

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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November 2002

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NT Government delivers on Freedom of Information Legislation

The October sittings of NT Parliament saw the NT Government deliver on its pre-election commitment to introduce Freedom of Information legislation for the NT. The passage of the Information Bill on the 8th of October saw Territorians gain access to information held by government that they had been denied for many years. The Environment Centre congratulates the NT Government for moving quickly on this important issue.

ECNT has been highlighting the need for the NT to introduce Freedom of Information (FoI) legislation for many years. With other community groups the Environment Centre organised Tasmanian FoI expert Rick Snell's visit to Darwin last year to increase public debate and awareness about the proposed FoI legislation and to assist community groups make submissions on the draft legislation.

The legislation approved by the Parliament was a great improvement on the draft bill released for public consultation. ECNT was heartened by the fact that many of the issues raised in submissions made by the public were taken on board and incorporated in the final Bill. For instance the draft

legislation proposed that the legislation would have a retrospective period of 5 years (the Act will commence on 1st July 2003 - therefore under the original Bill the public could request information dating back to 1998). In our submission ECNT recommended that the Act should have a retrospective period of at least 10 years. The retrospective period was increased to 10 years in the final legislation passed.

Whilst the legislation still provides some exemptions (that is, information requests can be denied by Government) we are hopeful that these exemptions will not be used unless there is a very good reason for doing so (unlike some FoI applications that ECNT has made to the Commonwealth which have come back as blacked out documents). We are hopeful that a culture can be created within the NT Government that encourages open and accountable government.

FoI legislation will hopefully assist ECNT in our campaigning efforts. The NT has a history of political decisions being made in the interests of small sections of the community rather than in the public interest. Hopefully FoI legislation will open up government de-

cision making processes for scrutiny and make it possible for the public to access information about past decisions.

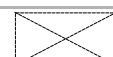
Viva democracy!

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair



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Government all out of excuses on Kyoto

Adding to the many arguments in favour of Kyoto ratification, recent studies have found a strong economic case for Australian greenhouse action.

Two new studies have shown that ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will not be harmful to the Australian economy and, according to one of the studies, could benefit it in the short term. The economic modeling carried out by the McKibbin Software Group and by ABARE showed that the impact of ratification would only decrease Real GNP by just over 0.20 percent by 2020. To put this in perspective, the Australian economy would take only three weeks longer to reach its projected level of growth eighteen years from now.

As the newly formed Australian Business Council for Sustainable Energy points out, this is insignificant compared with the potential havoc that will be caused to Australia's agriculture, tourism and services industries by not taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (*Ecogeneration* Oct/Nov 2002: p19). It is already estimated by ABARE that the drought currently affecting much of Australia will cost farmers \$6 billion. To this tally we must add the loss of an estimated 10 million

tonnes of top soil blown into the ocean by the recent huge dust storm.

The McKibbin model, meanwhile, demonstrated that the economy would grow by 0.07 percent by 2010 as Australian businesses benefited from the trading of emissions permits between participant nations. More and more Australian companies are therefore viewing Kyoto as being in the best interests of both their shareholders and Australia as a whole. Grant King, CEO of Origin Energy, a renewable and gas electricity company, stated recently: For Australia to exempt itself would be a bad outcome. We should participate. We have leading technologies in renewable energy and good abatement opportunities (*Ecogeneration* Oct/Nov 2002: p19). Some of those abatement opportunities may lie in the Northern Territory through changing fire management practices and revegetation.

The Commonwealth Government has been arguing all along that Kyoto would significantly hurt the economy. Now it must face up to the growing evidence that this excuse for inaction has been entirely without substance.

-Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

COOL COMMUNITIES AUDITORS NEEDED

The Parap, Fannie Bay, Ludmilla and The Narrows Cool Communities project is requiring more people who are willing to be trained as household energy auditors. Auditors should understand household energy use and savings opportunities and possess high quality speaking, listening and written communication skills.

