



Australian Government

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

Annual Statement on Northern Australia

Monday 24 November 2025

Introduction

I rise to make the Annual Statement on Northern Australia.

Before I do, I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we meet on today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples.

I pay my respects to their Elders, to their customs, and to their enduring connection to Country. Our First Nations peoples were Australia's first miners, mappers and navigators, and we have much to learn from their 60,000 years of care of this vast island continent.

I extend that respect to all First Nations people here in the Chamber.

I also extend my thoughts to all of the people across the north who are currently dealing with the impact of Tropical Cyclone Fina, which has hit communities across the Northern Territory and is now making its way towards Western Australia's north.

We urge everyone to take notice of local emergency warnings and do everything possible to remain safe.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory authorities to provide all assistance necessary.

And I thank emergency services personnel for their help in preparing for the cyclone and the ongoing work to support communities and to assist with the clean up.

Many of my Parliamentary colleagues from northern Australia can't be here in Canberra today as they have remained at home to help their communities deal with the cyclone.

The Member for Solomon (Luke Gosling), the Member for Lingiari (Marion Scrymgour) and the Minister for Indigenous Australians (Malarndirri McCarthy).

I thank them also for their contribution to their communities.

Emergency Management Minister Kristy McBain is in the Northern Territory today to meet with the Northern Territory Government and offer assistance.

Tropical Cyclone Fina is a timely reminder of the extra challenges faced by people and communities across the north.

Here in Parliament, I warmly welcome the recently appointed members of the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group, led by the esteemed Chair Professor Martin Nakata.

The Indigenous Reference Group provides crucial advice to our government on our northern Australia agenda, and I am very pleased that members Flora Warrior and Troy Fraser have been able to join us in the public gallery today. I also acknowledge the contributions of Ninielia Mills, Alinta McGuire and Damien Djerrkura who unfortunately can't be with us today.

I also take this moment to publicly thank past members of the Indigenous Reference Group – Jerome Cubillo, Tara Craigie, Peter Jeffries, Gillian Mailman, and the former Chair Colin Saltmere – for their contribution to the IRG and support for northern Australia.

Also here today are our other key partners in developing northern Australia:

- Tracey Hayes – Chair Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) and other valued members of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Board;
- Craig Doyle – CEO of NAIF;
- Sheriden Morris – Chair of the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA), and;
- Anthony Curro – Chief Executive Strategy and Engagement at CRCNA.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Professor Allan Dale, outgoing Chair of the Developing Northern Australia Conference and Chief Scientist at CRCNA.

And I also acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues from across the political spectrum who represent the people and interests of northern Australia in this chamber, and in the Senate.

In particular, I want to acknowledge Cairns local, the Member for Leichhardt, Matt Smith, who was elected at the general election in May of this year. He is an excellent representative for Far North Queensland in a seat that stretches from Cairns to Cape York and over Torres Strait to take in the Torres Strait Islands. He is the local member for my older sister, Rebecca, and so I get regular updates of his great progress as the Member for Leichhardt.

I would also recognise the efforts of the former Member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch, who represented the Leichhardt electorate for over 25 years.

For their representation and advocacy for their constituents in Northern Australia, I thank:

- Senator for Queensland, and the Shadow Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, Senator Susan McDonald;
- the leader of the National Party and Member for Maranoa (David Littleproud);
- the Member for Solomon (Luke Gosling);
- the Member for Lingiari (Marion Scrymgeour);
- My Western Australian Senate colleagues, Senators Glenn Sterle; Varun Gosh; Ellie Whittaker, and President of the Senate, Sue Lines
- The Member for Durack and Shadow Minister for Defence Industry and Defence Personnel (Melissa Price);
- the Members for each of the seats of:
 - Kennedy (Bob Katter);
 - Dawson (Andrew Willcox);
 - Capricornia (Michelle Landry);
 - Herbert (Phillip Thompson);
 - Flynn (Colin Boyce);
- and Senators Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, Penny Allman-Payne and Matt Canavan.

