

17<sup>th</sup> February, 2014

Committee Secretary  
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia  
PO Box 6021  
Canberra ACT 2600  
[jscna@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscna@aph.gov.au)

ABN 44 798 638 628  
P: 07 4760 1612  
F: 07 4778 2952  
E: [info@rdanwq.org.au](mailto:info@rdanwq.org.au)  
PO Box 1669  
Townsville QLD 4810  
[www.rdanwq.org.au](http://www.rdanwq.org.au)

Dear Dr Pender

*Re: Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia*

On behalf of the Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland (RDA) Committee, I write to congratulate the Government and the Joint Select Committee on your focus and interest in addressing the challenges and developing the opportunities in Northern Australia and wish to provide comments in regard to the above Inquiry.

Our RDA Committee, with a 100% footprint in Northern Australia, is pleased to provide input and ongoing support to the Australian Government in the drafting of policy and programmes for the development of Northern Australia. Within our region, which covers 27% of the population and 15% of the area of Northern Australia, we have undertaken extensive consultation to create a Regional Roadmap using the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Regional Economic Development Framework. Across the four RDA regions of Northern Queensland, we have worked collaboratively to develop the Northern Queensland Strategy. This strategy is informed by the Regional Roadmaps of each RDA to focus on issues and opportunities of common interest from the Tropic of Capricorn to Cape York and the Gulf. On the basis of our regional and cross-regional work, we make comments below about the critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support the long term growth of the region.

#### **Background to RDA's Interest in the Development of Northern Australia**

Regional Development Australia was established by the Australian Government as a network of 55 Committees across Australia made up of local community leaders who are volunteers to champion the development of long-term sustainable communities. (Refer to [www.rda.gov.au](http://www.rda.gov.au))

The Regional Development Australia Committee for Townsville and North West Queensland (RDA) is an incorporated not-for-profit association and has twelve ministerially appointed members. Funding is provided by the Federal Government and in-kind support is provided by the Queensland Government. The Committee's purpose is to achieve a prosperous, sustainable, cohesive and liveable region. Our region covers 15 local government areas of Boulia, Burdekin, Burke, Carpentaria, Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Doomadgee, Flinders, Hinchinbrook, McKinlay, Mornington Island, Mount Isa, Palm Island, Richmond and Townsville. (Refer to [www.rdanwq.org.au](http://www.rdanwq.org.au))



An Australian Government Initiative



Queensland Government

RDA regularly engages and consults with regional stakeholders including Mayors, Councillors and Council Executives, Regional Economic Development Organisations, Natural Resource Management Groups, Chambers of Commerce, State and Federal Government representatives and other community representatives. Based on these consultations, RDA has developed a Regional Roadmap 2013-16 which informs the Federal and Queensland Governments of the regional priorities that need to be addressed based on the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Regional Economic Development Framework. RDA works with partners across the region to progress priorities that support the long term vision. (Refer to <http://www.rdatanwq.org.au/regional-roadmap> for the Regional Roadmap and Appendix of data including information on consultations undertaken.)

### **Townsville and North West Queensland Region Snapshot**

**Population** - 265,500 persons, accounting for 27% of Northern Australia's population; 5.8% of Queensland; 1.145% of Australia

**Projected population** - 386,652 persons by June 2031

**Area** - 449,190 km<sup>2</sup>, accounting for 15% of the Northern Australia's region; 25.9% of Queensland; 5.8% of Australia

**Population distribution** - 70% of the region's population lives in Townsville, the largest city in northern Australia. Mount Isa is the second largest city with a population of 22,800 while 22% of the region's residents live in shires of populations from 494 to 17,900 persons, indicating the large variation in population density across the region.

**Age distribution** - 21.1% of the persons in the region are aged 0 – 14 years; 68.3% are aged 16 – 64 years; 10.5% are aged 65 years and over. The population ratio of people in the 45 – 64 age statistical bracket is 2.2 times the number currently in the 65 plus statistical bracket.

**Education** - 50.9% of residents aged over 15 years completed high school to Year 11 or 12. This compares to a state average of 55.3%. Of residents aged over 15 years, 13,927 have not completed education beyond Year 8.

**Socio-Economic Status** - The Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage suggests that the region has a higher percentage of population that are more disadvantaged as compared to being in the higher status quintiles. Noteworthy is that the Indigenous Local Government areas of Palm Island, Doomadgee and Mornington Island experience almost 100% of their populations as being in the most disadvantaged quintile.

**Industry** - The largest contributors to gross regional product are mining, manufacturing, public administration and safety sectors, followed by construction and retail trade.

**Employment** - As compared to Queensland there is a larger percentage of employed in the agricultural, mining, electricity, public administration and education and training industries.

