-risk routine work could be reduced. Specifically, NT WorkSafe's directive could be modified to exempt the replacement of "like for like" electrical components, fittings, and fixtures that involve no material change to the installation. Such a change would limit CoC requirements to situations that inherently carry higher risk, ensuring that NT WorkSafe's resources are focused on genuinely safety-critical jobs.</p>
		6E. Amend the land Clearing Overlays in the NT Planning Scheme to exempt controls or approvals for low-risk activities.	DLPE	1	<p>Amendments could be made to the Clearing Overlay in the NT Planning Scheme that would allow for more timely approvals for low-risk land clearing activity. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> allowing for up to 10 hectares in aggregate of clearing without approval for unzoned land that is over 100ha in size. allowing for the development of internal roads, tracks and telecommunications towers within unzoned parcels, enabling them to be cleared of native vegetation without requiring approval. ensuring land clearing controls only apply in zones where necessary. For example, it could be appropriate to remove planning controls in zones that are typically in urban areas (such as Community Purpose zone), or where the land clearing has undergone another assessment such as through the <i>Environment Protection Act 2019</i>.

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		6F. Exempt the take of marine and estuary water under a water extraction licence to reflect low-risk profile of activity.	DLPE	1	Waterway is broadly defined in the <i>Water Act 1992</i> , so any proponent wishing to take estuary water for their activity must apply to take water. The take of water from marine and estuarine environments is not considered to fit the objectives of licensing, providing no value on limiting and managing allocations for a beneficial use. Exempting this activity will reflect the low-risk nature of the activity, reducing an unnecessary touchpoint with government.
7.	Remove regulatory barriers that are forcing businesses to seek new or additional approvals rather than being able to vary their existing approval.	7A. Exempt low-risk buildings from requirements to submit a new planning application for minor changes to the building.	DLPE	1	<p>When a planning application is completed, subsequent changes are limited to a 5% threshold. If the change is greater than 5%, a new planning application is required. This disproportionately means smaller buildings may not undertake necessary improvements or expand due to additional costs.</p> <p>Exempting low-risk buildings from the 5% change threshold or other measurable requirements under section 43B(1)(a) and (b) of the <i>Planning Act 1999</i> will mean less administrative burden and cost for minor changes. Encouraging changes will also reduce the risk of the building becoming vacant, derelict or attracting anti-social behaviour.</p>
Enabling delegation and discretion					
8.	Increase the use of delegation and discretion for low-risk decisions.	8A. Delegate decisions regarding material alterations to licensed premises, under the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i> .	DTH	1	When an existing Licensee seeks to undertake a material alteration (renovate) their licenced premises, a timely and costly administrative process is required, as well as a complex public interest and community interest test. Currently the Northern Territory Liquor Commission is required to determine the application. This reform proposes that a permanent delegation be given to the Director of Liquor Licensing for material alterations for licenced premises through section 19(d) of the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i> . Additionally, this reform proposes removing the requirement to satisfy a public interest test and community impact for material alterations, to reflect that the material alteration does not change the existing licence. Delegating decisions and removing compliance requirements will fast track administrative processes that industry incurs because of licence changes.

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		8B. Determine land clearing applications in select zones (e.g. Agriculture, Horticulture, Rural) within DLPE rather than the Development Consent Authority (DCA).	DLPE	1	<p>There are currently two methods of assessing land clearing applications for agricultural and horticultural purposes under the Planning Act. These can lead to confusion by proponents.</p> <p>The Development Consent Authority (DCA) are currently determining land clearing applications for agricultural and horticultural purposes on zoned land that do not have a land use or development component.</p> <p>Land Resources Division within DLPE is arguably better placed to consider relevant matters to land clearing. Delegation of this function from DCA to the Land Resources Division would mean proponents applying to clear native vegetation for horticultural or agricultural purposes on unzoned and some zoned land will have clarity on the assessment process.</p>
9.	Introduce delegation powers in legislation to enable decisions on approvals to be delegated by Ministers and/or CEOs, where appropriate, to public sector employees.		Whole-of-Government	2	<p>There is a view from industry that approvals are unnecessarily escalated through multiple levels of the public service. Industry attributes this to a lack of delegation powers to or within the public service. Introducing wide delegation powers will decentralise decision-making on approval processes, reducing bottlenecks and decision delays in the public service. There are numerous examples of appropriate delegations in NT legislation. One example is section 170 of the <i>Mineral Titles Act 2010 NT</i>. This section allows any of the Minister's powers to be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer, and/or public sector officers within the agency.</p>

