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Allan Dale

Beyond the North–South Culture Wars

Reconciling Northern Australia's Recent Past With Its Future

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Preface

Northern Australia holds a special place in the hearts of most Australians, but it is particularly important to the million or so people who actually live north of the Tropic of Capricorn. While I grew up and live in Queensland's Wet Tropics, I've also had the pleasure of having worked across several of the north's diverse landscapes and communities, including Cape York Peninsula, the Torres Strait, the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the Northern Territory. My career has also been spent working closely with key northern industries, including mining, pastoralism, and tourism. Given my long experience in the north, I reckon it is a place like no other on the planet; a rich history and diverse set of cultures close to the Asia Pacific, a stunning landscape and a place of tremendous opportunity. These are just some of the reasons why northern Australians so deeply value the unique lifestyle that the north offers. Having also spent time working and living in Australia's populated capitals, however, I can also see why many in the nation's south also hold passionate views about the development and conservation of this special place.

No matter where you live in Australia, it would be hard not to notice that lately there has been much excited chatter in government circles, the media and academia about the future development and potential of northern Australia. Australian agriculturalists are looking to the nation's north to escape the high profile decline in water and soil resources in places like the Murray Darling. At the same time, many national governments across the globe are also looking to the north with a weather-eye on their own food security. Many Australians are also conscious that booming mineral and gas exploration and development across the north has helped underpin the nation's economic success in recent years. At the same time, the south's conservation sector would like to see much of the north preserved as iconic wilderness. Additionally, both conservation and resource development interests alike are often at odds with the interests of the north's traditional owners, many of whom remain trapped in welfare dependency and poverty.

There is indeed much opportunity for northern Australians within these new national debates. The past five decades of north Australian history, however, have largely been characterized by several national-scale conflicts being played out within and around regional and local communities in the north. Some of these have centered on the impact of major mining development such as the Coronation Hill dispute in Kakadu National Park and the development of gas processing facilities at James Price Point in the Kimberley. Others have concerned the growing

regulation of development opportunities within the northern Australian landscape, best represented by the proposed *Wild River* declarations in Cape York Peninsula. These types of development and conservation-based conflicts, however, strongly interface with the bigger policy debates about 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and other Australians. Importantly, all three of these conflicts have strong south-to-north drivers as it is the south that has the political power, money and population to deliver big changes in northern communities and landscapes.

With the view of learning from the past to help secure a brighter future for the north, this book explores the deep cultural drivers behind these south-to-north conflicts and suggests that a cultural divide between the north and the south needs to be reconciled if the nation as a whole is to benefit from this new phase of northern development. I first explore where the continuation of these historical conflicts could take us without a clear forward or guiding agenda. To do this, I tell personal stories from my long and diverse experiences in the north. To seek some conclusions, the book draws on these stories to help shape a cohesive agenda for the future.

My key take-home message is that the coming new phase of northern development doesn't have to repeat the litany of major policy and development conflicts that have riddled the recent past. The key to genuine progress relies on new approaches to policy development, planning at the regional and landscape scale and decision making about major projects. This will require governments, conservation interests, industries, and those in the north changing the culture away from how things have been done in the past. In all cases, this culture change means the parties *really* sitting down together to jointly decide the future directions that we will need to be taking together for the long term. Quality science and evidence need to infuse the decision-making processes being used, and together we need to monitor our joint progress toward shared goals. Much more also needs to be done to devolve the power for decision making into the north.

In telling these stories and in drawing out these conclusions, it could have been argued that there is no real north–south divide in Australia but instead just a rural–urban one. Others would argue that a similar east–west divide exists in Australia as well. I'd argue that while this case *could* be made, the north is so much less populated, less developed, and so culturally and climatically different to the south, that the difference is well worth highlighting. I'd make the case that the divide is real, even if only to draw attention to the importance of the north in a national context and the need for these conflict themes to be resolved to secure the whole nation's future.

