



**The Hon Madeleine King MP**  
Minister for Resources and Northern Australia

## **SPEECH**

17 October 2023

2023 Annual Statement to the Parliament on Developing  
Northern Australia

by the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, the Hon  
Madeleine King MP

### **Acknowledgements**

I rise to make the Annual Statement on Northern Australia, on behalf of the Minister for Northern Australia, who is unwell this week and unable to attend Parliament.

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this meeting place, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people.

I pay respect to Elders, customs and connection to country.

I extend this to Traditional Owners of the lands across our north and First Nations people in the Chamber.

Our Government is committed to working with First Nations people to ensure the north is fair, inclusive and prosperous for all who choose to call Northern Australia home. I want to thank Linda Burney, Minister for Indigenous Australians, for fostering meaningful engagement.

And all members and Senators who represent electorates across Northern Australia, in particular:

- In Queensland, Members for Leichhardt, Kennedy, Herbert, Dawson, Capricornia and Flynn, as well as, Senator Watt, Senator Chisholm and Senator Green;
- In Western Australia, the Member for Durack as well as Senator Dodson and Senator Sterle; and
- In the Northern Territory, the Members for Solomon and Lingiari, along with Senator McCarthy.

Thank you for your commitment and contribution and thanks also to Senator Susan McDonald, Shadow Minister for Northern Australia.

I acknowledge the shared vision and spirit of my state and territory ministerial colleagues, working through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum.

To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, I understand that the result at the weekend is for many of you a moment of great sadness and hurt.

Australians have voted against constitutional change but it is clear there is consensus that more must be done to tackle the disadvantage.

This is not the end of reconciliation - we have heard clearly from many remote communities, including those in Australia's north that there was a desire for this change - communities want to be heard.

We will continue to be a Government that listens to and works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We remain committed to closing the gap.

As a nation we will move forward and we will thrive.

Because we all agree we need better outcomes for First Nations people.

Earlier this month in Cairns, the intergovernmental Northern Australia Ministerial Forum discussed the strategic importance of the north and implementation of the Defence Strategic Review and the opportunities this offers for development in the north.

Northern Australia is critically important to our national security.

The **Defence Strategic Review**, outlines the need to improve the ability of the Australian Defence Force to operate from our network of bases, ports and barracks across the north from Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the northwest, through RAAF bases Learmouth, Curtin, Darwin, Tindal, Scherger and Townsville.

This is why we are investing \$3.8 billion in bases in the north, with a focus on delivering long-term growth and liveability of the regional areas that support them.

I would also like to acknowledge Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Chair, Tracey Hayes, CEO Craig Doyle, and officials, as well as the Chair of the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia, Sheridan Morris and Chief Scientist Allan Dale for the important work they do driving policy to support communities in the north.

Finally, let me thank members of the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group led by Chair Colin Saltmere, who

have travelled far to be here. I'd also like to thank members of the IRG:

- Ms Tara Craigie
- Mr Jerome Cubillo
- Mr Troy Fraser
- Mr Peter Jeffries; and
- Ms Gillian Mailman

Thank you for your commitment, Minister King looks forward to continuing to work together.

In this second annual statement about Northern Australia you will hear how the Albanese Government is taking action to secure a fair and ambitious future for the north.

This Government recognises the importance the north plays in the prosperity and security of all Australians.

## **Introduction**

Northern Australia is vast. Extending from the Tropic of Capricorn, it covers approximately three million sq. kms and includes over 10,000 km of coastline.

Demographically, it is a young and a multicultural community of great potential. Potential we can make the most of if the Federal Government and the states work together.

Over the past year, Minister King has visited many communities across the north, experiencing first-hand the resilience, innovation and energy of locals, and the deep connection to country.

## **Our vision**

Last year, Minister King announced the refresh of our policy cornerstone the **Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia** to better address contemporary challenges and opportunities.

We will achieve this through the development of the five-year action plan to continue to make progress towards realising our vision outlined in the White Paper to build a strong, prosperous economy and a safe, secure Australia.

Things have changed since the last White Paper was published. There are new challenges and opportunities ahead.

This white paper refresh will ensure this important document is working for communities in the north, making sure it includes the

work this Government is doing to lay strong economic foundations for the future.

Through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum, three priority areas have been set for the next five-year Northern Australia Action Plan: human capital, enabling infrastructure, and economic development and diversification.

This will provide the framework to help achieve our ambition, aligned to government priorities and a First Nations partnership approach.

Engagement is currently underway and we are listening to a wide range of stakeholders across Northern Australian communities, to make sure we get this next set of actions targeted right.

Minister King would like to thank those from Northern Australian businesses, industry, government and communities who have contributed through the engagement so far, your valuable input is helping to shape the future of the north.

Your feedback shows that the issues in Northern Australia are complex and there is no simple, quick-fix solution but that you are also passionate about the potential of the North. I thank you for your hard work.

The Albanese Government is also working with Queensland, Western Australia and Northern Territory Governments on a review of the Northern Australia Indigenous Development Accord to ensure First Nations aspirations are central to the Northern Australia agenda.

The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group continues to be a strong voice for First Nations aspirations in Northern Australia, providing valuable input to the White Paper refresh, the Accord review, and providing advice on priority areas for action in the north.

