

Savannah Symposium sets direction for the future of Northern Australia

More than 120 delegates from across northern Australia converged on Darwin last week to attend the inaugural Savannah Symposium, convened by Savannah Guides Ltd, Savannah Way Ltd and the Tropical Savannas Management CRC.



Industry, NGO and government participants and researchers illustrated successful initiatives in tourism, mining, natural resource management and indigenous ventures from across Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Speakers came from a diversity of businesses, large and small, NGOs, government agencies and research organisations. The audience was buoyed by the passion for and commitment to northern Australia, which was evident from the presentations.

The symposium demonstrated the close organisational, social and economic relationships that exist across northern Australia, where organisations deal with similar conditions and issues and have much to gain from interaction and exchange. It illustrated the challenges that businesses, government agencies and other organisations face when operating in this remote and sparsely populated part of Australia with a unique set of ecological conditions and constraints.

Indigenous economic development and environmental integrity of savannah landscapes were seen as major pillars for the future prosperity of the North.

Delegates were unanimous in their assessment that east-west linkages were paramount to the northern economy and applauded the achievements of Savannah Way Ltd in coordinating the internationally recognised themed tourism drive across two states and the NT.

The symposium allowed participants to renew and expand their personal and business networks, exchange experiences and develop strategies for a prosperous future.

The symposium highlighted the need for strategic research to generate innovation and support industries and government agencies in improving the way they do business in an increasingly uncertain and challenging future.

Effective governance, real community engagement, appropriate property rights and infrastructure to support regional development were seen as critical to the future of northern communities. Speakers noted a serious disconnect between indigenous and non-indigenous economies which must be addressed to enable advancement of north Australia.

The symposium strengthened the momentum for a new northern Australia CRC bid, which is planned for 2010, which will add value to existing initiatives including the NA Land and Water Taskforce and Water Resources Assessment. The bid will advance a holistic agenda to improve the wellbeing of residents as well as the people of Australia by (1) harnessing the physical, environmental, social and human assets of northern Australia, (2) generating opportunities for social and economic development, and (3) overcoming emerging challenges.

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