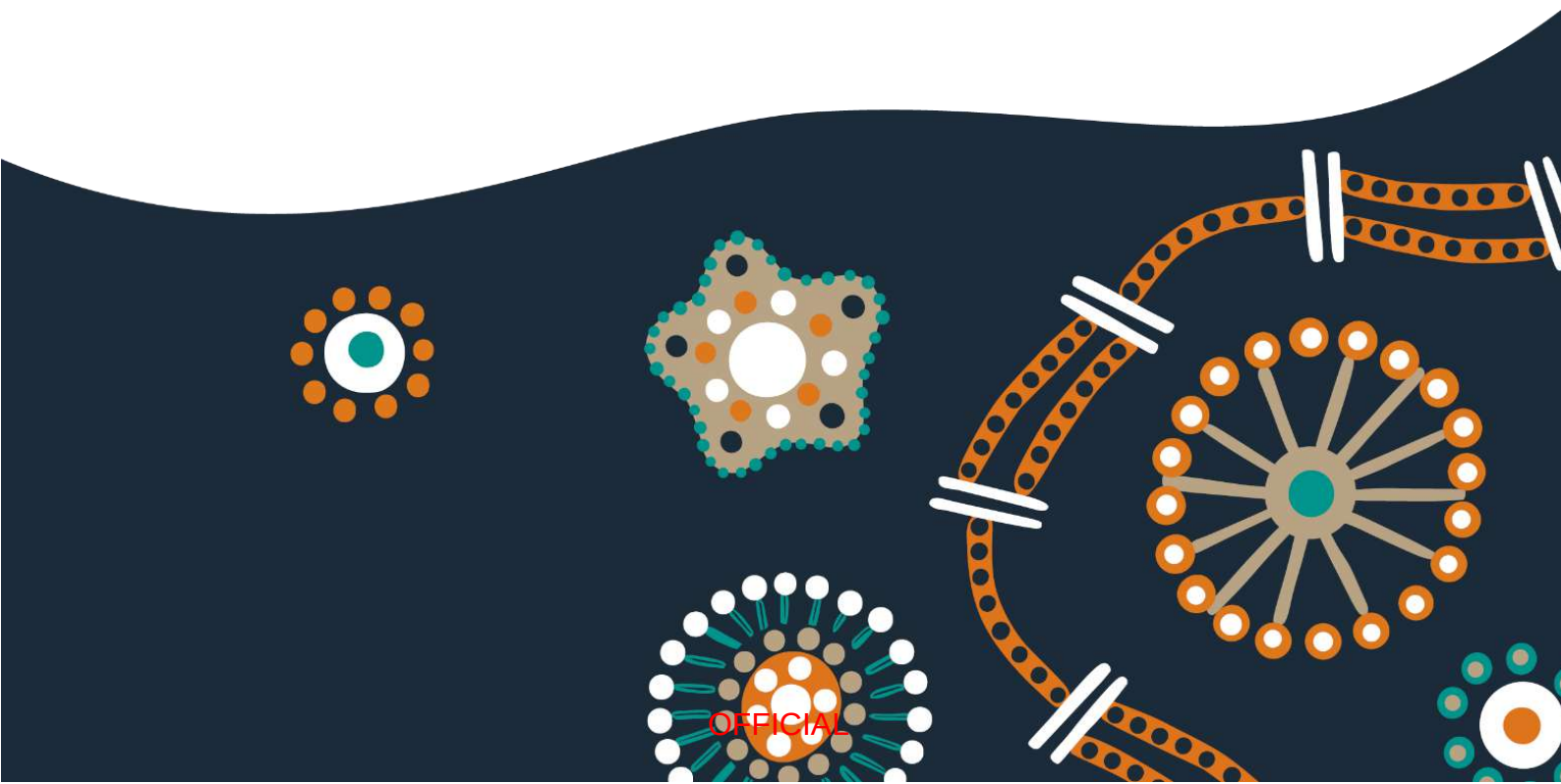
Australian Government
National Indigenous Australians Agency

NIAA

Regional Workforce Plan



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Overview

The Government is designing a new remote employment service to improve services delivered in remote Australia that better support job seekers, employers and the local community.

We recognise providers have valuable insights into local conditions and actively engage with communities and employers. We ask you to work with your local communities to develop and submit Regional Workforce Plans (RWP) that represent the community priorities, economic and job opportunities and related workforce development needs. Through the RWP, CDP participants and communities will have a central role in setting out a strategic vision tailored for each remote region. RWPs are community-centered and adopt a holistic approach to connect existing government services while fostering cross-sector collaboration to address local challenges and build on opportunities. By addressing current workforce planning requirements, your RWP could enhance the effectiveness of local employment service delivery in your region.

What is the intent of the RWP?

In accordance with the Community Development Program (CDP) Head Agreement 2019-2025, providers are required to develop a RWP that demonstrates their engagement with communities, employers and stakeholders. This plan should reflect an understanding of the specific workforce, business and industry needs unique to the region and its communities.

The RWP may be referenced to identify workforce needs at the regional level, and could assist government, employers, service providers and remote communities to align community and workforce development priorities, as well as economic opportunities throughout the region.

What goes into the RWP?

A template has been developed to assist providers and communities to develop the RWP. CDP providers must submit a completed RWP template to the NIAA by COB Wednesday 30 April.

Each CDP region must have a RWP inclusive of all communities within a region outlining current and future workforce priorities, opportunities and barriers for the region.

The NIAA is aware research and plans for many communities and regions already exist. Providers should access information from current resources such as: Local Implementation Plans, Regional Council plans and Community Service Delivery Overviews. NIAA's preference is for RWPs to be reflective of current community priorities and local trends and conditions. As a guide and where practical, RWPs should reference source documents from the last 5 years.

RWPs will have five parts:

- Community engagement and consultation
- Regional profile (including community priorities, opportunities and barriers)
- Workforce profile
- Workforce scan
- Regional recommendations

What support is available?

Providers will be able to access support from NIAA National Office staff who will provide guidance on completing the RWP. These sessions will be similar to sessions held with providers for Workforce Development Workplans.

Please email remoteservices@niaa.gov.au if you have any questions or would like to request a 1 on 1 session.

How do I submit the RWP?

Providers must submit the RWP to the NIAA using the specified template format.

The NIAA will inform providers once the RWP has been reviewed and accepted by NIAA. The NIAA may contact providers to seek clarification or seek a resubmission if further development is required.

RWPs must be emailed to remoteservices@niaa.gov.au by COB Wednesday 30 April 2025.

All RWPs will need to be in place and accepted before 30 June 2025.

How will I know if the RWP has been accepted?

The NIAA will review all RWPs and confirm if the plan is accepted or if further information or development is required. The NIAA will come back to providers where there are any concerns about the acceptability of the RWP.

For the RWP to be accepted by NIAA, providers must demonstrate the following:

Part One: Community engagement and consultation

- RWP has been developed through genuine engagement with communities in the region
- Broad range of stakeholder group and approaches were utilised to undertake engagement and consultation, and details of these are provided
- Existing local plans relevant to the scope of the RWP have been considered and referenced
- Key points from consultations are clear and accurately reflect the needs and priorities of the local community/ies
- Alternative or competing views are noted
- Include supporting evidence of community support for the RWP. This may include a CDP provider's board but must also include other organisations or groups. Examples of community support could include, but is not limited to:
    - a letter of support from local communities, local community organisations or leadership groups and/or
    - other documentation/evidence that the local community endorses the new job/s.

Part Two: Regional profile

- an understanding of employment and economic development priorities, opportunities and barriers in your specific region
- awareness of existing infrastructure in the communities, service gaps, economic and social issues and needs

Part Three: Workforce profile

- an understanding of the region's workforce profile
- an understanding of CDP participant needs and aspirations

Part Four: Workforce snapshot

- key data provided in relation to:
    - Demographic (male, female, Indigenous status, disability, cultural diversity, LGBTQIA+ and age)
    - Top five jobs industries participants want to be employed in
    - Total number of job ready participants or employed
    - Type of employment (casual, part-time, full-time) participants are interested in
    - Top five qualifications in demand by participants
    - Top five barriers to employment

Part Five: Regional recommendations

- comprehensive understanding of the region's unique issues, and the strategies and resources required to address these.
- recommendations are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely

How will the RWP be used?

Once accepted by NIAA, the RWPs will be uploaded to the NIAA website, making them publicly available and serving as a reference for communities, all levels of government, employers and service providers.

Providers should clearly identify any details in the plan that you or the community might prefer not to publish, and the NIAA will consider these requests on a case-by-case basis.

Timeframes

10 January 2025	Draft RWP template to be emailed to providers for feedback.
31 January 2025	Opportunity for providers to give feedback on the template.
7 February 2025	RWP template finalised and emailed to providers.
10 February to 7 March 2025	NIAA National Office support – optional drop-in and 1 on 1 sessions
30 April 2025	RWP due to NIAA. Alternatively, early submissions accepted.
1 May 2025	Commencement of RWP reviews by NIAA. Providers will be notified once RWP has been accepted or if further information/development is required in May and early June.
30 June 2025	Last date for all RWPs to be finalised, including where NIAA required further development.

TEMPLATE

Regional Workforce Plan

Region name: Darwin – Daly Region

Region number: Region 35

Provider: Ironbark Aboriginal Corporation

Template completion instructions

This template has been developed to assist providers and communities to develop the RWP. CDP providers must submit a completed RWP template to the NIAA by COB Wednesday 30 April.

Each CDP region must have a RWP inclusive of all communities within a region outlining current and future workforce priorities, opportunities and barriers for the region.

The NIAA is aware research and plans for many communities and regions already exist. Providers should access information from current resources such as: Local Implementation Plans, Regional Council plans and Community Service Delivery Overviews. As a guide and where practical, RWPs should reference source documents from the last 5 years. Please include all resources referenced for this plan.

In accordance with the Community Development Program (CDP) Head Agreement 2019-2025, providers are required to develop a RWP that demonstrates their engagement with communities, employers and stakeholders.

The RWP has five parts:

- Community engagement and consultation
- Regional profile (including priorities, opportunities and barriers)
- Workforce profile
- Workforce scan
- Regional recommendations

Part One: Community Engagement and Consultation

Who was engaged and consulted?

Stakeholder group	Stakeholder name	Contact details	Date of engagement	Engagement channel	Number of Participants
CDP participants	Humpty Doo CDP Participants	N/A	29/01/2025	Face-to-face meeting	8
CDP participants	Berry Springs CDP Participants	N/A	27/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	7
CDP participants	Adelaide River CDP Participants	N/A	24/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	5
CDP participants	Nauiyu Nambiyu/Daly River CDP Participants	N/A	25/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	17 (6 women and 11 men)[1]
CDP Participants	Belyuen CDP Participants	N/A	11/03/2025	Face-to-face meeting	3
Community Groups	Green River Aboriginal Corporation	Email: gm@grac.com.au	25/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	4
Community Groups	Catholic Care NT	Email: wendy.nicholls@catholiccarent.org.au	25/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	

[1] In Nauiyu Nambiyu/Daly River, Women and Men were consulted separately.

