



Tourism Top End Incorporated
T (08) 8980 6000
6 Bennett Street, Darwin NT 0800
tourismtopen.org.au

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia

Submitted by: Tourism Top End
Submission Date: January 2026

1. Introduction

Tourism Top End (TTE) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia's Inquiry into Preparing for Emerging Industries Across Northern Australia.

The Top End's climate, Country and rich cultural fabric underpin a world-class tourism offering and position the region as a key contributor to Northern Australia's visitor economy. Continued growth depends on practical policy settings and strong collaboration across industry, agencies and all levels of government.

Tourism is one of Northern Australia's most significant export industries and increasingly functions as an enabling sector — supporting workforce attraction and retention, regional liveability, First Nations economic participation, infrastructure utilisation and investment confidence. In many parts of Northern Australia, tourism brings people, skills and services to place ahead of other industries.

This submission outlines why tourism should be recognised as a critical emerging industry aligned to the Committee's Terms of Reference, with strong growth potential in sectors such as events, First Nations and cruise tourism.

Tourism Top End is the Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) for the Top End of the Northern Territory, covering Darwin, Kakadu, Arnhem Land, Litchfield, Katherine and the Big Rivers region. As an independent, industry-led, not-for-profit organisation, Tourism Top End champions and strengthens the Top End tourism industry.

Tourism Top End's membership plays a critical role in achieving the Territory's tourism growth targets. Tourism Top End works closely with industry and key stakeholders, including the Savannah Way partnership, Australia's North West Tourism, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, Tourism Central Australia, local government, Traditional Owners and industry operators — to grow a resilient, sustainable and globally competitive visitor economy for the Top End and Northern Australia more broadly

2. Tourism as an Emerging and Enabling Industry

Tourism is often viewed as a mature industry; however, in Northern Australia it is increasingly an *emerging, future-facing sector* with high growth potential and broad economic spill-over benefits.

Tourism delivers:

- Represents a source of export-equivalent revenue through domestic and international visitation, injecting income directly into Northern Australia and contributing to economic diversification.
- Generates local employment across urban, regional and remote communities, contributing to workforce participation and regional liveability where alternative jobs are limited.
- Creates pathways for First Nations enterprise, employment and cultural leadership through tourism businesses and experiences.
- Supports economic diversification in regions historically reliant on extractive industries, building more resilient local economies.
- Drives the demand base that justifies and maximises investment in enabling infrastructure such as aviation, roads, ports, digital connectivity and essential services.



Tourism Top End Incorporated
T (08) 8980 6000
6 Bennett Street, Darwin NT 0800
tourismtopen.org.au

Global tourism trends toward nature-based travel, cultural immersion, remote experiences, sustainability and Indigenous-led tourism align directly with the strengths of Northern Australia, including the Top End.

3. Alignment with the Inquiry Terms of Reference

3.1 Net Zero, Decarbonisation and Climate Adaptation – Tor (a)

Tourism operators in the Top End are already adapting to climate variability, extreme weather, seasonal shifts and access disruptions. The industry is well positioned to support the transition to net zero through:

- Accelerated adoption of renewable energy and hybrid solutions for remote accommodation and visitor facilities
- Implementation of regenerative tourism models and low-impact, reversible infrastructure that minimise environmental footprint
- Integration of visitor education programs that promote conservation outcomes, climate awareness and adaptive behaviours
- Strengthened partnerships with parks agencies and land managers to implement adaptive visitor management and climate-responsive practices aligned with national net zero objectives and EPBC reform principles

Targeted R&D and support for renewable fuels, off-grid energy solutions and climate-resilient infrastructure will enable tourism to lead and demonstrate adaptation in remote contexts.

3.2 Supporting Export Industries – TOR (c)

Tourism is a major export industry, bringing the customer to the product rather than exporting goods. Visitor expenditure supports aviation, retail, accommodation, tours, marine services and hospitality, generating significant flow-on benefits across the Northern Australian economy.

