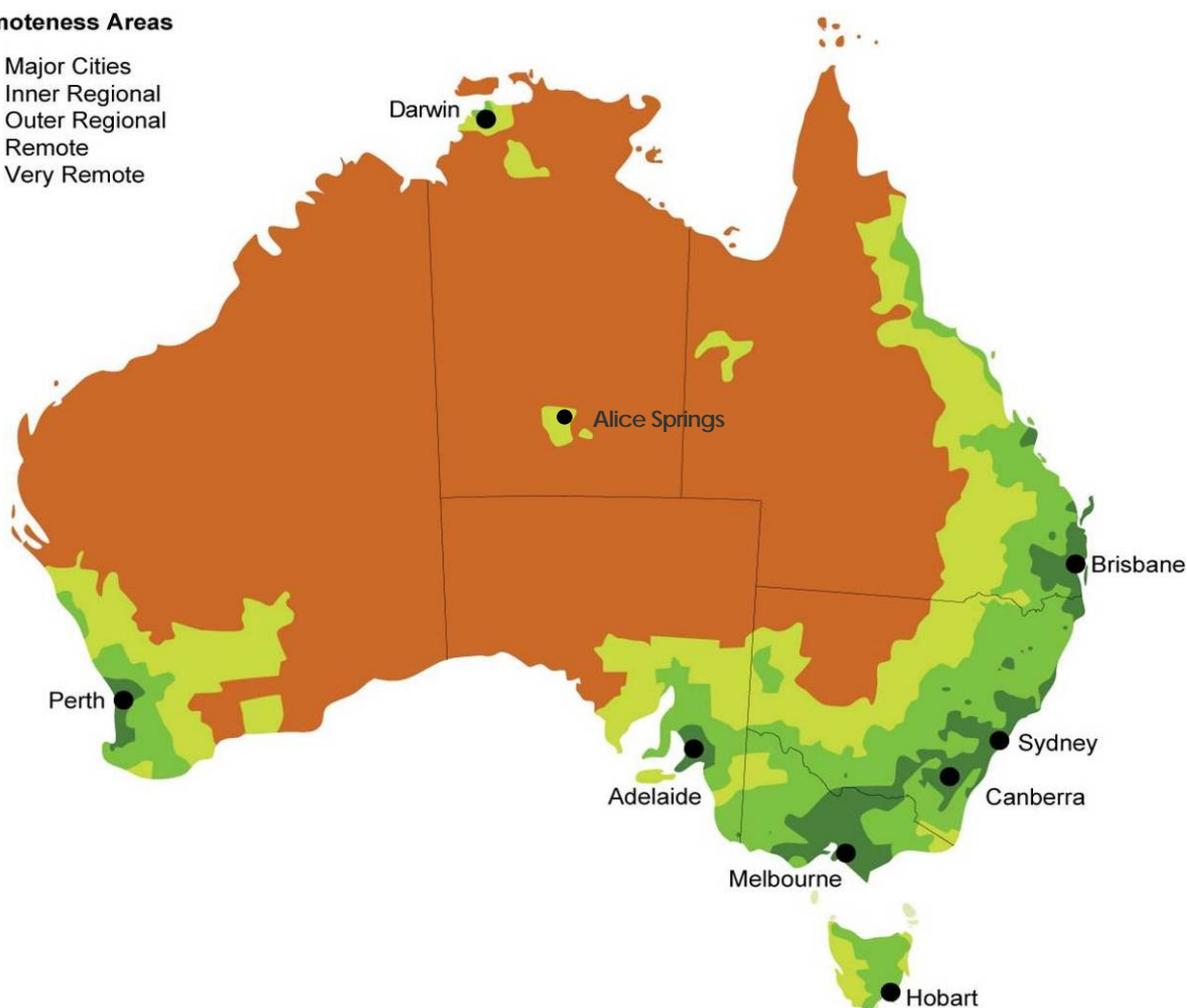


PROSPECTUS

remoteFOCUS: Revitalising Remote Australia

Remoteness Areas

- Major Cities
- Inner Regional
- Outer Regional
- Remote
- Very Remote



This project is facilitated by Desert Knowledge Australia
June 2009

This prospectus has been developed by the following people who were participants in a scoping workshop held in Perth on April 1 & 2, 2008. Not every view expressed is held by every participant. There is, however, general agreement among them that the issues and views raised require broader discussion and urgent attention from all relevant governments if the problems of Remote Australia are to be successfully addressed.



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In addition, the views contained herein do not necessarily represent the views of the above participants' employers, or any organisation of which they are part.

The financial and time contributions of each participant and the support of their employing institution, where applicable, are acknowledged.

We particularly acknowledge Howard Pedersen's efforts in the writing process.

Understanding that the original scoping workshop was limited in number and composition, a commitment was made at that workshop to extend discussions and invite people from various perspectives and places - including, importantly, Indigenous people - to consider the issues outlined in this prospectus and, it is hoped, offer input and support. Please turn to the ATTACHMENT 3 remoteFOCUS SUPPORTERS on page 21 to view the current list of people and/or organisations that have indicated their support for the thrust of the arguments in this prospectus and lend their voice to the need for significant reform in how Remote Australia is governed and administered.

If you would like to add your name in support of the main thrust of the arguments found in the Prospectus please contact Miranda Daniels on 08 8959 6020 or email her miranda.daniels@desertknowledge.com.au.

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remoteFOCUS: revitalising Remote Australia

Building momentum for positive change – developing alternatives that work

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is failure to recognise the escalating calamity facing Remote Australia

And yet huge opportunity exists...

In early April 2008 a group of concerned Australians met in Perth.

It was concluded that Remote Australia is in crisis

This is not an 'Indigenous issue' - it is an issue of ineffective government arrangements and disengagement

Governments, corporations, and the Australian public in general, fail to appreciate the impending calamity in Remote Australia as a combination of forces threaten to tear at Australia's sense of itself as a nation, imperil its strategic position within the Asian and South Pacific region and erode the nation's capacity to sustain long term growth. The components of what could be described as Remote Australia's 'perfect storm' include:

- the difficulties faced by all levels of government in providing basic community services and infrastructure, even in areas of great and vital wealth production
- the lack of any real local authority over decision making and allocation of resources
- the drift of the non-Indigenous population to more settled areas
- the severe stress on Indigenous culture and societal structures, and
- the risk of collapsing fragile ecosystems in the context of outmoded land management regimes.

