

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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May 2000

NEW OFFICE @ 3,98 WOODS ST

By the time you receive this newsletter we will have moved to our new office (on 28 April) which is at 3, 98 Woods St. It is in the last block before Daly St and there is a telephone box out the front. It isn't quite as central as our last one, being about five to ten minutes from the post office, but it is in a very pleasant garden, with plenty of parking. It should be possible to work from there for at least some of the Dry without airconditioning. We will be having a working bee on Saturday 6 May from 10am to 2pm. Please come along.

Koongarra- off the agenda.

The Northern Land Council full Council meeting of early April resolved to refuse consent to the Koongarra uranium mine. Koongarra Ltd, a subsidiary of controversial French nuclear operator Cogema, had been attempting to gain consent to exploration and mining at Koongarra, a large uranium orebody near Nourlangie Rock in Kakadu National Park. Koongarra lease lies upstream of the Woolwonga wetlands, an extremely important wetlands system in the South Alligator catchment.

The decision came after a meeting of traditional owners last December where it was decided not to consent to the mine. There were some concerns amongst traditional owners over 'traditional interest in Warramal land' but the NLC stated that "recent concerns raised were not about wanting the mine to proceed, but about answering questions concerning traditional interest in Warramal land". The NLC resolved to address these questions about

traditional ownership at a meeting in the next 3 months.

The resolution of the Northern Land Council asserted that the issue of mining at Koongarra would not be revisited for another 5 years. This decision represents a significant obstacle to the mine proceeding, particularly given that there may well be a change of Federal Government in the next 5 years. At this stage the ALP policy on uranium mining is that an ALP Government will not allow any new uranium mines to be developed. The decision is very welcome news for the Environment Centre, which has been campaigning on Koongarra on and off since its inception. The news coincided with the 21st anniversary of the proclamation of the first stage of Kakadu National Park. And while the Koongarra project is not yet dead in the water, it certainly looks increasingly unlikely to proceed.

Quiz Night Results

The Quiz night we held on 8 April was great success. We had a full house with over 150 people and made a fantastic profit of \$2700. Michael Mackenzie was a lively and persuasive quiz master who kept the night moving at a great pace and Mark, our quiz designer, kept him on track as well as manned our information desk. The massive job of preparing the meal was largely done by Kirsten Rob and Jane who worked pretty well non-stop from about 2pm to midnight. They were given plenty of help when it was needed by others, too numerous to mention. But a BIG THANK YOU TO YOU ALL. It was a very enjoyable night and it was good to see lots of familiar faces as well as quite a few new ones.

We would also like to thank our sponsors who donated prizes; Blazex, Copytime, Wheelmans, The Roma Bar, Jazzi's Casuarina, Greening Australia, The Bodyshop, Australian Geographic, Angus & Robinson Books, Cinema Darwin, Resistance, Nightcliff Foodstore, Healthy Life, Woolworths, Smith St and Casuarina and Vintage Cellars. We would like to suggest that you support those businesses that have supported us.

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Government fails to meet World Heritage Commitments on Jabiluka.

An Australian Government report to the World Heritage Bureau released on the 17th April highlighted the Government's failure to meet the commitments made to the World Heritage Committee to protect Kakadu National Park from the impacts of the Jabiluka uranium project.

Last July an historic Extraordinary session of the World Heritage Committee in Paris examined the impacts of Jabiluka. Prior to the meeting the 3 advisory groups to the Committee all recommended a 'World Heritage in danger' listing for Kakadu. The Australian Government made promises to this forum in an effort to avoid an 'in danger'

listing. The report, condemned by the Environment Centre and ACF, demonstrated that the Government has made no real progress towards meeting those commitments, and that in fact the situation has deteriorated over the past 9 months with the uncertainty surrounding ERA's proposal to mill ore at Jabiluka.

Key areas of concern and deficiencies in the report identified by ECNT and ACF include:

- the Government's unwillingness and inability to provide key data requested by the expert International Scientific Panel (ISP)
- the Government's failure to conduct a detailed Cultural Heritage Management plan
- the Government's failure to act on

its commitment to strengthen the legislation regulating uranium mining in the region and the role of the Commonwealth in the region.

- the great scientific uncertainty posed by mining company ERA's current plan to develop a uranium mill at the Jabiluka site. This plan has never been studied in detail by the World Heritage Committee.

ECNT and National environment groups will formally respond to the Governments report prior to its consideration by the World Heritage bureau in Paris in June 2000. There is no doubt the issue of Kakadu will remain a focus for World Heritage meetings in July in Paris and in December in Cairns.

David Suzuki still optimistic

Recently in Australia, David Suzuki spoke to Lynette Thorstensen about the future of the environment movement

DS " Well, I've come here as high as a kite. We had a fellow from a major international polling company, who had been working in 20 countries and for various clients getting information which he has shared with us, as he's a big fan of our foundation. He said that the environment for the last ten years has been off the richter scale, but in the last year and a half it's suddenly begun to come back. Their polling indicates that in two more years we'll see the environment on top of the global agenda again. He calls it the 'third wave'. The first wave was Rachel Carson, the second green wave was the lead up to Rio and he says this third wave is being driven now by the concern of parents for their children's health, and it will come through air, water and food.

