

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

April 2002

Website- <http://www.ecnt.org>

LABOR BACKFLIP ON PRE-ELECTION PROMISE No ban on mining in National Parks

BIG NEWS this month was the Territory Labor party's complete backdown from its pre-election promise to ban mining and mineral exploration in National Parks.

As members would be aware, the Environment Centre surveyed all parties on a range of environmental issues prior to last year's Territory election. The following is extracted from the Labor Party response, which came from Clare Martin's office:

Q. In Government will your party ban mineral exploration and mining in all National Parks and conservation reserves?

A. Labor will ban mining in National Parks and assess conservation reserves on a case-by-case basis.

ECNT has since received a letter from Paul Henderson, minister for Resource Development, which completely contradicts this position. Part of the letter states:

"Exploration and mining in Northern Territory National Parks and reserves would only be permitted under strict conditions and where the proposed activity did not

significantly impact on the purpose for which the park or reserve was created."

A complete backdown

On contacting both Minister Henderson and the Chief Minister's offices seeking clarification ECNT discovered that the NT Government had decided to renege on its pre-election promise. With only 5% of the NT in our National Parks estate, the failure by the new Government to guarantee the integrity of our National Parks is extremely disappointing.

The back-down signals a 'develop at all costs' attitude that will short-change Territorians and the NT environment if maintained. The only likely supporters of this extraordinary position are the ALP, the CLP and the mining industry.

The backdown also raises questions about the status of other pro-environment promises made by Territory Labor in the lead up to last year's election and leaves ECNT and the broader electorate wondering what to believe.

The backdown came during an assessment of mineral exploration applications in the West MacDonnell National Park, applied for under the previous government. ECNT was seeking clarification of how the Government was planning to implement its policy commitment when we realised that the Government had changed its policy.

Following considerable media interest in the backflip, Paul Henderson has since announced that his department had rejected three applications for minerals exploration in the West MacDonnell National Park.

Further to this on the 28th March the Minister for Central Australia, Peter Toyne, announced that the whole of the West MacDon-

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE ...

- Pg. 1 ALP Backflip
- Pg. 2 McArthur River closure
- Pg. 3 The latest on the Gas
- Pg. 4 Coffee
- Pg. 5 Jabiluka leak
- Pg. 6 The POD co-op and Landclearing guidelines
- Pg. 7 Bits & Pieces

(Continued from page 1)

nell National Park would be protected from mining. This is obviously good news but according to their pre-election promise, the Labor Government should never have considered the applications in the first place. Moreover the new ban on mining in the West MacDonnells demonstrates how vulnerable our other National Parks are and acknowledges that mining does pose a threat to some Parks. Do we now have protected and non-protected

National Parks?

ECNT will continue to pressure the Government on this issue. The only acceptable outcome is a reaffirmation of their previous position- a complete ban on mining in all National Parks.

We encourage you to let the Chief Minister, Clare Martin, the Resource Development Minister, Paul Henderson, and your local member know that this backflip is unacceptable.

Demand that the Labor Government commits to its promise to ban mining. Write to Ms Martin and Mr Henderson care of Parliament House, Darwin, 0800 or phone or email Clare Martin: chiefminister.nt@nt.gov.au and Paul Henderson: minister.henderson@nt.gov.au .

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

McArthur River closed to commercial fishers

ECNT welcomed the NT Government's decision, earlier this month, to close the McArthur River to commercial barramundi fishing from July 1 this year. Competition for the fish resources in the area between recreational, commercial and traditional owner fishers have made this one of the most highly charged natural resource management issues in the NT in recent times. Last year 10 dugongs were killed by one of the commercial fishers, which led to the temporary closure of the area to commercial operators.

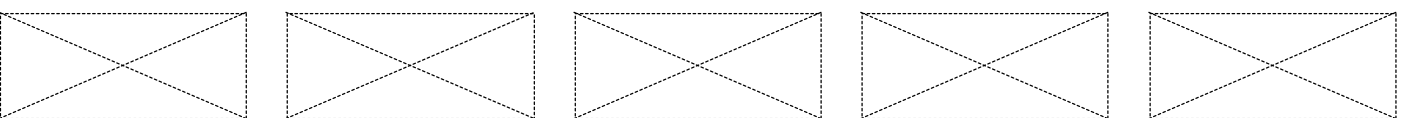
The recent decision to exclude commercial fishing from the McArthur will see a removal of gill nets, reducing the levels of by-catch (catch of non-targeted fish) in the area and helping to eliminate dugong kills. However ECNT believes that removing commercial fishing from the river is only the first step in protecting the environmental values of the area and securing the future of the fishery (and other fisheries in the NT). In our recent submission to the NT Government on this issue, ECNT made the following points:

