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Red tape 'blocking jobs and strangling farmers'

Ben Harvey

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Hundreds of jobs are going begging and investment valued at \$500 million has stalled because of red tape in the State's top end, the WA Government has been warned.

The Weekend West can reveal the at-times farcical situation confronting station owners trying to kick-start the State's economy by developing the Pilbara and Kimberley.

Examples of bureaucratic meddling contained in a submission to a Senate inquiry into red tape include:

Station owners being ordered to comb a 200,000ha station looking for a purple flower — even though the plant was not in season.

Waiting six months for responses to applications for water licences to grow feed for cattle.

A meeting being disrupted because of a birthday party at a government department.

Irrigation proposals knocked back despite the development area being equal to “two wheelie bins parked in the middle of the MCG”.

Regional Development Minister Alannah MacTiernan is streamlining the application process to clear the bottlenecks identified in the dossier of dysfunction compiled by the Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's Association.

The association represents the owners of 350,000 head of cattle. The submission to a Senate committee chaired by NSW Liberal Democrat David Leyonhjelm warns that red tape is retarding the development of 32,000ha.

With a development cost of about \$15,000 a hectare, investment valued at about \$500 million is at stake, it warned.



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Pastoralists say they have to jump through hoops to get anything done. Picture: Andrew Ramage

The association cited instances where pastoralists had to jump through hoops, such as at Nita Downs Station near Broome, where the Forshaw family wanted to irrigate 350ha of land using a type of irrigation equipment known as a “pivot”.

“In order to put in a pivot ... they had to complete a flora and fauna survey,” the submission said.

“The Forshaws waited over six months for a response to their application and were then referred back and forward ... for no less than two years now.

The Forshaw family received from DER correspondence requiring them to complete a Flora and Fauna Survey within 28 days from the date of their letter. This is an impossible feat living in remote Australia.”

“They were told they must look for a plant with a purple flower but this plant wasn’t flowering during the time requested.”



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Wallal Downs Station. Picture: Supplied

Neighbouring Wallal Downs Station had an application for a water licence disrupted by celebrations at the Department of Water.

“Wallal Downs was informed that an important meeting had meant a change in venue,” the submission noted.

“That important meeting was a staff member’s birthday party,” the submission said.



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A 38ha centre pivot at Mowanjum Station. Picture: Danella Bevis/The West Australian

Mowanjum Station, near Derby, has been waiting 10 months for approval to install two pivots.

“The day after they won the Premiers Award for Improving Aboriginal Outcomes, their application was knocked back due to the requirement for regional flora and fauna surveys,” the submission said.

“To paint a picture, the size of their proposed development is the equivalent of two wheelie bins parked in the middle of the MCG.”

The submission suggested a clearing application was not granted because “regulators take the view that the habitat ‘might’ be suitable for bilbies” even though “the Aboriginal people who own this land haven’t sited a bilby in the years they have lived there”.

Ms MacTiernan said the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation would be a “one-stop shop”.

“The State Government will also invest \$600,000 of Devolution for Regions funding in



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“Currently, there is limited information about bilbies and conservation-significant plants in the region south of Broome, which makes it difficult for proponents to know what risks to manage and studies to carry out.

“The surveys will be carried out by the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions in partnership with the Karajarri Rangers, Nyangumarta Rangers and Yawuru Country Managers and pastoralists.”

We take a look at what life is like on a cattle muster with Mount Magnet pastoralist Ashley Dowden.

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