



A Note on URBAN GROWTH IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA COUNTERING UNREALISTIC SUGGESTIONS

There have been suggestions recently that population growth in Northern Australia would be best promoted by concentrating on building up one city as a 'metropolitan' centre with Darwin, Townsville (or Cairns) being canvassed. This suggestion is unrealistic.

Ignores geographically realities

The suggestion fails to recognise that Northern Australia covers an area almost equivalent to that of southern Australia. Realities of areas and distances in southern Australia leads to six states and five metropolitan centres.

Although populations in Northern Australia are much smaller, realities of areas and distances leads to six clearly defined regions served by five regional cities of Darwin, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Rockhampton.

The regions these cities service are state sized in dimension. The Cairns / Far North region is as deep from north to south as the State of New South Wales. The regions based on Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton, each cover an area as large or larger than Victoria (see **Map 1**). The Mackay region covers an area the size of Tasmania.

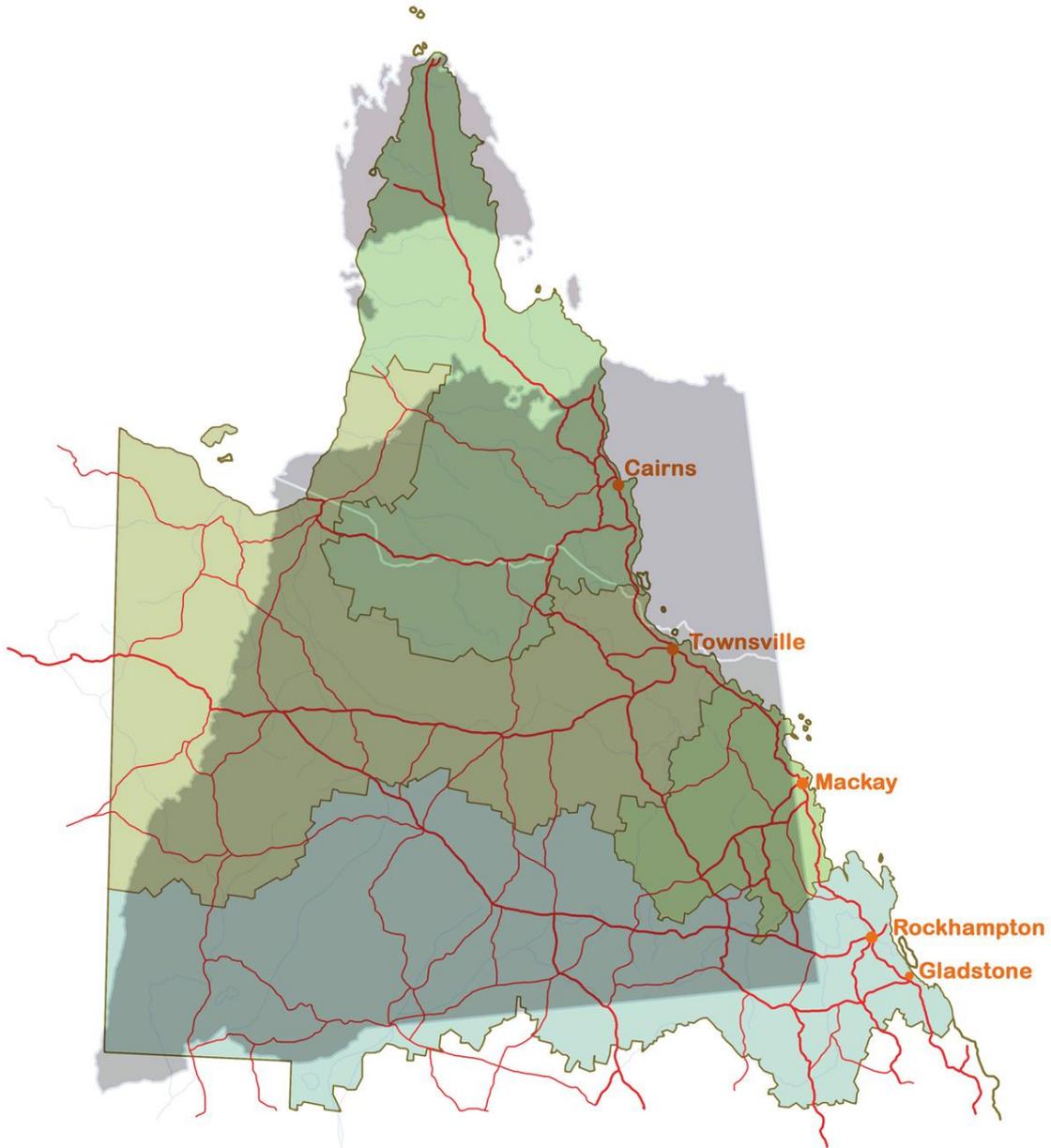
Ratios of population in the regional cities compared with hinterland and total regional populations are fairly typical of capital city relationships, ie. accounting for about half or more of total regional population. Typical of worldwide trends, the cities have been accounting for an increasing proportion of population in each of the regions.

