



DEVILS' ADVOCATE

AUTUMN 2015



A FREE PUBLICATION FROM
Healthy futures for arid lands and people
ARID LANDS ENVIRONMENT CENTRE
www.alec.org.au

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The Devils Advocate is the quarterly newsletter of the Arid Lands Environment Centre. The deadline for submissions for the Winter edition is Friday 29th May 2015. Articles, pictures, poetry, letters, welcome. Email communications@alec.org.au

All opinions expressed within Devils Advocate are those of the author alone, unless explicitly expressed.

The Devils Advocate is edited and designed by Nicole Pietsch, ALEC's Communications and Campaigns Manager. It is printed on 100% recycled paper.

The Arid Lands Environment Centre acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional owners, both past and present, of this region.

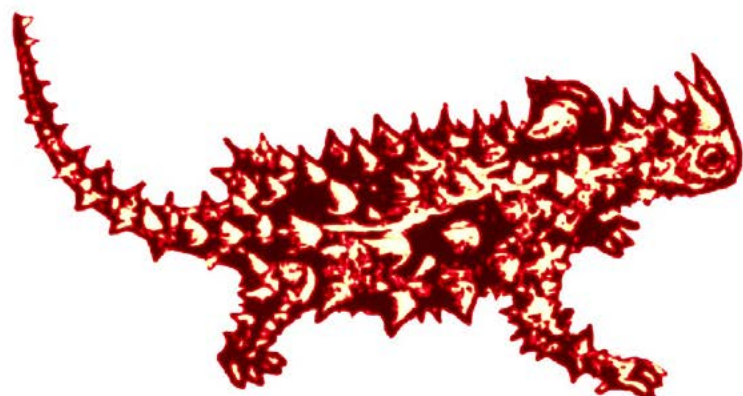
Front cover image by Petal

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ALEC will be moving May!

A generous community member has bought a building which ALEC can rent for a reduced rate - enabling us to have rental security and help us reduce our costs! We are looking for volunteers to help ALEC move between May 17th-31st. Email info@alec.org.au if you can help.

**Arid
Lands
Environment
Centre**



ALEC DIRECTORS' WELCOME

G'day folks and welcome to the first edition of the Devil's Advocate for 2015.

The year is off to a racing start. Outside of ALEC, the oil price has collapsed. Commodity prices have slumped. Political leadership both in the Territory and Federally is on the ropes. The Hawke Fracking Inquiry Report has been released green lighting the unconventional gas industry in the NT. The South Australian Government has initiated a Royal Commission into Nuclear Energy. The Western Australian Government continues to move towards closing around 150 remote communities in WA. All of these will have significant impacts on the work of ALEC and those of us living in Central Australia.

Closer to home, the wonderful rains of early January filled waterholes and the landscape exploded into life with plants, insects, reptiles, birds and I can only assume mammals - all benefitting from the healthy dose of H2O. However, as are the booms and busts of the arid zone, the landscape is now covered with buffel grass which comes with a host of complications including squeezing out other species and burning everything out once it dries out and catches alight - either by lightning or human activity.

Here at ALEC we have been busy, and not just adapting to the new era of reduced capacity due to funding cuts and reduced opportunities to work with government. Submissions have been made to the NSW Parliamentary Committee on the Supply of Gas and Liquid Fuels, the crux of which was that NSW should not be relying on the pipeline dreams of the Giles Government. ALEC has also made a submission to the Lands and Planning Minister opposing a development application to build an incinerator at the Brewer estate and raising concerns about a large-scale horticultural water licence application south of Alice Springs.

This is part of ALEC's job - we are the community's environmental watchdog - as a purely volunteer organisation, this sort of thing can't happen. Proposals that are ill-thought through or likely to have significant environmental impact must continue to have dissenting voices that question the merit of the

application. This is one of the reasons why ALEC's funding was cut - the current government doesn't want these voices to be heard.



Despite this, ALEC membership is at its highest level ever - with more than 280 members. We're not going to give up on this fight...but we do need your continued and regular support. We currently have fifteen people who have committed to \$100 per month, but we need much more. Desert Defenders are now the lifeblood of ALEC, if you can spare \$5, \$10, \$20 or even \$50 per month - please make a regular tax deductible donation to ALEC. The One Hot Night fundraiser in November was a success - with \$7500 raised, and the Bilbies and Bunnies Ball in early April also raised \$4000. Thanks to Chris Wilkinson and Epilogue Lounge staff for hosting us. Also, I'd like to thank everyone who came along and supported us, joined, renewed, donated and those who couldn't make it and donated anyway.

We have a big year ahead - across the ten deserts of Australia's arid zone and within the capital of the region- Alice Springs - our local and small-scale projects will keep ticking along and engaging people on sustainable living and nature conservation.

There is an African proverb that sums it up 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together'. ALEC is here for the long haul - 35 years and we're still going strong - come join us and let's build a healthy future out here together.

Thanks,

Jimmy Cocking
ALEC Director





Conservation Volunteers Needed! 2015 Field Trip Program



Saturday 9th May

Workshop: Propagating Native Plants
Alice Springs Desert Park Nursery
Presented by Alice Springs Desert Park
Normal park entry fees apply.

Saturday 13th June & Sunday 14th June

Overnight Field Trip: Palm Monitoring
and Surveying
Finke Gorge National Park
Presented by Parks and Wildlife
Commission of the NT
Cost: \$150, \$120 ALEC members/concession

Saturday 15th August

Walk: Eucalyptus Intertexta Forest
Presented by Alice Springs Field
Naturalists Club

www.biodiversitymatters.org.au

Saturday 23rd August

Working Bee: Buffel and Cactus
Busting in the Valley
Presented by Alice Springs Landcare

Wednesday 23rd September & Saturday 26th September

Field Trip: Fauna Trapping and
Surveying
Presented by Land For Wildlife

**Biodiversity Matters is an Arid Lands
Environment Centre initiative to
increase community participation in
land management and biodiversity
conservation activities.**

Check the website for full Biodiversity
Matters workshop and field trip details.
Email business@alec.org.au or phone
08 89522497 to book your place.

Vision

Australia's desert country is the healthiest and most ecologically intact arid landscapes remaining on Earth. The Ten Deserts Initiative will work to build collaborative partnerships across state and territory borders to support the long-term protection of the natural and cultural values of Australia's outback. A vibrant future for the arid lands will recognise the interdependence of people and nature with social and economic development being built on healthy and sustainably managed landscapes.

The Ten Deserts Initiative is a cross-border connectivity conservation initiative that started in June 2014. A range of organisations from Western Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory and other parts of the country agreed to work together to achieve this vision.

The purpose of the initiative is to:

- Promote integrated cross-border/tenure approaches to critical ecological threats
- Increase the impact of cross-border collaboration
- Increase the profile and public awareness of the value of Australia's desert country and the challenges of solving complex issues in remote regions
- Connect disparate and remote partners to attract and make better use of available resources
- Attract additional resources into Central Australia

ALEC currently has a coordinating role with the Ten Deserts through facilitating quarterly working group meetings and organised the first annual face to face meeting in Alice Springs this April. This role is funded through Rangelands WA, Dept Environment Water and Natural Resources (SA) and the Pew Charitable Trusts. This is an exciting project and one of the largest of its kind (over 2.85 million sq km). A website has been developed www.tendeserts.org, which will be increasingly populated over coming months.

