



NTCOSS Submission to Operation Rebound: suggestions for post-pandemic economic stimulus measures

NT Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is the peak body for the Northern Territory (NT) community sector and is a voice for people affected by social and economic disadvantage and inequality. The community sector in the NT is made up of community managed, non-government, not-for-profit organisations that work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy.

The community sector plays a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Territorians and in building safe and healthy communities by providing services that enable people to access and participate in health services, education, employment, economic development, and family and community life.

The community sector makes a major economic contribution to the NT both in the services we provide - which support and invest in social capital - and money we spend as services and individual staff.

NTCOSS is pleased to present this submission to the Commission, with opportunities for jobs creation, increasing economic activity and delivering social benefits to people facing significant hardship.

Principles

NTCOSS advocates for a range of economic stimulus measures that are consistent with a clean, fair future for the NT:

- where all Territorians benefit from economic development,
- where all Territorians have access to affordable and appropriate housing, education, health, transport and community services in the communities or regions in which they live,
- where Territorians feel safe and supported, are able to participate in community activities including sports and recreational activities, in a safe, clean environment.
- where diversity is valued.

Further, NTCOSS suggests that all recommended measures:

- positively impact the most disadvantaged communities
- generate sustainable local employment and regional economic opportunities
- promote a healthy environment and reduced emissions
- foster partnerships within and between communities and across sectors to build social cohesion

The NT Economic Reconstruction Commission wants to hear about projects, programs and proposals that:

- create jobs in the near term

- attract investment, including in regions and remote communities
- facilitate regulatory reform and streamlined approvals to support industry and investment
- build on the Territory's competitive advantage and strategic location
- engage with the Australian Government, investors and trade partners

This submission includes brief descriptions of economic stimulus projects that are consistent with the principles outlined above. Each of these proposals would also meet some if not all of the NT Economic Reconstruction Commission's criteria.

Our proposals are labour intensive rather than capital intensive and designed to provide benefits beyond economic stimulus.

The severe impacts of the economic downturn will be felt acutely by low to moderate income earners, and Territorians who are already facing significant financial hardship. NTCOSS supports proposals that put people first: proposals that will assist people most affected by COVID-19, and people already experiencing disadvantage and exclusion in the NT.

NTCOSS supports proposals that will provide lasting benefit to Territorians, measures that reduce carbon emissions in the NT, and projects that alleviate poverty and inequality. NTCOSS endorses submissions by NT Shelter, and the Australia Institute to this Commission, which are in keeping with these principles and outcomes.

Some comments on the NT Economic Reconstruction Commission criteria:

Create jobs in the near term

Stimulus measures need to create jobs now and into the future. We need to prioritise employment opportunities for:

- People who have lost their job or hours as a result of the pandemic, including hospitality workers, transport workers, arts and entertainment workers, young workers etc
- People who were already experiencing under or unemployment in the NT, including young people, people in remote NT
- Regions and remote communities
- Industries and sectors, trades and professions of the future – health and wellbeing, science

Attract investment, including in regions and remote communities

Support projects that will build economic and social infrastructure in regional and remote NT and create jobs and economic opportunities for the people that live in remote and regional NT, not just FIFO workers, and across a range of trades and professions.

Support local communities to plan and implement economic stimulus measures.

Many of the economic stimulus measures proposed below could be partially or fully funded by private investment or private/public partnerships.

All measures proposed will have a positive impact on employment and build physical and social assets in the NT.

Facilitate regulatory reform and streamlined approvals to support industry and investment

This principle should not be interpreted to mean relaxing financial, environmental or social requirements for any industry or sector.

It should mean that the regulatory settings are right, that information about those requirements is clear and readily available, processes are properly established and compliance is monitored.

Build on the Territory's competitive advantage and strategic location

Create jobs and projects that utilise what is unique to the NT:

- Cultural capital (The NT population is intensely multi-cultural and multi-lingual and the 2016 Census shows that 25% of the population is Aboriginal – the oldest continuing civilisation in the world)
- High solar radiance – great opportunities to drive economic development by using the NT's biggest asset for competitively priced renewable energy
- Proximity to Asia
- Young and diverse population

Engagement with the Australian Government, investors and trade partners.

Strategically engage with the Australian Government to maximise support and ensure Commonwealth resources are adequate and appropriately allocated. Market based funding mechanisms – eg NDIS and aged care services – do not work in the NT where markets are thin or non-existent, and result in an eventual loss of funding for those services in the NT.

Ensure that Australian Government funding for NT services is provided on a needs basis – taking into account the level of disadvantage, the breadth of the NT and the diverse geographic, climatic and social conditions.

Work with the Australian Government and service providers to ensure that accurate data is available to identify the level of need in the NT. For example, introduce a multilateral approach to the collection of census data, undertaken through the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Departments of Health, Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Social Services.

Likewise, ensure Commonwealth funds are not lost to the NT due to slow/late start of projects.