Theme 2: Fostering a regulatory culture that promotes business activity and certainty

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
Increasing regulatory certainty					
10.	Increase confidence and certainty in regulatory approvals through improved guidance on requirements and decision-making frameworks.	10A. Complete the implementation of Harvest Strategies for all NT fisheries and identify ways to improve industry confidence in the decision-making of fisheries management.	DAF	1	<p>Each fishery in the NT is managed through fishery-specific Management Frameworks, which are high-level planning documents that define the long-term vision and overarching rules for each fishery. Progressively, these frameworks also include a targeted Harvest Strategy designed to provide transparency, certainty and predictability in fisheries management. The NT Government should prioritise completing the implementation of Harvest Strategies for all NT fisheries to increase certainty for businesses.</p> <p>Harvest Strategies reduce uncertainty around decision-making and avoid delays, through clearly outlining in advance what actions will be taken and under what conditions, allowing stakeholders to plan with confidence. Stakeholders and licence holders are provided with evidence and rationale for required management actions, including in response to Harvest Strategy triggers. The Department should consider ways to further increase certainty in the management of fisheries through including standardised timeframes for decision, developing clear communications methods and templates and reviewing consultation requirements to ensure that consultation around decisions reflects the significance and risk profile of those decisions.</p>
		10B. Update the Development Guidelines for Government Controlled Roads and Performance Design Standards for NT Roads (and related policies) to provide greater certainty and transparency on how road access decisions are made, including transparency on how KPIs for road approvals are determined and monitored.	DLI	1	<p>Roads are a precursor to almost all development projects, and delays in road approvals can lead to significant downstream development timeframes blowouts. Updating the Development Guidelines for Government Controlled Roads and Performance Design Standards for NT Roads (and related policies) will create a clear and transparent decision-making framework to improve the Department's regulatory practice and facilitation of proponent applications. The Department should also work with industry to develop an agreed template for communication and to increase transparency on how KPIs for road approvals are determined and monitored to streamline the process.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		10C. Develop standardised traffic management plans for public events in identified activated spaces.	DLI	1	A streamlined approach for traffic management in activated spaces will reduce approval timeframes, regulatory burden and costs to businesses, and make it easier to use activated spaces for public events. Standardised traffic management plans in activated spaces where traffic management infrastructure exists (such as bollards) or where events have previously been held will remove an unnecessary barrier for applicants seeking to hold future public events.
		10D. Simplify the process for the transfer of water extraction licences.	DLI	1	<p>There is currently no provision within the Trading Licensed Water Entitlements Policy to reflect that an existing licence holder has undertaken a significant amount of regulatory work as part of the original application process. Streamlining water extraction licence transfers, to reflect the work undertaken by the licence holder in the original approval process, will avoid duplicated effort by the applicant and the regulator.</p> <p>There is currently also no provision within the Trading Licensed Water Entitlements Policy to ensure that consideration is given to whether the amount being paid by the buyer reflects the reasonable costs and loss of opportunity of the seller. The Department should review and amend the Policy to address these issues.</p> <p>This reform will simplify water trading and increase certainty for buyers and businesses seeking a temporary trade and ensure that the seller will assess the trade on its merits and not to maximise profits. The Department should also publish flowcharts and timeframes to increase certainty across industry, and provide clarity around when a trade application may take longer to process.</p>
		10E. Introduce application-specific assessment criteria for water extraction licence decisions, to consider whether the applicant intends to clear land and the timeframe for undertaking water extraction.	DLPE	1	The reform will speed up water extraction licence approvals for applicants by including application specific criteria to streamline consideration of applications. Application-specific criteria, including if the applicant requires land clearing approvals for the use of water allocation and the timeframe in which the majority of the water will be drawn upon, will support applicants who are ready to utilise water to stimulate business and economic activity.

