

Australian National University  
NORTH AUSTRALIA RESEARCH UNIT  
**DISCUSSION PAPER**

**STRATEGIC REGIONAL  
PLANNING ON THE  
NORTHERN FRONTIERS**

**John Holmes**

No. 4

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NORTH AUSTRALIA RESEARCH UNIT

In 1973 the Australian National University created the North Australia Research Unit for two purposes: to carry out a research program of its own and to provide a base and logistic support for research workers from ANU and from other Australian or overseas research institutions. The Unit is part of the Research School of Physical Sciences.

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## DISCUSSION PAPER

The Unit's scientific work is interdisciplinary and principally in the social sciences. An overall aim is to initiate research on problems of development in the north, little studied by other institutions. At present emphasis is being given to four main research areas:

- Environmental management and planning
- Governance and policymaking structures
- Economic development and social equity
- Quality of community life

The Publications Officer  
North Australia Research Unit  
PO Box 4321  
Darwin NT 1501

The main projects and present needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities remain a major theme in our work as we seek to understand the economic and social conditions of these communities.

### STRATEGIC REGIONAL PLANNING ON THE NORTHERN FRONTIERS

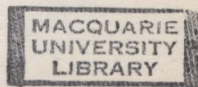
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The Unit's activities range well beyond its base in Darwin in the Northern Territory to research localities in central Australia and the north and west of Queensland and north Western Australia.

The Unit's academic work is interdisciplinary and principally in the social sciences. An overall aim is to initiate research on problems of development in the north, little studied by other institutions. At present, emphasis is being given to four main research areas:

- Environmental management and planning
- Governance and policymaking structures
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- Quality of community life

The future prospects and present needs of the Aboriginal and Islander communities remain a major theme in our work as are ecological and economic sustainability.

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We hope that this series will open up discussion about some issues of northern development and the inevitable conflicts that arise from change, culture contacts and diversity of values.

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## Notes on contributor

John Holmes is Professor of Geography at the University of Queensland. His interest in north Australia dates back to 1950 when, as an honours Geography student of the University of Sydney, he assisted in one of the earliest land classification surveys, in the Queensland Peninsula and Gulf Districts. This northern interest has been renewed from 1983 onwards, involving a succession of research projects and publications on problems of service delivery in remote regions, on the structure of large cattle stations, on pastoral resource appraisal in relation to the viability of marginal beef enterprises and, more recently, on adapting pastoral leasehold tenures to meet contemporary needs. In 1985, he undertook a consultancy for the Northern Territory Department of Lands involving an examination of land resources and land use options in the Gulf District. The subsequent report provided the framework for the *Gulf Region Land Use and Development Study*, which is examined in this discussion paper.

## ABSTRACT

In Australia's northern marginal regions, notably in the Kimberley, Northern Territory Gulf District and Cape York Peninsula, there has been a recent, abrupt move towards regional planning, based primarily on a land use strategic plan. This new direction is in response to the growth in competition over land, to the current fluidity in land ownership and use and to the pivotal role of governments in shaping land use and regional development. Superficially, this trend seems to mirror an earlier trend in Canada's Arctic frontier, where joint land use planning is a central element in an emerging partnership between governments and indigenous peoples. In the Canadian context, the planning process is intended to be dynamic, flexible, consultative, participatory, coordinative, responsive, influential and capable of resolving conflicts. Although the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy shows some promise of emulating the Canadian model, so far northern regional planning has been a token effort, focussing on bureaucratic and technocratic aspects. Most critically, a golden opportunity is being missed, to use regional land use planning as a means of recognising Aboriginal aspirations and for engaging in a constructive reconciliation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests.



## STRATEGIC REGIONAL PLANNING ON THE NORTHERN FRONTIERS

John Holmes

Recent NARU publications have well exemplified the value of comparative studies of northern 'frontier' regions in affluent nations such as Canada, Alaska, Australia and the Scandinavian lands (see particularly Jull 1991 and Jull & Roberts 1991.) Appropriately, there is a focus on conflicting values and aspirations between the native peoples and the larger society within which they are encompassed; on policies in pursuit of reconciliation or accommodation of these values and aspirations; and on needed institutional changes, touching on such pivotal issues as resource rights (notably land rights), modes of self-determination, justice administration and so on.

While these are the leading issues, driving the political agenda at the outset, there are consequential issues which will command more attention once the pivotal decisions on rights and responsibilities have been made. The focus will be directed away from creating new structures and towards making these structures workable, with a strong emphasis upon constructive co-existence between native and non-native interests within northern regions. One critical component in this co-existence scenario will be the creation of mechanisms for strategic, participatory regional planning, with a strong emphasis on land use, land management, environmental impacts and appropriate directions in social and economic development.

This consequential need for strategic regional planning was recognised in Berger's landmark inquiry into the social, economic and environmental implications of the proposed Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline which acted as the catalyst for far-reaching Canadian legislative reform (Berger 1977).

In both Canada and Alaska, regional land use and development planning has been inextricably linked to the settlement of native land claims. In northern Canada, there is a strong focus on mechanisms for ongoing consultation and equal participation by native and governmental representatives in the decision process.

Superficially, there appears to have been a belated Australian response towards a parallel form of regional planning in northern frontier regions, to match that already in train in Canada and Alaska. In rapid succession, three of Australia's most remote and least developed northern regions have become the focus of strategic regional planning. The *Kimberley Region Plan Study Report*, prepared jointly by the Western Australia Departments of Regional Development and the Northwest and of Planning and Urban Development, was released for public comment in December 1990. The *Gulf Region Land Use and Development Study* was published by the Northern Territory Department of Lands and Housing in October 1991. Finally the most ambitious proposal is the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy (CYPLUS) initiated by the Queensland government in early 1990, and with joint state-federal involvement, is still in the joint planning stage, with an ambitious program to be staged over at least five years.

It is significant that these planning exercises have been initiated by three separate governments and that in two cases, the Gulf Study and CYPLUS, the exercise is being undertaken in recognition of the special problems of these marginal regions, and is not seen as a precedent for statewide (or territory-wide) regional planning. This might suggest a parallel recognition of Berger's views on the central role of regional planning in achieving a reconciliation between local native and wider non-native interests. However, in the Australian context, regional planning has been entirely divorced from the settlement of Aboriginal claims. Also, in the first two planning exercises, in the Kimberley and the Gulf, Aboriginal issues receive scant attention. Consultation with Aborigines has been negligible and there is no mechanism for ongoing participation in an



evolving regional context. In CYPLUS greater attention is given to Aboriginal interests, but this is only one in a substantial list of interests to be consulted.

