Bringing Back the Arafura Games

Discussion Paper

The Northern Territory Government is working to bring back the Arafura Games, committing $4 million to have the Arafura Games return in 2019.

Background

The Arafura Games began as the Arafura Sports Festival in 1991 with 1,500 athletes competing in seven sports. From 1998 it was known as the Arafura Games and was held every two years until 2011, except in 2003 when it was cancelled due to concerns relating to an overseas health epidemic.

The Arafura Games was a well-developed international multi-sport event that attracted participants from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, with the 2011 event attracting 1,600 visiting athletes.

The Arafura Games fostered goodwill between sporting neighbours and shared sporting and cultural knowledge within the Asia-Pacific region. Significantly, the Arafura Games also provided Northern Territory sporting organisations with the opportunity to develop facilities, coaches, officials and athletes. In terms of community engagement, the Arafura Games recruited over 1,000 local and interstate volunteers to support the event and provided opportunity for interaction with local primary and secondary schools.

In 2012, the then Government cancelled the scheduled 2013 games, citing that the event cost too much and failed to meet Asian engagement objectives.

Current Situation

Lead by Mrs Kate Worden MLA, the Assistant Minister for Bringing Back the Arafura Games, a Steering Committee has been established to determine the philosophy and guiding principles for the Arafura Games.

The Committee is consulting with relevant stakeholders and the public on their views around the return of the Arafura Games. These consultations will inform the development of a Strategic Framework that will facilitate the return of the Arafura Games, and support the relationship between the business, cultural, sporting and tourism objectives.

Discussion Points

There are many questions to be asked, however the Steering Committee urges every stakeholder to at least consider the following:

- What time of year should the Arafura Games be scheduled?
- How long and how often should the Arafura Games be held?
- What sports should be included in the Arafura Games?
- What is the ideal standard of competition for the Arafura Games?
- What opportunities do you see for the Northern Territory from staging the Arafura Games?
Sporting Objective

Since the last Arafura Games held in 2011, sport has grown significantly in the Asia-Pacific region. It is a progressive market and there has been increased investment in the development of sporting industries by many of our neighbouring countries. It is important that we understand the sporting competition needs of both our Northern Territory sporting organisations as well as those of our Asia-Pacific neighbours. This will influence and inform the development of the structure of the sporting competition and how it is delivered.

Discussion Points

There are many questions to be asked, however the Steering Committee would urge every stakeholder to at least consider the following:

- What venues are available in Darwin that are of an appropriate standard to host the Arafura Games?
- Is there a place to include extreme sports in the Arafura Games?
- Should the Arafura Games be a qualifying event for other national or international competitions?
- What role can local sporting associations, community groups or individuals play in making the Arafura Games a reality?
- Should the Arafura Games support para-athletic competition, as it has in the past?
- Should Northern Territory athletes/sporting bodies participate in reciprocal International events?
- Are there existing working relationships with other Asia-Pacific sporting or community bodies that could benefit the Arafura Games?

Economic Objective

Darwin is ideally situated on Asia’s doorstep. As the closest region to Asia, the ‘Top End’ remains a valuable strategic location to Australia. This has enabled the Northern Territory to progressively integrate its economy with the Asian region. To attract increased foreign investment and further establish the Northern Territory as the gateway to Asia for tourists and businesses it is vital to grow strong relationships with the booming Asia-Pacific region.

The Arafura Games has the potential to become a key element to strengthen and sustain existing networks and leverage growth and opportunities in the tourism, business and trade industries. In order to do this the Arafura Games must clearly define how it may become a platform to sustain these relationships and strengthen its presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Discussion Points

There are many questions to be asked, however the Steering Committee would urge every stakeholder to at least consider the following:

- What benefits or business improvements were realised by business/industry as a result of the previous Arafura Games?
- What would a reinstated Arafura Games mean for local businesses/industries?
- How could local businesses/industries contribute to the Arafura Games?
- Which countries do you consider important to involve in the Arafura Games?
Arts and Community Engagement Objective

The Northern Territory, as an inclusive society, values and embraces cultural diversity. The Arafura Games presented an opportunity to showcase and celebrate the vibrant and distinctive arts and culture of the Northern Territory and participating countries. In particular, the Arafura Games opening and closing ceremonies provided an opportunity for the Northern Territory arts sector to curate and showcase local artists, as well as opportunities for youth, multicultural engagement and participation.

More broadly, a revitalised Arafura Games could also provide opportunities to strengthen existing, and establish new, arts and cultural relationships across the Asia-Pacific region. This may be fostered through a program of arts and cultural activities during the Arafura Games, linking to and promoting existing arts events, festivals and relationships with the arts sector in Darwin and the Northern Territory. The Arafura Games has the potential for arts sector development as well as business and employment opportunities for local artists and organisations.

Discussion Points

There are many questions to be asked, however the Steering Committee would urge every stakeholder to at least consider the following:

- What is the best way to celebrate and showcase Northern Territory arts and culture during the Arafura Games?
- What opportunities are there for Northern Territory organisations to work with or partner with visiting countries to showcase arts and culture at the Arafura Games?

Tourism Objective

The Northern Territory has an established reputation as a unique tourism destination centred on its extraordinary natural landscapes and rich Indigenous culture. Tourism is the third highest contributor to the Northern Territory economy behind construction and mining, contributing an estimated $1.76 billion annually in Gross Value Added.

Asian markets represented around 19% of the total 293,000 international visitors to the Territory for year ending September 2016, with traditional markets in the Western hemisphere contributing the vast majority of international visitor numbers. In the past the Arafura Games delivered very minimal direct tourism impact as many visitors were billeted rather than staying in commercial accommodation. It is still the case that Territory tourism offering does not align well with the product or value expectations of travellers from Asian markets. Positive benefits to the tourism industry could be realised, such as through pre and post touring, if a reinvigorated Arafura Games significantly increases visitation to the Territory from key tourism source markets in the region.

Discussion Points

There are many questions to be asked, however the Steering Committee would urge every stakeholder to at least consider the following:

- What benefits were realised by the tourism industry as a result of the previous Arafura Games?
- How can a revitalised Arafura Games contribute to the local tourism industry?
- What tourism markets (country, demographics) do you consider important to attract to the Arafura Games? What targets are realistic?