

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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April/May 2003

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

Mirrar plan for post -mining Jabiru and Kakadu

Rio Tinto continues to procrastinate on Jabiluka rehabilitation

Mirrar traditional owners, represented by the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, this month outlined their plans for the future of Jabiru in a post-mining environment. At a social infrastructure conference in Alice Springs Gundjehmi's Andy Ralph explained that the 'Jabiru Region Sustainability Project' has been formed to advance the Mirrar's land claim over Jabiru and to position Jabiru as a viable regional centre following the decommissioning of the Ranger uranium mine.

At the conference Mr Ralph stated that "Contrary to much speculation the Mirrar see a definite future for Jabiru. This

future involves providing certainty of tenure to both residents and commercial operators and aims to preserve the power balance in the town, with an ongoing role for the Commonwealth Government, Northern Territory Government and Northern Land Council."

Meanwhile Rio Tinto continues to drag its feet on decisions about the rehabilitation of the Jabiluka mine site. It is now over 9 months since Rio Tinto Chairman Sir Robert Wilson said on BBC television: "What we will do is to rehabilitate that area, we'll block off the adit." Whilst Rio has been undertaking scientific analyses of rehabilitation op-

tions it is yet to begin any significant on-ground rehabilitation effort. Neither has it formalised Sir Robert Wilson's commitment to Traditional Owners that "there would be no development of that project without the consent of the traditional landowners, the Mirrar people".

Environment groups will again be raising concerns about Rio's failure to follow through on its public commitments at upcoming Annual General Meetings in London and Perth and the ERA AGM in Sydney. Jabiluka also remains on the agenda of the World Heritage Committee, which is meeting in June in China. The Jabiluka blockade began on March 23rd 1998. Five years on the project has not progressed and indeed looks like going backwards.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

Environment Centre Fundraiser

**BOWLING FOR
COLUMBINE**
At (the NEW)
Deckchair Cinema
Wharf precinct
Tuesday 29 April 2003

Food from 6.30pm –
Tofu or beef burgers
Film 7.30pm

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new office & landclearing staff**

P3: Greenhouse Review
Barbara James

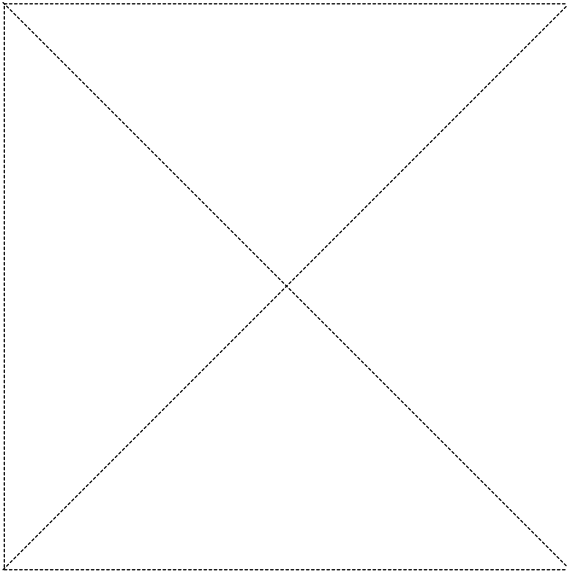
**P4 & 5: Darwin Harbour
submission**

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We would like to introduce two new members who have recently joined the staff of the Environment Centre. Both are learning and settling in quickly and are already making their own contributions to the dynamic operation of the Environment Centre. Please drop in and say "hello".



Hi,

Some of you may have already realised that I'm not from around here. I'm from sunny Scotland originally but left there about a decade ago in search of employment and adventure. I found some but also ended up doing some mad journey across the globe arriving in Darwin last June.

In between I spent seven years as a pharmaceutical researcher, working mainly on 'below the belt, above the knee' type problems. I'm pretty curious about the world and have worked in London, Hong Kong, China, Spain, Sydney and Melbourne.