Here is a golden opportunity foregone. It does not require a comparison with Canadian experience to demonstrate that a primary goal of strategic planning in our northern frontier regions should be to secure a cooperative engagement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests. This surely is self-evident, from any examination of emerging regional scenarios, which suggest increasing stress through the entrenchment of dualistic regional systems, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

Why is regional planning in Australia's north in danger of missing out in the pursuit of this central task? There are various partial, contributory explanations:

- concerning the segmented responsibilities of governments in northern Australia,
- the more limited powers and responsibilities of the national government (compared with Canada's federal territories),
- the lesser opportunities to engage in a comprehensive reallocation of resource rights in favour of native interests because of prior land allocation to private ownership,
- the higher proportion of non-native peoples within these regions and their more powerful control over regional resources and economic activity, and
- the less evident need for comprehensive land use planning where a land-ownership duopoly is absent.

While all these arguments carry some weight, *in toto* they do not provide a persuasive case. It can only be concluded, certainly in the Kimberley and Gulf cases, that there has been a lack of vision, involving a monumental failure to recognise the pivotal role which participatory coordinative regional planning could play in ensuring the engagement of Aboriginal interests.

It can further be argued that the greater relative strength of local non-Aboriginal interests in northern Australia adds weight to the need for regional planning, even though it adds complexity to the task and contributes uncertainty to the outcome. Here the contrast with northern Canada is striking. In northern Canada, the *Inuit*, *Dene* and *Metis* are not only numerically dominant but they have retained relatively unfettered traditional rights of resource use, while the legal title has been retained almost entirely by the national government. As a consequence, the negotiation of the new order is largely undertaken by two clearly defined power-groups. The local interest is largely coincident with the native interest, thus avoiding the local dualism present in north Australia. All other interests are mediated by the national government (but with some responsibilities being transferred to territory governments). Following the settlement of land claims, and the partitioning of land to create a duopoly of native and federal land, there is a clear necessity to engage in shared land use planning and environmental management, since decisions by one party can strongly impact on the other.

In northern Australia, regional interests are more complex and the most striking duality is emerging between local Aboriginal and local non-Aboriginal interests. In Australia's northern savanna zone, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are a minority, with only 26 per cent of the population (Holmes & Mott, in press). Even in the three frontier zones, now subject to regional planning, there is near-equality between native and non-native populations, with native peoples comprising 43 per cent in the Kimberley, 57 per cent in the Gulf and 46 per cent in Cape York Peninsula (55 per cent if Weipa is excluded). The former total dominance of non-native local interests is now being replaced by a complex interplay of interests, posing a greater but by no means insurmountable challenge in reconciling Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests. The task is further complicated by the continued occupancy of most land under pastoral leases, with substantial property rights held by lessees, and incorporating almost all lands with any potential for commercial production.



Particularly in the Kimberley and Gulf studies, there is a clear mismatch between the formidable challenges posed in pursuing comprehensive regional planning involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests and the low-key response, focussing on a limited array of Eurocentric-issues. So truncated is the conceptualisation of regional challenges and the apparent commitment to participatory regional planning, that one may ask why the two governments concerned felt obliged to engage in regional planning.

A review of the preliminary stages leading to these initiatives suggests two overriding considerations. The first of these is the increasing fluidity and uncertainty in land use and regional development in these marginal regions, where, until recently, the ascendancy of pastoralism has been complete, save for localised prospects in mining and agriculture, which have not demanded any careful governmental appraisal of land use options. Pastoral ascendancy has now been strongly challenged, not only by Aboriginal land claims, but also by competing broad-acres claims for nature preservation, recreation and tourism, and by an array of localised development opportunities relating to tourist resorts, growing urban centres, rural residential needs and even a proposed spaceport in Cape York Peninsula. Uncertainties have been reinforced by the retreat of pastoralism, however temporary, from the most marginal lands under the destocking and shoot-out programs of the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign (BTEC). (See, for example, Holmes 1990.)

Secondly, because of low land values and low levels of private investment governments still occupy a pivotal decision-making role in shaping development in these marginal regions. Governmental initiatives in regional infrastructure investment and in deciding land transfers from pastoral lease to other tenures will have major regional impacts, to a far greater extent than in the more closely settled *ecumene*, where private investment and private property rights reduce the need and limit the scope for governmental intervention.

In the face of these demands, the traditional fragmented, *ad hoc* responses by various government departments proved inadequate. Initially, half-hearted attempts were made to meet the new challenges. In the Kimberley, the 1985 *Inquiry into the Kimberley Pastoral Industry* (Western Australian Government 1985) identified a series of planning issues requiring a more comprehensive regional approach. The immediate triggers were the growing demands for land repurchase and subdivision from large pastoral leases around major towns; the need to accommodate tourism in its various forms; a concern to foster regional development in a backward region; and, finally, a recognition of Aboriginal land rights and infrastructure needs. These would require some degree of regional coordination.

In the Gulf District, the initiative largely rested with the Department of Lands and Housing, which was concerned to consider land use options in areas where cattle raising proved non-viable under the impact of BTEC. These options were examined in the Holmes Report (Holmes 1986), which also acted as a catalyst for the subsequent regional planning exercise by providing methods of assessing land use options leading to a broad outline of a regional land use strategy. However, again, Aboriginal interests were not directly examined, either in the 1985 report or in the 1990 regional study.

In sharp contrast to the Gulf District where major conflicts over development proposals remained only latent, and where there were no highly publicised land use conflicts, Cape York Peninsula was the arena for a succession of major conflicts, focussing on various tourism proposals, a projected spaceport, mining for bauxite (Gulf coast), silica (Shelburne Bay) and metals (McIlwraith Range) recently putting developers, conservationists and Aborigines in a three-way conflict. Changing governmental responses have closely mirrored changing political philosophies. Initially, under the Bjelke-Petersen National Party government, an opportunistic, *ad hoc*, pro-development, anti-planning, anti-Aborigines, anti-conservation philosophy prevailed, fostering a wave of land speculation on pastoral leases, further promoted by the abuse of



rights to convert from leasehold to freehold (Holmes 1991). The successor National Party governments, under Ahern and Cooper, failed to undertake any policy changes, although the Ahern government commissioned a modest consultancy report which summarised available data on resources, infrastructure and planning constraints (Connell Wagner 1989). Shortly after its election, the Goss Labor Party government announced its proposed land use strategy project for the peninsula, to be undertaken jointly with the federal government. Although there have been difficulties in agreeing on project objectives and programs, as evidenced in the two-year delay preceding the announcement of the detailed projects in Stage One (Resource Analysis), CYPLUS does hold promise of being the most comprehensive regional land use strategy yet undertaken in Australia, and the one which offers the greatest prospect for consultative, responsive planning. Whether it will match North American planning in scope and method is yet to be seen.