If you want any more information or interested in getting involved, please contact Jimmy at coordinator@tendeserts.org or call 0423511931



The Ten Deserts are:

- Sturt Stony Desert (SA, QLD, NSW)
- Strzelecki Desert (SA, QLD, NSW)
- Perdirka Desert (SA)
- Tirari Desert (SA)
- Great Sandy Desert (WA, NT)
- Simpson Desert (SA, NT, QLD, NSW)
- Gibson Desert (WA)
- Little Sandy Desert (WA)
- Tanami Desert (NT, WA)
- Great Victoria Desert (SA, WA)

and includes the arid and semi-arid lands of NT, WA and SA.



from Wikipedia: Map of Australia, with internal borders and Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA) regions overlaid; deserts highlighted, w/legend; also see <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/bioregion-framework/ibra/index.html> (<http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/pubs/regions.pdf>; <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/pubs/subregions.pdf>)

ARID EDGE

Arid Edge has kicked off the year with a series of gardening workshops in the Utopia Homelands. In partnership with Medicare Local NT and My Pathway, Arid Edge is working with local gardeners and residents to build their skills in arid gardening and permaculture. Late last year we installed a CAT wicking bed at the Alparra Aged Care Centre, and this February have started working on soil testing



Getting the wicking bed at the Batchelor Learning Centre ready for a new winter crop.



and garden bed preparation at existing beds in 3 Bore outstation and the Batchelor Learning Centre. Workshops to come include weed control, repairs to earth bag wicking beds, basic irrigation, fruit tree pruning and planting out the winters crop of veggies. Utopia locals have a history of gardening going back years now, and are proving keen participants. We're looking forward to more great work to come in Utopia.

Arid Edge is continuing its work at the Santa Theresa Orchard and is developing a 5-year plan for the site. This is building on previous work at the site and is in partnership with Catholic Care NT and Atyenghe-atherre Aboriginal Corporation.

Arid Edge has recently completed waste audits in 3 local schools. This year we are looking to partner with more schools in the areas of energy, water and waste efficiency.

Arid Edge is also planning the next Introduction to Permaculture Course this Autumn – watch out for dates in ALEC's fortnightly Thorny News and on the Arid Edge website aridedge.com.au

**Book a Garden Tune
Up now. Only \$49.00!**

30 minute consult includes:

- On the spot irrigation repairs + maintenance
- Water saving advice
- Quotes for further work needed



**IS
your
garden
ready for
summer
???**

Call: 8953 8835

Email: info@aridedge.com.au

www.aridedge.com.au

PARTICIPATE • LEARN • CREATE

Alice Springs Central Australia

Olive Pink Botanic Garden Alice Springs

Arid Lands Environment Centre

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA'S PREMIER SCIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY EVENT

Friday 7th August - Sunday 9th August

Olive Pink Botanic Gardens

Eco-Science Schools Day, Alice Springs Bicycle Film Festival, The Science of Soil Workshop, Sunday Eco-markets and Sustainable Living Festival

www.ecofair.org.au

Food for Alice

Local produce market stall

9am – 12pm @ East Side Pilates

Every alternative Saturday



Support local, ethical food, sell your excess produce, become a market volunteer and buy locally grown food

2015 Market Dates

7th and 21st of February
4th and 18th of April
13th and 27th of June

5th & 21st of March
2nd, 16th and 30th of May
11th and 25th July

Contact Carmel to sell your excess produce or to become a regular volunteer
business@alec.org.au or 0409 180 614



FOOD FOR ALICE

Food for Alice is an ALEC run local food distribution project aiming to increase local-grown produce and food resilience. I have been managing Food for Alice now for over 6 months and it has quickly become one of the most engaging and exciting projects I have done at ALEC.

I love the fact that we are giving local gardens an avenue to sell their excess produce that would have normally gone to compost. I love that most of our producers are now actively growing more without the constraint of only producing what their family and friends would have eaten. I love that we are able to pay for this produce giving local gardeners and growers rewards for their efforts and something to go towards the cost of producing this yummy fresh food.

I love the conversations I have at the market with customers about all sorts of things, from how what we are doing supports the local community, to just their joy at getting fresh local food. I especially love the education side, the fact that yes carrots can and do look like that, or yes a pumpkin can be sun bleached on the outside, and very yummy on the inside. That this is what spinach really looks like when it is grown with love and care, and yes it really does last up to a week and half in the fridge with no need of pesticide or preservatives.

The conversations with some first time customers who come looking for produce to only find out that it is out of season so it is not available right now. This one always reminds me of just how much, and how easily it is for people to become disconnected with food supplies and the fact that in order to have fruit and vegetables all year round, the supermarkets have to source them from all over the world. Like the table grapes that come from California, or mushrooms that come from Mexico. In fact some of these fruit and vegetables have travelled more than some people travel in their whole life.

So Food for Alice to me is more than just a local farmers market where people can purchase local fresh fruit and vegetables. It's a conversation started for environmental impact, it's a classroom and

teaching space, it's a social outing, it's a community space for people to get together and support each other. It is also direct proof that there is a market out there for locally grown produce. This is probably one of the most exciting aspects for me.

Food for Alice was expanded with the help of a Community Climate Change Grant from the NT government. The grant money ran out quite a while ago, and since then Food for Alice has made its own way with the support of volunteers and the surplus it makes from selling the produce. We are getting closer to the goal of turning this small social enterprise into its own sustainable small business that can actually pay for itself. And that is a very exciting thing.

Carmel Vandermolen

Food for Alice is always looking for new growers, excess produce and volunteers. Please contact Carmel on 89522497 business@alec.org.au

Join the Food for Alice Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/108715702520033/>



Local producer, Rodney from the Happy Farmer NT stocks the stall with home grown goodness



Don't Frack the Outback!

With 95% of the Northern Territory currently under application for exploration for petroleum and gas, the vast expanses of the Australian Outback are facing an unprecedented threat. The Arid Lands Environment Centre has been at the forefront of raising awareness and making public representations against the unconventional gas industry and the process of fracking in Central Australia.

ALEC is calling for a moratorium on the issuing of all exploration licenses until the process of hydraulic fracturing can be proven to be safe.

ALEC made a submission to the NT Hydraulic Fracturing Inquiry, which was commissioned by the NT Government in March 2014. The report was released to the public earlier in March 2015 and has provided a green light to the industry if the NT government tightens its regulations. This is deeply concerning for the future of the NT.

No Fracking Pipeline!

ALEC has been a strong advocate against the proposal to develop a gas pipeline from the Northern Territory to the Eastern States. Development of any gas pipeline will be a green light to the shale gas industry in the NT, opening up the market for mass unconventional gas production. Stopping the construction of the gas pipeline is an essential component of the campaign against shale gas production and fracking in the NT. Stand with ALEC and say "No Fracking Pipeline!"

Join the NT community and say - "Don't Frack the Outback"!

- Donate to the campaign
- Help organise a local fundraiser
- Write a letter to the NT Chief Minister and Minister for Mines and Energy
- Educate yourself and spread the word!



FRACK FREE COORDINATOR UPDATE

This year is already shaping up to be a big one in the fight against fracking with a growing global trend emerging to either outright ban fracking, or hold off until more is known about the impacts on the environment and local communities.

