

ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT (ECNT)
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May / June 2005

Environment a big winner from NT election

The environment was a big winner from the recent NT election, won in a landslide by Labor.

Doing a better job of looking after the ecosystems, landscapes and other environmental attributes that make the Territory special was a prominent issue in the election, with both Labor and the Greens running strongly on a range of environment issues.

The re-elected Martin government ran a positive, pro-environment campaign focusing on key issues including protecting the Daly River, no new uranium mining, creating an EPA, conserving Darwin Harbour, and

tackling invasive species.

For a complete list of Labor's election promises, see inside.

Labor's success, backed up by a strong vote for the Greens in most of the seats where they

ran, means the re-elected Martin government has a clear mandate and obligation to implement its promises and really start looking after the Territory's unique and threatened environments.

There is much that needs to be done that can only be achieved with visionary leadership and adequate funding.

The Environment Centre looks forward to working with the government to address the environment problems and needs of the NT and help ensure more focus on ecologically sustainable development.

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Labor's "Don't Risk the Daly" signs at city polling booths

Labor plea to voters: "Don't Risk the Daly"

On 8 June, just 10 days out from the NT election, Chief Minister Clare Martin announced that the current moratorium on land clearing approvals and pastoral subdivisions in the Daly Region would be extended. Initially this was reported on ABC local radio as a three year extension i.e. until some time in 2008. However, subsequent statements from the Government indicate that the moratorium will be in place until new water and land clearing monitoring systems are established, which is expected to take until some time in 2007. Additional funding of \$3.5 million was also announced to help put these much-needed monitoring systems in place.

This announcement also effectively means that major new water licence approvals, for instance the application for 20,000 Megalitres of groundwater per year from Larrakeyah Station near Katherine, will continue to be on hold. This is good news for the Daly and for all those thousands of people who would like to see secure protection for the river over the long-term.

The Labor Party ran strongly on their commitment to the Daly, as opposed to the CLP policy of lifting the moratorium immediately and allowing 'controlled development'. I might also add that the Labor position

reflected the views of a majority of the members of the Daly Region Community Reference Group (CRG). Although, the Chief Minister's decision does not rule out large scale land clearing and water extraction from occurring in the future, it certainly makes it a lot less likely, and should make any future development much more sustainable. ECNT is confident that further study will show that the significant natural and cultural values of the river and surrounding ecosystems will not be able to withstand the sorts of inappropriate large scale development proposed by various industry and government bodies in recent years.

On the same day as the extended moratorium was announced, the Government finally released the Daly CRG report, six months after receiving it. If you would like to order a copy of the full report on CD-Rom you will need to register online at <http://www.ipe.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/dalyregion/mysay/index1.html>. Alternatively you can email: ecnt-daly@iinet.net.au for a copy of the Executive Summary.

Dr Gary Scott, Freshwater Campaigner

Pipeline fiasco highlights need for better planning

The recent cancellation of the Trans Territory Pipeline (TTP) project is further proof that the energy infrastructure and industrialisation process taking place in the Top End is ad hoc and poorly planned. On 27 June, Alcan pulled out of a deal it had with Woodside to take gas from the Blacktip field offshore from Wadeye for its expanded Gove alumina refinery, citing a 30 percent increase in the cost of supply

The cancellation of the TTP project is largely welcomed by ECNT. We raised many objections to the proposal in our submission on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), including concerns about threats to wildlife, erosion from watercourse crossings, the spread of weeds and feral animals along the route and lack of adequate consultation with Indigenous groups.

We also objected strongly to the uncoordinated way in which the environmental approvals process

had been handled, with three separate EIS's for the Alcan Refinery expansion, the Blacktip Project and the Trans Territory Pipeline. None of our concerns about why it was absolutely necessary to build this pipeline all the way across the Top End were ever adequately addressed by the proponents or by government.

Alcan has now signed an agreement with Esso Highlands to bring gas from Papua New Guinea via the proposed Torres Strait/Cape York pipeline, another project which has had an uncertain status for nearly a decade. As recently as a month ago, the TTP proponents, in the supplement to their Environmental Impact Statement, ruled out this particular option as being uneconomic and unviable. ECNT is also concerned about the potential environmental implications of a pipeline link from Cape York across the Gulf of Carpentaria to Gove.

Meanwhile, it is ECNT's understanding that the Alcan refinery expansion will go ahead regardless of whether alternative supplies of gas are sourced, by continuing to burn the much more highly polluting and greenhouse intensive fuel oil that is being currently used at the plant.

