Welcome to edition 6 of Dialogue.
This is an important time for the north of Australia.

With the Liberal and National Parties in government, delivering on their promise to renew interest and action on the development of this critical part of our State, now is the time for LNP members to have their say on policy issues affecting northern development, and regional development more broadly.

Those who live outside of North Queensland should take great interest in this process, not just because freeing individuals and businesses to reach their potential is fundamental to our philosophy, but also because it is fundamental to ensuring the population growth, food production, and economic resilience the whole of our State requires.

May the current Inquiry into Northern Australia yield reforms that reduce economic barriers to investment and ignite the explosion in investment, activity and growth that the region has been seeking for so long.

Amanda Stoker – Editor, Dialogue magazine

Take photos? Win prizes!

Fancy yourself as a photographer? Or do you just have the best backyard in the world?

Either way, get snap happy and enter your photographs in Dialogue’s photography competition.

We are looking for striking photos that showcase the landscapes, industries and people of our great State. Get out your camera and show us how beautiful your home town is!

Each issue, a winning photo will be published prominently and will also win a prize.

Each photo must be your original work, and by entering the competition, you give your permission to have it published by the LNP in future editions of Dialogue. It must be a high resolution JPEG file, of between A4 and A3 size (300dpi). You can enter as many times as you like.

Send your entries to dialogue@lnp.org.au with your name, contact information, and a description of your photo. Entries for the next issue will close at 5:00pm on 31 July 2014.
The LNP’s submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Northern Australia

I recently had the opportunity to speak to the LNP’s policy submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Northern Australia. As Chair of the LNP’s Northern Development policy committee, I was fortunate to work with Mr David Farley, a leader in national and international agribusiness management with over 35 years experience, to help put our case.

Our focus for this submission is on Queensland, within a framework of the whole of the North and the opportunities that exist, both within our state, and in the broader Asia-Pacific region.

The committee is made up of people who come from all over Northern Queensland. It includes graziers, beef producers, economists, agricultural scientists, those with local government expertise, fishers and a number of other professionals, many of whom represent various northern organisations.

We are proud that our committee represents a real microcosm of the Northern community. Our committee understands the needs that drive economic and social development, the critical infrastructure needed and the security of power and water sources. Our underlying driving force is the belief in the enormous potential of the North, which can bring wealth, jobs and opportunities to all Australians.

We believe the submission before the Committee presents a blueprint for the development of the North in Queensland, but also a model for the rest of Northern Australia.

The key priorities identified in this submission are security of water, power and communications, specifically infrastructure. Without addressing these key aspects, the consequent challenge of increasing the population becomes too difficult to attain. All other aspects follow from these key components.

There are currently some 850,000 residents of North Queensland and yet the wealth generated in this large geographic area contributes some $60 billion to $78 billion to our economy. It is
imperative that changes are made to present policies that encourage people to move north where the rewards will be great.

The Queensland Plan, an initiative of the Newman Government, envisages that the state will face a rapidly changing future with significant population growth heading towards 8 million people with the goal of having half of the state’s population living outside of the south-east corner. For example, opportunities exist to move beef processing plants closer to their original source of production leading to increased employment in regional centres and increased profitability.

Relocation policies and programs must be a cornerstone of the Inquiry’s deliberations. With the changing face of manufacturing industries, particularly in the southern states with the consequent loss of jobs, we must harness the potential in the North, particularly for export markets where there are valuable and vast agricultural opportunities. We need a decentralised bureaucracy that reflects the region, its culture, its industries, and delivers the services that we need.

Land tenure has been a thorny issue and one which must be resolved in order to achieve the best outcomes for all. Investment requires security of tenure. The community needs to have confidence in the financial security of land administration and management systems.

In 2012 the Queensland Government instigated an inquiry into the future and continued relevance of government land tenure across Queensland in order to reform unnecessarily complex practices. Recently, and for the first time in history, indigenous communities have the choice to purchase freehold land.

This valuable opportunity provides our indigenous residents with an asset against which they can arrange finance to develop small businesses and become free and successful participants in the mainstream economy. This is an example of how governments can act to truly remove barriers to growth.

Our committee’s submission outlines the possibilities for the future, building on the successes of the present and highlighting key issues. It’s a blueprint, describing the future in mining, energy, power and the potential for agricultural development.

Highlights include:

• Investment in water storage to provide domestic supply and supply for agricultural, mining and industrial uses. North Queensland is blessed to have generous rainfall in the tropical regions and yet we waste this valuable resource as it flows out to sea. It is possible to harvest some of this flow with negligible impact on the environment in order to build economies and communities. An example when ideology conquered reason is Townsville, a city that has grown and developed since its water supply was secured by the Burdekin Dam. Nullinga Dam, west of Cairns, is another project just waiting to happen. Nullinga Dam has been talked about since the 1950’s and is the subject of numerous studies. It will guarantee Cairns’ water supply and free up the Tinaroo Dam for an enormous expansion in agricultural capability. Nullinga will also have the potential to produce hydro-electricity.

• Building of a base load power station in the North as the most economic means of power generation. Presently all power is provided by transmission from southern regions, with the resultant loss in transport added to power costs. Future mineral, agricultural, community and social development is dependent upon a competent and secure power supply.
• Limitless opportunities for agricultural exports to Asia. The potential for agricultural development is only limited by people’s thinking. In this submission there are 26 recommendations to develop this area.
• Careful management of our Coral Sea and Gulf resources must be a priority in order to maintain fish stocks and to allow our recreational fishing industry, which claims some 750,000 participants, to survive.
• The potential for tourism development is illustrated by the present proposals for the AQUIS $8.1 billion integrated resort north of Cairns which has moved an important step closer to reality with projections, subject to further approvals, to commence construction in 2015.
• Defence capability is another opportunity that the North is poised to seize, with some key bases and facilities already established. The geographical position of North Queensland makes it an ideal contender to become the home of the recently announced Australian Border Force. The $480.5 million package allocated to its establishment includes new vessels and their maintenance, increased intelligence systems, trade and travel and the creation of an ABF College.
• There are 16 additional recommendations for establishing a conducive regulatory, taxation and economic development regime where governments can address structural changes and where public/private partnerships are the preferred method of investment wherever appropriate.
• In education the opportunity exists to build on current infrastructure, creating an education hub with world class vocational and higher education campuses in selected areas, and growing exports of technical skills related to resources and agriculture into a $7 billion a year industry.

In order for the North to reach its potential, planning and cooperation at all levels of government is essential. This must be combined with extensive consultation with local communities and the local industries involved. Importantly, principle (ii) of this submission states that “The potential for major economic value (be) recognised and acted upon.” To this end, we would support a Minister for Northern Australia to fulfil this role and ensure hope, reward and opportunity are delivered to its people.

* * * * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robyn graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Government and with a Post Graduate Diploma of Education. She also holds qualifications from Griffith University in Civics and Citizenship. Robyn has had a successful career in education and is currently Head of English at Trinity Anglican School in Cairns, a position she has held for 10 years. She has been a representative for her profession and was invited to represent Education for Far North Queensland on a Cairns Mayoral delegation to China in 2004 which resulted in the establishment of a sister city and sister school relationships with Zhanjiang.

Robyn has an intense interest in the future development and prosperity of North Queensland. She has held the position of Chair of the LNP Northern Development Policy Committee since 2010 and this year has produced the LNPQ submission to the Federal Government’s White Paper for Northern Australia, appearing as a witness to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia. She has also coordinated the LNPQ’s recent submission to the Federal Governments discussion paper on the high cost of insurance in the North.

Robyn has served in a range of party positions and was the LNP candidate for Mulgrave in the 2012 state election and is the endorsed candidate for Mulgrave in the 2015 State election.

Robyn is married to Dennis and they have three adult children. They live at Fishery Falls in Far North Queensland.

“Our underlying driving force is the belief in the enormous potential of the North, which can bring wealth, jobs and opportunities to all Australians.”
I’m embracing the sense of optimism that is coming through in the inquiry looking into how government can enable the capturing of economic and social opportunities in Northern Australia. The response, as the Committee travels, has been very supportive - there is a collective intention that significant change is about to happen which is absolutely critical.

It’s been many years since the genesis of this focus on Northern Australia. I recall attending the first Northern Australia forum in Katherine, convened by Senator Macdonald in about 2002. Subsequently I was also a member of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce convened in 2006-7. Then, in 2013, the Coalition made a commitment that in Government, a White Paper would be produced identifying opportunities in Northern Australia and pinpointing how these can be converted into government policy.

These hearings have certainly been an eye-opener, and the submissions a fascinating snapshot of what people want the North to look like. They outline how we can grow our population, what infrastructure is needed and the impediments to development. It was even proposed that one of our red tape repeal days in Parliament should be totally focused on legislation impacting Northern Australia.

Whether in the Pilbara, Mt Isa, Mackay, Townsville, Perth, Cairns or the Torres Strait, the commonality of issues will certainly make it easier for us to provide clear recommendations to the Government’s White Paper.

A key theme throughout has been the need for investment in infrastructure – Road, Rail and Ports. All around Queensland, people have pushed for the completion of the Hann Highway sealing; an all-weather alternative to the Bruce Highway that would slash 15 hours off the journey from Cairns to Melbourne and open up tourism and transport opportunities.
On our coastlines, the Ports of Townsville, Dampier and Port Hedland are investing heavily in new infrastructure that will help them expand their capacity and diversify their business. The missing rail link between Tennant Creek and Mt Isa was identified as a priority for improving connectivity between Cairns/Townsville and Darwin; the challenge being the different gauges. It does however illustrate the need for elements of standardisation right across Northern Australia.

Zone tax offset arrangements and special economic zones have been consistently raised as an incentive to attract people and businesses to regional areas of Northern Australia. Mt Isa City Council gave us a 4000-signature petition calling for an increase in the regional tax rebate, which at its current rate is worthless given the high cost of living in these communities – up to $2400 a week to rent a three-bedroom house.

There are also the heavily skewed taxation benefits of the FIFO program and its impact on regional communities. The tax write-off for flying in workers, accommodating and feeding them is a major disincentive to mining companies to integrate their work force into the community, meanwhile local councils can’t afford to provide services or fix roads without a solid rate base.

Opportunities surrounding food security, agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture have featured heavily. Bowen was appropriately described as the “salad bowl of Australia” while in Mackay, the seafood industry is frustrated by barriers to growth.

One example really struck home - Pacific Reef Fisheries at Ayr see untapped market potential in prawn farming thanks to a favourable investment climate and our abundance of clean seawater and coastal land. However, the company has spent $4 million and 13 years on Environmental Impact Studies and are still trying to get the approvals they need, which is just ridiculous. It’s no wonder there hasn’t been a new aquaculture project in Northern Australia for 13 years.

As suspected at the outset, the affordability and availability of property insurance is a major impediment right across Northern Australia. Other key areas include land tenure resolution, decentralised governance, expansion of defence capabilities and alternative water and energy solutions. The Nullinga Dam near Cairns, the Urannah Dam near Mackay and the Tully Millstream all present valuable opportunities.

As we see the numbers of people living in the tropical zone growing to more than 50 per cent of the world population by 2050, we need to be mindful of capturing tropical expertise opportunities - not only in agriculture but also in the environment, medicine, education, governance, communication; the whole spectrum.

We need to continue to focus on becoming the keeper of best practice in everything tropical. Myself and the Abbott Government look forward to playing a key role in making this happen.

* * * * *
We've Got Queensland Covered

Are you interested in contributing to policy thinking?

SUPERIOR PRINT SOLUTIONS
Our continual investment in the very latest technology offers you the most comprehensive range of print and communication options available. Nothing is too big, too small or too complex.

A UNIQUE ONE-STOP SHOP
Fergies stands on its own as the largest print-to-post mail processor in Queensland. This fully integrated service gives you real efficiencies in production, costs and time.

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATION
We know that communication is more than just ink on paper. Our cutting-edge software, systems and expertise means you have access to communication solutions you didn't even know were possible.

To find out more about our unique capabilities, talk to Fergies.

www.fergies.com.au  07 3630 6500
OUR DIVERSE AND DYNAMIC NORTH

SENATOR THE HON. IAN MACDONALD
Ever since our country was first settled by Europeans in the late 18th century, Australians have been looking North for opportunities and fulfilment.

The North has always held promise for the courageous, the entrepreneurs, and the pioneers.

So ‘Develop the North’ is not a new mantra.

The opportunities and the resources are there. All we need to make the promise a reality, is leadership.

For many, developing the north immediately conjures up visions of vast plains of bountiful crops and well fed cattle watered by previously unharnessed flows in the wettest part of our country.

But this stereotypical grand vision is, in actuality, only a small part of what’s on offer.

Already the north boasts no less than 6 vibrant, sophisticated cities and some of these will grow to be great cities of the world.

Two world class universities are already doing cutting edge work in the disciplines in which they excel and have a competitive geographic and climatic advantage. The north has high quality teaching and vocational schools. There are health facilities that are not only assisting with the health of Australians but also have wonderful opportunities to export health and expertise to the tropical world.