Early in the year a parliamentary report was released in the UK calling for a ban on fracking due the huge uncertainties about the environmental risks. This was closely followed by Scotland announcing a moratorium on unconventional oil and gas fracking to allow time for a full public consultation and a full public health impact assessment, and then a ban on fracking in Wales until it can be proven safe in an environmental and public health context. This is also after the full ban on fracking in New York was announced late last year due to the public health risks.

Now we just need the NT to catch on to the trend! The Chief Minister has been quoted saying that people advocating against fracking just need to be better educated. However as more and more evidence emerges both nationally and globally it is clear that this practice is unsafe for communities, the air we breathe and the water we drink. A recent survey undertaken by the Don't Frack the Territory campaign group based in Darwin revealed that 84% of informed NT voters do not think fracking should go ahead and that seventy-seven percent will consider the issue when voting in the next election.

Yet the NT Government is blindly pushing forward



with it's plans to develop the shale gas industry and build a pipeline for fracked gas. It's time for the NT Government to rethink it's Developing the North agenda which promises widespread shale gas fracking at the cost of community health, our unique and pristine arid environment and even the water we drink.

We need to continue to send a strong message to those in power that we will not compromise the health and well being of our communities and our unique arid environment for an economic agenda that benefits foreign investors and corporate interests only.

Take a stand against fracking in Central Australia and get involved in the campaign.

To find out more contact Tanya at frackfreecoordinator@gmail.com

STOP PRESS!!

Recently announced - two NT municipalities have taken the lead in saying no to fracking! In a first for the NT, Wagait Shire Council passed its second anti-fracking motion on 15 February to oppose fracking as a process to explore and extract gas because of inherent risks, particularly its significant risk to water security. This was followed a week later by a motion passed by Katherine Town Council supporting a moratorium on fracking activity within the entire Katherine municipality. There are now more than 60 councils Australia-wide who have passed similar motions, with all mainland states now represented.

Here in Central Australia, the Alice Springs Town Council is divided on the issue - please email astc@astc.nt.gov.au to express your concerns on fracking.





**JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT -
Environment Centre NT and Arid Lands
Environment Centre 26th February 2015**

**NT Fracking report welcomed but
recommendations are lacking**

Northern Territory environment groups welcome yesterday's public release of the Hawke Hydraulic Fracturing Report but it has raised a number of significant issues.

"We welcome the long-awaited release of this critical independent report and look forward to examining its findings. As outlined in our original submission, we reiterate that it is inappropriate and nonsensical for the NT Government to support further shale gas 'fracking' development at least until the report's recommendations have been put into place," said Anna Boustead, Acting Director Environment Centre NT

'The release of this report confirms what we have been saying all along. The regulatory framework in the NT is not strong enough to ensure that our precious aquifers are protected from fracking. We maintain our calls for a moratorium on shale gas exploration until it can be proven safe.' said Jimmy Cocking Director of the Arid Lands Environment Centre

Environment groups claim that the risks associated with hydraulic fracturing have been played down by the Terms of Reference that were skewed towards shale gas production rather than a full assessment of the risks.

"It is not satisfactory to have inadequate environmental protection measures in place whilst the shale gas industry is allowed to continue to develop unbridled by proper environmental regulations. This clearly places gas company profits ahead of the risk of causing environmental damage." said Anna Boustead, Acting Director Environment Centre NT.

The Report has identified gaps in the regulatory framework around fracking - but has suggested that forming a Cabinet Sub-Committee will suffice to 'set the standard for best practice regulatory regime'.

'The NT Government has a clear pro-oil and gas agenda. It has run taxpayer-funded advertisements openly promoting oil and gas industry and just last week, the Chief Minister made a curious statement promoting an application by Inpex to conduct exploration for shale gas over the Daly Waters region, before Native Title owners had been consulted, or due process had been followed to approve it. We have no confidence that this proposed 'Sub-Committee' would give proper consideration to environmental risks or damage' said Anna Boustead, Acting Director Environment Centre NT.

The report outlines the need for a social licence to be earned by the industry and suggests that the NT Government work to improve community understanding and engagement on the issues of fracking.

'It is hoped that the NT Government will change its approach to fracking and start listening to the views of community members. We are seriously concerned about the lack of reserve blocks outside of Alice Springs and Darwin. This is a real risk to people living out bush whether on stations, small townships, communities or homelands,' said Jimmy Cocking, Director of the Arid Lands Environment Centre.

The report does concede that very little is known about the long-term impacts of abandoned wells but fails to address potential climate impacts and energy alternatives.

'It is not adequate to say that the total life-cycle climate impact of shale gas fracking is not known when there is much evidence pointing to a potentially significant climate impact' said Anna Boustead, Acting Director Environment Centre NT.

'We welcome the recommended inter-departmental collaboration on this, but it's like the NT Government is driving down a dirt road at 100km/h an hour with a flat tyre and telling us it'll be OK if we slow down to 80km/h instead. What we really need to do is pull over, try to fix the tyre before driving further down the road - without a moratorium and an overhaul of the regulatory system, there's the growing risk of a methane blow-out', concluded Jimmy Cocking, Director Arid Lands Environment Centre.



CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN FRACK FREE ALLIANCE

Watarrka (Kings Canyon) Campaign

Despite continued opposition to oil and gas exploration in Watarrka (Kings Canyon) National Park by Traditional Owners and the community, the exploration permit applications by Palatine Energy which cover almost the entirety of the park have not yet been rejected by the NT Government. Instead the exploration permit applications are being considered by a 'transparent and open process', which, while allowing for objections to be raised, still continues despite the fact that the Traditional Owners have been expressing their serious concerns with the applications since February 2013.

It is unthinkable to consider mining in an area with such strong tourism value, not to mention the cultural and natural heritage value of the park and CAFFA will continue to support the Traditional Owners of Watarrka to stand strong against mining in the park. If you want to take a stand to protect our iconic natural and cultural heritage you can write to Minister Tollner, who has the final say on approving the permit applications, and ask that the permits covering Watarrka National Park not be granted.

CAFFA is meeting regularly to plan our fight against fracking. We have a huge program of events planned for the year including film and discussion nights, skills building sessions and of course local actions to raise awareness of the risks of fracking!

Can you help out on the Campaign?!

