City of Townsville

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

WORKSHOP REPORT

Wednesday, 27th May 2009, 9.00am to 3.00pm, Tony Ireland Stadium, Riverway

Facilitated by internationally recognised cluster expert Rodin Genoff

Supported by:

A CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TROPICAL DESIGN
Sustainability & Innovation

NQACC
NORTH QUEENSLAND AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

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Workshop Context

Our global society is facing fundamental challenges in sustainable living, and so too are our regional, rural and remote communities. Many of these challenges have arisen because of a lack of recognition of the many integrated, complex and interdependent relationships that occur within and between our society, environment, economy and governance systems. A more integrated approach to the traditional application of the triple or quadruple bottom line method to sustainability is necessary.

Some of the current challenges facing the economies of rural and remote communities vs. city areas include:
- Size / lack of critical mass
- Limited or narrow economic base/opportunities
- Limited business and career opportunities
- Continuity of work opportunities
- Silo approach of government investments
- Logistics (distance, accessibility, manpower, infrastructure, machinery constraints)
- Limited skill sets and employment opportunities
- Limited prospects of attracting / retaining skilled people including former residents to "return home" with the skills that they have acquired away from home.

So, how can cities and rural and remote communities identify opportunities within these challenges, to achieve the twin imperatives of sustainability and economic competitiveness? How can cities such as Townsville:
1. Assist with providing mutually beneficial holistic and integrated solutions for rural and remote communities?
2. Provide value-added goods, services and solutions via collaboration between academia, government, business and community, to match the needs of rural and remote communities with capabilities?

International best practice on sustainable regional development suggests that the density and resilience of cross-sectorial networks and partnerships is a critical dimension for achieving competitive advantage. Furthermore, competitive innovations and skills emerge in regions where there is a high concentration of clusters, collaboration and learning networks.

These networks are formed through a range of formal and informal partnerships, relationships and collaborations that involve a dynamic mixture of government, business, community, industry financial and learning organisations. Typically they focus on a range of activities, from finding practical solutions to immediate problems, to pursuing innovative and creative approaches to emerging challenges and current problems.

Global experience has shown that innovation, and the collaborative networks that enable and nurture it, grow and flourish where there is:
- A desire of individuals / organisations to tackle difficult contemporary challenges
- Strong engagement with the community on practical issues of concern
- A shared commitment to a clear future vision and strategic intent
- An open dialogue fostered by a focus on practical applications, demonstration projects, innovation and capability building
- Cross-sectorial, cross-industry and cross-discipline exchange.

Effective networks and partnerships between the key stakeholders in urban and rural/remote communities will lead to better understanding and recognition of the many integrated, complex and interdependent relationships that occur within and between our society, environment, economy and governance systems. Sustainability will ultimately be achieved through a collaborative approach to identifying and addressing the specific challenges and opportunities in rural and remote communities.

The CETD and Cluster Development

The core aim of the Centre for Excellence in Tropical Design (CETD) is to strengthen the sustainability and global competitiveness of the North Queensland region with excellence in tropical sustainable design. It aims to do this by fostering the growth of a network of hubs of learning, innovation and business development. The Townsville City Council, in partnership with the CETD, has recently facilitated a number of workshops and programs for businesses across a range of industries, with international cluster expert Rodin Genoff.

The model for development of these clusters centres on firms that are networked, but not necessarily co-located. This is appropriate to the geography of North Queensland and more broadly to tropical regional Australia, including rural and remote communities.

> "Firms and organisations involved in clusters are able to achieve synergies and leverage economic advantage from shared access to information and knowledge networks, supplier and distribution chains, markets and marketing intelligence, competencies, and resources in a specific locality. The cluster concept focuses on the linkages and interdependencies among actors in value chains. It goes beyond the traditional ideas on clusters, which involved horizontal networks of firms operating on the same end-product market in a same industry group.
>
> The modern concept of clusters involves integrated and often dissimilar firms and public agencies/institutions specialising and collaborating on R&D, innovation, commercialisation and marketing to produce a range of new or re-engineered products and services which are often cross-sectoral in nature."
>
> Regional Clustering in Australia, Journal article by Michael J. Enright, Brian H. Roberts; Australian Journal of Management, 2001.