Selection of auditors will involve attendance at 1.5 days of free training beginning on Saturday 16 November; completion of a trial audit and submission of a report; and a Criminal History Check.

Auditors will be paid \$100 per household audit.

At the moment there are over 30 households in the Parap, Ludmilla, Fannie Bay and The Narrows suburbs wanting an energy audit done of their home. The project target is to have 100 audits completed by the end of June next year.

Please, if you are interested in being a Cool Communities auditor submit an expression of interest to me by 8 November 2002.

Gary Scott, Cool Communities Facilitator, ECNT,
GPO Box 2120, Darwin NT 0801;
Email ecntgary@octa4.net.au ; Phone 8981-2532.

New PARKS Master- plan to be Developed

As well as announcing that the NT Government and the Land Council would negotiate over tenure of the NT's National Parks and Conservation Reserves, the NT Government also announced that it intends to develop a new Parks Masterplan to replace the current document (pictured). The Masterplan developed by the CLP Government was poorly received and widely interpreted as a land grab exercise with its proposals for super-parks on Aboriginal land.

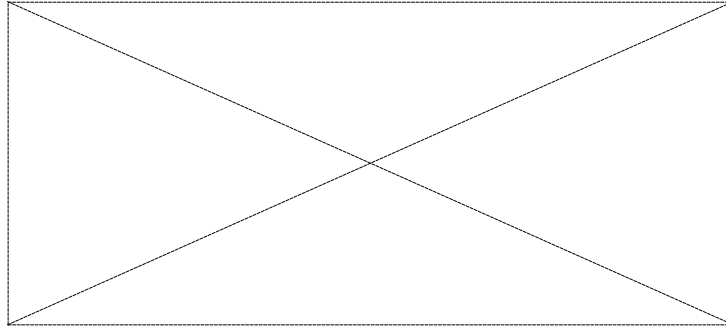
ECNT is looking forward to contributing to the new Parks Masterplan which we hope will greatly increase the area (both on land and at sea) that is protected within a conservation area.

- Mark Wakeham & Kirsten Blair



NT Govt to negotiate with Land Councils over National Parks but mining still an option.

The Environment Centre welcomed the NT Government's announcement in late October that it intends to negotiate with Land Councils over the tenure of the NT's National Parks and Reserves rather than commence legal actions. The NT Government has received legal advice that over 50 NT Parks have been invalidly declared following the Miriuwung and Gajerrong Native Title ruling. For too long Parks declaration in the NT has been at the expense of traditional owners land rights and we are hopeful that negotiations will lead to greater traditional owner involvement in Parks manage-



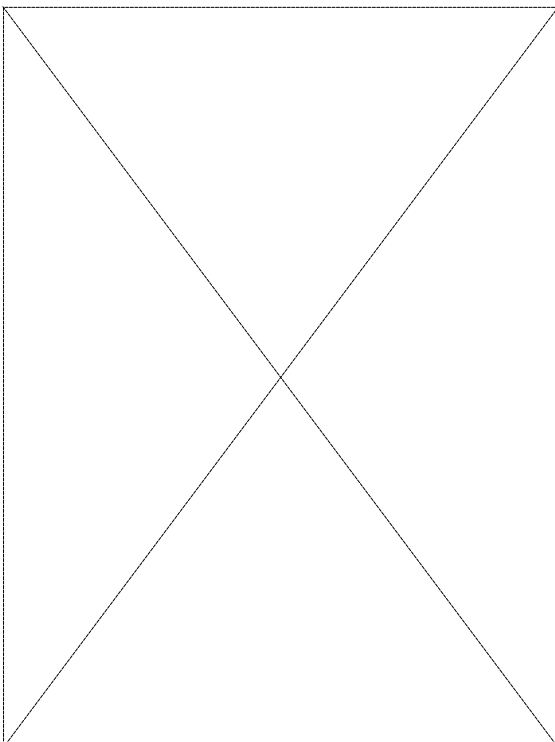
pointed by the NT Government's commitment to maintain business as usual in the Parks with regard to exploration and mining. Currently the NT Government allows mineral exploration in National Parks and is

prepared to consider mines on a case-by-case basis. This contradicts their pre-election promise and is out of step with public opinion on the issue. We will be watching the progress of the negotiation process with interest but call on the NT Government to exclude mining and exploration activities in our Parks and Reserves once and for all.

