

# ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT (ECNT)  
PO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801 Ph (08) 8981 1984 Fax (08) 8941 0387  
Unit 3, 98 Woods St, Darwin. E-mail: ecnt@octa4.net.au  
www.ecnt.org

March/ April 2005

## COMMONWEALTH FUNDING CUTS will harm NT environment for decades

The April 8 announcement by Federal Environment Minister Ian Campbell that State and Territory-based peak environmental organisations will have their funding slashed spells bad news for the NT environment and future generations.

Ever since he took office last year Senator Campbell has made reassuring noises about the continuation of the bipartisan 'GVEHO' grants program in relation to peak environment groups. Then out of the blue on a Friday at 3 o'clock in the afternoon he announced that the criteria for grants has been rewritten so as to make it almost impossible for peak environment groups like ECNT to gain funding for the crucial work they do on behalf of the community and environment.

This comes on top of the announcement two years ago that the Arid Lands Environment Centre in Alice Springs would have its Commonwealth funding slashed.

Under the new funding guidelines announced without any consultation by Minister Campbell, ECNT risks losing all or most of the annual grant it has previously received from the Commonwealth. Even the grant for the current financial year, which has not been received although the year is almost over, may be withdrawn or slashed. This amounts to about 20% of ECNT's total annual budget.

Its not as if we are seeking the kind of funding that the Commonwealth routinely hands out to the corporate sector and business lobby groups – which runs to hundreds of millions of dollars per annum.

The total Australia-wide GVEHO grant scheme was only \$1 million which is less than a drop in the ocean compared to what corporate organisations receive. For comparison, in just one case last year the Commonwealth gave \$137 million to one of the worlds biggest and most profitable mining companies, Rio Tinto (Comalco), for a new refinery.

Since 1983 ECNT has provided many services to the community, industry and government on a shoestring budget. On behalf of the community we are invited to sit on many government committees and provide independent and expert advice to innumerable government and Parliamentary inquiries.

We have pressured all governments of all political persuasions to improve their environmental performance, in accordance with community wishes.

Our advice and advocacy on the environment has prevented costly environmental damage, has improved developments by pointing out environmental flaws, and has helped ensure that previous environmental damage is recognized and addressed.

**No-one else fills the vital role we play.** If ECNT is forced to close or substantially reduce its activities, there will be no winners, not even amongst those who might appear to gain from weak environmental protection standards. In the long run everyone will lose out, and future generations will pay a high cost.

ECNT will be contacting the Minister to request that he reconsiders this decision in the best interests of the whole community.

ECNT has also called on all State and Territory Environment Ministers to pressure the Federal Environment Minister to reconsider his unwarranted decision to cut funding for State and Territory environment organisations.

The 60-70% of Australians who routinely rate the environment as one of the most important issues in Australia deserve better than this.

### WE NEED YOUR HELP

**If you are as concerned as we are about this decision, please contact Ian Campbell's office:  
Senator Ian Campbell: Minister for the Environment and Heritage**

**Party:** Liberal Party of Australia  
**Parliament Contact:**

Tel: (02) 6277 7640

Fax: (02) 6273 6101

Email: [senator.ian.campbell@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.ian.campbell@aph.gov.au)

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# Wadeye to Gove Gas Pipeline

The Trans-Territory Pipeline (TTP) is proposed to run 940 kilometres across the Top End from Wadeye to Gove, crossing a number of high conservation value environments. Its purpose is to enable the Alcan alumina refinery to switch from fuel oil to gas.

Construction of the expanded refinery has already begun. The expansion, however, does not depend upon the supply of gas from the pipeline, as Alcan will continue to burn fuel oil at Gove should the pipeline not proceed.