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		10F. Introduce a new Environmental Code of Practice and supporting processes to reduce approval timeframes for onshore gas.	DLPE	1	<p>Introduce a new Environmental Code of Practice and corresponding Approved Form, as well as the updated Decision Package. These guidelines and guidance materials will remove duplication and unnecessary requirements and maintain risk-based environmental standards.</p> <p>The new Code of Practice would be supported by a new standard form for Environmental Management Plans, which will mean the Code of Practice requirements are clear and easy to address. This will save the interest holder time and money, ensure the right information is provided, and be easy for the Agency and Minister to navigate.</p>
		10G. Amend the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016 to remove duplication, improve clarity and enable administrative efficiencies.	DLPE	1	<p>The Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016 need amendments to fix issues with the assessment and approval process for Environmental Management Plans (EMPs). This includes removing obligations to undertake stakeholder consultation where this duplicates other statutory requirements; clarifying the approval criteria to reduce the risk of judicial review; and providing administrative efficiencies by simplifying the process to request further information and resubmissions.</p>
		10H. Review which approvals are subject to third party review and who has the right of third party review in liquor licensing for low-risk authorities.	DLPE	1	<p>Under the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i>, a person (third party) who has made a submission, complaint or objection to an application (decision) is also entitled to have that decision reviewed by NTCAT.</p> <p>Enabling any person (third party) with the capacity to submit a complaint or objection to an application slows down the approval process. Amending section 61(4) of the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i> to only specific people and only certain types of approval processes will increase certainty for industry.</p>
		10I. Introduce disqualifying offences in liquor licensing regulations to increase certainty in determining whether applicants are fit and proper.	DTH	1	<p>Under the <i>Liquor Act 2019</i>, an applicant must be a fit and proper person. This has led to penalising and stopping younger and inexperienced applicants from entering the market. Introducing a list of disqualifying offences in regulations rather than meeting a subjective standard for being a fit and proper person will increase certainty for applicants. Reasonable criminal background checks should remain as a legislated requirement for an applicant.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
11.	Allow more flexibility in how regulations are applied, which focus on businesses complying with regulatory outcomes rather than specific activities.	11A. Amend the minimum extraction requirement under the Recovery of Unused Water Entitlements Policy from 90% to between 50-75%.	DLPE	1	Amending the extraction requirement will increase certainty for growers to plan for the future without risk of losing water allocations. The current minimum extraction requirement is not appropriate as it does not account for change in water usage experienced by farmers, especially horticulture growers. Lowering the requirement to between 50-75% will support industry to use water in an efficient manner and reduce unintended outcomes, such as licence holders dumping water with the sole purpose of achieving the current requirement.
		11B. Review existing restrictions on lots that are currently restricted to single dwelling development.	DLPE	1	Develop a planning pathway for densification of lots that are presently restricted to a single dwelling throughout the Northern Territory. A review will identify opportunities to address current regulatory settings that block higher density developments to support residential densification across the NT. Consider, for example, a wider implementation of the model that enabled additional dwellings on land in Low Density Residential Zones in Katherine East.
		11C. Undertake a review of minimum lot sizes to ensure Design Codes support the delivery of housing supply.	DLPE	1	<p>The Northern Territory lags behind other jurisdictions in applying flexible and responsive planning standards to established urban areas. A joint government–industry review of the Subdivision Development Guidelines and Planning Scheme should be undertaken to specifically address constraints in brownfield and infill development, with a focus on introducing changes to facilitate both a new minimum lot size for subdividing existing lots and/or more options for dual occupancy on land zoned Low Density Residential.</p> <p>Such reform would unlock underutilised residential land across Darwin and other urban centres, allowing for greater housing diversity, affordability, and population retention in established communities. It would also contribute in meeting the NT Government’s 50:50 housing target (50% greenfield / 50% infill) and bolster the rate base of local councils through increased density.</p>
		11D. Allow staged approvals for Land Clearing applications on unzoned land under the <i>Planning Act 1999</i> .	DLPE	1	Industry views the current land clearing application process as lengthy and unsupportive. Land clearing applications are often stalled by issues on specific areas of the proposed land area, which holds up approval for the low-risk areas where there are no identified issues. Implementing a staged approval system that allows for the staged approval of clearing areas, which meets the Northern Territory Planning Scheme Land Clearing Guidelines (NTPS LGC), will reduce approval timeframes and increase certainty for businesses.

