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Minister for the Environment and Energy

MEDIA RELEASE

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REFUSAL OF CHRISTMAS ISLAND PHOSPHATE EXPLORATION

The Government has decided not to approve Phosphate Resources Limited's exploration program on Christmas Island because it is likely to have significant and unacceptable impacts on matters protected under national environment law.

The decision follows a rigorous and comprehensive assessment under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, including the consideration of the social and economic benefits of the proposal as well as comments received on the proposed decision from relevant Ministers and from Phosphate Resources Limited.

The Government's decision reflects the fact that Christmas Island is a unique and irreplaceable environment. The Island was uninhabited until the late 19th century which allowed many species to evolve without human interference.

Christmas Island is home to many unique and rare plants and animals. These include the millions of red crabs which migrate to the sea each year to spawn in what has been called one of the wonders of the natural world.

Environmental damage on small islands has a far greater impact because of its limited capacity to recover from declines in biodiversity caused by the cumulative effects of land clearing, habitat fragmentation and invasive species compared to large land masses.

While there has been some mineral extraction dating back some 100 years, the Government has determined that this particular proposal is likely to have unacceptable impacts on the environment of Christmas Island, including the endangered Abbott's Booby, whose rainforest home on the Island is the only remaining nesting habitat for this bird in the world, and the endangered cave fern.

There is also a very real threat that this pattern of clearing would allow the introduction of aggressive weed species with the capacity to overwhelm native vegetation and to alter the structure of the surrounding forest.

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