

Long jail term is no deterrent for people smuggling

By SARAH CRAWFORD

A SUPREME Court Judge has questioned whether the mandatory sentencing of people smugglers to long jail terms has any effect on stopping the tide of poor Indonesian fisherman tempted by large sums of cash to bring

boat people to Australia. Justice Peter Barr expressed doubts about whether the Indonesians knew their fellow fishermen were being jailed for a least three years for people smuggling.

He said if they did not know, then how could the long sentences be justified as

a means of discouraging others? "People don't have access to Australian media. They have no knowledge of the sentences handed down in this country," Justice Barr said.

He made the comments in the Northern Territory Supreme Court after hearing

the guilty pleas of two Indonesian fishermen.

They brought 38 asylum seekers including a two-year-old in a 20m wooden boat into Australian waters, 900km west of Darwin.

Captain Tobin Seukh and Joni Balu were the fourth Indonesian boat crew to be sen-

tenced in the NT Supreme Court in the past month.

Under the Migration Act smugglers face a minimum mandatory sentence of five years in an Australian jail with a non-parole period of three years.

Justice Barr sentenced Balu to the mandatory mini-

mum of three years non-parole. Seukh was given a non-parole period of three years and six months.

Commonwealth Prosecutor Jody Nunn said since Seukh and Balu were caught in May last year there had been a further 80 boats arriving illegally in Australia.



More than 30 people were banned for a combined 150 years after a brawl in last year's AFL Under 17 Grand Final

Picture: JUSTIN BRIERTY

Bulldogs bite back on season suspension

By JESS WEBSTER

HERMANSBURG Football Club will front a hearing this week to appeal AFL Central Australia's decision to ban the club from the 2011 under-17 season after a grand-final riot against the Rovers last year.

An on-field fight turned into a large scale brawl when more than 100 spectators

flooded the field and during the melee a 16-year-old umpire was chased down and assaulted.

More than 30 people were banned for a combined 150 years for multiple offences ranging from assault to threatening behaviour and incitement. Two Hermannsburg under-17 players were given three-year sentences, one for tripping an umpire

and the other for violent conduct and continually inciting the fight.

The hearing was due last night but Alice Springs flooding has postponed it until later in the week.

Lawyers for the Bulldogs say the club will appeal the decision handed down by AFLCA to ban the entire side for the upcoming season, as well as extended suspen-

sions for the two players, as the principle of natural justice wasn't applied.

"We understand the board of the AFLCA heard other complaints about the team ... where our clients were not aware that the complaints had been made (and) were not given any right of appearance before the board or any right to make submissions or to present evi-

dence in answer to these allegations," Bulldogs' legal counsel George Newhouse said.

"Plainly under the AFLCA bylaws and the general law our clients were entitled to procedural fairness and the board was obliged to accord. Put simply, it is a nullity."

The club will not appeal the initial suspensions or any spectator bans.

RED LIGHT RUN

A DRUNK driver wasn't content with fleeing after crashing into a car. She followed up by jumping a red light.

The 30-year-old woman returned a blood-alcohol level of .172, more than three times the legal limit.

She backed into another car in Runge St, Coconut Grove, Darwin, early yesterday.

The woman was stopped by police after driving through a red light on McMillans Rd later in the night.

A 45-year-old man was also arrested for drink-driving yesterday after being stopped at a police road-breath-testing station on Bagot Rd.

GIESE HONOURED

AN ART gallery on the Charles Darwin University campus will now be known as Nan Giese, after a former chancellor of the university. Dr Nan Giese made strides in education for Territorians, including 17 years with Darwin Community College and demanding airconditioners at Darwin High School. In 1997, she was appointed Officer in the Order of Australia and in 2003 received the Centenary Medal.

MOWING MANIA

ALICE Springs will be cut down by a mowing blitz.

At the January Alice Springs Town Council meeting, aldermen voted for the immediate mowing blitz for parks and verges. Mayor Damien Ryan said the need had been caused by the unprecedented recent rain.

Part of the blitz this week were Snow Kenna Park, the Imparja Cup venues, the Hospital lawns and Billy Goat Hill.

NO BARGAINS IN NT

TERRITORIANS are missing out on bargain flights.

Jetstar is emailing offers of \$1 flights - but excludes flights to or from NT in its April sale.

The budget airline's media adviser, Jennifer Timm, said Darwin was such a healthy route that it did not need promoting.

"Sales are put in places where we need to stimulate demand," she said.

Iodine brain damage danger

By JESSICA PAN

INDIGENOUS teenagers in Darwin may be at risk of brain damage, stunted growth and a lower metabolic rate caused by an iodine deficiency, according to a new study.

Menzies School of Health Research senior research Fellow Dr Gurmeet Singh found indigenous people in the Northern Territory had a higher rate of iodine defi-

ciency than those reported elsewhere.

Low iodine levels can cause serious adverse effects on brain and growth development. Iodine is especially important for pregnant women as it aids in the brain development of foetuses.

"Iodine deficiency is the single most common cause of preventable brain damage in the world," Dr Singh said.

Babies born to iodine-deficient mothers could suf-

fer stunted growth and mental retardation. Low iodine levels may also cause an enlarged thyroid gland, wreaking havoc on the body.

The study's results suggest iodine deficiency may be a key factor in ill health and disability in indigenous people.

Dr Singh said the deficiency could be attributed to NT water, new cleaning agents in milk which remove iodine, and diets lacking in

iodine-rich foods, such as fish, nuts, and cheese.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand introduced mandatory iodine fortification of bread in October 2009, and Dr Singh hopes this change will increase iodine levels in indigenous people.

Dr Singh said a follow-up study in two years' time would re-test the iodine levels of indigenous Territorians to gauge whether other measures were necessary.

Alert on hoax email

AN email supposedly part of a search for a missing three-year-old girl is doing the rounds in the Top End.

The email, sent to more than 100 people and businesses in the Top End yesterday, shows a picture of a girl called Reachelle Marie Smith, with a contact number for a highway patrol officer in Tamworth.

Tamworth police yesterday advised anyone who receives the mail to ignore it and delete it.

The FBI in the US reported the same girl missing under suspicious circumstances from Minot, North Dakota, in May 2006.

The child's guardian woke to find her missing, but the guardian's flatmate said he had taken the child to his mother's place, where he said she would be spending a few days.

Reachelle has never been seen since, and the flatmate was found dead by apparent suicide a few days later.