

# ENVIRONMENT

The Newsletter of the Environment Centre NT (ECNT)  
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October/November 2005

## NT 'nuked' by draconian Bills

### Politicians use fear tactics to justify waste dump

The Environment Centre of the Northern Territory condemns the introduction of draconian Federal legislation that aims to override a range of NT laws and remove the ability of the NT government or public to legally challenge the imposition of a radioactive waste dump on the NT.

ECNT also condemns as base scaremongering the claims by Senator Nigel Scullion and David Tollner MHR that the Federal government was acting on health grounds.

Tollner and Scullion claimed that the waste dump was needed in order to proceed with the controversial new nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights in Sydney, which they in turn claimed was essential to saving the lives of thousands of Australians through the production of medical isotopes.

However, the alarmist statements by the two NT Federal representatives were contradicted by the far more authoritative statements from the former Chief Medical Research Scientist at ANSTO's nuclear medicine facility at Lucas Heights, Professor Barry Allen.:

**'Medically I do not believe the new [Lucas Heights] reactor is essential...I think it was inappropriate [of the Federal government] to claim it was required to save lives with nuclear medicine'.**

*(Report of the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Transportation and Storage of Nuclear Waste, 2004, pp 91-92)*

Senator Scullion and Mr Tollner were elected to look after the interests of Territorians, not meekly cave in to Ministerial pressure and then try to justify the 'nuking' of NT laws by resorting to groundless scaremongering.

The Federal government has blatantly lied about the waste dump and is now resorting to one of the most draconian, anti-democratic pieces of legis-

(MAPW), and look up their report "A New Clear Direction: Securing nuclear medicine for the next generation" which debunks the claims that a new reactor at Lucas Heights is needed: [www.mapw.org.au](http://www.mapw.org.au)

**SEE INSIDE FOR WHAT YOU CAN DO!**

Artwork: Jon F.

lation ever introduced into Federal parliament.

A nuclear waste dump in the NT is not necessary in order for Australians to have access to state-of-the-art health care – this is a myth.

### More information

For more information on why the new Lucas Heights reactor is not needed, go to the website of the Medical Association for Prevention of War

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# Scullion on the record

The Federal government's "Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2005" is not yet law. If NT Senator Nigel Scullion does what he has repeatedly said he will do (see below) and crosses the floor to vote against the legislation in the Senate, the Bill will be defeated.

If it becomes law, any NT and Commonwealth legislation that might in any way 'interfere' with the construction and operation of a Commonwealth nuclear waste dump in the NT will be made redundant. This includes environmental protection and impact assessment legislation, occupational health and safety legislation, transport of hazardous materials legislation, any legislation to do with land title including native title and pastoral leasehold title, heritage legislation and legislation allowing for appeals against Commonwealth decisions.

## Here is what Senator Scullion has publicly stated he will do:

"I'm quite sure that the government, knowing very well my views on the matter, would not send it [waste dump legislation] to the Senate and basically the word is I suppose, 'not on my watch'."

*ABC Darwin 8DDD Drive time, 9/06/05*

"I rang up Brendan Nelson and I said, 'look mate, you *know* I'm opposed to having *any* materials from the Lucas Heights as is every other Territorian and we're very concerned about high level radioactive waste coming to be stored in the Territory and I said 'not on my watch' and it's not going to happen mate'."

*ABC Darwin 8DDD Drive time, 15/07/2005*

"It's my role then to gauge exactly the feeling of Territorians on the matter and then represent them in that exact way. It's my task not to have my view, it's my task to provide parliament with the views of Territorians. It may well be the case that Territorians don't want this and want me to go and say that to the federal government and that's exactly what I will do. *ABC Darwin Drive time 25/7/05*

"I'm like every Territorian, nobody, particularly Territorians, don't like having this sort of stuff shoved down our throat because we're not a state."

*Top FM, 27/07/2005*

"Most importantly the Country Liberal Party's position hasn't changed.

I'm their representative in Canberra and I can assure you that the CLP policy is that we're not having anybody else's waste in our back yard at the moment, that's the situation, we're not having anyone's, we're happy to deal with our own but we're not having anybody else's...the people of the Northern Territory *don't* want anybody else's nuclear waste in the Northern Territory, I represent them and so 'not on my watch'. Everybody in the Northern Territory says that there shouldn't be a nuclear dump in the Northern Territory." *ABC Radio*

## What you can do

### to help stop this abuse of power by John Howard and Brendan Nelson

Previously, John Howard has said that Territorians will not be treated as "second class citizens" in relation to the waste dump. Brendan Nelson, the Federal Minister responsible for the waste dump, has himself stated publicly that a waste dump in the NT "is not strictly necessary"!

