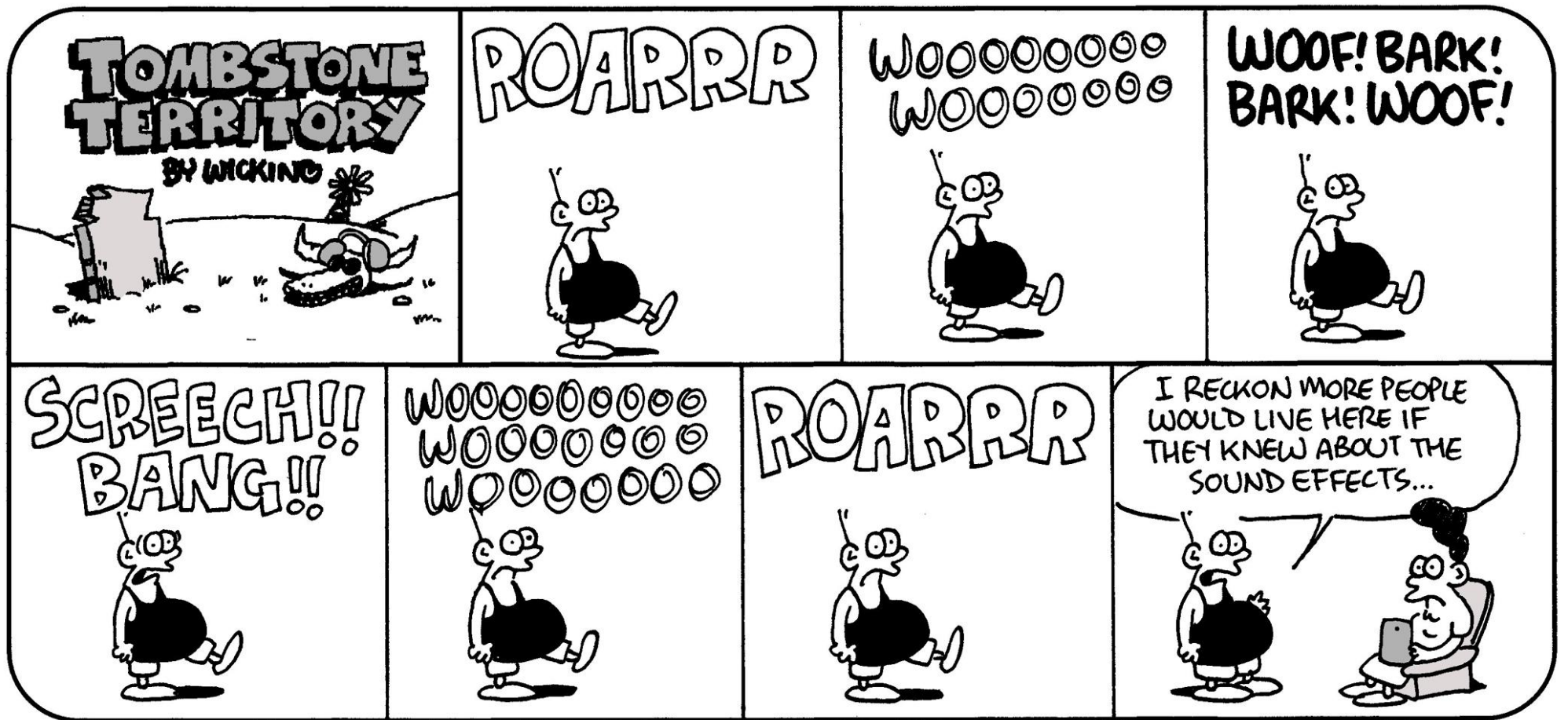


# THE SUNDAY SOAP BOX



## SUNDAY Territorian OUR SAY

### Government can't rely on charities

IT was a beautiful thing for Shannon McMillan and Kirstie Bryan to donate a Cuddle Cot to the new Palmerston Regional Hospital. Despite going through their own grieving process at the time, the parents realised others in their situation would need a chance to spend time with their babies before they buried them, and so raised more than \$6000 to purchase the cot. The one problem is they shouldn't have had to. Items like Cuddle Cots, which keep babies cool meaning they don't have to go to the morgue immediately, should be a standard in hospitals. In Australia, six babies are born stillborn every day. This is something thousands of parents are going through, yet many miss out on spending precious time with their little ones. More Cuddle Cots need to be provided to hospitals, to ensure no family misses out. But the issue isn't just with Cuddle Cots. Every year the Humpty Dumpty Foundation raises money to buy life-saving equipment for hospitals. Charities should not be having to provide equipment like this. It is the job of government, and our taxpayer dollars, to ensure our hospitals are first class. They should not have to rely on donations.