### **Strategic land use planning in frontier regions of Canada and Alaska**

Major planning programs were given legislative authorisation in Alaska in 1980 and Canada in 1981. In both cases, planning was a logical outcome of substantial changes in land ownership, involving actual and prospective transfers from national governments to native groups and also to state or territorial governments.

Until the award of statehood in 1959, Alaskan land was almost entirely federally owned, and administered by the Bureau of Land Management, with small areas under the control of the Forestry Service. As a result of the Alaska Statehood Act of 1959, almost 29 per cent of the land area was to be progressively transferred for state ownership and disposal. To date only 1.4 per cent of the entire state has been transferred to private ownership, mainly through state sales. Under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1970, 12 per cent of the state was awarded to native ownership, with rights being shared between 13 regional and over 200 village corporations. Further significant changes were made in the

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980. Major land transfers occurred between federal agencies, resulting in 13.9 per cent of the state being included in National Parks, 20.6 per cent in wildlife and wilderness reserves, 17.7 per cent in National Forests and 17.7 per cent retained by the Bureau of Land Management.

Since 1980, federal and state agencies have been drawing up land use and management plans for virtually all public land in Alaska, comprising over 86 per cent of the total area of the state. All of these planning activities require high levels of public involvement. The most open-ended planning tasks, providing scope for a major transfer in land ownership and land use are the comprehensive regional planning projects for the state lands which will guide management, sale, leasing, mineral entry and use of state lands within a 20-year time frame.

Quite apart from regional land use and management plans prepared separately for state and federal lands, the 1980 Act provided machinery for resolving land use conflicts between various levels of government. This is to be achieved through the high-level Alaska Land Use Planning Council, jointly headed by the state governor and a senior federal representative. While this council's functions are mainly advisory, it was given

*... significant powers to recommend uses for federal or state lands; to negotiate land exchanges; to identify specific opportunities for cooperation among state and federal governments and Natives (corporations); to encourage regional cooperative planning; and to provide for mutual consultation, review and coordination of resource management plans and programs (Cooley 1984, 44).*

To date, the main function of the council has been coordination and information exchange, which is an essential task, given the number of major agencies, federal, state and Native corporations (regional and village) involved in decisions on resource management and land use. For



useful reviews of the context of changing land ownership and related land use planning in Alaska, see Morehouse (1984), Leask (1985), and Willis (1985).

A comparable recent trend to comprehensive, participatory land use planning has occurred in Canada's two northern territories (Northwest Territories and Yukon) and, to a lesser extent, in northern Quebec and Labrador. In the two territories, almost all governmental power has for long been concentrated in the multipurpose Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). Particularly with the growth of the oil exploration and extraction industry, DIAND came under increasing pressure to engage in effective resource management. The first legal instruments towards this end were the Land Use Regulations under the Territorial Lands Act, which came into effect in 1971. The inadequacies of an *ad hoc* regulatory approach, reactive only to development initiatives, were soon evident, and were highlighted in the influential Berger Inquiry into the social, economic and environmental implications of the proposed Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline (Berger 1977).

There were increasing calls from almost all northern interest groups, as well as from industry, for a comprehensive approach to land use planning and resource management. In 1980 DIAND responded with two alternative draft proposals to Cabinet for implementing land use planning in the north. Both of these proposals aroused widespread criticism, not only from northern interest groups and the two territory governments, but also from other federal departments, on a number of critical issues.

*The draft Cabinet paper connected the need for land-use planning with imminent non-renewable resource development, but it ignored the rapidly changing political context in the North to which planning would have to adjust. The emphasis on the federal role in land-use planning subordinated the territorial governments and excluded native people's organisations, interest groups and local governments from effective participation. Socio-economic development, a fundamental concern of northerners, was to be addressed only through a public review of alternative plans. The*

*draft Cabinet paper did not take into account variations in the North's climate, geography, politics, and peoples, and it portrayed land-use planning as a technical exercise best performed by 'experts' from within federal government bureaucracies. This approach reflected DIAND's determination to maintain control of land-use planning (Fenge 1982, 32).*

Fenge provides a perceptive historical review of the ensuing negotiations between all interest groups leading to final agreements and implementation in the two territories in 1985. The final scheme gave recognition to Berger's proposals that land use planning should evolve naturally from the settlement of native land claims. There was a shift in emphasis towards renewable as well as non-renewable resources, towards issues of ongoing resource management, towards the economic and social needs and aspirations of local peoples and towards devolving much of the planning powers to regional commissions with equal numbers of local and federal representatives. Indeed, devolution of authority caused the Prime Minister's Office to advise Cabinet that DIAND was relinquishing too much federal power to manage northern land and resources and that the agreements were tantamount to constitutional change (Fenge 1987, 43). Certainly land use planning has become intimately connected to devolution of power and responsibilities away from the federal government towards territorial governments and local organisations representing the native *Inuit*, *Dene* and *Metis* peoples. The context within which land use planning has evolved in northern Canada is comprehensively examined in Fenge and Rees (1987) while the relationship to land claims policy is outlined in Task Force to Review Comprehensive Claims Policy (1985, 53-71).

### **What can we learn from North American experience?**

The contextual similarities between northern Canada/Alaska and northern Australia would suggest not only a comparable need for regional land use planning but also the likelihood of similar sets of goals, policy issues and



mechanisms for implementation. However, this is only partially true. While there are major points of similarity, there are also important differences.

The most basic similarities relate to: the relatively undeveloped status of these remote, marginal, sparsely settled regions; the current fluidity in land tenure, land use and resource management; the radical changes in the recognition of the rights of native peoples and in the award of land claims, involving novel forms of land tenure; the beginnings of devolution in decision-making to territorial and regional levels; nevertheless, a continuing pivotal role by central authorities in influencing regional economic and social development, in the absence of broad-scale, widespread private investment linked to entrenched private property rights; and the division of sovereign powers between federal and state/territorial governments. All of these attributes combine to provide an increasingly powerful *rationale* for regional land use planning, even if only as a means of coordinating the decisions taken by the various public authorities and influential non-government organisations, most notably those representing native peoples.

However, there are substantial differences, which are clearly evident from a comparison of the Canadian and Australian contexts. In Australia, primarily because of the prior allocation of property rights and the devolution of administrative responsibilities, there is much less scope for an *ab initio* approach towards multifaceted, comprehensive land use planning. Too much power and responsibility has already been handed over to a multiplicity of decision-makers in both public and private sectors. This can clearly be seen by a quick scan of the structure of land ownership and of administrative powers.

