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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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Humanities
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Declaration on Ethics

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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Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the role which my principal supervisor, Dr Jan Wegner, played in the writing of this thesis. She was there every step of the way, guiding, suggesting, constructively criticising, and raising the bar of her expectations to ensure a satisfactory outcome. Without her help and support I would have lost heart at the first hurdle. My other supervisor, Dr Doug Hunt also encouraged and offered valuable advice on the political content of the work. My Research Student Monitor, Dr Peter Griggs, was most supportive, and showed interest in the progress of the study all the way through. I also acknowledge the provision of an Australian Postgraduate Award. Without that assistance, this study would not have been possible.

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It is with awe that I acknowledge the role of the hundreds, if not thousands, of people who developed and established the Atherton Tablelands over the last hundred years. Their work and sacrifice was not in vain. The visions of their youth may have turned to the ashen dreams of their old age, but their legacy is the beautiful and productive place that exists today. Although the future is uncertain, it is certain that there will always be pioneers willing to try yet another industry from which to make a living.
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

Atherton News and Barron Valley Advocate  AN&BVA

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

Cairns Post  CP

Australia and New Zealand Closer Economic Relations  CER

Common Agricultural Policy  CAP
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hundredweight</td>
<td>cwt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industries Assistance Commission</td>
<td>IAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
<td>IMF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Oxley Library</td>
<td>JOL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal Party of Australia</td>
<td>LPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malanda Milk Ltd</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the House of Representatives</td>
<td>MHR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>MLA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member of the Legislative Council</td>
<td>MLC</td>
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<td>Millaa Millaa Cooperative Dairy Association</td>
<td>MMCDA</td>
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<td>National Farmers’ Federation</td>
<td>NFF</td>
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<td>National Party of Australia</td>
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<td>North America Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>North Queensland Cooperative Dairy Marketing Federation</td>
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<td>North Queensland Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association Pty Ltd</td>
<td>NQTGCA</td>
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<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia</td>
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Pence

Pound (weight)

Producer Subsidy Equivalent

Queensland Agricultural Journal

Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation

Queensland Parliamentary Debates

Queensland Parliamentary Papers

Queensland State Archives

Queensland Tobacco Adjustment Package 1997

Queensland Tobacco Leaf Marketing Board

Queensland Tobacco Marketing

Queensland Votes and Proceedings

Returned Soldiers', Sailors', and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia

Royal Commission

Shilling

Statutory Marketing Authorities

Tableland Examiner

Tableland Examiner and Barron Valley Advocate

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Tablelands Research and Consultancy Services
Technical and Further Education, College of
Tobacco Growers Trading
Tobacco Growers’ Council of Australia
Tobacco Industry Leaf Finance Authority
Tobacco Industry Stabilisation Plan
Ultra Heat Treated
United Kingdom
United States of America
World Trade Organisation

TRACS
TAFE
TGT
TGCA
TILFA
TISP
UHT
UK
USA
WTO
### Measurements

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<th><strong>Length</strong></th>
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<td>1 inch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 foot</td>
<td>30.5 centimetres</td>
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<td>1 yard</td>
<td>91.5 centimetres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 mile</td>
<td>1.61 kilometres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 pint = 568 millilitres</td>
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<td>2 pints = 1 quart</td>
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<td>4 quarts = 1 gallon</td>
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<td>1 gallon = 4.55 litres</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8 gallons = 1 bushel</td>
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<th><strong>Area</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>40 perches</td>
<td>1 rood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 roods</td>
<td>1 acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 acre</td>
<td>.405 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 pence = 1 shilling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 shillings = 1 pound (£1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£1 = $2 (1966)</td>
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<td>$1 = 100 cents</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<td>20 hundredweight</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 ton</td>
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