



Catholic Social Services
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Northern Australia Taskforce
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response to Green Paper on Northern Australia

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is pleased to submit a brief response to the recent Green Paper of the Northern Australia Taskforce. We have previously submitted a more comprehensive submissionⁱ to the Federal Parliament Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia and our recommendations to this Committee's Inquiry still stand. CSSA believes it is important, when economic development is being considered, that support for those people who are most vulnerable remains a priority.

At the outset we acknowledge that economic investment in new business, development and infrastructure in Northern Australia will have economic and social flow on benefits for the existing communities especially in job and training opportunities. However, our previous submission made recommendations about the importance of also investing in social services and infrastructure to ensure that economic development and growth in Northern Australia results in thriving communities where all residents can participate and flourish.

Our member services in Northern Australian communities are delivered by CatholicCare NT, Centacare Family Services Geraldton, Centacare Kimberley, Centacare Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton (Centacare Rockhampton), Centacare North Queensland, North West Queensland Indigenous Catholic Social Services and Centacare Cairns. These organizations together employ over 770 staffⁱⁱ and work with over 42,000 individualsⁱⁱⁱ and with their families and communities. The social services provided include working with vulnerable families, children, Indigenous Australians, migrant communities, elderly Australians, people with disabilities, people with mental illness and people who are homeless.

Advice from our Northern Australia member agencies indicates that there is a high demand for social services including mental health services in isolated communities (including in indigenous communities), support for families under financial pressure, effects of long term unemployment, assistance for families who cope with Fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) work practices and financial pressures from high rents where there are housing shortages. For these reasons and additional ones outlined in our previous submission we made the following recommendations to the Joint Select Committee:

1. Reinvest in social outcomes in regions where development is occurring similar to the Royalties for Regions Programs in Western Australia and Queensland;
2. Develop the local workforce with training and business skills including social enterprise;
3. Invest further in NBN and technology to address gaps in services and high costs and difficulties in providing services; and
4. Invest in the Not-for-profit sector with additional funding to support social outcomes.

Subsequently, the Green Paper on Northern Australia has identified six areas of strategic focus for further attention:

1. delivering economic infrastructure;
2. improving land use and access;
3. improving water access and management;
4. promoting trade and investment, and strengthening the business environment;
5. fostering education, research and innovation; and
6. enhancing governance.

As an overall comment we do not see any priority being placed on investment in people or communities such as in affordable housing, community and health services, social infrastructure and recreation; the social fabric that underpins strong and vibrant communities. As well as social benefits that would accrue from this investment, there are also sound economic ones as well. Research suggests that communities that do not have sufficient infrastructure, social amenity and economic diversity will not attract new residents and this will in turn constrain the social services industry's recruitment capacity.^{iv}

Growth should not be an end in itself, but must be balanced against long-term sustainability issues, and should not be at the expense of any sector of the population, particularly those most vulnerable. Ideally, growth should not just be about greater labour force participation, but that individuals and communities can share in the benefits of growth.^v

Pope Francis calls for justice in economic growth to ensure “*a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality*”.^{vi}

We see 'development' as having many different interpretations. On the one hand it is a measure of economic growth. On the other the concept must also embrace social and cultural development. If the development of northern Australia focusses too sharply on just the economic elements of growth, then there is a real danger that it will be at the expense of the population's social and cultural wellbeing, and unfortunately, history shows us with plenty of examples, that those least able in our communities will bear the brunt of the inequality and further disadvantage. And this is more likely to be borne by the Indigenous population as they are already significantly disadvantaged.

Our previous submission recommended a funding model that retains some of the economic benefits in the community which is then reinvested into social infrastructure and support. There are already precedents for this approach with the WA and Qld models of *Royalty for Regions*.^{vii} The economic benefits can then be used to address the existing deficit of services and also to plan for the needs of new and rapidly growing communities.

In summary, we recommend the Government have a much stronger position when developing its White Paper on the social issues and implications in Northern Australia, and explore opportunities to share the benefits of economic growth including with the most vulnerable, with additional social services and infrastructure.

We would be happy to further elaborate on this submission and extend an invitation to meet with our member agencies.

Please contact me or Liz de Chastel (liz.dechastel@cssa.org.au), Senior Policy Officer if you would like to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely,



Marcelle Mogg
CEO
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5th August 2014

ⁱ [http://www.cssa.org.au/policy-and-publications/policy-papers/submissions/#.U9BQRPN- IU](http://www.cssa.org.au/policy-and-publications/policy-papers/submissions/#.U9BQRPN-IU) and Submission 50 to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Northern_Australia/Inquiry_into_the_Development_of_Northern_Australia/Submissions

ⁱⁱ This number is based on numbers of staff employed in 2011/12. It does not include volunteers.

ⁱⁱⁱ This number is based on 2011/12 figures for agencies that have collected the data – the actual number is likely to be well over 50 000 individuals.

^{iv} Minerals Council of Australia submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Affairs (2013) *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia*

http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=ra/fifodid/o/report.htm and last viewed on 28th January 2014.

^v Adapted from the C20 Inclusive Growth and Employment Paper.

^{vi} Apostolic Exhortation http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#II.%E2%80%82The_inclusion_of_the_poor_in_society

accessed 24th July 2014

^{vii} <http://www.drd.wa.gov.au/royalties/Pages/default.aspx>