

Northern Australia Taskforce
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
Canberra ACT 2600

21 August 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

The Kimberley to Cape¹ Network is a growing group of organisations and individuals from multiple sectors (e.g. Indigenous, agriculture, fishing, mining, tourism, environment) who want to work together to support development and conservation across Northern Australia that maintains natural and cultural values and strengthens communities. It provides an ongoing forum to improve dialogue and understanding across sectors, and to promote future possibilities based on common values and goals. The recent Northern Australian Futures Roundtable² brought over 50 organisations from eight sectors together and, among other tasks, identified the common elements of a successful future for the North as:

- a shared vision supported by long term collaborative planning and decision-making
- greater acceptance of, respect for, and collaboration with, Indigenous people
- real acknowledgement that cultural, social, environmental and economic outcomes are interdependent rather than mutually exclusive
- an economy that is diverse, resilient, environmentally sustainable, equitable and based on world-leading industry practices
- recognition that healthy country supports healthy people.

Therefore to be effective in optimising the development potential of Northern Australia, and in addressing its development needs, the White Paper needs to look beyond food bowls, fossil fuels and traditional large scale infrastructure to a future based on maintaining and enhancing the North's Indigenous cultures, diverse communities, and globally significant natural environments and resources. It is strategic, economically rational and necessary to build a more diverse and resilient socio-economic fabric based on these outstanding attributes.

Keeping this in mind it is important to clearly articulate in the White Paper the purpose of developing the North (beyond economic goals), who/what development should benefit, and what existing values need to be maintained. We propose that the White Paper adopts the following principles³ in this regard:

- A resilient, diverse and sustainable economy for Northern Australia is necessary to underpin the wellbeing of its communities, the long-term management of its resources and its contribution to society
- Northern Australia's unique, intact and globally-significant natural and cultural values must be recognised, utilised and safeguarded as central to its future
- Indigenous interests must be recognised, and northern development and socio-economic development need to be pursued together, since neither is sustainable, nor equitable, without the other
- Development must involve genuine collaboration with local communities and be compatible with local cultures and conditions.

Such core principles should shape the goals of economic development in northern Australia as well as the outcome tests against which success is measured.

¹ please see Attachment A; ^{2,3} from the Northern Australian Futures Roundtable, please see Attachment B

We recommend the following supporting actions be embedded in the White Paper and in the delivery of policy priorities consequent to it:

Actions and policy priorities for the White Paper and beyond

1. Recognise and support strategic and systematic development and conservation planning across northern Australia, in collaboration with communities and at multiple scales (local, regional and landscape), to identify for example areas for development/conservation, values that need to be protected, criteria for landuse compatibility and locations of potential conflict and agreement (ToR Tasks 1 to 3 and Questions A5, B6, B7, B8, D1, D5). *Kimberley to Cape is scoping a strategic planning initiative in this regard.*
2. Include in the stocktake of natural assets (ToR Task 1) information on the North's unique and internationally significant landscape and biodiversity values (and their threats). The comparative advantage of Northern Australia's intact natural and cultural values has been identified as an increasingly scarce and valuable asset (eg CSIRO Megatrends report) and there is great potential for industries based on safeguarding it (Qs A5, B6, B8, C2, D1). *We are pursuing a 'connected landscape' initiative to maintain the world's last large tropical savanna and its outstanding values.*
3. Building on Northern Australia's natural and cultural comparative advantage, identify the opportunities and support mechanisms required to foster high socio-economic benefit, low ecological footprint industries such as renewable energies, culture based economies, knowledge economies, bioprospecting, ecosystem service-based industries, and multiple forms of tourism (sports, experiential, medical, eco etc) (ToR Task 1, Qs B7, D1, D5). *One mechanism being scoped by Kimberley to Cape here is 'Marketing & maintaining what's unique about the North'.*
4. Ensure policy actions use and build on the work of Traditional Owners and Indigenous bodies such as the North Australian Indigenous Experts Forum on Sustainable Economic Development and the Kimberley and Cape York Appropriate Economies Roundtables, and support mechanisms to run and engage with ongoing collaborative processes (ToR Task 2 and Qs B6, B8, D1, D5).
5. Recognise that the cumulative benefits of local and small to medium scale projects often exceed those of 'mega' projects. For proposed large/high impact developments, ensure robust benefit and impact assessments, risk assignments and insurances to avoid degradation and legacy issues (ToR Task 2 and Qs A5, B6,7,8, D1,2,5). *Kimberley to Cape is currently investing what this might look like via its 'Shared policy framework for large developments' initiative.*
6. In addition to identifying economic and social infrastructure, identify the environmental and cultural infrastructure needed to support and maintain the region, and identify ways to support planning and investment in this (ToR Task 3 and Qs A1, A3, B7, B8, C2).
7. Heed existing and emerging science, the lessons of the past and elsewhere, the knowledge of local communities (including Traditional Knowledge), the rights of existing users, and climate change, invasive species and other predictions, to better understand and communicate the positive and negative impacts of development options, and to ensure that options work within ecological and cultural boundaries (ToR tasks 1-3, Qs B8, C1,C6, D5). This is especially applicable to the Green Paper's focus on water and dams.
8. Engage Northern Australians, especially its Indigenous people, and others, in a genuine dialogue about the purpose of development, future aspirations, priorities and associated policies, and hear local voices and values. Also ensure development is based on a genuine free, prior and informed consent approach and that sufficient resources and time are allowed for this (ToR Tasks 1-3).

Please find a response to the Green Paper's six possible policy directions below and information on Kimberley to Cape and the Northern Australian Futures Roundtable in Attachments A and B.

