

WORKSHOP NOTES



Tennant Creek

Date: 10 July 2014

Key issues raised:

- concerns by the Patta Native Title group about the impacts of fracking on their land and water;
- the importance of jobs and training leading to real jobs;
- key potential opportunities are an 'inland port' or transport hub associated with a rail link to Mt Isa; attracting a Defence presence and servicing opportunities; gold mines and phosphate; a number of ideas to increase tourism spending;
- opportunities for additional users of Bing Bong port and upgrade of transport links to the port;
- the need for water mapping to understand the potential for agriculture and capacity to support other development;
- the importance of attracting tourists through dedicated marketing and upgraded services and attractions, eg a Mining Hall of Fame, or a 'caravan range' with minimal services to offer low-cost facilities to 'grey nomads' who now use roadside stops;
- how to get value-adding activities to the Barkly, eg shared processing plants;
- the importance of east-west road and rail connections but some fears that these could by-pass Tennant Creek. Examples would be taking the Barkly Highway through to Lajamanu and the Buntine Highway, the Plenty Highway and roads to Bing Bong Port such as the Carpentaria, Tablelands Highway and links to Ngukurr and the Gulf Country;
- the opportunities that could come from the gas pipeline, including spur lines and compressed gas;
- funding for infrastructure will probably have to come from the private sector and public private sector partnerships (PPPs), but does the public service have the skills and experience to work with multinational companies;
- an idea to provide automotive training is recycling second-hand cars and caravans to produce low-cost cars and spare bedrooms;
- training opportunities for Tennant Creek including mining and rehabilitation skills;

- the importance of community infrastructure to support growth and make Tennant Creek more attractive to potential workers, eg schools, childcare, trade training and a maternity ward at the hospital.

Regional Economic Development Committee

Chair of the Tennant Creek REDC, Jason Newman, outlined the REDC's roles and membership. The new REDC was set up last year. It has sent letters to everyone with an interest in the Barkly Region to come and talk to the committee, which has met with a range of groups, including a meeting in Darwin with a mining company and the Chief Minister.

The committee has set short, medium and long-term goals, with the aim of economic growth for Tennant Creek.

Short-term: If we could make some changes that would have immediate import, we could improve our image and the volume of tourism material out there. There has been good work by the Battery Hill Mining Centre Association to bring more tourism in. The Barkly Tourism Association has been allowed to re-establish and has got some of its marketing money back to provide a more targeted approach than was provided after Tennant Creek was incorporated with Tourism Central Australia. At the moment, there is no brochure on Tennant Creek. The Association, chaired by Jason, is getting its own brochures and will have new material in a fortnight. The Association is also getting welcome cards, to give visitors tips on things to do.

Medium term: Have been talking to all the mining companies operating or likely to operate in the region. One came to the REDC with three issues:

1. power and energy at a price that made it economical
2. the port
3. immigration.

Within a month, these issues were handled. Construction has now moved forward from 2016 to 2014. The committee took their investors around. They were happy that the community was saying 'we support your project'. The company is likely to have a number of jobs, including unskilled positions.

Long-term bigger projects:

1. APA Group and the potential of the gas pipeline.
2. Mt Isa to Tennant Creek railway, we want it funded. It's something that can unlock the country. If we were to bring that rail and have a view that in 20 years it would connect to Port Hedland, Tennant Creek would be ideal as an inland port (ie rail hub). Trains now go to Darwin for a specific boat. Companies could send anything else straight to Tennant Creek for Adelaide, Perth, Sydney. Freight

would get sorted in Tennant Creek. The Chinese and Americans do these things well. That could really unlock Tennant Creek.

3. We have talked to the Government about special economic zones.
4. Defence: We are the only region that doesn't have a Defence presence. (The old Juno gold mine) could be turned into a Defence facility. Could do armoured vehicle maintenance. A lot of it is trucked to South Australia. Could have a 200-person base.
5. Given the seismic capability in the Barkly, the US and NASA could do research and development. The airport is pretty good. It has been upgraded, you can land large aircraft and it's an opportunity that we aren't using.
6. Major mining centre of excellence, like a mining 'Stockman's Hall of Fame', with history, old dump trucks.

