

ENVIRONMENT

NT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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July 2001

Greenhouse and those Gas plans

What would LNG in Darwin mean for climate change?

"We need to move from fossil fuels to gas" – Denis Burke, Northern Territory Chief Minister (NT News, 9/6/01, p2).

Natural gas is currently being depicted as a clean source of energy, which will help to wean the industrialised world away from its dependence on oil and coal and play a key role in Australia's response to global warming. **But make no mistake, despite the assertion of the Chief Minister, natural gas is indeed a fossil fuel.** It is formed from the breakdown of prehistoric plant matter buried deep beneath the surface of the earth and consists mostly of methane, with varying quantities of carbon dioxide, both of which are core greenhouse gases.

Darwin-based development of the Timor Sea gas fields, along with the associated proposed Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) and methanol projects, will therefore lead to a huge increase in the NT's greenhouse gas emissions.

There are currently four major gas-based developments proposed for the Darwin region: two LNG plants and two methanol production plants. The LNG plants are proposed by Phillips Oil and Woodside. Phillips wants to locate their plant at Wickham Point (on Middle Arm) in Darwin Harbour. The company has completed an EIS which details some predicted levels of emissions likely to result from their plant. Woodside is in the process of preparing their EIS for a site at Gunn Point. Recent statements from the NT Government indicate that it is preferred for all gas-based development to be located on Middle Arm, but irrespective of the location, these projects all have major greenhouse implications. ECNT has major concerns about both the greenhouse implications and the on-site environmental impacts of

industrial expansion.

High levels of greenhouse gas emissions

The proposed Wickham Point LNG plant will produce a high level of greenhouse gas. Total emissions are estimated at 1.8 mega-tonnes (MT) per year, or 0.3% of Australia's 1994 emissions (Dames & Moore 1998). The natural gas that will be fed down the proposed pipeline from the Bayu-Undan field in the Timor Sea already contains 6% carbon dioxide (Dames & Moore 1998). As a point of comparison this is twice the carbon dioxide content of the gas which supplies Woodside's North West Shelf LNG plant in Western Australia. However, over half of the 1.7MT of carbon dioxide to be emitted every year will be produced during the process of combustion from the use of gas-powered turbines and heaters. Methane, a greenhouse gas at least 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide, will also be emitted from flaring.

Phillips Oil argues in its response to submissions on the Draft EIS that whilst the plant will emit large quantities of carbon dioxide, these would only represent a 0.0045% increase in global emissions. It then offers the spurious argument that 40% of the emissions 'occur naturally' in the gas supplied to the plant, rather than through the process of combustion. Of course, no emissions would occur at all if the gas were left in its natural state – under the sea. Moreover, the company asserts, there will be a net decrease in global emissions if the LNG product is used in preference to oil and coal for electricity generation. There are some plans to use the gas to replace dirtier power sources. The proposed Darwin to

Moomba gas pipeline may see some of the Timor gas replace coal fired power in southern Australia. The Nabalco bauxite mine at Gove (currently the single biggest polluter in the NT, with greenhouse emissions larger than for the whole of Darwin) also has plans to utilise the gas and change from oil-based power generation. But it is likely that the most of the LNG will be exported to meet the US economy's insatiable energy demand with no accompanying decrease in oil and coal use, especially if President Bush follows through with his current energy plan. Phillips has a letter of intent signed between El Paso Global LNG and itself for the supply of up to 4.8 million tonnes per annum of LNG starting in 2005. El Paso will sell the LNG to customers on the west coasts of the US and Mexico.

Carbon dioxide removal

When producing LNG, carbon dioxide and other impurities need to be removed. Some of this can be done in the field before the gas comes to shore and avoid the release of some

Inside

- P2 -More Ord approvals
- P3 -Help for users of Renewable Energy
-New life member!
- P 4-5 Daly Basin development plans
- P6 -Jabiluka must be rehabilitated
-Buy-up of Kakadu mines?
- P7- -Bits and Pieces



greenhouse gases. The carbon dioxide can be 're-injected' into spaces beneath the sea floor and effectively trapped there. This method can provide a cost saving in some cases as the size of the shore-bound pipeline can be reduced if the carbon dioxide is removed beforehand. Phillips argues that the percentage of carbon dioxide in the Timor Sea gas is not significant enough to warrant removal before it is piped onshore.