Allan Dale

Acknowledgments

Over many years, numerous people, industries, institutions, and communities have motivated me to create a national focus on northern Australia and to push toward a clearer future for the north.

First, I owe thanks to the people I worked with during my doctoral studies exploring the frequent collapse of government-funded rural development projects in remote Indigenous communities. In particular, working in the Aurukun community made it clear to me that northern Australia is unquestionably an Indigenous domain. Community elders such as Gladys Tybingompa, Frances Yunkaporta, and Silas Wolmby helped me to understand the true spirit and cultural complexity within the Wik nation. Work in central Queensland's Woorabinda community gave me an understanding of the government controls. Indigenous people faced in their communities well into the 1980s. Here, people like Mayor Terry Munns and Campbell Leisha, head of the community's cattle enterprise, showed me the importance of maintaining hope in communities facing such significant obstacles. In this work, I was lucky to have three unique supervisors. Geoff McDonald instilled in me the analytical foundations needed to understand how decisions are made in communities and regions. This planning expertise was strengthened by my anthropologist co-supervisors Athol Chase and Jon von Sturmer.

My doctoral studies melded seamlessly into some very illuminating consultancy work, primarily in Indigenous affairs. Much of this work played out within agencies such as the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Queensland Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, the Aboriginal Development Commission and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Moving in this world started to build my understanding of what does and doesn't work in the design and delivery of government programs. Key influences for me in these years included people like Mick Miller, Geoff Richardson, Mick Gooda, Ross Rolfe, Bill White, Merv Ah Kee and Tony Malamoo.

I came to owe much to Marcus Lane and Helen Ross, particularly during the ground breaking days of the Resource Assessment Commission Inquiry into mining at Coronation Hill. The experience started to build my understanding of the difference between politics and bureaucratic management. It also led me into an increasing amount of community development work in the north and, for the first time, in desert communities in the Northern Territory. Over this time, I was privileged to work very closely with some of the nation's most prominent Indigenous

leaders from within northern Australia. Being there on the day the Cape York Land Council was formed, for example, allowed me to experience a very memorable and critical juncture in north Queensland's history. At the same time, dealing with the emerging leadership in the conservation movement gave me a strong sense of how that largely southern-based sector views the world. Key people in that sector who better understood the north included Don Henry and Rosey Crisp.

My first foray into the Queensland Government was the key to learning how governments work, and as one of the few in government that knew something about social impact assessment, I was thrown into the heart of decision making at the highest level. Running Queensland's first Social Impact Assessment Unit was an unparalleled experience for me during the final years of the Goss Government. Tim Gleeson and Jan Williams, my first public sector bosses, taught me much about restraint and gave me the confidence to hold my ground within negotiations. I also thank Brian Head, then Chair of the Queensland Office of Public Sector Management, for instilling in me a stronger sense of the importance of dynamic governance in the face of 'wicked' problems. This experience introduced me to wide range of State and Federal agencies and every significant sector in the north. I dealt with leaders in such disparate groups as the Queensland Council of Social Services, Agforce, the Queensland Resources Council, the Urban Development Institute of Australia and Tourism Queensland. It also brought me directly into the world of the north's wide range of political leaders like Paul Bell, Mike Berwick, Ian McDonald, Jan McLucas, Bob Katter, Warren Entsch, Warren Snowden and many others.

I thank John Taylor, along with Jenny Bellamy, for headhunting me to get my teeth back into research on regional scale planning systems in CSIRO. Together with Phil Price of the Land and Water Research and Development Corporation and our partner rangeland regions in western NSW and Western Australia, I was able to rethink things I had been doing in government. Going back from CSIRO to the Senior Executive level within the Queensland Government, I was involved in building stronger intergovernmental partnerships with the Commonwealth. I particularly thank Scott Spencer, Mike Lee, and Alex Rankin for their support in helping me to come to terms with how Federalism could actually work effectively for the benefit of the nation.