Up until now there has been very little public debate about whether alternative supplies of energy, perhaps in the form of LNG or from an alternative pipeline route, could meet the needs of Alcan as well as provide improved environmental outcomes. However, it is starting to look like we're finally getting the debate we've been after.

And with this latest pipeline project falling over, ECNT is continuing to call for a broader strategic assessment of the industrialisation process right across the Top End. This could be carried out by a newly formed Environment Protection Authority or by an independent advisory group.



The Martin Government's promises for the environment 2005-09

Set out below are the major promises made by Chief Minister Clare Martin and the Labor Party in the course of the 2005 election campaign.

EPA

- Establish a strong Environment Protection Agency (EPA) with the necessary re-sources including the best environment protection laws in Australia.
- Enact the new Environment Protection and Management Act to provide the statutory basis for EPA.
- Immediately reorganize the Office of Environment and Heritage and appoint the new three person EPA board.
- Eight new staff and additional \$1.1 million in stage 2 of EPA creation (from 2007).
- Produce NT's first "State of the Environment Report".

Daly River

- No cotton
- No dams
- \$3.5 million for new monitoring program
- Moratorium on land clearing and pastoral lease subdivisions to continue until monitoring program in place (said to be 2007)

Living Rivers

- A new living rivers program, with new legislation, to give special status to NT's 'icon rivers', including Daly.

Marine and coastal

- Protect more mangroves along the coast-line in addition to Darwin Harbour
- Commence a comprehensive marine planning process
- [Although not explicitly addressed in the ALP's 2005 election commitments, there is a longstanding government commitment to a Bynoe Harbour Marine Protected Area and/or Plan of Management]

Mining and nuclear

- No new uranium mines in NT, including the proposed Koongarra mine in Kakadu
- No nuclear waste dump in NT
- Ongoing clean up of Mt Todd mine

Invasive species (weeds, cane toads, ferals)

- \$30 cane toad trap subsidy
- "Tackling Territory Invaders" program and summit

Greenhouse

- Double funding for the Cool Communities (COOLmob) program – for household energy (and now water) audits and efficiency education.
- Minimize greenhouse emissions by better fire management, land clearing controls and mandatory public reporting of emissions by major industries.
- Develop an air quality monitoring network.

Indigenous rangers

- Two new Indigenous ranger programs

Legislative reform

- Water Act overhaul "to meet world's best practice"
- Living Rivers Act
- Environment Protection and Management Act
- [Although not explicitly addressed in ALP's 2005 election commitments, there is an ongoing government review of other Acts including Mines, Fisheries, Pastoral Lands, etc, AND the need for a review of the NT Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act to become the NT Biodiversity Conservation Act]

Other

- \$50 rebate to encourage water conservation in Central Australia – to purchase water saving devices.
- Create a Rapid Creek Environment Hub – free space for community environment groups.



SEA CAGE FISH FARMS – thrown out of QLD and heading for the NT

The clean coastal environments of the Darwin and Tiwi Islands regions are currently being targeted by large scale Sea Cage fish farm developers. Bynoe Harbour, Darwin Harbour and the Tiwi Islands are currently under threat. The recent big win at Moreton Bay in QLD, with overwhelming opposition to the proposal there, has shown that the community and environment can prevail with outright rejection of Sea Cage developments.

(For more information on the Moreton Bay campaign go to www.qccqld.org.au/savethebay/index.htm)

fish are caught to produce **1kg of aquaculture farmed animal**. Farming carnivorous animals results in a net loss of fish protein and does not replace fishing of wild fish stocks, but in fact results in more wild fish and by-catch being harvested from oceans.

Pollution - Fish farms can be major sources of waste, nutrient and chemical pollution in the marine environment. Sea cages directly discharge nutrients, waste products, chemicals and antibiotics into the marine environment

number of species. It is highly likely that turtle and dugong will be significantly and adversely impacted upon in Bynoe Harbour and the Tiwi Island area.

Likely specific impacts for the Bynoe Harbour proposal include:

Sea cages attract predators to the area. This may result in an increase in predation of turtles.

Lighting associated with the operation will attract hatchlings in the area. Survival chances would then be close to nil.

Increased nutrients may affect the algal and seagrass balance and the species composition within these groups and therefore affect (possibly decrease) food availability for turtles and dugongs.

