

Midterm Report  
February 2009

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## 1. FOREWORD

Northern Australia is a region rich in natural resources that supports important natural and cultural values. The north's largely undamaged tropical savannas, rivers and seas have been assessed as being of global conservation significance. Indigenous people have lived across the north for over 40,000 years with many traditional owners still living on and managing land and sea country. Mining, farming, tourism and the conservation and cultural economies are all expanding, and in some areas driving wider economies.

It is important however that the ongoing development of the north is sustainable and protects the unique quality of life and world class environmental assets in northern Australia. Future development of northern Australia's land and water resources must take place in a strategic framework that does not significantly compromise its ecological and cultural values but rather protects and sustains those values. This is crucial if the widespread problems that have arisen from land and water resource development in other regions are to be avoided.

The Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce (the Taskforce) was established in 2007 to begin to consider how such a balance might be struck.

In September 2008 the membership of the Taskforce was changed and the terms of reference for the Taskforce were recast. The primary focus of the Taskforce on new development opportunities which deliver social, economic and environmental benefits in the north through consumptive and non-consumptive uses remains, with an increased scrutiny of how water availability and potential environmental impacts may be limiting factors.

Under a revised timetable, the Taskforce has been asked to present a Midterm Report to Government by 13 February 2009, with a final report due by the end of 2009.

The Taskforce first operated from June to November 2007. During this period the Taskforce was chaired by Senator the Hon. Bill Heffernan. This report draws heavily on the consultations undertaken and the issues identified by the Taskforce in 2007. The report also outlines the main issues and priorities the Taskforce will focus on in 2009.



Joe Ross  
Chair  
Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce  
February 2009

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 Establishment of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce**

The Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce was convened on 29 June 2007 and operated until the Federal election was called in November 2007, at which time it was temporarily suspended. Following the change of government in November 2007 the Taskforce was re-established with revised terms of reference and new membership.

#### **Background**

The National Water Initiative, agreed in 2004 by the Council of Australian Governments, provides a national blueprint for water reform. The ongoing drought in 2006 and 2007 underscored the importance of accelerating implementation of the National Water Initiative. In January 2007, the then Australian Government announced a \$10 billion reform program designed to place rural water use on a sustainable footing. The plan recognised that as the reality of changing water resource security in the south is better understood, there would be a need to consider the potential for other parts of Australia, such as the north, to support future land and water development.

One element of the plan was to establish the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce. Membership included both parliamentarians and industry experts and was chaired by Senator the Hon Bill Heffernan. The original Terms Of Reference asked the Taskforce (hereafter referred to as the 2007 Taskforce) to examine the longer term, strategic potential for further land and water development in northern Australia, with particular emphasis on the identification of the capacity of the north to play a role in future agricultural development. The original terms of reference and membership of the 2007 Taskforce are at **Attachment A**.

#### **Scope of Inquiries**

The scope of interest for the 2007 Taskforce was defined to include the Timor Sea, Gulf of Carpentaria and the North East Coast Drainage Divisions. With respect to the North East Coast Drainage Division, the southern limit of the area of interest was defined to be the Fitzroy River (QLD) Catchment.

### **2.2 Synopsis of 2007 Taskforce Inquiries**

This synopsis was provided by the Office of Northern Australia and provides a summary of the key issues and messages considered by the 2007 Taskforce in the period from June to November 2007. With six of the 2007 Taskforce members also members of the 2009 Taskforce, the information collected and views considered by the Taskforce in 2007 will provide important background to the deliberations of the current Taskforce.

The synopsis does not necessarily reflect the views of the current Taskforce given the amended Terms of Reference and membership.

## **Broad consultations**

To capture and understand the diverse range of views held by communities and stakeholders living and working in the north, the 2007 Taskforce undertook a series of face-to-face meetings with local residents and experts in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland.

