



Gender & Disaster Australia

Darwin

DISASTER CONTEXT

Socio-demographics from
a gendered perspective





Darwin



Map of Statistical Area 4: Darwin. [Source: https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/701](https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/701)





The area covered by this map, and considered in this factsheet, is the Statistical Area 4 (SA4) of Darwin. This was selected as most useful because it includes the entire Greater Darwin area, rather than the narrow area of the city of Darwin. The SA4 of Darwin includes a number of Local Government Areas (LGAs) around the LGA of Darwin that have been recently impacted by disaster. In the aftermath of tropical cyclone

Marcus, which is profiled in full below, financial assistance through the joint Australian, state and territory governments' Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) was available in the following LGAs in the SA4 of Darwin: Belyuen, Coomalie, Darwin, Litchfield, Palmerston, and Wagait.¹ Data cited in this factsheet relate to the SA4 of Darwin except where specific LGAs are highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

On 17 March 2018, tropical cyclone Marcus hit the Northern Territory (NT) coastline and passed directly over its capital city, Darwin.² At that time it was a Category 2 storm and the worst disaster to hit Darwin since severe tropical cyclone Tracy, a Category 4 storm that caused significant damage, injury, and fatality over Christmas in 1974.³ Cyclone Tracy was considered to be the first 'natural' disaster that was experienced as a 'national' event, imagined through a "national mythology that was distinct from the type that has traditionally been linked to the natural environment".⁴ There has been very little academic literature concerning the social impacts of Cyclone Marcus, possibly because the impacts were much less severe than those of Cyclone Tracy, which received more academic attention. For example, it was found that 58% of a sample of survivors of Cyclone Tracy who were evacuated to Sydney during the disaster had suffered pronounced psychological disturbance.⁵

This psychological disruption was initially experienced as fear of death or injury, but as time passed was more closely associated with the stress of relocation.⁶

Other analyses of the social impacts of Cyclone Tracy focused on the behaviour of residents during the disaster itself and during the recovery. It was found that despite multiple warnings, a substantial portion of Darwin's population did not take any precautions.⁷ However, in the aftermath of the cyclone, volunteer and community leadership in Darwin was critical to the recovery and worked well alongside official emergency management.⁸ During the reconstruction, major changes were made to building codes to ensure housing was better constructed to resist the impact of cyclones.⁹ The lessons from this process are considered to have increased Australia's disaster resilience as a whole.¹⁰

1 <https://www.disasterassist.gov.au/Pages/disasters/current-disasters/Northern-Territory/Tropical-Cyclone-Marcus-March-2018.aspx>

2 <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/2018-cyclone-nt-tropical-cyclone-marcus/>

3 <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/cyclone-cyclone-tracy-darwin-1974/>

4 West, B. (2000). Mythologising a natural disaster in post-industrial Australia: The incorporation of Cyclone Tracy within Australian national identity. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 24 (66), 197-204.

5 Parker, G. (1975). Psychological disturbance in Darwin evacuees following Cyclone Tracy. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 1(21), 650-652.

6 Parker, G. (1977). Cyclone Tracy and Darwin evacuees: On the restoration of the species. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 130 (6), 548-555.

7 Webber, D. L. (1976). Darwin Cyclone: An exploration of disaster behaviour. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 11 (1), 54-63.

8 Handmer, J., & Maynard, P. (2021). Civil society mobilisation after Cyclone Tracy, Darwin 1974. *Environmental Hazards*, 20 (1), 23-44.

9 Walker, G. R., & Minor, J. E. (1980). Cyclone Tracy in retrospect: a review of its impact on the Australian community. *Wind Engineering*, 1327-1337; Walters, K. J. (1978). The reconstruction of Darwin after Cyclone Tracy. *Disasters*, 2 (1), 59-68.

10 Walker, G. R. (2010). A review of the impact of cyclone Tracy on building regulations and insurance. *Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Journal*, 60 (3), 199.



