McARTHUR WILL BE CLOSED!

Minister Paul Henderson announced that the McArthur River will be closed to commercial barramundi fishing from 1 July 2002.

After an extended consultation period where local residents of Borroloola were able to have input to the process, the Minister made his announcement on 13 March.

This is a victory for commonsense. Only 4%, or 27 tonnes, of the commercial barramundi catch comes out of the McArthur River. Of this 4% about half (14 tonnes) comes out of the area that is to be closed. Compare the value of the commercial take from the McArthur at $209,600 and the direct expenditure in the McArthur area by recreational anglers of $3,300,000 and the evidence is clear.

We have listed the Minister's reasons for the decision and as this is a very important issue we have included all the reasons that the Minister announced.

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The Meteorological Marine Consultative Committee
Joan Feron, Bureau of Meteorology, Darwin - March 2002

The idea for having State and Territory based Marine Consultative Committees (MCC) emerged from the inquiry into the disastrous 1998 Sydney-Hobart yacht race. One of the issues highlighted by the race inquiry was lack of understanding of some important aspects regarding forecasts and warnings by some users of marine weather forecasts.

The NT MCC is convened each year, the first meeting being held in December 2000, and the second just recently on February the 6th this year.

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RECORD?
Karlee Jensen of Nhulunbuy High School landed a 10kg Queenfish during a competition last month - pending NT and Australian record. Courtesy of the Nhulunbuy High School newsletter.

NEW ADMIN OFFICER

I have joined AFANT as Administrative Officer having commenced my employment in February.

My position within AFANT is certainly proving to be both very interesting and challenging.

I am looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead and committed to representing your interests to ensure recreational fishing is maintained at its best for the years ahead.

Kristina Oberhardt

Reminder
for annual membership fees!
For those who have not paid their 2002 membership fees we would love to hear from you. It is not a large some of money ($10.00) and you should have received your reminder with this newsletter. We now have credit card facilities and we can take your membership payment in this manner – see details on renewal form.
After extending the period for six weeks to allow more time for consultations to be undertaken, I am very pleased to say that the Minister Paul Henderson has closed the McArthur River to commercial fishing and has put the closure line as per the discussion paper. During that six week period a number of meetings were held, and John and I attended one in Borroloola, which brought together all the major stake holders. This meeting was run by the Fisheries Dept. and allowed all interested people of the McArthur River area to have their say and put forward any new recommendations to the Minister. Over ninety people attended the meeting, the majority being local residents.

The closure will come into force as of the 1st July this year and in conjunction with this, the Government has commissioned a Regional Development Plan for the Borroloola region. This will give the people of the area a great opportunity to capitalise on the tourist potential the closure will offer. The Government had considered all the options put forward during the consultation period, including different closure lines and part- closure during the season but decided that on balance, the closure proposed in the discussion paper best meets the long term interests of the community of Borroloola.

I must say that I take my hat off to the Minister for taking this decision in light that it was the previous Government that announced the closure of the McArthur River leading up to the last election. It could have been so easy for the ALP Government to go against what the previous Government proposed to score cheap political points, but the ALP Government showed they are willing to make the difficult decisions and the right decisions for all Territorians future. Well done Mr Henderson and the ALP Government.

The Government has announced it will develop a long term management plan for the fisheries resources of the Northern Territory. All future fisheries allocation decisions will be made within the framework of this plan which will be based on the properly researched scientific and economic data and developed in consultation with all stakeholders. What does this mean? Basically, it means there will be no more closures of rivers by a thousand lashes of the Government. We will need to sit down with other interested stakeholders and discuss the process for future river closures. Should make for some interesting times.

The AFANT committee has written to the Fishing Clubs of Darwin to ask for their help in starting a research project on the Adelaide River. This project will be to record Barramundi stocks of the Adelaide River now, based on the same lines as the Billy Taylor Barra Watch program, which is being conducted on the Victoria and Roper River systems. With this information we can compare the effort to catch a barra in the Adelaide to the Vic and Roper Rivers. Given that the Vic and Roper are closed to commercial barra gillnet fishing, and the Adelaide is still open to commercial fishing, it may help provide the scientific evidence to prove what effort commercial gillnet fishing has on our river systems. If you fish the Adelaide River on a regular basis and would like to take part in this project, please contact John at AFANT.

