

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr. Higgins to the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources:

No go zones

1. What is the status of the exploration permits, issued to petroleum companies, that fall within the ‘no go zones’?

The Government’s Reserved Block Policy was released in July 2019 and details that Exploration Permit holders under *the Petroleum Act* are expected to relinquish the areas within their permits that are affected by identified reserved blocks.

This request does not include exploration permits held on land governed by the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth).

In August 2019, Government wrote to permit holders that have identified reserve blocks on their petroleum interest and sought their relinquishment of those areas from their permit.

Once these identified reserve block areas are removed from an exploration permit, the areas will be declared a reserved block, under Section 9 of the *Petroleum Act*.

There are 47 exploration permits granted in the Northern Territory, with 27 of these permits containing identified reserved blocks. This does not mean 25 permits need to be relinquished in entirety. Some permits have relatively small areas to be relinquished (e.g. 10 or less blocks).

The Reserved Block Policy and related information is available at:
<https://nt.gov.au/industry/mining-and-petroleum/land-tenure-and-availability/petroleum-reserved-blocks>

2. What is the basis of the declaration of the ‘no go zones’ i.e. what factors determined whether exploration can or cannot proceed in certain parts of the Northern Territory?

The Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing (Inquiry) made a recommendation (Recommendation 14.4) that certain areas of the Northern Territory should not be subject to petroleum exploration or production activities. Recommendation 14.4 also stated the areas that should be declared a reserved block or “no go zone”, which included:

- areas of high tourism value;
- towns and residential areas (including areas that have assets of strategic importance to nearby residential areas);
- national parks;
- conservation reserves;
- areas of high ecological value;
- areas of cultural significance; and
- Indigenous Protected Areas.

The Inquiry also determined (Recommendation 14.3) that areas which are geologically not prospective for petroleum exploration should be declared reserved blocks.

3. Will this decision be reviewed and if so when?

The Reserved Block Policy commenced in July 2019, following public consultation on a draft policy earlier this year.

The relinquishment of these blocks by exploration permit holders is aligned to Government's commitment to implement all of the Inquiry's 135 recommendation in full and the community expectation that certain areas, identified by the Inquiry, are declared reserved blocks under the Act.

4. Is the power to review this declaration in the Act and/or the regulations and if so, who has this authority?

The Minister for Primary Industry and Resources has the authority to declare reserved blocks under section 9 of the *Petroleum Act*. The gazettal of an Instrument formalizes the reserved block declaration.

5. Will there be compensation paid to exploration permit holders who are no longer able to do so?

Government expects permit holders to relinquish the areas affected by identified reserve blocks from their exploration permit.

There may be some instances where permit holders wish to negotiate with government regarding this relinquishment. Such instances could be considered on a case by case basis.