$60,000 liquor litter charge. By KIERAN FINNANE.

“You don’t want my comment, you wouldn’t be able to print it!” said a furious Diane Loechel, owner with husband Ray of the Gapview Hotel, as she left Tuesday’s meeting about the Town Council’s liquor litter charge, which disclosed the scale of the charge. The Gapview Hotel and the Todd Tavern, together with the two supermarket-associated bottleshops in the CBD, will attract a charge of $60,000 each. These four have the lion’s share (the Alice News understands, 70%) of the take-away liquor market in Alice Springs. The charge will actually be directed to the property-owners where take-away liquor outlets are located, 12 in all. The smaller outlets will attract charges of $7,500 each. The money will offset the expense to council of cleaning up liquor-related litter from public areas in the town. Samih Habib, an alderman who as part-owner of the Milner Road shopping centre is also affected by the charge, was also angry as he left the meeting: “The courts will decide,” he said. He said there are people on council who think that all businessmen are millionaires. “There are no millionaires in this town – they’ve all left,” he said. Col Penley, manager for Power Mining, owners of the Coles Complex, said it was “certainly not our view” that 12 property owners should subsidise litter collection in town. “The liquor outlets did not put the litter there, someone else did,” he said. Mr Habib has not been involved in council’s recent debates and decision-making on the charge because of his conflict of interest. Ald Brendan Heenan, chair of council’s finance committee, was absent on business on Monday when the vote was taken, but had let Mayor Ryan know that the charge had his full support. The remaining seven aldermen all voted to push ahead with the charge as part of council’s draft business plan which was to be released yesterday. All residents, including of course the liquor retailers and property-owners affected by the liquor litter charge, have until May 21 to respond to the plan. Mayor Damien Ryan was confident that although opposition would be encountered in some quarters, other quarters would appreciate council’s action given that litter and cleanliness rate at the top of residents’ concerns about the town. About possible legal action, Mayor Ryan said: “We’re working with what’s available to us under the Local Government Act. If we go to court, the Act goes to court.” Ald Murray Stewart said: “A clean town is good for business and that includes the liquor retail businesses.” Ald Heenan acknowledged that some people were “uptight and upset” but “we need to clean the town up”. The charge will be imposed from the next financial year, which will also see the start of council’s cash for containers scheme for an initial 12 months. This will cost council $465,000, with two people employed to run a recycling collection station at council’s depot in Wilkinson Street, open every Friday and Saturday, 7.30am to 3pm. Council will be paying five cents per glass or can drink container, limited to 500 at a time and only to Alice Springs residents. The container deposit scheme in SA, which started in 1977, sees approximately 540 million refundable containers sold in South Australia every year, with approximately 420 million returned for refunds.

Is it a lesson in delaying container deposit laws?
Container deposit legislation in the Territory? Don’t hold your breath – or should we say, don’t worry, it’s not going to happen.
That seems to be the message from John Gaynor, Chief Minister Paul Henderson’s senior adviser in Alice Springs, in an email to a liquor retailer.
The Alice News showed the communication to Mayor Damien Ryan and asked him to comment.
He said the Federal and NT Governments have had over 30 years – ever since container deposit legislation came into force in South Australia, back in 1975 – to introduce a scheme in the Territory.
He says Alice Springs “can’t operate as a town with the quantity of liquor litter we have”.
A previous trial by council of a cash for cans scheme over three months took 339,000 cans out of the litter stream for recycling.
The scheme the council now hopes to get up and running will apply to drink bottles as well as cans.
“We would hope the Territory Government does bring along a cash for container scheme by 2011 but I would need to be convinced that they will move quickly.
“In this document [Mr Gaynor’s email] I’m concerned to see so many hurdles mentioned and don’t read any enthusiasm for a start date.
“Meanwhile we can’t sit back and wait.”
This is what Mr Gaynor, in well honed bureaucratese, has to say:
There are some complexities to be resolved in a mandatory, Territory wide container deposit scheme that don’t arise in the voluntary deposit trials that have [been] undertaken over the year[s], for example:
• An appropriate model needs to be determined for the “materials co-ordinator” who brokers the flow of containers and deposits and handling fees between the manufacturers and collection depots. This is a critical function of any legislated container deposit scheme that is robust and has financial accountability. Options include industry operated and independently operated. Legal issues such as taxation are relevant.
• Further financial modelling is required to determine an appropriate level of collection depots while maintaining financial viability of the whole system.
• Options for limiting the stockpiling of cans and bottles prior to commencement of the scheme need to be determined – significant stockpiling would have the potential to distort the financial operation of the scheme in its early years.
• Negotiations need to occur with the beverage manufacturers on issues such as how to transition the labelling requirements on containers.
• Further analysis and discussions need to occur to determine the role that community stores might play as collection points in remote communities that are distant from the more formalised collection depots. All Territorians should have a reasonable opportunity of redeeming deposits.
All of the above require further legal, financial and project management investigation and will involve analysing how other jurisdictions (some international) have dealt with the issues. The results will feed into the design of the legislation which in turn frames the operational scheme.
Once the design features are settled there are a number of further necessary steps before the scheme becomes operational, including:
• Legislation to establish the scheme needs to be written and passed in the Legislative Assembly – the community will rightly expect opportunity for some input;
• The materials co-ordinator needs to be established with the purpose of brokering the deposits and handling fees between manufacturers and collection depots;
• A systematic compliance, accounting and auditing regime of materials and deposits needs to be developed to ensure the financial and legal robustness of the scheme;
• The main collection depots need to be in place. This may involve an expressions of interest process;
• A clear set of policies and standards for redeeming deposits needs to be developed to guide operations of collection depots (covering issues such as how many cans and bottles can be redeemed in one transaction).
Collection depots will then need to be licensed to ensure that the standards are adhered to;
• The materials co-ordinator will need to enter into financial arrangements with collection depots;
• Industry needs to change its labels and enter into arrangements with the materials co-ordinator; and
• A substantial community awareness program needs to be developed so that Territorians understand what is happening, when the scheme becomes operational and where they can go to redeem deposits.
Given that, 2011 is not an easy target – but if the scheme can be established sooner, it will.
The proposed timeline is certainly consistent with international experience - Hawaii for example took over two years to
Why some will never get elected. By KIERAN FINNANE.

