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Conveners Annual Report for 2013

Here is the Convener's Annual Report for the year 2013

1. Funding

The year started full of hope with the promise of an operating grant from the new Northern Territory Government (NTG) for \$30,000 for each of the years 2013, 2014, and 2015. This was a real boon since the previous government had been refusing to consider our applications for funding, claiming that we were not an 'environmental' group.

This loss of our funding had been unexpected, and left us insecure. In previous years, the NTG had included PLan as an environmental group among the four groups funded to participate in the Environmental Hub at the Rapid Creek Business Village. With the new funds, we were able to continue renting Shop 23 in the Village.

2. Let's Ask our Community Series

Using the remainder of the funds for the series from a City of Darwin Grant, a public meeting was held on 10th April, at Rapid Creek about the controversial proposed restaurant on the Nightcliff Foreshore, and possible loss of the Green Belt in the Kulaluk flight path to Light Industrial uses for Jape. The meeting resolved to advise Council against the building of a restaurant on public land. It supported the retention of the Green Belt. Both issues remain unfinalized.

3. Provision for Youth Activities in the Northern Suburbs

Late in 2012, PLan had proposed a community meeting with the Member for Sanderson, concerning youth activities in the Northern Suburbs. PLan sees a need for smaller local youth facilities which teenagers and young people can reach by walking or cycling, rather than one 'grand' centre reachable only by car. It was suggested that Sanderson High's own facilities might form a useful venue. When taken up in 2013, the matter rather lapsed due to other pressures, and when the local member became a government Minister. Fortunately adverse reports of youth on the streets have declined.

4. Mitchell Creek Catchment

PLan is dedicated to protecting the catchment which is one of our three important urban catchments. Longstanding Area Plans for the development of new suburbs in Palmerston East contained protection for the Mitchell Creek catchment. Unfortunately in recent years, current planning policy has not respected the proper status of these three Palmerston East Area Plans in the Northern Territory Planning Scheme (NTPS).

Indicative Conservation zones have been ignored as substitute area plans authorized by Ministers, replace them putting residential growth too close to the creek, maximizing residential housing numbers through 'integrated' development with small building lots, and dependence of artificial Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) concrete engineering.

This situation is exacerbated by lack of continuity amongst planning staff, and by the attitude of the Development Consent Authority (DCA). In the process, large areas of native vegetation are being successively bulldozed.

PLan is extremely disappointed with the official response of the NT Ombudsman's Office on this matter.

In recent years, Sue McKinnon, a resident of Palmerston, and a member of the PLan Committee, has worked hard to inform the Palmerston community of the values of the Mitchell Creek Catchment. She has also formed the Friends of the Mitchell Creek Catchment to help preserve it.

Sue is now making special efforts to protect spots of particular natural beauty such as the Monsoon Gully. Her expertise is now being recognized by the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. However it has so far proved impossible to counter ingrained habits of widespread natural vegetation destruction using large equipment in the establishment of infrastructure for new suburbs. Sue was recently personally recognized by Natural Resources Management (NRM) with the presenting of two supreme personal awards. Congratulations to her for her hard work and dedication !

5. Palmerston Planning

Moves are in place to settle the permanent plans for various aspects of the Palmerston CBD. Local residential consultation is important. This is long overdue for the rapidly growing city. The University Village development is proceeding in a largely disappointing way for former Durack residents. Many of the lots are very small, green buffer zones not as large as expected, and some traffic arrangements a problem.

6. Arafura Harbour

A Friends of Darwin Harbour Alliance was firmly established in defence of Ludmilla Bay and the Kulaluk foreshore, as a watching brief on any proposal for a Arafura Harbour Canal Estate. An excellent and informative small boat study tour of Ludmilla Creek, with Planning Minister Chandler, environmental experts and members of the Alliance, was arranged by Stuart Blanch of the NT Environment Centre. Fortunately nothing has been heard about Arafura Harbor this year.

7. Proposed Restaurant on the Nightcliff Foreshore

Controversy surrounds this proposal. Many have questioned Council's on-line survey and its analysis, the notion of building a large restaurant on public foreshore so close to the sea, traffic arrangements, and the financial liabilities which could fall on Council and ratepayers. An alternative masterplan for reviewing the foreshore area, prepared by local architects (Simon Scully and friends) and incorporating a small café'/coffee shop, in/or near the swimming baths, has been ignored by Council to date.

