

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
PO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801 Ph (08) 8981 1984 Fax (08) 8941 0387
Unit 5, 38 Woods St, Darwin. E-mail: ecnt@octa4.net.au
Website- <http://www1.octa4.net.au/ecnt>

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GST for Conservation and Community organisations

The Coalition and Democrat's GST will take effect in 3 months. The Environment Centre has been preparing for the introduction of the new tax system over recent months. While this has not been a particularly exciting task, we're very aware that the impact of the new system on small and non-profit organisations is likely to be huge, and could even send some unprepared or struggling organisations to the wall.

Assessing the impact of GST has been quite difficult given the conflicting and incomplete information available to non-profit organisations. GST implementation resources seem to have been targeted at the 'business end of town' though small community organisations are perhaps much more likely to suffer the impacts of the GST, given their lack of financial and accounting expertise and focus.

The Conservation Council network (of which ECNT is a member) were recently invited to a workshop with the Australian Taxation Office to

attempt to work through some of the uncertainties and impacts conservation organisations are likely to face with GST. The meeting was very productive in that a lot of grey areas were worked through. The fact that so many areas of uncertainty remain 3 months before the tax system takes effect is extremely concerning however.

The main ways to prepare your

GST portion of purchases refunded.

2. Investigate whether your organisation qualifies as a 'charity' for GST purposes. NB- If the primary objective of your organisation is conservation, you may well be considered a 'charity' which will enable you to receive tax-deductible donations.

3. Work through a list of goods and services you purchase and goods and services you provide and consider ways of restructuring to avoid or reduce the impact of GST or reduce the GST administration load.

If you are involved in a community group which may be affected by GST and have questions, feel free to give the Environment Centre a call. We're no experts, but we will answer your questions if we can, or pursue them for you.

organisation/group for the GST are as follows:

1. Work out whether you want to apply for an Australian Business Number and register to have the

STOP PRESS.....

It looks as if we will have to move yet again!! Our landlord, the head office of the LHMU, has sold our office, and in spite of us having taken our option to another years' lease, the new owner has said he wants us out by the end of April. While we are still checking our legal position, we are also urgently looking for alternative space. We need about 100 square metres and can't afford a high rent. If anyone has any suggestions, please let us know.

in your April issue..

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More on the Ord

As mentioned in last month's Environment, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Ord River Irrigation Area Stage 2 (ORIA 2) proposed development of the M2 area (what a mouthful that is, hereafter referred to as 'the EIS') was released for public comment in January. The coordinators and a team of volunteers have been preparing the ECNT response to the EIS. Some of our concerns with the proposal were listed in the March newsletter but closer analysis has brought more problems to light. Three of these are as follows:

1. The inadequate scope of the EIS:

The EIS assumes that the cropping in the ORIA 2 development will consist exclusively of sugarcane and all predictions are based on this assumption. Throughout the document, the possibility of selling the land off at some future time for other uses is mentioned, yet no consideration is given to the possible impacts that these other uses may have. In fact, many claims

of 'environmental benefits' made in the EIS cite sugarcane as the reason these benefits will result.

2. Greenhouse gas emissions:

The EIS claims that the project

would actually reduce the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (p26 Executive Summary). A large portion of the 32,000 hectares that would be cleared if this project proceeds is wetlands on the floodplain of the Keep River. Wetlands are carbon sinks, that is they are a net store of carbon so any clearing of wetlands results in the release of that stored carbon into the atmosphere. There is no consideration to this given in the EIS

when greenhouse emissions are estimated.

3. Fundamental lack of data:

This has been a comment echoed not only by the scientists reading the EIS for ECNT but from those working on submissions for other groups. In many cases the conclusions being drawn about the minimal impact the project will have on the region are based on nothing. For example: no data on aquatic flora are presented but it is claimed there are no rare species present and no impacts will arise from development. Clearly this is inadequate when considering a development of this scale. Many thanks to the volunteers who have helped in the preparation of ECNT's submission, it is available for reading in the office. ECNT continues the campaign to raise public, government and industry awareness of the potential impact of this and other proposed broadscale clearing and irrigation projects for Northern Australia. If you'd like to get involved please contact Kirsten or Mark in the office.

