

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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August 2002

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

Railway company destroys Gouldian Finch habitat

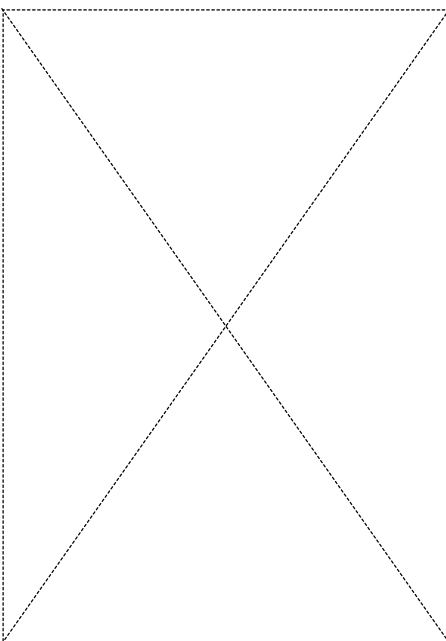
It was revealed last week that contractors for the Alice Springs to Darwin railway accidentally bulldozed an area of prime Gouldian Finch habitat along the railway construction corridor, 50km north of Katherine.

The Gouldian Finch is listed as critically endangered on both the Federal and NT threatened species lists with an estimated 2500 birds left in the wild and a \$1 million recovery project currently underway in the Katherine region.

The proponent for the railway, ADrail, had been advised that the railway corridor should avoid this area west of the Yinberrie Hills as it is critical habitat for the finch. The birds use this area for feeding on native grass during the wet season, when pressure for feeding sites is greatest. The NT Government has not specified the details but we understand that through an agreement between the NT Government and ADrail, the key feeding areas were cordoned off from the construction area. Unfortunately the contractors mistook the cordoned off area for the railway corridor and demol-

ished grasses on several of the protected areas before realising their mistake.

The error is understood to have occurred several months ago and although the NT Government was alerted



to it by ADrail, no public statement had been made until after the story broke last week. The company claims to be rehabilitating the site, although there was no evidence of that in the bulldozed areas visited by ECNT last week. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to recreate this sort of habitat and any efforts to re-sew the grasses may be fruitless.

This incident confirms many of the Environment Centre's fears about the previous NT Government's decision to use the approvals given for the project back in 1982 rather than requiring the company to complete a new Environmental Impact Statement. Environmental impact assessment, like any other form of assessment, is not valid indefinitely.

The Gouldian Finch was not even listed as endangered back in 1982 when the original approvals for this project were given. The change of circumstances for this bird alone should have alerted the NT Government to the fact that

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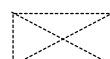
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Insert: Climate Change postcard to send



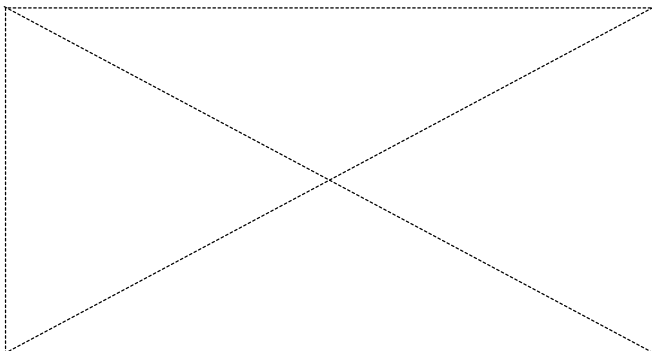
Environment Centre omitted from new NT Landcare Council

We were disappointed to learn this month that the Environment Centre has been excluded from the re-formulated NT Landcare Council. Environment Minister Kon Vatskalis appoints the Council and while the new membership has not yet been publicly announced, ECNT learnt of its omission from those who were recently advised of their appointment to the new Council.

