



NORTHERN
LAND COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

Our Land, Our Sea, Our Life

Northern Land Council condemns water access changes as a betrayal of the interests of all Territorians

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The Northern Land Council condemns the recent passage of the water-related parts of the *Statute Law Amendment (Territory Economic Reconstruction Committee) Bill* as a fundamental betrayal of the interests of all Territorians—and Aboriginal Territorians in particular—in a most precious common resource—our water.

These changes bring into law controversial amendments that pave the way for large developers to apply for a new type of water licence, giving them access to unprecedented volumes of water for private profit without proper public scrutiny and accountability.

The rhetoric from the NT government is that these laws represent a mere change in process but not a change in policy. That is wrong. In fact, it is clear the amendments are not at all about changes to process and should have been subjected to far greater public scrutiny and consideration before being pushed through the Legislative Assembly tucked away in an omnibus Bill.

In June this year the NLC successfully challenged a water licence granted to the government's own NT Land Corporation at Larrimah. That licence was later overturned by the NT government.

Now however, the NLC is concerned the recent changes to water laws will allow licences like the one overturned at Larrimah to be granted in future. This could see large-scale water allocations granted outside of the established water allocation processes without any proper scrutiny or involvement by Aboriginal traditional owners and other stakeholders.

Chairman of the Northern Land Council, Samuel Bush-Blanasi, is very concerned at the lack of information made available to Aboriginal people about the changes to the water laws. "The government should be telling our mob more about what they are doing to our water. If we

aren't careful, we'll end up like the Murray-Darling river systems in New South Wales, where governments have long failed indigenous interests in water.

“The government has talked about making business easier but we need to hold them to account and make sure they do the right thing by Aboriginal and other Territorians and not just big developers who want big mobs of our water for free,” said Mr Bush-Blanasi.

NLC Acting CEO Joe Martin-Jard echoed those concerns. “Land Councils and our constituents are being effectively ignored by the government. Just last week we heard that a survey commissioned by the Central Land Council has identified dozens of sacred sites that could be threatened by a massive water licence at Singleton Station. The CLC is making a formal review of a massive water allocation at Singleton Station because the government failed to carry out an adequate baseline assessment of the impacts to Aboriginal cultural values before issuing the water licence.”

“How can we possibly keep our sacred places safe while growing our own Aboriginal economy if our voices aren't being listened to?” said Mr Martin-Jard.