



## **Australian Government**

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

### 2024 Annual Statement to the Parliament on Developing Northern Australia

19 November 2024

I rise to make the Government's annual statement on developing northern Australia, and in doing so, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this meeting place, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people.

I pay respect to First Nations Elders, customs and connections to Country.

I extend this respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands across Australia and First Nations peoples in the Chamber today.

I also want to acknowledge former Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Linda Burney and her commitment to supporting First Nations ambitions of self-determination.

I thank Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, the current Minister for Indigenous Australians for her work advancing First Nations outcomes in the north.

I acknowledge the passion and commitment of all members and Senators who represent electorates across northern Australia.

In July, the government strengthened its commitment to the north by appointing my very good friend and the Member for Solomon, Luke Gosling OAM, as Special Envoy for Defence, Veterans' Affairs and Northern Australia.

Luke has always been a great ambassador for the north. And this new role as special envoy is official recognition of his tireless work.

This year I have had the pleasure of continuing to work with my state and territory ministerial colleagues through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum. We focussed on:

- maximising Defence investment outcomes for northern communities;
- the importance of overseas migration to growing the north's population and meeting workforce and skills needs; and
- addressing urgent housing needs.

I would like to thank current and past members of the Forum:

- from Queensland, the Hon Glenn Butcher and new member the Hon Dale Last;
- from Western Australia, the Hon Don Punch; and
- from the Northern Territory, the Hon Nicole Manison, the Hon Eva Lawler and new member the Hon Gerard Maley.

My sincere thanks also to our key partners, some of whom have travelled a long way to be here today. In particular:

- the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group;
- the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility team;
- the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia; and
- all our other community, industry, government and non-government partners across northern Australia.

I would also like to mention another champion of the north, Luke Bowen, whom we sadly lost this year.

Luke was an industry and community leader.

The memorial service held in Darwin in September to honour Luke's life was a great tribute to his legacy. I was honoured to attend. My sincere condolences to Tracey and Luke's family.

A strong north means a strong Australia.

And we can't build a Future Made in Australia without a strong north.

Mr Speaker, since coming to office, this Government has been working hard for the north.

We are delivering on our promises.

Too many Australians who live in the big cities have not experienced the scale and beauty of the north.

Too many Australians are unaware of the challenges faced by northern communities.

Challenges presented by out-of-the-ordinary events, but also by the day-to-day challenges of living in regional and remote areas.

Equally, many Australians are unaware of the north's extraordinary opportunities and its contributions to the national economy.

This Government has been working to change that.

Northern Australia punches above its weight in terms of its economic contribution to this country.

Only 5 per cent of Australia's population lives in the north.

But the estimated Gross Regional Product for Northern Australia is between 8.5 and 11.5 per cent.

This is well above the per capita production across Southern Australia.

That output is hard-won.

People in the north work hard, travel long distances, and don't always have the support or infrastructure that people in the big cities do. They are true pioneers.

At the Developing Northern Australia Conference in August I announced the Albanese Government's Northern Australia Action Plan.

At the core of the Action Plan is the commitment to adopt practical solutions, driven and designed by the communities they are designed to serve.

The Government has identified 6 policy priorities in the Northern Australia Action Plan.

These are:

1. activating the northern economy
2. supporting infrastructure to unlock growth
3. creating a safe and secure north
4. growing the northern Australia workforce
5. supporting liveable, healthy and resilient communities; and
6. protecting the north's environment and cultural heritage.

The Albanese Government is delivering on these promises.

The Action Plan points to 178 actions being taken since this Government came to office.

Actions like maximising the benefits to local communities from our \$18 billion investment to enhance the resilience of Defence bases in the North.

Actions like prioritising local organisations based in the north for competitive grants that are to be delivered in the north.

The Action Plan will be accountable, and next year's annual Northern Australia statement to Parliament will include the first annual report on the delivery of the Northern Australia Action Plan.

The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility is at the heart of the Government's agenda for delivering economic development.

The NAIF is funding, real, tangible projects in the north, that are creating good, skilled jobs and are supercharging the economy.

Projects that are improving people's lives.

The NAIF has committed over \$4.6 billion in investments across the north, supporting more than 20,000 jobs and generating nearly \$40 billion in public benefit.

NAIF projects range from large-scale critical minerals and energy developments to social infrastructure.

I recently joined the Prime Minister and Minister O'Neil in Cairns to announce Queensland's biggest social and affordable housing project.

Delivering 490 homes in Woree.

It's aimed at older Queenslanders looking to downsize from their current home, and will in turn free up larger homes for families.

Improving the prosperity of First Nations Australians in the north is central to the northern Australia agenda.

A strength of the NAIF is its requirement that proponents engage productively with local Traditional Owners to develop an Indigenous Engagement Strategy.

We have seen over 1,100 of the jobs forecast from NAIF-funded projects filled by First Nations people. Indigenous procurement across NAIF projects has exceeded \$87 million.

Through initiatives like the new toolkit and guideline I announced earlier this year, we are committed to increasing those figures. Importantly, the toolkit was developed in consultation with First Nations communities including members of the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group.

The IRG's advice has been instrumental in ensuring that the northern Australia agenda incorporates First Nations perspectives and supports Indigenous outcomes.

I thank the IRG members for the invaluable contributions they have made.

