



# SUMMER 2015/2016

A FREE PUBLICATION FROM
Healthy futures for and 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 Autumn edition is Friday 29th January 2016.

Articles, pictures, poetry, letters, welcome.

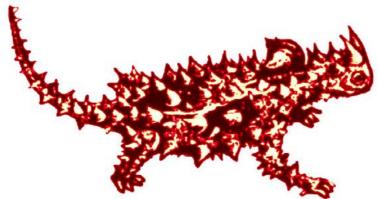
Email communications@alec.org.au

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 Peachy



# **CONTENTS**

**ALEC Directors Welcome Ten Deserts ALEC Crowdfunding Campaign Arid Edge Environmental Services Food For Alice** On Country in Kiwirrkurra **Frack Free Coordinator Update Centralian Frack Free Alliance** 2015 Ecofair Report **Alice Springs Community Garden Biodiversity Matters Intertexta Forest Walk Beyond Nuclear Initiative Leak Weak** You Can Make a Difference Indonesia is Burning Big Hot Ball **People's Climate March Donate to ALEC** 

## **ALEC XMAS Closing hours**

The ALEC Office will be closed from Thursday 24th December, and will re-open again Monday 4th January 2015.

We hope that the festive season provides opportunities for relaxation, spending time with family and an acknowledgement and celebration of the blessings in our lives.

Arid Lands Environment Centre



# **ALEC DIRECTORS' WELCOME**

G'day folks and welcome to the summer edition of the Devil's Advocate.

The weather is warming up with this October's average maximum temperature being 4.5°C higher than the long-term average. This combined with the Bureau of Meteorology's observations that indicate a strong El Niño (warm eastern Pacific ocean temperatures) is predicted to decrease rainfall and increase temperatures across the eastern half of Australia through the summer and into autumn. El Niño events are also responsible for a decline in cyclone activity in the north, which is predicted to impact on rainfall in the centre. If you want more information on El Niño check out the BoM link here: http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/. If you were considering an irrigation or leak check, now is the time for an Arid Edge Garden Tune Up and get it sorted before summer hits.

Change is in the air; we now have our fifth Prime Minister in five years with Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberal Party ousting Tony Abbott. This is a welcome relief in that the Abbott Government was extremely combative in regards to the environment movement. In two years much damage was done including but not limited to:

- Repealing the carbon price
- Abolishing the Climate Commission
- Undermining the renewable energy industry (winding back the Renewable Energy Target and attempting to abolish the Renewable Energy Agency, Climate Change Authority and Clean Energy Finance Corporation).
- Attempting to create 'one stop shop' to give approval powers to the royalty hungry State and Territory Governments in relation to issues of national environmental significance;
- Attempting to weaken the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (which is still to be debated in the Senate);
- Threatening the tax deductibility of

environmental charities who advocate for strong environmental policies; the hostility towards the renewable energy industry



- Abolishing the Grants for Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations which provided \$30000 per annum to ALEC for operational expenses
- Defunding the Environment Defenders Offices nationally
- Abolishing the National Water Commission

And while the extremism of the Abbott Government's approach to environmental issues is somewhat tempered, many of the policies remain and a focus on developing the North without adequate climate and water policies to remotely get it right.

The winds of change are upon us. In August we were lamenting the future of the EcoFair beyond 2015. Given its success, ALEC has again applied for National Science Week funding to support the EcoFair, this time including the Alice Springs Desert Park and the Earth Sanctuary, in addition to Olive Pink Botanic Gardens as major venues for the event. The outcome of the grant application will be known in January. Here's hoping we can do it again in 2016.

In other news, ALEC has received confirmation that the Pew Charitable Trusts will support the Ten Deserts Coordinator position at 0.5FTE dependent on outcomes and leveraging of other funding sources. This will enable ramping up of on-ground activities in relation to collaborative fire management and support for the Buffel free



Great Victoria Desert initiative. This exciting development will require ALEC to make some internal changes to continue to build momentum towards 'healthy futures for arid lands and people'. See the Ten Deserts update for more details.

ALEC has also been taking a lead in regards to water policy in the NT. I was lucky enough to be invited to speak at the Australian Water Association Conference in Darwin in late October as part of a panel on the 'Risks and Rewards of Developing the North'. The point was clearly made that water policy and regulation is not robust enough to protect our aquifers from mining, fracking and over allocation. ALEC is also following this up with an application for the Minister to review the decision to increase the extraction of water from Rocky Hill to grow onions. There are very real concerns about the future water supply of Alice Springs.

As the end of the year fast approaches we have numerous events on the calendar following up from the inspiring This Changes Everything documentary screening:

- Saturday November 21 Big Hot Ball ALEC Fundraiser at Olive Pink Botanic Gardens
- Wednesday November 25 ALEC AGM 5.30pm at 90 Gap Rd
- Sunday November 29 The People's

Climate March at the Alice Springs Town Council Lawns.

We will need all the help we can muster to organise these events – so please email Nicole at communications@alec.org.au if you can assist at all.

Finally, some personal news from me, in early December my partner Karine, and I are expecting the arrival of our first child. I will be taking some time off over summer to share this special time with my new family.

In the meantime, I am busily getting everything done that I think needs doing before this life changing event occurs. I am looking forward to continuing to work with the amazing team of people that keep this great little organisation courageously creating change in central Australia.

May our hearts continue to beat for environmental and social justice in our time!

In solidarity,

Jimmy Cocking ALEC Director



# **ALEC CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN**

ALEC is planning a crowdfunding campaign for early 2016. We are looking for experienced crowd funders, film-makers and other support to help raise at least \$50K to establish the Arid Lands Eco House at 90 Gap Rd which will include:

- Solar power
- Retrofitting for energy and water

efficiency

- Smart metering for energy and water
- Native verge garden
- Fruit trees
- Water harvesting

If you can help or keen on being part of a working group contact Jimmy on info@alec.org.au, or call 8952 2497





One of the most exciting things that we're working on at ALEC is the Coordination of the Ten Deserts initiative. The Ten Deserts is a collaboration of conservation groups, indigenous land managers and Natural Resource Management organisations to support on-ground biodiversity conservation and land management outcomes in the arid lands of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

As the Coordinator, ALEC is hosting phone-link up meetings across five time zones between the working group members to update each other on current priorities and to advance collaborative projects across land tenures and state/territory borders.