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		11E. Establish mining security thresholds aligned to disturbance footprint and works.	DLPE	2	<p>All mining activities must pay a mining security under the <i>Environment Protection Act 2019</i>. The security is calculated on the level of disturbance occurring as a result of the planned activities. The need to separately calculate a security for all activities undermines the flexibility and operation of the environmental (mining) licensing scheme as operators are still being licensed for specific activities (e.g. 3 drill holes) to enable an assessment of the appropriate security.</p> <p>Establishing standard security amounts based on a disturbance and works threshold will streamline security calculations and approval processes for low-risk activities. Operators will be able to pay the defined security for the level of disturbance proposed. This will reduce requirements for specific security calculations.</p>
		11F. Review the matters considered when calculating the 10Ha disturbance threshold for low risk exploration activities.	DLPE	2	<p>In the Northern Territory, an environmental (mining) licence is required for all mining activities, except exploration projects that do not result in substantial disturbance.</p> <p>The risk criteria and standard conditions for low risk exploration activities declared under the <i>Environment Protection Act 2019</i> impose a maximum disturbance limit of 10 hectares, including for access tracks, on standard and modified condition licences. This threshold applies to the total area impacted by exploration, and not just the target area (i.e. where drill pads will be located). The inclusion of access tracks takes up a disproportionately large proportion of the 10Ha threshold.</p> <p>The NT Government should consider excluding access tracks when calculating the 10Ha disturbance area for low risk exploration activities on standard and modified condition licences.</p>
12.	Amend regulations to require all agencies to publish flowcharts of their regulatory decision-making processes and introduce standardised reasons for decisions.		Whole-of-Government	2	<p>Published flow-charts would provide transparency and clarity in what is often a confusing and frustrating process for industry. Standardised reasons for decision-making would provide consistency in government decisions, increasing regulatory certainty for industry and business. Increasing the understanding and knowledge of decision-making processes within industry and applicants will assist businesses in completing application processes and avoiding delays.</p>
13.	Introduce an optional licence model for demolition service providers to increase certainty for providers and defence contractors.		AGD	2	<p>An optional licence will support NT demolition services to secure contracts in defence and other industries that seek a form of regulatory or quality assurance. Government projects, particularly large defence contracts, seek some form of regulatory or quality assurance in procuring demolition services in the Northern Territory. The lack of any such scheme is restricting the ability for NT businesses to complete this work.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
14.	Complete work to develop a strategic plan for the extraction of construction materials to increase efficiency.		DLI	2	<p>The department is developing an Extractive Materials Strategy, in consultation with industry and relevant stakeholders, to explore the compliance and process requirements for materials extraction, identify risks and make recommendations to support industry secure materials essential for construction.</p> <p>Coordinated effort across government, including with DLPE and DME, is required to clarify requirements for access to construction materials, like sand and gravel fill, and approval for their extraction, and support civil contractors overcome inefficiencies in approval processes.</p>
15.	Safeguard small businesses from the impacts of new regulatory changes over the next three years.		DTBAR	2	<p>Safeguarding small businesses from the impacts of significant policy changes will provide regulatory and investment certainty for local businesses.</p> <p>Small businesses could be exempt from significant changes to law, regulation or policy that would negatively impact the sector, for example through introducing safeguards in the Cabinet process. This reform acknowledges that small businesses face a heavy regulatory burden, having limited resources and time to complete regulatory approvals. Any exemptions would not apply to matters that are deemed necessary for health or safety of the public or a business' employees.</p>
16.	Strengthen accountability around approval timeframes.	<p>16A. Introduce mandatory approval timeframes across approvals, including for local governments and statutory authorities.</p> <p>16B. Introduce mechanisms to motivate compliance with approval timeframes, including a requirement to publish agency performance metrics.</p>	<p>Whole-of-Government</p> <p>Whole-of-Government</p>	<p>3</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Mandatory approval timeframes will create accountability and transparency in approvals processes across all government agencies. For businesses, it will provide certainty and allow them to plan their business activity and decisions around set approval timeframes.</p> <p>The introduction of mechanisms, which could include fee waivers and “deemed approvals”, if agencies fail to meet approval timeframes shifts the impetus within the approval process from proponents to agencies to consider approvals in a timely and efficient manner. Similarly, public reporting on performance metrics will increase transparency and accountability.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
Driving systems improvements					
17.	Ramp up implementation and use of digital systems across government to streamline interactions for businesses.	17A. Integrate electronic payment of invoices to the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure through NTGPay to reduce payment processing time and enhance contractor experience.	DLI	1	A standardised digital system for processing invoices will streamline and reduce timeframes for payment processes, make it easier for contractors to follow up on their invoice, and reduce administrative costs associated with handling and transaction errors. The introduction of an electronic payment system addresses industry concern around delays in payments and would assist in bringing the department up to industry standard and expectations.
		17B. Develop a transport permit system to reduce timeframes for regulatory approvals and enhance user experience.	DLI	1	A digitised transport permit system will simplify the applications process and reduce administrative burden for both applicants and the department. A trial commenced by the Department should be expanded to digitise additional permit applications to decrease processing time and enhance use experience across other applications, including permit to work, corridor management, road event permit applications.
		17C. Develop a standardised system for data collection, monitoring and reporting on approval timeframes.	Whole-of-Government	3	A whole-of-government data collection, monitoring and reporting system for tracking approvals will increase efficiency, improve communication with applicants, streamline internal government systems and processes, and reduce complexity and delays in seeking updates on applications.
		17D. Complete the digitisation of all remaining online small business applications forms and renewals.	DCDD	3	Significant investment has been made by the NT Government to digitise forms to ease the burden of interacting with application processes, including through the Territory Services platform. This work should continue and expanded to apply to all small business application processes.

