

ENVIRONMENT

NT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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July 2002

Darwin Harbour Management Plan Announced...but gas still a threat at Wickham Point

Last month saw the NT Government announce plans to develop a Coastal Marine Protection Strategy and a Plan of Management for Darwin Harbour. The Environment Centre welcomes these moves and we hope to see the processes deliver some certainty for the future protection of Darwin Harbour and the NT coast.

Of particular interest is the fact that the Darwin Harbour Management Plan proposes to incorporate protection for the broader Harbour catchment, acknowledging the potential impacts of upstream activities on Harbour health. The ministerial statement also announced Conservation Zone Protection status for mangroves and while we are yet to see how effective this measure will be, it is clear recognition of the important role mangroves play in maintaining a healthy and relatively intact Darwin Harbour.

Whilst we congratulate Minister Vatskalis for pursuing these important areas of policy development and hope to see positive conservation outcomes from them, the Environ-

ment Centre maintains the view that there should be no industrial development in Darwin Harbour. The LNG facility proposed for Wickham Point is completely inappropriate and in many ways contradicts the positive messages we are seeing from the Environment Minister. The Government cannot have it both ways on Darwin Harbour but at the moment it still has a choice: to permanently destroy a large area of important rainforest and coastal ecosystems for the sake of 17 years of gas production or protect the entire Harbour for all time. We know the community wants to see long term protection, it is time the Government responded.

The following is an edited version of a 'My View on Sunday' which was recently printed in the Sunday Territorian. We have included it here as it outlines the key Climate Change concerns that this project would bring.

Darwin Harbour is special to everyone. It is a beautiful place that supports an abundance of life and a range of lifestyles. The natural, cul-

tural, recreational and aesthetic value of Darwin Harbour is indisputable. It is very clear that people want a secure future for Darwin Harbour, a future that is assured for the long term. Petitions in recent months have seen thousands of Territorians call for a National Park for Darwin Harbour and its mangroves yet there is still no protection in place and the Harbour's future is as uncertain as ever.

Threats to Darwin Harbour continue to loom and the community is continually fighting to keep the Harbour in its relatively undeveloped state. Community pressure forced the Government to shelve plans for a dam on the beautiful Elizabeth River but then the proposal to build a huge LNG plant at Wickham Point reared its head again. This proposal cannot be seen in

BUSH DANCE - Fannie Bay Gaol to Re-open!

On Saturday 20 July, members and friends of the Environment Centre are invited to attend the Fannie Bay Gaol for a Bush Dance and Concert with local musicians and singers. Dancing is not compulsory (but highly recommended!) Food, Games, Prizes and drinks available.

See inside for more details. (page 7)