### The Ten Deserts Working Group includes:

Arid Lands Environment Centre
Department of Land Resource Management (NT)
Great Victoria Desert Biodiversity Trust
Greening Australia
Kanyirnipa Jukurrpa
Land for Wildlife Central Australia
Natural Resources – Alinytjara Wilurara
Ngaanyatjarra Council
Rangelands NRM (WA)
Territory NRM
The Nature Conservancy
The Pew Charitable Trusts

### Partner organisations:

Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara

Arid Recovery
Central Desert Native Title Services
Central Land Council
with more to come

In early October, Pew Charitable Trusts confirmed that it will contribute \$60 000 a year for 2016 and 2017 to support the ongoing work of Ten Deserts.

Funding is for supporting the following broad strategy going forward:

- Establishment of the Indigenous Desert Fire Forum within the Indigenous Desert Network
- Engagement of Indigenous rangers, NRMs, progressive pastoralists and mining interests in Ten Deserts in regards to large, landscape scale fire management initiative (Desert Fire concept)
- The launch and implementation of the Great Victoria Desert buffel free campaign on both sides of the border including achieving measureable progress in the first year
- State, Territory and Federal Governments are financial supporting specific subregional cross-border collaboration on fire management
- Other winnable management campaigns (i.e camels) are identified and endorsed by the Ten Deserts stakeholders
- Ten Deserts communications strategy being executed

This is a fantastic step forward for the Ten Deserts and with increased investment in the



Paddy O'Leary from Pew Charitable Trusts outlines the Buffel Free GVD concept to the group, April 2015

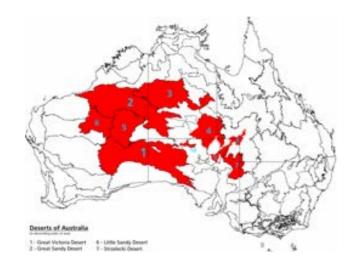


initiative it is hoped that it will leverage financial support for the Indigenous Desert Fire Forum (IDFF). The IDFF The Forum (if supported) will build capacity of desert land managers and increase collaboration in fire planning and management across the desert country of north and western Australia. Stay tuned.

The other exciting project is the Buffel Free GVD (Great Victoria Desert). This concept emerged from the face-to-face workshop in Alice Springs, April 2015. It was discussed that through bringing together indigenous land management groups and other stakeholders in the region to work in a coordinated and targeted way buffel grass could be eradicated from the periphery of the GVD. Due to timing issues, the group is yet to convene, however individual groups and agencies working in the GVD are raising the priority of buffel eradication in their workplans.

### The Ten Deserts are:

- Sturt Stony Desert (SA, QLD, NSW)
- Strzelecki Desert (SA, QLD, NSW)



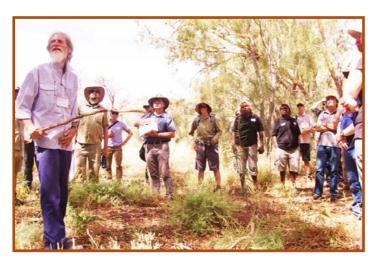
from Wikipedia: Map of Australia, with internal borders and Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA) regions overlaid; deserts highlighted, w/legend; also see http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/bioregion-framework/ibra/index.html (http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/pubs/regions.pdf;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

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

The region incorporates 2.85 million sq km and 17 bioregions. It is a massive area of country with only small numbers of people working to keep it healthy. Ten Deserts connects these vast regions through connecting the people who manage the country. Sharing knowledge, building capacity and coordinating cross-border responses to ecological threats will enable us to increase the collective impact of our work.

The Ten Deserts is just ramping up... see what our partners are doing here: http://tendeserts.org/partners/newsletters/www.tendeserts.org or email coordinator@tendeserts.org

## Jimmy Cocking



Peter Latz describes the ecological significance of the Intertexta Forest next to the Ilparpa Claypans to the Ten Deserts Working Group



# Food for Alice

Local produce market stall 9am-12pm @ Eastside Pilates

Now every Saturday morning!













Food for Alice is a local food distribution project and local food movement advocate. We are a social enterprise which brings people together in order to create choices as to where our food comes from, help reduce our food miles and invest in local growers and gardeners.

Support local, ethical food. Sell your excess produce, become a market volunteer, buy locally grown food!

Contact Carmel to sell your excess produce or to become a regular volunteer business@alec.org.au 0409180614







# FOOD FOR ALICE

Wow what a fantastic response we have had from both Customers and Producers from moving to being open every single Saturday. To see so much local produce going from local gardens to the plates of our customers is just fantastic. Most mornings we move over 100 items of produce which lately has been made up of Chard, Carrots, Dates, Honey, Beetroots, Radishes, Herbs, different types of Spinage, Kail, Bok Choy, Snow Peas, Broad Beans, and much more. That is the second exciting factor about the stall is that we are slowly getting more and more varieties of different vegetables and fruits. And at times these are not available anywhere else in Alice. Some of the amazing citrus like Lemonades and Mello Yellow Tangellos. And then things like Broad Beans that you can only by frozen. And then some of the Asian Spinages that are not available to purchase at all locally.

And now we look forward to the summer months and the crops of local food the season brings, Eggplants will soon be ready to harvest, as will Zucchinis, along with different types of cucumbers. This also brings us to the time that Eastside Pilarties will be closed over the summer break. Please watch on the Food For Alice FaceBook page for updates on how



we will be operating over summer. While us humans see this as a holiday time, the fruit and vegetables really don't see it as any different and will continue to produce, so we will be setting up somewhere and continuing to sell.

Finally I would personally like to say a big Thank You to Rachael who made it possible to open up every Saturday. Rachael will be with us until mid January, then she heads overseas for 12 month for a very long anticipated volunteer position.

