An Australian Government Initiative

Regional Development Australia

State of the Region: Barkly

Where the Barkly is now, what's changing and the trends shaping the region.

RDA NT and .id (Informed Decisions)

Acknowledgment of Country

Regional Development Australia Northern Territory acknowledges First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Australia.

We respect and celebrate the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their commitment to the land, waters and their communities.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



Who we are



Rob Hall

Chief Economist,
.id (Informed Decisions)



Katrina Kawaljenko

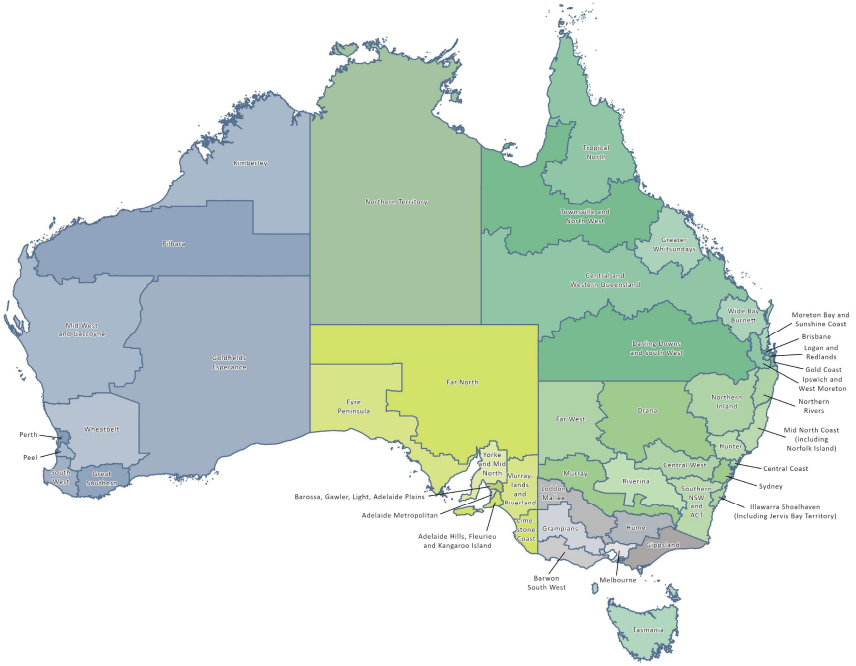
Chief Executive Officer,
Regional Development
Australia NT



Maddison Clonan

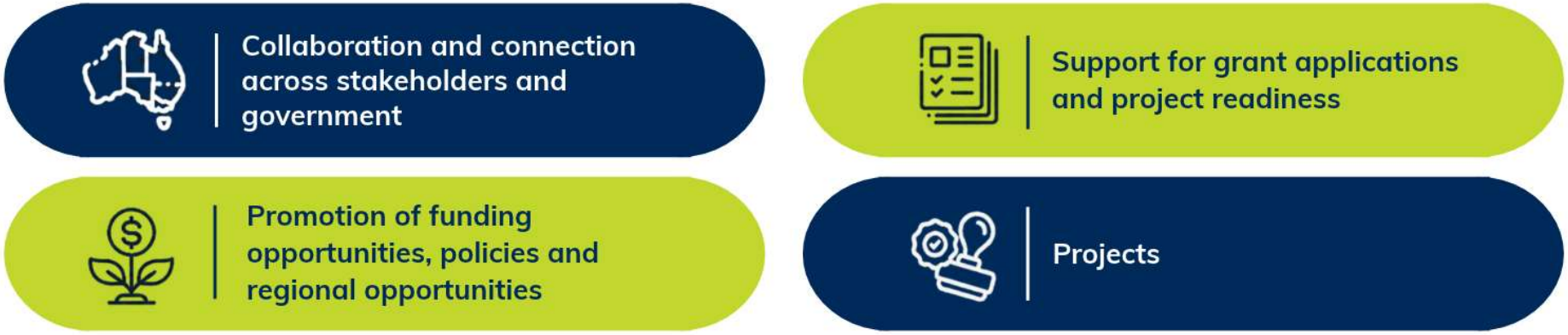
Regional Development
Manager, Regional
Development Australia
NT

Regional Development Australia Program



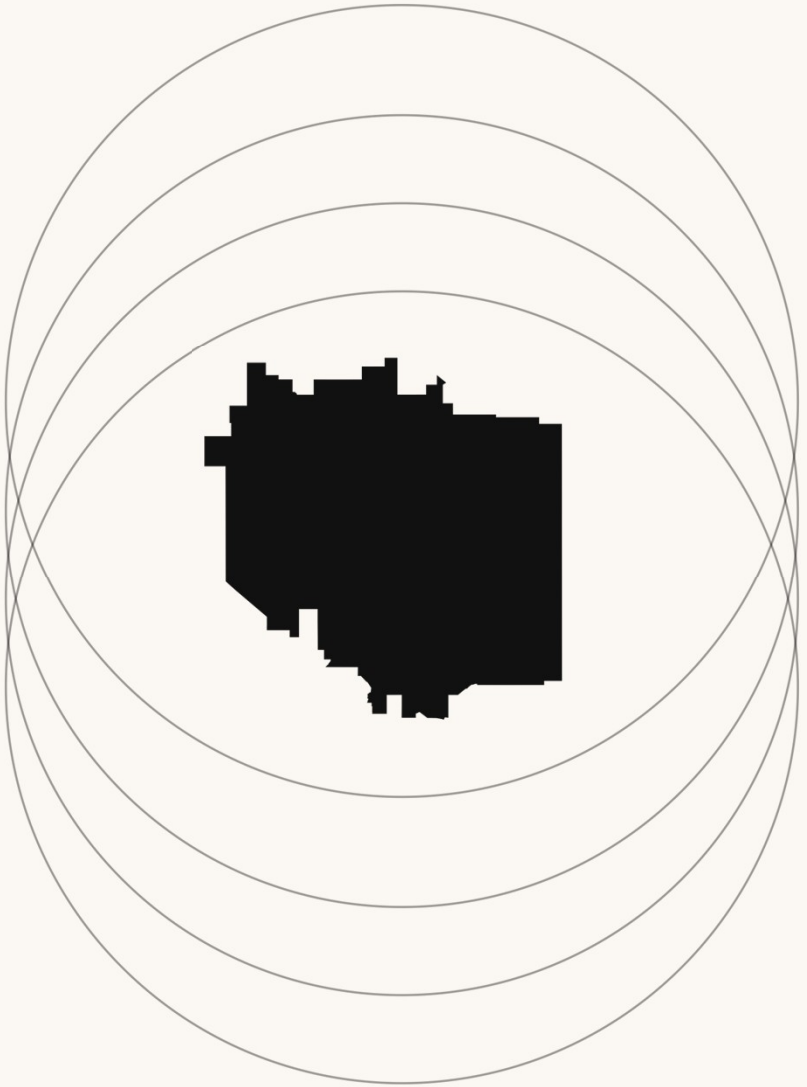
- Part of the federally funded RDA network, with more than 50 committees across Australia.
- Supports economic growth, stronger regional communities and long-term development priorities.
- Independent.
- Works with all levels of government and community stakeholders.
- Helps deliver the Regional Investment Framework across People, Places, Services, Industries and Local Economies.

How does RDA NT deliver?



State of Barkly Briefing 2026

Latest insights on national, NT and local trends



Presented by Rob Hall – Chief Economist
rob@id.com.au | 3 November 2026

What we'll cover:

01 Introduction

02 National and Northern Territory Insights

03 Barkly Insights

04 Key Takeaways

Act on what matters

One integrated understanding of community and place.

OUR EXPERTISE

Since 1997

Independent, evidence-based insight insight

Local area experts

Demographers, forecasters, economists and social researchers researchers

WHO WE WORK WITH

300+ councils

Alongside state and federal government

Essential services

Spanning education, health, transport and the private sector

Delivered online

Continually updated evidence base for your most important decisions

Capability building

We help build skills and confidence to use data for data for decision making

Expert support

Our specialists work closely with your team, providing advisory services as required

Local Government Toolkit

Unlock the complete picture of your LGA or Region

Community Views

Community's views and needs in policy and advocacy

Community Profile

Curated online community profile that provides deep demographic insights

Housing Monitor

Plan, deliver and monitor the supply of affordable and appropriate housing

Social Atlas

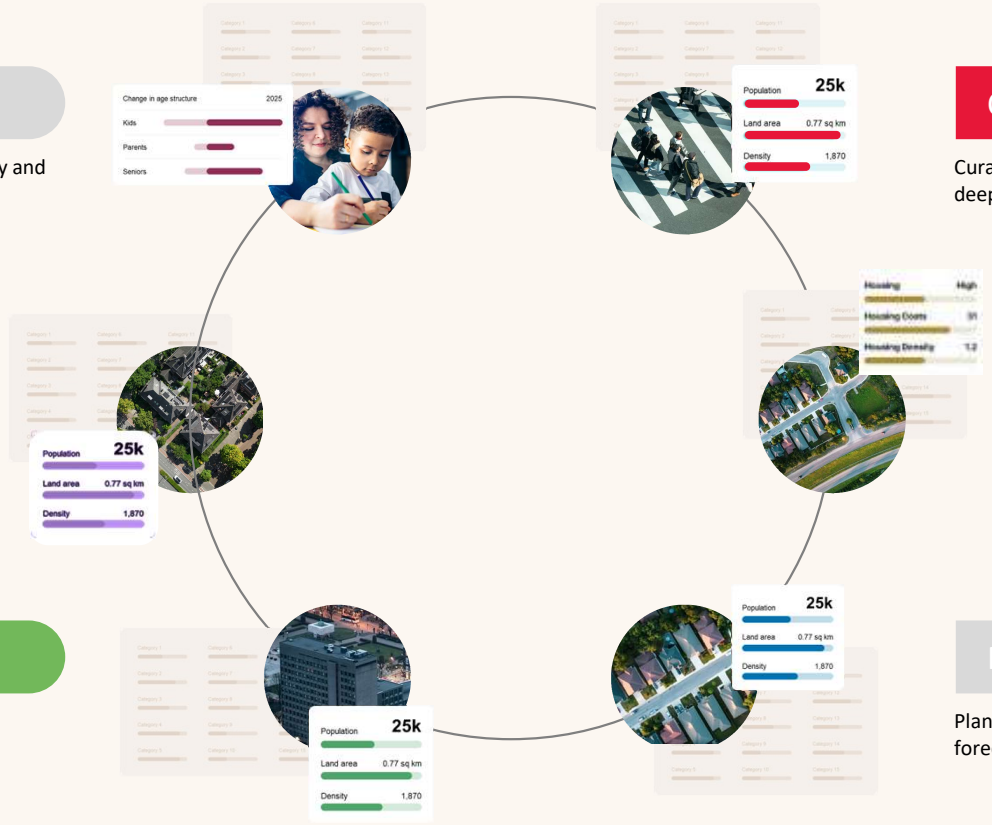
Powerful thematic maps to show where resources are best allocated

