



The Hon Madeleine King MP
Minister for Resources and Northern Australia

SPEECH

22 November 2022

2022 Annual Statement to the Parliament on Developing
Northern Australia

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

Opening remarks

I rise to make the annual statement on Northern Australia.

Acknowledgements

I begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land we are on today and pay my respects to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, their Elders past and present.

I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today as well as all Traditional Owners across Northern Australia.

I also reaffirm the Government's commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and our commitment to deliver on its recommendations in full.

I acknowledge the Member for Maranoa, and Leader of the Nationals, as the former Minister for Northern Australia and Senator Susan McDonald as the Shadow Minister for Northern Australia.

Bi-partisan support for the north's development is vital for enduring success. I also want to recognise those members of this place that represent the electorates across Northern Australia:

- In Western Australia, the Member for Durack;
- In the Northern Territory, the Member for Solomon and the Member for Lingiari; and
- In Queensland, the Members for Leichhardt, Kennedy, Herbert, Dawson, Capricornia and Flynn.

These Members, as well as all the Senators from across three states, represent the people of Northern Australia. Most of these seats cover vast distances and encounter many

challenges and I want to thank each of these representatives for their commitment to their communities and to recognise the ambition we all hold for the great vast north of this nation.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge key partners in developing Northern Australia. Some of them are in the Speaker's Gallery today – including members of the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group led by Chair Colin Saltmere, along with Jerome Cubillo, Troy Fraser, Tara Craigie and Gillian Mailman. Cara Peek and Peter Jefferies could not make it today. I want to thank all IRG members for their commitment.

I also acknowledge the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Chair Tracey Hayes and Chief Executive Officer Craig Doyle and officials from the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, as well as Chief Executive Officer of the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia, Anne Stünzner, Chief Scientist Allan Dale, and General Manager Carla Keith.

In this, the seventh Annual Statement and my first as Minister, I would like to reaffirm this Government's commitment to the north. This is a commitment to the people of Northern Australia

and a commitment to delivering sustainable and resilient growth across the north for decades to come.

This Government intends to deliver a collaborative agenda for liveable, safe, sustainable and healthy communities.

It will empower First Nations Australians to be partners and advisors in the development of some of the most significant resource and renewable energy projects Australia has ever seen.

The Northern Australia agenda presents us with one of the most significant opportunities to increase our national productivity and living standards in decades.

It will drive our decarbonised future.

It will position Australia as a renewable energy superpower – at the same time as delivering transformative prosperity and opportunity for communities in the north.

This is about a just economy where fairness and prosperity go hand in hand.

We have a responsibility to improve the lives of those living in our northern communities and to support them to take advantage of tremendous opportunities for nationally significant growth.

The people of Northern Australia are as remarkable and as resilient as the landscape and environment in which they live. It is a region that presents significant challenges for policymakers.

Among them are vast distances, a dispersed population, thin markets and economies of scale that don't always lend themselves to traditional modelling. Significant and sometimes unique challenges require policy responses that are thoughtful and fit for purpose. Responses that might work well in other regions of Australia will not necessarily be the best fit for the north.

While the north might be challenging, it also presents unique opportunities.

The north offers a young, diverse and multicultural population, a rich First Nations culture, truly unique world-class visitor experiences, suitable climates for forestry, aquaculture and agriculture, as well as globally significant critical mineral reserves and renewable energy sources to drive the development of Australia's future net-zero economy.

Working together: First Nations people and the Ministerial Forum

Close collaboration between stakeholders and decision makers sits at the heart of our Government's approach.

Northern Australia's First Nations people are key partners in our vision for the north.

Their knowledge, built on tens of thousands of years of traditional custodianship, is informing our policies across a range of portfolios. From cultural conservation, land and ecological management, biosecurity surveillance, culturally appropriate health and housing, to community and justice solutions.

In July, I joined an official meeting of the **Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group** in Mackay on Yuwibara Country.

The passion and dedication of its members, and the expertise and experience they bring to contemporary policy making is deeply impressive and I thank each one for their commitment and service.

The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group ensures our First Australians have a strong voice in Northern Australia policy. And the group is already making a significant contribution.

The Indigenous Reference Group has worked to identify how localised business support, individualised workforce development and connectivity are vital for First Nations businesses and communities to prosper in Northern Australia.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Indigenous Reference Group, and collaborating with my colleague, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, to ensure First Australians benefit from ongoing development across Northern Australia.

This Government is committed to the north, its people and its prosperity. This is why one of my first actions as Minister for Northern Australia was to re-establish the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum.

The Ministerial Forum met for the first time since 2019 at the end of October in Darwin, on Larrakia Country. The Forum brought together my state colleagues - Queensland Minister for Regional Development, Glenn Butcher, Western Australia Minister for Regional Development, Alannah MacTiernan, and Northern Territory Minister for Northern Australia and Trade, Nicole Manison.

During the meeting, my colleagues and I agreed to a range of priorities to diversify and strengthen the north's economy and support our people.

These priorities are grouped around the important themes of human capital, enabling infrastructure, and economic development and diversification.

It was the first collective meeting of portfolio Ministers representing northern jurisdictions since 2019 and I want to thank its members for their positive and collaborative approach.

Development of sustainable industries

In May, Australians voted for a change of government. A Government that is taking real action on climate change.

Australia now has legislated targets of 43 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050, and Northern Australia will play a key role in getting there.