- The McArthur River debate over recent years exemplifies the difficulty in making informed fisheries management decisions given the paucity of data and research into fisheries management. ECNT supports research that will assist in better estimates of fishery effort and sustainability. Fishing impacts of the recreational sector are particularly poorly known.
- By-catch and the incidental catch of aquatic wildlife are important issues that need to be

addressed by the commercial sector at the NT, national and international levels (not just in the McArthur River). However recent dugong deaths in the area have again highlighted the need for the development and implementation of management plans for particular species of high conservation value. **There is a critical need for the development and implementation of dugong and turtle management plans across the NT.** Obviously there is a need to work closely with traditional owners in the development of such plans.

- ECNT supports the closure of the McArthur River system to commercial barramundi fishing given the area's high conservation values and the estimated, and in some cases demonstrated, impacts of commercial fishing on these values. However we believe that we also need to ensure that we are not replacing a regulated sector with one that is largely unregulated, particularly given the high levels of recreational fishing in the area. **ECNT supports and encourages the development of improved methods of regulating recreational fishing to ensure catches are ecologically sustainable.** In the meantime we believe it is important that current regulations are enforced. One relatively simple way of doing this would be to conduct spot-checks of vehicles leaving the area and of camp-sites to ensure that bag limits are not being exceeded. Such a measure should be supported by responsible recreational fishers.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair



Darwin Harbour LNG Plans get even bigger

The campaign to prevent the industrialisation of Darwin Harbour and create a national park has reached a critical phase with Phillips seeking further environmental approvals for its proposed liquid natural gas (LNG) plant at Wickham Point.

In 1998 the company released its Draft EIS for a large LNG facility utilising gas from the Bayu-Undan field in the Timor Sea. Soon after, the plant, which was to produce 3 million tonnes (mega tonnes: MT) of LNG per year for export, received its environmental approvals from the Territory and Commonwealth Governments. This was despite the proposed destruction of 66.8 hectares of rainforest, the release of 1.8 MT of greenhouse gas every year, and the discharge of 4.5 cubic metres per hour of wastewater. At the time the company also indicated that given favourable market conditions it may look to build a plant producing 9 MT of LNG per annum and permission for such an expansion was included in the initial approvals.

A new Public Environment Report, released a few weeks ago, outlines the scope of Phillips updated plans. And they certainly are big plans. Production levels have increased more than threefold to 10 million tonnes. A further 21.5 hectares of rainforest will be cleared and greenhouse emissions will leap to 4.56 MT per year, massively increasing the NT's greenhouse gas emissions.

The company also proposes that the destruction of the largely unmodified dry rainforest at Wickham Point be offset by the purchase of an appropriate area of forest in the Darwin area for conservation. ECNT believes that such a proposal ignores the fact that we should be preserving **all** of our important ecosystems like mangroves and rainforests, rather than allowing some sacrifice zones. If the Phillips development proceeds, habitat for local birdlife and mammals, such as the Northern Brown Bandicoot, Northern Brushtail Possum and Agile Wallaby, will be permanently lost at Wickham Point.

Submissions on the PER are due by 29th April. The report can be viewed at ECNT, most public libraries and at the following website <http://www.lpe.nt.gov.au/enviro/EAIREG/eiareg.htm>.

Gas development in the National Interest?

Meanwhile in Canberra, Chief Minister Clare Martin has been arguing the Territory Government's case for bringing gas from the Greater Sunrise field onshore to Darwin. Two of the partners in the Sunrise development, Shell and Woodside, are pushing for a floating LNG plant out in the Timor Sea rather than an onshore

facility. This would mean that the other main partner, Phillips, would only proceed with an undersea pipeline from the Bayu-Undan field to Darwin of sufficient diameter to feed its own proposed LNG plant at Wickham Point. The Government has been arguing that the Territory and the rest of Australia would miss out on the economic and environmental benefits of piping gas to places such as Gove and the eastern seaboard if the off-shore project goes ahead.