Economic Profile

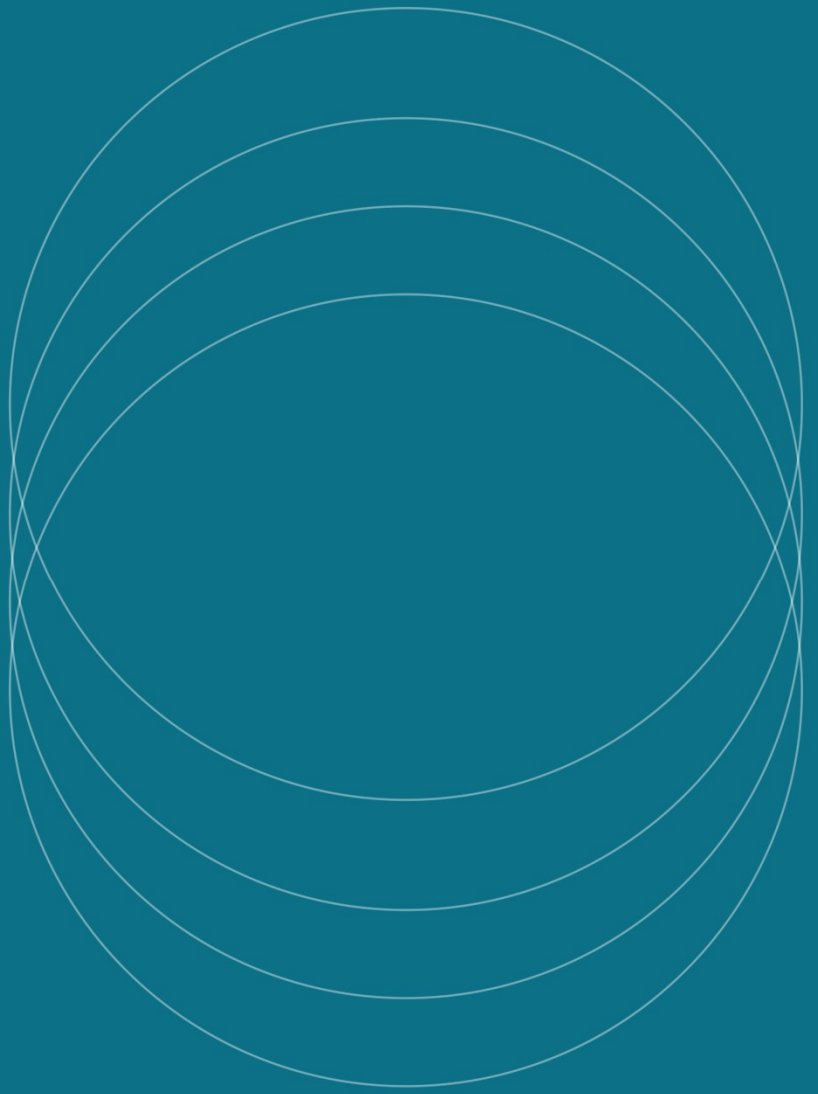
Comprehensive local economic profile and impact modelling tools

Population Forecast

Plan for the future with a single-scenario forecast of population and housing



Latest insights: Australia and Northern Territory



The national economy is slowing. Global shocks arrive as diesel bills and commodity prices.

+2.5%

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since March 2025

Modest growth off the back of consumption and business investment.

+3.7%

Annual weekly earnings, May 2026

Lowest annual increase since November 2022

4.6%

Australian unemployment, Sept 2026

The jobs market remains resilient, although labour force conditions are weakening

$80

Brent oil, per barrel AUD (Sep 2026)

Brent Oil prices up 10% from pre-conflict.

Diesel hit record highs in September.

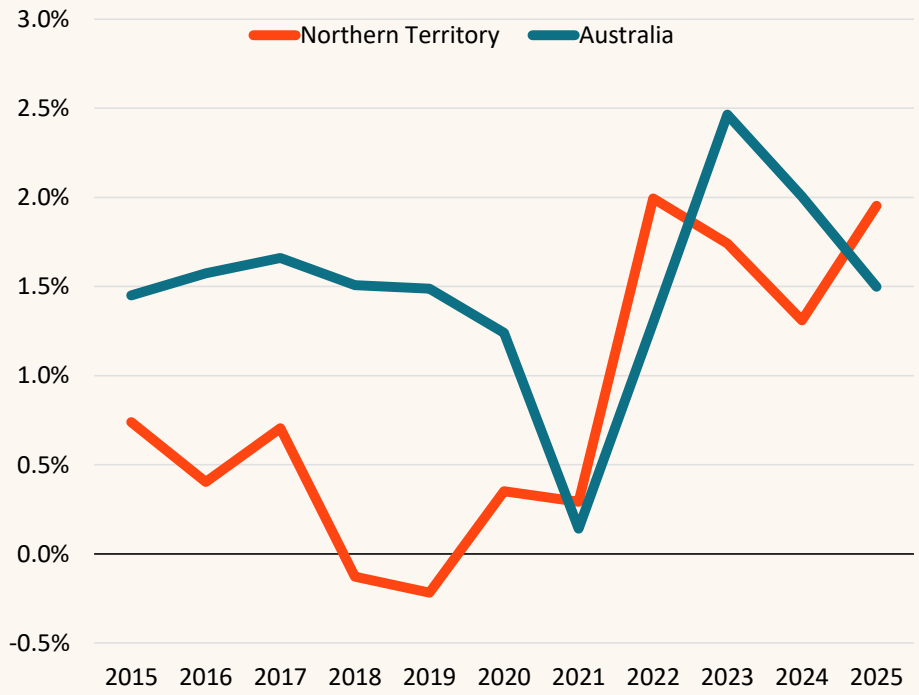
$4.00/kg

Ex-Darwin feeder steers (June 2026)

Live exports down 29% in H1 2026; Indonesia takes 77%.

Northern Territory's population growth 2nd fastest in the country at 2.0%

Annual % Change





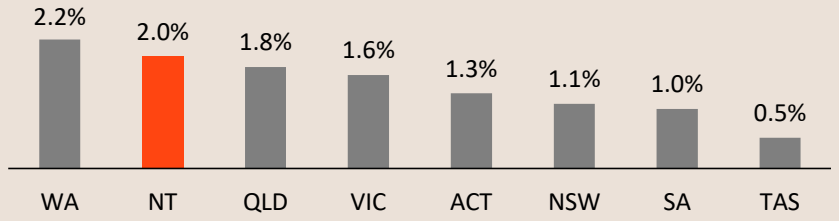
June 2025 estimate

265,978

People living in Northern Territory

2.0% **+5,094**

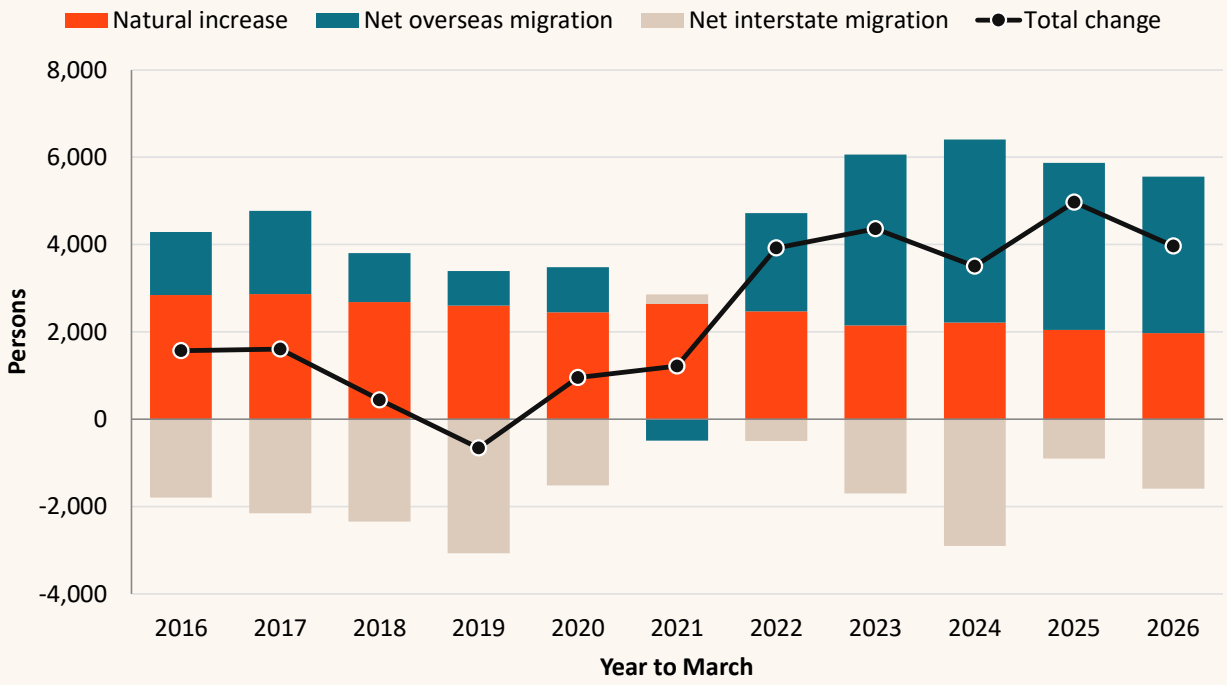
Change from the year before



Source: ABS National, state and territory population

The NT is growing on overseas migration while losing people interstate. The Barkly shows the same pattern.

Components of Change – Northern Territory (year to March)



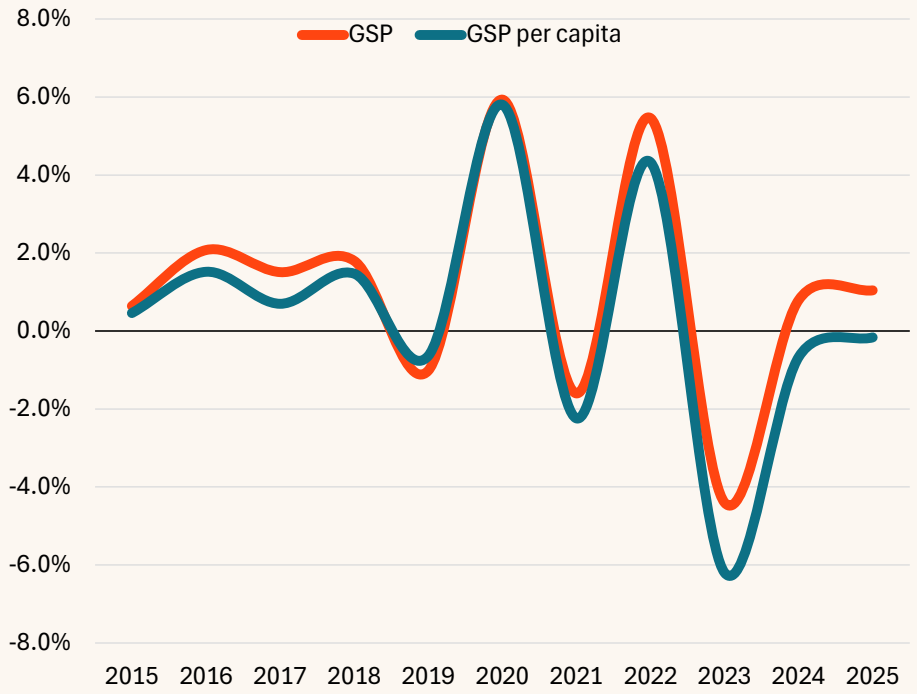
Top 5 – Net Migration in 2024/25

- India
- Philippines
- Nepal
- Bangladesh
- Indonesia

Source: ABS National, state and territory population

NT was the 5th fastest economy in 2024/25; per capita growth negative

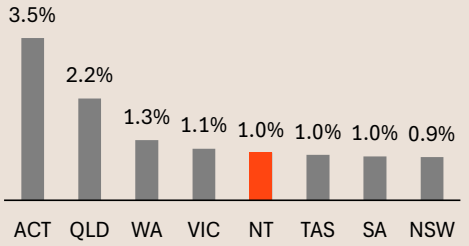
Annual % Change



Financial Year (compared to year before)