What this means is that Food for Alice will be on the look out for another person to fill this role of opening the market every alternative Saturday to me. This is a paid volunteer position, so if you are interested keep an eye out for when we advertise the position.

Finally, since this will be the last DA for 2015, have an amazing Xmas and Safe New Year, and remember to come and get all your local food needs from Food for Alice every Saturday in 2016.

Carmel Vandermolen

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





# ON COUNTRY IN KIWIRRKURRA

In late August I had the opportunity to work on a contract (for ALEC) with Central Desert Land and Community to support and facilitate the Telstra Pay It Forward 2015 volunteer program held on country near Kiwirrkurra, 700kms west of Alice Springs, in Western Australia. The group of 20 were peer-nominated winners chosen from Telstra's vast staff and management located around the country. It was the first outback experience for almost everyone in the group. Our goals for the week were to 1) build a shelter for the use by the rangers and visitors to the area 2) install signs informing travellers that they were entering the Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area and; 3) experiencing first-hand indigenous land management within the 42 857 square kilometre IPA.

It was a privilege to see Lake Mackay, a giant salt lake extending into the Northern Territory and to see people living and thriving on country. It was a fantastic experience working alongside the Traditional Owners including four of the Pintupi nine who walked out of the Gibson Desert in 1982; Centre for Appropriate Technology staff; Central Desert mob and the Telstra team. It was great to see traditional land management in practice, lighting fires and cleaning up country while also managing to get a feed of goanna, witchetty grub or bush turkey after recording signs of small mammals and other tracks in the dunes. The construction projects provided

a great example of teamwork, engineered perfection and persistence.

Everyone who participated in this project was touched by the experience. Learning about the desert country, traditional culture and how Traditional Owners are caring for country was very real and present for all of the visitors out there

Building the awareness of remote Australia in the hearts and minds of urban people is a very important step towards understanding. This trip taught me a lot about myself especially how much I appreciate getting out 'on country' and how little I actually know about the bush. Thanks to Central Desert Land and Community for the opportunity to see what we're actually advocating for.

### More information:

Telstra Pay It Forward 2015 – Kiwirrkurra on Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rplr\_2v4qo&feature=youtu.be
Embracing the Land - http://www.
latrobevalleyexpress.com.au/story/3328404/
embracing-the-land/
Lake Mackay
Country, Culture, Futures Vol. 6 http://www.
centraldesert.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/
Newsletter-Volume-6-website-vsn.pdf

### Jimmy Cocking





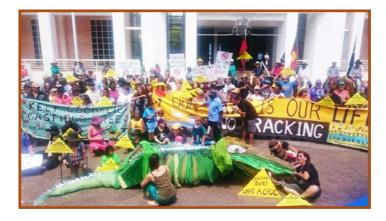


# FRACK FREE COORDINATOR UPDATE

### Our Precious Arid Environment Still Not Safe!

Communities across the NT are amping up the fight against the invasive gas industry!!

September saw a landmark protest in the NT with over 200 people on foot and horseback marching on NT Parliament in Darwin to call for a moratorium on shale gas fracking in the NT. In Alice Springs an event held at the Council lawns was attended by around 100 people calling for greater action and protections for the environment and communities from fracking.



A delegation of representatives from Indigenous communities, food growers, remote tourism operators and cattle stations held a special hearing inside NT Parliament on November 16 to share the impacts of shale gas fracking on their livelihoods with decision makers.

Batchelor and Coomalie communities have also recently joined Adelaide River in becoming a 'gasfield free' community. We will be doing community surveying in Alice Springs from early next year – if you're interested to get involved please get in touch!

Ongoing pressure on NT Government is required as their negligent promotion of the shale gas industry continues. Recent 'improvements' to the regulatory framework fall far short of

what is needed to provide adequate protection from communities and the environment. The NT Government's 'Principles for Hydraulic Fracturing', which were released in August, rely solely on operator self-regulation and are not enforceable. The NT Government has indicated that the principles are an interim measure until a 'comprehensive review' of relevant legislation is undertaken. An overhaul of both the Petroleum Act and Water Acts is urgently needed with a pause on fracking operations until this has taken place.

### The Fracking Pipeline Campaign Kicks Off!

At the time of printing the winner of the competitive bidding process for the North East Gas (NEGI) pipeline was yet to be announced, along with which of the proposed routes will be used.

However in the lead up to the announcement the NT Frack Free Alliance has been building community opposition to the pipeline and will continue to do so as the selected company commences community engagement in the coming months.

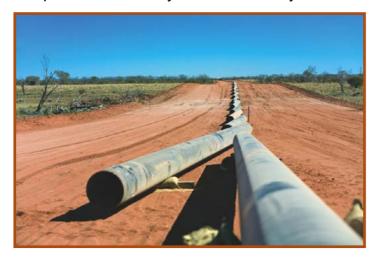
From July to September community forums and meetings with Traditional Owners along the Tennant Creek to Mt Isa proposed route were held to raise awareness of the role of the pipeline





in facilitating the shale gas industry in the NT. Traditional Owners were strongly opposed to opening up country for fracking through the development of the pipeline.

Despite financial analysts now seriously



questioning the economic basis of the pipeline, in October the NT Government committed \$200 million from the sale of TIO for a fund for major gas infrastructure projects including the NEGI pipeline.

Opposition Leader Michael Gunner has also indicated Labor support for the project despite the party's position on a moratorium on fracking agreed at the state-wide conference earlier this year.

What will it take for our Government and representatives to stop supporting this reckless drive to expand this damaging industry?!

We need to make our voices heard on the issue now! To get involved in the local campaign, get in touch at frackfreecoordinator@gmail.com

# **CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN FRACK FREE ALLIANCE**

The Central Australian Frack Free Alliance has been keeping the pressure on in Alice Springs by bringing the issue of fracking to the fore at any opportunity!

In August a Frack-Free team entered into the 'build your own boat' competition Henley on Todd and won!



The Alliance also ensured that the issue of fracking featured in the decision making process of residents in the Council byelection in October. The Alliance sought the views of all candidates on fracking and produced a 'scorecard' to inform community members of how to vote for a frack-free future for the region.



