

# AFANT



Election commitments to enhance and  
improve Recreational Fishing in the Northern  
Territory

---

*Representing recreational fishing in the NT and ensuring the quality of our sport*

PO Box 40694 Casuarina NT 0811

Phone: 08 8945 6455 Fax: 08 8945 6055 Email: [eo@afant.com.au](mailto:eo@afant.com.au)

[www.afant.com.au](http://www.afant.com.au)

## **Introduction**

Recreational fishing is an important social and cultural component of the Northern Territory lifestyle as well as being a major tourism drawcard and a significant contributor to the economy. Recreational fishing surveys and fishing tour operator data indicates that more than 35,000 Territory residents and 54,000 visitors participated in recreational fishing in the Territory in 2010. And it is estimated that the current figures for 2015 far exceed these with 35,000 tourists currently registered for the NT Tourism 'Million Dollar Barra' promotion. Recreational fishing was estimated to contribute at least \$100 Million directly to the Northern Territory economy during 2014.

As identified in the NT Governments Recreational Fishing Development Plan 2012-2022, seventy per cent of recreational fishing in the Territory occurs in its regional areas, where it is often the primary economic and development driver. King Ash Bay on the McArthur River, the Daly River, the Roper River and Dundee Beach are examples of communities where recreational fishing underpins development. Fishing tourism also providing impetus for regional development on Aboriginal land, such as the Tiwi Islands, Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt.

The Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory (AFANT) welcomes the opportunity to provide input on a variety of infrastructure projects and fisheries enhancement initiatives that we believe would significantly improve recreational fishing in the Northern Territory. AFANT is seeking a commitment from political parties to support these projects prior to 2016 Northern Territory election. These projects and infrastructure suggestions have been divided into various categories for ease of reference ranging from Short Term/Low Cost Projects with often direct and immediate community benefits right through to Long Term/High Cost infrastructure and fisheries enhancement projects with significant regional and Northern Territory wide benefits.

## **Short Term/ Low Cost Projects**

### **Stocking residential lakes with Barramundi fingerlings**

AFANT would like a dedicated government program of stocking the residential lakes around Darwin and Palmerston with Barramundi fingerlings. There was limited successful stocking of excess Barramundi fingerlings from aquaculture programs into the residential lakes of Durack in Palmerston in 2012, these fish have since survived and thrived. AFANT believes such a program would improve the lifestyle and recreational opportunities of residents as well as providing a safe and easily accessible opportunity for children and especially low socio-economic families to go fishing. This program could also be extended to include re-stocking Manton Dam with Barramundi fingerlings.

### **Government funding for fishing clubs to run children's fishing clinics**

Recreational fishing is currently one of the most popular sporting activities in the Northern Territory; however fishing clubs receive no government funding to run activities to encourage public participation in the sport. This includes fishing clinics to teach children who otherwise don't have the opportunity the fundamentals of recreational fishing. Many clubs fund such programs often at considerable expense to the club itself and AFANT believes that in the interest of improving grassroots participation, similar to other sports, grants should be made available to these clubs under an appropriate acquittal process to run children's fishing clinics.

### **Increased land based fishing platforms in residential areas for disabled anglers and children**

Due to the risk of crocodiles, stingers and the large tidal movement in estuaries the majority of recreational fishing effort is conducted by boat with only a small amount of fishing land based. Despite the excellent fishing available close to residential areas there is a lack of safe, easily accessible land based fishing locations in Darwin and Palmerston. Locations are often high above water with the risk of falling for young children, inaccessible to disabled anglers, crowded, poorly lit or placed in unproductive fishing locations. Unfortunately for low socio-economic families and children this makes fishing a risky or expensive proposition that requires buying a boat. AFANT would like an ongoing project of land based fishing platforms to be installed at appropriate locations. Ideally these platforms would be situated at water

level, in easily accessible locations, wheelchair accessible and with adequate lighting and crocodile protection barriers in place. We believe such a project would have immediate benefits to local communities and result in increase participation in recreational fishing from residents.

### **The removal of the seasonal Barramundi fishing closure of the lower Daly River**

A seasonal recreational fishing closure of the lower Daly River from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October to the 31<sup>st</sup> of January was put in place to halt declining Barramundi stocks during the 1980s. This closure, the banning of commercial netting and other management changes has seen the Daly River Barramundi stocks recover significantly. A similar closure was put in place in the Mary River during the 1980's by the NT government as well. This was removed by government in 2014 and was welcomed by recreational anglers.

AFANT sees removing the Daly river seasonal closure as an important opportunity to further enhance the access and opportunities for recreational fishing over the build-up and early wet season to this iconic Barramundi fishing area.

