

# ENVIRONMENT **NT**

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT  
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May /June 2004

## NT Budget: Environment debt gets bigger

**The Environment Centre of the NT says the Territory budget and subsequent advertising material contradict the government's claim to be 'balancing development and the environment'.**

There were small but welcome increases in some parts of the environment budget, such as grants for community environment groups (including, for the first time ever, a grant from the NT government to ECNT of \$15,000), and for the Cool Communities project (\$150,000). Environment Minister Marion Scrymgour is to be congratulated for her efforts in securing this funding.

However, the overall outcome for the environment across the whole of government was almost stagnant and this meant the big environment problems of the NT would continue to grow.

As an example of the government's lack of balance on the environment, it is giving the Department of Infrastructure Planning and the Environment \$53 million for a single road upgrade in the Litchfield National Park, an amount which is about double the total NT government expenditure on national park management. [And almost ten times the total annual

budget for the NT Office of Environment and Heritage.]

What's the use of flash tourist roads if the tourist destinations are infested with weeds and feral animals, the water is contaminated and native species are disappearing?

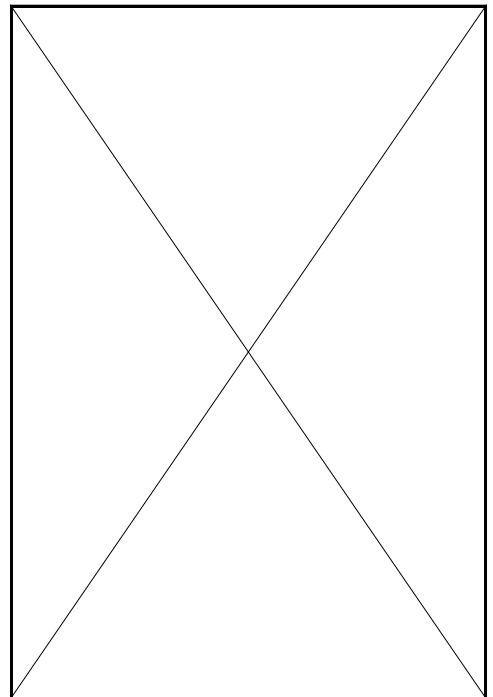
Imagine if these figures were reversed. We could actually get the NT's huge weed problem under control; curb our ever-increasing greenhouse gas emissions; and conduct proper environmental assessments and strategic planning so that unique places like the Daly River, Darwin Harbour and Glyde Point are not destroyed in the name of short term development.

In its subsequent full page ads in the NT News announcing the main budget outcomes, not a single reference was made to the environment.

Has the government conducted polling showing that Territorians don't care about the environment? Or is the government wanting to ignore the environment in favour of its aggressive development agenda?

Either way, the Territory's already huge environmental debt is set to grow. The government needs to remember

that lots of people care about the environment and it risks losing support in key marginal seats if it continues to be so heavily biased in favour of short term development over the environment.



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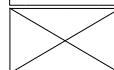
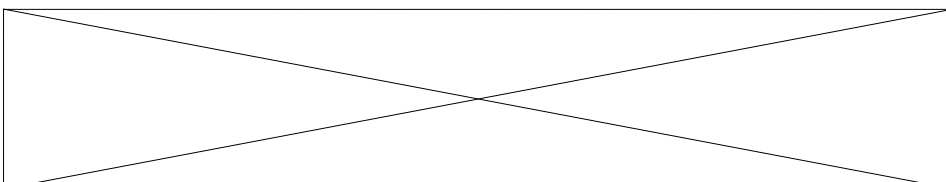
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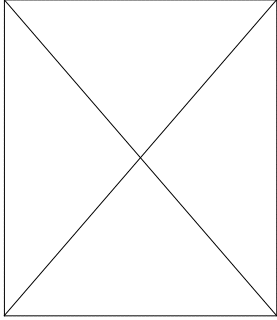
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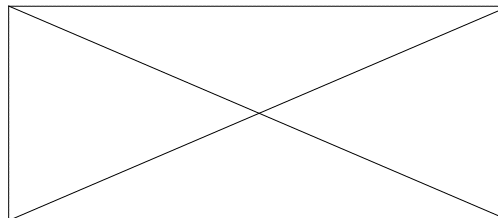
# Can the Daly Plan deliver?



