



# Over the Horizon 2026

## Economic Snapshot

- > NT economic growth was higher than anticipated in 2024-25 with Gross State Product (GSP) growing 1.0%, which averted the expected 2.6% decline. However, it was less than the national growth rate, failing to achieve the growth outpacing the nation target.
- > State Final Demand (SFD) fell 0.2% in the year ending Dec 2025, which was below both national demand and the NT 5-year annual average, driven largely by falling private capital investments reflecting the end of the Barossa Project's construction phase. SFD rose 0.8% in the December 2026 quarter due to Commonwealth capital investment and private residential investment.
- > Productivity improved in 2024-25. Labour, Capital and Multi-Factor Productivity outperformed historical averages by growing 4.2%, 0.4% and 1.9%, respectively.
- > The Territory's economic output remains highly concentrated, with natural strength industries (including mining, agriculture and public service) contributing 38.2% to GSP in 2024-25, slightly below the 5-year average but double the national contribution.
- > Exports were stronger than expected in 2024-25; livestock exports lifted by 58.0% to 444,341 head, and dry bulk shipments rose 36.9% to 325,658 tonnes following the resumption of Frances Creek operations.
- > The structural vulnerability of the Territory's investment profile remains, with the ratio of private to public planned investment (total building approvals) at 0.8 in the 12 months to Jan 2026. The ratio for Gross Fixed Capital Formation declined to 2.1 in the year to Dec 2025 as private capital investment fell by 12.5%.
- > Government debt reached \$10.5 billion in 2024-25 (31.3% of GSP), with debt per capita rising to \$39,945 – approximately 24.0% larger than the Australian level. However, the outlook has improved, as debt is no longer projected to exceed \$15 billion.

## Economic snapshot (cont)

- > Population growth remained positive in 2024-25, increasing by 1.2% (or 3,527 people), close to the government's 4,000-person target. Yet retention challenges persist; while net migration was positive overall at 1,503 persons, 2,105 residents still left the Territory and relocated to other states.
- > The labour market grew over 2024-25, with employment increasing 1.9% (or 119,886 jobs), exceeding both the national rate and the Territory 5-year annual average. Employment in the oil and gas extraction sector rose slightly by 0.2% (793 jobs), while education employment rose significantly by 10.6%.
- > Public service is still a major employer, employing 18.0% of the workforce, with a further 2.1% employed as NDIS providers as of Dec 2025. Average yearly growth was 0.24% in the 5 years to 2024-25.
- > Residents and businesses continue to navigate high cost-of-living. CPI for the year to Dec 2025 was 3.1%, which is below the 5-year average of 4.3%. Median weekly rents in Greater Darwin increased 5.0% to \$682 – notably higher than regional competitors like Cairns (\$620) and Townsville (\$525).
- > Tourism in the NT softened in 2024-25, with visitor nights falling by 2.3% and inbound flights only growing marginally at 0.7%. Tourism investment per visitor was \$1,263, driven by a 12.0% increase in investment.
- > Pressure on the NT justice system remains; court finalisations in 2023-24 were 3,564.9 per 100,000 residents, while Children's Court finalisations rose 7.4% to 320.3 per 100,000 residents. Both rates remain significantly higher than national levels. School attendance continued to decline in 2025, with an average attendance rate of 73.0%. Attendance fell by 6.2% from term 1 to term 4, a sharper drop than the 5.3% average seen over the previous five years.

## NT Policy Environment




In 2025, the NT Government's key policy areas were:

- > Reducing crime
- > Rebuilding the economy
- > Restoring our lifestyle.

Key indicators help inform future planning and decision-making and assist to identify strategies to unlock, support and enable growth.

AEC has summarised some of the key indicators, comparing the Territory's position against benchmarks and performance in previous Over the Horizon reports (2025 – 2026 included).

**Table 1. Socio-Economic Indicator Category Descriptions**

| Category Description  |   |
|---|---|
|  | The indicator is making positive progress and is higher than relevant comparison levels.  |
|  | The indicator is trending positively, however, still well below relevant comparison levels OR the indicator is trending negatively but is higher than relevant comparison levels. |
|  | The indicator is trending negatively and/ or is well-below relevant comparison levels.  |



# Economic Indicators

# Key Indicators

## Growth

GSP growth increases government revenue, reducing reliance on deficit spending. Growth also leads to broader social outcomes such as greater job opportunities and better health outcomes.