### **The installation of CCTV cameras and toilets at the Dinah Beach boat ramp**

Dinah Beach Boat Ramp is arguably the most popular and easy to launch boat ramp in Darwin yet it has no amenities in the form of toilets or wash down facilities for boats and it suffers from a high amount of crime such as the theft of boat trailers and the break-in of cars. CCTV cameras have been installed at numerous other boat ramps resulting in a significant reduction of crime. AFANT believe it is in the best interest of the public to upgrade the Dinah Beach boat ramp to an adequate standard by providing CCTV cameras and appropriate amenities.

### **Environmental Protection of Water Resources**

AFANT has a strong commitment to ensuring the protection of the quality of the recreational fishing in the Northern Territory which is inextricably linked to the health and quality of the top end aquifers, rivers, waterways, landscapes and coastal areas. Fair, transparent and sustainable water policies are vital to avoid future conflict over water extraction and to prevent long lasting detrimental impacts to the fisheries and ecosystems of our iconic top end rivers. AFANT believes previously disbanded

Water Advisory Committees should be reconvened in order to allow appropriate and transparent community consultation over water policy and usage.

AFANT also believes that the *Water Act* (Section 92) also need to be amended to reflect growing community concerns around profiteering by land owners from water hoarding and real estate transactions in which the transfer of land also results in the transfer of the licence to the new land owner effectively allowing land owners to profit from a public resource which they received at no cost.

There are long standing concerns from AFANT around hydraulic fracturing due to inadequate consultation, environmental concerns and lack of transparency of process. While the Hawke Inquiry submitted to the government in 2014 found that environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracturing can be managed effectively subject to the creation of a satisfactory regulatory regime, AFANT is sceptical of an adequate regulatory regime being established. AFANT's opinion is based on the history of environmental failures in the NT in the conventional mining industry and the enduring negative environmental impacts of legacy mines in the NT landscape. Unfortunately the current EPA is a "toothless tiger" lacking the power to issue adequate fines and effectively enforce legislation. Without a strong regulatory body there is little incentive for mining and petroleum companies to abide by environmental protection legislation.

## **Medium Term/ Medium Cost Projects**

### **Upgrade of the Middle Arm boat ramp car park**

Middle Arm boat ramp suffers from a serious congestion problem due to the large amounts of fishermen and boat traffic using the ramp. On weekends this often results in a lack of available parking spaces. To cope with demand and the increasing popularity of the boat ramp to reach the productive fishing areas of Middle Arm AFANT believes funding should be allocated to increase the parking spaces and upgrade the amenities at the Middle Arm boat ramp.

### **A long term program of artificial reefs and FAD's**

Artificial reefs and Fish Attraction Devices (FAD's) are an extremely efficient method of enhancing fish stocks through replicating the fish attracting properties of natural

structures. This is of particular interest to AFANT due to the large amounts of naturally occurring reef areas that have been lost to recreational fishing as a result of reef protection programs for at risk reef fish species such as Golden Snapper and Black Jewfish. Artificial reefs and FAD's located within the greater Darwin region would be a boon to both recreational fishing and tourism operators with an increase in fish and noticeable benefits within a relatively short period of time from deployment.

### **Funding for the installation of a marine radio repeater system for recreational boating safety and communication**

Unlike every other state in Australia the Northern Territory does not have an emergency system of communication for maritime recreational boat traffic. Southern states rely on marine radio repeater systems that vessels in distress can use to request assistance through "Mayday" or "Pan Pan" radio calls. This same system can also be used for day-to-day maritime communication.

In either a life threatening or non-life threatening situation such as a mechanical failure the only option available to recreational boaters in the Northern Territory is the activation of an EPIRB, an emergency response positioning system which enables rescue helicopters and emergency services such as Water Police to locate vessels. This obviously is done at enormous cost to the public and the organisations involved. For example the Careflight helicopter costs \$7000 for every 15 mins in the air with many search and rescue operations taking much longer than this.

AFANT believe a marine radio repeater system would result in a lessening of costs and call-outs for emergency services for non-life threatening situations and would allow recreational vessels to communicate and request assistance. This would be extremely advantageous to both recreational fishermen but also many other maritime industries.

### **A buy-out of commercial crab fishing licences in Bynoe Harbour and Saltwater Arm**

Mud crabs are an important recreational species on par with Barramundi. With the increasing population of Darwin and Palmerston there is increasing pressure on Mud

crab populations within Darwin Harbour. As such fishing effort is shifting to the east in Salt Water Arm and the west in Bynoe Harbour. Both these areas are currently closed to all commercial fishing effort apart from commercial mud crab fishing. Due to increasing pressure and future population growth AFANT would like these two areas to be brought in line with the commercial fishing restrictions on Darwin Harbour which does not allow any commercial fishing including commercial mud crab fishing.

