

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT
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June—July 2003

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

Beverage Industry wins on CDL, Community and Environment lose.

We were extremely disappointed to learn this month that the NT Labor Government appears to have no commitment to the introduction of Container Deposit Legislation (CDL) in the NT. CDL is the legislation that currently allows consumers in South Australia to redeem a deposit on empty drink containers (cans, bottles etc) and is a proven way to reduce litter and increase recycling. The Government has been considering different models of such a scheme for introduction here in the Territory but recently decided to abandon another pre-election promise and instead pursue a waste management scheme supported by the very industry that is opposed to CDL. The Government cited likely cost increases as the reason for not supporting the introduction of CDL despite the fact that experience in South Australia has demonstrated no such cost effect.

In recent months we have seen intense lobbying from the beverage industry to have the Container Deposit Legislation proposal knocked on the head and now it appears that lobbying has paid off. Instead of announcing CDL in the May sitting of NT Parliament, Environment Minister Chris Burns announced an 'anti-litter strategy'. This strategy will be funded by the beverage industry to the tune of half a million dollars and is largely a re-hashing of the old Territory Anti Litter Committee, a scheme which funded anti-litter education and the tidy towns program. While these initiatives are valuable in their own way, the Minister can not pretend that they are a substitute for CDL.

Aside from the outcome itself, which is extremely disappointing, this decision represents yet another back down on a pre-election commitment from NT Labor.

Before the 2001 NT Election, ECNT asked all parties a range of questions. This was the one relating to CDL:

ECNT: In Government will your party introduce container deposit legislation for PET, glass and aluminium?
NT Labor: *Labor supports the move towards container deposit legislation, but needs a process of community consultation before introducing legislation.*

The report from that community consultation was handed to Minister Kon Vatskalis in 2002 and the results showed resounding support for the introduction of CDL. (ECNT has a copy of this report, if you are interested in reading it, please contact the office.)

Despite the fact that over 90% of respondents to the community consultation were in favour of introducing CDL, the Government has chosen a waste management plan which has not been subject to community consultation. This response by the NT Government begs the question who the government is governing for and listening to - the people of the NT or corporate lobby groups? ECNT will continue to press for the introduction of CDL in the NT - perhaps as the next election approaches the NT Government will become more sensitive to community opinion on the issue.

-Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

ECNT Turns 20!

It's hard to believe but the Environment Centre has been campaigning in the Territory for 20 years.

To celebrate some of those historic campaigns we'll be throwing a Big Birthday Bash in September.

We're looking for good organisers to join our Birthday Bash Committee as well as people to help out in various other ways.

If you have the time to spare we would love to hear from you. It'll be great fun and a fantastic way to support your favourite environment group.

Call us on 8981 1984 for more information or to sign up to help

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**INSERT: Climate Action
Postcard—please post!**

Queensland – An end to clearing?

On 22nd May 2003, the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments announced an agreement to end large scale treeclearing in Queensland. If implemented in its current form this agreement signals the biggest conservation outcome for Australia's woodlands in the last two decades. The average rate of treeclearing in Queensland over the last few years was 568 000 hectares- or three football fields every five minutes.

The agreement between the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments contained the provision to phase out broad scale clearing in Queensland

by 2006 and an adjustment package of \$150 million for property owners affected by the controls. The NT remains one of the last jurisdictions in Australia without effective controls to prevent large scale tree clearing. Treeclearing in the NT has increased dramatically over the last decade in areas such as the Litchfield Shire and the Daly. There is every chance that the Northern Territory could become another Queensland if real controls are not put in place to eliminate large scale treeclearing. Otherwise there is the risk that all those Queensland bulldozers will look to cross the border and clear the NT's woodlands!

- Henry Boer, Landclearing Campaigner

News on the Nuclear front

NT Labor rejects nuclear dump for NT

At its recent annual conference, NT Labor formally rejected any Federal Government plans to locate a national radioactive waste dump in the NT. This news comes after Dave Tollner, CLP Federal Member for the NT seat of Solomon suggested the CLP would support such an idea. NT opposition leader Denis Burke has stated publicly that the CLP would not support such a move but as yet there is no formal position on the issue from the CLP.

