

# ENVIRONMENT

# NT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT  
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October 2001

## New Government, new opportunities?

August 18<sup>th</sup> 2001 saw the Labor Party take office for the first time in the NT. Hopefully the change in government signals a sea-change in NT politics that will see environment and social justice issues given much higher standing in decision-making.

ECNT's pre-election work in which we surveyed the various parties on 60-odd areas of environment policy should prove useful over the next term of government.

Since the election ECNT has been working with the Arid Lands Environment Centre (in Alice Springs) to prioritise our environment policy asks. ECNT has met with the new Lands, Planning and Environment Minister, Kon Vatskalis and Deputy Chief Minister, Syd Stirling (also Minister for Parks and Wildlife) and discussed these areas of

environment policy. The willingness of the new Government to discuss these issues has been extremely refreshing. In fact Syd Stirling's visit to the ECNT office was, we believe, the first visit to ECNT by an NT Minister.

Obviously it's very early days for the new Government. Ministers are coming to terms with issues and Parliament does not resume until October 16<sup>th</sup>, however 2 major changes in approach to environment-related issues are already evident. Firstly the new NT Government has clearly stated that it supports Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA's), which will assist in new declarations of IPA's. IPA's provide Federal funding for Traditional Owners to manage their land for conservation. This is in direct contrast with the previous Government who opposed

the IPA concept and attempted to undermine the recently declared Dhimmuru IPA. Secondly the new Government is introducing draft Freedom of Information legislation into the first session of the new Parliament, which should help ensure that the Government decision-making processes are accountable.

ECNT commends these initiatives, and looks forward to working with the new Government to further conservation in the NT and across Northern Australia. However ECNT will of course remain independent. As has always been the case ECNT will support policy that furthers environmental protection and work to change policy with negative environmental and social impacts.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

## ECNT launches Cool Communities

On Friday 24 August at lunchtime the launch of the joint Australian Greenhouse Office and Environment Centre initiative, Cool Communities, was held in Raintree Park. Just to remind you Cool Communities aims to work with community organisations in the Top End to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from households.

It was a beautifully fine dry season day (that is if you ignored the smoky air from the surrounding burn-offs, which according to a 1991 estimate contribute over half of the NT's greenhouse emissions). SolarHart brought along a trailer with a sample solar hot water system. There was also a table with information from the Australia New Zealand Solar Energy Society and some display boards on tropical house design courtesy of local architectural

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Borroloola  
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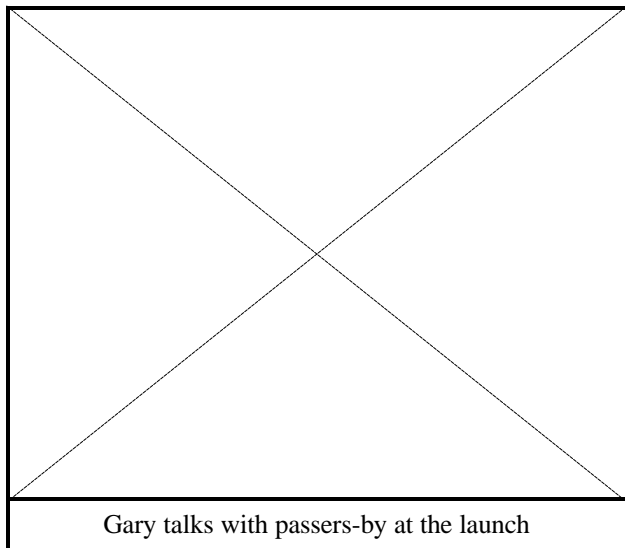
**P 7 -Bits & Pieces  
Inserts: Greenhouse tips, Gene  
Ethics info, Steiner survey**



(Continued from page 1)

firms Architects Studio and Troppo Architects. My thanks go out to these participants. There were about 20 people in attendance for the speeches by Darwin Lord Mayor George Brown and myself, with other people wandering past and stopping to look at the displays.

George Brown discussed the need to look after the envi-



Gary talks with passers-by at the launch

ronment and described what the council was doing in this area, including its proposal to generate electricity using gas from the council landfill. There then followed some very cool live music from local musician Foz Lester, an appropriately laid back way to end the launch of the only Cool Communities initiative in tropical Australia. The NT News was also there to cover the story, which appeared in the following Monday's paper under the eye-catching headline 'NT urged to help save world'.

