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AUSTRALIA

Ninti One Limited

Submission to the draft Northern Territory Economic Development Strategy

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Introduction

Ninti One welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Northern Territory Economic Development Strategy. Ninti One has over 10 years' experience in working and conducting research and community development projects in remote Australia, and has extensive experience in working with and in remote Northern Territory communities. Our submission concentrates on issues, challenges and opportunities inherent to remote areas, which we believe need to be considered to develop a successful strategy to develop the North and achieving a prosperous Territory economy.

About Ninti One

Established in 2003, Ninti One is a not-for-profit, independent national company that builds opportunities for people in remote Australia through research, innovation and community development. Ninti One manages:

- the current activities and partnerships of the CRC for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP);
- the commercialisation of the Intellectual Property from CRC-REP and the legacy projects from the former Desert Knowledge CRC (DKCRC) that ran from 2003 - 2010; and,
- consultancy services (that are separate from the CRC) related to the delivery and commercialisation of research for the benefit of Australians living in remote areas.

Ninti One's headquarters is in Alice Springs, from where we employ around 100 Territorians full-time and part-time. We employ many Aboriginal researchers across communities in the NT. Alice Springs is central to the remote expanse of Australia that Ninti One serves. Ninti One through the CRC-REP conducts important research in the Northern Territory, which can assist in the development of successful policy and initiatives geared toward increasing economic participation in remote areas. Relevant research projects are discussed throughout this submission.

More information on our activities can be found at www.nintione.com.au and www.crc-rep.com

Summary of key points

- **Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the economy**

The Strategy would benefit from a stronger emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development opportunities, including in the priority sectors identified in the Strategy. Based on population number, occupation and ownership of land, we believe a prosperous Territory economy and a successful Northern Australia development will ultimately depend on increased Aboriginal participation in the economy.

Approximately 50% of the Northern Territory land mass is Aboriginal land in addition to about 85% of its coastline. Northern Territory population comprises 30% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with around half its population under 24 years in remote communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment rates are low in remote communities with the employment to population ratio at about 45%. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the largest industry sectors in the Northern Territory, namely, energy resources, mining, agriculture, government services and tourism, is low.

Our research shows there are plenty of real jobs in remote Australia but over 90% of them are taken by non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Our research also shows that training and qualifications are not pre-requisite to engagement in employment in remote Australia as 44% of all employees have not completed a Certificate or higher qualification. Other factors are at play. We know that conventional regional development policy thinking and approaches are unlikely to be an agent of change in remote communities.

Recommendations:

- The Strategy needs to have a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development.
- In developing the Strategy, there is a critical need to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to identify new and existing opportunities and how to realise them. Strong community consultation mechanisms will be required.
- Critical need to understand unique circumstances, needs and aspirations of communities to ignite entrepreneurship and business development.
- There is a need to think differently about employment practices to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation.
- Develop strategies to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in existing large industry sectors present in the Northern Territory, especially mining and tourism sectors.
- Identifying new opportunities, including in the fields of carbon economies, biodiversity conservation and land management, border security, quarantine, construction and knowledge economy.
- Regional and local customisations will be critical for successful economic development.

Ninti One has developed an Aboriginal Community Researchers (ACR) program, which enables Ninti One to deliver tailored, innovative and highly relevant research and community development outcomes in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Mainstream research practices and methodologies have often failed to achieve desired outcomes in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. By contrast, the Aboriginal



Community Researcher Program has proven track records of achieving positive research outcomes because the program is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's viewpoint and knowledge and places effective community engagement at the heart of its practice. We believe the Aboriginal Community Researcher program could assist in the development of the Strategy to design and rollout effective programs aimed at increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic participation. By involving local people it not only provides good employment outcomes it also fast tracks implementation of initiatives as change is more rapidly adopted at the local area.

- **Minerals sector and local communities**

As described in the Strategy, the Northern Territory is a mineral-rich province with existing mining and extractive industries and, has more than 40 discovered but undeveloped mineral deposits. Currently, only limited revenue generated by the resources industry remains in the community or even the region where it is generated. Our CRC-REP research project Enduring Community Value from Mining research is analysing benefits flowing from mining and how these can provide enduring benefits to communities and small-to-medium sized enterprises during and beyond the mine's life. In developing the Strategy and future initiatives, it may be useful to consult our researchers to discuss their work currently underway in the Territory and Pilbara region. This can assist in ensuring that existing and future mining activities and mining-related employment and business opportunities provide increased benefits to local communities.

- **Tourism**

As described in the Strategy, continuing to open territory parks to development opportunities will encourage industry to offer new experiences and increase visitor numbers. We see great opportunities for Aboriginal communities, businesses and ranger groups to be involved in the development and management of tourism products in Territory parks and beyond. Our CRC-REP research project Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remote Tourism may assist in strengthening the sector and in identifying new opportunities. Our recently released summary paper on enterprise diversification provides some key recommendations for the sector, government agencies and policy makers:

http://www.crc-rep.com.au/resource/RRS007_EnterpriseDiversification.pdf

- **Agribusiness**

Pastoral industry

Opportunities for increasing beef production and industry profitability across the Territory exist through the development of new technologies to improve extensive cattle production systems. Current challenges are the high labour and infrastructure requirements to collect the data needed to make optimum decisions as to when animals are bought and sold or husbandry practices are performed.

