


## NOTICE OF DECISION AND STATEMENT OF REASONS

Section 55 of the *Environment Protection Act 2019* (EP Act)  
Regulations 58(1)(b) and 63 of the *Environment Protection Regulations 2020* (EP Regulations)

<b>Name of proposed action</b>	Australia-ASEAN Power Link Project Proponent initiated EIS referral EP2020/002 accepted 16 October 2020
<b>Proponent</b>	Sun Cable Pty Ltd
<b>Description of proposed action</b>	The proposed action is to establish a solar farm and energy storage, electrical and supporting infrastructure extending up to 12 000 hectares near Elliott in the Northern Territory, with power exported via a high-voltage direct current overhead transmission line to Darwin. Supporting infrastructure at Middle Arm peninsula would connect to the Darwin-Katherine electricity grid and to a subsea cable through Darwin Harbour to Singapore.
<b>Nature and location of proposed action</b>	Energy (renewable) Barkly to Darwin Regions; Darwin Harbour
<b>Person authorised to make decision</b>	Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA)
<b>Decision</b>	<b>Standard environmental impact assessment is required</b> in accordance with section 55 of the EP Act and regulation 58(1)(b)(i) of the EP Regulations <b>An environmental impact statement is required</b> in accordance with regulation 58(1)(b)(ii) of the EP Regulations
<b>Signature</b>	 Dr Paul Vogel AM Chairperson, NT EPA
<b>Date of decision</b>	12 January 2021
<b>Matters considered under EP Regulation 56</b>	The NT EPA has considered the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>the accepted referral (including the referral form, referral report and appendices; statement of reasons; draft terms of reference)</li><li>submissions received in relation to the referral information during the public consultation period 19 October 2020 to 27 November 2020<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>public submissions received: 5 (three from non-government organisations; two from private individuals)</li><li>government authority submissions received: 7</li></ul></li></ul>

## Statement of Reasons

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### Overview

The NT EPA considers that the proposed action has the potential to significantly impact environmental values associated with the following 12 environmental factors<sup>1</sup>.

Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Terrestrial environmental quality</b> – soil quality may be significantly impacted over a large area through: vegetation clearing; erosion; shading from solar panels; leaks of hazardous materials.</li><li>• <b>Terrestrial ecosystems</b> – threatened species, and sensitive and significant vegetation, may be impacted by vegetation clearing and habitat disturbance. There is a high level of uncertainty regarding the significance of potential impacts due to lack of information.</li></ul>
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Hydrological processes</b> – the area of disturbance for the solar farm and numerous water crossings for the transmission line may result in impacts on surface hydrology, though the significance of potential impacts is uncertain.</li><li>• <b>Inland water environmental quality</b> – the area of disturbance for the solar farm and numerous water crossings for the transmission line may result in impacts on surface water quality, though the significance of potential impacts is uncertain.</li><li>• <b>Aquatic ecosystems</b> – the area of disturbance for the solar farm and numerous water crossings for the transmission line may result in impacts on aquatic ecosystems, though the significance of potential impacts is uncertain.</li></ul>
Sea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Marine environmental quality</b> – significant impacts to marine water quality may occur due to disturbance of the seabed during sub-sea cable installation.</li><li>• <b>Marine ecosystems</b> – significant impacts to marine ecosystems may occur due to disturbance of habitat and threatened species during sub-sea cable installation and operation.</li></ul>
Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Air quality</b> – there is the potential for significant impact to air quality through dust emissions at the solar farm precinct due to the large area of disturbance.</li><li>• <b>Atmospheric processes</b> – while a renewable energy proposal may contribute to achieving greenhouse gas emission targets in the NT, this is yet to be demonstrated taking into account vegetation clearing.</li></ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Community and economy</b> – the proposed action has the potential to significantly impact communities, including Aboriginal communities, within its area of influence, both adversely and beneficially.</li><li>• <b>Culture and heritage</b> – sacred sites and cultural and historical heritage may be impacted during construction of the proposed action. The significance of impacts is currently uncertain.</li><li>• <b>Human health</b> – significant adverse impacts to human health from the proposed action are not anticipated but this must be demonstrated.</li></ul>

The NT EPA considered other environmental factors during its consideration of the referral, however, the impact on those factors was not considered to be significant.

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<sup>1</sup> [NT EPA Environmental factors and objectives](#)

## Justification

A standard assessment by environmental impact statement is required due to:

- Regulation 59 (a) the significance of the potential impacts of the proposed action identified above
- Regulation 59 (b) the need to improve the NT EPA's level of confidence in predicting potential significant impacts of the proposed action taking into account the extent and currency of existing knowledge, particularly in relation to:
- impacts to surface water resources and aquatic ecosystems during construction of all land-based proposed action components and operation of the solar farm
  - the significance of impacts to threatened species and habitats in the terrestrial and marine environments
  - the benefits to the NT of the proposed action, including to the NT Government's greenhouse gas emissions target
  - information about social and cultural impacts that may arise through engagement and consultation with communities affected by the proposed action, including Aboriginal communities
- Regulation 59 (c) the need to develop measures to avoid, mitigate or manage potential significant impacts, and increase the NT EPA's confidence in the effectiveness of the proposed measures, with respect to:
- potential impacts to threatened species and sensitive vegetation from clearing activities
  - soil erosion and dust generation from disturbance at the solar farm site
  - potential impacts to aquatic ecosystems from transmission line construction over waterways
  - potential impacts to the marine environment from installation of the sub-sea cable
  - potential social and cultural impacts
- Regulation 59 (d) & (e) the limited extent of community engagement that has occurred in relation to the proposed action, and therefore, the capacity for communities to access and understand information about the proposed action. This includes avoidance of negative social and economic impacts and maximisation of benefits.

In summary, the NT EPA considers that the proposed action has the potential for significant impacts on multiple environmental factors, and that environmental impact assessment is required.

## Conclusion

The NT EPA considers that the proposed action has the potential to have a significant impact on the environment due to the considerable scale and extent of the proposed action, and the environmental values that may be present within and adjacent to the footprint of the proposed action. There is a high level of uncertainty regarding the values that may be impacted by some components of the proposed action and the magnitude of those impacts due to the preliminary nature of the information available. Management and mitigation measures proposed in the design, planning, construction and operational phases of the proposed action are high level and require further development during preparation of the EIS in consideration of values identified through studies and stakeholder engagement.

**NOTICE OF DECISION AND STATEMENT OF REASONS –  
SUN CABLE – AUSTRALIA- ASEAN POWER LINK PROJECT**

In making its decision under EP Regulation 58(1)(b), the NT EPA has considered:

- the objects of the Act in section 3 of the EP Act
  - the purposes of the environmental impact assessment process in section 42 of the EP Act
  - the matters under regulation 56 of the EP Regulations
  - the matters relevant to a consideration of the method of environmental impact assessment in regulation 59 of the EP Regulations.
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