The travel and the research were great but the corporate world wasn't really for me. So I finally took the plunge and decided to do what my heart had been telling me since I was about 6, which was put my energies into protecting wildlife. I have always had an especially squidgy spot for Australian flora and fauna. Luckily I landed a role with The Wilderness Society in Mel-

bourne as their Fundraising and Development Manager and can now point to bits of Victorian forest and say I helped keep it from being destroyed. That's far more rewarding than anything.

But after a couple of years my better half and I developed itchy feet and longed to get out of the metropolitan sprawl. So last February we bought a Patrol and spent the next 6 months camping our way clockwise around the country in search of wombats, wedge-tails and wallabies. Little did we know we would end up buying a rural property in Darwin.

So now I enjoy three days a week with ECNT as their fundraiser and office administrator. I look forward to contributing towards preserving some of this amazing tropical wilderness.

Gill Ainsworth

New Northern Woodlands Campaigner

Hi, my name is Henry Boer and I recently started as the Northern Woodlands Campaigner working on tree clearing in the Northern Territory. Prior to taking up the position with ECNT I was the Coordinator of the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre. Although from the east I have a good understanding of the "development at all costs" mentality in northern Australia.

The position has changed significantly since last year and I will be focusing on the NT with a priority on the Daly River Campaign. This is building up as a priority campaign over the year with the NT Government set to release more land for intensive agricultural development in the Douglas Daly area.

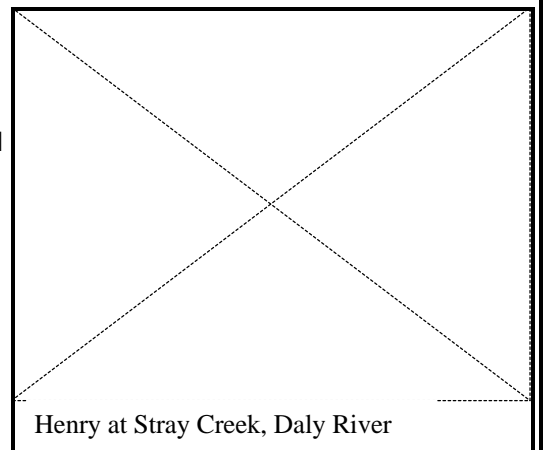
At this stage the NT Government is supporting plans to clear tens of thousands of hectares of trees and pump millions of litres of groundwater onto new farms. The Government has to think seriously about the future of the Daly River and whether it wants to protect one of the NT's natural icons or create another Murray Darling disaster.

The ECNT is committed to saving the Daly River. Over the coming months we plan to build community awareness of the Daly and generate wide public support to stop further agricultural subdivisions. Your help in building public support over this period is much needed and greatly appreciated.

If you would like me to keep you informed about what's going on in the Daly campaign email me at: northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au or give me a call on 8941 7439.

-Henry Boer

On Tuesday 6th May we will be holding a Daly River campaign meeting to provide a briefing on campaign developments and discuss future campaign activities. Please come along to the Environment Centre, 13/98 Woods St, 5.30 pm.



Henry at Stray Creek, Daly River

NT Greenhouse Strategy -a Major Opportunity

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, the NT Greenhouse Strategy Discussion paper was recently released for public comment. A full copy of ECNT's response to the paper is available on our website: www.ecnt.org under Campaigns – Greenhouse. ECNT will also be preparing our strategy for NT Greenhouse Gas emissions reduction. The following is a summary of the ECNT submission.

The paper states that this Strategy 'will aim to balance economic and greenhouse goals and support sustainable development in the Territory'. ECNT argues that fossil-fuel based development is not sustainable in the medium to long term and that in these circumstances economic and greenhouse goals are not always compatible. Only the creation and support of renewable energy systems can provide the balance the NT Government is seeking. The argument put forward in the discussion paper that the NT is 'unique in its stage of economic development' and that it is 'essential that the national policies recognise the NT's unique economic position' is taken too far. The NT's current economic development path is not set in stone. The NT Government must take the lead in encouraging renewable energy technologies.

