



# NORTHERN TERRITORY PROFESSIONALS

Newsletter of COMMUNITY & PUBLIC SECTOR UNION  
professionals in the Northern Territory public service



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This is the third edition of the NTPS Professionals Newsletter. We hope to receive contributions from members working within the NTPS in the future. To contribute articles or letters to this Newsletter, please see below.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of the Environment**

## Climate change impacts in the Northern Territory

### Potential impacts and costs

The Northern Territory is the least populous of Australia's states and territories, home to 1 per cent of Australia's population. Of the 230,000 people living in the NT, the majority of people live in Darwin. There are numerous remote settlements and approximately 31 per cent of all Indigenous Australians live in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory has two distinct climate zones. The Top End, including Darwin, has a tropical climate with high humidity and two seasons, the wet season (November to April) and the dry season (May to October). By contrast, the central region of the Territory, including Alice Springs and the Uluru National Park, is semi-arid.

Projected changes in climate conditions may affect natural systems and human settlements in the NT. The following information highlights potential impacts and costs to the Northern Territory's industries, environment and people from climate change.

### Coastal zone

Climate change will lead to sea level rise and potentially greater storm surges which will impact on coastal settlements, infrastructure and ecosystems. Between 260

and 370 residential buildings, with a current value of between \$100 million and \$134 million may be at risk of inundation from a sea level rise of 1.1 metres. A 1.1 metre sea level rise will also put 2045 kilometres of the NT's roads, up to 24 commercial buildings and 32km of railways at risk. These assets have an estimated value of up to \$1.8 billion, \$500 million and \$100 million respectively.

Darwin is particularly vulnerable to riverine flooding and more intense cyclonic activity. Impacts on infrastructure are expected to be extreme under a 'business as usual' climate scenario, including major threats to vital port infrastructure on the NT coast.

Global sea levels increased by 1.7 millimetres per year over the 20th century. Over the past 15 years, this trend has increased to approximately 3.2 millimetres per year. This rate varies significantly around Australia. Since the early 1990s northern Australia has experienced increases of up to 7.1 millimetres per year.

In 2009, the Australian Government produced the report, [Climate Change Risks to Australia's Coasts](#), followed in 2011 by an update to this report entitled [Climate Change Risks to Coastal Buildings and Infrastructure](#). For a visualisation of the potential sea level rise, the Department has also produced a series of maps available at [www.ozcoasts.gov.au](http://www.ozcoasts.gov.au) (link is external)

### Extreme events

In Darwin the number of days over 35 degrees Celsius is expected to increase from 11 per year currently experienced to up to 69 by 2030 and up to 308 by 2070 without global action to reduce emissions. Coupled with the extremely high humidity that Darwin experiences during

the wet season, higher temperatures are expected to adversely affect levels of human comfort.

In Alice Springs, the number of hot days over 35 degrees Celsius is expected to increase from 90 per year currently experienced to up to 182 by 2070 without global action to reduce emissions.

Projections indicate there may be an increase in the proportion of tropical cyclones in the more intense categories, with a decrease in the total number of cyclones. For example, the number of category 3 to 5 cyclones is projected to increase, and by 2030 there may be a 60 per cent increase in intensity of the most severe storms, and a 140 per cent increase by 2070.

### **Human health**

It is predicted that without mitigation there may be as many as 407 temperature-related deaths in the NT by 2100 compared to 61 in a world with no human induced climate change. In Darwin, an estimated 2 people aged over 65 years die each year from heat-related deaths (1997-1999 average). This could potentially rise to between 37 and 126 each year by 2050.

The NT is also highly receptive to the establishment of mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue, which can lead to serious and sometimes life-threatening illnesses. Under moderately warmer and wetter climate conditions, combined with changes in water storage practices such as an increase in the establishment of water tanks under increasing drought conditions, there may be an increase in the prevalence of some mosquito-borne diseases in some parts of the NT.

Warmer temperatures and increased rainfall variation may also increase the occurrence of food and water-borne diseases.

### **Natural environments**

Tourism is a major industry and employment sector for the NT and is largely focused on the natural environments. In 2010, 1.3 million people visited the NT and spent over \$1.4

billion. Tourism is estimated to contribute around 10 per cent to the NT economy.

Some of the most visited iconic sites, such as the Kakadu National Park, are under threat from the impacts of climate change.