On her death bed, Rosey Crisp convinced me it was time to return to where my heart for country was: Far North Queensland. I took on the role of CEO of Terrain NRM, the community-based regional natural resource management body for the Wet Tropics. This transition reinforced my views on the importance of strong, regionally driven governance, and my colleagues in industry, social services, and other sectors in the northern regions have continued to inspire me to this end. Penny van Oosterzee and Noel Preece, Terrain's joint venture partners, also inspired me to chase major economic reforms to secure a system for ecosystem service payments in the north.

This book could not have been completed without the support of my family, particularly through the contributions of my four brothers Terry, Harry, Glenn, and Paul, and my parents, Val and Harry Dale. It goes without saying that my wife Michele and kids Taylor and Lewahna are the engines that drive my passion for

life, and they encouraged me to write these stories. For reviewing drafts and for helping this particular book reach publication, I would like to thank Andrew Johnson, Melissa George, Ian Poiner, Ruth Wallace, Anne Stephens, Bruce Taylor, Noelene Iken, Bruce Martin, Michael Winer, Sheridan Morris, Katrina Keith, Jenny McHugh, and Geoff Lawrence. I thank those who have provided materials and annecdotes and note that every effort has been made to contact the copyright holders of the figures reproduced from other sources. Anyone who has not been properly credited is requested to contact the publishers and author so that due acknowledgement may be made in subsequent editions. Indeed, while there are many others to thank, due to the limits of space and memory, I seek their forgiveness in advance. Finally, this book was supported through the Australian Government's Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) program (within the Northern Futures CRN at Charles Darwin University).

Otherwise, thank you all for you're your support in the process and looking forward to working further with Petra re marketing and distribution. Would appreciate an estimate of the day you think it will actually be finalised at this point.

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About the Author

Associate Professor Allan Dale is the Research Leader in Tropical Regional Development with James Cook University's Cairns Institute and an Honorary Professorial Research Fellow with Charles Darwin University's Northern Institute. Having grown up in Far North Queensland and having held senior executive roles within the Queensland Government, Allan has a keen interest in the governance of Northern Australia. Having started his career as an agricultural scientist, his doctoral work explored rural development in remote Indigenous communities across the north. He has research, management and policy experience in regional development and natural resource governance, including in northern Australia's pastoral, fishing, forestry, tourism, and mining sectors. As the inaugural head of the Queensland Government's Social Impact Assessment Unit, he was involved in

decision making from national to local levels. Before joining the Cairns Institute, Allan was the CEO of one of the nation's leading community-based regional natural resource management bodies; Terrain NRM. In his spare time, Allan is Chair of Regional Development Australia (Far North Queensland and Torres Strait) and lives with his wife and two children at Mirriwinni, a small northern sugar-growing community.

Part I
The Cultural Divide Between Northern and Southern Australia

Chapter 1
Themes in the North's Recent History

Abstract The last 50 years of north Australian history has been characterised by high profile conflicts surrounding major conservation campaigns, big resource developments and contentious government policy directions and outcomes with respect to Indigenous development. These conflicts draw much breath from major cultural divides between northern and southern Australia. The south has the finances, population and the locus of political power to exert major influence over the north. In the interests of the future of the nation as a whole, however, both the north and the south need each other, and a real effort is needed to reconcile these cultural differences. As a foundation for the balance of this book, this chapter explores where the future of the north may head without such reconciliation. It also considers the need for a clear forward agenda.

Keywords North Australian history · Future northern scenarios · Cultural drivers

1.1 An Introduction

Over the decade since the turn of the century, many major themes in the Australian press and literature would suggest northern Australia is a world apart. Most hint at a major conflict between the values and cultures of northern Australians and those of the rest of the nation.[1] Prominent spats include the black–white history wars, debates over tree clearing on pastoral lands, major new agricultural and dam developments, the tensions emerging from a two speed economy, the Commonwealth intervention in Indigenous communities, an Indigenous backlash against wilderness declarations, and even the more recent suspension of the live cattle trade. These fights suggest that northern Australians and those in the south need to reach a greater mutual understanding if we are to secure a better future for the nation as a whole.

