

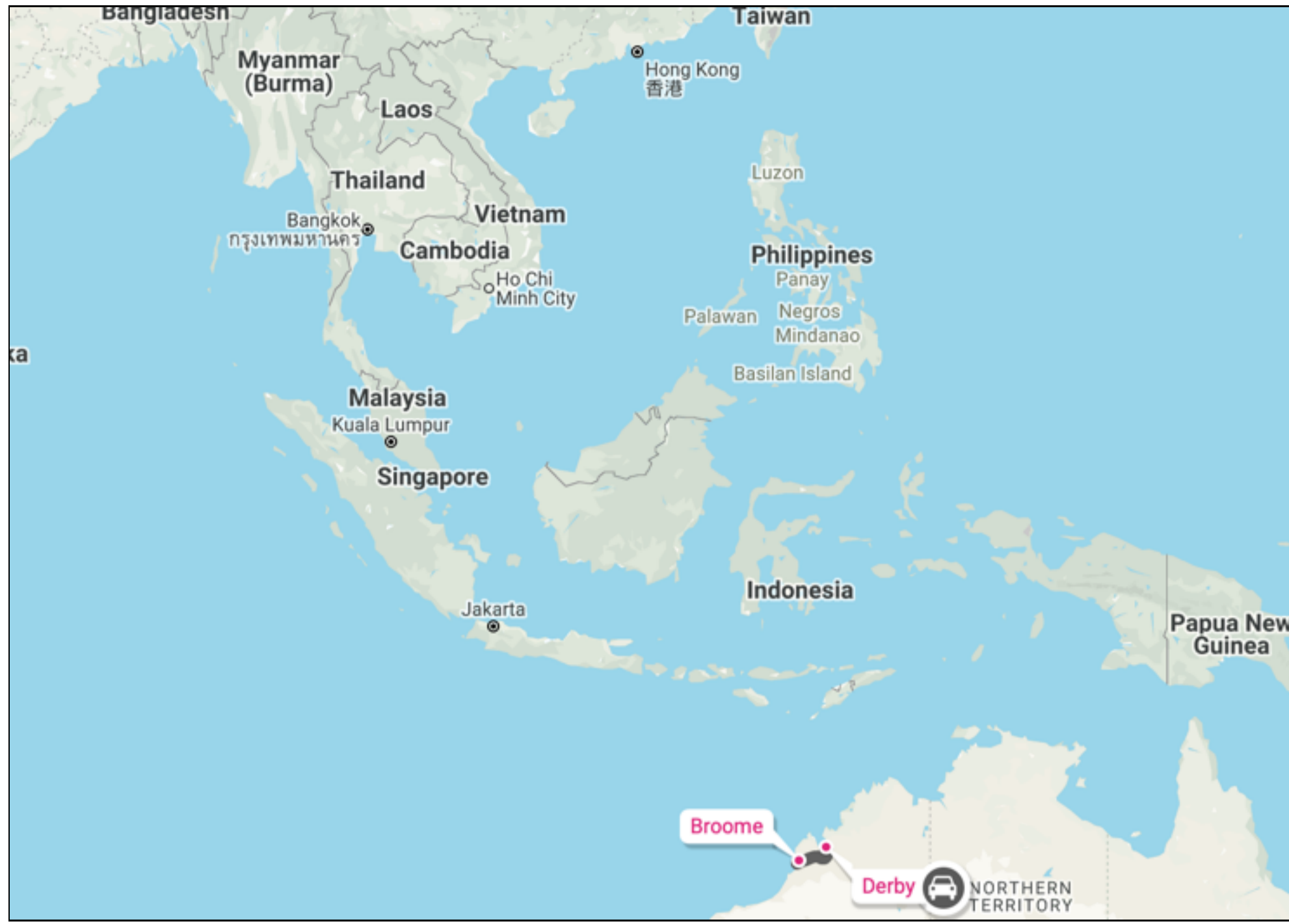
Australian International Zone (AIZ)

A small area (say 200 sq km) of unproductive land in the Kimberley area of the North-West, between Broome and Derby, [not under native title] should be excised and made available to the Australian Federal government and nations in the South-East Asian region as an International Zone for cooperative educative/research and diplomatic activities.