Community Groups	Mirriam Rose Foundation	Email: programmanager@miriamrosefoundation.org.au	25/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	
Local Government	Victoria-Daly Regional Council	Email: pat.hollowood@vicdaly.nt.gov.au	25/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	
Community Groups	Children's Ground	Email: rickilee.tilmouth@childrensground.org.au	29/01/2025	Face-to-face meeting	3
Northern Territory Government	Northern Territory Department of Health	Email: Camilla.feeney@nt.gov.au	22/01/2025	Email	1
Northern Territory Government	Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services (NT PFES)	Email: elissa.moy@pfes.nt.gov.au	13/03/2025	Video Conference	1
Local Business	Humpty Doo Barramundi	Email: Jason.warren@hdbarra.com.au	29/01/2025	Face-to-face meeting	2
Community Groups	The Gathering (Baptist Bush Church)	Phone: (08) 8988 1177	13/02/2025	Phone Call	1
Educational Institution	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	Email: ceo@batchelor.edu.au	24/02/2025	Face-to-face meeting	3
Community Organisation	Industry Skills Advisory Council	Email: Godfred.Addai@isacnt.org.au	03/03/2025	Video Conference	1

	Northern Territory (ISACNT)				
Business Peak Body	Chamber of Commerce Northern Territory	Email: ceo@chambernt.com.au	04/03/2025	Video Conference	2
Local Government	Wagait Shire Council	Email: ceo@wagait.nt.gov.au	18/03/2025	Video Conference	1

What were the key points that came out of the consultation for each stakeholder group?

During the development process for this Regional Workforce Plan, stakeholders from across the spectrum of End Users, Organisations and Business/Industry were consulted to elicit feedback. Feedback was sought based on questions under the following topics of interest, and although stakeholders provided diverse perspectives, common themes emerged across groups:

- Community Demographics and Workforce Engagement.
- Jobs and Skills in Demand (Now and Future).
- Key Workforce Challenges.
- Mitigation of Workforce Challenges.
- Workforce Development Strategies.

General Feedback

General feedback emphasised that workforce planning in the Darwin-Daly Region must be led by the community and designed to reflect local strengths, challenges, and aspirations. Key to this is investing in transport, infrastructure and the right support services to remove barriers to training and employment to help people succeed in the long term. Expanding wraparound support and providing more tailored, one-on-one support will be significant enablers to ensuring that people have the right training, clear employment pathways, and help to address social challenges along the way.

Community voices in the region have made it clear that workforce development must go beyond job placements alone – it needs to consider how it can strengthen cultural knowledge transfer to support re-engagement of young people, particularly with the ongoing loss of Elders and the disadvantage experienced by young and emerging leaders. This means consideration of jobs that align with cultural knowledge and skills, such as roles in land management, language services, and community leadership, for example community and social services delivery. It also means investing in strong mentoring programs to connect young people with positive role models who can guide and support them.

Practical actions, such as improving access to transport and employment, enabling equipment, expanding local job creation in areas like health, education, maintenance and land management, and strengthening training-to-employment pathways, are all essential. Employers and contractors need to be held accountable for their commitments to local hiring, but at the same time must also be provided adequate support to enable them to provide opportunities to local people through programs like the CDP.

Finally, communities have a strong interest in developing practical skills that benefit both work and everyday life, particularly in trades and mechanical work, which supports local infrastructure and creates opportunities for economic self-sufficiency. Workforce planning that truly reflects the community's strengths, culture and aspirations will create better outcomes not just for employment, but for the region's future as a whole.

Community Demographics and Workforce Engagement

The communities across the Ironbark Aboriginal Corporation (Ironbark) CDP Region (Region 35) are incredibly diverse, covering a wide range of cultural and language groups across both rural townships and more remote communities. The people living in these communities have different needs, with workforce challenges varying significantly between the areas closer to Greater Darwin and those further out. In the communities closer to Darwin, Ironbark supports a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, while in more remote areas, the majority of participants are Indigenous.

Young people, particularly young men aged 16-25, have been identified as a key group requiring targeted support, especially in remote areas where disengagement is high. A range of factors contribute to workforce disengagement across the region. In more remote locations, there are simply fewer job opportunities, and many of the roles that do exist are not always suitable for people based on their age, physical ability, or education levels. For parents, limited access to formal childcare continues to be a major barrier to workforce participation. This disproportionately impacts women, and young women in particular, with a trend in young women in rural and remote communities having children earlier and therefore having less opportunities to engage in the workforce.

Another challenge raised by communities is the reliance on external workers, such as FIFO, DIDO and backpackers, to fill local jobs — reducing opportunities for local people and reinforcing disengagement. Combined with a lack of positive role models in many areas, and social pressures, this can discourage people from even trying to enter the workforce.

There's also a clear gap for young people who leave school early, often around the age of 14, but who don't become eligible for CDP services until they turn 16 — leaving them with little support during a critical period when early intervention could make a real difference.

Addressing these challenges requires tailored, place-based solutions that reflect the unique circumstances of each community, while creating pathways that support young people, parents, and those currently disengaged to build skills, confidence and a connection to meaningful work.

Jobs and Skills in Demand (Now and Future)

Across the Darwin-Daly Region, there is strong community interest in employment that aligns with cultural values and local needs, particularly jobs that offer real skills, fair conditions and opportunities for career progression. Outdoor, hands-on work is especially popular with male job seekers who are physically able to do it, while roles in community services, childcare, creative industries, and tourism attract a broader range of participants.

Businesses have expressed interest in hiring more Indigenous workers or workers through CDP, but many say they need better support systems in place — such as wraparound services for employees — to give them confidence when hiring and to ensure staff have the right support to succeed in the workplace.

Current job opportunities in demand across the region include community-based roles in aged care, disability support, childcare, night patrol, and community organisations. Skilled trades such as mechanics, truck driving, fencing, and civil construction are also in demand, alongside culturally aligned jobs like Ranger work, Caring for Country programs, and water monitoring. The tourism and hospitality sector offers opportunities in cultural tourism, recreational fishing, caravan parks and hospitality venues, with some additional training needed for remote first aid and off-road driving.

Other industries with strong potential include aquaculture, agriculture, food processing, retail, administration, health and education (including teacher aides, school mentors, and Aboriginal Health Practitioners), and creative industries such as music, dance, and screen media (particularly popular with young people). Beauty and personal services have also been identified as a growing interest, particularly for local women.

From a business perspective, the top five sectors for employment demand have been identified as the hospitality and tourism, retail, warehousing, agriculture, and construction sectors, with additional demand in mining, defence support, and security.

Looking to the future, there is strong potential for growth in Indigenous Ranger and Defence roles, particularly in conservation-based employment and within NORFORCE. The screen, media and technology sectors also offer future employment potential if the right training is provided. There is growing demand for Aboriginal interpreting services across justice, government, and private sectors, providing employment while preserving and promoting local languages. Cultural tourism is another emerging opportunity, aligning with Northern Territory Government strategies to promote self-drive tourism into more remote areas. Aged care and social services are also expected to grow as the population ages.

To meet these current and future opportunities, targeted training is essential. Key needs include licensing (such as Light and Heavy Rigid licences), practical skills like mechanical repairs and maintenance, and essential digital literacy to support job readiness in an increasingly online world. Place-based training, delivered in communities rather than requiring travel to Darwin, is critical to making training accessible. In cases where local demand does not justify on-site delivery, a regional training approach, which brings together participants from neighbouring communities, could offer a practical solution.

Overall, while the current training and support for obtaining tickets offered through CDP is valued, there is an opportunity to better align this training with clear, long-term employment pathways developed in partnership with local industry. By linking training, job creation, and support into a clear and community-led workforce strategy, employment outcomes that benefit individuals, families, and communities across the region can be built.

Key Workforce Challenges

Even though there is strong community interest in employment across the Darwin-Daly Region, systemic barriers continue to limit workforce participation and job retention. These challenges are wide-ranging, from a lack of local job opportunities to limited access to training, essential infrastructure gaps, and a disconnect between employer expectations and the reality of life in community, particularly when it comes to balancing work with cultural responsibilities.

Access to Jobs and Workforce Readiness

Many community members want to work locally, but there is a perception that available jobs are often filled by non-local workers, including backpackers and FIFO/DIDO staff. The jobs that are available locally are often seasonal or short-term, making it difficult to plan for long-term employment. There's also a mismatch between available jobs and job seeker capability, with many CDP opportunities focused on outdoor labour, which is not suitable for older participants or those with health issues.

Job seekers also raised concerns about the lack of advance notice for upcoming opportunities. Ideally, people need six to 12 months' lead time to build the right skills and get work ready. Transport, accommodation, and understanding workplace expectations are all additional barriers, especially for those who have never held a formal job before. Basic work-readiness skills, like admin, punctuality and general life skills, also need strengthening.

Criminal history, health issues, and limited access to licences or ID further complicate employment pathways. In remote areas, licence testing only happens once a year, leaving people without a critical piece of the puzzle for work eligibility.

Employers also face challenges. Many businesses struggle to retain Indigenous staff, often due to a lack of flexibility around cultural obligations, which can lead to disengagement. High relocation costs mean some businesses rely on non-local hires, further reinforcing local disengagement.

Training and Development Gaps

There are also issues with training pathways not aligning to real jobs. Communities want to see training linked directly to long-term employment opportunities, with closer coordination between training providers, service providers and local industries. Digital literacy and basic literacy remain a barrier for many participants, especially in an increasingly online world.

One-on-one mentoring is considered essential to supporting young people who do not see themselves in the workforce. Meanwhile, the cost of delivering training outside of Darwin can be prohibitive for providers, particularly if demand in smaller communities is too low to justify regular delivery. In addition to this, in some communities social issues and unrest are causing less training to occur, due to safety concerns for training providers. Stronger partnerships between businesses and service providers could also help, as many businesses are unaware of the workforce programs that could help them access and support local workers.

Infrastructure and Systemic Barriers

Transport and infrastructure issues, including poor internet connectivity, lack of reliable public transport, and poor road conditions, directly impact employment opportunities. Even for those with vehicles, high fuel costs and the rising cost of living make it harder for people to consistently get to work. Housing is also a barrier, with overcrowding and limited housing options creating instability that affects work-readiness.

Poor internet access, combined with low digital literacy, also means many people simply do not know about jobs when they become available. For community-based maintenance roles, there's also a lack of basic tools and equipment, making it hard to carry out the work even when people are employed.

Employer and Workplace Challenges

A consistent theme from community feedback is that workforce programs designed externally (including by Ironbark) do not always align with what communities actually need. This highlights the importance of culturally appropriate, community-led workforce development that understands the local context.

