

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

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Switkowski nuclear report misses the point

By Professor Jim Falk

GIVEN its origins and the composition of the panel, the Prime Minister's nuclear taskforce report, released by Ziggy Switkowski on 21 November, is surprisingly downbeat about nuclear energy.

As predicted the report supports uranium mining and nuclear power, but for at least the medium term effectively rejects uranium enrichment, fuel fabrication and

spent nuclear fuel reprocessing, and all but ignores the original requirement to investigate the "business case" for establishing a repository for high-level nuclear waste from overseas.

The Switkowski report stresses that nuclear power could be competitive only if a substantial carbon tax is imposed, and estimates the cost of nuclear power to be 20-50 per cent greater than the cost of electricity from coal. Even this seems an optimistic assessment.

The narrow terms of reference set by the Prime Minister restricted the Switkowski panel to a study of nuclear power, not a serious study of energy options for Australia. As a result, the main problem with the report is that it simply misses the point.

A panel with a broader range of expertise and a less limited brief could have been asked to explore

the impact of carbon tax and other policy measures on energy demand. It could have tackled the most effective means by which that demand could be met, and greenhouse emissions reduced, taking into account all the energy options, costs, time frames, waste, safety and other relevant issues.

The report simply accepts that energy demand will grow remorselessly along a projected curve. But it also proposes imposition of a carbon tax in which case the cost of electricity will significantly increase.

Of course, as we know with water, the simplest thing when a resource becomes harder to buy, or more costly, is to use it less wastefully. Similarly, a host of studies show that there is great potential for reducing energy wastage, and that a dollar invested in energy efficiency will

'A dollar invested in energy efficiency will produce two to seven times greater returns in energy availability and emissions reductions compared to a dollar spent on new nuclear power'

produce some two to seven times the returns in energy availability and emissions reductions versus a dollar invested in new nuclear power.

While the Switkowski panel was prevented from asking key questions, there's no reason for the rest of us to avoid them. A body of existing research indicates that the objectives of meeting energy demand and reducing greenhouse emissions can be met with a combination of renewable energy and gas to displace coal, combined

with energy efficiency measures, without recourse to nuclear power.

For example, a study by AGL, Frontier Economics and WWF-Australia

published in May 2006 finds a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from electricity generation in Australia can be achieved by 2030 at the modest cost of 43c per week per person over 24 years.

Many authoritative studies dispel the myths which, unfortunately, have been promulgated by the Switkowski report, such as the claim that only coal and nuclear power are suitable to provide reliable base-load power.

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COOLmob's Thea trained by Al Gore

Al Gore's recent documentary film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, has been a catalyst for bringing climate change to the forefront of people's minds. Many people are starting to appreciate the seriousness of climate change as we begin to see the consequences, including changes to rainfall patterns and higher temperatures. We are also gradually peeling away the layers of misinformation that so called sceptics (often funded by the fossil fuel industry) have used to muddy the climate change waters.

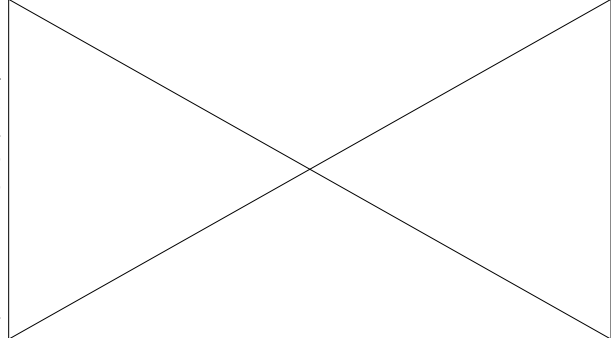
Gore's film is based on a presentation about climate change Gore has given over 1000 times to audiences around the world, dispersed with autobiographical details conveying Gore's relationship with nature and his efforts to bring attention to, and action on, climate change.

When Gore was asked, 'What's next?' he responded that he would train 1000 Climate Change Messengers to further spread his important message. These 1000 people are from the US, UK and Australia. I recently attended the Australian training workshop in Sydney to

become one of Gore's Climate Change Messengers. The training was organised through The Climate Project - Australia a program in partnership with the Australian Conservation Foundation.

Gore trained 84 Australians and each of us will provide at least 10 presentations in our respective communities. During the training, I met many fantastic people, all really committed and motivated to make a difference and promote awareness in Australia of the need to take immediate action on climate change. The participants were from a wide cross section of society, including farmers, stay at home mothers, doctors, economists, film makers, artists and teachers.

Gore proved to be an impressive trainer, fuelling an otherwise exhausting schedule with much energy and fun as well as relating many poignant personal experiences.

