



**NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL**
Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

MEDIA RELEASE

“Our voices have been ignored”: Traditional Owners stand up against Claravale land clearing

14 July 2026

Wagiman Traditional Owners are taking the Federal Environment Minister to court for failing to listen and consult with Wagiman people around the protection of their Country.

Large-scale land clearing began in June on Claravale Station and Farm to make way for cropping.

This was deeply disappointing to Wagiman Traditional Owners – who have not once been consulted by the Federal or Territory Governments.

Despite consistent and strong Traditional Owner opposition to land clearing on Wagiman Country, the Top End Pastoral Company’s applications to bulldoze 2,722.7 hectares across Claravale Station and Farm, north of Katherine, were approved in 2025 by the Northern Territory Government.

The area – almost 10 times the size of Sydney’s CBD – is home to a number of threatened species including ghost bats, freshwater sawfish, Gouldian finches and the red goshawk, an endangered bird of prey.

Due to this risk to threatened and endangered species, the proposal to clear 2,722.7 hectares was referred for assessment under Federal environmental laws in December last year.

In its referral application, Top End Pastoral Company described the land clearing as stage two of a three staged clearing project.

In 2021, stage one of the clearing saw the loss of 1,205.97 hectares of native vegetation without consultation.

If stage 3 is to occur, this could see a total of almost 6,000 hectares of savanna cleared.

The Wagiman Traditional Owners have traditional, cultural and historical knowledge of the land proposed to be cleared, and in their capacity as Rangers, care for, hunt, fish and collect flora and fauna on the surrounding country.

The Northern Land Council has lodged a number of submissions on behalf of Wagiman Traditional Owners since 2021 to the Northern Territory and Federal Governments, expressing opposition to land clearing on Claravale Farm and Station to protect native animals and vegetation.

In January this year, on behalf of the Wagiman Traditional Owners the Northern Land Council sent a submission with the Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt inviting him to visit Wagiman Country, to speak with and hear from the Wagiman directly.

In the submission, the Traditional Owners also asked the Minister to see first-hand the impacts of previous land clearing to understand the Wagiman's concerns with Top End Pastoral Company's proposal to clear a further 2,722.7 hectares.

Despite their invitation, at no point during the assessment process were Traditional Owners consulted by Federal Government on this matter.

In February, Minister Watt determined that Top End Pastoral Company's proposal to clear 2,722.7 hectares of native vegetation was unlikely to have a significant impact on threatened species and that further assessment under Australia's national environment laws was not necessary.

At the end of June, the Federal Court of Australia dismissed an application by the Environment Centre (NT) for urgent relief to stop the land clearing.

On behalf of Wagiman Traditional Owners, the NLC has now launched its own application for the Court to hear the Wagiman people's concerns with the Minister's decision to allow the land clearing to go ahead.

Quotes attributable to:

Verona Huddleston, Wagiman Traditional Owner:

"We are unhappy about this news. We have told them that we don't want this clearing...it was fine before but now I drive through my country and it's all going to be gone."

"It's hurtful that we didn't get any feedback or asked about this. It really hurts."

Theresa Banderson, Wagiman Traditional Owner:

"All the traditional owners feel no good about this."

"We want our trees there, all our animals, all our kangaroos, porcupines, we want to try stop that, we don't want it knocked down."

"We have all our young ones coming up, and we need that country there so we can teach them about this country."

Jabul Huddleston, Wagiman Traditional Owner:

"If I say no, that's it, no more questions. That's the word we are giving. Leave the country healthy, so that we can keep walking on it."

"We need to stand up for our country and keep it strong."

NLC Chair, Matthew Ryan:

“The fact that both the NT and Federal Government have not even bothered to sit down and talk with Traditional Owners about their concerns is appalling.”

“Traditional Owners must be listened to. This country is precious and must be protected in a sustainable way.”

- **ENDS** -

Media contact: media@nlc.org.au.