

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon Gary Gray AO MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia

16 December 2009

GG061/2009 TASKFORCES REPORT CHARTS NEW DIRECTIONS

FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIAS NORTH

A new approach to the sustainable development of Australia's north is based on solid science and traditional Indigenous knowledge, Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, Gary Gray, said as he accepted a report from the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce.

The report, titled *Sustainable Development in Northern Australia*, was presented to Mr Gray by Taskforce chair Joe Ross in Perth today.

"The report is based on an understanding of the north's unique qualities and an approach that genuinely empowers the people who live and work in the north," Mr Gray said.

"This is an approach that sees the Commonwealth, Western Australian, Queensland and Northern Territory Governments adopting a planned and cooperative approach to the sustainable development of northern Australia.

"The report will make an important contribution to the development of strategies to advance the economic, social and environmental and ecological development of the north," Mr Gray said.

"The Government will give the Taskforce findings and recommendations careful consideration."

The Taskforce was convened in June 2007 to establish a better understanding of the opportunities for new and sustainable development in northern Australia.

Key priorities for the Taskforce were to find new opportunities for economic development based on water availability and sustainability and report on the possible impact of new development in the region on water balance and quality, the environment, existing water users and the broader community.

Mr Gray said the Taskforce consulted widely with stakeholders and communities across northern Australia.

More than 80 public meetings and consultations were conducted and more than 100 public submissions received, including a meeting of over 80 indigenous water experts convened with the assistance of the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Alliance (NAILSMA).

The *Northern Australia Land and Water Science Review 2009* was coordinated by CSIRO in collaboration with 80 of Australia's leading scientists working on northern land and water matters.

The Science Review represents the most comprehensive and thorough review ever undertaken of conventional science and knowledge of issues relevant to the sustainable development of northern Australian land and water.

Mr Gray thanked Mr Ross and all the Taskforce members for their hard work in producing this important report and the Office of Northern Australia for the support it provided to the Taskforce in recent months.

"I expect to release the final Taskforce report and the Science Review, as well as an interim response to the Taskforce recommendations early next year," Mr Gray said.