[1] For the purposes of this book, northern Australia is considered to include all Australian lands and waters that lie north of the Tropic of Capricorn.

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Many northern Australians want people in the south to better understand this unique, majestic land and its importance. Over recent years, I have seen several columnists and academics have a go, but most contribute stories written from a southern perspective and intended for a southern audience. Few have tried to start a genuine dialogue between the north and the south; a dialogue focused on how the nation as a whole might work towards a better future for northern Australia.

I've grown up and continue to live in northern Australia, so I hope to bring a northern voice to the opening up of such a dialogue. My work has had a wide reach across the north. From the mid-1980s on, I could usually be found researching the common collapse of rural development projects in Cape York Peninsula's Aboriginal communities. Later I became more involved in broad community development work in northern Queensland and the Northern Territory. Since then, I've just about done everything from dealing with major development conflicts in the mining, forestry and tourism sectors to planning to make sure we don't stuff up our soils, water supplies, rivers and forests. I've been a CSIRO researcher, a policy-wonk, a government regulator and a hands-on land manager. My role as the Chief Executive of a not-for profit natural resource management body for the Wet Tropics brought all these things together. I've played out these roles from the international to the local scale, and in doing so I've built up a sense of how things work, or don't work, in northern Australia.

For me personally, northern Australia is like no other place. It is relatively undeveloped amidst a crowded world. Its eclectic mix of ethnic (Aboriginal, Islander, Italian, Irish, Chinese, Japanese, Indian and others) and industry (pastoral, fishing, forestry, mining, farming and tourism) cultures is unique. It is perhaps the world's most extensive Indigenous domain; a wide landscape where pockets of mainstream economic activity function *within* the world of the nation's original inhabitants.[2] While the north is remote in Australian terms, it is closer to the population centres of South East Asia and the Pacific than our own major centres in the south. It has a moody wet season full of cyclonic risk. The wet has a breathtaking intensity that is pretty well impossible to get out of your blood. The north is where *my* heart for country lies.

While things have changed a lot in the past five decades of north Australian history, the changes are about to accelerate. Australia's southern agriculturalists are looking north to escape the consequences of poor land and water use, droughts that are harder to bounce back from, the insidious creep of dryland salinity and dwindling water supplies. North Australia's mineral resources have been driving Australia's two-speed economic growth post the global financial crisis; developments that contrast with intractable Indigenous disadvantage and poverty. Further, while those in the south think the north will be wetter under climate change compared to the south, it is also likely that there will be an increase in the frequency of whopper (Category 4/5) cyclones. New weeds and pests are changing entire landscapes forever, and all this is happening at a time when the rest of the

[2] See (Gammage 2013).

world is looking to treasure, even pay for, north Australia's wild values and outstanding biological and cultural diversity.

These coming pressures make me uneasy. At the same time though, opportunities are emerging that might help us as a nation take the right course for the future of the north to the great benefit of the nation as a whole. Many of these opportunities have not been available before and the possibility of taking advantage of them makes me want to get up in the morning. One thing I do know for certain, however, is that getting the best social, economic and ecological outcomes for northern Australia's future will require the goodwill, intellect and combined resources of all Australians; both those in the north and those in the south of the nation.

My own and my family's involvement in the north's recent history is deep, and this gives me an understanding of where the opportunities and pitfalls lie. Indeed, my four brothers have all worked across the widest range of the north's diverse industries. Over the past forty years, we have all been returning (somewhat irregularly) to our home near Cairns from employment in vastly different industries and communities from Cairns to Kununurra. Indeed, Christmas with my family, when we still came together, would have been rich pickings for an anthropologist or historian with an interest in recording modern north Australian history and culture. We have had a bizarre mix of roles ranging from the precise government regulator to the sun-dried fisherman. Our industry backgrounds have covered the key economic foundations of the north, including mining, cattle, tourism, urban development, fishing and forestry. Our work has taken us from the northeast's wet tropical forests to remote exploration camps in the northern Tanami; from island communities in the Torres Strait to extensive pastoral properties and trawlers in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Collectively we have a wealth of experience from the north's recent past.

