



Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

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## **Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia**

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia*.

AFDO has been established as a primary national voice to Government that fully represents the interests of people with disability across Australia. The mission of AFDO is to champion the rights of people with disability in Australia and help them participate fully in Australian life.

One of AFDO's member organisations, the National Ethnic Disability Alliance, has provided significant input into this submission on issues concerning people with a disability from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities, which we have included in Attachment 1.

### **Employment**

Developing Northern Australia can provide employment opportunities for people with disability. People with disability have a range of skills and experience that would be an asset to economic development in Northern Australia and could be a potential resource to address any skill shortages that may exist now and in the future.

Australia has a poor record of employment participation of people with disability. From 2003 to 2009 there was no significant change in the national labour force participation rate for people with disability (COAG Reform Council). Further, the recent ABS Survey of Disability and Carers (2012) has shown that the labour force participation of people with disability has *decreased* by 0.4% since 2003, indicating that in the last decade we have not only made no progress, but have in fact stagnated in addressing employment participation. With the unemployment rate almost double that of Australians without a disability (9.4% as compared to 4.9%), it is clear that any opportunity to increase the employment participation rate for people with disability should be pursued with vigour.

AFDO is working with the Government and a number of key stakeholders from the business and disability sectors to develop new initiatives to increase the employment participation of people with disability, which may be applicable to development in Northern Australia. AFDO would like to encourage the Government to include people with disability as a priority target group for employment recruitment in Northern Australia.

## **Income Support**

AFDO is concerned that people with a disability may experience a higher cost of living if they reside in remote communities in Northern Australia. Higher costs of goods and services, transport, aids and equipment and medication may result in a diminished standard of living or increase in poverty. It is for this reason we urge the Government to introduce some incentives, or additional payments, to people with disability who live in remote communities if they are unable to work or are in transition to work.

## **National Broadband Network**

The National Broadband Network (NBN) will provide greater opportunities for people with disability to access information and connect with their communities. In more remote areas, such as Northern Australia, access to high speed internet connection is even more important.

AFDO is concerned that the cost of the NBN may prevent people with disability on low income from accessing it. AFDO therefore recommends that a subsidy for people with disability for internet connection be introduced to enable them to stay connected to the Australian community.

## **Infrastructure Design and Development**

Economic, social and environmental benefits would be gained by applying Universal Design principles to all infrastructure development in Northern Australia. Universal Design principles give the highest level of access to the greatest number of people, and can be applied to all infrastructure including transport, housing, public buildings, road and pedestrian infrastructure and communication.

Applying Universal Design to new housing is much more cost effective than retrofitting to meet the changing needs of the population, particularly as people age. This applies to both privately owned homes and houses in private or public rental markets.

Economic benefits are achieved by a greater number of people having access to businesses as customers and employees; social benefits are achieved by reducing social isolation and promoting more connected communities; and environmental benefits are achieved by lower energy costs and greater longevity of buildings and infrastructure.

AFDO is a strong advocate for the application of Universal Design principles to ensure people with disability have equitable access to the built environment and communication, but everyone benefits from Universal Design.

Universal Design principles can be implemented through the application of a range of regulations, Australian Standards and guidelines. Some of these are the Building Code of

Australia (and associated building regulations), Australian Standard AS 1428, Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport and the Liveable Housing Design Guidelines. It is also advisable to engage the services of an Access Consultant in the design phase of buildings and infrastructure. A listing of accredited Access Consultants can be found at <http://www.access.asn.au/>

## **Consultation with Organisations representing People with Disability**

To ensure developments in Northern Australia are socially inclusive and reflect the principles of a civil society, it is imperative that the views of people with disability are included in the planning and implementation of all initiatives and projects.

In Australia there is a network of local, regional state and national organisations that represent people with disability. AFDO, the national peak body representing people with disability, has members and networks who have an extensive collective knowledge of the needs and views of people with disability. A particular organisation in this network with relevant knowledge of Northern Australia is the First Peoples Disability Network (Australia). This organisation is a national peak representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and their families and would be a good starting point when consulting with people with disability regarding developments in Northern Australia.

AFDO is keen to continue to support the Government to achieve sustainable and socially inclusive development in Northern Australia.

## **Tourism**

Tourism is a major contributor to economic development in Australia. Northern Australia is already a popular tourist destination and has the potential to attract even more tourists. One of the ways of doing this is to develop an Accessible Tourism Strategy to attract tourists who have access needs.

People with a disability account for some 8.2 million overnight trips and spend \$8 billion or 11 per cent of Australia's overall tourism expenditure (Victorian Employer's Chamber of Commerce). Providing easy access to tourist destinations is an effective business and industry strategy to increase the tourism spend. With ageing baby boomers being one of the fastest growing demographics in Australia, providing easy access to tourist destinations is of increasing importance.