8. Green Open Spaces and Public Facilities and Council

PLan began its campaign for parks and public facilities by making a presentation and statement on 18th March to a full Council Meeting. The presentation emphasized that there is a difference between development and planning, and that we need more planning for community. The DCA does no planning, dealing only with development applications from developers. There is no pathway for the establishing of parks, green open spaces and public facilities. City of Darwin needs to fill this role, particularly in the CBD where the population is growing so rapidly. The City of Darwin did not respond to this challenge.

9. Green Open Spaces and Public Facilities and the new Planning Commission

Garry Nairn as Chairman of the new Planning Commission was also making a presentation that day on the role of the Planning Commission. PLan later made a similar submission to him, with the same result. It seems that Green Open Spaces and Public facilities are not strategic.

So no government agency is responsible for providing for Green Open Spaces and Public facilities. It has been suggested that just as developers pay into Council for carparking shortages, there should be a green park fund. This is so in the UK, and also in Argentina. Something needs to be done, and these facilities should be in walking distance of homes. This is an essential part of urban 'densification'.

10. Kulaluk Stockpile

Mid year an Exceptional Development Permit(EDP) was applied for in an attempt to legalise the Kulaluk Stockpile. Kulaluk is the name of the special purpose lease at Coconut Grove/Ludmilla granted some years ago to the Gwalwa Daraniki to save the natural environment there from built development. In recent years, this group has moved to subleasing parts of the land, meaning considerable encroachment.

The stockpile, seen from Dick Ward Drive, consists of piles of fill dumped there. Weeds have grown on them so that the wind transports seeds into the environment around the site which is close to the sensitive foreshore. PAn has been pointing out for years that these piles are in an area zoned CONSERVATION, and should be removed.

The environmental report forming part of the EDP application did more to describe the valuable natural vegetation, and the impact on the environment than support the case for a 15 year extension for the piles. In early November, staff of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment eventually sent its report to Minister to make a decision.

11. Application for 'Health and Wellness Centre, Freshwater Road, Rapid Creek.

In April, a group of five doctors through Masterplan, applied for the development of a Health and Wellness Centre on Lot 9738, Nightcliff, at 47 Freshwater Road, Jingili. Claiming it as an undefined/unlisted use, they asked that the DCA approve it using its discretionary powers. The DCA did so. There were over 20 community objections.

PAn sees the proposal as a medical clinic, a usage which is too large and commercial for the SD11 zoning in the buffer zone to Rapid Creek. Along with one resident, PAn has appealed in the Lands, Planning and Mining Tribunal. The magistrate judges such appeals based on submissions from the parties. He intends to hand down his decision before Christmas, 2013. Our first ever appeal has been very time consuming.

12. Communication with authorities

Every effort has been made to keep in touch with relevant Ministers, CEO', and departmental staff. Sometimes this has been successful, but often they fail to engage or are guarded.

13. Bayview Extension

David Tollner had a community BBQ where a plan was shown and information was given to local residents about the extension of Bayview as an estate. We are told that this extension will reach

the top of Sadgroves Creek. Minister Chandler later on seemed unaware of this, and its effect on the mangroves.

14. O'Ferrals Rock

After years of neglect by the DCA and the Darwin City Council, O'Ferrals Rock was finally zoned as CONSERVATION(CN). This was the result of action by PLan. Graeme Hockey who lives in Bayview, working with the office of local member Dave Tollner surveyed local residents, and produced a petition for Parliament. 98% wanted conservation recognition for O'Ferrals Rock, and support for its heritage listing.

Unfortunately, after being provided with much documentation the NT Heritage Council thought it unnecessary to ASSESS it for heritage because one of their members stated that the conservation zoning was sufficient to protect it. It is the heritage listing notation on the title documentation that protects places from destruction from developers.

Ultimately the NT Heritage Council has also failed to protect the harbor Catalinas from the impact of INPEX dredging.

15. Issues on Little Mindil.

PLan still has issues with this area. Containers stacked on Little Mindil were recently moved following our complaint. Our members understood that the 'secret' parent Casino lease which the NTG would not release to the public, was for 10 years. It now seems that it was for five years, making the Casino now the owner if all conditions are accepted as having been satisfied. That is the impact of 'commercial in confidence'.

PLan remains actively concerned.

16. Proposed Strata Title Legislation.

We were contacted by a person worried about the NTG plans to amend the two strata title acts to make it possible for strata titled buildings to be demolished when a certain proportion of owners agreed to a proposition to redevelop. Apparently there had been one sided consultations with the usual 'stakeholders', but few people knew about it.