Industry pollution info now on-line

by John Denlay

Anyone with Internet access can now find out about the pollutants emitted from 74 NT industry sites. The data is presented as part of the National Pollutant Inventory (NPI), a public database of emissions of a wide range of substances that can be harmful to human health and the environment. Across Australia, larger industries are now required to report their annual emissions to air, land and water. Other sources of pollution, such as small business, households and transport are also included on the NPI. Emissions from these are estimated by state and territory environmental agencies. Territory facilities on the NPI include large gold, bauxite, manganese, lead and uranium mines, PAWA power stations and sewage treatment plants, Alice Springs and Darwin Hospitals, and bulk fuel depots in Darwin and other major centres. The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment is currently undertaking studies into small business and other major, but diffuse, sources of emissions in the Darwin and Alice Springs regions. These include motor vehicles in both regions, bushfires in Darwin and wood heaters in Alice Springs. This additional data will be available via the NPI in early 2001. Emissions data from other industrial sources, such as landfills, defence, airports, quarries, and oil and gas production should also be available. The NPI can be found at <http://www.npi.ea.gov.au> or come along to the information night at the Environment Centre, upstairs at 38 Woods Street on Thursday 13 April from 5.30pm.

John Denlay is the National Pollutant Inventory Officer for the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

Harbour Arts project

Brown's Mart Community Arts wants to develop a series of events, probably over several years, revolving around, emanating from, or inspired by Darwin Harbour.

Numerous opportunities exist for artists, communities and individuals to celebrate the beauty and diversity of this natural asset.

Brown's Mart wants to put together a list of possible events, ideas or crazy notions, and a list of organisations which may wish to present concerts, plays, exhibitions, or to develop harbour site specific activities as part of their program; to extend the small core of people who can

contribute to developing ideas, networking opportunities, and coordinating and planning future programs - a steering/reference group.
Possible participants include:- Government Departments and agencies at all levels; businesses and industries which line or have a relationship or dependence upon, the harbour; sports and social organisations; community groups including environmental and planning interests; Indigenous bodies; historical societies; agencies relating to fishing, tourism, transport, oil and gas, migration and defence...

Events or activities might include:- celebrating sites, creative signage and interpretation, new ways of focussing on

history, significance, Aboriginal sites etc; walks and "ferry routes" encouraging harbourside recreation; art exhibitions and competitions; multimedia artists creating events/CD ROM/websites, literary, photographic and performance statements or events; site specific performance and concerts; and possibly in about two years a community participation environmental theatre spectacle...

Brown's Mart would like to play a major coordinating role in establishing future partnerships as noted above, help to program participation, and find members for a steering group which goes beyond our own staff and members.

If you can provide any of the above, or would like further information, please contact Ken or Jane at Brown's Mart ph8981 5522 email brownsmart@octa4.net.au or fax 8941 3222.

Harbour concerns shown by Port Darwin candidates.

During the recent Port Darwin by election, the Darwin Harbour Alliance (DHA) took the opportunity to raise the issue of Darwin Harbour with the four candidates. Local ECNT members may have seen a summarised version of the results in an ad which ran in the NT News the Friday before election day. Candidates were asked to comment on three questions, their full responses as DHA received them, are provided here:

i) Does your party support the damming of Elizabeth River or other arms of Darwin or Bynoe Harbour as proposed in the 1990 Land Use Structure Plan?

Susan Bradley: No, 1990 Plans are out-dated - Darwin is a very different city in 2000 to 1990. Needs a 'Whole of Darwin' approach and wide public input.

Sue Carter: Personally I do not support the damming of the rivers and the CLP has not generally considered the question. The 1990 plan is just that - a concept plan, not very recent and all plans change after public comment.

