



Community Recommendations 2016

Preamble

People value natural areas and healthy catchments because they support the health and wellbeing of communities and our quality of life. Governments, councils and the NT Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) need to publicly promote and raise awareness of the benefits of catchments and natural areas as places that:

- protect the health of aquatic and terrestrial ecological systems many of which occur nowhere else in the world
- maintain the quality of water in our creeks, rivers, waterholes and seas, by reducing erosion, pollution, flood intensity, and protect against the impacts of climate change and rising sea levels
- provide valuable environmental services, for example they protect the resources upon which much of NT economy relies: eg fishing, tourism and related service industries, and
- enhance the quality of life for NT residents by cooling suburbs and living areas, and providing places for recreational, relaxation and inspiration.

The broader communities need to be aware of the financial risks involved with damaging natural areas and that to keep them in their natural state is a cheaper management option than rehabilitation works which never replace the complexity of the original landscape.

Recommendation 1

Enforce existing laws that protect the environment and prosecute offenders

The laws that exist to protect catchments and natural areas need to be enforced and the perpetrators prosecuted sending a clear message from the Government that the natural environment is valuable.

- Prosecute illegal land clearing: eg No 1 Boulter Road clearing
- Prosecute illegal dumping: eg repeated landscape/household rubbish dumping along Richardson Drive, Namarluk Drive, along Mitchell Creek, and on Defence Housing Australia land
- Prosecute illegal stock piling and pollution: eg Kulaluk stock pile is an eroding forest of coffee bush and other weeds contaminating the Ludmilla catchment and need to be removed immediately.
- Prosecute illegal vandalism and anti-social behaviour eg Richardson Park parking area and sports ground
- Prosecute illegal access: eg vehicle and motor bike access along Casuarina Coastal Reserve eroding dunes and interrupting important migratory bird activities (resting, roosting, feeding) that put the success of their migration at risk; vehicle and motor bike access throughout the Mitchell Creek catchment creating major erosion gullies
- Prosecute illegal dog access: eg along Casuarina Coastal Reserve in migratory bird habitat – ie between Lee Point and Buffalo Creek estuary.
- Prosecute arsonists: eg arson is a regular occurrence in the Casuarina Coastal Reserve.

Recommendation 2

Change planning acts to support community involvement and increase the protection of the biodiversity of catchments and natural areas.

1. June 2016 amendment to the Planning Act needs to be rescinded as it denies the public a say in the maintenance of the planning scheme.
2. Reintroduce and review the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee with catchment subcommittees
3. Strengthen Conservation Zoning to protect catchments, riparian vegetation and creek corridors. Declare as Conservation Zones sizeable buffers on either side of creeks and waterways to adequately protect catchment boundaries.
4. Ban any further clearing of mangroves (as Queensland has done), and the relevant Government Minister needs to decree that s/he will not approve any future permit to clear mangroves, and prosecute any clearing of mangroves

Recommendation 3

Improve Government environmental policy, planning and community involvement processes

The Government planning process is a tool that can be used to protect catchments and natural areas. However, Government community engagement methods are superficial with ad hoc and secretive decisions been made that disempower the community. People lack confidence in the planning processes, so are disengaged and disinterested in planning discussions. When the community is faced with the results of secretive or politically motivated planning decisions people become outraged, and express their anger and distrust of Government through social media and demonstrations, for example Richardson Park proposed redevelopment and the Ministerial decision to dismiss the recommendations to list Kulaluk Heritage as a Heritage site.

Unfortunately both the Government and the community are losing out because of the poor planning decisions and the lack of effective community engagement processes.

The Government is not reaping the benefits that understanding the depth of community concerns would bring such as:

- sources of on- ground knowledge (often developed by residents over decades), and innovative approaches to problems
- reduced management costs as communities take responsibility for their local landscape
- reduced cost of litigation as neighbourhoods take pride in their surrounds
- community goodwill towards Government, and a community willing to participate, negotiate and accept necessary change, and
- a community educated in environmental and social challenges and solutions.

The community is not learning of the environmental and social challenges facing society and land management agencies, many feel disconnected from their local area and so don't enjoy the sense of pride that goes with a strong sense of ownership. Instead what is more common is a careless 'only here for a few years' - 'won't get involved locally' – 'fly in fly out' attitude.

Ways to improve community confidence and involvement in Government policy and planning processes:

1. Government needs to commit to open decision making and planning.
2. Ministerial and planning decisions need to comply with objectives of the Planning Act.
3. Changes to status of Crown Lands need to be open and transparent and in the public interest
4. Actively protect biodiversity by ensuring NT Clearing Guidelines are adhered to and adequate buffer zones remain along the length and width of rivers, creeks and their tributaries.

