Minister for Fisheries the Hon Kon Vatskalis has announced the date when the last commercial barramundi fishing will occur on the Adelaide River. From 1 July 2004 there will no longer be any walls of nets in the river.

Mr Vatskalis said the move was imperative not only for our fisheries, but for our great Territory lifestyle. “The closure of commercial fishing in this river is a significant step and honours another commitment of the Martin Government.”

“By removing commercial fishing, we will ensure the future of the fishery for the thousands of recreational anglers who access the area. We are protecting our great Territory lifestyle while also boosting our fishing-tourism effort.” Mr Vatskalis said

“This is very good news for both the commercial and recreational barramundi fishing industries. We have removed competition between commercial and recreational interests for the barra stock within the Adelaide River area”. said Mr Vatskalis.

The closure line is on the map included in this article. A line that was agreed at the Aquatic Resource User Group Forum (ARUGF) which includes commercial, recreational and indigenous fishing representatives. To ensure that there is no aggregation of commercial effort due to the closure 1 full licence (10 units of 100 metres of net) has been removed, through buyback, from the commercial barramundi fishery.

It will be very interesting to see what difference the closure will make to the barra fishing in the river over the course of the next 2 years. Evidence we have, particularly for the Daly and McArthur rivers shows a marked improvement in the quality of fishing once the nets are removed.

AFANT has been running a log book project on recreational catch of barramundi on the Adelaide River. The rationale is

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Looking at Limits

INDepth
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PO Box 40694
Casuarina NT 0811
Telephone: (08) 8945 6455
Facsimile: (08) 8945 6055
Email: afant@afant.com.au
Website: www.afant.com.au

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The decision to close the Adelaide River to Commercial Barramundi fishing has now been finalised with the Government announcing the date. The closure will be the 1st of July 2004 and the Government has also bought out a full commercial Barramundi licence from the industry.

The present operator in the Adelaide River will also be compensated to shift his operation elsewhere as he did not wish to sell his licence to the Government. The closure line is something of concern to AFANT if it is placed in the proposed location, which is at the mouth of the Adelaide River.

At the Aquatic Resource User Group Forum (ARUGF) AFANT proposed two closure lines which where further out but those proposals where rejected by the Seafood Council. After much debating and the possibility of holding up the process of the closure, AFANT let the closure line be at the mouth of the river thinking that the Government would look more closely at the location once the decision was made on the date of closure. Each river system should be assessed by Fisheries scientist’s to make sure that the closure line is put in the best place so barra can travel in and out of the river system without the threat of being caught in pro nets.

The Territory Government has made a substantial investment of tax payers money in closing the Adelaide River to Commercial Barramundi fishing and should make sure that they get maximum benefit to recreational anglers otherwise the whole exercise will be of little benefit.

The Community Reference Group (CRG) which was formed by the Territory Government to provide advice on the future land and water use in the Douglas Daly Region has to make some serious decisions in the coming weeks. These decisions will help form the basis for the future development of the Daly region, decisions such as water allocation - how much for development and how much for the environment? Land clearing is another major issue that will have long lasting effects on the Daly River as we know it today. All these decisions will not be made easily as there are several interest groups represented on the CRG committee. AFANT is represented on this committee by John Harrison who has made a major contribution to the understanding of the importance of recreational fishing on the Daly River. It is quite simple to Territorians and interstate anglers that I have spoken to about the future of the Daly River, they just want to be able to catch barra in the Daly the same as they are today in 5,10,20 years time. Just make it so Clare!