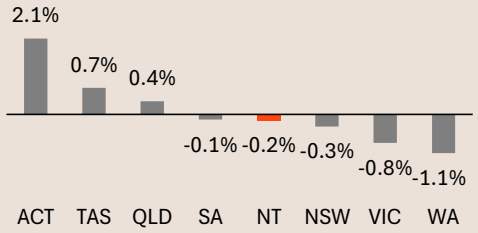


1.0%
GSP





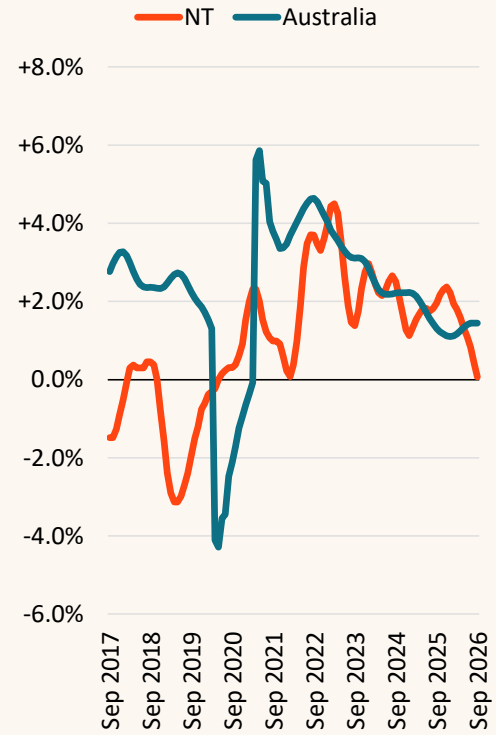
-0.2%
GSP per capita



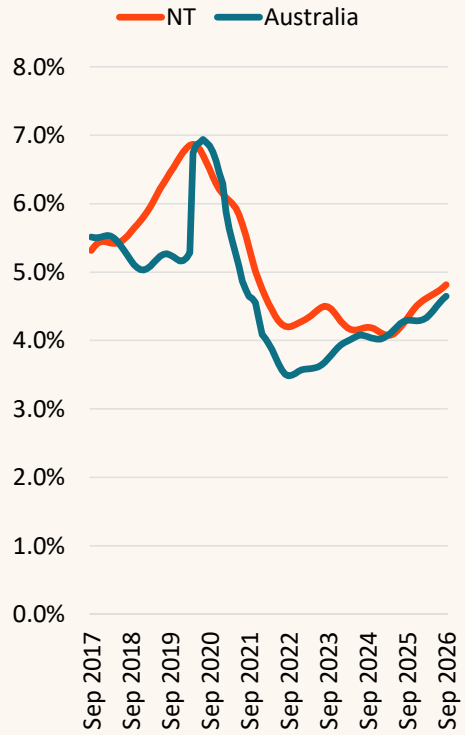
Source: ABS **Australian National Accounts: State Accounts**

Labour force conditions have eased after a period of solid employment growth

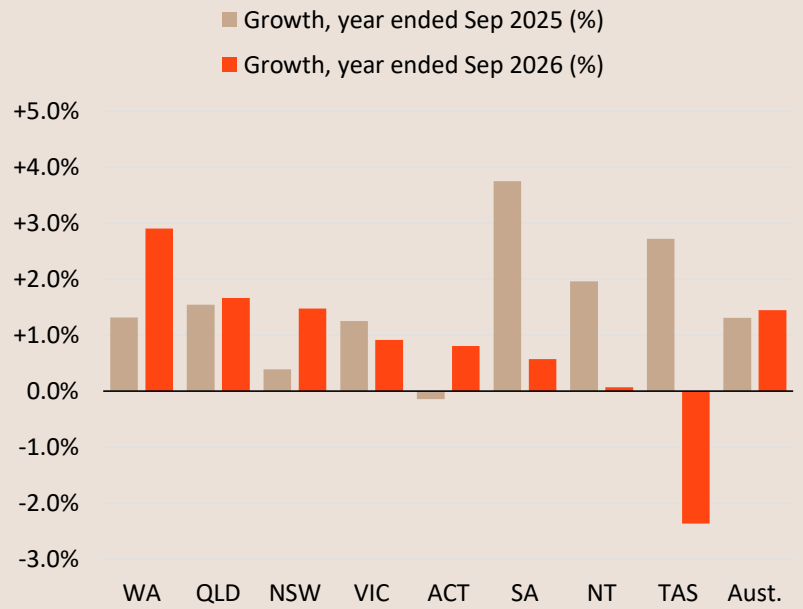
Employment Growth
(year ended)



Unemployment rate



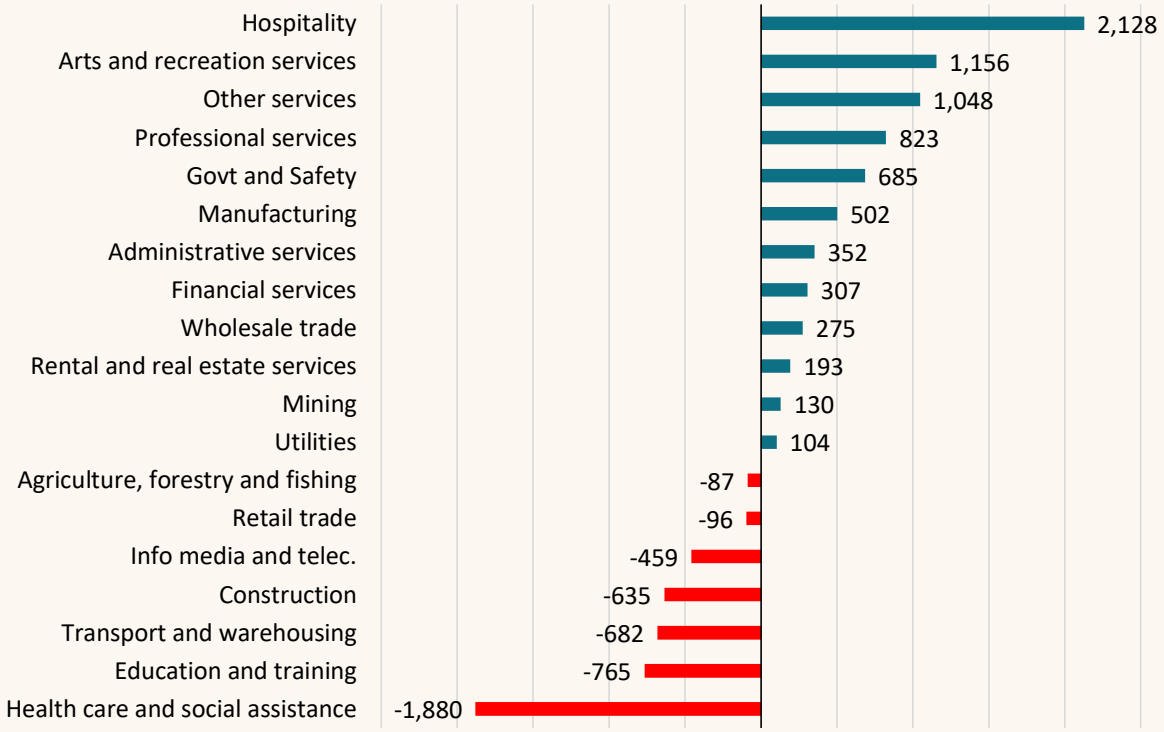
Employment growth



Source: ABS Labour Force, Australia (6202.0)

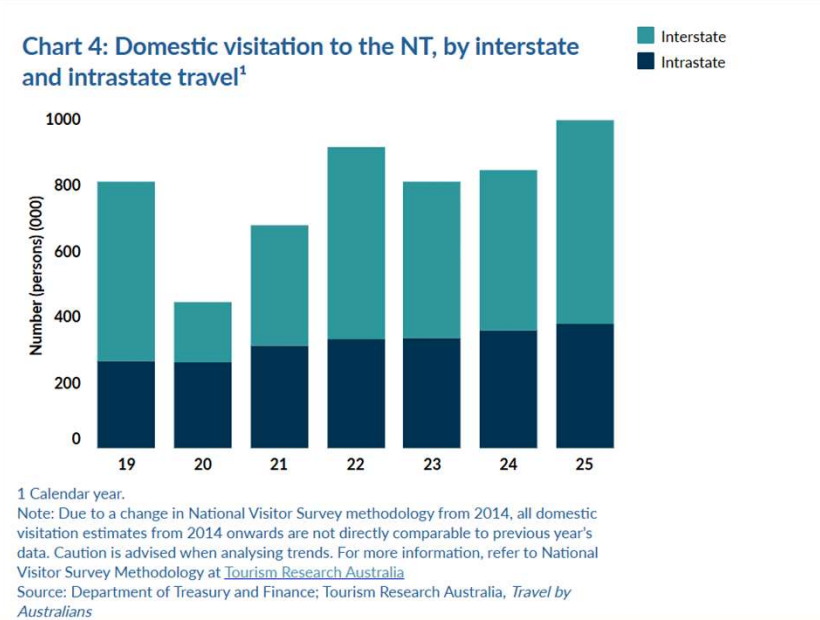
Employment growth led by hospitality, arts and recreation and other services

NT Employment change by industry, year to August 2026 (four quarter average)

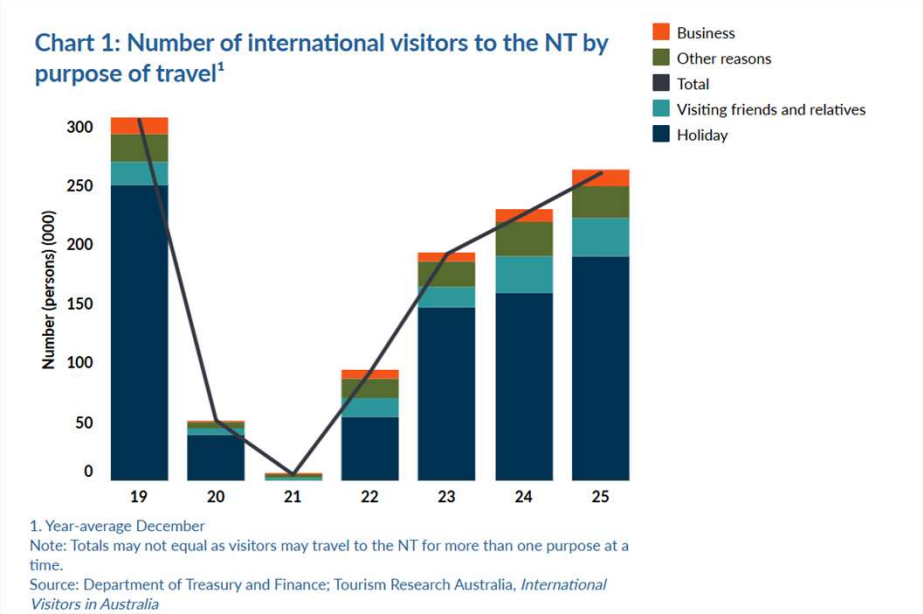


Source: ABS Labour Force

Strong growth in visitation and visitor expenditure in 2025



1 Calendar year.
Note: Due to a change in National Visitor Survey methodology from 2014, all domestic visitation estimates from 2014 onwards are not directly comparable to previous year's data. Caution is advised when analysing trends. For more information, refer to National Visitor Survey Methodology at Tourism Research Australia
Source: Department of Treasury and Finance; Tourism Research Australia, *Travel by Australians*