ment. Less than 5% of the NT is currently in a protected area, which is significantly less than the proportion of land and sea protected in other parts of Australia. A constructive approach to resolving Land Rights and Native Title issues could ultimately lead to new additions to the NT's protected areas estate once traditional owners start to receive some benefits from protected areas. Whilst the negotiation approach is welcome, we are disap-

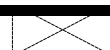
- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

ECNT weeds books travelling far and wide



We've been overwhelmed by the demand for our new weeds book *Weeds of the Wet/Dry Tropics*. Since the book was launched in July this year we've distributed over 3000 copies of the book all over northern Australia. Processing, packing and posting weeds book orders has been our major administrative task for the past few months. We've also had some interest in the book from parts of South-east Asia. Recently ECNT donated some weeds books to communities in East Timor. The Australian Conservation Foundation's Asia Pacific Unit Coordinator Lee Tan took some copies over to East Timor in October. East Timor shares many of the same weeds that we are trying to eradicate in northern Australia.

ACF's Lee Tan takes the ECNT weeds book to East Timor.
Photo- ECNT



Emerging Problems for the Ord

Not only is the future of any Stage II proposal straggling along, there is now research indicating that the existing irrigation area has grave salinity and rising groundwater problems.

Preliminary research undertaken through the Ord Bonaparte Program has stated that in many existing irrigation areas, including the Kimberley Research Station and area around lake Kununurra, the groundwater is unsuitable to be used for irrigation as it is highly saline. Further, there is an urgent groundwater problem at Martins Location, Green Location, Cave Springs and Packsaddle Creek which needs immediate attention. Remediation action would involve lining the irrigation channels to prevent seepage and installing a number of dewatering bores—both cost prohibitive options. The risk of accumulation of salts is even greater in the Ord River Irrigation Area because of the high evaporation rate due to persistent high temperatures throughout most of the year (*Needs Analysis for Best Utilisation of Water Resources for the Ord Irrigation Area CLW 41 3.3B*, Dr Ramsis Salama, CSIRO Land and Water Perth, 2002; p.5 summary from OBP *Water*

Resources Planning and Management—research project July 2002).

Why on earth should any more taxpayers money be spent on “fixing” up this problem? Vast amounts of taxpayers money has already gone into the project with the construction of the Argyle and Diversion dams, the development of the Kununurra township and the previously long running farm gate price guarantees ie. Subsidies. Has any other industry and other individuals benefited from such government support which has provided little if any public benefit, environmental devastation and cultural dispossession?

The Environment Centre believes that there is absolutely no basis for any continued expansion of irrigated agricultural activity and any form of the Ord Stage II project should be abandoned.

Jann Crase

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NT Minerals Council Undermines Push for an Environment Protection Authority

ECNT was recently disappointed to learn that the NT Minerals Council has been actively lobbying the NT Government against the establishment of an EPA in the Northern Territory. The NT is the only State or Territory in the country not to have an independent Environment Protection Authority to monitor and regulate the environmental performance of industry, government and the public.

ECNT attended and spoke at a Minerals Council Environment Management workshop in late September (as we have done several times over the past couple of years). One of the points that we have been making to the minerals industry is that the industry's environmental and social record will not just be judged upon how individual mine sites are performing, but also how the industry is acting as a whole, and how its peak bodies, like the Minerals Council, are acting. During our presentation we questioned whether the NT Minerals Council had been lobbying NT Ministers in an attempt to prevent the introduc-

tion of an EPA in the NT. Following the presentation the Executive Officer of the Minerals Council, Kezia Purich, confirmed that the NT Minerals Council had made representations to NT Government Ministers arguing that the existing mining regulations are adequate and that an EPA is unnecessary.

