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

Dear Dr Pender

Submission to Inquiry – Developing Northern Australia

I attach a submission from the Northern Territory Planning Commission (NTPC) outlining future land use planning currently underway in the Northern Territory.

As Chairman of the NTPC, I would be available to speak to the submission at the proposed public hearings.

Yours sincerely

Hon. Gary Nairn
Chairman
Northern Territory Planning Commission

17 February 2014

Inquiry – Developing Northern Australia **Submission from the Northern Territory Planning Commission**

Introduction – Guiding the Northern Territory’s Long Term Growth

The Northern Territory Planning Commission (NTPC) is in a position to provide policy guidance and plans on future land use in the Northern Territory consistent with the Australian Government’s vision to further the economic development of Northern Australia.

Work of the NTPC specifically relates to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry to identify critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support long term growth of the region, and ways to support planning and investment in that infrastructure.

The NTPC contributes to the Northern Territory Government’s strategic approach to *Framing the Future* of the Territory and its vision for a *Prosperous Economy, a Balanced Environment, and a Strong Society* through the identification of:

- road, rail and port infrastructure;
- utility corridors and sites for essential facilities including communication, water and power supply, water and sewerage;
- industrial, residential and commercial uses;
- social infrastructure, including hospitals and schools based on research into population and demographics, which could include sites suited to medical research facilities and education hubs; and
- land suited for pastoral and agricultural use with suitable soils and water supplies in order to contribute to food security across Northern Australia.

With the assistance of the Northern Territory (NT) Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, research is undertaken into population projections, economic, and demographic changes, along with environmental and heritage matters.

Consideration of the local community’s aspirations is achieved through comprehensive communication strategies during preparation of land use plans.

Role of NTPC

On 1 January 2013, the NTPC was established to guide the NT’s future growth, and to develop strategic plans and guidelines that promote confidence and certainty for industry and community.

The functions of the NTPC under the *Planning Act* (NT) include:

- conducting research and giving the Minister reports about future land use and development in the Territory, taking into account projected economic, social and demographic changes, underpinned by community engagement early in the planning process;
- preparing integrated strategic land use plans, identifying future transport and utility corridors, and sites for essential facilities (i.e. communication,

water and power supply, gas and similar condensates, effluent treatment and regional waste, and other public and social infrastructure);

- providing guidance through master plans on where and how communities or urban areas should grow, through the inclusion of maps, policy statements and objectives relating to housing, transportation, economic development, the environment, open space, and conservation;
- providing advice on developments regarded as having a significant impact on future land use, the environment, or adjoining land or areas of land such as those downstream of the development; and
- reviewing the NT Planning Scheme with the support of the NT Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment.

Relevant extracts from the *Planning Act* (NT) regarding the functions of the Planning Commission is at Attachment 1. A link to the Planning Commission 2012-13 Annual Report is included in the References section below.

NTPC Membership

There are ten members on the NTPC. To achieve a more integrated approach to land use planning, membership of the NTPC includes the Chairs of the NT Environment Protection Authority, the Development Consent Authority and the Heritage Council, a representative of the Local Government Association and a maximum of 5 other members.

The NTPC must perform its functions and exercise its powers independently, impartially and in the public interest, taking into account the objects of the *Planning Act* (NT).

Media releases regarding the appointment of the Chairman and members of the NTPC are at Attachments 2 and 3 respectively.

Community Consultation

Consultation is key to the future land use planning for the NTPC, and has concentrated on establishing strong productive working relationships with Northern Territory Government and Australian Government agencies, local governments, local community members, land owners, industry representatives, developers and community groups.

NTPC Work Program

Key priorities for the NTPC include land use planning and investigation of future residential, commercial and industrial developments across the Territory, including Land Use Plans for the Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs regions.

Darwin Region

Towards a Darwin Regional Land Use Plan 2014 was released for public comment on 17 December 2013. The Plan covers the sub-regions of Darwin, Palmerston, East Arm, Litchfield, Cox Peninsula, Finiss and Coomalie. A copy of the plan is at Attachment 4.

Greenfield and infill options are canvassed, including planning for significant transport infrastructure including future airports, sea ports, rail and arterial roads. These options include future port facilities on the Gunn Point peninsula (Glyde Point), new residential opportunities in Hughes and Noonamah, and future urban development opportunities around a new regional hospital in Palmerston North.