Right now we are calling for people who can participate in a letter writing group once a month targeting gas companies and the NTG, as well as people who can help with doing research to support the campaign. If you have an hour or two spare you could contribute to the campaign please get in touch:

email: frackfreecoordinator@gmail.com



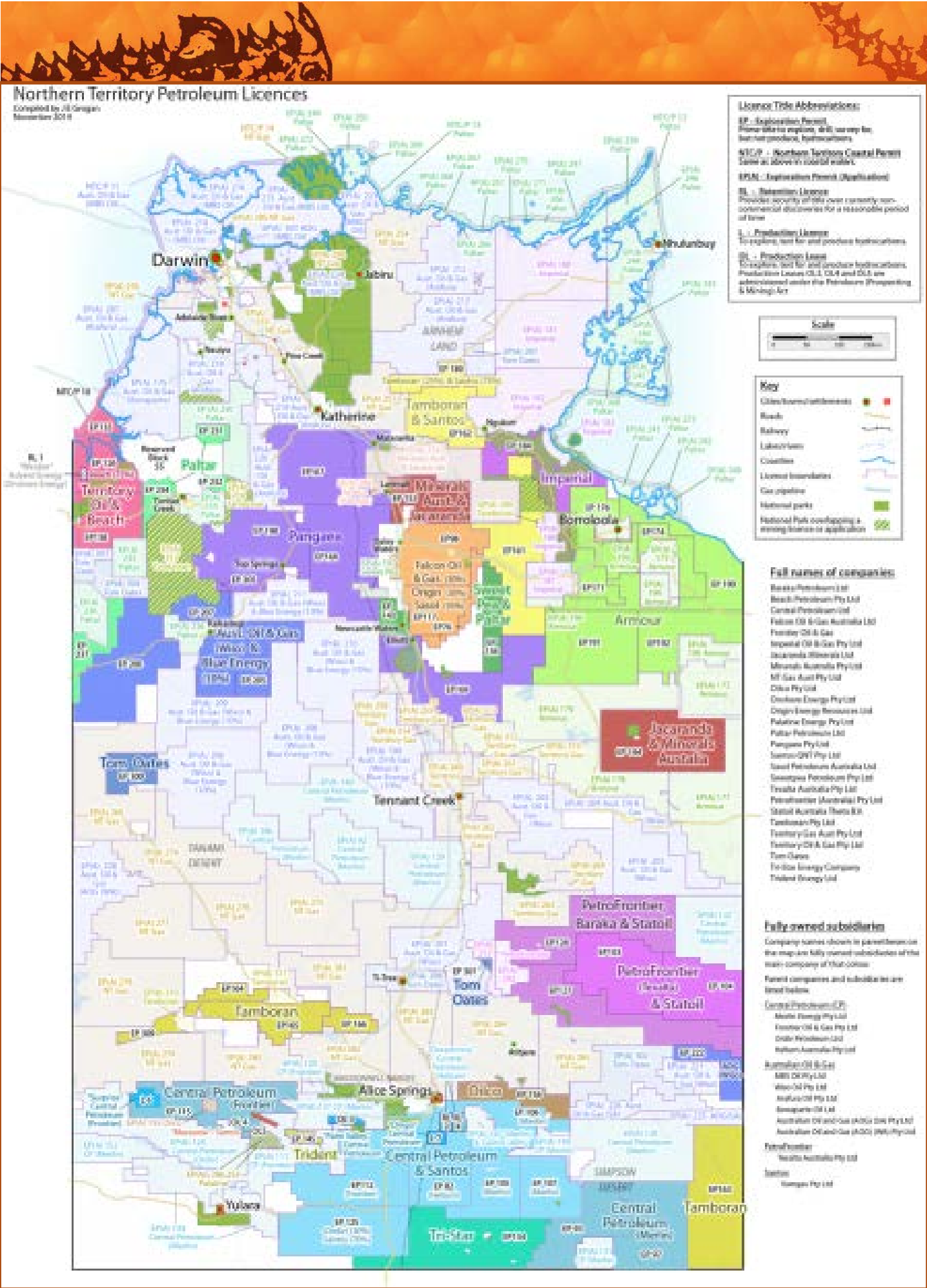
Community protest against fracking out the front of the Alice Springs Convention Centre to meet mining and gas industry representatives at the Annual Geoscience and Exploration Seminar

**For more information or to get involved in CAFFA
email: frackfreecoordinator@gmail.com**

Or visit the CAFFA Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Central-Australian-Frack-Free-Alliance/306595772848043>



Concerned community members assemble outside Chief Minister Adam Giles Office and demand the release of the fracking report in March.



While the NTG spin is that the NEGI will transport gas from existing onshore & offshore gas fields the sole purpose of it is to make an expanded shale gas industry viable in the NT, which will require the use of widespread fracking.

There are 3 proposed routes for the pipeline – 2 which connect existing pipelines at Tennant Creek to Mt Isa / Boulia and one connecting Alice Springs to Moomba in SA. The latter route will cut through the proposed wilderness area of Simpson Desert and the Lake Eyre Basin with numerous river crossings, creating significant damage in these pristine arid environments.

Instead the Territory needs sustainable economic development which would be better provided by investment in renewable energy such as solar. We can't afford the significant investment of tax payer

ALEC & The Central Frack Free Alliance will be building a campaign to stop the fracking pipeline and shift this investment into sustainable clean energy solutions – more info coming soon!



Like ALEC, the Environmental Defenders Office NT lost all of its funding in 2014. EDO NT have been strong opponents to the unconventional gas industry in the NT.

“The currently regulatory regime is by far the weakest in Australia, the correct order of things is to fix that first. Until that occurs, the process of facilitating exploration and extraction of shale gas by fracking should be put on hold. Current NT laws are open to be abused by any unscrupulous operator who is granted a permit. The Petroleum Act clearly places economic interests over environmental interests. In fact, there is no specific requirement for the Minister, when issuing permits, to consider the need to preserve and protect the environment at all.” David Morris, Principal Lawyer EDO NT.

**Donate today to keep the doors
of the EDO NT open!**
<http://edont.org.au>



ALICE SPRINGS COMMUNITY GARDEN

Garden News

Thanks to everyone for your ongoing support of the Community Garden. It is going from strength to strength with great participation from members, new plots and exciting developments happening! We had a great Earth Hour evening on 28 March with over 60 people in attendance, cooking pizzas in the dark! Thanks to the organisers, pizza cooks and everyone who helped clean up. We raised over \$200 for the garden and ALEC from this evening.

The Alice Springs Community Garden recently become a Garden for Wildlife member. For a \$10 life time registration fee, members are offered free resources, advice and ongoing support to help you keep motivated to manage your garden/property to increase biodiversity. The scheme targets residential properties within Alice Springs. For more info: Land For Wildlife lfw@lowecol.com.au



Working Bees

Your ASCG Committee has decided to hold one BIG WORKING BEE on the 3rd Sunday of every Month from 8am-11am.

We would like all plot holders to come and lend a hand at least 6 times a year. Allan O'Keefe and Bruce Simmons will coordinate tasks. There will be cold water and hot beverages. Please bring a plate of you feel like it. On the 1st Sunday of every month we will routinely hold a smaller working bee.

Manure

Just wanting to let everyone know that from now on the only manure we can get will always have a fair bit of decomposing hay in it so it's best used as a surface layer (10 -20cm deep) and not dug in. Within a month or two it should be beautifully broken down. Until then it's probably better to plant your seeds and seedlings along small furrows filled with compost or potting soil that follow the mini-scape water lines.

New Beds

We have two new beds being prepared. We have



Tim, Bruce, Jen and Jimmy erected the Garden for Wildlife sign on the front gate of the garden.

adopted that big bad nuisance buffel grass as a great base for many of our raised plots. A 30cm layer of buffel grass on top of a cardboard layer to smother any weeds, covered by another 20-30 cm layer of spoilt hay and manure has proven a highly successful planting bed. In the end it all breaks down to about 15 cm of garden loam which needs some more boosting after a year or so. Overall though, most plots are producing really well and we have a growing resource of rich soil.



The mandala garden survived the heat of the summer.