Look out for an upcoming free participatory workshop, provisionally titled '\$aving energy, \$taying cool', in early November. This will explore ways to save energy in the home, cut down on power bills and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Contact me for a registration form.

Gary Scott  
Cool Communities Facilitator  
Ph. 8981-2532 or email. [ecntgary@octa4.net.au](mailto:ecntgary@octa4.net.au)

*Included in the edition of EnvironmeNT is a copy of a handy Cool Communities checklist outlining simple ways to save money and energy around the home.*

## Stray Creek land sales Clearing accelerating in the Daly Basin

On the 23 of August an auction was held for the sale of over thirteen thousand hectares of crown land from the Stray Creek area of the Daly Basin. The land under threat from clearing was equivalent to nearly 9000 football fields. None of the four properties sold at the auction however two were subsequently sold for the impressive (?) sum of \$59 per hectare. This means that nearly 3,500 footy fields of land (5,225 hectares) are at immediate risk of being cleared.

Terms of the lease agreement provide a subsidy to clear land as tenure will be upgraded to freehold when \$250,000 is spent on 'development' activities including landclearing, building fences, sinking bores, developing roads and actually cropping (ie. seed purchase, fertiliser,

pesticides etc.). The lease agreement provides further incentive to purchase land by issuing a free 10-year water extraction licence which allows the lessee to use of up to 2,500 mega litres per year. ECNT believes these licenses to be in contravention of COAG water reform requirements agreed to by the NT Government in 1994.

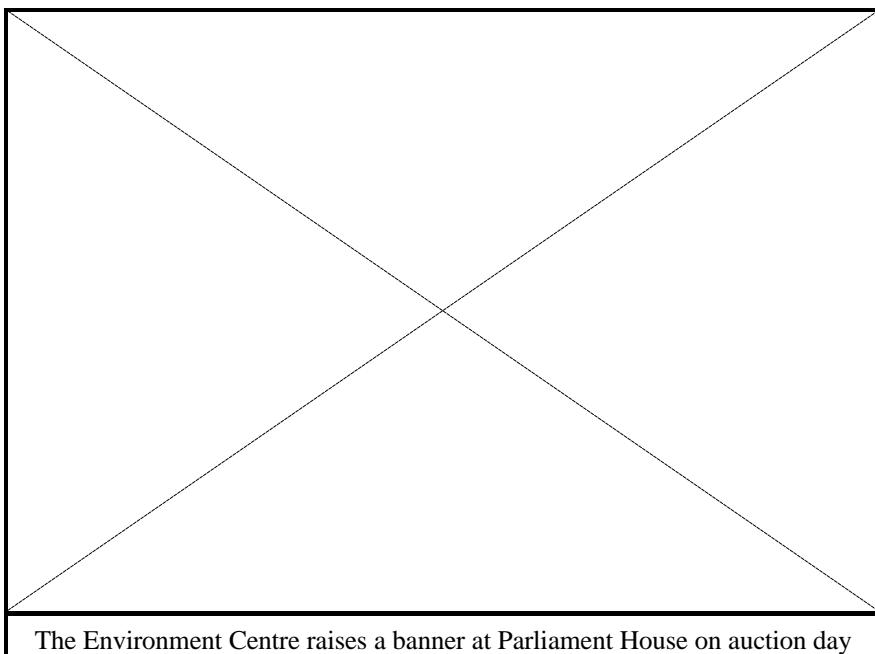
The fact that the NT Government is subsidising landclearing and water extraction suggests that we are yet to learn from experiences 'down south'.

### Some facts about the Daly Basin

The Daly Basin bioregion is 20,800km<sup>2</sup> but only 2.4% of the bioregion is protected in reserves ie. only 500km<sup>2</sup>.

Forty seven percent of the bioregion (ie. one million hectares!) is targeted for agricultural development under the previous NT Government's plans. Already 7% of the bioregion has been cleared since white settlement - primarily for pastoralism and largely failed attempts at cropping. At this stage the new NT Government's position on the future development of the Daly Basin is unknown.