In Canada's two northern territories, Yukon and the Northwest Territories, save for some pocket-handkerchief tracts adjoining a few small administrative centres such as Yellowknife and Whitehorse, land has remained federally owned with administrative responsibilities concentrated within one department, DIAND. During the 1970s and

1980s, negotiations on land transfers to native organisations and to territorial governments could readily be linked to binding agreements on future management and use, which not merely facilitated land use planning but indeed made planning a central element in the future scheme of things.

There was no parallel scope for comprehensive land transfers in northern Australia. Within the northern savanna zone, 63.7 per cent of all land is held in pastoral leases (Holmes & Mott, in press). While these leases do not quite provide private property rights equal to freehold land, nevertheless the rights of lessees act as powerful constraints against the adoption of an *ab initio* approach to land use and development planning. Pastoral ownership has also acted to severely limit the scope for land allocations to Aborigines. These have been largely confined to previously designated reserves or to scattered parcels of resource-poor vacant Crown land. The predetermined *locale* of land transfers and the legalistic mechanisms for determining land rights have precluded the adoption of a holistic, coordinated approach, linking land allocations to land use planning.

Paralleling this largely pre-existing structure of property rights and land tenures are more complex, fully articulated public institutional structures, less capable of being reordered to meet emerging needs. The powers of the federal government relating to natural resources are less than in either Alaska or northern Canada, and greater authority resides with the Queensland, Western Australia and even the Northern Territory governments than with their North American counterparts. Furthermore, there is an entrenched partitioning of responsibilities between various government departments, while local government also has a major role in both Queensland and Western Australia.

While these constraints will make the planning task more complex and onerous, they do not rule out the prospect of significant positive outcomes, nor do they justify the modest commitment and limited goals



of the Kimberley and Gulf planning exercises. The limitations of these two programs can be well revealed by measuring their performance against appropriate criteria.

## Criteria for effective strategic land use planning

Planning can be defined as

*... any formal, structured process by which someone makes choices about the use of resources and their allocation among legitimate, competing uses, in order to achieve stated objectives over some specified period in the future. ... Making choices implies the existence of alternatives, but experience shows that certain options may not be apparent at the outset. Therefore, any credible planning process devotes considerable energy to the identification and exploration of feasible alternatives. Its objective in doing so is to understand fully the benefits and costs associated with each possibility, because many decisions, particularly those affecting non-renewable or ecologically-sensitive resources, may close the door forever on other potentially superior alternatives. It is this characteristic of good planning that makes land-use planning so much more attractive than ad hoc regulation ... (Rees 1987, 10).*

In an ideal world, the entity responsible for regional land use planning should be:

### **1. Well informed**

This involves not only the assembly, processing, storage and management of basic information on regional resources, but also having access to the needed expertise to interpret the data, to prepare resource appraisals, to develop realistic scenarios, to examine the economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of the scenarios and to assess their probability under varying assumptions. Most of the expenditure on

staffing, consultancies and advice from other governmental or non-governmental sources is directed to the goal of becoming well informed on regional attributes and options.

## ***2. Dynamic and flexible***

'Planning is not an activity resulting in products called plans: it is a continuous process, whereby the process itself — namely that of aborting the plans — is the pay-off...' (Beer 1979, 338, quoted in Rees 1987, 11). There is an inevitable tension between the search for certainty and predictability which is best satisfied by a focussing on a structure plan, usually a static image reflecting the *status quo*, and the equally powerful need not only to accommodate change but to promote desired change, which, however, reduces certainty and may lead to conflict. Hence the need to give emphasis to planning as an ongoing process, and to provide mechanisms for monitoring feedback and up-dating at frequent intervals.

## ***3. Consultative and participatory***

Effective ongoing planning is not solely the province of experts, public servants and politicians, but also must engage the interest and involvement of local groups, who must be given some visible share in the process of decision-making. This is particularly so in marginal regions such as northern Australia and northern Canada, where land use planning offers possibilities for returning power to dispossessed native peoples.

## ***4. Responsive and accountable***

Planning decisions are expected to reflect the public interest. However, there are often many different 'public interests' associated with differing private interests, values and perceptions, with no possibility of a clear consensus. This imposes special obligations on politicians and planners to examine all relevant policy options and to seek fair and equitable solutions, while also satisfying stated economic, social and environmental objectives. This may involve choosing from an array of valid alternatives



which may be mutually exclusive. This places a premium on accountability, which in turn rests upon high quality information and effective consultation.

### **5. Capable of resolving conflicts**

The increasing diversity of values and goals within the community and the growing capacity of interest groups to identify and articulate their objectives, in relation to specific issues of regional resource use, is generating strong pressure on governments to improve their capacity to anticipate, minimise and resolve disputes. The Federal Government has recognised this need by establishing the Resource Assessment Commission, to advise on disputes delineated primarily within economic sectors, such as forestry issues. Comparable mechanisms for dispute resolution need to be incorporated into regional strategic planning. This is increasingly being recognised in Australia. See, for example, the comprehensive report on this prepared by the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry into Fraser Island (Queensland 1990).

### **6. Coordinative**

*Land use planning is neither an isolated process nor an end in itself. Ideally, land use matters will be an integral component of a more comprehensive planning process. When land use is considered within a framework of overall development policy, it becomes the spatial or geographic expression of regional social and economic objectives (Rees 1987, 13).*

While Rees could well have added 'environmental' to his objectives, nevertheless the point remains that land use planning provides the focus for all governmental activities at the regional level. This requires a high level of consultation and joint decision-making with other public authorities, involving the possible transfer to some powers to the regional entity. Rarely are other government departments or agencies willing to agree to such transfers.

## 7. Influential

Boulding has pinpointed the main defect with regional planning:

*The world moves into the future as a result of decisions, not as a result of plans. Plans are significant only in so far as they affect decisions ... if planning is not part of a decision-making process, it is a bag of wind, a piece of paper, and worthless diagrams. (Boulding, quoted by Fenge 1987, 21).*

Such has been the fate of most regional planning projects in the past, and is likely to be in the future. Even in present-day northern Canada, where regional land use strategic planning seems well placed to occupy a pivotal role in shaping regional futures, some doubts have already been raised about its capacity to influence the most important decisions. Such doubts were expressed to this writer by various participants in the regional planning process, during interviews in Yellowknife, Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk and Whitehorse in July 1990.

Satisfying all seven of the criteria stated above is a near-impossible task, the more so because high performance standards on one criterion, or towards one particular objective, often make other performance levels more difficult to achieve, for example, reliance on expert advice versus local aspirations; emphasis on local participation versus public agency coordination; satisfying economic development versus social versus environmental goals; and so on. It is not surprising that governments are reluctant to venture too far into this field, and commonly set tight limits on resources, mechanisms, goals and expectations in regional planning. There is the added incentive of seeking to minimise the loss of decision-making capacity by governments and by entrenched agencies.