ECNT has been on the Landcare Council for 10 years and has contributed constructively and energetically over that period. We nominated an extremely experienced and skilled person for the new Council who had significant expertise to contribute. This new Council will be making decisions on how large amounts of Commonwealth environment funds will be expended and developing regional natural resource management plans. As the peak community environment NGO in the NT, ECNT should be involved in these important decisions.

The Environment Centre has a history of advocating for the environment in an independent way, without any vested interests. We call decisions on the environment as we see them and can't help but wonder if this is why the Minister did not want ECNT to be represented this time around. ECNT will continue to work with the Council where possible to secure environmental gains. However we're concerned that at a time when we really need a strong voice for the environment in the NT we've been cut out of this important process.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair



Position Vacant

Office Administration Manager (part time)

The Environment Centre of the Northern Territory (ECNT) seeks a motivated and committed Office Administration Manager. This exciting new position is being created in response to the ECNT entering a phase of growth. The Office Administration Manager will work closely with the Coordinators, membership and volunteers at the Centre. The position is 24 hours per week, with a salary of \$33 043 pa pro rata.

A job description available at www.ecnt.org under 'What's New' or contact 8981 1984 to speak with the ECNT Coordinators.

Applications close Monday 12th August, 2002.

Railway company destroys Gouldian Finch habitat cont ...

(Continued from page 1) approvals given at that time were in need of urgent and thorough review before construction of the railway began. The current approval allows ADrail to monitor its own compliance with the requirements of the Environmental Management Plan, an arrangement that takes accountability out of public hands and is completely unacceptable. The fact that this incident was not reported publicly by Government raises questions about other possible environmental breaches along the railway construction corridor.

The onus is on the regulator (in the case the NT Government) to ensure the public can have confidence in their commitment to environmental protection. In this case, both the NT Government and the company have failed in their environmental responsibilities making it very clear that the current regulatory system is inadequate. This situation once again highlights the need for an independent Environmental Protection Agency in the Territory to enforce strict controls and monitor compliance with any environmental requirements.

-Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

World Population Day: Time for leadership towards a sustainable future

July 11th was World Population Day and ECNT used the day to highlight the close links between issues of environment and population here in the NT.

Following statements from Minister Paul Henderson about the need for population policy in the NT, ECNT has called for open and informed public debate as the Government works through that policy development process.

A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics report shows that the NT reached a population of 200,000 in January of this year and continues to grow. This highlights the need for public debate on the direction we want to see the population in the NT take. Many environmental issues in the Territory can be clearly linked to

population whether it's clearing mangroves for waterfront housing development or excessive consumption driving resource extraction and landfill.

When we consider what a truly sustainable population for the Territory means, we must address issues of consumption and resource use. Existing resources are not currently being managed sustainably but in the NT we have the opportunity to move away from the destructive industries of the past towards a low-impact future, one which will sustain more people, for longer. We encourage the Government to embrace a long term and sustainable view through development of its population policy.

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

Pine Gap Protest October 5-7 2002, Alice Springs.

Pine Gap is a military spy base for the United States located in the middle of Australia. It has been here since the 1960s and has played a major role in many US military operations (including the Gulf War and the current "War on Terror"). It will be an integral part of the proposed US star wars system enabling the US to dominate and control space. Its very existence on Australian soil makes us complicit in the military strikes of America and makes us a nuclear target. We don't want it. Help us expose it and shut it down this October.

There are national actions planned for the US military base at Pine Gap just outside of Alice Springs. The dates of the protests are 5-7 October. There are groups organising from all over the country in small

ways and big. Mass transport is being coordinated from most capital cities. Some groups are lining up trainers to assist people to know what they are going to, how to form affinity groups, etc. Medical teams are being organised. Legal teams are being sought. Raging Grannies are tuning up their voice boxes. Students are working out their latest chants. People are looking in the back shed for their tents. Its a happening thing.

**BYO food, drink,
tents, music, theatre,
anti-war passion.**

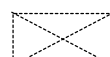
Buses are being organised from most states; camping sites will be available in town (approx \$28 for 3 days camping fees) or

there are possible bush camp options;

Contacts: there are activists working towards these actions in Alice Springs and Darwin but they do not currently have the capacity to be contacted directly.