Table #1: Historical Population Relationship between the North's Regional Capitals and their Service Areas (estimated residential population)

	<u>1976</u>		<u>2011</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Capital of region</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Capital of region</u>
Darwin	46,655	46%	129,062	56%
Northern Territory	101,400		231,331	
Cairns SSD	48,753	39%	146,477	55%
Far North Queensland SD	125,210		265,945	
Townsville SSD	88,400	47%	167,636	64%
North & North West SDs	180,560		260,048	
Mackay SSD	39,500	44%	83,350	49%
Mackay SD	89,300		171,297	
Rockhampton/Gladstone SSDs ⁽¹⁾	72,900	51%	126,155	55%
Fitzroy & Central West SDs	144,050		229,552	

⁽¹⁾ Note: Rockhampton's port is about 100km away at Gladstone.
The other cities are co-located with their port.

**Map 1 – Area of Northern Queensland Compared with
New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania**



The northern cities already outpacing the southern metropolitan centres

The suggestion ignores that the North's regional capitals have been growing strongly as part of an increasingly successful North.

Table #2: Long Term Growth, Northern Australia's Major Regional Capitals, 1976 to 2011 (Est Res Pop'n)

Northern Australia	1976	2011	Growth	
			No.	%
Darwin	46,655	129,062	82,407	+177%
Cairns	48,753	146,477	97,724	+200%
Townsville	88,401	167,626	79,225	+90%
Mackay	39,500	83,350	43,850	+111%
Rockhampton / Gladstone	72,900	126,155	53,255	+73%
Total	296,209	652,670	356,461	+120%

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Cat 3218.0 and previous.

Percentage growth rates of the combined northern cities at 120% has outstripped that of all the southern metropolitan centres.

Table #3: Percentage Growth Combined Northern Cities Compared with Southern Metropolitan Centres, 1976-2011

Sydney	+47%
Melbourne	+49%
Brisbane	+103%
Adelaide	+34%
Perth	+117%
Average	+60%
cf Northern Regional Capitals	+120%

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Cat 3218.0 and previous.

As following **Table #4** illustrates, the combined population growth 1976-2011 in the northern regional cities exceeded in absolute terms that of Adelaide (the smallest of the southern metropolitan centres). On a continuation of 1976-2011 trajectories, their combined total will be close to Adelaide in size by 2046.

Table #4: Growth in Population, Northern Regional Capitals and Greater Adelaide Metropolitan Area Compared, 1976-2011

Population	Regional Cities Northern Australia	Greater Adelaide
1976	296,209	940,100
2011	652,670	1,262,940
Growth	356,461	322,840
	+120%	+34%
Projected 2046	1,435,874	1,692,340

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Cat 3218.0 and previous.

Ignores economic realities

Like the metropolitan centres in southern Australia, the comparative growth of the regional cities of the North is very much governed by a combination of the inherent natural resource endowment in their service regions, strategic location, market, and economic forces.

An examination of **Table #2** indicates that the two largest cities in 1976, Townsville and Rockhampton / Gladstone (the old pastoral port capitals of Northern and Central Queensland), have been the slowest growing.

Fastest growing have been the two Far Northern cities of Cairns and Darwin servicing regions deeper into the tropics and previously less developed. These cities are also closest to Asia.

The Mackay region located like Cairns in a higher rainfall coastal belt, has already passed Rockhampton (without Gladstone) in population.

Cairns has been drawing up on Townsville and its regional population is now larger than the Townsville region.

Townsville, despite a great deal of 'pump' priming as a 'growth centre' in the past, including major defence bases, university, research and government offices, has failed to respond commensurately.

Townsville has been successful as a capital of its immediate north and north west regions and increased its percentage of population in this area. However its percentage of population in a wider northern Queensland region from Sarina north has hardly increased, ie. from 22% in 1976 to 24% in 2011. This is hardly a capital city relationship to this wider area.

The right policies for urban development in the North

The North has five well established urban growth centres (including Rockhampton / Gladstone as one growth centre), that by and large, have been outgrowing in percentage terms the metropolitan centres of the south and by a long way most regional cities in the south. They each service state sized regions and there is need for Government services to be delivered through each; not just one of two.

As **Table #5** illustrates, on a repeat of the growth trajectories of the 35 years, 1976 to 2011, population in the Northern capitals could be expected to be up to 1.4 million by 2046.

Table #5: Forward Projection of Population at Same Rate as 35 Years, 1976-2011

	<u>Growth 1976-2011</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2046</u>
Darwin	+177%	129,062	357,000
Cairns	+200%	146,477	439,000
Townsville	+90%	167,626	318,000
Mackay	+111%	83,350	176,000
Rockhampton / Gladstone	+73%	126,155	218,000
Total	+120%	652,670	1,435,874

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS Cat 3218.0 and previous.

It is important to recognize in the North however, that much growth will come from dispersed resource based development and that there will be a need for growth of urban service centres outside of the northern capitals where needed to support development in fields like agriculture, fisheries, mining and tourism.