

Statement on Middle Arm 'Sustainable' Development Precinct

My name is Robert Woods. I have been living in the Darwin since 2009 and currently live in [REDACTED] the Northern Suburbs of Darwin with my wife Tracey [REDACTED]. We have been operating a tourism venture in the Top End since 2014 which features small groups, high level educational components whilst engaging in the natural spaces of national parks and public area. These experiences focus on the idea and implementation of sustainable practices both in our work and private life role and mesh together the sometimes idealistic desires with what is actually practical. Always though it is with the view of identifying and choosing the best options.

Prior to starting the tour venture I had also spent considerable time in researching and monitoring environmental parameters as a means to create a mathematical model to predict such things as algae blooms and subsequent water treatment requirements for potable water sources in northern NSW. I have a degree in Engineering (resource science) and a Masters Degree in natural resources and use this background in the tourism space when discussing such things as environmental management plans, initiatives, motives and outcomes.

With specific reference to the current situation with the proposed development in the middle arm region we expect to be impacted directly in both our family and business spheres. This impact will also be passed on to our children and theirs to come.

Middle Arm Sustainable Precinct – Impacts on ethical adventures family and business.

Business

1. Tour Schedules
 - a. Increased traffic in and around the immediate area will force us to change our itinerary and avoid that pathway. This will add approximately 5% increased transit time to our day
 - b. Increased road use by buses transporting workers to the site will affect other arterial roads we use also which will add time to our schedule
2. Safety
 - a. Increased road traffic of both people transport sources and heavy vehicles adds potential for an already high level of road incidences
 - b. Increased level of road degradation due to higher level of traffic and heavy machinery resulting in increase damage to vehicles, windscreens and tyres leading to increased potential for accidents
3. General Experiential outcomes
 - a. High proportion of Fly In Fly Workers (FIFO) whom utilise traditional tourism hotspots but whom have vastly different motivation for attending the Top End.

Discontent and general negative attitude to the Top End dampening the enthusiasm of visitors who have sought out experiences in the region.

4. General service costs increases
 - a. Rental and cost of living pressures driving up wages for guides and workers
 - b. Increase pressure on resources resulting in increased cost of living in general.

Personal

1. Recreation
 - a. Currently we utilise the Elizabeth area to fish and catch mud crabs for our families consumption. Since Inpex the level of heavy metal contamination in the harbour is already above 30% since 2008 levels for things such as cadmium and lead such that further industrialization will render food from this area not fit for consumption.
 - b. Harbour use – Our family enjoys simply cruising round the harbour and going to the many beaches. Contamination of such spaces is not compatible with these pursuits.
2. Lack of or diminished services
 - a. Co-funding/ financial grants to industry initiatives that result in limited financial returns takes away resources for community projects like health clinics, medical staff, teachers, police, roads, fire management and the list goes on of things which are lagging behind and are making the NT less attractive to raising a family and running a business.
3. Health
 - a. Air quality – Darwin is already a city under siege when it comes to poor air quality so to place an industrialized zone next to the city will certainly add to that. I would expect that pollution from the zone will not be contained to Palmerston and the immediate area and thus would result in similar issues found elsewhere in the world where such development occurs.

Moral Obligations

As a family with small children I am ever reminded of the life I had as a kid and the life we are leaving for our kids. The difference in air, water and land quality and the general demise of integrity of some ecosystems justified by our leaders and in the name of progress, need and jobs. Even though it is apparent that there is ALWAYS other ways to satisfy these 3 key tenants of a responsible government we allow our governments to continue making the same mistakes again and again. It is a moral obligation for those that are supposed to be the very people that todays leaders are making decisions on behalf that we tell these leaders that they DO NOT represent our desires, wishes or needs and in fact need to be focused on the holistic health of the natural, economic and social fabric of the future world for our kids.

Justification for prediction of impacts on ethical adventures and our family

When predicting the impacts on our family and business I have considered both the historical lessons learned from similar such projects as well as our own personal experiences with such developments. I am also driven to ask some simple questions of the panel.