My family, however, originally came from southern Australia, and indeed, I have spent significant parts of my working life employed in government agencies in southern capitals. Having lived and worked in both Australian cultures, I can see real depth in the tensions between the visions both those in the north and the south have for northern Australia. While I have always been able to see and experience a deep divide between both cultures, at the same time, I can also see a great potential for aligning the aspirations and interests of both.

I believe that this dual perspective gives me the credibility to start the new dialogue needed between the north and the south of Australia. To do this, it seemed best to use my own personal experiences in the north to tell stories that would help me to explore the recent past and to set a foundation for thinking about the future. I will do this by using these stories to tease out north Australia's environment and culture *and* to document the events from recent history that have implications for its future.

1.2 The Present Becomes History

At 42, I reached that age where I realised history included things that had occurred within my lifetime. Maybe that's why *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* selected that particular number as being critical to an understanding of the universe. Until I reached that age, I'd considered history to be before my time, and most history books about northern Australia would reel out the usual fair of dreamtime stories, maritime adventures, frontier conflicts and propaganda-tinged accounts of successive waves of resource development. Some historians also now detail the achievements of non-Anglo migrants from fields as far away as the Pacific Islands, Japan and China. Finally, there are stories of World War II (which affected the north more directly than the south) and that prosperous period of post-war development.

If I am lucky enough to live well into the middle of the 21st century, however, the future record of the modern history of northern Australia, from around 1970 to 2020, would likely describe a series of far more diverse, subtle and indeed low-profile conflicts than those from our colonial past. In fact, three key conflict-based historical themes would stand out in the haze of detailed facts and dates.

The first conflict theme would relate to political skirmishes arising from rampant resource development within the stunning natural and complex cultural environments of the north; a landscape considered to be of national, if not international value by those hungering for the sanctity of wilderness from their base in the over-developed parts of the south.

The second would be a mirror image conflict between the progressive creep of environmental regulation across the northern frontier and a subsequent shift in management control from strongly independent and individualistic northern land owners and managers to more faceless groups of southern bureaucrats or regulators.

Finally, the third theme would relate to the reassertion of Indigenous rights in the ownership and management of their own economy and their land and sea resources across northern Australia. Although Indigenous north Australians have always asserted their role in managing their country, among other historical events, it wasn't until after the constitutional changes associated with the national referendum in 1967 that they could start to claw back *actual* control over their economic and social destiny.

As with much world history, this modern north Australian history has been defined by conflict over natural resource use. These have played out via disputes between people and interest groups with vastly different social agenda and values. The thing connecting all three of these conflict themes, however, is to a large extent, the fact that they all draw breath from cultural tensions within and between northern and southern Australia. They are also made more complicated by differences between the climate and geography of the north compared to the south.

It is this complex north–south cultural and geographic divide, and the impact that it has had on the recent history of northern Australia, that is the focus of this book. While this more modern phase in the history of the north is not yet over, I do

believe the most significant battles have been fought, but perhaps not yet settled. In fact, they may be just about to intensify. As in most conflicts, there have been no clear winners or losers. Indeed, all the parties have come out of the experience changed forever. In some ways, this period of north Australian history is almost the metaphorical reverse of the recurring patterns in ancient Chinese history; where the remote northern plainsmen invaded the more developed southern townships in successive waves. In northern Australia, the agenda comes from the developed south to the remote north. In both cases, however, after each wave of influence, those undertaking the colonial project have eventually found themselves transformed by their new conquests.

It is a fact that waves of different social, political and economic agendas from southern Australia have washed over the north in its recent history. Indeed, the three conflict-related themes mentioned above arise from three very distinct south-to-north cultural drivers. This is not to say that these drivers came only from the south. In fact, as in any contested landscape, there have always been local supporters of the coming waves of changes. The south, however, has the political power, money and population to deliver big changes in the northern landscape. For this reason, it is fair to focus on the south to north aspect of these successive waves of change.