ECNT believes that a history of environmental problems and incidents at mines like Mt Todd, Ranger, Alcan's Nhulubuy operations and BHP's Groote-Eylands operations demonstrate clearly the need for an EPA in the NT. More recently damage done to Gouldian Finch habitat in construction of the railway may have been avoided with a vigilant and independent regulator.

In addition to attempting to prevent the introduction of an EPA, the NT mining industry has also been active and influential in the debate about mining in National Parks and protected areas. Just prior to the NT election in 2001 the Minerals Council told ABC news that “there should not be any places off limits to mining

companies for exploration” and that “the Minerals Council believes there should be exploration mining in Territory parks as the legislation does allow it in the Territory.” (ABC Darwin radio news, Wed 8 Aug 2001 11:58 ACST). Given that the NT ALP back-flipped on its pre-election promise to ban mining in National Parks it appears that the Minerals Council lobbying on this issue has been successful to date.

ECNT respects the rights of individuals and organisations to speak freely and lobby government on important issues. However we believe that the NT Minerals Council's anti-environmental lobbying seriously undermines the credibility of the mining industry's claims that it is serious about improving its environmental and social performance. As long as the mining industry refuses to accept and support improvements to current regulatory regimes and performance standards, it is hard to believe that the industry is committed to corporate social responsibility.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair



Statement on Sydney WTO Meeting



The Environment Centre NT, along with many aid, environment and other community groups, has signed on to the following statement in support of the Global Justice campaign in the lead up to the World Trade Organisation meeting in Sydney this month.

On November 14-15 2002 an "informal" meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will be held in Sydney. Only 25 of the 144 member governments of the WTO have been invited. The WTO is dominated by the economically powerful: the USA, Canada, Europe and Japan. The Australian government has joined with them to pressure selected governments to support an agenda dominated by transnational corporations.

In a world where 2 billion people live on less than US\$2 per day with little access to health, education and water services, and with continued destruction of the environment, this agenda puts corporate rights before worker and human rights. This contributes to displacement of people, and to war.

The WTO agenda includes:

- Treating essential services like health, education and water as commercial goods, opening them to privatisation.
- Undermining social and environmental sustainability by reducing government regulation of trade and investment.
- Further tariff cuts regardless of their impact in terms of job losses and economic insecurity.
- Preaching free trade in agriculture to benefit subsidised agribusiness in rich countries while undermining food security in poor countries
- Restricting governments from using government purchasing to assist local jobs and development.
- Giving corporations patenting rights regardless of the impact on basic needs, such as medicine and seeds.

We oppose and reject this undemocratic and elitist meeting. Fair Trade, not Free Trade

A better world is possible. We support multilateral regulation of trade through open and democratic processes with all nations freely participating. Trade is not an end in itself, but should support social and environmental objectives.

- Trade agreements should support not undermine United Nations standards on human rights, land rights, labour rights and the environment.
- Essential public services should not be included in trade agreements.
- Governments should retain full rights to regulate for social and environmental reasons, and to have industry policies to support local jobs and development.
- Corporations must conform to United Nations standards on human rights, labour rights and the ecological sustainability of the planet we all share.

We will organise to raise public awareness, and peaceful protest, based on democratic decision-making by the broadest possible range of organisations including signatories to this statement. We encourage all organizations and individuals who believe a better world is possible to come to Sydney in November 2002 and participate in these actions.