Concerns around employer inflexibility also came through strongly. For many people, cultural obligations, such as attending ceremonies or fulfilling kinship responsibilities, are non-negotiable, and workplaces need to be more flexible to accommodate this. Employers also need to build better cultural awareness to reduce misunderstandings and workplace friction.

At the same time, communities expect fairness, if non-local workers receive accommodation or other benefits, these should also be offered to locals where needed. Businesses themselves are also under pressure, with rising costs meaning many employers simply do not have the capacity to invest in training staff from scratch, they need people who are ready to step straight into a role.

Addressing these challenges will require a coordinated, community-led approach that brings employers, training providers, and communities together to create practical solutions that work for everyone. This means culturally safe employment models, stronger training-to-employment pathways, improved infrastructure, and better wraparound support, all grounded in the reality of life in the region.

Mitigation of Workforce Challenges

Mitigating workforce challenges in the Darwin-Daly Region requires more than just short-term programs; it needs real, systemic change to how training is delivered, how employers engage with communities, and how transport and infrastructure barriers are addressed. A community-led and culturally responsive approach is essential to ensure employment pathways are not only sustainable but also meaningful to local people.

Improving Training and Employment Pathways

Training needs to be delivered in a way that works for the region, with more place-based training delivered locally to remove transport barriers. Where local delivery is not viable, a regional training model could bring together participants from nearby communities to create viable group sizes. Training also needs to

directly link to real jobs, ensuring that people are building the right skills for actual employment opportunities, rather than completing ad hoc courses with no clear pathway to work.

Strong training-to-employment links are particularly important. More structured apprenticeships and traineeships should be developed to create long-term career pathways. To stop young people from falling through the cracks, early intervention is essential, with structured programs that engage youth under 16 in job readiness, training, and positive community-based activities before they become disengaged and/or engaging in activity that may disqualify them from future opportunities.

Enhancing Workforce Transition Support

Getting a job is just one part of the story - keeping it requires wraparound support that addresses the full picture. Holistic programs that help with housing, transport, financial literacy, and workplace expectations will help job seekers successfully transition into long-term employment. Communities have also asked for longer lead times (ideally 6-12 months) for upcoming job opportunities, giving people time to complete training and build the necessary skills. Formal mentoring programs, connecting job seekers with positive role models, are also critical to building confidence and supporting retention.

Transport and Infrastructure Solutions

Transport remains one of the biggest practical barriers to work. Funding for community transport options, such as a community bus, would make a significant difference. However, this needs to be balanced with ongoing social issues around property crime, and its impacts on the availability of existing community transport assets. Driver's licence testing also needs to be more frequent and accessible, working with MVR to remove this unnecessary barrier. Local employment also relies on access to the right tools, equipment and infrastructure, particularly for maintenance, construction and land management roles, targeted investment in these areas would directly support job creation.

Strengthening Employer Engagement and Workforce Policies

Stronger local employment policies are needed within procurement contracts to ensure businesses meet their obligations to hire local workers, rather than finding ways to bypass these commitments. Contractors and service providers working in the region should be required to recruit and train locals, especially in sectors like healthcare, education and essential services which require understanding of local context and culture.

All external providers should be expected to engage with communities in a culturally responsive way, respecting local knowledge, leadership and cultural obligations. Local workers should also receive the same benefits as non-local hires, ensuring equal and fair conditions. There's also a need for targeted engagement with young people, particularly young men, through mentoring, pre-employment programs, and ongoing support to help build confidence, motivation and long-term commitment to the workforce.

While holding business to account is important, it is equally important that businesses are given the support they need to help workers succeed. Wraparound support not only for employees, but for employers, will be key to ensuring the best outcomes for all parties involved.

Industry-Specific Workforce Development

Increased local training options are critical to reduce reliance on interstate training, particularly in emerging industries like aquaculture. Expanding training programs for Indigenous Rangers, civil construction, and contractor work will directly support local employment in areas with clear demand. At the same time, industry needs to play a bigger role, with contractors and service providers expected to actively recruit and train local workers, not just source labour from elsewhere.

By embedding these changes into a long-term, community-led workforce plan, the region can move beyond short-term fixes and build a stronger, more resilient workforce that creates real opportunities for local people, now and into the future.

Workforce Development Strategies

To build a sustainable regional workforce plan, there needs to be a focus on prioritising community leadership, cultural responsiveness, and direct alignment with real job opportunities. Key recommendations from stakeholders include:

Holistic Workforce Support

- Deliver wraparound support for job seekers, addressing housing, transport, counselling, and flexible training needs.
- Introduce hands-on career exploration opportunities so job seekers can trial different career paths.
- Strengthen pre-employment training to focus on life skills, workplace expectations, and basic admin skills.
- Establish formal mentoring programs, connecting job seekers with local role models well before jobs become available.

Strengthen Local Workforce Planning

- Embed community governance councils to lead workforce planning and align programs with local priorities and Territory-wide policies and programs.
- Design community-driven employment programs that reflect place-based plans and cultural priorities.
- Ensure job opportunities are well advertised across multiple accessible platforms acknowledging literacy/digital literacy and IT access issues across the Region.

Enhance Industry and Employer Partnerships

- Require large contractors and service providers to actively recruit and train local workers wherever possible.
- Expand industry engagement programs (expos, site visits) to rural and remote communities.
- Ensure local hiring requirements are embedded in contracts and are effectively monitored and enforced.
- Offer businesses workforce support packages to assist with employee transport, mentoring, and cultural obligations.

Align Training with Real Jobs

- Deliver place-based training in community spaces and ensure training links directly to current job demand.
- Prioritise training in high-demand and 'dual benefit' skills (e.g., mechanical repairs, civil works, land management).
- Develop 'train the trainer' models to build local training capacity and reduce reliance on outside trainers over time.

Target Essential Services Workforce Development

- Invest in local training pipelines for essential service roles (healthcare, education, power, water).
- Expand rural access to mental health, AOD, and counselling services to address underlying employment barriers.
- Ensure all training programs clearly outline possible employment pathways from the start.

Was there anyone else who wasn't consulted? Why?

A broad and diverse group of stakeholders from across the Darwin-Daly Region were provided with an opportunity to participate in the consultation process, with requests sent to stakeholders across government (local and Northern Territory), community organisations, businesses and industry peak bodies. For CDP Participant/End User engagement, this was undertaken through an informal yarning-based approach, with the engagement team basing themselves out of Ironbark offices across the service area on days where CDP Participants were most likely to attend Ironbark's offices. All stakeholders who were sent requests for consultation were given the opportunity to meet face-to-face, provide feedback virtually (via Microsoft Teams or over the phone), or via email, depending on their preferences. Requests emphasised that all consultation was voluntary, and many stakeholders did not provide responses to requests.

Were there any alternative or competing views that should be acknowledged?

As demonstrated by the feedback outlined in the summary above, the primary alternative or competing view that was expressed by stakeholders was around the availability of jobs. Feedback from job seekers/End Users indicated that there are limited jobs available in many communities, while feedback from businesses emphasised that there are more jobs than people to fill them.

Part Two: Regional Profile

Introduction and Overview

As of June 30, 2023, the Northern Territory's estimated population was 253,062, a 1.13% increase from the previous year. The Greater Darwin area, including the City of Darwin, City of Palmerston, and Litchfield Council, grew by 1.06%. While the Darwin-Daly Region (CDP Region 35) does not include Darwin and Palmerston, these urban centres serve as key hubs for surrounding communities within the region.

The Darwin-Daly Region is home to several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, including the Larrakia, Malak Malak, Wagiman, Ngan'giwumirri, Ngen'giwumirri, Wulna, and Kungarakan peoples, who maintain strong cultural connections to their traditional lands.

Local governance is managed by multiple councils, including the City of Darwin, City of Palmerston, Litchfield Council, Belyuen Community Government Council, and Victoria Daly Regional Council. These councils, alongside the Northern Territory Government, develop strategies to address regional priorities and challenges.

Ironbark Aboriginal Corporation (IAC) plays a key role in community development across the region, serving communities such as Humpty Doo, Marrakai, Acacia Hills, Knuckey Lagoon, Belyuen, Wagait, Berry Springs, Batchelor, Nauiyu Nambiyu/Daly River, and Adelaide River. As a non-profit based in Darwin, IAC delivers programs that connect communities, strengthen relationships, build life skills, celebrate culture, and create employment opportunities.

As in all parts of Australia, effective regional workforce planning must be guided by local needs, addressing economic and employment growth while tackling social, cultural, and geographic barriers that limit full participation. Understanding these unique challenges is the first step toward developing inclusive, community-led solutions.

Infrastructure, Service Gaps and Economic Barriers

The Darwin-Daly Region faces ongoing infrastructure challenges, critical service gaps, and economic barriers to job creation and participation, particularly in rural and remote areas. These issues limit employment opportunities, hinder economic growth, and create long-term social disadvantages for the people and communities of the Region.

This section outlines the region's existing infrastructure, employment priorities, and key service gaps, highlighting their impacts on job creation and economic development. Addressing these barriers requires a coordinated, community-led approach in partnership with local councils and government authorities, so that sustainable solutions can be developed collectively rather than in isolation to create lasting change and unlock the region's full economic and social potential.

Effective workforce planning depends on a deep understanding of the region's social, cultural, economic, and geographic realities. Engaging with affected communities and representative bodies ensures that government initiatives respond directly to lived experiences and deliver real value for both local communities and taxpayer-funded investments.

The Urban-Rural-Remote Divide

The urban-rural-remote divide is a key challenge in the Darwin-Daly Region, shaping access to services, employment, and infrastructure. While economic growth is concentrated in Darwin and nearby urban areas, remote and semi-rural communities face limited access to healthcare, education, digital connectivity, and transport.

Many residents in smaller communities must travel long distances for basic services and job opportunities, creating economic and social barriers. High living costs, housing shortages, and infrastructure gaps further widen these disparities, making sustainable growth more difficult in remote areas.

Addressing these challenges requires community-driven solutions, such as remote job creation, improved digital infrastructure, locally tailored training, and better transport connectivity. Strong collaboration between governments, community organisations, and private enterprises will be essential to ensuring equitable economic development and long-term opportunities for all residents, regardless of location.

Existing Infrastructure in the Darwin-Daly Region

The Darwin-Daly Region has a mix of urban, semi-rural, and remote communities, each with varying levels of infrastructure to support economic growth and the delivery of essential services. While Darwin and its surrounding areas benefit from well-developed infrastructure, remote communities often face limited access to reliable water, transport, energy, and urban development services. This section provides an overview of the existing infrastructure in key sectors and highlights the challenges that need to be addressed for sustainable regional growth.