Even when there is apparent agreement between those in the north and south, you can usually count on there still being a wide cultural gulf between the parties. These differences come from the very different life experiences of northern and southern Australians. A great example of seeming agreement being underpinned by fatal differences was the southern green and northern Indigenous alliance over future land tenure and land use issues in Cape York Peninsula from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. This so-called green-black alliance has crumbled in recent years after the wilderness ideals of the greens threatened future economic opportunities for northern Indigenous communities. This breakdown recently reached a peak in the overt and very bitter conflicts arising from Queensland's proposed Wild Rivers legislation.

1.2.1 Three Different South-to-North Agenda

The first of these three south-to-north cultural agendas, driven by the *natural resource exploitationists*, is based on the problematic view that any natural resource not being applied to the good of perpetual and unlimited economic growth is 'wasted'. Anyone picking up Brisbane's *Courier Mail* in early 2007 would likely see pleas from some in the drought stricken south to pipe water down from the 'water rich' north. Apart from the crazy economics, a great irony in this call is that, had southerners better considered the limits to the use of water, then they may not have had to look north to quench their thirst in the first place.

Equally, at the same time, the front page headline in the *Cairns Post* had the northern sympathisers of the resource exploitationists decrying the planned release of environmental water from Lake Tinaroo on the Atherton Tablelands. They considered this an affront to their thirsty southern cousins. In their view, 'all that water just runs out sea and goes to waste', ignoring the fact that environmental flows also underpin the region's tourism and fishing economies.

Equally problematic are the *resource preservationists*; those who seek a northern wilderness but appear to lack much empathy for those people who actually live in, care for, and derive an income from the northern Australian landscape. My oldest brother actually calls the proponents of this agenda the *resource abstinationists*. While I won't use that term, I do like the sense, however, that he views the resource preservationists somewhat in the same light as those of us who think *breatharians* should try more solid foods in their diet.

The resource preservationist agenda ignores the legitimate economic aspirations of northern Australians as well as their strong social connections to country. The agenda, like the resource exploitationist agenda, has an essence of merit. But like the resource exploitationists, the resource preservationists often lack empathy for those living within the areas they have pencilled in as turn-of-the-century style 'wilderness'.

Finally, the third cultural agenda relates to southern Australia's response to the *Indigenous rights* agenda. Led by Indigenous Australians, this agenda relates to a legitimate historical redress; overcoming the inequity of past (but in living memory) conflict in the north. Interestingly, it is an agenda of big concern to both the resource exploitationists *and* the resource preservationists. The resource exploitationists see Indigenous rights as a barrier to *their* unlimited access to land and natural resources. The resource preservationists, while often couching their response in sympathetic language, privately and sometimes publicly fear that hard won Indigenous rights might not fit well with the people-less landscapes they dream of (i.e., they also may at times see Indigenous rights as a barrier to *their* unlimited control of land and natural resources).

While I perhaps simplistically and cheekily describe and refer to the first two of these agenda as caricatures at the extreme ends of two political cultures, I do recognise that very few people could be labelled as holding such simplistic notions. I use these terms, however, in an attempt to define and position the staging posts in the north Australia divide. These two competing agenda have predominantly set the stage for conflict in the north's recent history. The Indigenous rights agenda, however, is different in that it can't be cast as an extreme agenda; particularly given the gracious, patient and non-violent way Indigenous Australians have sought to remedy the past and ongoing injustices that they face. This third agenda however, does create a unique dynamic compared to a simple environment versus development conflict.

