



17 February 2014

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

By email to: [jscna@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscna@aph.gov.au)

Dear Dr Pender,

Advance Cairns welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia, to help inform and shape the Committee's recommendations to the Parliament for the development of a white paper.

Advance Cairns is the peak regional advocacy and economic development organisation for Tropical North Queensland (TNQ). We are a proactive, independent and apolitical organisation which brings together business and industry leaders and key decision makers to identify strategic priorities to address issues of regional importance. Our members represent the majority of the main businesses of the region and are high level influencers who want to be involved in making a positive contribution to the long-term development and progression of our region. We advocate on behalf of various projects, policies and plans which are determined by our members on an annual basis.

Our geographic area, which encompasses the Cairns region, (including Port Douglas), Cassowary Coast (Innisfail, Mission Beach and Tully), the Tablelands region and Cook Shire, has a population of nearly 245,000, supports more than 23,400 registered businesses and covers more than 270,000 km<sup>2</sup> or about one and a half times the size of the state of Victoria.

### **About our region**

Tropical North Queensland is blessed with many natural and other advantages, including the skills and expertise of our people, reliable water supplies, abundant fertile agricultural land, close proximity to local mineral wealth and economic growth zones in South East Asia and the Western Pacific, and a beautiful natural environment and surrounds. It is also a place where people want to come to live, work and play.

In the early years, our region's prosperity was driven by the mining and agricultural industries. Exports of gold, tin and copper, and timber, tobacco, sugar, dairy and seafood, lead to the growth of a strong regional economy and provided the basis for the development of higher order services which made the area a more comfortable place to live for its rapidly growing population.

The region's economic history has however been characterised by cycles of boom and bust driven by external factors. In recent years an increased recognition of the environmental heritage of our region has seen the decline of our timber industry and much of the mining activity as areas have been protected under environmental legislation. Deregulation of the tobacco industry saw a complete collapse of the industry and deregulation of the dairy industry has seen the demise of many family businesses. Most recently the commercial fishing industry has contracted and is at risk of further contraction as marine park boundaries expand and the industry becomes less viable.

Yet despite these economic setbacks, our region has continued to prosper because of spectacular growth in our tourism industry. What was a niche industry in the 1960s is now one of our largest regional industries, biggest employers and a major contributor to our regional economy. Growth in the tourism industry has supported growth in our construction and manufacturing sectors, driven population growth and lead to the establishment of high quality services in education, health, information technology, arts and entertainment, and supporting infrastructure.

Tourism is however a volatile industry subject to a whole range of shocks, which have in the past included the loss of direct air services, Ansett Airlines collapse, September 11, Asian Bird Flu and SARS, tropical cyclones, and the high Australian dollar.

Our challenge as a region has been to balance growth in our tourism industry with exploring opportunities to develop other industries. Economic diversification is the key to sustainable growth of our region into the future.

## **Our vision**

Tropical North Queensland is perfectly positioned to become *The World's Leading Sustainable Tropical Region*. In an interconnected, highly contested global economy we see ourselves as leading the way in the tropical knowledge sector and exporting our expertise all over the world because we have an inherent specialisation in those areas associated with our location and natural assets.

Our people will be highly skilled and we will be a region where people want to come to live, work and play. Employment opportunities in a diverse range of high quality industries like health, education, marine and aviation will be available and our core industries of agriculture and tourism will lead the way in the development of world's best practice in recognition of our unique natural environment.

Our region will be a global provider of high quality agricultural produce and our regional and rural communities will share in the prosperity. They will be strong and vibrant and a place where families will see a bright future for themselves. We will be connected to the world and distance from capital cities will not be a barrier to business success.

We will lead the way in the development of renewable energy technologies which will solve our reliance on non-renewable resources. Our water resources will be sustainably managed and with regard to changing climates. Our immense regional biodiversity will support the research and development of bio-technical products with global application.

Our growing population will be supported by world-class educational, health and medical facilities. Infrastructure planning will meet the pace of demand and regional liveability will rival that of anywhere else in Australia. We will be an international hub for sports training and development, and a place where people will come to participate in or watch global sporting events.

The cultural and heritage values of our Indigenous people will be highly valued and our Indigenous communities will provide employment and business opportunities equal to other communities in the region.