The primary aim of this proposal is to establish a regional 'Switzerland' -- a Geneva-like, neutral, stable and independent base for joint regional diplomacy discussions, conferences, trade organisations, and educational/research activities -- as a non-belligerent way of confronting Chinese expansionism in the region.

This concept was defined many years before the Covid-19 crisis and the Hong Kong meltdown, but it has increased relevance now as a possible '**staging-post**' to allow Australians to continue trading and dealing with our global neighbours while subject to various stages of national border lock-downs.

New Zealand and Australia should work together on this project as co-hosts of the AIZ.



Functions

Diplomacy and Defence:

This approach should not be viewed as an alternative to conventional defence, but it allows Australia to take the lead in a coordinated regional opposition to Chinese expansionism without the unproductive and recent hostile rhetoric leading to the generation of trade wars.

The value of an excised international zone:

- The United Nations, ASEAN, and other regional humanitarian, health, and educational organisations should be offered the opportunity to build their own secretariats and subsidiary bases for their agencies.
- The primary group invited to participate would be the core nations of ASEAN, along with India and Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
- The major world powers (USA, UK, Russia and China) should **not** be included on the grounds that they are: not in the region, have different interests and agreement problems, and tend to dominate discussions. This is not a forum for the dominant global powers; they have the UN.
- The zone should be totally devoted to diplomacy, trade, education, research, health and humanitarian functions. It should specifically exclude defence.
- All ASEAN's joint security and defence functions should remain with ASEAN's current secretariat in Jakarta.

Trade and business:

Since the zones would no longer be subject to the normal jurisdiction of Australian federal laws and taxation requirements, they should be cooperatively managed along the lines of the UN and WTO and similar establishments in Switzerland and Holland.

- The North-West area should provide a safe-haven for many businesses now operating in Hong Kong who wish to stay in this region.
- The heavy hand of the Chinese authorities will undoubtedly send many ex-Hong Kong individuals to London and New York, however the real value of HK was in its regional function of linking the East and the West. Asian proximity was an essential component.
- It is possible that some of these historic business function will transferring to Singapore if the Malaysians don't come under too much pressure from China. But Australian stability and independence, coupled with a certain amount of distance, could well be the deciding factor.
- The ABC claims that there are 100,000 Australian ex-pats living in HK, so it is feasible that many Hong Kong business enterprises could be interested in transferring to the AIZ fairly rapidly.

Travel and tourism:

If the global pandemic persists, Australia would benefit enormously from having a purpose-built West-coast border facility where the international flights from Asia and Europe, meet with Australia's domestic flights.

- The North West proximity to Asia and the air-routes from Europe, and the area's low-population density gives us the opportunity to create some bubble relationships for tourism and business exchanges.
- Australia and New Zealand appear likely to be the first two countries in the world to restore both their own internal air-travel networks -- and likely trans-Tasman exchanges. It is fairly obvious now that it will be many years before normality is restored in the rest of the world, so new ways of handling international travellers at borders will need to be devised.
- If current 14-day border bans persist then it would make sense to provide a regional airline hub at Broome, well away from Australia's other cities, where Australia can continue to interact with the rest of the world in the most effective way possible in the circumstances. In the AIZ, a much higher and authoritarian standard of virus testing can be imposed, and more attractive venues for quarantine isolation can be purpose-built.
- It is also possible to construct meeting and conference facilities along the lines of medical isolation facilities, with special air-treatment techniques (air-knife separation, micro-filtration, UV sterilisation, etc). This would allow politicians, business leaders and scientist to hold face-to-face meetings without the risk of infectious transfer, and to thereby avoid the 14-day isolation rule.