Boat strike: Increased boats in the area could increase injuries and deaths from collisions with dugongs and turtles.

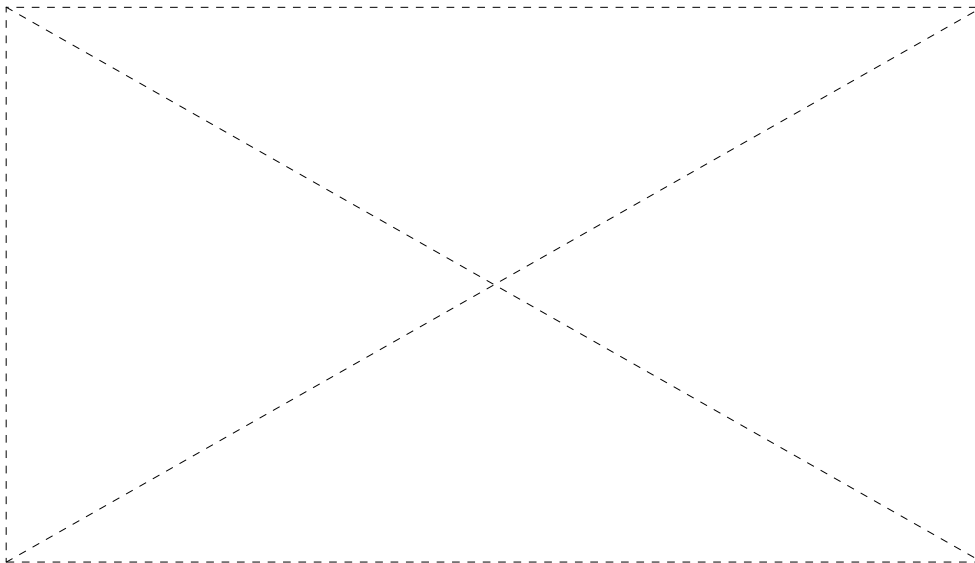
Other general impacts of sea cage aquaculture

Loss of remoteness, naturalness and aesthetic values and associated tourism values.

Potential for escapes leading to spread of disease into wild populations and environments.

Possible impacts of sourcing broodstock from wild populations, and selectively breeding fish with a very narrow genetic variation, which may in turn escape into the wild.

Creation of noise and odour nuisance.



Eel Aquaculture Facility, Taiwan. Photograph: AIMS

Impacts of sea cage fish farms

There are many documented environmental, health, social and economic impacts and risks associated with sea cage fish farm projects, especially as they are 'open' system farms thus waste directly enters the marine environment. Impacts include:

Feed- feed for aquaculture farmed animals is made up of fish meal and fish oil. Anywhere from **2kg -12kg of wild**

without any form of treatment. Further, the risk posed by fuel and chemical spill is considered to be serious.

Impacts on threatened and migratory species from current proposals (including turtle and dugong) - There is 13 threatened and 31 migratory species listed for the proposed Bynoe Harbour fish farm area. 11 threatened and 19 migratory species are listed for the proposed Tiwi Islands fish farm area- this is a very large and significant



Potential impacts on other users of the marine environment including Indigenous communities.

Is Aquaculture sustainable?

It is our strong view that sea cage fish farm developments are environmentally and socially inappropriate. They are high risk ventures with high economic risks, social impacts when they fail, and substantial environmental impacts. **However**, environmentally and socially sensitive aquaculture developments **are possible**. For aquaculture to be sustainable we must move away from traditionally destructive aquaculture towards innovative and ecologically responsible developments.