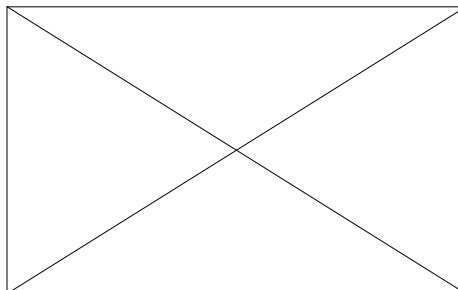
ECNT has recently made a detailed submission on the TTP Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We considered it to be a deeply flawed document that left far too many questions unanswered and failed to demonstrate that the project was the best option for supplying gas to Gove, or of net benefit to the Territory.

Some of the major impacts which ECNT and/or the EIS have identified include:

- The pipeline will require a permanent corridor 30 metres wide, and a trench up to 2 metres deep, to be driven through forests and woodlands, rivers, wetlands and escarpment country. Construction will involve almost 3000 hectares of native vegetation clearing.
- The pipeline route will provide permanent access for vehicles, people, pollutants, weeds, and feral animals into remote and relatively pristine environments in such regions as the south Daly catchment, Arnhem Land and the Arafura Swamp. The negative environmental, social and cultural impacts of this new access are likely to be serious and permanent.
- There is a 40 kilometre section of the proposed pipeline route

through Arnhem Land that remains unsurveyed due to the social and cultural concerns of local Aboriginal people.

- The pipeline trench will cut across, or in some cases under, 16 major permanent rivers and streams and across at least nine wetlands of regional or national significance, and many other creeks, ponds, marshes, springs and floodplains.
- There are major risks during construction and post-construction of erosion and consequent pollution (sedimentation) of these freshwater systems, with potentially serious impacts on fish.
- During construction, studies show that thousands of native reptiles and mammals are likely to be trapped in the pipeline trench and die.



ECNT called on both the NT and the Commonwealth Governments, both of which are involved in the project assessment, to put a hold on the process pending a strategic review of the pipeline project, including less damaging alternatives, and pending the completion by Woodside/Alcan of a much more thorough and detailed EIS.

We have also written to the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, Senator Ian Campbell, pointing out the inadequate and piecemeal way in which the environmental assessment processes for the TTP, the Blacktip Gas Project and the Alcan Refinery expansion have been handled. The

separate assessments carried out for each project, with no analysis of their combined impacts, may turn out to be a breach of the Commonwealth's obligations under the Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act).

Meanwhile, the project proponents have announced the consortium that will build, own and operate the pipeline. It will be led by Australian Pipeline Trust and ANZ Infrastructure Services, though whether the Northern Land Council will have its sought after 40 percent stake in the investment has not yet been finalised.

It will be up to this consortium to develop and finalise all outstanding environmental protection, social impact and cultural heritage plans for the project. The Commonwealth has also recently granted 'Major Project Facilitation' status for both the Blacktip and the TTP projects, a move which is designed to speed up the approvals process even further.

On 23 March, special legislation was introduced into the NT Parliament, partly to enable the pipeline consortium to construct the pipeline across waterways with direct written approval from the NT Minister of Lands and Planning. ECNT is making enquiries as to whether this hastily introduced Bill – the "TTP and Blacktip Gas Projects (Special Provisions) Act" – effectively means that usual environmental protection procedures under the *Water Act* are being sidelined.

The rush to gasify the Top End is therefore continuing apace. ECNT believes it is time to step back and consider the long-term environmental and social consequences of taking such a rapid and poorly assessed industrialisation path.

ECNT's submission on the TTP Environmental Impact Statement is downloadable from [www.ecnt.org](http://www.ecnt.org) in the 'What's New' section.



# TOAD ACTION!

FrogWatch (North), the Darwin-based organization that is taking on the cane toad as the toad's frontline rings the cities of Darwin and Palmerston, believes the answer is not to fence them out – but bring them in and trap them.

“The past 12 months have seen quite a revolution in our thinking on cane toad management,” says long time FrogWatch (North) joint-coordinator, Graeme Sawyer.

“When we took on the fight we thought it would mainly rely on ‘ToadBuster’ or ‘ToadMuster’ nights, when volunteers would go out on ‘seek and destroy’ missions.

