

# Save Litchfield National Park from gamba catastrophe

*An open letter to the Honourable Chief Minister and Members of the NT Legislative Assembly from 31 businesses, 13 organisations and 50 scientists and environmental professionals.*

We are asking the NT Government to protect Litchfield National Park from ecosystem collapse due to the spread of invasive, highly flammable gamba grass. We request the Government commit to implementing in full the gamba management option for the Park which was researched and costed by Charles Darwin University scientists [in their 2023 report](#):

- Expand the Park’s current (10,525 ha) gamba grass “eradication zone” to a much larger (74,331 ha) zone, thereby protecting most places people like to visit, along with key areas of biodiversity (see map).
- Immediately begin a five-year eradication program within that enlarged eradication zone, requiring investment of \$1.3 million annually. This would include employment of a full-time coordinator to plan and support all gamba control and survey work. Such certainty of funding over multiple years could support expansion of capacity and jobs in the weed management arena.
- Follow the eradication program with ongoing maintenance at a much-reduced annual cost (\$111,000), including annual aerial surveys and subsequent control of newly identified infestations.

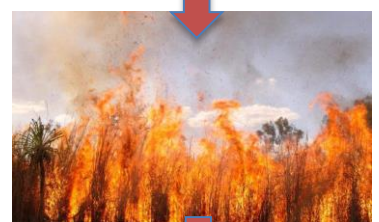


Adapted from Rossiter-Rachor et al (2023)

We acknowledge and support the work that's been done to manage gamba in the Park to date. Furthermore, we welcome the previous Government’s announcement of \$250,000 annual funding to control gamba grass in the Park. However we believe this amount (less than a fifth of what scientists say is required over the next few years) would fail to protect the Park into the future. It would mean gamba control continues to focus on the current eradication zone - which is small and includes practically no visitor sites - instead of the much larger zone proposed by scientists (see map).

As tourism goes, Litchfield is the NT’s jewel in the crown - our most-visited national Park. It’s “Darwin’s backyard” where we love to go on weekends and holidays. It’s a draw card for national and international visitors and a vital source of income for hundreds of Top End businesses. More than \$20 million has been spent on the Park’s facilities in recent years.

Endemic, vulnerable and threatened species - such as the northern quoll, northern brush-tailed phascogale, partridge pigeon, ghost bats and black-footed tree rat - make their home in this “Biodiversity and Visitor Class 1 Park” (the highest possible rating for an NT national Park).



Local Indigenous families hold precious many cultural sites within the Park.

Yet Litchfield is heading towards “an endpoint of ecosystem collapse” due to repeated high-intensity wildfires fueled by gamba grass - *unless immediate and substantial action is taken*.

This is the conclusion reached by Charles Darwin University scientists after years of exhaustive research and analysis (Rossiter-Rachor et al, [The cost of not acting: Delaying invasive grass management increases costs and threatens assets in a national Park, northern Australia](#))

Without urgent and sustained action, say these scientists, the Park’s ancient savanna woodland will be replaced by four metre tall, highly-flammable gamba monocultures, whose wildfires will “impact on all key visitor assets in the Park” as “infestation rapidly worsens over the next decade”.

Avoiding action could lead to an “endpoint of irreversible collapse” - meaning loss of key species, ecosystem services and function (Bergstrom et al, [Combating ecosystem collapse from the tropics to the Antarctic](#))

Likewise, the [Park’s own Plan of Management](#) states that gamba grass and wildfire are the two key threats into the future, and that "management of Gamba grass is essential to ensure the long term safety of visitors and the integrity of the Park".

We therefore ask the Government to commit to implementing the management option outlined above. We also request the government return to the previous policy of publishing regular “Report Cards” for each national Park, so ordinary citizens can keep track of how Litchfield’s natural heritage is being protected (the only report card published for Litchfield was in [2015](#)).

The “cost of not acting” on gamba in Litchfield has been spelled out by CDU scientists: each year that this threat is not taken seriously will make gamba catastrophe more and more costly and difficult to avert. If we leave it much longer, this will become inevitable. Continued inaction would be at a huge cost to our businesses, plants and animals and to all Top Enders.

As stated in the [NT Parks Masterplan 2023-53](#), “we have an opportunity to ensure the diversity and integrity of the Territory’s natural and cultural heritage remains intact, both now and for future generations”.

