

Foreign Policy White Paper

Professor Sandra Harding

Vice Chancellor and President

James Cook University

Cairns – Singapore – Townsville

T (07) 4781 4165

E vc@jcu.edu.au

W www.jcu.edu.au

Introduction

James Cook University (JCU) commends the development of a Foreign Policy White Paper to guide international engagement over the next decade as an important and positive action and is pleased to contribute to that process by providing this submission.

The increasing importance of the Tropics world-wide is a key component of the environment in which Australia pursues its national interests, and James Cook University is uniquely placed to contribute to advancing those interests.

James Cook University

JCU is committed to creating a brighter future for life in the Tropics world-wide through graduates and discoveries that make a difference.

JCU has a demonstrated commitment to research of excellence and high impact, addressing opportunities and critical challenges facing the Tropics world-wide. We are due to celebrate our 50th anniversary in 2020. We have 22,146 individual students, 4,827 individual staff, and three main campuses in Cairns, Singapore and Townsville. Our Singapore campus is home to 3,130 students. International students make up 12.1 per cent of students at our Australian tropical campuses.

JCU is ranked in the top two per cent of universities worldwide in the 2015 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and the top 300 universities in the Times Higher Education (THES) World University Rankings.

The sustainable development of northern Australia is underwritten by an educated population, and increasing participation rates in education are necessary if Queensland, and Australia, are to benefit from our geo-political location in the tropical world.

JCU is committed to ensuring that the communities we serve in northern Queensland, and across the Tropics more broadly, are equipped to engage in a changing global economic context, and that they have real access to knowledge, skills and research to create sustainable and stable futures.

State of the Tropics Project

Aristotle's lateral understanding of the world featuring the Frigid, Temperate and Torrid Zones was replaced in modernity by the geopolitical expressions of north/south, east/west, developed/developing, Asia/the rest, to describe and parse the world. The idea of the Tropics retreated, and yet more than 40 per cent of the world's people live in the Tropics along with around 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity and some of the most critical issues of our time, including health and disease, management of natural resources, economic development, social instability and the development of governance structures are all playing out in the Tropics.

Over five years ago, a project was launched that reprised Aristotle's lateral way of viewing the world. The aim was twofold. The first objective was to answer a very simple question: Is life in the Tropics getting better? The second was to chart the Tropics, to investigate its power and potential as a way of understanding global dynamics. To this end, James Cook University initiated the State of the Tropics project, inviting 11 other institutions around the world to participate. The State of the Tropics 2014 Report was the first output of this world-defining project. The Report took three years to complete and was launched by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on 29 June 2014.

The Report draws on valid and reliable data covering around 50 social, economic and environmental indicators, and found that life in the Tropics has improved, though rates of improvement are highly variable across the Tropics.

Population projections suggest that, within a few short decades, more than half of the world's population will live in the Tropics. By 2050, it is estimated that close to 70 per cent of the world's children will live in the Tropics. This demographic dividend presents great opportunity for the Tropics, but also great challenge. Poverty has declined but remains at a higher level than the rest of the world. Education attainment (particularly for girls) has improved, but remains lower than the rest of the world. A double disease burden plagues tropical communities, with infectious diseases being joined by lifestyle diseases (for example, diabetes, cardiovascular disease), the latter resulting from lifestyle changes invoked by higher incomes and the demand for and access to non-traditional food and pastimes. With hundreds of millions of people relying on marine and coastal resources for their livelihood, growing demographic pressure adds to the challenges of managing natural resources in a sustainable way. Furthermore, tropical populations are urbanising at a faster rate than the rest of the world. There are great risks associated with unmediated urban growth. Likely negative outcomes include social instability with the potential for dysfunction, radicalism and extremism born of alienation and disadvantage. The sheer scale of demographic growth coupled with a large and growing middle class means that there is a growing demand for goods and services readily available elsewhere in the world. There is also a hunger for education and a strong desire to engage in and reap the benefits of new knowledge and innovation.

Economic development in the Tropics is proceeding at a faster rate than the rest of the world (often from a lower base). The Tropics currently account for 20 per cent of global economic output and that output is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the world. The sum of the world's tropical economies – the global tropical product – is projected to reach US\$40 trillion by 2025, 20 times Australia's projected GDP. It is estimated that 25–30 per cent of this will be spent on importing goods and services and even more on developing new industries.