The present method of counting votes in local government elections in the Territory – known as the exhaustive preferential system – is leading to domination of large groups in the new shires, while small groups are left out in the cold, electorally speaking.

The issue is raised regularly after municipal elections in Alice Springs, where eight members (formerly 10) are chosen from a single ward and historically minority candidates with hefty primary votes have not been successful. (Google ‘exhaustive’ in our web story archive.)

It has now come to the attention of an Australian National University researcher, Dr Will Sanders, who is also involved in the Desert Knowledge CRC’s Sustainable Desert Settlements project.

He was intrigued to observe the results in the multi-members wards of the newly formed Central Desert and MacDonnell shires following the inaugural elections last year.

How was it, he wondered, that in well-contested four member races people with very small primary votes were getting elected into the third and fourth positions?

He found the answer in the vote counting system.

It takes the method for a single member electorate – where a member needs to get half the vote plus one – and applies it to a multi-member electorate.

In effect this produces repeated single-member elections within the ward.

Each time a candidate is successful their ballots are re-distributed as primary votes to the second preference choice on those ballots.

Thus voters for the most successful candidate are effectively able to double dip and get their second choice up as well, so “fueling large group dominance”.

Dr Sanders looked at the example of Central Desert Shire’s Southern Tanami Ward, which takes in the settlements of Yuendumu (the largest), Nyirripi and Willowra.

Candidates from Nyirripi and Willowra got the highest number of primary votes, but ultimately the successful candidates were all from Yuendumu.

The first and second-placed candidates both got reasonably high primary votes, but the third and fourth-placed were close to the bottom in the primary count.

They moved up the pack on the basis of being the second choice of voters for the first and second place-getters.

Similarly, in Central Desert Shire’s Anmatjere Ward, the first and second place getters came from Nturiya / Ti-Tree and Laramba and were ultimately joined by candidates from Ti-Tree and Yuelamu.

While this looks like more of a spread, Dr Sanders, who has done extensive work in the Anmatjere area over the years, points out that the end result left the smaller communities of the eastern part of the ward unrepresented.

He is less familiar with groupings in other areas, but also looked at the results in MacDonnell Shire’s Ljirapinta Ward, where the first place-getter, with a reasonably high primary vote, was joined in second place by a family member with a much lower primary vote.

In an alternative counting method, known as proportional representation, the successful candidates’ ballots are taken out of the race before the next round.

This basically says to those voters, you’ve got your candidate, now let’s give others voters a chance.

And with proportional representation, instead of each candidate having to achieve half the vote plus one, in a four-member race, for example, they have to achieve a fifth of the vote plus one.

In a six-member race it would be a seventh of the vote plus one.

The mathematical rule is the same, which makes it possible to have a mix of single and multi-member electorates or wards within the one election.

This type of counting leads to a broader spread of representation across an electorate, with minority groups standing a much better chance of getting up a candidate.

Dr Sanders is talking to the Territory Government about a change in counting methods in local government elections but he points out that the shires themselves can take action.

Instead of dividing the shires into multi-member wards they could divide them into multiple single-member wards, or smaller multi-member wards, to give smaller groups within the shire a better chance of representation.
It was up to the shires how they divided up their electorate. Each was to have a shire council of 12 members and most chose to have four wards.

But one shire, Victoria-Daly, chose to have eight wards – six single member wards, plus one two-member ward and one four-member ward (Wadeye), roughly reflecting population. This shire was thus more prescriptive than the others, says Dr Sanders, about ensuring representation for smaller groups.

Using the exhaustive preferential system “repeats a historic mistake”, says Dr Sanders. It was used for Australian Senate elections from 1919 to 1946, yielding wildly swinging majorities – “at times there were only three Opposition senators”.

When the counting system changed, the Senate become more representative and thus more legitimate in the eyes of the people. Exhaustive preferential counting was also abandoned in Victorian local government elections after their amalgamation reforms in the ’nineties, because it was seen to be having the unintended consequence of large group dominance. This “winner takes all majoritarianism” is not good where there’s social diversity, says Dr Sanders.

**Shire CEO pulls pin. By ERWIN CHLANDA.**

The MacDonnell Shire is less than a year old yet its CEO, Wayne Wright, has resigned and will finish up tomorrow. He says personal and family matters are the reason, and he will be moving to Darwin.

He says the start of the shire was “difficult” but the staff are “fantastic, as good as anyone could hope to work with”.

Mr Wright says he has the “utmost respect” for the councillors who he says will be “moving the MacDonnell Shire forward.

“Very good things will be happening.”

Mr Wright has previously worked in WA and Victoria and was an engineer with state government owned SA Water for 23 years.

Mr Wright says local government in the NT is a “fantastic industry” and he recommends it as a career.

**Slump slows down re-think of how to better run Centre. By KIERAN FINNANE.**

The uncertain economic climate is slowing down progress for the remoteFocus project, launched last year in an effort to get a re-think on how government decisions affecting remote Australia are made.

“There’s a mentality mismatch,” says John Huigen, CEO of Desert Knowledge Australia, which facilitated the project.

“Decision-making takes place thousands of kilometres away by people who live in a completely different context.

“There’s an understandable tendency in government to have one-size-fits-all policies but this doesn’t necessarily work well for the 4.5% of the population living in remote areas.

“People from the bush suffer from the tyranny of democracy and this can produce unhelpful dynamics, a feeling of being forgotten, even victimised.

