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**19<sup>th</sup> BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

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## **Northern Australia: the new frontier**

**Luke Bowen**

General Manager, Northern Australia Development & Trade, Darwin NT 0801

Australia's North is close to 50% of the continent's landmass yet it holds only 5% of the population. Northern Australia sits within a sphere capturing half the world's population and an increasing share of the economic and strategic power. Almost all of the entire Northern Australia region is rangeland therefore the rangelands are at the heart of our nation's connection with this dynamic region.

It is fair to say that for most Australians, the North is somewhat of a mystery; with prevailing knowledge perhaps informed by the front pages of newspapers, tourism ads and the odd current affairs program focussed on the latest contentious or sensitive issue. Unfortunately much of what is perceived and known bears little relationship to the reality - a fact not aided by the slim representation from Northern Australia in our national parliament.

It is clear that the accepted time scale for human habitation in Australia and Northern Australia keeps getting pushed back, by 15,000 years most recently. What a fascinating time lapse it would be to see the last 65,000 years roll out on the big screen!

While it may be interesting to reflect on what we think it may have been like once upon a time and debate the pros and cons of the impacts of the last 150 odd years, the challenges and opportunities of today cannot be isolated and siloed. The rangelands of Northern Australia must be viewed within the wider national and international context, including the role Northern Australia will play in the future prosperity and security of our nation.