Ian Fraser: No, there are absolutely no grounds for damming the Elizabeth River or any other.

Andy Gough: No, we feel that dams would have a disastrous environmental impact and are not an option.

ii) Does your party support a public review of the Darwin Regional Land Use Structure Plan?

Susan Bradley: Yes, essential.

Sue Carter: Personally Yes and the Party has never discussed this issue. No plan is ever put into place without change. There is a public review of this plan every time that part is activated such as the recent Central Darwin Plan or the Litchfield Land use objectives.

Ian Fraser: Land Use Objectives under Labor will be reviewed five yearly with full and effective public consultation.

Andy Gough: Yes, we believe public input from community groups must be factored into any long term land-use proposals for Darwin

and the harbours

iii) Does your party support the concept of a conservation area incorporating Darwin and Bynoe Harbours. eg. a national park or marine park.

Susan Bradley: Yes and No. No: not until it is a 'whole of Darwin Harbour' plan. Yes: I'd like to see both a national park and a marine park.

Sue Carter: Personally Yes within the boundaries of reasonable public use. Parts of both harbours are protected already by the CLP government - eg Charles Darwin National Park. Darwin is of course a major shipping harbour and recreational area so it is not feasible to totally protect everything.

Ian Fraser: Yes. The County Liberals have a concept for such a marine park - the Beagle Gulf Marine Park but have done nothing to progress it - Labor will.

Andy Gough: Yes, we want to see legislation introduced to protect all remaining mangroves. We support initiatives for a multiple use conservation strategy for our harbours.

It's certainly encouraging that all candidates share the concerns of the broader community with regard to the Harbour. We hope that the new member for Port Darwin, Sue Carter will be putting the personal views stated here forward when the CLP considers these issues.

DHA has also put these questions to Lands, Planning and Environment Minister Tim Baldwin. Representatives of the Alliance will meet with him in April to discuss the future of our harbours.

The outcomes of that meeting will be announced at a public meeting on Darwin Harbour, planned for the 9th of May. Keep the date free; venue to be announced.

Future Changes to Natural Resource Management

Greg Keith has been working on the ECNT's submission on this major new policy and gives a brief summary of the main points below.

MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES IN RURAL AUSTRALIA FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: A Discussion paper for developing a national policy.

The federal government in consultation with the state governments has released a discussion paper to work towards a new policy approach to managing natural resources across Australia. The discussion paper is based on the recognition that previous policies to natural resource management (NRM), specifically in relation to agriculture, have resulted in current unsustainable production systems and massive resulting land degradation, arguably Australia's worst environmental management problem. The discussion paper is not focussed on specific issues or strategies but rather outlines a set of principles and strategic policy directions where future policy should be directed and suggests some 'indicators of progress' which may be used to evaluate the effectiveness of such policies.

Timely Release

The discussion paper has invited input in the form of submissions due on March 30 to comment on the future issues that NRM policy should address and strategies for implementing policy. Coming at the end of the 'Decade of Landcare', the discussion paper is timely and its release has been welcomed by stakeholders including conservation groups,

government agencies and agricultural groups. Any open forum for discussion and the chance for public input into a policy which will direct the future of NRM, particularly agriculture, is welcome and necessary as any future policy resulting from this process will effect land

not addressed

One of the criticisms of the discussion paper has been that the use of the term 'natural resources' implies all land, water and biological resources including coastal systems. However on careful reading of the forward of the paper it is indicated that the paper is

management decisions across Australia. With the proposed development of the Ord Stage 2 project and the current land clearing happening in Queensland it would appear that a national approach to NRM is necessary and policy implementation urgent.

One of the difficulties with the discussion paper is that in attempting to develop a national policy approach for NRM issues it cannot be too specific in identifying issues and policy, given that Australia's large climatic and regional differences. What results is a rather difficult to read and generalised document where in order to get a full understanding of the concepts the reader needs to have a good understanding of policy, economics and issues relating to agriculture in Australia.