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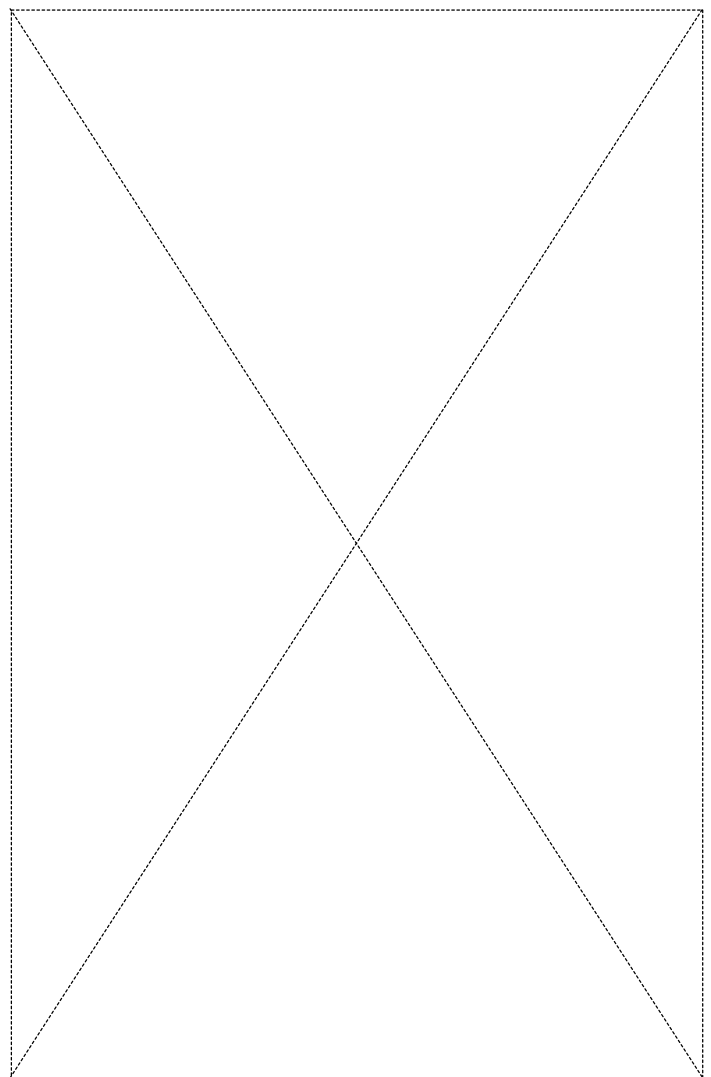
isolation, current planning documents identify the entire Ware Peninsula (which Wickham Point is the end of) as a proposed future industrial zone. If the LNG plant goes ahead, associated industries will be quick to follow and we will soon be living by a very different Harbour. Darwin will become primarily an industrial city, and like industrial towns elsewhere in Australia, this piece of coast will be changed for all time and changed for the worse.

The problems with this proposal are many and not all relate to the siting of the plant. We need to ask whether the Timor Sea gas reserves should be exploited at all and how the product will be used. As a part of the global community the Northern Territory has a responsibility to ensure that development here does not lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions globally. Levels of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, in the atmosphere are increasing dramatically. This is largely due to increasing industrialisation internationally which has been happening more and more rapidly for the last 100 years or so. Things like coal or gas fired power stations, oil-burning transport (planes, trucks and cars) as well as major developments such as aluminium smelters and broadscale land-clearing all contribute to increasing the emission of these gases. Increased levels of greenhouse gases are widely accepted by scientists as being responsible for the major shifts in climate patterns that we are seeing around the world. From the dramatic storms that have hit Europe and Central America in the past few years to the unusually long droughts currently being experienced in Tasmania, world weather patterns are becoming increasingly un-

predictable and extreme and the blame is largely being squared at increased levels of greenhouse gases, caused by humans. The Territory is not immune to such impacts and in our climate of extremes, there is not much room to move before climate change will mean extinctions and major changes to the landscape we currently know and love. When considering the pros and cons of using gas reserves, climate change must be considered. While burning gas does produce less greenhouse gases than burning other fossil fuels such as coal, it is far from a 'clean green' fuel as some would have us believe. Gas has the potential to be a useful transition fuel between the old world 'hot heavy and wet' economies which rely on the dirtiest fossil fuels such as oil and coal and the new 'clean light and dry' economies of an ecologically sustainable future. The Territory is in prime position to become a world leader in these economies of the future such as renewable energy. If Timor Sea gas is to be developed, we must ensure that it is not used to create new energy markets which could otherwise be supplied by emerging renewable technologies. The gas must only be used as part of a clear transition away from coal and oil fired power stations, such as those in southern Australia. Its time to make a choice about the future we want for Darwin

Harbour. Even if the gas plant is not built at Wickham Point, without legislative protection there is no certainty and another development could be put on the table tomorrow. Its time to stop the pressures on the Harbour once and for all. We need to see comprehensive planning which includes protection for Darwin Harbour, and provides the community with a range of adequately assessed options for siting industrial developments, away from areas of environmental importance. Only then will we be able to consider development proposals on a case by case basis without having to trade off the values of beautiful Darwin Harbour against dubious developments that could certainly be sited elsewhere.

Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

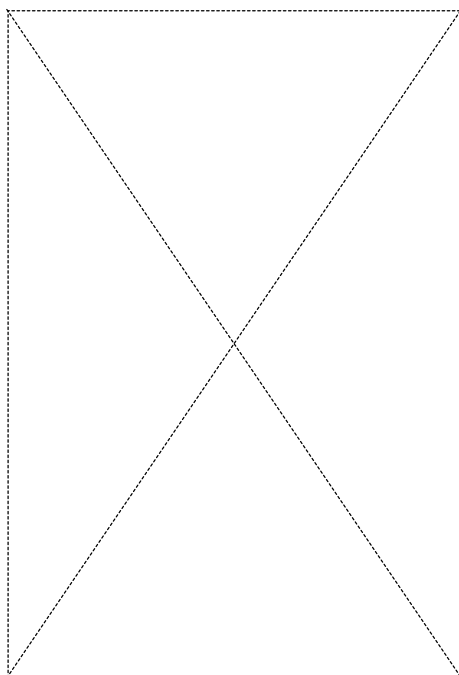


A sample page from the new ECNT publication; "Weeds of the Wet/Dry Tropics of Australia: A Field Guide"



ECNT publishes new weeds book.

Weeds of the Wet/Dry Tropics of Australia: A Field Guide



After nearly 3 years of work ECNT is very proud to announce that its new publication "Weeds of the Wet/Dry Tropics of Australia: A Field Guide" by Nick Smith is now available. This book is a full-colour revised and expanded edition of the previous publication 'Weeds of Natural Ecosystems: A field guide to environmental weeds of the NT'.

The new weeds book features detailed descriptions and photographs of over 80 weed species that are

found in northern Australia and outlines the best control and eradication measures for these species. The book also includes a section on quarantine threats - that is weeds which aren't yet present in northern Australia but which would thrive if introduced. We think that the book will be an invaluable tool for land managers across northern Australia. Hopefully it will assist us to stem the spread of weeds, which is one of the biggest environmental problems in northern Australia.

We would not have been able to produce this publication without the help of a large number of people. In particular we would like to thank Deb Bisa for her tireless work in co-ordinating the new edition, Claire Pallant for her fantastic design work, and Heather Ryan and Milton Andrews for their excellent mapping and illustration work. Nick Smith, the author, was very generous

with his time and knowledge. We would also like to thank the Steering Committee for the project which comprised Colin Wilson, Michael Storrs, Andrew Mitchell, Naomi Rea, Mike Clark, Leslee Hills and John Clarkson. Many others contributed and are acknowledged in the publication.

Included in this newsletter are order forms for 'Weeds of the Wet/Dry Tropics of Australia'. These order forms will also be available on the ECNT website at <http://www.ecnt.org/weeds.htm>. The weeds book is also on sale at ECNT. The book retails at \$19.95 (inc GST). A wholesale price of \$16.50 per copy applies to orders of 10 or more copies. Please help us publicise the book by letting your friends and colleagues know about it.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair.

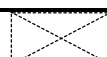
I recommend this new edition to a wide readership. The invasion of native vegetation by weeds is one of the major threats to conservation world-wide. By helping to identify the weedy species of importance to northern Australia and by recommending the best ways to manage them, publication of this guide should do much to reduce that conservation threat - a worthy aim indeed! My congratulations to you all!

Dr Richard Groves, Weeds CRC Program Leader for Environmental Weeds

Time to celebrate - ECNT is holding an informal launch of the publication on the 12th July in the George Brown Botanic Gardens (near the relocated Wesleyan church) from 4.30 pm till dusk. All ECNT members, supporters and friends are invited to come along and have a drink with us to celebrate the completion of this project.

