

Australian Population Association Conference 2018

Welcome speech delivered by Chief Minister Michael Gunner

Darwin Convention Centre, 18 July 2018

Check against delivery

Thank you (aunty) Bilawara for your welcome to country.

I pay my respects to you ... your family ... and Larrakia elders past, present and future as the keepers of this land and of our most ancient and precious stories.

I acknowledge and welcome our distinguished guests and in particular those who have come from such a long way away.

We have delegates from not only across our state borders, but from across our oceans.

Welcome to our tropical paradise.

You know in Melbourne right now it's 15 degrees and raining?

Tell your friends. Tell your families.

We meet today as the debate about population and migration gets another cycle through the national media.

Do we ... don't we?

Let me state this right at the top: The Northern Territory wants ... the Northern Territory needs ... more people.

More dreamers. More entrepreneurs. More hands for the heavy lifting.

Few things could be more important for the Northern Territory than sustainable population growth.

Population growth for the Territory means a more diversified economy less reliant on 'that next big thing'.

More people is more jobs, more investment, more people through the shops, cafes and calling up our cash-strapped tradies.

More people means increased GST revenue from the Commonwealth, which means better service delivery.

Build the population – create the demand - and the high costs of flights in and out of the NT begin to come down.

Build the population and we get better services and more people to build the economies and livelihoods of the remote regions.

Charles Darwin University's Demography and Growth team found we've experienced close to 30 consecutive quarters of negative net interstate migration.

They've found we're now more than eight years into a low growth phase.

Stagnant growth has become the status quo.

But to accept this status quo is to accept the boom and bust; business by handout; isolation by flight costs; empty shop fronts, units and pockets.

More than this, to accept stagnant population growth is to miss our enormous opportunities.

Consider that Northern Australia, including the tops of W.A and Queensland, contribute more than half our nation's exports – and more than 12 per cent of gross domestic product - from just a tick over five per cent of the population.

More than half our exports from just five per cent of the people.

Just imagine what we can do up here with more people.

More dreamers. More entrepreneurs. More hands for the heavy lifting.

Next month we release our Population Strategy and Northern Territory master brand, setting out how we keep our good hands and find new ones.

It goes without saying we'll get there so much sooner with the buy-in of the Commonwealth.

I welcome Senator Dean's Smith call for an inquiry into Australia's population policy.

It's a conversation we need to have.

An inquiry would give the Territory a chance to put its case forward.

As it stands, the points for and against population growth and migration seem to be run through the prism of a clogged Melbourne Fwy.

Or through the prism of Sydney home prices.

Or through the prism of Brisbane's public transport system.

What about our abundant resources and nascent industry needing people and investment?

What about our boundless plains?

What about the Developing the North agenda?

Let me read you a quote:

"Transformation won't happen if (the North's) population inches up by a few hundred thousand over the next 20 years. It would remain a high cost, small scale economy; more of a pilot project than a powerhouse."

We need to lay the foundations for rapid population growth and put the north on a trajectory to reach a population of four to five million by 2060.”

This is from the Developing Northern Australia White Paper.

So this is the Commonwealth’s own strategy. We ask the Commonwealth to buy into it. Buy into it with economic, infrastructure and population strategy.

Because this is Australia’s gateway to the Asian centuries.

This is Australia’s next great opportunity.

This is where we need the people.

It just goes to show we need different migration policies for different regions.

The Designated Area Migration Agreement, which makes it easier for Territory businesses to fill skill shortages with foreign workers, is one example.

But we can go further. Much further.

I’m ready to work with the Commonwealth about how we get businesses, regional headquarters and people away from the congested, cold metropolises of the south and into the Northern Territory

You only need to look at a map to see that it makes sense to populate the North.

I go up and down the track and across the oceans with this message to people and business, and I invite the Commonwealth to join in:

If you want a stable and safe regional base ... come to the Northern Territory.

