



MINUTES

PARKS AND WILDLIFE ADVISORY COUNCIL

7th Meeting

WEDNESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2006

8:30AM

Level 5, Energy House - DARWIN

1. ATTENDANCE

Members

Bill Goedegebuure – Chairman
Penelope Figgis
David Garnett – interim member
Matthew Ryan
Djawa Yunupingu

Paula Elmer – Executive Officer
Robert Fox
Mick Jerram
Jayne Weepers

Apologies

Anne-Marie Delahunt (away on interstate business)

Official Observers

David Ritchie CE, DNRETA (attended part of morning session)
Graham Phelps Executive Director Parks, DNRETA
Greg Leach Executive Director Biodiversity Conservation, DNRETA

Guests

John de Koning A/Director Northern Region Parks, DNRETA (attended morning session)

Meeting opened at 8:30am.

The Chairman announced that David Garnett has replaced Gordon Duff as acting CEO Tropical Savannas CRC and has agreed to temporarily sit on Council until the Department seeks Ministerial appointment for a permanent placement in 2007.

The Chairman welcomed Jayne Weepers back to Council after taking a few months maternity leave.

The Chairman welcomed members and acknowledged the attendance of the new Executive Director Parks, Graham Phelps, who is representing 'parks'.

The Chairman welcomed Greg Leach, Executive Director Biodiversity who is representing 'wildlife'.

The Chairman welcomed John de Koning, who is acting in Dave West's position whilst Dave is on long service leave. John is here today to provide support to Graham Phelps.

The Chairman advised that the Minister recently requested a copy of Penny Figgis presentation 'Parks of the Future' which Penny delivered at the August meeting.

The Chairman congratulated Bob Fox on his appointment as President of the NT Firearm's Association. Bob stated he is currently preparing a presentation on lead shots and is happy to make a copy available to Council.

2. PRESENTATIONS

2.1 Tourism developments affecting Parks by John Coleman, General Manager Tourism NT

John Coleman, General Manager Tourism NT, was invited to attend today's meeting to address issues relating to tourism developments affecting parks. The matter arises out of earlier discussions on invasive species, in particular, weeds. Mr Coleman outlined how the tourism industry might assist Parks and Wildlife in critical management tasks such as invasive species management. A discussion of the relationship between Parks and Wildlife and Tourism NT followed and key points stressed were:

- "Parks are our product" – the parks of the Northern Territory are the primary asset of a \$700 million industry.
- The irreplaceable natural and cultural qualities are the key values.
- Healthy, well managed parks are essential to delivering the Territory visitor experience.
- Many tourists want to contribute, to 'give back' to the places they value.

Mr Coleman advised Tourism NT were happy to continue working with Parks and Wildlife. Some possible areas of cooperation flagged by Mr Coleman and the Council include:

Public Awareness

- Placing mutually supportive material on websites.
- Placing conservation messages on tourism maps.
- Possible roadside messages in tourism stops for conservation.
- Provide a laminated Fact Sheet for all hire vehicles for identifying weeds and provide a mechanism for guides to report sightings back to Park's staff.

Monitoring

- Incorporate monitoring opportunities into tour products, trip information e.g. weeds and feral animal observation.
- Feedback mechanism could be a simple template that guides can fill out on the spot and their operations manager can fax to a central Park's number at anytime.

On-ground management

- Packaging of management tasks (e.g. Earthwatch).
- Site management in return for exclusive access.
- Site management assistance for normal visitation areas e.g. rubbish collection, weed removal.
- Development of volunteer programs on the model of 'Willing Workers on Organic Farms'.

Infrastructure

- Tourism and Parks can continue to collaborate to deliver appropriate park infrastructure to enhance visitor experience.
- Tourism NT are working on a 4x4 trail map and walking trail map across the whole of the Territory to promote overseas visitors. Maps will be digital and available July 2007.
- Tourism NT has assisted Parks and Wildlife by providing funding towards park infrastructure e.g. Larapinta Trail, walk ways at Fogg Dam.

Resolution: The Council strongly encourages a continued and enhanced dialogue cooperation between the tourist industry and Parks and Wildlife to both benefit the parks and enhance the Territory visitor experience.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

3.1 Minutes / Actions of Meeting, 22 August 2006

The minutes and actions of the 6th Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council meeting were accepted with following amendments:

Item 3.4 McArthur River Mine Open Cut Project

Resolution: "Council resolved to express their concerns on *wildlife issues* on the McArthur River Mine Open Cut Project to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife for consideration in final recommendations" – delete words "wildlife issues" and replace words "environmental impacts".

