

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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April 2001

"Jabiluka may be doomed,"

says Rio Tinto chief-

Sydney Morning Herald headline 24/03/01

On Thursday March 22 Leigh Clifford, the CEO of Rio Tinto (68% owner of Energy Resources of Australia) spoke at a Securities Institute lunch in Sydney.

He stated that because of continuing Aboriginal traditional owner and wider community opposition combined with a record low market price for uranium that Rio "did not support the development of Jabiluka in the short term".

This is a major step in the campaign to stop the mine. It is the first time in Jabiluka's 30 year history that the company that is driving the project has acknowledged that Aboriginal and community concern is both real and valid and has the potential to stop the operation. It is a major vindication of all the efforts made by people everywhere to halt the mine and has made the Jabiluka mine's future more uncertain.

But it is not the end of the story. Rio have not said that they won't continue with their efforts to sell ERA /Jabiluka nor have they committed to not developing the mine in the future. While the Financial Re-

view saw Rio's announcement as a sign of the 'new corporate culture' (29/03/01) Rio have demonstrated in the past that they are prepared to over-ride community and indigenous opposition to their operations- Rio have been responsible for major human rights abuses and environmental impacts at the Bougainville copper mine, Rossing in Namibia, Freeport in West Papua/Irian Jaya and numerous other mines.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

We need to continue our efforts to put pressure on Rio to commit to neither selling nor developing Jabiluka. In this month's newsletter you will find a postcard for you to sign and send to the Australian Managing Director of Rio. The company has been receiving hundreds of these postcards weekly in the lead up to Rio's Annual General Meeting in late April. Please sign and send your postcard today.

**ECNT website
new address:
www.ecnt.org**

Call for Rio Tinto proxies

Rio Tinto are the majority shareholder of Energy Resources of Australia who own the controversial Jabiluka uranium mine within Kakadu National Park.

If you are a Rio Tinto shareholder and would like your voice heard at the forthcoming Rio Tinto AGM in Sydney on April 27 please send your signed proxy forms to:

ACF 340 Gore St,
Fitzroy
VIC 3065
Attention: Michele

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Exciting times at the Environment Centre!!

The beginning of 2001 has seen the Environment Centre grow significantly. Since your last newsletter 2 new staff members have begun work at ECNT. Gary Scott began work in March on the 'Cool Communities' project- a project which aims to reduce Household Greenhouse Gas emissions. Gary will be working on the Cool Communities project 3 days per weeks from ECNT. This week Jann Crase began work as the full-time Northern Woodlands Campaigner for ECNT and Environs Kimberley. Jann has a huge job ahead of her looking at ways to prevent broadscale landclearing across the Top End and Kimberley and helping us to avoid the fate of woodlands in Southern and Eastern Australia. We'd like to wish Jann and Gary all the best for their work and welcome them to the Environment Centre. Please make them feel welcome too.

Cool Communities

An Australian Greenhouse Office project delivered in collaboration with ECNT

Hi ECNT members and supporters. Three years ago I came to Darwin in the middle of the wet season as a traveller from nuclear-free Aotearoa/NZ. It wasn't long before I became involved in the Jabiluka blockade after first hearing about it whilst visiting the former ECNT office in Cavenagh Street. Now I'm very happy to be back amongst the hard-working team at the ECNT as the new Cool Communities Facilitator, although the office has certainly shifted around a bit in the intervening years.

So what exactly is Cool Communities? Sounds like an oxymoron in the hot and humid north doesn't it? Two years of negotiations between state and territory environmental organisations, including the ECNT and ALEC, and the Australian Greenhouse Office has resulted in a joint project to combat greenhouse gas emissions at the household and community level. Currently, greenhouse gas emissions from the household sector account for almost one-fifth of Australia's total emissions, with energy use in the home being by far the most significant single item, followed by private transport and the decay of household waste in landfills.