After six months of a rushed and poorly resourced planning process we are still no closer to reaching any acceptable outcomes for the Daly River catchment. The NT Government has fallen far short of producing the high quality scientific information required to build a framework for conservation

of the Daly's significant natural values. Despite the serious flaws with the process the NT Government is preparing a draft Integrated Land-Use Plan to be released for public consultation by the end of June 2004. The ECNT has submitted a set of preliminary recommendations to the Community Reference Group (CRG), the Expert Reference Group (ERG) and the NT Government to overcome a number of fundamental problems. These recommendations must be endorsed by the NT Government if they are to retain the confidence of conservation groups in the planning process.

- **The** current timeframe is too short to produce a high quality plan that addresses all the key issues related to land and water management and biodiversity conservation. The NT Government should allow 3-5 years to develop a regional plan for the Daly and decisions about future land and water use should not be made until the plan is completed.
- **There** remain significant threats from further large scale clearing and massive increases in extraction of surface and groundwater. The Government must continue with a 3-5 year moratorium on landclearing and agricultural subdivisions and immediately introduce a moratorium on water licences.
- **There** is a paucity of high quality science in a number of key areas including, aquatic biota, geomorphology, water quality, and estuarine ecosystems. Planning decisions that could potentially degrade large areas of the catchment cannot be made in the absence of the high quality, independent science. Funding should be made available to undertake this research from the \$12 million available under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.
- **There** are serious concerns from all stakeholders regarding the quality of the information guiding the preparation of the Water Allocation Plan. The assessments and modelling underpinning the draft Plan suffers from major discrepancies. The entire water allocation planning process requires an urgent audit by an independent national scientific organisation.



Government should assess the adequacy of current legislation including: native vegetation management, water resources and biodiversity conservation, and provide recommendations on possible legislative reform.

## Moratorium on water licenses.

Conservation groups are calling for a moratorium on the issuing of new water licences in the Daly River catchment. According to figures released to the Community Reference Group there are 25 surface and groundwater licences – totalling a massive 32 billion litres - that are awaiting approval. This is a staggering increase on current levels of licensed water use. There is nothing to stop the Department approving these licences before a Water Allocation Plan has been completed – an appalling flaw of the current NT Water Act.

- **A** robust and statutory natural resource management (NRM) model must underpin the development of any regional plan. So far the planning process has not received any information on possible NRM models. The CRG, ERG and NT Government should seek the best independent expert advice from around Australia on possible models for integrated NRM.
- **There** are significant impacts from land clearing and existing land uses, such as agriculture and pastoralism in the Daly River catchment. Research work to date has shown evidence of increased sedimentation, altered nutrient levels, infestation of exotic species and decline in native species. The NT Government should begin a comprehensive assessment of existing land uses on the Daly River catchment. Money should be committed from the Natural Heritage Trust to manage existing problems.
- **Current** NT legislation is incapable of delivering integrated NRM and protection of natural values across the Daly River catchment. The NT

## What you can do for the Daly!

### PUBLIC HEARINGS in DARWIN

The Daly River Community Reference Group, which ECNT sits on, will be holding public hearings in Darwin on 28/29 June. Please come along and have your say! Details will be advertised in NT News, or call ECNT on 8981 1984



# Darwin Waterfront Development

The Darwin Waterfront Development Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be publicly available from Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May. You have 6 weeks to comment. The EIA document will be available at [www.waterfront.nt.gov.au](http://www.waterfront.nt.gov.au) and hardcopies are available at an exorbitant price: \$100!  
Things to consider:

The public announcement of timelines for the Darwin Waterfront Development revealed that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process would be completed **prior** to the development plans being finalised and made public.

The public is being asked to comment on the EIA for the development without actually seeing what the development entails – it is a backwards approach.

The Wharf Precinct is a massive development and its environmental impacts should not be taken lightly. In Darwin we are fortunate to have the Harbour's unique marine and coastal

environment right on our doorstep, and the community recognises that it needs strong protection.

