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JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION BY INVITATION

from

TROPLINKS INC.

07th March 2014

environment ○ agriculture ○ health ○ tropical living

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Overcoming the Challenges for Business and Knowledge-based Industries in Northern Australia

Challenges:

1. Businesses are mainly SME's in Northern Australia
2. Northern SME's often lack the critical mass to pursue larger opportunities domestically and internationally both in opportunity identification and the winning/servicing of the opportunity
3. While often being at the forefront of their sectors, these SME's often lack the branding power to be recognised domestically and internationally when compared with businesses in southern Australia
4. Although the regional research community has capability which often leads the world in a range of tropical-related sectors, the capability exists mostly within small groups or relatively few individuals previously without effective coordination
5. State and Commonwealth Government agencies are able to offer very limited support due to the comparatively small population base in Northern Australia compared with southern metropolitan regions where greater "bang for buck" is achievable, and local government has little capacity to offer support
6. The limited support is not the fault of public servants but is a result of the direction given to them and the resources made available to service the Northern region. Business, researchers and the Northern Australia community must look within their own capability to a greater extent to advance their economic development



Opportunities:

1. Tropical Expertise is simply defined as the expertise developed by people who live and work in the Tropics (Northern Australia). The solutions developed to meet the business, environmental and living conditions in Tropical Australia have required a uniquely-developed capability to meet the challenges for Northern Australia and throughout other tropical economies

2. There is strong recognition of the concept of Tropical Expertise across Northern Australia in the areas of:
 - Tropical Health - in the region, there exists world-leading research capability in tropical medicine such as mosquito-borne diseases, marine, AIDS research and Indigenous health

 - Tropical Agriculture - crops, animal production have unique solutions developed in the region necessary for dry and wet tropical conditions

 - Tropical Environmental Services - tropical areas have special requirements and Northern Australia is known for its highly developed capability in this sector which account for factors such as the high humidity and temperatures, rainfall and the requirements of preservation of tropical flora and fauna

 - Tropical Engineering and Energy Services – Northern Australia is one of the few regions in a developed country to operate in a tropical environment, giving rise to innovative development in the areas of design, engineering and energy generation to both accommodate and exploit the tropical environment

 - Tropical Living e.g. the architectural requirements for housing and commercial buildings require different designs to be effective in the tropics with its greater heat and humidity issues than structures designed for temperate climates, social issues in small tropical communities are different due to smaller population base, energy delivery can be highly challenging due to long distances and weather conditions and of great importance are the capabilities in Northern Australia developed to overcome the challenges in indigenous communities in social issues, infrastructure delivery, health etc. and the fact that these skills are transferable internationally

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3. There is good recognition of the concept of Tropical Expertise outside of Northern Australia in international markets and thus the region's capabilities to meet the needs of the Tropical World in such areas as PNG, the Pacific and South-East Asia especially.
4. This region is one of the few areas situated in the tropical region of the world located in a developed country

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Overcoming the Challenges to Maximise Growth Opportunities:

1. There is a need for a mechanism to put business/researchers/economic development agencies together to:
 - Create the critical mass required to pursue larger economic opportunities by matching complementary capabilities amongst business, research and community organisations
 - Coach and guide the pursuit of economic opportunities
 - Advocate for the advantages of employing Northern Australia's Tropical Expertise in economic and social development
 - Develop a "one-stop shop" within the region to facilitate the consolidation of Tropical Expertise messages to the rest of the world, domestically and internationally
2. TropLinks Inc. is a not-for-profit association including members from across Northern Australia, the rest of Australia and internationally with the common interest of the promotion of Tropical Expertise
3. TropLinks is now managed fully by a private sector board with a high motivation towards sustainable economic development, opportunity identification and assistance in opportunity capture and delivery, both within Australia and internationally
4. TropLinks received an initial investment of \$1M from the Queensland Government to establish the structure and set it on a path towards sustainability to assist the business and research community in the field of Tropical Expertise so much of the groundwork has already been carried out
5. TropLinks is the only organisation that traverses across the whole of Northern Australia including Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia. TropLinks has a growing and diverse membership in excess of 300 members from across academia, the business sector, development organisations and government.

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6. TropLinks is an organisation specifically tasked to enhance opportunities cross-sectorally in Tropical Health, Agriculture, Environment and Living and can bring all these sectors to work together and creating the required critical mass to pursue larger economic and research projects and raise investment capital
7. With the change in government in Queensland, funding ceased before self-sustainability targets were met. TropLinks had been well on its way towards this sustainability and had achieved a \$14M impact for the Northern Australia region in business opportunities and investment. After a period of consolidation to ensure its direction and mission TropLinks requires funding to “kickstart” its work again for the pursuit of a range of well-defined and targeted opportunities
8. TropLinks has continued to engage the business, research and general community to date and kept working with its ally structure built up previously
9. A modest investment by the Australian Government would provide a regionally-based and tropically-focused team to progress the development of Tropical Expertise across Northern Australia without increasing either the size of the public service or the need for new structures to be developed
10. The focus will be to build on work already underway with a stronger focus through the region of Oceania expanding across North Australia



Appendices/Email Attachment:

1. TropLinks PowerPoint Presentation 21.01.14 given to Rotary Club of Cairns
(TropLinks 2014 Rotary Presn 21.01.2014.pptx)

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