Yet the region holds enormous and largely untapped economic and social potential. These include resources and agricultural development, Indigenous employment and training, Indigenous enterprise and wealth management, and cultural and eco-tourism as well as emerging and existing opportunities in areas such as climate change (sustainable energy, desert management and, possibly, carbon trading),

On 1st and 2nd April 2008, a group of 28 people with extensive experience in dealing with Remote Australia, including senior industry figures, met in Perth to consider the looming crisis facing Remote Australia and the apparent failure of Australian governments to adequately govern and engage with the country's vast arid and tropical regions (see list of participants at Attachment A).

The Forum Participants concluded that the situation in Remote Australia has reached crisis point, with clear evidence that there is a 'failed state' at the heart of our nation and if this is not addressed there will be dire economic, social, cultural, environmental and security consequences for Australia as a whole. Many of these are already apparent.

These problems are too often perceived only in the context of the dysfunction of remote Indigenous settlements and seen therefore as purely 'Indigenous' issues rather than issues of government capability. That is a mistake.

There are many drivers that contribute to the parlous state of affairs in Remote Australia. Some of these are 'global', such as the changing nature and structure of the global economy, or the changing *modus operandi* of extractive industries (eg fly-in fly-out). Other contributors appear more local, but reflect global trends,

There are significant issues that affect and are affected by Indigenous people that will not be resolved without the wider system being revamped.

Ignoring Remote Australia will significantly affect all Australians

such as changing settlement patterns in Remote Australia (reflecting ongoing global urbanisation) and changes in significant industries (eg pastoralism).

While acknowledging these broader drivers and factors, remoteFOCUS believes that government policies, structures and administrative arrangements are critically significant drivers of many of the problems that are all too apparent in remote Indigenous Australia.

The issues in remote Indigenous settlements are, nevertheless, compelling and real. They include:

- the social implosion and large scale movement of Indigenous people to towns and service centres
- the consequences of demographic change in which the Indigenous population is growing at more than twice the rate of others
- the disengagement of the rapidly enlarging Indigenous permanent population from the mainstream economy and therefore the increased welfare dependency
- the vulnerability of Indigenous governance structures required to cope with the resources boom and the phenomenal streams of new revenue from agreements with resource companies.

All are exacerbated by government disengagement with Remote Australia.

The Forum Participants also concluded that the ongoing economic, social and environmental issues which bedevil Remote Australia will not be resolved by merely applying the tools available under existing institutional and governance frameworks. Notwithstanding good intentions current government policies, funding mechanisms and programs are inadequate or demonstrably failing. There are structural issues and broader institutional factors which need to be brought into the policy equation. This will require nothing short of a national commitment to drive fundamental reform at a range of levels.

Change is needed, to not only benefit Remote Australians but all Australians. For example, there are significant security and environmental issues that affect every Australian. The reality that much of the nation's wealth will come from Remote Australia is only one aspect of this. The fact that the centre of global power is moving towards our region makes Remote Australia a matter of strategic national importance. The Indigenous settlements and pastoral leases of remote Australia are obviously integral to its human element, but it could be argued that apart from that our tenure of Remote Australia under the present regime is largely expeditionary (fly-in fly-out or relatively short term residence) in nature, which means that the vast resources zones could end up being contested, by virtue of the land being considered 'unsettled'. The lack of management of the natural environment compounds the problem by failing to create or sustain a living environment attractive to Indigenous and non Indigenous inhabitants alike. This is why the governance of Remote Australia is a public policy matter that shouldn't be left in the hands of the market and business, as it increasingly is. It requires a paradigm shift in the national strategic philosophy – one that recognises the rate of global strategic change.

remoteFOCUS aims to facilitate momentum for change

Different approaches can and will work, offering significant opportunities

This Prospectus will be used to engage a range of interested parties and individuals in public discussion about Remote Australia and how it should be governed and how to include the remote regions into a modern integrated Australian nation. RemoteFOCUS believe there is a compelling case for urgent change. There is a need for new approaches to remote area governance which must embrace genuine participation of those who inhabit Remote Australia in policy, administrative and financial decisions on matters which affect them. This will only happen through the agency of a broad coalition of parties who see their shared interests as far more important than the sectoral issues that may have divided them in the past; a coalition fully engaged with and connected to the peoples and communities of Remote Australia.

There is a compelling case for urgent change. But are there viable alternatives? remoteFOCUS believes so. The value of structures that devolve responsibility and authority and are accountable has been demonstrated. Policies and administrative arrangements that work in remote contexts and take into account the particular demographic can be developed. This will take commitment, energy, goodwill and the coordinated support of many but offers the alternative of a strong, resilient Remote Australia and a place where its peoples can thrive.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Remote Australia is huge - 85% of the continent
But Remote Australia is often invisible.
Few votes = little attention

Remote Australia occupies approximately 85% of the Australian continent.

However, because of the nature of the nation's political system and demographic realities (95% of the nation's population resides in the cities and their rural hinterlands), Remote Australian settlements and their residents are marginal within the Australian polity.

Many Australians view Remote Australia in terms of extremes; as a last frontier, a vast unsettled terrain, a place of Indigenous crisis, or an economic wasteland. To them, it has legitimacy in Australian nationhood only because of the heritage status of the pastoral industry and the major resource development projects which are scattered throughout the remote regions.

It is worth noting the dissonance of this view with that of many Indigenous Australians who see Remote Australia as Country, a place that nourishes and provides meaning and identity. One world view wants to dominate and tame the space while the other lives in and adapts within it. This difference or tension in perception is part of the complex of issues that needs to be addressed and reconciled.

If Remote Australia continues to be ignored there will be significant

The distorted "extremes" view from closely settled Australia leads to a failure to appreciate the looming social, economic and ecological crisis in Remote Australia that has significant consequences for the nation as a whole.

Remote Australia is inevitably distant – and remote - from the everyday

consequences to the nation

The remoteFOCUS Initiative seeks to stimulate informed discussion and alternatives...

The remoteFOCUS Initiative's focus is on reforming the governance, administration and public policy of Remote Australia

Ideological differences can (and must) be overcome

The remoteFOCUS

attentions of government. Despite best intentions Remote Australia will not consistently attract the attention of metropolitan-focused governments. Successive and sincere efforts to 'make a difference' have generally failed. It is vital to have an effective and sustainable governance regime for Remote Australia which is not dependent on the intermittent attention of distant and distracted governments.

RemoteFOCUS seeks a serious public discourse about the incapacity of the present structure of government to administer Remote Australia effectively. This must transcend the notion that these problems belong solely to the realm of Indigenous public policy. Remote Australia is not solely an 'Indigenous problem'. Much of the recent public policy debate on Indigenous issues has been focused on addressing the issue of dysfunction within Indigenous settlements. Unfortunately, this debate has ignored the failure of the 'governance of governments' in Indigenous affairs and Remote Australia generally, and the fundamental role that dysfunction and failure has played in contributing to remote community socio-economic disadvantage and under-development.