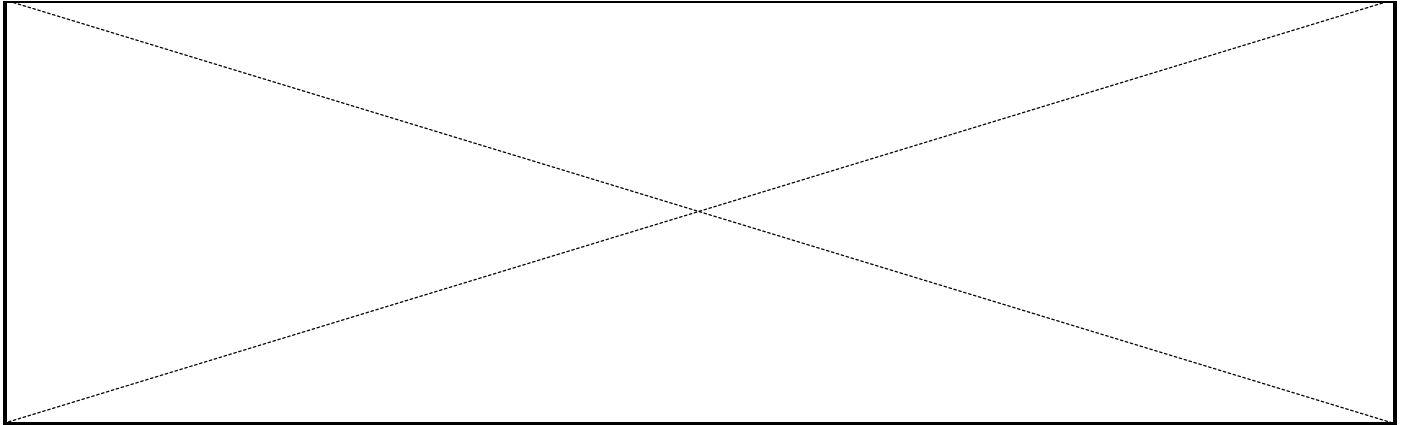
Drinks and snacks will be available.

We would like to thank those organisations that helped fund the publication of the book. ECNT received a Natural Heritage Trust Bushcare grant and additional support from the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS), the CRC for Tropical Savannas Management, Greening Australia, WWF and the Australian Conservation Foundation.



Northern Woodlands and Wetlands Campaign Update

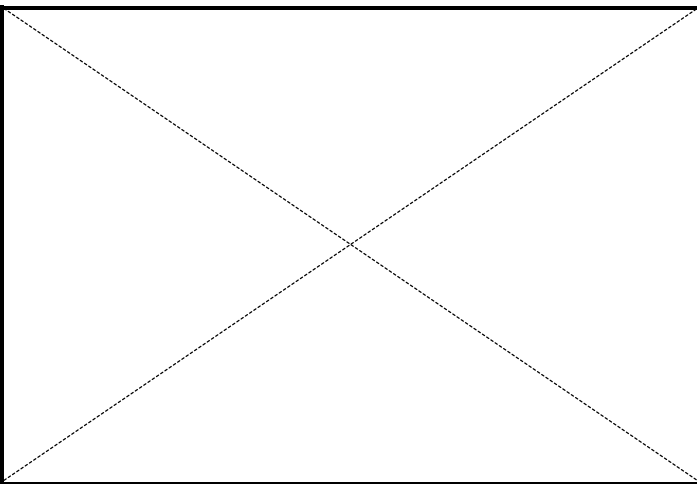
The NWW Campaign has been refocused on two key areas: the Daly and the Ord as a result of recent steering committee meetings in Darwin.



A Freshwater croc on the Daly River edge: Photo Alec Marr

The Daly

Greater attention to landclearing around the Daly is certainly warranted in light of recent clearing on freehold land (see picture) for which there are still no controls. An application to subdivide this land to grow melons is currently being decided by the Environment Minister, Kon Vatskalis. However in deciding this application the Minister cannot consider matters such as the potential impacts from chemical use (herbicides, insecticides etc.), water use (type of irrigation method etc.) or even whether the project is viable or not.



