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Mr David Sullivan
Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
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Dear Mr Sullivan *David*

I am writing in response to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's inquiry into the Defence Legislation Amendment (Woomera Prohibited Area) Bill 2014. I am disappointed that the Northern Territory Government's submissions to inquiries on previous Bills introduced to the Senate on the same issue have not resulted in any substantive changes to the current Bill.

As advised previously, the Northern Territory supports the objective of opening up the Woomera Prohibited Area to new users in order to maximise its economic potential, which may realise some benefits for the Northern Territory.

However, the Bill and the proposed new Woomera Prohibited Area Rules that accompany the Bill present the potential for Defence activities to cause major disruptions to the road and rail links between Adelaide and Darwin. It is simply unacceptable for these major arterial routes, which are vital for the Territory's economy and the development of Northern Australia, to be subject to lengthy closures.

The Committee's report from its inquiry into the previous Bill notes that:


"a number of points of particular concern to the South Australian and Northern Territory government...are best resolved initially through the amended version of the bill currently being prepared by the government..." (paragraph 1.12)

Senator the Hon David Johnston also made comment in Parliament during debate of the previous Bill, acknowledging the Northern Territory's concerns about road and railway closures and suggesting that these concerns would be addressed by the Government in the development of the current Bill.

Despite these acknowledgements by Senator Johnston and the Committee, the current Bill does not appear to contain any substantive changes and there is no consideration of the Bill's impact on the Stuart Highway and the Darwin to Adelaide railway in the Bill's Regulatory Impact Statement. There is also no indication of any changes to the Woomera Prohibitive Area Rules, which are established by the Bill and define permissions for existing and new users, exclusion zones and Ministerial delegations.

My Government's position therefore remains unchanged and I urge the Committee to fully consider the Northern Territory Government's previous submissions in this current inquiry.

Given the importance of this issue to the Northern Territory, I request and would expect to be further consulted on this issue. I look forward to the Committee's report on the Bill and working constructively with the Federal Government on this issue.

Yours sincerely 

ADAM GILES

27 APR 2014