RemoteFOCUS seeks reform of public policy relating to Remote Australia because government has responsibility to provide an institutional framework that enables civil society and economic and social development. Without reform in this area other reforms will continue to fail.

The present circumstances in Remote Australia have been influenced by the frameworks within which industries such as mining and pastoralism have operated. Conflicts between economic activities and Indigenous interests have helped shape attitudes and structures. In recent years an increasingly constructive engagement between industry and Indigenous interests point to a more collaborative future. RemoteFOCUS hopes to engage with these interests to assist in promoting reform in the governance, administration and public policy of Remote Australia.

There is a range of views and differing analysis relating to the problems of remote Australia. These include:

- that Government action and intervention is required in remote Australia on the basis of 'market failure'
- that the social crisis in this region of Australia is a consequence of structural issues of underdevelopment and legacies of colonialism that call for non-market based public investment solutions, and
- that neo liberalism and the emphasis on the market economy has fundamentally eroded the sense of community in Australia and driven a growth in individualism and inequality which has exacerbated a neglect of Remote Australia.

It is acknowledged that such views are often strongly contested in the wider community and within sectoral interests but remoteFOCUS believe that despite some ideological differences consensus can (and must) be achieved on the broad thrust of structural reforms required for the economic, social and cultural inclusion of this vast region of the continent within Australian nationhood.

The participants in the first forum held in Perth do not presume to be an expert

Initiative aims to engage with affected people, to create a new future

group prescribing solutions to the evident problems. The purpose of this Prospectus is to enlist the engagement of Indigenous, corporate, civil society, academic and broader community interests in a new and inclusive conversation about the future of Remote Australia; one that will influence governments and the private sector to embark on an agenda for fundamental reform and re-engagement.

THE 'FAILED STATE' OF REMOTE AUSTRALIA

Australia has taken cooperative interventions in 'failed states' in our region

In recent years the notion of the 'failed state' has figured powerfully in Australia's foreign affairs and security strategies. Since the late 1990s Australia has demonstrated an increased preparedness to intervene in weak and failing states in our region, taking action under cooperative intervention arrangements involving military and police resources to address law and order and initiate developmental measures aimed at long-term nation building.

Remote Australia can be described as a failed state

It may appear provocatively alarmist to compare Remote Australia to weak states engulfed by poverty, the destabilisation of conflict, and weak political systems that barely function. However, the conclusions of remoteFOCUS support the detailed analysis of Neil Westbury and Michael Dillon in their recent book *Beyond Humbug* published in late 2007¹. There, the authors make a compelling case that Remote Australia exemplifies the conditions of a 'failed state', using four criteria developed by the Brookings Institute in 2006. These criteria are World Bank data that measure poverty, security issues relating to violence and homicide, the capacity of governments to provide basic needs for human development (particularly health and education), and the legitimacy of government in the lives of people.

The failed state description of Remote Australia has been given credence by a succession of damning government reports and inquiries

The failed state of Remote Australia has been given credence by a succession of government reports and inquiries: these include the Northern Territory *Little Children Are Sacred Report*; successive reports on the parlous state of education in remote regions; and the Western Australian State Coroner's report on the suicide of 22 Indigenous people in the Kimberley region delivered in February this year, in which Coroner Hope found an appalling lack of governance, little or no coordination between the Federal and Western Australian Governments, and a lack of a system of government accountability to measure outcomes from significant public investment aimed to alleviate Indigenous disadvantage.

A seismic shift in demographics is emerging and will have radical impacts

Further, a significant shift in demography will emerge over the next decade. While rural settlements in settled Australia are declining in population, many towns in remote regions are growing rapidly because of Indigenous population growth and mobility. Numerous towns throughout Remote Australia that were established to service the mining and pastoral industry are becoming predominantly Indigenous welfare-dependent settlements. This trend is likely to continue with predictable economic and social consequences that will further entrench the 'failed state' status of Remote Australia.

¹ Dillon, M and Westbury, N. 2007. *Beyond humbug: transforming government engagement with indigenous Australia*, Seaview Press, West Lakes.

These impacts will be felt not only by Remote Australians. Every Australian will be affected

The impact of the failed state of Remote Australia reaches beyond its Indigenous settlements to affect all residents of remote regions. In addition the consequences will increasingly be felt in the metropolitan towns and cities where the majority of Australians live. Services for homeless people, gaols, state health services, metropolitan hospitals and emergency departments are increasingly impacted upon by the problems in Remote Australia, affecting the lives (and pockets) of metropolitan based Australians.

THE DYING HEART OF AUSTRALIA?

remoteFOCUS argues that governments have failed to meet their obligations

It can be argued that in Remote Australia governments at all levels have failed to create and maintain the institutional frameworks which are the foundation of the Australian nation state, and which underpin citizens' rights and responsibilities and the effective operation of a sound regional economy. These institutional deficits relate to weaknesses in legislative arrangements, enforcement of criminal and civil laws, capital under-investment, recurrent government programs and funding and the diminishing presence of 'on the ground' experienced government officers.

Separate services for Indigenous people disguises failure and masks government responsibility

In many cases, the deficits are disguised by the existence of non-standard ('special Indigenous') arrangements which often deliver unacceptable outcomes and obscure the failure of mainstream government programs and departments to effectively service Indigenous populations. In other cases, the reality of remoteness and low population densities provide a partial explanation for under-development and socio-economic marginalisation, but they do not provide an excuse for institutional or structural government disengagement.

Government programs designed for metropolitan Australia continue to be applied in Remote Australia, with significant failure. One size does not fit all

Government engagement in Remote Australia is almost invariably not tailored to the specific needs of local and remote circumstances. Also, the sheer number and complexity of government policies, programs and organisational structures (fuelled by the increasing use of outsourced arrangements, and the hyper-fluidity of policy changes) have created an environment where supposedly 'universal' benefits are delivered erratically and inconsistently and, in many parts of Remote Australia, not at all. Many laws are not applied or enforced. The structural preconditions for the operation of a sustainable economy and framework of service provision, particularly in land, labour and housing, are not in place.

The problems of Remote Australia are systemic and institutional

This assessment is not intended to be critical of parliamentarians, public servants and other participants in the 'system'. It is critical of the present system, not the people participating in it (except to the extent that they are resistant to considering alternatives). Indeed, it will be essential to enrol elected and unelected government officials to support change and help develop sustainable and effective alternatives to the present arrangements.