At a time when the Kyoto Protocol is under severe threat of disintegration due to the short-sighted stance of the US Bush administration it becomes increasingly vital that local communities show the way. One aim of the project is therefore to encour-

age people to develop their own strategies for reducing greenhouse emissions – and not simply the '10 easy things' as outlined in the Don Burke TV and newspaper advertisements, although no doubt these will play an important part. Up here in the Top End we should be exploring the enormous possibilities offered by solar and wind energy, rather than looking to the unsafe, unsustainable and costly nuclear industry as an alternative to fossil fuels, as the NT News did in a recent editorial.

As the Cool Communities Facilitator here in the Top End I will be actively seeking communities that are interested in pursuing energy efficiency and local abatement measures. These could include urban residential neighbourhoods, rural council areas, schools and indigenous communities amongst others. An important part of my job will be to identify some of the barriers holding back further reductions of household emissions, whether they are financial, institutional or arise from lack of information. I will also be encouraging the Northern Territory Government and local councils to play a more pro-active role in greenhouse gas reduction.

Cool Communities is an exciting project which offers a more bottom-up approach than we often associate with federally funded initiatives. I look forward to working with many of you over the coming months. And please come and visit me at the ECNT office (Wed-Fri) or ring me on 8981 2532 if you would like to know more, throw some ideas around or can assist in any way.

Gary Scott
ecntgary@octa4.net.au



Northern Woodlands Campaign

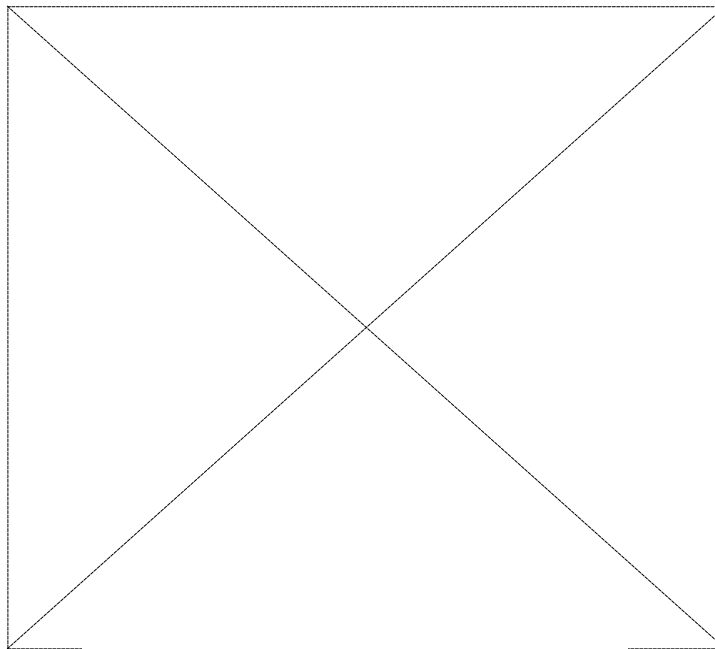
In recognition of the increasing threats to the northern woodlands a full-time campaign position has been established by ECNT and Environs Kimberley with the assistance of ACF and The Wilderness Society. The northern woodlands campaign will focus on woodlands in the Top End and Kimberley area, including savannah regions. The aim of the campaign is to halt the decline and degradation of the northern woodlands at risk from clearing for agricultural, horticultural and urban expansion.

What are woodlands?

Australian woodlands are essentially the area lying between the wetter coastal and mountain areas and the drier semi-arid and arid areas of the inland. The woodlands comprise mostly areas with scattered eucalypts with a grassy or shrubby understorey. Included in the woodlands area are patches, extensive in parts, of mallee, grassland and dry forest and monsoon forest. The woodlands can be divided into tropical and temperate areas.

