WEAKER DOLLAR CAN WORK FOR ALICE! Report by ERWIN CHLANDA.

Lifting the standard of tour operators through accreditation, creating opportunities for visitors to mix with locals, and targeting a bigger slice of the Territory's promotion budget at overseas markets would maximise opportunities created by the falling dollar. This is the view of the only NT based director of the Australian Tourist Commission (ATC), Alice Springs' Paul Ah Chee Ngala. He says the Olympics have increased tourist numbers by 490,000 over last year's four million, and overseas visitors are expected to double in the next 10 years. But Alice Springs still has a majority of budget travelers Ð some 60 per cent Ð and time spent in town is dropping. Says Mr Ah Chee: "Retail operators from art shops to cafes are noticing that people are coming in but they are whisked away on various tours, three to five day experiences, to Uluru, Kings Canyon, the Western MacDonnellls. "The people aren't staying on the streets, they're not shopping. They're jumping on the bus and they're going out of town. "That affects the retail operators who rely on these people being here for at least one day."

"These tours are being sold overseas," says Mr Ah Chee. "What's missing in that is the people, and that's where Aboriginal tourism comes in." The door is open, it's slightly ajar. It's creaking. "We just need to put some oil in the hinges and start pushing it wide open." Mr Ah Chee is the principal of the Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre. "I get a lot of requests from people saying we just want to talk to people. "People are big communicators. That one on one communication is something that can be explored, not lectures, but conversations." Mr Ah Chee says tourists these days want to be "informed, they go out of their way to get information. "And it needs to be correct and interesting and authentic. "People want to have fun and to interact. They want to be able to say, I've increased my knowledge base. They're thirsting for knowledge. "Maybe Alice Springs can become the conversation town. "Come to Alice Springs and have a conversation, pastoralists talking about the cattle industry, Aborigines about traditions, artists about art. "There's a multitude of things but at present there isn't much of a two-way exchange and there's a fantastic opportunity." He says there is a good case for operators' accreditation mooted at a recent meeting of the Central Australian Tourism Industry Association (CATIA). This would help gain business from the "high end market". Says Mr Ah Chee: "We need to be looking at the markets we're working in, the type of visitor we want to attract, and how we develop our products and our accreditation. "Through our state and territory tourism commissions and our regional tourism associations we can control what type of tour operator is out there." If we get that out into the market place ... if you come to Australia you get a good type of product." Mr Ah Chee says at present "very few" operators are accredited. ACCREDITATION "There's going to come a time when operators who don't have accreditation will find it more difficult because accredited operators will be preferred." It will be a matter of quality."

Mr Ah Chee is calling for "a consolidated approach as to who markets Australia, who brands Australia. "There needs to be more cohesion between the states and territories tourist commissions and the ATC. "That's something that will be looked at very closely." International campaigns "should be run through the ATC but utilising the resources of the states and territories tourist commissions." He says the commissions are already working together but there needs to be a "more formalised" relationship.

LETTERS: Lim dodging sewage issue: "gate to town is a cesspool".