1.3 Where to Without a Forward Agenda?

I'm not writing this account of modern north Australian history for the sake of record keeping. I seek to progress a national dialogue about a cohesive forward agenda. To do this though, I need to give a sense of why, in this closing stage of modern north Australian history, these conflicts can't be left to continue unabated. I also need to suggest where things could be headed if we don't get these conflicts resolved. Where could each of these three north–south conflict themes take us without a forward agenda to guide all Australians towards a better future for the north?[3]

1.3.1 Rampant Resource Exploitation Without Effective Conflict Management

The world's economy and population is growing rapidly while biodiversity, mineral, soil and water resources *and* our climate are in progressive decline. One thing I know as a natural resource scientist and planner is that, across the globe, many of our previously robust agricultural regions, forests and fisheries are becoming less productive. Our global biodiversity is in retreat. Potable water is becoming scarce in many parts of the world. When we add the spectre of human-induced climate change, then areas with wilderness qualities and high biodiversity suddenly become significant: globally significant.

With the exception of the high economic (but non-renewable) value of mineral and energy resources, northern Australia is a pretty marginal productive resource. That's why it remains far less developed and less populated than southern Australia. The dual combination of impoverished soils and a harsh climate make that a reality. While mineral resources provide the most significant economic base, mining is generally the domain of national and multi-national corporations. While economic benefits certainly accrue to the north, the profits generally gush to the south or overseas.

Given the twin assets of stunning terrestrial and marine environments (particularly the Great Barrier Reef) and under projected global climate scenarios, the ecological and Indigenous cultural resources of northern Australia are set to become more valuable; and I don't just mean for the world's eco-tourists. In a rapidly unfolding world of tradeable offsets, triple bottom line accounting and ethical development with a low ecological footprint, northern Australia's wild, biodiverse and culturally rich landscapes become an investment jewel. While carbon is a regulated, tradeable commodity in many countries at the moment, it is likely that tradeable biodiversity, water quality and even social justice offsets or credits won't be far behind.

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[3] See these scenarios also detailed in (Dale 2013).

In northern Australia, rampant resource exploitation without looking after these values is not sensible economic management. It corrodes the crown jewels before they have been fully revealed to the market. This is not to say we should shut down existing resource industries or prevent new ones emerging; as indeed such industries tend to affect only small areas. It does, however, mean planning much more seriously to identify the values we are seeking to protect in the north and managing all economic development in ways that look after and sustain these values. Just sending Australia's agriculture north, for example, because we've stuffed the natural resource base in the south, isn't a sound solution to Australia's economic future.

Northern Australia's economy has never been particularly resilient, and, more than in the south, it has risen and fallen on the strength of key resources markets. These ups and downs range from the early mining and forest resource booms to the rise and fall of buffalo and crocodile-skin markets. They include the cattle price crash in the 1970s and the temporary collapse of tourism in the pilot's strike in the 1980s (and more recently under the Global Financial Crisis). Few recognise how close the pilot's strike took significant parts of north Queensland to the brink of economic collapse.

A future based on short term partying on the back of unregulated resource exploitation, without building a more diverse economy with continuous reforms to improve productivity, will keep the north in a permanent boom and bust cycle.

1.3.2 Regulatory Creep Without Social Justice

Equally as problematic for the north is the prospect of southern-derived regulation of the landscape which brings no economic return or which limits other already marginal opportunities for economic development. In effect, it's the economic equivalent of the south affording the luxury of locking up the north as its winter wilderness playground. Even if the most vocal resource preservationists don't visit very often though, at least they will sleep well at night knowing that a wilderness exists. Trouble is, they will also sleep well at night knowing they didn't have to pay much at all for that warm inner feeling while northerners wear the costs.

Ultimately, the 'regulate the north' routine creates significant injustices, setting the scene for future social and economic problems. Indigenous communities, already with all the hallmarks of long abandoned missions and reserves, are left with even fewer future economic options. We also create a wave of disengagement for our northern grazing and fishing communities. It doesn't surprise me that much of the language I hear among the north's graziers is not that dissimilar to the language used by marginalised and dispossessed Aboriginal communities. We are potentially setting a significant and important part of north Australia's social and cultural landscape on a familiar path towards welfare. All this at a time when we actually need people in the landscape to manage the very environmental values the south seeks to protect.