“But the success of trapping at three trial sites has made it clear that attracting and trapping toads is less labour-intensive and probably a more effective way of minimising toad populations.”

FrogWatch has designed, field-tested and has for sale a portable toad trap – a wire cage with an overhead light and a one way door. The light attracts insects which attracts toads which head-but their way through the transparent fingers of the door and are trapped.

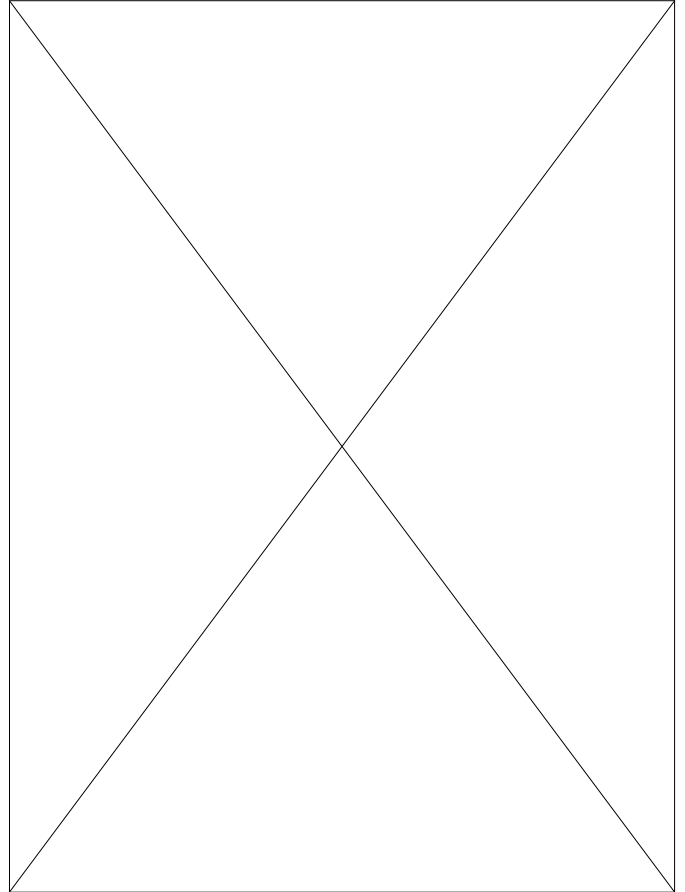
Graeme says that as long as the trap contains water and shade, the trap can be left for several days without concern for the captured toad's well being.

“That means we can put in large permanent traps at lagoons and in key wetland areas and they can be easily managed by local volunteers.”

The cane toad, originally released in Queensland in 1935 in an effort to control the cane (grey backed) beetle, has been steadily spreading across the country since.

“In Kakadu the devastation to native wildlife from

the toad invasion has been so self evident that the Territory and Commonwealth Governments have funded an ‘Island Ark’ rescue, transferring cap-



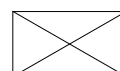
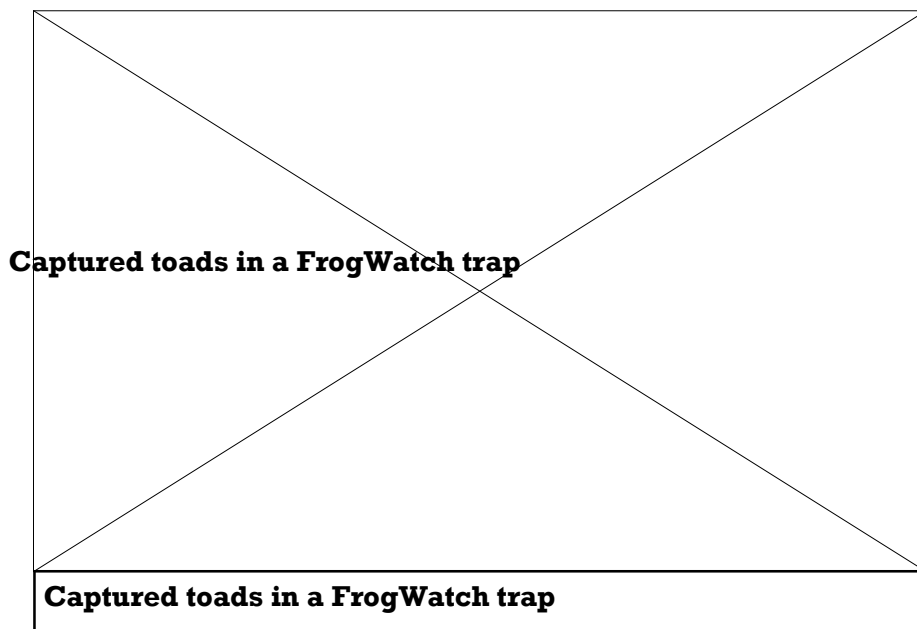
tured quolls and goannas to offshore islands for their survival.

