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Kept in the dark and fed at a late hour

WAS the decision to treat us all as mushrooms a formal one or simply a loose agreement knocked up by some like-minded souls over a long lunch?

Because, love it or loathe it, the proposed plan for a billion-dollar-plus residential, marina and commercial complex on Darwin Harbour is an insult to us all.

Since the story was first broken in tantalising snippets by the ABC's wonderful dawn-buster Julia Christensen and then given more meat in the *Northern Territory News*, many people have tended to embrace it as the best April Fools' joke ever perpetrated.

But, no, it wasn't just cooked up to celebrate All Fools' Day — it just felt like it — because the plan has been known about for several months by "those in the know".

This is neither a criticism of the developer nor the plan. There'll be time later to talk about both.

But it is a damning indictment of those who govern us — be it on a Territory or local government level — and further proof that the planning process in the NT is a joke.

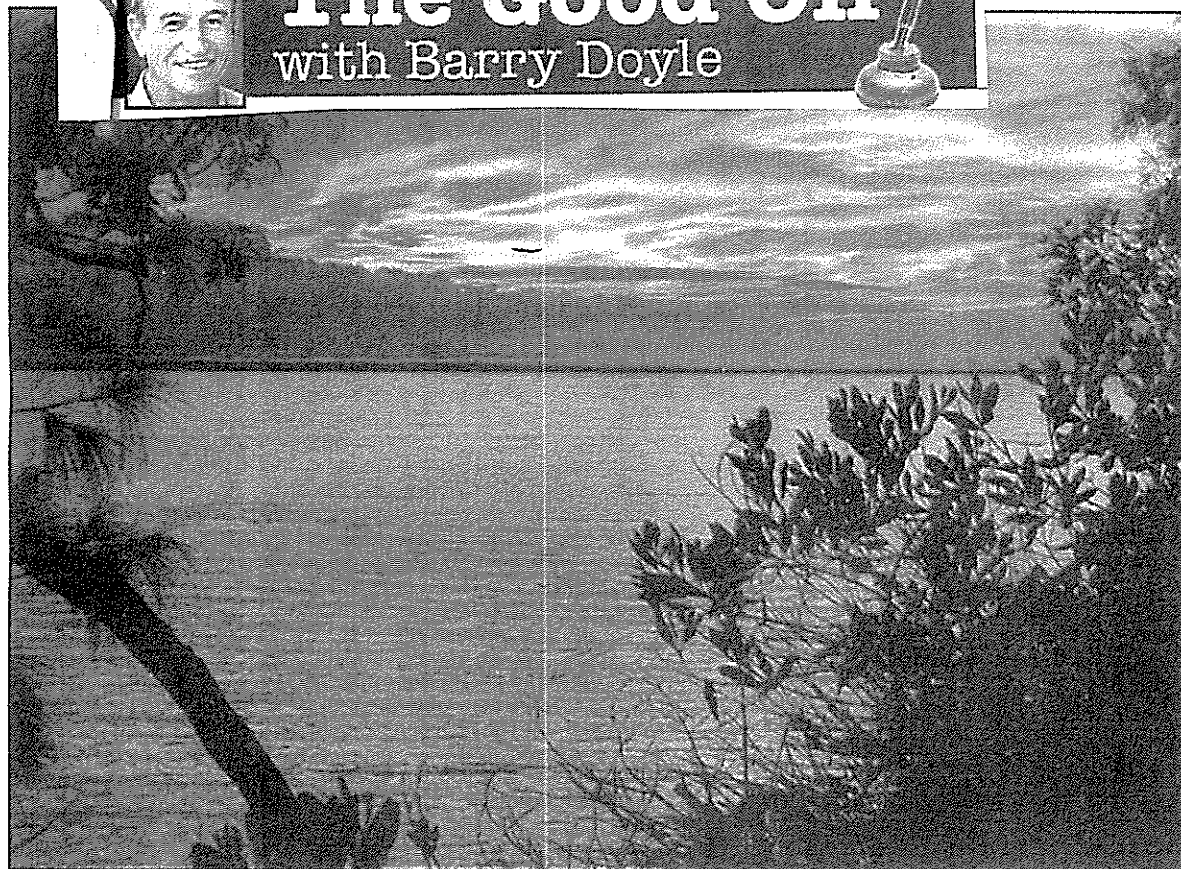
When Christensen started picking at a few loose threads on Tuesday morning, a succession of insiders began admitting that there may be something going on but, "really Julia", nothing further could be said because it was "in confidence".

Confidence? That is exactly what we should not have. How dare they?

The proposed development would



The Good Oil with Barry Doyle



PRIME LOCATION: Reader Mari Barrios captured this sunset over Darwin Harbour from East Point

constitute the greatest change to the face of Darwin since the rebuilding effort in the wake of Cyclone Tracy.

It is early days yet but it seems the various interested parties — government, indigenous groups, business interests and even the occasional cashed-up barfly — have been consulted about the plan and a generally approving consensus achieved.

Put down the glasses — and perhaps tell the punters in the race to the line.

Let me digress.

A couple of years ago I was vice-president of the Darwin Ski Club — no one else wanted the job — and that strong-boned and refined but

tattered old lady of a place was approached by a developer.

Well, not quite. The club was contacted by a Territory government functionary on behalf of a developer. Would we be interested in having a bit of a chat that could be to the club's advantage?

A meeting was arranged.

Representatives of the developer, who had a solid reputation for helping turn Queensland's Airlie Beach into what it is today, cobbled together some plans and flew in to Darwin for a very relaxed and informal presentation.

It was up to us, of course, but, broadly speaking, if we played ball

we may be able to get out of any financial difficulties, build a new two-storey clubhouse with upstairs restaurant, keep some of the bar and restaurant takings and still have a bit of land left over for club use.

Most of the land would, naturally, have to go to the developer.

What disturbed me back then, and still gets up my nose, is that the meeting was also attended by two NT government functionaries.

Bureaucrats tend to use the word "facilitate"; the rest of us use a more direct word that also starts with "F".

It became clear that what was being brokered in the concept was not just ski club land but an area

Territory moments

IT was absolutely fascinating to hear the early stages of the "Arafura Harbour" story play out on ABC radio on Tuesday as listeners responded to Julia Christensen's puzzled 6am "what's going on?" opening gambit.

It's down by the "failed barramundi farm and the failed mud crab farm," said one. That nailed the exact position for most of us.

Then there were the conspiracy theorists: "Julia, why d'ya reckon they've been stockpiling that big heap of dirt?" The calls kept coming in until what had been a whisper turned in to a whopper.

Ah, Jools, what a top fisho you are. Love your work. Well done.

stretching back to the Darwin Bowls Club car park and some parkland.

Quid pro quo. You scratch our back and we'll return the favour.

The ski club unanimously rejected the proposal and now threatens to thrive under the remarkable presidency of Kelly Burns.

My point is, if there has been general agreement to the Arafura Harbour development by government and other stakeholders, who gets what? And when will we be told?

Or is that termed, "commercial — in confidence"? Pull the other one.