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
Delivering effective regulatory stewardship					
18.	Finalise implementation of the remaining recommendations from the Bringing Land to Market report within 12 months.		Whole-of-Government	1	<p>Industry worked with government to identify a comprehensive set of recommendations that will support land development systems keep pace with the Territory's housing needs.</p> <p>Fifteen of the twenty-three recommendations in the 2021 <i>Bringing Land to Market</i> report have been fully implemented. There is significant opportunity for the NT Government to continue work in implementing existing recommendations to speed up the supply of land and streamline development processes.</p>
19.	Ensure decision-making bodies are fit for purpose by amending legislation for board appointments to require, where practicable, representation of members with practical NT-based industry experience and technical expertise.		Whole-of-Government	1	<p>Industry experience and representation on regulatory boards will increase the likelihood that decisions reflect the needs and concerns of industry and businesses operating in the NT context.</p> <p>Currently too many boards have appointees who are not based in the Northern Territory or do not have relevant experience in key sectors of the NT economy. This creates issues for industry engagement with these regulatory bodies.</p> <p>One example, where the skills and experience mix of the Board appears skewed is the Development Consent Authority, which, seems to be dominated by legal professionals, with little development experience.</p>
20.	Establish Water Management Advisory Bodies to provide advice to the Water Controller.		DLPE	1	<p>The current regulatory management of water resources is creating friction points for industry. Regulating at each individual licence level restricts the Controller's ability to consider the water allocation for the whole area covered by a plan. This has flow-on impacts for licence holders and applicants, reducing certainty and flexibility in the process.</p> <p>Creating a Water Management Advisory Body for each Declared Water Allocation Plan to provide non-binding advice to the Water Controller will assist industry. To increase effectiveness of reform the Department should undertake further stakeholder consultation to determine both membership and advisory scope of any Management Advisory Body.</p>
21.	Conduct a major review of the <i>Local Government Act 2019</i> to identify further reform opportunities to reduce timeframes for local government approvals.		Whole-of-Government	2	<p>A review will identify further areas of reform relating to delays associated with industry engagement with Local Government approvals, including where these interact with Territory approval processes.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
22.	Create a whole-of-government facilitative approach to approvals by strengthening accountability mechanisms around regulatory approvals and improving the capacity and capability of regulatory officers.	22A. Introduce dedicated “fast-track” planning assessment processes to reduce approval times for low-risk applications.	DLPE	3	<p>A ‘fast track’ planning assessment process could support approvals for low-risk applications that do not have the same complexities or risk as other planning applications. This means that low-risk applications can be processed more quickly, and resources freed up to expend effort on more complex or priority applications.</p> <p>The Department has trialled a ‘fast track’ planning officer function since October 2024. This function should be made permanent, and the Department should look to further streamline templates and supports for applicants.</p>
		22B. Mandate outcome-focussed KPIs for all agencies, focussed on facilitation, not just compliance.	Whole-of-government	3	<p>Mandating KPIs specific to facilitating regulatory approvals will improve transparency on agencies’ commitments to the reforms recommended by the Taskforce.</p> <p>The KPIs will require departmental staff to consider facilitation of business activity, encourage efficiency in approvals processes, and provide increased support and guidance for industry. Outcome-focussed KPIs will shift the culture of the public sector to move towards a facilitative regulatory culture focussed on clear outcomes, and proactive communication and decision-making, not just on compliance.</p>
		22C. Establish a permanent industry regulatory advisory body, under the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations, to monitor and drive reform.	DTBAR	3	<p>A permanent industry advisory body will create a mechanism for industry feedback on approvals and reform ideas, to make sure government processes reflect industry needs and challenges. Regular consultation with industry will support government and regulators to understand how the regulatory system is functioning and avoid regulation creep or creating avoidable regulatory burden for industry.</p>
		22D. Conduct regular independent audits of agency approval practices to ensure alignment with legislation.	Whole-of-government	3	<p>Industry has reported cases where agencies seem to be imposing requirements that fall outside of their statutory remit, increasing burden on applicants. A mechanism should be implemented to periodically review agencies’ approval practices to ensure they act within their statutory obligations and maintain consistency. The review could recommend changes to approval requirements that are unnecessary or practices that lack a clear legislative basis.</p> <p>Independent audits will also assist in avoiding regulation creep, overlapping regulatory processes and identifying friction points for industry that can be avoided.</p>