There is another major development proposed for gas to be brought onshore at Glyde Point and we are now starting to get a clearer picture of what is proposed. Whilst this may have been spoken about in years gone by it has never been a serious proposal until now. AFANT will be looking very seriously at this project and will be meeting with government departments to get a full understanding of the proposal. I must make comment about the Editorial in the N.T News on Tuesday 8th June 2004 where the editor Nigel Adlam accuses AFANT of hypocrisy for raising concerns about Glyde Point. He says and I quote “The motives of the Amateur Fishermen’s Association in objecting to Glyde Point also demand examination. As with Wickham Point, AFANT raised no objection to the Glyde Point project when it was first developed by the previous government. But now, suddenly the association has come out against it. What possibly could have changed between now and the 1990s” (end of quote). Surely you don’t mean the Government Mr. Adlam? If we cried wolf every time a proposal came across our desk that had no time lines or definite start up dates than you would be accusing us of scare mongering. There are many things that are proposed and only a few that make it and those that do, change many times before the end result so please forgive us for not having the same crystal ball as you. AFANT will continue to represent its members as it sees the need today and into the future.
Once again the club had the mammoth task of organizing this great tournament which was held from the 12th to the 16th May. An event that promised to be terrific as the wet season was kind to us dumping plenty of rain on the Daly Region and filling the flood plains producing a long and plentiful run off. Just the recipe for a fantastic fishing season.

With 41 teams and 123 anglers to contest the ‘tournament with a difference’ enthusiasm was high for the briefing night held at the Aviation Institute, the home of the club. The atmosphere was electric as all were dressed in their team uniform. Dinner was on and the Calcutta saw the teams auctioned. Who would win was anyone’s guess but some teams had faith to buy themselves hoping to get in on the prize money.

It was an early night and many headed down to the river to get a head start. First day was orientation but some of us did not get onto the river as we were waiting for our boat to come off the production line, however it was worth the wait. First task was to find the snags, sand bars and rock bars - where were they after such a wet? But with water levels relatively high in the river and with the tides still fairly neap there was not too much chance of hitting anything.

First night on the river was a further briefing about all the rules and how to tag a fish for the new comers. The tournament is still continuing the project with NT Fisheries in the tag and release program. Only fish above 40 cm are tagged and score points, no fish are kept as the event is catch, tag and release in the shortest possible time, allowing of course for a photo.

Time to meet all the competitors, 52 virgins fished this year the most we have had for a long time, only 11 of those teams were total virgins with the others making up numbers in other teams. They were in for a treat. Day one of the tournament saw us all line up at 7am. Dressed slick or silly, some teams go to a lot of trouble for this but silly seems to be the most popular. For myself, I decided a few years ago that girls just don’t come across as slick so we now go for silly. Final winners were the Kingfishers (by default) dressed in yellow wigs and outfits to match. Slick going to Team Raysea Marine. With an Indian file start and time for a photo shoot past the marshall the teams were off. They had chosen a number the night before which gave them their starting position, luckily for the girls we landed 6th position.

Day one saw the field catching 306 with Burke Staple landing 12 so the event was off to a good start. Day two 281 fish were landed with Mark Cottrell landing 9 fish. Day three 211 fish with Warren Steptoe landing 7. Day four 210 fish and Mark Cottrell landing 8 fish and the last day 244 fish went into the nets and Scott Littler landed 11 fish. A total of 1252 fish for the week not bad considering the last couple years which were a bit disappointing. For the first time in ages no team went fishless which is encouraging as it can be very disheartening to fish hard for 5 days and have nothing to show but it does happen and fortunately for us they continue to return and keep trying.

The week ran smoothly. We ran a power point presentation on 2 nights, which consisted of all the teams at the briefing night, as well as the teams as they assembled at the sail pass. Everyone loves seeing themselves up on the big screen. We also added some great action shots from on the river. Nightly presentations were made to the female and male angler of the day. We finished up on the last night with some light singing entertainment.

Presentations were held at Parliament House on the Speakers Green, which is a great venue. All the virgins have said they will return and a few wanting to branch out from their team and start a new one. This should make for a full field once again for 2005. Look out for some TV coverage of the tournament on ET's segment where there will be a 2 part series in the near future. Anyone wanting photos, information, or statistics of the event give Julie a call on 89888003 ah. This year we have most photos available on CD so I am able to email them out. We will also have available a power point presentation on CD as soon as we can burn copies.

All in all a great week was had by all and we will return in 2005 when once again we will host the tournament with a difference the NT Barramundi Classic, from the 1st to the 5th of May. Anyone wishing to express an interest in fishing in 2005 must put it in writing to the club at PO Box 41866 Casuarina 0811.
The Fisheries Group, in consultation with stakeholder representatives, is currently reviewing the management arrangements applied to the Spanish Mackerel Fishery. The Spanish Mackerel Fishery is a multi-sector fishery involving commercial fishers, fishing tour operators, indigenous fishers and amateur fishers. The wider community also has an interest in maintaining the quality of the fishery.

