Foreword

The *Northern Australia Statistical Compendium 2009* was prepared by BITRE with the assistance of the Office of Northern Australia, with the aim of compiling a base of factual information that would contribute to improved understanding of the economic and social developments in this region. The compendium discusses essential characteristics of Northern Australia and offers comparisons with the rest of Australia, wherever possible. It provides information on population, the economy, employment, social conditions, education, transport, infrastructure, climate, land use and major industries for Northern Australia as a whole and for the regions within it.

The compendium is intended to support fact-based policy dialogue and formulation of policies conducive to economic development and social wellbeing. It is published in two formats: electronically and in print. The electronic version is available on the Internet and on compact disc. It includes detailed background data in addition to the overview paper. This allows for more detailed information to be provided on each of the regions, particularly at the statistical local area (SLA) and urban centre localities (UCL) level.

This project was led by Adam Malarz and Geoff Frost, with Jan Anderson-Muir and Olivia Waugh. Gary Dolman provided executive supervision and support.

Phil Potterton
Executive Director
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While BITRE is grateful for the assistance provided by these individuals and organisations, the views expressed in this report are those of BITRE and should not be attributed to any other organisation.
At a glance

• Northern Australians represented 4.7 per cent of the total Australian population in 2006. The majority of people within Northern Australia live in the northern regions of Queensland.

• The population of many Northern Australian regions is younger than that of Australia as a whole.

• Indigenous people comprise a relatively large proportion of the Northern Australian population (14.3 per cent), as compared with the whole of Australia (2.3 per cent).

• Northern Australia’s recent economic performance to 2005–06 can be broken down into three distinct phases: a growth phase from 1990–91 until 1995–96; a phase of stagnation and decline from 1995–96 until 2000–01; and then a phase of resource-driven growth from 2000–01.

• Employment grew faster in Northern Australia between the 2001 and 2006 census (11.4 per cent) than it did across Australia (9.7 per cent).

• In Northern Australia in 2006, 5.8 per cent of employees worked in mining, and 10.1 per cent of employees worked in government administration and defence. By comparison, across Australia as a whole, 1.2 per cent of employees worked in mining, and 5.5 per cent of employees worked in government administration and defence.

• In 2006, relatively few Northern Australians were employed in the manufacturing sector (7.0 per cent), and in finance, insurance, property and business services (9.1 per cent). By comparison, across Australia as a whole, the manufacturing sector employed 11.1 per cent of workers, and finance, insurance, property and business services employed 14.7 per cent of workers.

• Exports via Northern Australian ports grew faster than the total tonnage of Australia’s exports and represented 56.3 per cent of total tonnage and 21 per cent of value of Australian exports via sea ports in 2007–08.

• In education, the proportion of people to have completed Year 12 or equivalent in Northern Australia (27.3 per cent) was well below the Australian average (33.9 per cent).

• The proportion of health workers is lower across Northern Australia (2775 per 100,000) than Australia as a whole (3102 per 100,000), especially in parts of northern Western Australia and northern Queensland.

• The availability of the Internet in Northern Australia (62.3 per cent of households had access) was lower than in the rest of Australia (64.6 per cent of households had access). Fewer Northern Australian households had broadband access (34.4 per cent) than across Australia generally (39.2 per cent). Meanwhile, more households had dial-up Internet access in Northern Australia (23.3 per cent) than across Australia (21.5 per cent).
• Regular passenger transport, charter and other flying services are used relatively more frequently in Northern Australia than in the rest of Australia due to large distances and specific employment practices in that region, such as ‘fly-in, fly-out’.

• Electricity supply in Northern Australia is based largely on local gas-fired generators.

• Water resources and storage in Northern Australia are strongly concentrated around the coastline with major water reserves in the Kimberley Region and north-east Queensland.

• Fifty per cent of Australia’s rain falls in Northern Australia.

• On average, 13 cyclones occur in Australia each year, although many do not make landfall. The majority of cyclone activity across Australia occurred within regions in Northern Australia, particularly around north-east Queensland and north-west Western Australia.