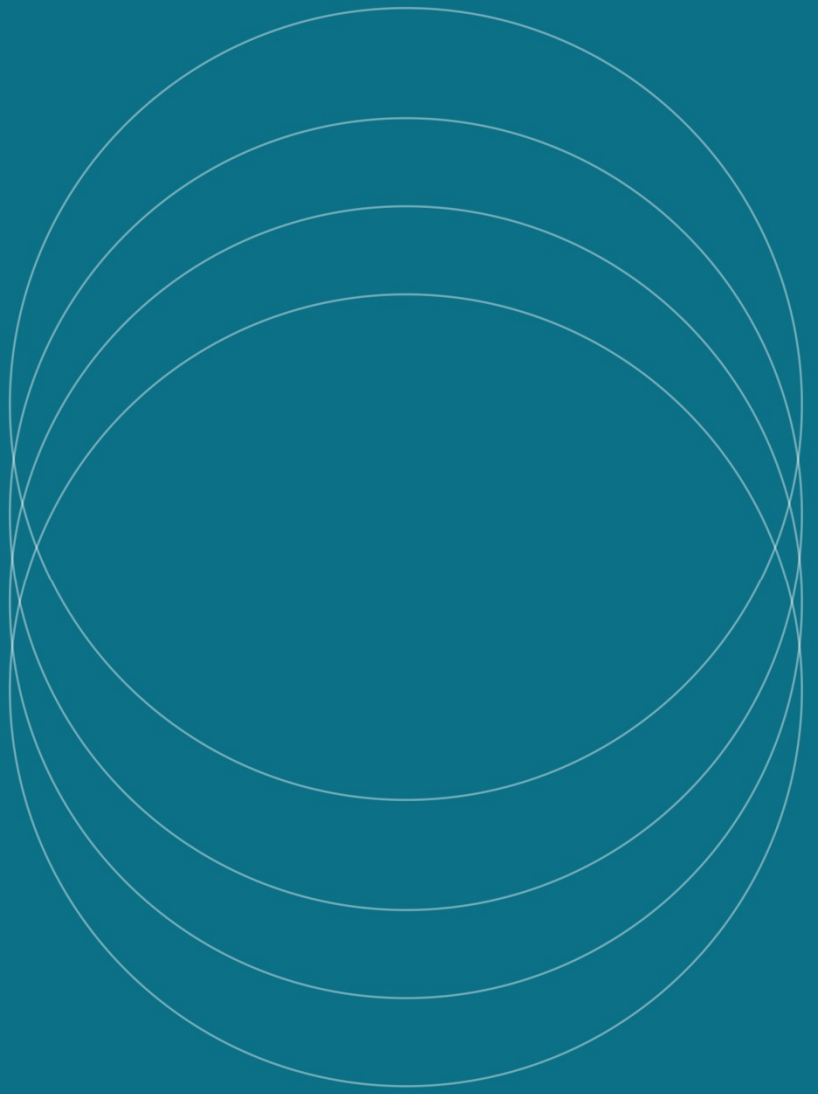


1. Year-average December
Note: Totals may not equal as visitors may travel to the NT for more than one purpose at a time.
Source: Department of Treasury and Finance; Tourism Research Australia, *International Visitors in Australia*

High inflation and increasing interest rates is likely to put pressure on tourism visitation in 2026

Source: NT Government based on TRA

Latest insights: Barkly



The Barkly is home to 7,448 people, two in three of them Aboriginal, with a $635M economy and 2,418 local jobs

Estimates at June 2025

$635M
Gross Regional Product
6.5% of Regional NT

7,448
Population
7.1% of Regional NT

2,418
Local Workers
5.5% of Regional NT

178
Local Businesses
4.2% of Regional NT

Census 2021

67%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents (NT 26%)

30
Median age (NT 33)

Top Employing Industries

- Healthcare & Social Assistance
- Public Administration
- Agriculture
- Education & Training
- Construction

Source: ABS National, state and territory population; NIEIR, 2026; ABS Counts of Australian Businesses; ABS Census of Population and Housing

Barkly is growing again. The task now is making that growth reach people

1

Barkly is growing again

Four years of population growth after years of decline, and economic activity up 9.3% in 2024/25

2

Growth hasn't turned into lasting local jobs

Local jobs fell, unemployment rate held and gaps in work, housing and education.

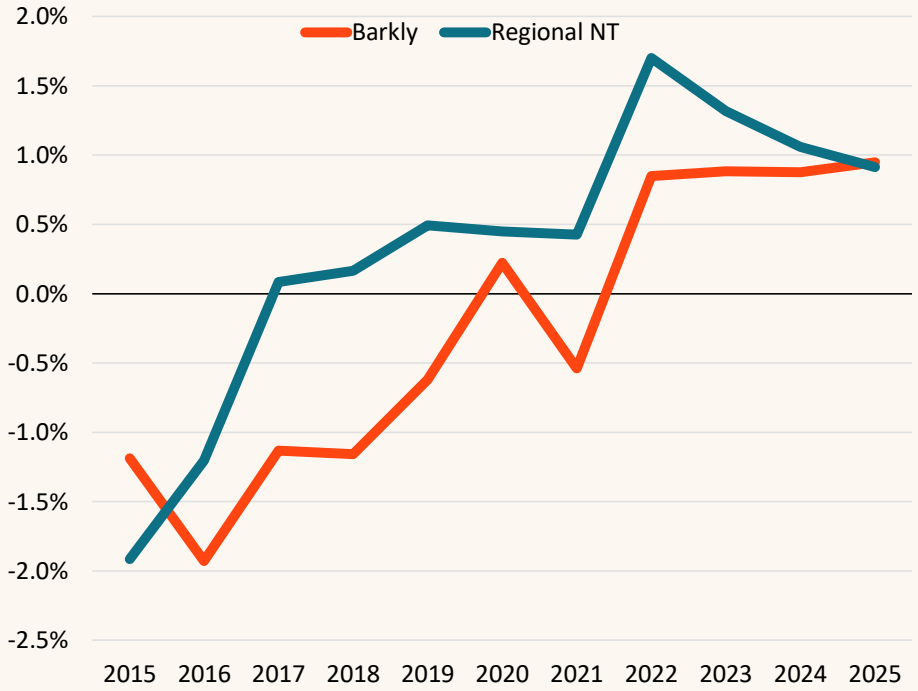
3

Building on Barkly's strengths

A young population, indigenous culture and growing industries give the Barkly something real to build on.

After years of decline, the Barkly has grown four years running, adding 70 people last year

Annual % Change



June 2025 estimate

7,448

People living in Barkly

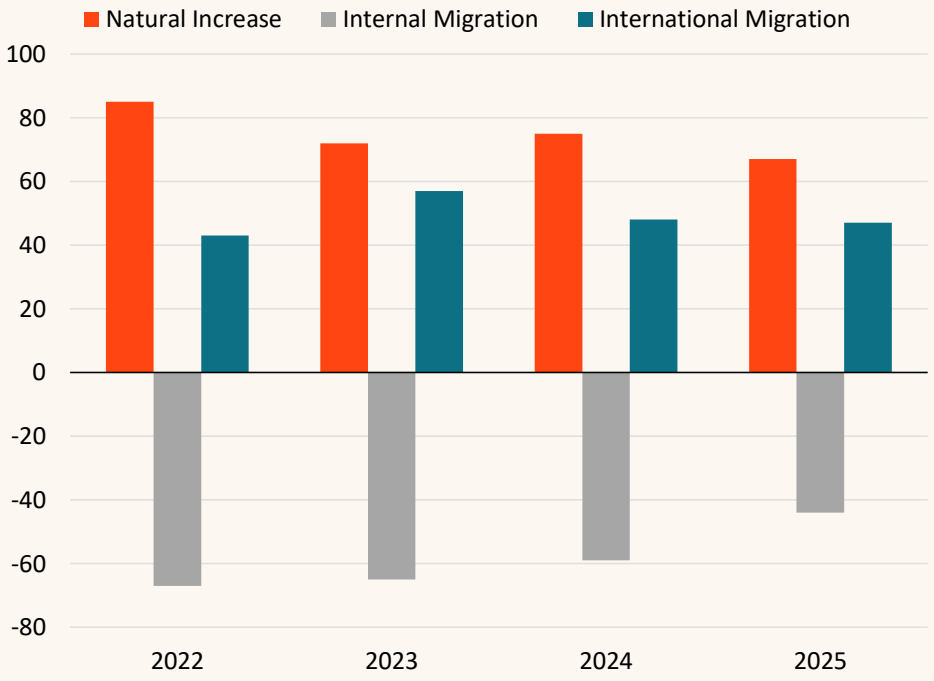
0.9% **+70**

Change from the year before

Source: ABS National, state and territory population

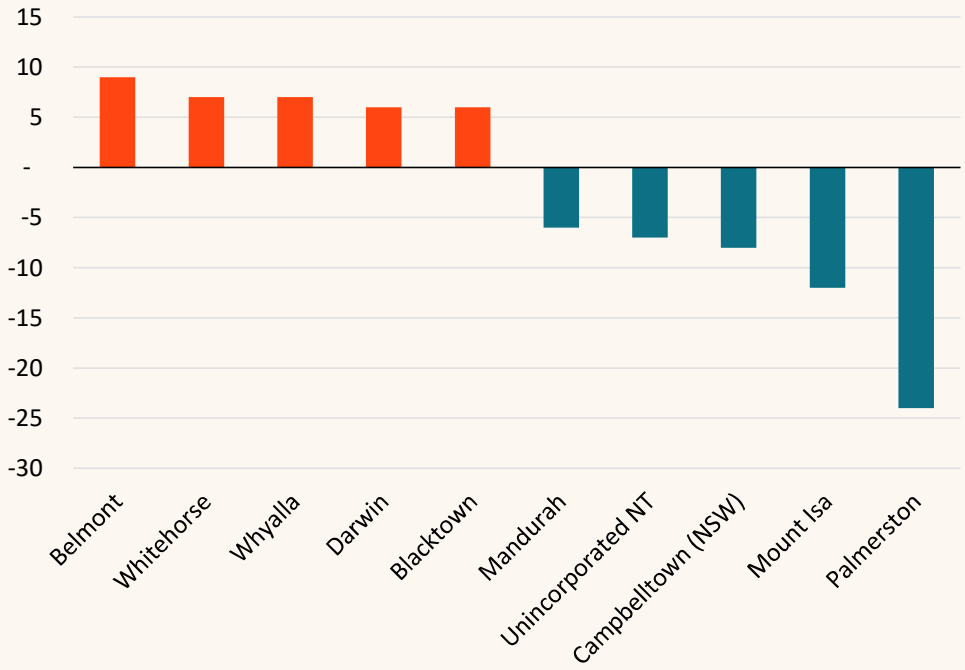
Births and overseas arrivals drive growth, while residents keep leaving for Palmerston and Mount Isa

Components of Change – Barkly



Source: ABS National, state and territory population

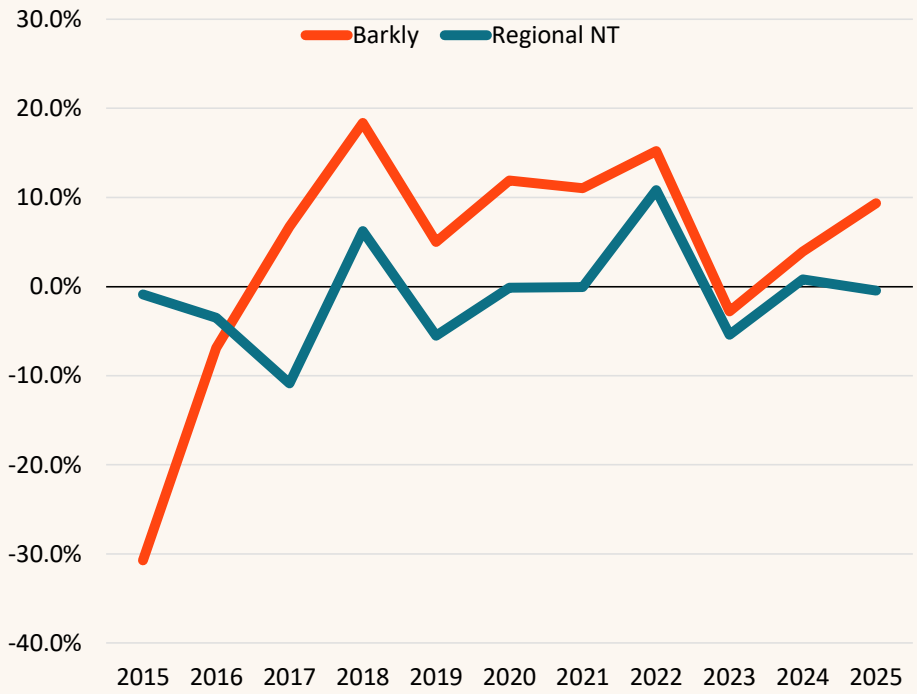
Top Net In-migration and Out-migration LGAs, 2024 to 2025



