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Western Gulf Savannah



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Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
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Dear Committee Members

**Burke Shire Council Submission to the Joint Select Committee Northern Australia
White Paper**

Burke Shire Council thanks the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia for the opportunity to provide comment on the White Paper.

Burke Shire Council is of the opinion that there needs to be serious and sustained investment into Northern Australia particularly in the area of key infrastructure such as roads, water storage, communication and energy provision. The current shortfall in both quality and quantity of infrastructure provision creates the following impediments:

- a. A decreased window of opportunity to trade along with reduced trading options
- b. An inability to access reliable, affordable and realistically metro comparable communication systems that impinges upon ability to trade, education, health, safety and liveability standards
- c. An inability to attract and/or retain a quality workforce and their families to live and work as shortcomings in available infrastructure are in nonalignment with 21st Century expectations of a metro comparable lifestyle being available regardless of location
- d. An unacceptable risk to commercial entities seeking to invest in Northern Australia.

We have provided in tabulated form below areas of focus and the challenges and opportunities provided by each.



| SECTOR | OPPORTUNITIES | CHALLENGES |
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| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing | <p>1. Processing plant(s) to send ¼ carcasses to Asia – doesn't require as highly skilled a workforce as a full breakdown works, by supplying a resalable product to purchasing country it then creates an employment opportunity in that country as well, provision of point of kill closer to production reduces impact on road infrastructure involved in taking stock to markets further South and enhances existing animal welfare outcomes. Last year there was a dramatic increase of carcass quarters into China by one of our large Northern pastoral companies as frozen product -protocol for chilled product has not yet been established</p> <p>2. Location/proximity to Asia-potential to grow and expand market share,</p> <p>3. Diversification of agriculture – cropping, fodder crops – to strengthen northern beef industry and allow for finishing of product locally which in turn makes it viable to run processing plant aquaculture,</p> <p>4.Irrigation (refer to NQAIS report released by CSIRO regarding potential of Flinders River Catchment to match and Gilbert River Catchment to exceed Ord River Development)</p> <p>5. Development of niche tourism markets for high end tourism – fishing and hunting opportunities</p> | <p>1. Paucity of infrastructure-energy, water storage, transport - that struggles to meet current needs and therefore will be unable to meet future needs or encourage investment to realise opportunities-creates risk for investors. Needed to strengthen existing business and encourage diversification to spread risk and meet emerging market needs.</p> <p>2. influence of groups with an agenda nonaligned with agricultural agenda and its impact on government policy and community perceptions</p> <p>3. Impact of Marine Park declaration on commercial fishing industry</p> <p>4.appropriate infrastructure to accommodate high end tourist expectations</p> <p>5. Rural debt crisis</p> <p>6. Current lack of protocols in certain markets to allow for sale of product as chilled</p> <p>7. Review of policies/legislation which impede diversification and sustainable development of agriculture – leasehold tenure also impedes this.</p> |
| Mining | <p>1.North Australia is a resource rich region</p> <p>2. Development of infrastructure to support mining could assist communities</p> <p>3. Potential for corporate investment in communities</p> <p>4. Existing transport corridor</p> | <p>1. Value of \$AUD</p> <p>2. FIFO policies of mining companies – change tax deductibility of this and encourage living in and therefore fiscal and social investment in local community- FIFO employees should not be entitled</p> |

