

**AAPowerLink Australia Assets Pty Ltd plan to develop a large-scale solar generation and battery energy storage system precinct** located in the Barkly Local Government Area. The proposal is located approximately 27 km west of the Stuart Highway and 121 km north of the Tennant Creek township and sits within NT Portion 5173.

We live on a 20 acre rural bush property at Tumbling Waters in the Northern Territory. This is often described by people visiting as a large property that must demand a lot of work to keep it going. When you consider that SunCable is planning to clear 49,300 hectares of valuable and unique native vegetation to build a massive solar precinct in the Barkly region, there are a lot more concerns of how this can be managed ecologically sustainably than on our 20 acres.

We are obviously concerned about the environmental impacts of building such a massive SunCable Precinct at Muckaty Station. We are equally concerned that SunCable has another huge 12,000 hectare solar farm project planned at Powell Creek Station. Apparently SunCable is on a mission to progress development of its flagship Australia-Asia PowerLink (AAPowerLink) project.<sup>1</sup>

It seriously concerns us that the company's major shareholder and director is a software billionaire interested in building data centres and investing in AI and the company has been talking to bankers, financiers and potential equity partners overseas as it seeks to start development of the project.<sup>2</sup>

According to the company, other industries looking for such power supplies include green fuels manufacturing, sustainable aviation fuels and critical minerals processing.<sup>3</sup> The current CEO is on the Australian Hydrogen Council which touts 'green' hydrogen as renewable energy. Other green billionaires have pulled out from this as not viable. As for 'sustainable aviation fuels', this means thousands and thousands of hectares cleared for grains planted for this purpose. Critical minerals such as lithium for batteries are needed by the US Defence Industry to carry out more war on those who don't recognise US rules-based 'order' as ecologically sustainable.

According to the company it still 'harbours ambitions of delivering power to Singapore, via a sub-sea cable to south-east Asia, and has Singapore government approvals'<sup>4</sup>

These projects are close to Lake Woods and the region has natural environment that is relatively intact and threatened species include the Bilby, Grey Falcon and Yellow-spotted Monitor. Lake Woods, and other regional wetlands like North-west Junction Swamp and Bundara Swamp to the East are large RAMSAR wetlands frequented by migratory species already threatened by climate change in their international breeding grounds and these risks must be taken seriously.

Although we want to see the NT transition to renewable energy, the AAPowerLink is being developed as the world's largest renewable energy and transmission project and one of the largest economic industrial developments in Australian history.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.suncable.energy/news/suncable-appoints-group-ceo>

<sup>2</sup> <https://reneweconomy.com.au/suncable-aims-to-deliver-its-first-firmed-power-from-australia-biggest-solar-project-by-end-of-decade/>

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> Op cit

Such massive industrial projects use solar panels that are still not able to be renewed or recycled effectively. Mining for lithium battery back-up pollutes water resources and degrades/destroys precious, iconic natural ecosystems. We would prefer that billionaires who profess to be green-powered fund education projects that help reduce energy consumption rather than increase it.

A much smaller SunCable project providing power for local people's consumption should be built on already cleared land, and not in a bilby stronghold and close to internationally significant wetlands. We prefer smaller, sustainable renewable energy industrial projects that have a small footprint and enable our precious bilbies and other iconic Australian wildlife species to continue to live healthily in their natural habitats.

This proposal is a major risk to iconic nationally threatened species - especially the bilby. It includes habitat critical to the survival of the bilby, according to documents lodged by SunCable.

The project will have a highly significant impact on animals, plants, soils and water bodies in the region and will drive threatened species closer to extinction.

We also condemn the recent agreement for a long-term lease of Aboriginal communal land with local community people and the NLC. We would like to see genuine participatory, well-informed negotiations with native title holders for Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) as well as free and informed consent from all local Aboriginal community members for Aboriginal communal land to be leased privately. We still remember that Muckaty Station was 'negotiated' to be a nuclear waste dump.

The SunCable chief executive, Ryan Willemsen-Bell, said the company's combined NT developments offered "a compelling proposition to attract global investment in an AI data centre precinct".<sup>6</sup> This would require an enormous amount of water.

Is this what we really need from people representing themselves as renewable and sustainable energy leaders? SunCable Group CEO Ryan Willemsen-Bell has said:

"I have spent much of my career within Australia's energy market pursuing the adoption of emerging technologies and, most recently, developing large-scale infrastructure projects to support carbon abatement. I'm excited I can continue to focus my passion on developing a nation- and region-defining project."<sup>7</sup> These are weasel words that show no concern for concepts of 'Small is Beautiful' and ecological sustainability. The precautionary principle cannot be adhered to under such a industrialised highly consumptive premise.

The SunCable project needs to be subjected to the highest level of environmental impact assessment by the NT EPA as well as for assessment under Federal Legislation.

Respectfully,

Diana and Greg

*Diana Rickard and Greg Chapman*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/nov/20/artificial-intelligence-data-centre-australia-solar-farm-possibly-unparalleled>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.suncable.energy/news/suncable-appoints-group-ceo>