

## **Barton Deakin: Developing Northern Australia**

**10 June 2014**

Today the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Hon Warren Truss MP, released the Green Paper on 'Developing Northern Australia'. This document will inform the Commonwealth's White Paper which is due to be released at the end of 2014.

The Green Paper outlines six key policy areas that will provide a focus for new development strategies in northern Australia:

- Economic infrastructure;
- Land use and access;
- Water access and management;
- Commerce trade and investment;
- Education, research and innovation; and
- Governance.

The Government is seeking [online submissions](#) in response to the Green Paper until 8 August 2014.

Minister Truss also announced the members of the expert Northern Australia Advisory Group, which will counsel the government on policies designed to facilitate growth and prosperity in the region.

### **2030 Vision for Developing Northern Australia**

Before the 2013 Federal Election, the Coalition set out a policy to guide development in Australia's north. It defined this area as the Northern Territory and parts of Western Australia and Queensland north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It encompasses major urban areas such as Darwin, Alice Springs, Cairns, Townsville, Mt Isa, Broome and Karratha, and regions including the Pilbara, the Kimberley, Arnhem Land and the Cape York Peninsula. Fifty-five per cent of Australia's exports are shipped through ports in this region and agricultural production totalled \$5 billion in 2010/11.

The development of a White Paper is central to the Government's efforts to facilitate economic expansion and investment in regional and remote Australia. It will outline short, medium and long term policy options to implement this agenda.

Thus far, the Coalition has pledged to:

- Create a new northern farming region, with the aim of doubling Australia's agricultural output;
- Focus on building an \$150 billion energy export industry; and
- Encourage two million international tourists to visit the region annually.



The Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have entered into a Strategic Partnership with the Premiers of Queensland and Western Australia and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory to consult on the development of the White Paper.

A parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia was established in December 2013 to further assist in the creation of the White Paper. The Committee conducted a community consultation process that closed in March 2014. It is due to present an interim report to the Parliament in June 2014, with the final recommendations of its inquiry expected to be released in September 2014.

At a bureaucratic level, the Government has established a cross-agency Northern Australia Taskforce within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to develop the White Paper and consult with potential stakeholders. The Taskforce can be contacted [here](#).

## **Green Paper**

The Green Paper outlines the opportunities and challenges arising out of plans to develop and invest in northern Australia. The six policy directions listed in the Green Paper provide companies, interest groups and individuals with a framework through which to provide the government with feedback.

### **1. Delivering economic infrastructure**

Northern Australia is connected by arterial highways, 20 major airports, 25 ports and three railway systems. The Green Paper considers effective ways to plan and prioritise project construction and improvement. Central to new infrastructure development will be the leveraging of private sector investment.

### **2. Improving land use and access**

The Green Paper highlights policy responses that could lead to more effective land use, including flexible and longer-term land tenures, consistency across jurisdictions, efficient native title processes and assisting indigenous communities to increase economic output on their land.

### **3. Improving water access and management**

Planning and investing in new water infrastructure, reforming water management and conducting research into water use systems are all considered in the Green Paper. Functioning water facilities and effective resource management is vital to northern Australia's agricultural sector.

### **4. Promoting trade and investment and strengthening the business environment**

The Green Paper promotes an increased population in the region, increased economic engagement with nearby Asian neighbours and a reduction in government interference and regulation. Private sector involvement is central to the government's plan to produce sustainable economic output in regional Australia.



## 5. Fostering education, research and innovation

Economic development is contingent on increased skills and training within northern Australia's communities. The Green Paper considers ways in which research networks and workforce participation can be improved, with particular focus on promoting northern Australia's universities and education facilities internationally.

## 6. Enhancing governance

Although northern Australia has significant strategic advantages, including proximity to Asia, agricultural, tourism and resource assets, the region has a low population, social and geographic problems and an unpredictable environment. The Coalition has resolved to create a regulatory and economic environment that encourages private sector engagement in the region.

The Developing Northern Australia Green Paper is available [here](#).

## Northern Australia Advisory Group

The newly appointed members of this expert group will advise the Strategic Partnership of Commonwealth and State/Territory Leaders on matters relating to economic and social development in Northern Australia. The Northern Australia Advisory Group is comprised of:

**The Hon Shane Stone AC QC (Group Chair)** – Former Chief Minister of the Northern Territory;

**Wayne Bergmann** – Former CEO of the Kimberley Land Council;

**Jack Burton** – Managing Director of the Yeeda Pastoral Company;

**Dr Ken Chapman** – Executive Director of the Chapman Group, North Queensland;

**Professor Sandra Harding** – Vice-Chancellor and President of James Cook University;

**Noeline Ikin** – CEO, Northern Gulf Company Alliance;

**David Menzel** – Chairman of the Ord Irrigated Cooperative, WA;

**Nicholas Paspaley AC** – Executive Chairman of the Paspaley Group of Companies;

**Trent Twomey** – Chair of Advance Cairns and President of the Australian College of Pharmacy;

**Ken Warriner AM** – Former Chairman and CEO of the Consolidated Pastoral Company; and

**Djawa Yunupingu** – Deputy Chairman of the Gumatj Corporation and founding member of the Dhimurru Land Corporation.

To read the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development's media release, click [here](#).

To read Barton Deakin's brief on the announcement of a White Paper on Developing Northern Australia, including the terms of reference, click [here](#).

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