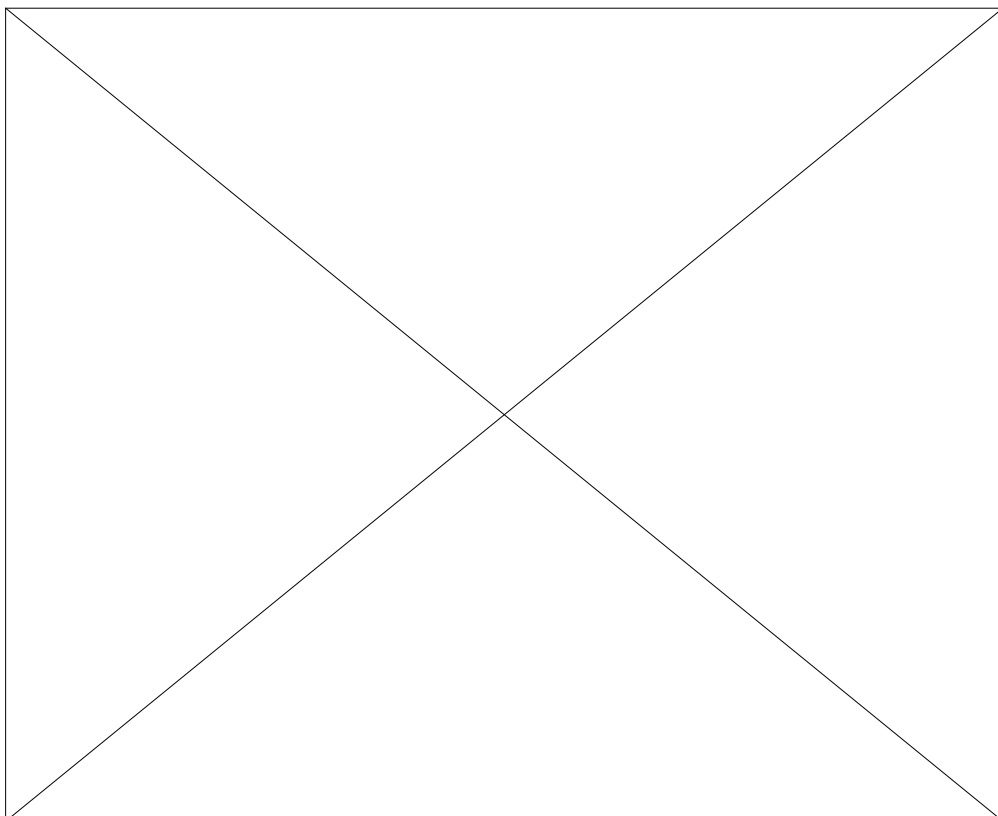
We believe that in light of all the well-documented problems associated with 'open' fish farms and aquaculture developments, only 'closed loop', non-polluting, on-land aquaculture facilities that do not release pollutants into the sea or rivers should be considered. Further feed regimes and sources need to be recon-

sidered aiming to move towards farming non carnivorous species. These systems should be locally owned and operated.

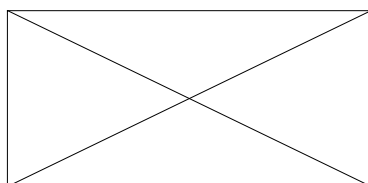
As for current Sea Cage fish farm proposals - the Northern Territory's coastal zone, including Tiwi Island and Bynoe Harbour, is far too precious to the community, economy and nature

itself to be exposed to inappropriate aquaculture development. **These local values are far too important to risk.**

For more information contact Adele Pedder, Northern Marine Campaigner, Australian Marine Conservation Society. Ph: 8941 7461 or adelepedder@amcs.org.au



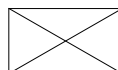
Abandoned Aquaculture Farm - Dick Ward Drive, Darwin. Photo: M Wakeham



Funding News

- During the election campaign, the ALP announced that from 2006-07, COOLmob's funding will be doubled! COOLmob will expand into a sustainable living project and will cover new issues including domestic water use!
- COOLmob have received a \$5,000 grant from Power and Water to provide a further 50 home energy audits!
- The Community Benefit Fund has provided a \$2,500 grant to help us print more booklets!

Thea Bray, COOLmob Project Manager, T: 8981 2532, coolcdarwin@inet.net.au



Oil, Gas and Greed in the Timor Sea

By Jude Conway and Robyn Waite, Timor Sea Justice Campaign

The David and Goliath battle between East Timor and Australia over the oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea is heating up. East Timor needs Australian people who believe in justice to pressure our government to give the tiny impoverished nation what is rightfully theirs under current international law. This article gives a brief outline of the current state of negotiations and what you can do to support the East Timorese.

Background

The UN Convention on Law of the Sea has favoured median line boundaries between two countries less than 400 nautical miles apart since 1982.

Australia withdrew from the maritime boundary jurisdiction of the two international arbitration bodies, the International Court of Justice and the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea in March 2002.

On the first day of East Timor's independence, 20 May 2002, Australia and East Timor signed the Timor Sea Treaty. This gave East Timor 90% of revenues from inside the Joint Petroleum Development Area (JPDA), for example the Bayu-Undan field, leaving other disputed territories for future discussion.