Recommendations for economic stimulus measures

Build New Social Housing and Renovate Existing Social Housing

- Renovate existing social housing stock to improve energy efficiency performance

- New stock and renovations etc must be to standards set out in the National Construction Code and National Indigenous Housing Standards, and planning and design should be undertaken with people who will ultimately live in the dwellings
- Plan and build new social housing stock throughout the NT, including specialist housing for young people, Aboriginal people, single person households, multi-family households
- New and refurbished Aboriginal housing in both remote and urban communities
- Support community controlled housing
- Bring forward repairs and maintenance programs for social housing
- Installation of solar on social housing

Economic and social benefits:

- Jobs for tradies
- Jobs in administration and planning
- Jobs throughout the NT
- High multiplier effect
- High social impact – the NT leads the nation in homelessness and overcrowding
- Economic and social benefits now and into the future
- Housing is the key to good health
- Increase value of housing stock
- Reduced energy costs for residents
- Increased social and economic participation by individuals, families and communities living in social housing
- Opportunity to create related programs eg appliance replacement schemes, training programs for energy efficiency assessors

Develop transport networks throughout the NT, including remote and local public transport networks

- Undertake regional and remote transport studies to identify gaps and opportunities
- Establish transport networks within major urban centres and between urban, regional and remote centres
- Ensure transport options area appropriate, affordable and fully accessible

Economic and social benefits:

- Jobs for tradies, jobs in repairs and maintenance of transport infrastructure, jobs for drivers
- Jobs in community consultation, administration & planning, customer service
- Jobs throughout the NT
- Improved transport will open up economic opportunities in remote and regional NT
- Jobs in the construction phase, jobs in the operational stage
- High social impact – people and communities more connected, better access to health, education, legal and retail services
- Improved, affordable access to employment and training opportunities

Invest in public spaces and clean, safe, accessible parks, community sports facilities

- Upgrade existing public spaces to improve facilities and safety

- Plan and build new public spaces, including parks, community sports facilities, spaces for passive and active community recreation activities
- Ensure public spaces across the NT area accessible and culturally appropriate

Economic and social benefits:

- Jobs for tradies
- Jobs in community consultation, administration and planning
- Jobs throughout the NT
- Increased public amenity
- Increased community health – both physical and mental health benefits
- Increased participation in sport and leisure activities, which in turns promotes health.
- There is evidence that access to parks etc (within walking distance) has a direct link to lower risk of blood pressure issues for women during pregnancy; good mental health and higher birth weights (amongst other health benefits)

Expand Creation of and Access to Renewable Energy

Invest in NT electricity infrastructure, including regional and local solar generation, storage and distribution. Cheaper, more abundant power will release huge economic potential for the NT. Renewables are cheaper than gas (NT has one of the highest levels of solar resources) and are the energy providers of the future.

- Invest in purchase and development of battery storage get the most from NT solar energy
- Invest in renewable energy projects
- Major contribution to NT target of net zero emissions by 2050

Economic and social benefits:

- Jobs for tradies
- Jobs in community consultation administration and planning
- Jobs throughout the NT
- High multiplier effect
- High social impact – reduce cost of energy and eradicate energy poverty in the NT
- Lower cost energy for Territorians would mean NT government could re-direct the over \$80 million it spends each year to subsidise the cost of power to everyone in the NT to people and communities in need

Invest in Jobs in regional and remote NT

- Invest in Caring for Country and Aboriginal Ranger programs
- Invest in more vocational and skills based training in remote and urban NT
- Increase resources to Support Local Decision Making
- Increased training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

Economic and social benefits:

- Increased training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people
- Increased career development opportunities for Aboriginal people, including increased opportunities for specialisation and advancement

- Jobs in community consultation, administration and planning
- Jobs in teaching
- Jobs throughout the NT
- High multiplier effect

Invest in Jobs in the “Caring Economy”

The social services sector is one of the largest employers in the NT (at 8% of the NT workforce, it employs more people than mining) and with a total annual income close to \$1 billion, more than half of which is generated from operations and donations. In 2017, \$417 million of paid employee expenses were fed back into the NT economy and community services. Access to appropriate community services as and when required reduces demand on government services including health and corrections.

- Invest in and support the community sector – now and in future
- Support the newly jobless to re-train for employment in the community sector
- Train staff and plan for increase to health and social assistance employment in aged care, disability services, early childhood education

Economic and social benefits:

- Community services help keep people well and engaged, increasing health and wellbeing, participation in community, education and employment
- Opportunities to create transitional jobs in areas of COVID-19 need including health services, mental health services, “track and trace” services, development and distribution of community information
- Jobs in community consultation, administration & planning, community engagement
- Jobs in health, social assistance, education and training, sport and recreation
- Jobs throughout the NT

Develop new urban, regional and remote recycling Centres

- Diversion of waste from construction and demolition for reuse or recycling
- Upgrade waste removal system in Town Camps and remote communities
- Upgrade infrastructure management in Town Camps and remote communities
- Invest in waste removal and management of infrastructure

Economic and social benefits:

- Opportunities for private investment
- Jobs for tradies
- Reduced reliance on centrally located recycling and waste management facilities
- On-going skilled and low-skilled employment opportunities
- Jobs in community consultation, administration and planning
- Small scale industry

I would be pleased to provide further details on any of our proposals and to address members of the NT Economic Reconstruction Commission and any of its advisory committees about the principles and suggestions in this submission.



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CEO, NTCOSS
21 July 2020

Attachments

- ACOSS and partners Proposal for Economic Stimulus: healthy and affordable homes: national low income energy productivity program.
- Value of the Sector Infographic
- Value of the Sector Report 2017

References:

(from NT Economic Reconstruction Commission Terms of Reference:

https://ntrebound.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/894951/territory-economic-reconstruction-commission-terms-reference.pdf)

Value of the Sector Report 2017

<https://mk0ntcossoq2ubakxf8.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/NTCOSS-VOS-Report-FINAL.compressed.pdf>

Crawford, R. H., Mathur, D., & Gerritsen, R. (2017). Barriers to Improving the Environmental Performance of Construction Waste Management in Remote Communities. *Procedia Engineering*, 196, 830-837. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2017.08.014>