ECNT is concerned that there is no mention in the paper of the inequitable social and economic impacts that will result from climate change, particularly with regard to health impacts through greater exposure to mosquito-borne diseases, the risks of more destructive storm surges and cyclones and rising insurance premiums. Many of the worst effects of these impacts will be felt in rural and remote areas of the Territory and in particular by Aboriginal people. Indeed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2001 report stresses that in Australia

'poorer communities, including many indigenous settlements, are particularly vulnerable to climate-related hazards and stresses on health because they are often in exposed areas and have less adequate housing, health care, and other resources for adaptation' (Table TS-15 in IPCC 2001: p283). It is disappointing that the NT Government does not appear to have taken this into account when formulating its 'Principles' for the greenhouse strategy. We advise greater consultation with representatives of Aboriginal organisations and communities and an education campaign to highlight potential impacts upon indigenous people. Planning for climate change in remote communities needs to begin now.

The draft strategy states that using natural gas for electricity generation results in approximately 40% lower greenhouse gas emissions than coal. Furthermore it is stated that bringing gas onshore 'will assist from a global perspective in providing less greenhouse intensive fossil fuel, while growing the NT economy'. Yet there is no evidence provided that natural gas will directly substitute for coal and oil in global markets and therefore result in less greenhouse emissions. To ECNT this seems like little more than a post-facto justification of government decisions that have been made solely on economic grounds.

The draft strategy's projected increase in NT greenhouse gas emissions from current development proposals represents a 75% increase on 2000 emissions. The bulk of this increase is the result of gas-related development. ECNT in fact believes this to be a significant underestimation. Firstly, it is unclear which proposals are included in this projection. We understand that it may not include potential ammonia/urea plants, nor does it include the recently announced expansion of the McArthur River Mine and potentially an associated coal-fired power station. ECNT's estimated increase in emis-

sions projects additional emissions as high as 20.3 MT per annum above 2000 levels and this projection does not even include the planned Alcan mine expansion and the proposed Compass Mine project.

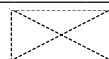
Savanna burning produced 47% of the NT's greenhouse emissions in 2000. Whilst ECNT certainly acknowledges the significance of this, it must be recognized that the proposed gas-based developments will reduce this percentage markedly in the next 5-10 years. So the focus of an NT Greenhouse Strategy should not be overly concentrated on fire management to the detriment of other emission sources. That said, the NT Government could demonstrate greater support for current fire management projects aimed at reducing savanna burning that are being conducted by CSIRO, Tropical Savannas CRC, the Land Councils and Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land.

Strategies to reduce greenhouse emissions will surely need to focus primarily on the increase caused by the proposed gas-based developments, with other important areas being savanna burning, the projected increase in stationary energy consumption (including household electricity use), transport and waste.
- Gary Scott

BARBARA JAMES

We were saddened to hear of the death of Barbara James last week. Barbara was one of the early members of the Environment Council which formed in the 70's and became ECNT in 1983.

Barbara will always be remembered for her passion and commitment to the natural as well as the built environment and for her continuing support of the many coordinators and volunteers of ECNT. She will be sadly missed, but gratefully remembered.



ECNT provides vision for future of Darwin Harbour

The final stage of round one of public consultations on the Plan of Management for Darwin Harbour and Catchment drew to a close in the first week of April. The Environment Centre submitted our vision for the future of Darwin Harbour for the Committee's consideration. In addition, ECNT was the only member of the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee to present at the public hearings on April 7th. These hearings were attended by several members of the public and some excellent submissions were received. Over coming months a first draft of the Plan will be completed and public comment will again be invited in August of this year.

The following is an edited version of our submission, the full document is available on the website: www.ecnt.org under Campaigns – Darwin Harbour.

This submission will outline the key principles the Environment Centre NT believes the PMDHC should encompass and how these could be implemented. We will then detail specific outcomes of the Plan that we would expect from a conservation perspective.

KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Prioritise community needs and values over short-term profit

Since European settlement in Darwin, the majority of land and sea use in the Harbour region has been determined by incremental demands. In the absence of binding long term planning, many of these have delivered short term financial benefits for a few investors or developers. But combined, these demands have cost the entire community an untold amount through cumulative loss of Harbour environments and amenity.

These demands have taken the form of things like:

- urban expansion such as housing, marinas and road building,
- large scale development proposals such as shipping infrastructure and the proposed LNG processing facility,
- extractive industries such as fishing, horticulture and minerals extraction.