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| | <p>infrastructure eg Pipeline in existence from MMG Century Mine (South of Burketown NW Qld) to Port of Karumba</p> <p>5. Potential of energy provision via Shale Seam Gas production – creation of base power stations in the region</p> | <p>to claim zonal rebate based on place of employment rather than place of residence</p> <p>3. lack of infrastructure – quantity and quality – to support scale of development required</p> <p>4. Ability to get product to market – investment in infrastructure. Need to identify possible infrastructure corridors to assist in moving product</p> <p>5. Identify areas of potential resource growth, market and point of export – create transport corridors, ensure adequate energy, communication provision in advance to ensure one impediment to development is removed- as this pre development work is a time consuming process that delays project commencement</p> |
| Manufacturing | <p>1.Carcass works</p> <p>2. Feedlots to background cattle for carcass works</p> | <p>1.Skilled workforce – up skilling local workers in conjunction with importing skilled workers</p> <p>2. infrastructure – quantity and quality – water storage, energy, transport to get product to market -road/port,</p> <p>3. Fodder production for stock</p> <p>4. Ability to maintain a constant supply to meet market requirements- improved infrastructure required to minimise issue</p> |
| Infrastructure | <p>1.<u>Water</u> – (refer North Australia Land and Water Taskforce report and NQAIS report released by CSIRO in 2014 for identified opportunities for agriculture), plentiful natural supply to support activity and to balance out with environmental needs</p> <p>2. <u>Energy</u> – Shale Seam Gas exploration in the Gulf of Carpentaria – potential to supply base power station, numerous potential green energy/renewable energy sources – wave/ocean technology, solar, Uranium – potential nuclear power</p> <p>3. <u>Transport</u>-</p> <p>a. <i>Ports</i>- proximity to Asian</p> | <p>1.<u>Water</u> – lack of infrastructure to harvest water resource, legislative impediments to building off stream storage on agricultural enterprises, need water releases to reflect community needs – current water releases are not always fully subscribed not through lack of interest in utilisation but because amount to be released is insufficient to meet needs of project and validate investment - water policies need to allocate releases for high priority water users, sufficient also need sufficient water storage available to meet the needs of remote towns/communities – recent droughts have highlighted that</p> |

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| | <p>markets, existing port in Karumba – only port between Weipa and Darwin and only port between Cairns and Darwin with multi resource utilisation as Weipa is primarily used for mineral export from local mine;</p> <p>b. <i>Road</i>- ability to link communities to market, already existing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Savannah Way road network from Cairns-Broome – benefit to biosecurity, tourism, community mental, social and fiscal wellbeing as well as national security- upgrade to a minimum sealed dual carriageway to maximise benefits – utilising existing Royalties to Region funding. Multiple local governments already recognise importance of this road and have prioritised funding to increase sealing programmes (Burke Shire Council has provided funding over 5 years to seal 25 km within its boundaries and neighbouring Doomadgee and Carpentaria Shires have also embarked on sealing programmes on the Savannah Way where it transgresses their Shires)- increase funding to fast track programme - facilitate cross border connections to create ability to develop successful collaborative partnerships and enhance funding applications | <p>current water storage facilities are incapable of meeting current needs so would be unable to support growth of community- yet this is what is required to ensure future sustainability through sufficient self-supply, need to identify and evaluate potential water capture and storage opportunities, assistance in developing irrigation developments</p> <p>2. <u>Energy</u>- still communities without mains power supply – growth is being stymied, price of electricity needs to remain affordable, need base power station(s) from some conventional source – coal, gas, hot rock – can then take full advantage of renewable energy to complement and supplement base power</p> <p>3. <u>Transport</u>-</p> <p>a. <i>Ports</i> – investment to maintain and expand existing ports – reduce road usage by utilising ports to move goods and services, challenges associated with dredging etc.;</p> <p>b. <i>Road</i>- many roads are not sealed effectively creating an island effect due to high seasonal rainfall in North, not sealed to a standard to allow for increased traffic created by development of industry/towns, increased safety risk, many road transport based industries currently are unable to trade year round due to Wet season influence on infrastructure – take business elsewhere, reduces competitiveness of suppliers and thus increases cost, cost increase of service also as a result of covering risk of supplier, decreases liveability in communities and therefore ability to attract workers and families. There is an acceptance that flood proofing roads in the North is cost prohibitive and it is unrealistic to expect that ability to trade via road access 12 months of the</p> |
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| | | <p>year is possible but ability to trade could be greatly enhanced through improving road network and looking at alternative delivery methods for goods – pipelines (MMG Century Mine are able to transport goods from minesite to Karumba all year due to this), ports, rail</p> <p>* Commercial/private sector investment will be curtailed in North Australia without serious investment in infrastructure – development and maintenance – due to unacceptable risk of inability to trade 24/7 and therefore maximise return on investment – development of quality infrastructure in a timely manner and to the extent it is required is essential to secure commercial/private sector investment. We live in a global village therefore we have to compete globally to attract that investment.</p> |
| Tourism | <p>1. Innumerable areas of High natural value, significant cultural or heritage value</p> <p>2. High end tourism – hunting/fishing</p> <p>3. Niche marketing – ornithology, astronomy, recreational fishing/camping, history, nature lovers</p> <p>4. Rich indigenous cultural experiences</p> | <p>1. lack of infrastructure to support increased tourism traffic</p> <p>2. increased risk to commercial investment due to islanded effect afforded by current infrastructure paucity and therefore reluctance to invest</p> <p>3. cost of commercial air travel – could be potentially redressed by economy of scale</p> <p>4. Encourage indigenous individuals/organisations to take advantage of interest in their culture and develop appropriate businesses – need business and marketing assistance, empowerment to take on enterprise</p> |
| Governance and Regulation | <p>1. Creation of a new government area to create better cross sector alliances and implement reforms</p> <p>2. Empowering local people in local decision making</p> <p>3. Provide cross sector partnerships (for Example in NW QLD – Mount Isa Townsville Economic Zone</p> | <p>1.3 tiered government – common issues are often managed in isolation</p> <p>2. Different investment prioritisation processes</p> <p>3. Governance from Southern capitals</p> <p>4. Diverse stakeholders and interests,</p> <p>5. provide fiscal, policy and</p> |

