

Big job for Northern Land and Water Taskforce

SECTION 2 THE FUTURE

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With a massive 300 million hectares sitting above the Tropic of Capricorn, the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce has a lot of ground (and water) to cover.

The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, has set the Taskforce the job of reporting to him by the end of 2009 on the sustainable development of Australia's northern water resources. That is:

- How water across the north can be used sustainably for development
- For communities and culture; and,
- For the environment.

Chairperson of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce, Joe Ross, said that the emphasis is on sustainable development.

"The challenge is to look at the long-term and to report on how we should go about developing the north so that its full contribution to, and its share in national prosperity, is realised. There is also the very strong undertone that we must not repeat the mistakes made in the south over the past 100 years," Joe said.

The Taskforce was originally set up in 2007. The original Taskforce focussed on identifying new development opportunities across the north, but in particular on opportunities in agriculture.

The change of government in November 2007 led to a change to the membership and as a first step several new members were appointed as well as Joe Ross as the new Chairperson.

Joe is a prominent indigenous leader from Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia and one of the original Taskforce members. He was appointed as the Chair in September 2008.

The terms of reference for the Taskforce were also broadened. No longer simply looking for new agricultural ventures, the Taskforce is now charged with considering indigenous futures, the potential market for ecosystem services, improved governance arrangements and the potential impacts of development, among other issues.

Joe said the Taskforce was no longer focussed on just finding a site for an irrigation scheme or a dam, but rather what the long term sustainable development of water resources in northern Australia needs to look like.

"We're looking at productive outcomes for truly sustainable developments involving innovative practices in aquaculture, horticulture and the pastoral industries; new markets for eco-system services and carbon abatement; and a new deal

for indigenous communities that includes genuine engagement and sustainable businesses," Joe said.

Joe anticipates that new employment growth will provide opportunities never experienced before in the north.

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