If you have inquiries about contacts in the NT, contact any of the other state based groups (South Australia, Australian Peace Committee ph: (08) 8332 3461 Victoria: Action for Peace through Friends of the Earth (03) 9419 8700 or ph: 0402 246 491). There will soon be a coordinating desk set up in Alice Springs which will take on the central organising role on the ground. Stay tuned!

- Dimity Hawkins

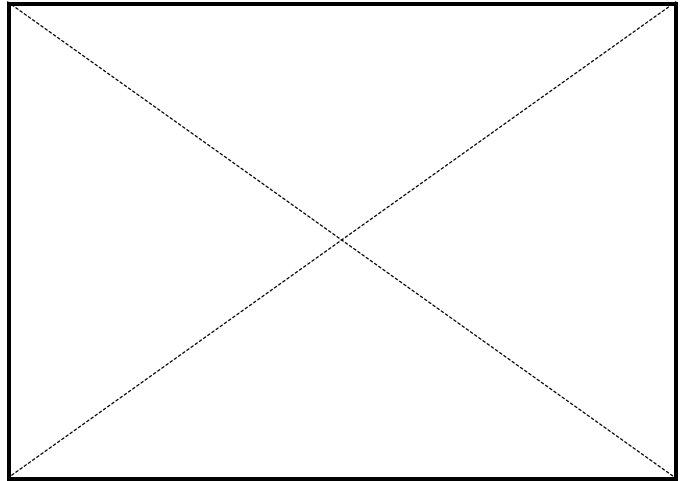


Two exciting ECNT projects launched

New Weeds Book

As advertised last month, ECNT's new publication "Weeds of the Wet/Dry Tropics of Australia: A Field Guide" was formally launched on July 12th at the George Brown Botanic Gardens.

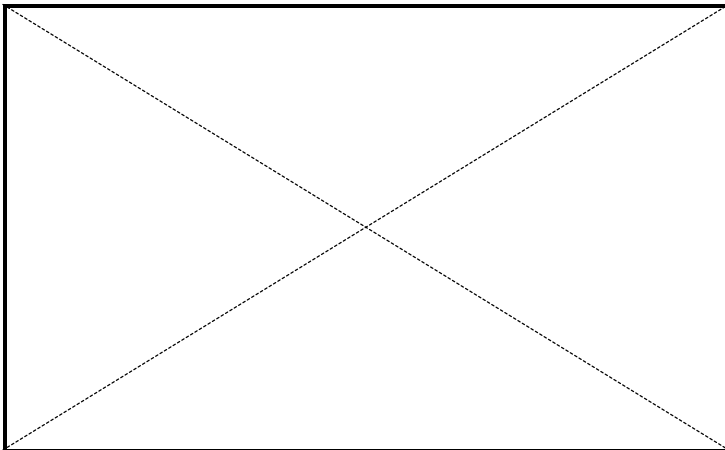
About 60 people from many different land management organisations attended the launch and enjoyed a Friday afternoon drink, nibbles and catching up in gorgeous surrounds. The book's author Nick Smith and ECNT coordinator Mark Wakeham both spoke about the



Nick Smith with Greening Australia's Mike Clark

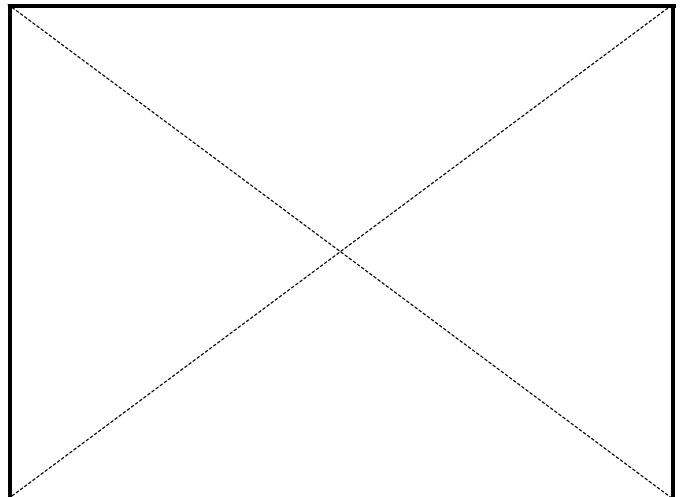
importance of the book and its timeliness given the spreading threat of weeds across the North of Australia.