Ranger mine on the way out?

Recent Senate Estimates Committee meetings in Canberra revealed some interesting news about the Ranger uranium mine. Both the Supervising Scientist and ERA stated that Ranger pit 3 would run out in 2009 and that no further uranium ore in pit 3 had been found. This means that ERA may well conclude mining at Ranger in 2009 unless further reserves are discovered. With traditional owners staunchly opposing mining at Jabiluka we could well have a nuclear-free Kakadu in 6 or 7 years.

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

Win for Rapid Creek!

Vegetation corridor to be returned to public ownership and management

Members will be pleased to hear that the NT Government has committed to acquiring land in the Rapid Creek corridor. Local residents, the Rapid Creek Landcare Group, Jingili and Millner Residents Action Group and Planning Action Network and ECNT have fought hard to get this special piece of Darwin into public ownership.

After a series of setbacks things are looking optimistic. At a well attended public meeting in March on the Red Footbridge Matthew Bonson, MLA, said the NT Government would acquire all the private land in the 100 metre creek corridor between McMillans Road and Trower Road. This will be handed to the Darwin City Council together with sufficient resources to rehabilitate the area. They are focusing on the Jingili side at this stage but hope to have the whole section secured by the end of the year.

This is a significant win to protect both public parklands and an important urban ecosystem. Well done to all involved.

-Lesley Alford



Daly River: southern mistakes in the Northern Territory!

The NT Government is in a very fortunate position of being able to protect the rivers and woodlands of northern Australia. They have every chance of avoiding the huge development mistakes which have scarred the rivers and woodlands in southern Australia. Mistakes on a continental scale, such as the Murray Darling, have cost the environment dearly. Billions of public dollars will have to be spent just to keep the Murray River flowing for the next ten years.

Unfortunately, the NT Government has not heard the message from southern Australia. In April the NT Government handed out another 720 hectares of treeclearing permits in the Daly Basin. This year alone, the NT Government has handed out over 7000 hectares of treeclearing permits in the Daly Basin. This type of piecemeal decision making is the same recipe that led to the problems in other states.

The NT Government is releasing five reports into the environmental flows of the Daly River. Four reports assessed the environmental flow requirements of the Daly for wetlands, the Pig Nosed Turtle, riparian vegetation and Vallisneria nana. A final summary report was then prepared by the Office of the Supervising Scientist. This final report recommends extraction of up to 20% of surface and groundwater flows from the River except when rates of flow drop below critical levels.

It appears the final recommendations are consistent with the arbitrary limits set by NT Government Policy on water extraction for all rivers in the NT. We are yet to

know whether such a high limit of extraction will cause the River to stop flowing in extremely dry years. These reports will be used as the basis for a Water Resource Plan for the Daly Basin, the draft of which is currently being developed by the NT Government.

In May, Dr Naomi Rea from the Faculty of Indigenous Research and Education at the NTU held a seminar on environmental flows

“The NT Government must recognise that large scale agriculture schemes are not sustainable in the Northern Territory.”

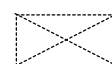
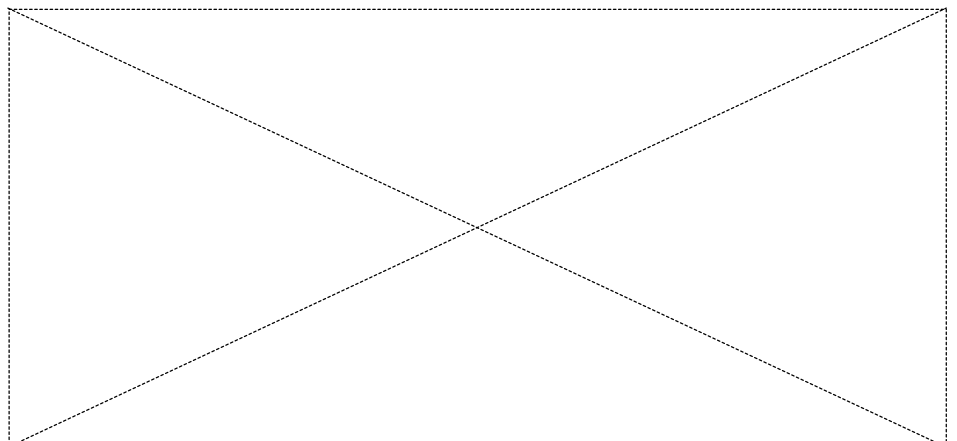
requirements for Vallisneria nana, an aquatic plant that is habitat for a number of species including the Pig Nosed Turtle. Dr Rea also outlined current planning processes and identified a serious gap between Government development aspirations and environmental planning requirements. From the scientific evidence presented it is clear that the NT Government trajectory will cause long term irreversible harm to the fragile aquatic ecosystems of the Daly

