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Vision

A vision based on growing the 'economic contribution' of agricultural industries must necessarily focus on marginal increases to gross product. It must ignore the glaring inefficiencies of the industry and huge associated costs.

These costs are almost exclusively borne by the Territory environment, and community in terms of impacts on culture, health and missed opportunity for developing more appropriate, sustainable industries.

As it stand the directions paper is speculative, and overstates the economic opportunities associated with resources for agriculture, especially in the arid zone. It cites no evidence of these benefits and it is unclear why it is overstated. Agriculture contributes only $627 million or (2.7%) from an $23 billion economy (very small in Central Australia) (https://economy.id.com.au/rda-northern-territory/value-add-by-industry?IndkeyNieir=23000&BMID=20). Other industry sectors, which leverage from well managed resources offer far more significant value to the Territory. For example tourism and hospitality, which generates $2.2 billion value added and is a large employer and benefits access to intact resources.

The costs to the Territory of managing (or not effectively managing) direct impacts of agriculture on the environment e.g. the spread of invasive pasture grasses and erosion of water ways, of building and maintaining infrastructure used primarily, or almost exclusively by industry e.g. many heavy vehicle roads, and managing the impacts on culture and health must be accounted for in an independent, rigorous, peer reviewed economic evaluation before we travel further down this 'direction' analysis includes non-monetized externalized costs and the lost opportunity costs of agriculture and aquaculture. It should not be forgotten that agriculture and aquaculture frequently locate at key environmental and cultural sites.

The vision should then reflect this challenge to , in the first instance, stop and mitigate the negative consequences of agriculture by:

1. minimising its footprint
2. minimising its externalised costs and ethically unacceptable impacts on the environment and cultural landscape
3. minimise the lost opportunity costs to Traditional Owners and other industries (e.g. tourism and recreational fishing)
4. introduce an equity test and proactively make agriculture benefit the Traditional Owners of the land upon which it occurs
5. stop industry self-regulation - the consequences of decisions in this sector have far greater reach (pastoralists should be able to provide advice to the pastoral lands board but NOT involved in decisions).
6. acknowledge and redress the toxic colonial legacy created by agricultural "pioneers".
7. stop exacerbating this toxic history through pastoral lease diversification
8. ensure any investment of public funds benefits the public rather than private investors (https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/P309-Dam-the-expense-

Ord-River-report-FINAL.3_0.pdf the Ord report found the public spent about $200,000 per hectare to create private wealth)

9. prioritise the landscape as a global resource for biodiversity and carbon storage during a biodiversity and climate change emergency.

At the very least this paper should acknowledge that the agricultural industry across the Territory provides only 2.8% of the GDP and yet consumes a massive land footprint, has alienated Traditional Owners from their land, caused untold environmental damage, and any benefits derived have been extremely unequally shared. Any evaluation should include transparent information on who benefits and explicitly address equity.

Purpose
I would like to see a strategy that focuses on biodiversity protection and moving to zero carbon.

We note cattle are high carbon generating should migrate to vegetable and grains and seek to minimise the land footprint used for agriculture, based on identification of high land capability land and retiring land which is unsuitable

Land that has poor capability, poor productivity, that was stolen from Aboriginal people, would be better used for climate change resilience or biodiversity corridors.

Driver
Where is the evidence that plans to grow agribusiness has been initiated and led by Aboriginal communities?

Megatrends
The fostering of the agriculture industry by successive governments has resulted in an odd cultural landscape in the Territory. The NT Government seems pathologically unable to implement progressive policy that responds adequately to the megatrends described in a raft areas, for example clearing legislation and water act reform, because of excessive sway held by a small number of millionaire pastoralists and a Territory that brands itself with a problematic colonial pastoral narrative.

My experience growing up in Central Australia with parents working in the public service (health and police) was that agriculture was irrelevant and provided me will no benefit. This continues to be the case. It just means I'm unable to access much of the land because it is gated or I have to worry about 1080. The parts of the land I can access are damaged to the point of ecosystem collapse https://theconversation.com/existential-threat-to-our-survival-see-the-19-australian-ecosystems-already-collapsing-154077 because of weeds infestation and sediment filling waterways and waterholes due to erosion upstream

Grow
Deliberately encouraging increased meat consumption / expanding such markets is not in keeping with megatrends described.

The special report on climate change and land by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describes plant-based diets as a major opportunity for mitigating and adapting to climate change — and includes a policy recommendation to reduce meat consumption.
https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/

Protect

If a collaborative approach to addressing biosecurity is taken, there must be strong and transparent mechanisms put in place to ensure the pesticide and herbicide industry do not dominate identification of problems or solutions. Tobacco industry interference in policy making provides a good example of how this can stifle innovation.
https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/165254/Tobacco-Industry-Interference-A-Global-Brief.pdf

The statements:

> *"The Territory's reputation as a ... safe ethical … producer."*
>
> *"Strong animal welfare performance and chemical regulation will continue to enhance our credibility in markets."*

Is not supported by the fact that:

- Widespread lethal control of dingoes, particularly with 1080, is poorly regulated and permitted, despite the evidence base that this practice is not effective.
- The continuation of the live export trade.

Adapt and Innovate Offsets should be used as a last resort, they should not be seen as sector to capitalise on. The NT offsets framework states *"offsets cannot be used to make an unacceptable impact acceptable."*
There must be strong and transparent mechanisms put in place to ensure industry / vested interests do not dominate research agendas. Tobacco industry interference in RD&E provides a good example of how this can stifle innovation.
https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/165254/Tobacco-Industry-Interference-A-Global-Brief.pdf

Engage
For community engagement to be honest, open, transparent both the benefits and costs of agribusiness and aquaculture must be communicated.

If the industry is to be expanded, Government Departments entrusted to approve and monitor industry must be supported and expanded, as must non-government environmental and cultural protection agencies. The NT Government must attract and facilitate new investments in these organisations and actively support and retain current investors. Engagement with Infrastructure NT on environmental protective infrastructure priorities will support approaches to Infrastructure Australia and the Commonwealth Government to seek funding partnerships. Being an integral part of the Regional Reconstruction Committees will keep environmental protection development firmly on the agenda.

Other comments

Public spending for private profit

Between 1959 and 1991 the public accrued a financial loss of $939 million, in 2016 dollars, representing a return of 17 cents for every public dollar invested. Private investors made modest gains of $32 million during that period. https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/dam-the-expense-the-ord-river-irrigation-scheme-and-the-development-of-northern-australia/

I do not want to see more public spending for private profit. If this strategy is just adding capital value to pastoral lands then the government should recover these costs.

Capital gains from public land
I am concerned that increasingly lax approval processes are primarily giving big business capital gains and benefit no-one else. For example Maryfield station was recently controversially granted a clearing permit for 4,544 hectares, and a licence to extract 3,392 megalitres of groundwater and subsequently listed the property for sale as a package with another lot for $150 million https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-11-23/maryfield-and-limbunya-cattle-stations-for-sale-nt/12904822.

Recovering capital gains based on public land assets
I am concerned about the massive growth in capital value of pastoral lease land which is going to individual station lessees and not the alienated Native Title holders.

It is clear process are not being realised because of improvements on properties such as fences and for stock. These large returns are because of the underlying value of the land. As such it should go to the state and Native Title holders, not the lessee. For example 50% of any capital gain on pastoral leases should be returned to the NT government/native title holders.

I would prefer to see a goal of minimising the externalised costs of agriculture, maximising equity , to return any capital gains benefits on leasehold land derived from the inherit land value, as opposed to infrastructure investment to the owners of the land i.e. the Territory not the lessees.