

Territory Coordinator Draft Bill Submission

From Christine M Cox. [REDACTED]

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To: [LA.Committees@nt.gov.au](mailto:LA.Committees@nt.gov.au). Legislative Scrutiny Committee  
**Territory Coordinator Bill 2025**

To the Legislative Scrutiny Committee of the NT Parliament

I am writing to strongly oppose the Territory Coordinator Draft Bill 2025.

I have been living and working as an Environmental Educator in the NT for over 30 years. I have raised my family in the NT. I have worked in tourism as a bushwalking guide, in Kakadu National Park as an interpretive ranger and as a Senior Secondary remote education teacher with the NT Government teaching Geography, Biology and Environmental Science to students located in urban and remote settings. I have tertiary qualifications with a degree in Environmental Science. Natural resource management principles I have learnt and taught define sustainable development as the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It aims to balance the needs of the environment, economy and social well being. Earth's life support systems cannot be ignored if we are to have long term sustainability. I believe to prioritise economic development is not in the best interests of long term liveability for NT residents.

I strongly object to the Bill which allows broadly defined economic considerations to override environmental, social and other decision-making considerations in legislation through application of the "primary principle".

I love living in the NT for its wild, pristine and natural beauty. I value the natural and cultural heritage value of so many places that are unique to the NT. I want to be able to enjoy my retirement years in the NT. And cannot without clean air and water and a safe climate.

I value living in a democratic society and believe everyone has a right to be heard and treated equally.

Specifically, regarding the Committee's responsibility to report to the Assembly on the following:

- a) whether the Assembly should pass the Bill. No.
- b) whether the Assembly should amend the Bill It should be rescinded in its entirety.
- c) whether the Bill has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals

*The legislation exaggerates the rights and liberties of two public officers at the expense of the Assembly, the Public Service and the population at large. It does not show sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals but diminishes them.*

- d) *whether the Bill has sufficient regard to the institution of Parliament.]*

*The Bill fails to give sufficient regard to the institution of Parliament, and it undermines Cabinet and numerous regulatory bodies and associated legislation.*

My objections to the Territory Bill are primarily for the following reasons:

- The proposed Bill concentrates too much power in the hands of the Territory Coordinator (TC) and with the Chief Minister. This Bill would give the TC powers to take over existing operations of government and decisions made across 32 Acts and the Regulations within them. The TC would not be accountable to the NT Parliament.
- I am particularly concerned that laws relating to environmental protection, water extraction, mining and petroleum, the handling and storage of nuclear waste, water and sewerage services and land acquisition will be eroded.
- I am also concerned that the TC and Chief Minister can step in and exempt projects from complying with law. The inclusion of the Nuclear Waste Act suggests the TC and CM will have the ability to override existing legislation potentially allowing for nuclear waste dumping in the NT.
- I strongly object to the use of step-in powers under the Bill which will remove third party review rights that would otherwise be available, including in relation to water, fracking and planning decisions. Examples of community review rights that could be affected include challenges to water extraction licence decisions under the Water Act 1992 (NT), challenges to the approval of Environment Management Plans under the Petroleum (Environment) Regulations 2016 (NT) and review rights under the Planning Act 1999 (NT).
- The Bill allows the TC to vary conditions on existing statutory approvals in a wide range of circumstances, even where this would not be permitted under the law, giving effect to the approval and where proponents have previously breached approvals. I believe it is wrong that conditions can be modified in a manner which is convenient to an approval holder, absent the usual statutory constraints, and even in a manner which effectively excuses prior breaches of conditions or other Territory laws. This has the potential to result in adverse environmental and social outcomes under the guise of economic progress. Recently DHA breached the NT planning Act by illegally clearing at Lee Point with no consequences.

Other NT issues of concern are:

The Territory has been identified as a key region for critical minerals mining such as lithium, cobalt and copper, with government and private investment being increasingly directed towards this sector. For example, the Territory is Australia's only lithium producer apart from Western Australia, and there are many lithium exploration licences held over areas immediately adjacent to Litchfield National Park. Whilst critical minerals are an important component of the global energy transition, significant concerns have been raised in the Territory and elsewhere about the environmental impacts of critical minerals mining and the need for robust regulation. Landholder rights in relation to mining activities are already very limited, whilst the Territory's new environmental (mining) licence scheme has significant shortcomings.

A recent Four Corners program showed the Singleton Irrigation proposal has been granted Australia's largest fresh groundwater licence. If it goes ahead its environmental impacts will be immense. It will damage or destroy groundwater dependent sacred sites and ecosystems over a vast area. A LECA petition attracted 23,326 signatories opposing the project. It remains the subject of a Supreme Court appeal. Thankfully now it is still subject to a major environmental impact assessment. It also needs clearing and non-pastoral use permits.

Under the bill, the Chief Minister could declare this a Project of Territory Significance enabling the TC to exercise powers such as to step into the shoes of the NT EPA during the Environmental Impact Assessment process or the NT Minister for the Environment at the environmental approval stage. This project, one the community of Ali Curung unanimously opposes. The environment and First Nations people must be afforded the full opportunity for justice under the law.

In summary I believe this Bill should not be passed for the following reasons:

The Bill is an overreach of power and a threat to democratic processes and institutions in the Northern Territory. Taking decision-making power away from independent statutory decision makers and centralising this power with an unelected bureaucrat and a single Minister is anti-democratic overreach. the removal of appropriate checks and balances threatens good decision-making and democratic process.

The Bill weakens safeguards designed to protect the Territory's environment, health, and lifestyle.

The 'Primary Principle' is ill-defined and does not reflect the genuine interests of Territorians.

The Bill undermines existing regulatory practices that are currently under resourced.

As a long term resident of the NT I strongly oppose the proposed TC Bill.

Yours Sincerely

Christine Cox