

ENVIRONMENT

NT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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June 2002

New Northern Australia Environment Alliance formed

From May 20th to May 24th ECNT hosted a meeting of regional, state and national environment groups in Darwin. At the meeting a new alliance of regional, state and national groups, the *Northern Australia Environment Alliance*, was formed. The meeting discussed environmental issues across Cape York Peninsula, Gulf Country, Top End and the Kimberley. This broad region is facing increasing development pressures and urgent conservation challenges. All present at the meeting recognised that as well as running reactive campaigns to try and prevent destructive developments from proceeding, environment groups also need to develop a long-term plan for a sustainable Northern Australia.

A media statement following the meeting made the following points: "We have learnt from this meeting of the major wave of extinctions in

birds and mammals occurring now in northern Australia, and the fragile state of the area's marine and estuarine fisheries," said Dr. Barry Traill from The Wilderness Society

"The lands and seas of tropical northern Australia are universally recognized for their natural and cultural heritage significance. From the Cape to the Kimberley, the region's environment still remains interconnected and largely intact, despite growing threats such as land clearing, irrigation developments, overfishing and poor land management," said Ms. Kirsten Blair from the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory.

"It is clear that the mistakes of land management made in southern Australia are now being repeated in the north. A consistent and coordinated approach is required across the

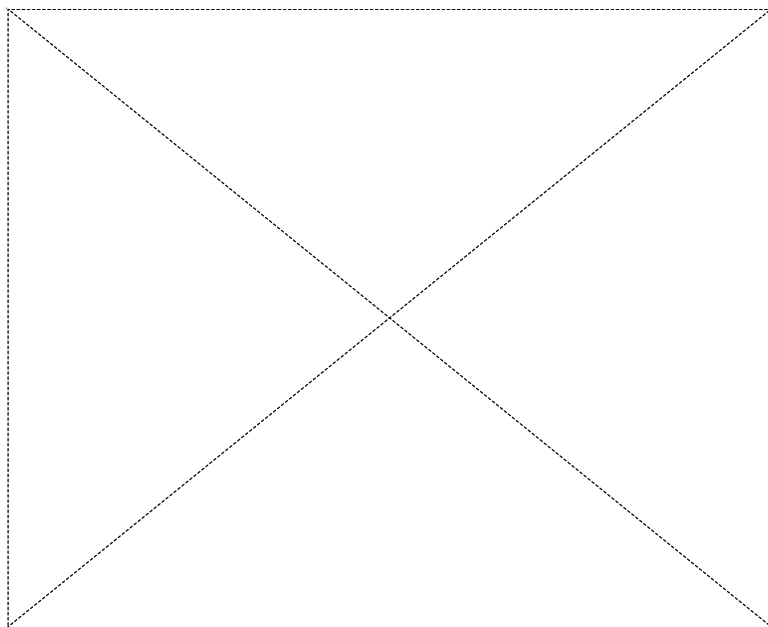
whole region. The involvement of traditional land owners in this process is essential," said Ms. Maria Mann, from Environs Kimberley.

"The vision which is emerging from this meeting is of a new innovative development framework to create a diverse, prosperous, sustainable and equitable future for the region which maintains the natural integrity of the environment in its totality. The vision can be summarized as healthy country and healthy communities for northern Australia," said Mr. Charlie Sherwin, from the Australian Conservation Foundation.

The new Alliance will shape the conservation efforts of all groups involved, including ECNT. Obviously we've got a lot of work ahead of us, both in developing the vision and in consulting with traditional owners and their representative bodies and then the broader public. However the Alliance represents a major opportunity to ensure the protection and management of Northern Australia's unique values.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

Representatives of Environment Centre of the Northern Territory, Conservation Council of Western Australia, Environs Kimberly, Queensland Conservation Council, North Queensland Conservation Council, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, The Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation and World Wildlife Fund attended the meeting.



