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NT 0870

16 October 2026
Pastoral Lands Board
Via 'Development Applications Online'

Dear Pastoral Lands Board,

RE: Standard Pastoral Land Clearing Application - Dungowan Station PPL 1076 NT Portions 850 & 2114 Sturt Plateau Pastoral District

I am writing to request that you reject the application by Troy Setter of Consolidated Pastoral Company PL to clear 4,105.1 ha of native vegetation for pasture production (Sabi Grass).

I object to this proposal on grounds of:

1. Unsuitability of Consolidated Pastoral Corporation as an applicant – it has a history of submitting untrustworthy applications that change once approved;
2. Unsuitability of Pastoral Land Board to determine the application, due to individual and collective vested interests;
3. Impacts on declared threatened species, including bilbies;
4. Damage significant vegetation; including loss and fragmentation of essential habitat in the tropical savannah ecosystem, an ecosystem described as being in a state of collapse;
5. Introduction and spread of environmental weeds;
6. Impacts of pesticides and fertilisers;
7. Avoidable impacts on groundwater recharge quality due to proximity to numerous sinkholes in an area low in the catchment in an area where runoff concentrates;
8. Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions and lack of offsets;
9. Unacceptable risk of breaching the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 and failure to consult with Native Title holders;
10. Inappropriate assessment process – Requires assessment under the *Environment Protection Act 2019* and referral under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.*

DISCUSSION

1. Unsuitability of Consolidated Pastoral Corporation (CPC) as an applicant

CPC is not suitable applicant and this application cannot be considered reliable. CPC has repeatedly submitted clearing applications for dryland purposes that are subsequently subject to groundwater extraction licence applications. Within the last year three clearing approvals it has obtained for dryland uses have subsequently been used for irrigation projects (Tandyidgee, Dungowan and Newcastle Waters).

This scope creep is transparently a way to avoid the full project impacts being assessed up front. This reduces the likelihood of a thoroughgoing environmental impact assessment being required and reduces the level of public scrutiny.

The impacts of irrigated agriculture are broader and even more significant than clearing for dryland farming. These need to be considered upfront on the basis of damage they will

cause to in-tact savanna lands, not after the subject lands have been significantly damaged by clearing for dryland purposes.

This application also sits above groundwater within the Cambrian Limestone Aquifer. It therefore could be subject to a groundwater extraction proposal. As this has happened too many times with other clearing applications from this company, no further land clearing applications should be accepted. CPC should be regarded as an unsuitable company to acquire any further pastoral leases.

2. Unsuitability of the Pastoral Land Board (PLB) to determine the application, due to individual and collective vested interests

The PLB is not in a position to make a sound decision on this proposal. The majority of its membership has a vested interest in proposals like this going ahead:

- Allan Andrews (Vice President) as a CPC company employee has a vested interest. (I assume will not participate in the decision.)
- Chair Paul Burke is also independent chair of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) Horticulture Council[1]. The role of this committee is *to form policy and advocate on behalf of the national horticulture industry*. Mr Burke clearly has a vested interest in facilitating irrigated agriculture proposals, which on past form this may become.
- All other PLB members who are pastoral lease holders on the committee also stand to benefit from a laissez faire approach to land clearing assessments and the tactic of allowing scope creep to gain approvals. These are expanding pastoral land entitlements and hence the value of pastoral leases.

I am also concerned that a board where the Chair and Vice Chair are so invested in irrigated agriculture is likely to have a culture of supporting this type of activity across the PLB regardless of whether Mr Andrews and Mr Burke participate in the decision.

These concerns are material:

- I have first-hand experience from presenting to the PLB on my concerns about scope creep in regards to a clearing application on Scott Creek in December 2025. I raised concerns that a proposal for dryland use in an area with known shallow groundwater could be subject to a later groundwater extraction proposal. These concerns were not addressed in the decision statement. How can I expect to get a fair hearing when Allan Andrews is in the room and casting vote while at the same time his company was proposing irrigation proposals on three pastoral leases (Tandyidgee, Dungowan and Newcastle Waters)?
- PLB's history of essentially never refusing clearing applications, is highly suggestive of a structural bias towards land clearing applicants.

Sub Recommendation: The Pastoral Land Board should refer itself for independent review of governance arrangements and how pastoral land clearing application are decided.

3. Impacts on threatened species including bilbies

[1] https://nff.org.au/media-release/paul-burke-appointed-independent-chair-of-nff-horticulture-council/

The application lists a wide range of species based on desktop studies.

Bilby is confirmed as present within the proposed clearing area. It is also deeply concerning that the field survey also confirms that the previous clearing application involved clearing bilby sites (burrow 3).

Rather than avoiding the risk, the applicant's response is to argue that the reduction in habitat is small in relation to the bilby's range.

This approach contradicts the Bilby Threatened Species Recovery Plan[2] which states ***habitat critical to the survival of the Greater Bilby can be considered to include any area where the species is known or likely to occur.*** The entire area within this clearing application should be treated as critical habitat and protected from clearing.