### The Kimberley and Gulf studies

On all criteria, both the Kimberley and the Gulf studies fall well short of the ideal, and on some their performance rating is near-zero. Generally,



the Kimberley study rates above the Gulf, but this is hardly a matter for high commendation, given the more challenging and pressing issues to be addressed in the Kimberley.

### ***The Kimberley Study: background***

The Kimberley Regional Plan Study is one of a series of six planning exercises undertaken by the Department of Planning and Urban Development, focussing on regions with special problems requiring a coordinated governmental approach. This is the only study undertaken jointly with the Department of Regional Development and the Northwest. As stated in the Report's introduction, 'The Kimberley Regional Plan addresses issues, opportunities and constraints to development and provides non-statutory policy solutions and recommendations' (Western Australian Government 1990, 1).

The main task was completed between 1986 and 1988 by a Study Director, overseen by the Kimberley Regional Planning Committee (comprising three government representatives and the four shire presidents), assisted by a technical advisory group of relevant government officers and involving some inadequately described public consultation. Working groups prepared and circulated papers on the following matters: tourism, fishing, mining and exploration, agriculture, pastoral, community services, education and training, and conservation and reserves. Aboriginal matters presumably received some mention in these, but were not singled out for focussed attention. In the short chapter on major issues (pp 5-6), the following were identified: social services to enhance the quality of life; economic potential; effective regionalisation; quality of environment; and land release to promote industrial, agricultural, commercial and residential development. Aborigines are mentioned only once in this issues chapter and it is instructive to quote *verbatim* the details on this reference:

*Opportunities exist to increase the variety of mineral and fossil fuel operations. Care must be taken to ensure that potential mineral wealth remains accessible. This must be balanced with*

*conservation requirements and traditional relationships of the Aborigines (WA Government 1990, 5).*

This statement can be regarded as a reasonably accurate indicator of the preoccupations within the report.

The report itself comprises chapters on Major Issues (2 pages), Regional Profile (14), Land Use (10), Managing the Environment (8), People (including infrastructure) (20), Economy (including mining and exploration, pastoral, agriculture, fishing, tourism, industry and commerce, and defence) (34), Regional Organisation and Coordination (6), Implementation of Study Findings (2) and Community Feedback (2). Also included is a detailed appendix of 36 pages describing proposed conservation areas. Throughout these is an admixture of description, analysis, appraisal and a copious number of recommendations, described as strategies. The most focussed of these are directed towards detailed appraisals of eight pastoral stations to ensure land release to accommodate town expansion, recreation, tourism, conservation, irrigation, agriculture, horticulture and Aboriginal land claims.

In marked contrast to land use strategies in northern Canada, where the primary focus is on reconciling native and non-native interests, in the Kimberley Study Report, Aboriginal matters are addressed in a fragmented way, always as an appendage to the various sectoral appraisals and strategies. Aboriginal matters occupy less than five per cent of the space in the report. These passages could be deleted without any detectable loss of continuity or coherence.

### ***The Kimberley Study: an appraisal***

How does the Kimberley Study perform against the criteria stated earlier? As with the Gulf Study, the Kimberley Study is predictably *well informed* on certain regional attributes and poorly informed on others. This variability reflects past priorities in information-gathering as well as current policy preoccupations. Given the large areas and limited capital available, the quality of information is reasonably good on environmental



attributes and resource appraisals from a Eurocentric perspective, involving broad-scale surveys of geology, soils, plants, animals and climate, synthesized into land systems and land-capability appraisals, mineral potential, fisheries and so on. To these can be added recent surveys of fauna, flora and other attributes to determine conservation values. While little of these data are directly included in the report, clearly they have informed the planning task. Also available are essential data on land tenure; the current status and problems of major economic activities, notably pastoralism; general data on economic, social and demographic structure; capital infrastructure such as transport, communication, health, education and community services; together with authoritative assessments of needs for the immediate future.

By contrast, there is no parallel regional appraisal from an Aboriginal perspective, dealing with such matters as: resource values; traditional contemporary and prospective resource use; resource rights; areas of cultural significance; socio-economic needs and aspirations, to name but a few. This neglect cannot be attributed to lack of information, given the rapid recent expansion of region-specific knowledge on Aboriginal matters. Most striking is the failure of the Kimberley Study to use the wealth of highly relevant information published by the East Kimberley Impact Assessment Project, which can aptly be described as a draft regional appraisal and framework for a regional strategy from an Aboriginal perspective. Even if the authoritative overview of the East Kimberley Project (Coombs *et al* 1989) was published too late to influence the Kimberley Study, at least most of the 34 working papers, published from 1985 to 1989, would have been available, yet only one paper, the twentieth in the series, is cited. (See Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, various dates.)

If only by default, the Kimberley Study must be regarded as *flexible* but only with modest prospects of being *dynamic*. Flexibility is an inevitable outcome where there is an absence of implementation powers. The wealth of recommendations in the study are merely recommendations, mainly derived from programs and proposals of the various responsible

government agencies, who still retain control over the outcomes. Other recommendations are so non-specific that it will be difficult to determine subsequently whether they have been implemented or not. The study does propose alternative frameworks which could sustain a dynamic, if fragmented, approach to regional planning while also moving partially towards a *consultative and participatory approach*. The Study Report recommends the creation of a Kimberley Regional Planning Committee, responsible for coordinating land use and development planning of the four shires and comprising shire representatives. Also recommended is an agency to promote economic, social and community development, with two alternative structures, namely either a relatively powerless Kimberley Regional Coordinating Committee, with wide local representation (including one Aboriginal representative in a committee of ten) or else a Kimberley Development Authority with modest statutory powers transferred from other government agencies. Some element of dynamism in regional planning may be injected from the activities of the two proposed bodies, if established. Whether such bodies would be *responsive and accountable* is hard to judge, given the limited detail in the recommendations. In any case, their structure would hardly ensure a high level of accountability to the Aboriginal peoples of the Kimberley.