Research by Ninti One and a commercial partner Precision Pastoral Pty. Ltd. has produced the Remote Livestock Management System (RLMS). The RLMS is a combination of hardware and software capable of remotely identifying, weighing, and drafting individual animals within a cattle herd without labour inputs. It introduces to graziers and pastoralists the same sort of precision available to dairy and beef farmers on much smaller properties – enabling them to muster, weigh, monitor, draft and hold pastoral cattle for market over large distances. The RLMS has the capacity to increase beef enterprise production while reducing operating costs.

Current research by CRC-REP, being conducted on pastoral stations, will combine the RLMS animal data with remote sensing tools for measuring pasture, to deliver decision-making software tailored to individual beef producers. This decision-making tool should not only improve profitability of the beef sector in the Territory, but should also assist sustainable land management and sector resilience.

The Strategy should facilitate this important sector to develop and adopt new technologies, which will support the growth and efficiency of the industry.

Bush foods

Our CRC-REP research into Bush-foods and Plant Products Enterprise presents opportunities for the Territory agribusiness industry and Aboriginal communities. The project is developing a model for improving native plant varieties to make horticultural production of bush foods more efficient and profitable. The focus is on sustained growth of value with the Bush Tomato trade as a case study, to increase business opportunities for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- **Infrastructure**

Road and transport infrastructures

The issue of lack of road and transport infrastructures in the Territory as an impediment to growth is well documented. For remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, transport systems are unsustainable and heavily dependent on private motor vehicles relying on petrol and roads. One of our CRC-REP research projects 'Transport futures for remote Australia' is exploring the potential for alternative transport systems, with a specific interest in how to enhance future livelihoods in remote Australia. The research is assessing the services and infrastructure, the economic opportunities available and will look at the technical feasibility of options and energy future scenarios.

We recently released a summary paper on strategies for enhancing transportation in remote Australia:

http://www.crc-rep.com.au/resource/Summary_CW017_EnhancingTransportInRemoteAustralia.pdf

This paper suggests that a wide variety of options could help make transport more affordable and efficient, with more coverage in remote Australia by using multifunctional and multimodal transport infrastructure; integrated planning and delivery of transport; making fuel efficiency an audit requirement of fleets, and combining vehicle use; looking at innovative fuels which could decrease fuel costs using low-powered vehicles within communities; improving access to affordable and appropriate vehicles with off-road capabilities; setting up mobile maintenance services and local workshops providing alternatives to goods that use expensive freight options; increasing self-sufficiency in remote communities; and improving telecommunications, so some journeys are not needed.

We would be happy to further discuss with the Northern Territory Government how it could assist within the development of a transport strategy for the Territory.

Technological readiness and telecommunication infrastructure

Technological readiness remains an important issue in the Northern Territory. This includes lack of mobile telephony coverage in remote communities; internet access and speed, affordability issues, digital literacy and active participation in the digital economy. Ninti One acknowledges and welcomes the recent initiatives made by the Territory Government to expand mobile coverage in additional Territory remote communities. This has been a very positive step. However, more is required to increase digital inclusion to foster economic and social development. Ninti One is one of the founding members of the Broadband for the Bush Alliance, which comprises a growing number of Northern Territory based organisations. The Alliance recommends the development of a telecommunication strategy aimed at improving communications in remote and rural Australia. This call for a national strategy will benefit the Northern Territory.

The Strategy aimed at improving communications in remote and rural Australia should:

- Recognise that fixed and mobile services are both equally important parts of the solution;
- Take account of existing communications infrastructure in remote and rural Australia and explore how to best use it, in conjunction infrastructure expansion activities;
- Apply the extended zone approach to mobile calls for greater affordability;
- Build the capacity of remote and rural Australians to participate effectively with the digital economy; and,
- Develop 'last mile' solutions to meet local needs

Such strategy would benefit the Northern Territory and increase productivity. Importantly, we believe that mobile communications is essential and should be given priority. As the smartphone continues to revolutionise the way in which we conduct our personal and professional lives, it is critical that all Australians have access to a reliable mobile service. As demand for access to broadband through mobile devices continues to grow, it is critical to continue to work toward improved coverage. The Broadband for the Bush Alliance has developed policy papers which describe our policy proposals in further details. Position papers and policy are available at: <http://broadbandforthebush.com.au/>

- **Supporting Research and Development in Territory**

The Strategy should consider how to better support Research and Development activities in the Territory. Efforts should be made to support existing research organisations and universities, which operate in the Territory and build capacity within the region.

Contact:

Should the Northern Territory Government require further information or would like to discuss the points raised above, please do not hesitate to contact Rod Reeve, Managing Director, Mob: 0411 481 974, rod.reeve@nintione.com.au