### WHAT'S THE DEAL?

WEREN'T we all pleased when high-profile, cashed-up Zehspeer owners including croc farmer Mick Burns, developer John "Foxy" Robinson, hotelier Justin Coleman and millionaire Brooke David cheered their gelding to Darwin Cup victory. OK, most of were peevied that a bunch of blokes who don't struggle for a quid just banked another \$200k but at least we thought we would get a free drink out of it. If it was good enough for John Singleton at a packed Rosehill, surely it was a non-negotiable for our lot?

# Population is key

LATE on the evening of Tuesday August 7 a baby was born, perhaps in Western Sydney, and Australia's population crashed through the 25 million barrier.

The news in Sydney and Melbourne is full of stories about overpopulated suburbs and infrastructure struggling to keep up; a 5km car trip may take half an hour, and it is almost impossible to get a seat on a peak hour train.

These are real problems which must be addressed.

However, the situation in Darwin couldn't be more different. Currently, Australia's population is increasing at 1.6 per cent annually, but the Territory's population may actually decline in the current year. This is bad news for the Top End. The main reason that the NT misses out so often — and in so many different ways — is our lack of population.

Careful, sustainable development in the Territory will bring jobs, GST dollars, and perhaps even cheaper airfares. It will enable Territorians to take advantage of a wider range of goods and services at more affordable prices. A Territory with more people will enable us to raise the revenue we need to build the schools, hospitals and roads of the future. The NT has a population of 247,000 people, compared to Queensland's population of five million.

Australia's population increases by about 400,000 people each year, but the Territory's population is stagnant if not trending down. The NT's share of the national population is diminishing at a significant rate, and our share of GST is declining accord-



LUKE GOSLING

ingly. Every person who leaves the NT reduces our GST share by around \$11,000 per year. With our current low revenue base this is unsustainable. The Territory's small population numbers and our remoteness, mean that we also lack political numbers on the national stage. The NT's 247,000 people are served by just two senators and

stronger economy will mean more jobs and more people.

The cost of airfares will fall, the number of specialists at the hospital will increase, and public transport will be improved. The long dreamt-of light rail between Darwin and Palmerston could also become a reality. Of course, population growth in Darwin and Palmer-

**"Careful, sustainable development in the Territory will bring jobs, GST dollars, and perhaps even cheaper airfares"**

two members of the House of Representatives.

That's just four NT representatives in a parliament of 226 members, and this number could slip back to three if we can't maintain our population. The vast distances in the Territory and the incredibly broad range of issues facing our community surely justify an increase in our representation rather than a reduction.

There is a strong national interest argument that we need to "grow the north" and work to significantly increase our Northern population on a sustainable basis. A bigger,

ston needs to be managed carefully, so that we can preserve all those things that we love about life here in the Top End. It's our connected and open community, where people have the time to chat, or to lend a hand. It's our unspoilt environment — a paradise for camping, fishing and outdoor adventures. It's our work-life balance, where we spend time with our families, rather than sitting for hours on public transport. To get this right, we need careful planning, so that we can develop our economy without losing what is great about our lifestyle.

For these reasons, I have enlisted the assistance of CDU's Northern Institute to run a population forum at the university at 5pm on Thursday August 30. The event — entitled "Darwin — Is Bigger Better?" will feature a presentation from Northern Institute demographer Dr Tom Wilson.

It will also offer a panel discussion with representatives from government, business, the environment sector, and the indigenous community.

Territory legend Benny Lew Fatt recently made a comment that resonated with me. He said that if you come to the Territory, you love it and you contribute, then you're a Territorian. I experienced this open and welcoming spirit first hand when I first came to the Top End, and it wasn't long before I knew it was the place I wanted to stay and raise a family.

The Territory has much to benefit from those who want to make our wonderful Territory their home.

Population policy is a critical issue for the future of the NT and is something that will affect all of us. I encourage you to come along to hear from the experts at the forum on August 30, but also to join in and contribute to the discussion on how we ensure a sustainable future for our home.

The population forum "Darwin — Is Bigger Better" will be held at Charles Darwin University from 5pm to 7pm, Thursday August 30.

Details can be found via the Luke Gosling MP Facebook page and on the Northern Institute's website.

**➤ Luke Gosling is the Territory's federal member for Solomon**

**TOUCHED BY THE ROAD TOLL** THIS YEAR **31** LAST YEAR **20**