

Preface

Northern Australia, as defined in the 2015 Australian Government' report *Our north, our future: White paper on developing Northern Australia*, consists of the Northern Territory and parts of Western Australia and Queensland above the Tropic of Capricorn. The region, covering 40 per cent of Australia's land mass, has abundant minerals and energy resources as well as vast potentials in agriculture and tourism.

As outlined in the 2015 white paper, a series of large-scale projects are set to drive population growth, urbanisation and infrastructure development in Northern Australia. To achieve these goals, it is important to capture and analyse existing knowledge of the economic, social and environmental impacts of existing policies and explore the potential impacts of these factors on any plans for development.

Leading from the North: Rethinking Northern Australia Development originated from a multi-disciplinary research collaboration that helped establish important research essential to meet the national challenges associated with living sustainably in the remote tropic zone and the interfaces between community and environments. It consists of place-based research focused on and in Northern Australia. The research considers the implications of these realities for development and the differential impact of development on communities and environments. Each chapter is based on research by northern-based researchers and practitioners that provide evidence-based analysis of the secondary costs and effects of development, including for Indigenous citizens and communities. Policies and funding to encourage development of Northern Australia need to consider the social, environmental, climatic and economic realities of Northern Australia to understand and minimise unanticipated and often perverse outcomes.

Several topics are addressed throughout this book, including social infrastructure; governance systems; economic, business and regional development; climates and adaptations; natural resources policies; and trends in demography and migration in the region.

Section 1 of this book analyses the impact of the one-size-fits-all approach to policy development and implementation in Northern Australia. Each chapter examines the specific attributes that define the socioeconomic characteristics of Northern Australian residents to describe how the application of current policy affects the health and wellbeing of these residents and makes a series of recommendations for reform. The four chapters in this section address these seemingly opposing views, but from a pragmatic northern-held view.

Section 2 of this book comprises five chapters that contribute to but do not define northern economic development. The chapters offer insights into the history and theory of northern economic development, a perspective on the northern tourism industry and its failure of demand creation and an interpretation of inequity issues in Northern Australia's economic development, and the final two interlinked chapters on a 'ground-up' approach to Aboriginal economic development use micro-level statistics to delineate a mixed-market economy in central Australian Aboriginal settlements.

Section 3 of this book outlines a number of the key demographic and migration challenges that need to be addressed if the ambitious population targets contained in the 2015 white paper are to be achieved. The two chapters in this section discuss population as a key factor in determining development pathways for regions, with the small resident population of Northern Australia being one of the principle limitations hampering future economic and social development of the region.

Section 4 of this book contains five chapters that offer a rich set of ideas portraying northern development in a different light. The chapters range from critical reflections on and possible solutions to the northern development dilemma, to governance of natural resource management. Connecting themes include the fluid and intertwined nature of northern people, places and policy; the emergence of the north as a place with a past and present able to speak for its future; and the north as a place of undervalued uniqueness and potential for innovation.

Climatic conditions are widely viewed as having negative implications for the development of Northern Australia. Against a backdrop of predictions of major climate changes, the chapters in Section 5 of this book consider the region's climate and its implications for human living and working conditions and the future economic development of Northern Australia.

The authors identify adaptive strategies to reduce the impacts and mitigate the negative effects of climatic extremes to facilitate people living and working healthily in Northern Australia. These present a starting point for providing regionally specific analyses of climate to support appropriate measures to enable populations to thrive in Northern Australia.

Overall, charting a clear pathway for the future of Northern Australia will rise or fall based on the health of our overall system of governance and decision-making related to the north, inclusive of national, pan-northern, jurisdictional (Western Australian, Northern Territory and Queensland), regional and local scales. The final collection of chapters in Section 6 of this book provide overviews of some of the key governance challenges and opportunities essential to building a stronger future for Northern Australia and its communities. These opportunities and challenges include wide exploration of the need for greater engagement and evidence-building in governance at all scales. They also include the need to focus on supporting strong Indigenous governance as an important feature of the wider system. Particular attention is also paid to supporting improved regional and local governance. The importance of building the endemic research and development capacity of Northern Australia is also explored, reminding us of the importance of independent academic critique in strengthening Northern Australian governance and decision-making.

This book aims to improve public dialogue around the future of Northern Australia to underpin robust and flexible planning and policy frameworks and provide opportunities for growth in the face of changing economies and technologies. Due to its collaborative nature, this book has taken a few years in the making and experienced delays during the COVID-19 pandemic. The issues and challenges mentioned in each chapter, faced by the people living in Northern Australia, continue to be relevant and crucial to Northern Australia development. I hope that the research and discussions presented in this book will help guide the policies associated with Northern Australia development based on the unique viewpoints of those who have worked and lived in the north.

Professor Ruth Wallace
Dean, College of Indigenous Futures, Education & the Arts
Director, Northern Institute
Charles Darwin University

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