The company has also stated that that no suitable structures for re-injection were found in the vicinity of the potential platform sites. Carbon dioxide will therefore be removed at the Phillips plant and released through a chimney. Removal of the carbon dioxide from the gas turbine emissions at the Darwin end, is technically feasible but not considered an economical option by the company 'as no suitable market or disposal options are available' (Dames & Moore 1998: 7.29). It appears that Phillips intends to take little more than a few grudging half-measures in response to some very real greenhouse concerns..

What's so good about gas anyway?

What we are looking at here in terms of the bigger picture is a massive increase in Australia's greenhouse gas contribution. The Timor Sea contains something like 600 billion cubic metres of natural gas reserves (or 22 trillion cubic feet) as

well as 1.05 billion barrels of oil, condensate and LPG (*NT Business Review* June 2001 p10). Extracting even a small proportion of this will make it more difficult to meet Australia's already generous Kyoto Protocol emissions target of 8% above 1990 levels by 2010.

It is true that natural gas has a lower greenhouse gas emission rate than oil and coal due to its lower carbon content (around half that of coal and two-thirds of oil). The gas industry has successfully communicated this fact to our politicians and gas is recognised

as a 'transition fuel' (an energy source to be used in place of coal and oil while renewable energy systems are established). However, this fact is irrelevant in cases where the gas is planned to supply new markets, not replace coal and oil.

NSW electricity company Pacific Power made a similar point last year when it argued that natural gas was not the answer to meeting Australia's greenhouse commitments (Commonwealth of Australia 2000). Gas would be unlikely to replace existing coal-fired plants in an industry characterised by high capital costs and long life assets. Increased gas use would therefore only mean that emissions would increase at a slower rate, rather than achieve outright reductions. Instead we should be trying to substantially decrease emissions from all fossil fuels and encourage the switch to renewables.

References

Commonwealth of Australia 2000. *The Heat is On: Australia's Greenhouse Future*, Report of the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee, Canberra.

Dames & Moore 1998. *Darwin LNG Plant: Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, Dames & Moore and Phillips Oil Company Australia.

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- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

WA EPA gives poor advice on Ord Stage 2

ECNT lodged an appeal on Tuesday 19th June against the WA Environmental Protection Agency's latest report and recommendations relating to the management of the proposed Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA) Stage 2. The EPA is advising the WA Environment Minister to issue an approval for the go ahead of Stage 2 of the ORIA. The Environment Centre is extremely concerned that the assessment has deemed the environmental impacts of the project (including the clearing and burning of 33,500ha) as 'acceptable'. There are also major pieces of work missing from the assessment including – no social impact assessment, no comprehensive cultural or archaeological surveys and assessments and no Aboriginal Socio-Economic Impact Assessment.

A more detailed article will be forthcoming in the next newsletter. For further information please contact Jann 8941 7439 or northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au.

Jann Crase



Help for users of renewable energy systems

Northern Australia has some of the best renewable energy resources in the world, but many of the people who would benefit from solar or wind powered energy systems instead rely on diesel or petrol generators for their power needs.

This may be due to the high upfront costs of renewable energy systems, or because they are unfamiliar with the technology and are therefore reluctant to rely on a power system they don't understand.

Alternative Technology Association is a non-profit community group that provides independent advice to domestic users of sustainable technologies.

Through its national magazine *ReNew*, the ATA contributes to thousands of successful installations in Australia every year by providing practical information for people who use renewable technology, and inspires those who would like to. *ReNew* is available at newsagencies or by subscription from the ATA.

The ATA's services would be particularly valuable for householders eligible for funds from the newly-available \$38.2 million Renewable Energy Rebate Program (RERP) being administered by the NT Department of Mines and Energy.

