

I am a retired scientist residing in Darwin, and I have many concerns about the proposed development. Darwin Harbour is the key natural asset of the region, recognized by its critical economic, environmental, social, cultural and recreational importance. In summary, the components of the so-called “sustainable” precinct are vastly at odds to maintaining the vital community and environmental values of the Harbour:

Establishing a petrochemical hub close to sensitive ecosystems and residential areas is indefensible. Even the proponent acknowledges that “significant adverse impacts to human health may occur from dredging, major hazardous facilities, operations and shipping”. It is worrying that the Northern Territory government as proponent, would blithely accept the risks to public health, from degraded air quality, accidental emissions or explosions.

The proponent also acknowledges that there may be: significant impact to soil quality; impact to threatened species and sensitive and significant vegetation; alteration to hydrological flows; impact to freshwater discharges to the Harbour; impact to groundwater flows; significant impact to marine water and Harbour sediment quality; significant impact to marine ecosystems and threatened species; significant impact to air quality; significant impact to achieving NT greenhouse gas emissions targets; significant adverse impact to communities including Aboriginal people; impact to sacred sites and cultural and heritage sites. It is hard to reconcile why the NT government would potentially jeopardise the viability of Darwin Harbour on so many fronts. To call this a “Sustainable Development Precinct” is an insult to the community.

The focus on gas as a feedstock, particularly involving the developing of new onshore and offshore gas resources, is a deeply regressive step, considering the criticality of meeting carbon emission targets. The clear message from the International Energy Agency is that for the world to have any chance of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050, no new fossil fuel projects should be developed. The proposed use of carbon capture and storage is tenuous, considering the lack lustre performance of the technology.

The long term economic and social benefits of the proposal are doubtful. There is no evidence that this precinct will fundamentally change the boom-bust nature of the Darwin economy or community demography (e.g. encouraging long-term residence of young families, improving gender balance).

The mechanism to streamline development approval of multiple industries, including reducing the opportunity for public comment, is untenable. The proposed industries are all technologically complex but have different potential environmental and community risks. Development proposals should be assessed individually in terms of potential hazards and impacts, within a framework that allows proper public comment.

This is not a forward-thinking proposal. The use of taxpayer dollars to help develop a gas-focused industrial complex in such a sensitive location, brands the Northern Territory government as having last-century thinking. This is not a great reputation to have in a world where jurisdictions are actively competing for private sector investments and partnerships in a new wave of industries and technologies. There are much better ways to demonstrate and encourage economic development that fits the definition of sustainable.

I request that my submission be published with my identifying information removed