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Dr Bill Pender
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

via email: jscna@aph.gov.au

Dear Dr Pender

Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia.

The attached submission is in response to the Committee's Terms of Reference. Council will also participate in the public hearings that are to be held across Northern Australia and looks forward to receiving advice regarding the hearing schedule.

Yours sincerely

BRENDAN DOWD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Encl.

The Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia has been tasked to consider policies for developing the parts of Australia which lie north of the Tropic of Capricorn. An across-the-top approach to identify opportunities to advance development, maximise economic prosperity and consolidate regional relationships.

As the only capital city north of the Tropic of Capricorn, Darwin, and in particular the City of Darwin, should be a key body of influence, expert advice and opinion to the Inquiry. The City of Darwin plays a role in supporting business investment in the City, tourism promotion and cultural diplomacy activities in the region through its International Relations Program.

To ensure relevant, timely and effective planning and management, any administrative component should be based in the north, rather than centralised in Canberra, away from on-the-ground expertise and local knowledge. Communities in the north would take umbrage at such an important opportunity being located in the south.

The City of Darwin looks forward to opportunities to participate in the public hearings to be held across Northern Australia in the months to come and to share its vision for the future growth and development of a thriving liveable city and important economic centre for the north.

1. Examine the potential for development of the region's mineral, energy, agricultural, tourism, defence and other industries.

The City of Darwin supports the sustainable and environmentally responsible growth of the mining and petroleum sectors in the Top End. Recent new business and industry investment in the region has presented Council with challenges for planning for and delivering facilities, amenities and programs that together deliver and maintain a quality of lifestyle that attracts and retains workers. Its current work in partnership with the Northern Territory Government in the development of the Darwin City Centre Masterplan is one mechanism for ensuring the capital city can meet future demands that growth presents. The Darwin City Centre Masterplan addresses the following matters:

- Movement by public and private transport, pedestrians and bicycles;
- The public realm, including streets, parks, malls, the water's edge and open spaces;
- Infrastructure such as arterial roads, bridges, utility services and social infrastructure;
- Potential and existing tourist networks and facilities;
- Land uses such as offices, retail, tourism, residential and community spaces; and
- Landscaping to increase shading, cooling and amenity of the urban environment.

Council plays an active role in the branding and positive promotion of the City and surrounds to tourists. Its strategic policies, facility and program provision support

the tourism sector and it also fulfils a strong advocacy role in ensuring the recent challenges faced by the tourism sector are understood and mitigated. Council welcomes the opportunity to discuss the needs for future tourism development in the region and how this can be supported through strategic planning.

The Inquiry also needs to focus on the inclusion of Indigenous people in employment opportunities such as the development of tourism initiatives and innovative business enterprise, to ensure equitable opportunities to new markets, audiences and support of sustainable communities.

Darwin is a key base for the Australian Defence Force. It is home to the 1st Brigade (based at Roberston Barracks) and shares its main runway at Darwin International Airport with the Royal Australian Air Force. Darwin is also an important Royal Australian Navy port from which border integrity operations are conducted and multi-national exercises involving visiting Australian and foreign major warships. It has also become an important rotational training location for the United States Marine Corps.

To support growth in tourism, movement of corporate visitors and residents, strategic expansion of the airport or alternatives needs to be part of any future consideration. In addition, transport corridors to and from the facility also needs to be considered at the early planning stages.

There needs to be a focus in good planning and integration of regional initiatives into the local transport system. Careful consideration and planning for the provision of alternative transport modes is required to ensure a balanced approach is achieved between efficiency of private transit use, the use of public transport and freight and industry logistical requirements.

2. Provide recommendations to:

- **Enhance trade and other investment links with the Asia-Pacific;**

The City of Darwin's International Relations Program has enabled it to nurture trusted relationships in the region that advance cultural diplomacy opportunities and leverage into communities that provide business entrée for new investment opportunities.

The City of Darwin is best placed to provide effective local leadership in this arena. In making its future funding recommendations the Inquiry should consider investing in the existing program and providing additional resourcing to build on the City of Darwin's international relations program.

- **Establish a conducive regulatory, taxation and economic environment;**

Taxation and regulatory reforms should be considered to remove barriers to trade and investment. The Inquiry should explore the possibility of establishing trade development or strategic economic zones in Northern

Australia. Regulatory harmonisation across the top or facilitating improved co-ordination between jurisdictions should also be explored.

The Inquiry should consider the inclusion of reviewing Zoning Allowances and the suitability of current incentives. Any reforms to existing GST, tax and superannuation arrangements need to ensure there are no unintended consequences to charges or duties, for example changes to GST arrangements regarding rural and commercial property transactions, should not impact on stamp duty charges.

The Inquiry should also encourage State and Territory authorities to explore current stamp duty arrangements and potential incentives or reforms to the system.

- **Address impediments to growth;**

The Northern Territory already contends with its own inherent geographical and economic challenges. The cost of living, housing affordability and rental accommodation rates are higher than some other Australian jurisdictions. Recent business and industry projects have placed increased pressure on this area and any future growth in wages and population will create further substantial stress.

Large regional construction and infrastructure projects have fuelled continued growth in demand for residential development in Darwin effectively increasing land values and construction costs and reducing affordability for existing and potential new residents. Affordability of housing is not just confined to initial purchase costs, with ongoing expenses of accessing employment and education as well as service costs and general living costs, also having significant impact.

Land for future social infrastructure providing the full range of community amenity such as community halls, sporting facilities, childcare centres, art centres and libraries, youth centres, schools and higher education needs to be highlighted in planning for future growth. The lack of adequate provision of social infrastructure is an impediment to growth, and attraction and retention of companies, businesses and employees.

More consideration should be given to allowing those who are incarcerated in the north to be allowed to work to help reduce the shortages of labour.

- **Set condition for private investment and innovation.**

Diversification of the economic and industry base of Northern Australia is a key element in supporting growth of regional communities and towns. Involvement of local leaders and business entrepreneurs is critical to innovation, particularly in remote communities. Incentives for private investment in regional centres should be explored as the ability for public investment is limited.

3. Identify the critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support the long term growth of the region, and ways to support planning and investment in that infrastructure.

Darwin requires further investment in its Port and related infrastructure such as road and rail links, if it is to keep in step with the demands of industry diversification and growth.

In parallel with the development of infrastructure, the Inquiry should also examine issues of access to markets, population growth and employment and training initiatives.

An increase in affordable and social housing is imperative to fostering the growth of industries that require unskilled labour, for example the hospitality industry or agri/aquiculture industry, and to cope with urban drift as people in the regions seek employment opportunities in our City.

Increased support services and facilities for the elderly need to be considered as the population ages and more elderly people choose to retire in the north and contribute to the economy.