The RERP was approved in April 2001 under the Commonwealth's Renewable Remote Power Generation Program (RRPGP). The RRPGP is aimed at supporting the installation of renewable energy systems in remote areas of Australia as a way of reducing diesel-based electricity generation. The \$264 million four-year RRPGP is funded from the Diesel Fuel Excise paid by publicly owned power utilities.

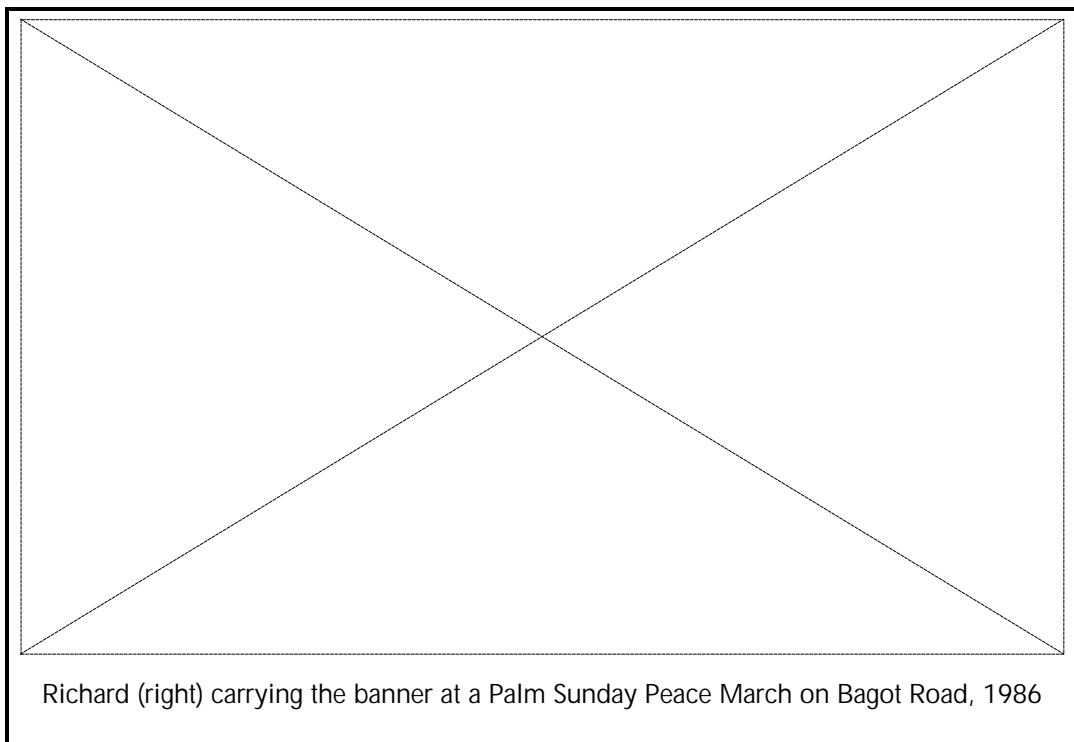
Any household in the Northern Territory which is not connected to an electricity grid, and which uses diesel electricity generation, is eligible for a 50 per cent rebate to cover the installation costs of a renewable energy system. Stay tuned for additional rebate programs to be announced by the NT government over the next few months.

To find out more about the RERP contact Subhash Chandra in the Department of Mines and Energy on 8999 5440, email: subhash.chandra@nt.gov.au or web: www.dme.nt.gov.au/energy

For more information about the ATA and *ReNew* contact: email: ata@ata.org.au or web: www.ata.org.au ph: (03) 9388 9311, fax: (03) 9388 9322.

Life membership for Richard Ledger

The Management Committee of ECNT is very pleased to announce that we have taken the (belated) step of making Richard Ledger a Life Member of ECNT. Richard was a co-founder of the Environment Centre and has been a major supporter, contributor and member of ECNT for 18 years.