Firstly, what does history show us ?

It is well established in literature freely available to anyone, such as the [Haswell study into gas processing](#), that developments such as the type and scale proposed for the Middle Arm Region directly results in premature death to men, women and children which live within the hot zone of that type of development. Although I personally do not live with the immediate hot zone we both travel through it regularly and visit friends and locations within it often and expect the pollution to spread across most of Darwin suburbs.

I need to ask the question:

Q. Why given this track record for such development is this even being considered ?

The fact that in previous occasions around the world where such a development has been undertaken there has been a resultant significant impact on the local people and health I am unable to understand why Politicians and big business try to tell us that everything will be OK.

There is NO track record of things being OK with regard to such development so on what basis should I as a resident in the affected area have confidence in the projections or actions of either the government nor the proponents when they say this time it will be different ?

In regards to both financial and environmental grounds -

Q - On what basis should the assurances of the NTG or proponents of major projects being offered be taken at face value ?

Given that the Middle Arm 'Sustainable' Precinct is going to result in the equal largest industrialized single footprint in Australia on the actual doorstep of Australia's smallest Capital City it is relevant to consider the capacity of the NTG to budget with public money responsibly and accurately as well as follow the spirit of remediation recommendations. There is also the dubious track record of big business in general in the NT also to be relied upon to 'do the right thing' (without being forced to) which needs to be considered when planning for costs and outcomes.

To analyze such things speaks to the sincerity / capacity of the NT government and big business when they present 'well founded' models, predictions and action plans to such hearings as this Senate Inquiry or indeed when they sprouik to the masses.

The NT is littered with examples of mismanagement and poor environmental and social outcomes resulting from significant projects. Some noteworthy examples need to be considered which highlight the connection between significant projects and poor environmental and social results.

EXAMPLES OF POOR ENVIRONMENTAL OVERSIGHT

Redbank mine clean up

- Legacy copper mine near the QLD border
- Mine started in 1994 and NT government allowed it to mine without an environmental bond
- Only mined for 2 years
- NTG assumed responsibility for the site in 2016

- Costs of clean up have been estimated at around \$1billion – but we don't know for sure because figure is not publicly released, but taxpayer is currently paying for contractors to estimate the clean up job.

Media Release - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-29/nt-indigenous-leaders-urge-redbank-mine-rehabilitation/103158550>

Range uranium mine clean up

- The rehabilitation of the decommissioned uranium mine in Kakadu National Park will cost upwards of \$1.2 billion more than expected and take years longer than initially planned.
- Production ceased in January 2021
- If ERA goes under and Rio Tinto doesn't **voluntarily** step in, the taxpayer will be left to fund the rehab costs. Ranger is a 40 year old uranium mine surrounded by Australia's largest World Heritage terrestrial national park and yet the mining company has been allowed to trade and operate for years with the knowledge they do not have the resources to fulfill their obligations to environment and society on closure.

Media Release – 3 April 2024 - <https://www.mining.com/rio-tinto-takes-over-ranger-uranium-mine-site-cleanup/>

EXAMPLES OF POOR FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Project Sea Dragon

- plans to build one of the world's largest prawn farms on a remote Northern Territory cattle station
- \$2billion project
- The NT government has spent around \$50 million on infrastructure to help the project reach fruition, granting it major project status in 2015.
- Entered voluntary administration in 2023
- Taken to the federal court over unpaid fees

Media Release – 15th Feb 2023 - <https://thefishsite.com/articles/project-sea-dragon-throws-in-the-towel-seafarms>

EXAMPLE OF POOR EVERYTHING

Core Lithium

- Lithium mine that was heavily promoted by the NTG
- Was found to have polluted a waterway but the Department retroactively authorized the waste discharge so as not to have to prosecute the mine
- Due to commodity price changes mine has now ceased productions

Media Release – 24th May 2024 - <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-24/nt-farmers-pastoralists-fear-exploration-for-lithium-renewables/101090970>