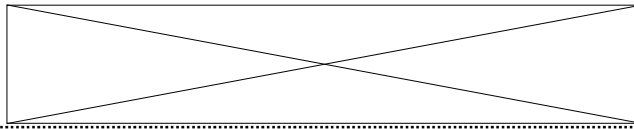
But FrogWatch declared its intention to control the toad on the mainland, hoping to create sanctuaries for effected wildlife in areas where there were

enough people to defeat the toad's seemingly unstoppable advance.

In February the Territory Government agreed to fund the ‘ToadBusting’ campaign – but its continuation is reliant on an assessment of success in mid 2006.

“We've got 18 months to show that we can make a difference – and by ‘we’ I mean everybody. We'll measure our success on the numbers of surviving goannas, frill-necks, dragons, frogs and other native species in the western Top End – relative to species survival where nothing has been done,” says Graeme.





## HELP US GIVE 10 MORE AUDITS!

**COOLmob have funding to provide another 15 home energy audits and we have to spend the money NOW!**

**So, help us help you and your friends save hundreds of dollars and greenhouse gas emissions!**

**Energy audits cost only \$10 (free to concession card holders), but are worth \$100 and can save households hundreds of dollars off their power and fuel bills!**

**Have you or someone you know been complaining about power bills or could you or a friend do with a hand making a home and lifestyle more energy efficient? A COOLmob home energy audit is the answer! Call 8981 2532 or join up on**

## TIPS TO REDUCE YOUR FUEL BILL AND CUT YOUR GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

In the Top End, transport is often responsible for half (or more) of a household's greenhouse gas emissions and is mainly from car usage. Reducing your car usage by walking, cycling or using public transport are obvious ways to reduce your greenhouse gas emissions. In addition:

☺ Less cars on the road also means less road congestion, and air and noise pollution.

☺ Walking and cycling are not only great for the environment, but they are also great ways to keep (or get) fit. Thirty minutes of exercise a day is said to reduce the risk of heart disease as well as decreasing your blood pressure, cholesterol level and can help control your weight.

☺ Cycling and walking can also have benefits to your mental health by lifting your mood, producing feelings of well being as well as reducing tension and anxiety.

☺ Learn where Darwin bus routes are and what the timetable is. Darwin buses are generally on time and can provide you with an opportunity to relax before or after work and catch up on some reading.

However, if you do not feel that you have an option but to drive your car, there are ways to make driving more efficient:

- ☞ If you have a choice of cars, choose the most fuel efficient (ie, not the diesel 4WD!)
- ☞ Diesel produces more greenhouse gases than petrol, which in turn produces more than gas

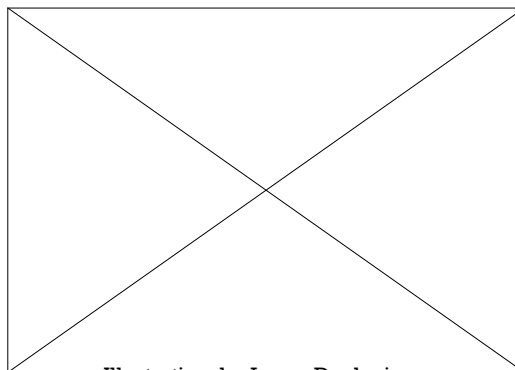


Illustration by James Dunlevie:  
(firehorse\_1966@hotmail.com)