Clearly, not every existing development within Darwin Harbour catchment has had a net negative impact. It is equally clear that several have and the community will continue to bear the costs of these well after the developers have spent their profits. Development and population expansion will continue but in order to avoid the mistakes of the past, priority must be given to reflecting the community's expectations for the long-term condition of the Harbour. Thorough cost benefit analysis considering not only financial but social and environmental factors must be undertaken for all proposals and reflected in final decisions.

Identification of community values and needs is part of what this initial phase of the PMDHC process should result in.

2. Long term commitment to whole of Harbour and catchment management

This means making a Plan for managing the entire Harbour and catchment that sees the Harbour as a continuous system in both time and space. This kind of management will recognise and set limits on the cumulative impacts that developments will have on the existing systems. These limits need to be set for all kinds of use within the Harbour. They need to specify acceptable impacts on not only the natural systems but the social, cultural and economic systems as well.

Whole of Harbour management will identify substantial areas of Harbour ecosystems for protection as well as areas that may be developed and the kinds of development that are acceptable. Considering the Harbour as a whole allows for potential cumulative impacts to be predicted and avoided if appropriate.

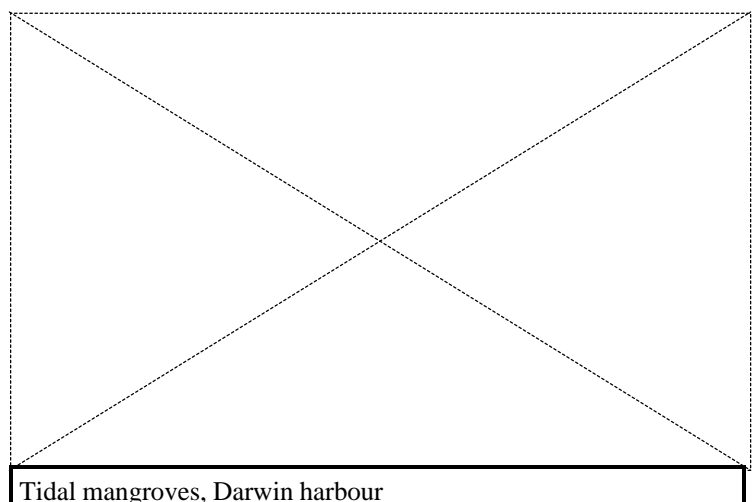
3. Regulatory Framework to ensure the Plan is implemented

This is of critical importance if this Plan is to have any practical relevance in the long term. Without legislative backing and a clear implementation strategy, this plan will prove to be of little relevance in actual Harbour management. This Plan cannot be simply another incorporated document under the NT Planning Scheme. The current review of the Planning Act and Scheme provides a perfect opportunity to ensure that not only the PMDHC but all regional plans developed under the NT Marine and Coastal Management Policy will be enforceable in law.

4. Commitment to Ecosystem Based Management (EBM), Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) and the Precautionary Principle

These principles are clearly reflected in the three points above, it is critical that they are truly integrated into this Plan and not merely paid lip service. In short:

- Ecosystem Based Management is about recognising the continuity of natural systems, planning to reflect this and ensuring that cumulative impacts are predicted and where appropriate avoided. EBM also recognises that human values play a key role in management decisions.



- Complying with Ecologically Sustainable Development principles means ensuring that decisions made by the current generation do not reduce the ability of future generations to meet their needs. ESD means decisions must ensure biodiversity conservation and the protection of ecosystems and also that irreversible environmental impacts must be avoided.
- Applying the Precautionary Principle means putting the burden of proof on the proponents of any proposal to show that it will not have a negative impact rather than using a lack of information about how much impact something will have as reason to go ahead regardless.

OUTCOMES FOR CONSERVATION

We believe adhering to all four of these points will make the PMDHC a valuable, strong and far-reaching document. Beyond being just a document this Plan will in fact become the blueprint for the future of Darwin Harbour, something that will give much-sought certainty to all sectors of the community.