Other projects/activities:

7. Elliott business centre;
8. Priority list of infrastructure around town: sometimes we know the departments work in silos and the infrastructure isn't what the community would say is necessary. We have a pre-school and primary school in town we want replaced as soon as possible. That infrastructure list is with Government.
9. We made a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia (which is available on the Parliamentary website, submission 100).
10. We have requested water mapping. What is the capability of Tennant Creek if you want to grow things. How far can it go? What water is around.
11. By and large in the town, a lot of strategic planning is missing. The Tourism plan is old. We are doing a strategic plan now.
12. We have talked to TNG, Minemakers, Rum Jungle, Arafura, APA Group, East-West Rail, Arnhem, Excalibur, Aard. We don't know what is going on at Peko. A new project is to bring those companies together for a summit with all the junior miners in town, facilitate a discussion, what do you all need? Are there opportunities to share processing plants, they all have different plans for sidings.

Richard James, speaking on behalf of the Patta Native Title holders said people were concerned about the protection of their waterways with fracking, what protections are there under the *Water Act*, with the Environment Protection Authority.

David Rolland from MomeNTum said Santos had told the Alice Springs workshop that they welcome regulation and control of the industry. (Comments about the need for people to be well-informed, the onshore gas industry needs to communicate better.)

There was discussion about a potential railway to Mt Isa. There was some concern that the railway could go north at Rockhampton Downs rather than coming through Tennant Creek, just as the Barkly came in at Three Ways, north of the town. Tennant Creek could become a

transport hub, including road transport, with jobs and workers' villages in the short-term with a railway connection longer-term. Ernie Wanka (now Government Chief Engineer with Department of Transport) sees Tennant Creek as a regional centre, it already has two major highways and there is a lot of social and infrastructure benefits from making the town a transport hub. Jason said there was land set aside on Warrego Road.

Feedback from the discussion groups

Group One

Discussed five key projects

1. **Caravan range** (as opposed to a caravan park), a large controlled area where caravans can free range park. At the moment caravans are filling the roadside rest areas. You could tidy up one of the sections of old road, it's beautiful, people could stay there. There would be opportunities for Indigenous rangers. You could have minimal infrastructure, maybe eco toilets and fire pit areas. Then people might stop closer to Tennant Creek. You would charge people a nominal amount and take responsibility for things like fire breaks. (Comments that similar facilities exist at places like Longreach and Tomato Island, which was a mess until it was cleaned up with proper facilities.)
2. **Central phosphate processing plant in Tennant Creek.** You could have a dedicated plant at an industry reserve along the railway line.
3. **Plenty/Sandover link:** to Hatches Creek, Epenarra and the Barkly Homestead, it would skirt the south-east Barkly minerals belt from the Plenty to the Barkly Highway. Infrastructure needed is a gravel pavement. (Comments: It would miss Tennant Creek and Camooweal, there's more benefit if the Binns Track comes into Tennant Creek. It should be left as a fire break.)
4. **Horticulture:** Within range of Tennant Creek. There have been many studies about where and when. (Comment: there was a report done around 2000.) Infrastructure needed is a sub-division, land release issues and set up costs such as water reticulation. The NT Government could sub-divide, leaving it to industry to set up.
5. **Training:** eg the training model used by Myuma at Alpurulam. There has been criticism of training models around Tennant Creek in the past, spending time on skills people will soon lose because there is no chance to practice them. The model at Alpurulam was good because they took the training out to where the jobs are, so the output matches the opportunity. (Comment: Bootu Creek did something similar).

Group Two

Did a 'macro' list, the big ticket items that could be nation-building, and that's minerals, resources and energy.

Beetaloo is on the energy scene in relation to domestic gas opportunities and oil. The region will need mega infrastructure to capitalise on the opportunities.

Roads are the connectors.

Bing Bong (port) could be a major player for exports.

Links for the Savannah Way, Carpentaria and Tablelands Highways will be feeders as the port grows.

The highway and connectors:

1. Major connector to the West to Lajamanu, Buntine Highway and a major connector via rail to Queensland. This mega-structure will support the opportunities in the north-west corner to Queensland. So they will export commodities through the Port of Darwin.
2. A second port is needed in Darwin as a commodities port.

