

To the Senate Committee on Environment, Communication and Art
Department of the Senate
Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

May I take the chance to produce this submission to the Senate Inquiry into Forestry, Mining and Economic Opportunities on the Tiwi Islands.

I visited Australia and the Tiwi Islands during the international research about drug abuse for my book “No Limit. Where society wants to go”, which was published prior the Beijing Olympics. My interest in the Tiwi People was excited, and ever since, through further general research and observations of their determination to create a sustainable economy on their own land. I was clearly saddened and almost appalled by the living conditions of the Tiwi Islanders existing on their own, healthy and rich land. Furthermore I was shocked to have learned that their effort to develop a forestry industry to secure the future of their people and create jobs was diminished and almost stopped by the “discovery” of a dunnart species, a small rat. My understanding is searching for those dunnarts and trapping them resulted in numerous findings of that animal throughout the islands. And because scientist are not sure enough how much living space that particular rat needs, they excluded for each dunnart found on the Tiwi Islands a “protection zone” of 70 ha around it. That caused the forest to be planted in unnecessary patches and could bring the whole project to a halt.

It was a rather unusual process to declare Tiwi land into a field laboratory, because of a guess by scientists. And it is especially unethical to elaborate a rat species above human beings who are living in a very unprivileged situation.

Every other community of around 2500 people, where more than 80 percent of the potential workforce is unemployed, would have been applauded nationwide and by government officials for attracting a potent and viable investor. This is not the case here. The very existence of this Senate Inquiry is evidence for the different measure applied to the Tiwi Islanders.

I am advised that the Tiwi people are using currently not even 5 percent of their land through forestry. Their wish is to expand that use to a maximum of 10 percent for the opportunity to develop an economy and create benefits from their land. I would like herewith to strongly point out that the UN Charter for Human Rights inscribes the Right for Economic Development in Indigenous Societies. This Human Right applies to the Tiwi Islanders.

In addition to the economic opportunities which open up through the use of a small part of their land, established environmental scientific research assures the Tiwi society would be enabled to protect actively the other 90 percent of their pristine island environment far more effectively. This would be in the interest of a global society as well.

Yours sincerely
Prof. Ines Geipel

Berlin, Germany, 11th of March 2009