Item 4.1 Council's Submission to Sessional Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Resolution: "Council recommended rather than a dedicated unit being established, a skilled group of experts *could be formed as a central point for dealing with these matters*" – delete words "be formed as a central point for dealing with these matters" and replace words "be identified to meet on an as needs basis".

3.2 List of outward correspondence

The list of outward correspondence since the last meeting was viewed and noted.

3.3 McArthur River Mine Open Cut Project

Correspondence on McArthur River Mine Open Cut Project forwarded with agenda papers was noted.

David Ritchie advised that the Mines Minister approved the Project and set conditions designed to ameliorate all the identified risks to the environment. These rules have been included in the Mine Management Plan (MMP) and MRM are required by law to observe them. David said the concerns raised by DNRETA have been dealt with and risks have been acknowledged and will be managed.

David advised there is a provision in the environment legislation for the Minister for Environment to carry out their own investigations if there was any concern.

David suggested a Mines and Energy officer could attend a future meeting to provide a briefing on the MMP monitoring conditions and compliance issues.

Penny Figgis highlighted that Council's concerns haven't gone away and Council supported the idea that if necessary, there should be an independent research and monitoring of environmental impacts.

Resolution: David Ritchie to report on specific monitoring conditions and Council be further advised on this matter at next meeting and, if possible, be addressed by a Mines officer.

3.4 NT NAP and NHT Investment Guidelines for Three Year Investment Strategies 2004/05 to 2006/07

The Chairman advised Council were recently given the opportunity to provide comments on Attachment A(4) of the NT National Action Plan and the Natural Heritage Trust Investment Guidelines for the Three Year Investment Strategies 2004/05 to 2006/07 by the Executive Director, Natural Resource Management (NRM). Due to the tight timeframe in the closing date for comments (1 week turnaround), the Chairman provided comment on behalf of the Council. The document was forwarded with agenda papers and members were encouraged to make further comment, if need be, and these comments would be forwarded to NRM Division.

David Ritchie provided a brief overview on this matter. The Chairman's letter to NRM was noted and supported by Council, however, Council would like to put more emphasis on the NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan (Masterplan).

The 'Investor Preferences' goals for regional plans align very closely with the content and aims of the Masterplan and would deliver real on-ground outcomes in priority areas such as protection of native vegetation, improved water quality and recognition of Indigenous values and resource use.

The Masterplan also strongly supports the first and third over-arching objectives of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT). The Council therefore would support any effort by the NT Government to access funding under the NHT and National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the Masterplan.

The Council particularly supports the Northern Territory seeking a special status under the National Reserve System Program of the NHT to provide for a 2:1 funding formulae for acquisitions to the Northern Territory parks systems.

The Council also encourages the development of plans in the Northern Territory to enhance the control of invasive terrestrial and marine species. Council believe these efforts are extremely consistent with the goals of the NHT and NAP.

Resolution: Council forward a letter to CE DNRETA to submit to the Joint Steering Committee highlighting Council issues.

3.5 Outcomes of Public Hearings on Inquiry into Invasive Species and Management Programs

A copy of the Chairman's Submission was emailed to members prior to meeting. The Chairman provided a brief overview on his Submission which he delivered to the Public Hearings on 16 November 2006. The Chairman's briefing and Submission's was noted by Council.

Members thanked the Chairman for his time and attention he has put into these Submissions. Chairman thanked Greg Leach and his scientists for their valuable input and the excellent support of the Executive Officer.

3.6 Draft Saltwater Crocodile Policy

It was noted that no policy currently exists for the management of saltwater crocodiles, therefore, the attached policy has been prepared by Parks and Wildlife. Parks and Wildlife seek the endorsement of Council, prior to the policy being forwarded to the Commission for approval. Greg Leach provided a brief background on this Policy. A brief discussion took place and Council suggested the following amendments:

- A scientific status on the crocodile should be stated in the Preamble and a mention that crocodiles are on the Convention on International Trade in Wild Flora and Fauna Species (CITES) list.
- Policy to state whose responsibility it is to install signage at boat ramps, etc, and whose responsibility it is to manage this signage.
- Public awareness of crocodiles could be linked in with tourism marketing, i.e. brochures.
- The word 'culture' be added after 'intrinsic' in the following statement:
"Respecting and protecting the *intrinsic cultural* values of the saltwater crocodile."

Resolution: Council has viewed the Saltwater Crocodile Policy and suggested a number of changes. Council endorsed the Policy on proviso that a scientific case be included in the Preamble and the word 'culture' be added after 'intrinsic' in the statement as outlined above.