The draft document is an important body of work to identify and leverage the opportunities associated with the Territory's geographical proximity to Asia, affirm the importance of sustainability and protect its unique environment and lifestyle. Of interest is the strategic location of Glyde Point and its ability to link Australia to Asia through proposed road, rail and port infrastructure.

The NTPC is also developing an Urban Growth Strategy to consider areas suitable for growth in the Darwin Region to support future land needs. New growth areas, including inner urban and rural activity centres will be investigated.

The publication takes into account work of the local government councils - the City of Darwin and City of Palmerston - on the Darwin City Centre Master Plan and the Palmerston CBD Master Plan respectively.

The NTPC is encouraging the community to provide input into this publication to shape the strategic land use planning for the region. Feedback from the community will assist the Commission in developing a final Darwin Regional Land Use Plan. Comments are open until 10 March 2014.

Katherine Region

The NTPC has recently investigated the land use potential for the Katherine region. This region has high water availability and land capability and is strategically placed to join transport corridors across the Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory borders.

The Federal Government's paper *2030 Vision for Developing Northern Australia* includes the proposal to drive growth by developing a food bowl, which could double Australia's agricultural output. The town of Katherine is strategically located to assist in development of this industry due to:

- road transport corridors adjoining WA and NT (i.e. Victoria Highway);
- rail corridor adjoining South Australia and the NT (i.e. Darwin to Adelaide Railway);
- the Ord Irrigation Scheme staged development, which is currently conducting a study into cross-border legislation and development zones;
- expanded agricultural and horticultural uses, suited to a food bowl in the north; and
- an expected increase in infrastructure at Tindal as a result of the introduction of the Joint Strike Force by Defence.

The Planning Commission has submitted a proposed Katherine Land Use Plan to the NT Minister for Lands, Planning and the Environment for his consideration.

The Commission has recommended that the Minister considers a formal amendment to include the proposed Katherine Land Use Plan as a policy document.

The process of amending the NT Planning Scheme will include formal exhibition. In the event that the proposed Katherine Land Use Plan is exhibited, a copy will be forwarded to the Committee.

Of direct relevance to the Term of Reference is the potential extension of the Ord Irrigation Scheme (known as Ord Stage 3) into the NT. For significant development proposals that may have a significant impact on future land use and development in the NT, the *Planning Act* (NT) enables the Minister to request the Planning Commission to provide advice on strategic planning implications and possible impacts arising from the proposal.

Tennant Creek Region

The NTPC has endorsed the Tennant Creek Land Use Framework into the Northern Territory Planning Scheme. In June 2013, the framework was incorporated into the NT Planning Scheme. This framework provides for orderly and appropriate land use and development catering for a growing population and provides appropriate areas for future industrial development including road and rail networks, and protection of natural drainage systems and bore fields. A copy of the framework is at Attachment 5.

Alice Springs Region

Although geographically located below the Tropic of Capricorn, the town of Alice Springs is directly connected to the provision of essential services and infrastructure to that area north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Timing for consideration will be given to this area following the release of the White Paper.

Conclusion

With its mandated responsibilities for future land use planning in the Territory, coupled with its commitment to comprehensive consultation with all related bodies, the NT Planning Commission is in a position to assist the Joint Select Committee on Developing Northern Australia.

The NTPC would welcome the opportunity to present further submissions at a hearing.

HON. GARY NAIRN
Chairman, NT Planning Commission

17 February 2014

Attachments

Attachment 1	Extract from <i>Planning Act</i> (NT) on Planning Commission
Attachment 2	Media release – Appointment of NTPC Chairman
Attachment 3	Media release – Appointment of NTPC Members
Attachment 4	Towards a Darwin Regional Land Use Plan 2014
Attachment 5a, 5b	Tennant Creek Land Use Framework

Other References

NT Planning Commission website	www.planningcommission.nt.gov.au
2012/13 Annual Report - link to Publications	www.planningcommission.nt.gov.au/publications
Towards a Darwin Regional Land Use Plan	www.planningcommission.nt.gov.au/publications
Northern Territory Planning Scheme	http://lands.nt.gov.au/planning/planning-scheme