



**RAPID CREEK LANDCARE GROUP INC.**

**SUBMISSION TO:**

**TOWARDS A DARWIN REGIONAL  
LAND USE PLAN 2014**

**MARCH 2014**

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Found in Darwin's northern suburbs, Rapid Creek and its catchment form the only significant freshwater system in Darwin's urban area and it is a valuable environmental and community asset.

The Rapid Creek Landcare Group's members look after Rapid Creek through regular working bees, by promoting awareness about the creek and by advocating for better management throughout the catchment. The group's website provides a summary ([www.rapidcreek.org.au](http://www.rapidcreek.org.au)).

**RAPID CREEK MANAGEMENT PLAN**

One of the Rapid Creek Landcare Group objects is to 'promote the implementation of the broad concepts and principles outlined in the *Rapid Creek Management Plan, 1994*'.

The Landcare Group was represented on the Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee (RCCAC) from its inception in 1996 until it was disbanded in late 2013. The RCCAC was formally established under Section 23 of the *Water Act*; it met regularly and was well attended by its members who represented community, industry and government stakeholders in the catchment. One of the RCCAC's Terms of Reference was 'To participate in the operation, progress and adoption of the resource management principles, policies and actions outlined in the *Rapid Creek Management Plan*.'

## RIPARIAN CORRIDOR

The riparian corridor is an extremely important part of the Rapid Creek system. Protection of the riparian corridor is of utmost importance. The Darwin Regional Land Use Plan (DRLUP) needs to protect the riparian corridor and its associated wetlands along all of Rapid Creek by maintaining, or strengthening, the existing zoning.

Along the main creek channel the riparian monsoon forest protects the creek's water quality, prevents erosion and has high biodiversity. The current DRLUP document shows the 'Conservation' zoning between the Darwin Water Gardens and McMillans Road disappearing, with the whole area marked as 'Urban and Peri-Urban'. This 'Conservation' zoning exists to protect the riparian corridor and monsoon forest in this area and was created following a strong community campaign. This area needs to be reinstated to the current 'Conservation' zoning. Similarly the area bordering the 'Conservation' zoning that is currently SD11 (Rural Living) needs to be changed from 'Urban and Peri-Urban' to 'Rural Living'. The 'Rural Living' buffer provides significant protection to the creek system.

## UPPER CATCHMENT

The upper catchment, and in particular the Boulter Road part of the Berrimah North area, is the subject of increasing development which is encroaching on the important wetland/swamp communities and is likely to be affecting the slow flow drainage characteristics of the upper catchment.

The *Rapid Creek Management Plan* states '... maintenance of the swamps .... is critical in providing flood attenuation downstream, and also to recharge ground water and maintain stream flows until late in the dry season' and the *Plan* has a high priority strategy for 'maintaining wetlands and slow flow areas in the upper catchment in the present undeveloped state'.

This strategy to maintain wetlands and low flow areas in the upper catchment was generally being achieved through the 'Community Purpose' zoning that was applied to most of the blocks in this part of the upper catchment. The move towards 'Multiple Dwelling Residential' zoning is increasing infrastructure density. The resultant changes in hydrology and pollution run-off are likely to have a detrimental impact on the important role of the upper catchment.

In August 2013 the Rapid Creek Landcare Group prepared a submission to the *Discussion Paper Towards an Area Plan for the Knuckey and Ironstone Lagoons Locality*. We welcomed the discussion paper as the first step towards a sustainable approach to development in the area. We mentioned that the western part of that study area falls within the Rapid Creek catchment and we raised a number of concerns.

In November 2013 the Northern Territory Planning Commission's media release stated '... there was broad consensus on the environmental attributes of the Knuckey and Ironstone Lagoons area, and the need for a considered approach to development ...

Following the submissions and community workshops and concerns raised as to the impact of further growth on storm water runoff and flooding, the Commission has determined not to proceed at this time with an Area Plan for Knuckey and Ironstone Lagoons ... However, the next steps for planning in this important locality will be the development of a draft Area Plan for the area west of Vanderlin Drive (Berrimah North).’ We understand that this new Berrimah North Area Plan will include at least the area covered by the current 2010 *Berrimah North Area Plan*.