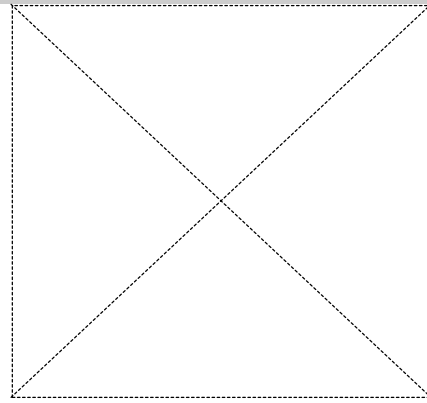
Inside your June newsletter:

- p2 Territory Greenhouse emissions set to rise
- p3 Environmental leadership
- p4-5 Christmas Island: Out of sight...out of mind?
- p6 Do you want to be a Cool Household?
- p7 Bits and pieces

Territory Greenhouse Emissions set to go sky-high

Greenhouse gas emissions from currently proposed major projects would increase the NT's emissions by almost 200% compared with 1995 emissions (the most recent data available). The table below includes estimates for 7 natural-gas based projects including two LNG plants and a Glyde Point smelter producing 500,000 tonnes of aluminium per annum. Not included in the table are the Compass Resources polymetallic mine proposal for Batchelor, which could possibly emit between 0.5 and 1.0 megatonnes (MT) per year, and the planned Nabalco alumina refinery expansion at Nhulunbuy.

ECNT believes it is irresponsible to proceed with major industrial developments in the absence of a greenhouse strategy which sets emissions targets for the NT and that the debate surrounding pro-



posed LNG related developments has failed to adequately address the greenhouse implications of such development. If LNG exports were going to directly substitute for coal consumption in Japan, the major proposed destination for LNG from Timor Sea gas, then the exploitation of the Timor Gas reserves may lead to a reduction in global emissions. Similarly, gas pipelines to the east coast of Australia would allow for the replacement of coal to some extent. However, by our calculations around

60% of the LNG exports would have to directly substitute for coal for global emissions to remain the same – a highly unlikely scenario since Japanese energy demand and coal consumption are still on the rise. Meanwhile, the greenhouse savings from piping Sunrise gas to the east coast are estimated by the NT Government to be only 2.8 MT per year, as we pointed out in the April newsletter.

Not only is the NT Government's support for rapid industrialization trading off the environmental values of Darwin Harbour, and ignoring the social and cultural impacts of the industrialisation process (do residents really want Darwin to become an industrial town?), it is set to make a substantial contribution to the global warming problem as well.

-Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

Estimated greenhouse gas emissions for proposed major projects

Proposed Project	Annual Greenhouse Emissions (Mega Tonnes)	Source
Phillips LNG Plant (Wickham Point - Darwin Harbour)	4.56	Phillips EIS for 10MTPA* facility March 2002
Mt Grace Magnesite Mine (Batchelor)	0.67	Mt Grace EIS March 2002
Woodside Sunrise Gas & Condensate Extraction (Timor Sea)	0.7	Woodside EIS March 2002
Pechiney Aluminium Smelter (Glyde Point)	5.5	Estimate based on EIS for the similar-sized Boyne Island smelter (Qld) and taking into account gas-fired electricity generation
Methanol Australia Methanol Plant (Tassie Shoal - Timor Sea)	0.9	Estimate based on proposed Methanex plant, Burrup Peninsula WA.
Shell/Woodside Floating LNG Plant (Sunrise - Timor Sea)	1.8	Estimate based on proposed Phillips 3MTPA LNG Plant for Darwin Harbour
Ammonia /Urea	1.4	Estimated based on Burrup Fertilisers Ammonia Plant WA.
Total Increase	15.5	
NT's emissions (1995)	8.6	

* MTPA - Mega Tonnes Per Annum



Environmental leadership

Occasionally a government or politician really takes the initiative on an environmental issue. At ECNT we've been particularly impressed by 2 recent examples. We thought we'd include them here for your information and inspiration.

Case #1 South Australian Government rejects a nuclear waste dump for SA.

The SA ALP Government sent the following letter to the Prime Minister following their election victory in March this year:

My dear Prime Minister

I am writing to you about a matter that is of great concern to the overwhelming majority of South Australians: the Commonwealth's declared intention to establish a national radioactive waste dump in South Australia.

The South Australian Government is opposed to any national radioactive or nuclear waste dumps being established in this State.

Given that thousands of square kilometres of this State were contaminated in the British nuclear weapons tests in the 1950s and 60s, South Australia has more than played its part. Millions of dollars have been spent in cleaning up that land.