The public must be able to see what the development entails in order to make informed comment on the Environmental Impact Assessment of the development. The public wants to ensure the Harbour's natural and cultural heritage values, and aesthetic, recreational and amenity values are protected, and they want to have a say on how this occurs.

The public also needs to be able to see and comment on the detail of the project to ensure that it uses the best available design and technology to create a tropics-friendly built environment based on solar design and recycling principles which minimise waste production, energy use and water consumption.

ECNT will continue to lobby for a proper EIA process.

## Federal election focus: The wisdom of Solomon

If you live anywhere in Darwin or Palmerston, congratulations! You live in Australia's most marginal Federal electorate: Solomon.

The seat of Solomon is currently held for the Country Liberal Party (CLP) by David Tollner. At the election due later this year it will be contested by a range of candidates including Jim Davidson for the Labor Party (ALP). Both the Greens and the Democrats will be standing candidates but they are yet to be preselected. It is likely that several independents will also run.

At the last Federal election in 2001, the final vote after preferences were allocated resulted in a win to the CLP over the ALP by a margin of 50.09% to 49.91%. That means if a net total of just 50 people out of a total electorate of about 54,000 change their vote at the coming Federal election, the seat changes hands. They don't get much closer than that!

As the Federal election approaches, the environment is finally starting to be talked about by the major parties. They realise that, even if they don't like it, the public cares about the environment. At a recent major speech Prime Minister Howard acknowledged the importance of the environment. Apparently Mr Howard is about to unveil a ten year vision for Australia's environment.

In this context it is unfortunate that many Federal government decisions, or non-decisions, have been very negative for the environment. These range from repudiation of the Kyoto climate change protocol and huge handouts to the fossil fuel industry, to support for the clearfelling of old growth forests and rainforests, to the withdrawal of funding from non-government environment organisations across Australia.

Now the Labor Party under new leader Mark Latham is taking up the environment issue as it too recognises the potential impact of the environment vote at the election.

Mr Latham has announced that Labor will, amongst other things, sign the Kyoto protocol; increase renewable energy targets; and

phase out" clearfelling of old growth forests.

Labor will also oppose the development of new uranium mines, including Jabiluka, in the vicinity of Kakadu National Park and increase protection of Australia's coastal environments.

While many of the ALP's new announcements are short on detail, or clearly do not go far enough, they do at least establish a starting point for discussion and debate with the public. Many Coalition and ALP policies clearly have relevance to the NT, but often only at a very general level.

So what then of the Northern Territory and its environment? What do the candidates for **Solomon** offer electors for the NT environment? Will either major party candidate speak up for the protection of the NT's precious rivers and coastal environments, which are clearly a Commonwealth responsibility as well as a Territory government one?

