



Save the Nature of the Kimberley

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KIMBERLEY
INC

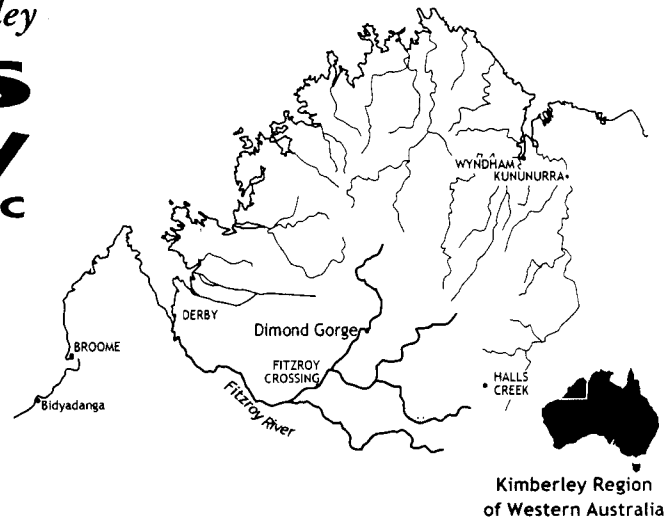
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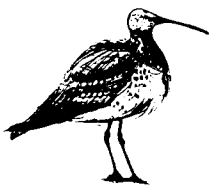
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cotton forum update

On Saturday September 22, Environs Kimberley will be hosting a Cotton Forum at the Broome Courthouse, from 9am to 1pm. The forum will provide the opportunity for Broome and West Kimberley residents and visitors to consider, discuss and debate the proposal by Western Agricultural Industries (WAI) to cultivate 225,000 hectares of genetically modified cotton south of Broome.



INSIDE: birds, birds, birds...

You may recall that the forum was initially planned for the first weekend in June, and postponed due to the inability of WAI to attend on this date. Environs Kimberley felt it important for the proponents of the project to attend in order to present their proposal and be involved in discussing it with the community. Unfortunately, WAI have again refused to participate, this time on the grounds that they feel that community consultation is premature.

EK strongly disagrees. Community consultation is vital at the initial stages of any development that will affect the region and its resources.

Some of the issues that will be discussed at the Forum include:

Water: Cotton requires a lot of water. The Memorandum Of Understanding between the WA Government and WAI grants the company the rights to up to ninety percent of the water in the La Grange sub basin for irrigation purposes. Salinity caused by over irrigation of inappropriate crops is one of the biggest problems facing Australia today. The question of water allocation in the Kimberley is a crucial one. Does the West Kimberley community really want to agree to a development that draws so heavily on our most precious resource?

The Karajarri traditional owners of the country in question are opposed to the project, which involves the privatisation of their water resources, and the potential destructive effects the development would have on their land and their ability to exercise cultural rights.

Broadscale irrigated Agriculture: A 225,000 hectare crop requires an enormous amount of land clearing and puts extreme pressure on the local environment to support a monoculture crop of this size. Alternatives are small scale, high value developments. Do we wish to support unsustainable development in our region?

Genetically Modified Crops: WAI proposes to grow the genetically modified Bt cotton, produced by multinational seed company, Monsanto. The effects of GM organisms on the environment are still being discovered. It is claimed that Bt cotton is resistant to certain pests, reducing the need for herbicides and pesticides. However, in areas where Bt cotton has been grown for some time, pests are becoming resistant to Bt, and Bt is proving toxic to benign organisms. Cotton plants from WAI's cotton trials at Shamrock station have escaped and spread as feral weeds into the surrounding bush. Do we want to agree to a proposal that releases GMOs into the Kimberley wild?

Pesticide use: Bt cotton is resistant to only a few pests. The crops will still need to be sprayed for others. The runoff and drift from pesticide use has caused severe health problems in communities near sprayed crops. The runoff from pesticide use also contaminates water and soil in the area.

Economic benefits: The proponents are an interstate company using seed and technology provided by a multinational corporation. How much of the 'economic benefit' will reach the Kimberley?

There are many more important issues for our community to consider. The question of sustainable development in the Kimberley is one that needs to be considered now, and decided by the people who will be directly affected.

Speakers at the forum will address the environmental, political, economic, ethical and practical issues that the prospect of cotton growing presents. There will be ample time for questions and discussion from the floor. Please come and be involved in deciding on the future health of your region.