



Media Statement, *Saturday 22 October 2016*

A port in a storm: A huge win for ECNT as the Port Melville approval is overturned by the Federal Court

The Environment Centre NT (ECNT) announced today it has won the legal battle against approval of the Port Melville oil and gas marine supply base. Last year the Port Melville base sparked controversy when it was reported that the 180 million dollar development had been built on the banks of the near pristine Apsley Strait without any environmental assessment. The ECNT has actively campaigned against the approval by meeting and lobbying government and finally engaging the Environmental Defenders Office NT to represent it in the Federal Court.

Drew English, Convenor of the ECNT stated that a full assessment was something ECNT had pushed for from the very beginning.

“The ECNT could not be happier. This type of large scale development is exactly why we have environmental assessment processes, particularly when you consider the location of this supply base. Our hope is that today’s ruling serves as notice not just to this developer, but to government and other developers. The NT community expects companies to apply both the spirit and intent of environmental assessment laws from the very beginning”.

The Federal Court has today ordered that the decision approving the Port Melville marine supply base to be set aside. The operation of the base at Port Melville now has no Commonwealth approval and all operations must cease.

This important win for the environment comes during National Bird Week. The Tiwi Islands are home to numerous threatened and migratory species, including dugongs, critically endangered shorebirds and threatened turtle species. The marine supply base at Port Melville was approved by the Minister’s delegate without an environmental impact assessment, despite Departmental concerns about the project’s risk to species and information deficiencies. Mr English is hopeful that the new Minister will order a full assessment of the base and was critical of the previous process under the Commonwealth laws.

“The orders today make it clear that what was done was inadequate, and the Northern Territory community, and our environment, expect and deserve better. These islands, like much of the Northern Territory, are important habitat for many species. They remain that way because the NT has avoided much of the damaging approach to development that has occurred down south. We’re not saying don’t develop, we are saying follow proper process”.

The Minister will now be required to reconsider whether the marine supply base needs an environmental impact assessment. The ECNT will continue to advocate for government to fully assess the impacts of this development.

The ECNT would like to express its gratitude to the Environmental Defenders Office NT and the barristers involved, Peter Gray QC and Phillip Cadman.

A copy of the court order can be viewed at: <http://ecnt.org.au/news/port-melville-court-order/>

Media comment: Environment Centre NT, Chairperson, Drew English: p.0407869989

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