The 2007 Taskforce also invited public submissions and asked respondents to nominate catchments or areas for review and to assist in identifying agricultural and other economic development and diversification opportunities. Ninety one submissions were received and raised issues across the following broad themes:

- the appropriateness of land development in a fragile environment;
- the need for relevant and rigorous research into likely impacts of proposals;
- consideration of alternative agriculture uses;
- community engagement; and
- respect for the land.

A clear need to establish a balance of stakeholder interests in addressing future development proposals or strategies was indicated.

Across Queensland, a large number of areas were identified which it was thought would be valuable for the 2007 Taskforce to examine more closely. The principal areas identified included the Burdekin, the Gulf Country, the Fitzroy Basin, the Carpentaria Shire and the Flinders River. For Western Australia, the focus of most respondents was on the Ord River Basin and the Kimberley region more generally. For the Northern Territory the main areas of interest included the Victoria River, the Katherine region, Daly River region, Wadeye and the Finnis and Roper Rivers.

## **Moving water from the north to the south**

A large number of submissions to the 2007 Taskforce commented on the considerable amount of water that falls in tropical Australia (over 70 per cent of Australia's total rainfall) and the opportunity to divert this water to southern Australia.

At the Water Summit on 23 February 2007, the Queensland Premier asked whether water could be diverted from rivers in northern Queensland to recharge the Murray-Darling Basin along the lines proposed by the engineer, Dr John Bradfield in 1941. The 2007 Taskforce met with Queensland Government officials on 24 September 2007 to discuss the proposal. The 2007 Taskforce considered that while such a scheme may be technically possible, it is not economically or practically feasible and resolved not to consider this issue further unless the Queensland Government gave a clear indication of its commitment to the proposal and willingness to progress the community engagement and technical work that would be required as a next step.

## **A poorly understood and highly variable landscape**

The 2007 Taskforce noted the importance many stakeholders placed on managing future development in a way that recognises the fragile nature of the unique natural assets of the north. For this to happen, the 2007 Taskforce noted that planners and developers need a good understanding of how the landscape works, especially the interconnectivity of ground and surface water systems, across northern Australia. Such knowledge requires good science, supported by sound measurement and monitoring practice, and most importantly, a system focused on the north, to capture the information, and make it accessible to those who need it.

Some of the key issues identified by the 2007 Taskforce relevant to this include:

- the hydrological regimes in the north are highly variable from catchment to catchment and year to year;
- for much of the northern Gulf and Cape York Peninsula regions, detailed on-the-ground and in-stream information are often sparse
- previously collected information is often not readily accessible;
- our understanding of the hydrology of the aquifers and waters below the river beds is not well developed; and
- the interconnectivity of ground and surface water systems, is not well understood.

As a consequence of this, water resource plans that have been developed, or are in the final stages of development, may over or under estimate levels of sustainable extraction from specific river reaches.

## **Mosaic style development**

Despite the vastness of the north, it is generally agreed there is a limited availability of good quality land suitable for agriculture across northern Australia. Hence, a recurring theme in discussions held by the 2007 Taskforce was the opportunity for mosaic-style smaller scale developments to succeed. The 2007 Taskforce visited a number of very successful operations that placed relatively small footprints on the broader landscape. Nevertheless, the 2007 Taskforce noted the important role that infrastructure plays in opening up development opportunities.

Improved roads and power supplies, access to education, health and community services, housing affordability and the availability of skilled and unskilled labour were all key issues raised with the 2007 Taskforce.

## **Land management and biosecurity**

Concerns were raised with the 2007 Taskforce that many remote areas in northern Australia are becoming increasingly depopulated, which has the potential to heighten a

range of important risks to the natural environment and to production assets such as with biosecurity, intense fires, or the spread of weeds and feral animals. The risk of unnoticed and uncontrolled spread of diseases was considered to be lower where land is well managed – whether it is managed for conservation and cultural values or for agriculture or other commercial purposes. The 2007 Taskforce noted strong support from some stakeholders to the notion of stewardship, whereby landholders deliver a range of environmental outcomes on behalf of the community as a whole.

