Landowner in hot water over wetlands wipeout

By CONOR BYRNE

THE NT Government will prosecute the owner of wetlands which were allegedly illegally cleared and put the dry season flow of Darwin’s Rapid Creek at risk.

About 4ha of land on the corner of Bouther Rd and Amy Johnson Rd in Berrimah, Darwin, was cleared about two weeks ago, angering the Rapid Creek Landcare Group because it meddles with the creek’s catchment.

The maximum fine for clearing the land could be $440,000.

Planning Minister Peter Chandler has confirmed the Development Consent Authority would pursue a legal case against the landowner.

“I cannot ask the public to have faith in the Government’s planning processes if they’re not enforced when there has been a clear breach,” he said.

“We want to see sustainable development, that’s why we’re looking at this area’s flood and drainage issues to see what development is appropriate.

“This guy has simply jumped the gun.”

The Landcare group say the ecology of Rapid Creek, the stream, could be damaged as the wetlands became a swamp in the dry season and was the reason the creek flowed all year round.

But the NT Government announced, after calls from the NT News, that it would prosecute the landowner.

The land has been zoned for “community purposes,” but group secretary Lesley Alford said it had been offered for sale recently as improperly subdivided into five lots.

She said ignorance of the law was no excuse.

“You’ve got to make sure you’re doing things legally before you do them. It’s like Telstra’s dial before you dig,” she said.

“It’s definitely not subdividing. It makes a mockery of the permit system.”

The creek starts near the Vanderlin Drive and McMillans Rd roundabout, and flows through the block.

Ms Alford said the destruction of the wetland forest was drastic enough to stop the creek flowing in the Dry. “It would be the beginning of the end for Rapid Creek,” she said.

Lands Department Development Consent Authority is progressing action against the landowner and investigating all aspects of the matter.”