Silent Meditation in the Garden



Sunday mornings
7.30 am until 8.15 am

Please join us at the Bodhi Tree in the north west corner of the Community Garden
All traditions welcome

BYO groundsheet and cushion(s)
A water bottle is a good idea in the heat
Donations of firewood in the cold weather welcomed

A gold coin donation towards Garden expenses appreciated

If you are not a member of the Community Garden please wait outside the gate until a member arrives to provide access

Any enquires phone Kay 89 52 8515

Autumn Plantings

It's that time of year for new plantings. The season has swung around from summer into this lovely time of cool nights and warm days, benign and kind for veggie growing. Here is some planting advice from Bruce on what to get in the ground now.

- All the brassicas - cabbages, broccoli, caulis, Brussels sprouts
- Leeks, onions of all types, garlic
- Non-hearting lettuces of all types (mid to late April probably better for the hearting types like iceberg)
- Radishes, beetroot, turnips, parsnips, carrots, kohlrabi
- Peas are probably best left to end of March. I recommend sugar snap climbers but you have to have space and be patient
- Broad beans

- Silver beet, rainbow chard, Asian greens of all types, rocket
- Asparagus, strawberries

Things NOT to plant now are those that are frost sensitive including tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, melons of all types, green beans, zucchinis, sweet corn, marigolds and basil.

Happy, Healthy Gardening
ASCG Team

Regular working bees are on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of every month.

www.alicecommunitygarden.org.au

BEYOND NUCLEAR INITIATIVE

Radioactive waste management post-Muckaty

As ALEC Members and supporters would know, in June 2014 the Australian federal government abandoned plans to build the first national nuclear waste facility on Aboriginal land at Muckaty in the Northern Territory. The decision came half way through a federal court case challenging the nomination of the site and is a testament to the determined eight year campaign by Traditional Owners and their supporters around the country and world.



Press conference June 19, 2014 announcing Muckaty campaign victory

Australian non-government and civil society organisations, including environment groups, public health organisations and trade unions, have consistently requested the government halt the search for a single remote site in favour of a process based on an audit of all radioactive waste materials in parallel with an independent Inquiry that considered the full range of waste management options.

However, in November 2014 federal Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane instead announced intention to open a nationwide site nomination and selection process for locating a national radioactive waste facility. The National Radioactive Waste Management Project (NRWMP) launched on Monday March 2 and aims to shortlist nominations, assess preferred sites and declare a final location by the middle of 2016.

The Beyond Nuclear Initiative considers this timeframe to be unnecessarily compressed and constrained, especially given that the first shipment of long-lived intermediate level waste returning to Australia from overseas reprocessing in December 2015 will be taken to a purpose built storage facility

at the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor complex just south of Sydney. Waste currently stored in Australia is concentrated at two secure federal facilities; the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation campus at Lucas Heights and the CSIRO facility at Woomera in South Australia. The majority of Australia's nuclear experts are also situated at Lucas Heights.



There is little opportunity for public input and consultation built into the NRWMP, especially in the early stages. Once preferred sites are shortlisted and field assessments begin, we understand that public input will include submissions to the Environmental Impact Assessment in accordance with the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) and Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act (ARPANS).

Essentially, there is still an underlying assumption – and a continuing push – that we need a single remote facility. However, Minister Macfarlane's public statement that the Muckaty process was a 'disaster' has clearly influenced the approach to the revised NRWMP. After decades of top down decision-making based on a Decide-Announce-Defend model, this new process does at least contain some degree of transparency, clarity and a stated commitment to volunteerism.

Two committees have been convened to assist the government developing criteria to select a site; a Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) and Public Interest Panel (PIP). The Australian Conservation Foundation was the only civil society organisation engaged with radioactive waste issues during the Muckaty/Northern Territory waste dump proposal that was offered a position on the PIP. According to the government website (radioactivewaste.gov.au), each shortlisted site will be assessed against three facility design options, two of which only have low level waste being transported to the facility and intermediate level waste managed 'under current arrangements'.

Looking at a broader range of options in collaboration with the two advisory panels – even if just on paper – is far better than the single-minded pursuit of a solo site for all radioactive waste located on remote Aboriginal Land. The Minister has taken a welcome half step back, but there are still many unanswered questions regarding this process, which we maintain would be far better addressed through an independent Inquiry.

The Beyond Nuclear Initiative will continue to monitor progress of the NRWMP and inform stakeholders and interested parties of key developments and opportunities for input into the process. That this process is happening at all is a tribute to the tenacity of the Muckaty Traditional Owners who took such sustained action to protect their country and culture. It is also a tribute to all who supported them. Now we need to maintain our vigilance and efforts to advance radioactive waste management in Australia in a more socially and environmentally responsible way.

Building international connections and support

A delegation representing the Australian Nuclear Free Alliance (ANFA) attended the World Uranium Symposium held in Quebec City, Canada from April 14-16.

The event featured presentations from over 100 international experts on a wide range of topics. The Australian contingent - which included Dr Helen Caldicott, ANFA co-chair Barb Shaw (Alice Springs), ANFA co-chair Peter Watts (Arabunna nation) and Dave Sweeney (Australian Conservation



ANFA co-chairs Peter Watts and Barbara Shaw at the World Uranium Symposium, Quebec.

Foundation)- presented at three plenary sessions and two workshops.

Following the Symposium was the 5th International Uranium Film Festival. Beyond Nuclear Initiative is very proud that the documentary about the Muckaty nuclear waste dump campaign titled "Protecting Manuwangu" featured at the festival. The film was produced by Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning (UTS) in collaboration with NITV, Beyond Nuclear Initiative and Muckaty Traditional Owners.

BNI assisted the ANFA delegation to document the Quebec tour by managing updates on the ANFA website and sharing information and images via twitter on #uranium2015.

ANFA website: <http://www.anfa.org.au/tour2015>
Twitter #uranium2015 or following @beyondnuclearoz
Facebook page: Beyond Nuclear Initiative

SA Royal Commission

A major development nationally has been the announcement of the South Australian Royal Commission into expansion of the nuclear industry, including options of uranium enrichment, nuclear power and hosting of an international nuclear waste facility. Not long after the Commission was announced, Premier Weatherill and nuclear advocate Ziggy Switkowski expressed the first two of these options are unlikely to be recommended, exposing that the main agenda was investigating development of a radioactive waste import industry. Campaigners and communities likely to be in the firing line of expanded uranium operations (or international nuclear waste dump proposals) have also expressed concern that the chair of the Commission and majority of the expert panel (with the exception of Professor Ian Lowe) are clearly pro-nuclear.

As well as impacts on the local environment and communities, an expanded nuclear industry in South Australia would impact people right along transport routes (up to and including Darwin Port) and workers handling radioactive materials. It would also further set back the struggle for a clean energy future that requires increased political support and direct investment in renewables infrastructure.



Beyond Nuclear Initiative is engaging with the Commission process through the public submission process and by supporting the community campaign calling for the negative environmental and social impacts of historical and current nuclear projects to be scrutinised by the Commission. BNI will also be facilitating a roundtable discussion for key SA stakeholder groups in Adelaide in mid-May.



March 2015 Protest in Adelaide against Nuclear Royal Commission

ACTU Congress

Building on the networks from the Muckaty campaign, BNI is hosting a fringe event at the Australian Council of Trade Unions Congress in late May titled South Australia: Renewable or Radioactive? Speakers will include Maritime Union of Australia (NT Branch) Secretary Thomas Mayor, Yankunytjatjara Anangu woman Karina Lester and a renewables and nuclear policy expert.

