

Radical fix idea for debt

JASON WALLS

THE association that controls the 300ha Kulaluk lease on Dick Ward Drive has proposed a radical land swap deal with the NT Government in a bid to get its troubled finances back into the black.

The Gwalwa Daraniki Association is currently under investigation by Licensing NT after missing multiple financial reporting deadlines dating back to 2017-18.

The plan – flagged with the Territory Government earlier this year – would see the Government buy a 4ha parcel of the lease from the GDA in exchange for the clearance of a \$1.2 million Power and Water debt.

The association is also running at a deficit of between \$200,000 and \$250,000 per year and the GDA proposal would also see the Government lease another parcel of land at that rate to establish an itinerant accommodation facility.

GDA chairwoman Helen Secretary said the facility would be a longer-term alternative to the controversial Frog Hollow Better Pathways Centre and was closer to shops, schools and health services.

“Our idea of doing this itinerant transitional camp is for countrymen to come into town that are living out in the

long grass and around town,” she said.

“At least then they’ve got this area of land where they can go and have accommodation and the service providers can come in and assist them if they want to live permanently in Darwin, if they have renal problems or they’ve got kids that need to attend school.

“Then there won’t be any complaints from the public and government departments that we’ve got itinerant problems, they will have shelter, they’ll have ablutions there for them, they’ll have accommodation until they can get assistance.”

Ms Secretary said while no alcohol would be permitted on the site, drunk people after somewhere to sleep and sober up would be welcome.

“If night patrol for example or the police pick up (community) members out in the public areas, they can take them there for accommodation,” she said.

“If they are too intoxicated and not going by the rules of the camp, then they can take them out to Berrimah where the sobering up shelter is but then they can come back.”

GDA consultant secretary Steven Doherty said while the association still disputed the legitimacy of the P&W debt, the proposal was a good-faith attempt to work with government to resolve the outstand-



The plan would see the Government buy a parcel of the Kulaluk lease

Picture: KERI MEGELUS

ing issues. The GDA has previously been criticised for its close and secretive control of the Kulaluk lease, which was vested to the organisation in perpetuity in 1979.

But Mr Doherty said the association saw the new proposal as an opportunity to work with Larrakia Nation and other interest groups in a new spirit of co-operation.

“The idea of bringing all these groups in is that where they have concerns they can put eyes on and see it for themselves and assist in the upkeep and maintenance, same with the greens groups

for the gamba grass and so forth,” he said.

Mr Doherty said the GDA had back-up plans it was confident would address its financial woes should the Government reject the deal, including selling the land to developers and taking court action over the disputed debt.

“Quite frankly, we don’t have to do this offer, but this is a window of opportunity for government to do a good news story where everyone in the community gets a bit of say over some land use,” he said.

Darwin Lord Mayor Kon Vatskalis has thrown his

weight behind the plan, saying the new Frog Hollow facility was ill-conceived, being only open until 6pm and within 200m of the nearest bottle shop.

“After 6 o’clock when it closes down because people will not be able to sleep there, what will happen? Frog Hollow will become a camping ground for homeless people,” he said.

A Chief Minister’s Department spokesman said the land swap was “still under consideration”.

Larrakia Nation was contacted for comment.

Aurukun group fears growing

COMMUNITY groups hold serious concerns for the health and safety of hundreds of people who fled a Cape York town when violence erupted after an alleged murder on New Year’s Day.

Riots in Aurukun have led to 130 people fleeing six hours west to Coen, with others moving south to Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw. Another 110 people travelled through the night to a makeshift bush camp 80km outside of Aurukun.

There are serious concerns about access to health services, food and their personal safety.

Thief makes off with \$70k violin

AN uninsured, century-old violin is among musical instruments worth \$100,000 that were stolen under the cloak of darkness in suburban Melbourne.

Thieves broke into a home at Warrigal Rd in Hughesdale on Tuesday between 2.30am and 7.30am, getting away with instruments including an AE Smith 1908 antique violin.

Music teacher Jenny Occleshaw says the 1908 violin – her main instrument, which she plays daily – is worth about \$70,000 in Australia.

Beacon saves Swiss tourist

AN injured Swiss tourist has been rescued from a gorge in Western Australia’s north after she activated her emergency beacon.

Police found the 47-year-old woman at 6pm on Wednesday about 600m down Kalamina Gorge in the Karijini National Park, lying on the edge of a pool with a broken leg and possible wrist injuries. She was taken to hospital for treatment.

WA Police said the quick response was only possible due to the woman activating her personal locator beacon.

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