

NOTICE OF DECISION AND STATEMENT OF REASONS

Section 55 of the *Environment Protection Act 2019* (EP Act)

Regulations 57(2)(b) and 63 of the *Environment Protection Regulations 2020* (EP Regulations)

Name of proposed action	Ammaroo Ammonium Phosphate Fertiliser Project
Proponent	Verdant Minerals Pty Ltd
NT EPA reference	EP2022/020 Referral accepted 18 November 2022
Description of proposed action	<p>Development of downstream processing facilities and associated amenity, storage and service infrastructure for production of ammonium phosphate fertilisers at the Ammaroo Phosphate mine, approximately 200 km south-east of Tennant Creek and 300 km north-east of Alice Springs, in the Barkly local government area. The proposed action is related to the Ammaroo Phosphate Project, which was assessed under the <i>Environmental Assessment Act 1982</i>. The NT EPA completed its assessment (Assessment Report 87) on 2 October 2018.</p> <p>The proposed activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • construction and operation of a ammonium phosphate fertiliser plant which includes: phosphoric acid plant; sulfuric acid plant; ammonia plant; and granulation plant • storage facilities for fertiliser, hazardous materials and reagents • natural gas use to 8.7 petajoules per year • expansion of borefield to supply an extra 3.9 gigalitres per year of groundwater • above-ground storage area to stack phosphogypsum waste product • upgraded import/export and storage facilities at the Port of Darwin • expanded accommodation facilities (800 rooms) • construction of an airfield.
Nature of proposed action	Mining and processing
Decision	<p>Standard environmental impact assessment is required in accordance with section 55 of the EP Act and regulation 57(2)(b)(i) of the EP Regulations.</p> <p>Assessment by environmental impact statement to be the method of environmental impact assessment in accordance with regulation 57(2)(b)(ii).</p>
Person authorised to make decision	Dr Paul Vogel AM – Chairperson, as delegate of the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA)

Signature



Date of decision

8 February 2023

The NT EPA has considered the following:

Matters considered under EP Regulation 56

- the accepted referral (including the referral form, referral report and appendices)
- submissions received in relation to the referral information during the public consultation period 20 November to 20 December 2022.
 - government authority submissions received: 9
 - public submissions: 3

Consultation

- The referral indicates the proponent engaged with stakeholders during June 2022 at the three locations most likely to be impacted by the proposal (Ampilatwatja, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs).
- Stakeholders consulted include Native Title Holders, community residents, service providers in Ampilatwatja, nearby pastoral stations and regional stakeholders in Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.
- Issues raised during consultation include:
 - impacts to road users from increased traffic and degradation of roads
 - governance and implementation of the Native Title Agreement
 - restrictions to access on Country for gathering and cultural practices
 - potential impacts from groundwater extraction
 - proponent's workforce accessing parts of the pastoral station without permission
 - cattle access to water points
 - impacts on local employment including procurement expectations and attraction and retention of workforce to the region
 - impacts resulting from greenhouse gas emissions.
- Public and government authority submissions identified potential impacts and risks to hydrological processes, air quality, atmospheric processes, and culture and heritage.

All submissions are available on the NT EPA website.

Statement of Reasons

Overview

The NT EPA considers that the proposed action has the potential to have a significant impact on environmental values associated with five environmental factors¹.

LAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Terrestrial ecosystems - There is insufficient information to assess the significance of impacts from emissions from the proposed ammonium phosphate fertiliser plant and the proposed increase in groundwater abstraction on groundwater dependent ecosystems.
WATER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hydrological processes - There is insufficient information to assess the significance of impacts from the proposed increase in groundwater abstraction on environmental values including ecological health, land uses and the welfare and amenity of people.
AIR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Air quality - The operation of the ammonium phosphate fertiliser plant requires stacks (chimneys) to disperse airborne contaminants. Insufficient information is available to determine the impacts over the mine life (25 years) on sensitive receptors such as native vegetation, soil quality, regional communities and Aboriginal sacred sites.• Atmospheric processes - The proposal is projected to generate approximately 491 800 tCO₂-e of greenhouse gas emissions annually during operations (scopes 1 and 2), triggering the NT Large Emitters Policy and requiring a Greenhouse Gas Abatement Plan to demonstrate how the proposal will meet the NT EPA's objective.
PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Culture and heritage - The proposal has the potential to significantly impact culturally significant aspects of the environment through noise, poor air quality, groundwater drawdown, proposal layout, and visual amenity impacts.

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.

Justification

A standard assessment by **environmental impact statement** is required having regard to:

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| Regulation 59 (a) | the significance of the potential impacts of the proposed action as described above. |
| Regulation 59 (b) | <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the significance of potential impacts from process air emissions• the potential impacts of increased groundwater abstraction and drawdown including to cultural values and groundwater dependent ecosystems• the significance of potential impacts to sacred sites and cultural heritage values. |

¹ [NT EPA Environmental factors and objectives](#)

Regulation 59 (c)	<p>the level of confidence in the effectiveness of the proposed measures to avoid, mitigate, or manage potential significant impacts with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• groundwater dependent ecosystems and values• air emissions and greenhouse gas emissions• Aboriginal sacred sites and cultural values.
Regulation 59 (d)	<p>the limited extent of community engagement with the Aboriginal custodians and their representative body in respect of the downstream processing proposal.</p>
Regulation 59 (e)	<p>the capacity of the communities and individuals likely to be affected, to access and understand information about the proposal and its potential significant impacts, particularly in relation to the potential impacts from airborne contaminants and groundwater drawdown on the communities' values and interests.</p>

Conclusion

The NT EPA considers that the proposed action is a major development that has the potential for significant impacts on five environmental factors, and that environmental impact assessment is required. The method of assessment will be environmental impact statement.

In making its decision under EP Regulation 57, the NT EPA has considered:

- the objects of the Act in section 3 of the EP Act
- the purpose 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.