Just as problematic from my point of view is the political impact that could arise from the creation of perpetuated Indigenous inequality and a new class of disenfranchised rural communities. Bad political deeds come back to bite in the ballot box. This could have two very unwelcome effects for Australia. First it could contribute to the continuation of the problematic spectre of reactionary political movements. Such movements often seek a return to unregulated developmentalism and increased racial friction. When your chips are down, it's always easier to bash up the group in society that is even worse off than you are. It's harder to target the institutions that got you into trouble in the first place. In short, the environmental gains from heavy-handed regulation could be just as easily undone via future political retribution.

1.3.3 Achieving Native Title Without Land Reform and Community Development

Returning title and access to country to traditional owners through native title, land purchase and other means is not just a social justice issue; it is an economic one. Despite land redistribution, however, the economic state and crippling social dysfunction of many Indigenous communities remains. As a result, progressing the land and sea rights agenda of Indigenous people without significant, determined and tenacious investments in Indigenous-led land reform and community development runs several risks.

First, emerging Indigenous communities, Land Trusts and Prescribed Body Corporates proud to have their land title formally recognised, struggle by themselves with the long haul economic and social reforms needed to take advantage of the recovered rights and resources. They also struggle to find support to look after their 'country' effectively. Often this has led to major land management problems and significant internal community conflict as tribes, clans and families fight over how to achieve the best result from returned lands.

Second, failed Indigenous enterprises and poor land management are the ammunition some need to attack Indigenous land rights, land purchase and the redistributive benefits of the *Native Title Act* and other approaches to land redistribution. In a brilliant book tracing the early history of land programs run by the Australian Government, Ian Palmer matches the cyclical failure of such initiatives to political backlashes to significant land purchase activities (Palmer 1988).

The final dilemma this situation creates for Indigenous communities, and perhaps the most problematic, comes back to the continuing lost opportunities and the perpetuation of social dysfunction and economic marginalisation. Every lost community development opportunity simply delays the return of traditional owners to a strong position of social and economic wellbeing within Australian society.

1.4 The Structure of this Book

This book is split into three distinct parts. Part I sets the context: why I believe there is value in talking about a north–south cultural divide in Australia and why Australia as a whole needs clarity and direction to bring this conflict-ridden phase of modern history to a close. Part II tells stories from my own (and wider family's) experiences from within this modern history of northern Australia. I tell these stories as a way of shining a light on this north–south cultural divide. I always think real stories, sprinkled with an analytical top dressing, are a good way to experience history. These stories also are played out around the three conflict themes I have already discussed. In addition, I have intentionally used them as a vehicle to give a stronger sense of why the north is different from the south in climatic, market and geographic terms.

Finally, Part III sets out that unashamed forward agenda that I mentioned earlier. The first chapter in Part III focuses on the need to build strong region-centred governance systems that can integrate the planning and implementation of both improved natural resource management *and* economic *and* social development. Working within our broader civil society, these integrated systems could build upon the north's existing and emerging public institutions and partnerships; Federal, State and Territory, local government, industry, a wide array of regional development bodies, Indigenous governance structures and research institutions. Together, these institutions could work together to collectively define a preferred future for different regions and to build the collaborative partnerships needed to achieve it. By region, I mean those often self-defined regions that make sense to people in the north in biophysical, social and geographic terms (e.g., the Torres Strait, Cape York, Kimberly regions, etc.).

The second forward agenda chapter in Part III looks at turning the market potential of Australia's biodiverse and culturally-rich landscapes into a reality. This involves the creation of an eco-system services trading regime that looks to southern Australia, if not the rest of the world, investing in those precious north Australian values. The third looks at Australia building the courage and commitment needed to support Indigenous-led land reform and to tackle Indigenous disadvantage. Finally, the concluding chapter brings the stories presented and the forward agenda proposed in this book to a meaningful close.

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