### **Labour supply and the availability of skilled workers**

The availability of labour, both skilled and unskilled, is a recurring concern across northern and remote Australia, with agriculture and mining sectors competing for the small pool of workers willing to live and work in the north. This was particularly evident in 2007 with strong demand from the resources sector for skilled tradespeople, as well as for non-skilled, casual workers.

The 2007 Taskforce discussed the positive impact the introduction of Temporary Business visas were having in some areas to supplement skilled labour shortages, such as with farm machinery operators. However, some concerns were raised with the 2007 Taskforce that while these visas suit some agricultural business needs, the minimum skill level currently accepted by immigration policy is too high for other categories of work, such as seasonal pickers.

### **Training and development opportunities**

A key issue discussed by the 2007 Taskforce was the pressing need to improve training opportunities for residents of the north, and particularly in Indigenous communities, to advance their skill base, improve work readiness and provide greater employment opportunities. The 2007 Taskforce visited the Indigenous Land Corporation properties Roebuck Plains Station (near Broome) and Home Valley Station (south-west of Kununurra) to view the training and development programs being provided by the Indigenous Land Corporation, as well as to look at examples of successful pastoral and tourism business initiatives being undertaken in-situ.

### **Land tenure**

The difficulty associated with creating sustainable development opportunities across northern Australia, and particularly for Indigenous communities, was an ongoing concern raised with the 2007 Taskforce.

An issue considered to be a critical threshold issue for the 2007 Taskforce was the 'bankability' of tenure (land title) and water allocation (water title) arrangements, including those that apply to freehold Aboriginal lands in each jurisdiction as well as to general (typically pastoral) leases. On a number of occasions stakeholders raised concerns with the 2007 Taskforce that difficulties in securing bankable title against land leases and water allocations was a major impediment to their expansion plans.

The 2007 Taskforce noted the difficulties faced by Indigenous communities and bodies such as the Land Councils, in dealing effectively with the significant differences in tenure arrangements that exist both within and between jurisdictions, typically with relatively limited resources. The 2007 Taskforce were concerned that under these circumstances, it is difficult for all parties to be well informed of the 'bankability' of leases.

After visiting Hopevale (QLD) in September 2007, the 2007 Taskforce also noted concerns raised by some stakeholders that Queensland legislative or policy instruments — such as the *Wild Rivers Act (2005)* and the *Queensland Vegetation Management Act (1999)* — might act to impede sustainable development opportunities for indigenous communities, particularly in the Cape York Peninsula area. An independent audit of sustainable business opportunities that exist across Cape York was proposed as one possible option that might be used to reveal the true social and economic cost of constraints that exist to development opportunities.

### **Water resource planning and trading**

The water planning and licensing reforms agreed under the National Water Initiative were widely discussed. This included the establishment of a water market, the trading of licenses and allocations, and the ability of a water market to stimulate development. The 2007 Taskforce noted that an important precondition to future development is the timely finalisation of water resource planning in each of the northern jurisdictions, as well as the importance of ensuring that good science supports water resource planning.

### **Infrastructure and services**

Stakeholders consistently identified the importance of infrastructure as one of the key foundations for future development in northern Australia. A lack of investment in infrastructure, particularly with respect to transport and power, was seen as a major impediment to the development of all business sectors across the north, not just agriculture.

After visiting the Kimberley in August 2007, the 2007 Taskforce also noted the serious impact the high cost of residential housing and accommodation has on development, including on existing businesses in the region.

### **Expansion of the Ord River irrigation scheme**

The 2007 Taskforce met with and heard the views of a wide range of people on the future development of the Western Australian Ord River irrigation scheme. Key issues the 2007 Taskforce considered needed to be addressed by governments working together included:

- the engagement of the Northern Territory Government in taking development in the Ord region forward;

- flexibility in the Ord development proposal, by ensuring that it includes a mix of soil types and crop options, opportunities for big and small farms, as well as incentives to continue to improve irrigation efficiency;
- staged development to allow the process to be expedited; and
- ensuring scientifically robust studies are undertaken to better understand and manage environmental impacts, especially salinity, of existing and future irrigation activities.

