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Australia's Great North

A summary of the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia

Introduction

There has been significant media attention over the last few days regarding the recent release of the Federal Government's White Paper on Developing Northern Australia (the latter being defined as all of Northern Territory and those parts of Western Australia and Queensland above the Tropic of Capricorn). Prime Minister Mr Tony Abbott rolled out the above White Paper in Cairns, Queensland on 19 June 2015, and made particular emphasis on the following six key areas for development in Northern Australia over the next 20 years.

The six key areas for development in Northern Australia over the next 20 years

1 Simpler land tenure arrangements to support investment

- overhaul the native title system including:
 - the finalisation of all existing native title claims within 10 years;
 - more efficient native title claim processes (to create more certainty for investors);
 - funding to assist native title holders to better engage with investors;
 - explore options for exclusive native title rights to be used for commercial purposes;
 - support freehold/99 year leaseholds for willing indigenous communities (to support home ownership);
 - consult on new models to manage native title funds for investment;
 - improve the security, bankability and efficiency of pastoral land (including pastoral leaseholds so that their tenure becomes broader and simpler).

2 Developing water resources

- create a new National Water Infrastructure Development Fund to develop secure and tradeable water rights;
- invest \$200 million to build water infrastructure in areas including:
 - the Mitchell River (Queensland);
 - West Kimberley (Western Australia); and
 - The Darwin region (Northern Territory).

3 Growing Northern Australia as a business, trade and investment gateway

- arrange for a major investment forum to be held in Darwin in late 2015 to attract investors and expose them to the opportunities in Northern Australia;
- publish and release investor-ready projects in Northern Australia;
- create a Northern Australia Insurance Premiums Taskforce focussed on reducing insurance costs in the north;
- provide funding and other initiatives to enhance the economic and business connections within the Asia-Pacific region;
- simplify administrative processes associated with Indigenous Cultural Heritage restrictions (including indigenous rangers), funding to smaller communities, the issuance of Chinese and Indian visitor visas, fisheries and aquaculture management and the export of low risk species;
- increase funding in biosecurity, including commercialising research and development in biosecurity;
- increase funding and emphasis on research and development regarding tropical health;
- create a "single point of entry" office in Darwin, Northern Territory to reduce

administrative processes for major project approvals;

- increase focus on accessibility to remote communities including reduced domestic airfares.

4 Investing in infrastructure to lower business and household costs

- funding to improve, create and upgrade road links, rail links and aviation links (including upgrading airstrips) throughout Northern Australia;
- improve cattle supply chains including identifying investment and deregulation priorities.

5 Reducing barriers to employing people

- provide incentives (including funding) for businesses to expand into northern Australia;
- expand and pilot visa programmes, particularly regarding northern tourism and agriculture resourcing in high demand areas;
- a more centralised Australian licencing regime to create flexibility for those wanting to work in Northern Australia;
- employment targets for Indigenous Australians.

6 Improving governance

- relocation of the Office of Northern Australia (part of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development) from Canberra to Darwin;
- regular meetings with the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Northern Australia to monitor the progress of the initiatives detailed in the white paper through the Northern Australia Strategic Partnership;
- an annual statement presented by the Deputy Prime Minister to Parliament regarding the progress of the white paper initiatives;
- the Joint Committee on Northern Australia be made an enduring feature of future Parliaments.

The Great North – Great Opportunities for investment in agribusiness?

The initiatives detailed in the Federal Government's White Paper on Developing Northern Australia, once implemented, could create tangible and exciting opportunities for investors in the food and agribusiness sectors.

This much anticipated white paper demonstrates the federal government's commitment to capitalising on a significant opportunity in the current and forecast economic climate to grow multiple regional economies in Northern Australia. The implementation of the white paper will however require a collaborative approach from multiple governments at a federal, state and regional level as well as the private sector and an ongoing commitment from the federal government to drive the white papers key recommendations.

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