

Dr David Liddle

14 June 2019

The Secretary
Social Policy Scrutiny Committee
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Darwin NT 0801
E: SPSC@nt.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Submission to the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee on the Environment Protection Bill 2019

The Territory is my home; it is the place where I have raised a family; and it is the place I intend to call home for the rest of my days. I visited the NT in May 1980 and was delighted by the natural and cultural environment. By the end of that year I had moved to live in Alice Springs and subsequently have lived in Tennant Creek and Darwin. I still take delight in the Territory; the vast landscapes, the prominence of relatively “natural” environment and the opportunity to share with others in cultural events such as the Barunga Festival last weekend. The people, landscapes and lifestyle of the NT are important to me. Thus it is with deeply felt concern that I write to you regards the Environment Protection Bill 2019.

I compliment the Government in taking steps to improve the environmental legislation in the Territory. There are many good points in the proposed legislation such as: inclusion of the precautionary principle; consideration of ecologically sustainable development; and the requirement for an approval from the Environment Minister for projects that are expected to have a significant impact on the environment. On the flip side there are some serious gaps in the proposed legislation. Important issues that need to be addressed are:

- Excluding the word “economy” from the definition of environment;
- Inclusion of climate impacts as a mandatory consideration in all environmental assessments;
- A broadening of those who have standing to request a merits review and judicial review to all who are affected by a proposed activity, including those who have made a submission about a proposal; and
- Increased transparency by requiring decision makers to provide an explanation of how the principles of ecologically sustainable development have been considered and applied.

To briefly elaborate on the above, the focus of this legislation should be environment protection rather than “economic” aspects. While the “economy” of the NT is important for our well-being,

more fundamentally we rely upon physical, biological, cultural and social aspects of where we live. There are numerous other actions of both the Government and private individuals that focus on economic considerations. Economic considerations should not be the focus of environmental legislation and raise serious scope for the economic to conflict with these more fundamental aspects.

There is overwhelming evidence that climate change is an existential threat to the world as we know it. Climate impacts need to be included as a mandatory consideration in environmental matters. The overwhelming evidence is that our kids and grandkids will pay heavily for the failure of the current generation to act. Living in Darwin, we are already witnesses to changes as the number of days exceeding 35°C continue to climb and the threat to industries such as tourism increase.

The Territory is our home and we are all impacted by Government decisions and development activities. For those that take enough interest in their home to make submissions about development proposals, they should have the right to seek review of decisions. In addition, these rights should extend to recognised environmental groups, whether or not they have made submissions in the early stages of the approval process. To give this right to the proponent, but not to interested Territorians is unjust.

Transparency underpins social licence and community support for developments. An explanation of how the principles of ecologically sustainable development have been considered and applied is one step towards increased transparency and confidence in decisions that have a significant impact on the people and landscapes of the NT.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to making our home an even better place to live and raise a family.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. T. Liddle".

Dr David T. Liddle