

# Hunt for WWII deadly gas dump

By ALAN HARDIE

## Islanders to be quizzed

**The whereabouts of a suspected toxic gas dump on Darwin's doorstep could only be revealed by Bathurst Island residents, defence experts believe.**

Defence staff will quiz islanders about chemical warfare agents they think might have been dumped north of the island after World War II.

In a startling revelation, a Defence Department report has disclosed: "An area north of Bathurst Island was designated as a disposal area for chemical warfare stocks — but it is not known if any material was dumped here."

The report, *Chemical Warfare Agent Sea Dumping off Australia*, reveals more than

14,000 tonnes of toxic chemicals were ditched off the Australian coast.

Now Defence officials plan a two-pronged effort to substantiate its fears:

**COMBING** long-forgotten records to see if mention is made of chemicals actually being dumped off Bathurst Island; and,

**INTERVIEWING** local islanders who may remember their parents talking of a chemical dumping.

Some dumps in Australian waters include the killer agent mustard gas, the report reveals.

It lifts a veil of secrecy that has surrounded Australia's involvement with chemical

weapons — notably the stockpiles and disposal of tens of thousands of tonnes stored during World War II.

A Defence spokesman said yesterday: "We don't know for sure if anything was dumped north of Bathurst Island, even though it was a designated area."

The Defence report said the public risk of coming into contact with a live bomb was almost nil. But it warned of the possible dangers of human contact with the gas.