

Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee



Annual Report 2001/2002



Northern Territory Government

Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment

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BACKGROUND

Found in Darwin's northern suburbs Rapid Creek drains a catchment of nearly 30 square kilometres. The creek and its catchment form the only significant freshwater system in Darwin and hence it is a valuable community asset. Increasing development in the catchment has necessitated closer management to ensure the protection of remnant vegetation and in particular the creek amenity and its water quality.

In 1994 the Darwin City Council and Greening Australia NT developed the Rapid Creek Management Plan. The plan proposed a range of strategies for implementation. The most fundamental requirement was to set up a management structure to coordinate implementation of the plan. In response to the plan and requests from the Rapid Creek Landcare Group the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment offered to set up a catchment management committee for Rapid Creek in 1996.

The Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee was established through the Water Act in 1996. The Committee considers and advises on policy for management of the natural resources of the catchment.

The Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee advises the Controller of Water Resources who in turn is accountable to the Minister for Planning and Environment. The Committee is required to report at least annually to the Minister and more frequently at significant milestones.

This is the fifth Annual Report.

MEMBERSHIP

1. Officer Commanding, Defence Northern Region Commonwealth Government
2. The General Manager, Darwin International Airport Industry
3. His Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Darwin Local Government
4. The President, Larrakia Association Community
5. The Chancellor, NT University Industry
6. The Chairperson, Greening Australia NT Community
7. The Chairperson, Rapid Creek Landcare Group Community
8. The Assistant Secretary, Natural Resources Division, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment NT Government
9. Member of Legislative Assembly Community
10. Representative Parks and Wildlife Commission NT Government

The Committee is chaired by Dr Graeme Suckling, Executive Officer Greening Australia NT.

MANAGEMENT PLAN AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK

The *Rapid Creek Management Plan* (1994) is the Committee's Working document. This is called the Management Plan throughout this report.

The Committee has devised a Reporting Framework based on the Catchment Strategies described in Chapter 5 of the Management Plan.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Using the Rapid Creek Management Plan as a reference that will be continually revised and updated, the Committee will consider and advise on policy and procedures and promote community awareness and research in the catchment.

Terms of Reference	Reported Under	Page
1. Progressively review the Rapid Creek Management Plan	Planning Issues Addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management Plan and Reporting Framework 	4
2. Through advice, coordination and initiatives implement the Management Plan maximising stakeholder involvement (seeking funding and implementing works)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities within the catchment 	7
3. Advocate the catchment values to the community	Education and Awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and Interpretation • Website 	11 11
4. Provide advice as appropriate on land use in the catchment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities within the catchment Planning Issues Addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yankee Pools area • O3 Creek Corridor Status • Boulter Rd development proposal 	7 12 12 13
5. Promote research on processes, which affect catchment values. Collect and review relevant research and surveys carried out or affecting the catchment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities within the catchment 	7

MEETINGS AND ATTENDANCE

The Committee met three times during 2001/2002. The committee also conducted a tour of the catchment in August 2001.

ORGANISATION	MEMBER/DELEGATE	MEETING
Defence	Tony Law	1
	Caroline Edwards	1
Darwin International Airport	Dan Richards	2
	Ian Kew	2
Darwin City Council	Dave Perry	2
	Jim Mitchell	1
	Chris Tilley	3
Larrakia Association	Donna Jackson	1
NT University	Hugh Clelland	3
Greening Australia		
	Graeme Suckling	3
Rapid Creek Landcare Group	Lex Martin	1
	Lesley Alford	1
	Peter O'Hagan	1
Member of Legislative Assembly	Chris Burns	2
Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment	Libby Benson	2
Parks and Wildlife Commission	Dal Hartley	2
Minutes / Correspondence / Coordination	Steve Popple	3

Activities within the catchment

Darwin City Council

Councils' involvement in maintenance has continued at a level similar to previous years. Areas of particular involvement continue to be adjacent to the Jingili Watergardens and along the Charles Eaton Drive section of the creek corridor.

Council continues to be actively involved in the implementation of the fire management regime outlined in the Rapid Creek Plan of Management for maintenance of the Rapid Creek corridor.

The Parks section at Council has continued its close working relationship with the Rapid Creek Landcare group by assisting in landcare projects when resources are available. This is generally via "in-kind" assistance through supply and delivery of woodchip mulch to landcare sites, support for working days with machinery/site preparation etc and other assistance as requested. Landcare support activities are viewed as an important function of Park's operation and outcomes are valued by Council staff.