ECNT is a member of the Australian Fair trade & Investment Network, for more information: www.affinet.org.au See also, Friends of the Earth: www/foe.org.au/gats



Beverage industry pulls out all stops to scuttle CDL

NT Government continues to stall on container deposit legislation

The Beverage Industry has increased its efforts to railroad Container Deposit Legislation in the NT. In recent months the Beverage Industry Environment Council (BIEC) has been extremely active in the Territory. Representatives of BIEC have visited Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek to lobby NT and local Government politicians as well as visiting a wide range of community groups (including the Environment Centre) and Aboriginal organisations in an attempt to convince Territorians that a Container Deposit system would not work in the NT.

In addition to heavy lobbying BIEC has also tried other tactics. As a result of the beverage industry's contribution to litter BIEC has traditionally funded a number of litter reduction programs and organisations. Having funded Keep Australia Beautiful in the NT for many years, BIEC decided to withdraw its \$250,000 funding of Keep Australia Beautiful (KAB). Independent MLA Loraine Braham (who has been a vigorous supporter of CDL) told the NT Parliament "KAB suspects that its public support for CDL had something to do with that decision... I have to say that I think it was a fairly spiteful move on the part of the beverage industry" (Hansard, 10/10/02).

BIEC has also resurrected its 'Do the right thing' campaign and they have been visiting councils and communities promising money for local litter reduction campaigns. The catch is however that the beverage industry will only fund these projects if a Container Deposit Scheme is not introduced in the NT. As Independent Member for Nelson, Gerry Wood, told Parliament "The whole push by BIEC is a con. It has the resources, it has the power and has the money to make sure that they are the winners and the rest of the community are the losers." (Hansard, 10/10/02). BIEC seems to be currently focused upon selling the message that Aboriginal communities won't reap any benefits from CDL, a message that has been refuted by several community councillors. ECNT believes that if CDL is implemented it will be critical to put in place the necessary measures to ensure that Aboriginal communities do benefit from the system.

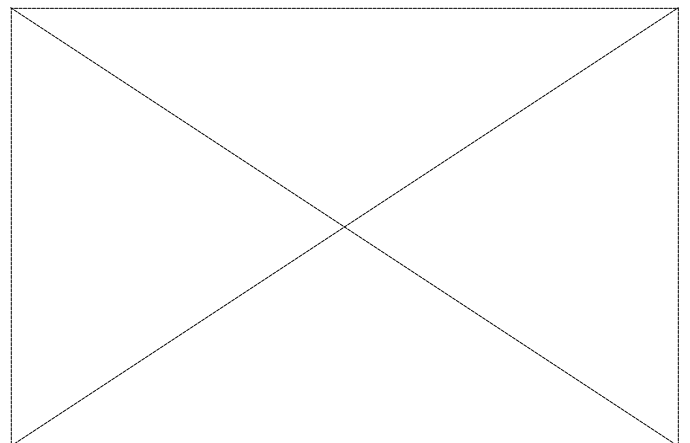
Additionally BIEC has just commissioned and released a report by Dr Siva Ram Venturi of NTU entitled "Sustainability of Recycling in the Northern Territory". The report concludes that "a sustainable recycling system for the Northern Territory can be better achieved through the concept

of shared responsibility amongst all waste-generating stakeholders, rather than relying upon a single use of legislated market instrumentation" (page 4). The report then goes on to explain why CDL wouldn't work in the NT. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the report, however our assessment in brief is that the report rehashes tired and inaccurate arguments, is reliant on data that is 13 years old and, far from looking at the 'sustainability of recycling in the NT', (as its title suggests) the report is purely preoccupied with attempting to demonstrate that CDL won't work.

How is the Government responding to the Beverage Industry's song and dance routine? To date BIEC seems to have scared the NT Government into putting CDL in the too hard basket. The NT Government appointed a committee chaired by a former Pauls CEO to assess the arguments for and against CDL. That Committee prepared a report for the then Environment Minister, Kon Vatskalis which was submitted in May. In the October sittings of Parliament Minister Vatskalis said that Cabinet would be making a decision on CDL in "a few weeks". The NT only has to look to South Australia for an example of CDL reducing litter, increasing recycling and providing funds for community groups. Its time for the NT Government to ignore the spoiling of the beverage industry and make the only decision that is in the public interest- introducing an NT container deposit system.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

Contact your local MLA and tell them you support the introduction of CDL. (If you don't know who your local member is, ring the Australian Electoral Commission on: 8999 5707 to find out.)