5. Develop and implement community education and support programs about Government planning processes and how the community can meaningfully participate, including making Notice of Intent more accessible. The information available needs to be as extensive as the amount of information and Government support provided to potential developers.
6. Engage and resource catchment sub-committees eg: re-establish the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee and catchment sub-committees.
7. Improve buffer zone boundary protection with follow up monitoring, enforcement and prosecution, and improve communication and coordination between Governments and departments. Boundaries of natural areas are often damaged and encroached upon at the different stages of development. For example at the subdivision design stage (Dept Planning); during infrastructure on-site investigative work (Dept of Infrastructure), during tender period and construction stage, and block by block due to builders disregard for boundary protection, eg driving into buffer zones, and using the areas to dump rubbish and effluent eg Zuccolli
8. Government needs to adequately resource the Environment Centre NT and the Environmental Defenders Office to ensure both organisations can continue their important role of providing advice and support to community members concerned about environmental issues, and so both organisations are adequately resourced to contribute to Government policy and development decisions that impact on the environment.

Recommendation 4

Baseline monitoring needs to be carried out Ludmilla, Mitchell and Sandy Creek catchments to determine long term trends and condition.

Recommendation 5

Protect migratory bird habitat provided by creek estuaries

The estuaries of Buffalo, Sandy and Ludmilla Creeks are important migratory bird habitat. Dogs, vehicles and people interrupt the birds as they feed, rest and roost after or before their long migratory flights across the world.

Parks and Wildlife are poorly resourced to enforce the 'no dog' and 'no vehicle access' regulations in Casuarina Coastal Reserve that help protect Sandy Creek estuary and the southern Buffalo Creek estuary.

1. The Environmental Impact Statement to be released by the Defence Housing Australia for the Lee Point Master Plan needs to ensure better protection of the migratory bird habitat at Sandy Creek estuary by altering the current location of the beach access from the proposed esplanade further north.
2. Remove the proposed stair to the beach and instead put beach access seaward from the recently upgraded WWII radar station heritage site (and it nearby seating). Promoting the WWII heritage site would continue the military theme of the 2CRU land.
3. Start monitoring the water quality of Sandy Creek to determine the effectiveness of the proposed stormwater management.
4. All dogs should be on leads along the walking paths behind the beach, and no dogs allowed south of the beach access seaward of the WWII heritage site.
5. The Casuarina Coastal Reserve Management Plan needs to include no dog zones around the estuary of Sandy Creek to the proposed beach access mentioned above, ie seaward from the WWII heritage site.

6. Defence Housing Australia (DHA) need to honour the commitment made in the Masterplan to fund and implementation of a community engagement and education strategy to promote environmental values and sensitivities of the area, dog regulations including encouraging a “pick up after your dog” campaign, and appropriate visitor use. An example of such a campaign is the one Parks and Wildlife delivered when current zones were established. That campaign included radio, television, brochures, signs, and amnesty period supported by face to face Ranger patrols, and then enforcement and prosecution.
7. DHA community engagement and education strategy to include the revision and renewal of all the Parks and Wildlife signs and publications explaining dog/horse regulations on beaches. Signs to be UV resistant.

Recommendation 6

NT PA and Governments need to recognise a healthy Mitchell Creek catchment as a great asset to the Palmerston region and take immediate action to protect its biodiversity, and rehabilitate damaged areas caused by the dense urbanisation of the area.

Governments and developers’ marketing campaigns promote the new suburbs encroaching on Mitchell Creek as clean green suburbs, but the biodiversity of the catchment is at risk from:

- the density of developments (small block sizes, close proximity of houses, small garden space, lack of green space)
 - inadequate creek and tributary buffer zones, eg the most recent Roystonea Avenue extension
 - a disregard for landscape plans that are sensitive to creek habitat and appropriate use
 - the dumping, pollution and run off into the creek, and
 - unrestricted off road vehicle access in buffer zones, crown lands and conservation areas, through unformed vehicle crossings and along creek beds, causing major erosion gullies and top soil run off.
1. Governments and NT EPA needs to act on recommendations made in the Mitchell Creek Natural Resource Management Plan developed by the Friends of Mitchell Creek (FoMC) in 2012.
 2. NT EPA needs to work with NT Government departments including the Education Department to support any proposal to be forward by the FoMC to engage Palmerston Region schools in programs to ‘adopt a spot’ along Mitchell Creek and become guardians for its local health and biodiversity and appropriate use.

Recommendation 7

Storm Water Implementation Plan needs to be supported by an extensive community engagement program

1. Sustainable tropical urban design needs to be the standard by which developments are approved.
2. Developments need to be monitored at all stages to ensure they are adhering to sustainable tropical urban design plans and that the end product matches what was initially approved.
3. Planning controls, monitoring and enforcement methods need to be put in place so that industrial sites, development sites do not pollute waterways using tropical standards.
4. NT EPA, Councils and Government need to deliver a synchronised community engagement and education program to raise the awareness of industry, developers and the community about the values of protecting the natural environment, the cost of rehabilitation; the risks of

development, industrial and household pollutants; and recycling obligations and opportunities. Regulations and associated fines need to be made clear and enforced.