“remoteFocus is not about blaming anyone and it is entirely unpolitical, but we do want to develop some propositions around a new way for remote Australia to be administered and governed.”

The group’s initial “prospectus”, which outlined the case for change, was developed with funding from BHP, Rio Tinto and the WA Local Government Association.

Mr Huigen says the mining companies were interested in the project because they are often relied upon to solve gaps in service delivery in remote areas, which would otherwise be the responsibility of governments.

However with the economic downturn they, together with most companies, are battening down the hatches. Last week the MacDonnell Shire in the NT handed over $50,000 to remoteFocus.

In a press release Shire President Raymond Kiernan said: “People living in remote Australia, like our residents in the MacDonnell Shire Council, face daily challenges that are often not understood or considered by government when most Australians live in urban coastal areas.

“By supporting Desert Knowledge’s remoteFOCUS project our Shire Council will be part of investigating and shaping long term, strategic changes in the way all levels of government approach governing remote Australia.”

But so far, that $50,000 is all that’s in the remoteFocus coffers.
The funds are required to take the next step, which is to assemble a wide range of people, with strong interest and background in remote Australia, to develop a set of propositions about the kind of governance changes needed. Following this the project wants to take these propositions to the people for testing and refining. How extensively it can do this will depend on the amount of money they can raise. And this, at the present time, is proving difficult.

**Could town camps leases be resumed?**

With Tangentyere Council again refusing to come to an agreement with the Federal Government over long-term leases for housing blocks on town camps, should the Territory Government consider resumption of the leases? NT Indigenous Affairs Minister Alison Anderson says she is still hoping that Federal Minister Jenny Macklin can achieve a negotiated solution with Tangentyere Council on D-day, May 4. She says the drawn-out negotiations can’t be allowed to continue and is hoping that the Tangentyere Executive will bear in mind the aims of what the Federal Government is trying to do: providing stable, secure accommodation and improved infrastructure for the men, women and children of the town camps. “And I’m hoping too that soon we can change the name from ‘town camp’ to ‘subdivision’.” She says a question raised by Tangentyere was that the $50m that is on the table won’t go very far once it’s divvied up between all the camps. However, she says Ms Macklin made it clear that if a lease agreement is signed there’s a “high likelihood” of more money. An informed source, who spoke to the Alice News on the understanding that he would not be named, says the lease issue is a red herring. The leases, which are either Crown leases or Special Purpose leases in perpetuity could be resumed under certain conditions – such as unapproved use or littering. But, says the source, as it is likely that those conditions would be addressed by the leaseholders, thus removing the possibility of resumption, that course of action would be futile. And he points out that although the land on which public housing is built elsewhere in the Territory is government-controlled, this in itself does not resolve the issues around proper care and maintenance of the housing. An alternative course of action would be to convert the leases to freehold, allowing some residents to purchase their own home and presumably care for it in such a way that it becomes a “shining example” for their neighbours.

**Bureaucrats spend $2.3m to oversee $5.7m in programs. By KIERAN FINNANE.**

The bad news is that there’s no more money – the Territory’s arts budget will stay stable at $8.5m – but the good news is that Arts Minister Alison Anderson is determined to get more of that money into the hands of artists and more fairly spread across the Territory. That means tackling the big ones: the cost of a burgeoning arts bureaucracy compared to the funding of projects and programs; and the highly centralised structure of key arts organisations, each with a supposed Territory-wide charter. “Cultural and recreational services”, to which the arts are a key contributor, according to the Alice Springs Economic Profile, contribute over $25m a year to the local economy, just under two per cent of the gross regional product. ARTS WISE?

Speaking to the Alice News before last week’s arts forum, “Are We Arts Wise?” Ms Anderson asked with characteristic frankness: “How can we have a $2m bureaucracy administering $5m worth of programs?” Unfortunately she could not attend the forum, but her forthright chief of staff, Mathew Fagan, added to the picture: $2.3m goes into ArtsNT, while $5.7m goes to arts organisations and individual practitioners. However, as he pointed out, there is also an administrative component in the latter figure, with every organisation and grant recipient obviously engaged in administrative processes of their own. So the amount of money that actually goes into making art and taking it to the people is significantly less, though Mr Fagan couldn’t say by how much. He told the forum that it has become clear that the Territory Government to date has not had a clear set of strategic priorities for arts funding and that Ms Anderson wants to change that.
The point of the forum was to get some guidance from artists, arts workers and interested others about what these priorities should be.

While Ms Anderson has some ideas, she doesn’t want to impose them without consultation, he said. However, she is committed to a more even spread of arts funding and activity across the Territory.

At present intensity of activity depends very much on who is good at writing submissions and where they are located or who they have relationships with.

A more equitable spread would not be confined to addressing an imbalance between Darwin and Alice. Getting more activity into rural and remote areas will be not only “fair”, he said, but unsurprising as a priority from a Minister who herself comes from a remote community.

As well, Ms Anderson had earlier told the News that some arts practitioners are clearly missing out relative to others, naming particularly film-makers, writers and performing artists.

Mr Fagan was asked whether funding is skewed to peak bodies. “Yes”, he answered.

He later added that arts organisations, like many government departments, operate “in silos”, each with an outreach program.

This results in activity outside the major centres being spread very thinly. The facilitator asked the meeting to consider whether there should be another model.

Not an easy question to answer on the hop and no clear response was given. A question went back: was the forum discussion leading into the development of a Territory arts policy, in which case at least a year would be needed as well as a strong document to work from.

Mr Fagan later said that policy would be developed alongside reforms. He said Ms Anderson wanted to see change quickly and wouldn’t be prepared to wait 18 months while a policy was being worked up.

He told the meeting that she is a “hands on” Minister, not a “rubber stamper”, that she drives policy, that she wants to take her reform program to Cabinet in June – which actually does not give much time for consultation.

Another change Ms Anderson wants to see is an end to the stop-start nature of much of the funding for arts activities, he said.