3.7 Draft Cycad Management Program

It was noted that this Program went through the public consultation stage before Council was established. This Program has now been forwarded to Council for endorsement, however, as Council have not yet had the opportunity to view the Program and provide comments, Council were encouraged to make any comments prior to our meeting, with the opportunity today for Council to discuss and make formal comments. Greg Leach provided a brief background on this Program and noted that cycads are on the CITES list.

It was noted that Council would like to get a feel on the degree of what has happened in earlier Programs/Plans before Council are asked to review the amended document.

Action: Chairman will discuss matter further with Department and report back at next meeting.

Resolution: Council endorsed the Cycad Management Program with no comment.

3.8 Draft Cobourg Marine Park Plan of Management

The Cobourg Peninsula Sanctuary and Marine Park Board along with DNRETA's Parks and Wildlife Service and the Fisheries Department have released the draft Cobourg Marine Park Plan for public comment. Council members, as individuals, have an opportunity to provide comments on this Plan direct to Parks and Wildlife, as the Plan is currently in the public consultation stage. The amended Plan will then be forwarded to the Council at a future meeting for endorsement.

Resolution: Council, as an individual are welcome to provide comments by 4 December direct to Jacqui Hindmarsh, Senior Planner at Parks and Wildlife.

3.9 Tiwi Islands Forestry Project

It was requested that this item be discussed as a general business item rather than information paper.

An information paper on the Tiwi Islands Forestry Project did not include the latest information and therefore did not adequately address the next stage of land clearing.

David Ritchie provided a brief report on the Project and advised there has been no 'Notice of Intent' delivered to DNRETA. This project has been talked about at political levels and a coordinated approach by the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Governments to get behind an industry that is sustainable for long term economy for the traditional owner's.

David advised that the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) recognises that the area has a high level of biodiversity and that the EPA is concerned about the large scale clearing. DNRETA's responsibility is to alert the Northern Territory Government of these concerns and that this Project will take place under strict environmental scrutiny. David advised that the Commonwealth are the main monitoring agency under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*, however, DNRETA does also have a role in monitoring.

DNRETA's concerns were drawn to the attention of the Commonwealth and an extended period of a voluntary audit on the process of the whole operation was included in conditions.

Resolutions:

- 1. The Council expressed its concerns in relation to the proposed expansion to Tiwi Islands Forestry Project because the Tiwi Islands are defined as a biodiversity 'hot spot' within the NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan and that any proposals be subjected to highest level of scrutiny.**
- 2. Council write to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife expressing these concerns and requests to be kept informed on this matter. Council does support establishment of sustainable industries, but Council are concerned with the current approach.**

4. PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

4.1 Update NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan

A briefing paper on the current status of the Masterplan by Stuart Gold was noted. David Ritchie provided an update on the Masterplan and advised there has been little advancement since the last meeting. DNRETA has been asked by the Chief Minister to provide a first stage implementation plan and Departmental officers are currently working with the Treasury Department. The team is at the final stages of this process and the implementation plan will be submitted to Cabinet in mid January for consideration in the 2007-08 Budget process.

Action: Item to stay on agenda and Executive Officer to arrange for an update at next meeting.

4.2 Tiwi Islands Forestry Project

It was requested that this item be discussed as a general business item rather than information paper – see general business.

4.3 Chief Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management

A briefing paper on the Chief Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management was noted.

4.4 Final Dingo Management Plan

It was noted that the Dingo Management Plan is now in the final stage and has been forwarded to the Parks and Wildlife Commission and the Minister for Parks and Wildlife for formal endorsement. A copy of the final Plan was forwarded to Council for information.

Council expressed an appreciation of all scientists involved in preparing the Plan and stated it was an excellent Plan.

Action: Executive Officer to check previous minutes to see that the comments regarding research were included in final Plan. If not, Greg Leach to ensure they are undertaken in his Division's Business Plan. Executive Officer to advise Greg Leach of findings and report back at next meeting.

4.5 Channel Point Coastal Reserve

A briefing paper on declaration on Channel Point Coastal Reserve was noted. David Ritchie advised this is one of our newest Parks that has been declared for sometime. John de Koning advised the Reserve is only a few hectares in size and will be managed by Parks and Wildlife Rangers based at Litchfield National Park. John advised the Reserve will be ready to be opened by mid December, however, it is the Minister's decision and also dependent on Wet season conditions.