In the Top End, tourism also plays an important role in strengthening Australia's global brand and supporting the broader export economy. Improved international aviation access and destination competitiveness will benefit tourism alongside other export-oriented sectors.

Establishing a dedicated Northern Australia aviation attraction and investment fund to attract and grow direct international aviation services would support long-term growth across multiple export industries, including tourism. While individual states have established aviation attraction funds, a Northern Australia-wide fund would extend the reach of these programs and deliver benefits at a regional scale across the north over the coming decade.

3.3 Infrastructure Development – TOR (f)

Tourism productivity depends on safe, reliable and climate-resilient infrastructure. In Northern Australia, tourism also provides the volume of use and economic justification that underpins the ongoing maintenance and viability of existing infrastructure, including roads, ports and airports, particularly in regional and remote areas.

Key infrastructure priorities for the Top End and Northern Australia include:

- All-weather road access to national parks, regional destinations and cross-border routes, including upgrades along the Savannah Way to create a reliable east–west corridor
- Aviation access that is affordable, reliable and resilient, including year-round services and all-weather approaches for remote communities



Tourism Top End Incorporated
T (08) 8980 6000
6 Bennett Street, Darwin NT 0800
tourismtopen.org.au

- Marine and barge infrastructure to support remote and coastal communities, freight and ferry services, and increased access for cruise and expedition vessels
- Digital connectivity to support visitor safety, bookings, marketing, and real-time road and weather information

Infrastructure planned for defence, freight or resource sectors should be co-designed to support tourism, maximising public value and delivering broader regional and community benefit.

There is an opportunity to better facilitate private sector investment in tourism infrastructure through more coordinated engagement between the Commonwealth, states, territories and local government. In particular, through the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, consideration could be given to an investment facility for priority tourism assets such as experiential accommodation, remote island resorts and tour infrastructure. A patient-capital model, operating alongside other investors and with access below current funding thresholds, would help unlock strategically important tourism investment across Northern Australia.

3.4 Workforce, Skills and Housing TOR (h)

Tourism is a major employer across Northern Australia but faces ongoing workforce constraints, including housing shortages in regional and remote centres, limited access to training, and seasonal volatility. These pressures restrict business capacity and service delivery across the visitor economy.

Tourism provides accessible employment pathways for young people, First Nations people, migrants and career changers, supporting regional workforce participation. Targeted investment in regional skills pathways, workforce accommodation and education-linked employment programs would strengthen labour supply across tourism and other emerging industries.

There is an opportunity to expand regional education and employment programs for interstate and international students, supporting workforce availability while strengthening the case for purpose-built student accommodation in regional centres.

Accommodation availability remains a critical constraint, with high demand from the resource sector placing pressure on visitor accommodation in regional and remote areas. An integrated approach to workforce, student and visitor accommodation is essential to support tourism growth, resource sector operations and broader regional liveability.

The Commonwealth should prioritise integrated workforce, training and accommodation initiatives in regional and remote Northern Australia, aligning tourism, resource and education sector needs to improve labour supply, housing availability and regional liveability.

3.5 First Nations Empowerment TOR (i)

The Top End contains some of Australia's most significant living Indigenous cultures, with First Nations people playing a central role in shaping the region's identity and visitor experience. First Nations tourism delivers broad economic, cultural and environmental outcomes, including:

- Community-led economic development that creates employment and enterprise opportunities on Country
- Cultural transmission and language maintenance through the sharing of stories, knowledge and traditions
- Caring-for-Country outcomes that support land management, conservation and cultural stewardship

First Nations tourism should be recognised as a priority emerging industry in Northern Australia, requiring targeted and sustained support for culturally appropriate infrastructure, enterprise development, skills and training pathways, and improved market access.