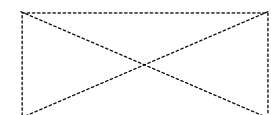
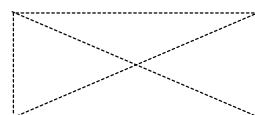
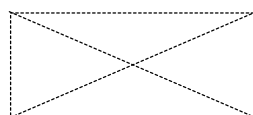
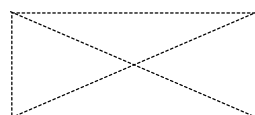
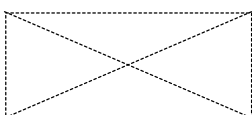
The NT Government's submission to the Commonwealth outlines a saving of at least 7.3MT of carbon dioxide per year if Greater Sunrise gas was brought onshore. However this impressive figure is based on some creative carbon accounting. 4.1MT of saving is identified as coming from the development of an aluminium smelter in Darwin in preference to another location where the smelter's vast requirement for electricity might be derived from black coal. This saving is not a reduction in greenhouse emissions then, simply a somewhat less enormous increase and based on a speculative project which has no status beyond proposal at this stage. It is also assumed that half of the gas piped to the eastern seaboard would substitute for coal-fired electricity with a saving of 2.8MT per annum, although there is no explanation of how this assumption is arrived at. Note that, notwithstanding all the rhetoric about gas pipelines from Darwin to Moomba and Mt Isa being in the national interest, this annual greenhouse saving is less than would be created in one year by the proposed Wickham Point LNG plant alone.

ECNT would like the Government to come clean on the greenhouse implications of natural gas development. A much more thorough analysis needs to be done before the environmental costs and benefits of bringing gas onshore can be fully determined.

-Kirsten Blair & Mark Wakeham

Litchfield Land Use objectives to write off Middle Arm for industrial development?

In late news the Development Consent Authority (DCA) met on the 2nd April to consider the Litchfield Land Use Objectives. The NT News reported that NT Government representatives advised the DCA that the whole of Middle Arm should be zoned for industrial development. If implemented this zoning would seriously threaten Darwin Harbour. The NT Government is now developing a management plan for Darwin Harbour. ECNT believes that the Litchfield LUO's must not be ratified before the Management Plan for the Harbour has been implemented.



The low-down on coffee

As part of our series of occasional reports looking at the environmental impact of common consumer items, ECNT volunteer Laura Wirf has a closer look at coffee.

Coffee is the world's most used stimulant and the second most heavily traded commodity (next to oil), but most of the twenty million people who produce it live in extreme poverty and the countries it is grown in are often destitute.

Coffee continues to increase in popularity but few consumers are aware of the social and environmental consequences of their coffee habit.

Responsible Consumption

Most of the world's coffee is produced in Latin America and Africa, grown by small-scale farmers in very poor conditions. Most of these coffee producers live at a subsistence level, they have little or no capital to invest into their farms and live under governments with huge international debts, forcing them into farming coffee as a cash crop for export. Competition in export between coffee producers in countries in these areas is high, driving prices down and forcing producers further below the poverty line. Because the isolated small-scale farmers are forced to grow coffee continuously and extensively, with no scientific or technical advice and often in environmentally sensitive locations, such as the Andes in Peru, the industry results in significant environmental as well as social impacts. Environmental damage associated with coffee production includes:

- **Deforestation and associated habitat and biodiversity loss.**
- **Destabilisation and erosion of soil leading to regional nutrient depletion.**
- **Extensive silting and pollution of rivers and other water-bodies causing problems to aquatic ecosystems.**

Traditional small-scale methods of production are significantly less damaging than more intensive methods which have recently been introduced by large companies attempting to get in on the market.

Traditionally, coffee is grown under shade, meaning that much of the original forest is left intact and remains as a viable habitat for native wildlife. Most small-scale farms are virtually organic, not having the capital to outlay for chemical herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers- weeding etc is done by hand. Soil degradation and erosion remains a problem, however it is likely that with previously unavailable scientific and technical advice and assistance, such as the introduction of terracing and more informed methods of

clearing these farms could become completely organic and sustainable, as well as more productive, quite easily.

