



**The Hon David Littleproud MP**  
Minister for Agriculture and Northern Australia

**SPEECH**

24 November 2021

**2021 Annual Statement to the Parliament on Developing  
Northern Australia**

**by the Minister for Agriculture and Northern Australia,  
the Hon David Littleproud MP**

**Opening remarks**

[Mr Speaker]

On 2 July this year I became the Minister for Northern Australia, and today I am pleased to deliver my first annual statement on the implementation of the Liberal National Government's Northern Australia development agenda.

We are almost six years into the 20-year policy vision for the North's sustainable economic development, established by the 2015 White Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

Our Government has laid a solid foundation to build on over the next five years, and I thank the former Minister and Assistant Minister for Northern Australia – the Hon Keith Pitt MP and the Hon Michelle Landry MP – for their contribution to this agenda.

I would also like to acknowledge the passion and dedication of Senator Susan McDonald, in her role as Special Envoy for Northern Australia.

**Achievements to date**

Developing Northern Australia is truly a whole of government responsibility – and we are seeing in the flesh the benefits of our collective work.

Roads and water infrastructure are being built, industry-led research is developing pathways for emerging markets and increasing the productivity of existing markets, we've enhanced liveability to attract skilled workers and families, and capacity building is creating greater economic opportunities on Indigenous land.

Led by the Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business, our education and skills development programs are equipping communities to achieve their full potential.

Over 70,000 enrolments are being supported by JobTrainer, and over \$364 million has been paid to Northern Australian businesses to encourage uptake of apprenticeships.

Together with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Immigration, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, we are addressing workforce shortages during harvest season, with the streamlining of our Pacific labour mobility programs, the Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Worker Programme through the new Pacific Australia Labour mobility scheme, and the recently announced Australian Agricultural Visa.

The reinsurance pool for cyclones and related flood damage, backed by a \$10 billion Government guarantee and commencing on 1 July 2022, will improve the accessibility and affordability of home and business insurance in cyclone-prone areas.

The \$40 million North Queensland Strata Title Resilience Pilot Program, commencing in January 2022, will subsidise cyclone disaster mitigation works to both improve resilience of strata title properties and insurance affordability in northern Queensland.

The Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment understands the North's role as a major economic driver. Through the Government's \$1 billion COVID Relief and Recovery Fund, we've supported tourism businesses to survive the loss of international visitors, including the zoos and aquariums that are so special to northern Australia and our nation's identity.

We're investing in health and social infrastructure by giving healthcare providers in regional and remote communities across northern Australia \$230 million to improve health outcomes, particularly for our Indigenous communities.

The Ministers for Defence and Defence Industry, and the Australian Defence Force, will invest \$10 billion into their infrastructure over the coming decade, creating business opportunities for local industry through demand for services and resources for Defence bases, and personnel and their families.

The Deputy Prime Minister is championing our infrastructure:

- By investing \$1.96 billion over the 10 years to 2028 on Roads of Strategic Importance, to better connect agricultural, tourism and mining regions to transport hubs – creating opportunities for greater regional employment and business growth.
- And by more than \$500 million towards water infrastructure like the Rookwood Weir and Big Rocks Weir through the National Water Grid Authority, because dams create jobs and water security.

## **The Next Five Years**

In the last Budget, the Federal Government committed \$189.6 million to kick start the next five years of development based on the White Paper.

This year we launch our \$111.9 million Northern Australia Development Program to give businesses and industry a helping hand to scale up and diversify their operations.

The first assessment round will close soon, with grants to be awarded from February.

We're also tackling the challenges of connecting people and businesses, with the \$68.5 million Connecting Northern Australia initiative, dedicated to improving digital and telecommunications connectivity and mobile black spots.

That program will open before the end of this year as part of the Regional Connectivity Program.

I want to highlight how we will implement the \$9.3 million Regions of Growth Pilot program, also announced in the last Budget.

These Regions of Growth cover Broome to Kununurra to Darwin, in Western Australia and the Northern Territory; the Beetaloo Basin to Katherine to Darwin, in the Northern Territory; Mount Isa to Townsville, and Cairns to Gladstone in Queensland.