### **2.3 Appointment of new Taskforce in 2008**

On 26 September 2008 the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP announced revised Taskforce Terms of Reference and membership, broadening the scope of inquiries and strengthening the independence of the Taskforce.

In re-establishing the Taskforce, party political members were removed. Six of the existing members remained and eight new members joined the Taskforce. See **Attachment A** for membership of the 2007 Taskforce and **Attachment B** for new membership and terms of reference for the Taskforce.

The revised Terms of Reference direct the new Taskforce to consider the broad range of sustainable development opportunities for northern Australia that are based on water resource availability. The Terms of Reference also direct the Taskforce to consider the potential impact of such development on the underlying water balance and water quality, and on the natural environment, existing water users and the broader community.

The Taskforce will address its enquiries to the key surface and groundwater systems within the Timor Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria drainage divisions and the North East Coast drainage division north of Cairns.

A new timeline for reporting was agreed with the Taskforce Midterm Report to be delivered at the end of 2008 and the final report at the end of 2009.

### **3 WORKPLAN METHOD**

The Government has charged the Taskforce to develop a better understanding of the opportunities for new, sustainable development in northern Australia and the potential impacts of these opportunities. Guiding principles within the National Water Initiative underpin Taskforce deliberations.

The Taskforce will produce an assessment of water and land resources available for development in northern Australia. Development options, impacts and impediments, emphasising enabling hard and soft infrastructure; ecological assets and the public benefits of the land and water in northern Australia; the principles for sustainable development and the governance arrangements for surface and groundwater that cross jurisdictional boundaries will be considered by the Taskforce.

Taskforce Terms of Reference will be addressed in the 2009 workplan grouped around the three themes of water supply, economic development opportunities and impacts and institutional and governance arrangements for effective management of water resources consistent with the National Water Initiative.

For each of the five terms of reference there is no 'off the shelf' information that is readily available for analysis however the Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment, (the Assessment) underway until 2012, aims to provide an enduring knowledge base so that development of northern Australia's water resources may proceed in an ecologically, culturally and economically sustainable manner. The Assessment is a multiyear, multidisciplinary program jointly delivered by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and the National Water Commission. The Assessment is closely aligned to the work of the Taskforce and will provide:

- a better understanding of water availability in northern Australia;
- a better understanding of key ecological assets in northern Australia, their watering needs and the risks arising from changes to their hydrology regimes;
- a better understanding of socio-cultural beliefs and practices in northern Australia associated with water, and the affect of any changes in water availability;
- development of an enduring knowledge base for the Assessment; and
- support to the Taskforce.

A key component of the Assessment is the CSIRO Northern Australia Sustainable Yields research project due to report in July 2009. Interim results were provided to the Taskforce in February 2009. When finalised, this research will provide the foundation for Taskforce deliberations about the sustainable capacity of river systems to support increased consumptive water use.

The valuable body of work undertaken by the 2007 Taskforce will also be considered when addressing the current Terms Of Reference.

The 2009 Taskforce workplan will encompass liaison with the Assessment team in the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts; research and analysis; engagement of experts and key stakeholders in addressing information gaps; discussion of findings with key stakeholders, seeking public comment and compilation of the final report. The workplan will ensure the development of processes to synthesise information from a range of sources.

A communications strategy will be developed to guide the Taskforce's interaction with public and key stakeholders.

The final public consultation phase will be undertaken in the second half of 2009 and precede the compilation of the Taskforce final report at the end of 2009.

