



# Northern Land Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Daly River under threat

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Aboriginal landowners in the Daly River region of the Northern Territory are concerned that a Northern Territory Government decision to allow the clearing of 7,000 hectares of land in the Upper Daly region will spell disaster on a broad scale.

NLC Executive Member for the Darwin/Daly/Wagait region, John Sullivan - a traditional owner in the region - said the river was of immense cultural significance to Aboriginal people and an important source of fresh water and other natural resources. Speaking at a public meeting held in Darwin yesterday evening, Mr Sullivan said he was concerned at the lack of consultation with interested stakeholders from the region.

“It seems as though the agricultural development plans are being kept secret from Aboriginal stakeholders,” Mr Sullivan said. “Peoples’ lifestyles will be threatened. These developments are starting without prior consultation with Aboriginal people and it is us who stand to be most affected if the river is degraded.”

“The river is a significant ceremonial track and contains sites of significance to us. A lowering of the water table brought about by water usage as planned will not only expose these sites visually, but will also make them prone to destruction.”

There are few rivers left in Australia that have not been degraded to at least some extent by large-scale agricultural activities. Currently in a near-pristine state, the Daly River retains virtually all of its pre-colonisation environmental assets.

Supporting the biggest diversity of freshwater turtles of any Australian river system, the Daly River is also believed to be an important breeding ground for freshwater bull sharks as well as an important habitat for other uncommon species such as whip-rays and sawfish.

It is believed the agricultural development will involve widespread tree clearing and the pumping of water from the river and water table for irrigation, and the variety of crops grown could involve extensive use of herbicides and pesticides.

“How do we measure the impact these chemicals will have on the local barramundi, bream and other edible fish species?” Mr Sullivan said. “And will these elements be transferred to local residents who rely on these species as a regular source of food? Will this in turn have an impact on major fishing tournaments held along the river? If so, how do local residents regain the revenue lost as a result of this impact?”

“There are many questions to be asked and answered, yet requests by the NLC for the Government to inform Aboriginal people and to consult with them over the agricultural developments have been ignored.”