• Tourism is an important industry in Northern Australia. Although the region had 4.7 per cent of Australia’s resident population in 2005, it also had a 16.9 per cent share of international tourist overnight stays and a 7.5 per cent share of domestic tourist overnight stays that year. Most tourist visits occurred in the northern regions of Queensland, followed by the Northern Territory.
Contents

Foreword .................................................................................................................................. iii
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ iv
At a glance ................................................................................................................................. v
Executive summary ................................................................................................................ xxiii

Chapter 1 Introduction to Northern Australia ......................................................... 1
  Background .................................................................................................. 3
  Population ................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 2 Population ................................................................................................... 13
  2.1 Population and population growth rates ................................... 15
  2.2 Population density .......................................................................... 16
  2.3 Ethnicity ............................................................................................ 19
  2.4 Population by age and sex ............................................................ 24
  2.5 Migration and population turnover ............................................ 31
  Data relating to population available in the online compendium .. 32

Chapter 3 Economic activity ...................................................................................... 35
  3.1 Economic growth in Northern Australia ........................................ 38
  3.2 Employment by industry ................................................................. 47
  3.3 Median individual income ............................................................... 53
Chapter 8 Natural resources ................................................................. 199
  8.1 Land use ..................................................................................... 202
  8.2 Rainfall and temperature .......................................................... 210
  8.3 Predicted future rainfall and temperature .................................. 219
  8.4 Cyclone activity ......................................................................... 224
  8.5 Minerals and energy resources ................................................. 226
  8.6 Soil characteristics .................................................................... 232
  8.8 Fisheries .................................................................................... 240
Data relating to natural resources available in the online compendium ......................................................... 246

Chapter 9 Main industries ................................................................. 247
  9.1 Agriculture ................................................................................ 249
  9.2 Business activity—entries, exits and dynamics ....................... 252
  9.3 Mining and minerals processing ............................................. 256
  9.4 Tourism ..................................................................................... 270
  9.5 Service industries ..................................................................... 273
Data relating to population available in the online compendium ................................................................. 275

Appendix .......................................................................................... 277
Abbreviations and acronyms .......................................................................................................................... 287
References ........................................................................................ 291
### Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland—native title cases</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—usually resident population numbers and growth rates, 2001 to 2016</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—usually resident population, area, and population density by region and selected UCL, 2006</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.3.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—usually resident population by ethnicity, 2006</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.3.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—percentage share of usually resident population by ethnicity, 2006</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.4</td>
<td>Life expectancy estimates—Indigenous population, selected states, 1996–01</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.5.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—population movement, by region, 2001–06</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—average annual ARTI growth by region 2000–01 to 2005–06</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—RIPT by region 1995–96 and 2005–06</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—percentage of people employed by industry, by region, 2006</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—number of people employed by industry, 2006</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2.3</td>
<td>Northern Australia—difference in the number of people employed by industry, 2001–06</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—weekly income by income bracket, percentage of males, by region, 2006</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—weekly income by income bracket, percentage of females, by region, 2006</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—taxpayer income earned (percentage of region total) by income type by region, 2005–06</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—average incomes (salaries, unincorporated businesses, investment, superannuation, other income) by income type by taxable income earning group by region, 2005–06</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—NTI average annual growth by region, 1995–96 to 2005–06</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1.1  Northern Australia—employment, unemployment, unemployment rates and labour force participation by region (persons), 2006 ................................................................. 73
Table 4.2.2  Northern Australia—employment, unemployment, unemployment rates and labour force participation by region (males and females), 2006 ................................................................. 74
Table 4.2.3  Northern Australia—number of CDEP participants as a proportion of the labour force, and their potential impact on unemployment figures, by region ......................................................... 77
Table 4.3.1  Northern Australia—employment growth by region, 2001–06........... 78
Table 4.4.1  Northern Australia—labour force (number) over time by region ... 80
Table 4.5.1  Northern Australia—unemployment rates over time by region ...... 84
Table 4.6.1  Northern Australia—highest year of school completed, by region, 2006 ................................................................................................ 88
Table 5.1.1  Northern Australia—income support and recipients by region, 1995–96 to 2000–01 ................................................................................... 101
Table 5.2.1  Northern Australia—household wealth by region, 2003–04 ........... 104
Table 5.4.1  Northern Australia—government school enrolments by region, 2008 ................................................................................................ 106
Table 5.4.2  Northern Australia—private school enrolments by region, 2008 ............................................................................................................. 107
Table 5.4.3  Northern Australia—student enrolments by school type (per cent of total enrolments) by region, 2008 ........................................... 108
Table 5.4.4  Northern Australia—school by year levels and Vocational Education and Training (VET) offered by region, 2008 ....................... 109
Table 5.5.1  Northern Australia—university campuses, by region, 2007 ............ 111
Table 5.5.2  Universities with a campus in Northern Australia—all students by higher education provider and broad level of course, full year 2007 ................................................................. 112
Table 5.5.3  Northern Australia—number and percentage of people at university or other tertiary institutions, by region, 2006 ......................... 114
Table 5.6.1  Northern Australia—location of TAFE institutions and training delivery locations, 2007 ................................................................. 117
Table 5.6.2  Northern Australia—percentage of usually resident students studying at TAFE institutions within or outside their own region, by region, 2007 ................................................................. 119
Table 5.7.1  Northern Australia—employed persons in health-related occupations, by region, 2006 ................................................................. 120
Table 5.7.2 Northern Australia—public and private hospitals, 2006–07 .......... 125
Table 6.1.1 Northern Australia—exports via sea ports, 1996–97 to 2007–08 
(thousand tonnes) ................................................................................... 133
Table 6.1.2 Northern Australia—exports via sea ports by region, 
1996–97 to 2007–08 ($ millions) .............................................................. 135
Table 6.1.3 Northern Australia—imports via sea ports, 1996–97 to 
2007–08 (thousand tonnes) .................................................................... 140
Table 6.1.4 Northern Australia—imports via sea ports by region, 
1996–97 to 2007–08 ($ millions) .............................................................. 143
Table 6.1.5 Northern Australia—coastal shipping, loaded tonnage, 
1996–97 to 2006–07 (thousand tonnes) ................................................ 145
Table 6.1.6 Northern Australia—coastal shipping, unloaded tonnage, 
1996–97 to 2006–07 (thousand tonnes) ................................................ 149
Table 6.1.7 Northern Australia—selected ports, by region, 2009 ............... 152
Table 6.2.1 Northern Australia—air travel distances and travel times on 
major domestic port pairs, 2007–08 ..................................................... 153
Table 6.2.2 Northern Australia—air travel distances, travel times and 
passenger numbers, top ten international pairs ............................... 154
Table 6.2.3 Northern Australia—air passenger and freight movements, 
2007–08 ...................................................................................................... 155
Table 6.2.4 Northern Australia—aircraft movements and RPT, 2007–08........ 158
Table 6.2.5 Northern Australia, aircraft movements in selected 
Northern Australian airports, as at November 2008 ......................... 159
Table 6.3.1 Northern Australia—type and length of railways, by region, 
2006 ............................................................................................................ 170
Table 6.4.1 Northern Australia—type and length of roads, by region, 2006.... 172
Table 7.1.1 Northern Australia—capacity of fossil fuel and renewable 
electricity power stations (megawatts) by region, 2008 ....................... 184
Table 7.1.2 Northern Australia—fossil fuel power stations by fuel type, 
technology, and capacity (megawatts), by SLA and region, 2008 ... 185
Table 7.1.3 Northern Australia—renewable electricity power stations by 
fuel type, technology, and capacity (megawatts), by SLA and 
region, 2006–07......................................................................................... 186
Table 7.2.1 Northern Australia—dams by location, storage capacity 
(megalitres), construction type, surface area and year of 
construction completion, by state ....................................................... 189
Table 7.2.2 Northern Australia—water usage by agricultural businesses, 
2005–06 ...................................................................................................... 190
Figures

