



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

NLC condemns McArthur River Mine approval

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The Northern Land Council has condemned the decision of the NT EPA to approve the overburden management project at the McArthur River Mine.

NLC CEO Joe Morrison said the EPA's assessment that the project can avoid significant environmental impacts is not supported by its own report.

"The sorry history of frequent environmental incidents at the mine and poor regulation mean that both the operator and regulator cannot be trusted," Mr Morrison said.

"The report represents an unacceptable approach to environmental risk. It is merely hoping against hope and goes against the weight of evidence presented to the EPA.

"This proposal to allow an expansion of a troubled operation in order to solve some of its problems is an extremely short-term solution that will result in a costly perpetual legacy for Traditional Owners and Territorians," Mr Morrison said.

"The assessment even records the EPA's concern that there is 'potential for future off-site impacts to occur as a result of the proposal' and that 'significant environmental impacts could occur as a result of a major incident, e.g. failure or overflow of the TSF [Tailings Storage Facility] or other events that may lead to uncontrolled release of contaminated water or tailings'."

The NLC raised many concerns about the MRM proposal in a weighty submission to the EPA. NLC officers then met with the board of the EPA and told them the MRM proposal should be redrafted to consider alternative development scenarios, provide economic modelling to support any cost/benefit assumptions, and should be underpinned by accepted leading practice community and other stakeholder consultation standards and methodologies (including MRM consultations with the NLC and local Aboriginal people).

"If the NLC's recommendations were incorporated into a revised proposal the EPA would have delivered a better environmental outcome," Mr Morrison said.

"Further, the EPA report does not provide any confidence that the closure plan will not result in unacceptable environmental outcomes. The recommendation for approval is based on a hope that over the next 20 years, while the volume of waste rock and tailings accumulates, some technological solution will prevail.

“Far from a best practice approach to environmental management based on detailed characterisation of risk and prevention through elimination or mitigation the NTEPA’s recommendations have a reliance on strengthened monitoring and adaptive management.

“The history of MRM demonstrates a failure of this approach, with combusting waste rock, continued erosion and failure to establish vegetation in the rechannel, seepage and concern around the stability and integrity of both the waste rock dump and the tailings storage facility and cattle contaminated with lead being a few of MRM’s operating results to date,” Mr Morrison said.

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