



CENTREFARM MEDIA RELEASE

Fortune Agribusiness application for 40 gigalitre water allocation at Singleton Station

The proposed Singleton Station groundwater extraction license may threaten Aboriginal-owned projects and employment plans in the region.

“Singleton’s modelled drawdown and impacts on regional groundwater dependent ecosystems may hinder neighbouring Aboriginal land trusts from successfully applying for smaller water licenses,” said Centrefarm chief executive Vin Lange.

“For example, the Iliyarne Aboriginal Land Trust has applied for a 1 gigalitre water license for a small, high value Aboriginal-owned horticultural operation south of Wycliffe Well, which may become unviable if the Singleton application is granted in its entirety. This is due to its drawdown impacts on groundwater dependent ecosystems.”

Centrefarm also train Aboriginal people from the Western Davenport region in horticulture at its Alekarenge training centre – with promising results.

“Teenagers who have been disengaged from school have been attending to learn about horticulture and are growing, harvesting and selling their own veggies to the community,” Joe Clarke, Centrefarm Business Strategy Manager, said.

“The project is giving these young people opportunities to work on Country but its future depends on nearby Aboriginal-owned projects having sustainable access to groundwater that could be threatened by the massive Singleton application.

“It would be a real shame if the Singleton allocation put local projects such as our training centre and Iliyarne’s plans at risk. These young people are the future and they must be the priority,” he said.

Centrefarm believe sustainable Aboriginal-led economic development should be prioritised over adjacent industrial-scale proposals.

It shares concerns about the lack of accurate scientific data supporting the Singleton application.

“Pumping 40 gigalitres is full of risks and unknowns,” Brody Smith, Centrefarm’s environmental scientist said.

“The sustainable yield, recharge potential, salinity levels and aquifer storage cannot be accurately estimated until you begin extracting water from the aquifer.

“We need a staged incremental approach to groundwater use and it needs to be clear who is going to do the monitoring, and pay for it,” he said.

A baseline field survey of groundwater dependent ecosystems has not been conducted and we therefore don’t know whether there are high value ecosystems in the drawdown area.”

“While traditional owners are told there’s water in the strategic Aboriginal water reserve there is currently no regulation and process in place and the threat to groundwater dependent ecosystems may make the reserve unusable,” Mr Lange added.

“We want regionally strategic and prudent developments rather than see the region locked into an unprecedented water allocation that may threaten the environment and local projects.

“The Territory has a history of denying Aboriginal landowners access to water and we don’t want to exclude them from developing their own projects in the future,” he said.

Centrefarm have been engaged by the Central Land Council and Northern Land Council to establish the Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency.

The agency this year plans to pilot six Aboriginal-owned horticultural projects.

Three of these projects are in the Western Davenport water control district and Iliyarne is one of them.

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