A more recent study of the long-term impacts of Cyclone Tracy on the cyclone risk perceptions of Darwin residents found a significant difference between short-term and long-term residents.¹¹ Short-term and lay residents also underestimated the level of climate change risk they were exposed to, compared to residents with expertise in disaster management.

The Indigenous experience of Cyclone Tracy was significantly under-researched. The exception is a study by Haynes et al., who interviewed Indigenous respondents about cultural influences on their experience of Cyclone Tracy.¹² Respondents discussed the role of traditional knowledge in preparing them for the cyclone, and how loss of connection with cultural heritage meant that some “learnt the hard way” from Cyclone Tracy how to interpret environmental signals. Respondents also reported that cultural attachment to country made Indigenous evacuees more likely to return to Darwin after Cyclone Tracy than non-Indigenous evacuees, and also made them more self-sufficient during the recovery period.



DISASTER BACKGROUND

Kind of disasters affecting this region/town: Tropical cyclones¹³

EVENT NAME	Hazard Type(s)
Tropical cyclone Marcus, 2018 ¹⁴	Tropical cyclone
Tropical cyclone Tracy, 1974 ¹⁵	Tropical cyclone

Recent major disaster: Tropical cyclone Marcus, 2018¹⁶

- Fatalities: 0
- People displaced:
 - o The cyclone eased by the end of the day and all residents who had been sheltering in cyclone shelters were able to return home.
- Properties and infrastructure affected:
 - o 26,000 homes were affected by electricity outages. Relief payments of between \$250 and \$650 were offered to households that were without power for 72 hours or more.¹⁷

11 Li, G. M. (2009). Tropical cyclone risk perceptions in Darwin, Australia: a comparison of different residential groups. *Natural Hazards*, 48, 365-382.

12 Haynes, K., Bird, D., Carson, D., Larkin, S., & Mason, M. (2011). *Institutional response and Indigenous experiences of Cyclone Tracy*. National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility.

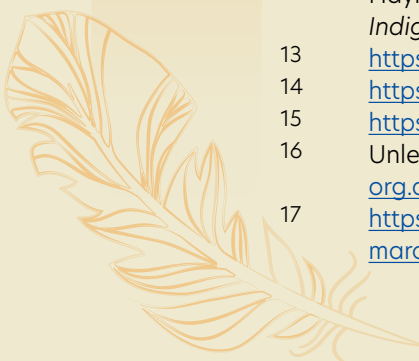
13 <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/disasters/>

14 <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/2018-cyclone-nt-tropical-cyclone-marcus/>

15 <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/cyclone-cyclone-tracy-darwin-1974/>

16 Unless otherwise indicated, information in this section is sourced from: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/2018-cyclone-nt-tropical-cyclone-marcus/>

17 <https://theconversation.com/lessons-not-learned-darwins-paying-the-price-after-cyclone-marcus-93862>





- o Thousands of residents in the greater Darwin area were warned to boil water before drinking it for nearly 48 hours.
- o Public schools and non-essential public service agencies were closed for several days.
- o The Health Department issued a warning for melioidosis, a life-threatening disease spread by contact with soil, mud, and surface water.
- o Thousands of large, shallow-rooted trees that were planted after tropical cyclone Tracy in 1974 were brought down by tropical cyclone Marcus. This was considered a hazard that could have been avoided.¹⁸
- o Waste facilities struggled to cope with the huge quantities of green waste generated by the cyclone.¹⁹
- o Overhead power lines brought down in the cyclone were also considered a hazard that could have been avoided. The ABC reported that the project to move overhead power cables underground was begun more than a decade before the cyclone, but was not completed due to lack of funding and political will.²⁰
- Insurance statistics:
 - o The Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) reported that at 20 March 2018, three days after landfall, claims had risen to more than 1800. Most claims were for light property damage, such as broken windows, property struck by fallen trees and damage to vehicles.²¹
 - o Overall there were more than 6,400 insurance claims, and insurance costs topped \$75 million.
- Other notable facts:
 - o Cyclone Marcus caused significant habitat destruction for tree-dwelling green ants. However, significant impact on species numbers was not expected. During cyclone Tracy, the entire green ant population of the Top End was “blown away and took years to re-establish”.²²
 - o Some reporting questioned why there was apparent reluctance from the NT’s chief minister to seek help from other states and whether this was associated with Commonwealth disregard for the NT in general. It was reported that then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull did not call the chief minister until five days after the cyclone.²³