The South Australian Government accepts responsibility for the oversight of handling and storage of the small amounts of radioactive waste produced here at sites such as hospitals and universities. Responsibility for supervision of this will be given to our environmental watchdog, the EPA, as part of the reorganisation and strengthening of its role.

As part of its commitment to stop any national nuclear waste dump being built in this State, the South Australian Government will:

- legislate against any national nuclear or radioactive waste dump being set up in SA, including a low-level national repository and*
- ban the transport of radioactive waste from interstate or overseas in SA for the purpose of sending it to a national waste dump in this State.*

The South Australian Government will introduce legislation to hold a referendum of South Australians if any Commonwealth Government, now or in the future, attempts to use its powers to override state laws and seeks to establish a medium or high level nuclear waste dump in South Australia..

I look forward to having a positive and constructive relationship with both you and your Government.

A am sure this can be achieved. However, I must make it clear that my Government and the vast majority of South Australians are opposed to this State becoming the nation's nuclear or radioactive waste dump.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Rann

Premier of South Australia

6/3/2002

Case study #2 Newly elected Costa Rican President commits to a sustainable future for Costa Rica

The following is an excerpt from the Inaugural Address of the President of the Republic of Costa Rica, Dr. Abel Pacheco, 8th May 2002

COSTA RICA DECLARES A PEACE FOR NATURE

We will compete without destroying nature because, beyond the events of the moment, our rich biodiversity will always be a great wealth and we will preserve it. Before becoming an oil enclave, before becoming a land of open pit mining, I plan to initiate a sustained effort to transform Costa Rica into an ecological power.

The true fuel and the true gold of the future will be water and oxygen; they will be our aquifers and our forests. Before we declare peace among ourselves and we declare peace among all nations; now we should declare a peace with nature. Costa Rica does have a future.

As part of the effort to guarantee this promising future, I want to announce that I have adopted the proposal from a group of young environmentalists that was transmitted to me by Gabriel Quesada, grandson of Víctor Quesada, editor of the Social Guarantees and by my son Fabián and that I will press forward surely and decidedly, to incorporate in the Constitution of the Republic a Chapter on Environmental Guarantees.

As part of this new Chapter in the Constitution, we will create the security of absolute protection for primary forests so that not a single tree there is cut; absolute protection for the aquifers and the rivers; the absolute protection for the coral ecosystems, of the mangroves and the wetlands; the absolute protection of wild fauna and flora. We will create the legal system so that deforested areas will be reforested with native species and to make clear that we won't be an oil enclave or land of open pit mining.

At the same time we will incorporate in this new Chapter of the Constitution all that is necessary to ensure appropriate processes for treatment of solid waste; to begin a systematic process of recycling and to foster the vigorous development of organic agriculture.

Added to this, we will guarantee Costa Ricans that technological developments; including the genetic advances, will have to be made in harmony with the nature. The inclusion of Social Guarantees, moved forward by Dr. Calderón Guardia, gave us social peace; the inclusion of the Chapter of Environmental Guarantees will give us sustainability and survival.

I call on all Costa Ricans, especially the youngest, to help me with this initiative, to contribute with their ideas, to reinforce with their proposals their right to make of this country a sanctuary for nature and for humanity.

Costa Rica has future and we will assure it.



Christmas Island: Out of Sight...Out of Mind?

Christmas Island, Indian Ocean, is one of Australia's most precious treasures. Home to numerous plants and animals found nowhere else in the world, several of which are endangered, the island is now faced with a barrage of major threats to its environmental integrity.

If the proliferation of the crazy ant and its devastating impact on the island's special crabs and birds isn't serious enough, now it's construction of a space station, proposals for a huge detention centre and 9 new mining leases which will result in clearing of 320 hectares of primary rainforest.

