



CAPE YORK SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

ABN 25 307 084 879

Incorporating local government represented by the Shires of Cook, Aurukun, Lockhart River, Mapoon and Napranum as well as the sectors of Land Stewardship, Tourism, Small Business, Agriculture, Mining, Community Development & Indigenous Business Development.

Mission: CYSF is the regional development & advocacy organisation for the people of Cape York. We do this by building capacity & self-sufficiency by supporting people's aspirations and empowering them to take control of their future.

12th March 2014

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

Dear Dr Pender

Re: Submission to the Joint Select Parliamentary Committee Inquiry on Northern Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the North Australia White Paper.

Cape York Sustainable Futures Inc (CYSF) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Parliamentary inquiry into Northern Australia. CYSF is the peak economic development organisation in Cape York Peninsula. CYSF previously Cape York Peninsula Development Association Inc (CYPDA Inc) was formed in 1987 to provide an independent forum to promote the development of Cape York Peninsula, an area covering 137,000 sq. kms. in one of Australia's most remote regions. Our group is apolitical, cross-sectional and considered a pioneer of community driven representation. It provides an open forum for debate and is the only organisation in the Peninsula to which everyone can belong and where everyone can have their say, with members coming from a cross section of the community including Indigenous people, pastoralists, small business owners, tourism operators, agricultural, community organisations, conservationists and local, state and federal government departments and agencies. We focus on building a cohesive empowered community with a vibrant diverse economy and strong social infrastructure that will help create a wealthy community where effective management of the environment provides for now and the future generations.

CYSF endorses the submission that RDAFNQTS has lodged in relation to Northern Australia and the strategic regional approach that will be developed and implemented. As such our submission will focus on Cape York issues which without a doubt will also fit in across North Australia.

Cape York Peninsula Overview

Cape York Peninsula is home for 16,000 people, almost three quarters of whom are Indigenous Australians. Their future, their concerns and aspirations must be an integral part of future planning, alongside issues of environmental and heritage conservation. These interests, human and environmental, should not be seen as being conflicting or incompatible.

Despite the existence of cattle grazing for around 150 years, Cape York Peninsula has a well earned reputation as a 'pristine wilderness', corroboration that the region has been exceptionally well managed for several thousand years. For the past several years, Cape York has had the imposition of the Wild Rivers legislation and more recently, select world heritage consultation which creates uncertainty amongst our residents, restricts their economic viability and is causing social stress.

The preservation and conservation of Cape York Peninsula's environmental and heritage values is the lynch pin of world heritage focus. However communities of people cannot be 'preserved'. On Cape York Peninsula we are dealing with dynamic and changing societies endeavouring to cope with the trials and pressures of the 21st Century. The right of the 16,000 residents to a positive and productive future on Cape York Peninsula and enhanced liveability of their communities are issues of social justice which cannot be disregarded.

The regional economy of Cape York Peninsula relies on primary industries and resources. Mining, cattle grazing, fishing and cropping are the main private sector industries. The public sector is the dominant employer via public administration, defence and community services. Tourism is perceived as an increasingly important source for sustainable economic development with significant investment by the Queensland Government in the Cape York Peninsula and Torres Tourism Development Action Plan 2008, which has initiated a number of tourism proposals and initiatives but with no money available for implementation.

Transport is a key component and major determinant of economic development on Cape York. Reliable, adequate, efficient and consistent transport systems are essential for significant business and industry development. Because the Wet Season closes roads for up to 4 months each year, Cape York relies heavily on air and sea freight and although the Peninsula Development Road is maintained by the Department of Transport and Main Roads, repairs wait upon the return of the dry. **This means that all economic activity including tourism in Cape York Peninsula is limited to May through to October each and every year.** The recent announcement of \$210M will make a huge difference but more is needed to not only bitumen the PDR but also the vast network of roads into the various Indigenous towns across Cape York.

Provision of infrastructure is a major challenge, and offers an immediate opportunity for investment. The majority of Cape York's communities rely on major diesel power generation systems with only the townships in the far south-east of the region connected to grid power.