## **Enablers for growth**

Much has been written about the development potential of Northern Australia and the renewed focus to identify the diverse opportunities available and develop a White Paper is extremely welcome.

General consensus across the region is that the enablers to long term sustainable growth across Northern Australia and what is required to meet our vision will be (in no particular order):

- Water security, including water allocations and infrastructure for the future.
- Solving the complex land tenure arrangements across Northern Australia.
- Addressing under-developed infrastructure – roads, rail, ports (sea and air), and digital connectivity (high speed broadband and mobile telecommunications).
- Innovative regional base load electricity generation which meets demand at lower costs.

At the heart of these issues and crucial to delivering the outcomes we are seeking is governance reform, accompanied by a place-based approach to the development and delivery of policies and programmes. Policy-making by those with an inherent knowledge and understanding of the issues will lead to better outcomes for regions.

Devolved decision-making to appropriate scales will require innovative new approaches to governance<sup>1</sup> but ultimately lead to vast improvements in cross regional and sectorial collaboration, program integration, and finance and investment attraction across Northern Australia.

A place-based approach to regional development which recognises the diversity of communities and opportunities that exist through leveraging the competitive advantages will best support the aspirations of people living in Northern Australia.

Endogenous growth through building regional capability, including the development of human and social capital, is a driver of long-term economic potential and performance for regions<sup>2</sup> and should also be at the centre of any plan to develop the north. This also means identifying ways to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of existing assets and infrastructure, both economic and social, in the region.

Recognising that not all economic growth is good for communities, getting better at what we do already can have more beneficial impacts on community and social wealth than simply getting bigger. This will require a balanced and considered approach, and a clear understanding of what the benefits for development in Northern Australia are.

Little focus has been given to Indigenous issues in the terms of reference for this inquiry but addressing the entrenched disadvantage faced by Indigenous communities and identifying strategies for their social and economic development must be a core component of both the Committee's report to Parliament and the development of a Northern Australia White Paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale, A. (2013) *Governance Challenges for Northern Australia*, Cairns: James Cook University

<sup>2</sup> Regional Australia Institute, *Rethinking the Future of Northern Australia's Regions*, November 2013

## Addressing the Terms of Reference

The Tropical North Queensland Regional Economic Plan (TNQREP), developed in 2011 by Advance Cairns in partnership with over 40 major stakeholders, articulates a 20 year economic vision for our region which has been built on the back of extensive consultation and research. In addressing the Committee's Terms of Reference, we have also taken into account the strategies and goals of the TNQREP and sought to align our long term vision of being *The World's Leading Sustainable Tropical Region* with a range of recommendations for the sustainable development of Northern Australia.

## Industry development

The challenge for sustainable development in Northern Australia is strengthening its low and narrow economic base. While economic activity in the regions may be trending positively, the narrow and shallow base increases volatility and therefore the region is highly susceptible to economic shocks. Industry development and sustainability relies upon a well-developed supply chain, industry diversity and connectivity.

Skills and labour shortages exist in most parts of Northern Australia and a challenge for industry development is meeting workforce supply and demand. Targeted regional migration must be part of the solution but innovative new ways to up-skill existing workforces, make better use of the knowledge and expertise of mature-aged workers and increase Indigenous participation will lead to better outcomes for local communities.

The Australian Government must also consider the impact the Queensland State Government's Cape York Regional Plan will have on the ability to develop industries, like mining, agriculture and tourism in Cape York. While currently in draft form, the Cape York Regional Plan proposes a number of restrictions on allowable activities and is viewed by some interests as being too heavily weighted towards environmental outcomes rather than sustainable economic outcomes. While we appreciate there needs to be a balanced approach, further restriction of activity could be counterproductive to the Australian Government's vision of growing Northern Australia.

## Mining

A Cummings Economics mining opportunities study,<sup>3</sup> notes there is significant mining activity across the Tropical North Queensland region and strong future demand. It also notes that this region is strategically located to service mining activity across much of Northern Australia, as well as into Papua New Guinea and eastern Indonesia. Increasing activity in the Western Pacific also has the potential to create opportunities for supply and servicing.

As with all development across Northern Australia, the enablers mentioned earlier are necessary to realise the potential for mining industry development, as is addressing skills and labour shortages. Added to this is the uncertainty in approvals processes and the impact this is having on attracting investment.

