

## CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY REPORT

The *Draft Darwin Regional Land Use Plan* (DDRLUP) was on public exhibition for 6 weeks from July through to early September. During that period there were 26 stakeholder briefings, public displays at 6 different venues and 55 submissions were received. This was in addition to the 100 submissions received during the previous public exhibition of the document *Towards a Darwin Regional Land Use Plan*.

Consultants to the NT Planning Commission, Michels Warren Munday, who assisted with the public consultation, provided a very comprehensive report on the consultation and it is available for download from the NT Planning Commission website ([www.planningcommission.nt.gov.au](http://www.planningcommission.nt.gov.au)).

The NTPC appreciates the strong public interest in the DDRLUP shown by a broad cross section of the community and for the many comments and suggested amendments to the planning document.

As a result of the consultation and submissions, the NT Planning Commission has made numerous amendments and additions to the final draft DRLUP. The finalised document has now been forwarded to the Minister for Lands, Planning & Environment for his consideration for inclusion in the NT Planning Scheme.

I am taking this opportunity to explain some of the key changes and additions we have made in the finalised document to the Minister, and why we have made those changes. I would also like to explain why some requested changes have not been made. As the Planning Commission is an independent and advisory body, the Minister is the decision-maker on whether he chooses to accept the Commission's advice as outlined below.

Firstly to the many additions made to the finalised Plan. While the exhibited draft document highlighted the role of our indigenous population in the history of the region, it was suggested that greater recognition of indigenous culture and connection to the land was needed. Subsequently that further recognition was made in the description of the *Present* and the *Future* as well as in the section on *Environment and Heritage*.

Many submitters and contributors to the draft document sought additions that will be more relevant to more detailed planning documents such as *Area Plans*. To overcome some of that confusion, the final document has been amended to better explain the role of this *Land Use Plan* in informing those more detailed, future planning documents.

Stronger recognition of a society that promotes innovation and tropical concepts and the importance of Darwin as a key tropical tourism gateway was also suggested, therefore more specific wording was added to reflect these views, as was a greater emphasis on the significance of Darwin Harbour, the conservation of wildlife and the protection of key natural areas. A reference to the recently released *A Stormwater Strategy for the Darwin Harbour Region* by the NT Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) has also been added.

A specific addition in respect to conservation is a reference to the world unique fauna and flora contained within the Howard Sands Plain. The NT EPA is now seeking to work with the Department of Mines & Energy (DME) to ensure the protection of those species and therefore it was very relevant for this planning document to reflect the need for that protection.

In residential areas and urban activity centres the draft document made reference to their role within the broader region. Following a variety of feedback on how best to describe these areas, additional references have been made to promoting healthy communities, clarifying the focus on accessibility to public transport, identifying consideration of reverse sensitivity issues (i.e. the impact of new developments on existing ones) and highlighting the important role of seniors within a cohesive society.

A number of submitters raised the issue of alternative transport means other than vehicles on roads. While the opportunity for future use of rapid bus transport and light rail was mentioned in the draft document, an amendment to the plan to change "*Arterial Roads*" to "*Roads and Transport Corridors*" has been made to better reflect the potential use of these corridors. Therefore, the "*Road and Transport Corridor*" shown to the second airport site and West Arm port could potentially include a rail connection.

The potential use of ferries as a means of transport has also been reinstated into the plan following strong support for that form of transport into the future.

Feedback from submitters during the consultation phase, particularly at regional shopping centres and markets, indicated that some people did not fully understand how closer development might occur in the rural area.

With any city growing at a rapid rate, urban creep into adjoining rural areas is inevitable. Darwin is no exception. The draft DRLUP makes allowance for future closer development in a number of ways and locations:

- Firstly, there is the natural growth immediately adjoining an existing urban area. The proposed urban/peri-urban area in Holtze is such an example as it will take advantage of the infrastructure existing and servicing the City of Palmerston. While this area is shown as urban/peri-urban, that doesn't mean there will be small urban lots proliferating from one end of the area to the other. The final Plan has been amended by removing the reference to an "urban growth corridor" as the intention is to transition from denser development adjacent to the proposed hospital to the adjoining existing rural lots on Wallaby Holtze Road and at Howard Springs. Wherever possible, good planning would not site a small urban lot immediately adjoining a large rural lot and the Plan has been amended to clarify this.
- Similarly, with the second example, a new urban/peri-urban area proposed within the existing rural area. Noonamah/Hughes is such an example. Once again, while parts of these developments are proposed to incorporate smaller urban lots, the overall design is that of a village concept set within a rural landscape with appropriate transition from larger to smaller and smaller to larger to maintain the rural harmony people seek.

