Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee Update

December 2011

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Proposed developments such as INPEX and the East Arm Wharf Expansion are moving through environmental assessment and management processes with public input at appropriate stages. It is clear from media focus and community advice that the importance and protection of Darwin Harbour is high on the radar.

I am pleased to report that the development of the Darwin Harbour Integrated Monitoring and Research Program is well underway. I chair the Interim Management Committee (IMC) which is overseeing this process and the IMC has endorsed the work-plan. You can read more about the program in the article on this page.

Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee (DHAC) responded to the East Arm Wharf Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with concerns over a lack of detail. The Supplement to this EIS has been submitted and the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport are now assessing the EIS under the Environment Assessment Act. The Department will provide the Assessment Report to the Minister under statutory timeframes and it will be publicly available in due course. It is hoped that DHAC concerns will be picked up.

DHAC has also provided a submission on the Public Environment Report for the Effluent Rising Main Duplication Project [2011] prepared by Power and Water Corporation. DHAC holds general concern regarding the increase of discharge at the current outfall location prior to extending the outfall.

DHAC continues to push for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Darwin Harbour region. A SEA should underpin the land (and water) use planning for the region. A SEA should address cumulative effects of the various developments and operations currently underway, and proposed, for the harbour. Such a strategic approach would reduce concern about the environmental impact of individual developments being considered in isolation of each other.

I look forward to 2012 and encourage the community to provide their views to the DHAC so that we can continue to represent the community in our mission towards the long term protection and sustainable development of the Darwin Harbour region.

Bill Stuchbery
Chair

Message from the Chair

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Working Together to Assess Harbour Health

Under a new program initiated in recent months, the Darwin Harbour Integrated Monitoring and Research Program, industry, Governments and research organisations are working together to better understand and monitor the health of Darwin Harbour.

Over the coming year, the Interim Management Committee (IMC) for the program is intending to review the current monitoring and research in the Harbour, look at how information might be shared, and develop a list of monitoring and research projects required to address knowledge gaps.

The program was initiated by the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee, as part of the Darwin Harbour Strategy. The Territory Government endorsed the strategy and the concept of the program in June 2010 and is providing support and resources to help get the program up and running.

Key industries are also supporting the Program, including INPEX, ConocoPhillips and OZ Minerals. Power and Water Corporation, Darwin Port Corporation, Darwin City Council and the Department of Defence are also lending their support, as are Charles Darwin University and the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

The IMC commenced operations in August 2011 and is hoping to have the Darwin Harbour Integrated Monitoring and Research Program designed and underway by December 2012.

www.harbourplan.nt.gov.au
In August 2011, in response to closures of some Darwin Harbour beaches due to elevated bacteria levels, the Territory Government established a taskforce to investigate the sources of these bacteria. The taskforce is chaired by Charles Darwin University Professor Andrew Campbell and includes senior officers from the Territory and Local Governments. The taskforce is also consulting with the DHAC and the Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee.

The taskforce will report its findings and recommendations through two reports. The Initial Report, which will be available in December 2011, will outline what we know and what we need to know about the sources of bacteria on Darwin Harbour beaches. The Final Report is to be made available early next year and will outline actions to address sources of bacteria and recommend an ongoing monitoring program for Darwin Harbour beaches.

While the work of the taskforce continues, the Territory Government is continuing to monitor Darwin Harbour beaches. Beach monitoring results can be found through the Department of Health website www.health.nt.gov.au.

Aquatic Health Unit Update

The Aquatic Health Unit of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) continue full steam ahead on a range of projects related to the health of Darwin Harbour. Mapping water quality indicators, monitoring tidal creeks, looking at bioindicators, harbour sites and tidal cycles along with identifying phytoplankton are some of the activities undertaken. This year’s Darwin Harbour region Report Cards are close to completion and a link will be available on the DHAC website.

Phase 2 of the Darwin Harbour Water Quality Protection Plan continues with activities such as an evaluation of market-based instruments by a Charles Darwin University student. A full update is available online at www.nt.gov.au/water
In December 2010, the Territory Government announced additional funding for high priority monitoring and research activities in Darwin Harbour. Some of the projects have begun this year and include assessment of the extent and condition of seagrass, to investigate and monitor fish biodiversity and comprehensively map and describe the seabed habitats of Darwin Harbour.

Darwin Harbour provides a unique opportunity for people to see dugongs in the wild because their favourite food is located off Casuarina and Vestey’s beaches. Seagrass meadows are also the main diet of green turtles and provide habitats for many smaller marine animals including commercially important species such as prawns and fish.