While the establishment of a Bilateral Agreement between the Federal and Queensland Governments is welcomed, creating a set of environmental benchmarks would also provide some certainty to mining companies of the likely outcome of an environmental assessment process.

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<sup>3</sup> Cummings Economics *Mining and Industrial Services Study 2010 Update*, Ref J2288 May 2010

## *Energy*

The development of an energy industry in Northern Queensland will deliver electricity with great cost efficiency and therefore not only reduce the need for public financial support, but better meet the growth projections of the region.

While there is a development plan for the renewable energy industry in the north and solar and wind farm projects are underway, establishing integrated distribution systems for base load generation of electricity is critical to the long term growth of Northern Australia.

The Pentland Study<sup>4</sup> currently underway is expected to identify the potential of base load power generation in North Queensland. We would welcome a further commitment to investigate innovative and sustainable solutions to ensure long-term energy affordability and security across Northern Australia which is not reliant on non-renewable resources, and identify the potential to establish an energy industry in the north of Queensland.

## *Agriculture*

Agriculture is a major industry in the Tropical North Queensland region and contributes significantly in all its forms to regional domestic product and employment. Our region boasts natural resources conducive to a strong and growing tropical agriculture industry including land, water supply and appropriate climate. As domestic and international demand for food production increases, the region is well positioned to expand and capitalise on this trend.

Strategies identified in the TNQREP to strengthen and diversify our region's agricultural industry focus on increasing food production capability, including food security and quality of production; diversifying through innovation and value adding opportunities; and addressing barriers to industry and enterprise development.

While it is clear there is a strong and clear case for substantial development of agricultural industries, including beef cattle and large scale irrigated agriculture in Northern Australia, support for the development of *high quality* agricultural and horticultural produce, niche markets like tropical fruits and organic produce, and emerging industries that can deliver catalytic economic benefits to regions also needs to be given serious consideration.

Supporting regional supply chains through investments in infrastructure and industry development, including building regional resilience, will also help to ensure smaller family farms can maximise their productivity.

As highlighted earlier, a substantial policy shift towards place-based regional development which puts human and social capital at the forefront will be needed to arrest the decline that is occurring in many rural communities.

The lack of transparency regarding foreign investment in the agricultural sector needs addressing to understand the potential for reduced competition in the supply chain.

## *Tourism*

Tourism is a vital industry in Tropical North Queensland and the region has had a long and successful history in this sector. With visitor expenditure totalling nearly \$2.9 billion<sup>5</sup>, it is a core component of the Tropical North Queensland economy. The strengthening and

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<sup>4</sup> In April 2013, the Federal Government announced funding of \$2.5 million towards a feasibility study to examine the electricity generation required to drive future economic development in North Queensland, particularly in the Pentland area.

<sup>5</sup> Tourism Queensland, Tropical North Queensland Tourism Economic Facts, November 2012



diversification of our tourism industry will build on our region's strengths while providing many flow-on benefits to other industry sectors.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland, the region's peak regional visitor destination marketing organisation, is focussed on growing overnight tourism expenditure to \$4.6 billion by 2020 through increasing domestic and international market share and strategic aviation growth. Tropical North Queensland is one of four priority regions in Queensland with primary responsibility for achieving the Queensland Government's target of doubling tourism expenditure to \$30 billion by 2020.

Direct international services from Singapore, China, Korea, Taiwan and other Asian countries into Cairns, offer excellent potential for significant growth in total international visitor numbers from key source markets. They also offer new potential for commercial and business development opportunities.

Attracting new air services into Cairns and other regional airports across Northern Australia will require substantial investment in aviation development, including the provision of airline incentives. Developing an equitable regime for federal charges at non-capital international airports such as Cairns Airport or the rebate to regional airports of the difference between capital city and regional international airport charges, and aviation reform which permits cabotage to increase the uptake and potential for success of international carriers through regional airports such as Cairns must also be part of the discussion. In particular, this policy constraint must be relaxed and consideration given to unilateral aviation liberalisation if Northern Australia is to be competitive.

We would also recommend a review of the Passenger Movement Charge (PMC) because of its potential to limit the competitiveness of Australia as a destination, and in doing so we would like to see a reinvestment of funds raised through the PMC back into the tourism industry.