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| | (MITEZ) and Gulf Savannah Development (GSD)) to support and advocate for sustainability of their regions and provide a collaborative framework for cross governmental and commercial relationships | consultant support to ensure sustainability of cross sector partnership organisations |
| Trade | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to strengthen global export demand and position through FTA and addressing trade/export barriers 2. Negate sovereign risk through stable political environment 3. Establish relationships in trading countries to enable up skilling of workforce and encourage uptake of Australian standards in manufacturing etc. 4. Create and support opportunities for Small/Medium Enterprises (SME) to increase scale and thus success 5. Investigate incentives available to diversify current export industries 6. Export beef creates significant opportunity- vertical integration of paddock to plate enterprises 7. Utilise the leverage of North Australia's proximity to SE Asia and the growing demand for food and resources which the North is positioned to provide 8. Importation of goods into Northern Australia through Northern Ports reduces costs to businesses/residents increasing viability | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. current lack of scale for SME's in remote area is a barrier to success 2. Investment in infrastructure for example the Port of Karumba, expansion and creation of trade, vertical integration of paddock to plate/market agricultural enterprises, 3. supportive government policy and legislation to improve value chain adding |
| Economic/Taxation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus on alternate finance arrangements – regionalised finance brokerage 2. create North Australian focussed superannuation funding arrangements 3. improved community and investment bank alliances for business financing (refer Ernst | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alteration of government policy to create EDZ's 2. At present remote area residents must pay increased costs to match urban counterparts living standards, 3. Businesses must pay higher wages to attract suitably qualified staff and provide extra incentives |

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| | <p>and Young Report 2012)</p> <p>4. Create Economic Development Zones (EDZ's) with minimal or no taxation (business/personal)applicable – set timeframe for example 25 years- in areas of high unemployment/current low growth, marginalised areas due to location – stimulate job creation, increase local business/department ability to attract workers and families, in turn stimulates investment in local financial and social economy- creating long term sustainability</p> <p>4. Review and update regional Tax Zones to include income beyond merely personal income</p> <p>5. Taxation -give weighting to disadvantages associated with remote area living/business – increased freight, food costs, travel to urban areas for business, schooling for children, running costs of business- creating reduction in nett income. If taxation weighting occurred it would seek to redress the imbalance in cost of living and maximise potential for all Australians to have equitable access to goods/services or run a business regardless of where they choose to live – share the burden. Replace Remote Area Allowances for business. Cross-subsidisation is what allowed East Coast to flourish and now needs to be reciprocated in the North</p> | <p>– housing, vehicles and services – and are penalised twice both in terms of cost of goods/services to run business, sending product to market as well as costs associated with wages/retaining suitable workforce (Remote Area Allowances) - marginalises profit and decreases sustainability of business long term</p> |
| NRM/Sustainability/Innovation/Research and Development | <p>1.Utilising local government systems and local knowledge to provide and enact decisions relating to local area</p> <p>2. Opportunity to utilise existing NRM/local groups to facilitate feral weed/animal control – large bank of local knowledge</p> <p>3. Provision of facilities/infrastructure, R&D to</p> | <p>1. Excessive regulation or land and sea at the expense of sustainable development</p> <p>2. Building relationships between government and local stakeholders – existing level of distrust is an impediment to successful collaborative relationships</p> <p>3. impact of feral animals, weeds on environment and their</p> |

