

## Economic resources

### Principle:

*Land, extractive minerals, selected plants, animal stock and water are natural economic resources that should be available for sustainable production, and protected from alienating uses.*

In 1996 Tiwi leaders identified the urgency of developing an independent economy as a route to improving social outcomes, and elimination of the destructive influence of welfare dependence. The greatest assets of the Tiwi Islands are their natural resources and the people, and natural resource utilisation has been identified as a key area for economic development.

It is also an area with high potential for providing long-term employment and training opportunities that are attractive to Tiwi residents. The challenge facing Tiwi organisations is to ensure that economic development supports and/or enhances the cultural and natural resource values of the region. Economic development and the associated allocation and management of natural resources has become a major focus of Tiwi Land Council activity.

An economic development strategy for the region prepared in 1996 provided a comprehensive assessment of mostly small enterprise and internal opportunity. It has been the belief of Tiwi leaders, however, that one large core enterprise on the Islands will provide the springboard for sustained, long term economic development. Small 'cottage industry' type enterprises in the past have proven to be high risk and, although valuable, have not provided the means for economic self-sufficiency.

Several areas of significant concentrations of mineral sands have been identified on the north coast of Melville Island and the west coast of Bathurst Island, and although Tiwi leaders have previously chosen not to pursue mining in the region, it remains a potential economic resource. The two key economic ventures that have been identified from natural resource utilisation that also have the potential to underpin a broader economic base for the region are aquaculture and plantation forestry.

Puig carried out a suitability assessment for aquaculture in 2000, and identified three prime sea cage sites in the region in addition to Port Hurd. He also provided detailed assessments for land based prawn aquaculture, and identified a number of sites with potential. The Port Hurd sea cage aquaculture facility is currently the only aquaculture project in the region.

Forestry was identified as a potential industry for the region as early as 1921, and advantages over the mainland included better rainfall distribution, more favourable soil types, groundwater reserves and lower incidences of termite attack. Hollingsworth carried out land resource capability assessments for forestry in 2003, and identified significant areas with high capability.

The current forestry project involves 30,000ha of plantation development, which is less than 4% of the Islands land mass, and around 5% of the selected vegetation type. The major natural resource issue arising out of the project has been the paucity of biodiversity information for the region, and the potential impact on biodiversity values. This has prompted intensive study over the past three years, and the most current recommendations are due for release in 2004. Lack of data has created some uncertainty for potential investors and landowners, and delays in project milestones.

Although aquaculture and forestry are the two key economic ventures that have been identified as core industries for the region, the Tiwi Land Council initiated a land capability study to identify other potential opportunities for development. The table below shows land capability classes for a selection of economic land uses.



Land Use	Class	Class Description	Area (ha)
Agriculture - general	1	Irrigable and forestry - no constraints	6,400
	2	Irrigable and forestry - sandy soils	21,500
	3	Irrigable and forestry with erosion control	197,000
Agriculture - bananas	1	Highly suitable	4,300
	2	Moderately suitable	19,200
Agriculture - peanuts	1	Highly suitable	4,300
	2	Moderately suitable	75,200
Aquaculture ponds	2	Moderate soil limitation	62,900
Roads and tracks	1	Slight site limitation	421,400
	2	Moderate site limitation	12,800
Roadfill	1	Good	17,200
Construction sand	1	Probable	4,800
Gravel	1	Probable	6,400

**Table 17:** Land Capability Classes (Hollingsworth 2003)

The Tiwi Islands have been formally involved in the tourism industry for many years, and in 1995 established the Tiwi Tourism Authority. Landowners recognised the potential value of high-end eco-tourism opportunities, and in 2000 agreed to the development of an exclusive, low impact resort on the north coast of Melville Island focusing on eco-tours and recreational fishing.

Recent global events postponed this project indefinitely, however landowners are now exploring alternative options for eco-friendly tourism. Tiwi Tours operates one and three day tours to Bathurst Island, and there are currently two Fishing Tour Operators resident on the Islands that offer catch and release guided fishing trips, and feral pig and buffalo trophy hunting. The Tiwi Art Network also co-ordinates specialised art tours of each community.

Major attractions for visitors to the Islands are the cultural experience, local art and craft, the 'unspoiled' environment, good fishing and the opportunity to hunt large game. The unpredictable nature of the tourist industry precludes it from becoming a core industry with which to underpin regional economic independence, however it will remain an important sector of the Tiwi economy.

From time to time opportunities arise for small scale commercialisation of natural resources. Projects have included crocodile and crocodile egg harvesting, mud crab farming, small scale market gardens, buffalo management, pharmaceutical compounds in native plants, essential oil production, native bush fruits and bottled water. Limited investigations have been undertaken within the commercial (wild catch) fishing industry, however it is an area where opportunities may be available for Tiwi enterprise in the future.



**Outcome:**

An independent and resilient Tiwi economy based on the orderly and well managed utilisation of natural resources.

**Objective:**

7. Develop and implement processes that provide for a range of sustainable economic resource development options that are consistent with other natural resource management objectives.

**Recommended Actions:**

- 7.1 Progress the development and expansion of land and sea based aquaculture in line with existing suitability studies.
- 7.2 Progress the development and expansion of forestry enterprise in line with existing land capability studies and biodiversity planning.
- 7.3 Finalise biodiversity studies in order to provide certainty to landowners and investors, and to avoid a 'shifting of the goal posts' approach.
- 7.4 Investigate the development and implementation of 'development zones' and 'conservation zones' within a regional context.
- 7.5 Update suitability and capability ratings as relevant information becomes available, and use as a basis for regional planning.
- 7.6 Continue to seek opportunities for high-end eco-tourism ventures.
- 7.7 Identify and protect areas of value to eco-tourism, including local swimming holes, tracts of wilderness and raw materials for art and craft (for example, ochre deposits, wood suitable for carving).
- 7.8 Support and encourage considered approaches for commercial wildlife utilisation opportunities.
- 7.9 Identify and assess wild catch fishery resources, and Tiwi access to commercial opportunities.