#### 4. 2009 TASKFORCE WORKPLAN

##### **Term of Reference # 1**

**Identify, consistent with the provisions of the National Water Initiative, the sustainable capacity of the river systems and/or drainage basins to support increased consumptive water use.**

The Taskforce assessment of the balance of water availability for consumptive use in northern Australia will be guided by the CSIRO Northern Australia Sustainable Yields research project, due for completion in July 2009.

It must be noted at the outset that there is a general paucity of reliable data about northern Australia's water resources. Developing an understanding of the characteristics of northern water resources will assist Taskforce deliberations.

Interim assessments confirm:

Northern Australia's rainfall is strongly seasonal, has high intensity, is variable from one year to the next and significantly decreases north to south.

In the northern landscape there is very high evapotranspiration throughout the year.

Consequently, runoff is variable, high and quick.

There are few perennial rivers in the region; these are key assets for everyone.

Deep aquifers may be a key resource; they are likely to cross jurisdictional boundaries and be a challenge to quantify.

Future climate is likely to be the same or drier than the recent past.

The Taskforce has identified that it will also consider:

How information on northern Australia's water supply can be used to promote the Government's water reform agenda, particularly where water markets do not exist.

Ecosystem needs of tropical water systems, based on a thorough literature review and expert input by scientists and hydrologists.

**Actions to Address Term of Reference #1**

- 1. Identify additional information and/or data that may be required from the Northern Australia Sustainable Yields research project and/or other sources.**
- 2. Analyse, synthesise and interpret available information about water supply in northern Australia.**

**The Taskforce will commission a discussion paper addressing water supply across northern Australia. The focus for this work may change during 2009 as a more comprehensive understanding of the Sustainable Yields report is achieved by the Taskforce. The discussion paper will focus on**

***Understanding the Water Balance in Northern Australia.***

**Scope: Identify the sustainable capacity of each drainage basin in northern Australia, or parts thereof, to support increased consumptive water use for additional economic activity. Reference to the information identified by the Taskforce to address Term of Reference #1 must be included in this assessment.**

- 3. Circulate the discussion paper to key stakeholders for comment and further analysis.**
- 4. If broad engagement is indicated the Taskforce may explore options ranging from inviting submissions addressing the discussion paper to offering a public forum.**

### **Terms of Reference #2 & #3**

**Identify, consistent with sustainable resource use principles and practices, economic development and diversification opportunities (including non-consumptive or in-stream uses) which rely on access to locally or regionally significant water resources.**

**Identify the potential impact of such development opportunities on the natural environment and other users and the broader community.**

The 2007 Taskforce called for Public Submissions identifying opportunities and constraints to growth in Northern Australia. Analysis of the Public Submissions was prepared by Urbis in March 2008 and will be a valuable information resource for Taskforce deliberations.

An assessment of land use suitability and possibilities will be an early consideration of the Taskforce.

The Taskforce has also prioritised further issues for consideration:

The drivers for and limitations to economic development, including consideration of infrastructure planning.

Economic development options including those that do not rely on consumptive water use.

Economic analysis of the conservation and cultural economy in northern Australia identifying the financial returns and employment levels from conservation-based enterprises.

The contribution that hard, soft and natural infrastructure make to economic development opportunities.

Indigenous employment by water-using sector, for example conservation, culture, irrigation, mining, manufacturing and services.

The impacts of changes to water quality and to water regimes on the marine environments including those with high heritage significance.

### *Actions to address Terms of Reference #2 & #3*

1. **Identify additional information and/or data that may be required to understand development options and impacts. For example data on rainfall intensity will be crucial for predicting the impact of soil erosion that might follow land clearing.**
2. **Analyse, synthesise and interpret available information about sustainable economic development opportunities and their impacts in northern Australia.**
3. **In order to assist with its deliberations the Taskforce will commission a discussion paper and/or case studies or scenarios to identify risks and impacts of development and demonstrate best practice in identifying the requirements for sustainable development in northern Australia. The commissioned additional information may address**