No.	Recommendations	Specific reform proposals	Lead agency	Timing	Reform benefit and justification
		22E. Amend the Administrative Arrangements Orders to re-establish the small business portfolio with a focus on regulatory reform and advocacy.	CMC/DTF/ DTBAR	3	<p>Small business interests should be a key focus of Government. The re-establishment of a Small Business Ministerial portfolio will support consideration of the impacts of policy decisions, including compliance burdens and challenges, for small businesses. It will also provide an avenue for small business and industry advocacy within government.</p> <p>This change would support recommendation 14, to ensure small business regulatory certainty over the medium term.</p>
		22F. Require NT Government Chief Executive Officers to identify and report quarterly on critical skills and capacity gaps across their regulatory functions to ensure capability and capacity is available to support timely regulatory approvals.	Whole-of-government	3	<p>Agencies should have systems in place to identify the critical skills and capacity required to achieve timely approvals.</p> <p>Regular reporting on the availability and retention of critical roles involved in approvals processes will provide transparency on departmental capacity. Agencies should be able to meet staff capacity and capability shortfalls to reduce delays caused by staffing issues. Government could also look to reduce barriers on agencies in outsourcing these roles through legislative and/or policy reforms.</p>
		22G. Develop and mandate risk management training for technical officers to support balanced, evidence-based risk decisions. Compliance on this should be reported through agency annual reports.	Whole-of-government	3	<p>Governments need to address the culture around risk management to ensure that officers are equipped and enabled to make appropriate risk-based decisions.</p> <p>Without proper training and capacity, industry have observed that some regulatory officers take an overly risk-averse approach, fearing reprimand for being proactive in providing approvals. Regulators should take account of the costs to business and the community from delays in economic activity alongside other risks in making decisions.</p> <p>Better training would support more balanced, evidence-based decisions.</p>

Acronyms	Full form
AGD	Attorney-General's Department
CM&C	Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet
DAF	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
DCDD	Department of Corporate and Digital Development
DoH	Department of Health
DLPE	Department of Lands, Planning and Environment
DLI	Department of Logistics and Infrastructure
DTH	Department of Tourism and Hospitality
DTBAR	Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance

Appendix B: Chamber of Commerce – Industry Engagement Summary

The Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce undertook industry engagement around the regulatory burden and administrative challenges faced by businesses.

Industry engagement with members took place over three weeks and included a member survey, a focus group, one-on-one meetings and engagement with Industry Councils. Overall, the Chamber engaged over 40 Territory businesses.

Red tape is causing delays and challenges across the approvals landscape.

Industry engagement found three areas where regulatory burden is causing businesses the most stress for local businesses. These are spread across different parts of the regulatory system, highlighting that challenges are present across the whole approvals landscape.



Work Health & Safety

78%



Transport & Infrastructure Approvals

77%



Environmental & Cultural Approvals

75%



88% of respondents felt that regulatory requirements aren't clear or easy to understand.

Respondents reported that they often face contradictory and inconsistent rules across the regions, and lengthy approval times. Respondents report that regulatory bodies give conflicting advice to business.