Figure 1: Illustration of a Spanish mackerel, or narrow barred mackerel as it is otherwise commonly known.

Improving the Management of the Spanish Mackerel Fishery
The objective of the current review is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Spanish Mackerel Fishery. To achieve this objective the following initiatives are to be developed:

- The management arrangements of all commercial fisheries are to be reviewed with the aim of reducing the level of Spanish mackerel harvested as byproduct.
- A ‘total allowable catch’ will be applied to benchmark the sustainable level of harvest for Spanish mackerel.
- The ‘total allowable catch’ will be divided into ‘relative catch shares’ to protect and recognise all fishing sectors.

These changes to the way the fishery is managed will be incorporated in the Spanish Mackerel Fishery Management Plan.

Establishing and implementing a Total Allowable Catch
A total allowable catch will be established to benchmark the amount of Spanish mackerel that may be harvested without affecting the fishery. Based on long-term catch data provided by domestic and foreign vessels, it is believed that up to 450 tonnes of Spanish mackerel can be removed per annum without significantly impacting on the future of the fishery. Therefore, the Spanish Mackerel Fishery Management Plan will incorporate a total allowable catch of 450 tonnes. If the total landings of the Spanish Mackerel Fishery reach 90% (being 405 tonnes) of the total allowable catch, there will be a review of the management arrangements of the fishery.

Establishing and implementing the Relative Catch Shares
Relative catch shares are being established to provide greater certainty for each fishing sector. The relative catch shares will be based on harvest levels identified from the National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey and will be incorporated into the Spanish Mackerel Management Plan. If any fishing sector exceeds its relative catch share, the management arrangements that apply to that sector will be reviewed.

The volume of Spanish mackerel removed by the commercial fishing sector is already known from compulsory catch records. From these records, using the same timeframe as the national survey, we are able to determine the relative catch share for the commercial fishing sector is 258 t per annum. Based on the same approach, the relative catch share of fishing tour operators was determined to be 9.7 tonnes.

As amateur fishers are not required to provide equivalent catch records, the Fisheries Group consulted with amateur fishers to establish the relative catch share of this sector. The relative catch share of the amateur fishing sector was determined to be 52.3 tonnes. Using the same approach, the relative catch share of indigenous fishing sector was determined to be 3.1 tonnes.

The total removal of Spanish mackerel from the waters of the Northern Territory by all sectors is estimated to be 322.8 tonnes. The commercial fishing sector accounts for 80% of all Spanish mackerel removed, with the amateur fishing sector accounting for 16%, fishing tour operators 3%, and the indigenous fishing sector 1% (see figure 2).

Figure 2: The relative catch shares of each fishing sector of the Spanish Mackerel Fishery.

Making the Changes Work
The Fisheries Group, working with stakeholders, is currently rewriting the Spanish Mackerel Management Plan to incorporate the total allowable catch and relative catch shares. In the near future, the draft of the revised Management Plan will be released for public comment. Amateur fishers will be notified of the release of the document through the AFANT newsletter and the NT News.
45 teams fronted up to the Banyan Farm on Sat 24 Apr eager to get among the fish. The big question begging to be answered – “Can anyone knock off Goldcans”. After a superb dinner and the official opening by Kon Vatskalis (Minister for Fisheries), teams were presented with their showbags.

Orientation day arrived and after the Anzac day dawn service most teams went exploring looking for the best places to set up over the next 5 days. Our own Phil Clark discovered the pain of fishing the day before official scoring when he landed a metre plus barra, sorry Phil only counts after the canon.

The official start of the competition arrived with Grant Denyer from the Channel 7 Sunrise program doing the canon honours (and being scared witless) and setting mayhem into action.

Day 1 proved to be outstanding with 9 fish over a metre and a total of 175 landed, leading to predictions of record scores and other outlandish improbables. Ken Brown proved to be the king of the day with 3 of those metre fish. Needless to say Team Stressless had started the week by jumping out of the blocks, however the team name seemed to catch up with them for the remainder of the week. Team Woodstock and the perennial Offshore Scorpions filling the minors at this early stage. Leading individuals were Ken Brown, Michael Dickinson and Melissa Pain.