The committee are also looking as starting a project on the McArthur River to monitor all fish species to try and get some base line data on fish stocks, and the effect of the river being closed to commercial fishing. By collecting this data we will be able to see if there is an increase in fish stocks in the coming years, or if there is too much pressure being put on the river by recreational anglers. All this information will be needed to be collected over a number of years to provide the scientific information to prove one way or the other the effects of commercial fishing and recreational fishing have on our river systems. If you fish the McArthur River on a regular basis and would like to help, please ring John at AFANT.
About two hundred people attended the AFANT AGM on 24 February with many keen to listen to the new Fisheries Minister Paul Henderson describe what plans the ALP Government had for recreational fishing in the NT.

In addition to the Minister’s address Mr Jim Smith from Skretting Australia gave a presentation to the meeting on the progress of the barramundi farming operation in Port Hurd on Bathurst Island. The first harvest of farmed barra will be in May with an anticipated harvest at the end of the year of 20 tonnes per week. Grown to about 3 kilos the fish will be about 55 cm in length and are aimed at the fresh fillet market.

Mr Henderson outlined a variety of initiatives that we covered in the last edition of Indepth. Mr Henderson stated that he was very proud to be the first ALP Fisheries Minister to address an AFANT AGM. One of the key points in his presentation was the $500,000 annual commitment to infrastructure for recreational fishing. Guaranteed at this amount for three years it will mean $1.5m will be spent on the likes of boat ramps both new and improvements and possibly some form of security around some of the more notorious boat ramps.

Six positions were vacant at the AGM and the people who were in those positions were re-elected unopposed – they were Geoff Bird Vice President, Duncan Wilson Treasurer, Tony Hare Assistant Secretary/Treasurer and three committee positions to Gavin Bedford, Peter Maley and Peter Grigg.

This was faxed to Darwin from one of the more remote areas of the NT with just a little bravado detailing the efforts of a recent fishing trip. It went like this:

“Went out after work yesterday afternoon. In the water at 5.00 and back by 7.30. Caught tally.
Under 70 cm – nil
Under 80 cm – one
Under 90 cm – two
Under 100 cm – nineteen
Over 100 cm – one.
Memorable dropped tally - Over 100 cm - five.
Fuel used – two litres, travelling time 3 minutes each way total of six minutes.
Life’s hard.”

Not a bad session for barramundi. All fish were released with the only problem being that the angler’s partner is complaining that there is no fish to eat. This angler only keeps a barra when it is between 55 cm and 70 cm.

The Darwin Flyrodders is the latest club to affiliate with AFANT. Formed about two years ago the club will host the Saltwater Fly Fishing Challenge held on Bynoe Harbour in September. The club meets at the Aviation institute on the last Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm. Casting lessons and fly tying are regular activities the club hosts at its meetings. For more information check www.afant.com.au under clubs and events.

Attendees at the recent meeting included Bureau of Meteorology representatives along with representatives from various NT marine organisations, including John Harrison from the Amateur Fishermen’s Association NT.

The most significant issue that was discussed at this years meeting was the introduction of the New Marine Radio Service (NMRS). On the 1st July 2002 broadcasts from VID Telstra Coastal Voice Radio will cease, and NMRS broadcasts from Wiluna and Charleville will commence. You may need to upgrade your current HF radio. For more details please read the last section of this article.

If any of you want any issues brought up at the next meeting please contact John at the Amateur Fishermen’s Association, or Joan Fernon at the Bureau of Meteorology.

Observations

One of the topics discussed at February’s meeting was current NT marine weather observations network. See map below.

Notes regarding map
AWS – Automatic Weather Station
Sonde – is a weather balloon flight, which measures the winds and temperature and humidity at all levels in the atmosphere.
AIFS is the computing system that forecasters use to view observations, satellite imagery and other information and compose and issue forecasts and warnings.
Co-operative Stations are weather observation stations that are operated by individuals who are contracted to the Bureau of Meteorology.
The two buoys in the Gulf of Carpentaria are near stationary and located at 13S 139E and 15S 139E. Northern Endeavour Automatic Weather Station located at 10.6S 126E.
Coastal Weather Observations are available on the 1900 voice telephone service, Weather by Fax and Coastal Radio. The buoy data is currently available on the 1900 service.
Details of these services are outlined on the next page.