Key areas of the campaign include:

- The Ord River Irrigation Scheme;
- Proposed agricultural developments in the West Kimberley (particularly the expansion of cotton) and the Katherine-Daly regions;
- Exploiting opportunities for gains through the Federal and NT elections as well as working with newly elected representatives in WA;
- Reforming land clearing legislation in the NT and WA.



Gary and Jann in the ECNT office

differently on endemic ecosystems.

As an escapee from North Queensland the effects of broad-scale landclearing still haunt my nightmares providing much incentive to protect the NT and Kimberley from a similar fate.

Please feel free to contact me (**8941 7439**) if you want further information about the campaign or indeed if you

have any ideas or information

that may be useful. Further reports about progress will be forthcoming in future editions of the newsletter.

Jann Crase
northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au

The Northern Woodlands Campaign fits in with the National Woodlands Campaign where there is underlying recognition of the need for each jurisdiction to develop their own distinct campaigns due to varying threatening processes impacting

ECNT website new address: www.ecnt.org

If you haven't had a look at our website recently you're in for a treat. We've recently added back issues of newsletters and all ECNT media releases can be found on the site. You can also print out membership forms from the website to give to a friend! We'd like to ask you all to help us by:

- 1) giving us any feedback on the site, and
- 2) helping us publicise the website and address
- 3) if you've got any web expertise, volunteering your services to help us make our website easier to find.



TAKE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE!

Climate Action Network Australia.

Australia: whose side are we on?

Last week the United States President caved into fossil fuel industry lobbying and said the US will not support the Kyoto Protocol treaty. This provocative action threatens the world's ability to make the cuts in greenhouse gas pollution necessary to avert climate change.

All countries will have to deal with the impacts of climate change, regardless of the proportion of total greenhouse emissions they create. Australia, an arid island nation with coastal populations, will not escape the extreme storms, rising sea levels and upset rainfall patterns caused by climate change. It is in our interests to ensure that countries (like the US) that can decide the future of the Kyoto Protocol are required to lead all nations to make an effective and just global agreement.

The Australian Prime Minister has said he agrees with George Bush that big polluting nations don't have to take action unless the poor nations of the world do first. He says Australia will not ratify the treaty without the US doing so.

Environment groups and Governments of many other nations of the world want a global agreement on climate change regardless of the US stance.

It is crucial that allies of the US, like Australia, do not follow their lead, but rather become part of the group of nations who ratify the treaty. If Australia joins with the European Union, Japan, Russia and New Zealand the Kyoto Protocol treaty can come into force and have the weight of international law.

While the Kyoto Protocol treaty is just a first step, it has been 10 years in the making and without it the momentum to reduce greenhouse gas

pollution will be seriously undermined.

Kirsten Blair & Mark Wakeham

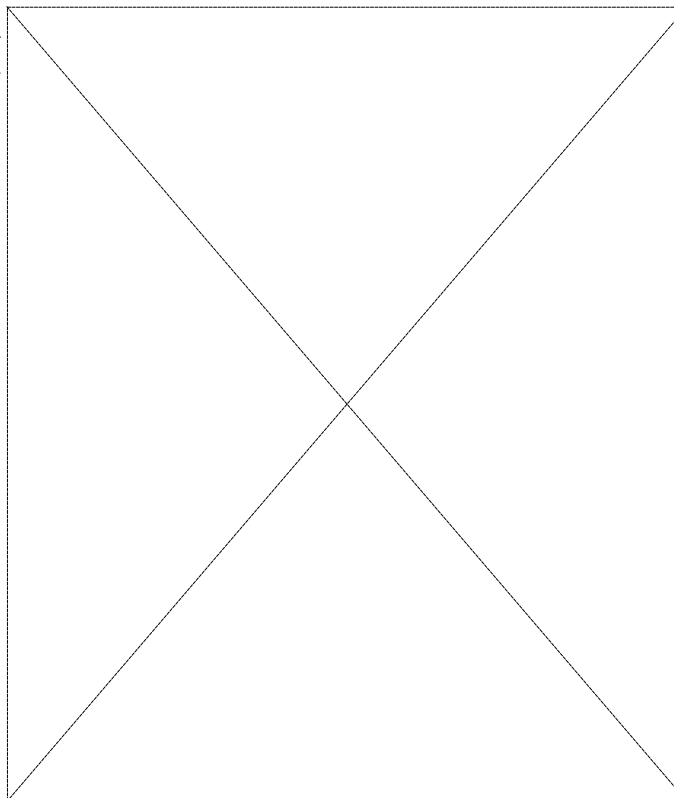
The Government and the Opposition must get the message from environment groups and supporters that Australia should join the group of nations who are committed to ratifying the Kyoto Protocol by 2002. Following are some points to help you write a letter or message to the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader. Also included are email addresses and fax numbers to send your letters and messages- please take action on this today!