Litter in Darwin's mangroves, Picture: Donna Lewis



Bits and Pieces

Notice of AGM

The Environment Centre will hold its Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 3 December at the Environment Centre at 5.30pm. We would love to see as many of our wonderful members as possible, Following the meeting we will have refreshments to which you are all invited.

Memberships as Gifts

Do you have friends for whom it is difficult to find a gift? We would like to suggest giving them membership to the Environment Centre. We have prepared some lovely gift notes which we will send with the first newsletter for any lucky people who receive this gift. You can organise this by phone, so just give us a ring any time.

Data Base Problems

Some members may have received A note in their last newsletter saying their membership had expired although they had renewed. We apologise for this error and ask anyone who wrongly received such a notice this time to let us know immediately so we can correct our database. Thank you.

Ethical Investment

ECNT has been a subscriber to the Magazine Ethicalinvestor for the past year. Members interested in reading or photocopying articles are welcome to come and do so.

Water Facts

With drought affecting much of Australia, it was interesting to read in the Weekend Australian of 26-27 October some figures on water use in Australia.

- Half the water used by households goes to gardens. Another quarter is flushed down the toilet.
- The biggest users of irrigation water are dairy (40%), cotton (15%), sugar cane (8%), beef (7%), grapes (5%)
- Vegetables earn the highest returns on water (\$1295 per megalitre - one megalitre equals one Olympic size pool), cotton earns \$452, rice earns \$31 and beef \$14

POD Co-op 6 months old

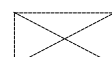
For many Darwinites who are health conscious, concerned for the environment, or just can't stand supermarkets, the opening of POD in April this year brought a sigh of relief. Planet Organic Darwin (POD) is Darwin's only co-operatively run food outlet. It stocks a wide range of healthy, organic and ethically sourced goods and provides a real alternative to the chemical-laden, packaging frenzied, disempowering experience that mainstream shopping in Darwin can be. 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. A co-op is not trying to make a profit or trying to take over

the market, it is about providing real food alternatives to the community. As part of the POD 6 month birthday celebrations, we have included a current stock and price list in this newsletter for reference when you're writing your shopping list.

New Zealand Introduces Carbon Tax

New Zealand has unveiled a carbon tax to help it meet the goals of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, which the country expects to ratify by year's end. The tax, which would be implemented in 2007 assuming Kyoto has come into effect, would boost retail gas prices by up to 6 percent, diesel prices by up to 12 percent, and gas and electricity prices by as much as 9 percent, according to government documents. Coal users would be the hardest hit, with a 19 percent price hike. New Zealand emits between 70 and 90 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year, making it the fourth-largest per capita producer after the United States, Australia, and Canada. New Zealand farmers would be exempt from the new tax plan (Half of New Zealand greenhouse gases come from the methane and CO2 emissions of the more than 50 million sheep and cattle that account for a third of the country's export earnings). What revenue the tax generated would be used for climate-change projects and to offset cuts in other taxes. NB: there are 2 NZ elections between now and 2007 so it could change.

Planet Ark, Reuters, Graeme Peters, 18 Oct 2002



DATES TO KEEP IN NOVEMBER

Sunday 3rd Green Left Weekly Dinner, 6pm @Frogs Hollow.
\$20/\$15/\$10 Bookings: 8981 4714

Sunday 1st Dec Peace Rally Rapid Creek Markets, 10am
Part of the National Weekend of Action Against War

Tuesday 3rd ECNT AGM 5.30pm at 3/98 Woods Street

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