

ADDRESS BY
HIS HONOUR MR TOM PAULING QC
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
ON THE OCCASION OF
**WELCOME RECEPTION FOR THE NT CATTLEMEN'S
ASSOCIATION 24th ANNUAL CONFERENCE**
SKYCITY Casino, Darwin
27 March 2008

As Administrator of the Northern Territory, I would like to welcome you to this venue beside the Arafura Sea. A location which emphasises the importance of the Territory's live cattle trade, which is our third largest GDP earner, and the value of the industry working together to invest in increasing market share, both domestically and in the world beef market, including relations with our neighbours to the north: Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and The Philippines.

The Northern Territory can be aptly described as the lungs of Australia with conduits carrying road trains full of cattle from remote stations to our ports and onwards to Asia. To describe our region as the lungs of the nation is not so far fetched as, together, the lungs contain approximately 2,400 kilometres of airways.

Our cattle stations which collectively carry more than two million head range from Mulga Park in the south to Melaleuca on the Mary River Flood Plains, from Birrindudu Wallamunga edged by desert some 700 kilometres south west of Katherine, to the vast area of Wollogorang which boasts the longest continuous occupation in the Territory.

In June 1881 a pastoral lease was taken up at Settlement Camp, near the site of the present homestead, by the Chisholm family who lived at Wollogorang House near Goulburn in New South Wales.

The first Northern Territory pastoral lease was Springvale on the Katherine River, established in 1878 on land owned by a respected pastoralist in South Australia, Dr W. J. Browne, who had heard good reports of the land around Katherine from Stuart and other explorers. He was one of the first to invest in the opening up of the area following the completion of The Overland Telegraph.

In 1879, Alfred Giles brought livestock to Springvale for Dr Browne. This particular trip, according to author Ernestine Hill, was *'the greatest cavalcade of droving ever seen in Australia'*. It included 300 horses, 2,000 cattle, 12,000 sheep, 12 bulls and 90 brood mares and they left Adelaide with four wagons, four drays, two express wagons, 40 men with portable troughs and a year's supply of fodder. It makes my current preparations at Government House to visit Territory cattle stations seem like child's play.

The second pastoral lease was assigned in 1878 to Delamere, initially known as Glencoe, now owned by Australia's oldest agricultural company - the Australian Agricultural Company. Many of our pastoral properties are currently held by major companies and I welcome their investment. It is also rewarding to note the stations which have been "in the family" for decades, like Riveren and Napperby and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those men and women who have laboured on the land over the years. It is intriguing to trace the advanced technology that now applies, from "Walk-Over-Weighing" to GPS collars for cows.

Reading through my research papers, I note that buffalo are also in the news with Italian stud buffalo successfully introduced into a Northern Territory milking buffalo herd, which may be good news for those who enjoy authentic Mozzarella.

But let me return to live cattle export, a topic about which I know a bit. When in private practice in the 1970s I represented Ian Britten-Jones and David George who developed some interesting markets, not only for cattle but for buffalo and not only by sea but also by air. We negotiated a contract with the government of the north-east state of Nigeria and flew 200 buffalo calves to Lagos via Kuala Lumpur, Colombo and Djibouti. On arrival a trader from the Tiffany Corporation laughed and said we would never get paid. He was astonished to learn that we had a hard letter of credit and the money was in the bank before we left, as they had about three million dollars worth of stuff at the airport they couldn't get in and couldn't get out without some informal payments.

B-J and Georgie also took buffalo up the Orinoco River in Guyana but it was the live trade to Hong Kong which I want to tell you about. The buyer, a Mr Peter Chan, was very happy with the docile Brahman-cross cattle coming off the plane at Kai Tak airport but he was intrigued to discover how buffalo meat would go in the market. He sent a telex requesting a trial run of twenty buffalo following the Wet. So Sid Parker and Georgie went to Wangi to see Johnny Harrower, known as "Squeaky". He was asked to bring in twenty buffalo at 800 lbs on a date some months away. *Won't be easy*, he grumbled, *Going to be hard work*. The day arrived. The cattle were yarded ready to be loaded after the buffalo, but where was Squeaky?

The pilot paced up and down. There was not much time to waste. Then up comes Squeaky with two K wagons. Sid Parker goes over to give Squeaky a piece of his mind while B-J looked at the buffalo.

Shocked, he yelled *Sid, you'd better have a look at these fellas.* Sid did and turned very pale. They were the biggest, meanest buffalo you would ever drag from a swamp against their will. Over the weighbridge they averaged more than 1,300 lbs each - they were a tad over 800 lbs dressed weight. *Oh, Squeaky says, I didn't know you meant live weight.*

Well, they got fourteen out of the twenty herded down one end of the plane and B-J says someone should shut the pen doors. No-one moved, so off goes B-J one by one until the last pin drops in and they are safe enough even with a nearly two-metre trophy-size horn span. The quiet cattle are then put on board and locked away and the plane flies into Kai Tak Airport down between the apartment buildings.

On the ground are Mr Peter Chan and a small tribe of men with bamboo panels. Off come the cute little Brahman-crosses and the panels are effective in getting them to trucks. In Darwin, the telex machine remained quiet. Another twenty-four hours passed, no news, – then the telex sprang to life: *no more buffalo please, still on plane 36 hours.*

In the end, frightened men with tranquiliser darts on the end of long bamboo poles resolved the issue and ended the buffalo trade to Hong Kong. The six buffalo that didn't make it to Hong Kong ended up at the Point Stuart abattoir. The young heifers we took to Nigeria were a very manageable size. The moral of the story is know your product, be careful what you ask for, know your market and warn your customers of what they are “about to receive”.

On that note may I welcome you all from near and far. I am coming to some of the sessions and of course the dinner. To new friends - it is great to meet you, and to old friends - it is great to catch up.

Have a great conference.

Thank you