There is no accurate species list for the Daly River. However, eight



The Environment Centre raises a banner at Parliament House on auction day



of the NT's nine turtle species live in the Daly River, including the Pig Nosed Turtle. There are also more than 20 migratory bird species present and seven nationally listed threatened species in the bioregion, including the endangered Gouldian Finch, the vulnerable Partridge Pigeon, Ghost Bat and Freshwater Sawfish.

**Environmental concerns with intensive agriculture in the Daly Basin**

There is NO NT process to assess the environmental impacts of this proposal so ECNT has submitted a request to Senator Hill to assess the proposal

- Lack of scientific research
- Lack of protection for species
- Landclearing impacts
- Water Use impacts
- Increased Run off, erosion and sediment to the Daly.
- Increased Chemical use
- Spread of weeds

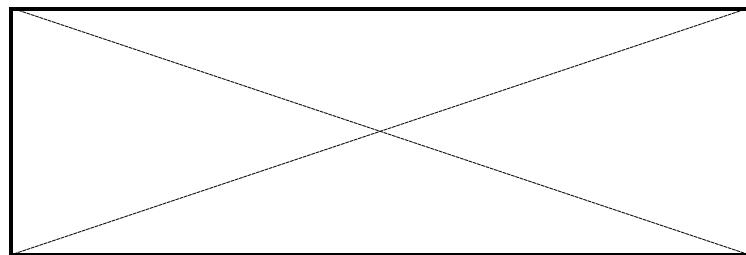
**Where to from here?**

ECNT is urging the new NT Government to stop any further land sales in the Daly Basin and to undertake a review of the previous government's massive agricultural plans for the bioregion. ECNT wants more funds for scientific research, a community consultation

Be prepared to write submissions to Senator Hill if the proposal 'qualifies' as one which needs assessment and approval under the EPBC Act. We need as many people as possible to make submissions on the likely impact of the proposal – unfortunately with the EPBC Act process we can only comment on the likely impact on migratory species, nationally listed threatened species or another matter of national environmental significance.

-Jann Crase

**More information about the Daly can be found at [www.ecnt.org](http://www.ecnt.org) and in the July edition of Environment.**



The vulnerable freshwater sawfish found in the Daly River.

under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) ('EPBC Act').

**ECNT is opposed to the sale of land in the Daly Basin for intensive agriculture for the following reasons:**

process to develop the conservation plan (which may need major revision) and a commitment to deliver on the recommendations of the conservation plan. You can write to the government making clear your concerns with the proposal, including a request to halt any further land sales, a review of the proposal and community consultation on the draft conservation plan.

**If you are interested in helping to protect the Daly Basin please email Jann at [northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au](mailto:northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au) so information to help you write submissions can be emailed to you as well as updates on progress with NT Government discussions.**

NT Government Contact Details

Chief Minister Clare Martin  
Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries: Peter Toyne  
Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment: Kon Vatskalis

**Send letters to:**  
**Parliament House Darwin,**  
**NT 0800**

**APPEAL! CALL FOR HELP AS RISING SEA LEVELS THREATEN PEOPLE IN THE PACIFIC**

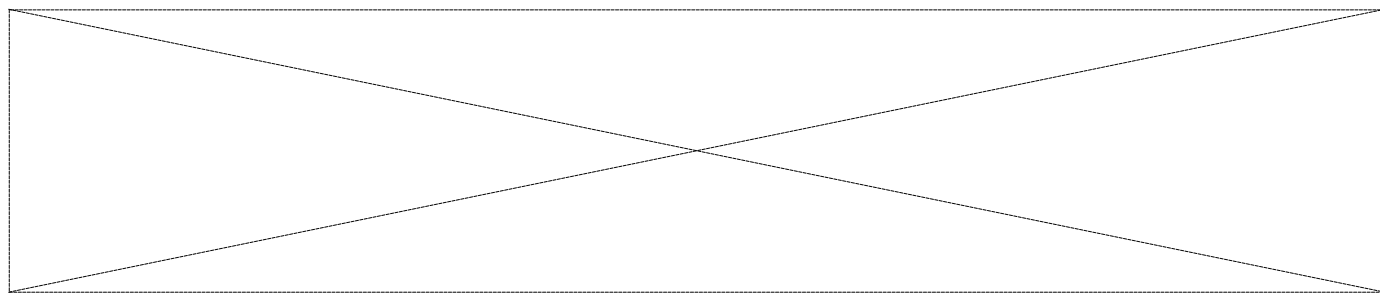
Environment supporters are being asked to assist people living on low-lying Pacific islands who face food shortages because of rising sea levels swamping their homes and farms.