From a conservation perspective, the following outcomes should be a result of this plan:

1. Protection

Comprehensive protection of significant ecosystems within the Harbour and Catchment is critical. We propose that National Park status be given to the remaining mangroves within Darwin Harbour including at least a 100m buffer beyond the most landward mangroves. A section of the water within Darwin Harbour should also be identified for management as a no-take Marine Protected Area. Protection from clearing should be given to all vegetation along watercourses throughout the catchment up to a minimum buffer of 500m either side of the banks. All rainforest patches and other significant habitat areas throughout the catchment must be protected from damage, again including a 500m buffer.

2. Appropriate developments pursued

Developments which fit within the principles outlined above

should be pursued under this Plan. This will mean questioning the current direction of development in the NT. A move away from old-style, fossil fuel dependent, short term or extractive industries is needed across the board if the NT is to embrace the future and develop industries that are sustainable at all three levels: economically, socially and environmentally. This Plan could provide the NT community with an opportunity to consider and pursue these kinds of avenues. Government funds of a similar scale to those we have seen given to support unsustainable developments to date could be channelled into developing some long term industries for the NT. Examples of suitable industries might include:

- renewable energy – both technology development and electricity generation or
- research – capitalising on the unique features of our tropical landscape to develop knowledge and application that will be relevant throughout the tropics across the globe.

Obviously further work needs to be done in this area and some of it will be outside the scope of the PMDHC but planning for development within the Harbour and its Catchment in this way would provide a useful checklist against which proposals could be assessed. For example: a marina estate which proposed the damming of Harbour arms would be in conflict with the community priorities as set out in the PMDHC and as such would be rejected before reaching the stage of environmental impact assessment.

Once again, we see this Plan as a crucial opportunity for the NT community to set the road map for the future of Darwin Harbour and we look forward to continuing our contribution to this process through our representation on the Advisory Committee as well as through further avenues for public input.

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

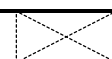
Daly River clearing update

Further to our article on landclearing approvals in the previous newsletter it is now confirmed that in February and March of this year the NT Government approved a massive 6300 hectares of tree clearing permits in the Douglas Daly area. The Environment Centre eventually received copies of all clearing approvals and was astounded to find that some developers had been granted a government bonus to clear more hectares than stated on the original application. A further application to clear another 600 hectares is still before government.

One application received approval to clear close to three thousand hectares, which from our estimation is close to 50% of the property. Clearing at this scale is similar to what is happening in parts of Queensland and a far cry from the Government's claim of supporting sustainable agricultural development.

Already around 10% of the Daly River Bioregion has been cleared and the Government plans to increase the rate of clearing approvals with further planned subdivision of 110 000 hectares of Douglas station. Clearing at these levels is destined to devastate the woodlands and fragile wetland ecology of the Daly region.

-Henry Boer
northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au



WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER

We the undersigned environment groups are opposed to the looming war against Iraq and deplore the loss of human life and the disastrous environmental and social impacts that would result from such a war.

We urge the Australian Government to avoid war and to pursue all possible avenues to bring about a diplomatic resolution with Iraq through the United Nations.

We support diplomacy, negotiation, international treaties and non-military options to resolve disputes and to promote human rights, environmental protection and sustainable societies.

The proposed first-strike war in Iraq is clearly inconsistent with this approach to foreign policy.

On a shared planet and with an increasingly interdependent world, we support cooperation ahead of conflict.

A major motivation for the proposed US-led war against Iraq is the perceived need to safeguard access to oil in the region. We believe that the best solution to the problem of oil dependency by highly industrialised countries is an increased reliance on clean, renewable and sustainable energy sources.