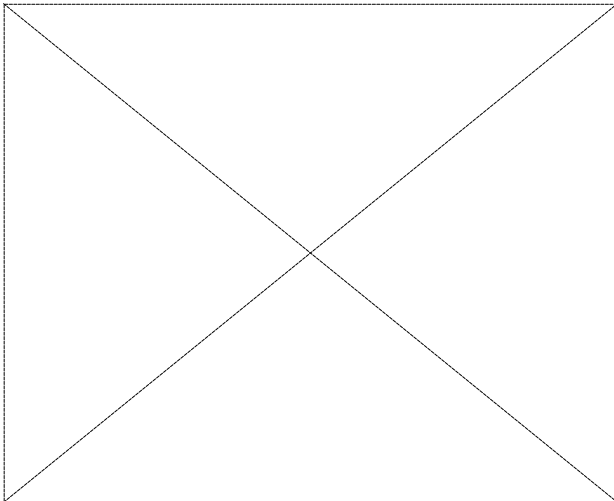


Daly Basin Development Plans

Repeating past mistakes

1. History

The Daly Basin has been targeted for agricultural development for over 100 years with the introduction of cane farming in 1879. This venture was abandoned shortly afterwards. Since then pastoralism has been the main agricultural activity though in recent years there has been a push for mixed farms and the establishment of irrigated and rainfed crops throughout the region. In the late 1960's broadscale clearing of 30,000 hectares took place at Tipperary Station for sorghum production. As with many other tropical agriculture initiatives cropping was later abandoned at Tipperary.



Aerial photo of unregulated clearing at Tipperary Station, NT. Photo ECNT

In the early 90's the NT Government developed the 'Katherine-Daly Farm Development' plan which outlined the NT Government's intention to subdivide 3 pastoral leases- Jindare, Douglas and Claravale- to develop 440,000 hectares of mixed farms. The Katherine-Daly Farm Development plan has faltered mainly due to a lack of investor interest, though the NT Government cites Native Title issues as the reason for stalled development. Currently agricultural production in the Daly Basin is limited to about 7,500 hectares of improved pastures, sorghum, maize and millet.

2 Recent developments

The NT Government remains commit-

ted to the Katherine-Daly Farm Development. The Office of Resource Development states that it is responsible for the development of 270,000 hectares of land in the Katherine-Daly Basin. Production of cotton, sugar, maize, soybeans, peanuts, horticultural products, grains and fodder crops is being promoted by the NT Government.

In 2000 the NT Government initiated the first stage of the 'Katherine-Daly Farm Development' with the announcement of the subdivision of 30,000 hectares of Crown land in the Stray Creek area. Two lots totalling 10,500 hectares were auctioned in December 2000. The lots were sold as

Crown Leases, however a covenant on the lots stipulates that if the purchaser 'improves' (ie clears and develops) the property to the value of \$250,000 over 3 years then the title will be converted to Freehold. Therefore the NT Government is providing a major land subsidy to agricultural developers.

The NT Government have also committed \$12 million to the development of road infrastructure in the Daly Basin over the course of 2000-2002 in order to facilitate further agricultural development in the region.

3 Environmental values and likely impacts of further development

Despite considerable grazing pressures the Daly Basin is still in relatively good condition. The major ecological feature of the bioregion, the Daly River, has extremely high conservation values. Little is known about the fish fauna of the river and its tributaries, however at least two threatened species, the Spear-tooth shark and the Freshwater Sawfish, have been found in the river. These species are known to have extremely strict flow requirements (ie minor changes to the flow of the river

could have major impacts on their populations). In addition eight out of nine freshwater turtle species found in the NT are found in the Daly River, including the largest known population of the threatened Pig-nosed Turtle in Australia. The bioregion is also home to a number of threatened terrestrial species including the Gouldian Finch, Partridge Pigeon, Ghost Bat and Crested Shrike-tit.

The major environmental impacts associated with increased agricultural development and production are likely to be:

- 1) Landclearing- up to 440,000 hectares are targeted for landclearing in the Daly Basin. Landclearing destroys and fragments habitat, interferes with soil and water processes increasing run-off and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions
- 2) Increased chemical load and soil run-off which will particularly impact upon the Daly river and other streams as well as groundwater.
- 3) Interruption of fire regimes and increased potential for weed problems associated with cleared land.
- 4) The use of groundwater and surface water for irrigation will reduce flows available for environmental functions.