**Unemployment** - Within the Townsville area, Palm Island experiences the highest unemployment level at 9.3% (December 2012). Whilst in the Mount Isa area, unemployment as of June 2011 was 5.4%, with particularly high unemployment in the areas of Burke (17.6 per cent), Doomadgee (17.1 per cent), Mornington (12.1 per cent) and Carpentaria (11.3 per cent).

### **Potential for the development of the region's mineral, energy, agricultural, tourism defence and other industries**

We provide comments on the above item in the Terms of Reference based on our experience and knowledge of Townsville and North West Queensland's globally significant industries and opportunities. The Townsville and North West Queensland region has:

- **a strong and diverse regional economy, contributing a total of \$18.4 billion to Queensland's Gross Regional Product (2010-2011)**, although sub-regions are often reliant on one core industry such as mining or agriculture
- **an internationally significant mining industry**, with an annual output worth approximately \$14.7 billion from the North West Minerals Province which contains an estimated 75% of Queensland's total metal resources, however there are problems with inefficiency and safety on regional roads and rail that need to be addressed through planning and investment including greater focus on transferring freight to the rail network
- **excellent potential for future mines** to open but this requires research, planning and solutions for capacity constraints
- **four major export-focussed minerals processing facilities** in Townsville and Mount Isa, but they are exposed to the high cost of energy which is impacting the viability of expanding operations and long-term sustainability
- **substantial agricultural and grazing industries**, with a focus on sugar (34% of Queensland's total production) and beef production (25% of Queensland's cattle), with new growth opportunities around irrigated agriculture in the Flinders River Precinct emerging
- A **leading world class university** (top 4% in the world) presence in the region, through James Cook University, with recognised research in areas such as marine sciences, biodiversity, tropical ecology and environments, global warming, tourism, and tropical medicine and public health care in under-served populations
- A wide range of **applied knowledge and expertise** on how to innovate in industries operating in the tropics, but this is yet to be fully developed into a successful framework for exporting to the \$40 trillion economy in the tropics of the world
- **excellent port infrastructure with three ports** in Townsville (handled 12.8% value of all of Queensland's exports in 2011 – 2012), Lucinda and Karumba but further investment is required into the rail access to enhance productivity

## Critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support the long term growth of the region

As per the above item in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, we wish to provide advice on priorities that we believe are not only relevant to the Townsville and North West Queensland region, but also more broadly across Northern Australia.

The following list is drawn from our experience in consulting extensively with 15 councils and other community representatives within the region and includes infrastructure, services and governance.

#	Priority	Potential actions
1	<p>Investment into energy infrastructure, and in particular, electricity generation and transmission including renewable generation – this will enable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost competitive delivery of electricity to attract and retain industry.</li> <li>• Reliable and affordable electricity supplies to residents and business.</li> <li>• Lower emissions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Electricity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the findings of the North and North West Queensland Sustainable Resource Feasibility Studies Report.</li> <li>• Encourage investment into electricity infrastructure solutions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Renewable Energy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage investment attraction into renewable generation in the region.</li> <li>• Encourage investment into transmission infrastructure to support the investment into electricity generation to get the electricity to markets.</li> </ul>
2	<p>Investment into urgent regional road priorities – this will improve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety and efficiency on transport routes for residents and tourists.</li> <li>• Productivity on supply chains for industry to access markets.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Roads</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund improvements to major northern roads, eg: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Bruce Highway</u> - the Haughton River Floodplain and Pink Lily Lagoon Upgrades (Townsville-Burdekin), the Townsville North Access Intersections Upgrade, Cattle and Frances Creeks Upgrades (Ingham) and Yellow Gin Creek Upgrade (Home Hill)</li> <li>○ <u>Kennedy Developmental Road/ Hann Highway</u> - sealing of the Hann Highway from The Lynd to Hughenden</li> <li>○ <u>Flinders Highway</u> –improvements to safety hazards and flood prone sectors of the Flinders and Barkly Highways</li> <li>○ <u>Savannah Way</u> – upgrades to the Gulf Developmental Road from the Kennedy Highway to the Burke Developmental Road, and then Doomadgee Road East and West through to the NT border</li> <li>○ <u>Landsborough and Barkly Highways</u> – upgrades from Winton to the NT border</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Encourage investment into intermodal transport solutions, for example, in Cloncurry.</li> </ul>