It is expected that with this model of cluster development, the CETD and Townsville City Council can help facilitate sustainable economic development by linking urban centre capabilities with rural and remote communities to provide value-added goods, services and solutions.

Workshop Methodology

The workshop utilised a "collective social learning" approach of sharing ideals, establishing facts, developing creative ideas and forming collaborative action. Eight groups were established within the participants and each group worked together to answer the following questions throughout the day:

FOCUS QUESTION
How can we collaborate, form partnerships or cluster to facilitate *sustainable* economic development in rural and remote communities?

1. "What Should Be?" (IDEALS)	➢	What are your strongest personal ideals of what economic sustainability in rural and remote communities should look like?
2. "What Is?" (FACTS)	➢	What are the inhibiting and supporting factors that exist now that contribute to economic sustainability in rural and remote communities?
3. "What Could Be?" (IDEAS)	➢	What are some great ideas for collaborating, forming partnerships or clustering, which could realistically achieve our ideals of economically sustainable rural and remote communities?
4. "What *Can* Be?" (ACTIONS)	➢	What can YOU do to collaborate, form partnerships or cluster to facilitate sustainable economic development in rural and remote communities?

Describing

1. IDEALS
What should be?

2. FACTS
What is?

Developing

How can we facilitate sustainable economic development in rural and remote communities?

Designing

3. ACTIONS
What can be?

3. IDEAS
What could be?

Doing
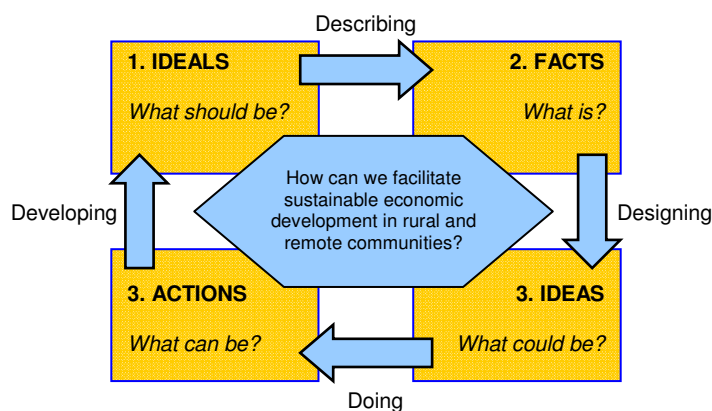
Attendance and Apologies

Table One

Brenda McAuliffe	Dept. Employment, Economic Development and Innovation
Greg Beavis	Townsville Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC)
Mark Stoneman	NQ Dry Tropics NRM
Rosemary Pennisi	Hinchinbrook Shire Council
Amanda Blizzard	Australian Industry Group
David Shepherd	Ergon Energy

Table Two

Michael Vest	Ark Homes
Lyn McLaughlin	Mayor, Burdekin Shire Council
Richard Monypenny	James Cook University
Ron White	Dept. of Defence
Brett Guldbransen	Industry Capability Network

Table Three

Tony Vaccaro	Burdekin Shire Council
Stephen Naylor	James Cook University
Drew Morris	Townsville City Council
Don Matthews	Dept. of Public Works
Lisa McDonald	Townsville Enterprise Ltd

Table Four

Rosi Dedecius	Townsville City Council
Cr Joyce Zahner	Deputy Mayor, Carpentaria Shire Council
David King	James Cook University
Alf Musumeci	Office of Rural and Regional Communities
Guy Lane	SEA02
David Lynch	Townsville City Council

Table Five

Cr Corrie Pickering	Mayor, Croydon Shire Council
Gerard Byrne	Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries
Brian Burkett	Dept. of Communities
Melissa Steedman	NQ Area Consultative Committee
Lee Chaney	Office of Northern Australia
Brett Henderson	AusIndustry