Many land use issues

aimed at addressing agricultural land management practices and purposely is not addressing NRM policy in industries such as mining, fishing, tourism and reserve based conservation (national parks) which also rely on the use of natural resources. The scope of the paper does include farm forestry, aquaculture, off reserve conservation and Indigenous land management practices.

Whilst the ideal approach would be to implement a fully comprehensive strategy addressing NRM in all of these sectors, considering the importance of agriculture in terms of both land area affected and economic activity as a result of it, a policy specific to agriculture is the first step. I do feel however that the relationship between terrestrial agriculture and coastal ecosystems needs to be identified as one of the NRM approaches currently dominant in agriculture is catchment management and management practice on lands has direct relationship to the health of our rivers and coastal ecosystems.

Three desired outcomes

Outlining a broad vision of NRM achieving the greatest long term social, economic and environmental benefits for all Australians, three 'Desired Outcomes' for NRM policy are identified as:

- *Healthy ecosystems and catchments in which the integrity of our soils, water, flora and fauna is maintained or enhanced wherever possible.*
- *Innovative and competitive industries that make use of natural resources within their capability, to generate wealth for social and economic well being.*
- *Selfsustaining, proactive regional communities that are committed to the ecologically sustainable management of natural resource in the region.*

These could be summarised as sustainable ecosystems, sustainable industry and sustainable communities and reflect the philosophical building block of the discussion paper which is to integrate ecological, economic and social and cultural factors into decision making.

Eleven principles are outlined on which policy direction should be based. You can access a copy of the discussion paper at ECNT and these do make for interesting reading. If seriously considered in future decision making, they may ensure a viable agricultural sector which does not cause further degradation to the environment. The problem is that principles such as ESD are highly subjective in their interpretation. Other principles include the acknowledgment of the rights and relationship to the land of Indigenous Australians, capacity building and

empowerment of rural communities and landholders to make informed decisions and that NRM decision requires a partnership between government, communities, industries and individuals.

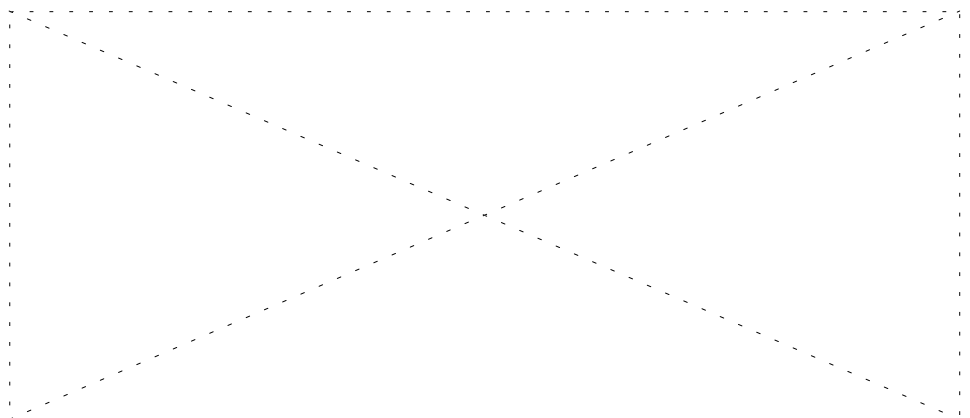
From these eleven principles there are seven 'Strategic Policy Direction' identified being:

- **Working together effectively** - a partnership approach to decision making
- **Devolving authority and empowering regions** - implementing a regional approach to NRM based on catchments or bioregions
- **Investing strategically at the regional scale**
- **Facilitating fundamental change** - changing land use, promoting innovation in agriculture where production and conservation outcomes result
- **Building on Landcare**
- **Capacity building for improved natural resource management** - national approach to training in natural resource management
- **Enhancing knowledge and information**

notion of a regional approach to NRM. From an environmental perspective a regional approach makes common sense as it identifies management within natural systems such as water catchments or bioregions. There are also social and economic benefits to be derived from regional management approaches such as strengthening local economies and communities. The paper even suggests that in the future there may be established Regional Management Authorities with statutory authority to make NRM decisions. The implementation of such an approach would represent a huge philosophical shift in policy making in Australia as currently NRM policy is the domain of state and territory governments who derive economic benefit from natural resource use within their boundaries. How this shift in power would occur is not discussed at length except to say that the development of regional approaches would require the cooperation of state and territory governments, also how such regional authorities would work with local governments is not fully identified.

