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Australia's Largest Limestone Cave System Under Threat

Australia's largest limestone cave system is under threat from a colossal hydrogen / ammonia production and export project. If it goes ahead, the proposed development will permanently damage more than 15,000 square kilometres of fragile limestone landscape, caves, Aboriginal cultural heritage, underground ecosystems and connected marine ecosystems, despite the area's proven World Heritage values.

Dr Stefan Eberhard, Director of Subterranean Ecology Pty Ltd and co-founder of Save the Nullarbor Inc. said:

"There is no doubt that the entire Nullarbor limestone region should be nominated by Australia for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List."

"We should follow the example of South Australia, and work to protect these extraordinary geological and ecological wonders. We should not allow the destruction of this globally significant cave and karst ecosystem."

The Nullarbor Plain is home to Australia's largest limestone cave and karst system, which includes a spectacular hidden world of ancient caves and rock holes of staggering dimensions, beauty, scientific values, and priceless cultural importance.

The Nullarbor stretches across the lower part of Western Australia and South Australia and connects with the coastal and marine ecosystems of the Great Australian Bight.

In South Australia, the cave systems and connected marine ecosystem are currently being promoted for a UNESCO World Heritage nomination.

In stark contrast, in Western Australia, a 50GW Western Green Energy Hub, first mooted in July 2021, proposes to industrialise 15,000 square kilometres of fragile limestone landscape containing thousands of rockholes, blow holes and caves with Aboriginal cultural heritage and rare species of fauna. The predominantly foreign consortium proposes to produce hydrogen / ammonia for export to Korea.

The proposed development is labelled a 'green energy' project because it aims to use solar and wind energy to create hydrogen and ammonia; but the project is not 'green'. It will involve removing vegetation across hundreds of square kilometres of fragile limestone ecosystem, and thousands of kilometres of roads, powerlines, and

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underground pipelines. The pipelines alone will damage and erode the fragile limestone soils and harm the underground ecosystem which is the home of rare and unique species including blind spiders and stygofauna.

Professor David Gillieson, Vice-President of the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association said:

“As part of the caving and scientific community in Australia, we are appalled to know that the Western Australian government might permit the destruction of the world’s largest arid limestone karst system.”

“The caves have preserved ancient underground landscapes, environmental histories and fauna that have remained ‘frozen in time’ for hundreds of thousands and even millions of years.”

Dr Michelle Maloney, Co-Founder and National Convenor of the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) said:

“Around the world, we are seeing governments and communities recognising the rights of ecosystems to exist, thrive and evolve. Rivers, forests, and entire bioregions are being protected and defended by Rights of Nature laws. It’s distressing to see that the Western Australian government might allow the destruction of the remarkable internationally recognised Nullarbor ecoregion of global significance. As a society, we need to recognise the rights of these places to exist, without interference by destructive developments.”

END TEXT – PHOTOS FOLLOW

Media Support:

To find out more about the Nullarbor limestone karst and its superlative natural and scientific values visit:

<https://linktr.ee/savethenullarbor>

www.savethenullarbor.org

Six photos following are available as unmarked jpeg files photographers to be credited.

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Australia's largest natural cavern. This world-class cave system is threatened by a colossal hydrogen / ammonia energy development proposed to be built only a few kilometres away. Photo Stefan & Bronwen Eberhard



Giant sinkhole 40 metres in diameter caused by collapse of the limestone into an underlying cave system. This world-class cave system is threatened by a colossal hydrogen / ammonia energy development. Photo Stefan & Bronwen Eberhard.

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Cave lake and underwater tunnel which drains part of the vast Nullarbor limestone aquifer. This world-class cave system is threatened by a colossal hydrogen / ammonia energy development proposed to be built only a few kilometres away. Photo Stefan & Bronwen Eberhard.



Cave divers exploring the vast underwater cave systems inside the Nullarbor limestone aquifer. This world-class cave system is threatened by a colossal hydrogen / ammonia energy development proposed to be built only a few kilometres away. Photo Stefan Eberhard

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Mirning People are the Traditional Custodians of the Nullarbor limestone Country spanning more than 40,000 years. Photo Stefan & Bronwen Eberhard



Rare species of stygofauna and troglodfauna inhabit the Nullarbor limestone aquifer and caves. Photo Stefan Eberhard