

ENCL: YES

**DARWIN CITY COUNCIL**  
**REPORT**

DATE: 26/6/09

TO: 2<sup>ND</sup> ORDINARY COUNCIL

APPROVED: JB

FROM: ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

REPORT NO: 09C0102 JB:mrg

COMMON NO: 1333675

SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON 2009/10 CITY OF DARWIN MUNICIPAL PLAN FROM  
SURF LIFE SAVING NORTHERN TERRITORY AND MINDIL BEACH  
SURF LIFE SAVING CLUB

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ITEM NO: 13.5

**SYNOPSIS:**

This report is in response to comments received from Surf Life Saving Northern Territory and Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club on the 2009/10 Darwin Municipal Plan and also refers to report number 09A0111 entitled Adoption of the 2009/10 City of Darwin Municipal Plan submitted to this meeting.

**GENERAL:**

These matters do not have significant impact on Council's budget submission should it determine to proceed with the requested funding however there are complex community service considerations in respect to the provision of surf life saving services in Darwin.

These matters will be subject to a future report to Council.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That it be a recommendation to Council that:

- A. THAT report number 09C0103 JB:mrg entitled Comments On 2009/10 City of Darwin Municipal Plan From Surf Life Saving Northern Territory and Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club, be received and noted.
- B. THAT a further report be submitted to Council regarding the comments on the 2009/10 City of Darwin Municipal Plan From Surf Life Saving Northern Territory and Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club.

**JOHN BANKS**

**A/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Any queries on this report may be directed to John Banks on 89300633.



# Surf Life Saving Northern Territory Inc

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The Chief Executive Officer  
Mr Brendan Dowd  
Darwin City Council  
Harry Chan Avenue  
PO Box 84  
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Brendan,

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 June 2009 inviting comment on the draft 2009-10 City of Darwin Municipal Plan.

**Surf Life Saving Northern Territory requests the reinstatement of the Mindil Beach Lifeguard Service as an essential component of Council's commitment to public water safety in Darwin.**

SLSNT has reviewed the Mindil Beach service and proposes a modified operation which provides a Lifeguard service in the afternoons, which is the most popular time for beachgoers. This significantly reduces the cost whilst maintaining a lifeguard presence in line with the volunteer service provided on Sunday afternoons.

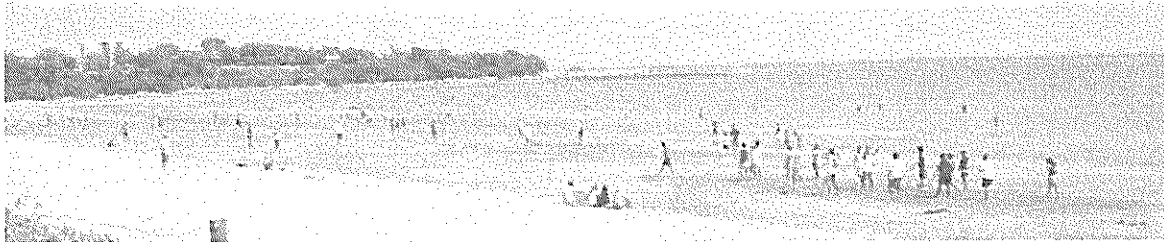
The revised annual cost of this service for a 5 hours per day, 6 days a week, and covering the 'dry season' months of July, August, September, and June in each financial year is \$33,000 (plus GST). This service aligns with the hours provided by the Mindil Beach SLSC volunteer service on Sunday afternoons from 1.00pm through to 6.00pm.

Should the DCC prefer a 4 hour per day service for the same months the cost would be \$29,200 (plus GST). A 4 hour service may be confusing to the public as it doesn't align with the volunteer service and popular visitation times. It is also a less beneficial use of lifeguard hours when comparing setup and packup time to lifeguard duty hours and service to the public.

SLSNT seeks to bring more value to the DCC and the community in a revised service, which includes:

- A safe reassuring environment for beachgoers.
- Improved community relations and advice to numerous beach goers frequenting Mindil Beach.
- A cleaner, less hazardous beach.
- Improved cooperation and behaviour from itinerant people.
- Significant reduction of risk to Council.