In order to defeat this draconian legislation and the unnecessary waste dump, Senator Scullion must cross the floor in the Senate (as his coalition colleague Senator Barnaby Joyce recently did). BUT he needs your encouragement, so...

## ...call Senator Scullion today and ask him to honour his word and vote against the Bill:

### Canberra Contact:

Tel: (02) 6277 3436

Fax: (02) 6277 3704

Email:

[senator.scullion@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.scullion@aph.gov.au)

### Darwin Electorate Office:

229 McMillans Road  
Jingili NT 0810

Tel: (08) 8948 3555

Fax: (08) 8948 3544



# Darwin's (and the Top End's) looming weeds and water crises

There are growing concerns about increasing unregulated water use across Darwin and the rural area. Here is an edited report from ECNT member Rob Wesley-Smith of a recent meeting held to discuss the problem:

Estimates of water pumping are: • **25%** by blockies/domestic; • **16%** by PAWA for Darwin water supply (more alkaline to mix with acid Dam water) • **59%** by Horticulture /Agriculture irrigation usage.

All the pumping pulls down the water table each year by 10m I think - I noted that to be 5m early on but at the end it was said to be 10m drawdown. Anyway **5-10m**. Last wet was so poor the table did not fully top up by 3m.

With the same level of pumping by Govt and Private, and in fact it started a month or 2 earlier than usual, the water table has dropped to the point that Howard Springs has dried up already, a tragedy. No doubt other springs and wetlands are also suffering or dying. Is this a major concern? Yes. Can we have total development and natural systems together? Probably not.

One solution is for more water to be supplied from Govt Dams and reticulated through the rural area, starting with it being compulsory on new subdivisions. People will use less water if supplied by pipeline with rates attached. Personally, as a matter of principle I believe we should pay something for our water use, unless we just capture what falls on our own land. Tanks, with first flush water disposal mechanisms, flushing bungs, and mozzie protection, should be encouraged. Water from dams compared to bores was said to be cheaper for PAWA to supply anyway.

Greg said that the water table/groundwater tops up by infiltration over the landscape, and not particularly from wetlands which may be perched. And NOT from PNG! This suggests to me that the sandy damp soils such as where Grevillea and pandanus etc may thrive may be where much water can get absorbed, (as against eg my soil which has a

clay layer under the top soil). These sandy soils often get drained by subdivision developers to make more blocks. In any case, roads and housing areas etc. will usually have drains to take water rapidly to creeks and the sea and thus not into the groundwater. Structures to allow infiltration may need to be more common.

Urgent attention is needed at Howard Springs. It used to be dredged every one or 2 years. A deep spot could be dug, or a second wall built to separate main swimming area from natural areas. If bird poop and leaf/branch drop is a big issues then maybe trimming trees back a couple of metres from the water's edge would not be too bad. Letting it just die is a disgrace.

UPDATE: "Friends of the Springs" met with Minister Scrymgeour who has committed \$25,000 in funds to drill a new bore into the dolerite substrate to provide top-up water for Howard Springs. The Government is also looking at whether the main pool needs to be cleaned out to remove 20 years of sediment.

## Gamba grass - time to act!

### ECNT nominates gamba as a National Key Threatening Process

To mark National Weedbuster Week, the Environment Centre NT (ECNT) formally nominated the weed Gamba as a Key Threatening Process (KTP) under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act).

Listing of Gamba as a KTP, if successful, will highlight the great danger the weed poses to the natural environment and social and economic wellbeing of the NT, and the urgent need for concerted action at a local, Territory and national level to contain and eradicate Gamba infestations.

Listing would trigger the requirement for a Threat Abatement Plan which would in turn potentially see Commonwealth action to assist the Territory to control this major menace.

Gamba has already taken over large areas of the Darwin rural area but has the potential to invade all of the Top End (north of Daly Waters) with devastating consequences for our wildlife, our bushland, wetlands and river systems, and for a range of industries and activities that rely on a healthy environment including tourism, pastoralism and recreational fishing.

