

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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Ord Stage 2 Off!

Ray of Sunshine for the future of the East Kimberley

It was on Tuesday the 11th of December 2001 that the rumors concerning the Ord Stage 2 proposal were confirmed by the proponents at a public meeting in Kununurra. The project was off!

Citing the poor global sugar market prices, uncertainty over land tenure due to unresolved native title issues, uncertainty over water allocation and outstanding environmental issues Wesfarmers and Marubeni pulled out of the proposal to clear over 33,500 ha of woodland to establish irrigated sugar cane. The proposed project area spanned the NT and WA border and included the Keep River floodplains.

ECNT can be proud of its efforts to raise community awareness of the environmental impacts that would have been associated with Ord Stage 2 development. ECNT made submissions at all stages of the approvals process and appealed all approvals under Western Australian legislation.

While the announcement is a major reprieve for the environmental values of the area, industry advocates continue to press for further development of broad-scale irrigated agriculture. Some industry suggestions have included staged development by small operators to expand the existing irrigation area for horticulture and possibly other crops. The cotton industry is also

extremely interested in future land releases and further development of the area as the Ord is the site of the longest running, largest cotton trials in Northern Australia. The cotton industry appears to see the Ord area as the target for establishing a cotton industry in the Northern Australia something we don't want to see!

Meanwhile current agricultural operations in the Ord are the subject of ongoing concern despite efforts within the community to institute changes through the Ord Land and Water group. A fish kill as recently as November 2001 reinforced the need to reduce chemical use, improve management and be aware of the persisting ecological dangers of chemicals used decades ago. The chemical causing this particular fish kill was DDE, a degraded form of DDT which has not been used in the area since it was banned in the 1970s. Ord Land and Water has recently employed a full time coordinator so there will be much greater activity on the ground to improve current practices through implementation of their management plan.

Now the immediate development pressure associated with Ord Stage 2 is off we have an opportunity to work with the community of the East Kimberley and the WA Government (and NT Government where appropriate) to institute a planning process to

ensure truly sustainable land uses that will not compromise the cultural and ecological integrity of the region (and indeed right across Northern Australia). There is an urgent need to undertake a comprehensive analysis of Ord Stage 1 particularly looking at the cultural, social, economic and environmental impacts of development.

The reprieve offered by the collapse of the Ord Stage 2 proposal provides us with the opportunity to identify and develop high value, low impact land uses that will truly deliver long term economic benefits to the community. Changing development and land use/management paradigms is a long, slow process but we are committed to instituting this change across Northern Australia and will hang in there for as long as it takes.

*-Jann Crase
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Inside

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Beverley Hillbillies-

SA Uranium Mine leak unacceptable

The Australian Conservation Foundation has called for the immediate suspension of operations at the controversial Beverley uranium mine in South Australia following a major radiation spill at the site that occurred on January 11 2002.

A spill involving an estimated 60,000 litres of contaminated material including sulphuric acid and uranium occurred following a routine maintenance operation.

The Beverley mine, operated by the US owned Heathgate Resources, uses a technique known as in situ leach (ISL) mining which involves pumping an acid solution underground to leach uranium ore. This mining method is not ap-

proved in any other OECD nation and has been responsible for serious contamination where it has been used in former East bloc nations.

"This leak is further evidence of the dangers of the uranium mining industry," said ACF nuclear campaigner Dave Sweeney. "At a minimum mining at Beverley must be halted until there has been a detailed and independent assessment of what went wrong and what the impacts are. It is unacceptable for the mining company to be the judge of what is an acceptable impact."

"South Australia has borne the brunt of the adverse impacts of nuclear weapons tests in the past and now it is again being used as a test site, this time by foreign uranium mining com-

panies who would not be able to mine this way at home." There are two newly approved acid ISL uranium mining operations in SA with commercial operations at Beverley and approval given since the federal election to a Canadian owned operation at nearby Honey-moon.

"With leaking ISL mines and the federal government intent on pushing ahead with plans for a series of national radioactive waste dumps in SA the Festival State runs the real risk of becoming the Radiation State," said Dave Sweeney.

Nuclear issues are shaping up to be one of the major issues in the forthcoming South Australian State election to be held on February 9th.

Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows to be A Cool Community

The ECNT congratulates Parap Residents Association and Ludmilla Creek Landcare Group on their successful joint application to the Cool Communities programme. Cool Communities is a joint initiative of the Australian Greenhouse Office and Australian environmental organisations, including the ECNT. The Cool Communities program will offer households in the four suburbs of Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows the opportunity to take positive action to reduce the future impacts of global warming by finding ways to cut down on their energy consumption, household waste and car use.

