

START AGAIN THE RIGHT WAY

CARPENTARIA LAND COUNCIL ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE GULF OF CARPENTARIA REGION SUMMARY REPORT



March 2013



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Context

Current and prospective Aboriginal ownership of significant areas of land in the Southern Gulf of Carpentaria means that Traditional Owners now have the opportunity to take advantage of business and economic development opportunities.

This summary report identifies the economic and business development opportunities in the Southern Gulf region for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities. Whilst some important opportunities are uniquely Indigenous, most are not although the local aboriginal community should be ideally placed to drive development due to established organisational infrastructure and access to capital.

What is missing most in the local aboriginal community is an understanding or experience of business and suitable role models. It is considered that any program to encourage economic and business development should include a pathway for motivated young people to develop their skills and experience which will enable them to pursue business opportunities.



The region

The Southern Gulf region covers a relatively large area, a little over 100,000 km², and is sparsely populated. Although less than 800 road km's from either Cairns or Townsville, the region appears to share similar economic characteristics with more remote regions in Australia.

The region's economic base is narrow and its urban base is limited and under-developed, largely reflecting the small scale of the towns in the region. The region's economic base is dominated by beef cattle, mining, and fishing and tourism industries with a small range of services located in the towns. The cattle and mining industries are mature and exhibit some degree of medium to long term vulnerability. On the other hand, tourism is a potential growth industry.

The population is largely concentrated in two aboriginal communities, Doomadgee and Mornington Island and three general communities; Burketown, Normanton and Karumba the region's port. Normanton is the largest town. Whilst government and utility services in Normanton are reasonably comprehensive, the commercial base is limited, lacking basic businesses that exist in other towns throughout Australia of similar size. Commercial infrastructure at Karumba is more extensive reflecting its status as a base for the local mining, fishing and beef cattle export industries.



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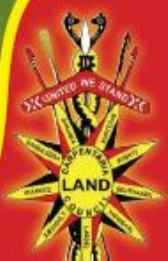


Strengths

Against a background of remoteness, small population base and lack of commercial development, the challenges are clear and it is easy to miss the opportunities for economic and business development. The region's strengths are more obvious on a regional scale and capable of driving development opportunities. These include:

- ❖ the pristine and diverse natural environment including the coastline, remote islands, wetlands, rivers and wildlife;
- ❖ access with sealed roads to the populated south and east;
- ❖ Normanton and Burketown as compulsory outback tourist stops;
- ❖ the existence of Government and commercial services in Normanton; and
- ❖ regular air services to most centres in the region.

The opportunities that can leverage off these strengths are primarily related to tourism and local services. Tourism needs to be the key economic driver in the region however currently there are few opportunities to engage with the region, its Indigenous peoples or natural environment and a lack of support services and infrastructure – all addressable issues.



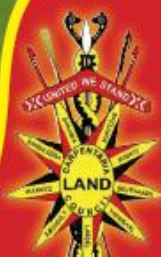
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Challenges

The obvious challenges confronting economic and business development in the Southern Gulf region include:

- ❖ small population base;
- ❖ inability to drive macro or catalytic initiatives;
- ❖ institutional reliance;
- ❖ competition between organisations;
- ❖ need to develop skill sets and support networks;
- ❖ access to capital;
- ❖ shortage of urban land;
- ❖ lack of retail infrastructure;
- ❖ impending closure of the MMG Century Mine;
- ❖ few role models;
- ❖ regulatory approvals.

An investment drought and the absence of small scale entrepreneurial activity are caused by a build up of pressure over time from these factors operating together. Change has to be cultural and driven by motivated individuals who can see the opportunities and identify the pathways to pursuing them.



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Opportunities

Opportunities capable of driving economic development have been identified. Some are relatively large or potentially complex and will require capital and wider community and council commitment but others are quite small and present businesses opportunities for motivated individuals. The key opportunities, from which a range of small experiences could emerge, include:

- ❖ A motel or accommodation development;
- ❖ Development of local services;
- ❖ Establishment of a retail property hub;
- ❖ Revitalisation of the region's tourism industry including:
 - Development of Indigenous tourism experiences;
 - Diversification and expansion of nature based tourism experiences; and
 - Cattle station experiences such as Delta Downs Station.



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Pathways

There are two pathways, which are not mutually exclusive, to pursuing these opportunities:

- ❖ direct corporate and / or institutional investment; and
- ❖ small scale individual investment.

The macroeconomic projects will be driven by corporate or institutional investment due to the likely scale of these projects. Smaller scale tourist related projects and local services opportunities should be driven by motivated local individuals.

Due to many of the challenges noted earlier, small scale business activity in the region is limited and there is a need for greater Aboriginal community participation. Small scale business activity should be encouraged in the Aboriginal community especially amongst motivated younger people with appropriate skill sets.

A key recommendation of this initiative is the establishment of a business incubator to support younger Aboriginal people and aspiring Indigenous business operators develop small businesses. Not only would this promote economic independence it could, in time, develop role models for young people to enter business and participate in the economic life of the local community.



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Key recommendations

1. Promote a motel / accommodation development and small retail development;
2. Develop the incubator model with key partners;
3. Engage with local aboriginal groups to develop an Indigenous experience;
4. Engage with local councils and other organisations to prioritise potential projects;
5. Engage with local Indigenous organisations to prioritise potential projects;
6. Investigate options for existing Indigenous organisations in the region better harness and align their resources to drive Indigenous economic development;
7. Analyse capital ownership in the region;
8. Develop strategies to recycle existing capital;
9. Analyse skill sets, capabilities and aspirations in the region;
10. Examine opportunities to integrate the Ranger program with the incubator model;
11. Work with local tourist operators and business owners in growing the tourism sector including Indigenous tourism products; and
12. Encourage the development of additional community voices.



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