Scientific research is showing that as Gamba invades the natural environment,

the intensity of wild fires increases dramatically, and over time wildlife and ecosystems will be eradicated.

Gamba also has the potential to seriously degrade rivers and streams, reducing stream flows and altering hydrological systems. This in turn has implications for native fish breeding and habitat.

It is not yet too late to turn around the Gamba threat, but further delays in concerted action - such as the delays we have witnessed over the past few years - will be a disaster for the environment and our Top End life-style and economy.



# ECNT Members News



## JOIN ECNT & WIN!

- ★ Attention ECNT Members! Are your friends, family or workmates current members of ECNT? No? Maybe a little sweetener would encourage them to do so. All new members who join during November go into the draw to win a fabulous mystery prize.
- ★ With Xmas just around the corner, why not buy a Gift Membership for that special person, then they have the chance to win twice!! (Once with the gift membership and again in the mystery prize draw!)
- ★ Don't worry, we haven't forgotten about **you**, our valued current member. If you refer a person to join and they mention your name when they do, you also go into a draw for a prize. Everybody wins with ECNT in November!!
- ★ Current membership rates and application form on Page 8.



Hammerhead  
sharks  
Photo: Kelvin  
Aitken  
Marine Themes

## Notice of AGM and SGM

Members are encouraged to attend the Environment Centre's AGM on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November to be held at the Darwin Sailing Club (Committee Room), Atkins Drive, Fannie Bay from 5.30pm.

Nominations for Management Committee positions must be received at ECNT by Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> November. Contact Elly on 8981 1984 if you need a nomination form to be sent to you.

An SGM will be held immediately after the AGM to make minor amendments to the constitution to comply with the new Associations Act.

See you there!

## NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan: released for public comment

### A major milestone in conservation in the NT

For the past two years the Environment Centre NT (ECNT) and Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) have had a strong involvement with the development of the new NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan (PCM). The draft of the PCM has now been released by the government for public comment.

While some aspects of the plan are disappointing, (e.g. no ban on mining in National Parks; lack of certainty in relation to improved conservation and biodiversity outcomes on pastoral leasehold land; acceptance of ongoing land clearing without adequate controls), the PCM on the whole is an important step forward for the NT.

The PCM addresses improved management of our existing conservation reserves (e.g. national parks); identifies areas of national and international conservation significance which should be protected, including freshwater ecosystems; promotes a range of partnership mechanisms to ensure better conservation outcomes on Aboriginal land and on land under pastoral management; sets out the steps necessary to better conserve our marine environments; and it looks at improved environmental research and monitoring and legislation.

Assuming the NT government has the political will to implement it, the plan should deliver desperately needed improvements in conservation outcomes across our marine and terrestrial environments.

Crucial to the success or failure of the plan will be government commitment to increased funding for the environment, e.g. weed control, and redrafting of a range of pieces of environmental and natural resource legislation, e.g. Water Act, to bring them up to date.

**Your comments are being sought by the government. Please consider making a submission. ECNT can help you if you are not sure what to include.**

To view the PCM, visit: [www.nreta.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/parksmasterplan-draft/draft\\_summary.html](http://www.nreta.nt.gov.au/whatwedo/parksmasterplan-draft/draft_summary.html). Comments close: Friday 4 November 2005. Contact the Masterplan Project Officer on 1800 813 337 or email [parks-masterplan@nt.gov.au](mailto:parks-masterplan@nt.gov.au)



# ECNT's achievements in 2005 (so far)

With another year nearly gone, it is time again to reflect on and celebrate what we have been able to achieve.

ECNT, COOLmob and the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS—Darwin) have had a big year in 2005. A major focus during the earlier half of the year was the NT election; in the latter half, the big push from industry and the Federal government for more uranium mines and radioactive waste dumps became a major focus, unfortunately. Here is a summary of what we have achieved this year.

## 1. Key reports and submissions to government:

Submission on Trans-Territory Pipeline and Blacktip gas project: a *very damaging proposal subsequently dumped by Alcan.*

Submissions on NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan: *ECNT and AMCS have helped turn this into a good blueprint for implementation.*

Submissions on the need for government policies and strategic assessments of proposed new aquaculture and Tiwi Island sandmining projects.

Discussion paper on 'Securing the long term protection of the Daly River' (*in progress*).