Thanks go to Lesley Alford for organising such a successful launch. Since the



Mark Wakeham launching the book

launch, copies of the book have been selling extremely quickly, indicating the strong

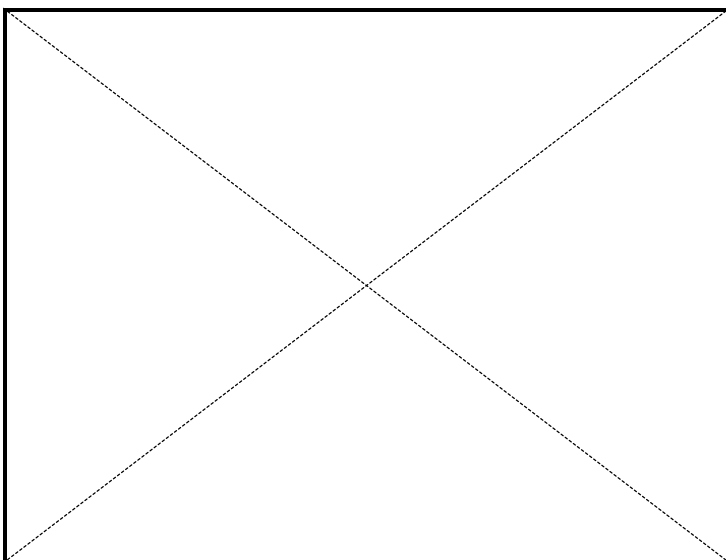


Deb Bisa and Heather Ryan — part of the project team

demand for such a publication. The book retails for \$19.95. Order forms can be downloaded from the Environment Centre website: <http://www.ecnt.org/weeds.htm>

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

All photos: ECNT

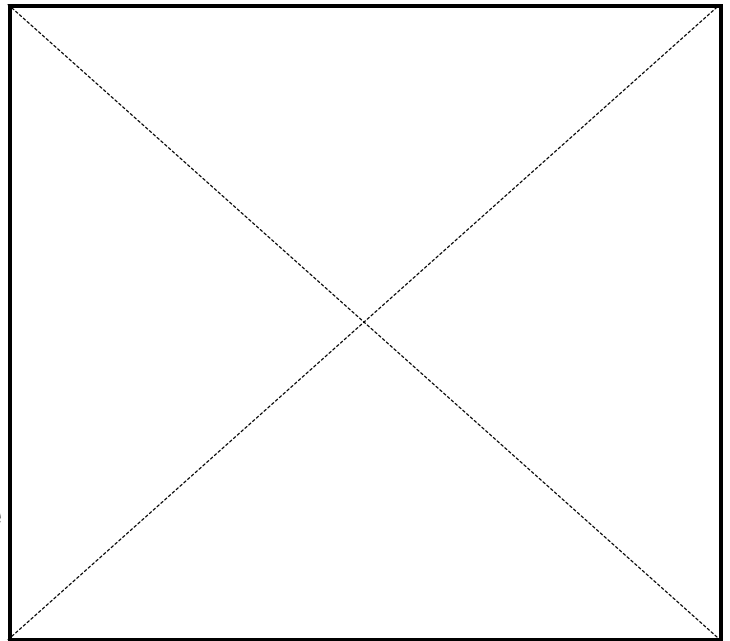


Christine Bach (selling books) Jann Crase (ECNT) and Dave Cash (Greening Australia)