### **Upgrade the Channel Island boat ramp**

Channel Island boat ramp is rarely used by the general public as there is a limited parking spaces and the drop-off from the ramp is precarious at low tide as well as ramp itself being narrow and difficult for fishermen inexperienced at reversing trailers. Lengthening and broadening the existing ramp would increase its use by recreational fishermen and relieve some congestion and pressure from the boat ramps at East and Middle Arms.

### **Funding for AFANT**

AFANT requests that a three year funding agreement be struck with the NT Government.

AFANT represents the recreational fishing sector on numerous fisheries and management committees and provides consistent and considered views on all issues in relation to recreational fishing and resources. This provides a significant and cost effective service to government and the recreational fishing sector.

AFANT has had no increase in funding from the NT Government since July 2006 and, with increasing costs and a significant increase in both the amount and complexity of our workload, it is increasingly difficult for us to continue to maintain the range of services we currently provide to our members, recreational fishers in general and the NT Government. While we have carefully managed our current expenditure to ensure we are not operating at a loss, it will soon be impossible for us to do so without an increase in funding.

AFANT has previously negotiated three year funding agreements with the NT government. We believe that long term funding agreements are essential for the ongoing budgetary planning and management of the organisations operations including staffing and other financial arrangements.

AFANT welcomes your written commitment for a multiple year funding arrangement in more detail.

### **Resolution to Blue Mud Bay Intertidal Access Agreements**

AFANT is extremely concerned with the lack of progress on this issue, particularly with those areas where recreational fishing is excluded such as the Tiwi Islands and the upper Finniss River. However we fully understand the complexity of the issue and the difficulty that the Blue Mud Bay ruling places on government.

AFANT is aware of six areas of the coastline that have agreement and that the majority of the remaining areas are yet to be resolved. We would like to see this settlement process significantly strengthened and accelerated in order to resolve concerns amongst the recreational fishing community and grant closure to traditional owners.

### **Long Term/Large Cost Projects**

#### **Public access on the Western Desert ore road to the Limmen Bight and mouth of the Roper River**

Despite being built in excellent condition the Western Desert ore road is slowly degrading. While public access is currently not allowed many locals of the area still travel on the road and there is a huge potential for the Western Desert ore road to be used for the benefit of recreational fishing, tourism and other industries looking to access the Limmen Bight and the mouth of the Roper River if it was maintained to a satisfactory standard. AFANT believe that a commitment should be made to maintain the road in its present condition with the road to be handed back to Western Desert if the mine ever became operational in the future.



### **The upgrade of Point Stuart road**

In 2012 the CLP Government bought back six commercial Barramundi Fishing Licences worth an estimated \$6 million to establish a recreational only fishing area in Chambers and Finke Bays. The aim of this buy back was to provide recreational fishermen and tourism operator's exclusive access to the fishery and enhance both economic and social and cultural opportunities for the Mary River region.

The full potential of this recreational only fishery area has not been realised due to difficulties in access through appropriate roads and boat ramps. The Point Stuart road leads directly to a private boat ramp to access this fishery but it is only single lane road and treacherous, frequently leading to bogged vehicles and damaged boat trailers. AFANT proposes upgrading the road to a sufficient standard to allow easier and safer recreational fishing and tourism access to Chambers and Finke Bay. The owner of the private boat ramp at Point Stuart Tree Fishing Camp has indicated he would be willing to allow free public access to the boat ramp if the road was upgraded to a sufficient standard.

### **The upgrade of Gunn Point road**

AFANT believes that an upgrade of the Gunn Point road will have significant positive flow on effects as Gunn Point road has always been a difficult and unreliable access point to numerous iconic fishing destinations such as Leaders Creek, the Vernon Islands, Saltwater Arm and the lower Adelaide River all within close proximity to Darwin, Palmerston and surrounding suburbs.

Aside from recreational fishermen, Gunn Point beach is a popular location for families to camp or caravan and there are many other additional users of this road including but not limited to; Police (including the Fisheries and Marine Compliance Division), Rescue Operation Units, Ambulance Services, Power and Water employees, Parks and Wildlife officers, Customs Officers, the Australian Army as well as recreational hunters and quad bike users.

Due to the heavily degraded nature and irregular grading and maintenance of Gunn Point road, frequent damage and breakages occur to boat trailers, caravans and vehicles and the condition of the road is a severely limiting factor to any further growth in recreational fishing or tourism for the area.

## **Conclusion**

The Territory's recreational fishery is world class, with healthy wild fish stocks, pristine aquatic environments and a vast number of popular species abundant. The future challenge is to maintain a high quality fishery while allowing for increased participation and optimising the social and economic values recreational fishing generates.

AFANT would welcome the opportunity for greater engagement and consideration of our views and ideas in regards to the opportunities for increasing recreational fishing opportunities, fisheries management and enhancement projects throughout the Northern Territory.

Yours sincerely



Tristan Sloan  
Executive Officer  
Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT Inc.

9<sup>th</sup> February, 2016