Recognising their important work, I have taken the decision to extend the IRG for another two years to December 2026 to support the implementation of the Northern Australia Action Plan.

The world is transitioning to a net zero economy and the north is the engine room of Australia's role in that transformation.

\$840 million in government finance, including \$200 million from the NAIF, is being provided for the Arafura Nolan's Bore Rare Earths Project outside Alice Springs.

A further \$400 million will support the Alpha High Priority Alumina First Project near Gladstone, including \$200 million from the NAIF.

Projects like this will contribute to Australia's clean energy transition, the Government's Critical Minerals Strategy, and foster long term prosperity.

The Government will offer further support for these job-generating projects in northern Australia through more than \$17 billion in Production Tax Incentives, designed to grow processing of critical minerals and rare earths here in Australia.

As we know, gas will play an important part in supporting the shift to renewables, and northern Australia is home to all of Australia's large gas export projects.

Gas is a transition fuel and it is our insurance policy for energy security as we transition to cleaner and greener renewables.

The Beetaloo sub-basin in the Northern Territory has the potential to join the ranks as a major gas producing region.

While there are a range of environmental approvals needed before gas production reaches scale, the real potential lies in the Beetaloo's potential to diversify and grow economic opportunities for potentially thousands of workers in the Northern Territory.

Investment is crucial to unlocking the region's potential.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Northern Australia's Cotton, Grains, Cattle program is an example of the role research and development plays in building capacity across the north and with key partners like the NAIF.

The NAIF's \$34 million loan for the Kimberley Cotton Gin Project is providing essential infrastructure required for cotton processing, which will help to realise productive broadacre cropping in the Ord.

Elsewhere, through the Making Water Work program the CRCNA is working with government, industry and communities on a co-design framework for new water infrastructure at Rookwood Weir in Central Queensland to improve water security for the region.

This Government has made housing a priority. We are working to address the unique logistical, cultural and environmental needs for housing in northern Australia.

The Queensland, Western Australian and Northern Territory governments will receive \$355 million, \$190 million and \$55 million respectively this year under the new National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness.

And the Australian and Northern Territory governments have committed \$4 billion over ten years to improve housing in remote Northern Territory communities and homelands.

We are also supporting the development of the north's airport and port infrastructure.

\$11.9 million is being invested in airstrips in northern jurisdictions through the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program.

With the support of a \$155 million NAIF loan, the North Queensland Airports project will support upgrades at the Cairns and Mackay airports.

NAIF loans are also supporting airport upgrades in Darwin, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, and a loan to Alliance Aviation will enhance Rockhampton's aviation landscape.

In February, we announced the Port of Broome will be supported for expanded border services, supporting local industries and bolstering trade capacity.

And the stunning Cable Beach will get the iconic upgrades it deserves through the regional Precinct and Partnerships Program.

The Albanese Government committed an additional \$888.3 million through the 2024–25 budget for 17 new road projects and 17 existing projects across the north. This includes:

- \$132 million for projects along the Great Northern Highway Corridor in WA
- \$115 million for flood resilience projects on major highways, the Industry Roads Corridor and to duplicate Berrimah Road in the NT
- \$68 million for the Cape York Corridor in Queensland.

The Government remains committed to its \$1 billion investment towards sealing the Outback Way.

Plus over \$1 billion towards the Tanami Road, and almost \$580 million for the Stuart, Victoria and Barkly Highways.

Another key piece of job-creating infrastructure supported by this Government for the north is the Middle Arm Precinct in Darwin.

The Government will provide \$1.5 billion in planned equity to support the development of the Middle Arm, together with \$440 million for Regional Logistic Hubs along key transport links to connect Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek to Darwin.

Our funding will go towards infrastructure that supports industries critical to meet our commitment to Net Zero.

Darwin is one of the few capital cities that does not have a significant industrial precinct.

Middle Arm is about trying to take advantage of the energy future that is needed for this country and about bringing that advantage to the Northern Territory.

It will provide the people of the Northern Territory with new jobs and an economic revenue stream that allows them to fund hospitals, schools and services for First Nations peoples.

It is through projects like this that this Government is taking the north from strength to strength.

Supporting northern Australia in accessing the skilled workforce required for economic growth is a key priority for Government.

People in northern Australia should be able to access education and training where they live. To support this, the Australian Government is investing \$30 million to create opportunities for First Nations peoples in remote Central Australia to access on-Country training, to deliver local, sustainable jobs.

We are supporting the establishment of a new medical school at Charles Darwin University for up to 40 new medical students each year, with \$24 million provided over four years.

Kids living in the north deserve the same opportunities as kids living in the big cities.

Under the landmark Better and Fairer Schools Agreement between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, all Northern Territory public schools will be fully funded.

Over the next 5 years, the Commonwealth will contribute over \$736 million in additional schools funding. This is the largest investment in Northern Territory schools from the Australian Government – ever.

Not only that, every student in the great north of WA will attend a fully funded school by the first day of school in 2026!

This Government is investing an additional \$785 million and the WA Government will invest an equivalent amount.

And my colleague the Minister for Indigenous Australians recently announced that three schools in Alice Springs were offered grants under the \$18 million Central Australia Boarding Response Fund.

When the north does well, Australia does well.



The Albanese Government is delivering real outcomes for northern Australia.

Working together we will champion the north into the future.

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

Speaker, we are building northern Australia's future, and I am confident that the best is yet to come.

Thank you.