We are always seeking volunteers to keep a strong campaign presence – whether it's volunteering once a month on the market stall, helping with data entry or research or a myriad of other tasks – we need your help to win this fight!



# **BUSTING THE FRACKING MYTHS...**

Government and gas industry reps can often be heard to claim 'fracking has occurred safely in Central Australia for more than 40 years without incident'. However this statement is obscuring the facts to infer the safety of this practice.

Yes, it is true that hydraulic fracking for conventional gas has been taking place in Central Australia since 1976 but largely in the 1990's, with a total of 33 wells fracked. Hydraulic fracturing for unconventional shale gas in the NT however, only commenced in 2012.

Fracking for unconventional gas is a process which is vastly different from and far riskier than fracking for conventional gas. It uses significant quantities of a large variety of chemicals, many of which are known to be toxic or their toxicity is unassessed; it requires massive volumes of water and produces large volumes of toxic wastewater; uses much higher pressures; and it requires the use of new horizontal drilling techniques, which make effective and secure well construction much more difficult to achieve.

When this statement is used by Government representatives such as the Minister for Mines and Energy Dave Tollner, it can only be seen as a deliberate attempt to mislead the



community and is a dishonest way of winning the compliance of Territorians to this dangerous technology.

It is also grossly untrue to say that the unconventional gas fracking operations that have taken place to date occurred 'without incident'.

The Department of Mines and Energy itself has confirmed that 3 out of the first 3 horizontal fracking operations undertaken in Central Australia (off the Plenty Highway) by company Petrofrontier in 2012 failed. The first one suffered a shallow well-casing failure on commencement requiring the operation to be immediately terminated, and in the other 2 operations the wells were found to be 'communicating' with groundwater aquifers, as evidenced by the presence of hydrogen sulphide. All wells were subsequently abandoned.

These initial experiments with fracking in the NT do little to instil faith in the safety in the process, which the NT Government goes to such lengths to assure us of....

# Tanya Hall





# 2015 ECOFAIR -

### A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

The desertSMART EcoFair has again been another resounding success, with more than 2000 people participating in science and sustainability focused events over the weekend of 7-9th August in Alice Springs.

desertSMART EcoFair was organised by the Arid Lands Environment Centre, as part of National Science Week, and was sponsored by the Australian Government's Inspiring Australia Initiative, as well as a range of local community sponsors. The event is a focal point for scientific research and sustainability initiatives that exist in Central Australia, and encourages discussion on how we manage and connect to country, how we build community resilience and live together sustainably in the desert.

The EcoFair was hosted by Olive Pink Botanic Garden. It continued to build on the strengths of previous years by again featuring the Eco-Science Schools Day, the live 783 ABC Outside Broadcast, The Alice Springs Bicycle Film Festival, the Science of Soil Workshop with Costa Georgiadis, and the Sunday Eco-Markets and Sustainable Living Festival.





The Eco-Science Schools Day on Friday 7th February saw 200 local school students participate in hands on workshops on the issues of energy, water, land management, climate, health, science and technology. Learning about ant ecology with Dr Kirsti Abbott was a highlight, and students also participated in workshops by Engineers Without Borders Australia, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, Parks and Wildlife Commission NT, Land for Wildlife, Live and Learn, and the National Rural Health Students Network.

The 783 ABC Outside Live Broadcast from the BeanTree Café provided a focus on the activities of EcoFair, and included interviews with EcoFair ambassador Costa Georgiadis, Dr Kirsti Abbott from the School of Ants, Millie Anthony from the





Australian Youth Climate Coalition as well as featuring the Alice Springs Bicycle Film Festival, The Asante Sana Choir and The Great Science Quiz.

The Alice Springs Bicycle Film Festival was again a very popular feature of the EcoFair with more than 300 people attending and enjoying a night of bicycle-focused films, food and fires under a clear starry sky. There were a record 10 local film entries, with "The Real McMichaels" winning the people's choice award.

The Science of Soil Workshop with Eco-Fair Ambassador Costa Georgiadis reflected an event focus to coincide with the International Years of Soil and Light, and was held at the Alice Springs Community Garden. Participants learnt about improving soil structures, composting and getting the science of gardening in the arid zone.

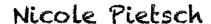
More than 1200 people attended the Sunday Eco-Markets and Sustainable Living Festival on Sunday 9th August. Participants listened to local, regional and national science and sustainable living experts, and engaged in presentations, workshops, tree plantings and tours of Olive Pink Botanic Gardens. Participants also enjoyed the markets featuring more than 40 local environmental, community and informational stalls. An intimate conservation between Costa

Georgiadis and local custodian Aunty Dorris Stuart was a highlight of the program, as was the feature presentation by Dr Mark Diesendorf on the exciting possibilities of renewable energy technology to completely provide for our energy needs.

desertSMART EcoFair provides the community with the chance to engage with science and sustainability, and the forces that shape our world. Feedback from the 2015 EcoFair event has been resoundingly positive. The Arid Lands Environment Centre, despite funding cuts and reduced capacity, hopes the event can continue in 2016 with the assistance of a community organising committee.

Given its success, ALEC has again applied for National Science Week funding to support the EcoFair, this time including the Alice Springs Desert Park and the Earth Sanctuary, in addition to Olive Pink Botanic Gardens as major venues for the event. The outcome of the grant application will be known in January. Here's hoping we can do it again in 2016.

If you would like to be part of the 2016 EcoFair Organising Committee please email: communications@alec.org.au









# **ALICE SPRINGS COMMUNITY GARDEN**

# A FEW UPDATES ON THE GARDEN'S DEVELOPMENT...

We have a 'Work for the Dole' team coming some mornings each week for the next 6 months, supervised by Ben Wall. They are working on a number of projects approved by the ASCG Committee. It should be exciting! More in due course.

Our Spring Equinox Get Together was so good that we want to have a regular garden gettogether on the last Friday of each month from 5-ish to 7-ish. Bring a plate to share, something to drink and a story or two to tell!