#### *Options For and Impacts of Developing Northern Australia's Water Resources.*

**Scope: Taking a principles approach, describe the viable developments that are likely to proceed in northern Australia in the near future and determine the requirements for regulatory authorities to identify the level of sustainability of those proposals.**

**Consideration of the following matters will be required:**

- **the capacity of drainage basins to support existing and additional economic activity;**
  - **the type of new/additional economic activity that could be sustained in those drainage basins;**
  - **the likelihood or demand for the economic activity proposed;**
  - **impediments to development and new infrastructure required to underpin economic activity;**
  - **the range of impacts identified in scenarios and also reported by Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment; and**
  - **the potential value of and opportunities for Indigenous economic participation.**
4. **Circulate the discussion paper to key stakeholders for comment and further analysis.**
  5. **If broad engagement is desired, the Taskforce may explore options ranging from inviting submissions addressing the discussion paper to offering a public forum on these issues.**

## **Terms of Reference #4 & #5**

**Identify incentive, market, regulatory or planning instruments that could be used to facilitate, control or influence development, such that it proceeds in a manner consistent with the principles of the National Water Initiative**

**Recommend governance arrangements for the effective management of surface and groundwater resources that cross jurisdictional boundaries.**

Information currently held by research institutions and government bodies in each jurisdiction across northern Australia will inform an audit and evaluation of current development incentives and controls. This assessment will identify where there is a need for consistency with the principles of the National Water Initiative and guide consideration of the governance arrangements for water resources that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

It will be important to consider information on Indigenous governance systems and approaches to cross-cultural legal and institutional arrangements as well as the role of Indigenous Land Use Agreements in water development.

The Taskforce will assess the case for linking water use with land use planning to develop integrated planning instruments.

Critical assessment of existing intergovernmental governance arrangements that could inform sustainable development across the jurisdictions of northern Australia will be undertaken. Examination of international examples of integrated river basin management initiatives for conserving and sustainably developing largely intact ecosystems will also be undertaken.

Preliminary consideration of principles for development in northern Australia include:

National Security

Reduce Carbon Emissions

Conservation of national and internationally significant natural and cultural values

Building climate change adaptive capacities

Recognition and respect for the cultural dimension of sustainability, particularly in relation to Indigenous cultures and languages

Security of Food, Energy and Water

Closing the Gap and Indigenous Futures

**Actions to address Terms of Reference #4 & #5**

- 1. Identify additional information and/or data that may be required, for example the extent to which governments and corporate entities in northern Australia deliver sustainable development that is consistent with the principles of the National Water Initiative. Inter-jurisdictional arrangements for water resource planning and management are a priority.**
- 2. Analyse, synthesise and interpret available information about incentives, market, regulatory or planning instruments and governance arrangements that encourage development in a manner that is consistent with the principles of the National Water Initiative.**

**In order to assist with its deliberations the Taskforce will commission a discussion paper and/or case studies to identify the institutional and governance arrangements for water resource management, development and planning, for example:**

***Improved planning instruments, incentives and/or governance arrangements to ensure sustainable development across northern Australia***

**Scope:**

**Conduct an audit of the planning instruments and incentives currently implemented by governments in northern Australia and compare them for efficacy and outcomes consistent with the National Water Initiative.**

**Provide case studies to:**

- illustrate the efficacy of jurisdictional planning and regulatory frameworks to ensure sustainable water use in northern Australia; and**
- recommend improved systems of governance for effective management of northern water resources that cross jurisdictional boundaries.**

- 3. Circulate the discussion paper to key stakeholders for comment and further analysis.**
- 4. If broad engagement is indicated the Taskforce may explore options ranging from inviting submissions addressing the discussion paper to offering a government officials forum to address these issues.**

## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **Original Taskforce membership and terms of reference**

#### **Chair**

Senator the Hon Bill Heffernan

#### **Members**

A high level, joint government and industry Taskforce

#### **Task**

To examine the potential for further land and water development in northern Australia, with particular emphasis on the identification of the capacity of the north to play a role in future agricultural development.