Landclearing at the Daly photo Barry Traill

This type of development is occurring without any controls on landclearing, without any water allocation plan, without any conservation plan or development plan. It is critical that effective and enforceable landclearing controls are in

place as soon as possible to curb this pre-emptive clearing and development.

Landclearing in the NT

A final landclearing policy submission is being made to Cabinet in the next month which we believe will include:

- a) proposals for legislative reform to control landclearing under the *Planning Act 1999*;
- b) Daly Basin Conservation Plan;
- c) Katherine Daly Basin Development plan.

ECNT is committed to working very hard to make sure we get the best controls we can we'll keep you posted on progress in future newsletters.

The Ord

Our attention to this proposal remains justified by the continued commitment of the NT and WA Governments to the expansion of irrigated agriculture in the Ord. The draft Interim Water Allocation Plan is still to be released - which will apparently happen within the next month. Further, the WA Government has indicated that it will be re-advertising for tenders for the project later this year.

-Jann Crase

If you are interested in learning more about this campaign and are keen to help please come along to the Environment Centre on Tuesday 16th July 5.30pm for our third campaign briefing session. Light refreshments will be available.



Population and Environment Workshop a success

The Environment Centre and the Family Planning and Welfare Association of the NT have made a commitment to work together to link Population and Environment issues. This joint work is part of a broader project called 'Common Ground' which is being coordinated nationally through the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance, Family Planning Australia and the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre. The Common Ground project aims to see the links between these issues better understood and reflected in policy on a State/Territory and National level.

As a part of the project, the two NT-based organisations held a two day workshop last month which was attended by representatives from a range of sectors including health and environment. This poem was written by Darryl Butler at the workshop and reflects many of the issues raised over the two days, we thank Darryl for allowing us to reproduce it here. If you have an interest in becoming involved in future work on this project, please contact the Environment Centre.

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

Commercial Genetically Modified Cotton

Yes this particular nightmare could become a reality a lot faster than anticipated. Despite the extremely small trials of Bollgard II® (double Bt gene cotton) in Katherine (less than 2 hectares) and the Ord (approximately 9 hectares) the company who developed Bollgard II®, Monsanto, has applied for its commercial release in northern Australia. Shires targeted include Katherine, Broome, Wyndham – East Kimberley and a number of shires in the Gulf Country of Queensland.

As well as the usual issues with irrigated agriculture such as significant impacts from broadscale landclearing, chemical use (Bt gene cotton still requires pesticides, fertilisers and defoliants) and taking water in the dry season, of particular concern is the lack of publicly available research on –

- the potential weediness of Bt gene cotton,
- whether Bt gene cotton can cross-breed with native cotton,
- the impacts of Bt gene cotton on non-target species such as humans, quolls, beneficial insects etc.

ECNT and all other conservation groups in northern Australia will be opposing this application so please check out our website for further information in the coming weeks. Check out the website of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator for more information on this application (DIR012/2002) – www.oagr.gov.au - there will be a further opportunity in late July to comment on the draft Risk Assessment and draft Risk Management Plan in relation to this application.

- Jann Crase

European Union Criticises Australia's stance on Kyoto

The European Union Environment Ministers meeting in Luxembourg have singled out John Howard for criticism for his inaction regarding the world's most pressing environmental issue, climate change. The European Union, they said, "expresses its disappointment with the announcement recently made by the Prime Minister of Australia relating to the non-ratification of the Kyoto protocol". In 1997 at Kyoto, Australia got, a favourable deal - where other countries were required to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions between 1990 and 2010, we were allowed to increase ours by 8%, and were permitted to take into account landclearing occurring at the time, which makes our target easier to meet. The fact that the Federal Government will not commit to even this level of Greenhouse action is an international embarrassment. It is very clear that the Kyoto Protocol is just the first step needed in a global effort to curb the effects of Climate Change, effects which are already being felt in many parts of Australia and the world. Meanwhile, Japan ratified the Kyoto protocol on June 4th and said it would urge other countries including Russia and the United States to do the same.