Last November, Minister King delivered her first Annual Statement to Parliament on Northern Australia, outlining our agenda to drive diversified, sustainable growth.

I can report to the Chamber we are making good progress.

We have demonstrated our commitment, and in the 2023-24 budget announced significant investments in the region of over \$5 billion.

The Albanese Government is addressing cost of living pressures through investments in health, housing, childcare, skills, education and vocational training.



We are investing in roads, regional infrastructure and essential services. Delivering enabling infrastructure to help regions thrive and connect to markets and services.

We are supporting an agile local workforce that can benefit from emerging and traditional industries, including agriculture, aquaculture, biosecurity and defence.

We are working with partners to build a sustainable resources and energy industry.

And we are working across government, with industry, community stakeholders and First Nations people.

Our Government is committed to the north; a strong north means a strong nation.

### **A cleaner, more secure future**

The north is home to some of the world's most precious environments.

Climate change is impacting these natural environments, economies and the liveability of our communities. The recent decision by UNESCO to not list the Great Barrier Reef as 'in danger' is testament to the serious action we are taking on climate change.

The north is home to rich mineral earth deposits, natural resources and long sunny days.

The world is seeking to partner with us as we transition to a low carbon economy. Our government will not waste this opportunity. We need to make investment in the north easier and more attractive.

Harnessing the globally-significant critical mineral, rare-earths and renewable-energy supplies is key. Critical minerals are crucial components of low-emission technologies and global demand is growing.

Our new **Critical Minerals Strategy** anticipates this, with a focus on creating local jobs, industries and secure supply chains.

The strategy also sets aside \$500 million for critical minerals projects through the **Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility** - NAIF for short – which I will speak to later.

As we position Australia as a renewable energy superpower, we are partnering with First Nations people through initiatives such as the **First Nations Clean Energy Strategy**.

Our \$1.5 billion investment in the **Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct** in Darwin, is supporting the Northern

Territory Government to create a globally-competitive precinct which will unlock new renewable energy industries.

Our \$565 million investment in the **Pilbara Ports Update** at Lumsden Point (Port Hedland) and Dampier, and our \$70 million investment in the **Townsville Hydrogen Hub** will promote clean, sustainable exports.

Our Government is committed to building resilient communities and transitioning the economy as we adapt for a stronger future.

We are investing more than \$1.5 billion in critical road infrastructure that service important industries including beef and agriculture.

When the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum met in Kununurra in June, on Miriuwung and Gajerrong country, they discussed ways to better mitigate and respond to the risks of increasing natural disasters.

They also examined the importance of agriculture and biosecurity to national food security, and opportunities for collaboration and investment.

Our Government has committed more than \$50 million to boost food security in remote First Nation's communities and to continue the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program.

Investment in research and development is important in developing new industries in Northern Australia.

Industry-led research collaborations through the **Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia** are supporting important industry sectors such as aquaculture, with more than 2300 jobs forecast for the north over the next decade.

Minister King saw this in Rockhampton when she visited Central Queensland University's 'Sesame Central' National Research Innovation Hub, which will provide much needed coordination for sesame research in Australia and help address challenges faced by growers.

Aquaculture presents exciting new opportunities for First Nations communities, and research on expanding the north's oyster, jewfish and rock lobster industries.

Targeted investment in liveability is a key priority, alongside recognising investment where it is most needed.

To support the security and safety of Central Australians, we are funding close to \$299 million for the **Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan**. Working with the local community, the focus is on youth services in Alice Springs and infrastructure funding for amenities, water, power and housing

**Financing our future: *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility***

I mentioned the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, which, since 2016, has financed transformational projects that support the economy, social outcomes, local jobs and businesses.

The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) is at the heart of our agenda to facilitate transformative growth across the north. We have increased NAIF financing by \$2 billion, to a total of \$7 billion, and extended the NAIF's remit to cover Australia's Indian Ocean Territories: Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Minister King intends to table an updated Investment Mandate for NAIF in the coming weeks. The new mandate will focus NAIF on policy priorities I have outlined today; keeping NAIF at the heart of our policy agenda for the north.

To date, the NAIF has approved nearly \$4 billion in loan investments across a range of sectors including critical minerals, energy, agriculture, aquaculture, universities and airports.

This includes \$655 million for critical minerals and rare-earth projects forecast to deliver \$5.5 billion to the economy and 2,500 jobs.

In 2022-23 alone, NAIF approved \$491 million in new loans, supporting over 1,000 new jobs in the north.

This year also saw the opening of the new James Cook University student accommodation in Townsville, supported by a \$46 million NAIF loan – and construction is well progressed on the new \$250 million Education and Community Precinct at Charles Darwin University, backed by a \$151.5 million NAIF loan.

I am tremendously excited about the difference NAIF is making in developing new economic activity in the North, creating local jobs and delivering much-needed services.

## **Closing**

To those in the Chamber, especially those who have travelled, and to fellow Australians - as I have outlined today, developing the north is critical to the sustained prosperity and security of our nation.

Our Government is delivering substantial and diversified investment to deliver a once in a generation transformation of our economy.

And we are working together to create a fair, sustainable and secure north now, and for decades to come.

Thank you.