Many of Australia’s most significant and wondrous natural tourist attractions are located in the North. The Great Barrier and Ningaloo Reefs, the Kimberleys, the Torres Strait and Barrier Reef islands, wet tropic rain forests and mountain ranges, Uluru, the broad plains and sunsets of the inland, the deserts and part time waterways of the Channel Country and the Tanami, are unique to Australia.

But all these existing attributes both natural and man made can be built upon and that is the challenge for the current long awaited and very welcome Federal Government focus on Northern Australia. That focus must not be on what the Government should develop but on how the Government can encourage and facilitate investment and growth by the private sector.

Since my maiden speech in parliament in 1990 where I said “The future of our nation lies in north Queensland and northern Australia”, I have maintained as my principal goal, the sustainable development of the North. And I feel, we are almost there!

In the years after the Howard Government, the Liberal and National Parties have worked diligently on a Plan for Northern Australia and this was launched first at the 2010 election, and then, with greater finesse and resources, was relaunched as a very significant policy for the 2013 election.

The 2013 election Policy was in the form of a Green Paper which promised the release of a Government White Paper with a detailed plan forward, within twelve months of the election.

Since the election that process has again been repeated with a Parliamentary Committee on Northern Australia and another Green Paper.

Our policy highlighted Australia’s unique position in the tropical world which circles the globe between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn and which is home to 40% of the world’s population. Australia is one of the few advanced, developed countries in this part of the world.

Our location and expertise means that in a diverse range of daily endeavours in health, science, education, agriculture, communications, architecture and construction we will be able to benefit new generations in the Tropics.

The Tropic Zone will shortly be home to more than one billion middle class people all wanting better food, better education, better health facilities and better tourist experiences, all in a safe, secure and comfortable environment. By 2020 half of the world’s middle class will be in Asia.

Australia’s preeminent position in marine science has been earned by James Cook University, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, CSIRO and many other university and scientific entities in the North. But we can do more.

We are already leading the fight against tropical diseases in both human beings and animals.
Already a significant element of the Coalition’s policies of both 2010 and 2013 has been implemented with the provision by the Abbott Government of some $42 million to James Cook University for the establishment of Australia’s first Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine. A similar contribution had been made by the Newman Government, so that long-awaited facility is now underway.

I believe in the future, the value of northern exports in health, education and tropical expertise may challenge the huge wealth we currently obtain from our northern minerals.

Careful and considered thought can ensure the ongoing benefit to Australia of our significant mineral resources in the North and three downstream processing plants already existing in Townsville.

There are real opportunities for expanded agriculture both in crops and livestock. New abattoirs already on the drawing board will enable us to trade and feed many of the hungry, but increasingly wealthy, mouths in the tropical zone.

And you don’t have to be a great military strategist to work out that the defence of our borders is best conducted around the north of our country from assets that are based in the north. It is accordingly counter-intuitive to place the bulk of Australia’s naval fleet in Sydney harbour. HMAS Cairns is Australia’s second largest east coast naval base and is well able to accommodate additional ships as is Darwin and locations in the north-west.

The dream of a highly developed north will require leadership and courage from government initially and then from entrepreneurs, investors and pioneers.

The momentum is building and next step will come with the release of the Government’s White Paper on Northern Australia before the end of this year.

The world renowned Davos Foundation held a Northern Development Forum in Townsville in June 2014 when some of Australia’s leading academics, intellectuals, business people and civic leaders added to the momentum, sharing their expertise and opinions.

There will of course be challenges to the goals we seek. Development needs to be sustainable to ensure that we avoid the mistakes of the past.
Because of the financial mess left to us by the previous Labor government, there will not be Australian taxpayer’s money immediately available for investment into projects in the North – but then, that was never the plan. What is needed is the vision, the encouragement and the facilitation, to allow those with the energy and resources to make the development of the North happen.

But while we await the publication of the government’s White Paper document later this year, there are a couple of actions that the government could take immediately that are doable and that could be financed within existing Budget constraints.

A couple of these immediate actions might be:
- To ensure that new graduates taken on by the Australian Taxation Office are placed in the existing taxation offices in the North
- To replace Caribou aircraft that were based in Townsville for many years with the replacement C27J Spartan aircraft
- Base the navy’s new large “aircraft carrier size” ships, the Landing Helicopter Decks, in Townsville and/or Cairns
- Relocate additional capital ships out of Sydney Harbour to Cairns, Darwin and the north-west
- Build new army vehicle maintenance workshops in existing army facilities in the north
- Determine that the new Headquarters and Training facilities for the recently announced Australian Border Force are in Northern Australia
- Locate more of our science and research positions in the North
- Facilitate additional international flights to existing and new Northern ports and
- Look at regulatory reform to remove green and red tape impediments to growth in Northern Australia

The North has a grand future. The first catalyst to unlocking that future is Government leadership and this must happen before the end of this year. The White Paper must be a real and achievable blueprint for sustainable development, and it must be timely.

* * * * *
A PLACE OF GREAT POTENTIAL

PETER SPIES
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE STATE’S FAR NORTH

By 2050, world food demand is expected to rise by 77 per cent in monetary terms. Much of this growth will occur in Asia where demand will double. Through close productive relationships with our Asian trading partners, Australia will be able to make the most of these opportunities.

Northern Queensland is at the doorway to Asian markets that will contribute to this region being the Australian food bowl for the future and it is the key to achieving our state’s target of doubling food production by 2040.

Each sub-region within Far North Queensland has unique competitive advantages ranging from sugar, beef, dairy, maize, field crops, peanuts, horticulture, bananas, mangoes, avocados, citrus, coffee, tea, grass seed, hay and forestry – just to name a few.

While economic considerations must recognise the region’s significance for Indigenous people and their connectedness to land and water, it needs to give Indigenous people the opportunity to build an economy through unlocking the land’s economic value.

Areas with potential for agricultural development include:
• Land within the Gilbert River (Georgetown) and Flinders Precincts;
• Upper Herbert River alluviums south of Mt Garnet.
• Areas within Cape York (i.e. Endeavour Valley, Lakeland, the red soils around Weipa, the Hopevale-McIvor-Starcke areas north of Cooktown and areas of red earth soils west of Laura on the Kimba plateau).
• Currently unused land within and possible further expansion of Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area.
• Upper Burdekin north of Charters Towers.
• Areas on the Cape and Campaspe Rivers around Pentland.

The Gilbert River Agricultural Precinct concept has been around in one form or another for many years. Some 88,500ha was assessed as potential agricultural land within 5km of the river. There are crops which are currently grown along the Gilbert, like sorghum, maize, grass seed, hay, peanuts and mangoes which require limited investigation (Mason 2009). Other potential cropping options which need further market and production analysis include cotton, sugarcane and guar.