The NT Government must recognise that large scale agriculture schemes are not sustainable in the Northern Territory. The Gov-

ernment has committed to a land use plan for the Daly region that incorporates controls on tree-clearing and retention of less than 1/3 of the woodlands. This type of planning was developed in southern Australia long after vast areas of woodlands had been removed and the rivers were degraded.

The Northern Territory is different. Outmoded planning models designed for southern Australia just won't work in the Daly Basin. Most of the Daly Basin is covered in woodlands and the rivers still run clean and clear through the dry season. The NT Government needs to invest in catchment wide planning models designed for intact tropical savannah landscapes. These new planning tools should be built together with the Traditional Owners, communities, the rec fishers and existing industries of the Daly Basin.

Over the next few months the ECNT will be taking the message to the public through stalls, meetings and information distribution. On the 7th and 8th June we will be hosting an information stall at the Merepen Arts Festival in Naiyu Community on the Daly River. If you would like to get involved in helping with stalls and information distribution please email me at: northernwoodlands@octa4.net.au
-Henry Boer



Mining a river?

The proposed McArthur River mine expansion

In February this year MIM announced their intention to expand their McArthur River lead and zinc mining operations. The McArthur River mine is located in the gulf country of the Northern Territory around 60 kilometres from the township of Borroloola. ECNT attended a briefing on the expansion in February, and on learning more about the project, prioritised visiting the Gulf area to inspect the mine and talk with local community members to hear their views on the expansion. Mark and Gary have just returned from the Gulf and filed this report.

Background: The McArthur River mine is operated by MIM Holdings Ltd, an Australian company which is currently being taken over by the Swiss company X-Strata. The mine opened in 1995 despite a strong and vocal campaign by the Environment Centre NT and the Australian Conservation Foundation. The mine received significant financial assistance from both the Commonwealth and NT Governments including funding of major

infrastructure, tax and royalty concessions. The Environmental Impact Assessment process was also fast-tracked, with the entire process taking less than 6 months. Much of the documentation of the EIS process was deemed commercial-in-confidence and not made publicly available.

Proposed expansion: MIM Holdings announced their intention to expand their McArthur River Mine lead/zinc/silver operations on the 11th February 2003. Already a huge mine, MIM plan to quadruple the amount of material processed each year. The mine is currently an underground operation with the orebody directly underneath the McArthur River. If the expansion proceeds MIM plan to dig an open cut pit in the current location of the McArthur River, and re-route the river over a section of about 5 kilometres. This would require constructing a huge channel, building a 30-35 metre high wall around the open cut pit, and building a weir on one of the rivers that flows into the McArthur River (the Glyde River) to provide a large source of water for minerals processing.