And finally, I thank each and every person working in the offices of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility and in the Office of Northern Australia. You all do such remarkable work, often unheralded, and all in the interests of the North, and therefore in the interests of the whole nation.

Northern Australia

Mr Speaker, I was honoured to be reappointed as Minister for Northern Australia after the very successful re-election of the Albanese Labor Government in May of this year.

Such is the importance of this work to the Albanese Government that now, in our second term, the Prime Minister has appointed an Assistant Minister for Northern Australia, Senator Nita Green. Assistant Minister Green is a Cairns local and a strong voice for Far North Queensland, as well as the whole of the North.

And the member for Solomon (Luke Gosling OAM), a proud Territorian and a veteran of our Defence Forces, continues his important role, serving as Special Envoy for Defence, Veterans' Affairs and Northern Australia.

Northern Australia is a vast and extraordinary place.

It is home to First Nations communities, with deep, ancient and eternal connections to Country.

It is rich in the resources needed to drive Australia's next economic transformation – the shift to net zero. It is also key to building a Future Made in Australia.

It is crucial to our national security and to our engagement with our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific.

Mr Speaker, the development of northern Australia is a priority for the Albanese Government.

We are committed to realising the full potential of a region that already accounts for so much of our nation's prosperity.

Because a strong north means a strong Australia.

Action Plan Update

Last year I launched the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029.

Today, I'm proud to publish the first annual progress report on our Action Plan, and our achievements across six policy priority areas.

This report shows the government is delivering on its promises.

We are activating the northern economy - creating jobs and driving growth across agriculture, tourism, critical minerals, and renewable energy.

We are investing in infrastructure to unlock growth, with road, rail, port and digital connectivity projects.

We are bolstering safety and building national security through upgrades to northern defence bases.

And we are protecting the north's unique environment and cultural heritage - with First Nations aspirations and economic empowerment at the heart of our work.

Infrastructure and Investment

Our main vehicle for investment is the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, or NAIF. It has proven to be a catalyst in getting crucial projects off the ground.

NAIF now has an impressive portfolio of 32 project investments — fourteen in Queensland, ten in Western Australia and eight in the Northern Territory.

This represents more than \$4.3 billion in approved loans to projects which are forecast to generate more than \$33 billion in public benefit and support thousands of jobs across the north.

By the end of October, around \$2.8 billion in NAIF funds had been drawn down to progress these projects.

A strength of the NAIF is the way it is helping diversify the economy of Northern Australia.

Kimberley Cotton Gin

Take the new Kimberley Cotton Gin in Kununurra in northern Western Australia for example.

Supported by a NAIF loan of up to \$34 million, this project is forecast to return a public benefit of around \$248 million and establish the Ord River Irrigation Area as a cotton region.

Along with hundreds of others, I had the pleasure of attending its opening in August. It is a productivity game changer for the local cotton industry, which can now process their crops locally, saving the cost and inconvenience of sending the cotton hundreds of kilometres away for processing.

The project will be supported by the expansion of port and border services at the nearby Port of Wyndham, which will allow exports directly from the region.

While the investment in the Kimberley Cotton Gin is far from the largest NAIF loan, having witnessed the enthusiasm from the local community I can firmly state that it is among the NAIF loans with the highest local impact.

That simply demonstrates how the diversity of projects the NAIF backs in supports northern communities in all sorts of ways.

Renewable Energy

NAIF is actively supporting the use of renewable energy, investing in the Hudson Creek Power Station and Batchelor Solar Farm projects in the Northern Territory and the Kidston Pumped

Storage Hydro Project in Queensland - the first hydro energy storage scheme globally to be developed in an abandoned gold mine.

Critical Minerals

And Mr Speaker, through NAIF, along with other facilities, we're backing critical minerals and rare earths—the building blocks of the net zero economy. And increasingly imperative to growing our trade and security relationships.