A monitoring program for Darwin Harbour seagrass will join Seagrass-Watch, a global scientific, non-destructive, seagrass assessment and monitoring program. This is a partnership program between community, qualified scientists and the data users (environment management agencies) aiming to raise awareness on the condition and trend of nearshore seagrass ecosystems.

Darwin Harbour supports very high fish diversity with 415 fish species now known. More than 30 per cent of all recreational fishing in the Territory occurs in Darwin Harbour and nearby areas so it is vital to protect the biodiversity and maintain fish resources at sustainable levels for future enjoyment for everyone.

A fish survey is being undertaken as part of the enhanced monitoring program for Darwin Harbour. Video cameras in underwater housings, combined with a canister with crushed pilchards to attract fish, captures the benefits of both underwater visual counts and trapping in surveys of bottom-dwelling fish. To complement the video camera surveys, Fisheries Research Unit of the Department of Resources will conduct surveys in mangrove creeks and other fish habitats where visibility is much lower.

Habitat mapping of Darwin Harbour has commenced and will support decision making about development in the future. In collaboration with Australian Institute of Marine Science, Geoscience Australia and the Darwin Port Corporation the project will describe and map many of the diverse estuarine and marine habitats of Darwin Harbour including coral reefs, seagrass meadows and mudflats. Mapping the seafloor is a three stage process: 1) Bathymetry data is collected using a multi-beam echo sounder sonar; 2) Description of the types of sediment (rock, sand etc) and animals and plants by carrying out surveys of the actual seafloor using techniques such as grab samples, trawls and video survey; 3) All data is then analysed to model different habitats, typically done using Geographic Information systems (GIS). Different layers of information is modelled to identify unique habitats which can then be mapped and used by a range of different people for their individual needs.

This information will be used to inform future management and decisions for years to come.
Closing the Larrakeyah Outfall

The closure and diversion of Larrakeyah Outfall is well underway. By the end of December 2011, all flow from Larrakeyah Outfall, with the exception of extreme wet weather events, such as cyclones, will be diverted to the Ludmilla Wastewater Treatment Plan. This equates to approximately 90% of flow. Larrakeyah Outfall will remain open temporarily to manage the extreme wet weather predicted this season. Power and Water’s license to discharge via Larrakeyah will expire on 31 May 2012 and the Larrakeyah Outfall will then be closed.

Tunnelling works through the Darwin CBD and Larrakeyah areas will divert the flows from the Larrakeyah Outfall to the Ludmilla Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The Ludmilla Wastewater Treatment Plant is being upgraded to cater for the additional flows diverted from Larrakeyah Outfall. Temporary works have already been completed, including the upgrade of the current disinfection system. The upgrade works began in November 2011 and are due for completion in late 2012. The upgrade will eliminate odours and meet anticipated future growth over the next 20 years.

Discharge of treated wastewater from Ludmilla Wastewater Treatment Plant is via the East Point Outfall. Power and Water Corporation have submitted a Public Environment Report (PER) proposing the construction of another rising main from the treatment plant to the East Point outfall to cater for additional flows and meet future demand. The due date for public submissions on the PER is 12 December 2011. For further information visit www.powerwater.com.au

Meet the Committee

Mr Bill Stuchbery, Independent Chair
Mr Greg Bicknell, NT Chamber of Commerce
Mr Alastair Black, Darwin Port Corporation
Professor Andrew Campbell, Charles Darwin University
Mr Greg Constantine, Larrakia Development Corporation
Ms Juanita Croft, Environment Centre of the Northern Territory
Mr Tom Harris, NT Horticultural Association
Mr Greg Leach, Land Care Urban (Greening Australia NT)
Mr Graeme Lewis, Tourism Top End
Mr Chris Makepeace, Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the Northern Territory
Mr Robert Macleod, representing Local Government
Mr Steve McKenzie, Power and Water Corporation
Professor David Parry, Australian Institute of Marine Science
Dr Graeme Suckling, Community Representative

The Committee welcomes new members, Mr Greg Leach, Greening Australia NT and Juanita Croft, Environment Centre NT.

Dr Melanie Bradley, Environment Centre NT, Ms Catherine Orme, Greening Australia NT and Ms Pam Robinson, Darwin City Council have recently resigned from the Committee.

Due to recent staff movements, new representatives are currently being sought from the following member organisations:

- Shipping and Transport
- Darwin City Council

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