#	Priority	Potential actions
3	Investment into rail, intermodal, port and airport infrastructure to support productivity on supply chains for industry to access markets.	<p><b>Rail</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage investment into rail transport productivity improvements and development of capacity to meet future demand on the North West Rail Corridor connecting Mount Isa and Townsville.</li> <li>• Invest into the Townsville Eastern Rail Corridor (TEARC) to improve productivity for rail freight into the Port of Townsville.</li> </ul> <p><b>Airports and Air Access</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more funding opportunities for local governments, and in particular those in rural and remote areas, to address maintenance and improvements in airport infrastructure including but not limited to runways, hand stands, terminals and parking.</li> <li>• Provide funding support and encourage investment into airports and in particular those that are under great pressure from the mining industry, such as Cloncurry Airport.</li> <li>• Encourage an increase in air services.</li> <li>• Support the delivery of affordable air access for remote or isolated communities, such as Mornington Island, Doomadgee, Normanton, Burketown, Boulia and Palm Island.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ports</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support investment into expanded port operations at the Port of Townsville in accordance with feasibility studies based on supply and market demand.</li> <li>• Support the development of a Master Plan for Karumba Port and identified investment opportunities associated with feasibility studies based on supply and market demand.</li> </ul>
4	<p>Communications infrastructure improvements across the region including mobile and high speed broadband access, to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents, in particular those in rural and remote areas, with access to health, education and other online services.</li> <li>• Industry with access to productivity improvements and markets.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the roll out of high speed broadband to all communities with solutions that will ensure equity of access and opportunity.</li> <li>• Provide funding programmes to address communications infrastructure gaps such as mobile coverage black spots. E.g. mobile and broadband infrastructure into towns like Greenvale and many like them across rural and remote areas in order to address safety issues associated with communications regarding accidents and natural disasters, connectivity for business purposes including exporting and for attracting and retaining workers and their families.</li> </ul>
5	Planning and solutions for water quality improvements, sustainable access to water and its storage to expand agriculture, grazing and other industries.	<p><b>Water</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more funding opportunities for local governments and in particular those in rural and remote areas, to address water quality, storage and supply requirements for domestic consumption.</li> <li>• Encourage investment into water infrastructure for industrial and agricultural developments.</li> </ul>
6	Identification of new mining and minerals processing opportunities in the region to ensure the future prosperity of the region.	<p><b>Mining</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the findings of the MITEZ North West Queensland Strategic Development Study to identify new mining and minerals processing opportunities.</li> </ul>

#	Priority	Potential actions
7	Development of the branding, positioning and exporting of Tropical Knowledge and Expertise.	<p><b>Tropical Expertise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund the CRC for Northern Australia, promoting research and business linkages for industries of strength and opportunity in the north.</li> <li>• Fund collaboration to position and develop business and particularly export opportunities associated with tropical expertise.</li> <li>• Provide funding support to the Tropical Knowledge and Innovation Centre – a partnership between James Cook University and the private sector - as identified in the Northern Queensland Strategy.</li> <li>• Position Australian Trade Commission executives within the major cities in the region to promote opportunities for exporting, in particular to other tropical economies.</li> </ul>
8	Improved education attainment levels to provide more opportunities in the region to ensure the future prosperity of the region.	<p><b>Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate the importance of and awareness of the issue of lower education attainment levels in the region (within the community – not just in the education sector) and develop strategies to achieve better outcomes.</li> <li>• Ensure equality of access to high speed broadband to enable engagement by all in online education opportunities.</li> <li>• Support initiatives that develop skills and encourage lifetime learning.</li> <li>• Support programs to develop health literacy</li> </ul>
9	Land tenure security for leasehold land, lessening the disincentive for investment in the region.	<p><b>Land</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify Native Title processes for all parties</li> </ul>
10	Funding opportunities for Local Governments to develop community infrastructure for access, health, culture, the arts, sport and recreation.	<p><b>Funding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide funding programs to Local Government to address enhanced liveability for attraction and retention of people.</li> <li>• Invest in major regional lifestyle infrastructure that will encourage and support attraction of workers and families to Northern Australia (eg Stadium Northern Australia in Townsville)</li> </ul>
11	Maintenance and improvement of health and social services infrastructure to meet current and projected needs.	<p><b>Health and Social Services Facilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in facilities that will meet regional needs, such as The Salvation Army Multi-Purpose Centre in Townsville (addressing drug and alcohol rehabilitation) and The Village project developed by Flexi Queensland in Ayr (providing housing solutions for those with a disability).</li> <li>• Provide funding opportunities for high care and services facilities throughout the region.</li> <li>• Investigate unique partnership opportunities with the State Government to meet increasing aged needs</li> </ul>
12	Coordinated emergency, social and health care, including provision of aged care facilities and health care services.	<p><b>Health and Aged Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for greater collaboration to streamline Federal and State health and social services delivery to reduce duplication of services, identify gaps and create efficiency gains.</li> <li>• Ensure the equality of access to high speed broadband to enable access by all, and especially those in remote areas, to tele-health and online health education services.</li> </ul>
13	Availability of affordable housing.	<p><b>Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate innovative multi agency solutions to create supply of affordable housing.</li> <li>• Create policy and funding programs to attract investment to meet social and community needs.</li> </ul>