- Jobs for locals.
- Prospect of developing trainee Indigenous lifeguard in partnership with the Larrakia Land Council.
- Improved conservation and environmental outcomes. Lifeguard to provide an interpretive service to enquiring public on historical, cultural, environmental including the interesting marine biodiversity.



*Photo: Friday 12 June 2009*

### **Background**

Surf Life Saving Northern Territory (SLSNT) is affiliated with Surf Life Saving Australia - one of Australia's largest volunteer organisations and Australia's major coastal public safety and rescue authority. Each year NT lifesavers and lifeguards perform up to 50 rescues and keep watch over more than 35,000 Top End beach goers. This is a very important contribution to water safety in the Northern Territory on behalf of the responsible land managers and supports the safety and enjoyment of a widely used natural resource and recreational amenity.

Until July 2006 volunteer lifesavers provided a weekend service but no city beach had a 7-day lifesaving service. The initiative of the Council, to provide a lifeguard service at Mindil Beach, resulted in Council contracting Surf Life Saving Northern Territory and our recent submission to Council highlights the extraordinary success of this service.

With regard for the safe enjoyment of our city's coast it is SLSNT's fundamental position, on behalf of the beach-going public of Darwin and the many thousands of visitors to our city and, that Darwin, as a modern Australian capital city, should have at least one beach with a daily lifeguard service.

Other tropical regional coastal cities have lifeguard services provided by local government, including Mackay, Townsville, Cairns and also the towns of Port Douglas and Broome. These services cater for local and tourists alike, and the beaches are popular – their conditions are very similar to Darwin. Mindil Beach is just as attractive.

### **Swimming on NT Beaches**

In the Northern Territory the growth and development of our tropical city has included the development of Darwin's beaches with access paths, public facilities and car parking being provided. Aquatic sports in the dry season have always been popular and include swimming, windsurfing, kitesurfing, canoeing, sailing and much more. Statistics collected by the Lifeguard Service for beach usage in 2006, 2007 and 2008 show an increasing trend of usage by the public, community groups and schools.

All Australian beaches have an inherent risk of injury. The Darwin Harbour area is actively managed to control crocodile populations and there has not been a fatal crocodile attack in this area for over 120 years. Box Jellyfish (*Chironex fleckerii*) and related species are

common in the wet season but uncommon during the dry season. The risk of a sting is greatly reduced by a lifeguard presence because lifeguards inspect and sample the inshore area (visual inspection, stinger net drags) and actively discourage people from entering the water if any of these animals are detected - usually with 100% success. There has not been a Box Jellyfish sting at Mindil Beach during lifeguard patrol hours for two years.

SLSNT believes that an unacceptably heightened risk for beach users has occurred with the Lifeguard Service absent from Mindil Beach in May and June 2009. This has meant none of the recommended risk controls and risk reduction strategies have been effected. Mindil Beach may not have dangerous surf in the dry season but marine animals pose a high risk. It is important to note that Mindil Beach was closed by lifeguards twice in 2008 (crocodiles) - a proactive action by lifeguards to maximize public safety.

### **Going Forward**

SLSNT proposes that the continuing the lifeguard service will;

- capitalise on the significant \$50k investment in existing gear, equipment and storage
- complement the volunteer service provided by the volunteer surf lifesavers of the Mindil Beach SLSC.
- be promoted by many tourism operators inc Mindil Beach Markets Assoc'n.

### **Public Support**

Mindil Beach, due to its proximity to a large amount of visitor accommodation and residential urban areas, and its high profile in marketing and tourism programs, is the city's most popular beach. SLSNT believes the Mindil Beach Lifeguard Service is highly valued by Darwin's residents and visitors. The lifeguards are very interactive with the public with nearly one in three beach users consulting the lifeguard before going in the water - possibly the highest rate of interaction of any lifeguard service in Australia!

Last month (18-26 May 2009) the radio station, Territory FM, conducted an online poll and sought responses to the question... ***"Do you agree with Council's decision to remove the lifeguard service from Mindil Beach?"*** 95% of approximately 500 listeners responded with a No vote. (contact: Ali, Territory FM 8946 6266)

### **Mindil Beach is now Untidy and at times Unsafe**

Currently, Mindil Beach has significantly deteriorated as a recreational amenity. Unpleasant anti-social behaviour is occurring almost every day, litter on some parts of the beach is disgusting and there have even been fires left smouldering in areas of soft sand where people walk and children play. SLSNT staff and Mindil Beach SLSC volunteers have tried to rectify some of these issues but without a regular daily presence it is an uphill battle. Council appears to have abandoned this important community resource. The current situation means that families and small groups would be reluctant to use some areas of the beach.