1. Water Supply Infrastructure	▪ The Darwin-Daly Region relies on a combination of surface water and groundwater sources to meet its water needs. The Darwin River Dam supplies approximately 85% of the region's water, with additional sources including Manton Dam, the McMinns and Howard East borefields, and local groundwater supplies. However, demand is increasing, and long-term water security remains a concern, particularly for remote communities where access to clean and reliable water is more limited. ▪ To address future supply challenges, the Adelaide River Off-stream Water Storage (AROWS) Project has been proposed, aiming to increase water availability by harvesting excess wet-season flows. Investments in water recycling, desalination, and improved water management will also be critical to ensuring sustainable access to water for residential, agricultural, and industrial uses across the region.
2. Transport Infrastructure (Roads and Public Transport)	▪ Road networks are the primary mode of transport in the Darwin-Daly Region, with key highways such as the Stuart Highway, Arnhem Highway, and Cox Peninsula Road linking major population centers. While Darwin and Palmerston benefit from sealed roads and well-maintained transport links, rural and remote communities often rely on unsealed roads that become inaccessible during the wet season, creating barriers to essential services, employment, and economic development. ▪ Public transport options are limited outside of Darwin, where the bus network services urban areas but does not extend to remote communities, or even rural areas on the outskirts of Darwin. The lack of regular, reliable, and affordable transport options means many residents in smaller communities must rely on private vehicles or infrequent chartered services to access healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. Improving road maintenance, upgrading remote access routes, and exploring expanded public transport services are essential to enhancing mobility, economic participation, and regional connectivity.
3. Energy Infrastructure	▪ The region's energy supply is primarily provided by the Northern Territory's power grid, which sources electricity from gas-fired power stations, solar energy, and limited hydro resources. The Channel Island and Weddell Power Stations are the largest electricity generators, supplying Darwin, Palmerston, and surrounding areas. ▪ In remote communities, electricity is often generated through standalone diesel generators, which are costly, environmentally unsustainable, and vulnerable to supply disruptions. The expansion of renewable energy—particularly solar and battery storage systems—is being prioritised to reduce reliance on diesel and enhance energy security in these areas. Government and private sector initiatives are increasingly investing in renewable energy

	projects, including solar farms and microgrid solutions, to improve energy affordability and reliability across the region.
4. Urban Development Infrastructure	▪ Urban development in the Darwin-Daly Region varies significantly between urban, peri-urban, and remote communities. Darwin, Palmerston, and Litchfield have established housing, commercial centers, and industrial zones, with continued investment in residential growth, roads, and essential services. However, affordable housing shortages, population growth pressures, and climate resilience remain key urban planning challenges. ▪ In smaller towns and Aboriginal communities, urban infrastructure is often underdeveloped, with inadequate housing, limited community facilities, and constraints on land availability for expansion. Many communities also face challenges with waste management, drainage systems, and climate-adaptive infrastructure, particularly as extreme weather events become more frequent. ▪ Strategic investment in affordable housing, essential community services, and climate-resilient infrastructure is needed to support equitable regional development and improve living conditions across the Darwin-Daly Region. ▪ While the Darwin-Daly Region has several well-established infrastructure assets, regional disparities in access to water, transport, energy, and urban development remain key challenges. Addressing these gaps will require targeted investment, long-term planning, and collaborative efforts between governments, industry, and community stakeholders to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth across the region.

Local and Regional Council Priorities

The following section provides an overview of priorities, challenges and opportunities as determined and published by each Council / Authority within this Region. It will also draw out common themes across the various locations and aim to identify opportunities for removing barriers and optimising synergy and innovation in partnership with the Territory Government and other relevant stakeholders where possible.

1. City of Darwin

1.1 Overview

The City of Darwin is the Capital of the Northern Territory and Australia's northern most city. The City of Darwin is bounded by Beagle Gulf (the Timor Sea) in the north and west, the Litchfield Council area in the east, and Port Darwin and Unincorporated Northern Territory in the south. The population as of 2023 was 85,465 people.

The traditional owners of the Darwin area are the Larrakia (Saltwater) people.

Darwin is a residential, commercial and military area. The city is home to several defence areas, including the Defence Establishment Berrimah, Larrakeyah Barracks, RAAF Base Darwin and the RAAF Bombing and Gunnery Range. The city encompasses a total land area of about 112 square kilometres. Retailing is concentrated in central Darwin and in the northern centre of Casuarina.

1.2 City of Darwin Priorities

The five major focus area priorities of the Darwin City Council are:

1. A capital city with best practice and sustainable infrastructure	▪ By 2030, a number of strategic infrastructure projects will be developed and delivered.
2. A safe, liveable and healthy city	▪ By 2030, Darwin will be a safer place to live and visit. ▪ By 2030, Darwin will be increasingly recognised as a liveable city. ▪ By 2030, Darwin residents will be more active and healthy.

3. A cool, clean and green city	▪ By 2030, Darwin will be recognised as a clean and environmentally responsible city.
4. A smart and prosperous city	▪ By 2030, Darwin will be recognised globally as a smart city. ▪ By 2030, Darwin will have attracted and retained more residents and will offer sustainable investment opportunities.
5. A vibrant and creative city	▪ By 2030, Darwin will be recognised as an iconic destination. ▪ By 2030, Darwin will be a more conected community and have pride in our cultural identity.

2. City of Palmerston

2.1 Overview

The City of Palmerston is located about 20 kilometres south-east of the Darwin CBD. The City of Palmerston is bordered by the Litchfield Council area in the north, east and south, by the East Arm in the west, and Unincorporated Northern Territory in the north-west. The population as of 2023 was 41,143 people.

The traditional owners of the City of Palmerston are the Larrakia (Saltwater) people.

The City of Palmerston is a rapidly growing residential area, with light industrial areas in the suburbs of Pinelands and Yarrawonga. Palmerston has functioned as a dormitory area for the families of servicemen on defence bases in and around Darwin. The City encompasses a total land area of 56 square kilometres.

2.2 City of Palmerston Priorities

The seven major focus area priorities of the City of Palmerston are:

1. Family and Community	▪ An increase in the number of people attending Council events and engaging in community activities. ▪ Reduced crime rates - specifically a reduction in alcohol fueled violence. ▪ Increased partnerships in place between the Council and other levels of government which seek to address crime. ▪ Increased accessibility of Council facilities and resources for community activities for all members of our community.
2. Vibrant Economy	▪ The people of Palmerston choose to shop local. ▪ Occupancy rates – retail shop spaces are full. ▪ Employment rates increase. ▪ The population of Palmerston is growing (families stay). ▪ More tourists visit Palmerston.

3. Vibrant Economy	▪ There are more funds available for Council to invest in the community. ▪ There are more businesses located in Palmerston. ▪ Council is committed to ensuring local businesses and industry receive the support they need in order to grow and prosper within our region - measured through the Community Satisfaction Survey.
4. Cultural Diversity	▪ Council consults with and includes the needs of all people in its programs and planning using a mechanism it has agreed with those communities. ▪ Fostering and promotion of arts and culture within our community and the awareness and promotion of our local history is improved.
5. A Future Focus	▪ Council consults with and includes the needs of all people in its programs and planning using a mechanism it has agreed with those communities. ▪ Fostering and promotion of arts and culture within our community and the awareness and promotion of our local history is improved.
6. Environmental Sustainability	▪ The level of recycling / proportion of rubbish recycled is increased. ▪ There is a decrease in littering. ▪ Increase the canopy coverage (percentage of areas shaded by trees). ▪ Reduction in businesses using packaging and wrapping. ▪ Performance in actively protecting and enhancing the environmental assets and infrastructure of the City of Palmerston, while supporting local businesses and industry in sustainable land use, is improved. ▪ Performance in committing to effective and responsible city planning which balances and meets residential and commercial needs in our community is improved.

7. Governance	▪ Community are satisfied that Council values and encourages participation in Council activities by the community and is committed to delivering the highest possible levels of service and community engagement. ▪ Community are satisfied that Council is committed to ensuring that the systems and processes of Council support the organisation in delivering the best possible services to the community. ▪ Community are satisfied that Council values its people and the culture of our organisation. Council is committed to continuous improvement and innovation whilst seeking to reduce the costs of Council services through increased efficiency. ▪ Community are satisfied that Council is showing corporate and social responsibility, ensuring the sustainability of Council assets and services and undertaking effective planning and reporting of Council performance to the community.

3. Litchfield Council

3.1 Overview

The Litchfield Council area is located between 10 and 60 kilometres east of the Darwin CBD. The Litchfield Council area is bordered by Van Diemen Gulf and the Timor Sea in the north, the Adelaide River and Unincorporated Northern Territory in the east, the Coomalie Community Government Council area in the south, Unincorporated Northern Territory in the south-east, and the City of Palmerston and the City of Darwin in the west. The area has a population of 23, 415 people as of 2023.

The Traditional Owners in this area are the Larrakia, Woolner and Djowei Peoples.

The Litchfield Council area is predominantly rural and rural-residential, with some small Indigenous communities, a defence area and a prison. The main townships are Howard Springs and Humpty Doo, which include residential, commercial and industrial land use. Rural land is used mainly for agriculture (particularly beef cattle farming) and horticulture, with some conservation areas. Tourism is also an important industry. The Council area encompasses a total land area of about 2,900 square kilometres, including coastal and riverine areas, rainforests and lagoons.

3.2 Litchfield Council Priorities

As detailed in the Litchfield Council Strategic Plan 2022-2025, the municipality has a range of plans for improving services and quality of life within the community. These include:

1. Community and Lifestyle	▪ Further develop Recreation Facilities and Reserves and support Reserve Committees. ▪ Ongoing support for not-for-profit groups. ▪ Proactively engage NTG on activity centre planning. ▪ Provide an accessible, family friendly library service. ▪ Proactive involvement in animal management Develop by-laws in line with community expectations. ▪ Proactively deliver and encourage Waste Management and recycling. ▪ Proactive weeds management, including a focus on Gamba grass Improve Councils communication, education and engagement with community and other key stakeholders.

2. Continuity of Services and Facilities	▪ Council will continue to provide services and facilities at best value for our community. ▪ Council will focus on continuous improvement and regularly review service levels. ▪ Where possible, Council will investigate using technology and data to produce more efficient outcomes for our community.
3. Roads and Infrastructure	▪ Undertake a review of Council's roads delivery program, with an emphasis on advocating for sealing Council's unsealed roads. ▪ Continue to advocate for water security to all our communities and industries. ▪ Maintain community infrastructure where people can connect (community halls and recreation reserves). ▪ Maintain community infrastructure to meet required standards. ▪ Continue to develop asset management plans that drive efficient infrastructure spend.

4. Wagait Shire Council

4.1 Overview

Wagait Shire is located in the top end of the Northern Territory, about 10 kilometres west of the Darwin CBD. Wagait Shire is bounded by Beagle Gulf (the Timor Sea) in the north and east, and Unincorporated Northern Territory in the south and west. Wagait Shire includes two sections, divided by Charles Point Road. The area is home to 464 people as of 2023.

The traditional owners of the Wagait Shire are the Larrakia (Saltwater) people.

Wagait Shire includes a small township and holiday area, with some undeveloped areas in the east and south. The Shire encompasses a total land area of about six square kilometres.