Figure 2.4.1 Northern Australia—population distribution by age group and sex, by region, 2006 (Western Australia) ................................................. 24
Figure 2.4.2 Northern Australia—population distribution by age group and sex, by region, 2006 (Northern Territory) ........................................ 25
Figure 2.4.3 Northern Australia—population distribution by age group and sex, by region, 2006 (Queensland) .................................................. 25
Figure 2.4.4 Northern Australia—population distribution by age group and sex, by region, 2006 ................................................................. 26
Figure 2.4.5 Northern Australia (Queensland)—population, by age and sex, 2006 (per cent) ................................................................. 28
Figure 2.4.6 Northern Australia (Northern Territory)—population, by age and sex, 2006 (per cent) ................................................................. 28
Figure 2.4.7 Northern Australia (Western Australia)—population, by age and sex, 2006 (per cent) ................................................................. 29
Figure 2.4.8 Northern Australia—population, by age and sex, 2006 (per cent) ................................................................. 29
Figure 2.4.9 Northern Australia—Indigenous population by age and sex, 2006 (per cent) ................................................................. 30
Figure 2.4.10 Northern Australia—non-Indigenous population by age and sex, 2006 (per cent) ................................................................. 30
Figure 3.1.1 Northern Australia—ARTI annual growth 1990–91 to 2005–06 .......... 39
Figure 3.1.2 Northern Australia—ARTI annual growth by state, 1990–91 to 2005–06 .............................................................................. 40
Figure 3.1.3 Northern Australia—real income per taxpayer (RIPT), 1990–91 to 2005–06 ................................................................. 43
Figure 3.1.4 Northern Australia—RIPT by state, 1990–91 to 2005–06 ................. 44
Figure 3.1.5 Northern Australia—number of taxable individuals (NTI) and aggregate real taxable income (ARTI) as percentage of Australia, 1990–91 to 2005–06 ................................................................. 46
Figure 3.2.1 Northern Australia—employment by key industries, by region, 2006 .............................................................................. 50
Figure 3.2.2 Northern Australia—employment by remaining industries, by region, 2006 .............................................................................. 51
Figure 3.2.3 Northern Australia—difference in the percentage of people employed by industry, 2001–06 ................................................................. 53
Figure 3.3.1  Northern Australia—median individual income by SLA, 2006
Figure 3.3.2  Australia—median individual income by SLA, 2006
Figure 3.4.1  Northern Australia (Western Australia)—weekly income by income bracket, by region, 2006
Figure 3.4.2  Northern Australia (Northern Territory)—weekly income by income bracket, by region, 2006
Figure 3.4.3  Northern Australia (Queensland)—weekly income by income bracket, by region, 2006
Figure 3.4.4  Northern Australia—weekly income by income bracket, by gender, 2006
Figure 4.1.1  Northern Australia year—number of taxable individuals, growth 1990–91 to 2005–06
Figure 4.4.1  Northern Australia—labour force (persons) by year
Figure 4.4.2  Northern Australia—labour force (persons) by year
Figure 4.4.3  Northern Australia (Western Australia)—labour force (persons) by year
Figure 4.4.4  Northern Australia (Queensland)—labour force (persons) by year
Figure 4.5.1  Northern Australia (Western Australia)—unemployment over time by region, 1998–2007
Figure 4.5.2  Northern Australia (Northern Territory)—unemployment rates over time by region, 1998–2007
Figure 4.5.3  Northern Australia (Queensland)—unemployment rates over time by region, 1998–2007
Figure 4.6.1  Northern Australia—highest year of school completed, 2006
Figure 4.6.2  Northern Australia—highest year of school completed, by region, 2006
Figure 4.7.1  Northern Australia—highest level of qualification, by region, 2006
Figure 4.7.2  Northern Australia—highest level of qualification, by urban centre/locality, 2006
Figure 4.7.3  Northern Australia—highest level of qualification, males, 2006
Figure 4.7.4  Northern Australia—highest level of qualification, females, 2006
Figure 5.1.1  Northern Australia—income support as a percentage of aggregate individual income by region (growth), 1995–96 to 2000–01
Figure 5.5.1  Northern Australia—percentage of persons at university or other tertiary institution, by region, 2006 ...................................................... 113
Figure 5.5.2  Northern Australia—percentage of persons at university or other tertiary institution, 2006 .............................................................. 115
Figure 5.5.3  Northern Australia—percentage of people at university or other tertiary institutions, by region, by gender, 2006 ................. 116
Figure 5.6.1  Northern Australia—usually resident enrolled TAFE students per 1000 population by region, 2007 .................................................... 118
Figure 5.7.1  Northern Australia—health workers per 100 000 people, by region, 2006 .............................................................................................. 121