Christmas Island is only small – no more than 20 km wide – but it is remarkably rich in unique wildlife, fascinating and unusual plants within a ruggedly beautiful landscape. In global terms, it is the only nesting site for the IUCN red-listed Abbot's Booby and other endemic species including a Gos-hawk, Imperial Pigeon, Emerald

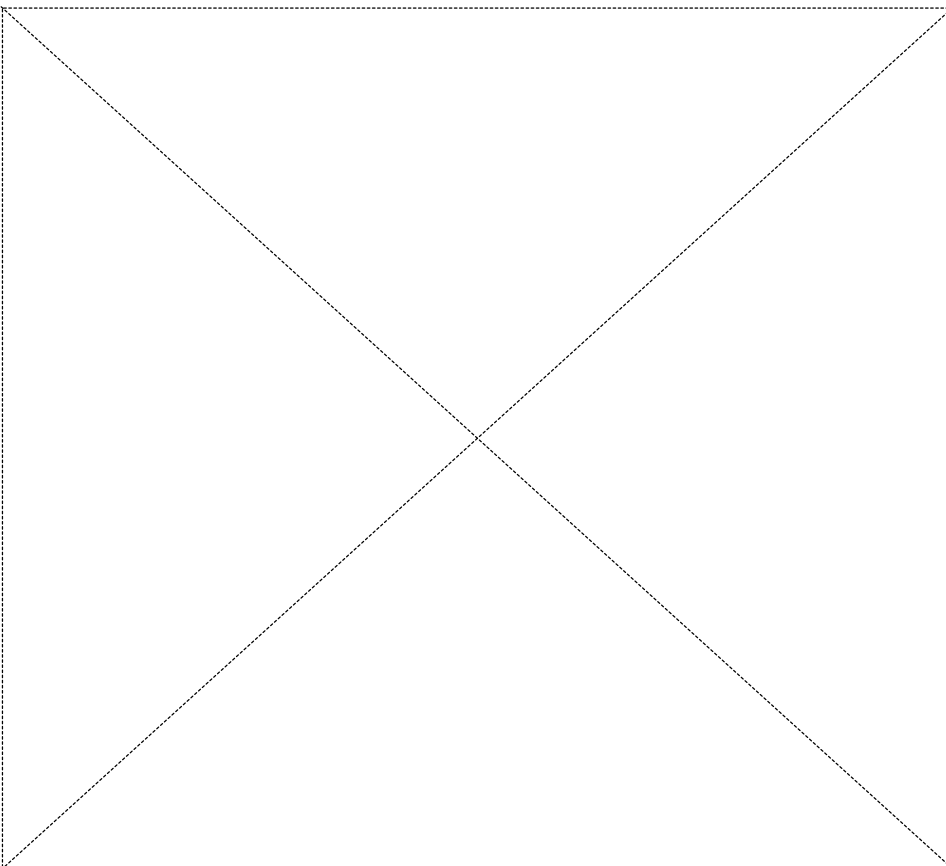
Dove, Hawk Owl, White-eye and a Thrush. These bird species and a whole host of plant species occur nowhere else. The island is perhaps best known for its annual migration of millions of red crabs, but it is also the habitat for a bizarre range of other land-dwelling crabs including giant robber crabs and the remarkable blue crabs from freshwater areas.

Naturally one would assume that with such a valuable and intriguing natural heritage, the Australian Government would have strict conservation laws to protect the island and would not permit developments that threaten the integrity of the island's ecology. Sadly this is not the case. Indeed a policy of 'out of sight, out of mind' prevails and it appears that there is little or no respect for conservation of the forest and the exceptional fauna it supports. Even worse, it appears that the fast-tracking of several developments suggest land deals may have been brokered between the govern-

ment and companies with development interests in the area. What is happening makes a mockery of the Environmental Impact Assessment process and existing legislation to protect internationally significant species.

The most pressing threat involves the proposal by PRL (Phosphate Resources Limited) to acquire 9 new mining leases on the island. The ailing company (which coincidentally has just relinquished Mining Lease 138 to the government during its urgent scramble to find somewhere to build a detention centre) has commenced an Environmental Impact Study in a bid to secure 448 hectares of land for new phosphate mines. Tragically, over two thirds of this area comprises 320 hectares of primary rainforest. This is no ordinary forest, with majestic canopy trees 30-40m tall and emergents to 50m, their straight trunks rich in endemic orchids and epiphytes. Beneath the canopy, endemic species such as Lister's Palm and *Pandanus elatus* occur, amongst numerous other species of botanical interest.