The State of the Tropics report has served to reveal a new geo-politic: in no small way, the future of the world belongs to the Tropics. It certainly depends on it. The Tropical geo-political economy provides an important context when mapping a vision for Australia's international engagement. The international community are mobilising around the issues of the Tropics, reflected in the United Nations declaring in 2016 that 29 June would be *International Day of the Tropics*. JCU is working with international partners, including the Rockefeller Foundation, to ensure that the university's assets and relationships in northern Australia – and Singapore, in particular – can support the international community.

Australia – and northern Australia in particular - has the great good fortune to lie at the intersection of the two great axes of global growth: the Asian axis and the Tropical axis. Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper provides a timely opportunity to consider the opportunities and challenges which this situation implies.

Defining Australia's National Interest.

Australia's National Interest should be considered within the context of the Global Tropical agenda. The demographic, political, environmental and economic pressures, described above, require long term and committed action.

The reality, scale and pace of development in the Tropics challenges our country to engage with governments, businesses, academic intuitions and civil society of the Tropical region. Given that 40 per cent of the Australian continent is tropical, there is enormous potential for Australia to further develop and export tropical knowledge. There are exciting opportunities to build on northern Australia's foundations of tourism, agriculture, mining and land management through dynamic development and leveraging of smart technologies, place-based tropical expertise and by building economic, research and educational links with, and across the Tropics, to the develop a spectrum of tropically relevant and adapted products, technologies, processes and services. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Singapore is an example of the Australian government facilitating these possibilities.

JCU believes that knowledge, through education, has the power to change lives, and that we are enriched by the diversity of our communities. These beliefs and values underpin the priority we give to research agendas that have the potential to make a significant impact on local and global change, as well as support research methodologies based on reciprocity and collaboration. JCU strongly supports internationalised research and education agendas. Our success in doing so is dependent on opportunities to draw on various enabling initiatives and institutions, most recently including the Australia-ASEAN Council on the State of the Tropics project, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), and the New Colombo Plan and mobility programs for both domestic and international students.

United Nations International Day of the Tropics

The Australian Government has recognised the importance of the Tropics and led the effort to have an International Day of the Tropics recognised by the United Nations. Leadership by Ministers Bishop and Frydenberg and work by Australia's Mission to the United Nations, formally commencing with a Ministerial announcement in September 2016, has been highly successful, with 74 nations joining Australia to co-sponsor a resolution to have 29 June declared as the International Day of the Tropics. This date commemorates the day in 2014 when Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi launched the landmark State of the Tropics report.

JCU warmly acknowledges this focus and the leadership displayed by the Australian Government, and encourages further action on issues affecting the Tropics, northern Australia and, indeed, the globe.

Diverse interests that span the globe

The physical proximity of northern Australia to the fast growing nations of South East Asia, and the unique cultures and environments of the tropical Pacific, will be important for foreign policy going forward, but also the shared challenges associated with tropical climates and ecosystems which connect Australia across the tropics to South Asia, South America and Africa.

Disaster Resilience

Although vulnerable to natural disasters, the institutional and individual knowledge regarding preparedness and recovery from disasters means Australia is very resilient, particularly to extreme weather events such as tropical cyclones, flooding and bushfires. Loss of life due to extreme weather events in Australia is extremely rare; in other tropical nations the situation is very different. This is a key area where knowledge and skills developed in Australia have direct relevance for other nations in our region.

Health

The globalisation of the health sector is increasing with a developing flow of services, expertise, information and people (including both health professionals and consumers) across borders. Australia's reputation as a quality provider of health care within a region in which the middle class is predicted to grow from 300 million to 3 billion people within 40 years, offers significant opportunities.

The Australian continent lies in close proximity to nations struggling with some of the greatest health challenges of our time including high rates of maternal mortality (Timor-Leste, PNG), drug resistant tuberculosis (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands) and mosquito-borne viruses such as malaria, zika, chikungunya, and dengue.

