

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
PO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801 Ph (08) 8981 1984 Fax (08) 8941 0387
Unit 3, 98 Woods St, Darwin. E-mail: ecnt@octa4.net.au
Website- <http://www1.octa4.net.au/ecnt>

February/March 2001

Harbour win- Dam plans scrapped!

Good news for Elizabeth River, now it's time for a National Park

ECNT welcomed the news that the NT Government has finally decided to see sense on the issue of damming the Elizabeth River. Certainly the views of the community on this issue were not news to us or other members of the Darwin Harbour Alliance. As the Chief Minister stated "its clearly an issue (sic) that's not supported by Territorians" (NT News Jan 24).

The decision to scrap the dam was purely political- it's a shame that the NT Government has failed to concede that the destruction of mangrove habitats is both environmentally and politically unacceptable. Had the dam proceeded 780 ha of mangroves would have been inundated and destroyed and there would have been significant downstream impacts.

The values of Darwin Harbour are important to many people for many reasons and everyone who made their voice count for Elizabeth River should be congratulated.

Thank you to all Environment Centre members who are involved in the campaign. This year will be a crucial one for the future of Darwin Har-

bour, the fight is not over yet. Almost 8000 people signed the petitions calling on the Government to abandon the dam plans.

These petitions also call for legislative protection for the whole of the Harbour. This is where the Darwin Harbour Alliance will continue its focus this year. The opportunity exists now for a National Park to be declared, preserving the unique values of the Harbour and preventing the destruction of important ecosystems.

Petitions presented to Parliament.

Members of the Darwin Harbour Alliance invited Chief Minister Denis Burke and Opposition Leader Clare Martin to receive the petitions on Wednesday 21st February. Mr Burke was unable to attend and sent Peter Maley (who is the pre-selected CLP candidate for Goyder and not a member of NT Parliament) in his place.

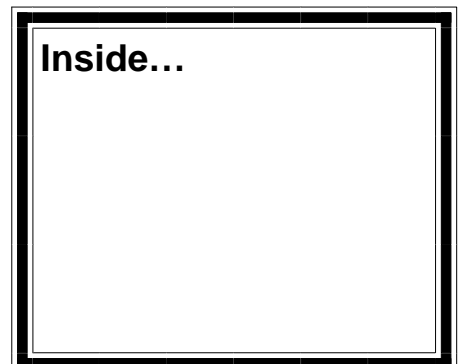
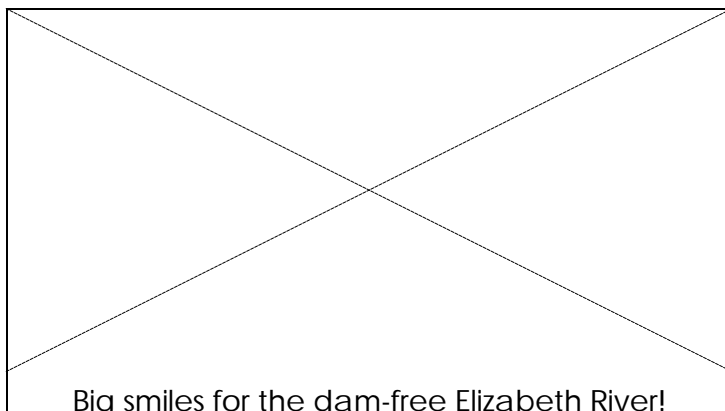
Mr Maley and Ms Martin accepted the petitions, which were tabled in NT Parliament on Feb. 22. The Alliance is encouraging all parties and candi-

dates in the forthcoming election to come out strongly in support of protection for Darwin Harbour. At the time of writing there is no commitment from either the CLP or the Labor Party to legislate for the protection of this important Territory icon, despite the overwhelming community support for such a move.

Harbour Alliance Celebrates

Members and supporters of the Darwin Harbour Alliance recently celebrated the Elizabeth River dam win. A happy crowd met at Dinah Beach to watch the evening light on the mangroves of Sadgroves Creek and enjoy a meal together. The party will be even bigger once the National Park is declared!
Kirsten Blair & Mark Wakeham

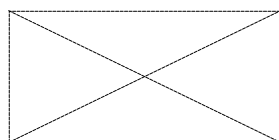
Don't forget, if you don't have a Livid Lizzie T-shirt yet, we still have a few left in stock, so come in to ECNT or call us with your order. Now selling for just \$15 each, available in black or white S, M, L.