National Staging Post:

The rapid development COVID-19 crisis has added another dimension to this proposal.

We can now [Aug 2020] assume that even with a viable vaccine Australia will take one or two years to control the pandemic to a level where all internal movements can be allowed, and domestic flights restored. However, it is also obvious that there will be sporadic outbreaks of virus problems throughout the densely populated Indo-Pacific area for at least 5 years, and possibly 10 years or more. These regions face other problems also.

Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia were quick to take action when the CORVID-19 pandemic struck, but they have shared borders with other nations which haven't yet controlled the spread, and they are trading partners with India, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines, which have been slow to act.

Future outbreaks will require regular or erratic imposition of Australia's national border quarantine rules and bans for decades. Therefore, to restore the economy, Australia will need specially designed staging-posts on both the Pacific coast and in the North-West to allow business-people, politicians, academics/research experts, and others to move globally.

These would involve the development of a special 'village-estate' for both short-stay housings and meetings. They would need to use construction techniques suited to the respective climate and weather extremes, and provide self-isolation accommodation, meeting, and conference facilities fitted with special air-scrubbing technologies.

Education and Research:

As with travel and tourism in any long-term scenario, many Australians will need to maintain some physical 'contact' channels linking us with the rest of the world. This will be especially so for cooperative research in the event that viral-type problems persist.

- The Australian universities make a healthy income out of degree courses, financed by fees paid by scholarships and some wealthy students from Asia. However currently, when they complete their course, these students will often be encouraged to remain in Australia under various visa arrangement. This means that we effectively create a 'brain drain' on those countries who can least afford to lose their educated professionals.
- Much more useful to our neighbours would be the provision of short specialist course on practical subject directly connected to front-line health, hospitals, child-birth, education, laboratory techniques, etc. and these would best be run within the AIZ.
- Over-population is the primary serious issue in Asia, and the cause of much of their continuing poverty and disease incubation problems. China under Mao has been the only Asian country to have success here.

We know now that the most effective form of contraception is female education, and to have any impact on poverty and global climate change Australian foreign assistance programs need to focus on teaching the teachers. Ideally this would become an easily accessible location for special short (one-to-six months) courses of this kind. This is especially important for some of the region's more chauvinistic communities.

- Preparatory English language courses are needed for international students enrolled in three-year degree courses at Australian universities. A joint-university establishment in the AIZ could provide a prerequisite short course in English and Australian culture before the new students transfer to their chosen university.
- Research programs, if successful, often result in Intellectual Property (IP) locked up to the detriment of smaller and poorer nations. The AIZ can offer a legal environment where cooperative research can be conducted without the risk of later private exploitation by Big Pharma, etc. Cooperative research facilities established in the AIZ would attract special interest and donations from a range of different wealthy individuals and charitable institutions.

Language translation and publishing:

Conventional book publishing will probably still be around for many decades, especially in the field of education. The need to translate both print and video material will also persist. The AIZ offers an ideal location for language translation. It would be multicultural, with diplomatic and staff resources from many nations, and be servicing many shared education and research institutions.

Asylum and Refugees:

The zone offers Australia an alternate way of handling refugees. With over-population and millions in refugee camps, the forced migration of minorities will inevitably become a major problem once the Covid-19 crisis begins to moderate. Australia has a couple of million displaced people housed in slum conditions just to our north, so it is ridiculous to assume that we have already solved the boat-people problem.

- Asylum-seekers would be considered as temporary visitors in the zone and provided with work visas restricted to the zone only. They should be given some practical education, work, and dignity, rather than just incarceration and used productively before being returned to their country of origin.
 - To discourage the boats, it should be stressed to everyone that the granting of asylum does not confer any special status; nor any priority for citizenship. Any non-Australian in the zone must return to their original home country when their asylum period ends (provided they are not at risk).
- We can make use of the skills and labour of refugees who do arrive on our shores, to our mutual benefit. Knowledge of the agricultural poverty of the North-Western part of the country will filter back and should discourage any flood of economic refugees.
- It is possible/probable that China will seek to generate dissatisfaction among Asia's minorities by promoting maps of Australia's unsettled land mass as a desirable location for agriculture. With the AIZ occupying otherwise vacant map-space we won't need to undertake the draconian (albeit successful) actions against boat-people that Australia did under Abbott.

