Fishing for Kakadu’s opportunities

AFANT submission on the Draft plan of management for Kakadu National Park.
AFANT submission to the draft management plan

AFANT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft plan of management for Kakadu National Park.

The rivers and billabongs in Kakadu are some of the most important areas for recreational fishing in the Northern Territory and as such AFANT has a strong interest in ensuring the best outcomes for recreational fishing are delivered in the management plan.

The recreational fishing sector has some significant areas of Kakadu that are off limits, we are strongly of the view that management of access not exclusion of recreational fishing from areas will deliver the best benefit not just for the recreational fishing but also the future visitation, management, public standing and use of the park.

Impact of fishing and boating

While the draft plan does not specify access or restricted areas for recreational fishing other than the current areas that remain open the draft does make a number of negative comments regarding concern with fishing pressure and number of boats. AFANT notes that these comments are not based on any scientific research or justification which is a concern.

AFANT strongly supports recreational fishing practices that are low impact, sustainable and ensure a high quality experience whilst protecting the special natural assets of the Kakadu NP.

We would be the first organisation to support or recommend measures to address actual identified impacts or sustainability concerns.

Like many areas across the Territory, Kakadu NP has seen an increase in fishing effort. This is predominantly managed in the NT with possession limits. With the exception of reef fish species like snapper and jewfish, the sustainability of fish stocks in the NT is very good and the current possession limits of fish like barramundi are sufficient to manage the stocks and leave a significant buffer to ensure quality fishing is available into the future.

The proposal in the draft plan for the reduction in the possession limit of barramundi from 5 to 3 (10.7.17) in Kakadu, while not based on current sustainability concerns, is supported by AFANT as a prudent management tool change to ensure the protection of the barramundi stocks. AFANT believes that this change will add value to the Kakadu barramundi fishery whilst still allowing anglers to retain a reasonable number of fish for the table.

AFANT is strongly of the view that spreading the recreational fishing effort through improvements to accessible areas has the potential to improve the Kakadu recreational fishing experience and reducing any real or perceived fishing pressure concerns.

In regards to research into the impact of fishing pressure and boat traffic on bank erosion (5.3.40) AFANT believes that Kakadu NP has had the opportunity to conduct research into these issues more so than other areas of the Northern Territory with a number of areas off limits to recreational fishing and boating but we are surprised that this has not been undertaken when this was the justification for the closure of rivers like the west alligator.

While we do not support these closures we would be happy to participate or be involved in any research projects even though we believe that the management arrangements in place will show limited impact on the waterways of Kakadu from recreational fishing.

AFANT would also like to offer our members services as volunteers for fisheries tagging or catch and effort data collection, this is research which we currently undertake in a number of river
systems across the Northern Territory and we believe targeted research in Kakadu could provide valuable information to parks management on the state of fish stocks.

**Salvinia**

AFANT has concerns that areas closed to recreational fishing/boating due to salvinia which was first detected in the Magela catchment in 1983 have remained closed in the park, although it is acknowledged that salvinia has since still spread through a range of areas where it was not previously present and that the transfer or spread was most likely due to water birds or other vectors.

The justification for closures of fishing areas to prevent salvinia spread was based on the perceived risk of boats and trailers spreading the weed. While we acknowledge that salvinia can be spread by vessels, it is currently established in all waters open to recreational fishing vessels as well as a number of closed waterways and this spread has not been attributed to boat trailers. We acknowledge that salvinia management is still an issue in the park and AFANT is willing to work with Kakadu park management and traditional owners on any programs across all waterways to improve the removal of salvinia or through educating rec fishers about protecting our waterways particularly from the spread of salvinia or other introduced plants.

AFANT would like to work with traditional owners and park managers in the process of reopening the waters that were closed on the basis of the now non-existent risk of salvinia spread.

**Areas open to recreational fishing**

AFANT supports the review of areas within the park and would welcome the opportunity to be involved as a key stakeholder. We believe that some of the areas that are currently closed on the east of the Kakadu highway could be opened up to land based lure and fly only catch and release fishing, with negligible impact on the fish stocks. Exclusions could be put into place around swimming areas or high tourist areas.

AFANT has identified a number of billabongs and areas that are currently closed or without access that with the implementation of reasonable management arrangements, could be reopened to recreational angling whilst still protecting the values and principles of the national park.

AFANT believes that the current areas that are closed in the park are not clearly defined or explained and justified and AFANT believes that clearer maps and information for recreational anglers is required.

AFANT also has concerns regarding the comments within the draft plan regarding recommending recreational fishers avoid areas such as bird rookeries on the East Alligator and South Alligator rivers.

AFANT believes that the following areas should be considered for improving access:

- Island billabong
- Jabaluka billabong
- Ja Ja billabong
- Magela billabongs south of the Oenpelli Road
- Nourlangie River below Anbangbang billabong
- Extension of the access at the top of the South Alligator River to take in the 2km above the current closure
- Jim Jim upstream of the communities
- West Alligator River
Regulations

AFANT would like clarification on the ability of the director to change rules in the park (10.7.15) and what consultation agreement and process will be undertaken before any change which may impact on recreational fishing and boating access or operation.

While we accept the need for flexibility within the plan over its lifetime and the ability of parks management to make required changes based on unforeseen issues, AFANT has real concerns with some clauses in the draft that could have a negative impact on recreational fishing within the Kakadu national park.

A number of provisions within the plan which would seem to allow the director to make significant changes to boating or fishing in the park with limited consultation are a real concern.

AFANT would also like clarification on the purpose of the provisions that allow the implementation of a licence system in the park.

AFANT would like the plan to recognise the use of landing nets as a legitimate fishing gear in the park as the plan is unclear on landing nets.

AFANT also questions the provisions to allow the carriage of mud Crab pots through the park for their legitimate use outside the park boundary’s without a similar provision to allow the carriage of a legal catch of mud crabs.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional information or to discuss any of the issues raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely

Craig Ingram

Executive Officer
Amateur Fishermen’s Association of the NT Inc.

25th November 2015