

19<sup>th</sup> February 2025

To Legislative Scrutiny Committee  
[LA.Committees@nt.gov.au](mailto:LA.Committees@nt.gov.au)

**Re: Territory Coordinator Bill**  
About BirdLife Top End

The Top End branch of BirdLife Australia is a central forum for community activities focussed on the conservation of birds and their habitats in the 'Top End' region of the Northern Territory. The BirdLife Top End branch is volunteer-run, and aligns with the core values of BirdLife Australia to make a real and positive difference for Australia's birds in the Territory. Our core jurisdiction spans from the Barkly region to the northern tip of the continent, as well as the Tiwi Islands, Groote Eylandt, and all other offshore islands.

Our committed volunteers and members are involved in a range of activities, including research and monitoring programs, capacity-building initiatives, advocating for birds or their habitats under threat, and raising awareness among community members through outreach and education.

Submission

**BirdLife Top End does not support the Draft Territory Coordinator Bill.** BirdLife Top End are deeply concerned with the proposed Bill, which will create unprecedented powers to override a swathe of the Northern Territory's Environmental Laws. Robust environmental regulation is critical for the conservation of birds because it provides a structured framework to address threats to bird populations and their habitats.

Giving a bureaucrat broad power to circumvent environmental legislation in order to advance economic interests of industry could have far-reaching consequences for bird populations, some of which we detail below:

**1. Prioritization of Development Over Conservation and Eco-Tourism**

- The primary focus of a Territory Coordinator is likely to fast-track approvals for infrastructure, mining, and other large-scale projects.
- This emphasis on economic growth could lead to:
  - **Habitat destruction** from land clearing, construction, and resource extraction.
  - Increased disturbance to critical habitats for environmentally, socially and culturally important birds like the Red Goshawk, Gouldian Finch, Magpie Goose, and multiple nationally and internationally threatened species of migratory shorebird. Many of these species are targets species for the multi-million dollar avi-tourism industry<sup>1</sup>.

**2. Weakening of Environmental Regulations**

- Streamlining development often involves bypassing or relaxing the requirements for robust environmental impact assessments (EIAs).
- This could result in:
  - Insufficient consideration of the ecological impacts on birds and their habitats, and any alternatives
  - Approval of projects that affect sensitive areas like wetlands, floodplains, and monsoon vine thickets or rainforests without adequate mitigation measures.

**3. Threats to Protected Areas**

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<sup>1</sup> Steven, R. (2022) Bird and Nature Tourism in Australia. KBAs in Danger Case Study Report. Report prepared for BirdLife Australia. Carlton, Australia.

- The Northern Territory is home to globally significant bird habitats, including Ramsar-listed wetlands (e.g., Garig Gunak Barlu Nation Park and Kakadu National Park) and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) (e.g. Shoal Bay KBA).
- A focus on rapid project approvals could encroach on these protected areas, as well as unduly fragment the landscape, undermining decades of conservation efforts and international agreements.

#### **4. Increased Pollution**

- Fast-tracked industrial and agricultural projects could lead to:
  - Water pollution from runoff containing pesticides, fertilizers, or mining waste, harming aquatic ecosystems that support waterbirds.
  - Air pollution affecting delicate ecosystems where bird species thrive.

#### **5. Exacerbation of Climate Change**

- Many of the current major development projects in the NT involve activities that increase greenhouse gas emissions, such as deforestation, mining, and fossil fuel extraction.
- Climate change poses a significant threat to the Northern Territories birds by altering fire regimes, seasonality of resources (e.g. water), disrupting migration patterns, and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events.

#### **6. Inadequate Consultation with Indigenous Communities**

- Indigenous knowledge and stewardship play a critical role in conserving the Northern Territory's unique ecosystems and bird species.
- A fast-tracked approach to development may marginalise, suppress and exclude Indigenous voices, leading to decisions that overlook the cultural and ecological significance of certain areas and contribute to ongoing disenfranchisement and subversion of thousands of years of culture.
- We call for all government projects to be required to obtain Free, Prior and Informed Consent from Traditional Owners prior to approval.

#### **7. Expansion of Invasive Species**

- Large-scale developments often disturb ecosystems, creating opportunities for invasive species like feral cats, cane toads, invasive birds and weeds to spread, as well as pose biosecurity risks like introducing novel pathogens to a relatively intact ecosystem.
- These invasive species are significant threats to native birds.

#### **8. Cumulative Impacts on Birds**

- Birds are particularly sensitive to cumulative environmental changes. Rapid development could lead to:
  - Habitat fragmentation, which isolates bird populations and reduces genetic diversity.
  - Increased human activity in previously undisturbed areas, disrupting bird behaviours like breeding and feeding, contributing to population decline.

#### **9. Undermining Public Trust in Environmental Oversight**

- The perception that environmental protections are secondary to economic goals could erode public confidence in the government's commitment to conservation and the overall well being of the Northern Territory for all Territorians.

#### **Conclusion**



The proposed Territory Coordinator position risks prioritising rapid economic development at the expense of environmental protection and ongoing protection of the Northern Territory's unique nature for all Territorians. For birds in the Northern Territory, it could mean habitat loss and fragmentation, disruption to key breeding and feeding resources and timing, increased threats from invasive species and pollution, and weakened conservation efforts.

Balancing sustainable development with rigorous environmental oversight is essential to ensure the long-term survival of the Northern Territory's unique bird species and the ecological, cultural, and economic benefits they provide.

While developing the economy is a clear objective of the Northern Territory Government, so is maintaining the Territory lifestyle. Prioritising the development of major industries over the environment birds, and humans, depend on, is something we oppose in the strongest possible terms.

We welcome the opportunity to engage with the Northern Territory Government in a constructive consultation on this matter.

Sincerely,

Brittany Hayward-Brown  
Convener, BirdLife Top End