4.2 Wagait Shire Priorities

The Strategic Focus Areas of the Wagait Shire Council for the 2024-2025 period are:

1. Community Wellbeing and Access to Services	▪ Increase Appropriate Transportation Services and Accessibility ▪ Increase to Health, Aged Care and Disability Services ▪ Social and Emotional Wellbeing Programs ▪ Emergency Management Planning ▪ Support local organisations and community groups
2. Environmental Management and Protection	▪ Waste Management Strategy ▪ Climate Change Risk Assessment and Adaption Plan and Action Plan ▪ Land and Coastline Management ▪ Protect Local Wildlife ▪ Assist to manage Feral Animal issues

	▪ Assist to reduce invasive species throughout the shire area
3. Amenities and Infrastructure	▪ Roads and Drains Infrastructure Program ▪ Continue to implement Cloppenburg Park Masterplan ▪ Footpaths and Bike paths ▪ Develop a Council Grounds Masterplan
4. Sustainable Local Economy	▪ Support Local Business ▪ Support new Business opportunities ▪ Identify Tourism Industry opportunities ▪ Assist with local employment opportunities
5. Partnerships and Advocacy for Wagait Shire	▪ Advocate for Wagait Shire interests ▪ Stakeholder relationships ▪ Work in Partnerships
6. Council Governance and Sustainability	▪ Financial Sustainability ▪ Secure Funding opportunities ▪ Boundary reform and/or Amalgamation ▪ Appropriate and effective Stakeholder communication and opportunities for feedback

5. Belyuen Community Government Council

5.1 Overview

The Belyuen Community Government Council area is located on the Cox Peninsula, in the top end of the Northern Territory, about 20 kilometres south-west of the Darwin CBD (130 kilometres by road). The Belyuen Community Government Council area is surrounded entirely by Unincorporated Northern Territory. The population of the community was 166 people as of 2023, with seven language groups including the Emmi, Wadjiginy, Kiuk, Malak Malak, Mendtha, Marriamu and Maranunggu.

The traditional owners of the Belyuen Community Government Council area are the Larrakia (Saltwater) people.

The Belyuen Community Government Council area includes a small community, with some undeveloped areas. The majority of the population is Aboriginal. The Council area encompasses a total land area of about 40 square kilometres.

Through the implementation of their strategic plan, the BCGC aims to:

- To improve the lifestyle and quality of life of the residents of Belyuen;
- To provide sustainable employment opportunities; and
- To involve the community in local decision making that affect their lives.

5.2 Belyuen Priority Areas

The priority areas for the BCGC are:

1. Community and Culture	▪ Creative, educated community. ▪ Active, healthy community. ▪ A safe, sustainable and resilient community. ▪ A connected and inclusive community.

2. Financial Management and Governance	▪ Responsible financial management with efficient and timely cost controls ▪ Council Sustainability vs business operations. ▪ Shire governed in consultation and partnership with the community. ▪ Responsive and efficient customer service delivery. ▪ Strategic management of Council.
3. Infrastructure and Asset Management	▪ Integrated and timely provision and sustainable management of infrastructure and assets. ▪ A safe and sustainable road network. ▪ A safe and sustainable water network. ▪ Sustainable waste management. ▪ Sustainable sewerage network. ▪ Community Housing.
4. Organisational Culture	▪ Responsive and effective service delivery.
5. Environment	▪ All community land is protected. ▪ Natural resources management plan maintained and implemented.
6. Community Wellbeing	▪ Services improvement. ▪ Mental well-being.

6. Coomalie Community Government Council

6.1 Overview

The Coomalie Community Government Council is a local government area in the Northern Territory of Australia, situated south of Darwin, Palmerston, and Litchfield. Established in 1990, the council governs an area of 2,056 km² and serves an estimated population of 1,318 residents. The region encompasses the localities of Batchelor, Adelaide River, and Lake Bennett.

The council's jurisdiction extends from Manton Dam in the north to the town of Adelaide River in the south, and from the Adelaide River in the east to the Litchfield National Park in the west.

The council provides various services and facilities, including community library services, sporting facilities such as ovals and a swimming pool, and support for community events.

6.2 Coomalie Community Government Council Priority Areas

1. Stability - Strong, transparent and accountable local governance to achieve quality service delivery.	▪ Support provision of training for Elected Members. ▪ Recruit, retain and support quality staff and volunteers. ▪ Communicate effectively and honestly with community stakeholders. ▪ Develop and implement long term strategic, financial and operational plans. ▪ Comply with statutory and regulatory requirements.
2. Advocacy - Advocate responsibly and vigorously for the interest and wellbeing of our community	▪ Lobby government to seek engagement and support for identified social and community issues and needs. ▪ Utilise technology to maximise responsible information gathering and communication to inform Council, residents and visitors. ▪ Provide assistance, participate in and support civic and community events. ▪ Ensure community can voice opinions and ideas to Council.

3. Sustainability - Implement comprehensive and innovative planning for sustainable service delivery across the social, economic, environmental and culture spheres.	▪ Asset and infrastructure management planning to reflect social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of Council. ▪ Improve the asset base needed to deliver services in fit for purpose infrastructure. ▪ Engage with the community in order to identify, assess and prioritise delivery in each sphere. ▪ Ensure Council incorporates efficient and effective means to achieve managed growth resilience.
4. Community Wellbeing and Resilience - Demonstrate strong support for community wellbeing	▪ Participate and represent the region at government and community's existing economic development networks. ▪ Provide safe and attractive parks, gardens, and open areas. ▪ Promote local employment options. ▪ Support and develop social and economic infrastructure inline with community use, activities and services. ▪ Respect culture and diversity.

7. Victoria Daly Regional Council

7.1 Overview

The Victoria Daly Regional Council area is located in the north-western section of the Northern Territory, between 120 and 650 kilometres south of the Darwin CBD. The Victoria Daly Regional Council area is bounded by Unincorporated Northern Territory, the Coomalie Community Government Council area and the West Arnhem Regional Council area in the north, the Roper Gulf Regional Council area, the Katherine Town Council area and the Barkly Regional Council area in the east, the Central Desert Regional Council area in the south, the State of Western Australia in the south-west, and the Timor Sea and the West Daly Regional Council area in the north-west.

The Victoria Daly Regional Council area is mainly rural, with some defence areas, and a number of small townships and indigenous communities, including Kalkarindji, Nauiyu, Pine Creek, Timber Creek and Yarralin. At least half the population are Aboriginal. The Council area encompasses a total land area of about 153,000 square kilometres. Rural land is used largely for pastoral purposes (cattle grazing), with some tourism along the Daly and Victoria Rivers.

7.2 Victoria Daly Regional Council Priority Areas

As detailed in the Victoria Daly Regional Plan 2024-2025, the Council has a number of plans and priority areas for improving services and quality of life within the community. These include:

1. Leadership	▪ Provide proactive leadership with transparent and accountable governance. ▪ Ensure effective community leadership and representation to Council of local issues through local authority committees. ▪ Support and train elected regional representatives. ▪ Comply with all statutory, regulatory, and reporting requirements. ▪ Create and implement an external communications plan which informs stakeholders of Council's activities. ▪ Advocate on behalf of the region to address regional disadvantage. ▪ Develop an overall reporting structure to enable Council to review the implementation and success or otherwise of the strategic plan and its objectives.

2. Prosperity	▪ Enhance the Council's financial sustainability to enable quality services and assets across the region. ▪ Further develop and diversify the Council's business division's contracts and activities to provide a wide range of income sources. ▪ Work with key on-ground personnel to develop innovative budget solutions to minimise expenditure and maximise income streams. ▪ Improve efficiencies within the Council to minimise resource wastage. ▪ Creation of a reserve to address Council's short, medium, and long-term infrastructure requirements.
3. People	▪ Grow our people through investment in training, skills recognition and developing regional opportunities for employment. ▪ Invest in training through the development and implementation of a comprehensive training planning covering all staff. ▪ Review the current organisational structure to improve communications, maximise inter departmental support and to grow staff capabilities and remuneration ▪ Create and implement an internal communications and visitation plan which builds understanding between all divisions of council. ▪ Grow local employment through the development and delivery of programs and contracts in communities and across the region.
4. Places	▪ Enhance the liveability of our communities and our regional lifestyle. ▪ Delivery of quality programs which supports resident's wellbeing. ▪ Support and or facilitation of local and regional cultural and festival events ▪ Facilitate the provision of services which improve residents' lives.

	▪ Be business friendly to encourage the development of business and industry investment into the region. 4.5 Enhance the local sport and recreational environmental within each community.

Priorities

The Darwin-Daly Region is a geographically, culturally and economically diverse part of Northern Australia. There is a significant urban/remote divide with much of the Territory's population and economic output located in the major metropolitan centres of Darwin and Palmerston.

As such, the economic and employment profile and priority focus of each area within this Region is complex, with the goals and objectives for growth and development driven by relevant local governments/authorities underpinned by broader Territory policy including the Regional Development Framework.

Increasing economic and employment opportunities across various sectors for the people of the Darwin-Daly Region and connecting those to the priorities of the Territory as a whole, is a core focus of local and Territory Governments, councils, including the Northern Territory Business council, and the IAC alike.

Based on the community breakdown in the section above, common priority areas for the region include, but are not limited to:

Priority	Priority description	Which region or community/ies are the priorities relevant to?
1. **Workforce development and employment growth**	▪ Training and Skills Development – Investment in vocational training, apprenticeships, and skill-building programs to increase local employment, particularly in remote and Indigenous communities. ▪ Support for Local Workforce – Encouraging job creation, upskilling, and workforce retention to reduce reliance on external labor. ▪ Indigenous Employment Pathways – Strengthening Aboriginal capability and leadership, fostering culturally appropriate employment opportunities, and supporting Indigenous-owned businesses.	Darwin Daly Region inclusive of all local authorities.
2. **Infrastructure and Connectivity**	▪ Roads and Transport – Addressing inadequate transport networks, particularly in rural and remote areas, by improving sealed roads, drainage, and public transport services.	Darwin Daly Region inclusive of all local authorities.

	▪ Digital and Communications Infrastructure – Expanding high-speed internet and mobile network coverage to support business, education, and community engagement. ▪ Water and Energy Security – Advocating for sustainable water management and renewable energy solutions, especially in rural areas where access is limited.	
3. Business and Industry Development	▪ Support for Small and Local Businesses – Creating business-friendly policies and incentives to help local enterprises grow and expand. ▪ Tourism and Visitor Economy – Enhancing regional tourism infrastructure, promoting cultural heritage experiences, and developing eco-tourism opportunities. ▪ Diversification of the Economy – Expanding industries beyond government and defense, including agriculture, horticulture, and conservation-based industries. ▪	Darwin Daly Region inclusive of all local authorities.
4. Environmental Sustainability and Land Management	▪ Climate Resilience and Adaptation – Developing strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change, extreme weather, and rising sea levels. ▪ Waste and Resource Management – Implementing efficient waste disposal, recycling programs, and weed management initiatives to protect the region's environment. ▪ Sustainable Land Use Planning – Ensuring land development aligns with environmental conservation, community needs, and economic potential.	Darwin Daly Region inclusive of all local authorities.