Major new investment in tourism and associated infrastructure will also be required to maintain competitiveness of Northern Australia's tourism industry, particularly if there is a focus on attracting the premium end of the market. Industry development, through the development of products, experiences and supporting services must also be a focus. Along with adventure and nature-based tourism opportunities in Northern Australia, development of the Indigenous tourism sector needs significant focus to realise its true potential and meet the demand for cultural experiences of our international visitors.

Projects which Advance Cairns views as critical to the development of the region's tourism industry include the Cairns Shipping Development Project to allow continued development of the cruise shipping sector, and support for the positioning of the region as a world class sporting hub to attract international and domestic competitors and spectators.

The long term future of tourism relies also on getting the balance right between industry development and environmental protection. No other region recognises the enormous values of our natural assets like the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics Rainforests than ours. However the policy and regulatory environment must recognise that the development and success our tourism industry is intertwined with these natural assets.

Most critically, tourism has to be recognised much more widely as an industry in its own right, and one that is of economic significance. Industry leaders need to be sitting at the table to help inform the development of strategic alliances with international partners like Asia. Industry leaders must also be included in high level discussions regarding planning and development of Northern Australia, and involved in the proposed Northern Australia Strategic Partnership.

## *Sports*

### **Sports tourism**

Tropical North Queensland has already established itself as an international sporting destination and has hosted numerous iconic and world class events, including mountain biking, adventure racing, marathons, triathalons and Iron Man events. Strategies have been developed to attract high participation sports and adventure sports to the region to promote Tropical North Queensland as the adventure capital of Australia, as well as high profile sports which offer good media leverage and exposure for the region.

The development of a sports tourism industry is a strategy to drive diversification within the tourism industry and the broader regional economy. As sport has developed as an industry in the region, so too has the development of associated infrastructure and business opportunities.

### **Sports training**

With world-class sporting infrastructure, the region is gaining recognition as an elite sports training and conditioning hub. As one of the most developed tropical cities in the entire tropical zone, Cairns is ideally positioned to provide training and acclimatisation for elite athletes from across the world, including in the lead up to the Rio Olympics in 2016 and the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast in 2018. Further infrastructure development will augment the tropical sports science research facilities at James Cook University, as part of the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine.

## *Defence*

Advance Cairns has long recognised the strategic opportunities for expanding defence facilities in Northern Australia. Tropical North Queensland is the closest air and sea service hub to much of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The region has strong commercial linkages with South East Asia, Guam, PNG and surrounding Pacific Island nations which has enabled Defence to engage in capacity-building and training exercises.

Cairns is the second largest Naval base on the eastern seaboard, and development to date has established HMAS Cairns a key base for Asia/ Pacific operational deployments for patrol boats and other vessels.

Operational capacity exists for expansion of fleet assets in Cairns to support current and future operations in our areas of interest. These could include current patrol boat and hydrographic vessels, and future Offshore Combatant Vessels (OCV).

Naval assets are well supported with extensive marine construction and support facilities, which have been well proven as reliable and competent. The strategic capacity of the marine support facilities in Cairns should be acknowledged as a key component of Australia's defence industries. Dredging at the Port of Cairns would provide further opportunity for growth of Naval facilities at Cairns.

RAAF Scherger is a strategic air base with a development priority aligned to the introduction of the new air platforms to the RAAF. Capacity of this facility should remain ahead of capability enhancements.

## **Other Industries**

### *Marine*

The Cairns region has a well-established and world renowned marine industry, and has the largest marine tourism sector in Australia.

Established first to support a large commercial fishing industry, the marine support facilities in Cairns are a key component of Australia's marine engineering and support capability, and in terms of the infrastructure, skills and highly technical expertise, are the only such facilities in Northern Australia. As above, this provides critical strategic capability for defence and commercial marine industries.

Cairns is also recognised as a desirable destination for super yachts, attracting 35-50 super yachts each year. The ability to base super yachts in Cairns for chartering purposes will strengthen the well-established marine industry and position the region as a leader in marine servicing and supply.

Ensuring that these industries and the supporting workforce are globally competitive should be acknowledged and nurtured.

Advance Cairns has identified the potential for the development of a Centre of Excellence for maintenance and refit of RAN patrol boats, Customs and other similar vessels to further support development of the industry, as would dredging at the Port of Cairns.