Day 2 produced another outstanding day with Chris Bentley (Broomite) from Team Reelfast landing a 119cm monster on his threadline gear. Along with some other good fish this moved the team well into contention. 205 fish landed moved the total along to 380 for the comp. Missing from the leader board was the indomitable Gold Cans. Bill and Neville were heard to mutter on the river, “bloody Buffalo, every time he hooks a fish on a hard lure he pulls the hooks out, we will have to go back to our creek.” Stressless remains at the top of the heap but Reelfast are coming on strong after their good day. Team Twocan filling the minors. Brownie still leads the individual despite not catching a fish today with Trevor Meadows and Dean Gebert catching fast.

Day 3 and the fish landed count increased again to 285 with the largest being 98cm from Deano of Team Triple DDD. With the smaller tides coming and the reducing numbers of large fish around many teams were starting to target the snags and this would appear to be reflected in the scores. Reelfast now overtaking Stressless (living up to their name) for first with Classic Lures moving up to third position. Individual standing’s remained the same with Brownie finally awaking from his slumber and starting to land fish again.

Day 4 saw an incredible 317 fish caught bringing the total up to 994 for the week. The neap tides are now having an effect and several game plans that didn’t pay off too well early in the week were now coming to the fore. Notable among these being Classic lures, who had literally made friends with every branch, twig and leaf on the Tackle shop. The scores were not tallied on the scoreboards on the night which lead to many tall tales and just flatout downright lies around the bar that night. Reelfast still lead from a closing Classic lures with the Stressless ones still hanging in there. Brownie continued to lead the individual effort with Chris Bentley from Reelfast and Rohan Short from Classic lures closing in.

The final day of competition arrived with several teams in the running. Metre fish returned today with Bryce Guest (101 cm) from Purple Patch finally finding one (purple patch that is) bringing the total of metre fish to 14 for the week. Total fish landed for the week was 1180. After great week of fishing Classic Lures (Rob Gaden, Rohan Short, and Peter Washington) just managed to get up by 99 points from Reelfast (John Rushford, Mick Rushford, Chris Bentley). Ken Brown managed to hold on the lead of the individual section for the whole week despite the little rest in the middle.

ChampionTeam Classic Lures - 3643 points Champion Angler Ken Brown - 1781 points Champion Local Team Atsea Team Twocan - 2560 points Champion Interstate Team Reelfast - 3544 points Champion Mixed Team Stressless - 2623 points Largest Barra Chris Bentley - 119cm

The answer to the question had been provided, “Goldcans can be beaten”. Neville and Bill finally have the excuse to get rid of that old bearded bloke at last.
## Lets look at the limits!

*By Rohan “Shorty” Short*

When I was a kid I lived on the Katherine River. I couldn’t wait for school to end so I could go fishing. Sooty Grunter were the staple catch, occasionally however, I would catch a barra. Nothing big mind you, 30 – 50 cm was the average size. I tell you though, the smile couldn’t be wiped from my face when this 8 year old hunter and gatherer brought mum home a barra for tea. These days kids can’t do that unless its 55cm or more and I for one think that it’s a shame.

I am a staunch supporter of bag limits, however my opinion is that the current regulation needs an overhaul. The bag limit of 5 is fine, it’s the 55cm minimum that troubles me. I’ll put the scenario to you. Over the last 2 months the fishing on the Daly River has been tremendous with plenty of fish from 80cm to over a meter being caught. I’m willing to wager that plenty of boats caught and kept their bag limits with several large barra amongst them. All power to them, its all above board and legal.

**Scenario 2**

Old mate fishes off the crossing, catches and keeps 5 x 40cm barra - go directly to jail.

Question – Which scenario causes the most harm to the fishery?

I’m not a scientist, though I’m willing to bet dozens perhaps even hundreds of juvenile Barra die for every fish that reaches maturity. Those 80 cm plus fish are already, or very close to, a breeding age. Having spoken to scientists in this field, it was my impression that they were very much in favour of keeping small fish and releasing the larger models.