Points to make in your letters:

⇒ The Australian Government (and the Opposition) should publicly state that it will ratify the Kyoto Protocol and join with the other nations of the world who have expressed their intention to do so by 2002 – including the European Union, Japan and New Zealand.

⇒ Australia should play a positive role in advancing the international treaty process, regardless of what the US does, because it is in Australia's national interest to avoid the damaging effects of climate change.

⇒ The Australian Government (and Opposition) should officially condemn the United States for their stance on climate change - blaming the world's poor nations as the reason for trashing the Kyoto Protocol is unfair and like diners in a five star restaurant demanding that the people in the soup kitchen pay the bill.



Special thanks to Andrew Weldon for this month's fabulous cartoon



Climate Change to blame for Flood Insurance Price Hike

The recently announced increases in Top End flood insurance premiums are a direct result of climate change. Massive changes to the planet's weather patterns caused by greenhouse gas emissions are causing more extreme storm and drought events worldwide.

In response to the increase in natural disasters, international reinsurance agencies are sending their prices skyward. These increases are then passed on to local insurance agencies, like the TIO, who have no choice but to pass them on to Territorians through their premiums. The NT Government has said that it expects greenhouse gas emissions in the Territory to increase over the next ten years, which will only increase the risk of increased flooding and storms. The opportunity exists now for the NT to cut its emissions and contribute to solving this global problem.

If the NT Government is serious about wanting to minimise this impact on Territorians' hip pockets, it needs to commit to measures to reduce the Territory's greenhouse gas emissions now, as part of the global effort to minimise climate change. The Territory as a developing economy, is in a strong position to grow in areas of sustainable technology but this is an opportunity the Government is yet to grasp.

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

Where to send your letter / message

The Prime Minister

The Hon. John Howard

Fax: 02 6273 4100 / 2923

Email by going to: http://www.pm.gov.au/your_feedback/feedback.htm

Email a copy of your letter to the PM to staff members in key Ministerial Offices:

- Foreign Minister, Mr. Downer – joshua.frydenberg@dfat.gov.au
- Environment Minister, Senator Hill – Peter.Cosier@ea.gov.au
- Energy and Resources, Senator Minchin – james.kelly@isr.gov.au

The Hon. Kim Beazley

Leader of the Opposition

Fax: 02 6277 8495

Email: Kim.Beazley.MP@aph.gov.au

Or via the website: <http://www.alp.org.au/kimbeazley/email.html>

Email a copy your letter to Mr. Beazley to staff members in key Shadow Ministers offices:

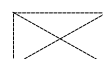
- Deputy Leader, Mr. Simon Crean – chris.fry@aph.gov.au
- Environment Shadow Minister, Senator Nick Bolkus – alex.gordon@aph.gov.au

Minister launches Dhimurru Indigenous Protected Area-Territory's first!