Making information about tourist destinations more accessible, promoting the accessibility features of tourist destinations and applying Universal Design principles are just a few examples of steps to promote accessible tourism.

Tourism Victoria has developed a resource kit titled *Accessible Tourism – It's your Business*, which outlines possible strategies for tourist operators to attract tourists with access needs. This resource can be found at <http://www.tourism.vic.gov.au/business-tools-support/accessible-tourism.html#toolkit>

## **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)**

The NDIS is one of the most significant social reforms in Australia with a total budget of approximately \$22.41 billion at full roll-out. The NDIS could add value to developments in

Northern Australia by enabling people with a disability to contribute through employment, volunteerism and civic participation.

Opportunities could also exist for appropriately qualified organisations to work with the National Disability Insurance Agency to become registered providers for the NDIS. This would not only contribute to economic development of Northern Australia, but would also enable people with a disability who receive support packages to find a service provider in their local community.

The NDIS will be rolled out in stages in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia and AFDO would urge the Government to integrate the planned roll-out of the NDIS with developments in Northern Australia.





## Attachment 1.

### Commentary and Recommendations from the National Ethnic Disability Alliance

#### Employment

It is reported by COAG that the use of Commonwealth-delivered supported employment services, is decreasing, nationally and in most jurisdictions. (This report is available at <http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/disability/disability-2011-12-comparing-performance-across-australia>)

In the Northern Territory the rate of 3.2% in 2010–11 was reported at less than half the national average. Nationally, in 2010–11, 6.8% of Indigenous Australians with disability (or 4700 of 69 088) used open employment services, and for people born in non-English speaking countries the rate was 5.1%.

NEDA believes that the redefining and developing Northern Australia into an economic powerhouse can be a great opportunity to improve employment pathways for people with disability from CaLD backgrounds, as well as Indigenous and Torres Straits Islanders. This will enable these individuals to enter paid employment and will have a positive flow-on and will allow family members and/or carers to re-enter the workforce, especially if their lives have been dominated by the need to provide ongoing support to a family member with a disability.

#### Income Support

NEDA believes that it is more important to have better supports for people from CaLD backgrounds with a disability due to the eligibility requirements for DSP for migrants and/or refugees with a disability (10-Year waiting period).

For persons from NESB/CaLD communities with disability, the restrictions faced in receiving DSP highlights the need for better strategies and employment pathways to gain entry into the labour market for economic security and empowerment. The lack of income support reflects the incentives for better mechanisms and resources to be in place to support persons of NESB/CaLD communities with a disability to enter the labour market force.

As such, NEDA is supportive of the opportunities to encourage investment and innovation to Northern Australia, which may once again provide more employment opportunities for individuals who are unable to receive income support, or additional supports for themselves and/or their family members and carers.

#### Consultation with Organisations representing People with Disability

NEDA believes that all consultation processes should include CaLD communities. Based on ABS statistics (2013), 27% of those in Northern Territory speak other languages; and 17% are born overseas – as such, there is a significant number of CaLD and/or NESB

communities in NT and it is important to ensure that these individuals are also actively and extensively involved and included in the consultation processes.

NEDA believes that the Government need to implement better community engagement practices with NESB/CALD and more importantly, with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Of special concern are the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or those who are not linked into existing support networks and how these individuals can be better supported in the development of the The Coalition's [2030 Vision for Developing Northern Australia](#)

## **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)**

### **WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND NDIS**

An integral component that needs to be considered in the development of Northern Australia, is also to ensure that through the NDIS, the Government ensures that a workforce strategy to be in place in order to provide lifetime support to individuals with a disability; as well as for participants in the scheme to be properly supported and receive appropriate services for their individual needs, particularly for participants from NESB and/or CaLD communities with a disability.

NEDA is concerned that an efficient workforce strategy for the NDIS has not been adequately addressed, particularly for individuals from NESB and/or CaLD communities and more so for those people with disabilities living in remote areas of Northern Territory, that the scheme will not have the capacity to be responsive and provide them with culturally and linguistically appropriate and sensitive services due to the current limitations in the workforce.

Therefore, NEDA strongly argues for a NDIS workforce strategy to be reinforced as part of the Government's 2030 Vision for Developing Northern Australia in order to not only ensure that appropriate and responsive supports for people from CaLD backgrounds with a disability; but also to use the benefits of the scheme to boost economic transformation in the Northern Territory.

NEDA does not support the elimination of block funding (i.e.: HACCC for an example) as small remote and rural communities are reliant on these funds for service delivery; as much as choice and control are important as is individual packages some people in remote communities don't have the availability of services and delivery mechanisms that will allow them to procure services hence the continuation of block funding in these communities again very important for some aspects of the CaLD/ NESB community