The panel will examine nuclear industry operations in Australia and highlight the need for direct investment in the renewables industry. Assisting workers to transition away from struggling, hazardous and polluting industries must be recognised as essential for creation of long term and sustainable jobs in rural and regional areas.

Beyond Nuclear Initiative maintains an active role on the Australian Nuclear Free Alliance committee and supports campaigns against uranium and nuclear projects rights across the country. Drawing inspiration from the many successful campaigns that have stopped uranium mines and nuclear waste dumps, we continue to highlight the human and environmental cost of the toxic uranium trade as we work toward a nuclear- and fossil fuel- free future.

www.beyondnuclearinitiative.com

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What you can put in our bins:

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- Wine and spirit bottles
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- Rinsed flavoured milks
- Clean Glass jars
- Clean tins
- Pieces of Aluminium, Copper, Brass
- Aluminium Coffee Pods



Volunteer Conservation Program

Saturday 13th June, Sunday 14th June Overnight Field Trip: Palm Monitoring & Surveying Finke Gorge National Park

This will be an overnight camp at the Finke Gorge National Park. Rangers and scientific staff will lead activities, and will provide briefing talks on the first day. In 2013 Biodiversity Matters volunteers helped set up a long-term project looking at the impacts of grassy environmental weeds (buffel grass and couch grass) on the recruitment of the threatened red cabbage palm. This trip we will go back and participate in habitat restoration, palm surveying, Black-footed wallaby surveying, fence maintenance and clearing.

Participants will leave from ALEC 8am Saturday morning, and return Sunday afternoon. Cost: \$150, \$120 ALEC members/concession; includes travel and 4 meals. Bookings to business@alec.org.au, 89522497 by Friday 29th May.



www.biodiversitymatters.org.au

A CLIMATE OF LOCAL OPPORTUNITY

**Published in the Alice Springs News Online
January 1, 2015. By Jimmy Cocking**
<http://www.alicespringsnews.com.au/2015/01/01/a-climate-of-local-opportunity/>

Unfortunately and unsurprisingly, 2014 is set to be the world's hottest year on record. There is no denying the thermometer of global mean temperatures, nor the causal relationship of man-made emissions being the cause of it. As emissions continue to rise, so too does the prospect of life getting harder and hotter for all species that call this planet home. The problem is that despite everybody knowing this, even though some refuse to believe it - our economic system is increasing risk and supporting a more dangerous future for all of us.

The Northern Territory with all of its complexity is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The Top End has the complication of rising oceans and cyclones, whereas we down here can expect longer dry-spells, increasing numbers of hot days, increased variability in relation to rainfall and as a result, increased intensity of fires. The other, not highly publicised risk for the Territory is growing inequality and the disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. This growing disparity is what will determine how Central Australia fares as the impacts of increasing temperatures are felt.

Central Australia has three distinct advantages in dealing with climate change on a local level. We have relatively abundant underground water supplies; unequalled abundance of solar energy and people whose ancestors have lived here through great climatic changes of millennia past. By planning and managing our use of groundwater; investing in renewable energy and building efficiency; while ensuring that communities are prepared for the impacts through education and developing and implementing community and regionally-specific adaptation action plans - we might be OK. But that depends on a number of factors.

The current lack of political will, or more worryingly the increasing pressure from vested interests has the potential to squander our natural advantages. The

poisoning of progress by creating a false competition between jobs and the environment will impact on all of us. The mantras of 'open for business' and 'Developing the North' may create short-term gains for shareholders in global corporations, but the rest of us will be left high and dry as a result of this myopic economic agenda. In a changing world, the economics need to reflect the times and not extremist ideologies based on increasing the power of the market, reducing corporate taxes and shrinking government responsibilities. The reality is that the boom is over. Commodity prices (oil, coal, iron ore etc) are crashing, causing geopolitical tensions and pressures globally and locally. Now is the time to invest in the future and not squander opportunities chasing pipedreams and economic fantasies.

The key going forward is ensuring that investments are targeted to generate economic development that builds on our ability to cope with a warming world. This is an all-inclusive opportunity to ensure that future generations not only have a reason to live here, but more importantly, are able to. This requires holistic thinking and actual planning for the region. Alice Springs is the capital of outback Australia, servicing communities across South Australia, Western Australia and of course the Northern Territory. We need to think of development as a regional issue, not just concerning ourselves with the Alice Springs CBD separate from the rest - but as a



ALEC staff at the Uterne Solar Power Station

collective whole.

What are our assets? What are the threats? What are our opportunities? How can we overcome the barriers?

These are questions we would expect our decision-makers to be considering. However, the narrowness of vision sees our assets as something to be sold off; threats to be ignored or gambled with; opportunities created for friends and party donors; while barriers to development are removed by limiting community participation in policy development under the guise of 'consultation'.

The real assets in Central Australia are not the minerals in the ground or potential for gas extraction. It is the ingenuity of the people living here. Those who persist and persevere against the odds. Those who have mapped, studied, observed and acted in the interest of the people living here. The threats to the people living in Central Australia are related to ideological policies that will see internal dislocation and relocation of people into unsustainable communities. The potential pollution of our aquifers from unfettered shale gas exploration. The industrialisation of our landscapes that locals and visitors treasure. These are the threats being gambled with at present. Not to mention the climate impacts of massive leaking and burning of methane.

The opportunities for sustainable development are plentiful. Rather than building carbon intensive skyscrapers across the Alice Springs CBD; retrofitting homes and businesses for energy and water efficiency would create lasting jobs, as would supporting movement towards more than 10 000 roofs in Alice Springs equipped with solar panels and water heating units. Overcoming the barriers to this require government investment. This means supporting community and business-initiatives to reduce and adapt to the impacts of climate change, not exacerbate them. But first, the government needs to acknowledge it by having a policy that seeks to mitigate emissions and support communities to adapt to the likely scenarios presented by the scientific literature.

2014 was a year of going backwards in many ways. The Federal Government scrapped the carbon price

and mining tax, created uncertainty in renewable energy investment, handed over environmental assessment powers to the states and territories, cut funding to environmental groups and community legal centres, scrapped the National Water Commission and gutted departments and committees working on climate change including cuts to the CSIRO. The Northern Territory Government sold off TIO; voted for and then put down an independent political donations inquiry; continued approving exploration that involves fracking while conducting an Inquiry into the process (report yet to be released), cut funds to environment groups and social support agencies; started a bidding process for a gas pipeline and belligerently supporting a 'development at all costs' agenda. Meanwhile, iron ore and bauxite mines have closed across the Top End; the Macarthur River Mine continues to release sulfur dioxide (key ingredient for acid rain) into the atmosphere; the Minister for Land Resource Management (and Mines and Energy) Willem Westra Van Holthe was taken to court for water licensing issues; and investment is drying up due to shaky commodity markets. Despite all this, the NT government remains committed to its economic agenda but is failing to recognise the signs of the times.

