



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Researchers to Travel to the Groote Archipelago**

Teams of researchers will travel to the remote Groote Archipelago off eastern Arnhem Land this week to work with Anindilyakwa Rangers to assess and document biodiversity values.

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts senior scientist and project leader Dr Alaric Fisher said the islands were thought to have high conservation values as a refuge for some plant and animal species.

“It is clear from studies conducted on Groote Eylandt during the past hundred years that it has a number of significant values, including several endemic and threatened plants and animals,” he said.

“Despite this, flora and fauna of the Archipelago is still only partly understood. The data on the main island of Groote is incomplete and many of the smaller islands remain virtually unknown from a scientific perspective.

“From what we know most of the islands remain free from introduced species such as cane toads, feral cats, hooved animals and weeds that have affected populations of species on the mainland.

“Threatened species such as the northern quoll are rapidly disappearing on the mainland because of the impacts of cane toads, but we believe there are healthy populations in the Groote archipelago.”

Dr Fisher said this project was part of a long-term program to document the biodiversity values of all the island chains around the NT coast.

“During the 17 day trip we hope to develop vegetation and habitat maps, conduct plant and animal surveys to clarify the status of rare or threatened species and further investigate some individual significant species,” he said.

Dr Fisher said the team of researchers would work collaboratively with Rangers from the Anindilyakwa Land Council to define conservation values and management priorities for the archipelago, which has recently been declared as an Indigenous protected area (IPA).

Anindilyakwa Land Council Ranger Program co-ordinator Simon Hartley said the rangers would provide the researchers with local expertise and transport them by boat to the small uninhabited islands of the Archipelago.

“Where possible the rangers will also work with the researchers to help build their capacity to assist with scientific survey and monitoring,” he said.

“The rangers will work with the NRETA researchers to assess the conservation values of islands – this will help ensure those with high conservation values are quarantined against threats, such as cane toads.”

The project is funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and the Tropical Savannas CRC.

Ends

**Media Note – For more information contact Alaric Fisher on 89448454 or 0432 854 480.**

Issued: 9am Thursday, 17 August 2006