JCU warmly acknowledges the Australian Government's support for tropical health and medicine through its funding for the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine at James Cook University. Given Australia's location and the proximity of tropical health and medicine, northern Australia is the right place for such investments. Given growing population of near neighbours and critical health risks presented, there will likely be the need for further attention and investment in this area.

Environmental, marine and coastal management

The challenge of balancing natural capital with social and economic capital is familiar to Australia. Accordingly, we have a great deal of experience in environmental management, particularly in coast and marine environments. This knowledge and management, particularly of tropical marine resources provides opportunities for Australia throughout the Tropics.

The State of the Tropics report provides baseline data, analysis and future priorities on:

- Atmosphere: land and water; oceans; and biodiversity
- society: poverty and urbanisation; health; education and work
- the economy: economic output and the government; international trade and investment; science and technology
- governance: crime, corruption and human security; gender equality; infrastructure; information technology and communications.

Report available at: <http://stateofthetropics.org/>

Influencing regional and international organisations

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), African Union (AU), New Infrastructure Bank and the Pacific Community (SPC) are all key institutions, and there are many others.

Collaborative work conducted by the State of the Tropics, supported by DFAT's Australia-ASEAN Council, brought together experts from throughout the tropical world to discuss challenges associated with infrastructure development in the Tropics, an important priority of the G20. A key recommendation that arose from that workshop is the importance of local, baseline information, particularly for underdeveloped regions of the Tropics.

Ambitious economic opportunities

Education, Research and Industry Collaborations

International education is Australia's largest service export, with the Higher Education and Research Sector accounting for the lion's share of education export earnings. In addition to an international demand for professions that Australian institutions can and should service, there will be a growing need for high quality trades and sub-professions expertise in the nations around us. Education as a service export not only generates revenue for Australia, it will be increasingly important in ensuring the basic needs of other nations are met.

To put it more plainly, there will be great demand for high quality and accessible education at all levels, not the least higher education, especially by students from tropical nations who wish to acquire essential knowledge and skills that can be applied to the needs of their home countries. Furthermore, given the growth of the Tropics and the commercial opportunities that reside there, professionals from Australia and around the world will seek out appropriate training and experiences to better service growing markets.

The provision of international education intersects with international research, and industry collaborations, and forms an important pillar of Australia's diplomatic efforts. The priorities articulated under the National Strategy for International Education need whole of government support to ensure that Australia's trade and investment potential is reached, and collaborative research, education and industry relationships are developed with a broader range of countries. This will require continued and sustained investment and consistent regulatory and policy settings.

JCU recommends further attention to and engagement with the tropical agenda, including focused policy attention, including consideration of support for international students from the Tropics to study in Australia and for domestic students to study in the Tropics, research partnerships and business and industry exchanges. The University particularly commends the New Colombo Plan for this forward thinking approach to ensuring that Australian students have the opportunity to study and work in the broader region, including with our near neighbours in the Tropics.

Political and Social Security

Australia's rule of law, and systems of government, regulations and processes provide a valuable basis for knowledge services exports, particularly to those states in the Tropics who share similar geographical factors, such as distance and environmental constraints and enablers.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity has long been of huge importance to Australia, and has particular relevance to the Tropics. Northern Australia's connection to countries in the north via the Torres Strait, the diversity of plants and wildlife and other environmental characteristics make this region particularly vulnerable to the introduction or emergence of new diseases and vectors to spread them. Biosecurity sits at the heart of all aspects of agriculture.

Assets and capabilities

The investment of the Australian Government in university infrastructure provides assets of national importance. The Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine is the result of strategic government investment in state-of-the-art programs and facilities in Townsville, Cairns and Thursday Island.

In addition, JCU has more than 31 operational sites of teaching, learning and research activity in northern Queensland – in addition to our Singapore campus. The Tropical Australian Academic Health Centre – designed to improve translation and impact through the embedding of research into service delivery – is an example of the opportunities leveraging existing health assets for broader health and social impact brings. The various models developed at JCU to operate across vast distances with variable levels of technological infrastructure are applicable to our regional neighbours.

Further information:

Vanessa Cannon, Chief of Staff, t: 07-47814078 e: chiefofstaff@jcu.edu.au