18 <https://theconversation.com/lessons-not-learned-darwins-paying-the-price-after-cyclone-marcus-93862>

19 <https://theconversation.com/lessons-not-learned-darwins-paying-the-price-after-cyclone-marcus-93862>

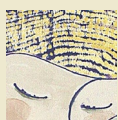
20 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-21/cyclone-marcus-curious-darwin-answers-your-questions-about-storm/9570680>

21 https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/resources/Media%20releases/2018/2018_03/2018_03_Insurance%20Council%20declares%20Darwin%20Catastrophe%20%20for%20TC%20Marcus.pdf

22 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-21/cyclone-marcus-curious-darwin-answers-your-questions-about-storm/9570680>

23 <https://www.theguardian.com/weather/2018/mar/21/cyclone-marcus-turnbull-sends-thoughts-five-days-after-storm-hit-darwin>; <https://theconversation.com/lessons-not-learned-darwins-paying-the-price-after-cyclone-marcus-93862>





ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE²⁴

- Belyuen LGA is ranked:
 - 2 out of 544 LGAs in Australia (where 1 is most disadvantaged)
 - in the 1st decile (out of 10, where 1 is most disadvantaged)
 - In the 1st percentile (out of 100, where 1 is most disadvantaged)
- Coomalie LGA is ranked:
 - 51 out of 544 LGAs in Australia (where 1 is most disadvantaged)
 - in the 1st decile (out of 10, where 1 is most disadvantaged)
 - In the 2nd percentile (out of 100, where 1 is most disadvantaged)

Given the relative socioeconomic disadvantage of the Belyuen and Coomalie LGAs, and the impact of tropical cyclone Marcus on these LGAs, the rest of this fact sheet will include data for the Belyuen and Coomalie LGAs where available as well as data for the SA4 of Darwin. Unless these LGAs are specified, data relate to the SA4 of Darwin.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS

- Housing affordability in Darwin:

	Belyuen LGA ²⁵	Coomalie LGA ²⁶	SA4 Darwin ²⁷	Northern Territory	Australia
Median mortgage repayments	\$0/mth	\$1517/mth	\$2100/mth	\$2000/mth	\$1863/mth
Mortgage stress ²⁸	n/a	25.4%	11.5%	11.3%	14.5%
Median rent payments	\$75/wk	\$175/wk	\$385/wk	\$325/wk	\$375/wk
Rental stress ²⁹	n/a	25%	19.5%	16.3%	32.2%

- Homelessness
 - In 2021-22, 2447 people accessed Specialist Homelessness Services in the SA4 of Darwin,³⁰ equating to 1.7% of the population, or 175 per 10,000.
 - 954 of these were men (135 per 10,000) and 1493 were women (216 per 10,000)³¹

²⁴ These rankings come from the ABS Local Government Area Indexes, available here: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2033.0.55.0012016?OpenDocument>

²⁵ Data in this column: <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA70540>

²⁶ Data in this column: <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA70700>

²⁷ Data in final three columns: <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/701>

²⁸ Refers to the percentage of households with mortgage repayments exceeding 30% of household income

²⁹ Refers to the percentage of households with rental payments exceeding 30% of household income

³⁰ Data cube: SHSC geographical location of client—SA3, SA4, RA, GCCSA. Available here: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shsc-data-cubes/contents/specialist-homelessness-services-collection-shsc-data-cubes>