#	Priority	Potential actions
14	Interconnection abilities through transport options for people and freight.	<p><b>Public Transport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead discussion and research on public transport options for regional towns.</li> <li>• Encourage investment into public transport as an enabler for better outcomes in health, education, youth engagement, social inclusion and community well-being and justice.</li> </ul>
15	<p>Promotion of the region for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition and development of the region's competitive advantages in existing industries and the attraction of investment and business in both existing and new sectors.</li> <li>• Attracting skilled workers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Agriculture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the findings of the Northern Queensland Irrigated Agricultural Strategy Governance Committee that focuses on the Flinders River and Gilbert River for expanding irrigated agriculture in the region.</li> <li>• Encourage investment into value adding for agriculture and pastoral industries.</li> <li>• Provide funding into projects that promote innovation and greater productivity such as the Pacific Reef Bioremediation Aquaculture Project in Ayr which is a partnership between MBD Energy and James Cook University and is included in the Northern Queensland Strategy.</li> <li>• Support the strengthening and development of existing primary and downstream processing industries, especially those with competitive advantage.</li> <li>• Promote opportunities for exporting, in particular to Asia, through Australian Trade Commission work in the region.</li> </ul> <p><b>Industries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the strengthening and development of existing industries, especially those with competitive advantage. For example support investment attraction into new tourism infrastructure including educational tourism such as the Be Engulfed Monsoon Experience / Monsoon Centre in Normanton, Carpentaria Shire.</li> <li>• Support the attraction of new industries, especially those that can leverage access to high speed broadband as it is rolled out in the region.</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in regional branding and promotional activities that raise the profile of Northern Australia, its opportunities and advantages to investors, financial institutions, industries, customers, workers and tourists – both within Australia and overseas</li> </ul>
16	Valuing of the resource base and its contributing value to the region's output and industry.	<p><b>Natural Resource Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement funding programs that support the region's Natural Resource Management Groups.</li> </ul> <p><b>Environmental Stewardship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop policies that adhere to the principles of natural resource management stewardship.</li> <li>• Encourage investment into facilities and programs that support natural resource management.</li> <li>• Support the case for appropriate natural resource management stewardship in new industrial development proposals.</li> </ul>
17	Coordinated and planned delivery of infrastructure needs for the region.	<p><b>Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a Northern Australia 30-Year Infrastructure Plan.</li> <li>• Collaborate with State and Territory authorities for additional planning instruments, as required, to assist in coordination of future infrastructure and land use.</li> </ul>
18	Support collaborative arrangements that will strengthen opportunities for the region.	<p><b>Statistical Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure ongoing collection and distribution of ABS and other data to decision-makers at all levels of government and in communities.</li> <li>• Undertake a service population profile to be undertaken throughout the region. This will then take into account the visiting Fly-In, Fly-Out or Drive-In, Drive-Out workforce impact on service suppliers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the promotion of leadership, development and award and recognition</li> </ul>

#	Priority	Potential actions
		<p>programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote individuals and organisations making a difference to the sustainable future of the region.</li> </ul> <p><b>Collaboration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilise the RDA network to enhance community consultation and development of the White Paper on Northern Australia Development.</li> <li>• Reference existing materials and data collected by the RDA network and partnerships such as the Northern Queensland Strategy.</li> </ul> <p><b>Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly consult with regional stakeholders, such as the RDA network.</li> <li>• Monitor regional media for developments on regional issues.</li> </ul> <p><b>Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a larger Australian Government presence throughout the region.</li> <li>• Support the Queensland Government to decentralise government agencies as part of the Queensland Plan's regionalisation focus.</li> </ul>

I would be pleased to expand on any comments or answer any questions you may have and can be reached on 0429 468 606 or by email at [Manfred@harboursat.com.au](mailto:Manfred@harboursat.com.au) alternatively you can make contact with our Chief Executive Officer Ms Glenys Schuntner on 07 4760 1612 or at [ceo@rdanwq.org.au](mailto:ceo@rdanwq.org.au). My RDA Committee and I look forward to further engagement in the development of Northern Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Woodhouse', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Paul Woodhouse**

Chairman

Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland Committee

Cc: Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald  
Senator the Hon Jan McLucas  
Mr Ewen Jones, Member for Herbert  
Mr George Christensen, Member for Dawson  
The Hon Bob Katter, Member for Kennedy  
Mr David Williamson, Head, Northern Australia Taskforce

Att: Townsville and North West Queensland Regional Roadmap 2013-16  
Northern Queensland Strategy