When viewed solely in Eurocentric terms, the Kimberley proposals may well achieve some modest successes in relation to the final three criteria, in *resolving disputes*, and in being *coordinative and influential*. The identification of certain critical planning issues and proposals for investigation and action will assist in the task of dispute avoidance and dispute resolution. The proposed planning mechanisms will ensure some disjointed efforts at coordination, at various levels with the degree of influence likely to be determined by the statutory powers (if any) granted to the relevant regional bodies. The division of responsibilities between two distinct regional bodies is not promising. The proposed Kimberley Regional Planning Committee will be a creature of the four shires, and could well find its most influential role to be in opposition to the other proposed regional agency. This other agency will also have clear defects. The option of a Kimberley Regional Coordinating Committee does go



some way towards effective representation of (Eurocentric) regional interests, but clearly would be powerless when squeezed between the local government interests marshalled in the Planning Committee and the various state government departments. The proposed alternative, the Kimberley Regional Authority, would have some devolved coordinating powers but would likely be unrepresentative and non-accountable to local interests, being comprised of a Director and five ministerial appointees. Whichever structures are agreed to, they can hardly be expected to maximise the opportunities for an influential, coordinated, representative regional role, even in dealing solely with Eurocentric matters. The failure to recognise and address Aboriginal aspirations and concerns and the related issue of potential regional links between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sectors indicates that the Kimberley proposals have very little in common with the northern Canada model, and will do little to resolve the most pressing regional issues.

### *The Gulf Study: background*

The Northern Territory Gulf District, extending from the Roper River to the Queensland border, and from the Gulf shoreline to the edge of the Barkly Tableland, is the least developed and least populated region in underdeveloped, underpopulated northern Australia. In 1986, the region supported barely 1 000 people, of whom 650 were in Borroloola, with 57 per cent Aboriginal. Only in its areal dimensions can this be described as a region. The 'regional economy' barely deserves to be classed as a local economy, and more appropriately a micro-economy. Such a modest economic/demographic entity barely deserves a lavishly presented report with five well produced fold-out maps, and a series of recommendations in strategic planning, the more so when Aboriginal issues receive only passing attention. There are no pressing Eurocentric regional development or conflict issues, given that the one significant development proposal, namely the large silver-lead mine project at Macarthur River and related land transport and Gulf shipping facility has a low prospect of development in the near future. The most pressing

'development' issues appear to be pressures on river frontages and the barramundi fishery for wilderness recreationists and the need to set aside lands for a National Park and nature reserves.

Indeed, the *rationale* for the Gulf Study is the reverse of the usual. It is the lack of any development pressures which has motivated the Northern Territory government, through its Department of Lands and Housing, to undertake this study. The Background Statement in the Final Report commences:

*The Gulf Region Land Use and Development Study was undertaken to assist review Government land use and policy directions particularly in relation to problems being faced by the pastoral industry related to BTEC. Of specific concern were the more marginal and poorer pastoral leases relying on feral harvest of livestock and a low level of improvement infrastructure and herd management.*

*There was also a realisation and an expectation that the region could benefit from potential for development associated with tourism, recreation, amateur and commercial fishing, mining and creation of various types of parks and conservation areas as well as associated service infrastructure. (NT Department of Lands and Housing 1992, 7).*

Thus, as is stated in the report summary, the Gulf Study complements the Holmes Report (Holmes 1986, 1990) and indeed is a logical updating and extension of that report. This author was commissioned to assess the impact of the national Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign on the Gulf Region generally, and, more specifically, to assess the viability of the 26 cattle enterprises in the region under strict BTEC herd management requirements, to consider problems of controlling feral animals, to examine the scope for restructuring pastoral leases and to consider the prospects for alternative land use, including conservation and recreation. However, Aboriginal land claims were not included in the



investigation brief, which could be justified in a formal sense since these claims are subject to complex processes of determination under federal legislation.

The Regional Study is a logical extension of the Holmes Report and has readily been grafted into the conceptual structure and detailed proposals of the earlier report, most strikingly, in the land use strategy, which forms the core of the regional proposals. Given the framework provided by the earlier report and the pool of local expertise and survey skills provided by one or two officers in the Department of Lands and the Conservation Commission, there was a clear opening for the government to be able to complete a reasonably coherent and useful regional report with only a modicum of effort. The investment of effort was commensurate with the challenge, provided the complex set of Aboriginal issues was to be ignored. In finalising the report, the government can be seen to be concerned about the status of the Gulf Region and to have been taking possibly the only readily available constructive course of action to demonstrate its concern.

### *The Gulf Study: an appraisal*

The Gulf Study is remarkably similar to the Kimberley Study in its general structure, information content, appraisals and recommendations. Consistent with the more modest context and lesser challenges, the Gulf Study is a lower-key replica, almost matching the latter in its information content and its procedures for deciding a regional land use strategic plan, but falling well short, even of the Kimberley's modest levels, in providing a set of mechanisms for effective planning as an ongoing process.

As with the Kimberley Report, the Gulf Study is reasonably well informed on most matters of non-Aboriginal concern. Basic information on environmental attributes and resource appraisals are reasonably strong, given the limited level of resource use in the region and the consequent lack of in-depth testing of resource capabilities. The Gulf Study is able to provide a more focussed and coherent land use strategy through a region-wide differentiation between (core) pastoral lands and (marginal) 'pastoral

support' lands, following closely the differentiation between core management areas and 'bush mustering' areas in the Holmes Report. This differentiation is essential not only in determining appropriate responses to BTEC, but in developing a long-term land use strategy, with the pastoral support lands being most readily available to justify alternative land requirements. As with the Kimberley Report, the Gulf Study is also reasonably well informed on regional economy, population, infrastructure and immediate service requirements. However, as in the Kimberley, the study team remains uninformed about Aboriginal needs, and has not sought to remedy this deficiency. Indeed, less than one page of text is devoted to Aboriginal matters, together with factual tables on formally listed land claims, community living areas and sacred sites, lacking any commentary.

Even more so than the Kimberley Report, planning subsequent to the Gulf Study will be highly *flexible*. Here are no statutory requirements to be met, nor any formal mechanisms in place to ensure adherence to the regional strategy. Until the more complex issues relating to Aboriginal needs are addressed, a flexible strategy with an opportunistic response to any emerging possibilities is appropriate. There is no mechanism to ensure any *dynamic* element in the planning 'process'. Indeed, given the lack of any stated mechanisms either for plan implementation or for periodic review, the current study must be regarded as a static exercise. Similar comments can be made concerning whether the Gulf Study process is *consultative and participatory* and *responsive and accountable*. There were no formal mechanisms for consultation, other than initial unspecified meetings with local individuals and groups, and also a twelve-week period for receipt of comments and submissions following release of the Draft Study Report in May or June 1990.

A comparison of the Draft and Final Reports reveals that the only significant alterations in the Final Report are the result of input, not from local groups, but from influential departments. These amendments reflect a more cautious approach and a slightly stronger pro-development bias in the Final Report. The draft proposal for five-yearly reviews is deleted,



but a new objective emphasising flexibility is added. Certain negative appraisals of pastoral potential are partly deleted and a cautiously optimistic statement on prospects for pasture and herd improvement added. Most significantly, the extensive lands provisionally classified for conservation and recreation have been thoroughly reviewed, and much more modest proposals for National Parks and nature reserves inserted, with the remaining lands being classed as pastoral support lands with conservation/recreation values, to be retained within leases. This reduction of lands reserved for conservation probably reflects the combined influence of mining interests seeking to minimise access problems and the Conservation Commission seeking to minimise management costs.