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| | <p>increase resilience/ability to recover from natural disaster and adaption of activities</p> <p>4. Northern CRC's (region or industry based) could capture and share tropical expertise</p> | <p>control/eradication – funding required</p> <p>4. Natural disasters/climate – fire, flood, drought effect on landscape and business- increased insurance premiums, effects on infrastructure and trading window</p> |
| Technology/Telecommunication | <p>1.Potential for technology to narrow gap of educational/social/health/business disadvantage created by tyranny of distance, provide opportunities to be part of global village- remove barrier created by distance/isolation</p> <p>2. Facilitate community connectivity and safety through enhanced mobile and internet provision</p> <p>3. increase liveability by providing truly metro-comparable telecommunication and internet services</p> <p>3. Increase export business by creating links through technology</p> <p>4. Target investment strategies to provide better connections</p> | <p>1. identify shortcomings and prioritise rural/remote areas to receive service upgrades rather than urban areas first as is current policy</p> <p>2. identify and actively reduce mobile coverage black spots</p> <p>3.</p> |
| Security of Land | <p>1.Reduces risk, increases investment potential</p> <p>2. Create affordable free holding opportunities and/or review of state-based leasehold regulations which outline rent and other conditions on pastoral and indigenous leases</p> <p>3. Continuous improvements in Native Title and Land Claim related processes through reviews of State/Federal Acts</p> | <p>1. Current Native Title system – long delays</p> <p>2. Predominant tenure in leasehold (in Qld) which negatively affects significant long term investment and can also reduce profitability through variable and political rent-setting cycles</p> |
| Human Capital - overall | <p>1.provision of a literate, numerate and skilled local workforce – likely to remain in region as this is their home</p> <p>2. imperative that State and Federal Government work with and support strong mutually beneficial partnerships between Traditional Owners of Country, local government and private enterprise to ensure</p> | <p>1.identifying shortfalls in learning and targeting areas to ensure improved outcomes – providing incentives (not necessarily financial) to encourage school attendance</p> <p>2. Recognise that while the majority of residents within Northern Australia are indigenous there are significant numbers of long term – sometimes fifth</p> |