For those of you who fish around Darwin and Bynoe Harbours you’ll be interested to know that in the next year the Bureau will be installing two marine automatic weather stations in Darwin Harbour, one at Nightcliff Jetty and the other at East Arm Port. Another weather station will be installed just outside Bynoe Harbour at Fish Reef. Observations from these sites will be available via the 1900 telephone service voice, HF radio, and on the web. See details next page.
Automatic Weather Stations such as McCluer Island, Cape Wessel and Charles Point provide valuable information for forecasters and marine users alike, but they are occasionally subject to failure due to battery run down and communications problems. Unfortunately failures are most likely to occur during severe weather events, just when they are really needed.

There are also a number of ships that move through NT coastal waters that send observations. The Darwin Bureau hopes to install a marine automatic weather station on the barge that travels between Darwin and Groote Eylandt.

How good are the forecasts?
Forecast accuracy was also discussed at the NT MCC meeting. Forecasts will never be perfect at all times; however they are steadily improving, helped in part by increasingly accurate computer models of the atmosphere.

For those who are out in small craft on the NT waters, accurate forecasts of surges in the Dry Season southeast flow are crucial. Forecasters do generally pick these surges; however brief surges in the southeast flow can go un-forecast. Forecasting the onset of fresh monsoonal flow is also improving.

Getting Weather Information

Coastal Voice Radio
VID HF radio from Darwin - broadcasts Highs Seas and Coastal Waters Products. Please note this service is ceasing on the 1st July 2002.

1300 and 1900 telephone voice services
1900 numbers 77c per minute,
1300 numbers cost of local call

1900 955 367
Coastal Forecast, Warnings and Observations Bulletins

1300 659 214
non TC warnings (includes Coastal Waters Warnings)

*** Notes on calling the 1900 955 367 service
Now you have typed in zero to get the main menu, wait for the message to be read out then if you want:
• the weather situation - Type 31
• the Darwin Harbour Forecast - Type 32
• the Kuri Bay to Wyndham forecasts and observations - Type 331
• the Wyndham to Daly River forecasts and observations - Type 332
• the Daly River to Cape Don forecasts and observations - Type 333
• the Cape Don to Cape Wessel forecasts and observations - Type 334
• the Northwest Gulf of Carpentaria forecasts and observations - Type 335
• the Northwest Gulf of Carpentaria forecasts and observations - Type 336

Bureau Web Pages
Coastal Waters forecasts, warnings and observations.

InformateL Weather by Fax
190 293 5214
Coastal Waters Forecasts - this includes reference to Coastal Warnings

Calling the Bureau of Meteorology in Darwin
Remember if you have any forecast queries you can ring 8920 3824 24 hours.

If you have queries or problems with any of the Bureau’s services call 8920 3810 during office hours.

The New Marine Radio Service

HF Coastal Radio from 1 July 2002
VID Telstra Coastal Voice Radio ceases on the 1st July 2002. New Marine Radio Service (NMRS) broadcasting from Wiluna and Charleville will take over these services.

Broadcast schedule: repeated every 4 hours.
Wiluna (VMW) will broadcast coastal waters forecasts, warnings and observations, for all NT coastal waters. Charleville (VMC) will broadcast coastal waters forecasts, warnings and observations for NT Waters east of Cape Don.

The full schedule has yet to be finalised, but will be detailed at the following web address when available.

NMRS Broadcast frequencies
Charleville will be broadcasting using the current Telstra VID frequencies, plus an additional 16MHz frequency. Wiluna will be broadcasting on a new set of frequencies.

VMC broadcasts on frequencies (kHz)
2201 | 4426 | 6507 | 8176 | 12365 | 16537

VMW broadcasts on frequencies (kHz)
2056 | 4149 | 6230 | 8113 | 12356 | 16528

Transmissions will be on four frequencies simultaneously. Lower frequencies will be used at night and higher frequencies by day. More details will be available from the above web location.