Current State of Play

The first substantive round of talks between Australia and East Timor on a permanent maritime boundary was held in Dili in April 2004.

The Movement Against the Occupation of the Timor Sea (MKOTT), a coalition of Timorese non-government organisations, was formed in Dili at this time. MKOTT stated its aim was 'to help the Australian government and people better understand how people in East Timor feel about Australia's violations of our rights, occupation of our maritime territory, theft of our resources, and denial of our nationhood'.

Hundreds of Timorese demonstrated peacefully in front of the Australian embassy. No progress was made at the talks as Australia insisted on a continental shelf boundary along the Timor trough, and refused to negotiate about areas to the east and west of the JPDA where the lucrative Buffalo, Corallina, Laminaria and Greater Sunrise fields are located.

The Laminaria-Corallina oil field, much closer to East Timor than to Australia, began production in 1999. To date, this field has produced nearly AUD\$2 billion in government revenues, all of which has gone to Australia. This exceeds the amount Australia has spent on InterFET and aid to East Timor. Australia justifies exercising "exclusive sovereign rights" because it had done so "for an extended period of time".

Another round of talks between the two nations took place in Canberra in September 2004. Little substantive progress was made.

When Australian businessman Ian Melrose heard of a ten year old Timorese girl dying from infestation of worms because her family could not afford to pay 15c for a worm tablet he decided to spend one million dollars on radio and television ads alerting the Australian people to the attempts of our government to 'steal' East Timor's oil.

After a Dili round of talks in April 2005 Alexander Downer reported that the two countries had agreed on "key elements" of a revenue-sharing deal that could provide East Timor with as much as A\$5 billion of additional revenue in exchange for agreeing to ratify an accord on the Greater Sunrise gas project and deferring talks on permanent sea borders.

East Timor's Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri denied that a tentative agreement had been reached, labelling the Australian media reports an "absolute lie". Journalist HT Lee on Crikey.com website wrote that the aim of the spin from Downer was to put pressure on East Timor's parliament to ratify the "deal".

Tomas Freitas from MKOTT reports that if Woodside Petroleum do not agree to build a pipeline from the Greater Sunrise gas field to East Timor, then Mari Alkatiri would look to the many other companies that are interested in operating in the field. Tomas also reports that Alkatiri believes negotiations must continue

with Australia until a maritime boundary has been agreed to or East Timor would lose the right to later take the issue to court.

That the Australian government is starting to feel the pressure to give East Timor a better deal is obvious. The style of the media reports on the issue is reminiscent of pre-99 when activists for the self-determination of East Timor were denigrated, eg Ian Melrose was labelled 'a pest' (Australian June 7), and East Timor is accused of not appreciating all the help that Australia has given them in the past (NT News, June 8). In response to this accusation Tomas Freitas invites people to come to East Timor and meet with old Timorese who helped Australian soldiers in World War II.

Your support CAN make a difference!

1. Write to John Howard, Prime Minister, Parliament House, Canberra 2600,, stating that you call on the Australian Government to:

- Stop unilaterally exploiting contested gas and oil resources in the Timor Sea.
- Place disputed revenues taken by the Australian Government into a trust fund to be distributed when the dispute is resolved.
- Immediately negotiate a permanent maritime boundary with East Timor in accordance with principles of International Law.
- Re-submit to the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea to settle the dispute by independent arbitration if necessary.

2. Join the TIMOR SEA JUSTICE CAMPAIGN. Contact Jude 0409-193242 or Robyn 0410-781310 to get involved, help out on stalls, arrange speakers and/or films in your local area. Send a blank email to tsjc_darwin@yahoo.com.au to get details of local events and/or announce-subscribe@timorseajustice.org to stay informed of negotiation developments.



Bits and Pieces

2005 NT Threatened Species Art and Photography Exhibition

Its coming around to that time of the year again when artists and photographers start preparing for the annual exhibition.

The theme of the event is 'NT threatened species, their threats and their habitats'. The event is open to all mediums (painting, sketch, sculpture, photography etc), on display at the Darwin Entertainment Centre Gallery from September 7th-10th,

First prize for the adult overall winner is \$1000 cash, and entries close 26th August. There is also a category for under 18s.

It is not a 'hard core' art event, the primary purpose is to raise awareness of the NT environment and its threats, so even if people have photographs, painting etc that aren't totally brilliant, it still would be good to have them exhibited.