5. Community Wellbeing and Social Inclusion	▪ Health, Aged Care, and Disability Services – Expanding access to primary healthcare, aged care, and mental health services, particularly in remote and underserved areas. ▪ Cultural Recognition and Community Engagement – Strengthening Larrakia and other Indigenous cultural connections, supporting local festivals, events, and community-driven initiatives. ▪ Community Safety and Governance – Enhancing law enforcement services, community safety initiatives, and transparent governance to improve overall quality of life.	Darwin Daly Region inclusive of all local authorities.

Opportunities

Opportunity	Opportunity description
1. Work with authorities and representative bodies to increase infrastructure investment and development in line with local government objectives.	• Many local stakeholder organisations, particularly in remote areas, are focused on increasing investment in infrastructure, especially in relation to connectivity with other regions via roads and public transport. • Increased services to these areas will unlock a range of interconnected opportunities, including greater access to training and education opportunities in other parts of the Territory, and for ease of travel for people from outside these communities including tourists and professionals. • Working in partnership and collaboration with local government and representative agencies in a more coordinated and collective way will also allow for greater value for money across investments delivering effective, interconnected solutions to locally identified infrastructure challenges.
2. Expand and prioritise education, training and mentorship initiatives.	• In collaboration with local stakeholders, invest in more far-reaching opportunities for education, training and mentorship in remote locations across the Darwin-Daly region. • Build upon existing service provision across these areas to increase access, awareness and availability of training opportunities, including innovative initiatives such as mentorship programs within early and secondary education and entry level employment. • Mentorship for young people and early career job seekers will help to boost confidence, productivity, participation and a future generation of local mentors and role models.

3. Optimise the development of regional tourism throughout the Darwin-Daly Region.	• Tourism is a significant option for employment across the Darwin-Daly region, particularly in remote areas where there are limited other options for workforce participation. • Local people are best placed to work in tourism and hospitality roles across this region as people who know the areas and their histories. • Work closely with local stakeholders to raise awareness nationally of tourism opportunities across this region. • Provide incentives for businesses to invest in tourism and hospitality initiatives across the Darwin-Daly region, and for the priority employment of local people.

Barriers

Each of the service gaps listed and discussed above result in economic and employment barriers to equitable and sustainable growth across the Darwin – Daly Region. For these barriers to reduced, mitigated and ultimately removed, plans, policies and actions to address them must include a focus on understanding the root causes of these issues, listening to those most closely impacted and tailoring solutions that respond to regionally relevant obstacles to change. The most effective way of achieving this important goal is by consistently working with communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative bodies through long-term engagement so that responses to these issues can be tweaked or adjusted as they inevitably evolve.

Five key barriers to employment and economic development in this region include, but are not limited to:

1. Limited Employment Opportunities outside of Major Hubs	Job opportunities are highly concentrated in Darwin and Palmerston, leaving remote and rural communities with fewer employment options.
2. High Cost of Living and Doing Business	The cost of goods, services, housing, and utilities is significantly higher in the region, particularly in remote communities, making it difficult for businesses to operate profitably and for residents to afford basic needs.

3. Limited Access to Finance and Investment	Many small businesses and entrepreneurs in the Darwin-Daly Region struggle to access capital and investment opportunities, particularly in remote areas. High borrowing costs, limited banking services, and risk-averse lending practices make it difficult for businesses to expand, innovate, or establish new enterprises, stalling economic growth and diversification.
4. Workforce Skill Gaps and Labor Shortages	The region experiences a shortage of skilled workers across various industries, including construction, healthcare, and education. Limited vocational training and higher education options in rural areas further restrict workforce development.
5. Overreliance on Government Funding and Public Sector Employment	A significant portion of jobs and services in the region rely on government funding, limiting private sector growth and economic diversification. This dependence makes the local economy vulnerable to policy changes and funding fluctuations.

Service Gaps

The Darwin-Daly Region faces significant gaps in critical social services, particularly outside of major urban hubs, where limited access to essential services and infrastructure affects quality of life, economic participation, and community well-being.

1. Access to Healthcare Services	Many communities lack local medical facilities, requiring residents to travel long distances for primary healthcare, specialist services, and emergency care. Mental health and aged care services are also limited, impacting vulnerable populations.
2. Access to Infrastructure (Roads and Public Transport)	Poorly maintained roads and unsealed tracks restrict movement, particularly in the wet season, cutting off access to jobs, education, and services. Public transport options are minimal or nonexistent in rural areas, forcing reliance on private vehicles.
3. Access to Education and Training	Limited schools, vocational training centers, and tertiary education options in remote areas contribute to lower education outcomes and reduced employment opportunities. Digital learning options are also restricted due to poor internet access.
4. Access to Energy Services	Many rural and Indigenous communities rely on diesel generators, which are costly and unreliable. There is limited access to renewable energy solutions, increasing power outages and energy insecurity.
5. Access to Communications Services	Mobile coverage and internet connectivity are unreliable or nonexistent in some areas, restricting access to online education, telehealth services, and digital employment opportunities. The digital divide continues to widen between urban and rural residents.

1. Access to Community Support Programs and Services	Many communities have limited access to social services, including youth programs, aged care, disability services, and mental health support, increasing social isolation and vulnerability.
2. Access to and Issues with Law Enforcement and Community Safety	Under-resourced police services in remote communities result in delayed response times and inconsistent law enforcement. Community safety concerns, including domestic violence and substance abuse, are exacerbated by limited support services and intervention programs.

Social and Cultural Aspects of the Region

The Darwin-Daly Region faces a range of social, cultural, economic, and geographic challenges that impact economic growth, employment opportunities, and overall regional development. Addressing these issues is essential for creating a more inclusive and sustainable future.

1. Social	Limited access to healthcare, education, and essential services affects community well-being and workforce readiness, particularly in remote and semi-rural communities. Housing shortages, high living costs, and social disadvantage further contribute to inequality and unemployment, making it difficult for residents to engage in long-term economic participation.
2. Cultural	The region is home to diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, whose cultural connections to land and traditions shape their economic and employment participation. A lack of culturally appropriate employment opportunities, discrimination, and barriers to land use for business development remain significant challenges. Recognition of traditional land rights and support for Indigenous-led enterprises are crucial for economic inclusion.
3. Economic	Employment opportunities are concentrated in urban areas like Darwin and Palmerston, while remote and rural communities have limited access to jobs, training, and business investment. The high cost of living, infrastructure constraints, and reliance on government-funded programs hinder private sector growth and regional economic diversification.

4. Geographic and Environmental	The urban-rural divide, extreme weather conditions, and seasonal flooding pose significant infrastructure and transport challenges, making it difficult for remote communities to access jobs, markets, and essential services. Climate change and environmental degradation further threaten agriculture, water security, and long-term economic sustainability. By addressing these challenges through targeted investment, policy interventions, and community-driven solutions, the region can unlock greater economic and employment opportunities while ensuring equitable development for all residents.

Part Three: Workforce profile

The workforce snapshot for the Darwin-Daly Region highlights a diverse labour market with significant employment opportunities but persistent barriers to workforce participation, particularly in remote communities. While urban centres like Darwin and Palmerston serve as employment hubs, many job seekers outside these areas struggle with accessibility, training gaps, and limited job readiness, as mentioned in the sections above

Workforce Overview & Demographics

The region's total workforce is estimated at 71,618, with an FTE employment figure of 77,117. The workforce in the Region is relatively young, with the largest age group participating in the 25–34-year-old range. The gender split is nearly even, while Indigenous workers make up 11.6% of the overall workforce.

Additionally, vulnerable groups, including ex-offenders (208 individuals) and people with disabilities (408 individuals), require targeted workforce support both the enter and remain in employment.

Industry & Employment Demand

Employment in the region is concentrated in public administration (14,010 workers), healthcare (11,597), education (6,314), construction (6,242), and retail (5,296). These sectors drive the economy and provide long-term career potential for those in these roles

However, community engagement with CDP Participants highlights some different interests, with high demand for:

- Community and social services (aged care, disability support, childcare, night patrol).
- Culturally aligned roles (Ranger work, Caring for Country, cultural tourism).
- Trades and manual labour (construction, agriculture, aquaculture).
- Retail, administration, and hospitality (public service, remote stores, tourism).
- Education and health sector roles (teaching, school mentorship, Aboriginal health roles).

The most in-demand qualifications reflect industry needs, with hospitality, retail, warehousing, agriculture/aquaculture, and construction leading demand. However, low job readiness means many job seekers require pre-employment training, mentoring, and structured career pathways to stay engaged.

Key Pathways to Employment

To improve workforce participation, five critical pathways have been identified by the stakeholders engaged. These are:

- Localised Training & Industry Alignment – Delivering place-based training that leads directly to employment rather than general qualifications.
- Mentorship & Early Intervention – Providing structured mentoring and engaging youth before they disengage from education or employment.
- Workforce Transition & Support – Offering housing, transport, and financial literacy programs to help job seekers sustain employment.
- Stronger Industry & Employer Engagement – Ensuring businesses are accountable for local hiring and workforce development.
- Community-Led Economic Development – Investing in transport, digital infrastructure, and local workforce planning to remove structural barriers.

Major Barriers to Employment

Despite job availability across the Region, several systemic challenges restrict workforce participation, including:

- Limited Local Jobs & Mismatched Skills – Many available roles don't align with job seekers' capabilities, and remote areas have fewer employment opportunities.
- Transport & Infrastructure Issues – Poor public transport, road conditions, and driver's licence access make commuting difficult.
- Training & Job Readiness Gaps – Many job seekers lack formal employment experience, digital literacy, or industry-specific training.
- Social & Cultural Barriers – Early school disengagement, a lack of role models, and cultural obligations impact workforce participation.
- Employer Challenges – Businesses struggle to retain Indigenous employees due to inflexible policies and inadequate workplace support.

In Summary

Throughout the Darwin-Daly Region, there are strong opportunities for employment across key industries including public administration, healthcare, education, construction, and retail. However, despite demand in these sectors, workforce participation remains low due to a range of interconnected and pervasive systemic and structural barriers. Many job seekers, particularly in remote communities, face challenges related to job readiness, access to training, and transport limitations. There is also a significant mismatch between available jobs and the skills, education levels, or physical capacity of the local workforce.

To address these challenges, workforce development must be community-led, culturally responsive, and industry-aligned. Training programs should be delivered locally and tailored to real employment opportunities rather than generic qualifications. Early intervention and mentoring programs will be essential in engaging young people before they disengage from education and employment pathways. Greater investment in transport, digital connectivity, and job transition support, such as access to driving licence testing, financial literacy programs, and wraparound services, will help remove practical barriers to workforce participation.