Barramundi farm could cause havoc, but Minister says no EIS required.

The NT Lands Planning and Environment Minister Tim Baldwin is neglecting his responsibilities by allowing the construction of a barramundi sea cage farm without the completion of a public Environmental Impact Study (EIS).

The Environment Centre first wrote to the Minister about this proposal in February of last year, inquiring as to the method of Environmental Impact Assessment being proposed and seeking input into the process. We were astonished to learn that there would be no public assessment. Guidelines have been developed by the Lands Planning



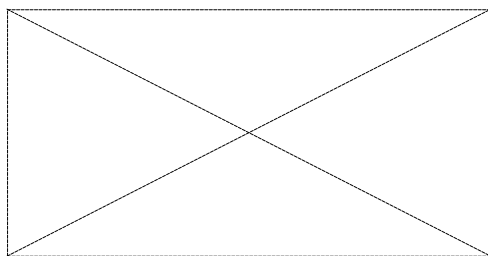
and Environment Department for monitoring that the proponent (Pivot, of fertiliser fame) is required to conduct. Details of these

guidelines have not been made available for public comment, nor have the protocols, which are to direct the proponent's ongoing monitoring of the project. There has been no commitment given by the Minister that there will be any independent monitoring of the project at any stage.

The reason given by Minister Baldwin for the lack of thorough assessment in this case is that the farm is in what he is calling a 'pilot phase'. Semantics aside, the project is clearly beginning as a full-scale operation. There are currently sixteen 25 x 25 x 6m cages in the water at Port Hurd at Bathurst Island with the first of 300,000 barramundi fingerlings expected to be released before the end of March. In the first four years of production, a yield of 3,000 tonnes of barramundi is expected and expansion of the project to further sites around the Tiwi Islands and in Bynoe Harbour is currently being investigated.

Despite the Minister's assurances that thorough monitoring will

take place throughout the project's life and that if any detrimental environmental impact is detected



'immediate action will be taken', ECNT continues to be very concerned by this proposal. To date, the Port Hurd project has been given the all clear despite increasing evidence from around that world that

sea cage fish farming can have significant and lasting impacts on the environment.

Some of the known environmental impacts of sea cages are as follows:

- Impact on other wildlife. In South Australia sea cages have been identified as the number one cause of cetacean deaths. This occurs when dolphins chasing fish are entangled in the netting of the cages. Fish cages may also attract other predators such as seabirds, sharks, other fish and potentially crocodiles.
- Introduction of disease or parasites into wild stocks of fish. Scientists in Scotland have shown that sea lice from fish farms are infecting and debilitating wild stocks of salmon.
- Impact on wild catch fisheries. Contrary to popular belief fish cages growing carnivorous fish such as barramundi can increase rather than reduce impacts on wild fish stocks. Food fish must be caught from the wild then ground up into fishmeal to be fed to farmed fish. It can actually take more than 1 kilo of 'feed fish' to produce 1 kilo of aquaculture fish.

- Pollution of water column and sea bed through fish faeces and uneaten food. This nutrient rich effluent from the cages is discharged directly to the sea. Depending on the tonnage of fish grown in cages this

can be the equivalent nutrient input to the environment to a small town's sewage, effectively untreated. In the US such pollution is thought to have contributed to extensive algal blooms.

With all of this evidence, it is unfortunate that the NT is not approaching this proposal with a little more caution. ECNT will aim to keep a close watch on how things proceed once the fish have been released and production begins.

Kirsten Blair & Mark Wakeham

What you can do: Write to Minister Tim Baldwin expressing your concerns. A project of this scale must be assessed publicly and known environmental impacts of sea cage farms must be taken into account. Send your letter to: The Hon Tim Baldwin, Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, Parliament House, Darwin, 0800.



Rio Tinto confirms it wants to sell ERA.