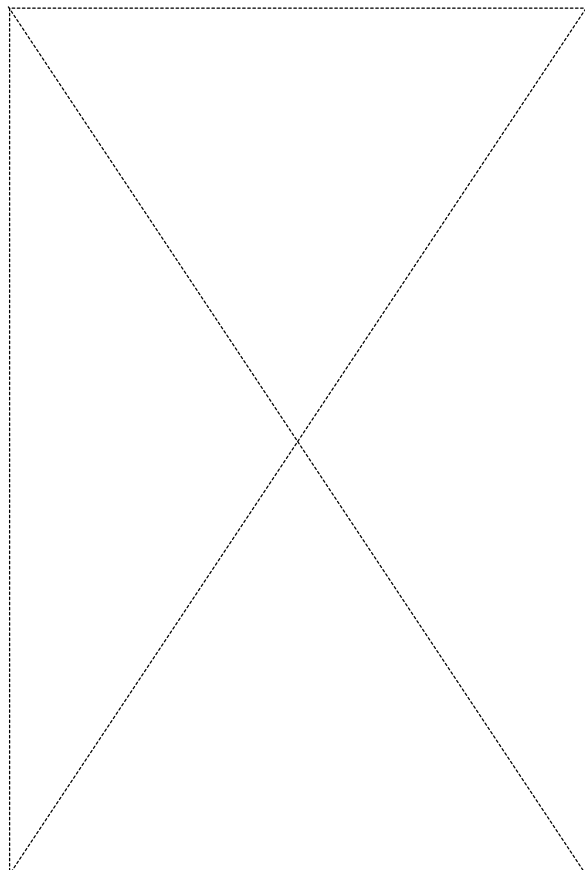
indicated that they would need to build a 350 Mw power station on site.

Environmental issues: The major environmental impacts of the proposed expansion are likely to include:

- **McArthur River:** long-term impacts on the McArthur River associated with the re-routing of the river and construction of artificial watercourses. The McArthur River has high biodiversity, recreation and cultural values. The proposal has triggered the EPBC Act with a listed threatened species, the Freshwater Sawfish (*Pristis Microdon*), and listed migratory species known to inhabit the river. MIM told ECNT that at this stage the Company is looking at leaving the mine pit at the conclusion of mining, and possibly flooding the pit. Therefore MIM is proposing to permanently alter the flow and form of the river. The impact of the expansion on the wetlands surrounding and downstream of the mine is also likely to be significant. The McArthur River floods every year. Two years ago, when ECNT revealed that the mine was dumping dirty water into the McArthur River, our concerns were dismissed by claims that the river was 35 kilometres wide and therefore that any pollution would be diluted. It is unclear whether their proposed construction will be capable of excluding a 35 kilometre wide river from an open-cut pit in the current location of the riverbed. The project is also likely to have major impacts on groundwater systems in the areas and groundwater recharge of surface waterways. It is also unclear at this stage what the likely impacts will be on the downstream seagrass beds that sustain local dugong populations and on commercial prawn and barramundi fisheries that operate in the Gulf. Dugong populations in the area are managed and harvested by local traditional owners who have expressed concerns in the past over the impacts of fishing and the mine on the health of dugong populations. The river is a renowned recreational fishery and has been the site of a major re-

Since the McArthur River mine opened in 1995 lead prices have fallen considerably and the operation posted a loss in 2001-2002. MIM believes that by pursuing the open-cut operation they will reduce production costs and increase the available mineral reserves. As a result of poor lead prices MIM is proposing to only produce zinc metal, leaving all of the lead and silver in the tailings dam.

MIM also intend to build a leaching plant on site to process the ore rather than export bulk concentrate. To do this they would need a new very large source of energy. They are investigating the possibilities of using natural gas from the proposed PNG pipeline, but given the likelihood that this gas will not come onshore in the near term, they are more likely to build a large-scale coal-fired power station on site. MIM's Notice of Intent (NoI) for the project



source dispute between recreational and commercial fishers in recent years. The dispute abated in 2002 with the exclusion of commercial fishers from the river by the NT Government.