She wants smaller centres and regions to have long-term funding certainty, he said.

And Ms Anderson told the News that a lot of time and effort is wasted with 12 month funding cycles.

She said a typical pattern is that three months is spent on preparing funding submissions, followed by a three month wait for an answer.

If successful there’s a three month period of activity before a three month acquittal phase.

She wants to put a stop to that.

The implication of all this, given that the bucket of money will remain the same, is that there will be winners and losers, but without detailed comparative analysis of how much money is spent on what and where, it is hard to predict where the axe will fall.

And without this analysis it was likewise hard for the strong contingent of local artists and arts workers who attended the forum to offer informed views on what should be prioritised.

For a meeting like this to be productive better groundwork needs to be done in advance.

At a glance it would seem, especially since the amalgamation of RedHOT Arts and the Alice Desert Festival into a single organisation, there’s scarcely any fat to trim in the Centre.

Indeed those attending the forum were quick to point to the substantial deficits, particularly in arts infrastructure in Alice Springs: the lack of a performance venue other than pubs and clubs for local musicians and the complete lack of a rehearsal venue for them; the lack of a permanent outdoor performance space; the lack, especially since the Central Australian Art Society shed was destroyed by fire, of a studio space for visual artists.

Many of these needs could be catered for by a Central Australian school of art, it was suggested. It could not only increase local opportunity but draw people here from interstate and overseas.

There was some discussion about continuity of funding not only for organisations but for projects, such as the annual Bush Bands Bash.

There was strong support for other government departments – health, education, environment, infrastructure – to make arts activity and funding part of their business.

A “percent for art” scheme, whereby all major infrastructure projects allocate a percentage of their budgets to commissioning art integral to the project, would be one way to address this.

(The Town Council to their credit has such a scheme and the new aquatic centre will be enhanced by several works of art as a result.)
A forum bringing together bureaucrats from government departments and artists could be helpful in this regard, to get past artists being “treated as an irritant”.

Lobbying for a significant arts program in the amalgamated high schools (ASHS and Anzac Hill) was urged. Some income security for artists was raised as an issue, with pointed reference to the contrasting position of some arts administrators:

“You don’t want to see yet another administration person on $80,000 a year while you’re on $10,000.”

Several comments were made around the perception of arts activities as elitist, not for the “common person”, requiring high level skills and as a result not attracting the kind of government support that sports do (especially in terms of infrastructure), and not having the same presence in community consciousness as sports do.

There were comments around assessment of arts grant applications and the importance of judging them on the basis of their pursuit of excellence and innovation.

Mr Fagan commented on “a real tension” between the pursuit of excellence and the push for greater accessibility and a more “common” touch.

More celebrations of the arts through festivals and awards would be a way of raising awareness of the arts and rewarding excellence, it was suggested.

The forum did not hear anything specific on the future of the NT Film Office.

To the Alice News Ms Anderson described the budget of the Film Office as “absolutely nothing” and said it should not remain in “the arts ghetto”.

Some kind of partnership arrangement with the Department of Business could offer a solution.

A similar forum will be held soon in Darwin, and the Territory’s 20 major Aboriginal communities will also be consulted over the next two months, said Mr Fagan.

There were calls for greater investment in Indigenous arts workers and for training to be linked to job certainty, but otherwise the forum heard little about the Indigenous art sector.

Ms Anderson told the News that there will be discussion around whether Indigenous arts will continue to be treated in separate categories by her department.

Feral dogs maul stud calf in the town area.

Rod Cramer from Temple Bar Station, a small pastoral lease within the Alice municipality, called on the Town Council this week to start legal dog baiting in the more remote parts of the municipality.

This followed the mauling death on Monday of a second stud calf (pictured) at the station in less than two weeks.

The animal was attacked by a pack of feral dogs – not dingos, said Mr Cramer.

He told council that the calf had had both its ears torn off before it died.

The unfortunate animal’s death was the fourth or fifth at Temple Bar this year, representing a “substantial economic loss” and creating “extensive trauma for us and the herd”.

Mr Cramer said baiting is the only way to deal with the problem. However, although the NT Government has approved the use of “Doggone” dry baits (in biscuit form) in the NT, he said Parks and Wildlife are the only legal suppliers of the baits and they don’t allow use of them in municipal areas.

Mr Cramer argued that council could become authorised to handle baits within the municipality.

Council’s Director of Corporate and Community Services, Craig Catchlove, says council could possibly obtain permission to bait but has previously decided against it principally because of the potential for the bait “to fall into the wrong hands” (human or animal), but also because it is a “nasty way” for an animal to die.

The issue will be revisited and a report prepared for council’s meeting next month.

Meanwhile, council rangers will “up the ante” with trapping and shooting in the Temple Bar area, but, says Mr Catchlove, as Mr Cramer is already doing these things himself, how much more can be achieved is “problematic”.

Writers to cook up word storm.

A late addition to the already impressive Eye of the Storm writers’ festival line-up is Najaf Mazari, a master rugmaker who fled Afghanistan in 2001 and ended up in Woomera Detention Centre.

The story of his youth in a northern Afghan village, during a time of civil war, and later his capture by the Taliban and
flight on a small boat to Australia, is told in The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif, co-authored by Mazari and biographer Robert Hillman.

At Eye of the Storm, which kicks off tomorrow, Mazari will take part in a panel titled Place Matters (replacing Beck Cole).

Together with authors Linda Jaivin, Michael Watts and Arnold Zable he’ll discuss the impact of place on his writing (Sunday 2.45pm).

He’ll also be a guest at the special event, 1001 Nights, again with Zable and Jaivin and joined by Centralians Kenny Laughton and Jo Dutton. This is billed as a night under the stars (at the Alice Springs Resort) with a Middle Eastern feast and “Scheherazade tales of love and heartbeat from around the globe” (Saturday, 8-10pm).

