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Subject: Project Ares submission - referral and draft Terms of Reference
Date: Thursday, 13 August 2026 12:46:38 AM

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As a Territory resident, based in Tumbling Waters, I am writing, with real concern, about the proposed Project Ares data centre and gas power station at Murrnaji Station.

I work in the Barkly and have seen both the beauty and the vulnerability of the land and communities. I grew up on the Murray and, as a child, I remember learning about the environmental threats to the Murray Darling Basin such as salination caused by irrigation practices. I remember thinking that the adults at the time mustn't have known better or realised the bigger picture. I also remember the weight of the devastation I felt when I learned that after so many years, the problems remained and damage to the waterway was largely irreversible. I don't want future generations to feel that same bewilderment and devastation when they look at the impacts of the data centres in the Barkly. I don't want them to wonder why the adults at the time didn't know better, and why we didn't do more to protect and preserve the environment and life-sustaining waterways.

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. I am concerned about this, and ask the NT EPA to require assessment of the project's impacts on Lake Woods and the creeks that feed it.

Project Ares would run on a gas plant of about 1,000 MW, bigger than the Territory's main power station, yet the referral will not say where the gas comes from. In this region, new gas means fracked Beetaloo shale gas. This is a real concern, and I ask the NT EPA to require that the source of the gas be disclosed and its full lifecycle emissions assessed, including the upstream fracking.

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 find this troubling, and ask that the NT EPA require a full, cumulative assessment of whether this level of groundwater extraction is sustainable before any approval.

The project depends on an off-site gas pipeline and shares water and infrastructure with a separate ammonia project, yet these are being treated as separate matters. I am concerned about this, and ask the NT EPA to 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.

The studies supporting the referral are largely desktop-based and leave the creek corridors and downstream areas unsurveyed. This worries me, and I ask the NT EPA to require field surveys across the full project footprint, in appropriate seasons, before the scope and level of assessment are locked in.

I am worried these matters could be waved through. I ask the NT EPA to require them in the Terms of Reference and to assess them in full before any decision is made. Thank you

for considering my submission.

Olivia Johansson
Tumbling Waters