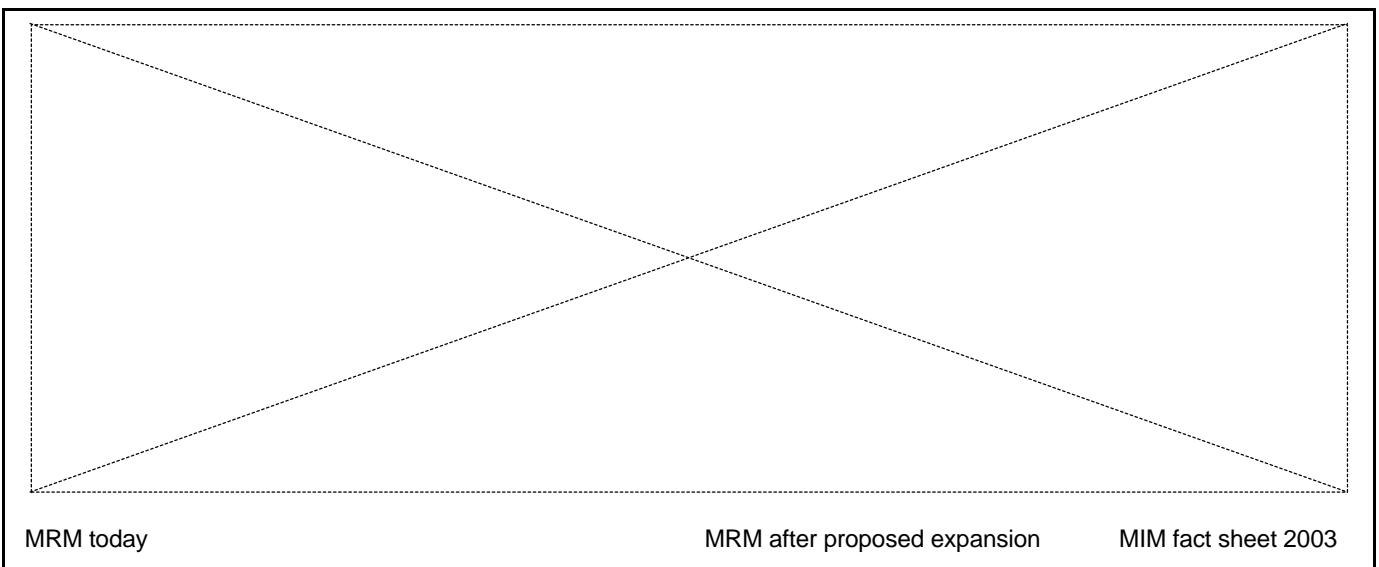
- Glyde River:** MIM is planning to use a new method for processing the zinc known as the Albion Process. This method requires extremely large quantities of both water and energy. MIM is planning to build a 20-25 metre high weir on the Glyde River to create a 15-20 km long reservoir to provide the necessary water for processing. The Glyde River flows into the McArthur River downstream of the mine. The Glyde River system

time frame are slim.

- Mine-site impacts:** The mine will have a much larger footprint than the current operation and will exacerbate water management and waste disposal problems. The tailings dam will need to be expanded considerably and will be more toxic given that MIM will now not be extracting and exporting the lead from the mine. A 100 metre high waste rock heap of an estimated 800 million tonnes would be created. The open cut pit in the current location of the McArthur River bed would be 420 m deep, 1600 m long by 1400 m wide and cover an area of around 200 ha (Draft Environmental Guidelines Part A).

at McArthur River and the company failed to negotiate an agreement or royalties following development of the project. While Traditional Owners have a Native Title claim over the mine site, they still have no formal veto rights over the new project. On meeting with many of the traditional owners in Borroloola it was clear that there were many concerns about the possible impacts of the project. Earlier this year, Harry Lansen, a senior traditional owner for the mine site opposed the expansion on ABC television's Stateline program saying "It is no good. I will be sick if they cut the place, because my spirit is there. All my songs are across the river...I don't want to see that thing happen in the McArthur River."

Other stakeholders views of the ex-



is in unusually good condition as the rocky river bank areas have been unsuitable for grazing. There have been few weed or feral animal incursions into the river system. MIM's plans would transform the river from a wild system with high biodiversity values into a 15-20 km long artificial reservoir.

