

Submission to EPA inquiry regarding Project Ares 2026

I am a long-term NT resident having lived here for 41 years. I was born and raised on the land in NSW, I have lived in central Australia, Arnhem Land, Alice Springs and am now retired and based in Millner, Darwin. I am a parent and grandparent, and am someone with interest and investment in the future of the NT. I am making this submission about the proposed Project Ares data centre and gas power station at Murrarji Station because the project really concerns me. I am interested in my grandchildren having opportunities in the NT that could include pastoral work and wildlife conservation. I am interested in the Top End remaining a liveable place and not subject to excessive heat from climate change due to excessive carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels.

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 I think that means gas fracked in the Beetaloo basin. I ask the NT EPA to require that the source of the gas be disclosed and its full lifecycle emissions assessed, including the process of fracking which I understand has so many excessive emissions it makes it as carbon dirty as burning coal. Also needless to say fracking risks our artesian water supplies which feed our stations and our remote homeland communities and towns. I believe that the cooling of data centres also requires large amounts of water. The proposal states up to ~4 GL a year pumped from the Cambrian Limestone Aquifer via a new borefield. These waters also feed our tourism industry with many thousands of visits to Mataranka, Bitter Springs and Lake Woods in particular. If EPA agrees to the proposal the cost of negative impacts on these other industries must be considered. Because these are the livelihoods of long-term Territorians not opportunists who can return to their original homes well off and leave the Territorians dependent on these flourishing ecosystems impoverished if water is drained or contaminated by new exploitative industries.

I've been to Lake Woods as a camper and been astounded by the birds and other wildlife. It is astounding that it continues in such a dry environment. I believe it is an important place and know that is nationally and internationally recognised as an important wetland. Lake Woods lies downstream of this project, in the same catchment, and supports enormous numbers of waterbirds and migratory shorebirds. Nothing in the referral examines what the project's runoff and creek crossings would do to it. The Terms of Reference should require assessment of the project's impacts on Lake Woods and the creeks that feed it.

The widespread clearing of over 19000 hectares is likely to have a detrimental effect on important wildlife and their habitats. Threatened wildlife already noted, includes the Greater Bilby, and other threatened species are also likely present. The proponent has relied largely on desktop review rather than looking properly on the ground. The Terms of Reference should require field surveys for these threatened species across the whole project footprint before any decision on impacts.

Up to 4 billion litres a year would be drawn from the Cambrian Limestone Aquifer for this one project, a large share of the region's allocation, on top of the demands of cotton, petroleum and a co-located ammonia plant on the same water. I ask the NT EPA to 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 NT EPA 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. This is because collectively these are the environmental impacts.

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 the NT EPA to require independent field surveys across the full project footprint, in appropriate seasons, before the scope and level of assessment are locked in.

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

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