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## **The Territory needs more than a “Jekyll and Hyde” plan for our future – you can’t push gas, pipelines and petrochemicals, *and* decarbonise the Territory’s economy**

The Environment Centre NT today has criticised the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission (TERC) for putting forward a confused “Jekyll and Hyde” plan for the Territory’s economic reconstruction. While talking up decarbonisation of our economy, the TERC simultaneously takes the Territory backwards by decades by favouring fracking, increasing access to our precious water for irrigators, and promoting the industrialisation of Darwin Harbour via pipelines and petrochemical plants.

Co-Director Kirsty Howey said: “The Northern Territory woke up to the news today that we have just experienced our hottest November since records began. Across the Territory, communities and country are experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change first hand. Two failed wet seasons and sweltering temperatures have led to widespread death of trees across the pastoral belt, drying aquifers and rivers, and worrying health impacts due to heat stress. On the Environment Minister, Eva Lawler’s, own assessment, large parts of the Territory will become uninhabitable if action is not taken to stop climate change.”

“Now, more than ever, we need a responsible and just plan for the Territory that responds to the realities of climate change, and sets the Northern Territory up for a fairer and more sustainable future.”

“Instead, the TERC report provides an incoherent vision for the Territory’s future, one that that will put the Territory’s future and very habitability at risk.”

“ECNT welcomes some some strong suggestions for decarbonising the Territory’s economy, including through energy transition towards electrification, interim emissions reduction targets and commercialising technology to decrease the emission intensity of existing industry areas.”

“However, ECNT is very concerned that the fine print reveals a different and inconsistent plan for the Territory’s future: one that puts our precious water and ecosystems at risk and increases the impacts of climate change. The Gunner Government can’t have both: it has to choose between a just, decarbonised economy powered by renewable energy, or a polluting petrochemical and gas industry that scuppers any chance of decarbonisation.”

“The TERC has delivered a plan that takes talks up the renewable potential of the Territory, but simultaneously takes the Territory backwards, to fossil fuel industrialisation and agricultural intensification. Instead of safeguarding our fragile rivers, savannas, and floodplains the TERC has suggested streamlining environmental approvals for their exploitation. Instead of providing a pathway to a sustainable economy, the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission has instead proposed petrochemical plants, pipelines, and gas fields.”

There are three key proposals of the TERC that the Environment Centre believes put the Territory’s future at risk.

### **1. The TERC plan is inconsistent with the Territory’s commitment to a net zero economy**

The TERC report relies heavily on the benefits from developing the Beetaloo’s onshore gas potential. The life cycle emissions from the Beetaloo alone may increase Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions by over 5%, scuppering Australia’s progress in meeting Paris target commitments. Experts say it is not possible to

offset those emissions in the Northern Territory. Not only is developing the Beetaloo inconsistent with Australia's international commitments, but it is completely incompatible with the Territory's commitment to become a net zero emission economy by 2050. Gas is not a transition fuel – the transition is over and we need to remove to a 100% renewable powered economy.

## **2. The TERC plan puts our precious water at risk**

While no particular industry is identified, there are numerous references in the TERC report to the need to improve “access to water” for irrigators, for a “more productive pastoral land estate”, including by developing a surface water harvesting policy. While cotton is not mentioned, this is the major industry pushing for a “more productive pastoral land estate”, which relies on intensive irrigation.

Irrigators already have access to water – with water licences handed out for free to developers by the Northern Territory Government while Indigenous communities don't have the most basic legal protections for their drinking water supply. Intensification of water use through large scale irrigated agriculture is the last things the Territory needs, presenting major risks to the environment and degrading our everyday enjoyment of our iconic rivers.

Where will this water come from? Existing annual water allocations for the Katherine Tindal Plan is 38ML, and the Ooloo Dolostone is 97ML. These systems are already fully allocated. We've heard that NT Farmers' hopes to access an extra 520GL for its proposed Douglas-Daly expansion for cotton – a quantity similar to the amount of water in Sydney Harbour. The TERC's proposal for a surface water harvesting policy to access more water will mean that our iconic Top End rivers can't get the water they need to remain healthy.

## **3. The TERC plan risks polluting Darwin Harbour and endangering the health of the residents of Darwin and Palmerston**

A petrochemical plant in Darwin harbour will pollute Darwin's pristine air, water and soils, and lead to adverse health impacts for residents of Belyuen community, Darwin and Palmerston. Pollutants such as sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and metals are frequently found in the vicinity of petrochemical plants. Recent research shows that there is an increased risk of cancer, asthma, increased mortality rates and pregnancy and birth impacts for those living near petrochemical industrial complexes (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969720326395>). Petrochemical production is a dirty and polluting industry that is not accepted by the Darwin community, and that puts our pristine environment at risk.

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