The Flinders River Agricultural Precinct presents tracts of the best farming soils in Queensland available for development. Possible crops include, but are not limited to, the production of cotton, rice, sugar, mung beans, soy beans, chick peas, maize, hay and sorghum (forage and grain). The Flinders River provides the security
of a reliable water source; water allocations from the Flinders River are currently underutilised, with an annual 3,800,000 ML of river flow.

However, while extensive areas of land have potential for development, the region has wide-ranging constraints (such as climatic extremes, feral animals, biosecurity risks and limited infrastructure) that limit its development. As a result, very little land has been used for large-scale agricultural development over the decades. Investment, both private and public, will be required for ‘catalytic’ infrastructure to see this ‘food bowl’ materialise.

The economic potential of Cape York is also yet to be realised. There is potentially good agricultural land near Hope Vale, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Napranum, Aurukun and Pormpuraaw. It is only with economic development and participation that Indigenous people will overcome high unemployment and disadvantage to achieve self-determination.

With horticulture, many areas in the Cape have the potential to grow mangos, papaya, bananas and citrus. Some of these crops, given the environment, will come in (mature) earlier than areas further south thereby achieving market premiums. Further, proximity to South-East Asia provides opportunity to export out of Weipa. If the Peninsula Development Road and major community access roads were upgraded over time this would provide greater opportunity for market access and shorter delay periods.

Unquestionably, economic development and environmental protection must go together – we must shift from approaches that place economic development and environment at loggerheads with each other.

Potential new Agricultural Areas on the Gilbert River, west of Georgetown. Picture taken from a Robinson R22. Note the good soils and rubbervine along the River. Cropping is an opportunity to reclaim rubbervine infested areas.
NEW INDUSTRY

There is potential for new crops suited to climates in the Far North (some of which are major consumptive crops in China, SE Asia and Pacific islands). These include: sweet potato, yam bean, yam, taro, cassava, lychee, rambutan, longans, tamarind, pataya (dragon fruit), and Australian dry land rice. Guar, a legume that produces a gum from the seeds is a crop that shows a lot of promise, requiring well-drained soils and warmer night temperatures. It is used as a food additive, but its most important use today is in hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for oil shale and gas. Cotton may have some promise on the clay soils associated with the Flinders and Gilbert Rivers.

The Goat meat industry shows potential as it is the most widely consumed meat in the world. China, India and Nigeria are the largest producers and consumers of goat meat and there is substantial demand from Middle East and South-East Asia. Supply chains need to be developed to better meet these unlocked markets and add value to the industry.

WATER FOR AGRICULTURE

Water infrastructure for economic and social development is required in the Far North. Government needs to continue investigations into a regional approach for water security and supply.

- The proposed Nullinga Dam site, on the Walsh River south-west of Mareeba, has the capacity to relieve pressure on the Tinaroo Dam by supplying water to the western parts of the Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area (MDIA) i.e. the Mutchilba Dimbulah localities and could also allow for further expansion of the MDIA and the moderation/upgrading of the current irrigation system for that area.
- The proposed site for the Greenhills Dam (300,000ML), on the Gilbert River, would allow for further development of the Gilbert River system.
- There is also much potential for Rivers in Northern Cape York and the river systems of the North West, like the Cloncurry River.
- There is scope to build another Dam on the Burdekin, north of Charters Towers at Hells Gate.

There are also private off-stream water storage opportunities, adjacent to the major streams that could be progressed or analysed for their contributions to long term sustainable economic development and minimise reliance on groundwater. Off-stream water storages in the Flinders and Gilbert Rivers’ catchments would provide for irrigation of fodder and grain crops for feedlotting, turning off a constant supply of fat cattle enabling the establishment of an economically viable meat works.

CATALYTIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Value-adding the regions’ agriculture is a natural consequence of development. This requires assistance and support for private investment in regional food processing and other value adding opportunities whether this is in horticulture (cannery) or meat processing capability. The northern beef industry is largely a price-taker, with the regional price largely set through the grinding beef price of JBS in Townsville. The next closest abattoir of any size is Mackay. However, there has been significant Chinese interest in the North Queensland cattle industry of late, and there is potential trade opportunities with China through live cattle and boxed beef.

Setting aside the beef industry’s current troubles, there is vast potential for the increase of and value adding to the beef cattle industry in the region. Expansion and sustainability rests on enhanced access to, and use of water; improved road
infrastructure which allows all weather access to markets, meatworks and ports, reform of leasehold conditions (tenure), improved pasture and meat processing capability.

There is huge energy demand and a base load power station to supply the future demands of the region is required. A secure power supply for new agricultural precincts e.g. the Gilbert River is needed. Three phase power is necessary to allow for value adding enterprises such as cotton gins, sugar mills, meat works and farming enterprises.

There is a need to revisit the Tully-Millstream proposal which was previously a 600MW power station (Barron Gorge is only 60MW). It is clean green energy, more efficient than wind or solar. The scheme has a small environmental footprint, involving the clearing/flooding of less than 150 Ha. This would partly address the growing massive deficit of power generation in the north and the need to unnecessarily import large amounts of electricity from south. It would avoid major quantities of greenhouse gas emissions. The scheme would also allow for water to the Upper Herbert and Tully Rivers.

Fuel pricing is an issue for the north and there is no ability to use natural gas. There is a huge price differential in fuel to southern outlets yet the far north is closer to Singapore’s refineries.

Landline, internet (high speed broadband) and mobile services need to be upgraded in rural and remote areas to advance both social and economic development. This is required, particularly for new cropping areas.

**TRANSPORT**

The Peninsula Developmental Road (PDR), which runs 558 km from Lakeland to Weipa, needs to be upgraded to unlock the area’s agricultural potential. Approximately 400 km of the road is unsealed and it is closed for up to four months per year due to the summer wet season. Sealing of the PDR with bitumen is essential to develop a vibrant, diverse and sustainable economy in Cape York.

The upgrading of the Bruce Highway is also of critical importance, as is sealing the remaining section of the Hann Highway; upgrading Kuranda Range Road to cater for b-doubles and sealing of the Savannah Way, from Cairns to Broome to dual carriageway.

Appropriate port infrastructure is also an issue for FNQ and Northern Australia more broadly. There needs to be consideration of the Cairns Shipping Development Project and consideration of regional ports including Karumba, Weipa and Mourilyan as playing a key role in the future growth of the region more broadly whether resulting from agriculture, tourism, mining activity, pastoralism, or energy.
REFERENCES


* * * * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Spies is an agricultural consultant who specialises in property-scale mapping and identification of good quality agricultural land, soil mapping, vegetation identification, cropping suitability, soil erosion and grazing land management. He has a Bachelor of Applied Science (Honours) in Rural Technology and is a qualified Agronomist and Land Resource Officer. Peter was previously employed in State Government for over 12 years with DNRM and DPI in Land Management. He has written material for land managers and has been published several times including as senior author of the National Case Studies Manual on Control of Prickly Acacia.

