

Kimberley Agricultural Investment: Carlton Plain – Stage 1 proposal

Further explanation of decision on referral

The Carlton Plain – Stage 1 proposal by Kimberley Agriculture Investment (KAI) (Figure 1) is the first stand-alone irrigated agriculture proposal to be assessed by the EPA since the Ord Stage 2 proposal which the EPA reported on in 2000.

The Ord area has had decades of science, planning and experience related to irrigated agriculture development (e.g. soils, water allocation). The potential impacts to the environment from irrigated agriculture are also well understood.

Approximately 250,000 ha or approximately 3.5% of the area of the Victoria Bonaparte IBRA subregion is set aside in conservation estate (Conservation Park, Nature Reserve and National Park) – see Figure 1.

The EPA Chairman visited the proposal area on 25 July 2017 with representatives from the proponent (KAI), and the departments of Water and Environmental Regulation; Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; and Primary Industries and Regional Development.

The EPA Chairman notes that the proposal area has been subject to cattle grazing for over 100 years and the limited areas of vegetation are largely degraded and infested with weeds, however there are still areas of important native riparian vegetation adjacent to the Ord River (see attached photographs from site visit).

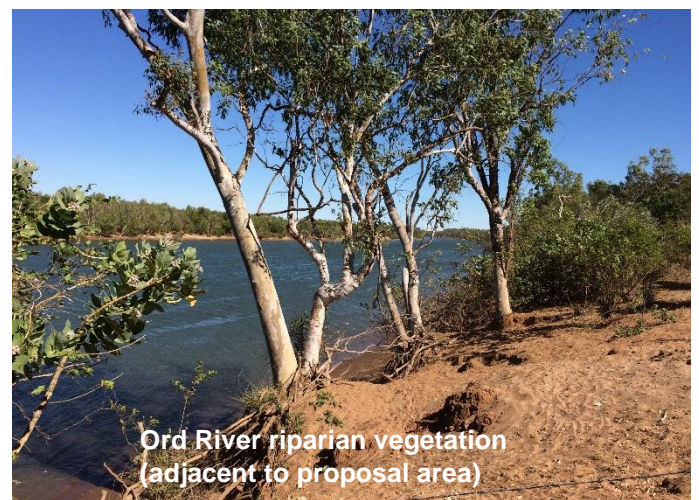
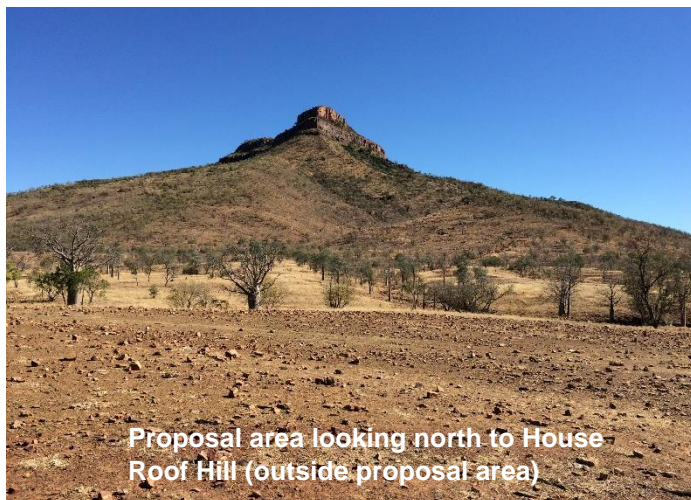
In making the decision, the EPA Chairman considered the referral documentation provided by the proponent, information obtained on the site visit, and public interest about the proposal. Having regard to the significance considerations in the EPA's *Statement of Environmental Principles, Factors and Objectives*, the EPA Chairman noted:

- Much of the proposal area to be cleared is degraded, however the proposal is located adjacent to a seasonal wetland, and the Ord River which has high environmental value. Parry Lagoon Nature Reserve is approximately 3.6 km due west of the proposal area (or approximately 8.5 km downstream along the Ord River).
- The proposed development area is of a relatively large scale at 3,086 ha and the development would likely be long-term.
- The proposal is the first stage of a larger program by KAI who plan to develop 25,156 ha of land at Carlton Plain, Mantinea and Tarrara.
- There is a high level of confidence in the prediction of impacts and understanding of appropriate management measures in relation to irrigated agriculture.
- There is public interest about the environmental effects of the proposal; many of the matters raised relate to the future broader development plan at Carlton Plain (Stage 2 and 3), Mantinea and Tarrara.

In determining the level of assessment, the EPA Chairman considered that management of the proposed irrigated agriculture operations is critical to avoiding impacts and protecting the Ord River and its environs. Therefore, KAI will be required to prepare and submit an Environmental Management Plan during the assessment that provides specific information on the proposed management in relation to the preliminary key environmental factors. In taking this approach, the EPA has responded to previous public concern that the EPA should consider Environmental Management Plans as part of the assessment.