Yolngu people from the areas surrounding Yirrkala in the Northern Territory celebrated recently when Senator Robert Hill officially launched the new Dhimurru Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) at Gulkula, near Nhulunbuy, in north east Arnhem Land. The Dhimurru organisation and local Yolngu people have been working hard over many years to establish the IPA. The area will increase the ability of Dhimurru to deliver conservation management based on traditional practices and modern conservation science to the spectacular beaches and bushland in the area which are being increasingly impacted by tourists, four wheel drives and marine debris. Senator Hill expressed disappointment that the launch was not attended by the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife service. Parks and Wildlife withdrew support from the area when their requests for direct involvement in the management of the IPA via the board were refused. Traditional owners of the area stressed that they would welcome the input of NT Parks and Wildlife in an advisory capacity and expressed hope that the Commission would reconsider their position. The IPA will now go forward under direct management of local traditional owners in partnership with the Commonwealth government. Senator Hill was presented with ceremonial spears following speeches on what all agreed was a happy and positive day for aboriginal people in the area and for good management and protection of the IPA in the future.

For more information about Dhimurru and the Nanydjaka area go to the Dhimurru website at www.octa4.net.au/dhimurru

-Patrick O'Leary



ERA in deep water at Jabiluka.

A heavy wet in Kakadu has seen serious water management problems emerge at Jabiluka. The Interim Water Management pond (IWMP) was designed to operate for a period of 12 months catching contaminated water that ran off the mine site during the construction phase. Two years later with construction halted at Jabiluka the IWMP is still in operation and has been unable to cope with the accumulated run-off from a couple of big wet seasons.

ground shafts in order to avoid the IWMP overflowing. Since then millions of litres of contaminated water have been pumped underground at Jabiluka. Some of this water will have permeated through into the groundwater and potentially into the surrounding wetlands. The remainder will become increasingly contaminated daily and contribute to a growing water management fiasco at Jabiluka. There is no guarantee that ERA will be able to treat all of the con-

of the Jabiluka mine. In July 1998 the then NT Minister for Mines and Energy, Eric Poole, approved the beginning of construction at Jabiluka. This was prior to the completion of the Public Environment Report for the Jabiluka Mill Alternative, which given the subsequent Mirrar veto of the Ranger Milling Alternative, was the only project option available to ERA. Therefore the NT Government approved construction for a project that hadn't yet been approved by the Commonwealth Minister.

Water management problems emerged at Jabiluka over the 1999/2000 wet with the pond filling almost to capacity. The water in the IWMP was contaminated with high levels of uranium and other radio-nucleides. Following the wet season ERA committed to installing a Reverse Osmosis (RO) plant in early 2000. RO plants essentially filter contami-

nated water to reasonable water quality standards. After several months of delay ERA finally got an RO system in place towards the end of 2000, but not in time to dispose of enough water before the 2000/2001 wet season.

In February 2001 the company was forced to resort to pumping water from the IWMP into the mine decline and under-

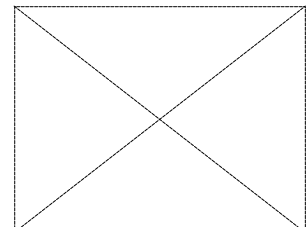
taminated water prior to the 2001/2002 wet season. The fact that Jabiluka is experiencing major water management problems at this stage of development does not say much for ERA's ability to responsibly operate a mine in full production.

The problems at Jabiluka have emerged as a result of premature approvals for construction

The writing is on the wall for Jabiluka. The approvals process has been shoddy, the mine is already experiencing major water management problems and it continues to be opposed by Traditional Owners, environment groups and the Australian public. Rio Tinto now has the perfect opportunity to demonstrate some responsibility and quit attempts to develop the mine.

Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair



Bits and Pieces

Darwin Harbour Strategic Plan – community input period extended

For almost a year now consultants Connell Wagner have been contracted by the NT Government to prepare a Strategic Plan for the Beneficial Uses of Darwin Harbour. The draft version of this report has been available for public comment since November 2000 and the period for submissions has just been extended to close on April 30, 2001. The Environment Centre has been involved in the steering committee for this project and will be making a submission on the draft plan. You can have your say too, check out the NT Lands Planning and Environment website www.lpe.nt.gov.au for the draft plan and the Environment Centre website www.ecnt.org for our position on the future of Darwin Harbour. Please feel free to contact ECNT if you would like help in preparing a submission.

