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Dr Dr Pender

Inquiry into the Development of Northern Australia

Thank you for your invitation to North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) to make a submission in relation to the above-mentioned inquiry.

Pressure of work forces our submission to be brief, but we would like to express our concern that the Terms of Reference make no mention whatsoever of the natural environment.

Australia, and particularly, northern Australia, is an extraordinarily environmentally rich but fragile area. To assume that growth in the north can occur, and that it can occur without consideration of the natural environment on which our economy ultimately depends, is disconcerting.

Efforts to, for example, establish a 'conducive' regulatory, taxation and economic environment' is very likely end up with non-monetary values being given short shrift. Just distortion of the market will advantage development over conservation. It is essential that damage to the environment, such as that associated with over-use of water, clearing and loss of biodiversity, is included when determining net benefits.

As more and more reports come out over a period of years, it is becoming apparent that the level of protection for the natural environment, despite laws and regulations, projects and programs, is insufficient to prevent degradation. Despite laudable goals, and considerable ostensibly targeted effort, we are finding that the outcomes (as opposed to the outputs) are below expectations. The health of the Great Barrier Reef, for example, has, despite efforts to protect it, recently been downgraded from 'moderate' to 'poor, with 50% of coral cover disappearing in 27

years; similarly biodiversity values are decreasing, despite laws intended to protect biodiversity.

Finally, dreams of 'greening the desert' and 'redirecting the waters' have been followed across the world and over the generations. What evidence is there that that this effort to develop northern Australia is feasible? Will low risk options be identified prior to implementation of any plan?

NQCC asks that, despite the limited Terms of Reference, the inquiry seek out and take into consideration robust and scientifically based data on all relevant aspects of the natural environment.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Tubman
Coordinator