CUMMINGS ECONOMICS

PO Box 2148 CAIRNS Q 4870 ABN 99 734 489 175

Mobile: 0418871011

Email: cummings@cummings.net.au / Website: www.cummings.net.au

3 March 2025

CE Ref-J3540

Comment

A TALE OF TWO PENINSULAS

GENERAL

While it may not be widely recognised, the FNQ Region/PENINSULA AUSTRALIA'S development has been profoundly influenced by historical developments in India, especially in those parts of India south of the Tropic of Cancer – PENINSULA INDIA.

CROPS & LIVESTOCK

Wherever you look in the FNQ Region's primary industry profile, there is a relationship with India. Many of the major crops and livestock types have their origin, or have been historically heavily developed, in India.

Over many years, sugarcane production has been the major agricultural industry in the region. Although the sugarcane plant is believed to have originated in New Guinea, it was heavily developed in and came to the rest of the world via India. India remains a major world sugar producer.

The Brahman cattle (Bos taurus indicus) breeds originated in India but have come to Australia via Texas. The breed has had a profound influence on the growth of the cattle industry in the North in recent decades.

The region's largest horticultural crop mangoes, seems to have originated in India.

The growing of cotton that is currently spreading across the North has strong associations with India.

When we started to look at possible biofuels a number of years back, the most promising was a tree crop Pongamia that had been grown in India since Vedic times for lamp oil. The Indian myna bird is believed to have been introduced to control cattle ticks.

SIMILAR CLIMATE & RAINFALL

The FNQ/ Peninsular area has striking similarities to southern India in area, latitude, water run-off and vegetation ranging from thick tropical rainforests to quite dry country. Yet there is no comparison in the range and scale of agricultural production in the two areas. The plants will grow, the animals prosper, but other factors have meant that the scale of agricultural development in the FNQ/ Peninsula area is very much lower.

DIFFERENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Historically, agricultural development in Northern Australia has had to take place in the context of the high wage costs in the Australian 'Common Market'. It has also been in an economic environment where competitive transfer of more highly developed plants and animals from temperate-zone Europe and northern America had been taking place into southern Australia. At that time, the level of plant and animal breeding and yields being achieved in tropical India was much lower and generally required substantial development, and in some cases mechanisation of production, to be competitive. It was not until the 1980s that the development of mechanised harvesting and bulk handling enabled Australia's sugar industry to become competitive on world markets without the support of domestic market protection.

CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

However, circumstances have been changing in both Australia and India. In more recent decades, the range and productivity of agriculture in the FNQ/Peninsula region has expanded dramatically. Under the influence of the introduction of Brahman breeds, there are now more beef cattle being recorded per hectare in Northern Australia than in the south. Infrastructure development, especially the sealing of transport routes from the North and the advent of more efficient road transport vehicles, the FNQ/Peninsula region has leap-frogged to being the third largest fruit growing region in Australia with a wide range of fruit and other products being grown for domestic markets. Growing of cotton, sorghum and pulses is currently expanding in Queensland's wet/dry regions.

In India, the 'green revolution' has been leading to strong growth in productivity that is helping India achieve strong growth in the manufacturing and services sectors. Increasing yields of plants and livestock will ease the process of transfer of a range of crops to Australia. As incomes and wages move up in India and the technology developed to mechanise, production in Australia will become more relevant to India. Developments in Australia and India have the potential to reduce the lag in agricultural technological development in tropical areas around the world.

OTHER FIELDS OF COMMON INTEREST

While the foregoing concentrates on agricultural development, the historic relationship between Peninsula India and Peninsula Australia is also there in fields like building design, temperature control, landscaping, medicine, and a concern with the potential effects of tropical weather events – all areas in which transfer of ideas and technologies could be mutually advantageous.

WS (Bill) Cummings,
BEcon (UQ), HonDEcon (CQU)
Research Fellow CITBA (JCU)