For each of the key surface and groundwater systems and basins within the Timor Sea Drainage Division, including the Fitzroy Catchment, Gulf of Carpentaria Drainage Division and the North East Drainage Division, the Taskforce will:

- Identify, consistent with the provisions of the NATIONAL WATER INITIATIVE, the sustainable capacity of the systems/basins to support increased consumptive water use.
- Identify, consistent with sustainable resource use principles and practices, agricultural and other economic development and diversification opportunities.
- Identify incentive, market, regulatory and planning instruments that could be used to facilitate, control or influence such development.
- Recommend governance arrangements for the effective management of land and surface and groundwater resources that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

In developing its advice, the Taskforce will seek submissions from all interested groups, including traditional owners, industry, community and environment groups.

#### **Timeframe**

The Taskforce will present a final report by March 2009. An interim report will be prepared in late 2007.

#### **Futures Assessment**

The Taskforce will take into account work by a Northern Australia Land and Water Futures Assessment. The Assessment will draw on analyses to be provided by resource management agencies, consultants and research bodies, and will incorporate findings from investigation programmes already completed or in progress or commissioned by the Taskforce. The Assessment will progressively provide reports and advice to the Taskforce on key surface and groundwater systems. These reports will provide factual data coupled with analytical advice (informed by resource management agencies, consultants and research bodies, and findings from investigation programmes already completed — supported as necessary by new research).

#### **Membership**

1. Senator the Hon Bill Heffernan — Chairman
2. Mr Barry Haase MP
3. Mr David Tollner MP
4. Hon Warren Entsch MP
5. Senator the Hon Ron Boswell
6. Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald
7. Mr David Crombie
8. Mr David Baffsky AC
9. Mr Lachlan Murdoch
10. Mr Noel Pearson
11. Mr John Daly
12. Mr Joe Ross
13. Mrs Terry Underwood AM
14. Dr Andrew Johnson

## **ATTACHMENT B**

### **Revised membership and terms of reference for the Taskforce**

#### **Chair**

Mr Joe Ross, Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia

#### **Members**

A high level, independent expert Taskforce.

#### **Outcome sought**

A better understanding of opportunities for new sustainable economic development in the north that are based on water resource availability, and the potential impact of such development on the underlying water balance and water quality, and on the natural environment, existing water users and the broader community.

For each of the key surface and groundwater systems and basins within the Timor Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria drainage divisions, and that part of the North East Coast drainage division north of Cairns, the Taskforce will:

1. Identify, consistent with the provisions of the National Water Initiative, the sustainable capacity of the river systems and/or drainage basins to support increased consumptive water use;
2. Identify, consistent with sustainable resource use principles and practices, economic development and diversification opportunities (including non-consumptive uses) which rely on access to locally or regionally significant water resources;
3. Identify the potential impact of such development opportunities on the natural environment and other users and the broader community;
4. Identify incentive, market, regulatory or planning instruments that could be used to facilitate, control or influence development, such that it proceeds in a manner consistent with the principles of the National Water Initiative; and
5. Recommend governance arrangements for the effective management of surface and groundwater resources that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

#### **Consultation**

In developing its advice, the Taskforce will seek submissions from all interested groups. The Taskforce will also consult with each of the three northern jurisdictions.

#### **Timeframe**

The Taskforce will present its final report by December 2009. A mid-term report will be prepared by the end of December 2008.

#### **Membership**

1. Mr Joe Ross - Chair
2. Mr Richard Ah Matt
3. Mr David Baffsky AO
4. Dr Stuart Blanch
5. Mr David Crombie
6. Ms Elaine Gardiner
7. Dr Rosemary Hill
8. Dr Andrew Johnson
9. Ms Shirley McPherson
10. Mr Lachlan Murdoch
11. Mr Michael Roche
12. Mrs Terry Underwood OAM
13. Prof Bob Wasson
14. Mr Walybuma Wunungmurra