Over the last decade, across Europe, North America and Australasia, there has been growing awareness and concern about the social injustice and environmental jeopardy caused by the current situation in the coffee industry. The result of this concern is the development of a number of Fair Trade coffee organisations. These organisations, which operate globally, were formed to establish a fairer trading system and better production methods within the coffee industry. Their main commitments are:

- *To deal directly with producers to cut out profit grabbing intermediaries and multinationals.*
- *To guarantee and pay a fair, higher and stable price to producers which would be set regardless of fluctuations in the world market prices.*
- *Work with producers to guarantee the highest quality coffee for consumers.*
- *A commitment to improve social conditions for producers and their communities.*
- *Providing scientific and technical environmental advice and support to producers to develop and ensure completely organic and environmentally sustainable production methods.*
- *To develop consumer awareness and encourage the purchase of fair trade coffee with marketing strategies based on social awareness and environmental commitment.*
- *Educate consumers about how their purchasing decisions affect regional and global economies and ecosystems.*

The coffee market is entirely consumer-driven, and a consumer's choice in product initiates a chain of responses that impact upon coffee farmers and workers, their families and communities and sensitive international ecosystems. As consumers it is up to us to make the right purchasing decisions to ensure a better deal for coffee growers and to support environmentally sustainable farming methods.

Fair trade coffee (and tea) brands, including Organic East Timorese coffee, are available in Darwin through the Darwin Alternative Trading Group (DATG), of which the Environment Centre is a member. DATG has regular stalls at the Rapid Creek and Nightcliff Sunday markets and also supplies Happy Food Land (Rapid Creek), Nightcliff Foodstore, and Marty's Fruit and Veg (Bagot Road).

More wet season problems at Ranger and Jabiluka mines

Once again the wet season has seen serious water management problems and reporting failures at Ranger and Jabiluka uranium mines. Separate incidents at both Jabiluka and Ranger have again highlighted the incompatibility of uranium mining and World Heritage protection.

At Ranger mine Rio Tinto's ERA misplaced a large quantity (the exact quantity is yet to be determined, but ECNT has been informed by several sources that it was in excess of 100,000 tonnes) of uranium ore on a stockpile that had been prepared for the wet. This led to elevated levels of uranium in nearby Corridor Creek, which flows into the World Heritage Area. Elevated uranium levels were also detected at monitoring point 009 which is upstream of the Aboriginal community of Mudginberri.

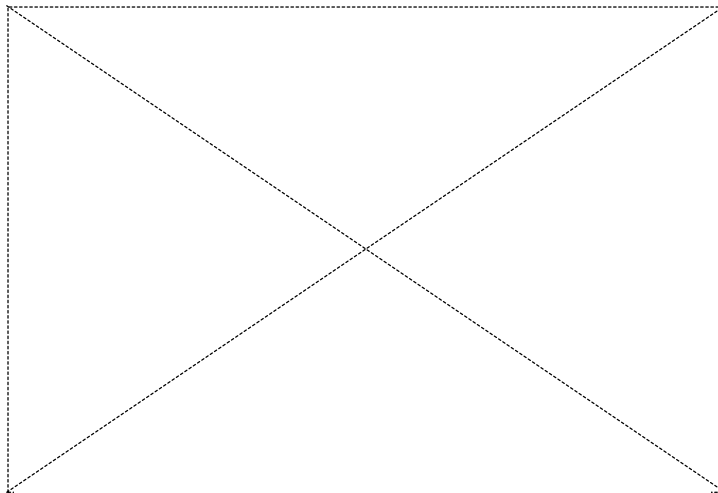
The company failed to report the elevated uranium levels for several weeks despite the levels detected being above the levels required for reporting. In addition to this incident Rio Tinto's ERA is again experiencing an accumulation of poor quality water on the site, with uranium levels in Retention Pond 1 again reaching high levels, despite company assurances given to ECNT and traditional owners over the past couple of years that the uranium spikes in the wet season would not be repeated. Rio Tinto is currently attempting to regulate the spillage of this contaminated water by using a sandbag wall on the spillway as pictured.

Meanwhile at Jabiluka despite the fact that the mine is not producing water management problems are compounding. Early January saw uranium levels downstream of the mine exceed reporting levels, however again the company failed to notify the authorities. While the uranium levels downstream of the mine are not particularly high (as yet) it is extremely significant that the uranium levels being detected downstream of the mine are 6 times higher than upstream, demonstrating the impact of the mine. Again these readings were taken off the mineral lease **inside the World Heritage Area**.

After a significant reporting delay Rio Tinto's ERA finally reported these incidents. The response to the incidents by regulatory authorities was once again disappointing. The NT Minister for Resource Development, Paul Henderson, denied that there had been any breach of environmental standards or reporting. He mustn't have been communicating with the company as half an hour later ERA CEO Bob Clearly apologised to traditional owners and the public and acknowledged that *the mistaken dumping had occurred and that the company had breached its reporting guidelines by delaying informing stakeholders* (The Australian, 6/03/02). That the NT Government immediately leapt to the defence of the company without examining the issue is extremely

disappointing, particularly given that many have been hoping for a new approach to mining regulation from the new government.