The panels and special events of the festival are a way for “a conversation to take place between Central Australian writers and writers from elsewhere”, says festival director Sandra Thibodeaux.

In putting the program together she sought to “celebrate writing specifically birthed in the Central Australian landscape, cultures and voices”.

The themes of the panels and events came in part from the writers but were also shaped by a desire “to highlight what is special about the Centre”, says Thibodeaux.

There’ll be several book launches: Jennifer Mills’ novel The Diamond Anchor (Monday, 4.30); two poetry collections – little bit long time by Ali Cobby Eckermann, and Awake During Anaesthetic by Kimberley Mann (Saturday, 4,30); and the new anthology of writing from the Centre, Fishtails in the Dust, published by Ptilotus Press (Friday, 7pm).

An exhibition of visual artists’ responses to selected writing from Fishtails will show at Watch This Space on Saturday, 6pm, and run until May 22.

Authors contributing to IAD Press’ inaugural NT Indigenous anthology will be giving a preview of the publication (Sunday, 11.45am.)

Acclaimed Australian author Kate Grenville features heavily in the program. In particular the panel, 222 Years in the Telling, in which she’ll explore, together with others, contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, should be a crowd puller. (Saturday, 10-11.30am.)

Popular crime writer, Shane Maloney, in conversation with TV host Jennifer Byrne will close the festival on Monday night, at an event called Stiff, the title of Maloney’s first Murray Whelan novel. That promises plenty of laughs from ‘one of the country’s funniest authors, whose novels are set in the murky world of politics. (5.30-8pm at Madigan’s.)

For full program details go to: www.ntwriters.com.au

Musical overload in the Wide Open Spaces. By POP VULTURE.

Tomorrow, Friday, the first darling bud of May, sees the Wide Open Spaces music and cultural festival begin at the picturesque Ross River resort, 85 kilometres east of town.

Imagine three days out of town, three days with an overload of things to do and see, three days of music with an emphasis on what some people born on the cusp of generation x and y are moving to.

Elefant Traks’ Urthboy will be there. One of this country’s best known MCs, his lyrical sense has placed him on the cutting edge of the Australian Hip Hop scene (Elefant Traks is an Australian Hip Hop record label). Although currently working on a solo release, Urthboy is better known for his collective work with the The Herd.

Another act will be Spoonbill. I have been a fan of this eclectic mixing fiend for a little over a year now, when a friend gave me copies of two of his releases, “Nestegg” and “Megafauna”, released on Omlette records of Melbourne. I’ve saved hearing the music from his latest instalment, “Zoomorphic” (released only last month) until the festival’s debut.

He plays with a juxtaposition of sounds edged with comedy, involving instruments, dialogues, monologues, and what sometimes appear to be household items.

Seeing this performed live will for me be one of the highlights of the festival, worth the daily entrance fee alone.

Now to Melbourne’s Mista Savona. Their music is a lacing of reggae, stylee and heavyweight Jamaican dancehall. A lot of the rhythms and beats pre-written (a hallmark of these genres) but Mista Savona adds a new and “modernesque” flavour to the old recipe. Newcomers will find it an easy music to move to.

A veritable bonfire of music and energy, and another jewel in the crown of Friday evening, is Combat Wombat, a Melbourne-based contingent of MCs and DJs.

They last made the trek to Alice about three years ago and some members still sway back and forth from here,
coordinating Hip Hop workshops in different Indigenous communities. Combat Wombat combine lyrics of a strong political nature with intelligent humour, and watching them perform can be an enlightening experience.

Charming tree hugger champions environment. By BEVERLEY JOHNSON.

Tree hugging, environment loving, Liana Werner-Gray has spent time recently educating local students on how to reduce their carbon footprint and help take better care of the world. Miss Werner-Gray, passionate about being green, has plans to visit schools throughout Australia. Having grown up in the Territory there was no better place to start than Gillen Primary School, where she was once a pupil.

“If we do not teach and encourage today’s youth to take more action towards caring for the environment, then there will be nothing left to enjoy in the future,” says Miss Werner-Gray.

During morning assembly she had pupils taking part in a game she has made up that helps them understand how everyday activities can affect the carbon footprint.

There are hundreds of ways you can reduce your carbon footprint, she says. Examples that young people are easily capable of include planting a tree, eating locally grown produce and unplugging their mobile phone charger when it’s not in use.

Principal David Glyde discovered his carbon footprint was quite high. So he’s decided to start riding his bike more and not use so many plastic bags.

Mr Glyde said, “It is tremendous what Liana is doing. To see a previous pupil spreading awareness on such an important and topical issue is fantastic.”

Students Tianne Rothwell and Claire Thomas said they really enjoyed the game and Miss Werner-Gray has helped them to learn more about how to stop polluting in the world.

Having created a website (www.iloveearth.com.au), Miss Werner-Gray approached a number of businesses who have donated prizes for her inspiring competition, “I love the earth.”

Anyone between the ages of five and 18 can enter a photo, video, painting, drawing, story, poem, or song that demonstrates how they are reducing their carbon footprint.

The competition closes on October 1.

“We need to inspire people to care for the environment.

“It sounds corny but there are not enough people leading the world who are tree huggers,” says Miss Werner-Gray.

Twenty years ago Miss Werner-Gray’s mother rallied in Alice Springs for a local recycling centre, an issue that hasn’t gone away.

“I have definitely followed in the footsteps of my mother,” she says. “Alice Springs is where I spent a lot of my youth. It is a place that has impacted my life. It is a place that I will never forget.”

Once the face of Yamba’s playtime princess, Miss Werner-Gray went on to star in the television show “I’m a celebrity, get me out of here”. She is now a nominee for the 2009 Miss Earth Australia competition, a green initiative that takes place in Sydney this September.

LETTERS: Tourist says town is filthy.

Sir,— We visited your beautiful part of the world over Easter and had a wonderful time driving around all the spectacular places.