Figure 5.7.2  Northern Australia—medical workers per 100 000 people, by region, 2006 .............................................................................................. 122
Figure 6.1.1  Northern Australia—export tonnage via sea ports, by region, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (millions of tonnes) ............................................. 132
Figure 6.1.2  Northern Australia—export tonnage via sea ports, by state, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (million tonnes)..................................................... 134
Figure 6.1.3  Northern Australia—value of exports via sea ports, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (index 1996–97 = 100) .......................................................... 136
Figure 6.1.4  Northern Australia—value of exports via sea ports, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (index 1996–97 = 100) ........................................................... 137
Figure 6.1.5  Northern Australia (Western Australia)—value of exports via sea ports, by region, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (index 1996–97 = 100) ...... 137
Figure 6.1.6  Northern Australia (Northern Territory)—value of exports via sea ports, by region, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (index 1996–97 = 100) ...... 138
Figure 6.1.7  North West Queensland—value of exports via sea ports, by region, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (index 1996–97 = 100)........................ 138
Figure 6.1.8  Northern Australia (Queensland)—value of exports via sea ports, by region, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (index 1996–97 = 100)..... 139
Figure 6.1.9  Northern Australia—import tonnage, via sea ports, by region, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (million tonnes).................................................... 141
Figure 6.1.10  Northern Australia—import tonnage via sea ports, by state, 1996–97 to 2007–08 (million tonnes)..................................................... 142
Figure 6.1.11  Northern Australia—import values via sea ports, by region, 1996–97 to 2007–08 ($ millions).............................................................. 144
Figure 6.1.12  Northern Australia—coastal shipping, loaded tonnage, 1996–97 to 2006–07 (index 1996–97 = 100).................................................... 146
Figure 6.1.13  Northern Australia—coastal shipping, loaded tonnage, by region, 1996–97 to 2006–07 (index 1996–97 = 100) ......................... 147
Figure 6.1.14 Northern Australia—coastal shipping, loaded tonnage, by region, 1996–97 to 2006–07 (index 1996–97 = 100) ........................ 147
Figure 6.1.15 Northern Australia—coastal shipping, unloaded tonnage, by state, 1996–97 to 2006–07 (index 1996–97 = 100) ......................... 148
Figure 6.1.16 Northern Australia (Western Australia and Northern Territory)—coastal shipping, unloaded tonnage, by region, 1996–97 to 2006–07 (index 1996–97 = 100) ........................................ 150
Figure 6.1.17 Northern Australia (Queensland)—coastal shipping, unloaded tonnage, by region, 1996–97 to 2006–07 (index 1996–97 = 100) ...... 151
Figure 6.2.1 Northern Australia—RPT domestic passenger movements in northern regions and state totals, 2007–08 ................................. 157
Figure 6.2.2 Northern Australia—domestic flights per capita by region, 2007–08 ..................................................................................... 157
Figure 6.3.1 Northern Australia—railway density, by region, 2006 ............... 169
Figure 6.3.2 Northern Australia—type and length of operational railways, by region, 2006 ........................................................................ 171
Figure 6.4.1 Northern Australia—road length (kilometres), by region, 2006 174
Figure 6.4.2 Northern Australia—road density, by region, 2006 ..................... 175
Figure 7.4.1 Northern Australia—household Internet connection by type, by state (per cent), 2006 ............................................................. 194
Figure 7.4.2 Northern Australia—household Internet connection by type, by region (per cent), 2006 ............................................................... 196
Figure 8.7.1 Groundwater usage, by state, 1996–97 ........................................ 239
Figure 9.1.1 Northern Australia—land use by region, 2005–06 ....................... 250
Figure 9.2.1 Northern Australia—net growth in the number of businesses by business type ................................................................. 254
## Maps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map 1.1</th>
<th>Northern Australia—BITRE subregions</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Map 1.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—Local Government Areas, 2008</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 1.3</td>
<td>Remoteness classes in Northern Australia, 2006</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 1.4</td>
<td>Northern Australia—land tenure, 1993</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 1.5</td>
<td>Northern Australia determinations of native title, 2009</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 1.6</td>
<td>Northern Australia Indigenous land use agreements, March 2009</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 3.1.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—ARTI growth, 2000–01 to 2005–06</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 3.1.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—RIPT by SLA, 2006</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 5.3.1</td>