Mobile phone and internet coverage is also accessible in most settled areas of the Cape. Telstra 'Next G' network has coverage within proximity of most towns and beyond that, satellite phones are necessary due to the remoteness created by vast uninhabited distances. It should be noted that there are big holes in service being available as well as landline communications being disrupted too often, leaving the whole region without telecommunications leading to centerlink services being cut, no eftpos and credit card facility stopping people having access to food. During the wet season when phones and news services are most needed, there are widespread outages. Telecommunications in Cape York are in need of a drastic overhaul.

Cape York is overlaid by a legislative framework of Acts and Regulations that place clear guidelines on development. Existing and pending legislation are important control mechanisms, but does sometimes form significant hurdles to regional development. This is what needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency so that progress can be made towards attaining a sustainable livelihood for the future generations in our region.

Our Opportunities

Right now we have the best opportunity provided to us with the Australia Government focusing of Northern Australia. It is imperative that we don't lose these opportunities and strive ahead for a vibrant and diverse future for the people of North Australia. CYSF has numerous studies and reports that we will make available to the Joint Committee for reference to the many economic and investment opportunities available but what we need to do first is remove the barriers that are impeding any progress. The following priorities have been developed following workshops CYSF have held across Cape York over the past few years.

1. COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

A recent survey undertaken by CYSF demonstrates clearly that the people of Cape York lack confidence in the future, feel there is a misuse of power and are constrained by rigid restrictive systems that hinder progress.

Actions: Engage community in policy and program development

◆ Introduce an immediate Moratorium on major policy decisions.

- Revoke the Wild Rivers legislation. It now looks like this will not occur with the Cape York Draft Plan.
- Moratorium on World Heritage proposal activity in Cape York.
- Launch investigation on status and justification of land tenure resolution process currently underway.
- Investigation of impact of grazing land buy back scheme
- Identify potential future uses for land already purchased to develop an economic base for future community development.
- Seek moratorium of pastoral lease dealings in Cape York until future land tenure arrangements are resolved as outlined above. This process has made some progress with the change of the Queensland Government but too much of the old ways are still in place. Too much land is under conservation leaving this land unmanaged and a threat to biosecurity.

◆ Undertake community forums involving all stakeholders to establish an agreed consultation and decision making process/framework as a blueprint for future government engagement. Cape York people do want to have a say in their future.

- Through elected local authority representation establish a community reference panel process that recognizes traditional ownership and land trust responsibilities and delivers on a broad community ownership of future policy direction.
- Support forums to engage broader community in the outcomes, direction and priority actions arising from the environmental management future workshops for Cape York run by CYSF. Seek broader endorsement of this program's direction by:
 - Resourcing the facilitation of 8 regional community forums across Cape York and report back to government

◆ Establish whole of community governance in partnership with government to determine and implement policy. Robust community governance frameworks are essential to the delivery of a community ownership framework that delivers on a broad consensus around policy direction. Not only that, current governance arrangements are failing people in remote areas. This needs to be addressed urgently.

- Seek direction from individual communities on workable community governance and community ownership models.
- Develop a concise and inclusive leadership structure is critical to the workability and functionality of the future governance arrangements to ensure inclusive representation.
- Provide a supporting mechanism such as appointed committees to provide technical, scientific, administrative and policy advice.
- Provide mentoring to ensure accountability, transparency and equity of process until each community is confident in process and systems.

2. RESOLVE LAND TENURE CONFUSION

Confusion and lack of clarity surrounding land tenure on Cape York is inhibiting growth.