### **Partnerships**

It is important to appreciate that the Lifeguard Service has enjoyed the support of the Larrakia Nation and there were plans to work with the proposed Junior Ranger program with a view to developing trainee indigenous lifeguards.

Other initiatives include lifeguards becoming 'authorised persons' to assist the implementation of Council policy and regulations (subject to Council agreement) and further

## MINDIL BEACH



SURF LIFESAVING CLUB  
Northern Territory

Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club (Inc)  
PO Box 76  
Parap 0804

The CEO  
Mr. Brendan Dowd,  
Darwin City Council

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the President and members of the Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club (Inc) I would like to respond to the invitation to comment on the draft 2009-10 City of Darwin Municipal Plan.

As Council would be aware the members of the Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club perform many hours of community service to the residents of Darwin, and the city's visitors, by providing a lifesaving service at Mindil Beach. Formed in 1996 we have provided many thousands of Mindil Beach patrons with advice, first aid treatment and rescue - an enviable record despite having very basic lifesaving amenities.

Our members are intensely proud of Mindil Beach. It is the city's most popular beach with lots of locals and visitors enjoying the beach and, during the dry season months of June-September, also enjoying the beautiful waters of this very special place.

With regard to safety on the beach and in the water it is the presence of our surf lifesavers and, during the last 3 years, the presence of the Council-supported lifeguard, that makes the beach a safer place. Like all Australian beaches there are risks associated with swimming and related aquatic recreational pursuits, but these risks are mitigated by the actions of the club's lifesavers and the paid lifeguard.

It is almost inconceivable that a capital city such as Darwin would not have a lifeguard service on its local popular beaches. Having only one beach that is guarded 7 days per week should be regarded as the absolute minimum.

Darwin doesn't hesitate to mention its beaches in the promotional literature about our city. It is not hard to find visitor promotions that show people on our beaches. This is fair and reasonable as we do have beautiful beaches and clear water. The vast majority of locals and visitors avoid swimming in the 'stinger season' and the number of stings recorded outside these months is extremely low and almost zero where lifesavers or lifeguards are on duty.

The Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club has had a close working relationship with Council's Lifeguard Service. We have shared resources and we both benefit from access

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**Mindil Beach SLSC 2009 Goals:** Be represented by Junior and Senior members at NT Championships ♦ Increase membership by 300% ♦ Establish improved facility at Mindil Beach ♦ Be represented at Inter Club Events ♦ Create a long distance craft competition event ♦ Further extend Life Saving Services at Mindil Beach.

## MINDIL BEACH



SURF LIFESAVING CLUB  
Northern Territory

Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club (Inc)  
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to subsidised equipment and a shared workload of asset maintenance. The club was extremely surprised when the lifeguard service was terminated and Mindil Beach was left unguarded for the critical period of May and June, 2009, other than our volunteer patrols on Sunday afternoons,

**Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club would like to recommend to Darwin City Council that the Mindil Beach Lifeguard Service is an essential component of Council's commitment to public water safety in Darwin.**

Yours sincerely,

Craig Croke  
Director of Administration  
Mindil Beach Surf Life Saving Club  
22 June 2009

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options to service other Darwin beaches with stinger stations and an occasional lifeguard service for storm surfing at Nightcliff Beach during the wet season.

**A cost-effective service**


SLSNT fully understands the need for Council to be financially prudent in meeting many competing demands for Council's products and services. We believe an afternoon lifeguard service is justified when considering beach usage, risk and public safety and should be considered with occasional morning duty for large special groups. This could be successfully marketed and implemented jointly by Council and SLSNT. An afternoon-only lifeguard service would provide costs savings as shown below..

2009-2010	\$33,000 (plus GST)	Was \$51,450 (plus GST)
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In the context of a 3 year lifeguard contract this price could be maintained with a modest 3% increase for each subsequent year.

I urge Darwin City Council to reinstate its commitment to aquatic safety and to provide this invaluable service to the city's residents and visitors.

Yours sincerely,



Bob Creek  
President, Surf Life Saving NT  
22 June 2009