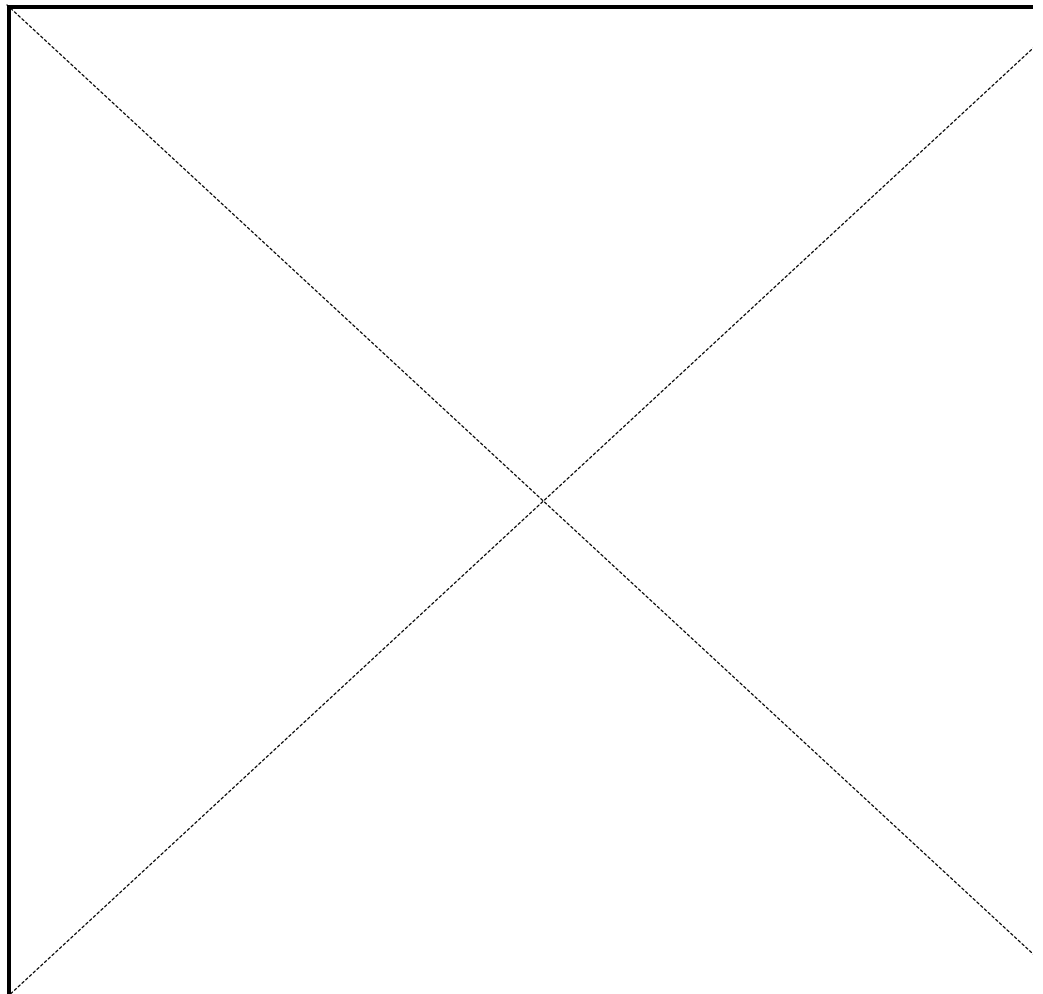
The destruction of the natural environment has itself become a tactic of war. Forests in Vietnam were chemically defoliated, and in 1991 the burning of oil wells in Kuwait during the Gulf War was both a political and military tactic. The Gulf War battlefields remain littered with discarded radioactive ordinance, resulting in continuing dangers to human and environmental health.

There are no ultimate winners in war – neither people, nations, nor the planetary ecosystem.

We maintain that national security would be better realised by working towards sustainable, meaningful lives for all, rather than increasing defence and security spending and engaging in armed conflicts.

Signed:

- Australian Conservation Foundation
- Cairns and the Far North Environment Centre
- Conservation Council of the south East Region and Canberra
- Conservation Council of Western Australia
- Environment Centre Northern Territory
- Environment Victoria
- Environs Kimberley
- Friends of the Earth Australia
- Greenpeace Australia Pacific
- National Parks Australia Council
- National Toxics Network
- Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales
- North Queensland Conservation Council
- Queensland Conservation Council
- The Wilderness Society



Bits and Pieces

ECNT 20 Years old

Do you know that the Environment Centre is twenty years old this year?

