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7 July, 2023
Pastoral Lands Board
Via 'Development Applications Online'

Dear Pastoral Lands Board,

RE: Standard Pastoral Land Clearing Application - Providence Station NT Portion 5806 (Pastoral Lease 1210) Sturt Plateau Pastoral District

I am writing to request that you reject the application by Sam McBean on behalf of Northern Livestock and Agriculture to clear 3662.86 ha of native vegetation for pasture production.

I am strongly opposed to this proposal on grounds of:

1. Failure to consider new information available in the SREBA report which suggests there are ecosystems of importance in the area and contains a wealth of data that was not available when this application was written
2. Impacts on threatened species and significant vegetation; including loss and fragmentation of essential habitat in the tropical savannah ecosystem, an ecosystem described as being in a state of collapse.
3. Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions from the project and lack of offsets.
4. Failure to explicitly consider impacts on cultural heritage.
5. Systemic failure in logical argumentation used to justify environmental damage
6. Inappropriate assessment process - Lack of assessment under the Environment Protection Act 2019.

1. Failure to consider new information available in the SREBA report which may mean there are ecosystems of importance in the area

The SREBA report has presented a wealth of information. "All of the data and information collected and collated for the SREBA are publicly accessible through the SREBA Data Catalogue and web portal" and yet none of this information is used.

This is particularly concerning as based upon figure 6.5 in the SREBA there appears to be a significant concentration of areas with moderately significant ecological value in the vicinity of Providence station.

The SREBA also highlights ecologically significant ecosystems including bullwaddy, which appears to be present within and close to the proposed areas to be cleared (refer photo point 1005) and satellite imagery in which bullwaddy is distinct.

This application must include newly available data from the SREBA final report and avoid impacts to bullwaddy ecosystems.

2. **Impacts on threatened species and significant vegetation; including loss and fragmentation of essential habitat in the tropical savannah ecosystem.**

The application lists a wide range of species based on desktop studies, but no field survey data. This demonstrates unsuitability to self-assess potential risk to protected matters and to self-refer where scientific uncertainty exists about the likelihood of a significant impact occurring or being likely to occur.

As described the proposal in itself could have a significant impact on biodiversity if species which may occur on the land do in fact occur. I am also concerned about the chronic degradation of biodiversity associated with the numerous clearing applications in train, which are occurring in the absence of any strategic plan for biodiversity conservation or clearing, especially given the severe risk posed by climate change and the NTG's chronic failure to manage other environmental risks (e.g weeds, ferals, livestock), which have led to the tropical savanna ecosystems being characterised as in a state of collapse[1].

Finally in respect to the ghost bat, the applicant asserts sinkholes are not present however topographic mapping shows these have been recorded nearby on neighbouring NT Portion 5805.

3. **Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions from the project and lack of offsets.**

I am opposed to this proposal on grounds of its fundamental non-compliance with the NTG carbon offsets framework.

The offsets framework makes clear offsets *cannot be used to make an unacceptable impact acceptable.* This proposal has unacceptable impacts (massive carbon emissions) which are avoidable. There is no public interest in clearing this land, given it will result in avoidable carbon emissions.

I am absolutely opposed to the allowing of these unnecessary carbon emissions. There has been a vast change in context since the policy was put in place given the global temperatures and other climate change metrics are changing quicker than expected and we have recently witnessed. The last week has seen the highest global temperature in the last 120,000 years, with UN describing climate change 'out of control'.[1]

No evidence for the estimated emissions (tonnes CO2-e) from the clearing.456,705 tCO2-e is provided. Clearly the estimate is close to the threshold established in the NT Government's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Management for New and Expanding Large Emitters' Policy, whereby a land use project generating over 500 000 tCO2-e from a single clearing event, OR cumulatively from multiple land clearing actions on a property over time is required to develop a Greenhouse Gas Abatement Plan (GGAP).