One thing, though, was a shock not only to us, but to many other visitors we came in contact with: the filth, broken bottles, rubbish everywhere ... and the smelly people/groups associated with it!

Coming from Cairns, where this problem has been vigorously addressed, we would suggest that you do something serious about this sorry situation.

We even saw an Indigenous man defecate in broad view of passing people – behind the building where the Information Centre is! The comment by passing tourists was unprintable!

Suggestion: why not withhold the taxpayer funded handouts to these people until they clean up their mess! Millions of $$ are wasted in handouts, and nothing is being achieved.

Give them a big bag, a shovel and send them into the Todd River and the parks where they congregate to pick up their
filth, broken bottles and so on, and then pay them after they have done the work – not before.
As a local nurse said: “We have to clean up after them, they take this for granted and we are not allowed to say
anything.”
Dr. Veronica Griffin,
Cairns

Footy adventure

Sir,— The insightful piece of writing by Tom Dutton (Alice News, April 23), concerning the football team from the
community of Kintore, was a real gem.
He provided a splendid picture of just how much the adventurous 530km trip into Alice for the annual Easter
Lightning Football Carnival meant to the combatants from Kintore. The footy carnival, which attracted 22 teams from
communities spread far and wide in the Territory, as well as from the Pitlands of SA and a team from over the border
in WA, does mean a hell of a lot to the competing communities and Tom brought that aspect out so well in his article
featuring the Kintore Hawks.
The strict rules imposed by the community leaders attached to the footy team, as told by Tom regarding players’
eligibility for the trip, emphasized the importance attached to the representation of the community.
Tom’s last paragraph, where he quotes the feelings of the players and they tell him that “they had the best weekend of
their lives”, is in one way a tad sad but also a transparent telling of what can inspire people on remote communities.
Tom’s piece also is a healthy reminder of the heavy commitment of travel of those communities such as Papunya /
Haasts Bluff, Yuendumu, Mt. Allan / Laramba and Hermannsburg mob who compete in the Central Australian footy
competition in Alice each week.
It is a tribute that should be more widely recognized. They, and Lytentye Apurte mob, have enriched the competition
in no small way.
Graham Tjilpi Buckley
Alice Springs

Camels should
not be hunted

Sir,— Thank you for the opportunity to address the issue of safari hunting of camels in Central Australia.
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) opposes all hunting because of the suffering that it causes
animals. Blasting away at animals in the Outback is neither sporting nor ‘conservation’.
Hunters often argue that they are ‘managing’ wildlife, yet hunting creates conditions that favor accelerated
reproduction: the abrupt population decline that it causes leads to less competition for food among survivors and
ultimately, a higher birth rate, thus leading once more to the very problems that hunters claim to solve.
Organizers of camel hunts will not primarily be interested in humanely controlling camel populations, but rather in
ensuring that there is an endless supply of camels for their clients to harass and kill.
And don’t forget that hunted animals are never killed in ways that do not cause suffering, especially when a hunting
outfit is run for profit or the experience is meant to be ‘fun’.
If our real concern is camel populations, then we should take steps to reduce animals’ fertility. But no matter what we
do, it must be humane. Hunting does not fit the bill.
Alistair Cornell
Australian Campaigns Coordinator
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

P & W price hike

Sir,— There is a petition running on the link below, regarding the Power and Water price increases.
A lot of people are not happy with the price hike and the way the government has handled the maintenance of our
ageing utilities.
It is not just the increases that are the problem, but it is the flow-on effect it will have on everything else as well.
There are also some very interesting things in the P&W 2008 annual report, such as profit, $57.5m; bank balance,
$89.3m; director’s remuneration up 38%. No mention of need for price hike.
This petition is a way the people can voice their opinion. The site has only been running for just on a week and there are already over 1000 signatures.
Deanna Barry
Darwin

**Protect poor**

Sir,— Four influential Northern Territory community groups are calling on the Henderson Government to ensure that vulnerable Territorians were not plunged into poverty by excessive increases in the cost of power and water. Concessions should be extended to all holders of health-care cards, so that utility price increases do not push low income earners further into poverty. The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) joined with housing peak NT Shelter, seniors lobby group the Council on the Ageing, and carers organisation Carers NT, to request that government reconsider the proposed increases. The Treasurer has indicated that power costs will increase by 18% on July 1 this year, and by a further 5% the following year. Water costs will also increase by 20% in each of the next three years. NTCOSS applauds an indication from the Treasurer that the increased costs will not be passed on to pensioners and carers. However, the greatest impact will be felt by people on other benefits such as Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance, who are not entitled to any concessions. Extending concessions to all holders of health-care cards will provide a measure of protection for Territorians who are most at risk. These price hikes will also place further pressure on the exorbitant cost of rental accommodation in Darwin, already the most expensive in Australia. Government has a responsibility to assist disadvantaged Territorians on low incomes especially as they prepare to weather the worst of the global economic storm.

Wendy Morton, Executive Director, NTCOSS
Toni Vine-Bromley, Executive Director, NT Shelter

**Public housing price gouge**

Sir,— The Henderson Government’s sharp increase in public housing rents will push many Territory pensioners below the breadline. A $20 increase on virtually all public housing tenancies will see some residents rent jump by more than 17%. The rent price hikes are sky high compared with increases in pensions. Not satisfied with creating the highest private rents in the country now the Henderson Government is putting the squeeze on residents in public housing to cover the mismanagement of its budget. Coming just weeks after a 25% increase in the price of electricity, this rental price hike is particularly hypocritical. When private landlords increase rents by large amounts the Henderson Government makes sympathetic noises. When the Government turns into a rent gouging landlord the Chief Minister is silent. By allowing a 17% increase in the price of public housing has the private rental market the green light to price gouge.