<td>Synthetic grocery price index by population centre, 2006</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 5.7.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—public hospital locations, May 2006</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 5.7.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—Aboriginal Medical Services, 2006</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 5.7.3</td>
<td>Northern Australia—Royal Flying Doctor Service locations, February 2008</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.1.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—Australia’s major freight flow, 2006–07</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.1.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—major ports, 2009</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.2.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—major airports, roads and railway, 2009</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.2.2</td>
<td>Intrastate air services on regional routes in Western Australia, 2005</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.2.3</td>
<td>Changes in intrastate air services between 2000 and 2005 on regional routes in Western Australia</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.2.4</td>
<td>Intrastate air services on regional routes in Northern Territory, 2005</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.2.5</td>
<td>Changes in intrastate air services between 2000 and 2005 on regional routes in the Northern Territory</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.2.6</td>
<td>Intrastate air services on regional routes in Queensland, 2005</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.2.7</td>
<td>Changes in intrastate air services between 2000 and 2005 on regional routes in Queensland</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.3.1</td>
<td>Northern Australia—main railway lines</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map 6.3.2</td>
<td>Northern Australia—assigned rail freight (kilotonnes), 2005</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Map 6.4.1  Northern Australia—assigned light vehicle traffic on major highways, 2005 ................................................................. 173
Map 6.4.2  Northern Australia—road freight density (kilotonnes), 2005 .... 173
Map 7.2.1  Northern Australia’s landmass topography .................................... 187
Map 7.2.2  Northern Australia—main rivers and reservoirs ............................ 187
Map 7.2.3  Northern Australia—land slope ...................................................... 188
Map 7.3.1  Northern Australia—gas pipelines, 2009........................................ 191
Map 7.3.2  Northern Western Australia and the Northern Territory—
gas pipelines, 2009 ........................................................................ 191
Map 8.1.1  Land use in the Pilbara Region (Western Australia), 2001 .......... 204
Map 8.1.2  Land use in the Kimberley Region (Western Australia), 2001 .... 204
Map 8.1.3  Land use in the Darwin-East Arnhem Region
(Northern Territory), 2001 .................................................................. 205
Map 8.1.4  Land use in the Katherine-Lower Top End Region
(Northern Territory), 2001 .................................................................. 205
Map 8.1.5  Land use in the Barkly-Central NT Region
(Northern Territory), 2001 .................................................................. 206
Map 8.1.6  Land use in the MacKay Region (Queensland), 2001 .......... 206
Map 8.1.7  Land use in the Northern Region (Queensland), 2001 .......... 207
Map 8.1.8  Land use in the Far North Region (Queensland), 2001 .......... 208
Map 8.1.9  Land use in the North West Region (Queensland), 2001 .......... 209
Map 8.1.10 Land use in the Longreach Region (Queensland), 2001 ........ 210
Map 8.2.1  Northern Australia—annual average rainfall (mm), 1961–90..... 211
Map 8.2.2  Northern Australia—February average rainfall (mm), 1961–90... 214
Map 8.2.3  Northern Australia—May average rainfall (mm), 1961–90....... 214
Map 8.2.4  Northern Australia—August average rainfall (mm), 1961–90.... 215
Map 8.2.5  Northern Australia—November average rainfall (mm), 1961–90................................................................. 215
Map 8.2.6  Northern Australia—February minimum temperature (celsius),
1961–90 ................................................................................................. 216
Map 8.2.7  Northern Australia—February maximum temperature (celsius),
1961–90 ................................................................................................. 216
Map 8.2.8  Northern Australia—May minimum temperature (celsius),
1961–90 ................................................................................................. 217
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map A1</th>
<th>Northern Territory—Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas</th>
<th>279</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Map A2</td>
<td>Northern Territory—Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map A3</td>
<td>Western Australia—Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map A4</td>
<td>Queensland—Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map A5</td>
<td>Queensland—Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive summary