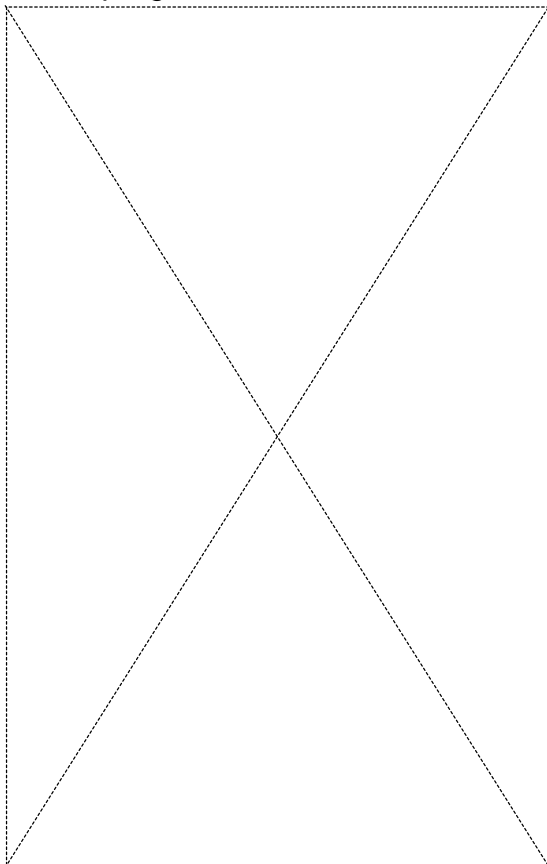
Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows - Cool Communities ready for some greenhouse action

On Saturday morning June 22 at Parap Markets, Parap Residents Association, Ludmilla Creek Landcare Group and the ECNT launched the Cool Communities project to reduce household greenhouse gas emissions in Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows. Speeches in support were made by Chief Minister Clare Martin (with the MLA for Millner, Matthew Bonson, also in attendance) and Darwin City Councillor Carole Miller. Rick Edmunds from Parap Residents Association spoke on behalf of the community groups involved. Interested passers-by stopped to look at the stall, whilst brochures on how to become a Cool Household were handed out.



Members of the Cool Community at the launch

Thus far over 25 households have signed up to the program, but there is still some way to go to reach

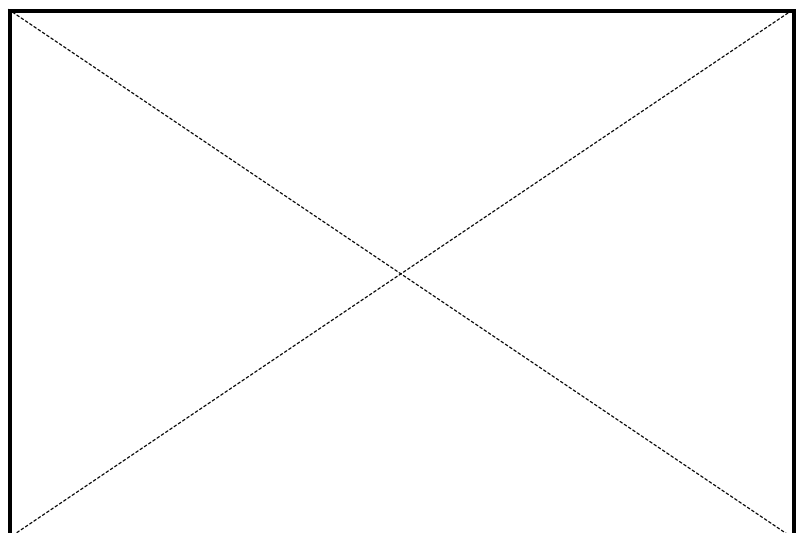


Rick Edmunds speaks for the Cool Community

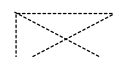
the target of 100. Households that sign up will receive a low cost home greenhouse audit (probably \$25 or free for those with concessions) and then be eligible for up to \$300 in financial assistance to make some changes to the way they use energy in the home.