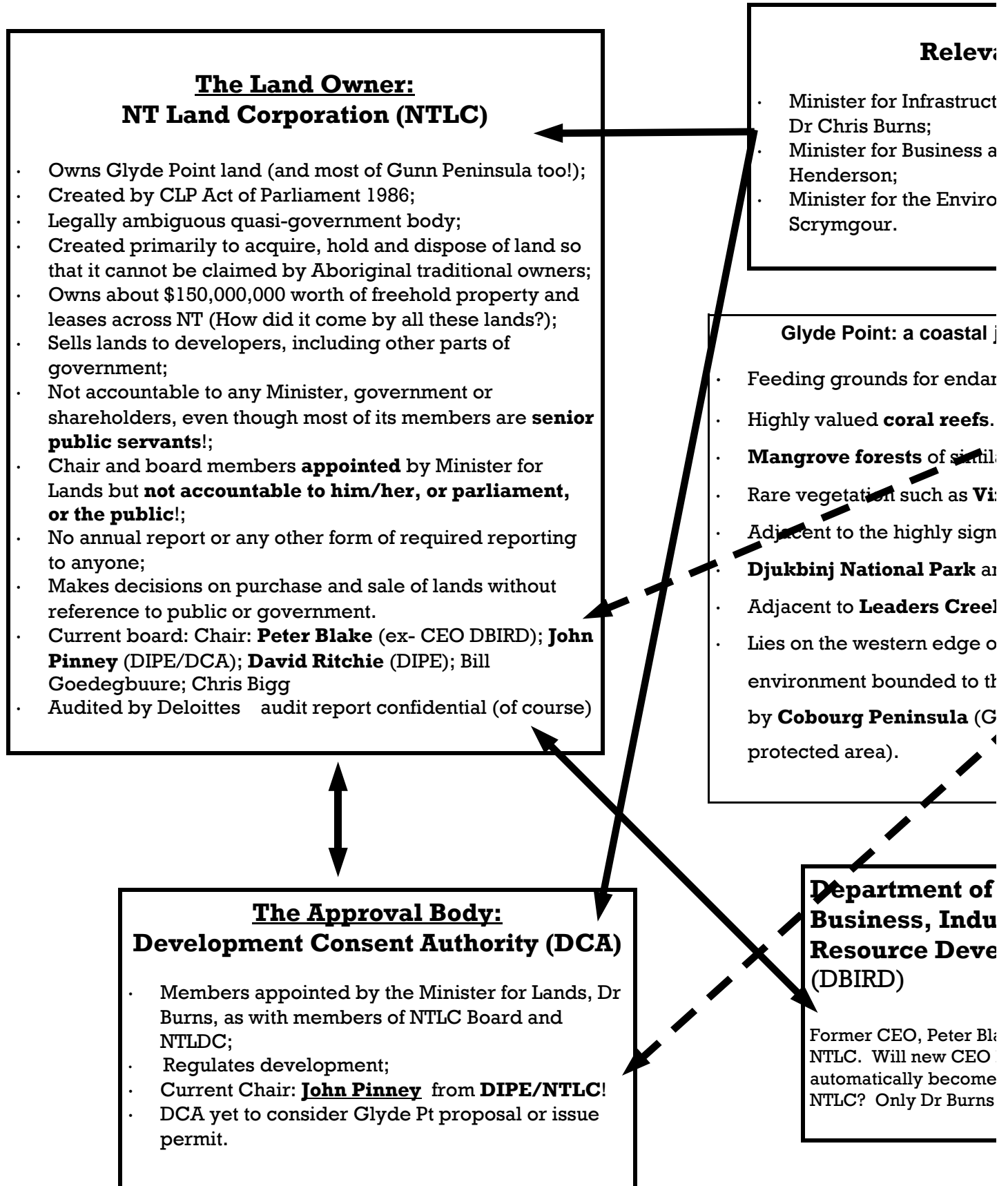
Will they support the protection of the Daly River from broadacre landclearing and intensive irrigation? Will they support the protection of Glyde Point from hairbrained industrial development plans? Will they oppose the hugely damaging expansion of the McArthur River mine in the Gulf? And what about the massive projected increase in the NT's greenhouse gas emissions caused by the fossil fuel-led industrialisation of the Top End? Or the need to make Darwin a more tropic-friendly and sustainable city and to protect Darwin Harbour?

In our next edition we will give the candidates an opportunity to state what their policies are on various NT environmental issues and what they will do if elected to help protect the environment of the NT. And then it's over to you, voters. Stay tuned!



# The proposed Glyde Point industrial de

The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment (DIPE) is proposing a huge  
of Environment, a unit within DIPE, is now conducting an environmental impact assessment  
in Glyde Point, giving rise to concerns that this



**The Proponent:**  
**Department of Infrastructure,  
Planning and Environment (DIPE)**

- Formal proponent for Glyde Point industrial estate development for the purposes of EIS assessment.
- CEO: **Barry Chambers\***
- Senior bureaucrat: **John Pinney**
- Senior bureaucrat: **David Ritchie**

\*NOTE: Mr Chambers has just retired. It remains to be seen if his replacement Ms Sarah Butterworth automatically becomes CEO of the Northern Territory Land Development Corporation (see below).

**The Developer:**  
**Northern Territory Land Development  
Corporation (NTLDC)**

- Ownership of Glyde Pt to be transferred to NTLDC when development is approved;
- Created by Act of Parliament in 2003;
- Composition of the Corporation (one person!):  
*"The Corporation consists of a Chief Executive Officer within the meaning of the Public Sector Employment and Management Act.*
- CEO: **Barry Chambers (DIPE)\***
- Appointed by Lands Minister (Dr Burns)

\*See above re Mr Chamber's recent resignation.