Climate action makes economic sense. Preparing for the long-term while immediately stimulating activity on the local level. Climate policies are a necessity for any government, left or right. This global issue is beyond politics and planning for it needs to be incorporated into all levels of governance. There are an abundance of opportunities to create work for



Alice Springs community members at the Global Day of Climate Action 2014

people through supporting investment into building efficiencies and renewable energy. The promise of gas wealth is narrowly distributed. Locally, some contractors may get jobs out of it, but mainly it will be a fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workforce who will contribute minimally to our local economy. The impacts of climate change require thinking beyond the election cycle and quarterly statements. By investing in our environmental balance sheet (clean air, clean water and clean country) we will provide better opportunities for future generations. Through investing in our people and their innovative potential, we can share the benefits with the world. Utility and household scale renewable energy; building efficiency (lifetime energy and water costs) in arid environments; remote recycling and small-scale industry; sustainable dry-land agriculture and horticulture; cultural knowledge

and understanding; arts, events and tourism; large-scale land management and biodiversity conservation; water sensitive urban design; climate adaptation and social activism. These are but some of the words that provide a lens for a sustained future out here.

This coming year I hope we see more substance and less spin in the realm of policymaking. I hope we see more equitable development and support for vulnerable people and communities in central Australia. But most of all, I hope more people recognise, respect and stand up for our shared rights to a safe climate, clean water and healthy landscapes. The failure of government becomes the responsibility of communities - if we love this place, then we must protect it.



Learning about what is happening with the weather is the beginning of a lifelong journey towards adapting to the changing climate. Congratulations to Ltyentye Apurte Rangers, Central Land Council, Tangentyere and CSIRO on producing this book. http://www.clc.org.au/files/pdf/CSIRO_A3ClimateBook_online.pdf

LOOKING AFTER YOU

Environmental activism is tough, so how do you look after your own wellbeing while facing such odds?

Everywhere you turn at the moment you can see an assault on our environment and sustainability. The issue of unconventional gas fracking that is being pushed onto the NT and everywhere else, the fact that the mining act means that mining company's do not have to comply with the water act. The push for more fossil fuels, pollution disasters, animals and plants going extinct at rapid rates. The plight of the bees and how the pesticide is now available here in Australia, the one place that the bee population is actually OK. The free trade agreements that are basically signing our rights away. There are just so many fronts that we are currently fighting on, with minimum resources to do so.

For me there is also undercurrent of disbelief that we even have to be fighting on these fronts in the first place. After all the entire long term situation is pretty clear and the argument around short term economic development falls flat when you start to look at the long term implications. One of my favourite slogans is that "we cannot drink Gas, we cannot eat coal". And yet the short term economic plans are constantly placing these things above the health of the planet, and there for, our basic needs.

So after all those depressing thoughts how do we keep our heads together, our spirits up and keep fighting? For everyone this is a little different as we all have different reasons that motivate us to be in this space in the first place. And this is probably one of the biggest keys to our success, as well as being one of the biggest weapons that can be used against us. Having different motivation reasons means we can be divided and broken into smaller groups, basically the old "divide and concour" rule which we se employed so often by those in power.

But how do we prevent that? By remembering that we all have the same big intention, even if we do come at it for different reasons.

So here are some general tips to help:

- Respect each other. Not everyone can put in the

same effort, nor do we all have the same skills, knowledge or resources at hand. By respecting and honouring what people can do we increase the support network for all of us.

- Be realistic about what you can do. Don't promise something that you know is going to be hard for you to pull off. It is both difficult and disappointing when it does not get done for both you and whoever you promised it to.
- Be mindful of the word "try". When you hear yourself (or others) use the word "try" you are not committing to actually doing it. For example, "I'll try to get that research done" really means I want to do it, but don't know how I can or when I will fit it in. In the famous words of the great Yoda "do or do not, there is no try".
- Be honest and transparent. It is so much easier working with people in the same fight when you know where they are coming from and they know where you are coming from.
- Celebrate every win, big or small, and celebrate well. Every time we gain ground no matter if it is an inch or a mile, celebrate. The gas pipe line stalls for a month and then another – celebrate. Another person disinvests from fossil fuel supporting banks – celebrate. One more

**TAKE CARE OF YOUR
BODY. IT'S THE ONLY
PLACE YOU HAVE
TO LIVE.**

Jim Rohn



person reduces consumption or stops supporting unsustainable companies – celebrate. The coal port gets delayed again – celebrate. Even if you had nothing to do with the win, celebrate. Celebrate the fact that there are others out there who are also fighting; you are not alone in this.



- Be good to yourself. We all know the benefits of exercise and eating well (I also love the fact that eating well as in fresh fruit and vegetables is also taking support away from sugary, processed, nutrient deficient processed food). However being good to yourself is not just about exercise and eating well, it is doing the things you love to do. Make time for that special something that makes you happy, from bush walking, painting, riding, talking with friends, playing with family, go for that massage, holiday or film you have wanted to see. If you find yourself putting these things aside then STOP. You need to recharge, this is not being selfish or wasting time on things when you should be fighting the fight. This is taking care of you and making sure that you are in good condition to fight.
- Be good to yourself. Yes I have just repeated myself and for good reason. This time it is about the days when you just feel like shit, the days you cannot cope, feel like ranting, crying, screaming. One of the most important things that was ever told to me is that “it is OK to feel like shit”. We all have bad days and there are going to be more of them, it’s OK. Give yourself permission to cry, rant, rave, hide in bed all day or whatever it is that

you need to do to help get it out of your system, it’s OK. You will feel better and you will get up and keep going.

- And lastly, HUG. The power of a hug can never be underestimated. Hugs are not just about the purely physical contact, hugs do a lot for the brain as well. A good hug lifts your spirits, increases the good flow of chemicals in the brain. They increase your energy, and remind you that you are not alone. The emotional benefit from a good hug can never be underestimated.

Ok there is a short list of tips that do help, and each one of us could add more, please do so. Remember that it is important for each of us as individuals to be in good shape. This is important to look after ourselves as just imagine how ruddy horrified the other side is when they look at us and realize that we are not divided and that even with the small amount of resources that we have, we are strong, powerful and we are not going away. We are most definitely a force that they lose sleep over, and that to me is a very good thing.

Carmel Vandermolen



WORKING TOWARDS FIFTY SHADES OF GREEN

Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) was introduced as a pasture grass to central Australia during a drought in the 1950s. Decades of overgrazing due to government enforced stocking rates combined with a long drought, was causing dust storms in the region and making it dangerous for the airline industry. The CSIRO and the Northern Territory Government introduced a range of different strains of buffel grass in the 1970s to keep the dust down around town. The different varieties hybridised, their genes crossed creating the monster grass we see all around Alice Springs and across central Australia. It is spreading fast and has become less palatable to cattle compared to native grasses.

A healthy arid ecosystem is defined by everything having its place. Take a look on the spinifex hills around town to see this in action. There should be fifty shades of green in the landscape but instead there is just one. Buffel grass is everywhere, crowding out local species and getting right up into the shrubs and the base of trees. It’s currently pretty depressing to look around and see how far it has gone. Even more so is the fact that every clump of buffel is now at the end of its flowering cycle, which is good for us hayfever sufferers but it means that the seed load – which has been massive, will be dispersed widely by the wind, domesticated and wild animals, vehicles and on our shoes and clothing.