Critical minerals such as like lithium, cobalt, rare-earths, platinum and silicon are the foundation for most, if not all, clean energy technologies such as electric vehicles, batteries and solar panels. Northern Australia's substantial deposits of these critical minerals combined with the incredible global demand for them provides an exceptional opportunity for Northern Australia. Those resources will play a crucial role in helping both Australia and the world achieve our net zero commitments.

An example of how this Government is assisting in developing the new resources economy in the north is in my home state of Western Australia. Our Government is investing 250 million dollars into the expansion of the existing Pilgan Plant, at which Pilbara Minerals produces spodumene concentrate – a key raw material for lithium-ion batteries. This support consists of a \$125 million loan from each of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) and Export Finance Australia.

This project is aligned with the Government's resolve to develop Northern Australia, grow our world-class critical minerals sector, diversify global supply chains, and meet growing demand for batteries, electric vehicles and clean energy technology.

Housing and skills development

Our nation needs people, skills, and opportunities for people to have rewarding careers.

We know that the attraction and retention of skilled workers remains a challenge in the north, as does employing seasonal workforces, particularly for the agricultural, hospitality and tourism sectors.

Digital connectivity enables our existing and emerging industries to thrive, and builds resilience to future natural, economic and social disruptions.

Our investments into modern, high-quality digital connectivity are addressing the challenges of geography such as remoteness and low-density population.

Regions with extractive industries are also highly reliant on fly in fly out workforces, and there is a flow-on effect for community liveability and access to amenities.

Through our new *Growing Regions; Precincts and Partnerships*; and *Priority Community Infrastructure* programs our Government is working with states and local councils to invest in place-based projects that transform regional centres across Australia.

These are matters that this Government is tackling head on.

Our Government's Jobs and Skills Summit in September explored ways to address these workforce issues on a national level.

One of the most pressing issues raised in the Jobs and Skills Roundtables I hosted was access to suitable and affordable housing.

In response, our first Budget in October made a substantial investment in Northern Australia to help build liveability and tackle housing issues.

Among the investments was \$100 million to Northern Territory Homelands and Remote Housing.

In addition to addressing the issue of housing, we will also place particular importance on social infrastructure that can benefit communities directly. It is all too common that social infrastructure taken for granted in our metropolitan areas and larger regional centres is not available in communities in the north. This is simply not fair.

Government support for the north should not be limited to resources and agriculture based proposals, but must look further afield to smaller projects that create social infrastructure for the benefit of the wider community.

Ideas for these social infrastructure projects should come from communities in the north themselves and not be imposed on them from Canberra.

The NAIF

The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility plays a significant role in supporting the Government's regional and Northern Australia agendas, including our ambitions on climate, investing in manufacturing and renewables to create more local jobs, and achieving better outcomes for First Nations Peoples.

The NAIF is financing infrastructure development, with \$3.9 billion in loans approved for projects to date, and \$2.6 billion of which is now contractually committed.

These investments are forecast to generate around \$29 billion in economic benefit and support more than 14,800 jobs.

I am pleased that in our first Budget last month this Government confirmed an additional \$2 billion investment into the NAIF.

This will ensure we can continue to grow the pipeline of investment into northern economies and boost local employment opportunities.

Budget

This Government's first Budget in October saw many new investments benefiting Northern Australia including:

In Western Australia

- Over \$430 million to the Tanami Road Freight Highway Upgrade Program in Western Australia.
- \$565 million for common user port facilities in the Pilbara in WA;
- Up to \$70 million for the Pilbara Hydrogen Hub

In Queensland

- \$150 million for the Cairns Marine Precinct and \$50 million for the Central Queensland University, Cairns campus in Queensland;
- \$79.1 million for the Townsville Hydrogen Hub;
- \$188 million for the Great Barrier Reef;
- \$400 million for Queensland Beef Corridors which will upgrade road infrastructure on the Dawson, Burnett and Leichhardt Highways

In the Northern Territory

- \$1.5 billion in planned equity for the Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct in the NT;
- \$80 million for the National Aboriginal Art Gallery in Alice Springs to establish a world-leading facility displaying Australia's most significant First Nations artists; and
- \$19 million to First Nations health infrastructure in Central Australia.

This is just a snapshot of what will be happening in the north.

A recurring issue that is raised everywhere I travel in the north is connectivity.

There is a significant digital divide in this country and Northern Australia is on the wrong side of it. Inadequate NBN and community wireless services is holding back innovation and community connection in the north. To address this, this Government has committed \$656 million through the Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia package to help make sure people in the north get the same access to digital services as those enjoyed by people in big cities.

CRCNA

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia.

Their core business is with industry-led research and development projects which resolve industry challenges and enable the sustainable economic development of Northern Australia.

In the five years since the CRCNA was established it has invested in 75 projects and I thank them for the important work they have done.

In summary

Since being sworn in as Minister, I have visited and met stakeholders right across the north, and I've been honoured to meet outstanding Northern Australians committed to their communities. And to demonstrate its commitment to Northern Australia, this Government held its first cabinet meeting outside of Canberra in the north, at Gladstone in Queensland in June.

As the Minister for Northern Australia, it is my ambition that Northern Australians should be able to enjoy opportunities, services and a quality of life as good as, or even better than anywhere in Australia.

Most people in Northern Australia would not swap their lifestyle for the world.

But many rightly worry that their communities are being left behind, as much of the prosperity generated in the north is

seen to provide a much greater benefit to the big cities in the south.

It is our responsibility to ensure that policies are developed and implemented to deliver the north the opportunities and prosperity it deserves, and to support the great ambitions of those pioneers of Northern Australia that have long recognised the economic potential of this vast region.

Strengthening our north strengthens Australia as a whole.

[ENDS]