A crisis that will affect the nation, Remote Australians and industries that

Remote Australia is subject to repetitive crises which have significant national consequences. That state of affairs is nurtured by the institutional arrangements outlined above. There is ample evidence of an emerging crisis in Remote Australia, as outlined above and detailed in Attachment 1, including rapidly

rely on a functioning Remote Australia is building and will come to a head

Only by addressing the systemic causes can this be avoided

There is no 'silver bullet'. A new paradigm is required

changing demography, a disconnected labour market, failing infrastructure, unacceptable health and education statistics, poor educational opportunities, cost of living and cost of transport impacts and stressed and failing ecosystems.

The components that drive and contribute to the impending calamity are interrelated and in many cases drive and perpetuate each other. The problems of Remote Australia must therefore be addressed as a 'whole system' rather than in piecemeal fashion.

RemoteFOCUS recognises that there is no 'silver bullet' to fix the problems and does not advocate a particular policy prescription. What it does advocate is the need for rigorous public discourse about a new paradigm for the revitalisation and inclusion of Remote Australia into the mainstream fabric of our nation, including serious consideration of appropriate public funding arrangements.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FAILED STATE OF REMOTE AUSTRALIA

The consequences of doing nothing are severe
Escalating public outlays on health and social services need to be avoided

A strategy and systemic approach to address Indigenous poverty and social breakdown is essential
Approaches that address the radically changing demographic in regional towns are required

The cost of Remote Australia languishing as a failed state is so grave that it constitutes a sovereign risk to the entire Australian nation.

Firstly, there is an escalating cost in public outlays particularly in the health, welfare and other social services, and justice areas. State and Territory government budgets are increasingly feeling the impact of poor health outcomes as greater numbers of Indigenous people occupy scarce (and getting scarcer) hospital beds in the public health system for serious illnesses such as renal failure. Continuing poor education outcomes make effective community governance and development hard to generate and sustain. The increasing focus on law and order intervention and substantial police recruitment to Remote Australia will inevitably lead to a need to expand the immensely costly prison system.

Without a proactive and coherent strategy that addresses Indigenous impoverishment and community breakdown in Remote Australia the demographic trends point to an exponentially increasing cost in public expenditure.

Secondly, as towns throughout Remote Australia feel the impact of the escalating social tension and public and private-sector disengagement, the phenomenon of 'white flight' takes hold (or is perceived to take hold) resulting in a rapid decline of services and social capital. In this situation the economic base in Remote Australia becomes starkly divided between the resource development sector that increasingly relies on fly-in fly-out labour, and the welfare sector that supports the rapidly expanding Indigenous population which is not engaged in the mainstream economy. The difficulties in recruiting and retaining professional staff in the areas of public health, education, justice, local government,

The national security imperative to maintain population and infrastructure must not be forgotten

Neither should the environmental imperatives (and opportunities) of Remote Australia be ignored

And the security of much of the nation's wealth generation through mining must be considered

management and community development are becoming increasingly apparent. This means that managing the welfare system, already under strain, becomes harder as the need expands proportionately and exponentially. Poor access to health services undermines attempts to attract and retain trained staff to Remote Areas.²

Thirdly, the increasing social crisis in (and drift of population from) Remote Australia has disturbing ramifications for Australia's national security. A coherent societal structure throughout Remote Australia, with its networked infrastructure of settlements, roads, airstrips and communication systems, should be supported as an important plank of Australia's defence system in the most vulnerable regions of the nation. Australia's defence against possible threats and breaches of security – including bio-security – emanating from south-east Asia and the south Pacific is made all the more difficult when Remote Australia itself is gripped by social and economic crisis. (The network of settlements and population also provides important support for the ever-increasing number of outback travellers.)

Fourthly, the failure to govern Remote Australia adequately has serious environmental implications. There is no integrated national strategy to manage the lands and fragile ecosystems of Remote Australia that are fundamentally made up of pastoral rangelands, savannahs, deserts, Indigenous titled land and lands dedicated to conservation. Problems such as changed fire management regimes, over-grazed pastoral lands, feral animals such as cane toads, cats and pigs constitute a burgeoning environmental hazard to the Australian nation. The natural resource management regime in Remote Australia is made up of a disconnected patchwork of Federal and State agencies, local governments and some Indigenous organisations with no nationally agreed plan of action to underpin their efforts. The 2006 Australian State of the Environment report commented on the incapacity of local governments and Indigenous organisations to manage publicly-funded natural resource management programs. Of particular concern is the lack of public investment to assist Indigenous interests to sustainably manage the Indigenous land estate that occupies approximately one-fifth of the continent, practically all of it in Remote Australia.

Fifthly, the social crisis in Remote Australia has serious implications for the nation to manage and sustain the prosperity from resource development. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade estimates that mining production amounted to \$90 Billion in 2006/07, which was the single biggest contributor to the Australian economy and approximately 65% of Australia's total commodity trade³. Approximately 60% of mining platforms operate in remote Australia⁴. The

² McKenzie H F 2007, *Attracting and retaining skilled and professional staff in remote locations*, DKCRC Research Report 21, Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, Alice Springs, available at www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au/publications/downloads/DKCRC-Report-21-Staff-Attraction-and-Retention.pdf

³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *About Australia Resources Sector* available at www.dfat.gov.au/facts/resources_sector.html

⁴ Geoscience Australia, *Australian Operating Mines Map, 1:10,000,000*, January 2008, available at www.ga.gov.au/image_cache/GA11430.pdf

Our international reputation and our national soul are at stake

mining industry's capacity to recruit skilled labour to regions of social crisis and depleting services is a serious issue for the long-term sustainability of the mining industry in Remote Australia. In addition, the mining industry is a potential source of significant revenue for Indigenous interests from native title and other agreements. However, in the absence of a regulatory and regional development framework, and in the context of fragile Indigenous community and regional governance structures, this new source of wealth may add to the crisis in Remote Australia through promoting community conflict and wastage of important community benefits. This Prospectus acknowledges that since the remoteFOCUS forum in Perth, the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs has established a reference group with stakeholder expertise to investigate this matter.

Finally, the crisis in Remote Australia has serious implications for Australia's human rights reputation. Prime Minister Rudd's recent announcement in the United Kingdom that there will be an annual report to the Australian Parliament on the national effort to address Indigenous disadvantage highlights the importance in which the Australian Government regards the international perception of the disparity between the economic and social position of Indigenous people and other Australians. With human rights issues becoming increasingly important in the international context, particularly involving China – our major trading partner – Australia is politically vulnerable whilst the living conditions of Indigenous people in Remote Australia remain deplorable.

A NEW PARADIGM FOR GOVERNING REMOTE AUSTRALIA

Decisive and comprehensive action is needed now

The overwhelming evidence demands that decisive and comprehensive action is needed now to address the crisis in Remote Australia.