What is even more disappointing is that this incident is almost identical to the tailings water return leak at Ranger that happened in May 2000. Following that leak an investigation resulted in much hand-wringing and promises that a repeat offence could not occur. However, the

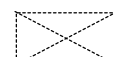


**Best Practice Water Management at Ranger?
Water dumping at Retention Pond 1**

management and reporting systems at Ranger and Jabiluka have once again failed comprehensively. As Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation Executive Officer Andy Ralph stated *How can the traditional owners have any confidence in the mining company?* (The Australian, 6/03/02)

ECNT believes that these incidents again highlight the need for an accelerated exit strategy for the Ranger mine. In the meantime, the regulatory framework needs to be fully reviewed. At Jabiluka however mine owners Rio Tinto need to listen to the very clear views of traditional owners and the Australian public and forego development of the mine once and for all.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair



POD - Planet Organic Darwin Wholefoods

POD OPENS AT NTU

Ever been to a shop where the food is all good for you? Where you can choose exactly how much of something you want to buy? Where you don't end up with a bin of useless packaging afterwards? Where the food gets even cheaper if you join the shop? Where the staff are volunteers and the feeling is friendly?

After years of wishing, negotiating and planning, Planet Organic Darwin is opening as a community-run, not-for-profit, bulk wholefoods shop on the Casuarina campus of the NTU.

POD, WHERE, WHEN, WHAT ...

- Northern Territory's first co-operative voluntary organic and B-D bulk wholefoods outlet
- Location- Under the Student Union, Northern Territory University, Casuarina Campus, Darwin
- Opening hours- Tues Wed Thurs- 10-3, Sat 10-2
- Opening Date Tuesday 16/4/2002

Membership details- \$15 and \$20 membership per year, with 10% discount for members

WHY IS POD WHOLEFOODS DIFFERENT TO NORMAL SHOPS?

A co-op is not trying to make a profit for the management, or trying to take over the market. Co-operatives are based on values of self-help, self responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

POD will stock primarily dry goods to begin with but after opening it is hoped that we will stock fresh Biodynamic and Organic fruit and vegetables produced by local farmers. POD wishes to complement and ex-

pand the Biodynamic and Organic food scene in Darwin rather than compete with existing suppliers. How can we help each other?

WHAT'S A CO-OP?

A food co-op is a mob of people united voluntarily to meet their foodie needs and dietary desires through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

For all the people of Darwin who are health conscious, concerned for the environment, or just can't stand supermarkets, the opening of POD will bring a sigh of relief.

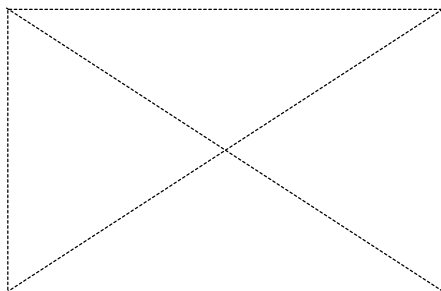
Check out a few of the delectables that punters can get in the POD.

Australian miso
Icy Cold organic drinks
Sticky dried bananas
Chocolate sultanas
Organic kick-ass muesli
Best quality rices and flours
Roasted macadamia nuts
Bulk tahini
Golden organic polenta
Organic apple and pear juice
Raw organic sugar
Aussie mango soy milk
Local bush honey and locally made arts and crafts

Volunteers and members are needed! Join the POD squad- email ntufoodcoop@yahoo.com or phone the Student Union (08) 89467740.

NT government releases landclearing guidelines.

The March session of NT Parliament saw the release of guidelines for landclearing in the NT. The document outlines some of the impacts of landclearing and some ways in which the impacts from landclearing can be reduced (if indeed it has to occur at all).



Following the guidelines release, **Jann Crase**, ECNT's northern woodlands and wetlands campaigner said "The release of voluntary guidelines to minimise environmental damage from clearing is a step in the right direction but it is certainly not enough. The NT Government's land clearing policy which is to be released soon, must establish a whole of Territory regulatory system that identifies where clearing can occur and how much can take place."

ECNT is encouraging the community to get involved in the debate about landclearing and recently launched a landclearing fact-sheet

that is available on the ECNT website.