Two large blocks on Boulter Road are currently for sale (Sections 5875 and 4106), both are completely covered with native vegetation; they have no development on them. A solid planning framework is needed before any decisions are made on such blocks to ensure development does not compromise the environmental values or hydrology of the area.

Of particular concern is Section 4106 which encompasses a paperbark wetland, transitional communities and eucalypt woodland. It is currently zoned ‘Community Purpose’ and is not subdivided, however the sale advertisement implied it was subdivided into 5 lots. The *Land Clearing Guidelines* require buffers of 200 metres from the edge of a wetland. In the absence of a detailed storm water management plan, the protection to wetlands afforded by the *Land Clearing Guidelines* by a 200 metre buffer should be used. This means all of Section 4106 should be encompassed in a buffer. The 2010 *Berrimah North Area Plan* had a small strip on the western end of this Section proposed for ‘Conservation’ zoning, we believe the whole of Section 4106 should be rezoned to ‘Conservation’ in the new Area Plan and the DRLUP.

Given the increasing developmental pressure in the upper catchment it is imperative that the new Berrimah North Area Plan and the DRLUP are completed prior to new development proposals or *NT Planning Scheme* amendments being approved. There needs to be community consultation and inclusion of all feedback from the Knuckey and Ironstone Lagoons study. A detailed storm water management plan needs to be included to ensure there will be no adverse affects from approved development on the function of Rapid Creek system.

The current DRLUP document shows all ‘Community Purpose’ land east and west of Amy Johnson Drive being changed to ‘Urban and Peri-Urban’. We do not believe this is in the best interest of the catchment. The Rapid Creek Landcare Group believes planning controls are necessary to protect the undeveloped areas of native vegetation in the upper catchment and to ensure the hydrological and ecological functions of Rapid Creek are protected. The DRLUP should consider increasing ‘Conservation’ zoning on particularly sensitive areas, such as Section 4106, and to reverting other ‘Multiple Dwelling Residential’ areas back to ‘Community Purpose’.

In addition to our environmental concerns, there are many important community services in the Boulter Road and Batten Road areas and there is a strong risk that they will not be compatible with such dense urban developments.

We would also like to see more detailed information from Darwin International Airport, Airservices Australia and Australian Government regulators in relation to development

scenarios in this area, particularly within the 20 ANEF (Australian Noise Exposure Forecast) or higher zones. This is relevant to the 'Community Purpose' zoning being changed to 'Urban and Peri-Urban' and the 'Restricted Development' zoning being changed to 'Industry'.

## **FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN**

The NT Government is also developing a Rapid Creek Floodplain Management Action Plan to address concerns about flooding issues in the Rapid Creek catchment. A discussion paper released as part of the Action Plan's development states 'planning measures be used to ensure development or re-development in other parts of the catchment is not of a type and extent that would worsen flooding'. The increasing densification in the upper catchment, and its resultant stormwater run-off, needs to be carefully considered when determining land use here.

We note that the Environment Protection Authority's report *A Case Study: Berrimah Business Park Stormwater Management & Planning Issues* (2012) raised issues and made recommendations that are relevant to increasing development in the Rapid Creek catchment. The Rapid Creek Floodplain Management Action Plan and DRLUP processes should take all the information in this report into consideration.

It is imperative that the development of the new Berrimah North Area Plan, the DRLUP and the Rapid Creek Floodplain Management Action Plan happen concurrently and that hydrological impacts of development in the upper catchment are considered by all of them.

## **THE PLANNING SYSTEM**

It would be useful if the land use categories in the DRLUP were the same as in NT Planning Scheme (NTPS) documents (or clear groupings of zoning categories). For example the NTPS has 'Public Open Space', 'Organised Recreation' and 'Conservation' but the DRLUP has 'Mangroves and Conservation' and 'Open Space and Natural Area'. There is room for confusion and ambiguity here.

The overuse of 'spot' rezonings and the Exceptional Development Permit (EDP) process in Darwin makes it difficult for people to have confidence in the town planning and zoning system. To maintain the integrity of the town planning system approval of 'spot' rezonings and EDP's must happen exceptionally sparingly and only where the approval is absolutely in the public's interest.

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