Table Six

Mark Kelleher	CEO, Carpentaria Shire Council
Jo Stephenson	Dept. of Infrastructure and Planning
Bob Frazer	NQ Dry Tropics NRM
Cr Vern Veitch	Townsville City Council
Jo Prego	Townsville City Council

Table Seven

Matthew Fanning	Carpentaria Shire Council
Leanne Pascoe	Dept. of Education and Training
Michael Bice	Dept. Justice Attorney General & RMCN
Glen Graham	Mt. Isa Townsville Economic Zone (MITEZ)
Tony O'Connor	Kookaburra Tours

Table Eight

David Wylie	Townsville Region Engineering Cluster
Terry Long	Dept. of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Kylie McLaren	Townsville City Council
Tim Lynam	CSIRO
Nigel Grier	Zing Space

<u>Apologies</u>

Duncan Chalmers	Dept. of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Ken Bellamy	Prime Carbon & Vital Resource Management
Penny Claringbull	Townsville City Council
June Powell	Dept. of Infrastructure and Planning

Workshop Aim and Definitions

The overarching goal of the workshop was to understand how we (stakeholders in both rural and remote communities and urban centres) can collaborate, form partnerships or cluster to facilitate *sustainable* economic development in rural and remote communities.

The group brainstormed both personal aims of the workshop and their definition of "Remote and Rural Communities".

The following suggestions were made:

Remote and Rural Communities

- It was mentioned that the State Government might define anything outside of the Brisbane area as 'regional'.
- While a number of factors were mentioned as potential contributors to defining what remote and rural mean (e.g. distance from facilities, accessibility of healthcare, ease of application for housing loans, distance from regional centres etc) the majority of the group found that it was not the 'label' or 'definition' which was important in establishing partnerships, but the actual ability of individuals to work together.
- It was mentioned that no matter how rural or remote a community might be, the local DNA and dedication of people are more important factors in creating partnerships.
- The majority of the group were also in agreement that we should be aware of, but not governed by, the challenges faced by remote and rural communities throughout this workshop and the projects that follow.

Aims

- Determine needs in remote and rural communities.
- Determine opportunities for economic sustainability.
- Link communities in a committed and long term fashion.
- Generate common goals.
- Share resources and ideas.
- Add value to businesses in these communities.
- Define community challenges
- Understanding what we have (resources, population, services etc)
- Identify the abilities of each community - "Who does what?"
- Determine how to form new business through partnerships.
- Understanding the barriers for remote communities.
- Skill sharing/development.

Focus Question 1: What Should Be?

Each of the eight tables answered the question "*What are your strongest personal ideals of what economic sustainability in rural and remote communities should look like?*"

Each individual answered this question personally and then each group arranged all their team members' ideals into common themes for presentation to the entire workshop.

The following ideals of perfect economic sustainability in rural and remote communities were identified during this activity:

Community
- Uniqueness
- Recognition of diversity
- Locals valuing their community
- Safety in communities
- Communities with goals
- Networks/links of communities collaborating
- Health, wealth, satisfaction and wellbeing for all
- Identifying common goals
- Understand the heart of the community
- Understanding interdependencies
- "Making a life" – sufficient income to maintain lifestyle
- Balance between social, economic, environmental and cultural values.
- Equity between urban and rural and remote communities
- Communities able to export their ideas and services

Population
- Stability of population/growth of population
- Employment options
- Retention of youth
- Non-aging community
- Retention of skilled workers
- Reduction in homelessness
- Unemployment in single figures
- Income is greater than cost of living
- High levels of education and opportunities for education
- Access to services (health, education)

Economic Development
- Economic development opportunities
- Innovation and forward thinking
- Sustainable growth
- Strong local government
- Cohesion
- Industry
- Build local infrastructure
- Understanding of, respect for and access to natural resources
- Financial incentives
- Technical understanding and access
- Communications
- Adaptability

Business Development
- Enterprise
- Capitalising on business opportunities
- Value adding to business

<u>Focus Question 2: What Is?</u>

Each of the eight tables discussed and noted down their responses to the question, "*What are the inhibiting and supporting factors that exist now that contribute to economic sustainability in rural and remote communities?*"

Each group listed supports for, and barriers to, economic sustainability in remote and rural communities and then chose their top three factors for each side.

