



9<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia  
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Canberra ACT 2600

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**Re: Northern Australia Workforce Development**

Cattle Australia (formerly Cattle Council of Australia) is the peak industry organisation representing Australia's grass-fed cattle producers. As a Peak Industry Council, we are responsible for grass-fed cattle industry policy development and advocacy.

Cattle Australia thanks the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry on workforce development in Northern Australia. We acknowledge that the inquiry is considering the impediments to building economic and social infrastructure across Northern Australia and the challenges to attracting and retaining a skilled workforce needed to support this economic development.

Cattle Australia considers that tremendous opportunities exist in Northern Australia. The beef industry has a proud history of being associated with the development of the North and that association will be imperative for growth of the region into the future. It is only by addressing the issues and harnessing the opportunities in a strategic way that change will occur.

The production of beef in Northern Australia is significant to the economy, social infrastructure and workforce development. In 2021 the Australian cattle herd was estimated at 24.4 million<sup>1</sup> head. The cattle herd in Northern Australia comprised 12.5 million head and was the biggest contributor to Australia's live cattle exports during that period (90% of live cattle exports come from Northern Australia)<sup>2</sup>.

The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data estimates there are 4,956 cattle businesses in northern QLD, 344 cattle businesses in northern Western Australia (WA) and 321 cattle businesses in the Northern Territory (NT). Directly, 9,332 people are employed in cattle related operations in northern QLD, 1,053 employed in cattle related operations in northern WA and 2,224 employed in cattle related operations in NT<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> MLA state of the industry report 2022, sited 24/1/22 [https://www.mla.com.au/globalassets/mla-corporate/prices--markets/documents/trends--analysis/soti-report/2879-mla-state-of-industry-report-2022\\_d6\\_low-res\\_spreads.pdf](https://www.mla.com.au/globalassets/mla-corporate/prices--markets/documents/trends--analysis/soti-report/2879-mla-state-of-industry-report-2022_d6_low-res_spreads.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/territories-regions-cities/regional-australia/office-northern-australia>

<sup>3</sup> ABS 2020-21 Agricultural Census - Business counts by select ANZSIC



The beef industry employs 10,000 people directly and indirectly in the NT<sup>4</sup> alone. The last comprehensive assessment of the economic value of the beef industry in Northern Australia estimated its worth at appropriately \$5 billion, of which \$3.7 billion was production at the farm gate<sup>5</sup>.

The live export trade employs more than 6,573 people full time nationally (directly and indirectly), with Northern Australia accounting for 82% of all direct employment<sup>6</sup>. The live cattle trade is an essential part of the northern economy. In 2020–21, the live cattle export trade (directly and indirectly) contributed up to \$1.4 billion to the Australian economy with 70% of the Northern Australia herd produced for live exports.

For beef farms in the NT, Indigenous employment accounted for 10.7% of the total employment, while in northwest WA it was 15%. An example of the beef industry increasing capacity amongst indigenous Australians is the Pastoral Real Jobs Program<sup>7</sup>, operated by the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA). Through the program, NTCA has provided training and job opportunities to more than 250 indigenous people, providing them crucial life skills to secure employment within the industry<sup>8</sup>. If meaningful workforce development is to occur in Northern Australia, governments must support industry led initiatives such as this.

The past decade has seen considerable deliberations from governments at Federal, State and Territory levels on how to optimise opportunities and overcome the challenges of doing business in Northern Australia. Previous attempts to approach the issue have failed due to an absence of consistent and strategic funding from all governments. This continues to be a major impediment to improve business opportunities in Northern Australia.

Australia, and specifically the northern beef industry's prosperity is highly dependent on international trade, from both live cattle and beef. Access to overseas markets is critical for these exports, and for the sourcing of inputs, technology and capital equipment which results in business and job creation.

Infrastructure development is a pressing need for Northern Australia, including for improved animal welfare outcomes. Access to processing and port facilities is limited with cattle being freighted significant distances for processing or to live export ports. In addition to freight costs, product from the few northern abattoirs is often shipped out of southern ports due to access issues for shipping companies. Infrastructure pressures significantly impact on the profitability of beef cattle enterprises and supply chain due to costs being passed back.

Given the sparse population and distances in Northern Australia, improvements to communication and cost structures would immensely benefit the industry, offering business efficiencies such as remote monitoring and improved contact with business communities, as well as providing workers

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<sup>4</sup> <https://herdthat.com.au/statistics/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://crcna.com.au/resources/publications/northern-australia-beef-situation-analysis-report-cooperative-research-centre-developing-northern-australia>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/reports/2022/the-economic-contribution-and-benefits-of-the-northern-live-export-cattle-industry/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ntca.org.au/programs/real-jobs-program>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au/globalassets/beef-sustainability/documents/absf\\_update\\_2022\\_web.pdf](https://www.sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au/globalassets/beef-sustainability/documents/absf_update_2022_web.pdf)Nationally,%20the%20live%20cattle%20export%20trade



with the ability to access tertiary education, information, services and be socially connected. Access to these is critical to improved workforce outcomes.

CCA would urge the current inquiry to revisit inquiries that have occurred in the past decade, and in particular recommendations from the 2014 Green and White paper process run by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet into Northern Australia Development to gain further insight into the challenges and opportunities for conducting business and attracting and retaining suitable employees in Northern Australia.

A coordinated approach is required to accurately assess impediments to building the economic and social infrastructure required to support industry and business to expand and create regional jobs in Australia's north.

We look forward to further consultation with the Joint select committee on this important issue. If there are any queries about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact our office on 1300 653 038 or email

Yours sincerely

John McGoverne  
CEO