Comprehensive reform of Remote Australia's governance system is required

What is required is comprehensive reform of Remote Australia's governance system in a new paradigm where governments substantively re-engage with Remote Australia. This substantive engagement might be summarised as restoring the footprint of government. The effective projection of this footprint is multi-layered, with a variety of institutions within the spheres of national, state and local governments needing to be tasked to deal with issues under an agreed national reform agenda.

Externally generated solutions won't work. Decisive action is needed...

Substantive engagement must also move beyond limited notions of externally imposed interventions that attempt to address the symptoms of a system but which necessarily result in failure. It must mean addressing the underlying structural and institutional issues outlined in this Prospectus. Decisive action is required.

...which must be balanced with meaningful engagement...

However, that decisive action must be balanced by meaningful and sustained engagement and partnerships with Remote Australian residents. Externally imposed solutions that do not take into account local aspirations and experience are not likely to be successful or achieve the legitimacy and support required for sustainable outcomes. Imposed 'solutions' will add to the list of failures.

...and aimed at building resilience and tolerance of inevitable future inattention

New thinking around citizen and government responsibilities needs to be taken into account

The special case and special arrangements required for Remote Australia needs to be carefully developed

The fact that there have been many genuine but unsuccessful attempts to deal with problems within existing government arrangements highlights the systemic nature of the underlying drivers of failure. The episodic nature of many interventions demonstrates the importance of developing systems, processes and structures that are resilient to the inevitable vagaries of political cycles, interest and attention.

The development of new institutional arrangements and public policy must necessarily be undertaken in the context of changing international and national trends that are seeing increasingly more explicit definition of the relationship between government and its citizens. If emerging notions of reciprocal responsibilities are to be considered it is essential that a framework of genuine and effective community engagement is established that addresses the present asymmetry of power between governments and their public services or agents on one hand, and community or community-based organisations on the other.

Whilst Australia's system of federalism has worked well for the vast majority of Australians, it has to date failed the people of Remote Australia.

The reconstruction and revitalisation of Remote Australia could be considered the last great task of Australia's structural reform project and one of the grand challenges for the national commitment to cooperative federalism.

POSITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES ARE ACHIEVABLE

An engagement process to develop alternatives will take place over the coming months. Features of these alternatives might include:

Networked governance

Reform of fiscal federalism and other financial arrangements

Over the coming months participants in the remoteFOCUS Initiative, facilitated by Desert Knowledge Australia, will engage with a range of opinion makers, peak bodies and the people and settlements of Remote Australia, with the aim of further developing the rationale and case for change in the governing arrangements of Remote Australia. Without wishing to pre-empt the outcomes of this engagement, it is anticipated that a new paradigm for governing Remote Australia is most likely to include or will substantively consider the following:

A reformed governance system for Remote Australia based on the principle of networked governance and decentralisation, in order to provide regional resilience in the face of inevitable variations in levels of attention by central governments. Network governance and decentralisation is based on global trends of delegating authority away from centres of power to local levels and recognises that governance is increasingly seen as non hierarchical but reflects a reality of diffused decision making within a localised economic and social system.

A reformed governance system must be underpinned by reform of fiscal federalism. This may involve the Commonwealth Grants Commission carving out a new jurisdiction for Remote Australia and the current comparative assessment process to be amended to take into account capital shortfalls in determining allocations. The present Australian Government proposal to reduce the number of special purpose grants to the states provides an opportunity for creative thinking about innovative funding arrangements.

Reform of local government funding

Innovative approaches to secure on-going re-investment

Avoidance of 'one size fits all' program design

Development of a systematic strategies by governments to re-engage with Remote Australians

Development of alternative and positive arrangements that take into account Indigenous interests in land

The provision of Local Government Assistance from the Commonwealth to ensure future assessments are made on the basis of need, rather than existing per capita arrangements that effectively discriminate against citizens of Remote Australia.

Remote Australia contains substantial common resource of the nation, and innovative approaches to sustaining capital re-investment in this common resource are needed. For example the Pilbara presently generates substantial wealth but very little is reinvested back into the region. Overseas examples, such as the Alaskan Permanent Fund, provide funding models where longer-term social and regional returns can be established from shorter-term mining booms. Given that much of this Remote Australian resource is affected by Indigenous tenure, creative options to develop structures that secure immediate benefits for the longer-term need to be considered.

Current policy and program arrangements, at both a Federal and State/ Territory government level are largely predicated on a 'one size fits all' approach. This approach is particularly apparent in the Indigenous context, where most government programs operate in a manner that marginalises Indigenous peoples' access to mainstream services (and confines them to a labyrinth of individual or one-off programs and related funding sources) that are poorly delivered and take little account of the individual circumstances of particular settlements. There seems to be little application of a 'bottom-up approach' – involving systemic consultation with communities of interest – in regard to appraisal of needs, delivery of services and infrastructure and community development and leadership. Policy and program settings therefore need to be streamlined and reformed in a manner that takes into account the specific geographic, cultural, social and economic life opportunities and needs that apply where people actually live.

The general structural disengagement by governments described herein is especially reflected in the current lack of coherent and effective institutional frameworks at both the local and regional levels in Remote Australia. This gap means that in many instances there is no effective or sustainable organisational presence onto which Commonwealth and State/Territory investments can be effectively grafted. This combined lack of coherent institutional architecture, and presence on the ground, has resulted in serious deficits in public and private service provision. A potential remedy is a systemic approach involving the development of inclusive and sustainable local governance arrangements across Remote Australia, incorporating both reform of existing arrangements and building on current reform initiatives.

It is estimated that Indigenous Australians own, control, or have management arrangements over approximately 20 per cent - around 1 million square kilometres - of the Australian continent, mostly located within Remote Australia. Indigenous landholdings can be expected to continue to increase in the next decade through native title determinations. Despite this expansive land estate, Indigenous people living in Remote Australia have the lowest socio-economic status, relative both to other Indigenous Australians and to non-Indigenous Australians. Given these existing land holdings and the significant native title

rights and interests that Indigenous people also hold over much of Remote Australia, it is timely to work with Indigenous interests and other relevant stakeholders to critically examine:

- options aimed at maximising economic opportunities from both conventional and emerging initiatives (e.g. land management and security, climate change, eco-tourism, pastoralism and the effective management of wealth gained from resources development);
- opportunities for negotiating comprehensive framework agreements based on native title which might encompass multiple claims across a region, adopting a broader perspective on the basis for recognising native title in relation to single claims or particular types of lands, and providing for a wider range of economically usable outcomes;
- options for future land tenure arrangements in relation to existing and emerging Indigenous townships which aim to accommodate the rights and interests of native title holders/ traditional owners with those of other residents. These should also consider the means of securing opportunities for substantive public and private investment in necessary housing and essential services infrastructure and local economic and small business opportunities.

