

KILL, CURE OR STRANGLE

The history of government intervention in three key agricultural industries on the Atherton Tablelands, 1895 – 2005

Thesis submitted by

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The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics: Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and *James Cook University Policy and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee, (Approval Number H1614).

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Abstract

The Atherton Tablelands, west of Cairns in Far North Queensland, comprise some of the richest agricultural lands in Australia. The area was settled from the 1880s, following the discovery of gold and other minerals on the Palmer River, the Hodgkinson and the Herberton fields. Situated as it is on the economic and geographic periphery of Australia, government sponsored agriculture on the Tablelands was seen not so much as a food producing venture, as a means of closer settlement and strategic defence in accord with the White Australia Policy.

Maize, dairy, and tobacco industries were set up by opening Crown Land for selection under conditions which inevitably caused destruction of thousands of acres of valuable rainforest, with consequent land degradation, erosion, and invasions of weeds. Subsequently, production became less than optimal, and without assured markets, transport systems and access to communications, the farmers struggled with subsistence conditions.

In order to keep unviable industries alive, successive Queensland and Commonwealth governments intervened with a plethora of schemes which had the effect of subjecting farm families to years of poverty and despair. In the process, the industries became subject to ever-increasing regulation which stifled enterprise, and led to over-production of commodities for the available market. All of the industries were supported to some degree by mechanisms ranging from statutory marketing to subsidies, bounties, direct grants and tariff protection.

When Australian governments moved to realign the economy of the nation according to neo-liberal principles, all of the support mechanisms which had allowed the industries to stay alive were withdrawn over a period of thirty years. The result has been predictable. Tobacco growing in the area has ceased, the dairy industry has declined to the point where it is unlikely to exist for much beyond 2010, and the maize industry is surviving as a provider of stock feed to the local market.

This study traces the establishment, development, and rationalization of each industry, and records the effects of these processes on the people, the environment, the wider community, and the politics of the area. In terms of regional decline, it is a microcosm case study of the effects of government intervention, both in the process of regulation and deregulation. The lessons to be drawn from the study point to profound implications for the production of food within a sustainable environment in Australia.

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Abbreviations

Atherton Tableland Co-operative Butter Association Ltd	ATCBA
<i>Atherton News and Barron Valley Advocate</i>	<i>AN&BVA</i>
Atherton Tableland Cooperative Butter and Bacon Company	ATCBBC
Atherton Tableland Co-operative Dairy Association	ATCDA
Atherton Tableland Maize Marketing Board	ATMMB
Australian Bureau of Agricultural And Resource Economics	ABARE
Australian Bureau of Statistics	ABS
Australian Cooperative Foods	ACF
Australian Council of Trade Unions	ACTU
Australian Government Printing Service	AGPS
Australian Labor Party	ALP
Australian Pacific Economic Cooperation	APEC
Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis	BSE
<i>Cairns Post</i>	<i>CP</i>
Australia and New Zealand Closer Economic Relations	CER
Common Agricultural Policy	CAP

Commonwealth Government Printing Service	CGPS
<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates</i>	<i>CPD</i>
Council of Australian Governments	COAG
Country Party	CP
Dairy Exit Program	DEP
Dairy Regional Adjustment Program	Dairy RAP
Dairy Structural Adjustment Program	DSAP
Eacham Historical Society	EHS
European Economic Community	EEC
European Union	EU
Federation of Australian Tobacco Growing Organisations	FATGO
Free Trade Agreement	FTA
General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade	GATT
Gross Domestic Product	GDP
Grower's Basic Quota	GBQ
<i>Herberton Advertiser</i>	<i>HA</i>
House of Representatives	H of R

Hundredweight	cwt
Industries Assistance Commission	IAC
International Monetary Fund	IMF
John Oxley Library	JOL
Liberal Party of Australia	LPA
Malanda Milk Ltd	MM
Member of the House of Representatives	MHR
Member of the Legislative Assembly	MLA
Member of the Legislative Council	MLC
Millaa Millaa Cooperative Dairy Association	MMCDA
National Farmers' Federation	NFF
National Party of Australia	NPA
North America Free Trade Agreement	NAFTA
North Queensland Cooperative Dairy Marketing Federation	NQCDMF
North Queensland Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association Pty Ltd	NQTGCA
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	OECD
Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia	PCA

Pence	d
Pound (weight)	lb
Producer Subsidy Equivalent	PSE
<i>Queensland Agricultural Journal</i>	<i>QAJ</i>
Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation	QDO
<i>Queensland Parliamentary Debates</i>	<i>QPD</i>
<i>Queensland Parliamentary Papers</i>	<i>QPP</i>
Queensland State Archives	QSA
Queensland Tobacco Adjustment Package 1997	QTAP 97
Queensland Tobacco Leaf Marketing Board	QTLMB
Queensland Tobacco Marketing	QTM
<i>Queensland Votes and Proceedings</i>	<i>QVP</i>
Returned Soldiers', Sailors', and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia	RSSAILA
Royal Commission	RC
Shilling	s
Statutory Marketing Authorities	SMAAs
<i>Tableland Examiner</i>	<i>TE</i>
<i>Tableland Examiner and Barron Valley Advocate</i>	<i>TEBVA</i>

Tablelands Research and Consultancy Services	TRACS
Technical and Further Education, College of	TAFE
Tobacco Growers Trading	TGT
Tobacco Growers' Council of Australia	TGCA
Tobacco Industry Leaf Finance Authority	TILFA
Tobacco Industry Stabilisation Plan	TISP
Ultra Heat Treated	UHT
United Kingdom	UK
United States of America	USA
World Trade Organisation	WTO

Measurements

Length

1 inch	=	2.54 centimetres
1 foot	=	30.5 centimetres
1 yard	=	91.5 centimetres
1 mile	=	1.61 kilometres

Area

40 perches	=	1 rood
4 roods	=	1 acre
1 acre	=	.405 hectares

Weight

1 ounce	=	28.3 grams
16 ounces	=	1 pound
1 pound	=	454 grams
112 pounds	=	1 hundredweight
20 hundredweight	=	1 ton
1 ton	=	1.02 tonne

Volume

1 pint	=	568 millilitres
2 pints	=	1 quart
4 quarts	=	1 gallon
1 gallon	=	4.55 litres
8 gallons	=	1 bushel

Currency

12 pence	=	1 shilling
20 shillings	=	1 pound (£1)
£1	=	\$2 (1966)
\$1	=	100 cents