**Some questions...for starters!**

- Why, after three years of Labor government, is the CLP s shadowy NT Land Corporation still in existence, hoarding and disposing of what is supposed to be public land?
- What declarations of conflict of interest have been registered at the meetings of any/all these interwoven bodies? What requirements are there for same?
- Why are plans cooked up years ago being pushed through as if nothing has changed in the meantime?
- How much is it going to cost the public to create this industrial estate and who is going to use it? DIPE says it is still working out the cost, and wants the approval to proceed even if no companies have said they would locate there. This is planning 1980's style!

**In coming months, ECNT will be embarking on a major campaign to protect Glyde Point, including a public meeting in July. Please stay tuned. If you want more info about the significance of Glyde Pt, call us.**

# Tiwi Islands forest clearing update

The continued clearing of the beautiful old growth native forests of the Tiwi Islands is a matter of continuing concern to the ECNT. This joint project between the Tiwi Island Land Council and Silvatech Pty Ltd involves the clearing of up to 25,000 ha of native forest for the establishment of plantations of the exotic *Acacia mangium* for woodchip exports. We are advised that:

- Approx 3,200 ha being cleared this year.
- Logs being exported to Asia.
- Fertilizers and pesticides being applied, including: Roundup; Star rain; Brush off.
- Mission grass invasions of cleared forest land.
- Fire breaks are being sprayed and very hot burns in adjacent forest including rainforest.
- *Acacia mangium* itself is becoming a weed and is invading surrounding forest and rainforest, especially following fires.
- Little monitoring occurring.
- Locals concerned especially about reduction in width of buffers (down from 250m to less than 100m).
- Port facility near completion: 7,000 tonnes of logs per barge.

**ECNT does not support this form of forestry entailing the broadscale clearfelling of native forest ecosystems and the introduction of an exotic potential weed species requiring fertilizers and pesticides which may not produce any long term benefit to the community on the Tiwi Islands.**

**ECNT wants:**

**An independent scientific monitoring team to visit the Tiwi Islands to assess the impacts of the project to date and its compliance with environmental conditions and to identify plans or practices requiring change. The report of such monitoring must be made public.**

## Trans-territory pipeline

Corporate giants Woodside and Alcan are planning to build a gas pipeline all the way across the Top End to supply gas to the Alcan alumina refinery at Gove. Here's the latest:

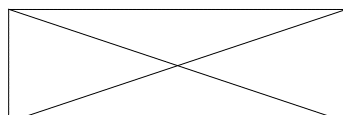
- Pipeline 940 kilometres long, with a corridor 30m wide. The pipeline will also require permanent access roads and powered compressor stations.
- Permanent infrastructure corridor with long term impacts and management issues including access for people, feral animals and weeds to otherwise remote and inaccessible areas.
- Cost: ~\$500,000,000
- 80% of route is Aboriginal land; huge consultation process currently underway.
- Currently subject to joint NT/Commonwealth government EIS process: decision on approval expected April 2005
- Pipeline corridor passes through or close to many very sensitive environments including rainforests; the massive Arafura wetland (or 'swamp') region; sandstone escarpment country; and many rivers (including the Daly).
- Lots of uncertainty surrounds almost all aspects of this project including its economic viability.

**ECNT does not support this pipeline, which will further transform large swathes of the Top End into a heavy industry-scarred landscape with many serious long term and cumulative impacts. This industrialisation is being developed on the run and in the absence of any strategic sustainability planning.**

**ECNT wants:**

1. **Before the Alcan expansion or pipeline is approved by government, work needs to be done on investigating alternative, less destructive means of delivering gas or other energy sources to the Gove refinery;**
2. **If government approves the pipeline, every effort must be made to ensure it avoids important places, including Arafura wetlands, and rainforests, and does not add to the already serious weeds, fire and feral animal problems of the NT.**

**Fundamentally, the NT government needs to conduct an open strategic review of the fossil fuel related industrialization of the NT with the aim of reducing environmental impacts and maximising long term community benefits (and not just short term corporate profits).**



# Bits and Pieces

## Goodbye Lenin! ECNT fundraiser

The rain threatened, but didn't actually fall and we had a modest crowd (about 80 people) who ate well and enjoyed the film. Peter introduced himself and gave a short talk with mention of some of our environmental issues. We had some fantastic helpers, including Thea and Brendan, Mark and Eni (hope that is correct spelling!) Julia, Lesley and her Dad, and Chris.