The following **supports** for economic sustainability in remote and rural communities were identified across the whole group:

Community Supports
- Sense of community/ community character
- Availability of lifestyle choices
- Willingness to grow and change
- Industry groups, e.g. GSD, MITEZ, NQACC
- NQ5
- Grey nomads willing to work
- Old fashioned service
- Reduced exposure to drugs

Commitment to Improvement
- Good remote capabilities and skill base
- Availability of local alternatives for solutions to problems/ niche markets / local knowledge
- Commitment to education/ up skilling (JCU, distance education, TAFE)
- Improved access to technology
- Ability to do more with less
- Local incentives for new businesses

Natural Resources
- Natural tourism resources
- Support for environmental sustainability
- Strong agriculture and fishing industries
- Value of the environment and resources, artesian basin, mineral province, land, water, sunshine
- Changes to Native Title Regime increases opportunities
- Cheap land

The following **barriers** to economic sustainability in remote and rural communities were identified across the whole group:

Lack of Opportunity for New Economic Development Projects
- Lack (and cost) of infrastructure, transport, services and funding for innovative projects
- Lack of entertainment
- Unavailability of housing
- Lack of support/recognition/understanding by State and Federal governments
- Councils looking inwards vs. outwards.

Inability to Overcome Regional Constraints
- Distance
- Exploitation / ignorance of resources
- No time for individual firms to network and plan/ lack of opportunities for business development / No customers
- Lack of knowledge and practice know-how
- Fear of the unknown/change and lack of self-belief in being able to achieve success

Population and Career Instability
- Population instability, lack of high growth projection, no succession planning, aging population, inability to retain staff and youths
- Lack of career paths/employment opportunities
- Reliance on mining in times of uncertainty and fly in fly out.
- Low education levels of job seekers
- Social segregation
- Lack of common community goals/focus

Focus Question 3: What Could Be?

Each of the eight tables discussed and brainstormed ideas for projects and noted down their answers for *"What are some great ideas for collaborating, forming partnerships or clustering, which could realistically achieve our ideals of economically sustainable rural and remote communities?"*

Each table then decided on their number one short term project (a project with the possibility to be put in place now) and their number one long term project (a realistic project to be considered for the future with more planning).

The following short and long term ideas for generating economic sustainability in remote and rural communities were identified within each group:

Table One:

- Short Term:
  - Bring people from all industries to the North by creating exchange programs for business, government and industry employees. Create a gap year/seasonal employment programs as taste testers and to show people what is happening in the North.
- Long Term:
  - Focus science on solving and improving telecommunications gaps and problems. Provide IT upgrades to infrastructure to remote areas before others.
- Other Projects
  - Role defence can play in establishing infrastructure
  - Green Skills – skilled labour ad expertise in environmental practices
  - Clustering groups with regional, remote and rural and metropolitan areas – bigger voice and more influence
  - Projects for retention of youth and skilled workers
  - Untapped indigenous employment sector
  - Access to water sources lead to prosperity – relocation of businesses that are under threat from lack of water to North Queensland
  - Work with industry, government to promote new innovative businesses into the communities

Table Two:

- Short Term:
  - Develop co-operatives of vegetable growers / butchers / farmers etc.
- Long Term:
  - Present Economic Development 'road shows' to provide opportunities and access to development. Create joint ventures between all levels of government to provide access to business development opportunities.
- Other Projects
  - Tree change, land development
  - Transportation and infrastructure consolidation
  - Link young achievers with a different industry each year, between different sorts of businesses

Table Three:

- Short Term:
    - Wholesale fruit and vegetable market e.g. Farmers' Co-operative.
- Long Term:
    - Councils collaborate with REDOs, government and private enterprise to facilitate projects
        - Identify a holistic approach to ensure a long-term low energy future for North Queensland
        - North Queensland Renewable Energy Investment Agency (link with the office of Clean Energy and Federal offices)
- Other Projects
    - Develop an agricultural incubator
    - Integrated Aqua/Agriculture – planning, training, marketing, transfer
    - Attract Agricultural processing to the bush
    - Consider ideas not impacted by distance
    - Northern Economic Forum
    - Networked tourism – using expertise within the community
    - Versatile building centres – ECO resorts, transitional accommodation, age/health based
    - R & D into water run-off, government regulations

Table Four:

- Short Term:
    - Local governments growing their capacity via collaboration.
        - E.g. resource sharing, sharing departments within a number of councils, increased networking events.
- Long Term:
    - Create a funded regional plan (or plans) for North/Regional Queensland.
- Other Projects
    - State government decentralisation
    - Awards night
    - Sport – subsidise, fund, support
    - Develop safe uranium industry
    - Councils, state government support GM crops

Table Five:

- Short Term:
    - Encourage a number of shires or regions to work on one project or tender document. By sharing resources and/or contracts regions can increase critical mass, resources and efficiency.
- Long Term:
    - Form an investment company using financial assets from within industry to provide funding for remote and rural communities with a long term outlook (not focussing on 'returns' in the short run).
- Other Projects
    - Educational revolution of what happens in the country, how it works and how its fed to the City
    - Redirect government structure to fit rural and remote – not the other way around.
    - Environmental opportunities. Funding for economic and environmental development is the driver for projects.

Table Six:

- Short Term:
    - Create a 'soft infrastructure hub' with a focus on technical and practical education and training. Innovative education. Provide a number of support services to practitioners in remote and rural communities (training and professional development).
    - Start with agriculture, science, business management and town planning courses.
    - Goals of returning people to the bush, tailor to the specific needs of people and communities, reduce the cost of delivery without reducing employment.
    - Partners – JCU, DPI, Corporates, Peak Bodies, LGAs, LGMA,
- Long Term:
    - Create the Northern Gulf Food Bowl
    - Strong dependence in improved public infrastructure
    - Partners – JCU, GSD, CSIRO, Gulf LGAs, DEEDI
- Other Projects
    - Build hard infrastructure
    - Renewable BL power,
    - Rail upgrade of Mount Isa to Townsville
    - Road Raid – Port Power
    - Local farmers co-op

Table Seven

- Short Term:
    - Run a consultative community workshop/forum into securing natural resources for fishing tourism by closing selected rivers to commercial use.
    - Partners – councils, GSD, Caravan Association, Commercial Fisherman Association, Grey Nomads websites, Recreational Fishing Associations, Fishing celebrities, Indigenous Community, Fishing Competition Committees, Karumba Progress Association, Local accommodations, Barramundi Farm, Local papers, Local industry champions.
- Long Term:
    - Jobs program to create real long term jobs
    - Resource sharing especially people – share technical skills between remote and rural communities.
    - Create partnerships with universities to use collective skills for planning solutions and ideas.
- Other Projects
    - Government alignment and support for regional projects – not to stymie through bureaucracy
    - National decentralisation policy – developing more inland hubs
    - Further structural change in local government
    - Taxation zone allowances - $10,000 K P.A.
    - Better system of incentives for investment in remote areas

Table Eight:

- Short Term:
    - Develop "N-Bay", a community version of eBay where 'needs' can be filled by connecting needs and capabilities electronically.
- Long Term:
    - Solar and thermal power generation
    - Cultural tourism within communities
    - Greater Northern Australian export and manufacturing opportunities.
- Other Projects

- Language and marketing (international training)
- Education qualifications to include on the job training at all levels
- Import technical, industrial and business trainers and partner with education

Focus Question 4: What Can Be?

At this point in the workshop, the ideas for each group's short term projects were laid out on each table. All participants were asked to move to the table with the idea which was of particular interest or concern to them personally. Participants then worked within their new groups to answer the question "What can YOU do to collaborate, form partnerships or cluster to facilitate sustainable economic development in rural and remote communities?"

Each group discussed the feasibility of their short term idea, refined the idea into a project and then assigned actions to specific group members to get the project rolling.