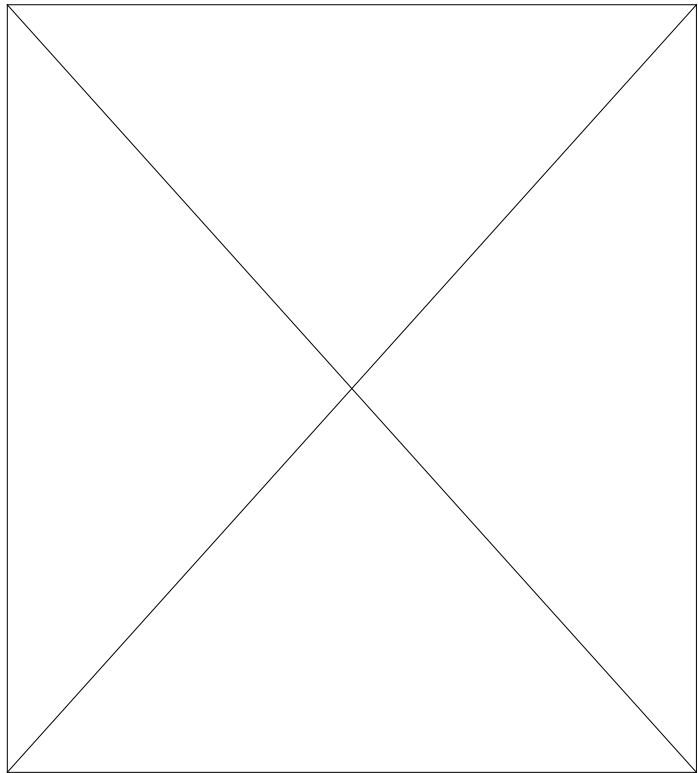
You can contact the Threatened Species Network for more information or for a list of all NT threatened species on 08 8954 7554 or jholmes@wwf.org.au.

Planet Ark Tree Day

The 10th annual National Tree Day is on Sunday July 31st and Schools Tree Day is on Friday July 29th. Organised by Planet Ark with backing from Toyota and AMP Foundation, last year's Tree Day saw 250,000 volunteers plant over a million wildlife-friendly native trees at 3,200 sites across Australia.

Call the Planet Ark Tree Day Hotline on 1300 88 5000 to get involved or visit www.planetark.com/treeday

The great ECNT fundraising drive



With the withdrawal of federal government funding for the ECNT, we have been left with a \$55,000 deficit for 2004-05.

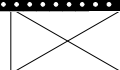
Generous support from our members and other members of the public has resulted in us so far making up this deficit by \$22,000.

Please help us reach our target of \$55,000 by 30 September 2005 by making a tax deductible donation to the ECNT.

We are trying to secure other funding but in the meantime the growing hole in our budget must be addressed.

WELCOME TO ELLY!!

We re very pleased to welcome Elly Langridge onto the team in the position of Office Administrator. Things have been pretty hectic in here and Elly has coped remarkably well. Photo in next issue!!!

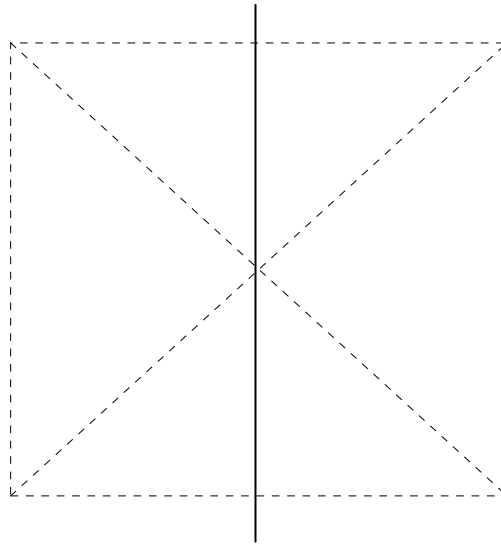


Dates to keep:

Friday 29 July: National Tree Day for schools Planet Ark 1399 885000

Sunday 31 July: Planet Ark National Tree Day 1399 885000

26 August Entries close for NT Threatened Species Art & Photo Exhibition: Info 8954 7554



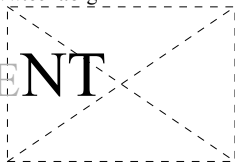
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