

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon Gary Gray AO MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia

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RUDD GOVERNMENT OVERHAULS NORTHERN AUSTRALIA TASKFORCE

The Rudd Government today announced an overhaul of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce to set a new direction for the body with an emphasis on sustainable economic development.

The changes include new membership, removing all politicians from the group, and new terms of reference, tackling the environmental, economic and social challenges facing northern Australia in the 21st century.

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

As part of the overhaul of the taskforce, the Government gave them two main responsibilities. They are:

- Finding new opportunities for economic development in the north based on water availability and sustainability; and
- Reporting on the potential impact of new development on water balance and quality, the environment, existing water users and the broader community.

This is about bringing together the best minds to work in partnership and create opportunities for sustainable development in northern Australia.

Northern Australia is a region of excitement and opportunity - whether it is mining and energy, farming, tourism or other industries.

Prominent Indigenous leader, Mr Joe Ross from Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia will be the new chair of the Taskforce.

The other members of the Taskforce will be:

- Mr Richard Ah Mat, Non-Executive Director, Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation
- Mr David Baffsky AO, Honorary Chairman, Accor Asia Pacific
- Dr Stuart Blanch, Manager of Northern Landscapes, World Wildlife Fund
- Mr David Crombie, President, National Farmers Federation
- Ms Elaine Gardiner, Chair, Ord Irrigation Cooperative
- Dr Rosemary Hill, Vice-President, Australian Conservation Foundation and Senior Scientist, CSIRO - Sustainable Ecosystems
- Dr Andrew Johnson, Group Executive - Environment, CSIRO

- Ms Shirley McPherson, Chair, Indigenous Land Corporation
- Mr Lachlan Murdoch, Chief Executive, Illyria PL
- Mr Michael Roche, Chief Executive, Queensland Resources Council
- Ms Terry Underwood OAM, Riveren Station, NT
- Mr Walynbuma Wunungmurra, Chair, Northern Land Council; and
- Prof Bob Wasson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Charles Darwin University.

Each of the taskforce members has been invited to participate in their capacity as private individuals rather than as representatives of organisations.

It is important that we encourage development that is sustainable and protects the unique quality of life in northern Australia and avoids mistakes made in other regions.

The taskforce will focus on 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

It was established in 2007 and I am delighted that six of the original members - Lachlan Murdoch, David Baffsky AO, David Crombie, Andrew Johnson; Ms Terry Underwood OAM and Joe Ross - have agreed to remain.

Under a revised timetable, the taskforce will present a mid-term report to Government by the end of this year, and its final report by December 2009.

The new terms of reference and membership were prepared in consultation with each of the three northern jurisdictions.

Further background on the Taskforce, including short biographies of the taskforce members can be found at www.nalwt.gov.au.

Terms of Reference for the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce

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.