

PUBLIC SUBMISSION – Territory Coordinator Bill 2025

To: Secretary, Legislative Scrutiny Committee,

For transparency purposes, I declare myself as a professional scientist working in agricultural and environmental contexts, with experience in the mining, consulting, research and education sectors. I write in my capacity as a private citizen and voter in the NT seat of Nightcliff.

Despite submission windows of just one week, the Phase 1 **Consultation Report** indicates over 400 people attended community meetings and 559 people wrote submissions, indicating strong interest. There was a strong response both for and against the draft Bill – but the report does not provide any indication of the *proportion* of submissions along those lines. For example, I understand that when a meeting of some 250 people was asked who did **not** support the Bill as framed, the entire meeting raised hands. Was there a similar proportion of concern among these two classes of submission writers? If so, has this level of public concern specifically been understood and addressed?

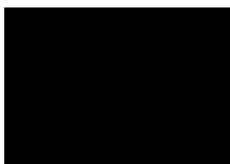
The **Consultation Report** also doesn't explain what suggestions or concerns were taken into consideration and what modifications were made to the Bill to address them. The report includes loosely framed comments, attributed as "some people", but not as editing actions taken.

Many of the concerns raised in the previous public submissions appear to still be relevant to the current draft. However, I focus on the following.

1. This lack of transparency in the **Consultation report**, potentially due to a lack of impartiality, already raises concerns about the transparency and depth of consideration in general about the Territory Coordinator concept.
2. If passed, this Bill creates an unprecedented and concerning concentration of power in one public officer. The draft bill appears to create a situation where many large-scale economic development projects will be determined without (or with drastically reduced) opportunities for public consultation, along with step-in options that may over-ride other NT policy (including laws). This coincides with recent removal of NT Government funding to two community NGOs who had capacity to support and represent community concerns regarding social and environmental impacts. This concerning lack of opportunity for comment impacts the civil liberties of NT citizens and residents, between elections. Is the Government concerned about this?
3. This concentration is moving in the opposite direction to the nation as a whole, where the interest in community led planning and politics is increasing (there are expected to be some 30 community-based candidates in the upcoming federal election, including the seat of Solomon). The Federal Member for

McKeller, Dr Sophie Scamps, introduced a Bill into federal parliament last week legally requiring public bodies to consider the impact of their decisions on future generations (much less current communities). Banks and superannuation companies are divesting funds from industries contributing to global warming. These actions and decisions seem to be reflecting an increase in community demands for more participation and consideration rather than less. These demands are being heard and acted upon. In the face of this power concentration, will the resourcing of other NT government agencies and civil society organisations be similarly be boosted to provide checks and balances on this new role, to protect public interests and ensure check and balances?

4. "Fast-tracking" is very unlikely to reduce the legacy of poor economic development decision-making. Increased agency efficiencies and better-informed decision-making can. How will the interest of future tax-payers be taken into consideration, with appropriate risk assessment in an environment of "fast-tracking" and in the absence of healthy public input?
5. A role of the Territory Coordinator role is to "Streamline approvals across government, removing roadblocks to economic progress", with consideration of social and environmental issues. All of these terms are ambiguous and require definition. Economic progress for whom, by what means will benefit or other impacts be determined? – there are no performance indicators stipulated. Reporting and review is mentioned, but on what?
6. Obviously, this position, will be exposed to powerful pressures from NT and Commonwealth political forces, and big businesses inside and outside the NT and Australia. Will this person be required to declare, and place on the public record, their personal financial or other circumstances and affiliations? Will there be a "fit person to serve" assessment made, specifically because of these issues?



Dr Penny Wurm