³¹ Data cube: SHSC geographical location of client—SA3, SA4, RA, GCCSA. Available here: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shsc-data-cubes/contents/specialist-homelessness-services-collection-shsc-data-cubes>



MENTAL HEALTH

- Mental health conditions (any):³² SA4 Darwin: 5.9% | NT: 5.1% | Aus: 8.8%
- Suicide rates:³³

Area	SA4 Darwin	Northern Territory	Australia
Age-standardised suicide rate per 100,000 population	14.8	19.7	12.6
Rate for males	19.7	26.9	19.2
Rate for females	9.6	12.3	6.1

GENDER EQUALITY

- Lone parent status
 - 16.2% one-parent families, of which 77.6% are female-led³⁴
- Mothers' Index (measured at LGA level)³⁵
 - Darwin LGA ranked 1st out of 14 LGAs, where 1 is the best place in the Northern Territory for a mother to live
 - Coomalie LGA ranked 7th out of 14 LGAs, where 1 is the best place in the Northern Territory for a mother to live
 - Belyuen LGA is not included in the Mothers' Index
- Unpaid work³⁶
 - Unpaid domestic work: 29,317 women did more than 5 hours of unpaid domestic work per week, compared to 20,427 men
 - Unpaid care: 6,087 women provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition, or due to old age, compared to 3,999 men
 - Unpaid childcare: 17,377 women provided unpaid childcare, compared to 12,793 men

³² <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/701>

³³ All suicide rate stats come from Data table: 2021 National Mortality Database - Suicide, Table NMD S10, available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/data-downloads>

³⁴ <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/701>

³⁵ The Mothers' Index consists of composite scores from five different indicators relating to maternal wellbeing (maternal health, children's wellbeing, educational status, economic status and socio-economic disadvantage), with each indicator given equal weighting. Scores were sorted from low to high and ranked from 1 to 14 (1 being the best place for a mother to live) to give the overall Mothers Index rank for each LGA in the NT. Full table available at <https://apo.org.au/node/63692>, p. 33.

³⁶ ABS General Community Profile for SA4 Darwin, Tables G24-G26, available here: <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/701>



- Violence against women³⁷
 - o There were 1140 domestic violence related assaults recorded in Darwin in the year to 28/2/2023, a decrease of 7.32% from the previous year. The domestic violence related assault rate per 100,000 population is 1307.7.
 - o There were 132 sexual assaults recorded in Darwin in the year to 28/2/2023, an increase of 6.45% from the previous year. The sexual assault rate per 100,000 population is 151.4.



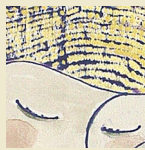
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

	SA4 Darwin ³⁸	Northern Territory	Australia
Median age	34	33	38
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	10.4%	26.3%	3.2%
Both parents born in Australia	44.3%	53.9%	45.9%
Non-English language used in household	28.8%	32.7%	24.8%
With university education	26%	21.5%	26.3%
Year 10 as highest qualification	8.5%	10.5%	10.0%
Labour force participation	69.7%	61.7%	61.1%
Working part-time	23.8%	22.8%	31.2%
Unemployment	4%	5.6%	5.1%
Median weekly personal income	\$1120	\$936	\$805
Median weekly household income	\$2209	\$2061	\$1746
Rate of people on Disability Support Pension per 10,000 population (measured at LGA and state level) ³⁹	Belyuen LGA: 1678 Coomalie LGA: 509 Darwin LGA: 264	355	294

³⁷ Data are recorded for the NT Police Darwin Metropolitan Command, which includes Darwin City and the associated suburbs from Buffalo Creek, Berrimah and East Arm westwards. Available here: <https://pfes.nt.gov.au/police/community-safety/nt-crime-statistics/darwin>

³⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all data in this table from: <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/701>

³⁹ <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/dss-payment-demographic-data>



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Endnotes