At the same time, employers must be set up to succeed when hiring local job seekers. Many businesses struggle with high turnover rates and need workforce stability guarantees, such as wraparound support for both employees and employers. This could include assistance with workplace expectations, mentoring for new hires, and cultural awareness training including and understanding of the walking in two worlds obligations of Indigenous staff to improve retention. Stronger accountability measures in procurement contracts and workforce planning are also needed to ensure local hiring commitments are upheld.

By aligning workforce development efforts with local needs, community priorities, and industry demand, the region can create sustainable, long-term and innovative employment pathways. A coordinated approach between government, industry, training providers, and local organisations will be critical in ensuring that both job seekers and employers are supported, leading to stronger workforce retention and long-term economic and positive social growth for the region.

Part four: Workforce snapshot

Overview

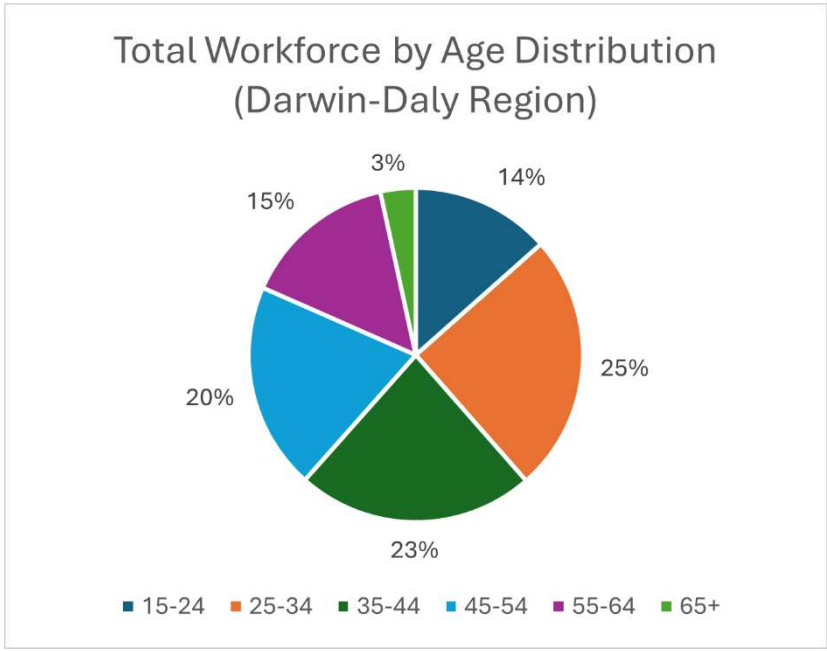
The workforce data provided for the Darwin-Daly Region (CDP Region 35) has been collated based on ABS Census data and data from the National Institute for Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR). Data from these sources are collated and presented based on Local Government Area (LGA). To ensure that workforce is captured appropriately, the data below includes the Darwin and Palmerston LGAs. While CDP does not apply in urban areas like Darwin and Palmerston, many of the employers in the Darwin-Daly Region are based there, and people who live outside those LGAs also work in the Darwin and Palmerston LGAs. LGA's in this data analysis include:

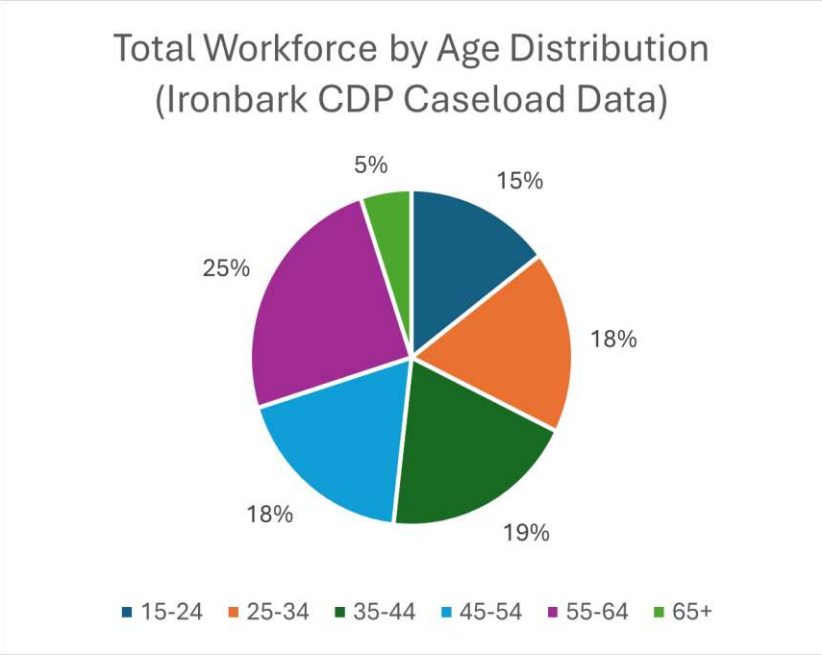
- City of Darwin.
- City of Palmerston.
- Litchfield Council.
- Coomalie Community Government Council.
- Belyuen Community Government Council.
- Wagait Shire.
- Victoria Daly Regional Council.

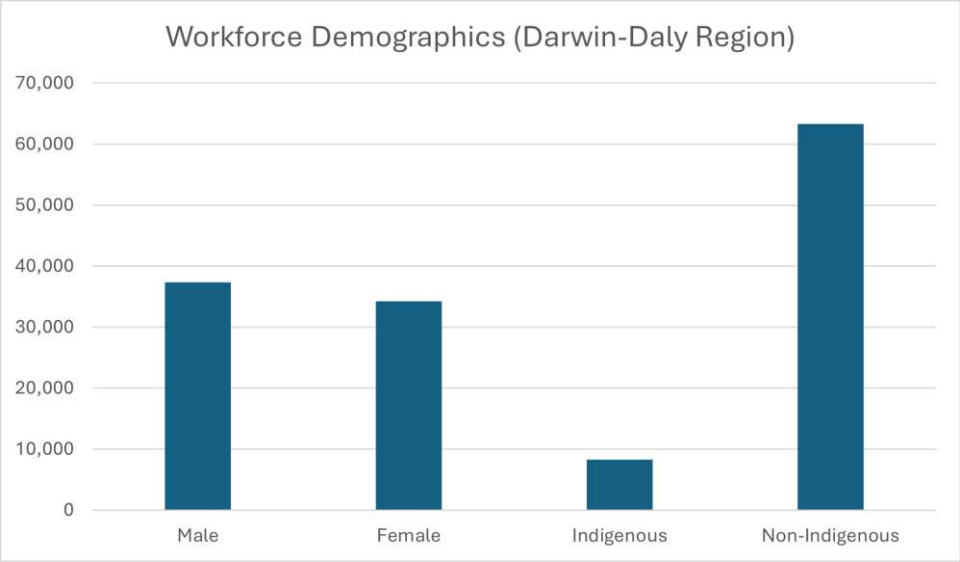
Data has also been provided based on Ironbark's CDP Caseload data, as of December 2024 and March 2025. Where total workforce figures are provided, two different figures are listed – total FTE and census headcount. The total FTE is based on modelling, where part-time workers are counted as fractions of full-time workers, while the census headcount is based on self-reporting at the census, where each worker is counted as one person regardless of how many hours they work.

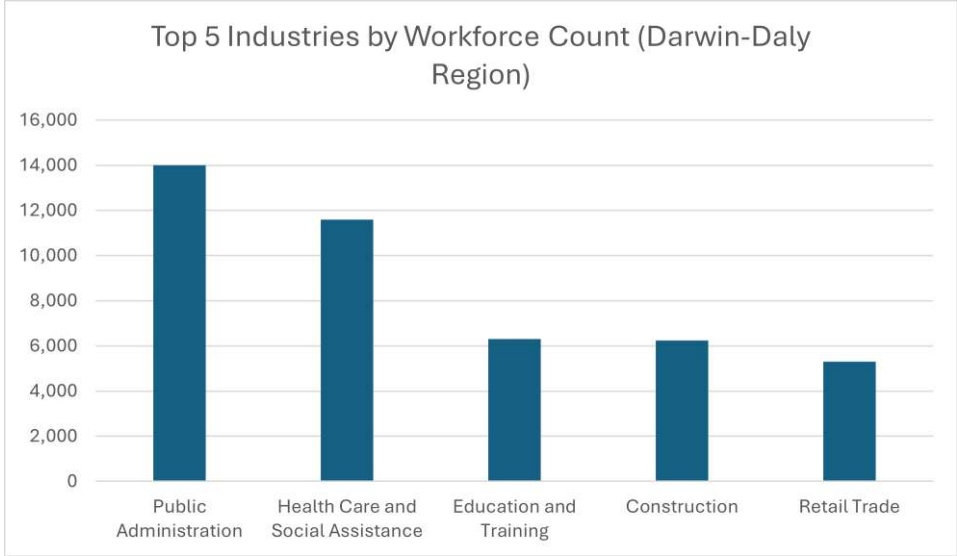
Workforce Data

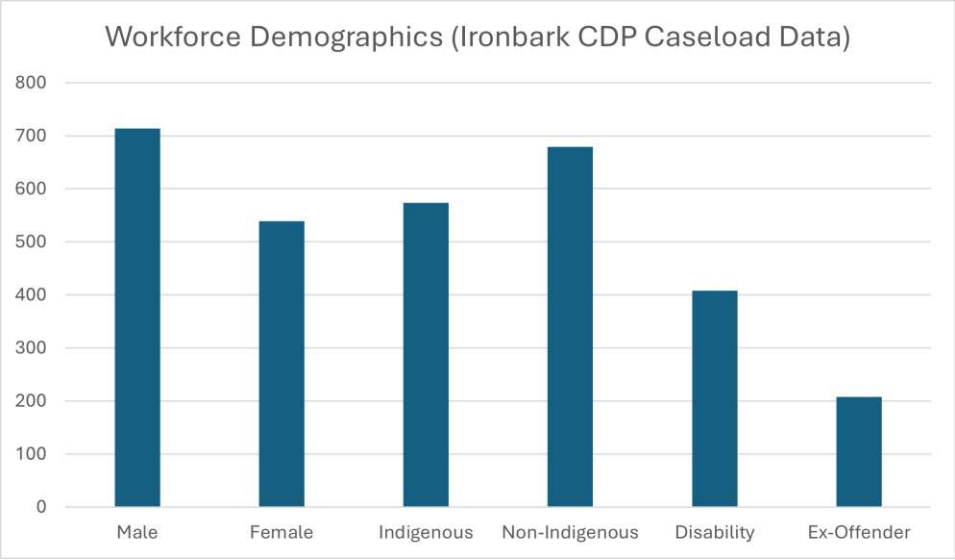
Measure	Data	Reference
Total FTE Employment	77,117	*Economy.id (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research)*
Total Workforce	71,618	*ABS Census Data 2021*
Employment: How many participants are currently employed?		
Measure	**Data**	**Reference**
Currently Employed (across all regions)	95	*Ironbark CDP Caseload Data (as at 13/03/2025)*
Employment type: What is the number of people in casual, part-time or full-time employment?		
Measure	**Data**	**Reference**
Casual	93	*Ironbark CDP Caseload Data (as at 13/03/2025)*
Part-time	1	
Full-time	1	