Clean soil. We need a few truckloads of clean soil (preferably free!) to finish building up the Garden entrance and path areas. If you know of any please contact Allan O'Keefe on 0428277043

We have a new and most energetic and knowledgeable gardener Shrike who has commenced building the first of what we hope will be a series of large biodynamic compost heaps.

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

www.alicecommunitygarden.org.au

# 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





The 2015 Biodiversity Matters program concluded at the end of September with the Fauna Trapping Surveying Field Trip hosted by Land for Wildlife.

The program saw 4 field trip events over the course of the year, which also included Propagating Native Plants hosted by the Alice Springs Desert Park, a visit to the Intertexta Eucalyptus Forest hosted by the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, and Buffel and Cactus Busting with Alice Springs Landcare.

All field trips averaged between 15-30 participants, and offered community members a chance to learn about and contribute to local





conservation projects.

Check out the great photos from the field trip events on the Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/biodiversitymattersaridlands/
This page also shares information about local conservation news and activities.

As a result of funding cuts to ALEC, who coordinates the Biodiversity Matters program, it is unsure at this stage whether it will continue into 2016 with regular field trips, however conservation information and activities will still be promoted via social media and the website.

### Nicole Pietsch





# INTERTEXTA FOREST WALK ASFNC

The Alice Springs Field Naturalists hosted a walk in the Intertexta Forest as part of Arid Lands Environment Centre Bio-diversity Program.

The dolomite/limestone foothills in front of the Heavitree quartzite range provide the source of the mineral and nutrient enriched soil that can support the Forest and its diverse and healthy understorey. The area has been looked after by volunteers over several years and most of the Buffel and other invasive weeds have been removed, making it a very special place to wander and observe the natural habitat.



The sennas are bearing their beautiful golden showers of flowers.



The native passionfruit leaves are yellow-brown

and crunchy now from the frosty nights but the plant will soon regrow and provide leafy food for the caper moth caterpillars and later, orange ribbed fruit for the ants and bowerbirds in the summer.

The native jasmine is growing strongly, long sturdy stems swinging round searching for handholds to support them to the next level. In the warmer months the perfume from their dainty white flowers will fill the forest.

Other vines - bush banana, bush bean and glycine twist around anything they can reach, while dried headache vine tumbles in a heap on the ground.

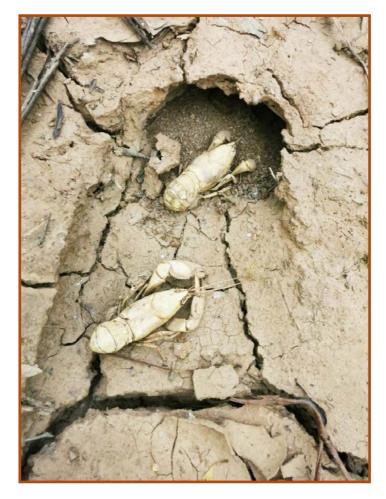
So many plants grow from underground roots of a parent plant pushing their way through the leafy mulch and sticks that cover the ground – needlebush, weeping emubush, and nardoo. Some are bigger than the big Tasmanian trees in mass, only here most of the tree is underground and protected. That way it can recover quickly from any setbacks.

No buffel here, many volunteer hands have forced it out, so native grasses dot the woodland. Their identity is still recognizable from a few dried heads – native millet, queensland blue, silky brown top, woolly oat grass, golden beard and curly windmill. On the other side of the fence where the cattle roam, the buffel still maintains its strangle hold.

In the dry cracked creek bed a small carpet of what were once squirming tadpoles in the last crowded puddle of water, are now dry and still, but the frogs will be well buried somewhere waiting for the next flood to lay more eggs. A couple of yabbies, now reduced to empty shells still stand guard over a hole in the bank. I wonder how their species survive the dry. Are



some buried somewhere or are there eggs that will hatch when moistened?



A few fresh flowers bloom - perennial yellowtop, mauve daisies, grey wrinklewort and dead finish.

The bastard coolibahs, Eucalyptus intertexa, big trees, shade the whole area. Some have



multiple trunks because their first single stem was cut short by fire many years ago. Birds are always here, flashes of colour, darting through the branches, calling to each other and nesting in hollows.

The Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club is a group of people of all ages, interested in the natural world. Many of the group are experts in particular fields: geology, fauna, and flora. All are keen both to learn and to share their particular knowledge with others.

Regular monthly meetings are held, with a guest speaker talking about some aspect of natural history. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December and January) at 7:00 pm at the Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University. Visitors are welcome.

Frequent field trips are usually organised at weekends and sometimes weekday mornings, longer ones in the Winter months, shorter ones in the heat of Summer. These include bushwalks of varying grades, drives to interesting locations and nocturnal wildlife spotting. They may be a few hours, day trips or over several days and include camping.

There is always plenty of time for observations, identifications, discussions and photographs. Projects include monitoring of local waterholes, fish, plant, bird and animal surveys.

A monthly newsletter is sent to all members with information on meetings, trips and activities, and any other articles of interest submitted by members.

For more information check our website http://www.alice fieldnaturalists.org.au

Barbara Gilfedder



# **BEYOND NUCLEAR INITIATIVE**

# Australia's Policy On Nuclear Waste Is All At Sea

http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/dave-sweeney/australias-nuclear-waste-\_b\_8387352.html

It sounds like a radio station but instead it's a radioactive shipment. And it's on its way to Sydney. The BBC Shanghai is a general-purpose cargo ship that left the French port of Cherbourg earlier this month carrying a thankfully rare cargo -- 25 tonnes of radioactive waste generated at Lucas Heights, treated in France and now heading back to Australia.

The ship is headed for Port Kembla, where it is hoped it will make an incident-free arrival in late November. What happens then is a test for the federal government and the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), and an issue of lasting importance for all Australians.

Put simply, Australia has dropped the ball badly in relation to responsible radioactive waste management. For over 20 years, successive federal governments have repeatedly tried and failed to 'solve' this issue by imposing a national nuclear facility on unwilling remote communities. Apart from causing unnecessary and deep community stress, this approach has delivered little.