Six Billion Hopes

As people are
Or people be
The less and more
By all them played
Six billions hopes
One worldly scope
Populating
Foot-printing
Born to say
This earth
This ground
Is ours today

As people are
Some people grow
The less on more
Their resource prey
A billion hopes
On worldly scale
Developing
Consuming
Born to say
This earth
This ground
Is our pay

As people are
Some people be
The poor of more
Are by them born
A billion hopes
By worldly scope
Struggling
Being
Brought forth to say
This earth
This ground
Is our today

As people are
As people be
We all the more
Depend on all
Six billion hopes
On worldly scale
Born to pray
Cradling
Suckling
This earth
This ground
Our shared today

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Darwin NT Australia
June 2002

Senate Inquiry to spotlight failing uranium industry

After much hard work by environment groups (including ECNT) and traditional owner bodies, a Senate Inquiry into uranium mining was called on June 20th. The move follows a series of leaks, spills and reporting failures at operations in the Northern Territory and South Australia.

The Inquiry is set to examine the effectiveness of regulation, monitoring and reporting at Rio Tinto's Ranger and Jabiluka mines in Kakadu and the Beverley and Honeymoon acid in-situ-leach (ISL) sites in South Australia. ECNT hopes that the Inquiry will help improve environmental performance and transparency of reporting at these poorly performing mines. The Inquiry was tabled by the ALP's Trish Crossin and will be chaired by the Democrats. The Inquiry followed an announcement by the NT Government that it will conduct an independent inquiry into the regulatory arrangements at Ranger and Jabiluka. Unfortunately it seems that this inquiry will not receive submissions from the public or from groups like ECNT or the traditional owners.

A joint environment groups media release welcomed

the news of the Senate Inquiry with the following statements:

"Uranium mines around the country have been leaking contaminants and credibility" said ACF nuclear campaigner Dave Sweeney. "This Inquiry is a timely and important wake up call for a seriously underperforming industry."

"Rio Tinto is on notice that its operations in Kakadu are under the spotlight" said Environment Centre of the Northern Territory Coordinator Mark Wakeham. "Kakadu National Park deserves better than leaking and polluting uranium mines and this Inquiry offers an opportunity to address the persistent problems at these mines."

"The Beverley and Honeymoon mines use a controversial acid ISL technique not used in any other Western nation", said Friends of the Earth Australia nuclear campaigner Bruce Thompson.

"There is an urgent need for an independent and comprehensive examination of this industry and these mines and this Senate Inquiry is an important step in this process."

Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee

Inquiry into Environmental Regulation of Uranium Mining

The Senate has referred the above matter to the Committee for inquiry and report by 5 December 2002. The terms of reference are:

The regulatory, monitoring, and reporting regimes that govern environmental performance at the Ranger and Jabiluka uranium operations in the Northern Territory and the Beverley and Honeymoon *in situ* leach operations in South Australia, with particular reference to:

- (a) the adequacy, effectiveness and performance of existing monitoring and reporting regimes and regulations;
- (b) the adequacy and effectiveness of those Commonwealth agencies responsible for the oversight and implementation of these regimes; and
- (c) a review of Commonwealth responsibilities and mechanisms to realise improved environmental performance and transparency of reporting.

The Committee invites written submissions from interested individuals and organisations to be lodged **by Friday 9 August 2002**.