ECNT believes that the regulatory regimes in place in the NT will not protect and maintain the environmental values of the Daly Basin in the face of future development. Landclearing controls in the NT are completely inadequate. In the Daly Basin no direct landclearing controls would apply to any development. (See ECNT report 'Clearing moves North: A review of landclearing in the NT' for a detailed analysis of the inadequacies of NT landclearing regulation. This report can be downloaded from www.ecnt.org).

Given that development is proceeding in an incremental, piecemeal fashion it seems unlikely that future agricultural development would trigger any NT or Commonwealth legislation. There is currently no process in place by which developers would be required to submit development applications, let alone be subject to environmental impact assessment.



The Parks and Wildlife Commission NT have been developing a conservation plan for the Daly Basin, which, if implemented, may mitigate some of the development impacts. However the context in which the plan is being developed (ie. in the midst of major proposals for agricultural development requiring clearing of up to 70% of some parts of the bioregion) assumes that development will proceed.

ECNT is particularly concerned that the framework for water resource allocation and regulation in the NT is insufficiently equipped to regulate and mitigate impacts from the raft of irrigated agriculture developments, like the Katherine-Daly Farm Development, that the NT Government is pursuing for the NT. The following section outlines the inadequacies of the regulatory framework for water allocation as they relate to the Daly Basin.

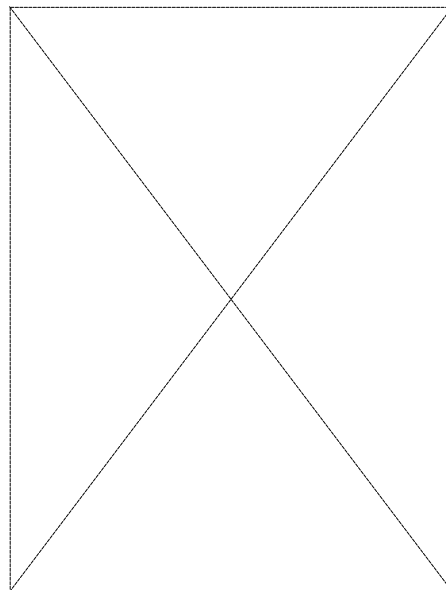
4. Water issues

The Daly Basin is not in a water control district. Therefore groundwater can be extracted at up to 15 litres/second without a permit. Existing and proposed future agriculture developments rely on groundwater. There is a high degree of connectivity between the groundwater systems and the Daly River. Irrigation in the Daly region drawing on the groundwater will impact on the ecology of the Daly River, particularly as the time when demand is highest for irrigation water, at the end of the dry season, coincides with the time that the river needs the groundwater recharge most. The dry season flow of the Daly can fall to less than 2 cubic metres/second with depths less than 50cm. The river is extremely susceptible to groundwater extraction at this time with the possibility that the river could cease to flow. By contrast, wet season flow from rainfall runoff is as high as 6,000 cubic metres/second with depths reaching 15-20 metres.

Small variations in the dry season flow rate may have major impacts on the freshwater flora and fauna including several endangered species that are known to live in the Daly River. For example the Freshwater Sawfish and the Pig-nosed Turtle are known to have strict flow and water requirements for feeding and breeding. The Freshwater Sawfish inhabits intermittent pools in

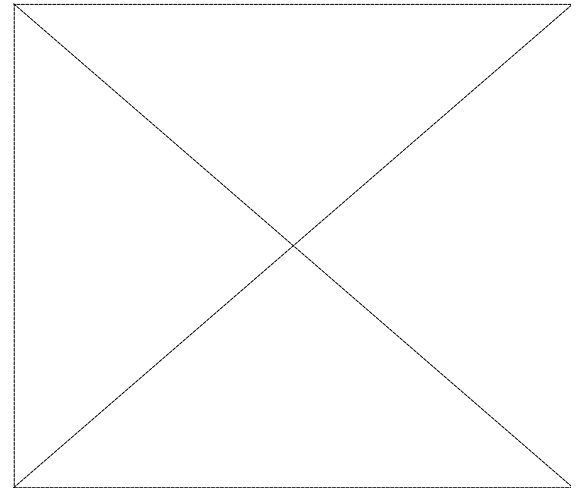
the river in the dry season. The impact of taking a large proportion (for example the NT Government's current 20% cap) of the dry season flow on the connectivity between pools is unknown. Pools may well dry up in the dry season with significant groundwater extraction. Similarly flow rates and water quality from groundwater input also affects the growth and distribution of ribbon weed in the river. Ribbon weed is a major food source for turtles (including the threatened Pig-nosed Turtle) and fish in the river. Changes to the river's ecology also have the potential to impact significantly on the cultural and recreational values of the region.

