



Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee

Report on the Review of the Plan of Management

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Introduction

The *Darwin Harbour Regional Plan of Management* (the Plan) was finalised in November 2003 after extensive consultation with the community and key stakeholders. The Plan provides a vision for the future and a framework for protecting and enhancing the Darwin Harbour region's natural resources in a sustainable and balanced manner.

The five goals of the Plan are:

- Goal 1 To maintain a healthy environment
- Goal 2 To support recreational use and enjoyment of the environment
- Goal 3 To encourage ecologically sustainable development
- Goal 4 To protect cultural values and heritage
- Goal 5 To foster community ownership and participation in management

In accordance with Section 4, Subsection 10 of the Plan, the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee (DHAC) is currently undertaking a review of the Plan. This report presents the findings of the review to date. It is important to note that the review process is not complete as this report is presented for public consultation, and the consultation process forms an important part of that review. This report should be read in conjunction with the draft *Darwin Harbour Regional Management Strategic Framework 2009–2013* (Strategic Framework) which has been drafted to replace the 2003 Plan.

Background

Over the past four years of the Plan's implementation, DHAC has undertaken two status reviews of the Plan. Both reviews have been reported to the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, and two publicly available reports have been issued. These are:

- Status Report on the implementation of the Darwin Harbour Regional Plan of Management 2004–2005
- 2005 Status Report on the implementation of the Darwin Harbour Regional Plan of Management

Both Status Reports considered the vast list of actions, the progress of their implementation, and timeframes for progress and completion outlined in the Plan. These snapshots also gave an opportunity to consider the degree to which the Plan had been implemented and whether this was sufficient for achieving its objectives. The Status Reports also considered the recommendations for integrated management and implementation as set out in Section 4 of the 2003 Plan. However, these reports did not add or delete actions as suggested in Subsection 10.

This 2008 review of the Plan is more extensive than the previous Status reviews, as it considers all aspects of the Plan and seeks public feedback on the Plan, the Review process, and the new draft *Darwin Harbour Regional Management Strategic Framework 2009–2013* (which is the document to replace the 2003 Plan).

Community input in the Review

This Report on the review of the Plan has been prepared by DHAC on the basis that DHAC represents a diverse cross section of the community who use, reside or have cultural ties to the Darwin Harbour region. This does not preclude members of the general public from providing input and feedback into the overall review process. The public are encouraged to contribute their views on this Report and the draft *Darwin Harbour Regional Management Strategic Framework 2009–2013* during the community consultation period.

Outcomes of the 2008 Review

In embarking on the 2007–2008 review, DHAC determined that the 2003 Plan needed to be completely re-examined both in terms of its content (to ensure relevance) as well as approach (to ensure its successful implementation).

Accordingly, towards the end of 2007 DHAC held a series of workshops with the sole intent of examining the Plan. The outcomes of these workshops are set out below.

1. DHAC agreed that the Plan is an extensive and thorough plan covering a broad range of issues. As a result of the extensive community consultation undertaken during the development of the Plan, it covers areas of concern held by most sectors of the community. However, the Plan is long and difficult to digest and follow, which reduces its usefulness and restricts the individuals and groups that will use it.

Conclusion: A Plan that is easy for decision-makers and all members of the public to follow would be preferable.

2. The list of actions in the Plan is extensive and difficult to drive and fund; and it is difficult to oversee the implementation of so many actions. Most of the actions that are already being implemented are part of Government Agency business plans and accordingly their inclusion in the Plan adds little value, while making the document long and unwieldy. The other actions that are not part of government business are unfunded and therefore difficult to implement. A number of the actions for which DHAC has the lead responsibility are outside DHAC's Terms of Reference, undertaken by other organisations and/or not practical for DHAC to implement. For example *Action 2.1 3.2 Facilitate festivals and events to promote aspects of recreation to the community*.

Conclusions: The nature of the Plan has inherent difficulties relating to the list of actions and their implementation. Due to its length and the number and diversity of issues covered, the Plan has been difficult to adequately implement in totality.

Without a legislative basis for the Plan or a statutory status for DHAC, the Committee holds no clear responsibility to ensure Government Agencies implement the actions of the Plan.

3. The Plan does not fit well under current legislation or other institutional mechanisms for implementation. Although the Plan is practical in the sense that it sets out clear actions to be followed, it does not clearly state policy positions on issues related to Darwin Harbour. Such policy would assist decision-makers to make informed decisions, on issues that affect the harbour, based on community desires.

Conclusion: Developing a Plan with a framework that can fit with current legislation or policy may assist the implementation of the Plan.

Overall, DHAC agreed that a new framework and format for the Plan would improve outcomes for the Harbour. The absence of policy positions and principles upon which to base decisions has been identified as a gap in the 2003 Plan. Accordingly a new Plan to replace the 2003 Plan – known as the draft *Darwin Harbour Regional Management Strategic Framework 2009–2013* (Strategic Framework) should be structured to provide founding principles to guide all decisions in relation to the Darwin Harbour region. Maintaining goals is still relevant but how these are to be achieved through the Plan should change. Rather than prescriptively detailing Outcomes, Strategies and Actions the Strategic Framework should provide guidelines supporting each goal. The aim is that everyone associated with the harbour is then responsible for following these guidelines in their use or decision-making relating to the region.

Goals

The five goals set out in the Plan have been reviewed by DHAC members, who found that the goals are still relevant and reflective of community expectations. In the Strategic Framework the wording of these goals has been amended slightly to clarify the intent of these goals.

Outcomes, Strategies and Actions

Guidelines, to cover the issues raised in the Outcomes and Strategies of the 2003 Plan, have been developed to replace those Outcomes and Strategies in the new Strategic Framework.

The Strategic Framework does not prescribe a list of actions. Rather, Government Agencies and any persons impacting on the harbour should take responsibility to act in line with these guidelines. This in turn will ensure the goals of the Strategic Framework are achieved.

Implementation and Integrated Management: Section 4 of the Plan

This section provided recommendations for integrated management and implementation of the Plan. If the Strategic Framework replaces the Plan a number of these recommendations will no longer be relevant and the review of the Committee will be undertaken as a separate strategic planning process.

Conclusion

As a result of reviewing the Plan, the status of its implementation and the “needs” for the future, DHAC has prepared a new document to replace the Plan. This new document – the draft *Darwin Harbour Regional Management Strategic Framework 2009-2013*, retains the intent of the vision and goals of the Plan but is in a format that is more strategic.

If adopted, the founding principles, the five goals and the guidelines of the Strategic Framework should be taken into consideration by all users of the region and those responsible for decision-making affecting the Darwin Harbour region. Relevant outcomes and strategies from the Plan have been reinterpreted as guidelines but the vast list of actions has not been included in the Strategic Framework. Instead, the Strategic Framework has been prepared with the expectation that the users of the Region will undertake the actions necessary to meet the goals of the Framework without those actions being prescriptively listed.

Although the Strategic Framework has been prepared to *replace* the Plan, the 2003 Plan will continue as a resource of information about the region and reflects the communities’ values and aspirations for the Region at the time of its preparation.

DHAC is seeking community feedback on this *Report on the Review of the Plan of Management* and the draft *Darwin Harbour Regional Management Strategic Framework 2009-2013*.

These documents are open for public comment until **Friday 15 May 2009**.