Source: ABS Regional Internal Migration Estimates (RIME) by LGA, ABS Regional population 2024–25

The economy grew 9.3% in 2024/25, adding $54M in a year

Annual % Change



June 2025 estimate



$635M

Gross Regional Product

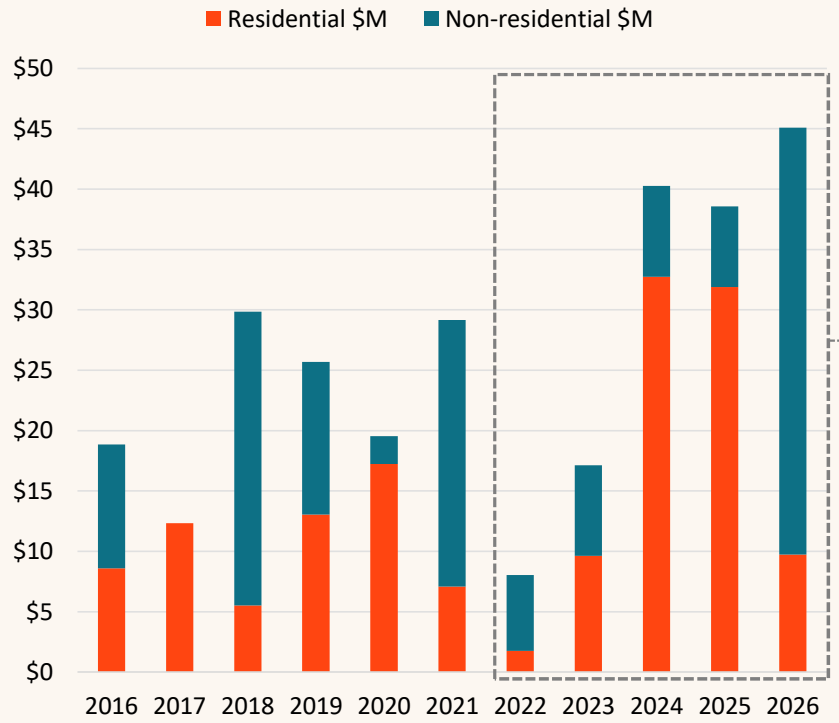
9.3% **+$54M**

Change from the year before

Source: NIEIR, 2026

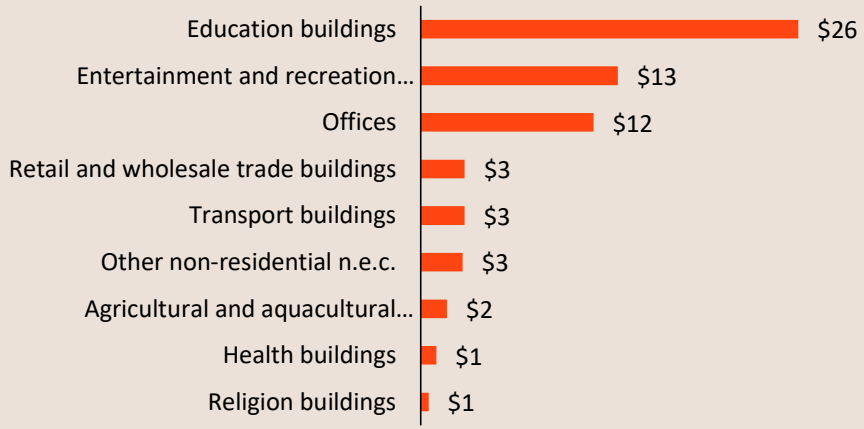
Investment followed, with approvals up 17% in value, mostly for schools and community buildings

Barkly - Value of Building Approvals*



+17% Change in Value Approved 2025/26 from year before

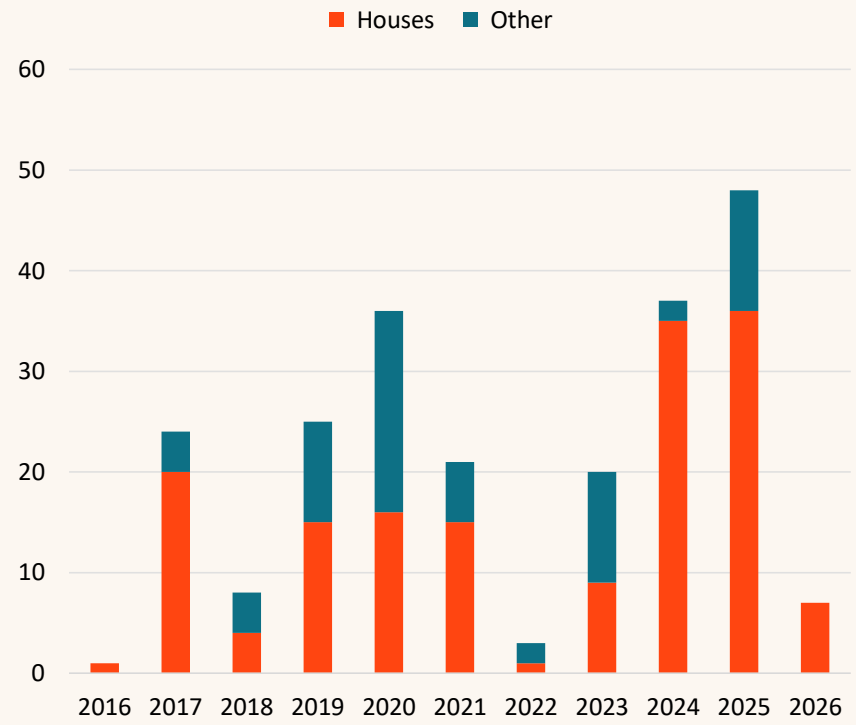
Top Non-Residential by Value, 5 years to 2025/26, $M



Source: ABS Building Approvals, Australia. * Does not include State Significant infrastructure projects

Housing approvals rebounded in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Slowdown in 2026

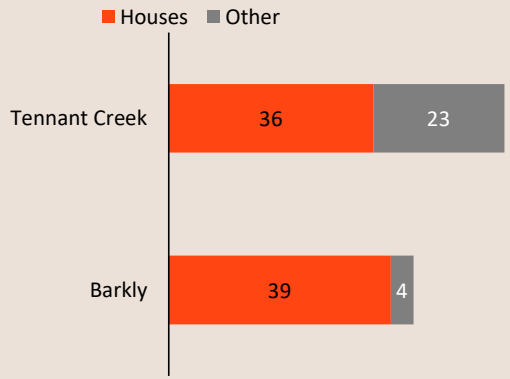
New Dwelling Approvals



-85%

Change in Dwellings Approved 2025/26 from year before

Dwellings Approved, Since July 2021



*SA2s do not necessarily correspond to suburb

Source: ABS Building Approvals, Australia

Growth hasn’t turned into lasting local jobs

1

Barkly is growing again

Four years of population growth after years of decline, and economic activity up 9.3% in 2024/25

2

Growth hasn’t turned into lasting local jobs

Local jobs fell, unemployment rate held and gaps in work, housing and education.

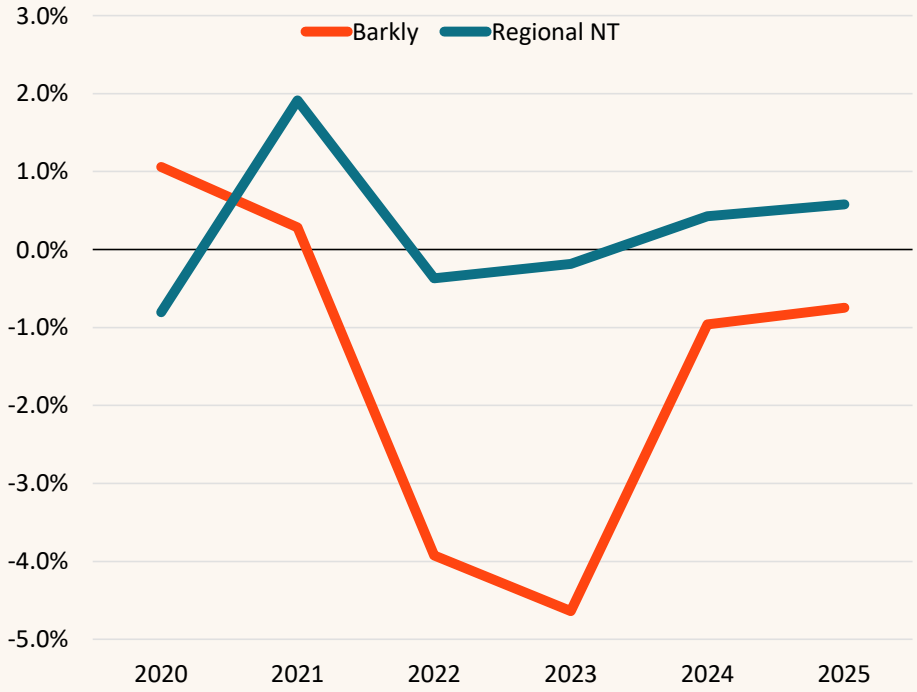
3

Building on Barkly’s strengths

A young population, indigenous culture and growing industries give the Barkly something real to build on.