Australian environment groups, as part of the Climate Action Network Australia have launched an appeal to assist people in the Carteret Islands off the coast of Bougainville whose food gardens have been destroyed by rising sea levels.

This is a terrible situation and we must act to support our neighbours. We must assist people in the Pacific to deal with both the current problem and the future sea level rises that will come with continued global warming. The Bougainville Administrator, Francis Kabano says that while 50 000 people in Bougainville are suffering food shortages as a result of floods and sea water storm surges, the Carterets Islands are the most affected areas. He says that two people have so far died as a result of food shortages and that the short-term plan is to seek donations to provide food to 2500 people for a 3 - 6 month period. Next year however the communities of Huene and Piul Islands will have to be permanently relocated to mainland Bougainville, and funds are also needed for this.

Community elders have indicated to the Bougainville Administration that rising sea levels have been occurring over the last 20 years but have been noticeably worse in the last 2 years. While CANA can not guarantee that this sea level rise is occurring as a result of global warming, it can not be ruled out as the cause of this problem. Low lying areas of the Pacific like the Carteret Islands will certainly become even more vulnerable as sea levels rise by up to 88cms by 2100 (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change 2001). We are calling on people to donate to this fund raising appeal to assist the Carteret Islanders with short-term food provision and longer term relocation costs.

*Tax-deductible donations sent to Appropriate Technology for Community and Environment (APACE, University of Technology Sydney, PO Box 123, Broadway, NSW 2001) will be passed on to the Provincial Disaster Management Trust Fund in Bougainville, the agency co-ordinating the operation to provide assistance to these communities.*



# APPROVED

## Massive Acacia Plantation on Tiwi Islands gets the go ahead

Senator Hill approved the clearing of 26,000 hectares for an Acacia plantation on the Tiwi Islands on the 12 August subject to various conditions. It was extremely disappointing that the proposal had been approved given the certain environmental impacts involved. However as a result of ECNT's submission a number of conditions were imposed that should reduce the impacts of the proposal. The Commonwealth approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) ('EPBC Act') marks the completion of the assessment stage for the proposal which means it can now go ahead.

### Environmental concerns with the proposal

ECNT lodged a detailed submission as part of the EPBC Act assessment process on the 22 of June. Our submission dealt with (amongst other issues) :

- the partial assessment of the project;
- issues with information and data;
- the environmental significance of the Tiwi Islands;
- details of the relevant impacts on nationally threatened species.

### Our concerns with the proposal and its proposed management include:

- the failure to consider the entire project proposal such as ancillary development (roads, facilities, accommodation for workers etc) and the complete proposed plantation project area of 100,000 hectares (approximately 16% of Melville Island);
- the impossible position that impacts from the clearing and burning of 26,000 hectares (4% of Melville Island) are 'acceptable' and will not have a significant impact on nationally listed threatened species';
- the lack of information relating to hydroecology and potential impacts – particularly on domestic water supplies and highly biodiverse habitats such as the wet rainforest patches;
- the lack of information relating to social impacts, cultural values and archaeological matters; and,
- the need for an upfront bond to cover management activities, remediate areas subject to unforeseen impacts and rehabilitate if the project fails.

The project is not ecologically sustainable – as it fails to sufficiently protect biodiversity and does not provide for intergenerational equity. Future generations are likely to end up with a costly, long term environmental problem and reduced resources for utilisation as a result. The material supporting the proposal does not provide sufficient justification on

economic, social or environmental grounds for the project to proceed.

