



BROADBAND
FOR THE TROPICS

**Tropical Innovation
Projects – An
Introduction**

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Dear Minister Albanese,

The Tropical zone is a region that is growing faster than the rest of the world economically and population-wise, yet has historically been subservient to the influences of the temperate zone, resulting in design and decision making inappropriate to tropical conditions. It is now apparent that the worlds' tropical zone needs to start taking control of its own destiny.

Our letter from Broadband for the Tropics (BftT) dated 15 March 2013 titled **Five \$1m Projects** highlights ways to support "tropical Australia" to enhance, by local input, the historical influence of temperate Australia on life in the tropics.

These projects will advance tropical knowledge and innovation from the ground up by harnessing local expertise and innovation. The projects plan to utilise local intellectual property, combined with best practice ICT tools, to better focus services and build an understanding of the economic and environmental challenges involved in developing Australia's tropical north. This group of **Tropical Innovation Projects (TIPs)** is designed to be executed quickly, providing rapid feedback for future development of our region. Each project can be run separately but the full benefits will be gained from their synergistic output as illustrated in the attached image "BftT_TIPs_relations".

BftT believes northern Australia can leverage the **TIPs**, along with the proposed Tropical Knowledge and Innovation Centre (TKIC) at James Cook University, in two ways:

FIRSTLY: *Strengthen the economy, resilience and profile of northern Australia by demonstrating how ICT can be used as a tool to liberate its immense untapped economic potential.*

BftT has been engaged at both high levels and grass roots business activity for over two years and has a clear understanding of the gaps in ICT capacity, uptake and innovation in northern Australia. A carefully planned intervention in the shape of the proposed projects with the wide-range of engaged partners they embrace, will effectively ramp up regional digital understanding and participation. As well as the range of knowledge innovation provided by **TIPs**, expected outcomes will also include the development of new (marketable) techniques specific to the tropical environment.

The ICT Industry will develop in parallel to this innovation, providing improved ICT capability and fostering an innovative and supportive ICT business environment.

Government can support development in northern Australia by funding the research and planning necessary to create a solid knowledge platform on which to design further development.

SECONDLY: *The creation of a new export business for Australia, that is, the direct export of tropical products and systems developed through TIPs to other tropical zones.*

Over 40% of the world population resides in the tropics and this will be a region of enormous growth in coming decades, as evidenced by many national and international reports.

Currently the environmental and economic decisions regarding northern Australia are influenced by interests based in “temperate Australia”. Distance often inadvertently results in decisions that are inappropriate for the tropical environment. BftT has identified a number of examples through our interactions, hence our selection of projects to demonstrate the importance of these issues across the region.

Although this situation is mirrored throughout the tropical world, many developing nations are now looking for best practice tropical knowledge and innovation appropriate to their circumstances. Our aim is for northern Australia to demonstrate leadership and become a focus of global tropical innovation.

BftT envisages innovations developed from the *TIPs* and through other TKIC projects to be marketed to the tropical world.

The Tropical Innovation Projects

As stated in our covering email to Minister Crean on 15 March 2013, each of the *TIPs* is capable of standing alone as a discrete project.

However, each has been designed around James Cook University’s Tropical Knowledge Innovation Centre - to interrelate, integrate and act as important progenitors towards achieving wider goals.

You will see from our final submission that we have rationalised the 5 projects into one project that covers 3 facets of living and working in the tropics. It does not address mining and agriculture as they are being dealt with elsewhere.

Broadband for the Tropics thanks you for your time and consideration in support of this group of projects. We strongly believe that this group of cohesive, inter-related and innovative tropical projects will provide a much needed kick-start to northern Australia Digital Economy initiatives and enablement.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Harkness

Chair, Broadband for the Tropics