Yet local jobs have fallen four years in a row, about one in ten since 2021

Annual % Change



June 2025 estimate

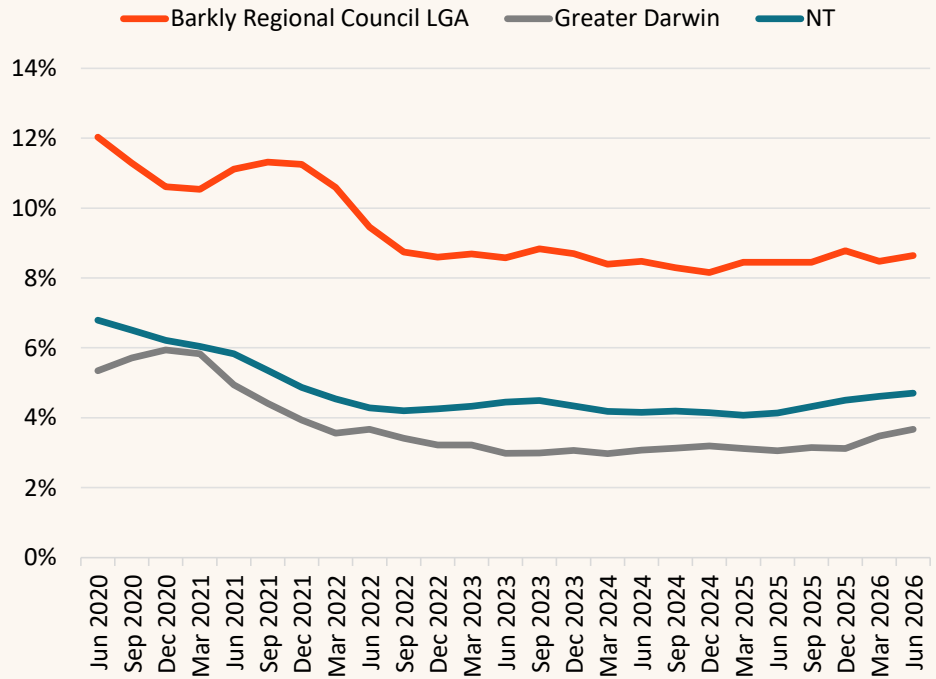
2,418
Local Workers

-0.7% **-18**
Change from the year before

Source: NIEIR, 2026

Unemployment remains around 8.5%, nearly double the NT rate

Unemployment Rate



Mar 2026 quarter

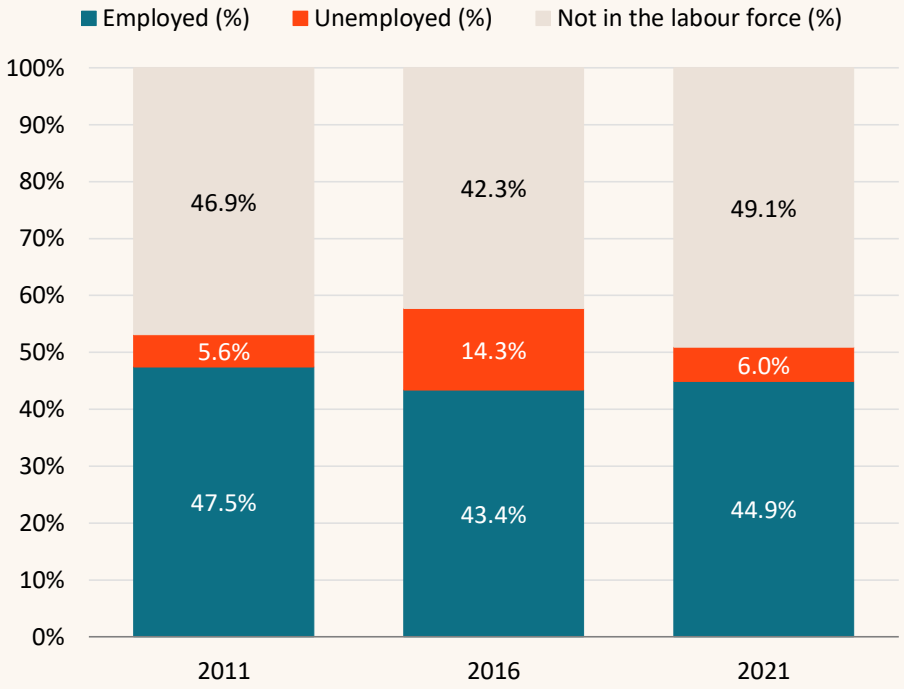
8.4%
Unemployment Rate

0.0%
Change (ppt) from the year before

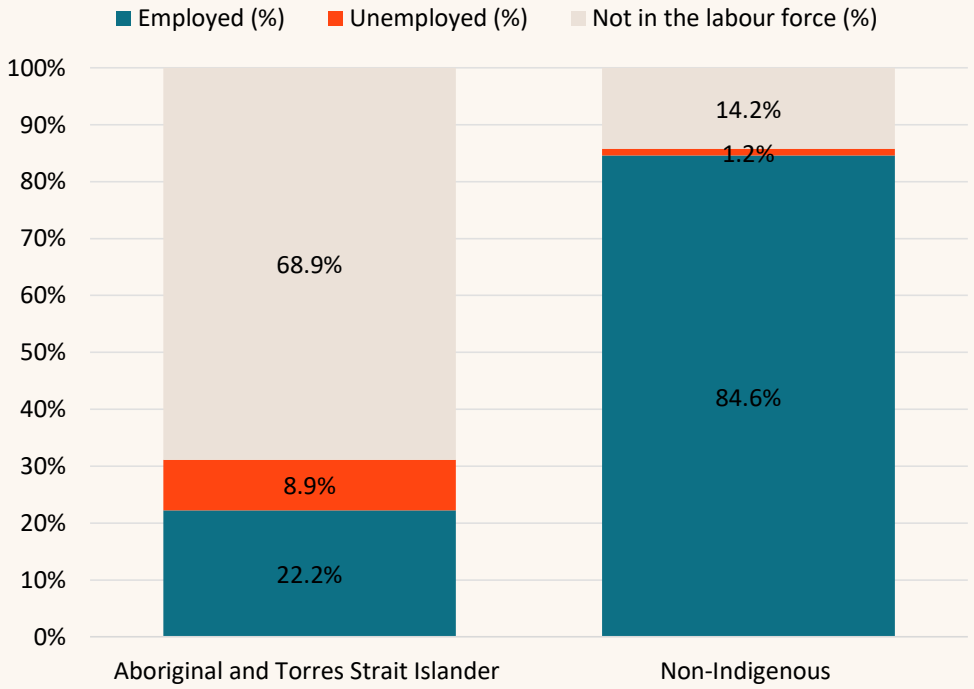
Source: Department of Employment, Small Area Labour Markets, 2026

Labour force participation is around 46%, well below the NT rate of 62%

Labour force status, persons 15+, Barkly, (% of those who stated their status)



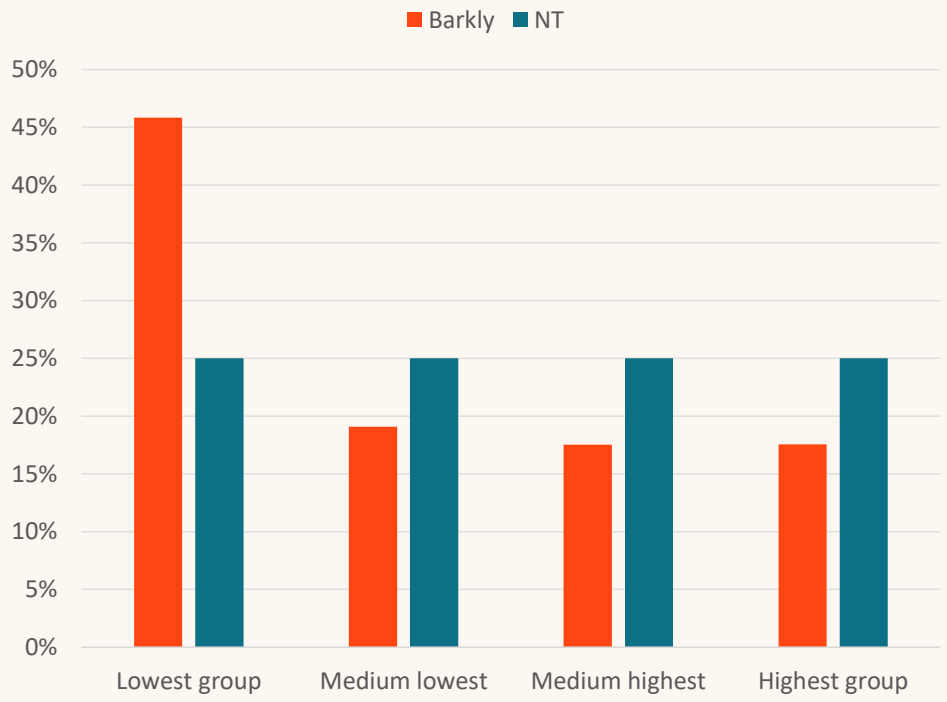
Labour force status by Indigenous status Barkly, 2021



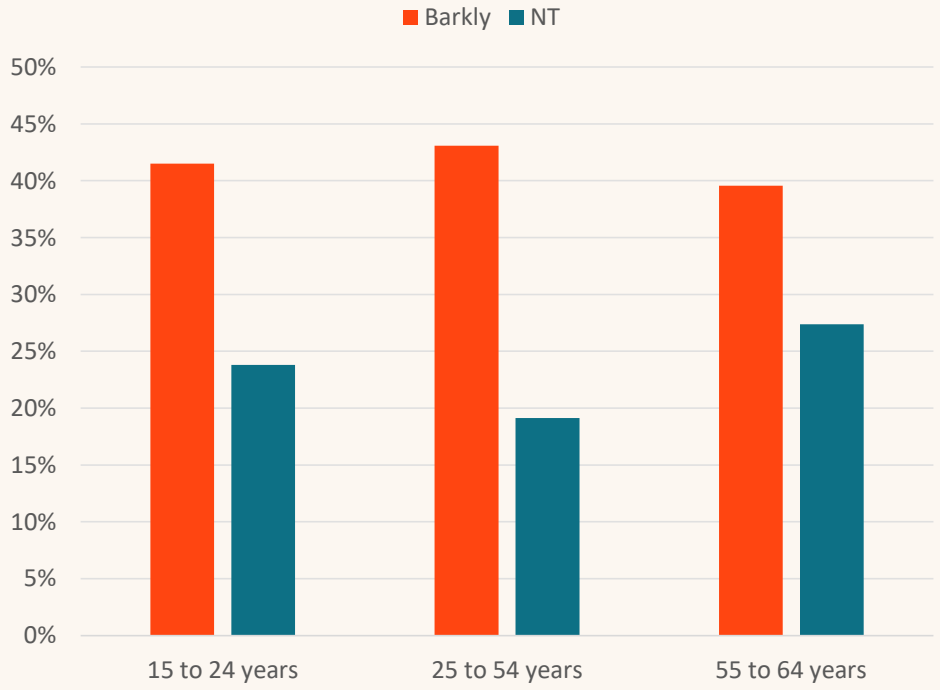
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Household incomes are lower, and many people are not working or studying