Other concerns with regional approaches are the potential for increased 'patchwork' of

A regional approach



to NRM

These seven strategic directions discuss possible methods of implementation at length (resulting in reading a lot of rhetoric). However one of the main themes to emerge is the

management practices across Australia as perceptions of what is sustainable management practice may vary greatly between regions. Another issue is that whilst regional decision making may be preferable for issues such as land clearing and land degradation

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control it is not necessarily suited to making decisions which have wide scale implications such as policies for the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or groundwater usage where many regions may rely on the one aquifer. Also there is the issue of how regions such as the NT's rangelands would adopt a regional approach where populations are too low to support effective scale regional authorities.

Economic tools and incentives

Another theme is the use of economic tools and incentives for decision making. Within this category a wide range of issues are discussed including the development of carbon crediting, taxation reform and environmental management accreditation. From the perspective of developing innovative agricultural industries that are truly ecologically sustainable, the development of accreditation systems has a lot of potential.

Other important themes include the need for increased research into new NRM practices and the for NRM and the paper is devoid of comment of what will happen when the NHT funding from the sale of Telstra dries up and where further funding will come from.

Indicators of Progress

- The paper also attempts to

identify 'Indicators of Progress' that may be used in the future to measure whether any new policies that are adopted are effective, however the document does not detail how these indicators of progress would be monitored. If these were to be taken seriously it could result in a substantial change in land management practice in five years. Although the need to implement controls especially on land clearing resulting in biodiversity loss are needed now, when one considers the large amount of degradation that has occurred in less than 200 years across the continent, the change that would result in five years is significant. Some of the 'Indicators of Progress' that are of specific interest from an environmental viewpoint include.

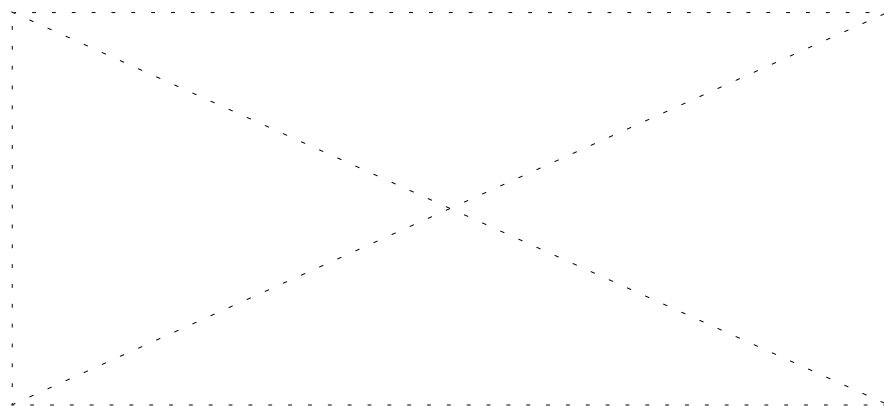
- *By 2005 each state and territory should establish a planning framework for all regions and catchments, with communities in half of these regions and catchments having developed and being in the process of implementing integrated natural resource management strategies.*
- *By 2005 all regional development initiatives and local government planning should be based on sound natural resource management principles and recognises the limitations of natural resources.*
- *By 2015 there should be a net reduction in the area of productive land as a*

consequence of soil degradation caused by acidity, salinity and erosion.

