



COMMUNIQUE

Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce

17 November 2008

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA TASKFORCE RESUMES

The Australian Government's Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce met in Canberra on 12 and 13 November 2008 to resume examination of the potential for new sustainable economic development in northern Australia.

The Taskforce was established in May 2007 to examine the potential for further developing land and water resources in northern Australia and undertook extensive community and stakeholder consultations from June to September 2007.

The role of the Taskforce is to develop a better understanding of opportunities for new sustainable economic development in the north that are based on water resource availability, including both the consumptive and non-consumptive uses of water. The Taskforce is also charged with examining the potential system-wide impact of developments on the natural environment, existing water users and the broader community.

Mr Joe Ross, the prominent Indigenous leader from Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia, is the new chair of the Taskforce and takes over from the previous chair, Senator the Hon. Bill Heffernan.

The meeting was opened by the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, the Hon. Gary Gray AO MP who noted the importance of establishing an effective public administration footprint across northern Australia. The Taskforce also met with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke MP and the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the Hon. Peter Garrett AM MP. Both Ministers spoke of the need to build the capacity and prosperity of the north and to protect the unique quality of life in northern Australia.

Mr Ross acknowledged the valuable contribution made by the original Taskforce in 2007 and agreed to build on the foundations it established. The Taskforce also discussed the critical importance of close cooperation with the Governments of the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia and undertook to engage with each of the northern jurisdictions as soon as possible.

In restarting the Taskforce and providing it with new terms of reference, the Rudd Government has set a new direction for the group with an emphasis on sustainable economic development and diversification. The Taskforce will present a final report to Government by December 2009.

The new membership of the Taskforce draws on experience from a diverse range of interests, including business, indigenous, conservation, agriculture, mining and science.

Six of the original members remain and provide a valuable link to the work of the 2007 Taskforce. These include: Mr David Baffsky AO, Accor Asia Pacific; Mr David Crombie, National Farmers Federation; Dr Andrew Johnson, CSIRO; Mr Lachlan Murdoch, Illyria PL; and Mrs Terry Underwood, Riveren Station, NT.

The new members of the Taskforce are: Mr Richard Ah Mat, Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation; Dr Stuart Blanch, World Wildlife Fund; Ms Elaine Gardiner, Ord Irrigation Cooperative and the National Water Commission; Dr Rosemary Hill, Australian Conservation Foundation and CSIRO; Ms Shirley McPherson, Indigenous Land Corporation; Mr Michael Roche, Queensland Resources Council; Mr Walybuma Wunungmurra, Northern Land Council; and Prof Bob Wasson, Charles Darwin University.

Taskforce members participate in their capacity as private individuals rather than as representatives of organisations, reinforcing the independence of the Taskforce.

Further background on the Taskforce, including short biographies of the taskforce members and the terms of reference can be found at <http://www.nalwt.gov.au/>.

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