



Tiwi Islands Shire Council

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
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Dear Committee Members

Submission to Senate Committee Inquiry on the Impacts of Mining and Forestry on the Tiwi Islands

The Tiwi Islands Shire Council is a body incorporated under the *Local Government Act*. Its 12 councillors were elected in October 2008 in the first elections under the new Local Government Act.

The shire encompasses the whole of the Tiwi islands, an area of over 7,500 square kilometres. The population of the Shire is just over 2,500. The majority of the people live in Nguiu and Wurankuwu on Bathurst Island, and in Pirlangimpi and Milikapiti on Melville Islands. Small communities exist at the Tiwi College at Pickertaramoor and Maxwell Creek, Great Southern's forestry headquarters. There are nearly 300 km of major public roads on the Islands, all of them in need of replacement or major repair.

The Shire's annual budget is \$27m and is used to deliver services on behalf of all three levels of government. Only \$5m is received for core shire services and the shire is able to raise only 4% of its own revenue. All other funding is via grants. The shire employs 120 FTE and another 450 through employment programs. Most employees are Tiwi people.

The Shire has adopted, and reviews annually a Strategic Plan, which contains longer term objectives that have been workshopped and adopted in sessions facilitated with a wide cross-section of the community.

It is evident to us at municipal level that Tiwi Islands Shire has benefited significantly from the existence of large scale forestry and mining operations on the Melville Island. Areas of impact are:

- **Roads** - The Tiwi Island Forestry Project through Great Southern has upgraded/rebuilt over 80 km of public road on Melville Island over the past three years. We estimate that the all-weather roading the company has constructed would have cost \$50,000 per kilometre, upgrading the value of Council's roads by over \$4 million.
- The road constructed is much safer than the previous tracks, and allows all-weather access, thus satisfying a key element of our Strategic Plan, namely a significant upgrade in road standards, allowing communities year-round access to educational and health services and sporting and cultural events.
- Great Southern and Matilda Mining also contributed under a memorandum of understanding between 2004 and 2007 approximately \$650,000 per year to road maintenance whilst haulage of logs and mineral sands occurred. We have also been able to work in close cooperation with the Forestry Project in improving road safety through physical improvements and raised awareness in those years and since.
- The road improvements which the presence of mining and forestry have brought about address Section 2.3 in the Strategic plan, "Well Maintained and Managed Roads and Traffic Conditions"
- The existence of these cornerstone industries has also laid the foundation for a permanent improvement in the productive capability of Tiwi land and Tiwi people, satisfying two other important elements of the Shire's Strategic Plan
 - Section 3.4 which aspires to establish "A dynamic and growing economy with strong local employment"; and
 - Section 3.3 which states the Shire's wish to "support and enhance opportunities for local employment"
- We are aware that when exports of some 500,000 tonnes of woodchips commence in 2012 or 2013, up to \$40 million will be spent each year on harvest, planting and maintenance and associated activities, and that this will provide jobs for 100 FTE's on the Tiwi's. This compares very favourably with the 350 – 400 Tiwi's to whom we expect be paying - mostly on a part-time basis - sustenance from CDEP payments in 2009/10. The Shire is a great believer in encouraging smaller craft and other industries, but they could not possibly be expected to have the impact that these larger employers, deriving substantial export incomes, will have. Tiwi aspirations for a better economic future will not be met by small and cottage industries alone.
- As the largest employer on the Islands, the Shire appreciates the co-existence of well-run sustainable businesses on the Islands, employing Tiwi's and engaging Tiwi contractors. Great Southern's adherence to world-standard health and safety policies and zero-tolerance in drugs and alcohol in the work place, and its achievement of ISO 14001 certification, has provided an excellent example and supported the Shire's own push for improved standards in these areas.

- Resource protection and fire prevention and response are concerns of the Shire (Section 2.8 of our Strategy - “Effective weed control and fire hazard management”). The advances in early burning and fuel reduction achieved by the forestry project and the major increase in fire awareness in the community has added to Melville Island’s environmental integrity and made the dry season safer for all on Melville Island.
- We have enjoyed a close and productive working relationship with the Forestry Project and the mining company in all matters and have welcomed and benefited from their presence on the Tiwi Islands.

Long-term funding

Laying the foundations of a stronger local economy is critical to the ability of any local government to provide the services and infrastructure to which all communities aspire. The situation is all the more so on the Tiwi’s which, by any municipal standard, are poorly equipped in terms of the plant and infrastructure required to maintain services, and poorly funded and resourced to provide the community services so badly needed.

Ensuring the ongoing development of industry and employment, will support the local economy and provide greater opportunity for employment.

The Shire supports this and other industry that provides services and employment in the Shire.

Sincerely,

Mark Goode
Chief Executive Officer
Tiwi Islands Shire Council