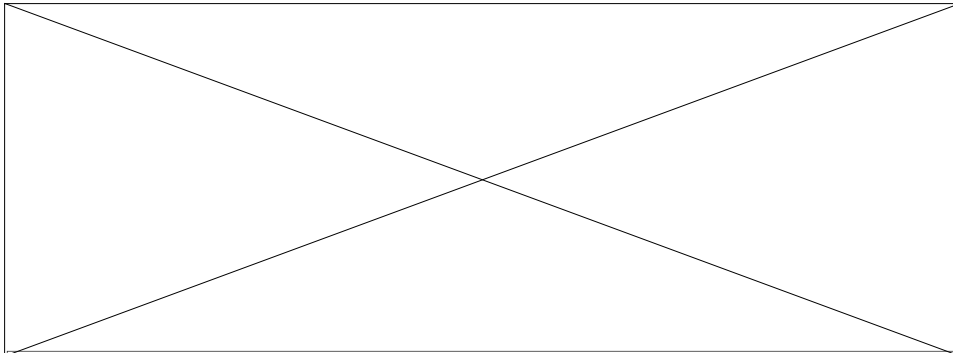


Al Gore presenting to Climate Change Messengers. © ACF.

Some people ask, 'What's the point of the film and the presentations? We've all heard about climate change.' Indeed, the issue we face now is to alert people to the fact that we actually need to do something about climate change! And we need to do it now! We need to stop thinking that everything will work out okay and take some action. Our beautiful planet and many of its inhabitants are at stake.

There is no single solution to climate change, but there are lots of things we can do to dramatically cut our CO2 emissions. Many of these steps are not too difficult, we just need to improve the things we are doing and change our thinking in other areas.

You can find more information about the project at www.acfonline.org.au and www.theclimateproject.org. If you would like to attend a presentation please contact Thea on 8981 2532 or coolmob@iinet.net.au



Darwin And Bynoe Harbours Saved From Sea Cage Fish Farms - a victory for the community and our environments.

It was announced on November 10 2006 that the Sea Cage Fish Farm proposals for Darwin Harbour, Bynoe Harbour and Snake Bay in the Northern Territory, were being withdrawn. This is a great victory for the community and our valuable environments.

The Environment Centre NT together with the Australian Marine Conservation Society outlined a number of significant

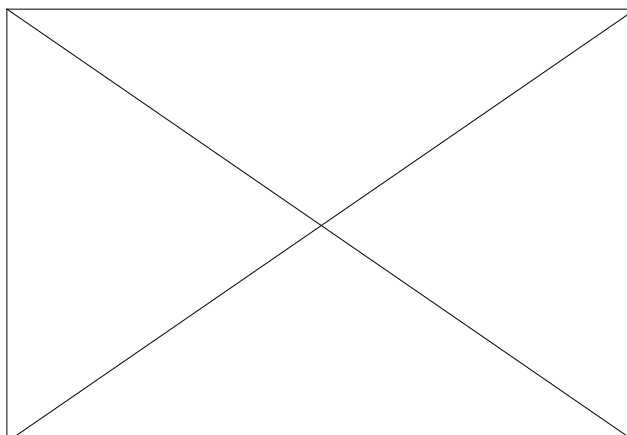
concerns with these proposals and called for the rejection of this type of polluting fish farming in such sensitive marine environments. The local and national community was very active on this issue with hundreds of people writing submissions and letters, signing on-line petitions and filling in campaign postcards sup-

porting the call of the environment groups.

Hopefully future proponents of aquaculture in the NT will learn from this episode and will propose only sustainable, land-based, 'closed-loop' fish farming that does not pollute marine environments, does not rely on huge quantities of wild caught fish for farm-fish feed, and does not pose a risk to wild fish populations.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the campaign.

With thanks to the Poola Foundation (Tom Kantor Fund), Australian Conservation Foundation and The Wilderness Society for their financial support through the Northern Australia Small Grants Program.



Switkowski nuclear report *cont'd* from page 1.

This claim is an oversimplified version of the complex question of how to provide statistical reliability in an energy generation system. Different technologies present different challenges. Nuclear reactors are stable while they work, but when they have an "outage" they can leave a big hole in supply. Once a reactor shuts down it can take weeks or months to re-start.

While a single wind turbine cannot be relied upon as a constant source of power, wind farms spread over a wide area provide a reliable power source.

Energy efficiency and waste-saving measures are too often ignored. Apart from their other advantages, energy-efficiency measures can reduce the demand for both base-load and peak-load power.

Energy-efficiency measures can also deliver large reductions in energy consumption and greenhouse emissions.

The Australian Ministerial Council on Energy published a report in 2003, Towards a National Framework for Energy Efficiency, which concludes that "consumption in the manufacturing, commercial and residential sectors could be reduced by 20-30 per cent with the adoption of current commercially available technologies with an average payback of four years".

