

15.02.25

Dear Scrutiny Committee of the Northern Parliament,

I am writing to voice my strong opposition to the Territory Coordinator Act as a fundamental attack on our Democracy in the Territory and I urge the Scrutiny committee to recommend it is not passed.

As a young doctor, I know that many early career professionals come to Darwin for a year - for experience or to have a year away from big cities and down south hustle and bustle. Many end up staying – and I can tell you why. It's because of the incredible natural environment, the culture -festivals, mud races and rodeos, the community, and the fact that we all know our neighbours in our tight-knit communities. I know that we are often focussed on born and bred Territorians, but the truth is these young people often form the backbone of our healthcare and teaching workforce. We have just welcomed more than 35 new junior doctors to RDH from interstate - I can tell you that hospital simply would not function without them.

These factors are also why the Territory is able to attract so many Tourists. When the Airport Development Group (a donor to both Labor and the CLP), raises concerns about tourist numbers (Camden Smith, NT News, 15.02.25), we need to consider what attracts visitors to the Territory - namely our internationally significant environmental & cultural icons. We need regulations to protect them, not fast track projects that threaten them. I make reference to this because I am worried about the Territory coordinator's powers to make unilateral decisions in relation to the Environmental Protection Act 2019, the Energy Pipelines Act 1981, the Fisheries Act 1988.

The Territory way of life is under threat with this proposal. Territorians want the Territory to develop and be economically viable, but not at the cost of our democracy or the things that make the Territory an incredible place to live.

This is also a threat to your relevance, and your job as MLAs. This proposal makes it possible for the Chief Minister to make captains calls - going above the heads of all members of parliament and the public. It essentially has the power to make MLAs irrelevant. What's more, the Territory Coordinator is an unelected bureaucrat who will have similar powers. Territorians have not consented to have two people in charge of so many important decisions. That is authoritarianism - and it should make us all worried. I know from discussions in my neighbourhood, just how worried people are becoming of a government that faces no scrutiny and makes decisions on their behalf.

Personally, in this bill, I am particularly worried about the:

- **Step in powers** of the Coordinator to make decisions for Government departments or ministers - it smacks of a Scott Morrison era secret consolidation of power. Government departments and ministers have much specific and specialised knowledge which helps them to make a decision, it is impossible for one or two people to be across the details of many, many government departments in order to make well considered decisions.
- **Powers to access land:** If Territorians were aware that it would be possible for people to access their private land, bring machinery and install equipment without a warrant or the permission of the land owner - I'm sure it wouldn't pass the pub test. It would make many people re-consider buying land that the government could then intervene on with no notice. It worries me in particular given the Land Title Act 2011 is included in the acts with exemption powers under the Territory Coordinator, but note it's relevance to the Pastoral Land Act 1992, the Heritage Act 2011, the Environmental Protection Act 2019, the Water Act 1992, The Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976 as well as many other acts. Please explain why this is necessary.
- **Condition variations:** If a project has been assessed and it is deemed necessary to place conditions on it, it renders risk assessing projects redundant. Development of the Territory is a good thing, however it has to be done in a way that ensures sustainable development and a protection of the assets the Territory has in order that we can continue to attract a strong workforce, tourists and protect our Territory way of life.
- **Protection from Liability:** I would like it explained why "A person is not civilly or criminally liable for an act done or omitted to be done by the person in good faith in the exercise of a power or performance of a function as: (a) the Territory Coordinator; or (b) a member of the Coordinator's staff; or 15 (c) any other person acting for or

on behalf of the Coordinator.” (section 104-1). Governments and bureaucrats should be accountable to the public and the judiciary, exempting them from liability gives them carte blanche to use their extraordinary powers with little oversight or repercussions.

- **Ignoring of community voices:** The CLP may have a vast majority in the LA, however, less than 50% of Territorians voted for them. Considering alternative points of view is part the job of all members, as MLAs represent their entire electorate, not just the people who voted them in. We elect a person who we believe will be represent us all, and listen to our concerns. It therefore contradicts the principles of good representation to ignore concerned community members.

Good governments should have proper oversight, and accountability to the people - removing that makes the government a farce. This government is focused on cutting red tape, however invalidating the role of MLAs and community voices through this proposal makes me wonder why we waste time on elections at all.

This bill is extremely concerning as it marks the consolidation of power into the hands of the Chief Minister and an unelected representative and undermines the foundations of democracy. Please consider the voices of the many Territorians who believe this marks a dark and authoritarian turn for our Government.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sibella Hare Breidahl