In his spare time Peter has a beef cattle seedstock operation, with 220 breeders, breeding Senepol and Composite bulls for the northern Industry and is involved in Agforce as its Far North delegate. Recently, Peter, through his practice – Pinnacle Consulting, was lead consultant for a large agricultural development of 28,023Ha on the Gilbert River in Far North Queensland. This application was the first of its kind in Queensland for high-value agriculture under the Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Act 2013.
Developing northern Australia: a taxing problem

SENATOR MATTHEW CANAVAN
Australia has 16 cities with a population of more than 100,000 people. Three of our youngest five cities, Cairns, Darwin and Townsville, are in Northern Australia. These three cities were all established within around a decade of each other, from 1865 to 1876.

It was not a coincidence that these towns were established just after the first gold rushes in southern Australia. The Burke and Wills expedition, of 1860–61, itself was financed by the wealth from the gold rushes.

We are just emerging from the biggest mining boom in Australia since then. The legacy of the 1850s and 1860s was formative for Australia. Victoria quickly became the most populous state, many towns were based around goldfields and the new found wealth gave Australians confidence to explore their nation and develop new parts of it.

Will we leave the same legacy from our mining boom?

Perhaps not, it is a different environment today. Back then there was no income tax, no corporate tax, no federal government and certainly very little red or green tape. Because developing new areas is always a risky business, modern taxation systems actively discourage development of new areas.

Taxation penalises all economic activity but it penalises risky economic activity more. That’s because under our tax system, if you make a profit the government takes its share, but if you make a loss you may never be able to claim the tax deduction.

Let’s say you make an investment that is risky. With equal likelihood the investment could give you either a $100 profit or an $80 loss. Without tax this investment would deliver an average profit of $10 so you should take the plunge. With say a 30 per cent corporate tax rate things completely change. Your $100 profit becomes just a $70 profit and the loss is still $80 (assuming you can’t transfer the loss). The same project now delivers, on average, a $5 loss so the investment won’t be made.

The government is a silent investment partner in every business, but only finds its voice in profitable years. The riskier the investment the more likely the government’s voice will stop investment in otherwise profitable ventures.

Developing northern Australia will certainly be a risky business. There is no low hanging fruit because if there were someone would have picked that fruit already.

So if we are serious about encouraging people to make risky investments in northern Australia we must reform our tax system to encourage such investments. I will outline three possible ideas here – although there are lots of ways to the top of this mountain.

First, many would not be aware that there is already a tax benefit that seeks to encourage northern development. In 1945, the Australian Government introduced an allowance for Australians living in northern Australia because of “the uncongenial climatic conditions, isolation and high costs of living in comparison to other areas of Australia.” It was set at £40 (A$72) for areas in remote areas, and £20 (A$36) in other parts of northern Australia. Today, those allowances (or now tax rebates) are $338 (up from £40) and $57 (up from £20) respectively. The rates have not been increased for more than 20 years. If the allowances had just kept up with inflation since 1945, the rates would now be $2,630 and $1,300 respectively.

The boundaries for getting the rebates have not been changed at all. People in Cairns and Townsville still get $57 a year for living in an area of “uncongenial conditions”. The zones are out of date, no one will move to Cairns for a carton of beer a year.

We should reform these rebates by better targeting them to areas that really do lack public services and increase them so that they really do attract people to move to northern Australia. The zone tax rebate costs Australia $285 million a year so there is a substantial amount of money to allocate.

Some argue that the constitution restricts such tax rebates because under section 51(ii)
the Commonwealth does not have powers of taxation that “discriminate between States or parts of States.” Yet, the zone tax rebate has been in place for 70 years without challenge.

Second, zone rebates can help workers move to northern Australia but businesses must move too for jobs to be created. The recent Northern Australia green paper identified agriculture as a key driver of those potential future jobs. There is more than 5 million hectares of land that can be irrigated in the north, an area where we use less than 5 per cent of the water available.

Tax legislation provides for accelerated depreciation for investments in dams, tanks, bores, wells, channels and windmills for irrigation purposes. Investments in these items can be depreciated over 3 years, which is in general much shorter than their economic life.

In the past, an immediate tax deduction was permitted for investments in these kinds of assets (section 75B). That is, a farmer could deduct the construction costs of a dam in the year it was built. If we want to encourage investment in new irrigation areas, we should consider reintroducing this provision. When you talk to farmers today, many of them comment that the removal of section 75B has substantially reduced incentives to invest in irrigation infrastructure.

Increasing investment in infrastructure that uses water should be a basic goal because we use too little of our water resources compared to other countries. Australia uses just 6 per cent of its water resources compared to a world average of 9 per cent. If we lifted our investment to the world average we would be more than halfway to doubling our food production target through that action alone.

*FIGURE CONSUMPTION OF AVAILABLE WATER RESOURCES*

**PERCENTAGE OF AVAILABLE WATER**

![Graph showing water consumption around the world](image)


Farmers will need ways to quickly and efficiently get their produce to market so investment in irrigation infrastructure will be essential. Some are growing cotton successfully in the Gulf right now, but the $70 to $80 a bale it costs to transport to the closest gin at Emerald destroys the economics of it.
In the 1960s the Menzies Government invested in beef roads and their legacy is still seen today. To drive growth in the north we will need a new surge in investment in northern infrastructure. Back then public funds were used, but now we have $667 billion of Labor debt.

We need to attract private funds, we need to attract some of the $1.6 trillion in superannuation that Australia has available to invest in the north. We can’t force people to invest in the north but we can offer a tax benefit to do so.

At the last election, the LNP promised to investigate the possibility of providing a tax benefit for investment in nationally significant infrastructure. The benefit would be based broadly on the municipal bond scheme in the United States. That scheme exempts the profits from certain infrastructure provided by local governments (or municipalities) from federal income tax. The size of the US municipal bond market is around $3.7 trillion, about 10 per cent of the total US bond market. It has proved to be a stable and popular way of funding infrastructure in the United States.

Australia does not have a sizeable or stable non-government bond market. A frequent criticism of Australian superannuation funds is that they invest too much in equities, but in fairness there are not many fixed income options in the Australian market.

Creating an infrastructure bond market in Australia, with a generous tax advantage, would be a worthwhile way of building more infrastructure for Australia, keeping more Australian savings invested in Australia and developing more mature and sophisticated domestic capital markets.

There are many ways to change the tax system to encourage development of northern Australia. I have just gone through a few ideas here. What is not in doubt is that the tax system can be used to direct investment into some areas but not others.