The end of January saw ERA post some of its worst financial results ever with the company blaming record low uranium prices for the result. A week later Rio Tinto announced that it was looking to sell its 67% of ERA. That the world's second largest mining company has decided that it doesn't want to be associated with uranium mining in Kakadu is another blow for ERA's plans to develop the Jabiluka mine.

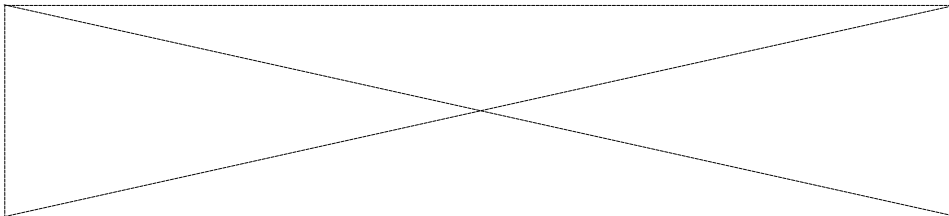
The only likely buyers of ERA are Canadian uranium miner Cameco and French nuclear subsidiary Cogema. Both of these companies have poor environmental and social records. Any sale to either of these companies would need to be approved by the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB), with the sale ultimately being approved by the Treasurer, Peter Costello. The FIRB and the Treasurer would need to declare the sale 'in the national interest'. Prime Minister Howard has already voiced his opinion in 1997 that the development of Jabiluka is in the 'national interest', though it could be politically difficult for the Coalition to make such a judgement again in an election year.

Environment groups are urging Rio Tinto to match the rhetoric of their environment policy and abandon the Jabiluka project. Any on-selling of ERA would be facilitating the development of the mine. We need your help.

Take action!

- 1) *Write to the Treasurer, Mr Peter Costello, (Suite MG7, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600) and tell him that the sale of ERA to a foreign company with a poor environmental and social record would not be in the national interest, and neither is the development of Jabiluka;*
- 2) *Write to Rio Tinto (Mr Barry Cusack, Rio Tinto, GPO Box 384D, Melbourne 3001) and urge them, as majority owners of ERA, to stick to their policy on environment and indigenous justice by demanding:*
 - No further development of uranium deposits in Kakadu including Jabiluka.
 - An accelerated phase-out of Ranger operations.
 - Resumption of Ranger and Jabiluka leases into Kakadu National Park and complete rehabilitation of all ERA uranium mining impacts in the region.

-Kirsten Blair & Mark Wakeham



Legal Defence Appeal—Please help if you can

One of Australia's key community conservation groups is being sued in a major defamation action by private developers associated with one of the most controversial 'developments' of the 1990s (the Hindmarsh Island Bridge).

The Conservation Council of South Australia and a number of its committee members are facing a very uncertain future due to the magnitude of the legal action (which has come about due to their campaign to protect the Coorong Ramsar listed wetland we all know and love from the movie 'Storm Boy'). The trial, which is due to commence on 2 July this year, will take an estimated 6 weeks at a cost to the Conservation Council of approx. \$80 000.

The ongoing effect of this law suit has been to significantly constrain CCSA in its ability to campaign for SA's environment. The implications for the whole conservation movement in Australia, should the developers be successful in suing a state's peak conservation body, are immense.

A national appeal has been commenced, to all Australian conservation activists, to assist CCSA to fend off this action, and in doing so to assert the rights of community groups to speak on matters of public concern.

Your financial assistance will enable CCSA to mount a strong defence, and stop a dangerous precedent being set.

For more information on the case, contact Michelle Grady, CCSA Executive Officer, on (08) 8223 5155 (email: executive@ccsa.asn.au).

Donations can be sent to: 'Legal Defence Appeal', The Conservation Council of South Australia Inc, 120 Wakefield St, Adelaide SA 5000. (cheque and credit card welcome). Fax: (08) 8232 4782

The Conservation Council of South Australia sincerely thanks the Environment Centre NT for its support in this matter.



THE LANDCLEARING DEBATE

The debate over landclearing and agricultural development in the Top End is set to heat up this year, especially with the commencement of ECNT and Environs Kimberley's 'Northern Woodlands Campaign'. Jann Crase is set to begin work at the Environment Centre at the start of April.