- *By 2005 no additional ecological communities should become threatened as a result of agricultural activity.*
- *By 2005 there should be no net loss of native vegetation measured within each jurisdiction.*
- *By 2005 all stressed rivers and a significant proportion of other priority regulated rivers should have incorporated an environmental flow regime to ensure maintenance of ecological processes.*

Overall the document, whilst having a long way to go has the potential to influence a positive change to current NRM policy and subsequently influence and affect land holder decision making. In what form this takes place is not certain and to an extent will be influenced by the input from submissions into the policy. For states and territories it may result in the end of the parochial 'let us make our own decisions' mentality and see decisions based on a national and an informed perspective.

Whether this is embraced by the NT government and landholders remains to be seen. Given the relatively healthy state of the NT's natural resources in terms of vegetation, water quality and land degradation compared to southern Australia, it is to be hoped that these suggested processes are positively embraced, rather than dismissed as being another attempt by Canberra to intervene in NT affairs.



Bits and Pieces

Shaky Future for Kakadu Miner

A report in "The Australian" on 17 March reported confidently that North Ltd's majority shareholding in ERA is likely to be sold off over the next few years. This report follows intense speculation over the future of the increasingly vulnerable Jabiluka development.

ERA's Jabiluka project remains the target of continuing opposition from environmental and anti-nuclear groups as well as from the region's Traditional Owners. It was described last year by Denis Burke as "stalled".

March 23 marked the second anniversary of the start of the Jabiluka Blockade, the largest such event in recent Australian history.

"North Ltd are losing both money and credibility every day they are involved with this shabby project," said Dave

Sweeney. They should stop throwing good money after bad and they should stop trying to run roughshod over real community concern. Jabiluka is going nowhere. North's gamble has failed and it is now time for the company to cut its radioactive albatross loose."

Bikes - a real alternative

The recent outburst of anger by many consumers at the continuing rise in the price of fuel in the Territory is perhaps a good reason to consider alternative ways of getting around. I would like to suggest that people consider the alternative of travelling by bike, now that the Dry Season is coming. It would be great if more people took the very pleasant choice of leaving the car at home at least a few days a week. Maybe you could start a trend at your work/study place.

We would love to hear of any groups or individuals who make this change. Maybe there are

enough of you to have regular "Bike Days" all over Darwin!! The Environment Centre would be really pleased to from anyone interested in helping to organise a campaign to encourage more bike use. Ask for Di.

PS

While I acknowledge that our bus system is far from perfect, the cost of fares seems quite reasonable (compared with current costs down South and in Europe at least) and on the occasions I've used the bus lately (during the week), I have found them to be fast, convenient and stress free.

Quiz Night

Well, preparations for our upcoming Quiz night are going very well and we have some great prizes. Cooks for the 3 course meal are all organised, but we would still like a few more people to help wash up on the night. You won't miss any of the quiz, we promise.

Bookings can be made by phoning us or dropping in to ECNT. Note that tickets bought at the door incur a \$2 late fee, so it certainly pays to pay early. At the time of writing, we already have bookings for 4 tables (maximum 13), so don't delay!!

HELP!!

If you have any free time in April, we need helpers to pack up the library in order to move. Bring strong boxes!!!

New post cards to send to the Managing Director of North Ltd before the end of April (available from ECNT)

Dates to remember in April

Saturday 8 April, Arafura Bowling Club 7pm QUIZ NIGHT
8 April NTU Youth Concert Basket ball courts 2pm to midnight
Thursday 13 April NPI Information session 5.30 at 38 Woods St -upstairs
During April - send postacrdcs to Managing Director of North
Tuesday 9 May Public meeting on Darwin Plans, venue to be announced

All of April...Packing up the library, please help (bring strong boxes)

The views expressed in *EnvironmeNT* are not necessarily those of the Environment Centre NT management committee
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PO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801 Ph (08) 8981 1984 Fax (08) 8941 0387
E-mail: ecnt@octa4.net.au

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