Background

This statistical compendium is a collection of data relating to that region north of the Tropic of Capricorn, named ‘Northern Australia’ by the Australian Government at the inception of its Office of Northern Australia. In addition to tabulated and graphed statistical data, the compendium discusses essential characteristics of the region and provides comparisons with the rest of Australia, wherever possible. The compendium provides information on population, economy and workforce, social conditions, education, transport, infrastructure, climate, land use and major industries in the region.

Population

1. Population, population growth rates and density

- Northern Australians represented 4.7 per cent of the total Australian population in 2006. The majority of people within Northern Australia (70.5 per cent) live in the northern regions of Queensland.

- Northern Australia exhibits a pattern of small, but relatively highly concentrated population areas, surrounded by large, sparsely populated areas. Within Northern Australia, Queensland is generally more densely populated than the northern regions of the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

2. Ethnicity, age and sex

- A relatively large proportion of the Northern Australian population is Indigenous (14.3 per cent) compared to that of the whole of Australia (2.3 per cent). In Northern Australia, 12.4 per cent of people were born overseas, compared with 22.2 per cent of Australians generally.

- There are more young people (22.9 per cent aged 0–14) and fewer old people (3.4 per cent aged 75 and over) within Northern Australia, compared with the rest of Australia (19.6 per cent and 6.2 per cent respectively), and working age males often outnumber working age females.
Economic activity

1. Economic growth

- Northern Australia’s recent economic performance can be broken down into three distinctive phases: a growth phase from 1990–91 until 1995–96; a phase of stagnation and decline from 1995–96 until 2000–01; and then a final phase of resource-driven growth from 2000–01 until 2005–06.

- The economy of Northern Australia is strongly linked to the mining and natural resources markets.

2. Employment by industry

- Relative to Australia, the industries of mining, government administration and defence were larger employers in Northern Australia. Less people were employed by the industries of manufacturing, finance, insurance, property and business services in Northern Australia in comparison with the rest of Australia.

- In Northern Australia in 2006, 5.8 per cent of employees worked in mining, and 10.1 per cent of employees worked in government administration and defence. By comparison, across Australia as a whole, 1.2 per cent of employees worked in mining, and 5.5 per cent of employees worked in government administration and defence.

- An increase in employment was observed across almost all industries in Northern Australia between 2001 and 2006, the largest increase being in construction, primarily due to the substantial expansion of minerals projects in northern Queensland, the Pilbara Region (Western Australia) and LNG projects in Darwin-East Arnhem (Northern Territory).

3. Income

- The most frequently observed median individual income for Northern Australia ($200–250 per week) indicates that many Statistical Local Areas (SLA) have a high number of people earning a low income.

- The income statistics also reveal a greater number of males earning a higher weekly income and a greater number of females earning an income in the lower income brackets.

- Broadly speaking, much of Northern Australia had a higher dependence on wage and salary income (84.5 per cent) than Australia as a whole (79.2 per cent) and a comparatively lower dependence on superannuation, annuities and investments (1.7 per cent in Northern Australia compared with 3.2 per cent in Australia).
Workforce

1. Employment, unemployment, labour force size and participation rates

- In 2006, labour force participation rates across Northern Australia (63.6 per cent) were all higher than the Australia labour force participation rate (60.4 per cent).