Terry Mills
Leader of the Opposition

**Retirees fight back**

Sir,— The issue of Retirement Incomes is on top of the list for Seniors in the Northern Territory as the Federal Government enters the final weeks of refining the Federal Budget, due to come down in May. The commitment of the Federal Government to sustainable Retirement Income policy is very welcome indeed, as well as the promised relief for the most vulnerable. National Seniors Australia emphasises that at a time when retirement incomes are under pressure it is unwise to target those people who have been able to partially or fully fund their own retirement.
We are disturbed that a consistent theme in the debate and commentary is that self funded retirees are all very wealthy and should not have access to various Government support programs and entitlements. Indeed some of the commentary is almost ideological and critical of self funded retirees for being able to contribute to their own retirement.

The Northern Territory Policy Group of NSA has been active in promoting a range of issues of concern to Senior Territorians. We encourage all seniors to contact their Federal Parliamentary members and lobby for their future particularly in relation to the impact of the current economic outlook on Older Australians and the need for a sustainable Retirement Income Policy.

Margaret Gaff
Chair, NT Policy Group, National Seniors Australia

Free transport welcome

Sir,— NTCOSS applauds Transport Minister Gerry McCarthy’s recent proposal for free public transport for all Territorians. This action would encourage greater community involvement, and bring substantial environmental benefit by reducing the number of cars on the road and the associated pollution. However, more bus routes and greater frequency of services are needed for the system to be fully effective. The lack of availability of public and community transport forces low income people to rely on other more expensive forms of transport, such as taxis and minibuses, to meet their everyday needs. It can be particularly hard for mothers and their babies to get into town for shopping and accessing services, when they do not have access to public transport. People miss out on public transport in the larger centres in the NT because there are no bus routes close to their homes.

Some town camp residents in Alice Springs are more than two kilometres from a public bus stop. In regional towns like Tennant Creek and Katherine there are no public bus services at all. Next month’s NT Budget presents an enormous opportunity for the Government to make public transport more affordable and accessible.

Jonathan Pilbrow
Central Australian Policy Officer, NTCOSS

Treasurer silent

Sir,— There’s a troubling silence coming out of the Treasurer’s Parliament House office just a week out from Delia Lawrie’s second Territory budget. Commonwealth and other Territory revenues have dried up, so too has Labor’s penchant for self promotion and self congratulation. Normally by this time, the Government is sending out multiple press releases about what is up-coming in the budget. We’ve seen a couple of releases but big ticket announcements – like plans to lower pay-roll tax or increase the pay-roll tax threshold – have been conspicuous by their absence. In addition, I was particularly looking forward to reading the Treasurer’s media release summarising Access Economics’ March Quarter review.

The Henderson Government had nobody but itself to blame for its financial predicament. We all know that there are budget pressures on this Government caused substantially by its squandering of $1.2billion of unexpected Commonwealth revenue over the past seven years. The Government has assiduously avoided warnings from many parties – including its own Treasury – about the fickle nature of the GST cash stream. Because of this failure to plan we’re heading for a budget deficit and a $200million black hole over the next 14 months.

In the interests of open and transparent governance, it’s time for Delia Lawrie to say from where Labor’s going to raise taxes and charges next financial year in addition to the Territory Housing rental increases and power price hikes we’ve seen so far.

John Elferink
$8000 meeting

Sir,— IAD Management Committee has called another Special General Meeting to be held on May 28. This meeting is requested by 17 IAD Members.

This is the second such request recently received from the same group.

The first request dated February 4, 2009 resulted in an SGM being convened under the Constitution on March 20. That SGM was closed at 11.38am (having started at 11.18am) after members of the requesting group were removed from the meeting for misbehaviour.

The cost of holding that meeting was considerable; in excess of $8000. The costs were paid from Institute funds. The cost of repeated requests for SGMs is putting enormous strain on the financial and other resources of the Institute and is a harmful distraction from the work of the Institute.

The purpose of the second SGM to be held 28 May is primarily to: “approve a members’ motion to remove from the current Management Committee the current Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, Public Officer and other Management Committee members, under clause 30 of the IAD Constitution.”

There is currently no “members’ motion” before the IAD in these terms or any other similar motion. This means that the stated purpose calling for the SGM is no purpose at all and is a nonsense. Therefore the Management Committee must avoid incurring the expense of calling an SGM for a purpose that will inevitably fail and create disorder.

This group has been asked to revisit their request, reformulate its purpose, and then resubmit the request with the required number of signatures (in accordance with clause 44 of the Constitution) and this will then be actioned.

The requesting group have failed to do this.

The work of the Institute cannot be performed diligently and thoroughly while this agenda is pursued by this disruptive group of Members.

The current Management Committee has only been in place for three months. It has only just had time to find its feet. To suggest that it has done anything wrong in that time lacks logic and smacks of ambition driven by self-interest. The disruptive group led by Neville Perkins has no authority from IAD, Neville Perkins has no authority to make statements on behalf of IAD or to use IAD letterhead or IAD logo.

The current IAD Management Committee has always and will continue to demonstrate accountability, appropriate transparency and respect of its Members.

On Thursday 9 April 2009 a morning tea was held.

All IAD Members were invited.

Current Management Committee openly responded to many and all questions from Members and a large number of Members left the Morning Tea assured and with full confidence in the current Management Committee.

It was noted NOT one of the disruptive group who have called these SGMs attended.

Janice Harris
Chairperson
Institute for Aboriginal Development

Confident about oil discoveries

Sir,— In addition to Coal Seam Gas seismic exploration and drilling, an extensive oil and gas focused 2D seismic program is planned to be mounted near Alice Springs later this year or early next year following new results by Central Petroleum Limited which continue to point to the region’s untapped hydrocarbon potential.

Analysis of the company’s recent drilling program in an area about 340 kilometres southeast of the Alice had concluded there were at least two active petroleum systems in the Pedirka Basin.

