

Mr Eric Fejo

Larrakia Elder

Submission to the Northern Territory Legislative Scrutiny Committee

Territory Coordinator Bill 2025

By email: LA.Committees@nt.gov.au and Julia.Knight@nt.gov.au

1. I write this submission as a Larrakia elder and recognised custodian of sacred sites under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth) and *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989* (NT).
2. I have lived on Larrakia Country my whole life, and have defended Larrakia Country and people for just as long.
3. I want Larrakia Country to be cherished and protected for future generations. I want to leave a legacy for my children and grandchildren, and make my ancestors proud.
4. Despite Larrakia people's calls for Treaty sparking the national land rights movement, Larrakia people still have no land rights, and no native title. We repeat our calls – as we have done for over 50 years - for a Treaty, as the only way to address the harms caused to our people. This is unfinished business for Larrakia people and it will eventually be achieved.
5. I have watched as my cultural heritage has been desecrated and destroyed without Larrakia consent time and time again during my lifetime, with no reparations. We have continually been let down by successive governments who have fought against our land claims and native title claims. The former CLP Government that was in power between 1978 and 2001 was the very worst, opposing every single land claim lodged in the Northern Territory, seeding racism and intolerance.
6. Now we see a return of the CLP's old ways under the Finocchiaro Government, and a return of their racist and bigoted ideology.

7. The Territory Coordinator Bill 2025 represents the very worst of CLP ideology and I oppose it.
8. I view this Bill as profoundly antidemocratic, autocratic and genocidal of my people.
9. It is an abomination, has no mandate with the people of the Northern Territory, and it requires the highest degree of scrutiny.
10. It is a disgrace that the community has been given one week to submit comments to the Scrutiny Committee. This authoritarian law requires considered and rigorous public scrutiny. I therefore request that the Legislative Scrutiny Committee holds a hearing into this Bill, and that I and other members of the public be given the opportunity to provide oral evidence at that hearing.
11. By enabling an unelected bureaucrat – and former Inpex boss - and the Chief Minister the power to completely override cultural heritage laws, fossil fuel companies, mining companies and unscrupulous developers will be given an almost unfettered right to continue the destruction of Larrakia people's – and indeed all First Nations' people in the Northern Territory's - cultural heritage. This is enabled through the disgraceful last-minute inclusion of the NT Heritage Act in the list of laws which can be intervened in and exempted by the Territory Coordinator.
12. Make no mistake, this is so the Finocchiaro Government can push ahead with destructive projects like the Middle Arm gas and petrochemical hub planned for Darwin Harbour with no regard for Larrakia views, or our unbroken history and connection with the land. Middle Arm, as the Finocchiaro Government well knows, is rich in cultural heritage sites that demonstrate Larrakia people's unbroken 60,000 year connection with this place. The Territory Coordinator and the Chief Minister herself will have the power to authorize the destruction of these places and exempt heritage laws altogether for this and other projects. This is immoral and will undoubtedly create another Juukan Gorge disaster. Furthermore, it goes against what Australians value in our democracy: the right to be heard and the right to be involved in decision-making that impacts our lives. This is not just an Aboriginal thing. All Australians value these things.

13. The concentration of sweeping legal powers into the hands of the Chief Minister and her unelected autocrat is a dangerous attack on Traditional Owners, on sacred sites custodians and indeed on the Territory community at large.
14. The removal of essential checks and balances via laws designed to protect our precious environment and heritage makes a complete mockery of democracy in the Northern Territory and will open the pathway to destruction of our beautiful natural environment that so many people treasure.
15. I urge the Scrutiny Committee to recommend that this Bill is not passed, and to do your utmost to ensure that democracy is upheld in the Northern Territory, including all the checks and balances that are part of this system. Please, do not allow the Northern Territory to go down the path of autocracy, fascism and dictatorship.
16. Combined with attacks on First Nations children through lowering the age of criminal responsibility to 10 years old, the removal of the Aboriginal child placement principle in child protection laws, and punitive laws which open the door to human rights abuses and overcrowding in our prisons, the Territory Coordinator Bill demonstrates clearly that the Finocchiaro Government is heading down a fascist and authoritarian pathway. We have seen this play out before in other countries, and it pains me to see it unfolding here in the Northern Territory.
17. As a community, we cannot stay silent. I am profoundly disappointed with Aboriginal organisations and other peak bodies who are supposed to represent civil society but are staying quiet while the Finocchiaro Government's punitive legislative agenda plays out in real time. They have been cowed and tamed by the government dollar. This is how cultural genocide happens. The revolution will not be funded.
18. I oppose the enactment of the Territory Coordinator Bill, as must any person who cares about the past, present and future of the Northern Territory, and Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Fejo