So I feel we just have to hang in there. A lot of campaigners are burning out. All the criteria indicate we're getting nowhere. If you've seen the Worldwatch report State of the World 2000, it's all there, a steady decline. Within our foundation, for three years now, at a million dollars a year - and that's a lot of money for us- we've been working on climate change. And yet all the climate indicators just keep going down hill.

But this guy from the polling company lifted our spirits. He said you've got to hang in there and you've got to be ready for this wave..."

This is an excerpt from 'Habitat' April 2000

Landclearing in the NT Project Officer

ECNT Management Committee recently decided to allocate some seed funding for campaign work on landclearing in the NT. We are now seeking a short-term project officer to research landclearing issues and develop the Environment Centre's campaign strategy. Total funding for the project is \$3000.

The Land Clearing in the NT Project Officer will be employed to complete an analysis of the status of landclearing in the NT, to make comparisons between landclearing regulations in the NT and elsewhere in Australia and to develop a strategy to assist ECNT to engage the community in lobbying for controls to reduce landclearing rates and ensure that all landclearing is subject to strict environmental regulation.

The Project Officer will be expected to liaise with people working on the issue both locally and nationally and to work closely with the ECNT Coordinators. ECNT Management Committee will oversee the progress of the project.

For further information or a job description contact Kirsten or Mark at ECNT on 898 1 1984. Applications close at the end of May.

Environmental Impact Assessment: taking a bruising in the Territory.

ECNT has for many years campaigned for better Environmental Impact Assessment legislation and processes in the Territory. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is supposed to ensure that all environmental impacts of a proposed project are assessed and then considered by the public in order to determine whether or not a project should be allowed to proceed on environmental grounds. Recent applications of EIA however, have highlighted the inadequacy of, and inconsistency of NT Government EIA processes. The Environment Centre is in the process of cataloguing the failures of, and inadequacies of NT environment legislation. This will be particularly relevant in the near future given that the new Federal Environment Legislation requires that the States' and Territories' EIA regimes will be assessed by the Federal Government. EIA regimes that are not up to scratch will not be accredited by the Federal Government, meaning that the environmental impacts of all proposed developments would be assessed by the Commonwealth rather than state or Territory Governments. Some key failings of the EIA processes in the NT as identified by the Environment Centre are summarised below:

**Failure to apply relevant legislation and processes-* some developments in the NT have completely avoided public scrutiny of environmental impacts, while the level of governmental assessment of impacts appears minimal or non-existent. For instance, pilot phases of the Tiwi Island

plantation project and the recently announced barramundi sea-cage farm seem to have avoided EIA processes. Likewise early work on the Howard River Prawn Farm saw a road developed without any public EIA processes

**Lack of regard for public input-* This month the Maud Creek Oxide project, a proposal to mine 150,000 tonnes of ore to extract gold adjacent to the Katherine River, was subject to a Public Environment Report. The public were given 10 working days to comment on this proposed mine, demonstrating the NT Government's contempt for the role of the public in environmental decision-making. When ECNT asked why the period for public input was so short we were told that this timeframe was necessary to meet project deadlines! ECNT is following this issue up with the Minister. Similarly, the difficulty (and cost) of obtaining development applications from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment and the inaccessibility and cost of EIA documentation for those without internet access seem designed to discourage public input.

**Lack of consistency-* The jurisdictional inconsistencies in the Territory when it comes to planning and development decisions seems to defy common sense. For instance, landclearing

is regulated on Pastoral lands, partially regulated in the Litchfield Shire, and remains unregulated elsewhere. Similarly levels of assessment chosen seem to hinge on political factors rather than the potential to cause environmental impact- for example why do some aquaculture developments receive no environmental impact assessment while others, like the Howard River Prawn farm are subject to a Public Environment Report?

There is a range of other weaknesses in the EIA regime in the NT. For instance, why doesn't the NT have an independent Environment Protection Authority? Or why is there no threatened species list under the EIA legislation? It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the public is being short-changed by the NT Government who seem to lack the necessary commitment to protect the NT's important and distinctive environments.

If you are interested in getting involved in ECNT's work on Environmental Impact Assessment in the NT, or have your own experiences or examples of the effectiveness of the EIA system, contact Kirsten or Mark at ECNT on 8981 1984.

Harbour Public Meeting. Help Needed

Darwin Folk: Please come along to the public meeting on the future of Darwin Harbour. (Details on insert with this newsletter) We need help distributing these fliers around the suburbs of Darwin. Please ring the office if you have any time to spend letterboxing before May ninth.

Bits and Pieces

Dates to remember in May

6 May: Working bee at new office 3,98 Woods St, from 10am to 2 pm

9 May: Meeting on "The Future of Darwin Harbour" room 22.01 NTU @ 7.30pm

see insert for details - volunteers for leaflet drop needed

27 & 28 May: Fred's pass Show: ECNT stall - Volunteers needed

4 June: World Environment Day event (details next newsletter)

5 June: World Environment Day

The views expressed in *Environment* are not necessarily those of the Environment Centre NT management committee
Please recycle this newsletter: leave it in a waiting room or other appropriate place for someone else to read

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