☞ Car pool to work or school and enjoy the company and reduction in fuel costs and car wear and tear

☞ Reduce the amount you need to drive by being organised about what errands you need to run and do them all in the one trip

☞ Drive in high gear for increased efficiency

☞ Keep your driving as smooth as possible by avoiding stop/start driving

☞ Avoid idling your car. If you are stopped or held up for a significant amount of time, turn your car off- you will save more fuel than the burst of fuel required to start the car again

☞ Driving at 90 km/h is much more efficient than driving at 110 km/h which uses 25% more fuel

☞ Roof racks and spoilers create aerodynamic drag on your car and increase fuel consumption, sometimes by up to 20%. So, remove these

accessories when they are not required

☞ Well tuned vehicles can reduce greenhouse gases by 5%, so get your car serviced regularly

☞ Inflate your tyres to the highest pressure recommended by the manufacturer to increase fuel efficiency and extend the life of your tyres

☞ If driving at under 80 km/h use your car air conditioning sparingly. If you are driving over 80 km/h, it is more efficient to have your windows closed and the air conditioning on, as open windows create significant aerodynamic drag at high speeds

☞ Reduce the amount of weight your car carries. Each additional 50 kg can increase fuel use by 2%

☞ Buying a car? Fuel efficient cars not only save you money in fuel costs but produce less greenhouse gases as well. Cars running on gas produce the least greenhouse gases and petrol cars produce less than cars running on diesel.

To help choose a vehicle see:

<http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/fuelguide/index.html>

For more information, please contact:  
Thea Bray, COOLmob Project Manager  
T: 8981 2532

[coolcdarwin@iinet.net.au](mailto:coolcdarwin@iinet.net.au)

### COOLmob SIGN UP A FRIEND COMPETITION

Congratulations to Renae Moore, the winner of the COOLmob sign up a friend competition. Renae has won a year's membership to Australian Geographic Society, including subscription to the Australian Geographic Journal. Congratulations Renae!

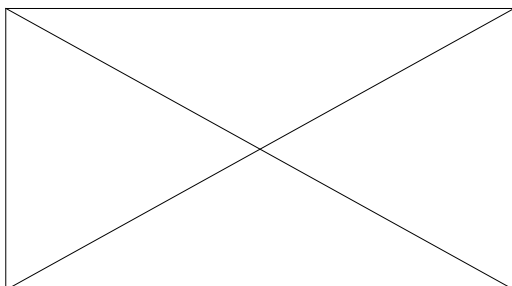


Illustration by James Dunlevie  
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# WA company may breach environmental policy in Tiwi woodchip takeover

The imminent takeover by WA company Great Southern Plantations (GSP) of a large scale native forestry operation on the Tiwi Islands risks breaching GSP's stated environmental principles.