From 1696 to 1851, the British Government imposed a “window tax” based on the number of windows in a house. The idea was that the number of windows would be a proxy for wealth. The response was obvious as people cut back on windows, and some floors had no windows at all to avoid the tax. There is even a report that 52 people died due to a lack of ventilation in a house with no windows, ostensibly to avoid the tax. Changing taxes is one of the quickest ways to change behaviour.

We want more Australians to move to, and invest in, northern Australia. Achieving that will be a lot easier if we encourage private investment as well as public. The tax system should be one cannon in our policy armoury that we use to attract investment in our north.

* * * * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Canavan is a Senator for Queensland. He was elected to the Senate at the 2013 election. Prior to entering the Senate Matthew had been Senator Barnaby Joyce’s Chief of Staff, a Director at the Productivity Commission and a Senior Executive at KPMG.

He has a first class honours degree in economics from the University of Queensland. He lives in Toowoomba with his wife and three children — soon to be four!
SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION: WASTE OIL IN QUEENSLAND

Southern Oil and J.J. Richard & Sons have entered into a Joint Venture to design, build and operate the Northern Oil Refinery, a new re-refining plant at Yarwun, near Gladstone. Officially launched by the Queensland Environment and Heritage Minister Andrew Powell and the federal Minister for Industry, the Hon Ian Macfarlane MP in March this year, the Northern Oil Refinery represents a $65 million greenfield investment in regional Queensland.

The Northern Oil Refinery is the first true re-refining plant in Queensland, and it has the potential to process 100% of Queensland’s annual production of waste lube oil back into high quality base oil, suitable as the raw material for manufacture of new engine oils for the automotive, transport, mining and agricultural sectors.

In Australia about 350 million litres of waste oil is collected every year. Until now 60% of that total has been burned in Australia, and 24% has been exported overseas to be burned. This represents a waste of a diminishing and finite resource, and a source of atmospheric emissions which can be avoided by waste generators choosing re-refining in preference to burning as the destination of choice for their waste oil.

Southern Oil, Managing Director Tim Rose said this was the next generation of waste oil management. “What we need now is strong support from waste oil producers like mines, and local governments, to direct their waste lube oil to make sure it is re-refined”, he said.

At full operational capacity, the plant will reduce Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions by about 290,000 tonnes every year – a real example of taking direct action on climate change – and will offset the average Australian’s lifetime production of greenhouse gas emissions every two days.

The Northern Oil Refinery has created 40 full time positions and supports many more indirect jobs in the region and Queensland.

Mr Rose said “That’s a win for the environment, it’s a win for business, and it secures the re-use of an otherwise diminishing and finite resource.”

J.J. Richards & Sons will manage the collection and transportation of waste lube oil, at no cost to waste oil generators, from across Queensland.
Providing Queensland Communities with Innovative and Sustainable Total Waste Management Solutions
A SUSTAINABLE EAST TRINITY

Lessons from history and a plan for the future

NORMAN WHITNEY
Adjacent to the eastern shoreline of Trinity Inlet, directly opposite the newly constructed Cairns Cruise Ship Terminal and less than one kilometre from the Cairns Convention centre and the Cairns Central Business District, there is a 943.6ha freehold State Government owned property attracting considerable interest.

The State Government’s election promise to upgrade the Cairns shipping channel poses a rare opportunity to improve the environmental condition of this site. Furthermore, the solution I propose is cost effective, and avoids the need to dump spoil on the Great Barrier Reef.

First let me explain the history of the site and how it was damaged. I will then outline a plan for its future.

**1. 1900 TO 1980: ORCHARDS, CATTLE AND SUGAR CANE**

From the early 1900s until World War II, the landholders occupying East Trinity operated dairy and cattle grazing farms. In the adjoining Glen Boughton Valley, orchards and market gardens were established. A horse drawn tram line was built to a jetty from which the produce was punted or rowed across the inlet to town markets. Grazing and horticulture continued up until the early 1960s when sugar cane growing took over. CSR purchased one of the productive farms and some additional land from the State. Some of this land was low lying and semi tidal. In 1972 CSR constructed a “bund” wall, reclaiming land which they filled and levelled to make the 775ha flat lowlands more productive.

**2. 1980S: CSR STOP GROWING CANE, EDMONTON SUGAR MILL CLOSED, DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

During the 1980s CSR divested many of its cane growing assets and closed the Edmonton Sugar Mill.

The East Trinity property was seen by many as a potential development site for the expansion of Cairns and was eventually purchased by developers. One of the State’s leading town planning consultants, led by Professor John Brannock, was engaged to design and gain approvals for what was to be the State’s most innovative resort and residential integrated development. In principle approval was granted by the State, and strongly supported by State Treasurer Keith DeLacy, then the Labor Member for Cairns. Many millions were spent on consultants researching and planning the “Royal Reef” proposal for approval in 1992.

Over the following three years numerous additional requirements and conditions were imposed, including a major financial contribution for direct city access. Accepting these, the proponents financed Main Roads Department studies to design the required bridges and roadways connecting to the Bruce Highway, also providing the vital second southern access to Cairns.

**3. OBJECTIONS BY ‘GREENS’ AND THE ANTI-DEVELOPMENT LOBBY SUCCEED, STATE PAY COMPENSATION**

During this period the now well-known extreme “green” and anti-development lobby strongly objected and protested against any development or Inlet crossing with deliberate misinformation and deceptive propaganda, resulting in approval delays.

The goal posts changed constantly, additional conditions were imposed until finally the financier abandoned the project, threatening legal action. To avoid that, the State purchased the property in 2000.

Unrelated to the development, CSIRO was investigating potential acid sulfate problems along the Australian coastline. The East Trinity property was of immense interest to them as a research area. The study concluded after three years of constant sampling and laboratory work. Details were made available to senior management of the State Environment Office, presented personally to Environment Minister Welford and sent to Premier Beattie. Each responded with disinterest.

Member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch, then Secretary to the Federal Minister for Science,
obtained the peer-reviewed and published CSIRO Land and Water papers (titled, Environmental impact of Acid Sulfate Soils, near Cairns - East Trinity Acid Sulfate Soils – environmental Hazards - Acid Sulfate Soils in East Trinity Inlet). Warren understood the environmental risk at stake.

4. CSIRO REPORT CONDEMNS REMEDIATION EFFORTS, SAYS CAPPING IS THE PREFERRED OPTION

Alarmingly, it was revealed that up to 6000 times the allowable ANZECC guidelines of aluminium, plus equivalent high levels of iron, zinc arsenic and other contaminates were being discharged into Trinity Inlet. This presented many problems for a bio-remediation method, or reflooding with normal tidal interchange. Surveys had revealed depression areas, formed in the 20 years since it was last drained, and from agricultural earthworks. The CSIRO said: ‘Experience of CSIRO scientists at the site indicates that remediation by conventional acid neutralisation or simple reflooding would be impractical. Moreover this approach is likely to be uneconomic and environmentally hazardous’.