But it’s not just the incredible rates of growth after rain that is the problem with buffel. It burns hotter than everything else. The flames reach into the crowns of trees and wipe out many fire-sensitive species of trees and shrubs. Fires race up rivers, creeks and hills quicker than ever before. Larger fires are more likely due to the ever-growing presence of buffel grass. Take a look around. An inland ocean of buffel surrounds us. It is waist high at present and is knocking on the back doors of almost every rural resident and urban fringe dweller in town. It’s been referred to as the cane toad of the grasses but it is also considered a very important grass for cattle producers. This here lays the problem. It is a curse for many but it is a blessing for others, which means rather than doing something about it – the problem is allowed to continue unabated.



The Federal Government has acknowledged that it is a ‘novel biota’ that is having impacts on biodiversity on a national level. A threat abatement advice was produced and released which detailed much about what we could do about it but there were no resources attached to assist. The South Australian Government has listed buffel grass as a weed and developed a strategic plan manage the threat. It is hoped that this will allocate some resources to support people willing to put some effort into dealing with it. Here in the Northern Territory, there is currently no risk of calling buffel grass a weed. In the latest iteration of the Alice Springs Regional Weed Management Plan – there was a refusal by the pastoral lobby to sign onto the plan if buffel grass was listed as a weed, instead it was listed as a significant threat and that was the end of that. However, this is why I have decided to write about buffel grass because you deserve to know and understand how much of a significant threat it is – it is huge.

We are surrounded...but what can we do?

The question is a matter of scale. The challenge of buffel grass is so huge that it immobilises people. It is a sure-fire way to feel helpless....walking into the



Spraying buffel grass was a demonstrative part of the Chemical Training Course completed in 2015, through ALEC's Biodiversity Matters program

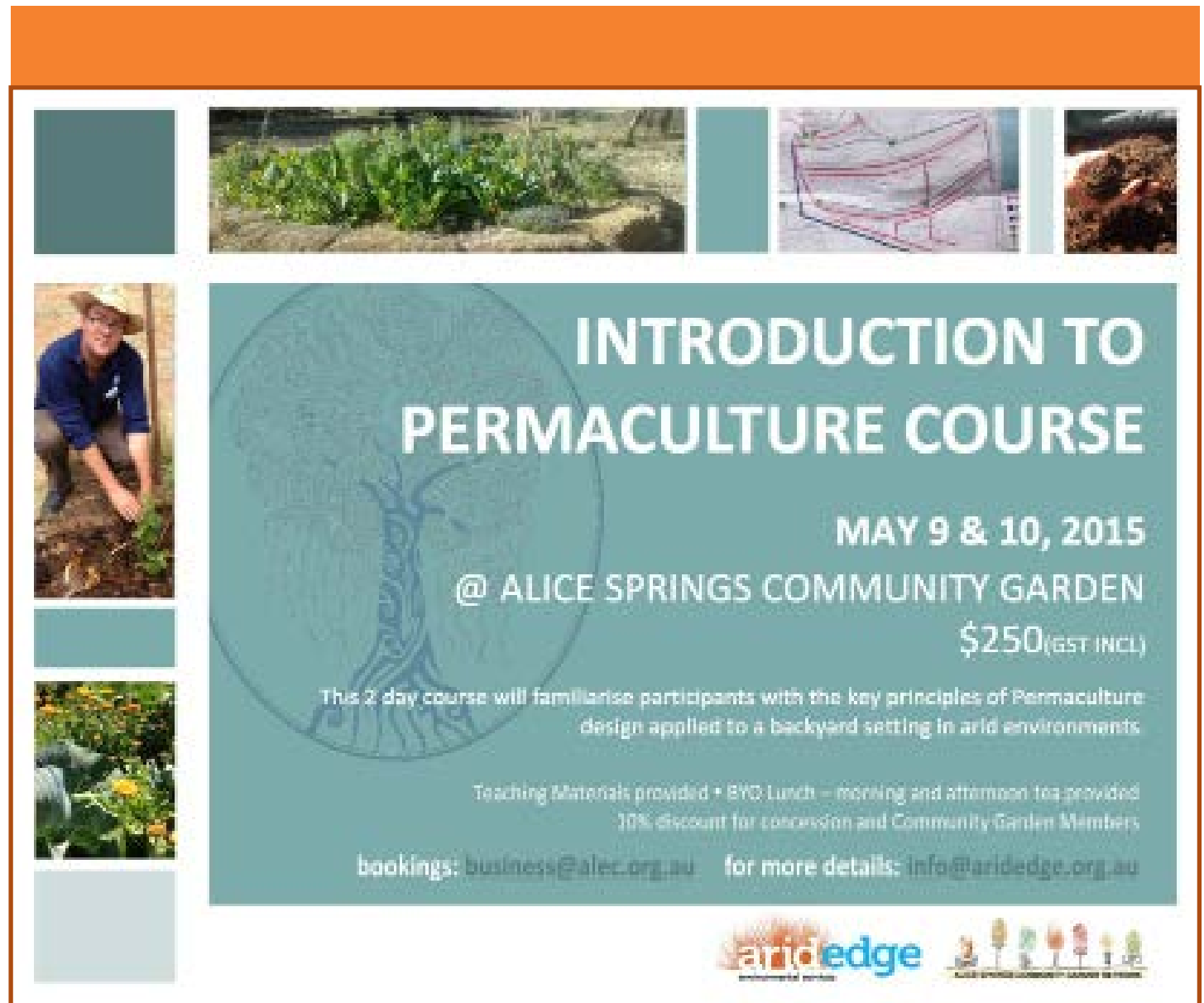
middle of an area completely covered in buffel grass and starting to pull up each tussock with the intention of eradicating it. I reckon after five minutes you'd be in a sweat and be giving up – cursing and swearing that you thought you could do anything. But it is not about eradication. There will be no eradication plan because it is too valuable to the pastoral industry – and that's OK. What we really need is for fifty shades of green to shine in an effort to protect the places that we love.

There are numerous examples of dedicated and inspiring people who have cleared their land or areas of public land of buffel grass. People like Peter Latz, Rod Cramer, Libby Prell, David Albrecht, Erwin Chlanda, Jude Pritchard, Andy Vinter, Ken Johnson and many others who have proudly stood up against the threat of buffel grass in one form or another. These inspirational local people show that with hard work and dedication, you can clear a block or a hill or an ecosystem. Given that the hot weather is drying the grass everyday – we are possibly within weeks of the grass becoming a fire threat. This means that we

only have a small window to protect our properties, sacred sites and local ecosystems from the scourge of buffel fire.

Individual and collective efforts add up. Join the local Alice Springs Landcare group. Support the local Bushfires NT and Fire and Rescue teams. Buy a small mattock and take it with you on your walks and protect your favourite trees and shrubs from fire by clearing underneath them. We may not stop the buffel spreading across the landscape and the fires that it carries – but we can try to reduce the threat on a small-scale. Every tree saved is a win in this fight. Every plant that comes back or doesn't burn is a success. Doesn't matter what shade of green you are – there is always something we can do.... join the fight and become a buffel buster too.

Jimmy Cocking



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A portrait of Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, wearing a grey suit and blue tie. He is standing in front of the United Nations flag, which is partially visible on the left. The background is a warm orange gradient with decorative leaf patterns at the top and bottom.

**The international community
has reached a fork in the road.**

**In one direction, a terrible
legacy could be handed to
our grandchildren and
their children. In the
other is the opportunity
to set our world on the
first steps toward a fairer
and sustainable future.**

**No one wants the generations
to come to say that we failed
them.**

**- Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General
of the United Nations**