The guidelines can be viewed at <http://www.lpe.nt.gov.au/advis/land/clearing>

For further information contact: Jann Crase - 08 8941 7439 or northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au

Bits and Pieces

A Win On The Mary

Good news came this week with the rejection of an application for a sand mining license on the Mary River.

ECNT was alerted to this proposal late last year by Gina and Mike Otswald, who live at the Mary River Park and are committed to the conservation of this beautiful area.

After visiting the river several other groups and individuals, including ECNT, made submissions to the NT Department of Mines and Energy detailing the environmental dangers associated with the dredging and clearing proposed for the mining project. The rejection of this proposal is great news - congratulations to all who made their voice heard on this issue.

Unfortunately, not all stretches of river and tracts of bush that may be under threat from sand mining are watched over by people like Gina and Mike

This story highlights the inadequacy of the current approvals process for extractive minerals operations, one of the many areas we are pursuing with the NT Government.

Multicultural Council Racism Hotline

Racist Incidents can now be reported by phoning

8981 4729.

If you or anyone else you know have been the victim of any form of racist behaviour, please contact the above number.

The information reported will be documented and used to demonstrate the prevalence of racism in the NT. You will also be provided with information on how to tackle racism and referrals.

MCNT ensures that each case will be handled with the highest confidentiality and sensitivity.

All the way with the USA

As mentioned last month, following the US abandonment of the Kyoto process, a joint statement on Climate Change was released by Australia and the United States at the end of February. The following is an excerpt from the press statement:

27. 2. 02 Washington

"The governments of Australia and the United States today announced an agreement to establish a Climate Action Partnership. The agreement was reached following meetings on climate change held in Washington this week by Dr. David Kemp, Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage, with senior members of the U.S. Administration.

The partnership will focus on practical approaches toward dealing with climate change.

Informal working groups will involve officials, under senior-level leadership, from the US Departments of Commerce, Energy and State and the US Environmental Protection Agency, and their Australian counterpart agencies, as well as research bodies and industry. They will focus on such issues as emissions measurement and accounting, climate change science, stationary energy technologies, engagement with business to create economically efficient climate change solutions, agriculture and land management and collaboration with developing countries to build capacity to deal with climate change.

In doing this, Australia and the US are openly dismissing the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. While the Kyoto treaty does not go anywhere near far enough, it does contain the vital first steps needed for an international effort to combat Global Warming and enjoys the support of most of the world's major polluting nations. Australia and the US are achieving international pariah status by taking this backward stand and have attracted strong criticism from world leaders for abandoning this vital agreement.

Make your voice heard on this issue: write to John Howard, Alexander Downer and Dr David Kemp, telling them to commit to ratification of Kyoto as a matter of urgency. Contact the office for more info or help.

What future for Darwin?

During the March field trip jointly organised by the Field Naturalists and the Environment Centre, we were discussing this question. What are the advantages and disadvantages, costs and benefits of population growth, and of industrial development in and around Darwin? What sort of city and community do we want for the future, and what are the various factors to take into account when forming our views?

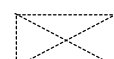
Some of us agreed that as well as wanting a Management Plan for Darwin Harbour, we would like community consultation on the broader issue of the type of city we want Darwin to become.

Personally, I feel there are too many gaps in my current knowledge about options and their likely implications to be able to engage in an informed debate about the future.

I would be very interested to work with others who could pool ideas about the various views and types of information that could inform this debate. I wonder whether, if we can access a range of considerations and perspectives, we could put together enough information to enable people like me, who want to be better educated about the options, to hold small discussion groups with friends, to stimulate a more informed debate about Darwin's future. If enough people are interested perhaps this could lead to a public meeting to discuss these views more broadly.

If you are interested in exploring this idea, please contact me on 89 481036 or let the Environment Centre know.

- Anthea Duquemin



A DATE TO REMEMBER

Sunday April 7, 7pm - *Future of the struggle in Aceh.*

Independence activist, Kautsar speaking at NTU. \$10/\$15

Saturday April 13th, 1-6pm M1 planning workshop at NTU. Contact Ruth for more information 89

Tuesday April 16th POD (Planet Organic Darwin) Food Coop opens, located in the Student Union building next to the basketball courts at NTU.

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

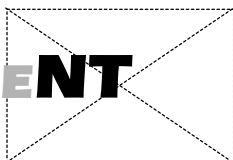
PO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801 Ph (08) 8981 1984 Fax (08) 8941 0387

E-mail: ecnt@octa4.net.au

Surface Mail

Postage
Paid

ENVIRONME**NT**



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