21 July, 2024

Dear Minister Worden and NT Controller of Water Resources,

I am writing to request you reject the unsustainable Larrimah Farms water licence.

It is highly inappropriate and not in the public interest for this proposed licence decision to have been advertised while the contentious and widely criticised draft Mataranka Water Allocation Plan is still being debated. Water licence decisions are required to give consideration to water allocation plans in the area and this one should. The absence of an adopted plan also makes it impossible for the public to give informed comment, deeply compromising this statutory consultation process. Given the extremely large size of a licence we must not risk a decision that locks in an unsustainable entitlement that may be at odds with the final plan, jeopardising the equitable access to this water resource and threatening the vital water dependent ecosystems.

I am deeply concerned about the proposed 10 billion litre/year water licence for majority irrigated cotton at Larrimah Farms. If approved, this water licence will be the largest in the Draft Mataranka Water Allocation Plan area, with the majority of the water planned to irrigate cotton crops. This is despite Larrimah Farms' land clearing permits making no mention of irrigated cotton as a prospective crop in the semi-arid region.

I note that the exact same water licence was revoked in 2021 following a merits review challenge by the ECNT and NLC. The government's own scientists warned that pumping too much water out of the ground at Larrimah could make the aquifer flow backwards, and the springs to stop flowing.

The science tells us that this water licence could have incredibly dire consequences for the places we love, as this underground water from Larrimah flows directly into the Roper River. We cannot let 10 billion litres of precious water be given to the cotton industry every year, while our environment and local communities dependent on the Roper River pay the price.

People have been giving a simple message up and down the Roper: no more water out. We're already seeing the effects of water extraction at Mataranka and across the Territory. This level of increased extraction could impact water supplies at Larrimah and communities downstream on the Roper River, causing wetlands, billabongs and cultural places to dry up earlier, impacting wildlife and cultural activities. It could increase fire risk and impact dry season flows to the Roper River.

I urge you to stand with the community and not approve the 10 billion litre/year licence application at Larrimah Farms. The evidence is clear - this unsustainable amount of water extraction is not backed by science and should not be approved.

Regards,

[redacted]