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Territory's infrastructure needs major improvements

The release today of the Engineers Australia 2010 Northern Territory Infrastructure Report Card found that the Territory's overall infrastructure requires major improvements, with only a small number of sectors being rated* as good.

The President of the Engineers Australia Northern Division, Len Chappell, said, "Since our initial report in 2005, marginal improvements have been made in the areas of National Roads and Stormwater. While the major Territory Roads have also improved slowly, other Territory Roads and Local Roads have declined.

"Also, the ratings for Rail, Ports, Airports, Potable Water, Wastewater, Electricity and Gas have all slipped. While improvements are planned or underway in all infrastructure sectors, many of these initiatives are either not funded or not expected to be delivered in the short-term."

The 2010 report card includes the extra categories of Roads Overall and Telecommunications that were not rated in 2005. The following table sets out ratings and comparisons.

| Infrastructure type | NT 2010 | NT 2005 | National 2005 | National 2001 |
|---------------------|-----------|--|---------------|---------------|
| Roads overall | C | Not rated | C | Not rated |
| National roads | B | B- | C+ | rated |
| Territory roads | C- | C (sealed) C- (unsealed) | C | C |
| Local roads | D+ | C (sealed) D (unsealed) | C- | C- |
| Rail | C+ | A | C- | D- |
| Ports | C+ | B+ B- (barge landings) | C+ | B |
| Airports | B- | A- (major airports) B+ (community airports) B- (outstation and pastoral airstrips) | B | B |
| Potable water | C- | B- (metropolitan) | B- | C |
| Wastewater | C- | C (metropolitan) C (remote communities) | C+ | C- |
| Stormwater | B- | C+ | C- | D |
| Irrigation | Not rated | B | C- | D- |
| Electricity | C- | B- | C+ | B- |
| Gas | A- | A | C+ | C |
| Telecommunications | C- | Not rated | Not rated | B |

Recommendations of the Report are:

- A coordinated long-term transport infrastructure plan be developed that involves the Australia, Northern Territory and local governments as well as the private sector.
- The recent increase in road maintenance continue and provision be made for replacing aged road assets.
- Road, marine and air access to regional and remote communities be progressively upgraded.
- Local governments build asset management systems for all assets, and the maintenance and renewal information from these systems become a key input into financial allocations to local governments.
- The Northern Territory Government plays a greater role in facilitating infrastructure expansion by coordinating demand from multiple commercial activities and governments with infrastructure providers.
- Ports focus on improving their environmental outcomes and the Port of Darwin implements its forward plans to meet and encourage demand.
- Darwin Airport addresses capacity issues and facilitates airline hubbing and economic growth.
- The Australian and Northern Territory Governments keep regional and remote airstrips viable.
- The Power and Water Corporation and the Northern Territory Government implement demand management strategies to reduce potable water consumption, and develop water source expansion plans for areas where water consumption will exceed supply in the medium to long-term.
- The water quality health issues for all water supplies be addressed.
- The wastewater upgrade and expansion works be completed to allow the closure of the Larrakeyah outfall that discharges raw sewage into the Darwin Harbour.
- The Power and Water Corporation implement the remedial asset management program and long-term action plans as recommended in the *Independent Enquiry into Casuarina Substation Events and Substation Maintenance across Darwin* report to improve security of service.
- Electricity and water/wastewater tariffs be set at a level that will ensure financial sustainability.
- The Australian and Northern Territory Governments to continue to invest in the development of alternative energy sources, and
- Telecommunication shortfalls be addressed by rolling out the National Broadband Network across the Territory and eliminating mobile phone blackspots in urban and fringe areas, and along heavily trafficked roads like highways.

Further Information: **Summaries** of each infrastructure type, grade and comment **are attached** and a copy of the full report is available at www.engineersaustralia.org.au/ircnt . Reports for all States and Territories will be released by mid November 2010.

(* **The ratings** have been based on an assessment of asset condition, asset availability and reliability, asset management and sustainability. An "A" means very good and the infrastructure is fit for its current and anticipated future purposes; "B" is good, with minor changes needed to meeting current and future needs; "C" is adequate, but major changes required; "D" is poor, with critical changes required; and "F" is inadequate).