- CO2 emissions:** The processing plant for the expanded mine is hugely energy intensive. The Notice of Intent for the project identifies MIM's intention to build a 350 MW power-station to fuel the processing plant (the current power plant produces 22 MW). This exceeds the total electricity consumption of the entire NT household and industrial sector excluding Alcan's Gove alumina refinery and would greatly increase the NT's greenhouse gas emissions. MIM is yet to decide if it will pursue a gas-fired or coal-fired power-station, however the chances of the PNG gas fields being exploited within the project's

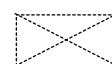
Status of the project: MIM lodged a Notice of Intent with the NT Government who determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was required under NT legislation. Guidelines for the EIS have been finalised and the Company has commenced work on the EIS. The project was also referred to the Commonwealth and triggered the EPBC Act via the threatened species and migratory species triggers. MIM is also preparing a feasibility statement to be submitted to the Board at the end of 2003. The NT Government has welcomed the project and talked up its economic benefits. The Chief Minister told NT Parliament that "The opportunities for Territorians to get highly skilled, highly paid jobs associated with these expansions are tangible- it is great!". A government committee has been set up to fast-track and facilitate development of the project. MIM has indicated that if the project receives approvals it will commence in 2004 and will be in full production by 2007.

Traditional owners views on the expansion: Traditional owners had no right of veto over the original mining proposal

Expansion: Other stakeholders likely to be concerned about the project include amateur fishers, local residents and potentially the prawn trawlers operating in the Gulf.

ECNT is extremely concerned about the likely environmental and social impacts should this project proceed. From our early analysis it looks to be one of the most destructive mining proposals seen in northern Australia. We are currently talking with traditional owners and other environment groups to determine our response to the proposal. If the project continues to proceed as proposed however it would have devastating impacts on the McArthur and Glyde rivers and potentially the fisheries in these rivers and downstream in the Gulf, massively increase the NT's greenhouse gas emissions and leave a lasting legacy of waste on the mine site.

-Mark Wakeham, Gary Scott and Gill Ainsworth



POD and the magic beans

Someone said to me that they loved going into POD because it felt happy. I smiled cause I spend time in there each week and despite the long faces when we run out of pies people are generally happy in that little corner of NTU... and with good reason.

why we do what we do

For many of us, the *stupormarket* is a depressing microcosm of the corporate age. Endless choice is packaged by a few big companies, vegetables have no season and are force fed poison, undervalued staff stand endlessly scanning... it all feels disconnected, strictly controlled and pretty joyless. We ask: if food is what we all need for sustenance shouldn't it be sustaining? Because if we transform the way we approach food, its production and supply and consumption, we transform the way we live.

And the good folk at POD are doing just that.

They are celebrating what food should be about: connection with the planet [through sustainable farming], connection with each other [through building communities that reject hierarchies and 'the big boss' and find new ways of sharing knowledge, skills and a more joyful way of being] and connection with our own bodies [because as

remarkable as they are, they're clearly unable to deal with the increasing amount of chemical toxins in most non 'organic' food].

And POD has just celebrated its first birthday. This means for over a year a group of people who were inspired to escape the stupor-market and build something better have been growing the NT's first ever organic food co-op. And every single person who has been a part of POD [as a volunteer or a shopper] is themselves a magic seed. Most of us wandered in not knowing much about how co-ops work but together we're learning and we can see it growing.

You too can enjoy shopping somewhere community owned and controlled, you can get great organic food without the crazy packaging and you can be a part of celebrating life and building something precious with us.

- Ally Richmond

To find out more call 8946 7736 or drop in to Planet Organic Darwin. We're open 10am-3pm tues, wed, thurs and 10am-2pm sat [you'll find us below the Student Union/ opposite the basketball courts at the NTU].

Trading Australia Away?

The Australian Government is currently considering signing a legally binding agreement with the United States which would remove all trade barriers between the two countries. The dangers of such an agreement include the potential deterioration of strong social policies that US negotiators see as barriers to trade. This means things like the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, controls on foreign investment within Australia and public control over public services like health, education and water are on the negotiating table.

A similar deal, the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has seen US companies such as Phillips Petroleum and US Metalclad (which builds hazardous waste facilities) suing Canadian, Mexican and US Governments for enforcing environmental legislation that affects their financial interests.