Household income - equivalised, 2021



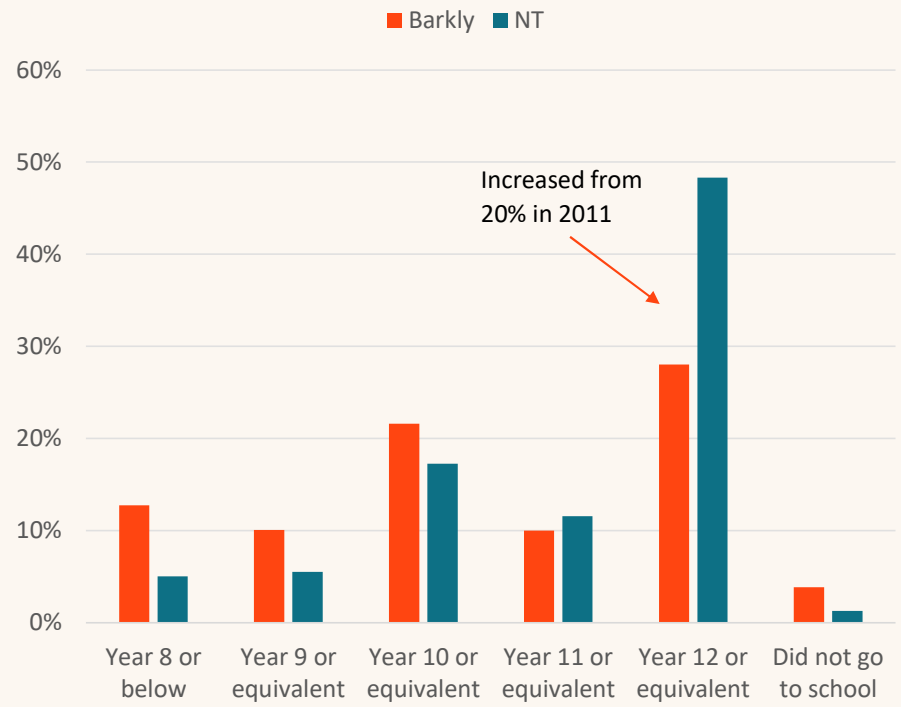
Disengaged persons by age, 2021



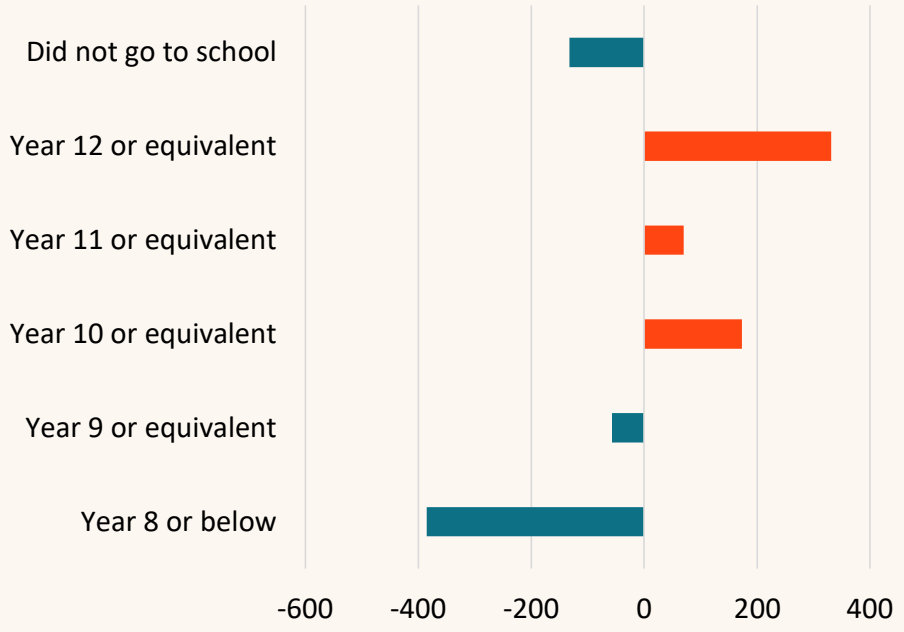
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

But adults are better schooled than a decade ago

Highest level of schooling, 2021



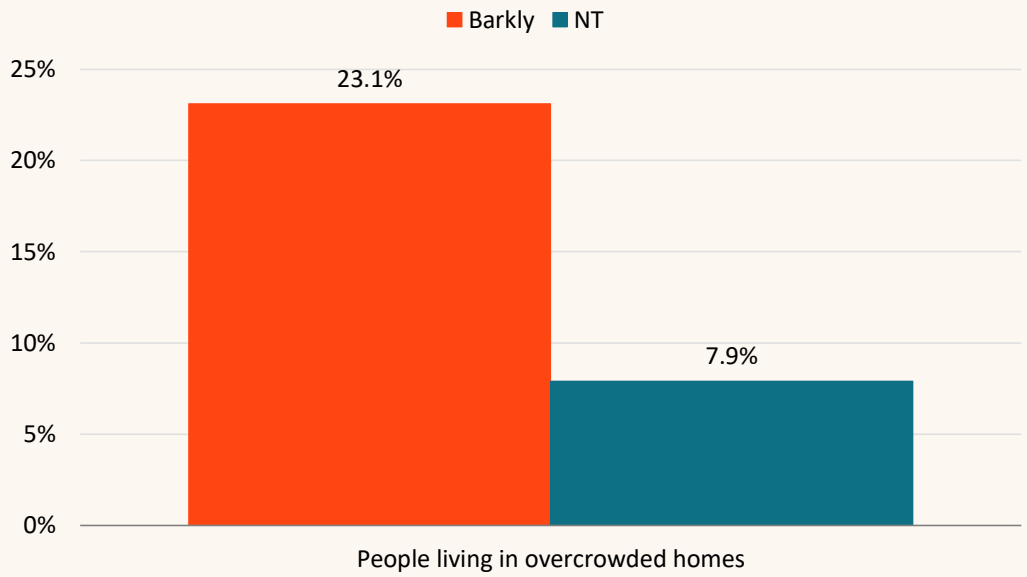
Change in highest level of schooling completed 2011-2021



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

One in four residents lives in a severely overcrowded home, yet dwelling approvals fell 85% this year

People living in overcrowded homes (3+ extra bedrooms needed), 2021



1,220 people

In overcrowded homes in 2021

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

2. GROWTH HASN'T TURNED INTO LASTING LOCAL JOBS

Next to other remote NT councils, the Barkly sits at the stronger end on housing, work, learning and income

	HOUSING 2021	WORK 2021			LEARNING, 2021		INCOME AND CULTURE, 2021	
Council	Overcrowded (3+ bedrooms)	Adults in work	Participation rate	Unemployment rate	Youth 15 to 24 not working or studying	Adults with Year 12	Households in lowest income quartile	Indigenous language at home
East Arnhem	47%	22%	30%	26%	65%	27%	72%	87%
West Arnhem	41%	31%	40%	24%	58%	28%	56%	75%
Roper Gulf	36%	27%	32%	14%	57%	22%	67%	63%
Barkly	**23%** 1st of 8	**40%** 1st of 8	**45%** 2nd of 8	**12%** 1st of 8	**41%** 1st of 8	**28%** 2nd of 8	**46%** 1st of 8	**44%** lowest of 8
MacDonnell	28%	26%	30%	14%	56%	16%	67%	67%
Central Desert	30%	28%	35%	19%	62%	19%	68%	74%
West Daly	45%	22%	27%	19%	68%	**32%**	76%	83%
Victoria Daly	28%	40%	**48%**	18%	43%	24%	58%	53%
Northern Territory	8%	58%	62%	6%	24%	48%	25%	16%

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2021. Overcrowding and income quartile (NT ranges) by place of enumeration; other measures by usual residence. Shares include not stated. East Arnhem excludes Groote Eylandt and Nhulunbuy.
Rank is among the eight remote councils, 1st is most favourable.

Building on Barkly's strengths

1

Barkly is growing again

Four years of population growth after years of decline, and economic activity up 9.3% in 2024/25

2

Growth hasn't turned into lasting local jobs

Local jobs fell, unemployment rate held and gaps in work, housing and education.

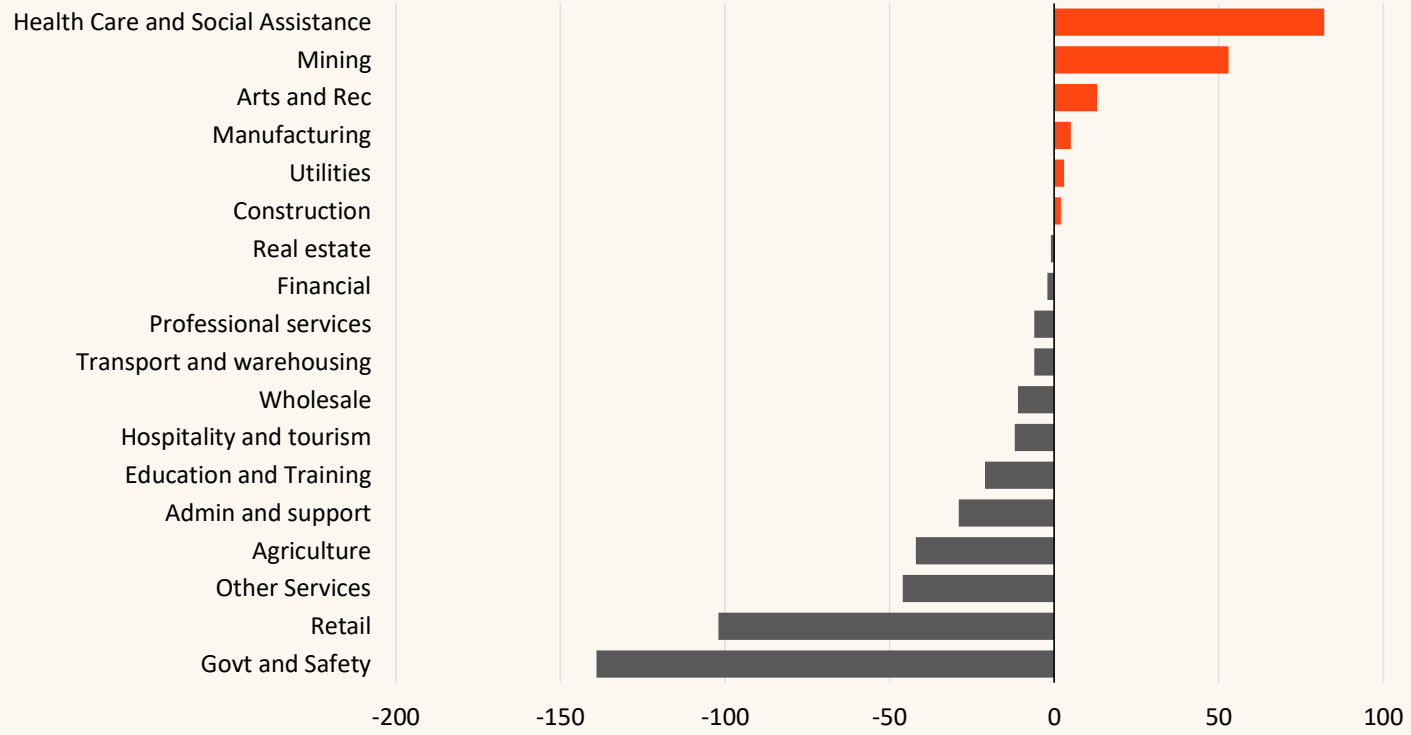
3

Building on Barkly's strengths

A young population, indigenous culture and growing industries give the Barkly something real to build on.

The jobs being created are in health care, mining and arts and recreation

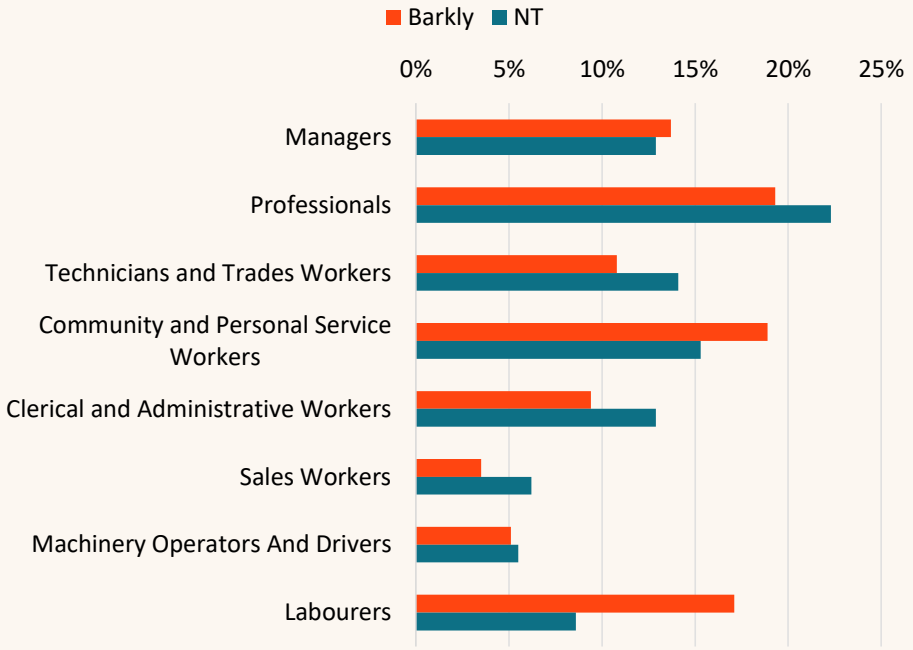
Barkly 5 year employment change (2020-2025)