Here's one view on the issue from Leonie Norrington of the Tropical Savannas CRC

Perhaps we can get it right!

Recent research in Litchfield Shire will provide guidelines to help governments plan ecologically sound agricultural developments in the Top End.

The research is part of a project by Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT, a partner is the Tropical Savannas Cooperative Research Centre

The greatest cause of extinction worldwide is habitat destruction caused by land clearing for farming and subdivision.

With a new agricultural development in the Daly Basin where 2,700 sq km of land will be converted into small farms designed for mixed cropping and improved pasture, researchers are looking for data that will allow the planners to subdivide in the most ecologically sustainable way.

"Wherever habitat is changed, some species will be lost," project director Dr Owen Price said.

"The challenge is how to make sure that you lose as few species as possible when you change from one land use to another."

To understand the way different species respond to habitat fragmentation, Dr Price and PhD student Brooke Rankmore are surveying animals and plants in the Litchfield Shire, an area where 100 square km of bushland has been cleared for horticultural and rural living, leaving often very isolated fragments of bushland.

"If we can work out what has happened in a fragmented landscape we can work out what different species need and plan a landscape which will have

minimal impact on wildlife," Dr Price said.

"So far, we've found evidence that some species may maintain a stable population if we retain the right mix of bushland within the agricultural matrix."

This type of planning need not mean a loss of profitable farmland. A recent flora and fauna survey in the Daly Basin showed that the distribution of animals and plants isn't necessarily related to good farmland.

Rather, Dr Price said, often land that had little agricultural value was land very important to wildlife.

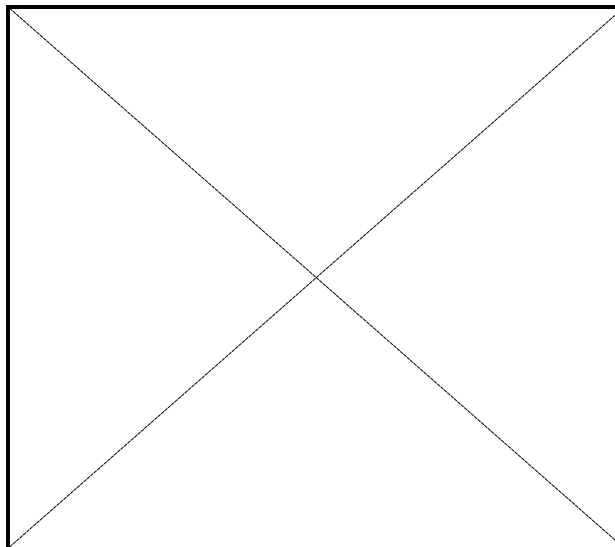
"A major contribution to the conservation and biodiversity, can be made simply by not clearing marginal agricultural land," he said.

However, the type of bushland retained is also important.

"It is reasonably well accepted by people that areas

of bushland along rivers and patches of rainforest should be retained and protected because of their public recreation and soil conservation values," Dr Price said.

"However, there is a general lack of appreciation among people for the ordinary bush that the majority of species need - open woodland, *Eucalyptus miniata* and *Eucalyptus tetradonta* forests."



A quoll with suckling babies— inhabitants of the NT bushland

"The ideal situation would be one where you had significant habitats like riparian and rainforest and also had open woodland areas dotted across the agricultural matrix."

The findings and guidelines of this research will be presented to the Government in June 2001.

- Leonie Norrington

The PWCNT is a partner in Tropical Savannas CRC.

Dr Owen Price: (08) 8944 8467, owen.price@nt.gov.au



McArthur River Mine

- not coping with the wet.

The mining industry has been operating in the NT for well over 100 years now. It seems surprising then that every year mining companies appear to be taken by surprise with the onset of the wet season. In mid February following heavy rain in the Gulf country McArthur River Mines applied for a licence to discharge excess water from the tailings dam. The water was contaminated with high levels of lead and zinc- with levels up to 10 times the ANZECC freshwater quality guidelines. The NT Departments of Lands, Planning and Environment and Mines and Energy subsequently approved the release of one billion litres of tailings water on the 17th February. Every day for the next 5 days 40 megalitres (40 million litres) of contaminated water was released into the McArthur River.