This information is taken from the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) info sheet "Trading Australia Away?" For more information and ideas about what you can do visit the AFTINET website: www.aftinet.org.au

- Kirsten Blair and Mark Wakeham

Bits and Pieces

Bowled Over by Columbine!

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who supported our recent Deckchair Cinema film night – Bowling for Columbine.

The evening was a great success with well over 200 tickets being sold. Burgers and cakes went down a treat and some great prizes were won in the raffle.

The next film night at the Deckchair is planned for October. We hope you'll join us once again for more celluloid entertainment under the stars.

Climate Action Postcard

In this edition of Environment you'll find a groovy postcard which we encourage you to send in to CANA. If you have already sent one, please pass it on to a friend. Thanks!

World Environment Day - 5th June

Conservation in the Amazon slideshow. Antony Paggart has spent the last ten years working as a conservationist in South America's Amazon rainforest. Founder of the Quistacocha Zoo in Peru, he will be presenting his work on conservation and rehabilitation of animals via a slideshow and Channel 9 documentary, Antony's Ark. Gold coin donation. NT Museum and Art Gallery, 5.30pm to 6.30pm, June 5th.

Australian Marine Conservation Society update

AMCS is dedicated to protecting the health and vitality of Australia's coasts and seas. AMCS staff are working for sustainable fishing, protection and recovery for threatened habitats and species and for the establishment of Sea Sanctuaries: areas where all marine life is protected. To find out more check out their fantastic new website at: www.amcs.org.au

Stop Plastic Rubbish at Mindil Beach – poster competition

ECNT and Mindil Beach Markets are running a poster competition to kick start a new campaign around reducing plastic rubbish at the markets and on the beach. Entrants will soon be invited to design a poster for display at Mindil Beach Markets that will help us help others to keep our beaches free from plastic and other waste.

NT based ECNT members will receive more info about the competition in the mail soon. If you would like to become involved in this campaign, please contact the ECNT office.

Good Paper Available!

Most of our readers will be aware that at the Environment Centre we mostly make use of paper that has already been used on one side, to make best use of our natural resources and to cut down on land fill. We obtain our one sided A4 paper from a variety of sources, including the Bureau of Meteorology.

Tim Buckley from the Bureau (8920 3825) has told me he has lots of other paper of various sizes (particularly larger sizes) which he would love to give to any school or other groups who need it. Any of our readers who have connection with a school or play group that might use this paper, please give him a ring.

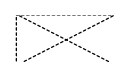
ECNT also has the only **truly 100% recycled office paper** available in Darwin. We just got a new batch delivered it is "Evolve office white" and is selling for \$9.50 per ream or \$8.50 for 10 reams or more. Give us a call to order or drop in and pick some up.

Fundraiser for POD

Tuesday 8th July, at the Deckchair Cinema. Bollywood extravaganza. Indian feast, music and film. "Saathyia" is a classic Bollywood film with amazing sets, songs and scenery. Come at 6pm for food. Film starts at 7.30pm.

Australia's Wildlife Collection in Darwin

Birds and bats, frogs and reptiles from the Australian National Wildlife Collection have left their dark Canberra vaults and are visiting Darwin. The wildlife is on a year-long tour of Australia and will be on display FREE in the Discovery Centre at the Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory until the end of June.



DATES TO KEEP IN JUNE + JULY

5th June – World Environment Day. Conservation in the Amazon slide show. NT Museum and Art Gallery, 5.30pm to 6.30pm.

17th June – Amnesty International and Melaleuca Refugee Centre fundraiser: "The Quiet American" at the Deckchair Cinema. Food from 6.30, film starts at 7.30.

8th July – Fundraiser for POD food co-op: Bollywood extravaganza. Indian feast, music and film. "Saathyia" is a classic Bollywood film with amazing sets and scenery. Come at 6pm for food, film starts at 7.30 pm.

11th July – World Population Day

27th July – National Tree Day

September – ECNT 20th Birthday Bash – helpers needed! Please ring if you can help.

The views expressed in *EnvironmeNT* are not necessarily those of the Environment Centre NT management committee
Please recycle this newsletter: leave it in a waiting room or other appropriate place for someone else to read

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