For help with submissions or for further info contact ECNT on 8981 1984

ECNT website overhaul

The ECNT website has had a significant overhaul to make it more user-friendly and easier to find in recent months. Take a look at <http://www.ecnt.org>. We're finding that the website offers us a relatively cheap and easy way to provide lots of information on our campaigns to people around the world. Currently the website is being visited about by 150 people per week. That's nearly 8000 visitors per year who are making use of the website!

Last newsletter typos

We're sorry about a couple of typos and omissions in the previous newsletter. Due to a last-minute problem with fonts we lost a few words which we didn't discover until after printing.

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Appeal and Fundraisers

Appeal thanks

We were overwhelmed here at ECNT by the response to our recent appeal. Thank you so much to all who were able to contribute and also to those who weren't but who continue to support the Environment Centre's work. As at the 28th June the appeal had raised over \$7000. We also had a couple of major donations immediately before the appeal, so once again thank-you very much. The money we receive from our appeals and membership is particularly valuable to us as it is untied

funding - that is we can use the funding for whatever is the highest priority for us, unlike project-specific funding which usually comes with some restrictions and limitations. We will use the donations to continue and increase our campaigning work and also to strengthen ECNT as an organisation to make sure that we're around to advocate for the environment and social justice over the long haul.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

Fundraisers

The recent Spaghetti Western night at the Deckchair Cinema went very smoothly, although numbers were down on past years. We attracted about 70 people, sold food to about 40 and made a profit of about \$400. It was good to see lots of new faces, as well as some regular supporters.

We would like some feedback for future events and strongly encourage members to complete and return the short questionnaire at the bottom of this page by 12 July to be in the draw for a double pass to the Bush Dance.

Our next MAJOR fundraiser for the year will be the BUSH DANCE and CONCERT to be held at Fannie Bay Gaol on Saturday 20 July. There are savings for people who buy their tickets in advance, (& even more for members). See enclosed flyer!!

This is the first event we have organised requiring a large up-front financial investment and we are feeling a little nervous, hoping our members are with us. We have booked a live band, with a dance caller. In addition, we will have the great pleasure of being entertained (and taught some Dances of Old Darwin) by the talented Mills Sisters. If you have not yet experienced the Creole version of Waltzing Matilda (written by Valentine McGinness, uncle to the Mills sisters) don't miss this chance!!

We strongly urge you to mark this date in your diaries now, and hope you will bring your friends, family & work mates with you for a great night out. Of course, dancing is NOT compulsory, although you may find it difficult not to join in.

We are hoping to attract families to this event and have made a special, low family price.

We will also need some volunteers on the night and have listed some ways you can help on the questionnaire.

Please cut and return the section below

- Di Koser.

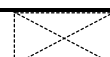
Questionnaire:

- 1) Would you attend future film + food nights at the Deckchair Cinema (must be Mon or Tues) YES ..NO
- 2) Possible films (specific names)
- 3) I can help with the BUSH DANCE in the following ways: (tick) Distribute flyers ..Use my truck/trailer to pick up chairs from Darwin High Lend a large Esky or equivalent Join a roster to; Sell tickets at door Sell food Sell drinks . Lend a portable light .Help clean up after event ..Other
- 4) I know a good, cheap supplier of baled hay I can pick up baled hay ..I will remove hay at end of night ..
- 5) My suggestion for future fundraising ..
- 6) Newsletters: We believe our members value our monthly newsletter, but they do take a lot of time to prepare and send. We are considering producing a bi-monthly newsletter, with email bulletins on important issues on alternate months. Would you support this change? YES NO
- 7) I would like to have future newsletters emailed. YES (give address) ...

Name:

Contact

Please return by fax (8941 0387), mail or hand .



DATES TO KEEP IN JULY

- Thursday 11 July:** World Population Day
Friday 12 July: Launch of Weeds Book at the George Brown Botanic Gardens from 4.45pm
Tuesday 16 July: Landclearing Campaign Briefing at ECNT from 5.30pm
Saturday 20 July: BUSH DANCE and CONCERT at Fannie Bay Gaol from 6.30pm

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