The Environment Centre responded to the release with the following statement:

"The release of tailings water contaminated with zinc and lead into the McArthur River is unacceptable. The company is basically using the river as a sewer with potentially fatal impacts on downstream wildlife."

"The mining company, MRM, and the Minister for Mines, Mr Manzie are blaming heavy rain for the situation which has seen an accumulation of contaminated water on the mine site. Every mining company operating across northern Australia must be aware of the annual monsoonal conditions. If a mine cannot cope with the rainfall associated with cyclones and other extreme weather conditions that are a fact of life in the Territory then it should not be allowed to continue to operate."

"The NT Government has once again authorised the release of contaminated water from a mine site, raising serious questions about their responsibility as a regulator of mining activities."

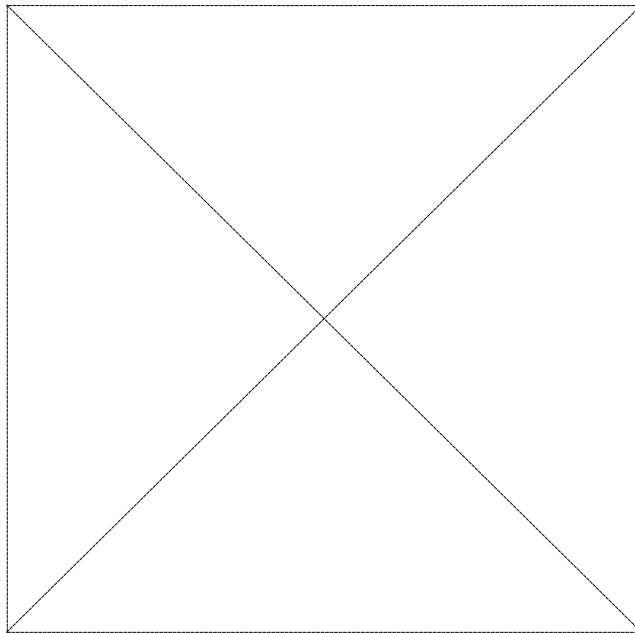
"The NT Government must now critically analyse the environmental performance of the McArthur River mine. If the mine cannot operate safely in extreme weather conditions then it should be closed".

This is not the first incident of this kind to take place at McArthur River- last wet season the Environment Centre reported the overflow of a pond filled with oil, petrol and water into the McArthur River to the NT Government. The NT Government failed to take action and therefore send the mining company the message that dumping waste into the McArthur River is unacceptable.

It's also a story that has been repeated at other mines around the Top End. In recent years water management problems have plagued operations at Nabalco, GEMCO, Mt Todd, Ranger and now Jabiluka. In all cases the NT Government has failed to take its regulatory role seriously and protect both the public interest and the environment.

Governments and the mining industry continually argue that the 'bad old days' of the mining industry are long gone. However regular examples of poor mining practices in the NT would seem to indicate that there's a long way to travel yet.

-Kirsten Blair & Mark Wakeham



New program for ECNT volunteers.

2001 is the International Year of the Volunteer, and ECNT definitely knows the value of community members who dedicate their time and knowledge to protecting the environment.

In order to make that aspect of ECNT run more smoothly, we now have a new system by which to work with volunteers! In particular this was set up to deal with the often vague arrangements that are made between a volunteer and the workplace which can sometimes end up being more frustrating (for both parties) than productive.

So: these are some of the new features that may lure you or your friends to spend a bit of your free time with us!

- A volunteer job book which you can come and flip through anytime and see if there's anything that takes your fancy. You may also wish to add jobs that you think would be good to do, but you don't have time yourself.
- A volunteer contract which clearly outlines the responsibilities and expectations of both parties. It includes things like the amount of training time we can afford to give you, (if needed) and job satisfaction and feedback that you can expect from us.
- A CERTIFICATE! If you'd like to receive one- in order that you volunteer hours do not go unrecognised and can be presented to employers in the future.

