Resignations delay plan

ESSENTIAL SERVICES REPORTER
Sasha Petrova
THE future of Alice Springs’ water supply will remain unclear for up to eight months with the department responsible for water management suggesting the final water allocation plan will be released some time in the first half of next year.

The Alice Springs Draft Water Allocation Plan was released for public comment in March this year but the final version has been held up due to a number of staff resignations from the water resources division of the Department for Land Resource Management - two since the start of this year, the department says.

Jimmy Cocking from the Arid Lands Environment Centre told the Centralian Advocates there has been a “flight of staff from the NT Government to another water department”.

“People are not comfortable working in positions where they are in the bureaucracy that is looking to extract water without any sense,” he said.

He was referring to reports earlier this year that Councillor Steve Brown had been lobbying the NT Government to scrap the cap imposed on water extraction from the Mearmore Aquifer at Roe Creek Borefield outside Alice Springs.

The system provides most of the town’s drinking water.

The draft plan was a review of the existing Water Resource Strategy set up in 2007 to maintain a sustainable water supply for Alice Springs and its surrounding area. The strategy put a cap on the extraction allowance of 9.3 gigalitres for Power Water Corporation while the reviewed plan increased the cap to 10.7 gigalitres.

But Mr Cocking was concerned the draft plan could be amended further to scrap the cap with the effect of reducing the current projected life of the aquifer.

Community consultation for the draft plan resulted in an agreement to ensure no more than 25 per cent of estimated groundwater storage would be used over the next 100 years.

“We want to know, does the current water allocation plan hold true or are they making policy by media release?”

The current draft plan noted that water in the Roe Creek Borefield was steeply declining and estimates showed that some 320 gigalitres of water had been extracted from Roe Creek since pumping began in the 1960s. Since then, the water level in the borefield had dropped by around 70 metres, or 30 per cent. In recent years, the average Alice Springs household has used approximately 530 kilolitres of water per year, more than twice the national average of 190 kilolitres.

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Yuendumu’s pool battling to stay afloat

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The pool has been credited with helping to improve the health of children and increasing school attendance rates in Yuendumu, about 1750km south of Darwin and about 260km north-east of Alice Springs.

Mt Theo Program chief executive Susie Low said the $2.4 million pool “had been sitting pretty” since opening in 2008 but that it was now in financial strife.

“The Government was putting $48,000 per year towards operational costs and we had community royalty funds to the value of $100,000 per year,” she said.

“But the NT Government has decided to stop this income and the Newman mines that were the source of the royalties have ceased to operate so we don’t receive anything any more.

About 95 swimmers use the pool each day it is open.

A campaign video by young Warlpiri people can be seen at mttheo.org/ home. Donations: giveino.com.au/mtheo

Hefty grant for vice study

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Grant recipient Dr Matt Stevens said that reducing the social and health impacts of smoking and gambling remained a major challenge in Clasing the Gap.

The study’s results will inform the NT Government’s tobacco control policies. The study was assisted by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

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