

Welcome Reception for the Northern Territory Cattlemen's  
Association 25th Annual Industry Conference  
SPEECH by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC  
Administrator of the Northern Territory  
Alice Springs – 26 March 2009

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As Administrator of the Northern Territory, I welcome you to this Reception for the NT Cattlemen's Association 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Industry Conference. I also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the area, Lhere Artpe Aboriginal Corporation.

On 11 July 2009, the Association celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which in the realms of marriage might mean the presentation of a silver tea set, silver vase or Silver Star rose – Roy and Janet, is that growing in your rose garden at Napperby?

Thinking of Napperby, Tessa and I were there in October and it was bone dry. Overestimating my powers as Administrator, I said that I would send rain. A week later I rang Janet to enquire whether they got the rain. "Yes" she said – 0.8mm in the gauge. Another week later it was a bit more substantial but I think I had better keep to my core business of opening rural shows.

Twenty-five years ago it was 1984. In April 1984, *Advance Australia Fair* was proclaimed our national anthem and a month later the \$1 coin was introduced. In the Northern Territory, Ian Tuxworth took over from Paul Everingham as Chief Minister. In Alice, Bobby Liddle was the first Aboriginal candidate to successfully contest the position of Alderman of a Northern Territory Council; the government sought to upgrade the airport to international standards; and the Yulara Tourist Resort was completed.

*1984* was also a famous novel written by Eric Arthur Blair in 1948 under his pseudonym, George Orwell. In another of his novels entitled *Animal Farm*, Orwell notes: *Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals.*

Other than man, a beast that stands with considerable majesty in the paddocks of the Northern Territory is the Brahman and I've known a station owner in the Top End express nothing less than complete adoration for his herd. Tessa and I have enjoyed a crisp dry white wine in the company of Brahman at Riveren with John and Terry Underwood and have been in the middle of a large helicopter muster of Brahman at Wave Hill. And I am not the only Administrator to have observed the humped cattle.

On 25 March 1912, Dr John Gilruth, a Doctor of Veterinary Science and Professor of Veterinary Pathology at the University of Melbourne, was appointed by the Federal Government as the first Administrator of the Northern Territory of the Commonwealth of Australia - on an annual salary of £1,750.

During his term, Gilruth often visited Koolpinyah station where he noticed wild Zebu cattle on the property. He saw that they appeared resistant to cattle ticks and seemed to thrive where British breeds of cattle did not. Gilruth later applied his observations to his scientific work.

Eighty years later, Dr George Jacobs, founder of the Mogul Brahman Stud, presented an excellent paper and I quote, with his permission: *The name "Brahman" was adopted in 1924 for the new bos indicus breed developed by American cattlemen who required an alternative to European type cattle for the difficult environment conditions along the Texas gulf coast. Nineteen head of cattle of the Brahman breed were first imported into Australia in 1933 by the CSIR, the forerunner of the CSIRO. As far back as 1752 at the Paris Agricultural Fair the name Zebu was officially adopted to describe all breeds of Bos Indicus. The name Zebu was taken from the Tibetan word Zen or Zeba which means "the hump of the camel".*

Dr Jacobs concludes as follows: *the question "what's in the hump" remains to be answered. Well, I'm pleased to tell you, says he, that it is a large slab of well marbled meat and in some South American countries it is cooked as a delicate dish for special occasions.*

It is worth noting the work of Dr Ralph Kelley, who joined the Division of Animal Health of CSIR as Animal Geneticist in 1931. One of his responsibilities was to investigate Dr. Gilruth's idea for an improved breed of cattle for Northern Australia by appropriate cross-breeding with Zebu strains. It was Dr Kelley who organised the initial importation of nineteen Zebu cattle for a syndicate of Queensland pastoralists, and subsequently observed and recorded their performance and that of their progeny under Australian conditions over the next 15 years. The first Administrator of the Northern Territory, Dr Gilruth, might have been very unpopular during his term but he certainly left a lasting legacy.

Twenty-five years ago, in 1984, no-one was thinking of harvesting the Brahman's hump for special occasions. Instead the cattle industry was combating the serious business of brucellosis and tuberculosis. A parliamentary record for 19 October 1984 states: *Senator Kilgariff (Northern Territory) – I give notice that, on the next day of sitting, I shall move: That the Senate ... calls upon the Federal Government to provide adequate finance to those property owners who have been forced to destock as a part of the brucellosis and tuberculosis eradication campaign, to ensure that herd levels are restored to a viable level nationally.*

I note that Bernie's call the previous day was for the government to commission a second inquiry into the viability of the Alice Springs to Darwin rail link project without delay.

The campaign for brucellosis eradication combined vaccination to detect the disease with test and slaughter to eradicate the infection. Chris Bunn from the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer reported: *That Australia could declare itself free of bovine brucellosis by 1992 was an amazing achievement. Such an effort not only required considerable support by industry, major resource inputs by governments, but also the backup of technology providing reliable laboratory results and, although primitive by today's standards, computer support maintaining records on a national basis.*

This is also when helimustering came into its own. The opening of the Katherine meatworks in the late sixties had been the first factor in the more widespread use of helicopters. Instead of a full stock camp of seven to ten men taking four days to muster a medium sized paddock, helimustering meant that it could be accomplished in four to five hours.

As the former President, John Armstrong, recalls: *The whole north Australian cattle industry moved up about fifteen gears in one go as we were able to rid the paddocks of feral bulls and this helped change the whole genetic baseline. The 'centre camp' herd (around The Alice) is predominantly British breeds and these have been upgraded. In all the BTEC program cost 970 million dollars, but the cattle industry is secure now because of it.*

The retiring Chairman of your Katherine Branch, Rohan Sullivan, has also been well placed to witness the changes over the past twenty-five years. His experience includes Adelaide River, Alroy Downs, Kidman Springs and Cave Creek. He noted that in 1984, BTEC was still a problem but the northern herds also began to be upgraded with Brahmans. The percentage turn off for live export was 6%. In 2004, it reached 89% which now equates to nearly a quarter of a million head from that region alone.

Many pastoral leases have been bought up and operate very differently to "the old days". Often only a few people live on them permanently, instead it is a 'fly in, fly out' work force. Some of those "old days" are beautifully preserved in the AusFuel photographic competition which forms part of this conference.

Looking to the future - a finalist for the 2009 Northern Territory Young Achiever Awards is Bronte James who helps her family on Hidden Valley Station and also works shifts in a gold mine. She began raising her first cow when five years old, has now formed her own herd and brand, transports cattle overseas and hopes to gain recognition for breeding growth in her area. Yes, cycles of nature continue. Droughts afflict and floods inundate. However, a colossal amount of personal effort continues to be invested to ensure the beef industry flourishes in the Northern Territory – for which I sincerely thank you all.