So if there are any ECNT members out there living in Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows who could do with a better ventilated home during the build-up, or who would like to install water-efficient showerheads or compact fluorescent lights for instance, now is the time to act. Have a chat to your neighbours and friends about Cool Communities too, and why not sign them up to be members of ECNT while you're at it!

Gary Scott, Cool Communities Facilitator,
ph. 8981-2532 or email:
ecntgary@octa4.net.au



Facilitator Gary Scott with community members



GM cotton release applications in the NT – genie out of the bottle?

In June this year Monsanto made an application to the Federal Government to release genetically modified cotton in the Katherine area (and other regions in northern Australia) for commercial cotton production. The release highlights that the current regulatory arrangements are seriously lacking.

Currently the release of GMO's (genetically Modified Organism's) is regulated under the Commonwealth *Gene Technology Act 2000* through the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator within the Department of Health and Ageing. (See the flowchart for details of the assessment and approval process and where the public has the opportunity to engage)

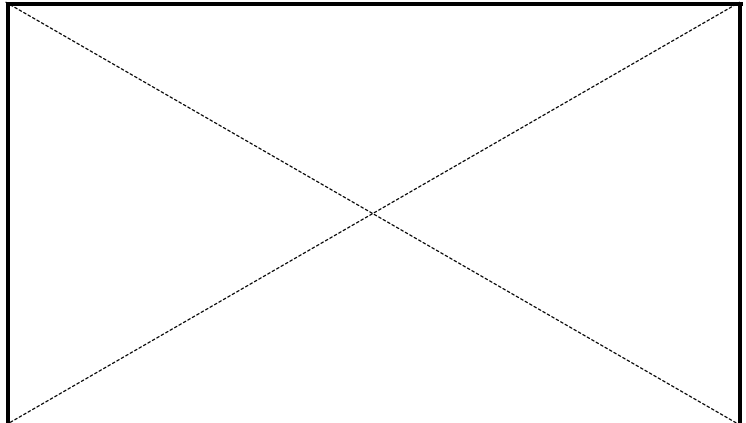
There has been not yet been adequate debate in the Northern Territory about Genetic Modification (GM) and the release of GMOs and much confusion within the NT Government about how to deal with this issue. It is primarily within the responsibilities of the Health Minister however the involvement of the Environment Minister and Minister for Primary Industries is crucial for an effective whole of government strategy on the release and management of GMOs in the NT.

The NT Government does have the power to pass legislation complementary to the Commonwealth legislation including the power to declare the entire Territory or areas of the Territory as GM free. However, the current application from Monsanto for the commercial release of GM cotton (double Bt gene cotton Bollgard II™) in Katherine Shire and a number of shires in northern Australia will restrict the Territory's capacity to determine whether it does want GMOs and how they should be introduced, managed etc. This application is premature and pre-empts appropriate discussion, debate and policy development amongst the community and government.

Information is available on the application (DIR 012/2002) from the OGTR website (www.ogtr.gov.au).

Or contact Jann for further details on how you can oppose this application

**Email: northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au
Telephone: 8941 7439**



Jann Crase and Barry Traill (The Wilderness Society) in cotton fields in the Ord. photo: ECNT

GM Licence Assessment & Approval Process *Gene Technology Act 2000* (Cth)

Application

Does application pose significant risk to health/environment?

Advertise – Public submission period on whether licence should be issued *

Prepare risk assessment & risk management plan

Advertise – Public submission period on risk assessment & risk management plan *

Decision on licence – Final risk assessment & risk management plan

Applicant notified of decision

*** Our opportunity to comment via written submissions**

Office of the Gene Technology Regulator –
1800 181 030

Dr Sue Meeks – Gene Technology Regulator
PO Box 100, Woden, ACT, 2600

ogtr@health.gov.au

www.ogtr.gov.au



Bits and Pieces

BUSHDANCE— a great success

As anyone who attended will testify, the ECNT bushdance held at Fannie Bay Gaol on July 20th was a roaring success. About 140 people came along and danced the night away to the fabulous tunes of local bands Murphy and Friends and the Mills Sisters. There was also a great deal of enthusiastic hand clapping and foot stomping from those sitting on hay bales as ECNT members and friends caught up with each other in a happy and relaxed atmosphere.

