The latest pawn in the game of ‘let’s—can everything be different—hate change’ is the Nightcliff Island proposal. In fact, it makes it even harder to take them seriously at all. We are talking about a mere 250sq m block in an existing carpark and removed back from the foreshore. There is no suggestion that Nightcliff is about to turn into the Surfers Paradise of Darwin so the NIMBY brigade need to take a Bex and settle down.

TERRITORIANS really do hate change. In fact, there seems to be an ingrained default position of “NO” in our psyche at the mere whiff of the word. The Territory proudly boasts a frontier status. It’s the last bastion of freedom. A haven of under-regulation. A land of unspoilt beauty. And it’s our royal right as NT citizens to oppose anything—for better or for worse—that might well turn us into a bunch of latte-sipping East Coast toffs.

But, of course, we also re-serve the right to become a pack of whingers if we can’t buy a decent caramel soy machiatto anywhere north of all a place to get a decent coffee shop.

Not that this should matter anyway. I’ve seen change on a large scale, particularly through the booming construction periods, and I’ve seen rapid objection on an even grander scale. Cullen Bay is probably the best case in point. The objection to the development of the marina back in the ’80s was the top and scaring-goring. Locals were convinced this development would turn the Top End into a carbon copy of the Gold Coast and were serious about the dire consequences of messing with the harbour. What we have now is a well-used, beautiful waterside suburb of around 2000 fixed residents and a vibrant entertainment precinct that attracts thousands of tourists and locals each year.

On a much smaller scale, the objection brigade was also vocal when plans to develop a barren parcel of industrial land—now known as the Darwin Waterfront—were first mooted well over a decade ago. Planning and environment groups, as well as city apartment owners who were worried about the impact on the value of their properties, all asked up. Apparently this development was going to destroy the essence of Darwin.

But can you imagine the Top End without the Waterfront now? I believe it’s still one of the most exciting developments this city has seen. The proposed $5 million cafe on the serene stretch of coastline in Nightcliff is the latest venture to create a stir; this time with the Friends of Nightcliff community.

Final designs for the fore-shore cafe have been lodged with the Development Consent Authority after Darwin council voted late last year to push ahead with it. I agree with Council on this occasion. The design is unobtrusive, attractive, and will genuinely add to the amenity of the area. The northern suburbs have long been the neglected cousins of the Darwin City/Parap precinct—Casuarina Shopping Centre aside; there are no eateries, entertainment precincts or even a place to get a decent bloody coffee anywhere north of Parap—where the majority of Darwin residents live. I might add. This narrow-minded objection to using a small parcel of land in an area that quite frankly, is crying out for some energy is frustrating and disingenuous.

And when the likes of Friends of Nightcliff choose to take issue with something as inoffensive as a coffee shop, then it doesn’t exactly give them leverage to execute a credible argument against something as significant as the Nightcliff Island proposal. In fact, it makes it even harder to take them seriously at all.

We are talking about a mere 250sq m block in an existing carpark and removed back from the foreshore. There is no suggestion that Nightcliff is about to turn into the Surfers Paradise of Darwin so the NIMBY brigade need to take a Bex and settle down. When you look at the way some esplanades across the east coast have been brought to life with cafes and restaurants, it is hard to imagine how one little cafe on such a huge stretch of virtually untouched foreshore will do anything but add to the area.

And give northern suburb residents an option to travel into the city for a coffee and bite to eat. In fact, perhaps we should be entertaining the idea of a full-throttle entertainment precinct incorporated into this area one day.

Although I suspect that may be quite a while away.