Parap Residents Association and Ludmilla Creek Landcare Group are one of only three successful applicants in the Northern Territory, the others being Desert Knowledge in Alice Springs and Ikuntji Community Council in Haasts Bluff. It is also the only community to be selected in Northern Australia. All told there are 24 Cool Communities around the country ranging from a West Australian timber town to one based around the Western Bulldogs Football Club in

Melbourne.

Spokesperson for the Parap Residents Association, Monica van den Nieuwenhof, has urged residents to get involved at this early stage. "We are hoping that households will eventually sign up to being a 'Cool House'. They will not only be able to help the environment but can save money on their power bills and fuel costs as well".

The two organisations have until 30 April to devise a Community Action Plan outlining abatement activities, target greenhouse reductions and a budget. **An initial planning workshop will be held on the 5 February at Parap Primary School Library at 5.30pm.** If you live in the area please come along and get involved in this exciting new project.

-Gary Scott
Cool Communities Facilitator
Ph. 8981-2532



Bits and Pieces

Happy New Year!

ECNT would like to wish all our members and supporters a very Happy New Year. The office is now back to usual opening hours (9-5, Monday to Friday). This newsletter is an abbreviated edition as we've been busy planning events for the upcoming year. The newsletter will return in full for the March edition.

Container Deposit Legislation

The NT Government is seeking public submissions on container deposit Legislation (again). A discussion paper is available to assist with submissions and can be obtained by telephoning 8924 4139. The closing date for submissions is 28th February, 2002. ECNT will be endeavouring to make a submission. If you would like to help or you need any assistance with your own submission call Kirsten or Mark on 8981 1984.

Freedom of Information Legislation

Yes it sure is submission time. Public comment on the NT Government's proposed Freedom of Information Legislation is due on February 28th. ECNT was involved in the Friends of Freedom of Information group that was convened late last year and which hosted a visit to Darwin from FoI expert Professor Rick Snell. We will be making a submission and will have resources

available to assist anyone planning to make a submission by February 8th. Please get in contact with Kirsten or Mark (8981 1984) if you're interested in making a submission

Public Comment sought on Gas development

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Sunrise Gas field development in the Timor Sea is available for public comment. We have a copy of the document at the Environment Centre and are currently drafting a submission. If you would like help with making your own submission, please contact Mark or Kirsten. Public comment is due by the 9th of February.

Insurers agree: Climate Change is happening now

A recent report from the Chartered Insurance Institute (UK) makes sobering reading regarding the insurance industry & climate change. Some selections:

"Existing insurance premiums based on the concept of the return period, such as a 1-in-100-year storm, have been exposed as not nearly sufficient to cover some recent losses. The resulting payouts were clearly greater than allowed for, stripping the companies' reserves, destroying profitability and in some cases causing bankruptcy"

"A small change to the climate could lead to a big change in insured and economic losses" "over the last 40 years, decade-by-decade, economic and insured losses have been increasing at an alarming rate (economic x 8, insured x 15)...the rate of increase in economic losses from all types of natural disasters rose at an annual rate of 12 per cent between the 1980s and 1990s, and the rate of increase is itself increasing"

The full report is available online at <http://www.cii.co.uk/climate3.html>

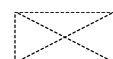
Pangea leaving Australia N-waste dump in terminal meltdown

PLANS for a \$10 billion nuclear waste dump in Western Australia have been ditched and its proponent, Pangea Resources, is winding up its Australian operations. Congratulations to all involved in the campaign to send Pangea packing.

World Wetlands Week 2002

It's not too late to register for the People in Tropical Wetlands seminar happening on Friday Feb 8th and field trip on Saturday Feb 9th as part of World Wetlands Week.

Check out the ECNT website: www.ecnt.org under What's New or contact the office for more information and a registration form.



Dates to note

Tuesday 5 February 5.30pm: Cool Communities planning workshop at Parap Primary School Library. All residents of Parap, Ludmilla, Fannie Bay and The Narrows urged to attend

Saturday 2 February to Friday 8 February: World Wetlands Week
Friday 8th February Tropical Wetlands Seminar, NTU
Saturday 9th February Local Wetlands Field Trip

Submissions due: 9 February: Sunrise Gas development
28 February: Freedom of Information legislation
Container Deposit legislation

The views expressed in *EnvironmeNT* are not necessarily those of the Environment Centre NT management committee
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