The following short term projects and actions to encourage economic sustainability in remote and rural communities were identified within each idea:

Identified Projects

1. **Audit of resources and skills in rural and remote organisations.**

   Create a survey to investigate the skills and resources within rural and remote organisations for future contract and tendering opportunities. These surveys could be distributed using a staged approach within councils, regional bodies, community organisations, industry and business. The areas for investigation will include economic development, HR, IT, roads, health, engineering and planning.

   By establishing this knowledge of local skills and resources this project will eventually identify common elements within organisations, investigate solutions to local problems and develop collaborative action plans and projects.

   Key questions to consider when developing this project will be; What area/region to start with, grant and funding possibilities, groups who have conducted similar studies/surveys, the development of a pilot area or trial project.

   Actions: Melissa Steedman from NQ Area Consultative Committee develops an initial expression of interest study to gauge which organisations would be interested in participating in the survey. Melissa, with the aid of Cr Corrie Pickering (who will approach Etheridge, Croydon and Carpentaria organisations), will develop and conduct a survey to be distributed across the region. Other possible partners for the project could include the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.

2. **Creation of an Economic Development Subgroup in the North Queensland ROC**

   Similar to the HR Subgroup which works cooperatively and shares information on an operational level, the Economic Development subgroup will collaborate to encourage knowledge and progress sharing. This subgroup will include representatives from the Economic Development departments from the NQ5 and will provide stewardship for economic development in North Queensland.

   Actions: Rosanna Dedecius from Townsville City Council will email Cr Lyn McLaughlin to have the idea brought forward at the next ROC meeting.

3. **Career Exchange Program**

This project involves running an exchange program for businesses, government departments, industry stakeholders or education providers to promote regional lifestyles, skilling and form collaborative partnerships. By participating in an exchange, people from urban areas will have a broader understanding of rural and remote issues and people from a regional area will build their experience and skill base. This project could also be provided between the local, state and federal tiers of government.

Possible stakeholders and advisors could include: DET, DEEWR, RMCN, Australian Industry Group, LGAQ, DEEDI, Office of Northern Australia, TEL, Office of Rural and Regional Communities, AGFORCE, Chamber of Commerce, NQ Dry Tropics and Canegrowers.

Actions:

- May be a 2-stage project because it needs both scoping and funding.
- Office of Rural and Regional Communities (Alf Musumeci) will coordinate the program with funding from Blueprint for the Bush.
- DEEWR to be approached to provide funding for nation wide implementation.
- Consultative workshop inviting all stakeholders to sign a MOU setting out roles and responsibilities for driving the project and to provide in-kind support.
- Identify a few people to trial the project to work out the logistics
- RMCN and AIG can work as networking groups for the project.
- Could look at expanding existing programs i.e. rotary, in state and federal areas which are limited in their reach.

4. **Education 'Hub'**

Improving training and learning in rural and remote communities using local resources, knowledge sharing, business/education exchanges within regions and learning strategies. This improvement could involve using IT to reach rural and remote training centres (pod casts etc), using flexible modes of teaching, block training, harnessing knowledge and experience of the 'grey nomads' as they travel the communities and more.

Actions: Project leader – Bob Frazer

Steps and actions	Who?	By When?
Map what is already happening.		
Set up an email group	Bob Frazer	5/06/09
All to contribute info on what's happening	All	19/06/09
All to contribute links to other potential partners/ participants in project	All	19/06/09
Collate information	Bob Frazer	Following contribution
Map present and potential future infrastructure i.e:		
IT support, pod casting, flexible modes of delivery, block training / course facilities, grey nomads websites.	Stephen Naylor and others who can contribute	Mid July 2009
Strategic planning workshop to discuss:		
Feasibility / PEST / SWOT analysis Funding / resources Commitments, reasons for partners to participate How to move forward Establish actions, responsibilities and timeframes	All	End July 2009

5. **Farmers Co-operative**

   Establish a local farmers' co-operative to increase rural and remote farming regions' sustainability, produce quality and competitiveness. Conduct research into current co-op models to identify benefits for stakeholders and end users.

