



Professor Michael N Barber FAA, FTSE  
President and Vice-Chancellor

GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001

[www.flinders.edu.au](http://www.flinders.edu.au)

File Ref: CF11/3525-02

17 February 2014

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

## **Flinders University Submission addressing the draft Terms of Reference of the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia**

### Introduction

Flinders University welcomes the announcement that the Australian Parliament's Northern Australia Committee has commenced an inquiry (the Inquiry) into the development of Northern Australia and welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed Terms of Reference (ToR). In light of the opportunities that the economic growth of China presents and specifically the proximity of the Northern Australia to Asia, the Inquiry is both timely and appropriate.

### About Flinders

Flinders University has played a leading role in providing innovative tertiary education and workforce development for health in northern Australia since 1997 when Flinders established the Northern Territory Clinical School (NTCS) based at Royal Darwin Hospital. The Centre for Remote Health, a joint initiative with Charles Darwin University (CDU), was established in 1999. The Northern Territory Remote Clinical School (NTRCS) followed in 2005 with major teaching sites at Katherine, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy. Since 1997 over 2800 Bedford Park-based students in the MBBS program have rotated through either NTCS or NTRCS. In addition the NTCS supports medical students from JCU to undertake placements in the NT.

In 2011 Flinders launched the Northern Territory Medical Program (NTMP) through which Territorians can complete a full medical education (leading now to a Flinders MD) while remaining resident in Darwin. The first students of the NTMP will graduate in November 2014.

Today, under the umbrella of Flinders NT, the University's major initiatives in the Territory – the NTMP, NTCS, NTRCS, the Centre for Remote Health and the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health (established in 2011) – involve more than 100 NT-based Flinders staff supported by annual expenditure of \$14 million and over \$40 million in capital projects including major buildings on the Casuarina Campus of CDU and at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Through Flinders NT the whole of Flinders University is accessible to health professionals and communities in northern Australia, providing resources previously not available in remote communities.

Integral to Flinders University's activities and programs in the NT is a strategic partnership with Charles Darwin University (CDU) and strong collaboration with (and support from) the NT Government particularly the NT Department of Health. Collaboration with CDU includes:

- a dual undergraduate degree that feeds to the NTMP with Indigenous enrolment a priority;
- the Centre for Remote Health,
- a jointly owned company, FCD Health, that manages the Palmerston GP Super Clinic; and
- teaching of languages particularly Greek and Chinese.

In the context this inquiry, Flinders is an example of how a southern Australia-based institution can, in partnership with agencies and partners, help build capacity and contribute to the development of Northern Australia. Certainly Flinders University sees our partnerships and our commitment to the North as very strategic and long term.

Flinders is broadly supportive of the ToR and offers the following comments in response.

**Point 1 – examine the potential for development of the region's mineral, energy, agricultural, tourism, defence and other industries**

Flinders recognises that the terms of reference for the review are, at this stage, very broad in scope. In Flinders' view, keeping the initial terms of reference wide in scope allows all aspects of industry to be considered and will be advantageous in ensuring that all stakeholders are included at the commencement of the Inquiry.

However, it is critical that the scope of the ToR for the Inquiry should explicitly recognise the education sector as an important industry in its own right with potential for further growth and development in northern Australia. The higher education sector contributes significantly to the economy of northern Australia, both directly through skills, knowledge exchange and research and indirectly as an adjunct to other industries. Furthermore, the higher education sector can contribute to the process of the Inquiry and assist with the implementation of the Committee's recommendations through the provision of support, advice, expertise and training taking account of the issues inherent to remote locations.

**Point 2 – provide recommendations to enhance trade and other investment links with the Asia-Pacific**

With increasing Asian demand for our natural resources and agriculture sector, we are likely to see increased opportunities for the services sectors of the economy including tourism and education, as well as areas such as water management and planning.

There is considerable international evidence that a highly skilled and flexible workforce is a critical factor in industry relocation decisions. Higher education can work with employers to identify and meet future regional skills needs.

There is potential for existing higher education relationships in Asian markets to be leveraged to enable continued growth in skills, education and training. In addition, such international networks can be exploited to export education and applied research services.

**Point 3 – provide recommendations to establish a conducive regulatory, taxation and economic environment**

Flinders strongly supports the Committee addressing the regulatory, taxation and economic impediments to growth and development. In particular the Committee should consider recommending that a standardised approach to regulation is adopted across state borders.

**Point 4 – provide recommendations to address impediments to growth**

There is a need for strong partnerships between communities, businesses and all levels of government. An environment where there is potential to grow opportunities in partnership, working across multi-state jurisdictions will assist with the challenge of achieving scale and capturing expertise.

**Point 5 – provide recommendations to set conditions for private investment and growth**

See Point 2 regarding skills development and applied research capability.

A strong enterprise culture to encourage new business start-up, innovation and growth can draw on higher education expertise to support business development in northern Australia.

Drawing off our own experience we believe that there would be significant benefit in a more holistic and integrated view of the 'SA-NT corridor'. Already a number of SA-based business including banks, professional service firms (and of course Flinders) operate SA-NT practices. In particular both the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) and Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) operate SA-NT chapters. The two jurisdictions are very complimentary in many ways and are connected by a rail line that, for example, would make Darwin a very obvious export hub for South Australian agribusiness particularly to Indonesia. Such an integrated focus would not only supply the North with necessary professional and other services for its development but also only generate economic development for SA. Flinders would encourage the Inquiry to specifically investigate the issues involved in expanding such a north-south dialogue and would be very happy to be involved in any such discussion.

**Point 6 – 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**

Flinders is pleased that the focus in the ToR is on identifying the critical and social infrastructure needed and the ways to support planning and investment in that infrastructure given the central role this will play in supporting the long term growth of the region.

The provision of well-resourced and sustainable educational infrastructure is vital to underpin the need to build local capacity and address current and emerging workforce skills and workforce development needs.

Flinders strongly recommends that the ToR clearly asserts that the Inquiry will develop an approach which respects the cultural aspects and history of the indigenous people of Northern Australia and aims to reduce the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

There are particular challenges and opportunities in the Northern Territory in working with and for community groups and organisations and health professionals including Aboriginal health workers. Already, Flinders NT has developed collaborative relationships with many stakeholder groups and organisations.

The tertiary sector has a direct role to play in educating Indigenous people with the skills required to gain employment and an important indirect impact through educating and training professionals who will work in Northern Australia

### Summary

Flinders welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Inquiry and is broadly supportive of the ToR.

Flinders is optimistic that an outcome of the Inquiry will be an environment that promotes lasting and strategic partnerships so that all Australians can enjoy the many social and economic benefits that will flow from development in northern Australia.

Flinders is pleased to comment on the ToR and looks forward to being able to provide further comment as the Inquiry progresses.

The University would welcome the opportunity provide a more detailed response and elaborate our views on the potential of our partnership in northern Australia to develop the concept of the central economic corridor of Australia. Once the ToR have been finalised we look forward to having an opportunity to meet with the Committee during the wider consultation process. Indeed, Flinders would encourage the Committee to visit our facilities on the Casuarina campus of CDU or at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Yours sincerely

Professor Michael Barber FAA FTSE FAICD  
Vice-Chancellor