

# Northern Australian Futures Roundtable Overview

Kimberley to Cape working with Regional Development Australia NT, Charles Darwin University, Minerals Council of Australia NT, Australian Conservation Foundation, Territory NRM, Northern Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, and others, hosted a two day Northern Australian Futures Roundtable, focusing on land and sea futures, in Darwin in May 2104.

Over 80 people participated from ~50 organisations representing agricultural, tourism, NRM, Indigenous, pastoral, finance, mining, oil/gas, conservation, research and government sectors. Speakers included Joe Morrison (Northern Land Council), Kevin Mulvahil (AACo), Drew Wagner (Minerals Council NT), Harvey Locke (consultant Yellowstone to Yukon), Kate Andrews (Territory NRM), John Woinarski (Consultant), Michael Douglas (CDU) and Clare Taylor (KtC), with Andrew Campbell (CDU) chairing the first session. Bevan Bessen facilitated the event which participants described as 'energising', 'collaborative' and 'inspiring'.

The following summarises the key messages produced and prioritised by participants over the two days. Please note that we did not call for any formal endorsement of these messages at the event so they may not represent the views of every participant or their organisation, however all participants were invited to comment on a draft and all comments have been incorporated here. **We ask that readers consider and use these messages and recommendations in their own work and activities wherever possible.**

## Key messages

1. All sectors represented have a strong interest in **working together** to support development and conservation across Northern Australia that maintains natural and cultural values and strengthens communities. There is a desire to share ideas and opportunities across sectors and to continue conversations and collaborations to achieve an economically resilient and environmentally sustainable future for the North.
2. Key **elements** of a successful future for Northern Australia include:
  - A long term shared vision for the future, supported by a long term planning approach and collaborative decision-making
  - An economy that is diverse, resilient, environmentally sustainable, equitable and based on world-leading industry practices
  - Greater recognition of, respect for, and collaboration with, Indigenous people as land holders/managers
  - Acknowledgement that cultural, social, environmental and economic outcomes are interrelated rather than mutually exclusive, and that healthy country helps ensure healthy people.
3. Common ground among sectors can be represented by the following **guiding principles**:
  - A resilient, diverse and sustainable economy for Northern Australia is necessary to underpin the wellbeing of its communities, the long-term management of its resources and its contribution to society
  - Northern Australia's unique, intact and globally-significant natural and cultural values must be recognised, utilised and safeguarded as central to its future
  - Indigenous interests must be recognised, and northern development and socio-economic development need to be pursued together, since neither is sustainable, nor equitable, without the other
  - Development options must involve genuine collaboration with local communities and be compatible with local conditions.
4. Key **pathways** to help achieve a successful future include:
  - Establish a shared policy framework for large developments to ensure that enduring values are maintained
  - Embed this in a strategic landuse planning process for development/conservation/land management
  - Progress a landscape scale connectivity initiative across Northern Australia
  - Build respectful relationships with Indigenous people by recognising their rights, land ownership, needs and aspirations via for example cultural enterprise economies and/or the Indigenous 'prospectus' proposal
  - Build on development that has worked in existing sectors, and focus on multiple benefits and high value products with low environmental footprint
  - Recognise that safeguarding catchment-marine connections is critical for successful development
  - Market what's unique about the north and implement mechanisms to maintain these attributes.

5. Specific pathway recommendations:

Policy & Planning	Establish a policy framework for large developments to ensure that enduring values (social, cultural, economic, environmental) are maintained and embed this in a land use planning process based on local collaboration and good science
	Develop a shared strategic plan for development and conservation of the North using either a structured process (eg clarify purpose, governance arrangements and engagement processes, develop an agreed vision among stakeholders based on the 'roundtable principles', set quantifiable objectives & targets) or via a grass-roots/social media approach eg based on existing property scale/tenure based plans
	Recognise Indigenous people as first peoples in the constitution, their ownership of and rights to land and the importance of building trust and respectful relationships
	Support an Indigenous community lead prospectus(i) to drive appropriate sustainable economic development
	Work with industry stakeholders, banks, NGO's and the commercial sector to establish greater transparency around development decisions and long-term policy stability for investors, communities and businesses
	Ensure decisions are based on good evidence and local knowledge, as well as two way learning
	Audit current policies, plans & information bases across the north to fill gaps in the basis of decision making
Country	Strengthen and expand Indigenous ranger programs since these have multiple benefits and are inexpensive
	Hold Roundtable meetings for specific issues (ie sea country issues, fisheries, mining, ports)
	Use best practice consultation, observe local protocols and recognise traditional knowledge and experience
	Adopt a long term approach to career pathways in land and sea management to ensure future generations develop and achieve career aspirations (e.g. cultural, corporate and academic training, internships, mentoring, case management, exchange programs, leadership programs)
Connectivity	Develop a landscape scale connectivity initiative based on the following vision "ensure that the world's largest tropical savannah and rivers region retains its outstanding biodiversity values and its vital Indigenous cultures, and supports healthy communities, from the Kimberley to Cape York"
	Identify people and organisations who are prepared to work together to realise this vision, develop a common agenda, establish shared measures of success (cultural & ecological values and processes, social & economic), undertake mutually reinforcing activities and develop a communication strategy on behalf of all participants
Agriculture	Improve our capacity to undertake strategic, economic and market analysis of agricultural development proposals including analysis of the opportunity costs/benefits of public investment
	Progress beyond the food bowl concept; capitalise on development in existing sectors (eg cattle and horticulture) that has worked, focus on reducing risk for producers and the environment, focus on multiple benefits and advocate for high value products with low environmental footprint
	Increase research, development and extension services in tropical agriculture and livestock systems and better use the knowledge of northern farmers
	Improve integration of agriculture and natural systems and implement useful land tenure reforms
	Adopt policy frameworks to distribute available resources fairly and recognises existing users. Especially improve policy and technical capacity in water allocation to be National Water Initiative consistent
Catchment	Recognise and communicate that 'catchment-to-the-sea' connections are the foundation for the environmental, economic and social health of Northern Australia
	Build a strong public advocacy around river health and protection on a quality information base
	Maintain or create Indigenous water policy groups for better communication with planners
	Advocate better compliance with NWI and best practice community engagement
Identity	Maintain what's unique about the north and market this
	Hold a workshop on identity of place, shared values, current markets, existing potential brands, commitment to the brand, targets and who's involved, to develop a value proposition for a Northern Australia brand. Identify a representative custodian/entity to protect and maintain it

**Kimberley to Cape**

- supports development and conservation that maintains natural and cultural values, and strengthens communities, from the Kimberley to Cape York
- serves a network, facilitates collaboration, aligns effort and catalyses action
- is Darwin-based and draws from a range of energy and expertise across the North and beyond

For more information please see [www.kimberleytocape.net.au](http://www.kimberleytocape.net.au) or email [kimberleytocape@iinet.net.au](mailto:kimberleytocape@iinet.net.au)