

1 INTRODUCTION



Over 4000 km² of mangroves fringe the coastline of the Northern Territory (NT) (refer to Figure 1). Mangroves are an integral part of the coastal eco-system, representing a significant environmental resource on a local, national and global scale.

Mangroves provide spawning and nursery areas for a multitude of marine species and protect the coastline from erosion due to storm surge and cyclones. They also provide a valuable recreational, educational and scientific resource and represent an important part of indigenous culture.

The mangrove communities of the NT remain relatively intact and free from major disturbance. Development associated with the expansion of the major population centre of Darwin has resulted in the clearing of just 2% of mangroves in Darwin Harbour. The future development around Darwin Harbour and other coastal centres around the NT will continue to place potential pressure on mangrove communities.



Plate 1 Mangroves, Sadgroves Creek, Darwin NT

In accepting that further development is necessary along the NT coastline, it is important to acknowledge that some areas of mangroves may be relinquished. It is necessary to ensure effective conservation and sustainable development is progressed in the NT.

Setting a balance between habitat conservation and development must be based on sound scientific knowledge of ecosystem functioning from around the world, in conjunction with the local scientific knowledge at hand. However, further studies are needed to build upon this knowledge base.



Mangrove Management in the Northern Territory

Due to the extensive coastline of the NT that is relatively pristine, it should be recognised that coastal development has, and is envisaged to continue to have, a minimal (if any) effect on overall mangrove productivity, as very little mangrove habitat has been or will be disturbed.

The knowledge of mangrove ecosystems is continually expanding. A great deal more research must be completed in order to attempt to understand these complex and unique coastal communities. This knowledge is critical in order to ensure that effective mangrove management is maintained within the context of ecologically sustainable development.



Plate 2 **Mudskipper (Gobiidae family), Darwin Harbour, NT**



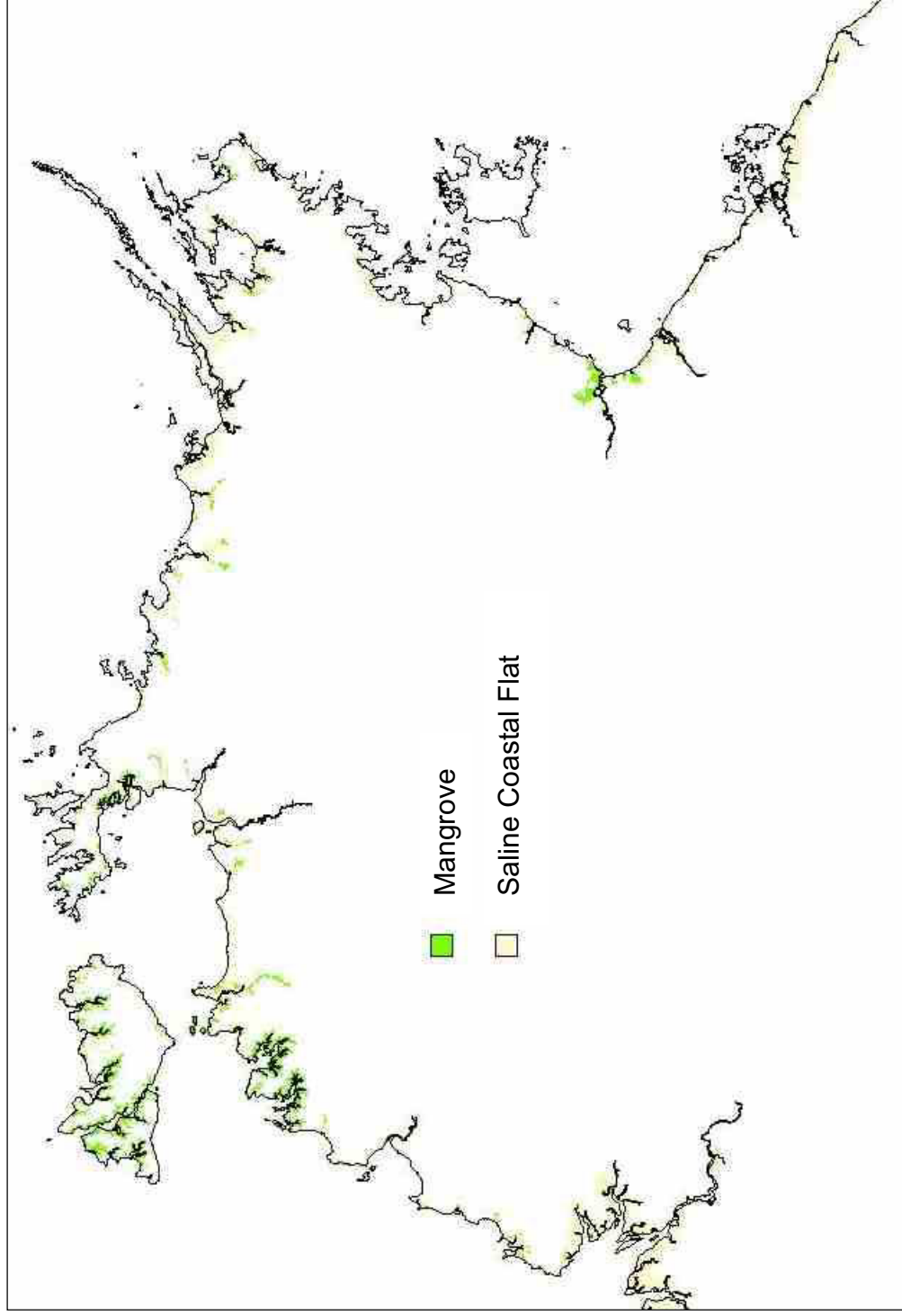


Figure 1 Distribution of mangroves and saline flats in the NT (Source: Brocklehurst and Edmeades, 1996a, 1996b)