McArthur River Mine

- 19 November 2020 – NT Mining Minister Nicole Manison announced her decision to approve an amended Mining Management Plan (MMP) and a varied authorization. Part of the MMP and the varied authorization were published on the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism website. The varied authorization reduced the security bond to \$400,003,226 (a reduction of approximately \$120,000million).
- August 2021 – An FOI request revealed that the funding and scope for environmental monitoring of the mine had been drastically reduced. Under the previous contractor costs of the report were estimated at \$2 million for three years, but the NT Gov accepted Advisian's tender to do it for \$350,000 for the same period, noting that there were "significant changes to the outputs required".
- History of environmental incidents, including the spontaneous combustion of the waste rock dump, and spills: May 2021 – An ABC story reports that 10 road train spills carrying chemicals from the mine had occurred since the start of 2019, at least two of which occurred near creeks or floodplains, raising concerns of water contamination.
- Actual cost of remediation could be up to a billion dollars:
<https://www.mining.com/mcarthur-river-mine-cost-1b-remediate/#:~:text=Open%20pit%20operations%20at%20the,of%20lead%2C%20zinc%20and%20silver.>

Fracking

Following the pepper Inquiry into Fracking in the NT there were 135 recommendations which were supposed to be implemented in effect and spirit to minimize (not remove) the expected negative impacts on the social and environmental landscapes of the NT.

To date this has been mainly circumvented to the point that:

- Even the Government's own independent regulator disputed government's claims it implemented all 135 recommendations of the Pepper Inquiry:
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-04/nt-beetaloo-analysts-question-pepper-inquiry-progress/102299456>
- Environmental Defenders Office analysis of the pepper inquiry recommendations showing that they're not being implemented: <https://www.edo.org.au/2023/05/03/nt-government-failing-spectacularly-on-pepper-review-recommendations/#:~:text=May%203%2C%202023-,NT%20Government%20failing%20'spectacularly'%20on%20Pepper%20Review%20recommendations,into%20an%20industrial%20gas%20field.>
- Already evidence of water contamination by Tamboran, and the industry has barely started: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-24/nt-contractors-accuse-tamboran-of-using-contaminated-water/102765872>

The clear non adherence to the spirit of the Pepper recommendations is demonstration of the modus operandi of the NTG and proponents in regards to large impactful projects and a clear warning of potential to repeat this disfunction in the instance of MASP.

The final example that is that of INPEX.

INPEX

Key background statistics on INPEX include:

- At peak construction about 8,000 workers were employed; 1,000 were local residents, according to the 2016 Census.
- The NTG was no better off after the “boom” of inpeex construction years. As of the beginning of 2019, the NTG spent \$4 million a day more than the revenue it collects to pay interest on its ballooning debt and to cover day-to-day operational costs, including public servant wages.
- In 2018 it was reported that there was a 53 per cent drop in total value of house and unit sales in the NT since 2014-15, when sales totaled \$2.24 billion
- One thing to note re: INPEX is that they are emitting more volatile organic compounds than they have stated they would (in their annual monitoring reports), and the NTEPA doesn't even monitor ambient air quality.
- INPEX were fined in 2019 for polluting the harbour:
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-14/inpeex-pfas-environment-animals-at-risk-darwin-harbour/11412180>

How INPEX directly impacted our home and business life included:

1. Rental of our home increase by approx. 30%
2. Bookings coming from hotels ceased overnight.
3. Traffic increased and transit time increased affecting the flow of our tourism experience
4. Materials and equipment repair and manufacturing increased
5. Experiential value for guest was diminished

Conclusion

At this juncture I rest my submission with an entreaty to all that in deciding what to do with the Middle Arm region we consider not only the long term trends in the world in regards to energy transitioning and climate management but also intergenerational equality and the hard lessons we have learned from previous large scale developments in the NT which present with best case scenarios on application but deliver worse case outcomes in reality.