

NEWSFEED



Time to Act on Northern Australia

Australia's North is a region vital to the economic growth of the nation.

Northern Australia is one of the greatest challenges and opportunities facing the country.

This is the view of Parliament's Northern Australia Committee, which has tabled its final report on the development of the region.

The committee took on several tasks, including investigating the potential for development of industries such as mining, energy, agriculture and tourism, and finding ways to address impediments to economic and social growth.

Committee Chair, Warren Entsch (Leichhardt, Qld), said it is time to act on Northern Australia, an area with a small population but large resource potential.

"Northern Australia covers over 40 per cent of Australia's land mass but contains only 4 per cent of the population. It has abundant land, water and mineral resources. It has medical and educational institutions with world class facilities."

Northern Australia sits on the doorstep of Asia and the tropics, which by 2050, will encompass over half of the world's population. Mr Entsch said that development could bring great opportunities.

"The committee has made recommendations to establish a Cooperative Research Centre for northern agriculture, and develop a national institute for tropical sports and sports medicine."

Some of the most important contributions to the inquiry stressed the need for detailed research on the best economic and social development options.

"We might not be the food bowl for Australia but we certainly can put more food on the table, and we can advance



THE GREAT NORTH: Calls for best development options.

the capacity of our Asian neighbours to feed themselves through the pioneering work that has been done in agricultural and horticultural innovation," said Mr Entsch.

Twenty seven public hearings and 15 days of site inspections were held in communities throughout the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia. Industry, council, business, Indigenous and community representatives identified what they see as the issues that need to be addressed.

The report makes 42 recommendations with seven priority recommendations:

- The creation of a Department of Northern Australian Development, based in Northern Australia.
- The identification of key roads and the commitment of funding for their upgrade as a matter of priority, subject to relative benefit assessment. Projects to consider include: continued upgrade of National Highways (including the Bruce and Stuart Highways);

Hann Highway; Peninsula Development Road; Tanami Road; Outback Way; and beef development roads.

- Cost-benefit analysis to be conducted on a rail link between Mount Isa and Tennant Creek, and the building of passing lanes on the Darwin to Alice Springs Railway.
- Funding and development of water infrastructure projects that meet scientific and economic assessments and are consistent with national water policy, including: use of groundwater for expanding horticulture, Flinders River Weir, Urannah Dam, Elliot Main Channel, Nullinga Dam, Eden Bann and Rockwood Weirs on the Fitzroy River, Cloncurry Dam, Cave Hill, and

proceeding with the set-up of the Water Project Development Fund.

- Investigation of the potential and practicality of special economic zones.
- Measures to reduce insurance premiums in Northern Australia to affordable levels.
- Continued funding of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative.

The committee's findings and recommendations will inform a Government White Paper, to be released later this year.

The full report can be found at www.aph.gov.au/jscna ■

LINKS

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