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Decision for no environmental assessment of Tiwi Islands oil and gas hub a disgrace

The Territory's environmental and recreational fishing groups have united to rally against Minister Greg Hunt's decision to approve Port Melville marine supply base without basic environmental impact assessment, calling the decision a 'disgrace'.

Australian Marine Conservation Society's Northern Marine Campaigner, Jacqui Taylor said: "This is a very sad day for our environment, our pristine waters and our Territory lifestyle. We are looking into options to challenge this approval."

"While governments around the world charge ahead protecting their oceans, both the Territory and Commonwealth governments are full steam ahead industrialising our Top End seas."

"The Northern Territory has some of the last relatively pristine waters on Earth, with an incredible abundance and diversity of marine species. The government needs to recognise the value of our pristine waters and provide a systematic approach to protect and manage our Top End seas."

Acting Director of Environment Centre NT, Anna Boustead said "This is a disgraceful decision which makes a mockery of the Territory and Australia's environmental laws.

"The NT Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and Minister Hunt have now left the door wide open to create the perfect storm for a major oil spill in the Apsley Strait. We have no confidence that the conditions the NT EPA and now Minister Hunt have included will address the risk to turtles, dugongs or seabirds.

"There is no requirement stated in the Cyclone Procedure to remove the large volumes of diesel which will be left in three 30,000ML tanks if a cyclone or major storm hits. Who will be responsible if an oil spill occurs, who will clean up the mess?

"We now know that this development is not about exporting woodchips. It is about creating an oil and gas hub on a vulnerable, biologically diverse and beautiful part of the Tiwi Islands coastline, home to 38 threatened species."

Executive Officer of Amateur Fisher's Association NT, Tristan Sloan said "The Tiwi Islands is one of the top ends most iconic fishing destination for both residents and tourists alike. AFANT believe that there is an unacceptable level of risk associated with the storage of 30 million liters of fuel at the Port Melville site. This is an area renowned for cyclonic activity and a potential fuel spill could have disastrous impact on fish stocks and the recreational fishing industry

Mr Sloan said AFANT was opposed to moves to water down national environmental laws even further as this is likely to result in catastrophe: "This decision by so-called 'Environment' Minister Hunt today clearly highlights the inadequacy of the NTEPA and our national environmental laws. The government's policy of removing 'red tape'" to encourage economic growth and investment has simply resulted in a weakening in environmental protection

“It sends the wrong message to developers and big business that Australia is not interested in protecting the environment from inappropriate, potentially environmentally damaging developments, considering alternatives to damaging developments, or even assessing environmental impacts thoroughly and to an adequate standard.”

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