***We therefore hope that you will carefully consider our request to act urgently for the future of Litchfield National Park.***

### ***See overleaf for signatories.***

***“Urgent management action is needed to reduce the spread and cover of [gamba] in the Park to reduce the risk of... ecosystem collapse”***

***“We note that..aerial spraying ... could reduce [our estimated] time and costs of achieving [this] management outcome.”***

***“High intensity, fast moving [gamba] wildfires could result in the loss of infrastructure at visitor sites .. and present a potential risk to visitors at these sites”***

**(Rossiter-Rachor et al, 2023)**

# Signatories:

## Organisations:

Samantha Bennett  
General Manager  
Tourism Top End

Matthew Phillips  
Chairperson  
Litchfield Regional  
Tourism Inc.

Dr Helen Bishop  
Chairperson  
The Kungarakana Culture  
& Education Association

Andrew Cox  
CEO,  
Invasive Species Council

Amelia Young  
National Campaign Director  
The Wilderness Society

Ronda Green  
Chair  
Wildlife Tourism Australia

Michelle Whitehouse  
President  
Savannah Guides.

Samantha Crameri  
President  
Darwin Bushwalking Club

Hecate Jay  
President  
Bushwalking Australia Inc.

Brittany Hayward-Brown  
Convenor  
BirdLife Top End

Robin Knox  
Chair  
Environment Centre NT

Alexander Vaughan  
Policy Officer  
Arid Lands  
Environment Centre

Deborah Hall  
Convenor  
Friends of Casuarina  
Coastal Reserve Inc.

## Businesses local to the Park:

Shelly Haitana  
Owner/Operator  
Litchfield Tourist Park

Julian & Louise Sharples  
Owners/Operators  
Litchfield Café  
and Wangi Falls Café

Brian & Natalie Sellars  
Owners / Operators  
Pandanus on Litchfield

Yoyo & Max  
Managers,  
Lanmax Pty Ltd  
T/A Batchelor Holiday Park

Kerri Draper  
Owner/Director/Operator  
Banyan Farm Tourist Park

Sue Mornane  
Owner/Manager  
Rum Jungle Bungalows

Roger & Vivienne Latham  
Owners /Managers  
Hideaway Litchfield

Jenny Campbell  
Owner/Operator  
Tumbling Waters  
Holiday Park

Kylie Fry  
Manager  
Mt Bundy Station

Sharon Beswick  
Owner/manager  
Adelaide River Store

Nina Keener, owner  
Nina's Ark  
Wildlife Sanctuary  
(Environmentalist,  
Wildlife Rehabilitator)

Dr Jan Hills  
Veterinarian (ret.)  
President /Curator  
Batchelor Museum

## **Other businesses:**

Daniel Thurling &  
Sheryl Ruperto  
Owners/Operators  
Litchfield Park Adventures

Caitlin Sewell  
Director/Owner/Manager  
Autopia Tours

Robert Woods  
Owner/guide  
Ethical Adventures Tours

Hamish Clark  
Owner/Operator/Guide  
Sugarbag Safaris

Scott Hannaford &  
Rebecca Nugent  
Owners/Operators  
Down Under Safaris

Wayne Wetherall  
Owner/Operator  
Kokoda Spirit /  
Wild Spirit Adventures

Scott O'Brien  
Director  
Overland Oz  
Educational Safaris

Deb Frosh  
Owner/Operator  
NT Driver Guide –  
Escorted Tours

Clinton Brisk  
Managing Director  
Airborne Solutions

Betty Franklin  
Owner/operator  
Bettybird Tours

Matthew Phillips  
Director  
Top End  
Cycling Adventures

Tim Walker  
Owner/director/guide  
Bike You

Russell Willis  
Owner/guide  
Willis's Walkabouts

Sebastien Heritier  
Owner/operator/guide  
No Traces  
Bushwalking Australia

Bill Sinclair  
Co-owner/manager  
The NT General Store

Louise Denton,  
Louise Denton  
Photography

Etienne Littlefair  
(Ecologist/photographer)  
& Cara Littlefair (Teacher)  
Wild Territory Images

Greig Taylor  
& Alina Baldrich  
Directors, Charter North  
4WD Safaris

Rossy  
Owner/operator  
Cockatours (Qld)

## Scientists and environmental professionals – NT

Prof. Jeremy Russell-Smith  
Research Director  
Darwin Centre for Bushfire  
Research  
CDU

Dr Andrew Edwards  
Senior Research Fellow  
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Darwin Centre for Bushfire  
Research  
CDU

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Charles Darwin University

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Fire Ecologist  
Macquarie Uni. & CDU

Dr Adam Smart  
RIEL, CDU

Rowena Eastick  
Land Management Ecologist

Dr David Liddle  
Ecologist

Ian Morris,  
Biologist, educator,  
conservationist  
Co-author: *A Natural  
History &  
Field Guide to Australia's  
Top End*

John Brock  
Naturalist, Author:  
*Native Plants of Northern  
Australia*  
(Rev. ed. 2022, Reed New  
Holland Pub.)