Capping, or burial beneath clean fill became the preferred recommendation ‘especially since large quantities of sediment may be available from harbour dredging’.

The Beattie Government’s department was not equipped, and did not have the staff or local facilities to manage the property. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service became trustee of the property, and it became the State’s responsibility to resolve the problems.

5. ‘ECO-TOURISM’ SUGGESTIONS TOO EXPENSIVE, LABOR RULE OUT DEVELOPMENT TO APPEASE ‘GREENS’

Desley Boyle, then the Labor Member for Cairns, arranged numerous discussions with many sectors seeking to solve the environmental problems and map out possible future uses for the land. Several development and ‘Eco Tourism’ suggestions were proposed, but all needed huge amounts of State finance for infrastructure and were deemed non-viable. To retain favour with the radical Greens, residential development was ruled out.

A group calling itself the Cairns Wetland Park Committee was formed from the Green lobby, with the objective of taking control of the property. QASSIT (Queensland Acid Sulfate Soil Investigation Team) was financed, and against advice from CSIRO, ‘triailed’ inundation of sea water to neutralise acid production, to create a Wetland Park. Additionally, hundreds of tonnes of lime were spread and introduced into the area’s waterways.

6. COSTLY MAINTENANCE EXACERBATES THIS ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER, AS CSIRO PREDICTED

This treatment has continued for the past 13 years at great cost to taxpayers. Acid has probably now been neutralised in many of the creeks and waterways, but thousands of once-flourishing melaleuca trees are now dead, and acres of other dead vegetation are now clearly visible. Large ponds of stagnant water, unaffected by the tidal flow, are breeding clouds of mosquitoes and a crocodile habitat, all within one kilometre of the city. The surrounding dry land is over-run with weeds, providing shelter to feral pigs and other vermin.

The result is a total environmental disaster, and potentially a public health disaster. The CSIRO predictions of environmental damage have been proven correct.

7. NOW A PROPOSAL TO DREDGE SHIPPING CHANNEL TO ALLOW LARGE CRUISE SHIPS TO BERTH IN CBD

Honouring an election promise, the LNP government will be upgrading the Cairns shipping channel to allow more large cruise ships to berth, along with other major maritime activities. The dredging program is expected to remove upwards of five million cubic meters which, during the normal maintenance dredging over a number of years, has been deposited off shore in an area approved by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park authority.
Maintenance dredging of the port has been conducted for the past 100 years. Previously, great quantities were pumped on shore: most of the Portsmith commercial/industrial area was established on this reclaimed land, together with other sites near the CBD.

With the huge quantity of dredged material to become available, using it as filling on the East Trinity site would be a win-win opportunity.

The acid sulfate contamination problem would be solved, in the manner proposed by CSIRO. The potential health risks from mosquito-borne diseases adjacent to the shipping port would be resolved. Should the State retain the property for a future use or sale, its value could increase dramatically. Alternatively, the State could pass ownership to the Cairns Regional Council to oversee this and other related projects. Moreover there would be no need for continuing the off-shore disposal which is causing much community concern. Many ‘experts’ have given evidence that the off-shore dumping is not a cause for concern or damage the environment. That may be so, however, many local people are worried about this massive amount of spoil being dumped ‘near our reef’.

8. AN OPPORTUNITY SOON TO FIX THIS POLLUTION AND ENABLE MORE PEOPLE TO LIVE CLOSE TO THE CBD

Ports North currently plan to continue dumping all spoil off shore. It is treated as a costly waste product. This potentially valuable resource could be conservatively valued at $20 per cubic metre.

If this spoil is used on the East Trinity site the increased value of the property could be far in excess of any pumping, placement and other related costs. Indeed the potential revenue and could well cover the total dredging operation as well as all development costs. The calculations for such developments have not been updated from 1994 estimates, however some early estimates are favourable.

Many Cairns residents eagerly await the Ports North draft Environmental Impact Statement. That report will provide a full assessment of five possible on-land options for placement of this spoil.

Wise decision-makers, unafraid of disinformation from a very small but vocal minority, need to act now. The environmental catastrophe at East Trinity can be resolved and the property made available for the City’s future growth. The land, and potentially another four square kilometres, could become an urban residential development area very close to the CBD, as advocated by town planners. A bonus would be that valuable agricultural land presently earmarked for residential development would remain productive, extending the viability of the sugar industry and the associated jobs.

Surely that is a win-win for the environment as well as most Cairns stakeholders.

★★★★★★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norman Whitney and his wife Edna settled in Cairns in 1968 after selling their business interests in Bougainville and moving back to Australia. After a career that included experience in the agriculture and earthmoving industries, Norm retired in 1991 hoping to spend more time on his rural property. Instead, he was engaged by Cairns Council and the Trinity Inlet Management Program to carry out water quality sampling. He also performed work on water quality for the CSIRO.

President for many years of the Eastern Trinity Inlet Ratepayers and Residents Association, Norm has been involved in many community groups, and represented them in discussions with government, council and developers. A section of Norm and Edna’s property overlooks the government’s ET site.
Sid Faithfull was an intensely private man, yet he created Australia’s largest privately-owned shipping company - Sea Swift, one of the biggest employers in Cairns.

The company continues to grow and provide economic benefits to many families and the region.

His death, at just 68, was premature, but Mr Faithfull made sure his company, his legacy to the region, would continue. He sold it 18 months ago in a deal involving private equity fund CHAMP Ventures 7 Funds, current CEO Fred White and other senior managers.

Mr Faithfull established Sea Swift in 1987 as a two-man, one vessel operation. Now it has more than 300 staff and 25 vessels and turns over $100 million a year. Within the next five years it plans to add another 100 staff and 10 more vessels.

Mr Faithfull was brought up in the Far North and his working life started as a jackaroo in the mid-1960s, progressed to crocodile hunting, mining at Agate Creek in the Far North, working as a cook in the Northern Territory and a prawn trawlerman at Karumba.

In the mid-1980s he bought his first boat, a tug named Carlock which became a mothership for the Gulf of Carpentaria prawn fishing fleet. Mr Faithfull then bought a cattle station, Neumayer Valley, and obtained his pilot’s licence as his cattle, transport and property business rapidly grew.

He returned to Cairns so his sons could attend high school and set up Sea Swift in 1987 on waterfront land at Portsmith. This would also be the year Air Swift planes also began operating.

In a book about the company’s first quarter of a century, Sea Swift, A 25 Year Passage, Mr Faithfull was described as “first and foremost the ultimate entrepreneur”.