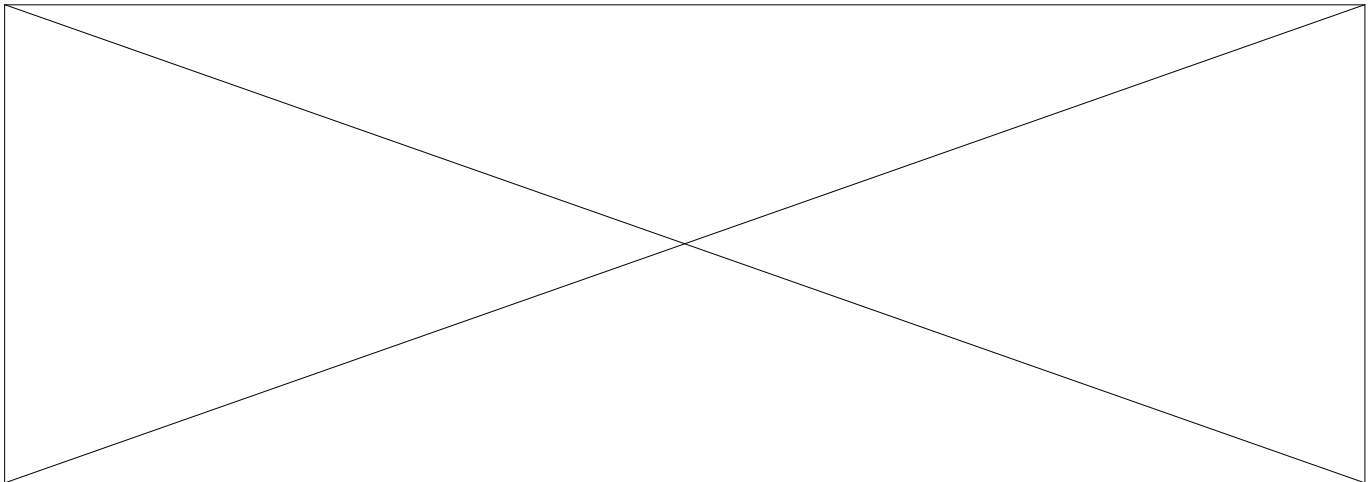
GSP shareholders recently voted on raising capital for the proposed takeover of Sylvatech Ltd, despite a devaluing of the company due to damage caused by Cyclone Ingrid. Sylvatech is the company currently responsible for clearing up to 25,000 hectares of native forest on the Tiwi Islands. The clearing, which has been approved by the Tiwi Land Council and NT and Federal Governments, is being done to establish large monoculture plantations of an exotic wattle, *Acacia mangium*, for woodchips for the Asian market.

GSP's website gives the impression that GSP does not involve itself with native forest clearing or logging, but this would no longer be true if the takeover went ahead. The GSP site states:

about the whole project, including the implications of this corporate takeover and the potential impacts of the proposed expansion. There have been many failed forestry projects in the NT and this one could well fail too, leaving the local Indigenous people in a very exposed situation with a large area of degraded country needing costly rehabilitation.

Establishing large-scale monocultures of exotic species grown as short rotation commodity crops brings many risks including the likely use of large quantities of toxic chemicals and fertilisers which can harm local species and pollute waterways and ultimately impact on the health of local communities. Exotic species also have a bad habit of becoming weeds in the NT.

The ECNT has urged GSP shareholders, who we believe are genuine in their concern for the environment and Indigenous communities, to insist that the company drop the proposed expansion.



**“Good for the environment, good for Australia... [your investment] is also good for the environment, with plantation forestry providing a sustainable alternative to the harvesting of Australia's precious native forests... Great Southern's plantations do not involve the clearfelling of old growth native forest.”**

What is even more worrying is that GSP seems just as committed as Sylvatech to the four-fold expansion of the project, clearing up to 100,000 hectares of forest—almost 20% of Melville Island. Such an outcome would be devastating to the Island's environment and would expose the Indigenous community to substantial social and economic risks.

We believe that the traditional owners and Indigenous communities need much more information

## **FUNDRAISERS:**

### **Dates for your calendar!**

**19 May**—Marine Conservation Society Fundraiser, Deckchair Cinema **DEEP BLUE(PG)**,

### **COMING**

**16 June**—ECNT fundraiser **MICROSOSMOS and The Hermits of Borroloola**  
Deckchair Cinema

Details next newsletter



# DEEP BLUE (PG)– Come on a journey into liquid space.

## Marine Conservation Society Fundraiser

**Deckchair Cinema**

**food and tickets from 6.30pm**

**Film from 7.30pm**

**“A stunning reminder of how beautiful & fragile our planet can be.”**

### COME AND JOIN US

- Earth is a blue planet.
- 97% of all water is contained by the oceans.
- 80% of all life exists under the ocean surface. No other habitat on Earth supports so much life.

The oceans are the last frontier of our planet – we know more about the surface of the moon than we do about the depths of our oceans.