NMRS - will you need a new radio?
If after 1st July 2002 you need to access weather information via HF please read on…

Do you have a modern synthesised HF radio?
You should have no problem picking up the new broadcasts.

Do you have a synthesised 99 channel HF radio?
If you operate west of Cape Don you will have to get your radio reprogrammed. If you operate east of Cape Don only then you will need to get your radio reprogrammed if you require the 16MHz channel to pick up Charleville broadcasts during the day.

Do you have an old crystal locked HF radio?
You may need to purchase a new radio, or you may be able to have the radio modified with new crystals.

…and you operate west of Cape Don?
Yes you’ll need to upgrade your radio.

…or you only operate east of Cape Don?
You may have to upgrade your radio. Even if your vessel has all the current Telstra five frequencies you may still need to upgrade, this is because you may need to use the extra 16Mhz broadcast frequency to pick up broadcasts from Charleville during the day. This same problem applies if your vessel is only equipped with a couple of the current Telstra frequencies. In which case you may have additional problems picking up Charleville on your existing frequencies and have to shift to higher or lower frequencies in the Telstra five frequency set.

| 2201 | 4426 | 6507 | 8176 | 12365 | 16537 |
| 2056 | 4149 | 6230 | 8113 | 12356 | 16528 |

Joan Fernon, Bureau of Meteorology, Darwin - March 2002

Article continued from page 1
THE DECISION

The Government, after extensive consultation and consideration, has decided to close the McArthur River to commercial Barramundi fishing. The closure lines will be as proposed in the discussion paper released in November 2001 (See attached Map). The closure will be effective from 1 July 2002.

BACKGROUND

In May of 2001 the previous government announced the closure of the McArthur River. There was widespread concern amongst key stakeholders including the Northern Territory Seafood Council, traditional owners, commercial fishers in the area and Borroloola region residents that they were not consulted over the decision.

The new Government was approached by numerous stakeholders requesting that a consultative process be undertaken before government made its decision. Additionally, the new government became aware that although the announcement had been made the necessary legislative steps to implement the closure were not taken by the previous government to close the river and hence it remained open to commercial fishing. Concerns were also expressed that no effective planning for the long term regional development of the Borroloola area had been undertaken in conjunction with the previous Government’s announcement. Given this, the Government instructed the Fisheries department to prepare a discussion paper on the closure for community feedback. Submissions on the discussion paper were closed on 28 December 2001.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

The response to the discussion paper was very strong with 141 submissions being received. Many of the submissions were very lengthy and detailed and a wide range of alternative initiatives and views were put forward. The vast majority of submissions were in support of a closure but even many of these raised options than could be considered alongside the closure proposed.

The respondents went to considerable effort in providing their advice to government. Given the vast number of responses and the variety of suggestions it was decided to extend the consultation period for a period of 6 weeks. While consultation continued the status quo remained, and the river remains open to commercial fishing until the end of the current licence period, 30 June 2002.

The Fisheries Department facilitated the consultation process with meetings and discussions held with all key stakeholders and a significant number of the respondents. Ongoing discussions continued with AFANT, the Seafood Council, the Northern Land Council and individual commercial fishermen. Discussions and proposals were considered along with the expert scientific advice provided by the department.

There are several key stakeholders in this decision as the river is important to the recreational fishing community and commercial fishers alike. Other important stakeholders are the residents of Borroloola, the Traditional Owners and all the other residents of the region. To properly consult with this group a public meeting was convened in Borroloola on 1 March. The Fisheries Division coordinated the meeting with the local Member for Barkly, Elliot McAdam attending. Participants were provided with an agenda and a summary of submissions document. The meeting was attended by up to 90 persons including key stakeholder representatives and a large number of the general Borroloola public. During the course of the meeting participants discussed the issues raised in the submission summary and in the process listed issues they wished to be included in the final deliberations.
Reasons for Decision
The Government has considered all of the options put forward during the consultation period, including different closure lines and part-closure during the season but has decided that on balance the closure proposed in the discussion paper best meets the long term interests of the community.

