
STATEMENT OF REASONS

Section 69(1)(a) of the *Environment Protection Act 2019* (EP Act)

Environmental approval holder	Equatorial Launch Australia Pty Ltd ABN 11 605 364 234
Environmental approval number	EP2023/031-001
Action	Phase 2 expansion of the Arnhem Space Centre Expansion of launch pads and associated facilities at the multi-user commercial Arnhem Space Centre located on NT Portion 1646 in the East Arnhem local government area, within the area of interest granted to the Gumatj Corporation Ltd under section 19 of the <i>Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976</i> , and sub-let to the approval holder. Operation of the expanded area includes up to 60 launches per year.
Material considered	Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) advice received on 20 November 2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessment Report 108• A draft environmental approval setting out recommended conditions. Fit and proper person advice – signed declaration.
Decision	In accordance with sections 69(1)(a) and 82(4)(a) of the EP Act, I accept the draft environmental approval, adopt the proposed conditions of the NT EPA and grant the approval.

REASONS

This Statement of Reasons has been prepared in accordance with sections 82(3) and 82(4) of the EP Act.

Overview of Action

Equatorial Launch Australia Pty Ltd proposes the following expansion to the existing multi-user Arnhem Space Centre:

- clearing approximately 120 ha of intact native vegetation and 26 ha of regrowth
 - constructing an additional 14 launch pads and supporting infrastructure:
 - mission support buildings
 - fuel storage and pumping facilities
 - 100 megalitre capacity water dam
 - helipad
 - accommodation facility
 - emergency egress roads.
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The action includes conducting activities to recover any returning waste materials and space debris from launched rockets from within NT land and coastal waters to the maximum extent reasonably practicable.

The granted approval under the EP Act is limited to the action within the Northern Territory.

Environmental context

The action infrastructure at the Arnhem Space Centre is located wholly within the East Arnhem local government area. The action is located on the Dhupuma Plateau, Gove Peninsula, north east Arnhem Land approximately 20 km south of Nhulunbuy in the NT. The Arnhem Space Centre site is within the Dhimurru Indigenous Protected Area and will occur on an area which includes the phase 1 launch pads and supporting infrastructure, Dhupuma Plateau Bauxite Mine and the European Launcher Development Organisation Gove Down Range Guidance and Telemetry Station. The Gulkula Ceremonial Site (comprising the Garma Institute and Garma Cultural Centre) is approximately 700 m from the nearest launch pad.

The downrange landing areas extend across the whole NT mainland and coastal waters.

Environmental values that require protection from the action include air quality, terrestrial ecosystems, culture and heritage. The action should not prevent enhancement of the communities and the economy for the welfare and benefit of current and future generations of Territorians.

Matters considered under section 73 of the EP Act

Section 73(1) Principles of environment protection and management

In considering Part 2 (principles of environment protection and management) of the EP Act, I have considered the meaning of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) and applied each of the principles of ESD. I have reviewed the NT EPA's consideration of the principles of ESD as summarised in Assessment Report 108. I have considered and weighed all the principles of ESD in making my decision.

The NT EPA's assessment process has considered, and I have applied approval conditions, to mitigate environmental impacts associated with construction, operation and decommissioning of the action. The assessment of the proposal, the NT EPA's advice to me and consequently my decision, has been informed by public and government authority consultation processes.

I have considered and applied the hierarchies for environmental decision-making and waste management. I have given particular consideration to the application of the environmental decision-making hierarchy, and proposed measures to avoid, and then mitigate and manage potential adverse impacts on the environment.

I am satisfied that through compliance with the environmental approval, the action is consistent with the ESD principles and the management hierarchies.

Section 73(1)(a) Objects of the EP Act

I have had regard to the objects of the EP Act. I note in particular that through the environmental impact assessment of the action and the granting of the environmental approval, significant adverse impacts on the Territory environment are likely to be avoided and the protection and management of the Territory environment have been promoted.

The approval of the action will allow construction and operation of the Arnhem Space Centre expansion within the Northern Territory while maintaining environmental protection including protection of air quality, terrestrial ecosystems, culture and heritage and community and economy. I also note the opportunity provided to the community for involvement in the environmental impact assessment of the action.

Section 73(1)(b) Assessment report on the action

I have considered the advice of the NT EPA in its assessment report on the action (Assessment Report 108) which provides the NT EPA's assessment of the potential significant impacts of the action and recommendations for avoiding, mitigating and managing those impacts. The NT EPA identified that the action has the potential to have a significant impact on environmental values, and conditions were recommended for four environmental factors: terrestrial ecosystems, community and economy, culture and heritage, and air quality. Assessment Report 108 states that the action is likely to meet the NT EPA's environmental objectives and can be implemented and managed in a manner that is environmentally acceptable. The NT EPA recommended an environmental approval be granted subject to implementation of the approval holder's commitments in the referral information and the recommended conditions in the draft environmental approval.

The proposed conditions of the NT EPA have been adopted in the environmental approval.

Section 73(1)(c) Fit and proper person to hold environmental approval

I have had regard to whether the approval holder is a fit and proper person to hold an environmental approval. I consider the approval holder to be a fit and proper person to hold an environmental approval.

Section 73(1)(d) Any other matters the Minister considers relevant

No other relevant matters have been identified.

Section 73(2) of the EP Act

Overall, having regard to the above and the materials I considered, I am satisfied that:

- the community has been consulted on the potential environmental impacts and environmental benefits of the proposed action through public consultation on the referral information and supplementary environmental report, and through the NT EPA's assessment of the proponent's consultation undertaken to inform the referral and SER. Noting that due to the commercial and campaign nature of the proposal, ongoing consultation is required with local community stakeholders and relevant stakeholders within the down range landing and hardware recovery areas; and
- the significant impacts of the action have been appropriately avoided or mitigated or can be appropriately managed to acceptable levels through compliance with the environmental approval. The NT EPA's Assessment Report 108 supports this view.

No significant residual adverse impacts on the environment were identified that would require an environmental offset.

Signature



Hon Joshua Burgoyne MLA

Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment

1st DECEMBER 2024