Marine training excellence is supported by the internationally-recognised Great Barrier Reef International Marine College, which could be integrated as a component of a regional marine Centre of Excellence.

### *Aviation*

Cairns and the region has achieved recognition as an Asia Pacific aviation and aerospace hub, and has the aviation maintenance and training facilities to support much further development of this industry.

Established in 2004, the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre is an important local industry partnership between the Cairns aviation industry and Aviation Australia to provide an aviation training campus in Cairns.

The centre offers world class facilities and is nationally recognised for its training programmes in aircraft maintenance engineering and cabin crew training.

Cairns has the only recognised service facility for Bombardier's Dash 8 Q-series aircraft in the southern hemisphere and also boasts the largest avionics facility in Australia.

While aircraft maintenance activities are concentrated in Cairns, significant opportunities exist for the development of maintenance and flight training facilities at Mareeba, with complementary activities at smaller regional airports.

### *Education*

The Cairns region boasts international-standard education and training facilities, including the world-renowned James Cook University, ranked in the top four per cent of the world's tertiary institutions, Central Queensland University's Cairns Distance Education Centre and the state-of-the art TNQ TAFE.



Well established facilities in Northern Australia, combined with natural assets and compelling lifestyle components underpin an opportunity for further development of the international education sector.

Regional education institutions suffer from a perception that they are not comparable to capital city institutions. Building on the recognised capabilities of capital city educational institutions and marketing the regions as having an equal standing will support development of this growing international trade sector.

International standing established in key areas could be leveraged to establish regions as internationally competitive.

### *Tropical Knowledge*

As a region, we have developed a unique knowledge in response to the characteristics of our tropical environment. A tropical knowledge economy is already enhancing productivity in existing industries like mining, energy, agriculture, construction and tourism, leading to the development of export opportunities.

Further development and recognition of a tropical knowledge economy requires investment in research and development in areas like tropical health, agriculture, environmental and disaster management, design and energy within the north.

Through commercialisation of our tropical knowledge and expertise, we can assist the proper development of tropical regions throughout the world and preserve the unique expertise that we possess.

### *Health*

Cairns is the hub for Tropical North Queensland and as such is the core base for services for a region that is now the largest in population in northern Australia. On top of this, the region is increasingly developing a role as a pivotal servicing hub for the wider Pacific region and a gateway city for the Asia Pacific region. It is clear we have a role to play in relation to sciences and health and James Cook University's Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine will support this development.

The growing economy and excellence in health related fields would be supported by health facilities of a commensurate nature. Therefore it is essential that any future planning take into account these current and future developments and provide the infrastructure to ensure their sustainability.

### **Enhancing trade and other investment links with the Asia-Pacific**

Northern Australia could be established as a regional incubator for further development of free trade zones through bilateral trade development in industries which have been identified as economic development catalysts. This could be place-based to accelerate trade development and testing of relational agreements.

Leveraging existing relationships with Asia can underpin further mutually beneficial trade development, identifying new trade zones with our near neighbours and opening new opportunities for each country.

An example of this could be the development of regional trade with Papua New Guinea. Tourism and trade development is hampered by the perceived or real security issues in the current "funneling" of passengers and goods through Port Moresby. Establishing PNG Customs and Immigration pre-clearance in Cairns would provide a much needed stimulus

and diversification to both economies in a region where there is high unemployment levels and much opportunity for economic development.

A study on the development of protocols to establish a PNG Customs and Immigration pre-clearance point in Cairns could further this initiative.

Our developing relationship with China also presents a huge opportunity to capitalise on the changing social trends in China. Already our region is one of the most visited places in Australia for holiday visitors, with 46% growth in the year ended June 2013<sup>6</sup> and is fast becoming a desirable location for investment. Chinese investment in the region includes dairy, cane sugar, beef cattle and tourist accommodation, with massive potential on the horizon including Tony Fung's \$4.2 billion Aquis Great Barrier Reef Resort.

Economic and social change in China is likely to see even more interest in our region as a place which not only offers investment opportunities, but one which can provide a high standard of education and health care, employment opportunities, and regional liveability. We will need to position ourselves for the future to capitalise on this interest and develop strong relationships between ourselves and our near neighbours.