Sir,- Your lead story of last week, "Mozzie disease crisis ... Lim mum", reminded me of a letter I composed, but then did not forward anywhere, at the time of Dr Lim's appointment as Minister for Central Australia. I had listened to his ABC radio interview wherein he enthusiastically promised to be "aggressive" and "good" for Central Australia, I decided to wait and see. The waiting continues, there is not much to see. The dubious tactics employed by the CLP to install Dr Lim to his elevated position ensures his compliance to the hierarchy. Aggression will not earn him favour where it counts. More likely he would lose his long-coveted role. He will not rock the boat; he will do as he is told. I cynically believe his keeping "mum" and dodging interviews is proof positive of his submission to directives from afar. Regarding the sewage saga: I recently suggested to interstate friends that instead of a trip to the USA, they divert
their finances to come and see the beauty of Central Australia, so flush with vegetation after our recent summer rains. I am now hesitant to pursue the invitation, made when I'd forgotten briefly the disgusting river of effluent (treated or otherwise) that we, as residents, pass by en route to town and home again. This also applies to visitors travelling the South Stuart Highway. We have our own name for it: S-H-I-T CREEK. In the early morning the stench is sometimes so sickening we close the car windows and switch on the air-conditioner. We only drive past; other unfortunates have it virtually at their front door, give or take a few metres. In February 1961 I arrived in this dust-smothered town with its population of approximately 4,500; with its backyard dunnies and the night-cart system of sewage collection. I was here when all the streets were dug up and pipes laid as the town was up-graded to a modern sewerage system that has failed to keep up with the increased population of 25 - 27,000, plus tourist numbers. Never, in 40 years of continuous residence have I felt so offended, ashamed and embarrassed as I do at the prospect of showing off Alice Springs to visitors. The state of the Todd River from the reed beds at Chinaman Creek (Gap bridge) to south of the farm area causeway is revolting. The majority of floating and bogged debris appears to be shining wine bladders and plastic shopping bags. I've already mentioned "flush", "bogged" and "bladder", ... get the idea??PAWA officials have the effrontery to blame another natural event for the town's public health menace of disease spreading mosquitoes, namely, rain. Rain is a blessing in this desert environment. Obviously the big bosses of PAWA were not here when Alice Springs town water supply consisted of a few small tanks on top of Billygoat Hill. Inept government policies have brought about this town's major health problem. Do government members' children or grandchildren stand beside an open effluent overflow as they wait for the school bus D as the children who live at St. Mary's do? Are their frail aged family members subjected to the health risks as are the residents and workers at the Old Timers' establishment? It is said that a community is judged by its treatment of the young and the elderly. Our Government and the town fathers show where their interests lie, to their shame. I am incensed. Get the priorities right. Clean up, restore and reorganize the southern entrance/exit to Alice Springs which is currently a cesspool, and looks it.
Patricia Nelson
Alice Springs

Sir,- I write to thank you for Kieran Finnane's article "Before and After for Alice's old cemetery" in last week's paper. To say the response was overwhelming would be an understatement. From 6pm, Wednesday, 14 March until 10am, Friday, 16 March I have received over 100 phone calls in relation to the article. Many of the callers were relatives of the folks published under "Did you know them?", with other callers just wishing Rotary all the best and asking Rotary to continue with the project of marking unmarked graves in the Memorial Drive Cemetery. Many of the callers have committed themselves to putting pen to paper about what they know about the persons named in the article and it is our club's commitment to ensure that the information received will be documented and inevitably will be a real source of information on our early pioneers.
David Mortimer
Coordinator, Rotary Club of Alice Springs

Sir,- I refer to the article in the Alice Springs News of March 7, entitled "Eddie may tip the scales in Braitling". I wish to advise that the views expressed in this article are my own, and do not reflect the views of Tangentyere Council.
Eddie Taylor,
Alice Springs

Sir,- The Country Liberal Party candidate in Braitling states in his introductory newsletter to the electorate that the Country Liberal Party is independent of mainstream political parties. Is it just an accident that the current national president of the Liberal Party is former CLP chief minister Shane Stone and the CLP policy on the new tax system is an unquestioning one hundred percent support for John Howard's GST? How independent is that? Mr Harvey please explain.
Vince Jeisman
Alice Springs

Sir,- Your readers may be interested to note that I have again been approached by a polling company to provide my rare and remarkable insights into their political tealeaf-reading strategies. The latest strategy involved asking me to join a focus group in Alice Springs on Wednesday evening last week. Of course I readily agreed to add my two penn'orth around the table at the Mercure Diplomat - even before Ruth, from the company Northern Field Services, had mentioned the fee or the refreshments! But then Ruth asked me whether anyone in my family was connected with the
media or public relations industries. That's when I was caught out: I did admit to submitting the occasional article to the Bushranger column in the Sunday Territorian. Then she dropped me like the proverbial. Apparently journalists and assorted hangers-on are poorly regarded.
Meredith Campbell
Independent Candidate for Araluen

NURSE FOR 20 YEARS: BUSH KIDS 'NOW HEALTHIER'. Report by KIERAN FINNANE.

