

Big Rivers is the Territory's second largest region, covering almost 25% of the Territory's land mass from the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf and Lajamanu in the west to Numbulwar and Borroloola in the east.



The Big Rivers region is made up of small communities separated by long distances and is home to around 21,500 people, of whom around 57% are Aboriginal. The town of Katherine is the region's main centre with a population of around 10,800 people. About 38% of the region's population is aged 24 years and under, while around 8% is aged 65 years and over.

Major industries in the Big Rivers region include tourism, horticulture, pastoral, mining and defence. The region has a significant defence presence, including the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Tindal, Bradshaw field training area and Delamere air weapons range. Key tourist attractions include Nitmiluk Gorge, Leliyn (Edith Falls), Mataranka and recreational fishing in the region's big rivers.

Nitmiluk National Park

To provide a further boost to tourism in the region, the 2025 Budget provides \$1.7 million to establish new walking and bike trails linking with mountain bike trails in the Nitmiluk National Park.

Improving access across the region

The 2025 Budget continues to enhance accessibility across the Big Rivers region to improve freight efficiency, connectivity, road safety and economic productivity by investing \$168 million, including:

- \$117.4 million for the Buntine Highway upgrades, including \$5 million to upgrade five heavy vehicle rest areas
- \$41.6 million for new and continuing works to upgrade the Newman to Katherine road corridor including sealing, strengthening and widening, and road safety improvements
- \$8.5 million for continuing works to upgrade the Carpentaria Highway, a key route for supplies and transport for Glencore's McArthur River Mine, major access road to the Beetaloo Sub-basin and Borroloola, and an important service route for the Borroloola community and pastoral, tourism, agricultural and mining sectors
- \$0.8 million to construct a compliance inspections shed at the Katherine heavy vehicle facility.

New multipurpose multicultural facility in Katherine

The 2025 Budget includes \$1.5 million for the Katherine multipurpose multicultural facility.

The multipurpose facility will serve both multicultural and broader community events, promoting social inclusion and participation. Having a safe space for multicultural events, educational programs, and community-building activities will encourage retention of the overseas-born population, providing opportunities for social interaction and cultural expression, which helps develop a sense of belonging and enhances workforce stability.

Hosting cultural events and community activities also drives local spending, enhances Katherine’s cultural scene, and builds vibrant, diverse and inclusive communities. Investing in this infrastructure will attract cultural festivals and community events that stimulate local businesses, boost tourism, and increase community engagement.

Beetaloo Sub-basin

The Beetaloo Sub-basin has moved towards commercial production, including the signing of gas sales agreements for Tamboran Resources and Empire Energy to supply gas to the Territory Government.

Empire Energy commenced drilling on its full-scale pilot development well in November 2024. In 2025, Empire is due to commence construction of the Carpentaria gas plant and associated infrastructure, and is aiming to begin gas deliveries in 2025.

Tamboran commenced its Shenandoah South pilot project drilling program in August 2024, and in February 2025, announced they had successfully completed stimulation activities. Tamboran remains on schedule to deliver appraisal gas to market in 2026.

STEAM centre

Work will continue on the \$16.7 million Katherine High School science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) centre. The project includes a mix of upgrades to existing facilities and development of new areas and purpose-built classrooms, art and music studios and a tiered performance space.

Borroloola health centre and morgue

The 2025 budget includes \$19.8 million for the construction of a new health centre in Borroloola to enhance delivery of health services. The new centre will assist in attracting and retaining clinical staff.

It will include clinical and pharmacy spaces, emergency resuscitation equipment, consulting spaces, morgue facilities and a separate patient and visitor entrance from staff.

Katherine amphitheatre

The \$7.6 million transformation of Godinymayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Culture Centre has been celebrated at the grand opening of its new amphitheatre in Katherine in April 2025.

The completion of the expanded stage and open-air venue for professional outdoor performances is an exciting milestone for the Katherine arts and culture centre, which now boasts more modern facilities for performers and visitors.

Remote housing

The 2025 Budget is reducing overcrowding and improving housing quality by delivering up to 2,700 houses over 10-years, and a comprehensive repairs and maintenance program, under the \$4 billion remote housing agreement, co-funded by the Territory and Commonwealth governments.

In 2024-25, around 41 dwellings are expected to be delivered across communities in Big Rivers, including 20 in Lajamanu. New subdivisions are also planned in 2025-26 for Minyerri.

Major works overview

	Capital works
	\$000
Transport	168 355
Health	19 765
Recreation, culture and religion	1 976
Education	1 210
Total Big Rivers	191 306

Photograph courtesy of Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, SetInStoneMedia