

MEDIA RELEASE

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NATIONAL FOOD PLAN DISMISSES NORTH AUSTRALIA FOOD BOWL

The Australian government's National Food Plan green paper is wrong to dismiss the major potential for expanding Northern Australia's agricultural output, according to John Shipp, Director of the ANDEV/IPA North Australia Project.

"North Australia has the opportunity to become a food bowl meeting booming demand for high quality produce in China and the wider Asia-Pacific region," Mr Shipp said.

According to a 2010 OECD report, by 2020, more than half the world's middle class will be in Asia and Asian consumers will account for over 40 per cent of global middle class consumption.

"That's a lot of mouths to feed, and as their quality of life improves they will start to demand more high quality and niche agricultural products, representing a major opportunity for Australia to increase and diversify its export base," Mr Shipp said.

However, the government's green paper sets out no clear strategy for unleashing Northern Australia's agricultural potential, according to Mr Shipp.

The green paper says "large-scale expansion of irrigated agriculture in northern Australia—the scale of which would be required to create a northern food bowl—does not appear to be sustainable or feasible".

"While calling for more food production, the federal government refuses to recognise the potential expansion of agricultural production in northern Australia through, for example, the building of dams. A previous government report from the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce dismissed the potential of the north, and this latest report follows that line," Mr Shipp said.

"There are areas of North Australia that receive almost double the annual rainfall of the Murray-Darling basin. If Australia's agricultural sector is to make the most of these exciting opportunities, we need to overcome this ridiculous aversion to building new dams."

"Current government policies lack the vision necessary to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in Asia, both as a destination for exports and as a source of capital," Mr Shipp said.

The Institute of Public Affairs, in conjunction with Australians for Northern Development and Economic Vision (ANDEV), is calling for the establishment of a Northern Special Economic Zone (SEZ) with lower taxes and a reduced regulatory burden.

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