The argument of the developer (PRL) will be that these forests occur outside Christmas Island national park and do not include sites where the Abbot's Booby are known to breed. However, it is a condition of the current mining lease that 'No more clearing of primary rainforest' is to occur. These conditions were imposed in the past in recognition of the previous tragic destruction of over 2,500 ha of the island's vegetation. Indeed, Parks Australia North staff currently spend the majority of their time and resources in rehabilitating old mine sites, some of the many persistent scars that remain from previous phosphate mining. Clearly, the argument of any thinking person or politician who



takes biodiversity conservation even mildly seriously would be to object to any extension of mining on Christmas Island. One has to ask, is there is any good reason to revoke the current conditions of the lease which were set in place with forest conservation in mind? Some background information: Mining lease 138, the ill-chosen site for the proposed detention centre (to house 1200 people), is completely surrounded by Christmas Island National Park. (reminiscent of Ranger mine in Kakadu in this way.) Just to the north, less than 200m away, are rainforest areas where Abbots Boobies breed. These remarkable seabirds are highly endangered there are less than 2,500 pairs left in the world which may sound like a lot until you find out that it takes 25 years for each pair to replace themselves. Nesting nowhere else on the planet, it makes such breeding sites very special indeed.

Part of the Booby problem lies in the fact that they are very slow to breed (taking approx. 18 months) and they have a very high juvenile mortality rate. They also have a particular set of requirements concerning tree height and access being huge seabirds with webbed feet, landing in treetops is understandably a tricky business. One severe wet season storm can knock chicks from their nests to the forest floor, thus wiping out many offspring.

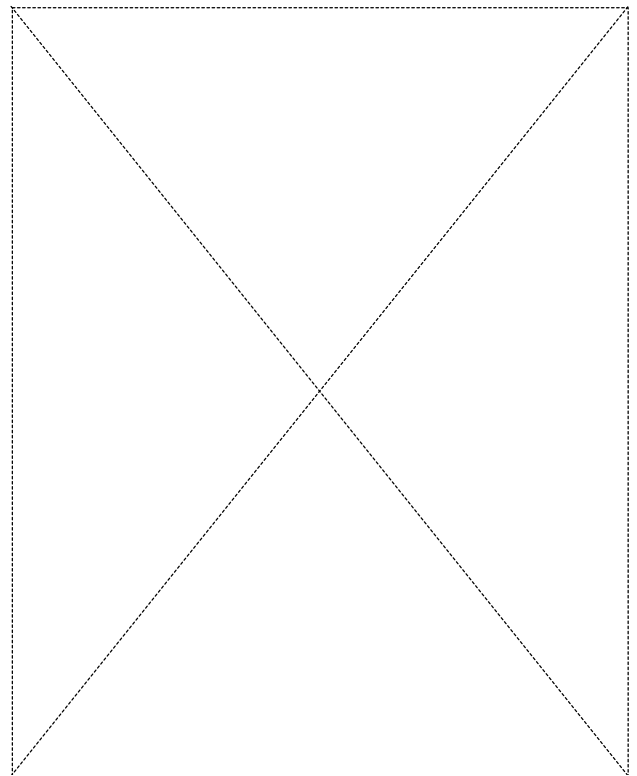
Further, in the windswept landscape of the island, turbulence when landing is also a big issue for this species. Reafforestation of old mine sites reduces the turbulence created by such breaks in the canopy and increases the available forest area suitable as nesting sites. Thus the importance of rehabilitation of Mining Lease 138. Fragmentation of the forest has had a big impact on this species leading to their endangered status. More forest clearing and

artificial lighting (causing disorientation) could have disastrous consequences for the Abbots Boobies of North West Point. In a recent assessment of priorities for rehabilitation Parks Australia recognised the ecological importance of MNL138 by ranking it highly (4/10, where 1 = highest).

Leaving aside the broader issues of whether building detention centres is a good idea, as a site this location is ill-chosen for other important reasons. The main road to the site becomes a highway for the massive migration of red crabs every year. Even the process of providing services to this area will represent a major impact on the crabs. The road is currently closed every year to protect the red crabs from massive road kills and traffic will therefore have to be diverted at this time. The more circuitous route to the site may help in protecting the crabs in the National Park but the considerable traffic to such a centre will instead impact on the red crabs in other parts of the island! This alone would be sufficient reason to consider relocating the centre.

For the lucky few that have visited this island, the demise of this extraordinary place for short-term economic and political gain, is too awful to contemplate. The possibility of clearing of primary rainforest for mining and proposals to build a huge barbed-wire detention centre in the middle of Christmas Island National Park is surely sufficient motivation to act. Christmas Island urgently needs your assistance to ensure that it remains intact.

