NORTHERN LAND COUNCIL
Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

MEDIA STATEMENT

Environment and Water Bill signals dangerous step backwards for the NT

9 November 2026

The Northern Land Council is calling on the Northern Territory Government to **withdraw the Environment and Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2026**.

A Bill of this kind must be open to community input and consultation and should have been referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee.

The omnibus Bill proposes amendments to nine pieces of legislation, including matters concerning water, mining, heritage and dredging.

This Bill tells us a lot about the Government's priorities. It was introduced without any consultation, it is avoiding the level of scrutiny Territorians deserve, and it represents yet another step backwards when it comes to protecting what matters most.

Backsliding on Best Practice

Proposed changes to the Water Act 1992 will significantly weaken water resource regulation and bring the NT further out of step with national best practice. It's a move the NT simply can't afford.

The Bill proposes to make water allocation plans stay in force indefinitely, until the Minister revokes them. This means locking in plans that are at odds with scientific best practice, such as the new Katherine Water Allocation Plan (WAP) and controversial Georgina Wiso WAP.

They will also make water plans non-binding on decision-makers, which means accountability and transparency will only be further eroded.

The proposed amendments affect nine current Acts and Regulations that have severe impacts on Territorians' ability to conduct business and sustain Country.

Further, amendments to the Environmental Protection Act 2019 and the Environment Protection Regulations 2020, will make it easier in certain circumstances for mining companies to have their security deposits refunded when mineral licenses are transferred and before mining or site rehabilitation has been completed.

This change makes it easier for operators to step away and recoup the costs of business whilst the land continues to be mined.

All Territorians deserve laws that protect them and future generations, not legislation that weakens accountability, weakens environmental safeguards and sidelines the people most affected by these decisions.

This Government appears intent on doing everything it can to help companies take precious resources like water, all while weakening protections that stand to benefit everyone.

Quotes attributable to NLC Chair Matthew Ryan:

Water is not just an economic asset to be exploited. For Aboriginal people in the NT, water is life, culture, kinship and responsibility. It's in no one's interests that poor environmental regulations like this becomes law.

Aboriginal people are being asked to accept weaker protections and less accountability, while others stand to benefit.

What the government should be focused on is fixing water infrastructure in remote communities, places like Bulla, which do not have access to safe drinking water from their taps.

ENDS

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