### **Establishing a conducive regulatory, taxation and economic environment**

As identified earlier in this submission, devolved decision-making and place-based governance structures are critical elements of an environment conducive to sustainable growth.

Advance Cairns also suggests attention is given to reform Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements policy by giving adequate recognition to the role local government plays in disaster recovery and gives thought to a value for money pricing model. Reforming this policy will lead to better financial outcomes for both the Federal Government and local governments and assist to mitigate future risk of damage to infrastructure.

Attention also needs to be given to the impacts or unintended consequences legislation has on the ability for new market development. One example is the inability of Australia's tourism and marine servicing industries to fully capitalise on the very lucrative international super yacht industry because of customs import arrangements.

Discussion centred on cuts to company tax rates is undoubtedly welcomed by business leaders however it also needs to be recognised that many businesses in Northern Australia will not currently be subject to company tax due to their nature and size. Investigation and attention on other areas of tax reform and red tape reduction will also be needed to improve the potential of existing and new business, as well as attract investment into the region.

### **Impediments to growth**

Critical impediments to growth have been identified earlier in this submission as:

- Under-developed infrastructure – roads, rail, ports (sea and air), and digital connectivity (high speed broadband and mobile telecommunications).
- High cost of electricity due to no regional base load generation.
- Water security, including water allocations and infrastructure for the future.
- Complexity of land tenure arrangements across Northern Australia.

These are the commonalities across the whole of Northern Australia and this will, without doubt, will be reflected in the many submissions made to this Inquiry.

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<sup>6</sup> Tropical North Queensland Regional Snapshot Year Ended June 2013, Tourism and Events Queensland

Many other impediments to growth have also been identified through responding to the industry development opportunities in this submission. In addition to these, Advance Cairns highlights the need to address the following:

- Lack of capacity in small and medium businesses.
- Limited uptake of innovation and innovative business practices.
- Skills shortages and labour mobility.
- Clearer targeting of regional migration programmes.
- Lack of affordable housing.
- Poor community infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Uncoordinated approach to Indigenous economic development.
- Increased costs of living due to lack of competition; for example, insurance costs.

## **Setting conditions for private investment and innovation**

Moving towards a digitally-enabled economy has been identified as a critical enabler to attracting investment and innovation into regional areas. More business activity will be conducted through high-speed broadband and many businesses agree high speed broadband will make competing globally easier, faster and more affordable.

As a region we seek equitable access to the digital economy, and recognise this as an opportunity to significantly increase the sustainability of our communities. Positioning the region for the digital economy is strongly embedded as a priority in our local and regional strategies which specifically target economic diversity and the strengthening of sectors like education, health and research.

Business incubation and support for entrepreneurial activities will help build the capacity, connectedness and confidence of small business as well as address some of the barriers to industry and enterprise growth and profitability.

Land use planning must address competing interests, including the encroachment of urban development. Long term planning which acknowledges the infrastructure needed as regions grow must be considered.

While we understand a balance approach is needed, reducing development constraints imposed by environmental legislation and devolving the decision making authority to regional levels could contribute to streamlining processes for investment.

## **Infrastructure**

### *Economic*

A long term focus on infrastructure planning is needed to support economic growth within Northern Australia. Recognition should however be given to existing infrastructure assets and how a staged programme of infrastructure development can make best use of these.

We welcome an audit of infrastructure and the development of a priority list of projects of various scales. Cost benefit analysis however must take into account the significant capital investment needed to address the shortfall of investment over many years, and the heterogeneous nature of Northern Australia.

The social outcomes of better infrastructure and the impact on regional liveability for communities must also be considered.

Public/private partnerships will need to be part of the solution to attract appropriate levels of investment.

Infrastructure priorities for attention or exploration include:

- Roads
  - Continued upgrades to the Bruce Highway
  - Incremental sealing of the Peninsula Development Road
  - Sealing the remaining section of the Hann Highway
  - Upgrading Kuranda Range Road to cater for b-doubles
  - Sealing of the Savannah Way, from Cairns to Broome to dual carriageway
- Rail
  - High speed all weather rail infrastructure to facilitate efficient freight movements
  - Consideration of east-west rail linkages
- Ports (sea)
  - Karumba
  - Weipa
  - Mourilyan Harbour
  - Cairns Shipping Development Project
- Ports (air)
  - Development at Mareeba Airport
- Water
  - Regional water supply assessment and Nullinga Dam development
  - Infrastructure to support irrigated agriculture
- Energy
  - Regional generation to reduce costs and improve security
  - Innovative off-grid solutions for remote communities
- Digital connectivity
  - High speed broadband
  - Mobile telecommunications

## *Social*

As noted throughout this submission, enhancing human and social capital must be at the centre of development plans for Northern Australia. The Regional Australia Institute reports that Northern Australia is well below the national average for indicators of competitiveness in human capital<sup>7</sup>. Meeting the social infrastructure needs of communities across Northern Australia is therefore going to take a very concerted effort and substantial investment.

