

AFANT



AFANT's submission on the Northern Territory Draft Biosecurity Strategy 2015- 2025

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

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AFANT's Submission

The Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT Inc (AFANT) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Northern Territory Draft NT Biosecurity Strategy 2015- 2025.

AFANT is strongly of the view that Northern Australia must learn from the mistakes of the more populated southern areas of Australia in regards to biosecurity and our waterways principally in regards to the introduction of invasive foreign pest species of fish, plants and reptiles.

The major threats to waterways across southern Australia in regards to biosecurity have by and large been as a result of the introduction of foreign aquarium plants, reptiles and fish to local waterways. Interstate examples include Mozambique Tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*), Spotted Tilapia (*Tilapia mariae*), Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), Pearl Cichlid (*Geophagus brasiliensis*) and Red-Eared Slider turtles (*Trachemys scripta*) just to name a few. While the Northern Territory has experience some outbreaks of foreign pest fish species, most notably that of Siamese Fighting Fish (*Betta splendens*) in Fogg Dam and on the Adelaide River floodplain to date we have been fortunate that no other serious instances have occurred apart from several minor and isolated incidents in the Darwin locality.

Numerous species of aquatic weeds also threaten aquatic habitats for native species and unfortunately these are not confined to southern Australia with the Northern Territory suffering from several species introduced as a result of the aquarium trade such as Cabomba (*Cabomba caroliniana*) and Salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*). These plants were deliberately introduced into Australia for their use in aquariums or fish ponds, but have since proven to be highly invasive. Salvinia has proved to be a major problem in the Northern Territory within Kakadu National Park clogging up billabongs and actively reducing the numbers and types of waterbirds using floodplain billabongs not to mention resulting in the closure of numerous billabongs to recreational fishing in the past.

AFANT believes that our contribution to the draft Northern Territory Biosecurity Strategy can best be implemented under the Criteria for Success; Prevention and Early Response.

Prevention

With the long recognised negative impacts of the aquarium industry more proactive measures need to be undertaken to educate and penalise people, businesses or organisation that run the risk of introducing invasive foreign pest species to our top end waterways. While AFANT agrees that it is not possible to isolate the NT from every [AFANT Representing recreational fishing in the NT and ensuring the quality of our sport](#)

biosecurity risk we believe strong and proactive measures must be undertaken. AFANT would like to see the government restrict the sale of non-native species to only individuals, businesses or organisation who follow an appropriate code of conduct and understand both their responsibilities and the risks of introducing invasive pest species into our native waterways.

Education

AFANT believes that education should be at the forefront of any biosecurity strategy. The vast majority of invasive species introduced to waterways in Australia and the Northern Territory have been as a result of ignorant members of the public emptying aquarium tanks or ponds containing fish, reptiles or aquatic plants into local waterways. While many aquarium wholesale businesses follow a code of conduct expressly to prevent such instances occurring the average consumer who purchases fish, reptiles or aquatic plants from a pet stores is exposed to little or no education regarding proper disposal of unwanted pets and content of aquarium tanks and ponds. AFANT is of the view that “prevention is better than cure” and believes that a comprehensive and strategic education program is needed to inform the general public at point of purchase of the ethical strategies than can be used to dispose of unwanted fish, reptiles and aquatic plants without risking the health of our top end waterways.

Proper education of the public and the aquarium industry, in both the wholesale and retail sectors, needs to be prioritised as one of the most effective tools in maintaining biosecurity and protecting out top end waterways.

Conclusion

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. Recreational fishing and tourism is a major contributor to the economy and lifestyle of the Northern Territory and must be protected at all costs from biosecurity threats.

The cost of restoring rivers and water ways that have been impacted by invasive pest species amounts to millions of taxpayers’ dollars on individual river systems just to return these rivers and waterways back to some lower level of environmental health. AFANT believes stronger measures for education, prevention and enforcement need to be put in place to protect the waterways of the Northern Territory.

We would welcome the opportunity for greater engagement and consideration of AFANT's views and ideas in the development of biosecurity strategy in the Northern Territory.

Yours sincerely

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