



**Marine
and Coastal**

National Environmental Science Program

Project 3.1

Building a northern Australian community of practice and sentinel case studies for supporting improved regional planning to achieve Ecologically Sustainable Development

Project Summary

This project aims to build a strong community of practice and conduct sentinel case studies in northern Australia that supports improved regional planning that seeks to achieve Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD). By engaging government agencies, practitioners, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities, the project will enhance knowledge sharing, capacity building, and innovative approaches in improving regional planning. The sentinel case studies will analyse current governance systems within three regions, integrate knowledge, and identify improvement priorities, focusing on Western Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory. This research will contribute to better landscape outcomes across the north, minimise the impact of development on marine environments, and inform current Federal, State and Territory policy reforms, particularly to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC).

Problem

Current environmental decision-making in northern Australia falls short of delivering positive outcomes for the environment, economy, and Indigenous interests. The Samuel review of the EPBC, research from the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA) (de-risking), and previous National Environmental Science Program (NESP) Hubs have highlighted the need for increased focus on Commonwealth-sponsored regional and place-based planning in the north. To support this, the project aims to establish a strong network and ensure the quality of practice from the beginning of these new regional planning efforts. It promotes improved integration of environmental decision-making, investment attraction, and Indigenous interests from the outset within these new efforts.

How Research Addresses the Problem

The project will establish a community of practice, bringing together various sectors involved in ESD-related regional planning in northern Australia. Through knowledge-sharing events, webinars, newsletters, and targeted symposiums, the project will enhance capacity and communication among stakeholders. Additionally, the sentinel case studies will utilise Governance Systems Analysis (GSA), engaging stakeholders in analysing complex governance systems and supporting improvements in regional planning practices. The research findings will inform policy and practice improvements at both jurisdictional and Commonwealth scales.

General Project Information

The research delivery involves building a strong regional planning community of practice through targeted knowledge sharing events, webinars, newsletters, and information products. The case study approach includes negotiating case regions, analysing current governance systems, integrating knowledge systems, and establishing improvement priorities and investment plans. The community of practice will scan the current environment for innovative approaches in regional planning, enhance communication, and grow capacity within the network. The sentinel case studies will employ the GSA method, which has been successfully used in previous research cycles in complex marine environments. The project aims to support emerging regional planning efforts in northern Australia and contribute to the ongoing reforms in environmental decision making.



LEFT: Burdekin Falls Dam on the Burdekin River in Queensland **RIGHT:** Aquaculture production in North Australia **IMAGE NQ REGISTER**
OPPOSITE PAGE: Aquaculture is a rapidly growing industry in Australia. **IMAGE GOODFISH.**

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