In late 2015 we have no national waste facility nor have we identified a possible future site. And we have a ship that is literally bringing this issue back home at a rate of knots. Instead of trying to dump this waste on remote Aboriginal land, a better solution can be found by referencing that most understated example of Aboriginal technology -- the boomerang. It may come as a surprise to some but Lucas Heights is actually the most appropriate place for this waste to be

stored.

ANSTO's Lucas Heights facility has secure tenure and is actively policed. The site is fenced and patrolled and both generates and is



home to the majority of Australia's radioactive waste. The facility is also home to Australia's highest concentration of nuclear expertise and technology.

Furthermore, after an Aboriginal-led campaign saw Muckaty Station in the NT removed as a possible waste site during a Federal Court trial last year, ANSTO has improved its ability to store waste at Lucas Heights with a new dedicated and purpose built on-site storage facility.

Key parties including ANSTO, industry lobby group The Australian Nuclear Association, and federal regulator The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency all agree that the secure management of radioactive waste at ANSTO is feasible and credible. And in a rare case of consensus on matters nuclear, national environment groups agree.

Two decades of short-term political 'fixes' for a long-term environmental and human challenge have delivered very little. Extended interim storage at the site of production at Lucas Heights offers the least-worst solution and provides a circuit breaker in a long running but scarcely advanced public debate.

It gives us the assurance and ability to do what Australia has never done and clearly needs to do. We need an evidence-based and open review into the best options to most responsibly manage Australia's radioactive waste.

In the interest of all, including future Australians,



this is an opportunity we cannot afford to waste.

Follow Dave Sweeney on Twitter: www.twitter. com/NukeDaveSweeney

# **Australian Nuclear Free Alliance Meeting in SA**

The Australian Government is doing its best dinosaur impression and trying hard to have a nuclear light-bulb moment, while the rest of the world is backing out of nuclear energy and buckling under the volumes of radioactive waste that need a permanent home. The South Australian Royal Commission into the Nuclear Fuel Cycle drags on irreverently and the hunt for a nuclear dumping ground is on.

It was wonderful to be on Nukunu country in the Flinders Ranges for the Australian Nuclear Free Alliance meeting in October. Since the Muckaty nuclear dump win, South Australia has been well and truly under the nuclear hammer, with state government enthusiasm for an international nuclear waste dump and the Federal Government pushing for a site for waste currently sailing towards Australia from 'reprocessing' in France. At the concference we heard from Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta whose families suffered under the Maralinga nuke bombs and fought off the last SA dump proposal. Aboriginal communities are facing closure while uranium miners circle and



dangle carrots. But this awesome alliance has seen off numerous mine and dump proposals and goes from strength to strength each year.

# Mirrarr people refuse ERA extension at Kakadu

http://www.theaustralian.com.au/ business/mining-energy/mirrarr-peoplerefuse-era-extension-at-kakadu/storye6frg9df-1227570819538

The death knell has been sounded for Energy Resources of Australia's uranium operations inside Kakadu, smashing the market value of the listed Rio Tinto subsidiary and reducing Australia's supplier role to the world's nuclear power industry.

The bad news was delivered by the Mirarr people, the traditional owners of land that hosts ERA's Ranger operation and the undeveloped Jabiluka deposit, both near Jabiru in the Northern Territory. They have formally told ERA that they will not support an extension of the current authority to mine beyond its expiry in 2021 because of the June decision by Rio — ERA's 68 per cent shareholder — to withdraw its support for ERA's mine life-extending plans.

The decision effectively kills off any hope ERA had of extending the life of the Ranger operation by developing the Ranger 3 Deeps deposit as an underground mining operation, following the recent exhaustion of Ranger's open cut resources. Developing the Jabiluka deposit using Ranger infrastructure has also been killed off.

The in-situ value of the two deposits is currently more than \$25 billion at current depressed prices for the nuclear fuel.

The decision also means that Australia's ability to contribute to the global warming challenge by fuelling overseas power stations will be diminished, to a degree at any rate.



# LEAK WEEK DETECTIVES FIND ALICE SPRINGS' LEAKS IN AUSTRALIAN-FIRST EVENT

THE NORTHERN Territory's Power and Water Corporation has completed an Australian-first event conducting almost 5000 household water meter leak checks in Alice Springs this week as part of their 'Leak Week' blitz event focused on preserving the town's most precious resource.

In the five day event, leak checks revealed that one in five or 972 homes in Alice Springs has a suspected leak. This amounts to wasting 286 million litres of water per year, which costs homeowners over half a million dollars (\$547 000) collectively.

It is like throwing away 25 wheelie bins of water per household per week or 1.2 million wheelie bins of precious water per year, Mark Wiltshire, Power and Water's Manager Sustainable Development said.

"The detected leaks could fill 130 Alice Springs Aquatic Centres or 115 Olympic swimming pools.

"Leak Week is a very innovative and unique program in Australia and the people of Alice Springs have responded very positively, with some of them fixing their leaks the same day they were found!

"While leaks in one in five homes is a lot of wasted water, this is actually an improvement from the 2011-2013 Alice Water Smart program when water efficiency consultations in 1000 homes found one in three homes had a leak," he said.

During Power and Water Corporation's Leak Week, 19 'leak detectives' walked from home to home to conduct a two minute water meter check.

"Leaks around the home and garden are still



"Through our Leak Week event, we reminded residents to check regularly for leaks and discover how easy it is to be water efficient and save on their water bills.

"The average Alice Springs home uses 490 kilolitres of water per year, so when you add up all the suspected leaks, the wasted water is equivalent to the water use of 585 average Alice Springs homes.

"Alice Springs has a finite supply of water and it makes sense to delay the cost of expensive new infrastructure for as long as we can."

Power and Water also launched a new edition of the Alice Water Smart Guide this week, which is packed full of water saving information specific to the Alice Springs' climate.

"We include information about how to find and fix leaks so that residents can check for themselves." said Mr Wiltshire.

"Through our Leak Week event, we've found the suspected leaks and let the homeowner know: now they just need to be fixed so that everyone in town can play their part to keep Alice water smart."