In the absence of adequate scientific understanding of the relationship between groundwater and the river and the environmental requirements of the ecosystems, the NT Government has stated that a 20% surface water extraction cap and an unspecified groundwater extraction cap will be applied to future development in the Daly Basin (and anywhere in the NT without an environmental allocation. (NCP Second Tranche Assessment, Water, NT, 1999) We believe that this approach is too crude to accommodate the environmental requirements of this fragile river ecosystem. Impacts associated with 20% extraction of the river's dry season flow and a considerable proportion of groundwater flows and recharges are likely to be unacceptable.



The Pig-nosed Turtle- dependent on ribbon weed in the Daly River. Photo: John Cann

The Environment Centre NT appreciates that a number of environmental studies in the Daly Basin region are currently being undertaken. However until more is known about the environmental requirements of the river there should be no further subdivision or new water allocations in the Daly basin.



A groundwater spring feeding into the Daly River. Photo ECNT

5. Conclusion

Development pressures on the Daly Basin threaten the health and integrity of one of Australia's most important river systems. Aspects of the Daly Basin ecology remain poorly understood. Development is proceeding in the Daly Basin in the absence of NT Government commitment to, and implementation of:

- ◆ appropriate landclearing controls
- ◆ water use regulation and restriction and a process for developing water allocation plans;
- ◆ an integrated catchment management strategy; and,
- ◆ economic analysis that values environmental inputs.

The NT Government seems intent on repeating the mistakes of agricultural development in southern Australia refusing to acknowledge the costs attached to landclearing, water extraction and intensive agricultural production.

-Mark Wakeham & Kirsten Blair



Jabiluka must be rehabilitated now

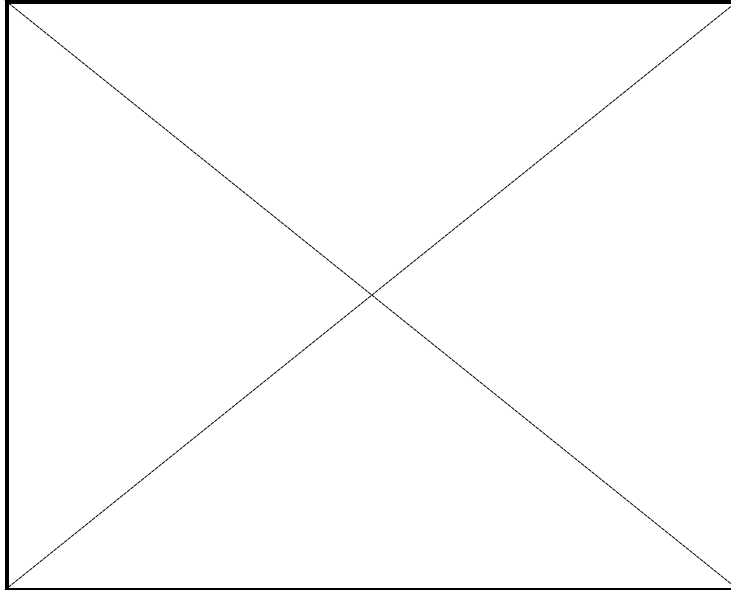
ECNT, ACF and Friends of the Earth publicly called for the full rehabilitation of the Jabiluka mine site last month. The rehabilitation call followed formal statements from Rio Tinto at company meetings in both Sydney and London earlier this year that the company did not support the development of Jabiluka in the "short term". The Australian Senate also passed a resolution calling for the rapid rehabilitation of Jabiluka after the Rio Tinto announcement. The groups made the following statement:

"The fact that there is now no short-term development plan for Jabiluka highlights the need for rehabilitation," stated the Northern Territory Environment Centre's Mark Wakeham. "We have a 20,000 tonne stockpile of ore containing uranium on site that is currently covered by a tarpaulin. We need

a better long term solution to ensure there is no leaching of radiation to the Kakadu environment, especially as water has been accumulating on site and becoming contaminated for the past 3

now", outlined Dave Sweeney of the Australian Conservation Foundation. "The ore already extracted should be buried and sealed in the decline, the water ponds fully rehabilitated and the site re-vegetated. The current situation has arisen as a result of premature approvals from both the NT Government and the Commonwealth and they and Rio Tinto must now act to limit the on-site environmental impacts and safeguard Kakadu".

"Traditional owners, environment groups and the Australian public have rejected the Jabiluka mine proposal", concluded Loretta O'Brien of Friends of the Earth Australia. "We welcome news that the mine will not be developed in the short term, however the threats to Kakadu remain until the project is formally stopped, the site fully rehabilitated and the lease permanently incorporated into Kakadu National Park."



Jabiluka mine site as at March 2001. Photo- D. Palmer

wet seasons. Obviously this is an unacceptable long term situation".

"The Jabiluka site needs rehabilitation

Commonwealth considers buying out Kakadu mining leases

At the end of May 'The Age' newspaper reported that the Federal Government is considering buying up mineral leases in the Coronation Hill area in Kakadu National Park. The Age reported that "the move would ensure that mining was not carried out at the Coronation Hill site after a High Court decision overturned the original ban by the Hawke Labour government." (30/05/01) The Coronation Hill project, a joint venture between Newcrest, Rio Tinto and Homestake was foiled by the Jawoyn traditional owners, the conservation movement and a subsequent decision to disallow mining at Coronation Hill by Prime Minister Hawke in 1990.

The proposal by the Coalition Government to buy back the leases would see the Federal Government compensate miners for loss of min-

ing revenue. In mid June Federal Cabinet approved the beginning of negotiations between the Commonwealth and mining companies with interests in the area. While ECNT welcome moves by the Commonwealth to revoke the mining leases, we are concerned that the mining industry is making a grab for public funds rather than accepting constraints to mining activities. Very few areas have been made off-limits to the industry, and yet where the mining industry is confronted with barriers to mining it heads straight to the courts and seeks government compensation.

Interestingly Newcrest's Managing Director, Russell Barwick, told 'The Age' "We want to come to some resolution. Everyone in the long run would like to see the park become whole". We agree, but we wonder

whether Newcrest consulted project partners Rio Tinto, current owners of the Ranger and Jabiluka projects, before making this statement! The minerals industry is constantly telling the public that it is changing with the times. Coronation Hill and other extant mineral leases in Kakadu provide the industry with an opportunity to demonstrate any change and demonstrate that they realise that mining in high conservation areas is unacceptable. However while mining companies continue to attempt to extract compensation for relinquishing mineral leases it is clear that they still believe they have a right to mine in National Parks and against the wishes of traditional owners and the public.

-Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham



Bits and Pieces

Spaghetti Western went down well.

Our film and food fundraiser on World Environment Day (5 June) at the Deck-chair Cinema well very well. Although the noodles took a bit longer to cook than we have anticipated, those who arrived early had the chance to catch up with friends and enjoy a drink from the bar while they waited for their food.

About 130 people attended, and approximately half bought food which seems to have been thoroughly enjoyed as there were very few scraps left over!

The film attracted quite a few new people (non members) which was part of the reason for its choice (but Mark also wanted to see it!!) We were even asked when the others in the series would be shown. If members have any suggestions for future film fundraisers (either environmentally themed or otherwise) let Di Koser know.