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| | <p>ongoing investment in Northern Australia and enable some of the nation's most disadvantaged communities will benefit from investment</p> <p>3. create on ground programmes and facilities, deliverable/overseen by local groups, to tackle issues of low numeracy/literacy, poor health and issues resulting from abuse of alcohol and illegal substances</p> | <p>generation or more – residents who do not identify as indigenous but are similarly hampered by lack of access to healthcare, educational and business opportunities. Their needs must also be taken into account, and their value not diminished, when planning to ensure they do not “slip through the cracks” due to an assumption that remote areas communities are regions are populated by one demographic only.</p> |
| Human Capital - Education | <p>1. People educated in the region are likely to stay in the region- reduce costs to access learning opportunities</p> <p>2. Distance Education(DE) already entrenched in rural/remote areas</p> <p>3. Early education investment – the key to breaking the negative cycles prevalent in many remote communities is education and starting as early as possible to instil love of and thirst for learning is the key</p> <p>4. Promote positive learning outcomes to create self-confidence and self-belief in ability to learn – creates increased value of importance of education in wider community. Set expectations around attendance and use community members to ensure adherence to requirements.</p> <p>5. National Curriculum relies heavily on technology to ensure optimum delivery of content – build in capacity of NBN or alternate future programmes to provide appropriate service levels – speed and size of plans.</p> | <p>1. Costs to attend university/boarding schools in larger centres prohibitive to uptake of opportunities</p> <p>2. Variability between states on DE delivery methodology</p> <p>3. Attracting suitably qualified staff to remote areas, particularly for part time community daycare/kindergarten facilities is very difficult. Need to enshrine in legislation the ability for remote areas to utilise skills of lesser qualified persons – work on up skilling those people to improve their ability to provide much needed opportunities for children</p> <p>4. Current internet provision is not allowing for full engagement with National Curriculum content – needs investment/policy to ensure availability of true metro comparable offerings at realistic prices (For example – 5GB/month at a cost of \$92 and 1056kbs upload is not metro comparable yet is best that can be accessed by one business and under current guidelines is considered a metro comparable service)</p> <p>5. Lack of access to allied health practitioners to enable children to access assistance to improve educational outcomes – conflicting government policies that stipulate use of educational department employees employing support when access to services is available from other service deliverers and so not</p> |

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| | | <p>recognised/inadmissible as part of educational profile and reflected in teaching programme</p> <p>6. Current State and Federal Allowances have not increased in line with CPI to assist families with the costs of children attending Boarding School. At best approx. 40% of costs are met through allowances (excluding costs of travel, uniforms, texts and inclusion in the full school programme through excursions, sport etc.)</p> <p>7. cost for rural/remote area children to attend university are exponentially greater than urban cousins – travel, accommodation, living are often added costs not borne by children in urban areas who can continue to live at home- and paperwork to apply for assistance is complicated and confusing and many families are excluded as a result of being asset rich but income poor. Children are potentially denied opportunity to reach their potential.</p> |
| Human Capital - Health | <p>1.Ability to use telehealth to enable consultations with specialists and access to allied health practitioners for community members with difficulties/disabilities – increase likelihood of uptake of treatment and potentially improve outcomes in health standards due to reluctance to leave communities/improve educational outcomes for children with learning difficulties</p> <p>2. aged care facilities in rural/remote towns to enable members to remain in their communities with support until higher care is needed</p> | <p>1. Ensuring access to adequate technology is in place to ensure successful utilisation of telehealth</p> <p>2. Having a bank of specialists and health service providers available to provide telehealth services – working out strategy for payment of services</p> <p>3. Closing the gap in life expectancy and reducing increase in “First World” illnesses for example diabetes in remote Australia</p> <p>4. Issues associated with alcohol and illegal substance abuse</p> |

In conclusion the potential for North Australia to contribute to the prosperity of this nation and also become an important player in future food security of the planet is immense. The sky is the limit! However it requires visionary and bold thinking at all levels of Government to create supporting policy and increased sustained investment in infrastructure to see that potential realised. With one third of the world's population living along the Equator in Second and Third World countries it is prudent that Australia look to them to see how they have overcome disadvantage caused by location and tackled obstacles to development and then apply them to our Northern regions. In other words "Look globally, apply locally". Recognising the role investment in human capital will play in the realising of the potential is also vital. It has long been acknowledged that those raised in these areas are most likely to return and invest their knowledge and skills back into their communities and strategies need to be put in place to enable affordable and diverse opportunities for successful engagement with further education. Up skilling those already committed to living in regions is another key strategy to strengthening the resilience and ability of residents to be ready to participate in emerging opportunities. Burke Shire Council looks forward to learning of the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee following the closure of submissions into the North Australia White Paper. It also looks forward to a partnership with all levels of government, commercial enterprise and on ground stakeholders that will see the delivery of much needed infrastructure and services to the North and the chance for this region to fulfil the potential held in these northern "Plains of Promise".

Should you wish to discuss this submission please contact Cr Ernie Camp, Mayor or myself.

Again I thank the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia for the opportunity to provide comment on the White Paper.

Yours faithfully

John Page
Chief Executive Officer