4.6 National Geographic Magazine – October edition

Bob Fox brings to Council's attention the October 2006 edition of National Geographic which features a section 'World Parks at Risk' which may be of interest to Members.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 Parks Operational Report

Graham Phelps briefed Council on current key issues within the Park Management Division and highlighted the following items:

- Amendment to the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* (TPWCA) – Section 71 of the TPWCA provides that the Parks and Wildlife Commission may make By-laws, not inconsistent with this Act or the regulations, for carrying out or giving effect to the functions and powers of the Commission. Cabinet approved the drafting of amendments to the TPWCA and these amendments allow the expansions of the infringement notice scheme, and infringeable offences, contained within the TPWCA By-laws. It is anticipated that a final version of the By-laws will be ready in early December 2006.
- Rehabilitation of Howard Springs Nature Park – the draft Plan of Management is expected to be presented to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife shortly then released for public comment. It will come into operation after tabling in the Legislative Assembly in early 2007.
- Channel Point Coast Reserve – additional points to information paper. A comprehensive signage plan is being developed. Interpretive and directional signage will be erected once all development works have been completed. An information sheet has been prepared for the Reserve to help visitors to have a safe and enjoyable visit whilst complying with permit conditions.
- Expansion of West MacDonnell National Park – Parks and Wildlife have prepared a Cabinet Submission recommending the inclusion of the eastern Alice Valley area of Owen Springs Reserve into the West MacDonnell National Park. Cabinet has directed that a joint Submission now be prepared with the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines.
- Joint Management Plans – Consultations have been completed with traditional owners of Rainbow Valley and Devils Marbles Conservation Reserves. Draft Plans will be circulated within Parks Division before the year's end. Several meetings and camps have been held with traditional owners of the West MacDonnell National Park to set the scene for developing a joint management plan. The Central Land Council is now consulting with traditional owner individuals and families to create representative traditional owner planning groups with a view to commence joint planning in 2007.
- Mataranka ablution facilities – a meeting was recently held between Parks and Wildlife, the current owners of the Mataranka Homestead and Tourism NT. Design and locations of a new toilet block were discussed. Three locations near the Thermal Pool on Park land were identified as potential sites. A preferred location has now been determined and surveys have been completed on this site and advice was sought from Environmental Health and DNRETA's Water Resources regarding the appropriate option for the sewerage system given the proximity of the spring and river.

- Nitmiluk Resort Development – The Jawoyn Association has begun the planning and design process for a resort development at the intensive use area at the Gorge. This development is in accordance with the recently released Nitmiluk Commercial Development Plan.

5.2 Sale of Wildlife Policy

The Sale of Wildlife Policy has been forwarded to Council as a late paper. Parks and Wildlife seek the endorsement of Council, prior to policy being forwarded to the Commission for approval. Greg Leach provided a brief background on this Policy. A brief discussion took place and Council suggested the following amendments:

- A scientific status up front as to why release into the wild is not an appropriate action in most cases be stated in the Preamble.
- The word 'redundant' wildlife be removed and replaced with a better term.
- Change the title of the Policy to better reflect intent of Policy.
- Council would have greater comfort if a major trafficking agency could trial this Policy.

Graham Phelps supported the Policy by highlighting the negative conservation consequences of release of wildlife outside of carefully planned reintroduction programs.

Resolution: Council has viewed the Policy and suggested a number of changes. Council endorsed the Policy 'in principle', on proviso that a scientific case is included in the preamble and the term "redundant" be changed for better term. Council requested the revised Policy be placed before Council at its February 2007 meeting for final endorsement.

5.3 Additional items tabled for information

Penny Figgis tabled the following World Wide Fund reports for information:

- 'Building Nature's Safety Net – A Review of Australia's Terrestrial Protected Area Systems, 1991-2004.
- 'A Way Forward on Developing a Living Rivers Program for the Northern Territory', a coordinated report with The Environment Centre NT – June 2006.
- 'Impacts of Land Clearing on Australian Wildlife in Queensland' – January 2003.

Penny Figgis suggested the report 'A Way Forward on Developing a Living Rivers Program for the Northern Territory' be placed on the agenda for discussion at a future meeting.

Action: Executive Officer to place item on Agenda of February 2007 meeting.

Bob Fox highlighted a recent presentation by Dr David Suzuki on world climate issues delivered to the National Press Club. The Executive Officer has obtained a copy of the presentation on DVD.

Members should contact the Executive Officer if they would like to borrow any of the reports noted or to view the DVD.

A member requested if a copy of the 'Wilson' report on enforcement training of staff could be obtained and forwarded as an information paper. Greg Leach indicated that the Wilson report is well out of date. The issue was raised in relation to item 1 in the Parks Operational report. If available, the Wilson report to be examined by the Chairman.

6. NEXT MEETING

Proposed meeting dates for 2007 were discussed and it was noted the possibility of holding the May meeting in Katherine and the August meeting in Alice Springs, however, the meeting date be brought forward a week. Dates will be confirmed and forwarded shortly.

The next meeting is scheduled for 28 February 2007, however, to be confirmed.

The Chairman wished all members a Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year.
Meeting closed at 3:00pm.