Actions: Commit to urgent actions aimed at resolving land tenure issues to include freehold

- There is an urgent and ongoing need to resolve land tenure issues to encourage private investment across Cape York.
- Existing pastoral leases need greater security of tenure, the Delbessie and Cape York Heritage Act arrangements include onerous constraints and complex processes to achieve the requirements for longer terms and renewals, 99 year leases or freehold are recommended.
- The diversity policy for pastoral leases needs to be relaxed and more economic opportunities (tourism, conservation and others) permitted for existing lessees.
- There needs to be an accessible mechanism for entrepreneurs (indigenous and non-indigenous, family, private and corporate entities) to excise or create small leases for specific purposes (or indeed small freehold parcels) to facilitate economic opportunities in tourism, retail, services etc. across Cape York. The timeframe and costs of this needs to recognise and be commensurate with the value of such lands in a remote area with often only seasonal business potential.
- There is an urgent need cut the red tape and expense of ILUA's, for pastoralists and entrepreneurs. A Government facilitation service is recommended to realise Cape York economic opportunities.
- The process to have leases for indigenous and non-indigenous business on DOGIT and Aboriginal Freehold needs to be streamlined with proactive assistance and facilitation by Government. The timeframe needs to be much shorter with no undetermined impediments after commencement. The costs of the process (including ILUA and IDAS requirements) needs to be commensurate with the value of the land and its use.
- There is a need to facilitate indigenous and non-indigenous micro and small business enterprises to support tourism in National Parks. Arrangements for approvals and appropriate tenure (with dealable security) needs to be established (such as leases and concessions).
- On Cape York there are some leases due for renewal in the coming years. There needs to be specific recognition of these to ensure they have security of tenure and access to any new tenure arrangements.
- The Cape York Tenure Resolution process has been ongoing and appears to be continuing. There is substantial community concern about priorities and the ultimate land tenure mix across Cape York. The priorities for National Park acquisition and likely overall National Park estate should be publicly available.

3. SMALL BUSINESS AND TOURISM SUPPORT

CYSF has identified small business and tourism as being sustainable enterprise development opportunities in Cape York and a key weapon against welfare dependency.

Actions: Commit to a range of initiatives to encourage small business and tourism investment:

- ◆ Support tourism branding and ongoing marketing of Cape York.
 - Resource the LTO, Tourism Cape York to be able to undertake important development of the tourism industry in Cape York
 - Under CYSF, develop a tourism and small business support service to assist new enterprise development and achieve the aspirations of local people.
 - Review the previous CYPDA Cape York Tourism Strategy.
- ◆ Further develop visitor facilities on public lands such as national parks and foster commercial tourism and self drive visitor access to key areas.
- ◆ Allow for leases and planning approvals for commercial development on a wide variety of land tenures.
- ◆ Provide areas for community growth and consequential retail and service industries.

- ◆ Allow for leases and planning approvals for agribusiness development in suitable areas.
- ◆ Long term programs be established which train, employ and empower indigenous and local community staff.

4. INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND KNOWLEDGE

The people of Cape York have declared a major priority for the region is basic infrastructure to facilitate growth. Sealing of the Peninsula Development Road is a priority. Identify necessary infrastructure. Recent CYSF initiatives such as the Cape York Investment Prospectus – New Horizons and Opportunities, The OTL Project Final Report along with the current DEEDI project Growing Eco-Tourism on Cape York are a source of further information.

Action: Commit to provision of quarantined funding per annum for completion of the bitumen road to Weipa by 2020 and other infrastructure.

- ◆ Facilitate development approvals for sustainable uses with an economic benefit such as ecotourism and cultural tourism.
- ◆ Maintenance and ongoing development of community infrastructure such as roads, mail service delivery, telecommunications (Mobile phone coverage) and information technology, TV coverage from FNQ, power lines, water supplies and marine facilities.
 - The construction of bitumen road from Laura to Weipa (a distance of over 450 km) will provide a lifeline for all residents and become a potential tourism route for over 2 million visitors to the Cairns Region annually. The magnitude of this project is on a scale not seen since Western Australia opened up their North West Coastal Highway.
 - Improve access to existing knowledge resources, baseline data, natural resource condition trend information and computer based mapping services through regionally specific internet databases and online interactive mapping websites.

5. SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The people of Cape York Peninsula want sustainable growth and protection of the regions intrinsic values.

It is widely acknowledged that we need to break the vicious circle of despair, welfare dependence and social breakdown which prevails on Aboriginal communities and end the uncertainties and stress relating to all landholders over lack of security and an unknown future. Enabling an environment in which personal and community wealth can be created will go a long way towards achieving that objective.