What *Microcosmos* did for creepy crawlies and *Travelling Birds* did for our feathered friends, *Deep Blue* does for ocean dwellers. Shot on a \$5 million budget over three years with 20 separate camera crews and across an enormous range of locations off all of the world's continents – including the Maldives, French Polynesia, Spain, Belize, Japan and Australia. *Deep Blue* is a must-see exploration of the ocean and a truly powerful reminder of the marine wonders that a few can ever experience first-hand.

#### **Deep Blue Creatures- Fact files on the movie stars**

##### **Whale Shark**

These gentle giants are the largest fish in the world with the largest recorded whale shark was 13.5 metres and can weigh 15 tonne. Whale sharks are filter feeders; they swim slowly through the water sucking up plankton, squid and small fish and expelling excess water through the gills. Estimated 100 year life span. In Australia it is known to occur from New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, Western Australia and occasionally Victoria and South Australia. Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia is famous for being home to whale shark. Basic information on conservation status is limited although evidence suggests populations are in decline.

##### **Polar bear**

Polar bears, found throughout the circumpolar Arctic south to Canada, are the largest species of bear and the largest land carnivore. They also eat berries and other vegetation. They have partially webbed furry feet that act as snowshoes and water-repellent dense fur enabling them to shake dry after swimming.

Global warming is considered to be a great threat to polar bears. Also, the Arctic is being exploited for its minerals and is threatened by pollution and mining for petrochemicals. The IUCN Red Data Book, which lists all rare species, describes the polar bear as 'conservation dependant', which means conservation efforts are needed to ensure its future.

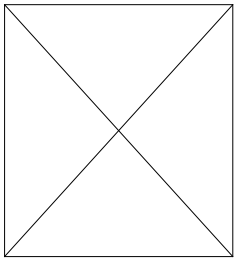
##### **Cranchiid Squid**

Cranchiid Squid are ten- armed cephalopods that can grow up to 2 metres in length. They are often transparent apart from their eyes and digestive organs allowing them to hide in the depths. As adults they live at depths between 200m and 1000m.

Other stars include Hermit crabs. Moray eel, Emperor penguins, Compass jellyfish, Sea lions and Black browed albatross.



# Bits and Pieces



## Are You Concerned About an Environmental Matter?

### EDO NT Can Help.

**The Environmental Defenders Office NT is a community legal centre practising public interest environmental law.** EDO NT uses law to help protect the environment. If you are concerned about an issue relating to the NT environment and you think it might be against the law then call our Principal Lawyer **Tom Cowen**.

Tom can provide you with free legal advice on any environmental matter including pollution, land clearing, planning and development applications and much more. EDO NT also conducts legal research and advocates for policy reform when appropriate to ensure current laws are up to date with environmental requirements.

**Email: [edont@edo.org.au](mailto:edont@edo.org.au) Website: [www.edo.org.au/edont](http://www.edo.org.au/edont)  
NT Freecall: 1800 635 944**

## Minister needs to check his own Government's policy on new NT uranium mine

Federal Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources Ian Macfarlane needs to check his own Government's policy on the proposed Koongarra uranium mine before he continues talking up new mines and the nuclear industry.

The proposed Koongarra uranium mine, which various companies have been trying to get approval for for over 30 years, would be immediately adjacent to the world famous Aboriginal cultural site and tourism destination of Nourlangie Rock in World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park.

In a recent interview about the prospects for new mines across Australia Mr Macfarlane failed to rule out the proposed Koongarra mine:

#### **PRESENTER:**

The moratorium on the lease Koongarra at Kakadu National Park runs out next month. I can ... I guess, we can expect that the Federal Government will give the go-ahead there?

#### **MACFARLANE:**

Well, that's got some way to go in terms of processes. The local Aboriginal heritage issues have to be dealt with. Obviously, there's a process that involves the Northern Territory Government. There are issues in relation to a whole range of permits. Once that comes forward to the Federal Government in terms of environmental safeguards, then that will be considered by my environmental colleague.