A widening of the creek corridor has commenced behind the properties along the Freshwater Rd side of the creek. This will continue as properties along this stretch are subdivided and will see the width of the creek corridor vary from between 20 and 40 metres. Additional vegetation maintenance has commenced this period, and funds are being sought to recognise the increasing maintenance requirement in this area in subsequent years.

Greening Australia NT

The role of Greening Australia has continued to be mainly an advisory one, as well as providing support to Darwin City Council and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment during control burning operations.

During the year Greening Australia received funding from the Natural Heritage Trust for a devolved grant funding program (Top End Nature Grants). Two of the grants approved by the Steering Committee for this program related to projects in the catchment: native plant species re-establishment behind the dunes in the Casuarina Coastal reserve and weed control and revegetation undertaken by the Rapid Creek Landcare Group.

Greening Australia also provided native trees and shrubs for use by the landcare group. The Greening Australia's contracts team conducted some weed control work along the creek corridor on a fee for service basis for Rapid Creek Landcare group.

Parks and Wildlife Commission

The Draft Casuarina Coastal Reserve Plan of Management was prepared and placed on public exhibition. The plan identifies the RCCAC as a key stakeholder and recommends the continued involvement in cooperative management of the creek. The RCCAC considered the Plan and resolved that individual members prepare submissions if interested.

Defence

Fire management activities have continued on the RAAF base and wildfire intensity has significantly reduced since 1998. The weed control program has continued on a strategic basis with approximately \$ 20,000 expended annually. The Environmental Management Plan for RAAF base was revised during 2001 with emphasis on risk assessment, and action to address those risks accordingly prioritised. Feral pigeon control was continued with NT government now coordinating the operation of the program



The coordinated management of fire is a major issue facing members of RCCAC.

Department Infrastructure, Planning and Environment

The Land Administration section is continuing to maintain firebreaks and hazard reduction slashing in accordance with the Fire Management Plan produced by Greening Australia NT. The maintenance is carried out every three weeks during the wet season and every six weeks during the dry season. The Conservation and Natural Resources division provides administrative support to the RCCAC and assists in the coordination of activities by land managers and supports the activities of Rapid Creek Landcare group throughout the catchment.

Darwin International Airport

Darwin International Airport has continued to develop its environmental management program to reduce the impact of airport activities on the Rapid Creek catchment. Environmental works in this period have included \$35,000 worth of erosion control works to reconstruct flood damaged drainage infrastructure. This work was carried out in accordance with the airport's five year erosion control plan with the aim of reducing erosion and sediment transport from the site. Weed and fire control works have been ongoing to control weed infestations and minimise the chance of destructive wild fires.

Rehabilitation of the Rapid Creek corridor has continued, with maintenance of the revegetation areas being carried out by the Larrakia Nation under a contract to the airport. Monthly monitoring of water from airport drains has been used to confirm the effectiveness of storm water management initiatives. Results from this monitoring have been given to Water Watch as part of a new data sharing arrangement.

Plans for the 2002/03 period include removal of concrete debris from the creek and creek corridor and further erosion works. Revegetation areas will be expanded along the creek line and monitoring of macro invertebrates will be added to the water monitoring program as indicators of stream health.

Waterwatch

Throughout the last year Waterwatch has been collecting water quality data from 10 monitoring sites along Rapid Creek. This data was collected with the assistance of two Green Corps teams together with students from Kormilda College.

There were no significant changes in water quality compared to the results from previous years. This year has seen a very late wet season together with a long dry season. As a result of these conditions the water quality did deteriorate slightly early in the dry season. This is the result of the creek flow decreasing together with accumulating gross pollutants and oils due to run off from the surrounding areas. It is important to note however that Rapid Creek is generally healthy given its position in the Darwin urban area.

The next year will see the continued monitoring of 14 sites once a month as done in previous years. Waterwatch over the coming year will also be looking to start joint testing with Darwin International Airport for heavy metals.

Rapid Creek Landcare Group

The Rapid Creek Landcare group has continued its involvement in the rehabilitation of the riparian vegetation between Trower Road and McMillans Road. The group holds monthly working bees, which include activities such as weed control, rubbish, removal, tree planting and seed collection. The Growing Trees at Home group propagates plants that are then used for revegetation during the wet season. The group successfully applied for a Top End Nature Grant to support its rehabilitation activities and works closely with Greening Australia NT. Darwin City Council has provided practical support for the group through deliveries of mulch and spraying of weeds. Rapid Creek Landcare group has continued to lobby to have the 03 corridor behind Freshwater Road placed in public ownership and rehabilitated.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Access and Interpretation

The committee assisted the Urban Enhancement Office with investigations into potential extensions of the Rapid Creek cycleway network. Issues such as sources of funding, access through Defence land and rehabilitation of degraded areas still need to be addressed.