Regional social services must be appropriately resourced to meet a growing demand on health and social services and the sector must be engaged from the very beginning in development and planning processes.

Education and training institutions needed to be supported to develop new and innovative ways of delivering learning outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students or those in very remote locations.

Further development of skilled local workforces, supplemented by targeted regional migration, will increase regional capacity to respond to opportunities and diversify local and regional economies.

Development of the service sector needs to be integrated across all service industries to help make regional development more sustainable, particularly as industries become highly technical and less mechanical.

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<sup>7</sup> Regional Australia Institute, *Rethinking the Future of Northern Australia's Regions*, November 2013

## Conclusion

This submission recognises that many of the opportunities for development of Northern Australia have been identified in an existing range of reports and papers, including the Coalition's pre-election paper *2030 Vision for Developing Northern Australia*, and is not intended to duplicate that work. Rather we have sought to highlight the opportunities at the regional level and how they may be leveraged not only for regional benefit, but for the benefit of the Northern Australian and national economies.

We have also sought to shine a spotlight on some of the key issues we believe to be critical to the long-term sustainable development of Northern Australia and again draw attention to the need for a place-based approach to achieve a successful outcome for our communities.

Without these being addressed through a long term *bipartisan* approach, visions of economic growth and the development of strong regional communities across the north will, as in the past, not come to fruition.

Advance Cairns looks forward to the opportunity to participate in the public hearings process to discuss our submission in greater detail with the members of the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Cam Charlton  
**Chairman**

Cc: Warren Entsch MP, Committee Chair  
Senator Jan McLucas, Senator for Queensland  
David Williamson, Northern Australia Taskforce

Consultation to develop a framework from which to write this submission was jointly conducted with Regional Development Australia Far North Queensland and Torres Strait, and therefore it is recommended this submission be read in conjunction with theirs.

This submission does not seek to represent the individual views of organisations involved in the consultation process, rather to highlight the key issues facing Tropical North Queensland and set the scene for deeper discussion. A list of participant organisations is attached as Appendix A.

Other submissions from this region that we suggest be read in conjunction also with ours include:

- Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils
- Cairns Regional Council
- Tablelands Futures Corporation
- Gulf Savannah Development
- Ports North
- Queensland Tourism Industry Council



## **Appendix A**

### **Participants in regional consultation**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Invited/participated</b>
1. The Hon Warren Entsch	Speaker/observer
2. The Hon Senator Jan McLucas	Observer
3. Cairns Regional Council	Participated – Neil Quinn, Angelo Finnochiaro
4. Gulf Savannah Development	Participated – Stephen Agius
5. Tablelands Regional Council	Participated - Cr Geoff Stocker
6. James Cook University	Participated – Bradley Smith
7. Cassowary Coast Regional Council	Invited
8. FNQ ROC	Participated – Darlene Irvine
9. Cape York Sustainable Futures	Participated – Isha Segboer
10. Torres Strait Regional Authority	Participated – John Rainbird
11. Terrain NRM	Participated – Carol Sweatman
12. Cook Shire Council	Invited
13. Cape York Land Council	Participated - Shannon Burns
14. Cape York Institute	Participated - Mike Winer
15. Balkanu – Cape York Development Corp	Participated – Terry Piper
16. Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning	Participated – Darren Cleland, Geoff Millgate
17. Mareeba Shire Council	Invited
18. Reef and Rainforest Research Centre	Invited
19. North Queensland Land Council	Invited
20. Tablelands Futures Corporation	Participated – John Pollock
21. RDA FNQ&TS	Host – Sonja Johnson, Jann Crase
22. Advance Cairns	Host – Mark Matthews, Melinda Eades