**1.0% rise in GSP in 2024-25**  
5-Yr Avg: 0.9%  
AUS Year Change: 1.4%

GSP grew by 1.0% in 2024-25, better than the 2.6% decline forecasted and the 5-year average but below the targeted national rate.

2026



2025



**0.2% Decline in SFD Year To Dec 2025**  
5-Yr Avg: 4.3%  
AUS Yearly Change: 2.3%  
Private share: 58.2%

Sate Final Demand fell 0.2% in the yea ending Dec 2025. Below national demand and NT 5-year annual average.



## Productivity

Improvement in productivity means more output can be generated from the same level of inputs to the economy. Productivity can lift wages & reduce working hours.



**1.9% Increase in Multi-Factor Productivity 2024-25**  
5-Yr Avg: -0.8%  
AUS 5-Yr Avg: 0.1%

NT MFP rose by 1.9% in 2024-25. NT MFP has on average declined by 0.8% per year over the past 5 years.

2026



2025



**4.2% Increase in Labour Productivity 2024-25**  
5-Yr Avg : -0.7%  
AUS 5-Yr Avg: -0.3%

Labour productivity in the NT grew by 4.2% in 2024-25 higher than both the NT and national 5-year annual averages.



**0.4% Increase in Capital Productivity 2024-25**  
5-Yr Avg : -1.1%  
AUS 5-Yr Avg: 0.4%

Capital productivity in the NT rose by 0.4% in 2024-25, higher than the NT 5-year annual average and equalling Australia.



# Key Indicators










## Government Debt

Expanding debt will increasingly burden the NT budget and impact its ability to secure future finance at competitive prices. Deficit spending cannot sustainably support economic growth.

|  |   | 2026   | 2025   |
|--|---|--|--|
|  <p><b>\$10.5 billion NT debt in 2024-25</b><br/>Yearly Change: 12.3%<br/>% of GSP: 31.3%<br/>AUS % of GDP: 32.2%</p> | <p>Growth of debt was large in 2024-25 at 12.3%. However, it was below the forecasted rate, reflecting a positive change.</p> |   |   |
|  <p><b>\$39,892 Debt Per Capita 2024-25</b><br/>Yearly Change: 10.9%<br/>AUS Per Capita: \$32,204</p>                | <p>GDP per capita rose by 10.9% in 2024-25. GDP per capita is now around 24.0% larger than the Australian level.</p>          |  |  |

## Private/ Public Economic Activity

Sustainable growth is driven by private sector investment.

|   |  | 2026  | 2025  |
|---|--|---|---|
|  <p><b>0.8 Ratio Private/ Public Planned Investment 12-Months to Jan 2026</b><br/>5-Yr Avg. 0.8<br/>AUS Ratio: 5.7</p>   | <p>The ratio of private to public planned investment (total building approvals) was 0.8 the 12-months to Jan 2026, significantly lower than the national ratio of 5.7.</p> |  |  |
|  <p><b>2.1 Ratio of Private/ Public GFCF Year to Dec 25</b><br/>Private Yr Change: -12.5%<br/>Public Yr Change: 0.5%</p> | <p>The ratio of private/ public GFCF declined in the year to Dec 2025 to 2.1. Private capital investment declined by 12.5%.</p>  |  |  |
|  <p><b>2.5% Business Growth 2024-25</b><br/>5-Yr Avg: 2.9%<br/>AUS: 2.5%</p>   | <p>Annual business growth improved in 2024-25, rising to 2.5%, equaling national growth, but slightly below NT 5-Yr average.</p>   |  |  |

# Key Indicators

## People

Population growth supports labour supply, economic activity and long-term growth in the Northern Territory.



**1.2% Population Increase In 2024-25**

5-Yr Avg: 1.3%  
AUS Yearly Change: 1.5%

NTs population rose by 3,527 people (1.2%) in 2024-25, close to the 4,000 target. While net migration was positive overall (1,503 persons), 2,105 moved to other states.

**2026**

**2025**



**1.9% Increase In Employment 2024-25**

5-Yr Avg: 1.7%  
AUS Yearly Change: 1.2%

Employment rose 1.9% in the NT in 2024-25. This was above the 5-year annual average and the national rate.