But as Switkowski has stressed in recent appearances, the taskforce was not charged with assessing those issues. Rather it was to look at the possibilities of a nuclear future. **Will the Prime Minister now convene a panel to explore the potential of a non-nuclear future for Australia supported by rapid development in renewable energy sources and energy efficiency?**

It is hoped he will, or better still, the Government will simply get to work supporting the implementation of the myriad of clean-energy solutions to the problem of climate change, such as those identified by the Ministerial Council on Energy.

Professor Jim Falk is director of the Australian Centre for Science, Innovation and Society at the University of Melbourne. The centre assists the development of the Energyscience Coalition which provides briefing papers at energyscience.org.au

For more information on nukes and energy visit:

www.energyscience.org.au

McArthur River Update

On Friday the 13th October the Northern Territory Government approved a proposal to mine and divert the McArthur River. The proposal will potentially have serious, long term and irreversible impacts on the McArthur River, including the effects of sedimentation and heavy metal pollution on the river and on the rich downstream marine environments of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

As anticipated, the Commonwealth Government agreed, and has given approval for the mine and diversion to proceed under the EPBC Act. The decision, which contradicts the commitment the Martin Government made at the last election to protect our living rivers, clearly demonstrates the scant regard the Government has for the natural environment.

The decision also contradicts the Government's claim of meaningful consultation with the Indigenous community (and genuine respect for), and illustrates the 'develop at all costs' mantra that has become the hallmark of the Martin Government.

Lastly, the decision flies in the face of the growing Australia-wide desire to protect our rivers and waterways; as we face the uncertainty of drought and climate change.

The response from the community was highly visible and sustained. From Mon 16th October to Thursday 19th October, Traditional owners from Borroloola, the ECNT and McArthur River supporters conducted a series of protests both inside and outside Parliament House. For those involved it was a special week, with many moments shared with old friends and new. Whilst impossible to describe, it is, perhaps, best illustrated by the photo taken of the protestors on the steps of Parliament House. (please have a look and send a message to the NT Government at http://www.ecnt.org/html/cur_mining_mcarthur_submit.html)

The Don't muck up the McArthur campaign is, however, far from over. As this newsletter goes to print, the Traditional Owners are expected to challenge the decision in the Supreme Court. The ECNT will be supporting their challenge and continuing to campaign for the protection of the McArthur River. Please contact Charles at ecntdaly@inet.net.au if you wish to be involved.

Waste Dump & Nuclear Update

With the release of the final Switkowsy Report (see front page story) due at the end of December, the ALP National Conference in April expected to debate their no new uranium mines policy, an announcement about the preferred site for a nuclear waste dump expected in mid-year and a federal election sometime after August, 2007 is shaping up to be a big year for anti-nuclear campaigning.

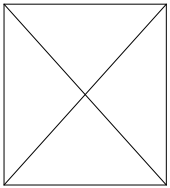
Some good news in this context is that the Beyond Nuclear Initiative has been re-funded, on a smaller scale, for another year. The funding includes wages for the uranium campaigner position at ECNT, the waste dump campaigner based at ALEC in Alice Springs and a national nuclear campaigner based at Friends of the Earth in Melbourne. Funding has also been given for another Alliance Against Uranium meeting during 2007.

Other positive developments include the visit to Darwin in November of representatives of community members from each of the proposed waste dump sites, including Muckaty Station. Traditional Owners from Muckaty, Harts Range and Mt Everard as well as pastoralists from the Fishers Ridge site near Katherine, met with politicians, media and the Northern Land Council. It was also the first opportunity that people from each of the dump sites had to meet with and express support for each other. Responses to this visit from government, the public and the media were extremely positive.

So while we are likely to have a big and possibly difficult year trying to keep Australia nuclear free, there are people, locally, NT-wide and nationally committed to ensuring that we don't go down the toxic nuclear path. Keep in touch to find out what you can do to help!

Emma King, Uranium Campaigner





To ECNT members and supporters. Best wishes for Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and safe 2007 from the crew at ECNT—Peter, Charles, Thea, Adele, Emma and Elly.



Lucky Bokashi winner!!

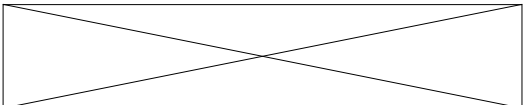
New members who joined during October and November had a chance to win a Bokashi kitchen compost bucket

Taegan Calnan became the lucky winner when her name was drawn from a hat. Congratulations to Taegan and welcome to all our other new members.



OH&S improvements.

With the assistance of a Community Benefit Fund Grant approved earlier this year, staff at ECNT can... well, I was going to say *rest easy* but that's far from the truth. The purpose of the CBF grant was to update some of the office tables that were being used as desks and replace some of the hand-me-down chairs that were in various stages of disrepair. With many long hours spent at our desks, it is important to have a comfortable workspace that promotes good posture and healthy work habits and through the Community Benefit Fund, we have been able to provide that.



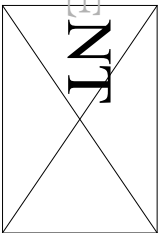
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