   Actions: Tony Vaccaro from Burdekin Shire Council will establish an initial meeting with stakeholders. At this meeting he will prepare a report on farmers' co-ops including "how they work / benefits / reasons" etc. He will be assisted by Faith Foster from Townsville City Council. The meeting should establish the project's phases i.e. a local market for small producers and a national market for large producers.

6. **Offsetting carbon emissions in rural and remote communities.**

   Investigate the potential for remote and rural councils to offset their carbon emissions from travel and other activities.

   Actions: Local entity My Clean Sky will approach the appropriate representatives at the Townsville City Council to discuss potential benefits for the region.

7. **Sustainable Fisheries**

   Encouraging sustainable fisheries and tourism opportunities for the Gulf of Carpentaria by protecting selected rivers from commercial use.

   The project will create opportunities for wild farming, fishing shows and competitions, the advancement of the tourism industry and a flow on supportive effect to small businesses in the region. Some challenges identified for the project involve compensation requirements, impact assessments, availability of funding and the need for ongoing monitoring of the project.

   This project is lead by Matt Fanning, Carpentaria Shire Council and would hopefully be in conjunction with accommodation providers, samall business, development organizations, GSD & KPA, tourism bodies, tour operators and agents, fishing charters, equipment supplies & hire, gov legislative bodies (EPA, DPI&F, fisheries reg), indigenous groups, hunting groups, bird watching groups and Gulflander.

8. **N-Bay**

   The project will develop a web portal for information exchange on projects and capabilities of local businesses.

   The information will feed from a number of sources including the Industry Capability Network, Townsville Enterprise, the CETD, TREC etc. There may also be a good linkage to project one "Audit of resources and skills in rural and remote organisations".

   Actions: The people responsible for putting the project into action are Lisa McDonald from TEL, Brett Gulbransen from ICN and Nigel Greer from Zingspace.

Where To From Here?

The Economic Sustainability in Rural and Remote Communities Workshop identified many issues and opportunities that will require continual investigation and development on the part of all the workshop participants.

It was identified that the main strengths in remote and rural communities lie within their 'community supports', their 'commitment to improvement' and an abundance of 'natural resources'. On the other hand the group agreed that the main weaknesses in remote and rural communities are a 'lack of opportunity for new economic development projects', an 'inability to overcome regional constraints' such as distance and 'population and career instability'.

These issues would suggest that while rural and remote communities have the capacity to develop thanks to their natural resources (both environmental and community commitment), constraints such as distance, government misconceptions and lack of skilled workers inhibit the accomplishment of significant development projects.

Whilst all the projects named on the day of the workshop address issues and opportunities within rural and remote communities, two projects in particular standout as excellent avenues for addressing the problem identified above; the Career Exchange Program and the Education Hub projects. By circulating knowledge and people from rural and remote communities through urban centres and vice versa, organisations will achieve both an understanding of the opportunities existing for their communities and the practical knowledge of how to capitalise on them. Exchange, education and communication are also the most valuable methods of encouraging understanding and acceptance in the place of misconceptions, stereotypes and fear of the unknown.

All the projects from the Economic Sustainability in Remote and Rural Communities workshop have allocated project leaders who have a responsibility within their project's actions. Townsville City Council staff will maintain an ongoing contact with these project leaders and we encourage workshop participants to update our staff on the progress they are making within each project. Wherever possible we will endeavour to offer support and guidance in accomplishing these projects for economic sustainability.

It was mentioned by workshop facilitator, Rodin Genoff, that a follow up workshop should be held in the later months of the year to discuss progress and also other projects (i.e. long term ideas) which could be put into practice. This workshop will be announced later in the year and all of May's workshop attendees will be encouraged to attend and share their progress. Incidentally, any feedback from the most recent workshop would be very valuable for our records and in helping us to organise similar workshops for the future. Please contact Townsville City Council's Economic Development team with any suggestions or thoughts you may have.

To this date, feedback from the workshop has been very positive and we look forward to your comments and participation in future events for Economic Sustainability in Rural and Remote Communities.