Nursing in remote Aboriginal communities in Central Australia is a "dramatically different and better" experience than it was 20 years ago, for both nurse and patient, says Sabina Knight (at right). After 24 years working in rural and remote health, most of them in The Centre, Sabina has been awarded the Dr Loui Ariotti Award for Excellence in her profession. An optimistic story about Aboriginal health is rare, but it's one that Sabina is keen to tell. Looking back to her arrival in the early Òeighties at Indulkana, in the far north of South Australia, as a new recruit to the community-controlled Nganampa Health Service, she sees considerable change for the better: "There's no doubt about it, health of children in remote communities has dramatically improved."Their families' better access to food, while it is still less than desirable, has meant that they are able to manage and control the food children and mothers have."The improvement is not just related to nutrition. It's also related to the fact that people have more control over their lives. "I think it demonstrates particularly the impact of Aboriginal health workers out bush."Together with remote area nurses, they have been able to work with families to identify the critical moments in children's lives, to recognise the importance of early management of diarrhoea and the other infectious conditions like pneumonia. "That's well and truly understood: people present to the clinic very early. "It's quite rare for us to send an acutely dehydrated child to hospital now."Acute infections like diarrhoea and pneumonia were the most common problems back in the Òeighties. If patients presented early enough health staff could make them better quickly "with fabulous simple drugs". There was some chronic disease, like diabetes and renal failure, but nothing like there is now. But on this score too, the future looks more hopeful, says Sabina. "The really challenging part of remote work now is dealing with the chronic conditions. Five days of antibiotics won't make them go away. "You know people are essentially on a downhill spiral, it's just a matter of how fast that's going to be, and how effective we can be in helping people understand what their options are. "But at the end of the day, most of those problems were laid down before birth, they're not due to lifestyle choices people made in adulthood."Understanding this point and seeing improved health among children and mothers leads Sabina to believe that some inroads are being made on the chronic conditions."It's easy to be quite negative about the chronic ill health of the people you are dealing with, and to forget about those who are doing quite well."People are incredibly resilient and the cultural vitality out bush is just outstanding."There's plenty of reason to be distressed and we mustn't live with a false sense of optimism, but we mustn't lose sight of the fact that there is optimism."If you are really gloomy about what you do, then you're not at all inspiring, you're a pain to be around. People have got enough pain and negativity without you joining in!"As a young person, Sabina didn't think about spending her life as a nurse, but she did think about spending it "in the bush". Bush was where she came from and she's proud of it. Her passion was horse-riding in general and rodeo in particular. She grew up on a cattle station, west of Wee Waa in outback New South Wales. There were four generations of her family on the property and the rest within a 10 kilometre radius. "grandparents, aunties and uncles to burn"! The social and personal support she had gives her great admiration for those grandmothers out bush who struggle to grow up children without it. Sabina was better equipped than many for the rough challenge of remote area nursing. "I'd spent a lot of time on the road with rodeoing and with cattle, so I knew a bit about being without electric lights and stoves."I knew which end was the working end of a spanner and I could fix a tyre."But she still had to adjust to the experience of having a blowout on the old South Road "when it was six hours before another car would come along, and the nuts were jammed, and all the effort in the world and a cheater bar just wasn't going to get them undone". She learnt how to sit in the shade and wait, and always carried a book and a box of matches under the seat: "You can always light a fire and have a read!"Roads are another thing that has changed for the better. "You couldn't imagine being on the South Road now without seeing a car within the hour."But in her role as Senior Lecturer with the Centre for Remote Health (where she spends half her time, the other half still out bush), Sabina continues to place high value on "nuts and bolts skills"."I think the Toyota is the most expensive and dangerous piece of medical equipment we've got. "You've got to know how to change a tyre, how to bleed a diesel, because that's the stuff that can save lives. "Understand your radio or your sat phone and understand that none of that technology's 100 per cent reliable. There are times when it won't work. Don't panic, don't blow your stack." Practical preparedness aside, Sabina says it is also essential for the remote area practitioner to understand the environment they are going to
Notwithstanding the remoteness of the risk of nuclear attack on the joint defense facilities, there is a disaster plan for Alice Springs in the event of a nuclear attack on the US base. The report cited above states (page 13, paragraphs 44-45): "Not withstanding the remoteness of the risk of nuclear attack on the joint defense facilities, there is..."
an overwhelming incentive for precautionary action to be taken in this area. Among the issues that might be examined are how best to arrange: preparation of evacuation plans for each of the communities; development of procedures for warning the communities about a nuclear attack; conduct of shelter surveys and the development of shelter plans; initiation of liaison programs by State and Territory Government emergency service organizations with local communities, to make them aware of the effects of nuclear weapons and civil defense arrangements for their protection; and transport and communications, medical, food and clothing requirements in the event of nuclear attack. None of these recommendations have been followed. In the absence of the base being removed, these remain, generally, the most practical measures available, although further work could be done to refine them. New disaster and emergency plans for the town are currently in draft form and it is not known when they will be complete. Although they do not cover the possibility of a nuclear attack, they do define the responsibilities of the various agencies. Unfortunately, there is no public comment period for these plans. Upon completion copies will be lodged with the various agencies concerned and with some libraries. On contacting the US base I discovered that plans for base personnel in the event of an attack are not available to the public. John McCarthy, Deputy Chief of Facility, explained that the Territory Emergency Services would be responsible for assistance to the town population in the event of an attack. This seems to imply that the base does not see itself as responsible for such a contingency and that the town of Alice Springs wears both the risk of being the potential target and the responsibility for coping with and cleaning up after an attack. A group of doctors, coordinated by Philip Nitschke, who analysed the Department of Defence document in 1988 agreed that evacuation would be the best method of preventing injury and death on a large scale. Evacuation however fails to cover the contingency of an accidental or guerrilla attack. Further, there is no evacuation plan for the whole town. Emergency Services do, however, have protocols for developing evacuation plans in the event of an evacuation being necessary. Evacuation also depends on governments having an excellent idea of potential threat and being both brave and caring enough to initiate an evacuation procedure at an early stage of any perceived threat, despite the financial costs. Intelligence gathered at the base might well permit the Australian Government the ability to initiate such an evacuation, but in general it seems the base does not supply the Australian Government with significant intelligence. Whether the US would supply intelligence of that sort may also depend upon strategic considerations. The US might feel compelled to maintain secrecy about how much it does know and what sources it is monitoring: an evacuation of Alice Springs might indicate to a potential enemy that the US is able to monitor messages concerning an attack on the base. It may be relevant to note that recent bombings of Iraq did not result in any notification of the Alice Springs population that there might be a threat of counter attack. Evacuation in response to an attack that has already been launched is not viable, as the available warning is likely to be less than one hour. Local head of Emergency Services, Iain Burns, explained that a nuclear attack would be dealt with by the current disaster plan. He accepted that a nuclear attack would raise particularly difficult problems, especially the electromagnetic pulse (more on this next week), which would knock out the electrical power grid and most if not all electrically dependent communication systems. He asserted, however, that that draft disaster plan should allow a strategy to be developed that would endeavor to meet that eventuality. Specific disaster plans are only developed for scenarios that seem to be a particularly high risk. Mr Burns said a nuclear attack on Pine Gap is deemed a very, very low risk. Internal sources have told me that the Alice Springs Hospital does not have a plan to cope with a nuclear emergency, although plans are in place to deal with other sorts of emergency and large increases in patients. The hospital has apparently not stockpiled selected treatments, such as iodine tablets, against the possibility of a nuclear attack and would be unable to cope with a massive influx of burns, breaks, severe cuts and radiation poisonings.