That's the infrastructure to support this region, which is a very lucrative region for the NT.

The big deal is the pipeline networks that underpin domestic gas. The reality will be using existing infrastructure with spurs into the north-south line. The action will be around Moomba so we need to focus on connectivity to this area.

Smaller opportunities:

- Gas: micro LNG and the remote regional opportunities.
- Phosphate: There are three major sites that could provide value-adding (with processing plant). In Tennant Creek, we have the natural resources. Why not value add. Rather than (bulk export) you could process and sell it in 20 kg bags to China and India.
- Power station and gas spur lines and the pipeline networks. There are opportunities to use compressed gas refuelling stations for heavy vehicles on major Territory roads. You could set up a fleet of vehicles using CNG for a mining project. But it would have to happen at the start of the project. It would reduce the amount of diesel burnt for transport. You could have spur lines to the power station. There are opportunities to gather lower quality oil and re-use it to run heavy vehicles.

Where will the money come from?

You would have to have private investment and that's likely to come from the Chinese. They have a lot of money and they want to spend it wisely.

We discussed Government and Crown assets: what is being done in the public service to start preparing our people for Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). Foreign investment will come roaring across the border. People need to be trained to deal with these companies.

How will the Northern Australia concept be governed?

Local labour force skills development will be important, vs buying in labour. If we don't get the locals involved, companies will be flying in and out. Attempts have been made to get young people from the Barkly to Darwin to work with projects like INPEX. If we don't use the opportunity (to work on such projects), other people will.

There is a challenge in Alice Springs with air links.

How will we deal with the community infrastructure issues. We have talked about schools. We also had a discussion about social housing. Is that part of the development of Northern Australia? People in Darwin have good jobs, good money, the government is releasing land for new housing. We don't have those opportunities in Tennant Creek. We talk about special tax zones, but where do we do social housing to start dealing with the social issues that deny kids the chance to get a good job.

If you attract Defence to Tennant Creek, they may be able to help construct social housing and teach Tennant Creek and Barkly youth. Epenarra and Canteen Creek are already doing this. It would help to address our issue about social housing. We need practical business models.

Richard outlined an idea that would get kids training. Communities are looking at recycling resources that are readily available, which also has environmental benefits. Eg if taking cars off the road and selling them for scrap, you could focus on training opportunities. "My dream is to have a shed like a factory down there, with cars and caravans. They get stripped down and pulled apart. You could have an Indigenous salesperson selling cars back to my people that are well-built. You would concentrate on good four wheel drives and Toyotas. Then you would have auto electricians, spray painters and accommodation. Caravans can be done up as a bedroom."

Importance of training leading to employment, not just training for training's sake.

Group three

Focussed on Tennant Creek being the 'centre of the universe' because what happens in Tennant Creek is good for the Barkly.

There have been many discussions over the years about how to attract people to Tennant Creek. It was to be marketed as a central meetings place. To do that will you need infrastructure such as an air service.

We looked at training, eg pastoral.

A month ago there were workshops at Battery Hill about Tennant Creek being a mining training area tapping into rehabilitation funding. You could set up a training system where

people are trained in the mining game but at the same time rehabilitating and learning the skills.

Not only would that benefit local people but it could attract people from other regions.

Rail (Tennant Creek to Mt Isa) and bring the Barkly Highway to Tennant Creek. We did manage to move it 500 metres once in this direction.

In terms of infrastructure, we need childcare. People coming to work here have to know they are coming to a place that meets their needs, eg air services, child care. At the moment there is a 12-month waiting list. Need a good primary school. The second one was turned into a TAFE. The high school is in reasonable condition but the pre-school and primary school are old and need to be replaced. The Trade Training Centre could be improved. The basis is there, but improve that side of the training.

Health: the hospital has had an upgrade, but no maternity ward. There are now 22 women in Tennant Creek who are pregnant (and have to go to places like Alice Springs). When you attract people here, they have to know their basic needs are being satisfied.

Anything that benefits Tennant Creek will benefit the Barkly because it services the area, including pastoral, mining and tourism.