The new and updated Alice Water Smart Guide is available for download. If you want a hard copy, come and see us at ALEC or drop into the regular market stalls.

http://www.alicewatersmart.com.au/sites/ default/files/PDF's/AWS Guide web.pdf



# YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

It is very easy in today's world to focus on all the horrible things that are happening to our planet. When we start thinking about "what will happen to us as humans if we keep going the way we are" is even more depressing. The problem can look and feel so big you can end up thinking "what the heck can I do anyway"?

For example, you see a you-tube video on the plight of the forests and wildlife that is being devastated for the palm oil industry. How can you, one small human in the midst of so many billions, do anything around that? Or the fact that the coal mine in QLD was approved even with the insurmountable evidence that it is a both unviable in the long term and environmental devastating. Or the fact that our own NT Government is continually pushing forward with Fracking, when the risks to our groundwater seem too high. What can little you do about such big problems that have such big money behind them??

Well you can actually do a lot. And one of the most effective things you can do does not involve signing petitions (though please keep doing this), or getting out there with signs and protesting. One of the most effective things you can do is to help take away the industry's power. How? By looking at where you spend your hard earned cash.

These big industries are there simply because in the past we have invested in them in some way. We have brought their products, or supported those that support them (even at times in a round about way). For the palm oil industry, supporting products that do not use palm oil removes the demand for palm oil. No demand means no income to the palm oil industry. No income means they do not have the resources or incentive to keep destroying the forests.

Yes, but, I hear you say, that does not mean other people will stop buying them. And yes you are right. However the power of individual action should not be under-rated.

By not supporting these companies it's like saving up all your 5cent pieces. If you do it for long enough it could buy you a solar system for your house. Small things add up, and it is not just you doing it, if you look around there are a lot of people doing it. However not enough – not guite yet. If you start then that is one more, and then at a dinner party you get onto the subject and some one else starts to think about it, and then they stop, and on and on. Sooner or later you get to a tipping point that we will never get to without you. You really are that important.

Looking at the Coal industry and the Fracking industry, it is important to look at not only where you spend your money, but also where your banks and super funds invest your money. We know the big four banks invest in these fossil fuel industries, we know that super funds invest in these industries. I am always amazed when I talk to people who do get out and protest, you ask where they bank and the answer is one of the big four. Or you are at a dinner party and talking to people who are big environmentalists with solar on their roof and sustainable living practices, and yet they bank with the big four

Again if I move my money, well that is one more 5 cent piece added to the pile of money that they no longer have access to. That pile is getting





bigger and we are getting closer and closer to the tipping point. That tipping point will put more renewable energy out into the markets making them more cost effective and available to more households.

Another example for myself that saves me money is that I make my own dog food. It's not perfect in food miles however it is better than what I used to do. I brought canned food, which was 1) bad for my dog which I found out later, and 2) has a lot of emissions tied up in production and transport. I now make my own dog food from the offcuts at the butcher with rice. This is not perfect as there are still emissions, and there is still transport of getting the produce here to Alice. However the emissions are a lot less than buying canned dog food, it is better for my dog and I save money that I can put towards other things.

So when you are looking around going "what the heck can little me do", have another look. Look at your home and what you buy, look at your investments and what needs to change. Take one at a time and change it, and talk about it to your friends and family. Sooner or later, and potentially sooner than you think, that tipping point will happen. Just imagine when every one has to buy palm oil free products, not by choice, because no palm oil is being produced as the bottom fell out of the industry when demand decreased for the product. Now that is a story I would like!

Carmel Vandermolen



# Desert inspired images needed!

ALEC has a number of different forms of communicating with our members and the general public.

Websites, newsletters, Devil's Advocates and Annual Reports all need stunning photos to showcase this wonderful region that we call home.

- Scenic desert landscapes
- Waterholes, gaps and gorges
- Native animals and plants
- Feral animals, impacts of weeds and over-grazing
- Mining and petroleum impacts
- · Any other aspects of desert living

We're asking for your help. Will you exchange your digital photos for photo credit in ALEC publications? Please email Nicole communications@alec.org.au or call 8952 2497.





# INDONESIA IS BURNING. SO WHY IS THE WORLD LOOKING AWAY?

http://www.theguardian.com/ commentisfree/2015/oct/30/indonesia-firesdisaster-21st-century-world-media?CMP=share\_ btn\_fb

I've often wondered how the media would respond when eco-apocalypse struck. I pictured the news programmes producing brief, sensational reports, while failing to explain why it was happening or how it might be stopped. Then they would ask their financial correspondents how the disaster affected share prices, before turning to the sport. As you can probably tell, I don't have an ocean of faith in the industry for which I work. What I did not expect was that they would ignore it.

A great tract of Earth is on fire. It looks as you might imagine hell to be. The air has turned ochre: visibility in some cities has been reduced to 30 metres. Children are being prepared for evacuation in warships; already some have choked to death. Species are going up in smoke at an untold rate. It is almost certainly the greatest environmental disaster of the 21st century – so far.

And the media? It's talking about the dress the Duchess of Cambridge wore to the James Bond premiere, Donald Trump's idiocy du jour and who got eliminated from the Halloween episode of Dancing with the Stars. The great debate of the week, dominating the news across much of the world? Sausages: are they really so bad for your health?

What I'm discussing is a barbecue on a different scale. Fire is raging across the 5,000km length of Indonesia. It is surely, on any objective assessment, more important than anything else taking place today. And it shouldn't require a

columnist, writing in the middle of a newspaper, to say so. It should be on everyone's front page. It is hard to convey the scale of this inferno, but here's a comparison that might help: it is currently producing more carbon dioxide than the US economy. And in three weeks the fires have released more CO2 than the annual emissions of Germany. But that doesn't really capture it. This catastrophe cannot be measured only in parts per million. The fires are destroying treasures as precious and irreplaceable as the archaeological remains being levelled by Isis. Orangutans, clouded leopards, sun bears, gibbons, the Sumatran rhinoceros and Sumatran tiger, these are among the threatened species being driven from much of their range by the flames. But there are thousands, perhaps millions, more.