LNG: rumours abound

There are many stories circulating about plans for Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) developments on the Top End coast. The two main players are Phillips Oil and Woodside. Both companies have plans to bring gas onshore from the Timor Sea in pipelines hundreds of kilometres long. Phillips has been granted approval to come onshore at Wickham Point, which is on Middle Arm in Darwin Harbour. Woodside wants to set up at Glyde Point, on Gunn Peninsula north of Darwin. There are environmental

concerns about both sites but of greater concern is the fact that these LNG processing plants are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of development in these areas. There has been talk about methanol production plants and other industries setting up to make use of the gas if it comes to shore. ECNT wants to see all possible LNG related proposals on the table at once. A potential development of this scale needs to be assessed as a whole rather than in increments, as is currently the case.

Environment Centre FUN Fundraiser

Do you want to celebrate World Environment Day in a fun, friendly fashion with other environmentally thoughtful folks? Well, this is our suggestion to you!

Come along to the Environment Centre's Spaghetti Western Film and Food Night at the Deckchair Cinema on Tuesday 5 June from 6.30. Come along with your mates in your best Western gear and join us for Spaghetti (and noodles and other Western type food)

We'll be showing the classic Spaghetti Western by Sergio Leone "A Fistful of Dollars"

You can buy your spaghetti and a drink from the bar, as well as coffee and cake and enjoy a great night out.

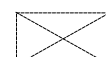
Thank you to those people who returned their volunteers slip, sent in the last newsletter – we'll be contacting you in the near future about what you would like to do for this event. Anyone else who has not replied, we would also love to hear from you as well if you can help beforehand or on the night.

Thousands Protest Nuclear Cargo

Shipments of nuclear waste travelling from Cogema's La Hague re-processing plant in France to an interim storage building in Gorleben, Germany last week were interrupted by hundreds of protesters at various places along the route. About 45 Greenpeace activists from 15 countries were arrested after occupying the 13 metre bridge over the River Jeetzel, more than 1,000 people occupied the train track at Lüneburg and hundreds were waiting when the train reached Gorleben. German police assigned 15 000 officers to the task of escorting the train on its controversial journey. This was the biggest mobilisation of the German Police force since World War 2. Protesters said they want not so much to block the waste altogether - it has to go somewhere - but to make handling it so expensive that the industry shuts down its reactors. To date, the world's nuclear reactors have produced about 200,000 tonnes of spent nuclear fuel, a figure that increases by about 12,000 tonnes a year. Currently, no safe long-term storage or disposal method for this waste exists.

Stall update

The Nightcliff stall has been running well, and a few volunteers have been taking on the job which is fantastic. Now that we're coming to dry season, we've decided to tackle Mindil every second week – so start calling now to sign up for your shift. If anyone feels really passionate about continuing Nightcliff, we're happy for it to keep going, but we won't be able to commit organising time.



Dates to remember in April

- Thursdays 6.30pm:** M1 Alliance meetings at NTU Students Union
- Thursday 19th:** 7pm, Food Coop start-up meeting at NTU Students Union
- 20th & 21st April:** Darwin Steiner Assoc. Inc: Workshop “ The eyes of Imagination”
Knuckey Lagoon Rec. Reserve. Ph Jenny- 0407 379916
- Friday 27th:** CSIRO Seminar “More than can be said: A Study of Pastoralist’s Learning”, 3.45 pm @CSIRO seminar room. Ring 8944 8400

OFFICE CHAIR NEEDED—CAN YOU HELP?

With the recent influx of staff, we are in desperate need of a good office chair. If you have one to spare, please call us or just bring it in.

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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