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Environmental Defender's Office
Of Northern Queensland Inc.

First Floor, 96-98 Lake Street

Cairns, QLD 4870. Ph (07) 4031 4766, Fax (07) 4041 4535, Email: edong@edo.org.au



Greenhouse link eludes Minister

The Federal Court at Brisbane today dismissed a case brought by North Queensland conservation group Wildlife Whitsunday involving greenhouse gas emissions from two large coal mines in Queensland, the Isaac Plains Coal Project and the Sonoma Coal Project. Justice John Dowsett found a government official acted lawfully in finding no link between the emissions from the mines and any specific damage to Australia's environment.

Australian Environment Minister Ian Campbell last year spelt out the clear threat posed by global warming saying, "*global warming ... is a very serious threat to Australia.*" Yet to win in the Federal Court the Minister relied on a government official to downplay the threat of global warming as merely a "*genuine concern*". The official found no link between even enormous emissions from coal mines and any specific impact on the environment.

The greenhouse gas emissions from the two coal mines in this case will be equivalent to about 25% of Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions in a single year. The mines will produce 48 million tonnes of coal over 15 years valued at roughly \$3.5 billion.

Ian Lee, President of Wildlife Whitsunday said, "*This decision shows our environmental laws aren't working properly. How can it be that the enormous greenhouse gas emissions from these mines aren't properly assessed and regulated under the Australia's main environmental law? This is a global problem and it's ridiculous to look for a specific impact when these enormous emissions will contribute significantly to the global problem.*"

Global warming is already having severe impacts on how we live – the prolonged drought in eastern Australia due to changed weather patterns is one example. Unless we act urgently to reduce emissions it is going to have catastrophic impacts on the things we treasure such as the Great Barrier Reef. We need our governments to think carefully about these impacts when assessing major projects like these coal mines. Right now that's not happening."

Wildlife Whitsunday is considering an appeal against the decision.

The decision is available at http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/federal_ct/2006/736.html

The Environmental Defender's Office of Northern Queensland Inc is the solicitor for the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Proserpine / Whitsunday Branch Inc ("Wildlife Whitsunday").

**For further information contact Ian Lee 0427 852 969; (07) 4785 2969 or
Kirsty Ruddock (Solicitor EDO-NQ) 0439 531 968; (07) 4031 4766.**