

12th February 2023

Dear Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority,

I currently reside in Mparntwe and have witnessed the transformative effects that listening to the advice of local custodians has on the wellbeing of individuals and communities, now and into the future as their deep understanding and care for country ensures the sustainability of our environment.

I am seriously concerned that the Singleton horticulture proposal poses a significant and unacceptable impact to the environment, and Fortune Agribusiness have not engaged in sufficient consultation with Traditional Owners and the broader communities who will be affected by the action.

The proposal has the potential to significantly harm the environment, including surrounding groundwater dependent ecosystems which currently sustain a diverse range of flora and fauna. These ecosystems are inextricably linked to the ongoing cultural practices of the four neighbouring Kaytetye language groups: the Anerre, Waake-Akwerlpe, Iliyarne and Arlpwe peoples. As documented by oral histories, these custodians have been unceasingly tied to these lands since time immemorial, and through colonisation have continued to hunt, practice ritual and live there around the Warrabri settlement, now Alekerenge community. Members of these communities have expressed concern over the consequences to the environment, themselves and families if the proposed action goes ahead, facing punishment from creator spirits residing in any of the 40 sacred sites within the drawdown zone if they cannot continue to practice Altyerre (Dreaming) Law.

I'm sure you're familiar with Susan Dale Donaldson's 2021 report in which further detail on this context can be found. Nonetheless I restate it here only to urge you to take the concerns of Traditional Owners into serious consideration. The extractive attitude of Fortune Agribusiness is evident in their stated intentions: to export 70% of their agricultural product overseas with only 6% being allocated to the Northern Territory, to utilise the labour of 1300 overseas FIFO workers, and to apportion only 200 out of the 40,000ML of groundwater for public supply. If regulatory bodies such as yourselves continue to ignore the concerns of the people who have maintained sustainable relationships to land for countless generations, in favour of profiteering businesses, the collective trauma of our past stands only to be repeated. As Warlpiri – Kaytetye artist, writer and knowledge holder Maureen Jipiyiliya Nampijinpa O'Keefe expresses for example, the profound impacts of the Maralinga rocket testing upon the surrounding environment and people were a direct result of refusal to consult with the people who "are living on this land... living off this land." She says, "Today we know what's about to happen, there is about to be a water crisis. We have to stop it before it happens."

The proposed development poses significant risks to various ecological, hydrological and cultural values, and even setting these aside, the project itself was found by Cooke and Keane to be unsustainable due to likely increasing salinity in the area with "very significant implications for long-term viability of irrigated horticulture."

I therefore request that you ensure that the most rigorous level of environmental impact assessment (Tier 3) is applied.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this letter.

Yours sincerely