The report does serve a moderately useful *coordinative* function, particularly in stimulating other influential government agencies to articulate their immediate plans for the region, most notably the Conservation Commission. Already well placed to exercise the major tasks in regional coordination, the Department of Lands and Housing has clearly strengthened its role. Furthermore, the publication of various governmental proposals may assist in *avoiding* future potential *conflicts*.

Indirectly, the Gulf Study may be moderately *influential* in shaping future directions in the Gulf District, merely through its existence as the first governmental attempt to 'bring it all together'. It provides a draft regional framework which will certainly influence the decisions of government agencies and non-government decision-makers in various ways.

The study's direct influence may be rather limited. However, there are three components within the study which can be regarded as important landmarks, likely to have a significant impact on future land use directions in the region.

Firstly, the study provides documentation on fauna and flora values, linking these to conservation priorities, and to substantial proposals for national parks, environmental management areas, and to pastoral support

areas with significant conservation/recreation values. This joint effort by the Conservation Commission and the Department of Lands and Housing should have a substantial impact in enhancing environmental priorities in the region, in linking these to other elements of a regional strategy and in initiating an institutional framework adequate to meet nature conservation goals.

Secondly, in differentiating between pastoral lands and pastoral support lands, the study is giving explicit recognition to the negligible pastoral potential of most of the Gulf lands, thus acknowledging that these lands may readily be reassigned to other uses, as opportunities arise.

In keeping with the uncertain pastoral future of the less viable leases, the study recommends that 19 per cent of existing pastoral lease land should be considered for conversion from pastoral to Crown lease to encourage enterprise diversification as a means of economic survival. While this is a laudable initiative, it is difficult to identify any adequate alternative income source in the immediate future, and these leases are likely to remain non-economic, being occupied either by long-term Gulf residents, primarily for lifestyle reasons, or by low-key, long-term speculators. Thus, although serving a valuable purpose in reaffirming the non-viable status of these leases, already determined in the Holmes Report, the study is inconclusive in identifying any realistic alternative land uses for these lands. There is a serious need to examine an alternative, non-freehold form of limited-rights Aboriginal tenure for much of this land.

Thirdly, the study breaks new ground in presenting specific proposals on the future ownership, management and use of river-frontage and coastal-foreshore lands (see pages 72 and 82). Because of their limited availability, their pivotal value to both recreation and conservation purposes, their complex management problems and their susceptibility to degradation, frontage lands are an increasingly important source of concern. The Gulf Study at least gives recognition to this issue and does



move forward in making specific recommendations, which, however, are more concerned with issues of public access and effective management rather than preservation of valued ecosystems.

### **Probable outcomes in north Australia**

The underlying similarities in the conceptualisation and implementation of regional planning in the Kimberley and Gulf suggest that strategic planning in northern Australia is likely to be implemented in a restricted, technical, bureaucratic manner, as characterised by the 1981 DIAND proposal rather than in the more open-ended, participative, coordinated manner involving links between ownership, use, management and conservation which is now being attempted in northern Canada. Land use planning in northern Australia is likely to have the following characteristics:

- There will be a lack of a systemwide, national approach, but separate evolution within the three relatively autonomous states/territory which, save in a few limited areas, retain the major powers relevant to effective land use planning.
- As with the 1981 DIAND proposal, planning will be seen primarily as a bureaucratic task requiring technical expertise, with the political input to the planning task being mainly transmitted through higher-level decisions rather than direct, grass-roots power. This is consistent with entrenched power-relations within Australian states.
- Centralised decision-making will be further demanded because of the larger number of special-purpose government departments with an interest in the process requiring higher-level determination.
- One further impetus to centralised decision-making arises from the entrenched local dualism between native and non-native interests in northern Australia, with these two sets of local interests often being so strongly divergent that the most critical regional decisions must

inevitably be taken by the central government. In northern Canada, and particularly in the Northwest Territory, there is a more symmetrical balance of forces, given that local interests coincide almost exactly with native interests, enabling a concerted, unified approach towards effective local participation. While the dualism of local interests in northern Australia should not be used as an argument against substantial local participation, it is nevertheless likely to render this participation less influential in determining major outcomes.

- Accordingly, land use planning will mainly be perceived as a means of achieving the following limited goals: coordinated assembling and dissemination of information on regional resources and planning issues; some coordinated decision-making between the various responsible authorities; an enhanced decision-context through identification of priorities in land use and management for specific land tracts; a more constructive, informed and open response by these authorities to changing local circumstances; and a genuine attempt at effective land use and land management strategies for some public lands, most notably national parks and wilderness areas.
- The degree of interest and involvement by relevant state or territory governments will wax and wane according to the pressures for coordinated decision-making. Since the recent growth in such pressures is likely to be maintained in the immediate future, there will be a parallel governmental response.

### **Some proposals for politically feasible change**

While a close replication of the current northern Canada model of strategic regional planning is clearly neither feasible nor entirely appropriate, nevertheless there are some major directions which may be politically feasible and even politically desirable. Those with the best prospects of realisation appear to be: higher community consultation and participation, including a stronger Aboriginal engagement; clearer



acknowledgement of the emerging dualism between Aboriginal and Eurocentric spheres, leading to constructive proposals to ensure positive outcomes from this dualism; and stronger links between land tenure, land management and land use, focussing upon strategic, flexible land use planning.

### ***1. Community consultation and participation***

Currently it is not realistic to pursue the high level of community involvement which is embedded in the northern Canadian planning machinery. The local community is less cohesive, being sharply divided between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests, while local Aboriginal groups lack the political cohesion which is strongly evident among *Inuit*, *Dene* and *Metis* communities in northern Canada. Rather than using this lack of cohesion as a reason for dismissing proposals for strong local participation, it can be argued that a purposeful approach towards enhanced local participation is an essential step in furthering self-reliance and social advancement for Aboriginal peoples, and that an active role in decision-making on future resource management and development is the most critical element in such advancement. The Canadian experience may well prove exemplary in charting future desirable directions.