Consideration of appropriate workforce development strategies that take into account the emerging and significant changes in the demographics

Given the growing needs of an expanding Indigenous working-age population and demand for labour in the resources industry, there is a need for new strategies to improve Indigenous participation in the labour market. This will require governments to link economic participation with public investment in education, health care and housing.

Taking into account the demographic of the region

Remote Australia has a patchy demographic that in very remote regions is dominated by Indigenous peoples, while in larger towns and mining settlements non-Indigenous people are the majority. Developing governance systems that are sensitive to the diversity of the local demographic will be essential. The present Northern Territory local government reforms signal a potential way forward. Recognition of the need to protect, respect and nurture Indigenous cultural tenets, beliefs and societal structures is essential, and any governance system must take into account the need for cultural sustainability, as well as (and assisting) community, economic, and ecological sustainability.

NEXT STEPS TO BUILD MOMENTUM FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

Positive options
are available

RemoteFOCUS believes that positive alternatives can be developed. International experience shows that creative, flexible and effective approaches to the governance and administration of remote regions with significant Indigenous populations can be developed and can be successful. Experience in North America, for example, demonstrates that significant social and economic outcomes can be achieved through partnerships between government, communities and business (e.g. Canada's Comprehensive Agreements).

Remote Australia
offers positive
contribution

Australia's Remote regions offer huge potential to the nation – culturally and economically. There is already much which emerges from Remote Australia that contributes to defining our nation – the Western Desert Art movement and pioneering pastoralism are two obvious and contrasting examples. But this is too often clouded by front-page news of dysfunction and tragedy.

RemoteFOCUS aims
to build momentum
for change
through
engagement with a
range of people

This Prospectus will be used to engage a range of interested parties and individuals on the plight of Remote Australia and is aimed at drawing national attention to the need to fully include the remote regions in a modern integrated Australian nation. This will include a genuine and significant engagement with people who live in Remote Australia, ensuring that the developments are relevant, workable and wanted. The development of a new paradigm of regional governance supported by a national policy effort of reform will only succeed through a broad coalition of parties who see their shared interests as far more important than the sectoral issues that may have divided them in the past, and a coalition that is fully engaged with and connected to the peoples and communities of Remote Australia.

Desert Knowledge
Australia will
facilitate this
process

The initiative will be supported by Desert Knowledge Australia during the initial period of consultation and engagement that will include peak bodies, Indigenous groups, corporations, political leaders and other key parties, leading to an all-embracing view of options for revitalising Remote Australia. In conjunction with participants in remoteFOCUS Desert Knowledge Australia will seek support to carry forward the wider engagement.

Next action steps

The participants in remoteFOCUS have committed to draw together a broad and representative coalition of concerned and committed people, organisations and communities to address the systemic and fundamental barriers outlined in this prospectus. The initiative will therefore evolve in response to the input, ideas and opportunities that will emerge through consultation and engagement. At this stage next steps will include:

1. Circulating this Prospectus, with individual participants engaging with key individuals, peak bodies, organisations and stakeholders, to engender support for the initiative and to gain feedback and ideas.
2. Gathering small groups together as appropriate.
3. The roll-out of an extensive Remote Australia-wide engagement process exploring alternative futures for Remote Australia and considering its governance and administration in particular. This is essential to avoid repetition of external generation of 'solutions' and to obtain broad and

How you can respond

- intercultural involvement (subject to resources – see next section).
4. A workshop to further develop to a deeper level the range of alternative governance and administration options for Remote Australia (July/August).
 5. Commissioning of specific research to underpin the above, including exploration of international initiatives aimed at addressing similar issues.
 6. Presentation of initiative outcomes and governance alternatives at the Desert Knowledge Symposium (Nov 3-6, Alice Springs) and other forums.

To respond to the challenges laid out in this Prospectus we seek:

- Input to, ideas for and participation in the Initiative
- Promotion of the ‘case for change’ at opportunities such as conferences and other forums
- Assistance in funding the program of activities, and facilitation costs to progress the Initiative.
- Support of specific elements, for example
 - The website
 - A community, state or region ‘future search’
 - Workshop on governance alternatives
- Access to your networks to expand the reach of the initiative
- Your support in hosting events such as lunches, seminars or workshops
- Your assistance in using networks and lobbying opportunities to promote the case for change and the alternatives for remote Australia
- Your help to make available to remoteFOCUS, and (if agreed) publicly via the website date, information and resources relevant to the Initiative

Why respond?

Why respond? Because of the need for change laid out in this Prospectus – change that is essential for the nation, for the peoples of Remote Australia, for the security of the country and its prosperity, and for business.

Why respond now?

Most Australians of goodwill in government and the general public are appalled at the policy failures in Remote Australia. Yet failure continues – and continues to build upon itself – because it is caused by deeply embedded structural issues. In many respects the social, environmental and infrastructure capital of Remote Australia is eroding at an accelerating rate. It is essential to harness the present goodwill and attention to achieve long-term and systemic change that will build resilience and a sustainable positive future for the peoples and settlements of Remote Australia.

Contact:

This prospectus may have been passed to you directly by a member of the remoteFOCUS initiative. Please respond to them in the first instance and they will liaise with Desert Knowledge Australia who is facilitating and coordinating this initiative. Or contact:

John Huigen
Chief Executive Officer
Desert Knowledge Australia
john.huigen@desertknowledge.com.au
08 8959 6012



ATTACHMENT 1 THE ACCELERATING CRISIS IN REMOTE AUSTRALIA

A crisis with significant consequences to the nation, to Remote Australians and to industries that rely on a functioning Remote Australia, is building and will come to a head

We argue that Remote Australia is accelerating to a crisis that will have very significant national consequences – a crisis that is being nurtured by the institutional arrangements outlined above. The following provides a summary of the evidence of this impending and accelerating crisis and the components that fuel it.

The social implosion and disintegration of some remote Indigenous settlements and resultant movement of Indigenous people to remote towns is placing inordinate pressures on urban services, infrastructures and social cohesion.