If you want to be close to market ... close to both the great centres of Asia and Australia ... come to the Territory.

If you want your workers to be happy, safe and live in the one of the friendliest and spectacular corners of the world, come to the Territory.

It makes sense.

We also recognise the Northern Territory Government needs to be doing more to get the message out there.

To sing our message from the rooftops louder, farther, smarter.

In February this year we contracted internationally-recognised brand specialists The Royals to deliver a unified Northern Territory master brand.

This is to inspire people to think differently about the Northern Territory ... to understand us better.

Many Australians only know about the Northern Territory through the famous front pages of the NT News, Crocodile Dundee or media reports highlighting remote disadvantage.

We are all these things, for better and worse, but we are also so much more.

What about our amazing lifestyle, schools, weather and diversity?

What about how we are bursting with opportunities, particularly for career-minded young people?

What about our future as the capital of Northern Australia; our nation's closest city and port to the exploding markets of the Indo-Pacific?

We know master brand exercises have real-world success.

Malaysia went from a place side-stepped by tourists to one of the most visited in the world through a branding campaign built around the slogan 'Malaysia: Truly Asia'.

France has some of the most sought-after wines in the world, even if its varieties are consistently beaten in blind taste tests.

Dubai has built its brand around luxury. The brand is even reinforced by the Dubai police, who have a \$450,000 Lamborghini as part of their fleet.

Lamborghinis aren't for the Territory, but what is?

We'll release the master brand strategy alongside our population strategy next month.

It's an exciting time, and I want to thank the team at CDU for their exceptional work researching population trends and opportunities.

The research has done some important myth busting.

One of the biggest take outs is that people aren't pushed out of the Territory because they don't like the place; they're far more likely to be pulled out because of job and family factors.

Similarly, we know most ex-Territorians really enjoyed their time here and a third are open to coming back.

We effectively have an army of alumni all over Australia who might consider returning or, failing that, have positive Territory experiences to share with others.

Our ex-pat strategy will look to engage these people to promote the Territory to their friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances.

It will build connections between ex-pats, Territory businesses and industry organisations – strengthening our national and international trade links and providing opportunities for information and skill sharing.

This is about unlocking all that built-up good will; unlocking it in the form of words and encouragement in the towns and cities of Australia and the world.

More than anything, we need to create more Territory-based jobs.

This is the number one priority of my Government and is manifest in countless initiatives and reforms since the 2016 election.

One of the initiatives as part of our population strategy is payroll tax cuts for businesses who replace non-Territory employees with someone who will live in the Territory.

This is effectively about converting our massive Fly-in Fly-out workforces into Territory workforces.

And if family reasons are pulling people away, we need to do better to keep hold of all branches of the family tree.

From the grandkids to the grandparents.

So we've overhauled the Pensioner Carer and Concession Scheme to make it fairer for everyone.

We're funding free bus travel for everyone over 60.

We're developing flexible working arrangements for seniors working in the public service.

And we're investing in new seniors living in Darwin, Darwin Rural area and Alice Springs.

We know we can also target key migrant communities.

We know some migrant groups are more prepared to build their lives and families here than others.

We just had a police recruit squad in Alice Springs made up almost entirely of New Zealand migrants, for example.

Also in Alice, our Indian community is thriving, contributing and growing exponentially.

Territory wide, our Nepalese community has grown by more than 200 per cent since the 2011 Census.

We have opportunities here. And the population plan will set them out.

We know from the CDU research one of the key markets we need to address is early career women.

The Territory's seen a 1/3 decline in female arrivals and a 1/3 increase in departures.

Last year we began a campaign 'Our Life Out Here' which dotted southern billboards, newspapers and websites with real life stories of people who relocated to the Territory for work.

This is just the beginning.

I look forward to sharing the detailed population plan and master brand next month.

I also look forward to hearing the ideas and initiatives to come from this forum.

Enjoy your time in the Northern Territory. Then tell your friends. Tell your families.

Thank you.