In 2011, the Australian Government released the report Kakadu: Vulnerability to Climate Change Impacts which outlines the impacts of climate change to this important area.

The lowland parts of Kakadu are vulnerable to changed salinity as a result of sea level rise and saline intrusion into groundwater. Current projections are that sea level around Kakadu will rise by at least 8 centimetres and by up to 30 centimetres by 2030.

Rising sea levels will have severe impacts given the wetland system of Kakadu is contingent on a delicately balanced interaction between its freshwater and marine environments. Fundamental changes in ecological function of the national park will place severe pressure on many species of both plants and animals.

Salt water intrusion into the Kakadu wetlands over the past 50 years has resulted in the tidal range of creeks moving four kilometres inland in the East Alligator River catchment, and significantly increased the area of bare and saline mudflats, killing two-thirds of the Melaleuca forest.

Melaleuca swamp forests are important roosting habitats for many waterbirds, and are also utilised by aquatic fauna for spawning. A decrease in this habitat will have negative impacts on such species.

### **Agriculture**

Climate change is likely to put at risk agricultural production, particularly beef production in the NT. The NT had an estimated meat cattle population of around 1.7 million in 2009. Potential changes in the climate could reduce beef production by 19.5 per cent by 2030 and by 33.2 per cent by 2050. Climate change may also exacerbate

the impacts of heat stress and cattle ticks on beef production.

### **Adaptation**

Given the Northern Territory's high vulnerability to projected climate change, it is important that appropriate actions are taken by government, businesses, communities and individuals to ensure effective adaptation is possible in a changing environment.

This Article has been taken from the Department of Environment website and can be found at <https://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science/impacts/nt>

## *There is no shame in being a member of a union.*

In recent times the union movement as a whole has found itself under siege. From the Trade Union Royal Commission to a double dissolution election being called on the basis of Union issues, Unions are often slammed in the media.

The trade union movement represents a broad cross section of the community. It encompasses people in a wide variety of occupations and professions. These vary from the person who serves you coffee to the scientists at CSIRO who provide vital scientific research to assist in the preservation of our planet.

The fact that some union officials have been found to have acted in an inappropriate or criminal manner should not detract from the fact that trade union officials are dedicated and hardworking individuals doing their very best to protect the hard fought for working conditions of their members. From time to time people in business commit fraud or behave in inappropriate ways. These sorts of behaviours do not invite us to consider that all business people behave in this way. Indeed we regard these people as an aberration. We recognise that the millions of small business people are working very hard to provide for

themselves and their families. The same is true of trade unionists.

This union has a proud tradition of representing its members. Professionals in particular have a proud tradition. The Professional Officers' Association, Commonwealth Public Service, was registered federally in 1917 and operated until 1975. It then became the Professional Officers' Association, Australian Public Service. The Union continued operating under this name, despite a merger in 1991 with the Australian Government Lawyers' Association. Ultimately, in 1993 it amalgamated with this union; the Community and Public Sector Union. The professionals in the Australian Public Service and Northern Territory Public Service are the inheritors of this broad tradition.

Professionals in the Australian Public Service and Northern Territory Public Service whilst fighting hard to protect the working conditions of their members have never been exclusively concerned with this. Professionals have focused on providing a first class service for members of the public. They also have a strong tradition of improving the intellectual capital of not only the organisations they work for but also the community as a whole.

The CPSU has strict governance procedures such as financial acquittal processes and published financial reports, and all officials undertake governance training.

If you are ever criticised for being a member of a union just remember the proud tradition you come from and the good service yourself and your fellow professional members provide to the community.

Shane McGrath – CPSU volunteer



## Considerations for suicide prevention in Australia’s prisons.

*By Dr Kaine Grigg MAPS, Department of Corrective Services, Western Australia, and Professor James R. P. Ogloff AM FAPS, Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, Swinburne University of Technology*

Suicide rates in prisons in developed countries are 3–8 times higher than the community (Fazel et al., 2011). Australian prison suicide rates have declined following implementation of suicide prevention initiatives and now are the lowest internationally (approx. 58 per 100,000). Yet suicide accounts for 30%-50% of Australian prisoner deaths (Lyneham & Chan, 2013).

Psychologists play a critical role in identifying and managing prisoners at risk of suicide.