The predicted emissions are just 43,295 less than the above threshold. It appears

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/07/un-climate-change-hottest-week-world

that the applicants have assumed 124.69 tonne/ha from the clearing. If this was wrong by just 11.8 tonne/ha (i.e. 8.4%) then the limit would be exceeded. Furthermore the carbon emissions calculation do not (but should) include the additional emissions associated with increased stocking rates.

Given the woody vegetation present and the sparse information presented such an underestimation is entirely possible and within the error margin of the calculation presented

It would represent an extreme naivety on the part of the Pastoral Lands Board and failure of due diligence if it did not demand greater evidence as to how carbon emissions have been calculated. This is especially so as the applicant has an extremely strong motivation to minimise the estimated emissions given that at the spot price of $35/tonne the cost of offsetting 500,000 tCO2 is $17,500,000.

Gifting this amount offsets is essentially gifting public money to a private company. Allowing these emissions is not in the public interest.

The enormity of this gift is especially remarkable given it may exceed the value of the pastoral lease and clearly is far in excess of the income derived from increased stocking densities.

I am also opposed to companies, like Northern Livestock and Agriculture which own multiple pastoral leases must not be gifted this 500,000 tonne for each lease.

4. **Inadequate authority certificate granted under the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989.**

An Abstract of Records is provided but this is insufficient to determine whether sacred sites exist. This is made clear in the advice from AAPA refer page 61 of the application.

> *Please note that the following only constitutes preliminary advice, and does not constitute a 'clearance' in regard to heritage matters.*
>
> *I have conducted a search for known archaeological places within the two clearing areas as defined in your Kmz files, which were titled Hot Socks and North Breeder.*
>
> *I can confirm that no previously recorded sites are located in these areas. However the database only includes information about known archaeological places.* ***The fact that there are no known archaeological places recorded may be because no archaeological surveys have been conducted in that particular area, and is not necessarily an indication they do not exist.***
>
> *An assessment of the likelihood of unrecorded archaeological places existing cannot be provided at this time, because of the lack of detail provided about these areas. In the process of submitting a formal land clearing application further information may be provided, including geo-referenced photographs and an understanding of land units, rock outcrops and rivers. This level of understanding is required to provide informed*

recommendations regarding the recommendation to conduct an archaeological survey.

Again please note this response only addresses the issue of known sites. It does not constitute an assessment or recommendation whether an archaeological survey is required.

In addition to inadequate information on sacred sites, no information is provided on the cultural values impacted or that the Native Title holders or whether owners of the neighbouring Dillinya Aboriginal Land Trust have been consulted. These both should happen before this application is assessed.

A full archaelogical survey, consideration of cultural values impacted and consultation with the Native Title holders and neighbouring ALT are all needed before this application can be assessed.

5. **Systemic failure in logical argumentation used to justify environmental damage**

This application persistently uses the faulty reasoning of "denying the antecedent" to argue for the absence of significant species.(i.e "If A, then B; not A; therefore not B" contains the incorrect assumption that B cannot be true if A is not true in cases where B must be true if A is true.)[2]

I.e. While the presence of a species record in sparse data on NRM Maps can confirm that species has been found in the area, the absence of a species from the data record cannot can-not confirm its absence from the area. Furthermore the presence of a variety of ecosystems and large mature trees on this site suggests this is an area could support significant flora and fauna that has not been identified in nearby surveys.

6. **Need for assessment under the Environment Protection Act 2019.**

While I am firmly opposed to this proposal I consider that if the applicants wish to proceed with this application it should in the first instance be subject to environmental impact assessment under the *Environment Protection Act 2019* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwth).

The *Environment Protection Act 2019* places the responsibility on the proponent to refer the proposed action if it has the potential to have a significant impact on the environment or if it meets a referral trigger. As the applicant has not referred this application, which details significant risks to the environment the Pastoral Lands Board should.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Sincerely,

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[2] https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/CC3BFEEB-C364-E1A1-A5390F221AC0FD2D/avoiding_logical_fallacies(2).pdf

[redacted]

CC:
NT EPA
Conservation Council of Australia