ROD'S PEN MIGHTIER THAN HIS BRUSH?

I'm not gun-crazy in any sense. I think the only time I was into guns was aged around 15 when I did a bit of rabbiting over the Xmas holidays on a cousin's sheep farm in Central Victoria. But any time I told the men at Whitegate, an Aboriginal fringe camp on Alice Springs' eastern perimeter, that I'd driven out of town, they invariably asked if I'd taken a gun and had I shot anything. Why travel so far and waste an opportunity? Though in nearly 20 years in the Centre I've yet to fire a shot, I still like to go hunting with the men on foot after kangaroos. The first time I took a carload, back in 1986, was a treat. We drove out towards Emily soak, my little Subaru station wagon packed to the gun-whales with adults and kids. Xavier Neal indicated to me to slow down. I tensed up. He got out and cocked the .22. His brother, Eric, said it was an anthill. Anyone can make mistakes. But we hadn't gone a hundred metres when Xavier again asked me to stop. He crept over the trough of the steeply cambered track. This time, even I could see it
was a horse. "That nanthe Xavier," chided Jennifer Johnson, "not kere aherre." David Johnson quietly relieved him of the rifle. Hunting euro and kangaroo sharpened our senses. Tracking, assessing scats, movements and particular birdcalls all informed us as we hunted. They clustered in on our senses. While we hunted our talk was minimal and replaced by gestures. I was told that day to remove my red-checked shirt as it would be easily seen by kangaroos.

