



17th February, 2014

Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
PO Box 6021
Canberra ACT 2600
jscna@aph.gov.au

Dear Dr Pender

Re: Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia

On behalf of the Queensland Western Roads Interim Working Group (IWG) *, I write to congratulate the Government and the Joint Select Committee on your focus and interest in addressing the challenges and developing the opportunities in Northern Australia. The purpose of our submission is to draw your attention to work being done that will inform decision-making on road infrastructure planning for Northern Australia. Our IWG is working closely with the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads to develop a Queensland Western Roads Action Plan that will incorporate prioritisation of work to be done.

*Membership of the Queensland Western Roads Interim Working Group is:

- Cr Eric (Rick) Britton, Chair of the IWG, Mayor Boulia Shire Council (Regional Development Australia rep)
- Cr Peter Maguire, Mayor Central Highlands Regional Council (Local Government and Regional Roads Group rep)
- Cr Butch Lenton, Mayor Winton Shire Council, (Local Government and Regional Roads Group rep)
- Mr Dave Burges, Chief Executive Officer, Quilpie Shire (Local Government and Regional Roads Group rep)
- Cr Ian Groves, Councillor, Barcoo Shire Council, Industry (AgForce – Cattle Industry rep)
- Ms Darlene Irvine, Executive Officer, Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (Local Government FNQ rep)

Background to the Queensland Western Roads Interim Working Group

The Queensland Western Roads Interim Working Group was developed as an outcome of the Queensland Regional Roads Forum held in Longreach on the 4 December, 2013 at the initiative of the Regional Development Australia (RDA) Committees from Townsville and North West Queensland, Far North Queensland and Torres Strait, Fitzroy and Central West, Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday and Darling Downs and South West.



An Australian Government Initiative



Queensland Government

50 representatives from organisations with a direct interest in roads attended the forum, such as the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads, the Queensland Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, local government Mayors and Chief Executive Officers including those involved with Regional Roads Groups, RACQ, Agforce, regional economic development organisations and transport organisations amongst others. Collectively we were able to identify a way forward that will encourage stakeholders to work together on a coordinated approach to prioritising Queensland's regional roads and effectively lead to better outcomes for road management.

The outcomes we achieved at the forum were as follows.

- a) Identification of criteria for prioritising regional roads – Economic value (including productivity on supply chains), Safety, Strategic Intent, Access and Social value; and an initial listing of regional roads priorities by forum participants.
- b) Identification of information gaps and information sources regarding Queensland regional roads.
- c) Identification of opportunities for joint advocacy and collaboration to progress priority rural roads.
- d) Agreement to the need and benefits of collaboration of advocacy efforts for regional roads.
- e) Agreement that all roads have merit, and priorities are determined by different means. It is important to cross-reference the priorities identified at the Regional Roads Forum against documents such as the Regional Roads Groups' priority documents and those identified in strategic government policy documents such as *Developing Northern Australia*.
- f) There was support for a future working group to be established. An Interim Working Group is to be established for the period to 31st March, 2014 to:
 - Draft the TOR for a future working group and consult stakeholders on its suitability.
 - List available information and evidence based sources as preparation for undertaking a gap analysis.
 - Establish contact with each Regional Roads Group and obtain lists of priorities and evidence based studies for cross referencing with forum identified priorities and strategic government policy documents such as the *Developing Northern Australia*.
 - Determine other stakeholders and their future participation and commitment.
 - Hold initial discussions with government to determine budgetary cycles.
- g) An agreement by stakeholders to advocate for support to develop a Queensland Western Roads Action Plan, similar to the one developed for the Bruce Highway which was a critical piece of work to secure support for funding commitments; and
- h) A strong sense of collaboration and agreement to work across borders to achieve better outcomes in western regional roads funding.

Since the forum and formation of the IWG, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development the Hon Warren Truss MP and Queensland Minister for Transport and Main Roads the Hon Scott Emerson MP have congratulated RDAs' initiative and the formation and work of the IWG and encouraged our work going forward.

Queensland Western Roads Action Plan

Several Department of Transport and Main Roads staff have provided advice, documentation and their support in developing a scoping document to achieve our goal of developing the Queensland Western Roads Action Plan for staging and attracting investment into high priority roads. It will be modelled on the Bruce Highway Crisis Action Plan. It will be based on data and evidence including safety and access data, technical and costing aspects of road upgrades. It will also be supported as appropriate by other documentation in regard to economic and social criteria and values. At this stage, we anticipate this being an 18 month process to develop the Action Plan, but we will be in a position to share information along the way and would hence welcome the opportunity to continue engagement in the development of the policies and programs for Northern Australia development and in particular in regard to infrastructure audits and planning.

Importantly, the roads network that we are working to develop links Northern and Southern Australian supply chains and north and central western based mining and agricultural industries to export markets through coastal ports.

The Queensland mining industry is among the most successful in the world and is the world's largest exporter of seaborne coal; home to over 50 major coal mines and 100 metalliferous mines, Australia's largest producer of base metals including copper, lead and zinc; the world's second largest producer of lead, third largest producer of zinc and the fifth largest producer of silver.¹ In 2010-11, the full direct impact of the mining industry in Queensland was valued at \$31 billion.²

The Queensland agriculture industry covers the largest area of agricultural land of any Australian state and the highest proportion of land area in Australia dedicated to agriculture. About 30,500 businesses carry out agricultural activity in Queensland and the industry contributes more than \$10 billion to the state's economy each year.³ For 2013-14, the total value of Queensland's primary industry commodities (combined gross value of production and first-stage processing) is forecast at \$14.86 billion 2012-13 which is one per cent higher than the average for the last five years.⁴

The Queensland Western Roads Action Plan will provide priority advice to the Commonwealth for potential investment in Federal Highways, State Roads of Regional significance, and Local Roads of regional significance. These prioritised roads will support industries including northern Queensland's two significant rural and remote industries of mining and agriculture, businesses either within the north or doing business with the north and communities that rely on the road network to access health, education, social services, sport and recreation.

¹ Source: Queensland Government website 17.2.14

² Queensland Resource Council Website, Economic Contribution of the Resources Sector 2012/13 Fast Facts 17.2.14

³ Source: Queensland Government website 17.2.14

⁴ Source: Queensland Government Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website 17.2.14

I would be pleased to expand on any comments or answer any questions you may have. You can make contact through our IWG Secretariat – RDA Townsville and North West Queensland Committee Chief Executive Officer Ms Glenys Schuntner
Our Interim Working Group looks forward to further engagement in the development of Northern Australia.

Yours sincerely

Cr Eric (Rick) Britton
Chairman
Queensland Western Roads Interim Working Group

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