

Full name: Deane Spurge

Submission content:

Dear Mr Vogel,

Re: Sweetwater Agricultural Development – Stage 1

I am writing to urge you to consider the impacts of the Sweetwater Agricultural Development, historically known as Ord 3, which could see the Ord River irrigation scheme expanded across the Territory border to irrigate crops.

It is the first land clearing application in the Territory's history to be considered under Australia's national environment laws, with Minister for the Environment Murray Watt, deeming the project a Controlled Action due to potential significant impacts to threatened and migratory species, and internationally important wetlands.

This project could damage ecological and biological diversity, harm threatened species, alter water flows, and impact important cultural heritage.

Spirit Hills Station is part of a living, breathing ecosystem that includes Ramsar-listed wetlands and floodplains – areas recognized as internationally significant for their unique environmental values and biodiversity. The area is also a site of exceptional cultural significance.

Threatened species including the freshwater sawfish, green sawfish, Gouldian finch, ghost bat, Merten's water monitor, northern blue-tongued skink, red goshawk and white-bellied sea eagle are all known to be present within the area.

Freshwater sawfish are now facing extinction in Australian waters due to over extraction of water, land-clearing and fishing practices.

Similarly, Gouldian finches are facing extinction due to habitat loss and degradation. This proposal will add yet another burden to species already struggling to survive.

The referral reveals plans to construct a new 10 billion litre dam (equivalent to 4000 Olympic swimming pools) using flows from the pristine Keep River, downstream of the magnificent Keep River National Park.

This is just the beginning of plans to massively expand the cotton industry in the Territory, which could see up to 67,500 hectares under development.

The cotton industry wants to take advantage of the Territory's free water, and we fear the dam rush is just beginning.

This large-scale development will intensify existing environmental pressures and further erode the resilience of ecosystems already under stress.

The impacts extend beyond this proposal alone. They must be understood in the context of cumulative pressures from the Sweetwater Agricultural Development Stages 1–3, other existing developments in the Keep River catchment, and the compounding effects of climate change.

Please consider the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of this development on cultural heritage, the Northern Territory's irreplaceable ecosystems and the unique species that depend on them.

Yours sincerely,

Deane Spurge

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