Of particular interest is the substantial residual oil staining evident in the Eromanga sequence within the Blamore-1 and Simpson-1 wells drilled by the company in the Simpson Desert.

Staining was evident over 31 metres in Blamore-1 and over 17 metres in Simpson-1.

While commercial oil was not encountered in either well, the residual oil columns in each are consistent with our pre-drill models predicting oil charge into the area from the Madigan Trough.

The results have increased our confidence as the likelihood of local indigenous sourcing from oil shales, updip spillage
and robust dip closures in this part of the desert and we have therefore scheduled a detailed seismic program to help identify enhanced drill targets for 2010. The company believes the target area had potential Undiscovered Oil Initially in Place (UOIIP) of around six billion barrels.

Any future exploration programme in the area is subject to the approval of Joint Venture Partners, Petroleum Exploration Australia (PXA).

It is anticipated that a meeting will be held late in June 2009 to consider the program proposed.

John Heugh
Managing Director,
Central Petroleum Limited

Huge nurse turnover

Sir,— Recruiting more nurses to the Northern Territory is only half the equation when it comes to ensuring properly staffed hospitals. Retention is as important as recruitment but the new Health Minister, Kon Vataskalis, has nothing to say about how he will staunch the 34% turnover of Territory nurses each year, which places enormous strain on the operation of Territory hospitals. It costs more than $10,000 to put a new nurse on a ward. In a workforce of 1900 that means $6.5 million will bleed from the health budget for recruitment costs alone. It’s impossible for a nursing workforce experiencing an extremely high level of transience to provide a level of care comparable to that of a stable workforce.

Matt Conlan, Shadow Minister for Health

ADAM'S APPLE: Don’t give hate a chance.

When I was a child, my best friend was a boy named Matthew Bennett. Never let it be said that he and George Clooney could be mistaken for one another. Matthew, it is fair to say, looked like the love child of Bill Gates and Woody Allen. All glasses and a mop of side-parted hair. For a time in my youth Matthew and I were inseparable. We did everything young boys do together. We got up to mischief together, we rode our bikes together, we generally fell into 11-year-old love with the same girl. Unlike Alice Springs, my home town didn’t have many Americans. There was a smattering, but there was a smattering of every culture so no one nationality really stuck out. Matthew was born in Iowa, in the same town as Radar O’Reilly from M*A*S*H.

Here the American population makes up a substantial part of the community in every sense of the word. They contribute not only to our population and our economy but also to the culture of the place. To the uninitiated, the idea that Americans are a significant part of the Alice Springs community might seem a little strange. We are after all the most Australian of towns, the heart of Australia as we all love to say. But if we think about it, Americans have a place in all of our societies. From remote communities with their American-designed electric guitars played in bush bands to the centre of urban culture with hip-hop, America is everywhere.

I have no problem with that. I know there is a section of the national community reluctant to allow American culture into Australia and which mourns in earnest the death of the ‘cobber’, ‘she’ll be right’, fair dinkum Australian. But the Australian culture has never been stagnant, constant and unflinching. That, in my mind, is one of the great beauties of the place. A nation full of people from every nation. A culture adaptable, fluid and vibrant. Australia has the rare ability to pick and choose what it likes and what it does not. One of the true pleasures of growing up in Australia is the ability to immerse yourself for a spell in the cultures of the entire globe, from Albania to Zimbabwe, without having to be defined by it. Since the first black fella crossed the Indonesian land bridge all those years ago, Australia has been a place where adaptation has been the only key to defining the culture.
From Halal butchers to Brazilian waxes, we have embraced all the bits of cultures we have liked. And on the whole we’ve rejected the bits we don’t fancy. While Indian immigrants were welcomed into society, the old caste system was not. While welcoming members of the Muslim faith, we reject the more fundamentalist of their populations. American culture is no different. Without America there would be no blues, no Hollywood, no Coca-Cola. Welcome to Australia, America!

But as there are parts of every culture we reject, there is a part of America to which we should say a big ‘no, thank you.’

There are at present 926 hate groups operating in the United States. From the regular run of the mill Klansmen through to the more obscure anti-gay, anti-Jewish and anti-liberal co-operatives. Like all hate groups all over the world they blame a small yet significant group of society for all the perceived ills of the world.

Venomous and entirely victim-based, they preach their poison from the pulpit, in the plaza and on the computer. They are the ultimate victim. ‘If only (insert minority here) didn’t exist. Then my life would be apples’. Left wing, right wing, religious, irreligious, hate groups break down a culture like bacteria. So blinded are they by their hate, they don’t care who gets in the way.

So far, even at their most popular, in Australia hate groups have been on the fringe. One could argue that One Nation had the ability to bring these groups into the legitimate world. But that never eventuated. Instead in Australia, hate groups lurk around the outer rim, with the disassociated, the disaffected and the disempowered.

One of the best things about Alice Springs is the ability to achieve pretty much anything you want. But this ability needs to be handled with responsibility.

In Alice Springs, in pubs and coffee shops and community events, you hear things – a moan or a groan here and there and you don’t think too much about it. Mostly you roll your eyes and walk away.

But I’ve heard enough of them. I’ve heard the vigilante talk. I’ve heard the increasing us and them from both us and them. I’ve heard the call to put law and order into the hands of the people.

Call me an alarmist, but if we don’t fix the problem, if we don’t stop the talk then it is only a matter of time before this town becomes ripe picking for an invasion of that most unwelcome aspect of American culture.

In a place where dreams can come true, so can nightmares. The very proud heart of Australia will suffer its own brand of cultural angina.

Show me a period of history where vigilantism has profited a culture one iota and I’ll bring the pitchforks. It doesn’t work in the same way that cancer is never good for the body. If you start attacking the systems that make a community work then the community fails.

That’s the key. What we don’t need in a failing community is accelerate systematic breakdown. We need to make the community healthier. And to do that we need community resolve, political will, substantial investment and a plan.

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