Further, the ECNT believes that the Minister in applying the precautionary principle, must reject the proposal as there will be significant impacts on nationally listed threatened species, namely :

- the Bare-rumped Sheathtail Bat (*Saccolaimus saccolaimus nudicluniatus*) the only **critically endangered** mammal species listed in Australia;
- *Burrnannia sp.* (**endangered**); and,
- the **vulnerable** Butler's Dunnart, Masked Owl (Melville Island subspecies), Partridge Pigeon (eastern subspecies), Red Goshawk and False Water-rat.

### Commonwealth Conditions

As a small measure of consolation the conditions attached to the Commonwealth approval addressed some of the matters raised in our submission. The conditions allow for the first 1,000 hectares to be cleared within 6 months provided the proponents (Tiwi Land Council and Australian Plantation Group):

- (a) comply with set buffer zones eg.150m from each high bank of a river and 400m wet rainforest patches;
- (b) not clear the treeless plains, rainforest or riparian areas near springs and watercourses; and,
- (c) undertake ecological studies of the Red Goshawk, Masked Owl, Partridge Pigeon and their habitats. Including studies to delineate population size, distribution, plantation impacts and habitat preference to enable population viability models to be developed.

For the clearing of the remaining 25,000 hectares other conditions apply.

- the Minister must approve plans prepared by the proponents that outline strategies to deal with the spread and control of weeds, fertiliser application, water quality and groundwater levels, the spread of *Acacia mangium* beyond the plantations, erosion control, sediment deposition, and fire management. These issues were raised in our submission as matters needing urgent attention and management.
- in each area to be cleared a plan for managing the impact of forestry on the Red Goshawk, Masked Owl, Partridge Pigeon and Butler's Dunnart must be prepared and approved by the Minister.
- a plan to monitor the impacts of clearing the land on the listed species must be prepared and approved by the Minister. The proponents must engage an independent auditor to audit compli-



ance with the conditions every three years. Unfortunately There is also no requirement to publicly release the audits.

- an Environmental Officer must be appointed to oversee compliance with the conditions.
- costed contingency plans and bonds to safeguard the ongoing viability of the Red Goshawk, Masked Owl, Partridge Pigeon and Butler's Dunart if the plantation were to fail are also required. This is a significant step forwards to ensuring corporate accountability for the life of the environmental impacts of their actions not just the life of their actions.
- All plans prepared in accordance with the conditions must be implemented.

### Corporate investment

There was a very interesting rural report on ABC radio recently about the plantation timber industry crisis marked by the major plantation company Australian Plantation Timbers Limited Pty Ltd going into receivership on 1 August. Concerns about the financial viability of one of the companies involved in the Tiwi Island proposal were raised by ECNT with Senator Hill.

A further interesting twist has been the corporate investment side of the project with an ethical investment company encouraging investment in the proposal despite that company's 'commitment' to not supporting projects that cause 'environmental

destruction'. ECNT is looking at whether such actions might constitute 'misleading conduct' under the governing legislation.

### Conclusion – where to from here?

Although ECNT's position is that the proposal should not go ahead at all, there is some satisfaction that the conditions will ensure that more information about the ecology of the area and particular species is collected and applied to improving management of the impacts of the plantation.

ECNT will monitor events on the Tiwi Islands and make concerns with the conditions known to Senator Hill. We will also continue to pursue the failings of ethical investment companies in their promotion of plantations that require landclearing and maintain a watching brief on the viability of the plantation industry as a whole.

**For a copy of the ECNT submission to Senator Hill or more information on the Tiwi Islands please email Jann at [northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au](mailto:northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au), call 8941 7439 or see our website– [www.ecnt.org](http://www.ecnt.org)**

**To access the ABC report on the plantation timber industry go to : [www.abc.net.au/rural/plantation/default.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/rural/plantation/default.htm)**

Jann Crase  
Northern Woodlands & Wetlands Campaigner

# 'Fight for Country. The story of the Jabiluka Blockade'

Four years in the making, this film tells the story of an incredible piece of Australian History.

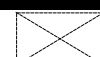
Screening as part of the Wild Spaces environmental video festival at the Deckchair Cinema  
Monday October 22nd from 7pm.

**Entry: \$8/\$6** (concession rates apply for ECNT members)

Food and drinks available on the night.

There will also be a brief update on where the Jabiluka campaign's at.