**73.0% Of Spending Was Discretionary In Jan 2026**

5-Yr Avg: 72.4%

73.0% of spending was discretionary (non-essentials) In Jan 2026, ahead of the NT 5-year average of 72.4%.





# Performance Indicators

# Key Indicators

## Industry Performance

Strengthening employment in oil and gas extraction and increasing contribution of natural strength industries to total GSP will directly drive economic growth in the NT.



### 793 Employment in Oil and Gas Extraction 2024-25

5-Yr Avg: 789  
Yearly Change: 0.7%  
AUS Yearly Change -1.3%

Employment in the oil and gas extraction sector rose slightly by 0.7% in 2024-25, stabilising from 2023-24 declines. Employment is still above the 5-year average.

2026



2025



### 38.2% in Natural Strength Industries Contribution to Total GVA 2024-25

5-Yr Avg: 38.7%  
Contribution to AUS: 16.9%

Natural strength industries contributed 38.2% to total GVA in 2024-25, which is slightly below the 5-year average but double the national contribution.



## General Economic Indicators

Improving business growth, stabilising inflation and addressing rising rental costs will foster economic resilience and improve affordability within the NT, supporting long-term sustainable development and population growth.

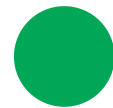


### 3.1% increase in Darwin's CPI the Year to Dec 2025

5-Yr Avg Annual Change: 4.3%  
AUS Year Change: 3.8%

Darwin's Consumer Price Index (CPI) was lower in the year to Dec 2025 (3.1%) than the 5-year average (4.3%) and the national year end change (3.8%).

2026



2025



### \$682/ Week Greater Darwin Median Rent Sep-2025

5-Yr Avg: \$599/ week  
Cairns: \$620/ week  
Townsville: \$525/ week







Greater Darwin's median rental price growth eased to 5.6% the year to Sep 2025. However, rents are still higher than similar markets Cairns and Townsville.



# Key Indicators










## Port of Darwin Throughput

Increasing trade through the Port of Darwin will strengthen relations with key export partners in South-east Asia and enhance the NT's role as a key export hub in Northern Australia, supporting further exports.

|  |  | 2026  | 2025  |
|--|--|---|---|
|   | <b>444,341 Head of Livestock Exported 2024-25</b><br>5-Yr Avg: 306,086 (No.) | The Port of Darwin exported 444,341 livestock in 2024-25, an annual increase of 58.0% and well above the 5-year average.                          |     |
|  | <b>325,658 Tonnes of Dry Bulk Exports 2024-25</b><br>5-Yr Avg: 423,959 t     | The Port of Darwin exported 325,658 tonnes of dry bulk in 2024-25, up 36.9% on the previous year. However, exports were below the 5-year average. |   |

## Building Approvals

Higher levels of building approvals in the NT will boost activity in the construction industry and increase necessary housing and infrastructure stocks that are required to support the NT's future population and industry growth.

|   |  | 2026  | 2025  |
|---|--|---|---|
|  | <b>\$332.9 M New Residential Approved in 2025</b><br>5-Yr Avg: \$272.0 M<br>12-Month Change: 57.1%<br>AUS 12-Month Change: 16.4%                 | New building approvals in the NT for both value and volume have seen significant improvement. This partly represents a return to normal from previous low levels. |   |
|  | <b>656 Dwellings Approved 12-Months to Jan 2026</b><br>5-Yr Avg: 520<br>12-Month Change: 35.5%   |   |   |
|  | <b>\$702.1 M Private Building Approvals 12-Months to Jan 2026</b><br>5-Yr Avg: \$501.6 M<br>12-Month Change: 20.5%<br>AUS 12-Month Change: 17.9% | \$702.1 M of private building approvals were recorded in the 12-months to Jan 2026, higher than the NT 5-year average and national 12-month change.               |   |

# Key Indicators

## Outdoor Lifestyle & Growing Tourism

Boosting visitation and tourism investment in the NT will enhance the region's tourism appeal, supporting further tourism investment and local tourism businesses.



**0.7% Rise in Inbound Flights 2024-25**

2023-24: 5.1%  
5-Yr Avg: 4.9%

Inbound flights to Darwin Airport were only 0.7% higher in 2024-25. This is significantly below the previous year and 5-year average.