As part of this we will deliver the Master Plans for three of those Regions of Growth, and their respective corridors – 20-year blueprints and five year action plans to lead a structured and coordinated investment agenda, in collaboration with our State and Territory counterparts, industry and communities.

The first three Master Plans will focus on locations within three Regions of Growth:

Broome to Kununurra to Darwin, in Western Australia and the Northern Territory; the Beetaloo Basin to Katherine to Darwin, in the Northern Territory; and Mount Isa to Townsville, in Queensland.

The Plans will decrease the risk of doing business in the North and give the private sector the confidence to invest there.

We will also look for opportunities to work collaboratively with jurisdictional counterparts to ensure that our policies and regulations are being implemented as intended, and are enabling sustainable growth, not hindering or delaying it.

The Master Plans represent our forward leaning approach to ensuring that the benefits of Australian Government investments are maximised and stay in the region.

And that's just the beginning – the Cairns to Gladstone Region of Growth will follow, and we are working to identify further Regions of Growth and pipelines of investment-ready projects.

I am pleased to release today, this information booklet that sets out this agenda and our priority areas in more detail - *Our North, Our Future: 2021-2026 – Targeted Growth* - which will be available on the Office of Northern Australia's website.

## **Working with key partners**

I also want to acknowledge the continuing contribution of Government agencies and private sector partners to implementing our vision.

The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (or NAIF), which has committed over \$3.1 billion of its \$5 billion to project financing. This commitment will generate an estimated total capital value of \$6.6 billion, \$16 billion in economic benefit, and around 10,000 jobs.

Some highlights include:

- \$704 million for the Lake Wells, Kalium Lakes and Mardie Salt projects in Western Australia, to support the establishment of a new potash industry.
- \$150 million for upgrades to Darwin Airport, including a new freight, cold storage, and import/export hub; and
- \$610 million loan to the Genex Kidston project to build Australia's first new pumped storage hydro project connected to the grid in 40 years.

Our Government is partnering with businesses to make sure these important projects come to fruition.

But our expectation, as part of this partnership, is that businesses pay their way first before dipping in to the public purse and using Australian taxpayers' money.

The NAIF will only draw down on the \$3.1 billion currently committed once businesses hit their key milestones, and once they've spent their own money.

And that's simply responsible use of taxpayers' money.

The NAIF will align more closely than ever with our national priorities and leverage private sector investment to maximise the benefits, not only for the northern economy but for the national economy too.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia has invested \$22 million across 59 projects, supporting pioneering industry-led research into:

- Water productivity for tropical horticulture, to future proof aquaculture industry and explore new industry options; and
- Improving the efficiency of existing Kakadu Plum value chains, to grow a sustainable industry for this unique bush food and grow consumer loyalty.

I want to thank members of the Indigenous Reference Group for their commitment and contributions to the northern Australia agenda.

I will soon stand up the second Indigenous Reference Group, which will be a valuable source of strategic advice to achieve practical outcomes.

## **Backing Indigenous Business**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are custodians of over 75% of Northern Australia's landmass. Backing our Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses is a top priority.

NAIF will support the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation with a \$13.5 million loan, to redevelop and expand a food cold storage and warehouse facility in Alice Springs, helping to get more fresh and frozen food into the region's communities.

Minister Wyatt recently announced the new Indigenous Business Hub for Darwin to realise the ever-increasing opportunities being created through procurement policies and emerging commercial prospects.

I congratulate Minister Wyatt on the progress made towards the development of the National Roadmap for Indigenous Skills, Jobs and Wealth Creation to date.

## **Summary**

[Mr Speaker]

The Liberal National Government already has a proven track record of investment, but we recognise that transformational change happens over many decades.

That is why we are taking the whole-of-government Master Plan approach, across all levels of government and priority sectors.

A stronger, more prosperous, and more resilient North will benefit our nation as a whole, through exponential growth.

**[ENDS]**