- Since 1981, the Indigenous population in remote areas of Australia has grown by 23 per cent. By contrast, since 1986, the non-Indigenous population has declined. The result, on the one hand, is the rapid formation of new Indigenous families and households, and the formation over time of remote Indigenous ‘towns’ with little or no planning. It is likely that virtually all the increase in the desert population over the next 15 years will arise from natural growth among Indigenous peoples.
- Despite unprecedented economic growth and associated demand for labour in the context of periodic resource booms, the latest 2006 Census data confirm that Remote Australia’s Indigenous population remains overly dependent on welfare, structurally detached from the labour market and ill-equipped to engage within it; while resource companies find it difficult to fill vacant positions in resource-rich regions.
- Detailed analysis also highlights that this situation will worsen as a result of Indigenous population growth and the current inadequacy of government funding and resources to meet the backlog of infrastructure needs and disadvantage that have so obviously accumulated in most Indigenous settlements in Remote Australia.
- According to a survey completed by the ABS in 2006, Indigenous people were 13 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to have been incarcerated in that year. Indigenous people in remote areas ‘were one-and-a half times more likely than Indigenous people in non-remote areas to report that a family member had been sent to jail or was currently in jail’⁵.
- The opportunity costs associated with a failure to address these trends is a key consideration, but so are the human costs which are being inflicted upon current and future generations (especially given the young age distribution of the Indigenous population). This reality is highlighted by two recent studies of Indigenous labour-force participation in the Pilbara and Kimberley resource boom regions of WA which concluded that for

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4722.0.55.003 - Law and justice statistics - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a snapshot, 2006, Updated May 2007 available at www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4722.0.55.003/http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4722.0.55.003/

Indigenous people who do reach workforce age, 28 per cent will not reach 50 years of age. Statistically, more than half (58%) of Indigenous males who reach 15 years of age will not survive to retirement age at 65 years. In other words, out of an average cohort of 100 Indigenous males aged 25, only 42 would still be alive by age 65⁶.

- These factors combined have lead independent analysts to conclude that ‘the continuation of low labour force status represents a major drain on the Australian economy in terms of foregone production and tax revenue, the fiscal costs of welfare provision, remedial costs of social pathology and social costs of exclusion. The allied deficits in education status, housing and health amongst people in the region, and the degree to which interaction with the police and subsequently the courts and various custodial institutions, has become so persuasive and pervasive, that indications are that such costs are no doubt substantial. These costs are likely to escalate further still against the background of a growing and intractably marginalised Indigenous population’⁷.
- The current and projected growth trends in the Indigenous population are contrasted by the continuing migration of the non-Indigenous population out of remote regions (resulting in the loss of families and skilled labour) and increased overall reliance on ‘fly-in, fly-out labour’.
- The longstanding deficit of capital and infrastructure investments by governments has led to consequent spiralling depreciation and outmoded technology in many regions of Remote Australia.
- There is growing incapacity of government agencies and local governments to provide basic community services as a result of the accumulated impacts of disengagement by governments, which over the past thirty years have essentially ‘vacated the field’ of Remote Australia.
- The decay of urban centres in Remote Australia looms large in the lives of all remote residents—for non-Indigenous people because most of them live there, and for Indigenous people because they frequently spend short periods of time accessing urban-based services. This dichotomy between concentration of services and population dispersion over vast distances, and the level of mobility that it engenders, raises a number of questions about access to and provision of services in remote regions and the need to revitalise and repopulate the urban heart of Remote Australia.
- The *Indigenous Community Governance Project*⁸ has documented the effect of crippling stresses on the Indigenous organisations who are trying to cope

⁶ Taylor, J. 2008. *Indigenous Labour Supply Constraints in the West Kimberley*, CAEPR Working Paper No. 39, ANU E Press, Canberra, available at www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/WP/CAEPRWP39.pdf

⁷ Taylor, J and Scambray, B. 2005. *Indigenous People and the Pilbara Mining Boom: a Baseline for Regional Participation*, CAEPR Research Monograph No. 25, ANU E Press, Canberra, available at http://epress.anu.edu.au/caepr_series/no_25/frames.php

⁸ Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research in partnership with Reconciliation Australia, *Indigenous Community Governance Project*, available at http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/ICGP_home.php

with labyrinthine government funding arrangements, duplication and red tape, cross-jurisdictional inefficiencies, and the confusing array of overlapping short-term niche programs.

- The evidence also points to the vulnerability of Indigenous governance structures trying to deal with the growing demands of resources boom, land negotiations, and very significant streams of new revenue from agreements with resource companies.
- Small to medium enterprises are also increasingly vulnerable in Remote Australia, facing significant pressures because of difficulties in staff attraction and retention, high fuel costs and other factors.
- The risk of collapsing fragile ecosystems in the context of outmoded land-management regimes is high and increasing in particular regions.
- There are strong indications that these crisis conditions are already apparent in Remote Australia and will, over the coming years, expand geographically and in their depth of impact as population growth and increased mobility occurs.

ATTACHMENT 2 LIST OF FORUM PARTICIPANTS

Perth, April 1, 2 2008

Simon Balderstone	Adviser, Yothu Yindi Foundation/Garma Festival and Director, Ways and Means Consultancy Pty Ltd
Mike Burgess	Chief Executive, Department of Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government
Fred Chaney	Chair, Desert Knowledge Australia
Christine Charles	Group Executive, External Affairs, Newmont Australia
Kevin Dolman	Principal Policy Advisor, Office of the Special Advisor on Indigenous Affairs to the Government of Western Australia
Ian Fletcher	Vice-President Government Relations in Western Australia, BHP Billiton
Jan Ferguson	Managing Director, Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre
Bill Gray AM	Consultant land development (former ATSIC CEO, and former Australian Electoral Commissioner)
Bill Hart	General Manager of Communities and External Relations, Rio Tinto Iron Ore
John Huigen	Chief Executive Officer, Desert Knowledge Australia
Marcus Lane	Senior Principle Research Scientist, Resource Futures, CSIRO
Adam Levin	Partner, Jackson McDonald Lawyers
Tim Marney	Under Treasurer, Government of Western Australia
Anthony Mitchell	Facilitator, Director - Bendelta Pty Ltd
Gavin Mooney	Professor of Health Economics and Director of the Social and Public Health Economics Research Group (Sphere), Curtin University
Howard Pedersen	Department of Local Government and Regional Development, Government of Western Australia & researcher
John Phillimore	Executive Director, The John Curtin Institute of Public Policy, Curtin University of Technology
John Sanderson	Special Advisor on Indigenous Affairs to the Government of Western Australia
Peter Shergold	Chief Executive, Centre for Social Impact, Australian School of Business, University of New South Wales
Di Smith	Visiting Fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University
Mark Stafford-Smith	CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems (& Desert Knowledge CRC)
Tom Stephens MLA	MLA, Parliament of Western Australia
Bruce Walker	Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Appropriate Technology
Neil Westbury	Consultant and author
Ben Wyatt MLA	MLA, Parliament of Western Australia

ATTACHMENT 3 remoteFOCUS SUPPORTERS

At this time (February 2009) the following people and/or organisations have indicated their support for the thrust of the arguments in this prospectus and lend their voice to the need for significant reform in how Remote Australia is governed and administered. The views contained herein do not necessarily represent the views of the following individuals' employers or any organisation they may be associated with, unless explicitly stated. This list will be updated as people/organisations indicate their support.