A majority of respondents felt Government agencies could improve communication.

44% of respondents rated the communication and responsiveness of agencies during approval processes as poor. A further 39% rated agencies average, highlighting the need for a shift in regulatory culture across the public sector.

Industry engagement key findings



95% of respondents said they had experienced significant delays in obtaining approvals.



88% of respondents felt that regulatory requirements were not clear or easy to understand.

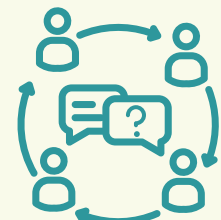


69% believe there are duplicative and unnecessary steps in the approval process.

69% of respondents said they had experienced issues with regulation creep.



100% of respondents said they would support more risk-based approvals.



44% of respondents rated government agencies communication and responsiveness 'poor'.

Many businesses faced duplicative or unnecessary steps in the approvals process

Just over 69% of respondents have noted encountering duplicative or unnecessary steps in an approvals process. Common examples of confusion and duplication in processes included sending applications multiple times because requirements are unclear, and overlapping requirements for different approvals processes.

No, 31%

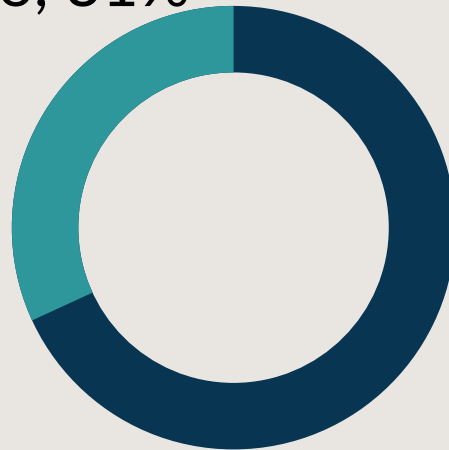


Yes
69%

69% of respondents have experienced 'regulation creep'

69% of respondents have experience 'regulation creep', defined as when the approvals process becomes more complex over time due to incremental changes. Examples included additional paperwork, longer processing times, involvement of multiple departments, higher costs and changing or unclear requirements.

No, 31%

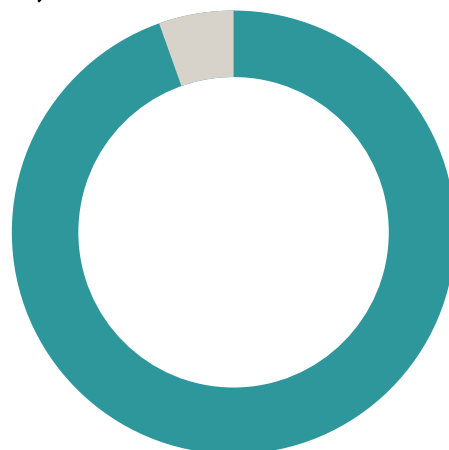


Yes
69%

Almost all of respondents have experienced significant delays in obtaining approvals

95% of respondents have experienced significant delays in obtaining approvals. Respondents provided examples including long delays from application processing timeframes and a time-consuming annual registration process. Respondents also reported delays from assessment processes where there is a high volume of applications, causing the system to be overwhelmed.

No, 5%



Yes
95%

Appendix C:

List of consultations

The Taskforce members have independently consulted with businesses from across the Territory.

In addition, formal meetings were arranged by the Secretariat with:

- Association of Mineral Exploration Companies (AMEC)
- Australia Bay Seafoods
- Chamber of Commerce NT
- Civil Contractors Federation NT
- Engineers Australia, Northern Territory Division
- Hospitality NT
- Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT)
- Master Builders Northern Territory (NT)
- Minerals Council of Australia – Northern Territory Division (MCA NT)
- Northern Territory Cattlemen’s Association (NTCA)
- Northern Territory Farmers Association (NT Farmers)
- Northern Territory Seafood Council
- Property Council of Australia- NT
- South 32
- Urban Developers Institute Australia- Northern Territory (UDIA-NT)

The Taskforce also met with the following Government departments and regulators to discuss their regulatory footprint and potential reform ideas:

- Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority
- Attorney-General’s Department
- Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
- Department of Health
- Department of Lands, Planning and Environment
- Department of Logistics and Infrastructure
- Department of Mining and Energy
- Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations
- Department of Tourism and Hospitality