- Employment grew more in Northern Australia (11.4 per cent) between the censuses of 2001 and 2006 than it did across Australia. ‘Fly-in, fly-out’ and ‘drive-in, drive-out’ staff rotations were significant features of employment growth in many Northern Australian mining regions.

2. Qualification and school completion

- In terms of education, the proportion of people who had completed Year 12 or equivalent in Northern Australia in 2006 (27.3 per cent) was well below the Australian figures (33.9 per cent).

- Higher proportions of Certificate level qualifications were seen across Northern Australia (37.5 per cent), compared to Australia (31.8 per cent), in 2006. Lower numbers of Postgraduate and Bachelor degree level qualifications, as well as lower levels of Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificates, were observed in that year compared to the rest of Australia.

Day-to-day living

1. Income support and wealth

- Between 1995–96 and 2000–01 dependence on government benefits increased in Northern Australia, more than it did across Australia as a whole.

- Household wealth was lower than that of Australian households generally in 2003–04. The average debt-to-asset ratio was also higher across Northern Australia (17 per cent) than across Australia generally (13 per cent).

2. Cost of living

- High grocery prices, nearly twice capital city prices, are characteristic of very remote and isolated places with large proportions of Indigenous people in the population.
3. **Schools, universities and TAFE institutions**

- School sizes and enrolments were often smaller within Northern Australia. In very remote regions, students wishing to study to Year 12 level often had to study outside their own local area. Of Australia’s 9562 schools, 681 (7.1 per cent) were located in Northern Australia. Six hundred and fifteen Northern Australian schools offered up to primary school education, 137 offered up to junior secondary education (this figure includes some mixed primary/secondary schools), and 196 offered up to Year 12 education (this figure includes some mixed primary/secondary schools).

- There are four tertiary institutions that have a main campus located within Northern Australia. In 2006, there were lower proportions of people at university in Northern Australia (3.0 per cent) compared to the rest of Australia (4.7 per cent), with particularly low proportions seen in northern Western Australia (1.4 per cent).

- Northern Australian student enrolments at TAFE institutions (84 per 1000 people) were higher than across Australia as a whole (65 per 1000).

4. **Health**

- Ninety-two of Australia’s 795 public hospitals (approximately 11.6 per cent) were located in Northern Australia. Further, 17 of Australia’s 549 private hospitals (approximately 3.1 per cent) were located across the region. Most of Northern Australia’s hospitals were located in the more populous areas of northern Queensland.

- The proportion of health workers is lower across Northern Australia (2775 per 100 000 people) than Australia as a whole (3102 per 100 000 people) especially in parts of northern Western Australia and Queensland. As the remoteness of SLAs increased, the proportion of health workers decreased.

- The breakdown of nine key health professions indicated that there are smaller proportions of nurses, medical workers, dentists, pharmacists, optometrists, physiotherapists, chiropractors and psychologists within Northern Australia than across Australia generally.

**Transport**

1. **Trade via maritime ports**

- In 2007–08, exports via northern Australian ports grew faster than the total tonnage of Australia’s exports and represented 56.3 per cent of the total tonnage of Australian exports via sea ports.

- Northern Australia’s value of exports was $74.1 billion or 21.1 per cent of the total Australian exports via sea ports in 2007–08. The Pilbara Region in Western Australia was the largest source of tonnage exported in Northern Australia. It was also the largest source of export value, with iron ore exports worth nearly $30 billion in 2007–08.
Executive summary

- Import tonnages via Northern Australian ports are only a small fraction of those exported via these ports, with Darwin-East Arnhem in the Northern Territory and the Northern Region of Queensland being the largest importing regions in Northern Australia.

2. Aviation, railways and roads

- Regular passenger transport, charter and other aviation services are used relatively more frequently in Northern Australia than in the rest of Australia due to large distances and specific employment practices, such as ‘fly-in, fly-out’ staff rotation.

- Railways in the northern regions of Western Australia are not dense or interconnected with the rest of the continent but carry very large tonnages of iron ore, coal and other minerals for exports via ports; Northern Territory and Queensland’s Northern Region standard gauge railways are interconnected with the southern states.

- Northern Australia is joined to the rest of Australia via mostly all-season roads which are essential for passenger and goods transport.

Infrastructure

1. Electricity and gas

- Electricity supply in Northern Australia is based largely on local generators.

- Except for Queensland’s eastern regions, most generators in Northern Australia are of relatively small capacity and use locally available gas and liquid fuels.

- Gas production and transmission is a large and growing industry in Northern Australia providing vital sources of heat and electricity for commodity production and processing in the region, as well as for use by the local population.

2. Water

- Water resources and storage in Northern Australia are strongly concentrated around the coastline with major water reserves in the Kimberley Region and north eastern regions of Queensland.