- The third example is *Rural Activity Centres*. The intention of such centres is to provide a specific area within the rural area where a variety of services, needed by the broader rural community, can be located. It is also envisaged that some smaller urban style lots will be located within such centres.

It was clear from the consultation that there are a large number of people who have lived in the rural area for many years who are, or will be in the future, seeking smaller lots to move to. They are however, reluctant to move to the major cities of Palmerston and Darwin. Smaller lots within a *Rural Activity Centre* provide an attractive alternative for these residents. With a growth in critical mass in such Centres, along with the services provided (including light industry), greater viability for improved public transport is also achieved.

Amendments in various parts of the *Plan* have been made to better explain these issues and to better guide future more detailed planning at the *Area Plan* level.

Within the urban context the hierarchy of activity centres was questioned by a number of submitters. The final Plan has been amended to better reflect their various roles including emphasising the pre-eminence of the Darwin CBD and the role and functions of each of the other centres.

With any new plan there will always be a variety of views about many specific aspects contained within it. In some cases a specific proposal will be both strongly supported and strongly opposed. The possibility of a new deep water port at Glyde Point and the creation of a lake on the Elizabeth River are two such examples.

Early studies have shown that Glyde Point is a location where a deep water port outside Darwin Harbour could be located. The studies also indicated suitable nearby land for strategic industrial development. Some submitters argued against the need for a port at Glyde Point on the basis that East Arm Port can be further extended and be made more productive. Others opposed Glyde Point claiming it would impact adversely on the local environment.

The NT Planning Commission agrees that East Arm Port has further capacity for extension and development and with the correct investment can become more productive. This would logically occur well before the establishment of a new port at Glyde Point. The DRLUP has been amended to better reflect this view.

With respect to adverse impact on the environment by a port developed at Glyde Point; clearly much more detailed work would need to occur to specifically identify the exact location and the extent of the area to be affected. The location and extent shown on the DRLUP is purely indicative on this higher level planning document. The DRLUP also reinforces that there would need to be a large, strategic industry identified before further investment in the more detailed studies could be justified.

Strong support for a water body on the Elizabeth River was received during the consultation process however there was equally strong opposition to the proposal. The draft DRLUP that was exhibited for public feedback included quite some detail on the NT Planning Commission's reasoning behind its inclusion, and a number of studies dating from the 1980's through to the early 2000's provided a substantial amount of information for the Planning Commission's consideration.

Supporters for a lake acknowledged it could control the biting midge problems and highlighted the advantages that a managed water body could provide for future residents in Palmerston and Weddell. People opposing the lake cited the loss of mangroves, the loss of breeding habitat for aquatic species and the perceived increased flooding on existing rural properties upstream along the Elizabeth River.

The exhibited document explained the various advantages of a water body so I won't repeat them here. The loss of mangroves and habitat were also acknowledged however the final document has been amended to quantify the mangrove loss as being less than 3% of the mangroves contained in Darwin Harbour. The Planning Commission has weighed that loss against the advantages when deciding to maintain the potential of including a lake at some time in the future.

Given the comments about increased flooding on existing rural properties upstream along the Elizabeth River, the previous studies were revisited and confirmed that they put forward proposals in relation to the design and management of a water body such that, they argue, current flooding during wet seasons would in fact be reduced.

While the Planning Commission included the lake in the DRLUP that was submitted to the Minister for his consideration, it has been amended to reinforce that substantial additional work would be required before any definitive decision on building such a structure could be made. It is pointed out that the need for such a decision will remain substantially into the future given alternative new urban development areas available, and therefore allowing proper and comprehensive work done to prove or disprove this concept.

I would like to emphasise that the DRLUP is much more than a map indicating present and future land uses. It is a comprehensive planning document that is both inspirational and aspirational of the community's future needs for long term growth. It sets the framework for, and then will guide, more detailed planning such as Sub-regional and Area Plans.

I am confident the Darwin Regional Land Use Plan prepared by the Planning Commission, that has been now been forwarded to the Minister, has been improved substantially as a result of the very comprehensive consultation undertaken following the exhibition of the draft document. Once again, I thank all those persons and organisations who took time to provide the Planning Commission with feedback and comment on the draft plan during the exhibition period.

The Planning Commission has forwarded the Plan to the Minister for Lands, Planning and the Environment, the Hon Peter Chandler, for his consideration.



The Hon. Gary Nairn  
**Chairman**  
**Northern Territory Planning Commission**