Actions: Commit to removing the impediments to regional growth

- ◆ Recall or remove the impediments of major constraint/concern to the communities imposed by the Wild Rivers and other legislation.
- ◆ Postpone consultation on world heritage. Urgently finalise work on cultural and natural values and their threats/conservation needs. Engage the whole of the Cape York community when there is a management framework and proposed boundaries which reflect values and management needs.
- ◆ Confirm that any new mining lease/new mine will be assessed in accordance with stringent environmental impact and in the context of the social, cultural and ecological values of Cape York.
- ◆ In order to foster a stronger economic base, there needs to be linkage to and close collaboration with a significant population base. Ideally consider Cairns as a key service delivery centre for Cape York and the Far North Queensland region.

6. HEALTH & WELL BEING

Action: promote all aspects of healthy, educated and safe communities and provide for growth in social change management and opportunities

7. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND WORLD HERITAGE

Conservation groups and outside interests intent on declaration of Cape York Peninsula as a World Heritage area are ignoring the needs and wishes of the 16,000 residents.

CYSF supports the conservation of the Cape's natural and cultural values for future generations. CYSF considers this can be achieved with or without world heritage listing. The concerns with world heritage listing are the potential loss of local self-determination, the additional environmental impact/approval process and potential land use constraints on economic development of the Cape.

The potential to nominate parts of the Cape for world heritage listing for natural value and as a cultural landscape is because of the landscape stewardship of current and past landowners. The most important aspect for the future environmental management of Cape York is resourcing broad acre land conservation and stewardship. There is a need to resolve tenure issues and build community capacity before there is any consideration of World Heritage as an option.

Action: Commit to a transparent and inclusive community consultation process. Develop a future consultation blueprint coming from the community as a whole before:

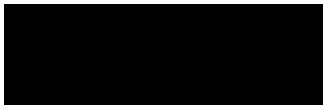
- ◆ **Engaging all Cape York residents, indigenous and non-indigenous and not excluding lease holders or industry in a negotiable manner.**

Action: Commit to Strategic Conservation and Stewardship:

- ◆ **Focus on identifying and highlighting key conservation and overall habitat values across Cape York, determining stewardship priorities and establishing long term programs for these (fire, weeds, feral animals, catchment integrity, protecting riparian, wetland and identified key habitats etc.)**
 - Develop a community owned NRM plan for Cape York and have funding fit for purpose as opposed to political outcomes.
 - Support 5 year programs to plan and implement fire, weed, feral animal, threatened species, catchment management and biodiversity programs.
 - Create a high profile program of excellence in environmental and community stewardship.
 - Support jobs, training and stewardship programs to build community skills and knowledge.
 - Support carbon and biodiversity market opportunities and commercial social responsibility and partnership programs to broaden long term employment and capacity building efforts.
 - Cape York Peninsula is one of the last strongholds for nesting sea turtles remaining in the world. Feral pigs and abandoned fishing nets are a major threat to their future. Committed long term support is required to expand conservation activities and reduce the impact of these threatening processes.
 - Determine the Cape York boundary in the area of the Joint Management Area (JMA) ideally by engaging the residents of the area as opposed to existing bodies or bureaucrats being engaged.

CYSF is looking forward to working further with the Committee in this most important opportunity for a vibrant diverse North Australia.

Yours sincerely



Trish Butler
Chief Executive Officer

- Appendix 1 The Future for Environmental Management on Cape York
- Appendix 2 Sustainable Social & Economic Growth for Cape York – A plan for immediate action
- Appendix 3 New Horizons and Opportunities
- Appendix 4 CYP Economic & Infrastructure Framework Report
- Appendix 5 Cape York World Heritage Discussion Paper
- Appendix 6 The Potential Economic Benefits of Protecting and Presenting Cape York
- Appendix 7 Cape York EcoTourism Feasibility Study
- Appendix 8 Overland Telegraph Line Report
- Appendix 9 Cape York Land Tenure for Economic Development Submission
- Appendix 10 Identifying indigenous business opportunities in the recreational fishing tourism industry on Cape York Peninsula