Tourism Top End Incorporated
T (08) 8980 6000
6 Bennett Street, Darwin NT 0800
tourismtopen.org.au

3.6 Marine Access and Remote Communities TOR (j)

Marine and barge infrastructure underpins community supply chains, tourism access and economic participation in coastal and island communities across Northern Australia. Multi-use marine infrastructure enables communities to benefit from cruise, charter and cultural tourism while strengthening resilience, connectivity and liveability.

Investment in multi-use barge landings and marine access points supports remote communities and enables tourism growth in coastal and island environments. Improved marine connectivity is critical not only for tourism, but also for community liveability, supporting access to essential goods, fresh food supplies, health services and emergency response, all of which contribute to improved health and social outcomes in remote communities.

Well-designed marine infrastructure enables multiple outcomes, including:

- Community connectivity and improved access to services
- Reliable supply logistics, including fresh food and essential goods
- Marine tourism opportunities, including charters, cruising, fishing and cultural Sea Country experiences

This infrastructure is also vital for enabling coastal and island communities to participate in the growing cruise and superyacht industries, ensuring economic benefits are shared beyond major ports.

The Commonwealth should co-invest with State and Territory Governments in marine access and barge infrastructure for coastal and island communities identified through Destination Management Plans as having cruise and marine tourism potential.

3.7 Research and Development TOR (k)

Northern Australia has the opportunity to become a national and international innovation hub for tourism, including:

- climate-resilient tourism models suited to remote and tropical environments
- sustainable destination management approaches that balance visitation and conservation
- Indigenous-led tourism frameworks that embed cultural authority and economic participation
- carrying capacity assessment and visitor dispersal planning to protect natural and cultural assets

Partnerships between government, Regional Tourism Organisations, universities, research institutions and Traditional Owners can drive applied research, innovation and knowledge transfer with national and global relevance. Over the next decade, with the support of the Federal Government and other partners, Northern Australia could become a recognised centre of excellence and showcase for sustainable, culturally appropriate tourism, attracting investment into the sector and demonstrating Australia's leadership across the Pacific and South-East Asia.

The Commonwealth should recognise tourism within Northern Australia as a priority sector for regional Research and Development, including through access to programs such as the Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program. CRC-style partnerships would enable industry, Traditional Owners and researchers to co-design and deliver applied research that supports climate adaptation, Indigenous-led tourism, sustainable destination management and scalable, exportable tourism models with global relevance.

4. Tourism Top End recommends that the Committee:

- Recognise tourism as a core emerging and enabling industry for Northern Australia, reflecting its role as a major export sector and its contribution to workforce attraction, regional liveability, infrastructure utilisation and investment confidence.



Tourism Top End Incorporated
T (08) 8980 6000
6 Bennett Street, Darwin NT 0800
tourismtopen.org.au

- Support tourism's contribution to net zero and climate adaptation objectives through targeted Research and Development, renewable and off-grid energy solutions, and climate-resilient tourism infrastructure in regional and remote areas.
- Strengthen tourism's role as an export industry by improving international aviation access, including consideration of a Northern Australia-wide aviation attraction and investment fund to grow direct international services.
- Prioritise investment in multi-use, climate-resilient infrastructure that supports tourism, defence, resources and community access, including roads, aviation, marine access and digital connectivity.
- Facilitate private sector investment in priority tourism infrastructure through Commonwealth mechanisms such as the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, including patient-capital models for strategically important tourism assets.
- Address workforce, skills and housing constraints through integrated regional programs, aligning tourism, resource and education sector needs to improve labour supply, accommodation availability and regional liveability.
- Recognise First Nations tourism and marine access as priority enablers of regional development, through targeted investment in culturally appropriate infrastructure, enterprise development, skills pathways and marine access for coastal and island communities

5. Conclusion

Tourism is fundamental to Northern Australia's economic future, acting as both a major export industry and an enabler of broader regional development. By attracting people, investment and services, tourism strengthens liveability, supports emerging industries and builds long-term regional resilience.

Tourism Top End welcomes ongoing engagement with the Committee and would be pleased to provide further evidence, case studies or appear at hearings to support the Inquiry's work.