

Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
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Dear Committee Members

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

North West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (NWQROC) is composed of membership of Councils located throughout the gulf and north-west Queensland regions, including Burke, Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Doomadgee, Etheridge, Flinders, McKinlay, Mount Isa and Richmond. The NWQROC's mission is to foster cooperation and promote resource sharing among member Councils to effectively develop and promote regional priorities, including developing future visions and strategies to advocate to other levels of government.

The member Councils of the NWQROC welcome the opportunity to lodge submissions with respect to the *Development of Northern Australia* and see that a coordinated, consistent and collaborative approach linked to tangible operational documents and budgets is the key to seeing real improvements on the ground in Northern Australia and in particular the member area regions.

Equitable Zone Tax Allowance

The NWQROC sees an overhaul of the Australian Governments *Zone Tax Allowance*, as being critical in order to make it fairer for all residents of remote and rural areas of Australia.

Key Points being:

- The need for recognition of the increased costs of living, isolation, uncongenial climatic conditions in rural and remote areas.
- Lack of basic institutional facilities like medical and education in these rural and remote areas. Better provision of these lead to improved quality of life for residents of these areas.
- Increase in the allowance to \$10,000 for rural and remote areas
- Increase in eligibility working/living in rural and remote area days

It is recognised that an important part of our economy is the mining and resources sector, with many of these work sites often located in the subject areas. The flow-on effect of this is the popularity and reliance of the fly-in fly-out employee to staff these operations. With this in mind, it is envisaged that a key part of this review excludes these employees from being eligible for revised allowance. This is achievable by increasing the number of days living and working in remote areas from 183 days to 256 days.

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This is on the basis that these employees are transient in nature to these remote communities and continue to maintain/reside in areas outside of the remote and special zones.

From current *Australian Bureau of Statistics* data, the revision of the current tax system in respect to the *Zone Tax Allowance* would not be a major budget burden on the government due to the relatively low inland populations.

In conclusion, an assumption that one key outcome of the *Development of Northern Australia* is to encourage decentralisation, which is extremely important to our nation and the future. One way to assist and help achieve this is to review the existing system and provide what is needed, that is incentives to live and work in these rural and remote areas then that way skilled services of teachers, doctors, nurses and police are available in these areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry and we would welcome the opportunity to further contribute towards this inquiry.

Yours faithfully



Cr Fred Pascoe
Chair NWQROC