Barramundi stocks throughout the Northern Territory are currently healthy and sustainable. However the issue of resource allocation between commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, fishing tour operators and indigenous people remains a source of conflict. An important factor in any resource allocation decision is regional development and the McArthur River is an important resource for all the residents of the Borroloola region. The McArthur River is the second most popular spot for recreational fishing in the Northern Territory behind only Darwin Harbour. 11% of the recreational fishing effort in the Territory occurs on the McArthur River. Tourism is the second biggest industry in the Northern Territory and Recreational Fishing forms an important and strategic part of the Territory’s tourism economy. Numerous submissions made reference to the increase in tourism that a closure to commercial fishing may bring.

Commercial fishing in the Territory is also very important and the Government understands the desire to retain access to river of the industry, in particular the fishermen who base their operations in the region. However commercial fishing in the McArthur river constitutes only 4% of the Northern Territory’s commercial Barramundi catch. The flow-on effects from commercial fishing are also a significant contributor to the economy of the Territory. These flow-on effects include the fit out of vessels and the provision of goods and services to support the industry. At present these flow on effects provide only a marginal benefit to the economy of the local Borroloola region.

The government considered all the potential economic benefits presented during consultation on either side of the debate. The Government believes that the opportunity for increases in tourism that could result from the river being free of commercial fishing offset any economic loss that may result from the cessation of commercial fishing in the river. The government acknowledges that this decision reduces the area available to the commercial Barramundi industry but believes the impact of this decision on the economy, particularly the regional economy, will be marginal.

Licence Buy Back Scheme
In accordance with the Northern Territory Licence Buy Back Scheme, the Government will buy back an appropriate amount of commercial effort as a result of the closure. The Licence Buy Backs are voluntary and help prevent the displacement of commercial fishing effort into other areas.

Regional Development Plan
In conjunction with this decision the government has commissioned a Regional Development plan for the Borroloola region to ensure that the benefits from the removal of commercial fishing are optimised. The Fisheries Division of the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development (DBIRD) will work with the Department of Community Development, the Northern Territory Tourist Commission and the local Borroloola community to assist the community in maximising the local returns including through fishing tour ventures. Indigenous involvement in these ventures will be particularly encouraged as market research demonstrates that tourists come to the Territory to learn more about Aboriginal culture. The McArthur River is ideally situated to provide a unique and cultural Territory fishing experience.

Code of Conduct for Recreational Fishing
The Government acknowledges the on going efforts of the commercial industry towards addressing concerns the community have with their presence in the Territory’s rivers, particularly the move to a zero by catch policy. The Government also acknowledges the considerable concern amongst numerous Borroloola residents, especially the Traditional Owners, of the potential adverse effects of an increase in recreational fishing in the area. The future development of the recreational industry will require controls. The Government will work with the Traditional Owners, the Northern Land Council, AFANT and recreational fishing clubs and tour operators in the region to put together a local code...
of conduct for recreational fishing. The key to this will be mutual respect and co-operation, in particular the observance of sacred sites.

Normal fishing regulations will apply and as announced in the November mini-budget, the Government will appoint 5 indigenous fishing officers in the Territory from next year to help monitor adherence to these regulations. The first of these new officers is to be appointed in the upcoming financial year and will be based in Borroloola. The role of these officers is to help communicate regulations and the local code of conduct to recreational fishers in the area. The Government will work with AFANT and the local fishing clubs in communicating these regulations.

Future Fishing Allocation Decisions – Long Term Management Plan
The Government will develop a long term management plan for the fisheries resource of the Northern Territory. Such a plan is long overdue and will look at our fisheries resource as a whole. The plan will be based on properly researched scientific and economic data. A key component of this plan will be a Barramundi management plan. All key stakeholders, including recreational and commercial fisherman, fishing tour operators, traditional owners and pastoralists will be involved in its development. The plan will address resource sustainability, the priorities and concerns of indigenous people, economic and regional development, tourism, the continuation of a viable commercial industry and the encouragement of recreational fishing.

The Government recognises the significant contribution made by the commercial seafood industry in providing Barramundi for export and local consumption and looks forward to working with the peak commercial body, the Northern Territory Seafood Council, in ensuring that this industry continues to develop in a viable and sustainable manner.

All future fisheries allocation decisions will be based within the framework of this plan. The government will not consider any additional such decisions until the plan is implemented.