A landmark report on the Daly River's aquatic conservation values (with WWF and CDU).

Report on Glyde Point conservation values report (with AMCS; *in progress*).

Submissions and correspondence on Waterfront and Myilly Point development proposals.

Submission on McArthur River mine expansion EIS (*in progress*).

Oral and written submissions to Federal House of Representatives inquiry into future uranium mining.

Correspondence on termite pesticide use at new Lyons residential development.

Submission on proposed new Browns Oxide/Rum Jungle mine (Batchelor).

Important report on the flaws in the NT Water Act and how it must be amended and improved.

Submission on the need to increase NT Government spending on the environment.

Submission in response to planning for the future of Kakadu National Park.

Objections to various land clearing proposals.

Formal nomination of Gamba grass as a 'Key Threatening Process' under Commonwealth legislation.

## 2. Election campaign

Our involvement in this year's NT election campaign—promoting the environment as a key issue—helped secure a series of important promises from the government, including:

- maintaining land clearing moratorium in Daly region.
- formation of an EPA for the NT.
- comprehensive marine planning.
- protection of mangroves beyond Darwin Harbour.
- new 'Living Rivers' legislation.
- funding for COOLmob doubled.
- increased focus on invasive species in NT.
- no new uranium mines or waste dumps.
- overhaul of Water Act and other key environmental legislation

## 3. ...and also:

- Participated in 'Darwin No Nuclear-Waste Dump Committee' and helped organise successful forum in Darwin;
- Continued our successful work in ensuring a clean up of the Mt Todd mine disaster area;
- COOLmob continued community

greenhouse education including-household energy audits;

- Helped ensure a full environmental impact assessment is carried out on proposed sandmining operations on Tiwi Is, and maintained focus on clearing of Tiwi forests by Sylvatech/Great Southern Plantations;
- Worked with AMCS to increase profile of shark fin fishing and threatened sharks. NT shark fishery has now been restructured;
- Continued involvement with regional and national environment NGOs on wide range of issues across the NT and northern Australia;
- Completed upgrade of website (thanks Claire and Gary);
- Many meetings with Ministers, MLAs, and Departmental officials;
- Public exposure and media coverage of a wide range of issues such as: climate change impacts; Tiwi logging and sandmining; Mt Todd mine disaster; McArthur River mine expansion; radioactive waste dump; weeds; Darwin Waterfront Development; sewerage dumping in the Harbour; Ranger uranium mine, etc;
- Sold several hundred more copies of our excellent Weeds of the Wet/Dry Tropics field guide.

## ECNT's ongoing committee work

ECNT sits on a range of government committees, including:

- Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee
- Daly River Community Reference Group (lapsed)
- Alligator Rivers Regional Advisory Committee (oversight of Ranger uranium mine)
- Mt Todd Rehabilitation Reference Group
- Parks and Conservation Masterplan Advisory Committee



# ECNT opposes McArthur River plans

## Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), McArthur River Mine Proposed Open Cut Project, October 2005.

Xstrata, which owns the McArthur River zinc and lead mine near Borroloola on the Gulf, is seeking approval to move from underground mining to open cut mining, with the McArthur river being diverted for five kilometers and the massive pit being dug in the bed of the river.

The Environment Centre NT (ECNT) is strongly of the opinion that the McArthur River Mine Open Cut Project does not meet acceptable environmental standards and that the project should therefore not be approved.

At a time when the Northern Territory Government has set a course towards providing a greater level of protection for NT rivers through its proposed Living Rivers initiative, and at a time when the environmental disaster at Mt Todd mine has highlighted the expensive legacy that the irresponsible management of mine wastes can leave for the community, it would be negligent in the extreme to approve this particular mining proposal.

Permanently altering the channel of such an important Top End river is unacceptable. Excavating a large open pit right on top of the river, involving the removal and relocation of millions of tonnes of rock waste, a significant proportion of which has the potential to contribute to an ongoing acid mine drainage problem, is also unacceptable.

MRM's own water quality monitoring data shows that some heavy metal concentrations in the McArthur River are already twice the level downstream from the mine as they are upstream. This indicates that discharges from the existing underground mining operation are already having a detrimental impact on the receiving environment. ECNT is not convinced by the information presented in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement that the Open Cut Project will lead to improved environmental outcomes.