### ***2. Acknowledgment of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal dualism***

There are marked dualisms in both northern Canada and northern Australia. In northern Canada, there is clear division between local, native interests and national, Eurocentric interests. In northern Australia, the dualism is more complex, because the local interests are sharply divided between Aboriginal and locally-entrenched non-Aboriginal peoples. The progressive recognition of Aboriginal rights, including the award of land rights, is a constructive means of acknowledging this dualism, but it also may have some negative outcomes in entrenching locally separatist economies and communities. While Aboriginal autonomy is a highly desired outcome, there is also a parallel need to pursue all means by which mutually beneficial integration can be

achieved within the region. This may well be best achieved through effective regional strategic planning, embracing all local interest-groups.

Linked to this is the need to expand Aboriginal rights to regional resources, beyond those within the boundaries of Aboriginal freehold lands. Given the resistance to further expansion of Aboriginal freehold, there is a strong case for considering some intermediate forms of land tenure, enabling Aboriginals to acquire rights to a more limited set of resources, but over much larger areas than currently seems politically feasible. This intermediate form of tenure would allow more flexibility in land use planning, would expand the Aboriginal resource base without major withdrawals from non-Aboriginal interests and would assist towards reducing community separatism.

### *3. Links between land tenure, land management and land use*

In marginal lands of low productivity, private property rights are often tenuous, limited and based upon customary practice, rather than legal titles. This lack of formally recognised private property rights provides the basis for a comprehensive approach to resource use planning in which novel forms of land tenure (such as community titles) can be closely integrated with long-term strategic land use planning. Indeed, these two processes are inextricably linked to each other.

In northern Australia, as in other marginal zones, freehold land title is rare. However, pastoral leasehold tenures provide substantial private property rights over almost all lands with any pastoral potential, and this pre-existing right does act as a major barrier to an integrated approach to land ownership and use (see, for example, Holmes 1991). However, there are some residual powers retained by the state within the leasehold tenure system, which enable governments to adopt a selective approach to property rights, linked to land use plans. The Gulf Study does offer some tentative proposals towards this end. It is suggested that leases which are regarded as non-viable for pastoral purposes will be eligible for conversion to limited-term crown leases, with covenants directed towards



conservation, tourism and recreation. This is an important breakthrough, in introducing some flexibility in land tenures which also recognises the limited prospects for pastoral enterprises. Further flexibility is needed in the allocation of property rights to the most marginal lands, including opportunities for greater recognition of Aboriginal rights to use resources on these lands.

### **CYPLUS: setting new directions?**

While the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study is only at the formative stage, it shows clear promise of setting new directions in northern frontier planning in Australia. This planning project has been prompted by a complex and varied array of emerging major issues, transforming Cape York Peninsula from a remote, ignored backwater to a focus of ongoing national attention. This large region is a prime focus for conservation, mining, tourism, spaceport and related development, as well as the home for a large population of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The adjacent islander community gained attention two years ago with its call for independence. The region also has important defence and quarantine functions.

This pivotal role was clearly recognised by the newly-elected Goss Labor government, which promptly announced an ambitious land use planning exercise, to be undertaken jointly with the federal government with costs to be shared equally.

The project has taken two years to reach commencement, perhaps reflecting the complexities of initial intergovernmental negotiations. Documentation is very skimpy, and my only reliable source is from typescript details accompanying a letter from the Director-General, Premier's Department, dated 3 March 1992. These give some idea of the substantial dimensions of the project. Stage One, lasting 'several' years, is the data-gathering stage, comprising nine separate programs. Stage Two, to commence two years after initiation of Stage One, comprises '... the formulation of land use policies and decision-making principles to form

the Land Use Strategy', while Stage Three 'will comprise consideration by both governments of the total package of policies and principles ... and implementation of the Strategy' (letter from Director-General).

Stage One comprises nine separate, major programs, covering natural resources analysis, public participation, conservation, cultural resources, primary industry, mining, tourism, accessibility and administrative processes. First to commence are natural resource analysis and public participation, with these two presenting conflicting signals about the likely outcomes. The Natural Resources Analysis Program, is the first to be formally approved for funding and currently comprises 17 separate major scientific projects, all being undertaken by governmental agencies. The emphasis is revealed in the project titles, which are:

- Vegetation Analysis
- Land Resource Inventory
- Terrestrial Fauna Survey
- Mineral Resource Inventory
- Bedrock Geological Data
- Marine Plant (Seagrass/Mangrove Distribution)
- Geographic Information System Creation/Maintenance
- Geographic Information System Development & Qld Co-ordination
- Wetland Fauna Survey
- Fish Fauna Survey (Freshwater & Estuarine)
- Environmental Region Analysis
- Regolith Terrain Mapping
- Coastal Environment Geoscience Survey
- Airborne Geophysical Survey
- Groundwater Investigation
- Insect Fauna Survey

While an increase in scientific knowledge will be beneficial, there is a strong impression of domination of the agenda by the entrenched bureaucratic and technocratic groups, with the likely outcome being the



fostering of established wisdom. It is also noteworthy that the funds requested for these projects sum to \$4 725 000 out of the total funds of \$9 000 000 committed to CYPLUS by the two governments.

The Natural Resources Analysis Program has been given priority in timing as well as in funding. The final list of projects has been approved without any form of local consultation on the detailed proposals. This order of precedence is difficult to reconcile with the statement in the Director-General's letter concerning public participation.

*Public participation will be the cornerstone of the entire project. The program has yet to be fully designed with the assistance of the people of Cape York Peninsula and other interested participants, but underlying principles have been agreed by both governments. These principles recognise the need for a regular flow of information about the project and on-going work.*

Already, Aboriginal communities in the Peninsula have questioned whether there is a strong commitment to public participation, as evidenced in the critical, formative stage of CYPLUS. While acknowledging the need for an information base to enable sound land use planning, communities are already expressing concern that the processes and principles adopted will have the potential to undermine their rights as landowners, to reduce or override their control over public access and thereby remove their initiative in controlling the research and development agenda for their communities. They are worried that Aboriginal people do not appear to have been involved in the formation of CYPLUS operating principles, nor in the development of programs associated with Stage One, even though much of the data collection activity will be carried out on Aboriginal land. Specific issues have been raised concerning safeguards on data collection, ownership and access, and on accountability to landowners and to local communities.

Clearly CYPLUS will be subjected to strong conflicting pressures, not only from a diversity of non-governmental interest-groups, but from intra- and inter- governmental tensions among federal and state

bureaucrats and technocrats. If CYPLUS is to avoid fragmentation into a patchwork of divergent, often conflicting agendas and projects, at the outset it needs to adopt a more strongly participatory and accountable mode of operation. In most critical respects, the task is more complex and more challenging than in northern Canada. Already the task is being made more difficult by a faulty assessment of priorities in the formative stage. It remains to be seen whether, indeed, 'public participation will be the cornerstone of the entire project'. While this may yet happen, the first steps have suggested otherwise.

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