*"You must see it" Naomi Klein*

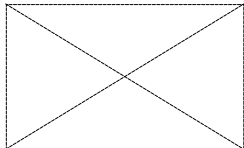


# Fishing nets kill Dugongs at Borroloola

-new approach needed.

Around ten Dugongs were killed recently in an incident at Borroloola where they became entangled in fishing nets. The nets were being used by commercial fishermen to target Barramundi in the area. At the first report of these deaths in the media commercial fishing representatives speculated that it may have been a result of Dugong 'disease'. Shortly after these statements a commercial fisherman licensed to fish barramundi in the area stated that the deaths were in fact due to entanglement in nets operated by his employee.

This event is similar to one which happened approximately 5 years ago in the area where around 30 dead dugong were discovered by traditional owners in the area. Many had stab marks and some had their tails cut off suggesting they had been entangled and drowned then cut free and possibly stabbed so that they would sink out of sight. Interestingly statements were also made at that time by fishermen that perhaps an unusual 'disease' had befallen these Dugong. As yet no evidence has been produced to support this view.

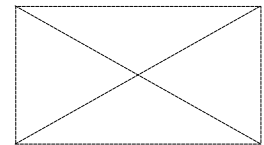


The recent deaths prompted the Mabunji Resource Association in Borroloola to call a two day meeting to address issues such as the Dugong deaths and other issues related to marine management in the area. The meeting was attended by recreational and commercial fishermen, the local member Elliot McAdam, traditional owners of the area and representatives of the fisheries department among others. A number of issues were raised and Mr McAdam indicated the government were interested in a new approach to regional management which may address these issues.

The Gulf of Carpentaria hosts some of the largest populations of Dugong in Australia and supports extensive sea-grass beds which are vital to their diet. As such it must be a priority area for conservation management of the species. Incidents like the entanglement in nets mentioned are simply one of a number of threats to Dugong which must be managed over the long term. The Mabunji Association have already undertaken measures to better understand and manage indigenous hunting of Dugong in the area and traditional owners have expressed strong concerns about future management of the

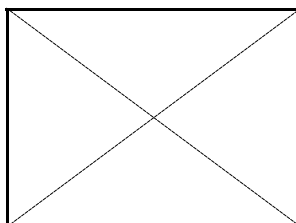
marine environment of the area. Unfortunately at this stage the NT still has no dugong or turtle management strategy despite the importance of these animals both in a conservation sense and as animals of high importance to indigenous coastal communities. The recent release of the Northern Territory Marine Conservation and Biodiversity Strategy by the previous NT government was an enormous disappointment and amounted only to a vague restating of existing initiatives rather than setting out a strong vision and implementation strategy for marine conservation in the NT. The Environment Centre of the NT will be lobbying the new government for a fresh approach to marine conservation in the NT including scrapping of existing marine and coastal policy and developing a new approach in consultation with the community particularly with indigenous coastal communities

-Kirsten Blair &Mark Wakeham.



## Getting Crabby

You may like catching and eating mud crabs or you may just like the fact that they are out there doing their mud crab 'thing' in mangroves and on mud flats all over the Top End. You may not know that the mud crab fishery in the Northern Territory is worth millions and catches around 1000 tonnes of mud crabs per year. If you calculated the average weight of each crab at 1kg that would amount to around 1 million crabs each year!. And don't forget that's only the commercial fishery- the estimated catch for the recreational fishery was estimated at around 40-50 tonnes and most of that happens around the Darwin area with the MacArthur River area probably coming in second for mud crab eaters. All this is very interesting you may say but so what? Well because of recent changes to federal government legislation all export fisheries like the mud crab fishery have to undergo an environmental assessment- this is aimed at making sure the fishery is ecologically sustainable in the long term and does not impact other aspects of



the environment negatively. This will be happening for the mud crab fishery very soon.

