



RAPID CREEK LANDCARE GROUP INC.

SUBMISSION TO: DARWIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT MASTER PLAN PRELIMINARY DRAFT - MARCH 2017

5 JUNE 2017

Please find below the Rapid Creek Landcare Group's (RCLG) feedback on the Darwin International Airport (DIA) Master Plan Preliminary Draft (MPPD).

RAPID CREEK RESERVE

The RCLG commends DIA for the creation and ongoing maintenance of the Rapid Creek Reserve. The reserve has become a significant environmental asset in Darwin and is highly valued by RCLG members and the wider community. The RCLG encourages DIA to continue to allocate resources to management of the reserve through revegetation, weed management, erosion and sediment control, litter collection and trail and fence maintenance. The group looks forward to the development of a five year management plan for Rapid Creek (page 162 of the MPPD).

Following correspondence and meetings in 2014 the RCLG was pleased to see fencing of the upper reserve take place. Since the fencing and gates were installed illegal dumping seems to have ceased and weeds and litter have significantly reduced in this part of the reserve. It has also given the community certainty about the boundaries of the Conservation area and helps to promote this special asset on DIA land.

It would be very useful to have a map of the full Rapid Creek Reserve in the Master Plan at a larger scale (e.g. at a similar scale to the map on page 100 of the MPPD which partially includes the reserve) underlain with an aerial image to assist with orientation. This would help with avoiding ambiguity about the boundaries of the reserve and Conservation zoning, and also avoid any misunderstanding as occurred when the Airport Lodge Stage 3 was developed. A current example is that the Gurumbai Trail passes behind the lodge and is assumed by the community to be within the Rapid Creek Reserve, however the boundary of Conservation zoning on page 14 of the MPPD appears to be on the weir which cuts out this whole section of walking trail and associated native vegetation and potentially leaves it vulnerable to development.

NATIVE VEGETATION RETENTION

The RCLG commends DIA on the preservation of native vegetation within Conservation zoning, both on the above mentioned Rapid Creek Reserve and on the Conservation Reserve south of Osgood Drive which is also in the Rapid Creek catchment. RCLG members have been enthusiastic participants at the various DIA community planting days on both reserves over the years.

The RCLG strongly encourages DIA to consider developing existing cleared land as a priority over developing land supporting native vegetation communities, and to consider surveying all existing native vegetation with a view to including more of the higher value areas into the Conservation zoned land on the airport. This would be in line with the Environment Policy on page 149 of the MPPD to "... protect biodiversity."

In 2011 the RCLG objected to the Airport Lodge Stage 3 development (read submission here) as it meant the clearing of nearly 7,000 square metres of mature eucalypt woodland. The submission stated "RCLG recommends that DIA look seriously at an alternative site for this development that does not involve clearing native vegetation." Unfortunately the development went ahead. The resultant facility now appears to remain largely unused following the Australian Government's policy change on asylum seekers. It seems such a waste to clear native vegetation with all its value when there are existing cleared areas on airport.

WEED MANAGEMENT

The RCLG acknowledges that DIA's weed management program has improved, particularly in relation to Gamba grass, at least in areas that are visible to the general public. However at this time of year there are still many weeds obvious on airport, including on tenanted areas. These include:

- Gamba grass (*Andropogon gayanus*): Gamba grass poses a serious fire risk. It is a Class A, B and C declared weed in the Northern Territory, a Weed of National Significance and a Key Threatening Process (KTP) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.
- Mission grasses (*Cenchrus polystachios* and *Cenchrus pedicellatus*): Mission grasses are also serious fire risks. *Cenchrus polystachios* is a Class B and C declared weed and a KTP and *Cenchrus pedicellatus* is a KTP.
- Snakeweeds (*Stachytarpheta cayennensis* and *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*): Both snakeweeds are Class B and C declared weeds. They are particularly prevalent in drains on the airport and infestations resulting from seeding plants continually occur on land downstream from the airport.

The RCLG considers that there could be more emphasis on weed management in the MPPD, particularly in relation to those species that pose a fire risk and species which are spreading onto neighbouring land.

EROSION AND SEDIMENT CONTROL

Despite having references to erosion and sediment control in the current *Environment Strategy* and the fact that the *Environment Management: An Information Handbook for Operators at the Airport* states “For all developments all tenants must create a Construction Environment Management Plan which follows guidelines outlined in *Best Practice Soil Erosion and Sediment Control ...*” the RCLG has noticed many incidences of poor sediment and erosion control. These have led to sediment contaminated water entering Rapid Creek and sediment build up in drains and gutters. Most of these have been brought to your attention as they occurred, they include:

- Developments along McMillans Road led to sediment being washed into the drain leading to Rapid Creek due to ineffective erosion control in the 2013/2014 wet season.
- The Larkin Avenue extension in 2014/2015 wet season had limited sediment control in the construction phase.
- The Airport Resort extension in the 2015/2016 wet season led to sediment entering Rapid Creek Reserve due to bad timing and minimal and poorly constructed sediment control.
- Stockpiles east of the South Osgood development led to significant sediment running into the drain along Osgood Drive towards Rapid Creek in the 2016/2017 wet season.
- Development of the carpark south of the Airport Inn had poor sediment control and resulted in sediment entering the Rapid Creek Reserve in the 2016/2017 season.

The MPPD has an action on page 159 to “Continue the implementation of Erosion Sediment Control measures when undertaking construction activities ...”. This needs to go further and state that *Best Practice Soil Erosion and Sediment Control* (IECA 2008) are to be rigorously enforced with all DIA projects.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

The MPPD states that in the past DIA has implemented various prescribed burning practices but implies that this no longer occurs. A much more detailed analysis is required to justify why prescribed burning may no longer be occurring and what management practices are in place to manage fire prone vegetation.

SOLAR POWER

We commend DIA on its solar power initiatives which reduce carbon emissions.

OTHER COMMENTS

On the map on page 144 the area defined as Rapid Creek Reserve (and owned by the City of Darwin) should be shown as Conservation zoning. It would also be useful to show the Conservation zoning on the portion of Ludmilla Creek and Gwalwa Daraniki land east and west of Dick Ward Drive which has been left blank.