David and Xavier made elaborate hand movements to indicate the location of animals. We stooped and walked slowly over the low ridges, keeping in the cover of rocks and trees, and upwind of the quarry while retaining as straight a line as possible. The crusted quartz, David had told me, were the shit of the mythological witchetty grubs as they made their procession towards Emily Gap. I followed his steps, soundless in the soft sand. He'd slipped his clacking thongs up over his ankles. Once or twice there was a snorting and a thump on the ground as we surprised our quarry and ourselves. The Ôroo would dash off. Maybe two or three of them. David saw what I could not see until my vision followed the barrel of his gun. He crouched on one knee on a ridge of quartz and cranked a bullet into the chamber, paused, then stood and walked closer. My tension mounted as we closed in. It seemed we were getting too close. Surely it would sense us from 30 metres. A misplaced step on a twig. A shirt catching on a bramble. Any twitch from us would give us away. My entire body felt like an eye. The Ôroo turned in our direction and stopped munching. It seemed to know we were there. David crouched again and squeezed the trigger. The crack of the gun seemed incommensurate with death, inconsequential to the expanse of the surrounding plain. The shot separated off and was swallowed by the scrub. But the bullet was not lost. It collided with the buck's cranium, splitting and removing a sizeable chunk of jaw. As if ignorant of the connection between the crack and the fizzing trajectory of the .308, it had leaped at the sound but towards the bullet, tumbling mid-flight to the gravel. A clean kill with no damage to the edible choice cuts. It was so large we butchered it on the spot, each of us lugging a quarter of the load to the car. When we got back to camp the meat was divvied up systematically. It was so succulent. And the hunt was mentioned on many occasions and each feature of it discussed. Giving meat was a big factor in the camp's reciprocal dealings. David, Xavier and Eric Neal proved their worth through meat provision and sharing. The places we walked over were remembered for the food they had provided. When I first killed a perentie by whacking it on the back of the neck with old Old Mr Johnson's walking stick on the Andado Road, he inspected its fatty legs pressing his fingers into its thighs."You be proper desert line man, now my son." He was as pleased with me as I was with myself. Every time we passed this spot on our way to his homelands in the Simpson Desert, he would remind me of the pleasure those fat legs and tail had given him. We'd walk for three to four hours on hunts like that first time, carrying only guns and water in two litre cordial bottles. David helped me identify various scats, the cubed Euro, kere arenge, and the soft-cornered plains kangaroo, kere aherre. Euro, the hairy one, was prized for its sweet meat, nurtured by grazing on the herbs in hilly country. It was easier to make sightings of Ôroos on cloudy days. As my eyes learnt what to look for so my expectation of seeing kangaroos increased. The women and smaller kids stayed under the rivergums by a fire. Short lengths of these gums were hacked from the banks and carved with tomahawks into lizards, snakes, and music sticks. The women brought bits of fencing wire and rotated them in the embers to blaze simple, repetitive patterns on the artefacts. The kids helped their mothers scrape water from a soakage in the creek. The billies soon simmered away. The women also brought flour and syrup to make Johnnycake or damper. It was just as well. More often than not we returned empty-handed from hunting. It would be a distortion to present this form of hunting as the exclusive or preferred practice of Arrernte men. If a Toyota was available, the men would drive it hard across all sorts of terrain and shoot Ôroos and euros from the cabin. This method did guarantee meat. The dead Ôroos were tied with their own sinew to the bull-bar or slung on roof racks; air-conditioned meat, fly-free for the run home. In places with water and good feed, kangaroo populations were obliterated at rates unknown to the fathers of most of the men in camp. The kids also demonstrated skills from my moving station wagon. Even without guns I'd drive in close to the quarry and the kids would pick off an eye with a slingshot, causing the Ôroo to stumble, and a dog to leap from the car and tackle it. The boys finished the job by clubbing the head. And there were also the road kills. Once or twice when I had passed a freshly hit 'roo that had been collected by a truck I would heave it into the back of the wagon and run it to camp.

"Where you been gettim?" "North Road, on the sixteen mile," I replied. "Oh, that Stephens' mob. That okay, that one." 'Roo steaks were available in the supermarkets. But the families didn't seek them. Old Mr Johnson, Myra and Patrick Hayes preferred minced meat or lamb chops. They had a problem with the supermarket kangaroo. No one in camp could verify whose country the meat came from, what part of the animal had been butchered. The Ôroo tails were a different matter. The small, local grocer shops kept freezers of furred tails and ran a brisk trade. I'd see older Aboriginal women with plastic carry bags bobbing with this ludicrous luggage, protruding tails lapping at their thighs. Perhaps the same questions didn't apply to these fatty morsels.