Fishing

Keeping

REGULAR visitors to Corroboree Billabong over the years would be acquainted with the annual Barra-mundi Barracade conducted by NT Fisheries Research. This experiment, as it is called, began back in 1987 and usually took place for a week just below Catfish Island on the big lagoon.

Fisheries would lock off a 400m stretch with small-mesh netting that went all the way from the surface to the bottom so every fish inside could not get out.

Scientists and staff then would use different mesh-sized nets to catch every fish in the enclosed area. These would be measured and tagged, with scale samples also removed from some for ageing purposes.

The results of the Barracade would be used to establish the statistics on the barra population at Corroboree; for example, the dominant year class or classes in the big waterway; years of good recruitment and bad recruitment; and the presence of the Red Spot virus which, in recent years, seems to have diminished considerably.

I remember one year back in the 1990s when the extrapolated population for the whole lagoon from the contained count was much more than a million barra.

The Barramundi Barracade normally is held in early to mid September, and I usually get a call from Fisheries to let people know it is on. Having not heard anything about it for a couple of years, I rang up Thor Sanders who is the Principal Fisheries Research Scientist.

Thor explained the program had been extended across the whole Mary River system and also now include the Daly River.

Instead of a barricade, however, the researchers now rely solely on electrofishing survey techniques. Basically, they zap the water along a bank with an electrofisher and stun fish which float to the surface where they are collected and sampled before release.

“Over the years of the Barramundi Barracade, we have learnt several things about the barra stocks, but mainly that the abundance of barra has varied greatly from year to year and that successful recruitment relies on habitat,’’ Thor said.