- The major water user is agriculture, as there are no population agglomerations over 200,000 people in Northern Australia.

- Artesian water is an important source for irrigation and other agricultural use.
3. **Telecommunications**

- The availability of the Internet in Northern Australia (62.3 per cent of households had access) was lower than in the rest of Australia (64.6 per cent of households had access). Fewer Northern Australian households had broadband access (34.4 per cent) than across Australia generally (39.2 per cent). Meanwhile, more households had dial-up Internet access in Northern Australia (23.3 per cent) than across Australia (21.5 per cent).

**Natural resources**

1. **Land use**

- The highest share of land use in Northern Australia was grazing natural vegetation (57.4 per cent) followed by conservation and natural environments (40.2 per cent).

- The largest part of area under grazing natural vegetation was in Queensland’s North West Region (94.88 per cent). Dry cropping was proportionately highest in the MacKay Region (1.45 per cent).

- Mines are significant land users in the Pilbara, Darwin-East Arnhem, Mackay, Northern Queensland, Far North Queensland and Gladstone regions.

2. **Rainfall and temperature**

- Many of the regions within Northern Australia experience the majority of their rainfall during the wet season, from approximately November through April. Warmer temperatures are also experienced during this period, with some regions experiencing the highest average maximum temperatures in Australia.

- Fifty per cent of Australia’s rain falls within Northern Australia.

- There is little rain during the dry season, from about May through October. Cooler temperatures are also experienced during this period.

3. **Predicted rainfall and temperature**

- According to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), based on modelling associated with current emission trends, by the year 2030 annual rainfall within Northern Australia is predicted to increase in parts of the Kimberley and Mackay regions, and in the Darwin-East Arnhem and Far North regions. It is predicted that most other parts of Northern Australia will experience a decrease in annual rainfall.

- The CSIRO predicts that there will be an increase in the average winter and summer temperatures across Northern Australia by 2030, particularly in inland areas.
4. **Cyclonic activity**

- On average there are about thirteen cyclones which form in the Australia region each cyclone season, although many do not make landfall. The majority of cyclone activity across Australia occurs within regions in Northern Australia, particularly in the regions around north-east Queensland and north-west Western Australia.

5. **Minerals and energy resources**

- Northern Australia’s minerals and energy resources are abundant and diverse and include metal ores, gas, oil, uranium, coal, gold and diamonds.

- The resource base has been reassessed and new deposits are being discovered and documented continuously.

6. **Soil characteristics**

- Northern regions of Western Australia and Northern Territory types of soil support pastoral uses and some irrigated cropping while Queensland’s northern regions are suitable for sugar cane cropping and other uses facilitated by higher water availability in most regions.

7. **Groundwater**

- Groundwater capacity varies considerably over the Northern Australian region. Across much of the Northern Territory’s interior and the northern Kimberley in Western Australia, groundwater basins have a sustainable yield of less than 500 gigalitres per year. Meanwhile, much of the Arnhem and Gulf coastal area of the Northern Territory have underground reserves which can produce a sustainable yield of between 2000 and 2500 gigalitres per year.

- The Great Artesian Basin stretches across much of Queensland (particularly the North West and Far North regions within Northern Australia), with a sustainable yield of between 200 000 and 500 000 megalitres of water per year.

8. **Fisheries**

- Fisheries in Northern Australia are subject to the same management rules as the rest of Australia. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority manages more than twenty fisheries, nine of which include waters off Northern Australia. Of these nine, four fisheries are exclusively associated with Northern Australia.
Industries

1. Mining and minerals processing
   - Australia’s two largest scale mining operations are located in Northern Australia: mining of iron ore in the Pilbara and mining of black coal in eastern Queensland’s MacKay Region.
   - The value adding operations are small compared with the large scale of mining minerals, which are exported predominantly unprocessed.

2. Businesses
   - Between 2004 and 2006, the total number of businesses grew more rapidly across much of northern Australia (4.8 per cent increase), more rapidly than it did in Australia as a whole (2.8 per cent increase).
   - From 2001 to 2006, there was a slight decline in the proportion of businesses which were owner-operated (50.3 per cent), accompanied by a rise in the proportions of businesses with employees (35.9 per cent), in line with national trends.

3. Tourism
   - Northern Australia had a very high share of tourist overnight stays (17.7 per cent of international overnight stays and 8.8 per cent of domestic overnight stays).
   - The highest number of Northern Australian tourist visits occurred in the northern regions of Queensland, followed by the Northern Territory.

4. Service industries
   - Relative to Australia, service industries such as finance, insurance, property and business services employ less people in Northern Australia.
   - On the other hand, government administration and defence are larger employers within Northern Australia.