RE: Mary River National Park draft joint management plan

The Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the Northern Territory (AFANT) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Mary River National Park Joint Management Plan. The Mary River National Park and surrounding waterways contain one of the Territory’s most important recreational fisheries which offers the full diversity of landscapes and fishing experiences available in the Top End.

We note that the NT Government is planning to make some significant changes to the Mary River management zone restrictions (advertised NT News 13 Sep 14) these changes will need to be included in the new plan. It is possible that other fisheries management changes including possession and size limits will also be implemented over the life of the new plan and it is important the management plan is flexible to accommodate any potential regulatory amendments.

We note that signage at some places in the park seem contradictory particularly signage at Bird Billabong which restrict fishing yet the plan says has fishing is available in all park waters. AFANT strongly supports the protecting and improving fishing access rights in the Mary River NP.

AFANT would like to ensure that the plan encourages increased and improved access to the park and its waterways. With increased population pressures around Darwin it is important that fishing pressure on popular fishing sites is well managed. One way of achieving this is increasing access and spreading the recreational fishing effort in the NT as this adds to the fishing experience and opportunities.

AFANT notes that the Marrakai station grazing licence for the Mary River conservation reserve will expire during the life of the plan. We are strongly of the view that the licence to graze this area should not be re-issued without access arrangements for the important recreational fishing areas, particularly for areas like the northern part of Alligator Head billabong which is in the reserve. There are a number of other billabongs in this reserve which managed dry season access would provide quality recreational fishing opportunities to areas currently unavailable to the recreational fishing sector. Negotiation for this access needs to be included early in the licence renegotiations.

We strongly support the upgrade of the Point Stuart road access as outlined in the plan. Minor works to ensure a solid wet season access road will open up more areas for late build up and run off fishing in areas that currently are not accessible in Chambers and Finke Bays.

AFANT is also supportive of the changes which allow the opportunity for a new ramp on the lower Mary River for boat launching and retrieving, this is a high priority for the recreational fishing sector. AFANT welcomes the plans acknowledgment that increased FWD and camping opportunities exist within the park. AFANT would like to be formally recognised in the management plan on any discussions around providing greater FWD access and camping as many of the potential sites offer real recreational fishing opportunities.
AFANT would welcome the opportunity to work with traditional owners and park managers on developing and managing recreational fishing access within the Mary River NP. We note that the plan recognises a number of pest plant and animal threats within the park including weeds and pest animals. We also believe that the plan should recognise additional threats like Salvinia (Salvinia molesta) in a number of adjacent waterways and Siamese fighting fish (Betta splendens) which are not included in the plan.

We also note the weed Mimosa (Mimosa pigra) is also present on the Mary River flood plain and possesses a real threat to the health of the rivers and wetlands if not adequately managed into the future.

AFANT has a strong interest in the lower Mary floodplain management and ensuring adequate fish passage. Concern has been expressed at the construction of barrages like many of those on the Mary River flood plain have held back water, caused fish kills, erosion and evulsions as well as creating a barrier to migratory fish species. AFANT would like to be recognised as a key stakeholder in any proposals to construct or maintain any water control devices on the floodplain to ensure that it will not impact on the fish movement and waterway health.

AFANT takes a strong interest in the safety of recreational fishers and would like to be involved in any review of crocodile safety management in the Park as outlined in the plan. Improving education and awareness of crocodile safety is a real issue within in the Mary River NP particularly where it affects recreational fishers and we believe it is essential that AFANT is involved in these plans.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment and provide input on the draft plan.

Yours sincerely

Craig Ingram
Executive Officer

6 October 2014