We are planning a BIRTHDAY EVENT (details still to be decided) in September. For this, we would love to know of any information about any matters the Environment Centre has been involved in – incidents from campaigns, photos, or any other details which might be of interest to our current members.

We will certainly be letting you know what shape our EVENT will take, but welcome all your suggestions.

We are also asking for interested people to join our planning committee. Please ring or email and leave us your details by the end of April.

ECNT receives NT Government grant

We were pleased to learn recently that our application to the NT Government's community benefit fund for new office furniture was successful. ECNT received almost \$3,000 to purchase a meeting table and chairs. We are having the table made locally out of recycled materials and or timber sourced from weed species. The chairs that we purchase will be made from recycled materials.

New database on environmentally friendly building supplies

The Australian Conservation Foundation, which has recently opened its 'green building' in Melbourne- a fantastic showcase of environmental design, has put together a website with information on how to source environmentally friendly building supplies and fittings. If you're looking at renovating or buying new furniture, carpets etc have a look at <http://www.acfonline.org.au/asp/pages/document.asp?idDoc=1189>

Creative Help Wanted

Anyone with skills and/or interest in helping to think up a slogan and/or design a poster about not littering and reducing plastic waste at Mindl markets, please contact Anthea Duquemin asap on 8948 1036

NT Government rejects best model for Container Deposit Legislation.

NT Environment Minister Chris Burns announced in March that the NT Government had rejected the Keep Australia beautiful container deposit legislation model. The Government seems to have

bought the arguments being run by the beverage and hotels industries that the legislation would increase the cost of beverages. A 20th March media release from the Environment Minister stated that "Some estimates pointed to the model also resulting in a \$3-5 increase in the cost of a carton of beer ... Now is not the time to be increasing the cost of living for Territory households".

ECNT is very disappointed that the NT Government has swallowed this bogus industry argument. One only has to look at the prices of beverages in South Australia where CDL has been operating for many years to see that there has been very little price effect. The price increases that Minister Burns is talking about are based on estimates provided by the Hotels industry. Predictably the NT Chamber of Commerce welcomed the announcement. Independent MLA Gerry Wood responded to the government announcement saying "the government has shown itself to be gutless when standing up to the threats of vested interests and making a decision for the people".

ECNT urges any members who are upset about this decision by Government to contact their local member of Parliament and let them know what you think of their decision.

-Mark Wakeham and Kirsten Blair

Foot in mouth disease

Forest campaigners from The Wilderness Society in Tasmania were pretty surprised by comments from John Gay, the head of Gunns Ltd, Tasmania's biggest wood-chipper recently.

Edited from Nine's Sunday Program on 9 Feb, 2003

GRAHAM DAVIS How do you feel about protected species dying for your business?

JOHN GAY: Well, there's too many of them and we need to keep them at a reasonable level.

GRAHAM DAVIS: It is acceptable practice to knock off all the wildlife in the surrounding areas, so that you can put your tree seedlings in?

JOHN GAY: Yes.

Environment Centre Fundraiser

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE
At (the NEW) Deckchair Cinema
Wharf precinct

Tuesday 29 April 2003

Food from 6.30pm Tofu or beef burgers
Film 7.30pm

Tickets : \$12, \$10 members

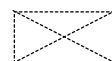
Tickets in advance from ECNT 8981 1984

Mike Moore goes where nobody else dares and does it with fearless wit. Bowling for Columbine is a Molotov cocktail of interviews, cartoons, spiky humour, news footage and confrontational journalism into American's love of arms.

Winner of the Special Jury Prize at Cannes and the Academy Award for Best Documentary.

Volunteers to help on the night needed selling tickets, cooking & serving food, or serving coffee & cake. **PLEASE CONTACT ME!! I NEED YOUR HELP!!**

Di Koser 8985 3691 or leave a message 8981 1984



DATES TO KEEP in APRIL & MAY

**Tuesday 29 April: ECNT Fundraiser at the Deckchair Cinema: Bowling for Columbine
6.30pm Food (tofu or steak burgers) 7.30 Bowling for Columbine(M)**

April 28—30 April: Landcare Conference in Darwin

May 22: Biodiversity Day

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