Incarceration can be distressing and rates of mental illnesses are dramatically higher in prisons than the community (Schilders & Ogloff, 2014). The State bears a duty of care for the physical and mental health of prisoners (UNESCO, 2015). The UNESCO mandates that prisoners receive the same standard of health care as in the community and that health care professionals examine all prisoners to identify suicide risk and manage such risk appropriately.

### Suicide and suicide risk in prisons

Attempts to understand and ultimately prevent suicides in prisons began in the 1960s, with theories proposing the inherently deprived prison environment (Goffman, 1961) and importation of community stressors to custody (Irwin & Cressy, 1962) as core to suicide in prison (Danto, 1973). Contemporary research suggests that suicides result from an interaction between prison factors (e.g., prison environment and risk management systems) and prisoner characteristics (e.g.,

vulnerability and coping capacity) that lead to prisoner distress (Dear, 2008; Liebling, 2006).

### Unique risk factors when working with prisoners

When examining prisoner risk, it is important to consider general and prison-based suicide risk and protective factors in a structured and comprehensive manner (see Hawgood and De Leo article pgs 10-11 for discussion on suicide risk assessment). Unfortunately, no well-validated measure for assessing suicide risk in prison exists. Psychologists working in prisons should therefore familiarise themselves with known prison-specific risk factors (see text box below) (Fazel et al., 2008; WHO, 2007).

### Prison-specific risk factors

<i>Individual</i>	<i>Forensic</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male (especially young males)</li> <li>• Elderly (especially males)</li> <li>• Indigenous</li> <li>• Mental illness</li> <li>• Pharmacological treatment</li> <li>• Substance related/addictive disorder</li> <li>• Previous suicide attempts</li> <li>• Relationship/social support changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single cell incarceration</li> <li>• &gt; 18 month sentence</li> <li>• Incarceration prior to conviction</li> <li>• Violent offence.</li> </ul>

### Effective suicide prevention in prisons

Best-practice in suicide prevention requires collaboration and open communication among administrators, medical and mental health clinicians (including psychologists), and custodial staff to identify at-risk inmates, intervene, and manage risk appropriately (Dear, 2008; WHO, 2007). Suicide risk is dynamic and the prison environment can fluctuate considerably; prison services must therefore be mindful of identified risks, prisoner distress, and coping capacity at all times. Clinical services are required, beginning with screening prisoners upon reception,

following transfer, and when court/significant events occur.

With respect to the prison environment, it is important to eliminate factors found to increase prisoner suicide (e.g., by ensuring appropriate prisoner placement, enhancing meaningful social interaction, and reducing physical risks; Liebling, 2006). Positive staff-prisoner relationships are core to reducing prisoners' stress levels and maximising the likelihood of prisoners' notifying staff about periods of increased risk. Distressed prisoners require careful management through provision of humane support rather than physical restrictions and restraints. Appropriate staff training is requisite to ensure proficiency and capacity to provide frontline suicide intervention via identifying, intervening, and managing the distress of prisoners.

It is critical that reliable systems are implemented for detecting prisoner distress. When levels of distress appear elevated or prisoners are otherwise identified as at risk, effective management is required, including increased monitoring and appropriate mental health treatment and crisis intervention.

In addition to assessment, psychologists play an important role in addressing prisoners' skills deficits, increasing coping capacity, and thereby reducing risk. Clinical psychological services in a prison setting largely aim to build an individual's resilience via the use of CBT and related interventions.

Despite all efforts, suicides in prison – as in the community – will continue to occur. Careful review is required to ensure that policies, procedures, and practices are as effective as possible. For all involved suicides are among the most traumatic events that occur in prisons. Bereaved and vulnerable individuals (staff and prisoners alike) must be supported and steps should be taken to limit the risk of additional suicides.

## Conclusion

While suicide prevention strategies and programs have successfully led to the reduction of prison suicides, there remains room for improvement. Additional research is required to evaluate and refine both suicide risk assessment and

intervention strategies implemented in prisons. Psychologists working in custodial settings need to practice in a research-informed manner, drawing upon the best available evidence to ensure the provision of the highest quality services and the prevention of as many suicides as possible.

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*Please feel free to make a contribution.*

If members know of any articles that might be of interest to fellow professional members please forward them to [kay.densley@cpsu.org.au](mailto:kay.densley@cpsu.org.au)