Total Workforce by Age Distribution
(Darwin-Daly Region)
3%
14%
15%
25%
20%
23%
15-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+


Total Workforce by Age Distribution
(Ironbark CDP Caseload Data)
5%
15%
25%
18%
18%
19%
15-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65+


Workforce Demographics (Darwin-Daly Region)
70,000
60,000
50,000
40,000
30,000
20,000
10,000
0
Male
Female
Indigenous
Non-Indigenous


Top 5 Industries by Workforce Count (Darwin-Daly Region)
16,000
14,000
12,000
10,000
8,000
6,000
4,000
2,000
0
Public Administration
Health Care and Social Assistance
Education and Training
Construction
Retail Trade


Workforce Demographics (Ironbark CDP Caseload Data)
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
Male
Female
Indigenous
Non-Indigenous
Disability
Ex-Offender

Jobs/Qualifications in Demand: Employers

Measure	Data	Reference
1. Hospitality	Top 5 qualifications in demand are based on feedback from the Chamber of Commerce Northern Territory, collected from regular employer surveys. Results are not presented in a prioritised number order.	*Chamber of Commerce Northern Territory*
2. Retail		
3. Warehousing		
4. Agriculture and Aquaculture		
5. Construction		

Jobs/Qualifications in Demand: Job Seekers

The following data has been obtained through engagement with CDP Participants within the Darwin-Daly Region between January and March 2025. Top 5 results are based on a collation and analysis of participants' feedback from across the region. Results are not presented in a prioritised number order.

What are the top five jobs' participants want to be employed in?

1. **Community-based and social sector roles**, including employment in community organisations, aged care, disability support, childcare and night patrol.
2. **Culturally aligned roles**, including Ranger work, Caring for Country, cultural tourism and water/environmental monitoring.
3. **Civil construction, skilled trades, maintenance and manual labour roles**, including agriculture, aquaculture and food processing, which allow people to work physically and gain skills which they can use for both employment and their personal lives to improve their homes or communities.
4. **Retail, administration, tourism and hospitality sector roles**, including public sector administration, remote stores and caravan parks and hospitality venues.
5. **Education and health sector roles**, including teachers, teacher aides, school guidance and mentorship, and Aboriginal Health Practitioner roles.

What are the top five pathways to employment in the region?

1. **Place-Based and Culturally Responsive Training**
    a. Deliver training locally or regionally to remove transport barriers and increase participation.
    b. Ensure training aligns with actual job opportunities, rather than providing generic qualifications.
    c. Introduce 'train the trainer' models to build local training capacity.

2. **Mentorship and Early Intervention Programs**
    a. Establish structured mentoring for young people and disengaged job seekers well before opportunities arise.
    b. Engage youth under 16 in job-readiness initiatives to prevent early disengagement.
    c. Connect job seekers with role models in their chosen industry, or employed role models, to provide guidance and motivation.
3. **Workforce Transition and Wraparound Support**
    a. Provide assistance with housing, transport, financial literacy, and workplace expectations.
    b. Offer longer lead times (6-12 months) for job openings to allow adequate training and preparation.
    c. Expand access to driver's licence testing and identification services to remove administrative barriers.
4. **Industry and Employer Engagement**
    a. Require contractors and service providers to prioritise local hiring and training in procurement contracts.
    b. Strengthen collaboration between businesses, government, and training providers to ensure workforce development aligns with industry needs.
    c. Expand industry exposure programs (e.g. job fairs, workplace visits) to rural and remote communities.
5. **Community-Led Employment and Economic Development**
    a. Support local councils and governance bodies in leading workforce planning efforts.
    b. Develop employment programs that aligns with community priorities and cultural values.
    c. Invest in infrastructure, transport and digital connectivity to improve job access and economic participation.

What are the top five barriers to employment in the region?

1. **Limited Local Job Availability and Mismatched Opportunities**
    a. Many available jobs are filled by non-local workers (e.g., FIFO, DIDO, backpackers).
    b. Remote areas have fewer job opportunities, and seasonal or short-term roles make long-term employment planning difficult.
    c. Available jobs often do not align with the skills, physical abilities, or education levels of local job seekers.
2. **Lack of Transport and Infrastructure**
    a. Inconsistent or unavailable public and community transport makes it difficult for job seekers to reach workplaces.
    b. Poor road conditions and high fuel costs further limit mobility.
    c. Limited access to driver's licence testing and formal identification services prevent many from securing employment.
3. **Workforce Readiness and Training Gaps**
    a. Many job seekers have never held formal employment, making workplace expectations, references, and transitions difficult.

b. Gaps in training-to-employment pathways mean that training does not always lead to real jobs.
c. Low literacy and digital skills create additional barriers, especially in an increasingly online job market.

4. **Social and Cultural Barriers**
   a. Many young people disengage from education early and face a gap in CDP eligibility, leading to increased criminality and social disconnection.
   b. A lack of role models and mentorship discourages workforce participation, particularly among young men.
   c. Family and cultural obligations can conflict with rigid Western workplace expectations, making retention difficult.
5. **Employer Challenges and Policy Gaps**
   a. Employers struggle with retaining Indigenous employees due to workplace inflexibility and a lack of cultural awareness.
   b. Businesses need more workforce support (e.g., transport assistance, mentoring programs) to confidently hire local workers.
   c. Contractors and service providers often bypass local hiring commitments due to policy loopholes or high recruitment costs.

Part Five: Regional recommendations

1. Expand Place-Based Training and Skills Development

To ensure workforce participation, training must be accessible, relevant, and directly connected to real job opportunities. The current system often requires people to travel long distances or complete training that does not align with available jobs. Expanding place-based training will remove these barriers and give job seekers the skills they need to succeed locally.

Recommendations include:

- Deliver training within communities, ensuring courses align with real job opportunities, particularly in those sectors which job seekers identified as most desirable.
- Adopt a regional training approach to pool participants from neighbouring communities, creating viable class sizes while keeping training local.
- Develop structured training-to-employment pathways, ensuring all training leads directly to available jobs rather than stand-alone qualifications.
- Strengthen licensing programs, including Light and Heavy Rigid licences, digital literacy, and trade skills, to help job seekers meet industry needs.
- Introduce “train the trainer” models, enabling local workers to become trainers and reducing reliance on external providers.

Barriers and Solutions

- Training is delivered too far from communities
  - Expand on-site and mobile training models to improve access.
- Current training does not lead to employment
  - Improve coordination between training providers and employers to ensure alignment.

2. Strengthen Workforce Transition and Wraparound Support

Many job seekers need more than training to succeed. They require long-term support to address barriers like transport, housing, and workplace readiness. Wraparound support, delivered in a personalised way, is critical to helping people not just find jobs, but stay in them.

Recommendations to consider include:

- Expand pre-employment training to focus on life skills, workplace expectations, and financial literacy, helping job seekers build confidence before entering the workforce.
- Strengthen one-on-one mentoring programs, particularly for young people aged 14-25, to provide positive role models and workforce guidance.

- Increase access to driver's licence testing and ID services in collaboration with the Northern Territory Government, removing unnecessary administrative barriers to work.
- Provide transitional housing and accommodation support for people relocating for jobs, ensuring stable living conditions to support workforce retention.
- Support businesses with wraparound services, providing guidance on cultural obligations, workforce retention strategies, and flexible employment models.

Barriers and Solutions

- Many job seekers have never been formally employed.
  - Expand job shadowing, mentoring, and work experience programs.
- Employers struggle with staff retention.
  - Workplace mentoring and employer support programs will help integrate and retain staff.

3. Improve Transport and Access to Employment

Transport remains one of the biggest barriers to employment in the region, particularly for people in remote communities. Without access to reliable transport, even available jobs remain out of reach. Community-driven transport solutions are needed to bridge this gap.

Recommendations include:

- Secure funding for community transport services, including subsidised jobseeker transport and community shuttle programs to connect workers with job hubs.
- Increase access to driver's licence testing in coordination with the Northern Territory Government, ensuring regular visits to remote communities rather than annual or infrequent testing.
- Develop a workforce in transport and logistics, training locals to become bus and truck drivers to create self-sustaining transport solutions.
- Address infrastructure issues, advocating for improved road maintenance and more affordable fuel subsidies to reduce travel costs.

Barriers and Solutions

- Limited access to driver's licence testing.
  - Increase mobile licensing services in remote communities.
- Transport options are unreliable or unsafe.
  - Secure funding for sustainable, community-managed transport solutions.

4. Strengthen Employer Engagement and Local Hiring Commitments

Employers in the region want to hire locally, but many feel they do not have the support to do so. At the same time, many communities feel that businesses bypass local hiring obligations, relying instead on FIFO, DIDO, and backpacker workers. A more structured and accountable approach is needed to ensure businesses follow through on hiring commitments while also receiving the support they need.

Potential solutions include:

- Enforce local hiring policies in government procurement contracts, ensuring contractors prioritise local workers over FIFO/DIDO staff.
- Provide wage subsidies and financial incentives to encourage businesses to hire, train, and retain local job seekers.
- Expand cultural competency training for employers, ensuring businesses understand Indigenous workforce needs, cultural obligations, and retention strategies.
- Create local employment guarantees, requiring businesses to provide structured on-the-job training and clear pathways for workforce development.
- Support industry engagement programs, such as job fairs, workplace visits, and school-to-work pathways, to connect employers with local talent early on.

Barriers and Solutions

- Employers say job seekers are not job ready.
    - Stronger pre-employment programs and structured apprenticeships will ensure a better fit.
- Cultural obligations are not well understood by employers.
    - Stronger cultural awareness training and workplace flexibility policies will improve retention.

5. Build Community-Led Economic Development Opportunities

Workforce development must align with community priorities and support long-term economic self-sufficiency. Communities want meaningful jobs that connect to culture, provide financial security, and help strengthen local infrastructure.

- Invest in Indigenous-led businesses and enterprises, particularly in cultural tourism, aquaculture, land management, and community services.
- Strengthen local workforce planning councils, ensuring employment strategies reflect community-identified needs rather than externally imposed models.
- Expand microfinance and small business support, providing grants and mentoring to help local entrepreneurs build businesses that create jobs.
- Develop dual-benefit employment models, focusing on roles that improve both community infrastructure and economic participation (e.g., mechanics, maintenance work).

- Ensure fair employment conditions, ensuring that local workers receive the same benefits as FIFO/DIDO workers, particularly regarding accommodation and incentives.

Barriers and Solutions

- Local industries need targeted investment.
  - Increased grants, funding, and business development support will help create sustainable employment.
- Culturally aligned jobs are undervalued.
  - Workforce planning should prioritise culturally significant roles, such as Ranger work, community services, and Aboriginal language interpreting.

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