Source: NIEIR, 2026

Key workers play an important role meeting local needs

Occupation profile, 2021



Top 10 occupations in Barkly

	Occupation	2021	Change
1	Farm, Forestry and Garden Workers	222	+40
2	Health and Welfare Support Workers	131	+18
3	School Teachers	118	+3
4	Midwifery and Nursing Professionals	90	+6
5	Personal Carers and Assistants	71	+8
6	Cleaners and Laundry Workers	63	-7
7	Education Aides	62	-21
8	General Clerks	62	-3
9	Social and Welfare Professionals	61	+12
10	Sales Assistants and Salespersons	60	-9

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Barkly has specialisations in agriculture, government, mining, construction and services

Most specialised

7.4x Agriculture

Greater than NT share of employment

Largest specialisations

319 Public Admin

Jobs and share is 1.4x greater than NT share

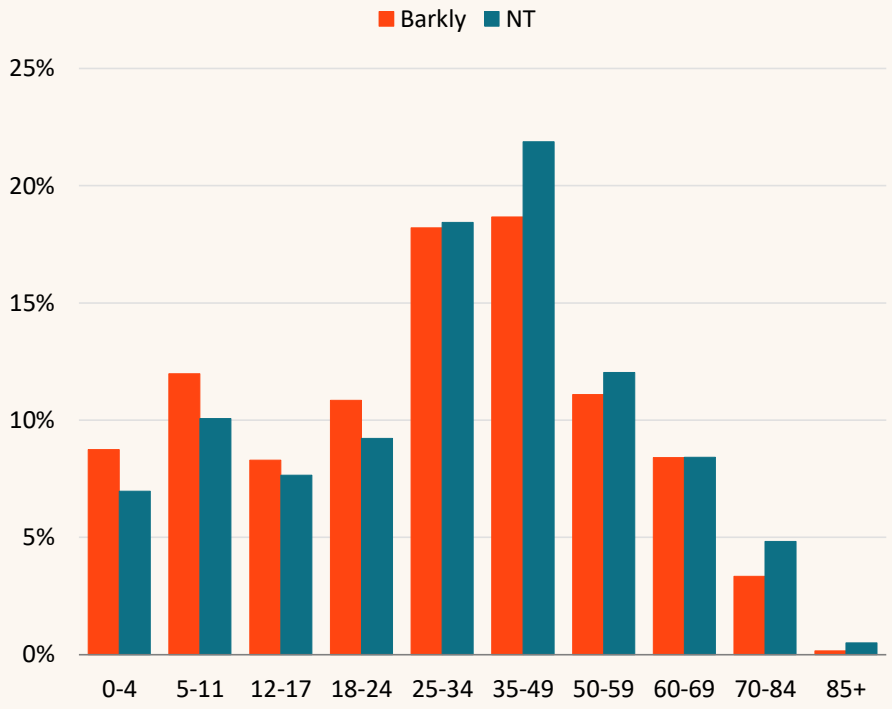
Barkly Industry Specialisations

Industry (detailed)	Specialisation (LQ)	Employment 2025
Agriculture	7.44	294
Creative & Performing Arts	3.87	41
Fuel Retailing	3.50	32
Residential Care Services	1.92	45
Building Construction	1.84	95
Metal Ore Mining	1.71	108
School Education	1.57	250
Medical care services	1.50	207
Social Assistance Services	1.42	212
Public Administration	1.39	319
Hospitals	1.27	159

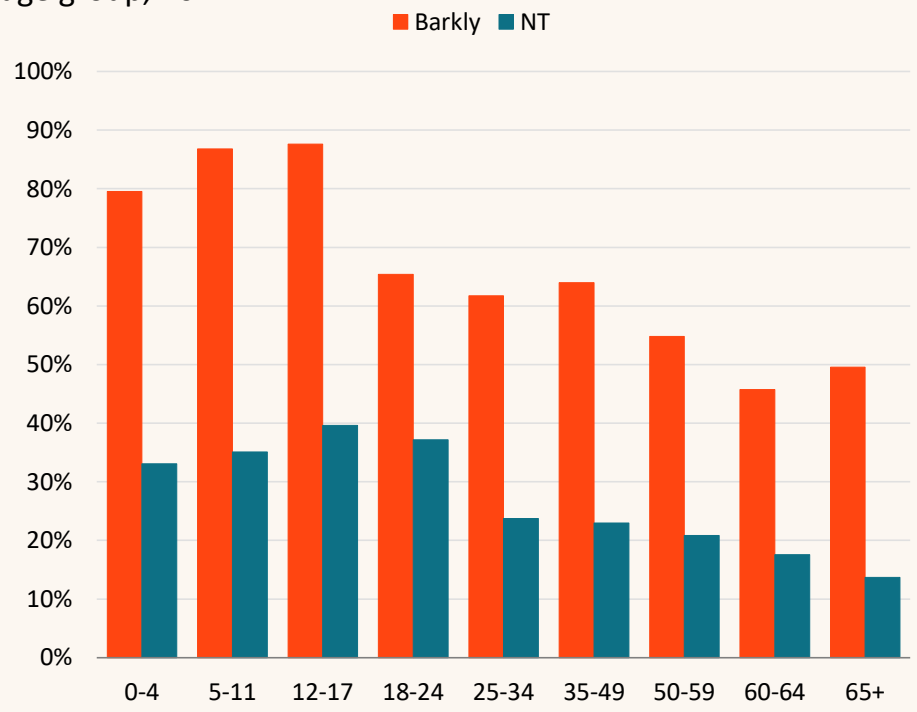
Source: NIEIR, 2026

Most Barkly children are Aboriginal, so the future workforce is young and local

Age structure by service age group, 2021 (% of population)



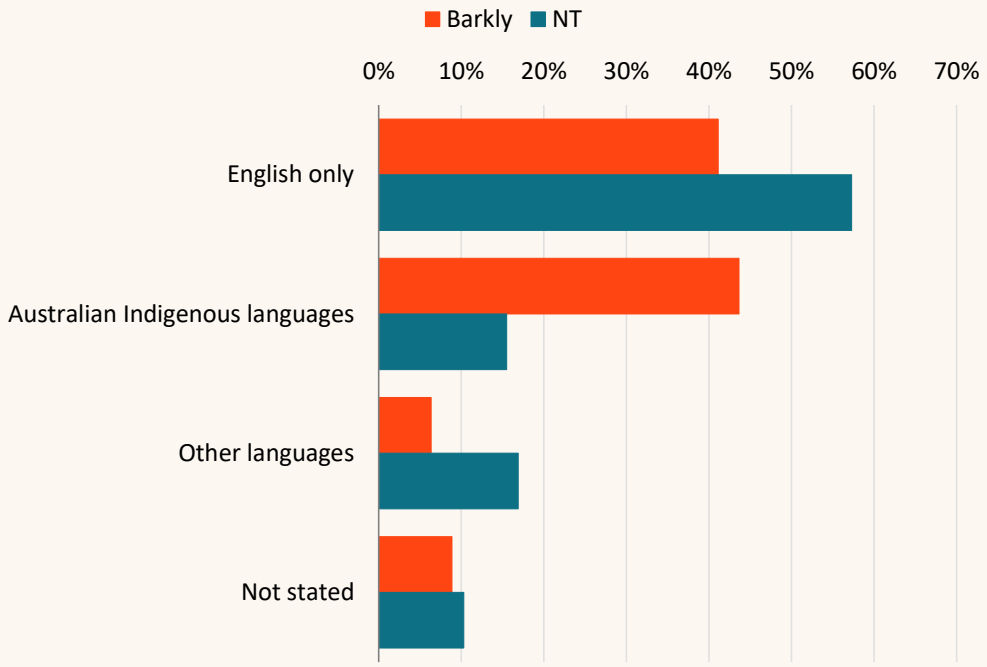
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents as % of each age group, 2021



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Half of residents speak a non-English language at home, a strong cultural base.

Language used at home, 2021 (% of population)



50% **(+7 ppt since 2011)**

Use a non-English language at home

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Outlook – Major Project List

Two mines and the NT Budget works are under way.

Under way

Tennant Mining gold (Nobles)
Operating. Targeting 100,000 oz a year by FY29
130 to 160 jobs

Wonarah phosphate (Avenira)
Site works Q4 2026, first shipment H1 2027
50 construction, 25 to 50 ongoing

NT Budget 2026-27

Tennant Creek High boarding
$8.3M, 40 beds, complete 2027

Tennant Creek Hospital
$5.3M CT scanner, $1M theatre and ED design

Housing and land
$5M Peko Road (HAFF bid), $1M land release, 6 remote homes

Roads and schools
$6.5M Barkly roads, $3.5M Ali Curung School

Approved, decision due 2027

AAPowerLink solar (SunCable)
Investment decision late 2027, power from 2032
6,800 to 14,300 construction, 1,100 ongoing

Ammaroo phosphate (Verdant)
Investment decision mid-2027
400 construction, 250 ongoing

Warrego copper-gold (Tennant Mining)
Pre-feasibility complete
Up to 300 jobs

Beetaloo gas

Shenandoah South pilot (Tamboran)
First gas into the NT grid 01/09/2026. Full 40 TJ a day by early 2027

Wider basin
NT Government estimate: 13,000 jobs by 2040, across the Territory
Sub-basin extends into the Barkly

Source: NT Government, Budget 2026-27 Barkly fact sheet; Resourcing the Territory; company announcements (Pan African, Avenira, Verdant, SunCable, Tamboran), Oct 2026. Job figures are proponent or government estimates.

Barkly has a foundation to build on. The task is aligning it with the investment now coming

1

Growth is back

Population has grown four years running and the economy grew 9.3% in 2024/25. Local jobs have not followed yet.

2

Local strengths are a foundation

A young population, strong Aboriginal culture and specialisations in agriculture, mining and government. Health care, mining and the arts are already adding jobs.

3

Align the foundation with the investment coming

Mining, energy and NT Budget works are bringing investment. Housing, infrastructure and training local people decide whether it leaves lasting jobs in the Barkly.

Thank you – questions?

Rob Hall
rob@id.com.au
CHIEF ECONOMIST

We provide the data to help you plan and invest at the local scale.

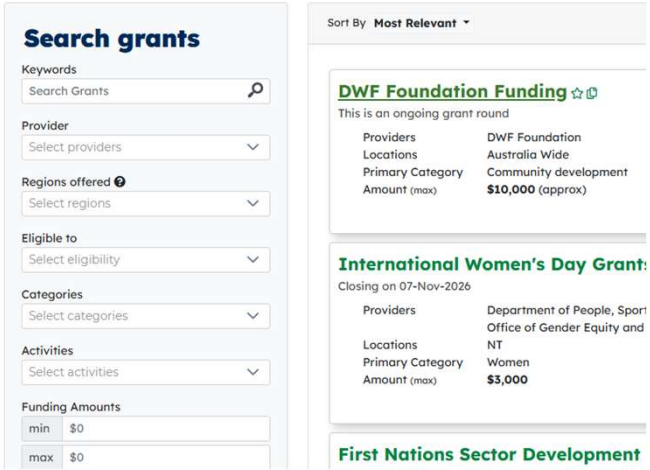
- Copy of this presentation and the data behind it
- Book a demonstration or private briefing
- Upcoming webinars and the .id Insights newsletter

Upcoming grants

- Growing Regions (before the end of 2026)
- Impact Philanthropy Application Program (opens 4 Nov)
- AgriFutures People and Capability program (closes 27 Nov)
- Grow Your Business (closes 13 Nov)
- Stronger Communities (MP nom closes 30 Nov)
- Barkly Local Community Funds (closes 9 Nov)

Visit our website to search grants

www.rdant.com.au/search-grants/



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admin@rdant.com.au

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RDA Northern Territory is seeking to better understand the needs, priorities and challenges of not-for-profit organisations across the NT. Your feedback will help identify opportunities for RDA NT to deliver for practical support, collaboration and advocacy tailored to the needs of the not-for-profit sector.