Importantly please note this submission complements, but sits behind, any individual submissions made by signatories.

Kimberley to Cape's ongoing work will helpfully inform the White Paper and how its policy priorities and actions are best delivered for the benefit of all Australians, particularly those that live and work

in the north. For questions or more information regarding this joint submission please contact Dr Clare Taylor (email kimberleytocape@iinet.net.au).

We look forward to working with you toward a more equitable, economically resilient and environmentally sustainable future for Northern Australia.

Yours sincerely,



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Administrator of the Diocese of Townsville

Bishop Christopher Saunders, Diocese of
Broome (Kimberley region)

Response to the Green Paper's six possible policy directions:

Infrastructure

We reinforce

- "infrastructure need not focus exclusively on large scale or 'mega' projects. Smaller scale projects, upgrades, maintenance, or better use of existing infrastructure can all deliver productivity benefits, often outweighing those of larger and more costly projects" p46
- "... new approaches to infrastructure planning and prioritising... need to balance potential long term benefits with more immediate implications" p46
- "...value for money must remain a cornerstone of public funding" p47

We recommend

- developing a more flexible approach to investment in infrastructure to recognise social, environmental and cultural infrastructure needs
- that planning and prioritising of infrastructure be transparent and include eg risk assignment, co-benefits, cumulative impacts, legacy etc.
- moving away from assuming that large scale infrastructure is prerequisite for success
- that a fair component of the economic benefits of significant new infrastructure be retained within the region, and specifically be used to contribute to actions that provide a net benefit to regional biodiversity and communities.

Land

We reinforce

- "Northern Australia is characterised by rich cultures, unique landscapes and biodiversity" p1
- "the north is not an uncharted frontier" p1
- "these [landscapes] are globally significant and support rich biodiversity, with plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world" p6
- "growth markets for biodiversity and ecosystem services could provide further economic opportunities" p27
- "effective management of these unique landscapes will create opportunities for increased tourism and ensure future generations continue to enjoy these world class environments" p27
- "Indigenous communities in northern Australia should be able to use their land for further economic development" p48
- "the focus should be on improving the prospects for Indigenous Australians to influence and benefit from their interests in land, without compromising their cultural integrity" p49

We recommend

- ensuring that "more efficient native title processes" does not mean reducing, narrowing or negatively affecting native title rights and interests

- recognising and supporting important co-benefits and positive externalities from land management activities (eg weeds, fire, ferals) by ranger groups and others
- investigating options for financing Indigenous land-based businesses in Northern Australia eg environmental services, culture-based economies and carbon farming
- recognising land holders, claimants and managers in addition to land owners
- recognising that the North's natural resources are not underutilised (p27) from an environmental and cultural perspective.

Water

We reinforce

- "Water systems support multiple uses... the amount of water available is finite, so any new use inevitably limits the amount available for existing industries and communities" p37

We recommend

- caution regarding investment in large dams and a moving away from the assumption that large water projects are a prerequisite for development
- recognising that many development options do not require "new" water, that water in the North is currently used effectively to support existing industries (eg recreational and commercial fishing, prawning, tourism and recreation, irrigated horticulture and floodplain grazing), and that continuous improvements in water use efficiency within consumptive water-use industries will facilitate their development.
- strengthening the implementation of NWI related water planning and policy across Northern Australia
- better recognising Indigenous rights and interests in water, eg via strategic reserves.

Business, Trade and Investment

We recommend

- supporting economies that a) are locally based, injecting income into local economies, b) create enduring employment opportunities and economic independence, c) strengthen local communities, d) help maintain cultural obligations, and e) complement rather than compete with existing values
- promoting business development policies that build on and safeguard the North's competitive advantages such as its outstanding natural capital, traditional knowledge and strategic location via eg economies such as education, tourism, recreation, defence, bio-prospecting, art, wild fisheries, renewable energies, carbon, and cultural and environmental services
- supporting tenure reforms that promote diversified, ecologically sustainable and culturally based economies.

Education, Research and Innovation

We reinforce

- “Further development of education, science and research services in the north will support innovation and development, grow and skill the local workforce, and diversify the northern economy. The north has potential as an education hub, with world class vocational and higher educational facilities delivering economic benefits... There are also opportunities to meet the needs of emerging tropical economies around the world as the north is one of the few established economies with this expertise” p60

We recommend

- supporting the expansion of the tropical knowledge economy eg in health, mining, building design, carbon, agriculture, fisheries, conservation, and natural resource and disaster management
- supporting the AgNorth CRC and research relevant to natural and cultural values
- acknowledging the constraints of existing knowledge of north Australian environments, particularly with respect to thresholds of environmental sustainability, and adopting the precautionary principle if uncertainties exist.

Governance

We reinforce

- “Closer engagement with local communities and organisations will ...help governments ensure policies reflect the needs of the north” p63
- “...increase community participation in policy development and implementation” p65
- “ Local communities are best placed to find solutions to local problems”p65

We recommend

- supporting the network of community focused organisations such as regional NRM groups, NAILSMA, Regional Development Australia committees, ranger groups etc
- supporting culturally appropriate governance as a cornerstone policy for the region
- making Northern Australia especially its current residents more ‘business ready’ in preparation for development
- working with communities to go about “improving coordination, building community engagement and strengthening local capacity” as “an essential part of the Government’s ongoing commitment to the north” p65, and to “strengthen institutional capacity within — and encourage more collaboration between — [local] organisations” since they “play a key role in developing the north” p65
- using local design and implementation of initiatives to engage, build capacity and facilitate collaboration and economic participation.