



Transitioning Regional Economies Inquiry
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins St East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003
19 June 2017

Email: transitioning.regions@pc.gov.au

Transitioning of Regional Economies post resource boom - East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce.

Dear Commissioner Lindwall,

The East Kimberley region like many other regions of Australia is in economic transition.

In the past few years it has seen the Panoramic Nickel Mine and Ridges Iron Ore Mine mothballed with the passing of the resource boom.

In 2021 the Argyle Diamond which has been a major part of the East Kimberley region's economy for 35 years will close.

The region has considerable youth employment challenges particularly for aboriginal youth, who on average get less family support than they should, to get education and employment options.

With this higher than acceptable level of unemployment our region still needs visa workers to fill the gap. Right now we have around 40 East Timorese workers working on farms, thankfully and what great young people they seem to be. What a shame local unemployed people will not take that work up, but good on the East Timor people who are most welcome. That is just one example of course, there are plenty of other examples.

Our region, the East Kimberley is fortunate to have other dimensions to it than just the resource sector. In particular tourism and agriculture are growing sectors of our economy, and the facilitation by Governments to support and accelerate that would be welcome. Sadly that is not always forthcoming. Too often Governments are found to be hindering rather than helping.

Governments often think what regions need is money. While money and investment in infrastructure is always welcome it is not the main need.

More timely decision making, less procrastination and less funding into endless studies, which contrary to enabling development hinder it more. For example funding \$2.5million of tax payer funds to investing Ord Stage 3 (NT) is not designed to enable investment, but to hinder it. Northern Australia is littered with report after report, and various matters which could unleash growth and development but sadly most of those

reports sit on office shelves gathering dust. We do not need to keep funding studies that do not lead to the private sector investing.

It would help diversify the economy and transition it away from the resources sector if the Australian Government led by example, and ceased funding the organisations who use that funding to fight the very agenda the Australian Government has for northern Australia.

While not primarily federal issues, land tenure and the opportunity for investors to create new business is a major issue holding back the economic transition that is needed. Red tape in approvals is a clear example and this is the subject to a separate inquiry the Australian Government is running and which this Chamber has made submission to. Much of this is State issue, but the Australian Government should do more to influence in the nations interest. If we are going to lock up blue chip real estate and not allow it to go into the hands of investors to grow the economy, then we will not transition to a brighter future.

Recently the Australian Government interacted with Mr Sawiris a potential investor in tourism in northern Australia. I understand that no proper follow up or encouragement has occurred with him. This is all too typical of how we let investment slip through our fingers in this country. It is a competitive world and investment will flow to the people who want to work with it most.

In summary, The East Kimberley Region has major investors, the natural assets, research, drive and ingenuity to transition from mining to agriculture, and tourism. What we need most from Government is streamlined processes and less red tape. Too often investors miss market opportunity due to untimely delays and costly repetitive approvals and processes.

More on the ground, cross industry consultation is required in our region to fully understand the real barriers to transitioning our economy. It is not a lack of opportunity. We already have a range of diverse industries, what we lack is government's support and facilitation.

Yours sincerely,

Jill Williams
President
East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce

Cc Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry of WA