Website

The Rapid Creek Plan of Management and all RCCAC Annual Reports are available on the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment's Web site on the Internet and linked to a report on the Rapid Creek Landcare Group and the Rapid Creek Waterwatch reports. The Web site can be found at http://lpe.nt.gov.au/dlpe/ecare/landcare/areport_contents.htm. The website is currently under review and it is envisaged that the site will be extensively revised to improve the presentation of information.



Water quality is a major focus of the Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee, particularly the issue of gross pollutants entering the creek.

PLANNING ISSUES ADDRESSED

Yankee Pools area

There are currently four landowners in the area known as Yankee Pools where there are issues of weed invasion, inappropriate fire regime, altered drainage and uncontrolled vehicle access. The Committee considers that the most effective way of addressing these issues is to reduce the number of landowners within the Yankee Pools area. The Yankee Pools management proposal developed by the Committee recommends that one organisation manage the land with financial contributions being made from all landowners. The Committee recognises that this is a long term aim and is dependent on a number of factors, which may not be resolved in the short term.

In order to formalise the process negotiations are currently in progress for a parcel of vacant crown land within the creek corridor to be transferred to the Darwin City Council. A Native Title claim is lodged over this area and needs to be resolved before the issue can progress further. Application for subdivision of Crown Land was advertised to facilitate the transfer to Darwin City Council.

For further activity to happen in the area the ongoing management issues need to be resolved and balanced with community expectations in terms of access and amenity. Darwin International Airport sees the opportunity to utilise the area as an important adjunct to its facilities and has undertaken extensive environmental restoration works.

O3 Creek Corridor Status

The Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee continued to lobby for the increased maintenance and improvement of public access along the O3 corridor. The Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Environment advised the RCCAC that the government was committed to the reinstatement of the original O3 corridor and he had instructed his Department to negotiate with landowners. The RCCAC has continued to pursue the issue of rehabilitation of the corridor, including the removal of fill, weeds and revegetation as part of the corridor process.

Boulter Road Development Proposal

The RCCAC provided comment on a proposal for Section 4106 Hundred of Bagot located on the corner of Boulter Road and Amy Johnson Drive which consisted of a commercial convention centre, restaurant and high density residential cluster dwellings.

The RCCAC recognised that Section 4106 comprises part of a seasonally inundated wetland that provides an important recharge role to the Rapid Creek system. The RCCAC opposed the proposed development and prepared a submission to the Development Consent Authority. The submission requested that the Development Consent Authority consider the rezoning of the seasonal wetland areas of section 4106 to 03. Additionally any development should:

- * Incorporate a suitable buffer to the seasonal wetland areas in any future development of section 4106.
- * Recognise the value of seasonal wetlands in maintaining the environmental values of the Rapid Creek system.
- * Recognise that development of residential facilities adjacent to areas suitable for mosquito breeding pose a potential public health risk.

The Development Consent Authority subsequently refused the application.



Seasonal wetland the corner of Boulter Road and Amy Johnson Drive.

APPENDIX

Progress on Catchment Issues at a Glance

1997

- 30,000 seedlings planted in catchment.
- 10 hectares re-established using direct seeding and natural regeneration.
- 1.5 kilometres of pedestrian track installed to control access along creek. Completed October 1999.
- 87 hectares managed cooperatively by landholders, GANT, Landcare members, community volunteers and Green Corps.
- 31 January 2000 Beneficial Uses of the freshwater reaches of Rapid Creek formally declared.
- 23 February 2000 Rapid Creek Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives 2000 formally declared.
- Rapid Creek Catchment Fire Management Plan produced March 2000. Rapid Creek Catchment Revegetation Strategy Report produced. Rapid Creek Catchment Weed Management Plan produced April 2000. Rapid Creek Revised Management Plan reprinted April 2000.
- Rapid Creek Access and Signage Master Plan presented to Minister Lands Planning and Environment, representatives Parks and Wildlife Commission and endorsed by Darwin City Council.
- Rapid Creek Natural Heritage Trust funded Integrated Management Project successfully completed June 2000.
- Cycle path constructed from McMillans Road to Red Footbridge in Water Gardens March 2001.
- Membership of RCCAC extended to include representatives from Parks and Wildlife Commission.
- Review of Rapid Creek Plan of Management Strategies commenced

2002