Greg Miles  
Conservationist,  
Kakadu NP Chief Ranger  
(Ret.)  
Author: *Wildlife of Kakadu*  
&  
*The Flame of Convenience*

Kym Brennan  
Botanist, ecologist

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Plant Ecologist

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Consultant Botanist

Dr Chris Humphrey  
Ecologist

Dr Amanda Lilleyman  
Ornithologist

Andrew Spiers  
Naturalist  
Park ranger (ret.)  
Lecturer, Conservation and  
Land Management (ret.)

Oscar Metcalfe,  
PhD researcher /  
Environmental Engineer  
RIEL, CDU

## Scientists and environmental professionals – outside NT

- Jane Catford  
Prof. of Ecological Change  
King's College London & ANU
- Prof. David Bowman  
Director, Fire Centre  
(Bushfire Research Hub), UTAS
- Owen Price  
Director, Centre for Environmental  
Risk Management of Bushfire  
School of Earth Atmosphere &  
Life Sciences, UOW
- Dr Rachel McFadyen AM  
Tropical invasive weed scientist (ret.)  
Hon. Life Member,  
International Organization of  
Biological Control &  
Queensland Invasive Species Society
- Tim Low AM  
Author: *Where Song Began /*  
*Feral Future / The New Nature*  
Ecologist & Co-founder  
Invasive Species Council
- Dr Carol Booth  
Principal Policy Analyst  
Invasive Species Council
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- Dr Donald Franklin  
Ecologist (Qld)
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Sciences, Deakin Univ.
- Prof. Rick Shine AM  
School of Natural Sciences  
Macquarie Univ.
- Euan Ritchie  
Prof. of Wildlife Ecology &  
Conservation, Deakin Univ.
- Prof. Martine Maron  
Ecologist, UQ
- Chris Dickman FAA FRZS FZSI  
Prof. Emeritus of Terrestrial Ecology  
School of Life &  
Environmental Sciences, USYD
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Social Scientist, Deakin Univ.
- Associate Prof. Diana Fisher  
Ecologist, Co-chair:  
IUCN Australasian Marsupial &  
Monotreme Species  
Specialist Group, UQ
- Madeline Newbery  
Department of Biological Sciences  
UOW
- Dr Anthony Young  
School of Agriculture &  
Food Sustainability, UQ
- Dr Hugh Possingham  
Prof. of Mathematics & Ecology, UQ
- Associate Prof. Patrick O'Connor  
School of Economics & Public Policy  
Univ. Adel.
- Dr James Watson FQAAS  
Prof. (Conservation Science), UQ

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Global Ecology, Flin. Univ.

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School of Natural Sciences  
Macquarie Univ.

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Prof. (Wildlife Conservation), UTAS

Prof. Jennifer Firn  
School of Biology and  
Environmental Science, QUT

Dr Jessie Wells  
Environmental Scientist  
(Vic.)

Aaron Petty  
Ecologist  
(Alberta, Canada, formerly NT)

Dr Kerry Beggs  
Ecologist, Director / Principal  
EnviroBiometry Consulting Pty Ltd  
(Qld)

Dr Barbara Stewart  
Ecologist, Director  
Landmark Ecological Services Pty Ltd  
(NSW)

Claire Hewitt  
Ecologist, botanist (NSW)

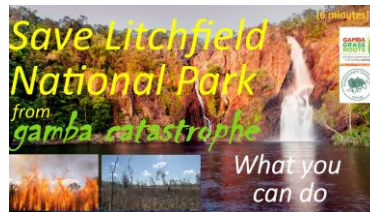
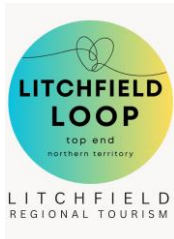
Greg Waddell  
Botanist, Environmental consultant  
(Vic.)

Dr Paula Peeters  
Ecologist, nature journaling teacher,  
writer, artist (Qld)

**Open Letter organized November 2024 by Gamba Grass Roots with assistance from the Invasive Species Council, Tourism Top End, Litchfield Regional Tourism Inc. and Environment Centre NT.**

*Authorised by Pauline Cass, Gamba Grass Roots*

*(Gamba Grass Roots is a group within Landcare NT.)*



**Citizens' online  
petition  
change.org**



<https://landcarent.org.au/groups/gamba-grass-roots/>

Ph. **0466 222 283**

[savelitchfield@gambagrassroots.org](mailto:savelitchfield@gambagrassroots.org)

<https://youtu.be/E-HaB0qDxyQ>

(Short information video explaining the issues and what the Open Letter is asking for)

<https://chn9.it/DDpv9ZFzjR>

(supporting the Open Letter)