2026

2025



**2.3% Fall in Visitor Nights Year Ending 2024-25**

4-Yr Avg: 25.9%  
AUS: 19.6%

Visitor nights fell by 2.3% in 2024-25, well below the NT and national 4-year averages.



**\$1,263 NT Tourism Investment per Visitor in 2024-25**

5-Yr Avg: \$1,085  
AUS: \$164

NT Tourism investment in 2023-24 per 2024-25 visitor was above the 5-year average at \$1,263, driven by a 12.0% increase in investment.



# Key Indicators

## Court Finalisations

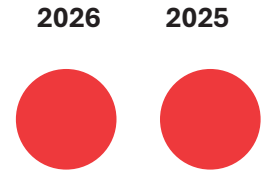
Enhanced job opportunities and increased awareness of education pathways has the potential to significantly reduce crime, create safer and more liveable communities and further supports population retention, growth and investor confidence.



**320.3 Children's Court Finalisations per 100,000 Residents 2023-24**

5-Yr Avg: 289.7  
AUS: 95.6

Children's Court finalisations were 320.3 per 100,000 residents in 2023-24, rising 7.4% for the year. This was significantly higher than the national rate which also fell 2.1% over the period.



**3,564.9 Court Finalisations per 100,000 Residents 2023-24**

5-Yr Avg: 3,653.2  
AUS: 1,918.0

Court finalisations were 3,564.9 per 100,000 residents, falling 2.1% to 2023-24. However, this is still significantly higher than the national rate.



## Education Sector

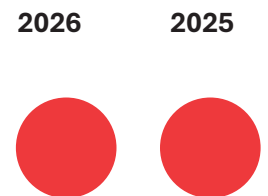
Improving school attendance rates and employment within the education sector will support long-term educational benefits to the NT, increase the NT's skilled workforce and improve overall socio-economic development.



**73.0% Average Attendance Rate in 2025**

5-Yr Avg: 74.2%

Average attendance throughout 2025 was 73.0%, declining from term 1 to 4 by 6.2%, higher than the average over the previous 5 years (5.3%).



**6,045 Avg. Employment in Education 2025**

Yearly Change: 10.6%  
Cairns: 0.9%  
Townsville: 1.5%

Average employment in education was 6,045, in 2025, an increase of 10.6% beating out Cairns and Townsville. Average annual growth was 7.1% over 5 years.



# Key Indicators

## Healthcare Sector

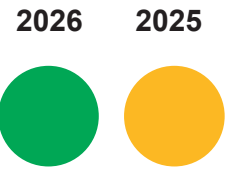
Improving key indicators in the healthcare sector will enhance the NT's community health outcomes, provide benefits to the workforce, improve overall liveability in the NT and support population retention and growth.



**490.5 Mortalities per 100,000 Residents 2024**

Year End Change: -3.1%  
5-Yr Avg: 485.7  
AUS 5-Yr Avg: 672.2

The mortality rate in 2024 (490.5 per 100,000 residents) was slightly higher than the NT 5-year average, but much lower than the national 5-year average.



**18,319 Employed in Healthcare Dec-2025**

Yearly Change: -0.8%  
Cairns: 3.7%  
Townsville: 7.2%

In December 2025, healthcare employment was 18,319, declining 0.8% for the year, while Cairns (3.7%) and Townsville (7.2%) rose. Average annual growth over 5 years was 4.6%



**449 Avg. Healthcare Job Vacancies through 2025**

Yearly Change: -6.1%  
North Queensland: -13.0%

There were on average 449 healthcare job vacancies in the NT in 2025, falling 6.1% over the year. North Queensland shrank by 13.0%.



## Community Grants

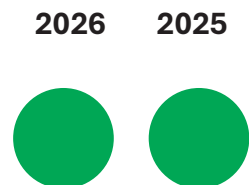
Increasing funding for community organisations strengthens social cohesion in the NT and can influence population retention.



**\$16.8 M Community Benefit Fund Grants 2024-25**

5-Yr Avg: \$14.2 M

\$16.8 M in Community Benefit Fund grants were delivered by the NT Government in 2024-25, higher than the 5-year average of \$14.2 M.







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