Some of the areas that we'd love some help with are

- Organising a fundraising event early in the year
- Assisting with stall minding on the weekends
- Making a pamphlet rack for our desk
- Rationalising our library and files

There is a wide range of jobs that take an equally wide range of skills and can be done here in the office or outside of work hours if that suits your lifestyle better

Another aspect of our volunteer system is a catalogue of people who have nominated areas they'd like to be involved with and contact details so we can call them when things comes up. Our catalogue is due for an update, so please fill out the details on the enclosed slip and return to us for our records. Thanks!

-Charlotte McCabe

Bits and Pieces

Natural Cork Recycling

Why recycle natural corks? It takes 43 years for a cork tree to yield its first wine cork, but just seconds to turn it into a throw-away item. Produced from the premium bark of the cork oak, wine corks are a quality natural material and far too valuable a resource to be discarded as household waste. In fact cork is one of the few forms of product packaging that is completely environmentally friendly – natural, renewable, fully recyclable and biodegradable. Guides Australia began its Cork Recycling Program in 1990 with groups throughout the country collecting natural corks from their local community as an environmental and fundraising effort. In the nine years approximately 75 million natural corks (250 tonnes) have been recycled. Recycled natural corks are used to produce items such as engine gaskets, cricket and hockey balls, industrial safety mats, boat decking and horse float floors. Funds raised through the collection helps Guides Australia to develop its outdoor activities, resources and facilities.

Corks can be left at any time in a wire crate situated out-

side the Guides NT office at 55 Ross Smith Ave, Parap. Their phone number is 8981 3628. This entry was written by Anne Wharton. Thanks Anne.

Publications to Give Away

We've been doing some office reshuffling lately, and there are a lot of books and publications that we can't keep any more. SO- if you'd like to come in and have a look through them, you're quite welcome to take them home. There are some really good publications and books that could be useful for your own interest, school projects or library collections. Come in and have a look.

Just some little notes from Charlotte Mc Cabe

NAPKINS PLEASE

I'd really like to make a sculpture out of all the napkins which we are regularly provided with but never need. Unfortunately the bundles that I collect seem to keep going missing, so I thought it could become a community project! All you need to do is keep those napkins that you get under your coffee etc, only ones that were totally unnecessary (and unused)- and if you remember, write the date and

the name of the place on them, and send them to the Environment Centre.

DEEP ECOLOGY

Deep Ecology is a global movement in environmental and social change. It involves a series of experiential workshops that draw on our personal experience as 'people who care.' I have found them to be extremely powerful and empowering sessions, which will leave you with a fuller understanding of yourself and your place on the earth. Deep Ecology creates a safe and sacred space amongst the group, it involves meditation, discussion, integrity listening and self exploration. If your feeling burnt out, in need of direction or re-juvenation, deep ecology is probably something for you.

I ran a weekend deep ecology workshop in Broome last year which went really well, so I was thinking of running another one in Darwin this year. If anyone is interested in Deep Ecology or if they have ever taken a deep ecology workshop before, I'd really like to speak to them. We will also need a good venue where a number of people could set up camp (usually one night) and feel protected in a safe space away from roads and other people etc.



Dates to remember in March 2001

- 11—17 March:** Sea week “Ocean Culture –People and the Sea”
Contact Roanna O’Neil 8999 4565
- 14 & 21 March :** Environmental Defenders’ Office “EPBC” (Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation) Legislation workshops @ NTU 5.30—7pm. Contact Tim Prichard 8982 1182
- 14 March:** Draft Gene Technology Regulations 2000 public consultation, 9am-5pm, Darwin Entertainment Centre, Exhibition Gallery.
- Every Thursday:** Darwin M1 Alliance @6.30pm,@ NTU Student Union, 8981 4714

Thursday 29 March: Newsletter folding @ECNT, 8981 1984

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.

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
PO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801 Ph (08) 8981 1984 Fax (08) 8941 0387
E-mail: ecnt@octa4.net.au

Surface Mail

Postage
Paid



Registered by Australia Post Print Post No.54539300037 If undeliverable please return to GPO Box 2120 Darwin NT

