



RAPID CREEK LANDCARE GROUP
RESPONSE TO
DARWIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
AIRPORT LODGE STAGE 3 DEVELOPMENT
FEBRUARY 2011



RAPID CREEK

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.

RAPID CREEK LANDCARE GROUP INC.

The Rapid Creek Landcare Group's (RCLG) members look after Rapid Creek through regular working bees, by promoting awareness about the creek and by advocating for better management throughout the catchment.

RAPID CREEK CATCHMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The RCLG is represented on the Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee (RCCAC). The RCCAC was formally established under the *Water Act* in 1996. RCCAC members represent the major stakeholders in the catchment and are committed to improving the cooperative management of the catchment and advising the Minister on policy for management of the natural resources of the catchment. RCCAC works to implement the *Rapid Creek Management Plan* (developed in 1994 by Greening Australia and the Darwin City Council).

DARWIN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Darwin International Airport (DIA) has been a member of the RCCAC since it inception. The RCLG commends DIA on its efforts to protect and enhance the Rapid Creek corridor on its lands in recent years.

AIRPORT LODGE STAGE 3

The development of the Airport Lodge Stage 3 will necessitate the clearing of nearly 7,000 square metres of mature eucalypt woodland. The area is shaded in red below. The RCLG's concerns are outlined on the following page. All photos in this response are taken within the development site.



CONCERNS RELATING TO AIRPORT LODGE STAGE 3

The RCLG is very disappointed in this recent proposal which will involve clearing a healthy stand of mature native vegetation adjacent to the creek corridor. The RCLG notes the following:

- The *Rapid Creek Management Plan* aims to 'Manage the remnant vegetation communities and adjoining open space to optimise their habitat and ecological values' and commits stakeholders to 'Consolidate and expand healthy remnant bushland areas into areas that are degraded.'
- 2010 *Darwin International Airport Master Plan* states 'DIA will continue to work ... to both: maintain the natural value of the Rapid Creek catchment area; and continue to improve public amenities in the Rapid Creek Environment Reserve over time.'
- The 2009 *Darwin International Airport Environment Strategy* has a key objective to '... protectnatural habitats, flora and fauna wherever practicable, through sustainable management practices.'
- The Australian Government states on their website 'Our first priority must be to protect and rehabilitate our existing native vegetation... Protecting remnant vegetation provides multiple productivity, biodiversity and greenhouse returns. The diversity and function of our Australian bush is virtually impossible to replicate or fully restore once lost.'

The RCLG strongly believes that no native vegetation should be cleared in the Rapid Creek catchment and especially on land immediately adjacent to the Rapid Creek corridor.

The RCLG recalls that the site in question was included in the tourist commercial zone at the time of the 2004 *Darwin International Airport Master Plan*. At around that time DIA invested resources into developing the Gurumbai Trail, including the walking track, interpretive signage and carparking.

The 2005 *Landscape Master Plan: Darwin International Airport* notes 'The walking track being built in Rapid Creek is showing vision and commitment by DIA and will become a substantial asset for the Resort if sensitively integrated and used.' The *Environment Strategy* notes proudly the achievement of 'Implementation of the Rapid Creek Corridor Management Plan and associated development of walking trails, signage and picnic facilities. This received a Highly Commended Award at the 2006 NT Power Water Melaleuca Awards.'

The section of the Gurumbai Trail running through the development area is highly used by visitors, it is the main access point to the creek in the Yankee Pools area. Part of the visitor experience is walking from the carpark through the shady woodland down to Rapid Creek. The RCLG was under the impression that it was DIA's long term vision to have this natural woodland as part of the tourism precinct. There seemed no reason to consider challenging the zoning of the site when the 2010 *Master Plan* was developed.

DIA has indicated that the Gurumbai Trail will be relocated to the other side of the drain prior to the development proceeding. This area does not have the same mature woodland community, and even with major revegetation efforts, it will be decades, if ever, before the woodland currently experienced by walkers can be duplicated. In any case the other side of the drain has the same zoning, providing no security for protection of the trail into the future.

The *Master Plan* is committed to the principles of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) including protecting existing natural features and ecological processes; and maintaining water quality and hydrologic behaviour of catchments. The retention of native vegetation alongside this major drain is in line with WSUD principles.

The RCLG notes that the *Master Plan* and *Environment Strategy* require contractors performing works with potential to cause environmental harm to prepare a Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP); and, in areas of intact native habitat, a flora and fauna survey needs to be conducted before construction begins. The RCLG would like to know if a CEMP and flora and fauna survey were conducted for this development.

The RCLG's members spend a lot of volunteer hours revegetating cleared areas in the catchment, it takes a long, long time to get the woodland to a mature state similar to the original vegetation. In addition to the environmental values of remnant vegetation, the amenity value of the area is kept by retaining remnant vegetation and will be lost by clearing it. Replanting or regrowth can not replace what is in place. Any further development should take place on already cleared land and vegetated areas protected with a long term view to enhancing the natural values of the catchment.

The RCLG disagrees with this proposal to clear mature eucalypt woodland when numerous cleared sites exist on DIA land. The RCLG recommends that DIA look seriously at an alternative site for this development that does not involve clearing native vegetation.





Enjoy this special place

Darwin International Airport
Accesses you to the
Rambal walking trail

It is a 1.5 km walking trail in the tropical rainforest of Darwin International Airport. The trail is a great place to enjoy the natural beauty of Darwin and the surrounding area. It is a great place to enjoy the natural beauty of Darwin and the surrounding area. It is a great place to enjoy the natural beauty of Darwin and the surrounding area.



Larvikia

... ..

Darwin