One of the burning provinces is West Papua, a nation that has been illegally occupied by Indonesia since 1963. I spent six months there when I was 24, investigating some of the factors that have led to this disaster. At the time it was a wonderland, rich with endemic species in every swamp and valley. Who knows how many of those have vanished in the past few weeks? This week I have pored and wept over photos of places I loved that have now been reduced to ash.





Nor do the greenhouse gas emissions capture the impact on the people of these lands. After the last great conflagration, in 1997, there was a missing cohort in Indonesia of 15,000 children under the age of three, attributed to air pollution. This, it seems, is worse. The surgical masks being distributed across the nation will do almost nothing to protect those living in a sunless smog. Members of parliament in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) have had to wear face masks during debates. The chamber is so foggy that they must have difficulty recognising one another.

It's not just the trees that are burning. It is the land itself. Much of the forest sits on great domes of peat. When the fires penetrate the earth, they smoulder for weeks, sometimes months, releasing clouds of methane, carbon monoxide, ozone and exotic gases such as ammonium cyanide. The plumes extend for hundreds of miles, causing diplomatic conflicts with neighbouring countries.

Why is this happening? Indonesia's forests have been fragmented for decades by timber and farming companies. Canals have been cut through the peat to drain and dry it. Plantation companies move in to destroy what remains of the forest to plant monocultures of pulpwood, timber and palm oil. The easiest way to clear the land is to torch it. Every year, this causes disasters. But in an extreme El Niño year like this one, we have a perfect formula for environmental catastrophe.

The president, Joko Widodo, is – or wants to be – a democrat. But he presides over a nation in which fascism and corruption flourish. As Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary The Act of Killing shows, leaders of the death squads that helped murder a million people during Suharto's terror in the 1960s, with the approval of the west, have since prospered through other forms of organised crime, including illegal deforestation. They are supported by a paramilitary

organisation with three million members, called Pancasila Youth. With its orange camo-print uniforms, scarlet berets, sentimental gatherings and schmaltzy music, it looks like a fascist militia as imagined by JG Ballard. There has been no truth, no reconciliation; the mass killers are still treated as heroes and feted on television. In some places, especially West Papua, the political murders continue.

Those who commit crimes against humanity don't hesitate to commit crimes against nature. Though Joko Widodo seems to want to stop the burning, his reach is limited. His government's policies are contradictory: among them are new subsidies for palm oil production that make further burning almost inevitable. Some plantation companies, prompted by their customers, have promised to stop destroying the rainforest. Government officials have responded angrily, arguing that such restraint impedes the country's development. That smoke blotting out the nation, which has already cost it some \$30bn? That, apparently, is development.

Our leverage is weak, but there are some things we can do. Some companies using palm oil have made visible efforts to reform their supply chains; but others seem to move more slowly and opaquely. Starbucks, PepsiCo and Kraft Heinz are examples. Don't buy their products until you see results.

On Monday, Widodo was in Washington, meeting





Barack Obama. Obama, the official communiqué recorded, "welcomed President Widodo's recent policy actions to combat and prevent forest fires". The eco-apocalypse taking place as they conferred, which makes a mockery of these commitments, wasn't mentioned.

Governments ignore issues when the media ignores them. And the media ignores them because ... well, there's a question with a thousand answers, many of which involve power. But one reason is the complete failure of perspective in a de-skilled industry dominated by corporate press releases, photo ops and fashion shoots, where everyone seems to be waiting for everyone else to take a lead. The media makes a collective non-decision to treat this catastrophe as a non-issue, and we all carry on as if it's not happening.

At the climate summit in Paris in December the media, trapped within the intergovernmental bubble of abstract diplomacy and manufactured drama, will cover the negotiations almost without reference to what is happening elsewhere. The talks will be removed to a realm with which we have no moral contact. And, when the circus moves on, the silence will resume. Is there any other industry that serves its customers so badly?

# George Monbiot



# Notice of ALEC Annual General Meeting

The Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) invites members, supporters and interested parties to the 2015 Annual General Meeting

When: 5.30pm-7.30pm
Wednesday 25th November
Where: ALEC, 90 Gap Road

Join us to hear about the great work of ALEC over the last financial year, and preview planned activities for 2016. BBQ and drinks provided.

We are seeking more people to become in engaged in the work and governance of ALEC. If you are an ALEC member you are entitled to vote at the AGM and are welcome to nominate for Board positions.

For more information: www.alec.org.au director@alec.org.au 89522497



# BIG HOT BALL



Saturday 21st November Olive Pink Botanic Garden

RUSTY & THE INFIDELS, STELLAR SEA BB SABINA, GABBY DEVER, HOT DJ'S

Plus twilight cabaret, kids disco 7-9pm, food & drinks Dress theme: HOT! More info: communications@alec.org.au

Major fundraiser/XMAS party for 7pm-late. Tickets at the door: \$20 Arid Lands Environment Centre www.alec.org.au

# Come visit the new ALEC Community Centre



90 Gap Rd (opposite Pigleys)



WE'RE ALL IN...

# **ALICE SPRINGS**Sunday 29th November

9am-12pm Älice Springs Town Council Lawns



JOIN US... and thousands across the world Family gathering with speakers, information stalls, music, kids activities, food and drinks

IT'S ABOUT ALL OF US!

For more information contact ALEC info@alec.org.au 89522497



# The future of the Arid Lands Environment Centre is in your hands......

ALEC's operational funding has been cut in the Federal and Territory budgets, leaving it up to the community to ensure the work of ALEC continues into the future.

ALEC has worked in Central Australia for 34 years standing up for the protection of the environment and developing programs to live sustainably in the arid lands.

# Can you help?

## Become an ALEC 100 member:

Donate \$100 a month each year, or contribute a one off \$1000 tax deductible donation. 100 supporters will provide the ongoing essential operating funds of ALEC.

## **Become a Desert Defender:**

Desert Defenders give monthly or one off tax deductible donations that provide critical funds to support ALEC programs and campaigns.

Donate at www.alec.org.au



Healthy futures for and lands and people
ARID LANDS ENVIRONMENT CENTRE
www.alec.org.au



# KEEP OUR WILD COUNTRY FRACK FREE NORTHERN TERRITORY