Although we didn't make a huge profit (a modest \$210) it was an enjoyable night. Thanks to everyone!

## No GM cotton in the Kimberley

Aboriginal leaders in the Kimberley have said "No" to a genetically modified cotton industry for Broome. This move came with news that Monsanto would suspend investment in Roundup Ready canola in 2004.

Western Australia and Tasmania have both banned GM crops, Victoria and South Australia both have a moratorium in place.

***WANTED! Computer Whizz! To help maintain ECNT's computer system. Call Gill on 8981 1984***

## Global growth of carbon dioxide still rising

CSIRO has measured above average growth in carbon dioxide levels in the global atmosphere, despite global attempts to reduce these emissions. The source of the increase is most likely from the burning of fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas.

Measurements at Cape Grim in Tasmania, Cape Ferguson in Queensland, sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island, Mawson in Antarctica, and the South Pole, show that carbon dioxide over the last two years has increased at near-record levels.

The last time growth rates of this magnitude were observed was in 1998 when a huge input of carbon dioxide, attributed by CSIRO to the 1997-98 Indonesian wildfires, caused global levels to jump alarmingly.

Compared to the trend over the last 10 years, when carbon dioxide has increased in the atmosphere by 13.3 billion tonnes per year, both 2002 and 2003 have seen above average global growth rates at 18.7 and 17.1 billion tonnes. Only 1998 had a higher growth rate over the decade of 23 billion tonnes.

## Other ECNT projects

In addition to the matters set out in preceding pages, ECNT is also involved in two other major pieces of work.

### EPA submission

ECNT is about to send to the government our submission on why the NT needs an Environmental Protection Authority (EPA).

Former WA Environmental Defenders Office solicitor Lee McIntosh has helped write the submission on behalf of six environmental organisations.

The ACF has assisted in this project through a \$3000 grant.

### Parks Masterplan submission

ECNT stalwart Dr Gary Scott is writing ECNT's submission to the Parks and Conservation Masterplan process.

This submission will set out how the NT can greatly improve its conservation efforts on lands and marine environments throughout the NT. It is being written on behalf of five environmental groups.

DIPE is assisting with this submission through a \$5000 grant.

## ECNT/AMCS stalls co-ordinator

**Tashi has commenced work as the ECNT's and AMCS's stalls coordinator.**

**She is running stalls at Mindil market, at selected festivals, and soon at Parap market. Further highly motivated people are welcome.**

**We aim to lift the profile of ECNT/AMCS and our campaigns and sign up lots of new members. Call us if you want to help too.**



## For Your Calendar:

- 5 June: Workshop, Tour and Coolmob Birthday Party! Saturday 5 June at Parap Primary School**  
**2.30 pm** Self Audit Workshop – making the big savings on your energy and transport costs –  
**5.15 pm** BBQ, Picnic and Birthday Cake at East Point playground
- 11 June:** EPA Public Hearing in Darwin (other hearings in other towns during May/June)  
**12 June :** Palmerston Festival  
**28/29 June:** public hearings for Daly CRG in Darwin **and... TBA:** Glyde Point public meeting

### **ECNT BOOKKEEPER REQUIRED!**

**ECNT is looking for a freelance bookkeeper to spend a few hours each week managing our financial transactions.**

**We need a meticulous person with experience in the following:**

- Reconciling monthly bank statements · Maintaining up to date debtors and creditors ledgers · Payroll for several people · BAS statements · Calculating and recording group tax · Profit and Loss · Month End / Financial Year End reporting · MYOB 13 or similar You will also be required to come into the office each week to pick up and drop off invoices, payments etc and liaise with our external accountant during annual financial audits.

**Call Gill on 8981 1984**

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

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