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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

NT Land Councils call on NT Government to bin Territory Coordinator Bill

The Northern Territory's four land councils have united in calling for the Territory Coordinator Bill to be dumped.

The Bill excludes Aboriginal people from involvement in development decisions on their traditional lands and prevents them from protecting their land and culture.

The NT Government plans to use its majority to steamroll the Bill through Parliament during sittings next week.

The Bill formally appoints the Territory Coordinator who will hold unchecked, expansive powers to circumvent regulations and bypass Territory laws and government processes.

This includes the authority to declare a Territory Development Area (TDA) or an Infrastructure Coordination Area (ICA) on Aboriginal land and Native Title areas without any prior consent or consultation with Traditional Owners.

The Territory Coordinator will be able to affect decisions and processes across 32 Scheduled Acts listed in the Bill, along with a host of regulations made under those Acts giving the coordinator unprecedented and sweeping powers.

The addition of the *Heritage Act 2011* to the list of Scheduled Acts will make it subject to the powers of the unelected Coordinator, demonstrating that the NT Government is callously uninterested in the protection and preservation of our places of historical importance; and powers to enter private property including Aboriginal freehold land without a warrant are a breach of fundamental rights.

It is also concerning that the Bill's Scheduled Acts can be updated at any stage by regulation. While the *Northern Territory Sacred Sites Act 1989* is currently not listed, it can be added at the Territory Coordinator's request – greatly increasing the vulnerability of thousands of critically important cultural and sacred sites.

While the Territory Coordinator cannot exercise powers over Federal laws such as the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* and the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*, he can modify the 32 scheduled pieces of Northern Territory legislation, most of which contain protections for Aboriginal culture and land rights.

Consultation on the Bill has been tokenistic at best, with almost no recommendations made by Land Councils taken on board from our comprehensive submissions. This feels like a sign of things to come. Instead of improving the Bill, the Territory Coordinator's decision-making powers in the final draft are expanded, and the public's right of review is removed.



The removal of merits review from the NT Petroleum, Planning and Water Acts is also likely to be passed in the March Sittings of Parliament.

When taken alongside the Territory Coordinator Bill, this represents a fundamental attack on the rights of Territorians to scrutinise government decision-making and protect the parts of the Territory's society and environment that are important to them.

Quotes attributable to Northern Land Council Chair Matthew Ryan:

"We should not be sidelined by the NT Government, we should have a seat at the table when it comes to decision-making that affects our future.

"Most land from the Top End islands to Central Australia, including our coastline, is owned by Traditional Owners or is subject to Native Title which gives us an enormous stake in the Northern Territory economy.

Quotes attributable to Central Land Council Chief Executive Les Turner:

"This deeply anti-democratic law would give an unelected bureaucrat almost unlimited power to make up the rules on the run and ignore our elected representatives.

"Like Aboriginal people at the mercy of an all-powerful mission manager, this time all Territorians would have to submit to the Territory Coordinator who has been appointed specifically to undermine Aboriginal involvement in assessment and approval processes under current laws."

Quotes attributable to Tiwi Land Council Chair Leslie Tungatalum:

"The people of the Northern Territory have had a lot to say about this Territory Coordinator through more than 540 submissions but the government won't release them.

"This is a government that claimed they would be transparent. Their actions speak louder than words."

Quotes attributable to Anindilyakwa Land Council Chair Cherelle Wurrawilya:

"All activities on Aboriginal land must involve the owners of that land.

"After all this is privately owned land. Any other private land owner would have the same expectations.

"The right people must be consulted and give their free, prior and informed consent."

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