Due to the public interest in the proposal, the EPA will release the Environmental Management Plan for public comment for 3 weeks. As part of the consultation process, the EPA Chairman will be available to meet with interested people in Kununurra during the review period, to discuss matters related to the Environmental Management Plan.

The EPA notes that KAI will refer the remainder of the Carlton Plain/Mantineia/Tarrara development program to the EPA. Given the scale of the remainder of the 25,156 ha program and location adjacent to the Parry Lagoon Nature Reserve, further studies and investigations will be required by the proponent and future proposal/s are likely to require assessment at the highest level with a public review period (Public Environmental Review).



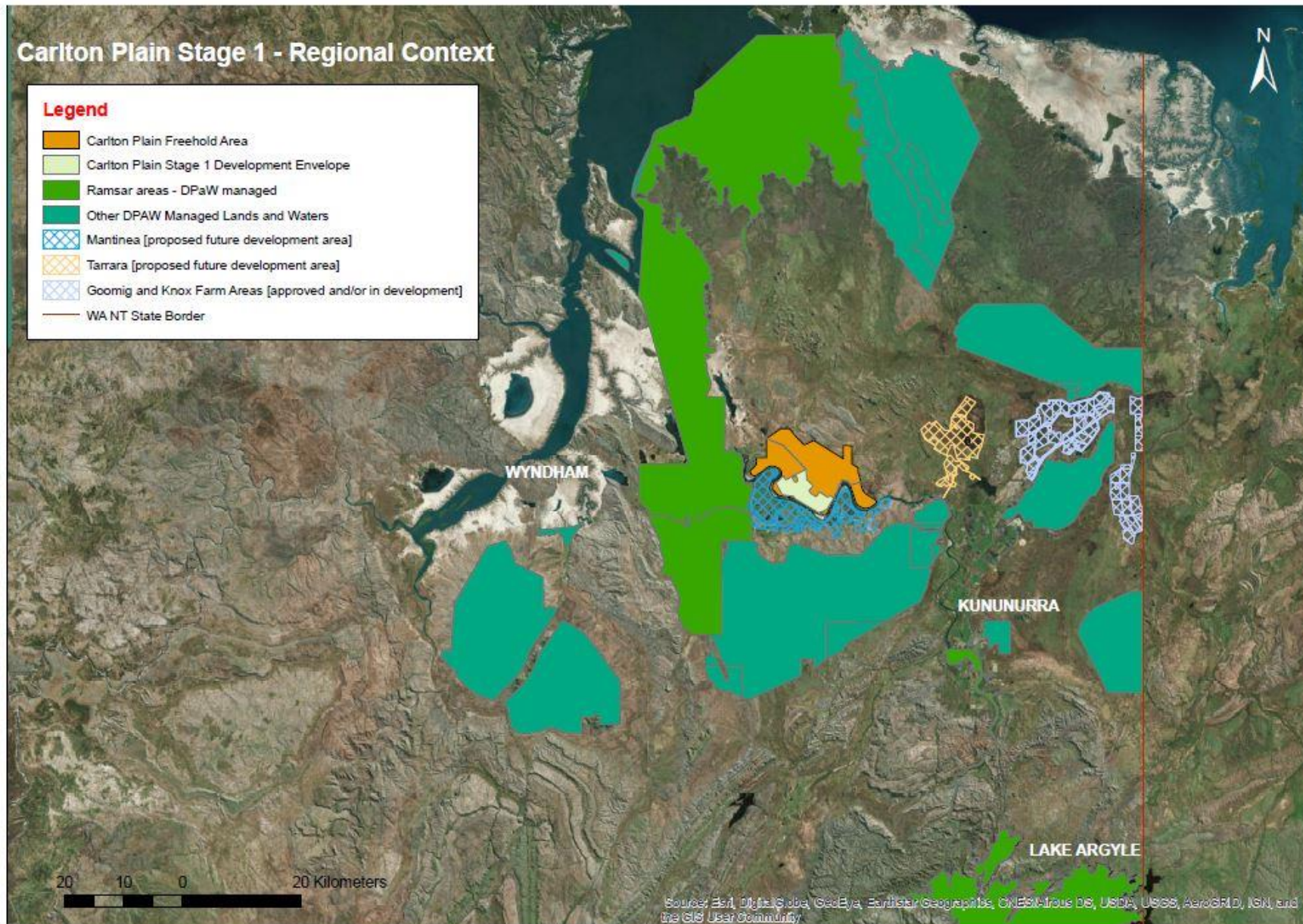


Figure 1: Location and proposal area (development envelope) (Source: *KAI Carlton Plain – Stage 1: Referral to EPA*, July 2017)