We made a profit of \$1,200 and joined up three new members, which was pretty pleasing for a night's work. Thanks to all those who cooked sauces for us and helped on the night. I would also like to thank Brumbys at Nightcliff for donating two huge bags of delicious bread. If any members shop there, it would be nice if you add your personal thanks too.
-Di Koser

Organic Vegie Box

Info from Fred Meyering

When I started the organic box, it was with the hope that I could get enough people interested, to place our first order. This is still a family & friends based organization though our friend's friends are now also part of the process. When placing an order for the first time, you will have to decide how much you want to order. You can order \$20 \$40 \$60 and so on boxes. A \$20 box should suit a single/ couple and a \$40 should suit a family.

You will need to supply your own container (foam broccoli box, cardboard box or a washing basket) your choice to carry your goodies away Please have your name **clearly marked front and side** for easy identification when breaking up the orders.

There are two places that you can pick up/drop off from.

1. Saturday mornings at Coolalinga markets between 9:00am - 12:00pm where it will be received at the organic/home grown food stall.
2. Saturday morning's at the "Parap Markets" for those of you living in town (where it will be received at the organic/home grown food stall which is at the Laundromat end of the markets) by 1 pm.

Are you interested? -- If so contact me (Fred) and let me know on Snail mail:

PO Box 1781, Palmerston, NT.
0831 Email: erfmeier-ing@bigpond.com.au
Telephone/Fax: 8988 2870
Mobile: 0404 132 980

Environment Conference

Planning is underway for an exciting environment movement conference to be held in Melbourne on September 8th and 9th. We will have more information next month, but book it into your diary now. It promises to be inspiring and fun!

Wild Spaces Film Awards

Film makers and friends!!!

Don't miss the opportunity to enter the Wild Spaces New Filmmaker Awards which are designed to reward and support new filmmakers. (If you are not a filmmaker but know someone who is and would benefit from support and exposure, please forward this email.)

Wild Spaces is calling for entries of videos ranging from documentaries to feature films and animations, that have significant reference to environment and social justice issues; entries closes 6 July 2001.

The new filmmaker awards competition is specifically for amateur filmmakers who are currently developing their skills. Selected films will be screened at the Wild Spaces Festival held in all Australian States and Territories over the three-day festival on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd September 2001.

Competition prizes to be confirmed. See website for details and entry forms.

<http://wildspaces.wild.net.au>

or contact the organizers at:

Wild Spaces
PO Box 222 Fitzroy VIC 3065
telephone: 03 9419 8700

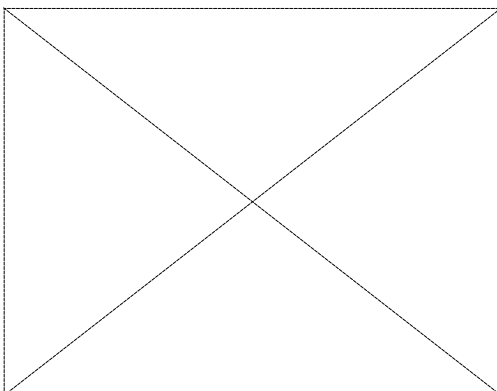
Background information

What is Wild Spaces?

Wild Spaces is Australia's only national environmental film festival; is now in its sixth year. The festival screens simultaneously in all States and Territories including many regional centres. Festival nights also feature information stalls, exhibitions and speakers specific to local areas.

Wild Spaces aims to give greater exposure in the wider community to innovative, educational, inspiring and entertaining environmental cinema. Most of the films selected have never been screened to the Australian public before.

For more information or to offer support contact Wild Spaces. Email: wildspaces@wild.net.au



Dates to remember in July and August

Wednesday 11th July - International Day of Action directed at ExxonMobil. Call ECNT for details.

Monday 6th August – Hiroshima Day. Call ECNT if you are interested in being involved in an event to mark the day.

Tuesday 7th August -Top End Bicycle Users Group meeting at Casuarina Library meeting room, 7pm. Ron Weepers is the ECNT rep on this group. If you can't make the meeting and want to raise something or would like an update on what the group is doing, please call Ron on 8981 8938 or leave a message for him at the ECNT office.

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