However, in a formal report to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 1999, the Howard Government stated it supported 'in principle' the World Heritage Committee's recommendation that the Koongarra Project Area be re-included in the Kakadu National Park and that mining be precluded. The Government stated it 'will not approve a mine that would damage World Heritage values'.

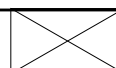
We wonder whether Mr Macfarlane is forgetting previous policies in his haste to drum up business for the nuclear industry, or whether he is just ignorant of the long history behind this highly destructive and repeatedly rejected mining project.

Clearly the Howard Government needs to come clean and announce publicly what its policy is on this uranium mine, and if it has changed from its previous policy.

**Join us at the Koongarra Action Day! ...26 April (details TBA)**

### **RECYCLED PAPER**

ECNT has just received a new lot of Real Recycled Paper (Evolve brand)  
Available from the office now @ \$9.50 per ream or \$8.50 per ream for lots of 10 or more



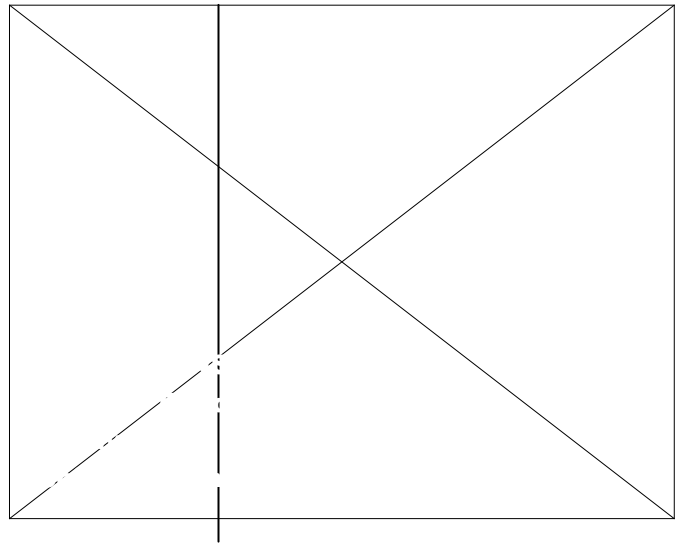
**IMPORTANT DATES TO KEEP:**

26 April—Koongarra Action Day— details TBA

28 April—Gamba, glyphosate and life forum

6 May—ERA in court on Ranger Contamination

19 May—Marine Conservation Society Fund-raiser, Deckchair Cinema **DEEP BLUE(PG)**, “A stunning reminder of how beautiful & fragile our planet can be.” See inside for more.

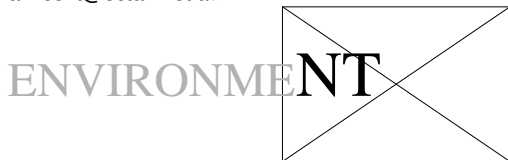


The views expressed in *EnvironmeNT* are not necessarily those of the Environment Centre NT management committee  
Please recycle this newsletter: leave it in a waiting room or other appropriate place for someone else to read

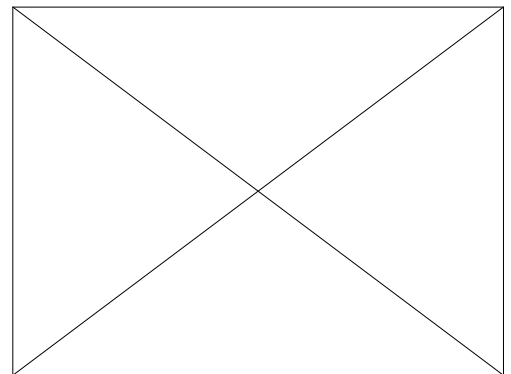
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PO Box 2120 Darwin NT 0801 Ph (08) 8981 1984 Fax (08) 8941 0387  
E-mail: [ecnt@octa4.net.au](mailto:ecnt@octa4.net.au)

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