



REGIONAL AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE

FACT SHEET

The national debate often fails to reflect the diversity of situation and opportunity in the north

THREE TYPES OF REGIONS IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA



Northern cities



Industry hubs



The very remote

FOR THE GOOD OF AUSTRALIA

Rethinking the future of northern Australia's regions: more than mines, dams and development dreams

Strategies for capturing the vast potential of northern Australia have been the topic of fierce debate and policy interest for many years. However, while discussion largely centres on the prospects for particular industries or projects, the national debate often fails to take into account the diversity of situation and opportunity in the north.

To foster meaningful, productive conversations with communities, government and policy-makers, the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) has developed *Rethinking the future of northern Australia's regions: more than mines, dams and development dreams*.

Released in November 2013, the paper draws on data from *[In]Sight: Australia's regional competitiveness index* to examine the socioeconomic profiles of 74 Local Government Areas and seven Regional Development Australia regions in northern Australia. It identifies the imperatives for a balanced, regionally responsive strategy for development.

The paper was developed in consultation with key stakeholders in northern Australian regions, spanning government, community, policy, research and development. A series of forums and discussions were also held in Alice Springs, Townsville, Darwin, Kununurra and Port Hedland.





Key findings:

The results show very clearly that infrastructure and human capital are the two most widely present and serious bottlenecks for growth in northern Australia. However, strategies for improving these will need to reflect three distinct types of regions found within northern Australia: northern cities, industry hubs and the very remote.

The **northern cities** of Cairns, Darwin, Mackay, Rockhampton and Townsville are underpinned by a range of industries, including mining, tourism and agriculture. Their size and economic diversity mean they are now considered self-sustaining in their own right, and provide vital opportunity to towns nearby.

In contrast, **industry hubs** such as Alice Springs, Broome, Karratha, Katherine, Mt Isa and Port Hedland are usually dominated by mining, tourism or agriculture. These communities have grown rapidly, but are challenged by narrow industry bases. Diversification into other economic opportunities will help them to grow their footprint in Australia and overseas.

The **very remote** areas are where challenges in health, education and infrastructure are the most constraining for growth and opportunity. Government often dominates local employment and private sector investment is low, with minimal, or in some cases no, industry presence. A focus on basic services, as well as governance and the resolution of land tenure issues, will be important to facilitate change.

The paper also examines the potential for regions to link with international and domestic markets, exporting services specific to northern Australia such as tropical expertise, education, mining and agricultural science to align with the needs of growing Asian and Pacific markets. Capturing this opportunity will be pivotal in transforming Australia from where it is, to where we want it to be.

Next steps:

Rethinking the future of northern Australia's regions: more than mines, dams and development dreams is designed to enhance the current debate on the pathways to success for northern Australia, taking a fresh perspective on population growth and economic development.

The RAI will continue to work with all stakeholders in northern Australia on this very important issue. Our collective challenge is to define an integrated suite of measures that stretch across regions, industry and geography to help the people and communities in northern Australia to make the most of their potential.

About the Regional Australia Institute

Independent and informed by both research and ongoing dialogue with the community, the Regional Australia Institute develops policy and advocates for change to build a stronger economy and better quality of life in regional Australia – for the benefit of all Australians. The Regional Australia Institute was established with support from the Australian Government.