**There will be an opportunity for public comment and if you are interested you can have your say. If you would like more information about this call Patrick O'Leary at the Marine and Coastal Community Network on 89815433 or email [nt@mccn.org.au](mailto:nt@mccn.org.au).**

**Watch out for Dugong in your area! Have you seen a Dugong recently? Would you like to help keeping watch for Dugongs?**

**Northern Territory Dugong scientist Dr Scott Whiting is conducting a dugong survey in the Darwin area and needs community help. If you want to participate contact the Marine and Coastal Community Network on 89815433 or [nt@mccn.org.au](mailto:nt@mccn.org.au) and find out more.**

# Bits and Pieces

## Slicks on Darwin Beaches

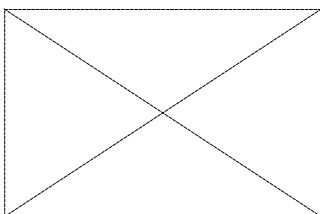
Around the 14 - 16 September some people may have noticed a greenish slick on the water accompanied by a rotting vegetation smell at Darwin beaches (Nightcliff and Casuarina in particular.) A call to the Pollution Response Line (1800 064 567) gave us the following information. Two of the most likely causes of slicks in the Darwin area are "blooming" of certain species of algae or mass spawning of corals.

Coral spawning takes place at the same time each year usually in September a few days after the full moon. When all the cells are congregated on the water surface they may be seen as from pink or white streaks.

The slicks seen in Darwin were however caused by algal blooms. The conditions which cause these blooms can occur as a result of an association of natural features including weather, temperature and nutrients. Sometimes, but not always, they may be accelerated by nutrients of human origin. In the NT the introduction of these kinds of nutrients is generally insignificant.

In global terms, the Timor and Arafura Seas are "hotspots" for these algae (*Trichodesmium*) which are the subject of intensive research by the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

Information supplied by the Environment Protection Division of the De-



partment of Lands, Planning and Environment. 8924 4140

## Unburnt Block Blossoms

We have received a phone call from Ken Simmons who owns a block at Adelaide River, which has not been burnt for three or four years. He has noticed an increase in wildlife and the rejuvenation of a natural spring. He'd like to show interested people around. His number is: 8976 7183.

## Wild Spaces Environmental Video Festival 22 & 23 October

The NTU Students' Union has organised for this popular festival to screen again this year at the Deckchair Cinema on Monday 22 and Tuesday 23 October. The first night will be a fundraiser for the Environment Centre and will feature the new film about Jabiluka, "Fight for Country" among others. There will be four sessions in total over the two nights and will include videos from Australia as well as some of our Asian neighbours. Food will be available for sale and the kiosk will operate as usual.

The gate will open at 6.30pm and food will be available before each session.

Tickets will cost:

All sessions- \$20 and \$15 ECNT, DFS members and concession,  
2 sessions- \$12 (\$10) and  
Single session- \$8 (\$6)

Program details will be available soon from ECNT, The University, Deckchair and usual outlets.

**Volunteers to help with food preparation and sale as well as to help on the nights are needed, so give us a ring if you can help.**

## ECNT website

The ECNT website is being constantly updated, so remember to keep checking out [www.ecnt.org](http://www.ecnt.org). Please help us publicise our website- if you know anyone who you think would be interested in the site please send them the address details or the webpage.

## Thanks again

A big thanks to all of our members who donated to our end of financial year appeal. The appeal was one of our most successful ever and raised over \$5000. Donations provide important campaign funds for the Centre.

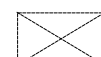
## 3 year memberships

Do you find it difficult to get around to renewing your membership? Or when you go to do it you can't find the membership form? Well ECNT is here to help you. You can renew your membership in a number of ways- by phone, fax, mail or by downloading a membership form from the ECNT website. You can also now choose to renew your membership for 3 years to give you a reprieve from our annual reminders.

So no more excuses!

## Like to help us get the newsletter together?

If you'd like to help us photocopy, fold and mail the newsletter once a month please give the ECNT office a call.



## This Month

Wednesday October 3rd

Peace Rally at Raintree Park, 6pm

6th October

Rural block owners expo, Bees Creek P.S.

Mon. & Tues 22 & 23 Oct

Wild Spaces Environmental Video  
Festival @ Deckchair Cinema. Premiere Darwin  
screening of 'Fight for Country- the story of the  
Jabiluka Blockade on the 22nd

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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

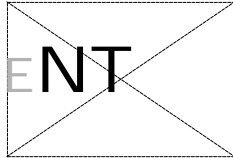
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