The ecological footprint of the open cut proposal is considerably larger than the existing underground operation. The pit will be 210 metres deep, 1400 metres long and 750 metres wide (an area of 83

hectares); the waste rock dump will cover 255 hectares, rise up to 50 metres in height and hold 185 million tonnes of overburden material; the McArthur river will be re-routed over a 5.5 kilometre stretch with a second 2.5 kilometre channel to re-align Surprise and Barney Creeks; 23 million cubic metres of tailings will eventually cover approximately three times the area used to this point in the life of the underground mine; 7,700 tonnes of contaminated waste will be disposed of in the tailings storage area every year; groundwater drawdown by the end of the 25 year life of the mine will be more than 200 metres around the open cut itself; and over 300 hectares of native vegetation will be destroyed, including 3.6 kilometres of valuable riparian habitat. It is also clear from the Draft EIS that not all of the toxic materials produced at the mine over its life can be contained on-site, or managed in a way that will not lead to substantial environmental degradation.

There are many additional reasons why ECNT believes this project should not be approved, including the lack of adequate consultation with Aboriginal Traditional Owners, the lack of research and monitoring carried out on the downstream impacts of the mine, the potential impacts on threatened species such as the Freshwater Sawfish and the Purple-crowned Fairy-wren, and the poorly conceived rehabilitation strategy.

Email Gary at: [ecntdaly@inet.net.au](mailto:ecntdaly@inet.net.au) to find out more.



# Bits and Pieces

**Earthdance 2005** was held on Saturday, September 17 at Charles Darwin National Park. As the nominated recipient of the profits from this event, The Environment Centre organised a team of volunteers to run the gate and also set up an information display.

The gate duties proved to be pretty tiring but a heap of fun. There was obviously some seasoned gate crew among us: Lee bringing a portable stove to make tea and coffee and Grusha providing mini chocolate cakes... yum!

The focus of the display was on waste dump and uranium issues with the No Waste Dump Committee providing drums, props, banners and info. The display was well patronized by the Earthdance attendees, a number of No Waste Dump petitions were filled with signatures, most of which were legible!

Organisers Peter, Crag, Simon and Zoe and their helpers worked extremely hard throughout the weekend, setting up; coordinating the smooth running of the event; then the daunting task of packing and cleaning up.

The event was a huge success in terms of the number of people attending – approximately 1500 – and by all accounts the music and band performances were of the highest quality, keeping the dancers grooving until daylight and beyond. Last week, The Environment Centre was presented with a cheque for \$4,380, most of which will go towards the current No Waste Dump campaign as well as the day to day running of the office.

Congratulations and a huge thanks to all involved.

## Canberra is coming to Darwin to hear from you:

**24 October, 2.30 pm at Parliament House, Darwin**

**Public hearings of the Federal House of Representatives Inquiry into the "importance of Australia's uranium resources". ECNT will be speaking at 2.30pm to say why the NT does not want or need any more uranium mines.**

## Say no to GMO!

**A Commonwealth review panel inquiring into the operation of the Gene Technology Act and the Office of Gene Technology is visiting Darwin for a public hearing.**

Under the Gene Technology Act 2000 the Gene Technology Ministerial Council must conduct an independent review of the operation of the Act, including the structure of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, as soon as possible after the fourth anniversary of the commencement of the

Act. As part of the consultation process, the Review Panel will be conducting a series of public forums throughout the country from October to December 2005

### Darwin

Date: Friday 2 December  
Time: 9 - 11am  
Location: Peninsula Room  
**Holiday Inn**  
122 The Esplanade  
Darwin

### More info:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/gtreview>

**Get active, not radioactive!**

## NO NUKES FILM NIGHT

**"Australian Atomic Confessions" - eyewitness accounts of the impacts of 12 British atomic bomb tests in out-back Australia.**

**PLUS** book launch:—  
"Talking straight out" - the story of the successful Indigenous campaign against the South Australian radioactive waste dump; **PLUS** Indigenous speaker from Alice Springs proposed waste dump area.

**Thursday 3 November  
Deckchair cinema  
6.30 for yummy food  
7.30 for movie**

## RALLY

**Monday 24 October, 1.30pm  
Parliament House, Darwin**

**To greet the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Uranium Mining which is holding public hearings that afternoon.**

**ECNT will be speaking to the inquiry at 2.30pm.**

**It is open to the public.**



