



*Australia's Adventure Drive*

## **Savannah Way Limited**

### **Submission to Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute a submission to this important enquiry.

Savannah Way Limited is the not-for-profit company promoting the drive route from Cairns to Broome. Since our formation in 2007 we have worked to link stakeholders across Northern Australia for development and marketing collaboration. Savannah Way Limited is also the Local Tourism Organisation for Queensland's Gulf Savannah.

The key issues articulated by our stakeholders in relation to the inquiry are:

**Road infrastructure:** Increased investment in roads would make more destinations and entire sub-routes available for more vehicles for more of the year. In every instance the sealing of roads in Northern Australia has increased visitation as caravans and two wheel drive vehicles bring new market segments. Road investment adds more confidence to advance holiday planning as well as supporting all other industries and community functions. Priority routes for sealing include the Hann Highway, Gulf Development Road between Normanton and Burketown, and Borroloola to Burketown sector.

**Digital Connectivity:** Mobile phone coverage is generally only through Telstra in towns, limiting safety communications and tourism marketing in between. Most towns have such limited internet capacity that one recreational vehicle with an illegal booster (which are common) knocks out the whole town's internet including EFTPOS and email for hours. This occurs continually, every tourist season in many towns. Tourism marketing increasingly focuses on digital platforms but these are not available in most of Northern Australia and far fewer tourists share their experiences on digital media because of the lack of connectivity. The health, education, lifestyles and business opportunities for people in regional Northern Australia would be immensely improved by reliable internet connectivity.

**A Northern Australia Tourism Forum:** The marketing of Northern Australia is undertaken by destinations that should remain separate identities, however strategic and development issues should be connected across northern Australia. The Developing Northern Australia Conference provides an opportunity for this, Savannah Way Limited has continued to run teleconferences linking all local governments across the north, and the Northern Australian Regional Development Australia offices have a northern alliance. Some strategic linkage of these mechanisms and a structure for policy development should be developed to coordinate and leverage activity.

**Business Development Support:** The commonality of many impediments and business types across northern Australia makes universal business support mechanisms very appropriate. Programs such as ASBAS NATI, Austrade's Entrepreneur Program and Indigenous mentoring programs should be continued and linked across Northern Australia to share resources and models. Key areas for support include financial and business management, experience development and marketing strategies.

**Entrepreneur Attraction:** Many towns and regions in Northern Australia present wonderful business and lifestyle opportunities for capable small business entrepreneurs. New initiatives by entrepreneurs can transform towns and communities. The benefits of regional business and the associated lifestyle must be promoted to people in more populated areas to attract them to regional areas, and incentives considered at all levels of government to encourage these new investors.

**Research:** NVS and IVS data for most of northern Australia is very limited and extrapolated from such unreliable samples that it is virtually useless. Occasional visitor surveys have been conducted in regions but there is very little reliable data on visitation overall and the best potential opportunities. A digital data collection methodology, supported by stakeholders across Northern Australia would support informed decision making around a wide range of development and marketing issues.

**National Parks as Icons:** Many of Northern Australia's most spectacular attractions are in National parks. Typically these are not well marketed, and often visitor infrastructure is limited. Modest investment in these parks and the better integration of their marketing into broader State and Territory marketing initiatives will showcase attractions, especially where private industry marketing budgets are limited. Ecotourism Australia's Destination Certification is a worthwhile tool for National Parks.

Please contact me for further information.

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