Cyber and Satellite:

Since Broome is at the Australian end of the Australian-Java undersea cable, it is also ideal for supervising attempts to disrupt the internet. The North West is also an ideal location for satellite communications.

- This is an ideal location for joint regional actions in the development of all forms of modern communications.
- Australia should also lead a joint effort to force technical identity modifications and general changes to the internet and email systems to make them secure, spam-free and more useful. No one else appears to be playing this role seriously.

Renewable Energy:

Outside the proposed international zone the North West is shaping up to be one of the world's major producers of hydrogen from the renewable solar farms, wind, and now wave-power generation. It will certainly become a centre for processing high-grade steel, aluminium extraction and rare earth metals processing.

- The potential this region has for developing tidal power is world class. Tidal has a six-hour regular cycle of generation which can be coupled to new forms of battery- or hydro-storage to produce large-scale base-line power.
- The AIZ has the potential to exploit these energy sources, especially in the electronics manufacturing business.

Building research:

The North West is in notorious tropical cyclone zone. It would be necessary to use a range of modern building techniques suited to these conditions (low-rise, earth-covered, water harvesting buildings). These should become the basis of a construction research and training resource for South East Asia.

Why the North-West?

The choice of location for the AIZ is determined by:

- The proximity to South East Asia, and also reasonable access to the Indian Ocean fringe nations of the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- With Broome as the major city in this area, it makes sense to build on existing facilities, including those of the Broome township, port, and the airport capable of handling the largest of international jets. The area is also served by a major highway/road (the A1), a port, satellite services, and internet access to the rest of the world.
- Australia, and particularly the North-West, offers international organisations the possibility of creating a permanently stable base for their head-quarters within a region of turmoil.
- The North West of the country has few resources for conventional industries other than mining, and fishing, but the absence of population makes it ideal for renewable energy-based industries, and as an international zone.
- The Ord River now offers a food-crop growing area which would support a moderate population -- instead of cotton and sugar-cane.
- Australia's economic strength these days comes increasingly from the export of non-tangible services like education and research, rather than the older industries. These sectors can benefit from occupying areas of our continent where proximity to the neighbours is of more importance.
- The North West has the potential to become a globally exporter of renewable energy in the form of hydrogen. This is an ideal area for renewable development, and therefore for Australian-energy-hungry processing of materials with export potential -- aluminium, steel, and rare-earth smelting.

What nations should specifically not be included:

- Functions in the AIZ should focus on the Indo-Pacific areas and the problems of the small and middle-size nations of South Asia. Therefore China, Russia, the USA, UK and Europe should not be included.
- This is a way for Australia and New Zealand to engage with our northern neighbours, not an attempt at establishing a coordinated defence. Activities in the zone should therefore focus on health, education, trade and cooperation, and explicitly reject defence establishments.
- Counterterrorism Forum is obviously an important joint objective for the region.

What about the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea, and others?

- **Trans-Pacific traffic** We envisage a similar staging-post for traffic from the US, Canada and Japan on Australia's Pacific coast, somewhere close to Surfer's Paradise, we imagine.
- **Pacific Islanders:** The islanders of the Pacific have affinity with the Maori of New Zealand and a completely different range of potential problems to the countries of South East Asia. They are best coordinated and supported through New Zealand.
- **Papua New Guinea:** Australia has a special bilateral relationship with PNG, and this should be retained and maintained in its current form as a direct exchange.
- **Japan:** Frankly, we just don't know whether it would be interested in being involved in an international zone.
- **Taiwan:** We would hope it would be interested in becoming involved. The decision whether to admit Taiwan should be left to the ASEAN collective within the zone.

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