It’s probably been 20 years since bag limits were introduced and many of the rivers then were in decline. The big fish did not seem to be in the abundance that they are now and so the 50cm limit set at the time was probably on the money. For those of you that are not aware the limit was increased to 55cm some time later.

I put it to you that the fishery has progressed to a stage where another change is in order. Drop the minimum legal size to around 40cm and put a bag limit of 2 on fish over say 80-85cm. Lets start protecting the breeders and letting the kids bring home a barra for their mum.

There are those that say bag limits don’t work without enforcement. I say bag limits are self-regulating and it’s only a small minority that disregards the rules. This I understand will seem like a preposterous idea to many though I feel it has some merit and is worth some consideration.

Although I am a current AFANT committee member and my opinion is not necessarily reflected by AFANT or the other members, I’m sure they would be interested in you feelings and ideas on this issue.

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### 2004 QUARTER 3 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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<th>Location</th>
<th>Host</th>
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<tr>
<td>28th &amp; 29th August 2004</td>
<td>Humminbird Corroboree Park Challenge</td>
<td>Corroboree Park Tavern</td>
<td>Palmerston Game Fishing Club</td>
<td>Dennis Smart</td>
<td>0418 891 184 or 08 8984 4777 <a href="http://www.palmerstongamefishing.com.au">www.palmerstongamefishing.com.au</a></td>
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<td>4th &amp; 5th September 2004</td>
<td>Barra Bonanza</td>
<td>Mary River</td>
<td>Northern Waters Angling Club</td>
<td>John Pomeroy</td>
<td>08 8927 3203</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th &amp; 12th September 2004</td>
<td>Boat, Motor &amp; Leisure Show</td>
<td>Marrara Indoor Stadium</td>
<td>Costa Simeon</td>
<td>08 8941 4720 or 0408 816 927</td>
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to record the number of fish, size and location of these fish and the catch per unit of effort (CPUE). Not surprisingly the figures do not paint a good picture for the Adelaide River when compared to two other rivers where similar logbook projects have been running.

The data shows a catch per unit of effort as follows:

- Roper River: 1 fish per 1.44 hrs
- Victoria River: 1 fish per 2.06 hrs
- Adelaide River: 1 fish per 19.5 hrs

Further anecdotal evidence comes from Mr Col Cordingley (Cords) who is recognised nationally as a legend in sport fishing in Australia. He has won 3 Barra Classics being champion angler twice and 3 times runner up, won 3 Barra Nationals being champion angler twice and 2 times runner up, won 2 Kakadu Klash and 2 times runner up and caught the first black marlin in a tournament in the NT. So his credentials as a first class sport fisherman are unquestionable.

Cords fished the Adelaide River on 20 March 2003 with two interstate anglers, both of whom are equally renowned and well credentialed anglers, and made the following comment on his log sheet about the fishing.

"Not one strike in 8 hours. The river does not have the fish it used to have. I fished with two anglers from Cairns, Jack Erskine and Laurie Woodbridge and they do not want to go back to the Adelaide River again. They say the impoundment fishing in Qld is better."

Since the closure of the Daly River to commercial barramundi fishing in 1989 the CPUE for the Barra Classic tournament has shown a dramatic increase, on average, over the past 15 years. In fact the average catch of fish per day from 1990 – 2004 has been 1.33 fish per angler per day. The average in the two years of 1985 & 86 when the Classic was held on the Daly whilst commercial fishing was still allowed in the river was 0.24 fish per angler per day. That is a staggering 554% increase in CPUE since the closure.

In addition, the CPUE for the commercial sector who fish outside the mouth of the Daly River in Anson Bay has also shown a steady increase since 1989. So we have a situation where both sectors have benefited from the closure.

We congratulate the NT Government for this important initiative and we believe the quality of recreational fishing in the Adelaide River will improve over the next 12 – 24 months. Our log books will assist in determining that and we strongly encourage anglers who want to assist in our research to contact us for their own log book.

PO Box 40694
Casuarina NT 0811.
Enquiries to: Ph: 89 456 455 Fx: 89 456 055 Email: afant@afant.com.au