



NORTHERN
TERRITORY
DIVISION

21 June 2021
Mr Paul Purdon
Executive Director, Environmental Assessment and Policy
Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security
GPO Box 3675
DARWIN NT 0801

Emailed to paul.purdon@nt.gov.au and environment.policy@nt.gov.au

Dear Mr Purdon

RE: Comments on Draft Declaration to prohibit seabed mining in the Northern Territory

The Minerals Council of Australia – Northern Territory Division (MCA NT) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Minister for Environment's Draft Declaration of Prohibited Action: Subsea Mining, released in April 2021 for community and stakeholder comment.

The MCA is the peak industry organisation representing Australia's exploration, mining and minerals processing industry, nationally and internationally. The MCA's strategic objective is to advocate public policy and operational practice for a world class industry that is safe, profitable, innovative, environmentally responsible and attuned to community needs and expectations.

The Minister's draft declaration is consistent with findings from the September 2020 *Review of Seabed Mining in the NT: Environmental Impacts and Management* prepared by the NT EPA, for which the MCA NT submitted comments. In that submission, the MCA NT acknowledged that the NT EPA must have adequate information on potentially significant environmental impacts and their mitigation to meet the objects of the Territory's *Environment Protection Act* in completing sound environmental impact assessments, and that currently too little is known about impacts of seabed mining and their mitigation for this to occur.

For this reason, the MCA NT supports the Minister's making the proposed declaration to prohibit seabed mining at this time.

A small but important and self-explanatory addition of two words in Part 4 (Reason for Declaration), Section 7(b) is recommended as indicated below:

7(b) the mining activity in the areas specified in Part 3 poses real risks of significant impacts that are adverse to the value of this environment and that the Territory is not currently in a position to adequately assess nor regulate mining activity in the areas specified in Part 3 in a manner consistent with the objects of the Act.

The government is encouraged to continue to support research that might someday generate adequate information for seabed mining projects to be considered in the future, at which time it would be appropriate to remove the declaration. The September 2020 review cites case studies where seabed mining has been done in coastal waters in Australia and overseas without unacceptable environmental impacts, and this might someday be the case for the Northern Territory.

As acknowledged in the final report from the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission (December 2020), a diverse economy is a resilient economy, and seabed mining projects could diversify the Territory's mining sector and attract additional private investment that creates jobs in regional and remote areas. Realising this opportunity, however, will depend on the government having adequate knowledge of potentially significant environmental impacts from such projects, and their mitigation, to both underpin sound environmental impact assessments and approvals, and to provide adequate confidence to the broader Territorian community that seabed mining can be safe, ecologically sustainable and support a diverse and robust economy to the benefit of all Territorians.

Should you wish to discuss this brief submission from the MCA NT, please do not hesitate to contact me on 08 8981 4486.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Janice W', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

(DR) JANICE WARREN
Manager – Policy & Research – MCA NT