PLan submitted when more consultation occurred. However the recent review of consultation by the Department of Justice shows a similar determination to press ahead, even though in southern states such moves are new and untried. This puts owner/occupiers in a stressed and invidious position, as against investors and developers. The legislation questions the viability of strata title itself, and even rights owners to a secure home for life. It will also facilitate the redevelopment quite 'young' buildings into denser buildings in the CBD and beyond.

The NTG intends to bring in the legislation in 2014.

17. Workers Accommodation

The 'boom' of activity associated with the construction of the Inpex plant at Blaydin Point has brought the building of massive workers' camps in places such as Channel Point Road, Howard Springs, Marrara, and now another Litchfield Camp. These developments naturally cause concern about the social impact on existing residents in their already crowded living environment. 'Floating' accommodation in Sadgroves Creek was strongly opposed by local residents. It was rejected by the DCA.

18. Darwin CBD Masterplan

This Masterplan has involved year long consultation, including three major public workshops. It was initiated by the city of Darwin and supported by the NTG and the Commonwealth Government in its Better Cities Programme. Stephen Thorne, the Co-ordinator, and has travelled world wide looking at cities, and involved sophisticated analysis. There is a wide brief, including infrastructure, and an emphasis on public transport, as well as streetscape, and urban design. Darwin as a tropical city should also be sheltered and cooled.

The Masterplan, now nearing completion, sees a further 30,000 people living in the Darwin CBD. It states that there must be about five activity nodes, and good access to sustain economic and social life within the CBD. However, final draft plans show once again the dominance and spread of new high rise residential development in and beyond the CBD, and the lack of provision for new local pocket parks and public facilities for the people living in Darwin. Facilities need to be localized for walkability.

19. Draft Area Plans for Knuckey's Lagoon and Katherine

The Planning Commission has prepared two new draft Area Plans. The Knuckey's Lagoon one, to which Plan made a submission, covers a wide area of Berrimah. It was a thoroughly produced document, covering wide issues including land capability.

20. The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)

The Authority sought submissions for a wide range of subjects.

21. The Environmental Defenders Office(NT)

PLan is a long term member of this organization. It deals with legal aspects of environmental work, including our own. After years with little funding now has two experienced lawyers.

22. Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee

This committee, based on the landholders in the Catchment has a long history of achievement. The NTG has recently abolished it, cutting off a huge amount of vital expertise. It apparently believes that its one water committee can cover all its needs.

Local residents were recently appalled at the NTG's plans to deal with creek flooding. A draft NTG Rapid Creek Action Plan is to be available for comment within days.

23. Densification

A densification policy was begun by the former ALP government to infill Greater Darwin instead of developing as much from a peripheral spread. This was based on Australian and overseas trends where cities are very large in circumference. The initial decision was to use residentially zoned land that was being underutilized. The basic assumption was also that densification should only occur within easy reach of public facilities.

Now the Minister is rezoning community purposes land for residential, and even proposing, after extensive use of Exceptional Development Permits(EDP's), that rezoning and development proposals should be combined as one step to speed development. There goes any real public consultation process !

24. Northern Territory Planning Scheme (NTPS)

The Planning Notices are issued each Friday in the NT News. These include both development applications for comment, and proposed amendments to the NTPS. PPlan spends a lot of time with these processes. However, the NTPS is being whittled away, particularly in relation to lot sizes.

25. PPlan Office moves from Rapid Creek to Woolner

The basic move was in October, 2013. This is a newer, brighter, more central office, without an increase in rent. Internet and email computer functions have always been poor at Rapid Creek.

26. Events

Stalls at the Garden Spectacular and the Seabreeze Festival, and public meetings.

27. Volunteers

The filing of records for sixteen years of PPlan is almost complete. This is due largely to volunteer members and friends, but also to help from Volunteers SA & NT initiated by Patsy Hickey, our main expert volunteer.

28. Thanks Go To

Committee Members - Sue McKinnon, Audrey Grace, Graeme
Hockey, Judy Menzies, Sharon Ninham and Coleen Harris.
Very Special Volunteer in Chief – Patsy Hickey
Member Volunteer - Ann Richards
And all the volunteers from Volunteers SA & NT

Special thanks to Christine at Central Business Equipment for our
reliable old photocopier, and moving it free to the new office.

And of course, thanks to all our members.

We work very hard during the year, but that is not always evident
because the public can only see the tip of the iceberg.

M A CLINCH – Convener
8.12.2013