Demonstrate that in this case out



Abbot s Booby

picture: Kristin Metcalfe

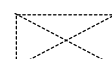
of sight must not be out of mind by writing to:

The Hon Dr David Kemp, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, 2600.

Points you may like to include in your letter:

- The natural values of Christmas Island National Park must be protected in their entirety. This is not consistent with any type of destructive development within the bounds of the National Park, be this mining, building of detention centres or any form of clearing.
- The Australian Government is bound by international obligations to ensure the survival of species such as the critically endangered Abbot s Booby and you expect the minister to ensure these obligations are met.
- Thorough and public environmental assessment processes, which include the consideration of a no project option, must be completed for any development proposals on Christmas Island.

-Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham



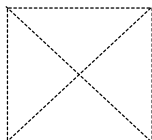
Do you want to be a Cool Household?

The Cool Communities project involving the Darwin suburbs of Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows will be launched later this month after the action plan received approval from the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO). The project, which aims to reduce greenhouse emissions from households, is being run by Parap Residents Association and Ludmilla Creek Landcare Group in partnership with ECNT and the AGO.

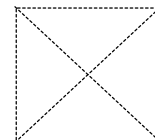
As part of this project we will be looking to recruit 100 households to become Cool Households. These households will be eligible for a home energy audit and to receive up to \$300 in assistance to help them reduce their greenhouse gas emissions (see the summary of the Community Action Plan below). If you are interested and live in any of these suburbs please contact me at the ECNT ph. 8981-2532 or email ecntgary@octa4.net.au. ECNT members are strongly encouraged to become involved.

Gary Scott

Cool Communities Facilitator



Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows Cool Community Action Plan - Summary



The project will develop through a number of stages:

1. Household Recruitment: Recruiting 100 households to become Cool Households (June - July 2002). This will involve media events, a stall at Parap Markets and a regular newsletter delivered to 2900 households.

2. Audit training workshops: Holding audit training workshops so that a panel of home energy auditors is created (August 2002). School pupils and university students will also be encouraged to become involved.

3. Home Energy Audits: Conducting 100 home energy audits at a highly subsidised rate. The cost to participating households is to be kept to a minimum, probably around \$25 (August 2002 ongoing).

4. Audit Implementation: Helping the 100 Cool Households to implement all or some of the audit recommendations with information resources, continual feedback and financial assistance. Households will be asked to commit to an annual savings target of 0.75 tonnes of greenhouse gas by undertaking a range of behavioural changes in the home (e.g. avoiding the use of air-conditioners). A typical Darwin household currently emits around 10-12 tonnes per year, so the target is by no means unrealistic.

Abatement measures which may be all or part funded include:

Roof ventilation or insulation

Shading devices

Swap to more greenhouse efficient equipment and appliances (solar hot water heaters, gas stoves, old fridges and air conditioners with new etc.)

One shot timers for solar hot water heater booster switches

Fridge and over door seals

Water efficient shower heads, flow restricting washers and replace leaky tap washers

Time switches for air conditioners

Time switches for pool pumps

Compost bins and worm farms

Ceiling fan installation

Improvement of natural ventilation (eg. replace sliding windows with louvers)

Lighting hardware modification (eg. lower wattage bulbs - especially fluorescent lamps - or skylights)

Financial assistance will include a first movers bonus to the first 50 households to take action. \$25000 has been budgeted for this stage of the project with a probable allocation of \$300 each to first movers and \$200 to other households (August 2002 ongoing).

5. Project Promotion and Communications: Community wide information on household case studies and how to save energy will be provided through the newsletter and brochures. Promoting greenhouse-friendly lighthouses will help show the way for others to follow. There will be recognition of household achievements through presentation of top performers awards at Cool Community Forums.

6. Data Collection and Progress Measurement: Participating Cool Households will be expected to monitor their electricity and petrol use using simple data collection forms and report quarterly to the Cool Communities Facilitator.

7. Seeking Ongoing Support: Liaising with a range of community partner organizations, including the NT Government, in order to seek support for continuation of the project beyond one year.