Furthermore this clearing proposal involves planting invasive grasses and creation of habitats suitable for feral animals, (i.e. the type of pastured land where bilbies have become extinct). This will damage the bilby prospects not just within the clearing footprint but beyond in surrounding areas

I note also that dingoes were observed at the site in the field survey. The Bilby Threatened Species Recovery Plan 'the presence of dingoes may improve habitat suitability for bilbies by predating upon or displacing more effective predators such as the foxes and feral cats.

Notwithstanding the Bilby Threatened Species Recovery Plan, the regional context needs to also be considered. The NT savanna region is under considerable pressure from ecosystem decline (climate change, invasive plants and animals) and there are multiple clearing applications across the bilby's remaining range (e.g. enormous clearing proposals for Muckaty and Murranji).

4. Damage and fragmentation of tropical savanna ecosystem.

I also object to the chronic degradation of savanna associated with the numerous clearing applications. These are occurring in the absence of any strategic plan for biodiversity conservation or clearing and are on top of the severe risk posed by climate change and the NTG's chronic failure to manage other environmental risks (e.g weeds, ferals, livestock).

The many threats which have led to the tropical savanna ecosystems being characterised as in a state of collapse[3]

5. Introduction and spread of environmental weeds

Sabi grass (*Urochloa mosambicensis*) is regarded as an environmental weed in parts of Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.[4] It has potential to spread beyond the clearing footprint and degrade surrounding ecosystems.

Furthermore removal of native vegetation, cultivation and more intensive use of the site will introduce likelihood of spread of other weeds.

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[2] https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/recovery-plan-greater-bilby-2023.pdf

[3] https://theconversation.com/existential-threat-to-our-survival-see-the-19-australian-ecosystems-already-collapsing-154077

[4] https://keyserver.lucidcentral.org/weeds/data/media/Html/urochloa_mosambicensis.htm

This location is particularly inappropriate as it is close to a waterway, which can act as a vector for weeds.

6. Pesticides and fertilisers

The application involves two broadscale glyphosate applications and fertiliser application (volumes not quantified).

These represents a significant avoidable degradation of soils and threats to unknown plant and insect populations, which are significant in themselves and a source of food for bilbies, skinks and other species.

7. Avoidable Impacts on groundwater recharge quality

The application details the area has an extremely high density of sinkholes - 20 recorded (others could form or be revealed). Tickell et al 2021[5] identifies that sinkholes can provide more rapid recharge pathways to aquifers in this area. As the proposed clearing is low in the catchment in an area where runoff concentrates this seems a particularly important area to avoid clearing.

8. Climate change, greenhouse gas emissions from the project and lack of offsets.

I object to the carbon emissions 228,643 tCO2-e.

Furthermore these emissions are not offset, meaning the direct cost of these avoidable emissions is born by the public at a time when we are facing global climate change tipping points.

At a conservative spot price of $35 tonne CO2 offset, this represents cost shifting onto the public of $8,002,005.

The offsets framework makes clear offsets *cannot be used to make an unacceptable impact acceptable*[6]. This proposal is unacceptable. There is no public interest in clearing this land, it involves environmental harm, is not needed and will result in avoidable carbon emissions.

CPC has cleared immense amounts of land over its many leases, none of which as far as I am aware have been offset. I object to this major ongoing public subsidy of a large international business.

9. Unacceptable risk of breaching the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 and failure to consult with Native Title holders

An Abstract of Records is provided but this is insufficient to determine whether sacred sites exist. A Sacred Sites clearance involving consultation with Traditional Owners attending the site has never been undertaken.

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[5] https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/900048/0/68 (p31)

[6] https://environment.nt.gov.au/environment/northern-territory-offsets-framework/greenhouse-gas-emissions-offsets-policy

Appendix 12 of the application shows the Heritage Branch recommends *that an archaeological survey is required to identify and mitigate the impact to Aboriginal or Macassan archaeological places and objects.*

No survey has been done. This is needed before this application is assessed to enable a balanced assessment

Furthermore the proposed mitigation '*If any potential sacred site, archaeological place, object or remains are identified during works, the area will be immediately excluded from disturbance and appropriately buffered',* is absurd and unreliable. Sites of significance are not necessarily visible to the naked eye and require the specific cultural knowledge. An unsupervised contractor driving a bulldozer with a vested interest in not noticing is not a sensible mitigation.

There is a Native Title determination over parts of Dungowan station. The Pastoral Lands Board should seek the Native Title Holders' approval for this change in land use as it could degrade the Native Title holders entitlements. There is no evidence in the application of any consultation having occurred with Native Title Holders.

Requires assessment under the NT *Environment Protection Act 2019* and Federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

If the applicants wish to proceed it should be subject to environmental impact assessment under the *Environment Protection Act 2019* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwth).

The applicant's self-assessment is manifestly cavalier and incorrect. For example this hand-written assessment (See attachment 14 NT EPA pre referral) answers 'no' to the questions around threatened species despite bilbies being present and the proposed clearing not being either necessary and not compliant with the Bilby Threatened Species Recovery Plan.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Sincerely,

Adrian Tomlinson

Written with respect on unceded Central Arrernte lands

Copies to

NTEPA (Attention Dr Paul Vogel)

Federal Minister for the Environment (via EADParliamentary@dcceew.gov.au)

Environmental Defenders Office (Attention Elanor Fenge)

The Centre for Public Integrity