The names and organisations on this page (along with the original participants) constitute the remoteFOCUS Group - those people and organisations who agree with the general thrust of the arguments outlined in this prospectus and who are committed to supporting the development of new approaches, arrangements and policies relating to remote Australia.

Trish Barron	Sharon Hocking - Vice President, Business Broken Hill and Desert Knowledge Australia, Local Foods and Products - Broken Hill facilitator
Mick Dodson – Director, National Centre for Indigenous Studies, ANU	Bret Fishley
Lesley Clark – Director, PacificPlus Consulting	Jesse Winton
Ross Clark – Director, PacificPlus Consulting	Ken Coghill – Department of Management, Monash University
Harold Furber – Director, Desert Knowledge Australia	Jocelyn Davies -Principal Research Scientist – Geographer, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Alice Springs, Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre
Kaye Harris - Business Development Manager, Koorie Heritage Trust	Dr Colin Hughes - CentrepoinT Swan View Medical Centre
Alwyn McKenzie – Director, Desert Knowledge Australia	Indigenous Development Group
Beryl Meiklejohn – Director, Desert Knowledge Australia	Margaret Heffernan OAM - RMIT University, Melbourne
Richard Monypenny - Adjunct Associate, School of Business, James Cook University, Townsville	Sue Currie
Des Rogers – Director, Desert Knowledge Australia	Robyn Vines MSc, FAPS - Clinical Psychologist/Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Monash University
David Ross – Director, Central Land Council	Christian Clark – PhD Candidate, School of Philosophy and Social Inquiry, The University of Melbourne
His Worship the Mayor Damien Ryan – Mayor of Alice Springs	John Wakerman – Director, Centre for Remote Health
WALGA Kimberley Country Zone	Local Knowledge
George Wilson - Director, Australian Wildlife Services	Jo Jackson King & Barbara King - Occupational
Andrew McEwen	
Chris Chappell - Director, Independent Consulting Services	

<p>Anne Savage - Executive Manager, Communications and Advocacy, Cancer Council Queensland</p> <p>Capricorn Community Development Association</p> <p>Lyn Allison - Former leader of the Australian Democrats, now member of a new alliance considering solutions to the shortage of experienced remote area nurses</p> <p>Barbara Shaw Snr – Tennant Creek</p> <p>Patrick Walker - Director General, Department of Indigenous Affairs, Western Australia</p> <p>Frontier Services - An agency of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia</p> <p>Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (ACPACS), University of Queensland</p> <p>CSR Sydney</p> <p>Jo Hawke</p> <p>Tim Costello, CEO, World Vision Australia</p> <p>Mark Moran, Head Australia Programs, World Vision Australia</p>	<p>Therapists, Murchison, WA</p> <p>Peter Johnstone, PJ Governance Pty Ltd</p>
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remoteFOCUS: REVITALISING REMOTE AUSTRALIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3

There is failure to recognise the escalating calamity facing Remote Australia
And yet huge opportunity exists...
In early April 2008 a group of concerned Australians met in Perth.
It was concluded that Remote Australia is in crisis
This is not an 'Indigenous issue' – it is an issue of ineffective government arrangements and
disengagement
There are significant issues that affect and are affected by Indigenous people that will not be resolved
without the wider system being revamped.
Ignoring Remote Australia will significantly affect all Australians
remoteFOCUS aims to facilitate momentum for change
Different approaches can and will work, offering significant opportunities

THE CURRENT SITUATION

5

Remote Australia is huge – 85% of the continent
But Remote Australia is often invisible. Few votes = little attention
If Remote Australia continues to be ignored there will be significant consequences to the nation
The remoteFOCUS Initiative seeks to stimulate informed discussion and alternatives...
The remoteFOCUS Initiative's focus is on reforming the governance, administration and public policy
of Remote Australia
Ideological differences can (and must) be overcome
The remoteFOCUS Initiative aims to engage with affected people, to create a new future

THE 'FAILED STATE' OF REMOTE AUSTRALIA

7

Australia has taken cooperative interventions in 'failed states' in our region
Remote Australia can be described as a failed state
The failed state description of Remote Australia has been given credence by a succession of damning
government reports and inquiries
A seismic shift in demographics is emerging and will have radical impacts
These impacts will be felt not only by Remote Australians. Every Australian will be affected

THE DYING HEART OF AUSTRALIA?

8

remoteFOCUS argues that governments have failed to meet their obligations
Separate services for Indigenous people disguises failure and masks government responsibility
Government programs designed for metropolitan Australia continue to be applied in Remote
Australia, with significant failure. One size does not fit all
The problems of Remote Australia are systemic and institutional
A crisis that will affect the nation, Remote Australians and industries that rely on a functioning
Remote Australia is building and will come to a head
Only by addressing the systemic causes can this be avoided
There is no 'silver bullet'. A new paradigm is required

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FAILED STATE OF REMOTE AUSTRALIA

9

The consequences of doing nothing are severe
Escalating public outlays on health and social services need to be avoided
A strategy and systemic approach to address Indigenous poverty and social breakdown is essential

Approaches that address the radically changing demographic in regional towns are required
The national security imperative to maintain population and infrastructure must not be forgotten
Neither should the environmental imperatives (and opportunities) of Remote Australia be ignored
And the security of much of the nation's wealth generation through mining must be considered
Our international reputation and our national soul are at stake

A NEW PARADIGM FOR GOVERNING REMOTE AUSTRALIA 11

Decisive and comprehensive action is needed now
Comprehensive reform of Remote Australia's governance system is required
Externally generated solutions won't work. Decisive action is needed...
...which must be balanced with meaningful engagement...
...and aimed at building resilience and tolerance of inevitable future inattention
New thinking around citizen and government responsibilities needs to be taken into account
The special case and special arrangements required for Remote Australia needs to be carefully developed

POSITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES ARE ACHIEVABLE 12

An engagement process to develop alternatives will take place over the coming months. Features of these alternatives might include:

- Networked governance
- Reform of fiscal federalism and other financial arrangements
- Reform of local government funding
- Innovative approaches to secure on-going re-investment
- Avoidance of 'one size fits all' program design
- Development of a systematic strategies by governments to re-engage with Remote Australians
- Development of alternative and positive arrangements that take into account Indigenous interests in land
- Consideration of appropriate workforce development strategies that take into account the emerging and significant changes in the demographics
- Taking into account the demographic of the region

NEXT STEPS TO BUILD MOMENTUM FOR POSITIVE CHANGE 15

Positive options are available
Remote Australia offers positive contribution
RemoteFOCUS aims to build momentum for change through engagement with a range of people
Desert Knowledge Australia will facilitate this process
Next action steps
How you can respond
Why respond?
Why respond **now**?

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Contact:

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