Media Contact: John Bright - 0407 234 490 / jbright@engineersaustralia.org.au
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Summary of comments about 2010 NT Infrastructure Report Card

| Infrastructure type | Grade | Comment |
|---|--------------------|---|
| Roads overall National roads Territory roads Local roads | C B C- D+ | These ratings recognise that there is considerable disparity between road types and between urban and non-urban areas and that major changes are required to some of the Territory's road network. National roads have improved, and while localised failures are increasing due to pavement aging, they are being addressed through ongoing intervention programs. The quality of the major Territory roads has slowly improved, but other Territory roads have declined due to increased traffic loads and lack of maintenance. Local road quality has deteriorated in many places outside urban areas, as road maintenance and resealing work have been postponed. There is a significant backlog of sealing/resealing work, and projects to provide all weather access on both Territory and local roads. While urban areas are well served by roads, most remote and some regional communities have roads that are less than adequate. |
| Rail | C+ | This rating recognises that the existing rail infrastructure is adequate for the current level of rail traffic. However, areas for improvement include the interface with the Port of Darwin and the track condition south of Alice Springs. A significant increase in bulk minerals traffic will require additional passing loops and improvements to the track to cope with the heavier bulk minerals trains. |
| Ports | C+ | This rating recognises that while there have been improvements at the Port of Darwin's facilities, its East Arm Wharf facilities face challenges with regard to maintenance, capacity, bulk materials handling and environmental issues. Barge landings and their supporting infrastructure are rudimentary and have not kept up with growing needs. |
| Airports | B- | This rating recognises that both Alice Springs and Darwin airport infrastructure is adequate for existing passenger and freight demand, and both have detailed expansion plans, although funding for developments is uncertain. The regional airports have limited infrastructure, which reflects their passenger numbers, and although airside infrastructure has generally improved, this has not been the case for land-side infrastructure. Some remote aerodromes are in very poor condition and some are unserviceable during the Wet Season. Given the scale of the problems and the limited resources of the NT Government and local governments, the prioritisation approach for upgrading remote aerodromes based on the community's reliance on air travel is appropriate. |
| Potable water | C- | This rating recognises that there have been significant infrastructure improvements to water supplies at a number of urban and remote communities, as well as the identification of water supply system deficiencies across the Territory. However, there are a few locations where water supplies do not meet microbiological water quality guidelines and many locations where they do not meet physical and chemical water quality guidelines. |
| Wastewater | C- | This rating recognises that raw sewage is still entering Darwin Harbour and localised problems arise from treated wastewater disposal in Darwin. However the quality of underground wastewater infrastructure in urban areas across the Territory is generally good, as are most urban wastewater treatment facilities. Wastewater infrastructure in remote communities remains a challenge and is becoming more of a problem as the remote population grows. |
| Stormwater | B- | This rating recognises that in new urban areas, stormwater systems are of a much higher quality, reflecting new design standards. There is a lack of condition information on stormwater assets in all urban areas, and in many areas, a gap is appearing between replacement funding and need. While the benefits of Water Sensitive Urban Design are recognised, there has been very limited application of this to date. |

Summary of comments about 2010 NT Infrastructure Report Card

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|--------------------|-----------|---|
| Irrigation | Not rated | Not rated |
| Electricity | C- | This rating recognises that while there has been an improvement in generation capacity for the Darwin-Katherine region, concerns exist about the quality of distribution infrastructure and its asset management. Advances have been made in increasing the capacity and security of electricity supply to Indigenous communities. |
| Gas | A- | This rating recognises that the gas transmission network remains in good condition and supply security has improved, with gas now being available from three sources. |
| Telecommunications | C- | This rating recognises that telecommunication services in urban areas are generally adequate. However, broadband blackspots still exist. While several backhaul projects have significantly improved telecommunication services for some remote and regional communities, many non-urban communities do not have adequate telecommunication services. The lack of universal mobile phone services along highways remains a challenge. |