

## Urbanisation

### Keep Rural Rural

Where I live in the rural area of Darwin the saying *Keep Rural Rural* is something that reflects a belief many of us who live on rural land support. It means we believe people should have a choice as to where they live and object to those who want to destroy that.

So a little history. Back in the 80s and 90s a plan was developed for the Darwin Region partly because of pending land claims and partly because there needed to be a plan for the Greater Darwin Region.

The plan had at its centre the Darwin Harbour with four distinct cities planned around the harbour. In some ways similar to the design of Canberra. Two cities have been developed so far. Naturally the first one is Darwin and the second Palmerston which was the original name for Darwin but is now south of Darwin.

In between the cities there is a mixture of industry, defence, conservation, horticulture and rural residential development.

When the City of Darwin started to grow and have its own council and later on after Cyclone Tracey people started to move into the rural area to get away from regulations imposed by the council including rates.

A local Government Shire was formed in 1986 in the rural area with minimal flat rate, minimal functions (the 3RRRs) and minimal regulation.

The majority of the land was made of 1ha, 2ha and 8ha blocks. A number of small service centres were developed at Humpty Doo, Howard Springs and Berry Springs. A larger complex has

now developed in recent times at Coolalinga on the Stuart Highway which has some suburban development.

But nearly 95% of residents live rural.

So why do they like to live rural. They like the space as a contrast to some of the tiny blocks being developed in Palmerston and Darwin. It's a great place to raise a family with chooks, horses, the bush, mango trees, a couple of dogs thrown in for good measure and enough room to kick the footy or play cricket. There is privacy. In the tropics that can be nice especially when the temperature is getting close to 40 and the humidity is about 90%. You might have neighbours but they are not too close but they are there when you need them – cyclones or fires. You can trip over the dog without the neighbours hearing your response. You don't have to live with air-conditioning if you design your house to use the natural ventilation and you don't have to build a house according to some bureaucratic building covenant. You can see the blue sky and the big storms approaching in the day and the stars at night. And one important thing – there is very little crime in the rural area compared those centres where people live urban. It's a safe place to live.

Now I understand some of our planners might believe in urbanisation. Better use of infrastructure, closer to facilities, walking distant from point A to point B, wellbeing, with the belief that all people really enjoy being crushed in tiny blocks of land or units.

And for some that might be fine but not for us. Our problem is that in trying to preserve our rural lifestyle we are challenged by developers, some landowners, planners, politics and weak Ministers who are persuaded to leave the vision of Darwin and introduce the notion of infill, peri urban and activity centres –

three planning terms that send shivers down our spines. Planners use these terms to destroy a legitimate lifestyle that costs very little to maintain and interferes with very few. The idea of living on land much bigger than 300 sqm to our planners is environmentally unsound and outside the planning purists' view of how we should live.

And of course we have developers who don't believe in the overall plan or the original vision. They don't live here. They see a profit opportunity and if you add in the new urban lifestyle, the jobs, the glossy brochures, the economy and the smooth talking, then how could you object.

Unfortunately this is what is happening now in our rural area and the fight is on to preserve our rural lifestyle. Recently all three local members who live in the rural area have asked our Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics not to approve a subdivision which would mean 14,000 or more people would live on land zoned for 2ha and 8ha blocks. A large landowner and a southern developer all telling the Minister how wonderful it would be, with the locals saying go home to Melbourne and leave us alone. If approved the urbanisation of our rural lifestyle would have begun.

So whilst some may proclaim the benefits of urbanisation others believe that the alternative especially for families is to give kids a chance to learn about and protect nature, feed the chooks, ride a horse, get on the ATV, become resilient and not get into trouble. And then retire to listen to the birds.

If you want to have proof of that you just have to attend one of our local primary schools when they have their open day. Chooks, goats, cows, vegetable garden, renewable energy displays, water efficiency, etc. all of which reflect where they live.

So please urbanisers be tolerant. Leave us rural dwellers alone enjoying the fresh air, the silence and the space. Good planning is about a vision, options and a willingness to stick to the plan.

In my part of the world there is room for both urban development and rural development. People should have a choice of how they live and sensible development that is part of a long term vision, not white anted by others with other agendas, should be something protected and applauded.