Expected Project Outcomes:

- Saving at least 75 tonnes of greenhouse gas from reductions in electricity consumption and car use (at an average of 0.75 tonnes per household).
- Increasing the greenhouse awareness of 2900 households in the 4 suburbs and developing a culture of greenhouse action.
- Household saving money.
- Enhancing community spirit, networks and sense of purpose.
- Less waste to be disposed of at Darwin City Council tip.
- More comfortable houses.
- More native trees.
- Water conservation.

Cool Communities is a joint project between Parap Residents Association, Ludmilla Creek Landcare Group, Environment Centre NT and funded by the A



Bits and Pieces

Conservation Starts at Home

Senior Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr Jose Ramos-Horta said today that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would make concerted efforts to conserve energy.

In encouraging staff to conserve energy where ever possible Dr Ramos-Horta has introduced a fine system for staff who leave lighting, computers and air conditioning on over night. The fines could be as much as US\$100 per room.

"Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation staff should be setting a good example for the community, this waste of energy is unnecessary expenditure." Dr Ramos-Horta said in response to a Ministry air conditioner being left on yesterday.

"Every year the government spends a lot of money on electricity and energy. East Timor faces continual power shortages, leaving our streets and homes dark. This flagrant waste of electricity, in a country with so very little is unacceptable." Dr Ramos-Horta said.

In order to reinforce the value of electricity and air conditioning, staff who work in the area where the air conditioning was left running will go without air conditioning for one week.

On the initiative of Dr Ramos-Horta, monies collected from the fines will go into a special fund to help the neediest staff of Foreign Ministry. The fund will be started with a contribution by Dr Ramos-Horta himself.

Something we could learn from EastTimor?

ECNT campaign briefings

As explained in our previous newsletter at the ECNT planning day earlier 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. The first session on ECNT's mining campaign was held in May and attended by a small but interested group of ECNT members and supporters. The schedule for the remaining campaign briefings is listed below so you can book the dates in your diary:

Darwin Harbour - 11th June

Landclearing - 16th July

Greenhouse - 6th August

All of these sessions will be at the Environment Centre (98 Woods St) at 5.30pm. Snacks and drinks will be available. Please spread the word amongst your friends and work-mates.

Argentinians protest

Aussie Nuclear

Waste Plans

About 3000 demonstrators gathered in Argentina's capital Buenos Aires to protest against plans to import nuclear waste from Australia. The plan involves Argentinian company INVAP, which has negotiated with the Australian Government to build a nuclear research reactor in exchange for taking Australian nuclear waste. Greenpeace has joined the Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth and People Against a Nuclear Reactor in the Reaction coalition, vowing to actively oppose construction of the reactor.

Pine Gap: the low down for activists

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.**

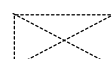
There are groups organising from all over the country in small ways and big. Mass transport is being considered from most capital cities. Some groups are lining up trainers to assist people in getting to know what they are going to, how to form affinity groups, etc. Medical teams are being organised. 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.

Enclosed in this newsletter is some info about the protests. Work is being done to organise a bus to travel down from Darwin in October. Keep in touch with ECNT if you are interested.

Check out: www.anti-bases.org

Canola Gene Contamination Fear

Dr Chris Preston of the Weed CRC in Adelaide is reported in the Weekly Times of 13/3/02 to have found that genetically modified canola will outcross to other canola. "It is going to happen and we've got to expect it to happen. Gene contamination can come from many sources - seed contamination, animals or wind." And the West Australian 13/5/02 reports U of WA research by Prof Stephen Powles showing gene flow from herbicide resistant canola to standard canola plants up to 3 km away, in trials conducted in 4 states.



DATES TO KEEP IN JUNE

Tues 4 June: ECNT fundraiser- **A Fistful of Dynamite: Spaghetti Western Food and Film Night for World Environment Day at the Deckchair cinema from 6.30pm**
Bookings: 8981 1984 or at the door

Wed 5 June: **World Environment Day**

Sat 8th June: **Community bike ride: Meet 9 am Jingili Water gardens pond, ride to POD Co-op for breakfast**

7 10 June : **Top Half Folk Festival at Mary River Park 8978 8897**

11 June: **Darwin Harbour campaign briefing at ECNT 5.30 7pm**

22 & 23 June: **Rock n Robin Rogaine at Adelaide River, Jon 8941 1059** If you missed the previous rogaines, we had a great time, so don't miss this one!

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