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Sent: Thursday, 16 July 2026 4:24 PM
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Cc: Das NTG <Das.NTG@nt.gov.au>
Subject: Project Ares submission - referral and draft Terms of Reference

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As a Territory resident, based in Rapid Creek, I am making this submission about the proposed Project Ares data centre and gas power station at Murrarji Station.

Yes I travel to the Barkly and I was shocked to see new infrastructure built on the highway. I don't see investment in health and education for the people of the NT. I see roads and infrastructure built for multinational corporations, that doesn't stand up to the pub test. My kids, my grandkids and their kids - deserve the same quality of life as me.

The project's creeks drain about 80 km to Lake Woods, a nationally important wetland that fills with up to 116,000 waterbirds. The referral admits the connection but has not assessed the downstream effect. The Terms of Reference should require assessment of the project's impacts on Lake Woods and the creeks that feed it.

A gas power station of around 1,000 MW would be built to run this data centre, larger than the Territory's biggest existing station. Where its gas would come from is left unstated, but in this part of the NT that means fracking the Beetaloo. The NT EPA should require that the source of the gas be disclosed and its full lifecycle emissions assessed, including the upstream fracking.

The Greater Bilby, a Vulnerable species and an Australian icon, is confirmed on the site, and the Grey Falcon and Yellow-spotted Monitor are expected here too. Yet the surveys so far are desktop-only and cover only part of the site. The Terms of Reference should require field surveys for these threatened species across the whole project footprint before any decision on impacts.

The project would take up to 4 billion litres of groundwater a year from the Cambrian Limestone Aquifer, about 30% of the water the regional plan makes available to all industry, while other users draw on the same system. I ask that the NT EPA require a full, cumulative assessment of whether this level of groundwater extraction is sustainable before any approval.

Assessing the data centre on its own hides its true footprint: it relies on a gas pipeline and is tied to a neighbouring ammonia project, and splitting these apart understates the combined impact. The Terms of Reference should require that the whole project and its connected parts, including the gas pipeline and the ammonia plant, be assessed together rather than piece by piece.

So far the environmental work is mostly desk research, done without surveying the creek lines or the country downstream in the seasons when it matters. I ask that the NT EPA require field surveys across the full project footprint, in appropriate seasons, before the scope and level of assessment are locked in.

The project can clear or disturb up to 19,150 hectares, an area roughly 14 km across. The Terms of Reference should require that the assessment be carried out against the full maximum footprint, with any later reduction made a binding condition of approval rather than an assumption.

The project is on land under a determined native title and rich in cultural heritage, yet consultation has barely begun. I ask that the NT EPA require that cultural heritage assessment be led with Traditional Owners through the Northern Land Council, properly resourced, and not rushed by a streamlined timeline.

I ask the NT EPA to ensure these matters are required in the Terms of Reference and assessed in full before any decision is made. Thank you for considering my submission.

Gabe Smith
Rapid Creek