“He sees an opportunity, does what needs to be done to build a business around the opportunity and then rolls up his sleeves and goes for it. Sid Faithfull is a calculated risk taker, an opportunist, a visionary and a believer who has never been afraid to back himself.”

Company chairman Peter Dexter said Mr Faithfull was a “remarkable” man.

Federal Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch said he was “a legend”. Mr Entsch said, “He was a pioneer in many ways … his entrepreneurial skills were quite amazing.”
Ports North chairman and Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry chairman Brett Moller said Mr Faithfull would be remembered for his entrepreneurial spirit and drive.

“He was a man of vision who realised opportunities and had the courage of his convictions to drive change and innovation,” he said.

Advance Cairns chief executive Mark Matthews said Mr Faithfull was a “quiet achiever (with) … strong family values and loyalty to staff”.

“He has left a legacy of an enduring business that has supported the development of the region, providing critical connection to and from the Cape and Torres Strait,” he said.

State Member for Cairns Gavin King said the Far North was built on the back of entrepreneurs like Mr Faithfull. “With tenacity, ingenuity and foresight Mr Faithfull saw a need and service gap in the 1970s and didn’t stop until that need was filled by what is now Australia’s largest private shipping company.”

Mr Faithfull is survived by his partner Christine, sons Bradley and Arran and daughter Jessie.
SKILLED EXODUS: GIVING REGIONAL YOUTH A REASON TO STAY

LAURA WALKER
The Far North Queensland region is known for the Great Barrier Reef, Daintree Forest and unique landscapes, making it a key tourist destination. However it’s not only those visiting who find themselves off the clock. Youth unemployment in Far North Queensland is amongst the highest in the nation. Cairns currently holds the title for having the highest rate of youth unemployment in the state.

The global financial crisis and the impacts of cyclones have had a hard impact on the Far North Queensland economy with tourism and agriculture amongst those industries hardest hit. Cyclone Yasi resulted in cane and sugar crops being completely destroyed. Whilst those in the southeast corner may have complained about the spike in cost for bananas, the reality is this destruction caused devastation and cost jobs in Far North Queensland.

The destruction of island resorts also contributed to further job losses in the region and an ongoing recovery bill. Many businesses did not recover from the GFC and the impacts of two major natural disasters. Those fortunate to survive are still struggling to recover with the added burden of the Labor Government’s carbon tax and the crippling cost of insurance. Many businesses simply cannot afford to employ more young workers lacking in experience and requiring training when there are other sources of trained labour, such as backpackers, available.

Young people between the ages of 18 – 25 are not attractive applicants. They face several challenges including the high minimum wage, superannuation costs and penalty rates. If young people have not been able to obtain employment with one of the big businesses like Coles or Woolworths by the time they are 18 they suddenly find it a whole lot harder to find a job.

The issue of youth unemployment cannot solely be attributed to economic downturns or lack of opportunity. The more sinister issue is an entrenched culture of entitlement. Where is the incentive for young people to get a job? They have grown up knowing that government will support them. Many leave school with no idea what they want to do and no sense of accountability to anyone. Centrelink provides an easy option.

When interviewed recently by the Cairns Post, the Member for Cairns, Gavin King MP, said, “young people cannot expect to step into a job as a CEO.” While we encourage young people to have goals and follow their dreams, it is also about time the youth of Far North Queensland learned that you have to start somewhere.

The 2014/2015 Budget is a step in the right direction, making work for the dole schemes mandatory for 18 – 30 year olds. Furthermore, budgetary changes do not touch Youth Allowance, ABStudy or Austudy rates. Consider this: a young person can finish school, commence studying at university and could complete their degree without ever doing a days work in their life. How is this preparing young people for a professional career?

Students should not be finishing a degree with a one-line resume that simply just reads Bachelor of Laws at James Cook University completed 2014. Make no mistake, students do often find it difficult to find a balance between work and full time study. However, it is imperative that students have exposure to a workplace environment in order to have a balanced skill set upon completion of their studies.

Unfortunately for students in Far North Queensland this variety of opportunities is simply not there. Hence, time flexibility and monetary incentives are vitally important to ensure the future of youth in Far North Queensland. Additionally, due to the structure of university study and the long holiday periods, those reliant on government assistance should be mandated to seek employment or undertake volunteer work or an internship during semester breaks to ensure that they are actively broadening their skill sets and employability.

Youth unemployment is not only about finding part time or casual jobs for those studying, it is
also about addressing the lack of level entry positions in the region. In order for the Far North to grow and prosper we need the ability to educate, train and employ young people without having to send them outside the region.

As it stands currently, many young people can complete their tertiary education within Far North Queensland but cannot find a job within their chosen discipline. The resulting exodus sees a countless number of skilled youth leave the region each year, never to return.

There is a silver lining – new investment and opportunities in the Far North region may provide a temporary solution. Projects such as the proposed Aquis development in Cairns and the Ella Bay Resort on the Cassowary Coast are a just a couple of the exciting developments offering a reinvigoration of the area and potential employment opportunities for the youth of the north. Finally, further investments in tropical health and medical research highlight the unique opportunities of the Far North region, leading to a growing mood of optimism.

The Federal Coalition’s Northern Australia White Paper Joint Select Committee, chaired the Honourable Warren Entsch MP, is set to provide a 2030 vision that will open up opportunities and address the issues. Far North Queensland is a beautiful, terrifying but resilient place. We’ve already weathered the GFC and many a cyclone. Now is the time for us as a region to tackle youth unemployment.

* * * * *
Interested in contributing to Dialogue?

Contact the editorial team at dialogue@lnp.org.au and let us know your area of interest.

Advertising enquiries, letters to the editor and your feedback and comments are welcome.

DOES YOUR PARTY UNIT NEED HELP WITH POLICY DEVELOPMENT?
The Policy Standing Committee is here to assist, and can provide information and training on how to develop effective policy motions. Let us know how we can assist your party unit via email to dialogue@lnp.org.au

Editor:

Amanda Stoker

Editorial team:

Roderick Schneider

Chris McLoughlin

Alessia Maruca

Richard Williams

Feature contributors:

Feature contributors are Robyn Quick, Hon. Warren Entsch MP, Sen. Hon. Ian Macdonald, Peter Spies, Sen Matthew Canavan, Norman Whitney, Laura Walker
THINKING AHEAD
Delivering solutions to Government

A Queensland Team with hands-on expertise and experience at all levels of Government.

We understand the challenges that you face.

THINK AHEAD. TALK TO US TODAY.
Contact Lindsay Cardell and our expert team for tailored solutions.
07 3222 9777  lcardell@bris.bentleys.com.au  www.bentleys.com.au