

Peter Chandler approved rezoning of Kulaluk lease in a surge zone at the end of Totem Road Coconut Grove, together with Jape's proposed Light Industry subdivision along Fitzner Drive Ludmilla... Jape Chin Planit Halikos are now applying to dump metres of fill

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Northern Territory News

Dear Sir

According to an NT News editorial, real estate industry insiders are warning that the market could be heading for a correction ("An economic wake-up call", 20 November). On the same page Wicking's homeless long grass characters satirically comment on the difference between the haves and the have-nots. Equally as pertinent is a letter by Ken Parish of CDU ("Risk Assessment", 20 November), bemoaning the practice of building in the primary surge zone and suggesting that the land be returned to open space.

The length of Coconut Grove from Nightcliff to Totem Road and almost the whole of the 301 hectare Kulaluk lease is an obvious example. As recently as March this year, Peter Chandler approved the rezoning of land at the end of Totem Road, together with Jape's proposed Light Industry subdivision along Fitzner Drive. Not surprisingly, both developers are now applying to dump metres of fill to raise the ground level.

After Cyclone Tracy the Larrakia Kulaluk land claim covered all the agriculture leases in Coconut Grove which were then valued at \$800,000 the lot, with building restrictions imposed by the Reconstruction Commission's surge contours. However the federal government balked at the price and passed the buck to the NT. By 1979 the surge zone was forgotten and the land was subdivided almost down to the high tide mark.

All was not lost – a goodly portion was returned to the Larrakia, preserving the largest surviving monsoon forest in Darwin and the vast Ludmilla Creek mangrove habitat, as well as acres of eucalypt and cycad forest in the airport flight path. In effect a green belt from East Point to Lee Point and Holmes Jungle.

Judge Dick Ward commented in his land claim report, "there is more chance of the environment being preserved if the land is handed over to the Aborigines." Now that it appears the judge was mistaken, what is to be the affect of flooding the Darwin land market with a 301ha community lease in the surge zone, granted at a peppercorn rent of ten cents per year?

The problem was foreseen in a 1985 report which questioned the release of land granted for community use which had "no land cost component in the establishment of an appropriate rental for any such development." In other words, certainly not the free market principles praised by economists like Adam Smith. In fact the land has never been "on the market" to find a true price. The developers admit this by valuing this priceless community land at a fraction of the value of land elsewhere in Darwin's industrial areas.

Surely there are enough empty tin shed in Winnellie without extending the Coconut Grove abomination the length of Dick Ward Drive?

Yours sincerely

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