Thanks go to many people for their hard work in making this year's bushdance a reality but in particular to Louise Brown and Di Koser who coordinated and planned since early this year to ensure it all worked out as well as it did. We are still waiting to finalise the amount we raised from the dance but it looks like it will be in the vicinity of \$1000 – money much needed for important campaign work. This is fantastic outcome and from the comments we've been getting since, the ECNT Bushdance may have to become an annual event!

-Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

Howard out of touch on Kyoto

Earlier this month, Greenpeace released opinion poll results utterly rejecting Prime Minister John Howard's statement that it would not be in Australia's interest to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Only 17% of Australians agree with the Prime Minister, while 71% of those polled believe it would be in Australia's interest to ratify the international treaty on climate

Young environmental leaders sought

The Future Leaders Environment Awards seek to recognise and reward young Australians who have shown outstanding environmental leadership. They also aim to inspire others to engage in environmental issues. The three winners will receive a fully funded Fellowship to participate in an international Earthwatch Expedition. Year 12 students can be nominated for a Future Leaders Environment Award by teachers, parents or members of the community. Nominations close on 1st September 2002.

To nominate someone, please visit <http://www.futureleaders.com.au/contact.htm>

change. Recently, both the European Union and Japan have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, bringing the total number to 73 countries, accounting for 35.4 % of developed country emissions from 1990. If Russia and New Zealand ratify, which they have both signalled that they will do, ratification by Australia would bring the Protocol into force.

The Kyoto Protocol is a first step towards making much deeper cuts in emissions needed to prevent dangerous climate change. For interviews or a copy of the poll results visit <http://www.greenpeace.org.au>

ERA profits still falling

Kakadu uranium miner Energy Resources of Australia recently announced a further 1/3 drop in after tax profits for the 6 months ending June 30 in a report to the Australian Stock Exchange.

The report also notes that no dividends will be paid to shareholders due to the low level of profit, which stands at just \$3.3 million for the 6 months. This announcement follows a similar result in January of this year when profit falls of 66% were recorded.

As well as falling profits, the company is battling a long-standing problem through its pursuit of the controversial Jabiluka proposal which has now been stalled for

over two years. Falling uranium prices and increasing international community opposition to all stages of the nuclear cycle have contributed to this huge drop in profits.

The writing is on the wall for Rio Tinto's ERA— its time for them to abandon their attempts to develop the Jabiluka mine.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

Greenhouse briefing for members

As explained in our previous newsletters this year Environment Centre Management Committee and staff developed a plan to have a series of briefing sessions for ECNT members and supporters on each of our 4 major campaign areas- mining, landclearing, Darwin Harbour, coastal and marine issues and greenhouse.

We've already run 3 of the briefing sessions, so we've only got one to go on ECNT's greenhouse campaign.

Where: at ECNT (98 Woods St)

When: 5.30 pm, Wed 7th August

Who: all interested members and supporters.

Snacks and drinks will be available.



Dates to remember in August:

Tuesday 6th—Greenhouse campaign briefing at ECNT, 5.30pm

Wednesday 7th—Gene Ethics meeting at ECNT, 5.30pm

Saturday 10th—Garden Fair at Botanic Gardens, ECNT weeds books for sale

Mon 26th—Wed 4th Sept—World Summit on Sustainable Development,
Johannesburg, South Africa

Saturday 31st—Public forum: 'It's your lifestyle, speak up now' at NTU, 1-5pm

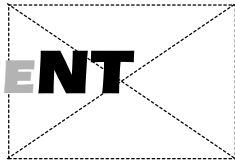
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