NAIF has earmarked \$500 million for projects under the government's Critical Minerals Strategy.

\$200 million of this funding is enabling the development of the Arafura Nolans Rare Earths integrated mine and processing facility near Alice Springs.

The Arafura Nolans project has been recognised as globally significant – with the potential to supply 4% of the world's magnet rare earths supply. This government's early decision to back it in is a key pillar in the work the Albanese Government is doing with the US administration in the seminal US-Australia Critical Minerals Framework.

The NAIF is also supporting the Alpha High Purity Alumina refinery in Gladstone, Queensland, with a \$200 million loan.

Projects like these and others right across the north also benefit from the Critical Minerals Production Tax Incentive under the Albanese Government's Future Made in Australia agenda.

US – Australia Critical Minerals and Rare Earths Framework

Projects such as these position northern Australia as a key link in global supply chains for rare earths and critical minerals.

The prime position was reinforced a few weeks ago when Prime Minister Albanese and US President Trump signed the historic Australia-US Critical Minerals and Rare Earths Framework at their meeting in the White House.

It was my very great honour to be present to witness this moment where- together, our nations committed to mobilising at least AU\$1.5 billion each towards a AU\$13 billion pipeline of priority projects over the next six months.

First Nations Participation

NAIF-funded projects are supporting almost 1400 Indigenous jobs and over \$200 million in Indigenous procurement.

This year's budget included almost \$12 million to help Native Title holders participate in the Australian Carbon Credit Scheme, with extra funding to support members of the Indigenous Carbon Industry Network.

These initiatives cut emissions, build skills, create income and economic empowerment, and support community-led climate action.

NAIF Review

Mr Speaker, our government wants to continue delivering results like this.

In our government's first Budget in 2022, we demonstrated our strong commitment to NAIF by extending NAIF funding by \$2 billion.

That provides NAIF with a total of \$7 billion to investment in economic development, jobs and opportunities across the north.

We want to ensure NAIF remains fit-for-purpose.

So, last year I commissioned a statutory review to consider the operation of the NAIF Act. I'd like to thank the Honourable Warren Snowdon, along with Professor Peter Yu and Doctor Lisa Caffery, for their work on the review.

Their report, which I tabled in Parliament in August this year, found overwhelming support for NAIF across government, industry and from the public.

In response to the Review, today I am announcing a further long-term commitment to NAIF.

I'm delighted to announce the Albanese Government will extend NAIF for another decade.

The 10-year extension means NAIF will continue to invest in projects across the North well beyond the current investment deadline of June 30 next year.

The continuation of NAIF for another decade will reassure communities and stakeholders in the north, many of whom contributed to the Review, that the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility is here to stay.

I will introduce legislation into Parliament to replace the existing legislated expiry of NAIF's investment period of 30 June 2026, and to introduce a review of NAIF's operations every five years to make sure the NAIF remains as vibrant and effective as it is today.

NAIF CEO

Mr Speaker, earlier I acknowledged the NAIF CEO Craig Doyle, who earlier this year announced his intention to retire from his position.

I'd like to personally and publicly thank Craig for his significant contribution to NAIF.

He has served as CEO since June 2022 – we started at the same time! Craig has led the organisation with distinction, overseeing major investments from large-scale resources and energy

developments, to social infrastructure projects across Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

The NAIF Board has conducted a thorough and transparent recruitment process and a new NAIF CEO is expected to be appointed in the near future.

Looking to the Future

Mr Speaker, we've made enormous progress on our northern agenda, but we know our job is far from done.

Transport and connectivity, housing and health – these are challenges we must continue to tackle, so that northern communities can fully participate in the opportunities on offer, and to grow resilient northern economies.

Transport

Reliable, resilient transport infrastructure is vital to the north's development. Through the refreshed National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy, we're strengthening productivity and resilience across northern Australia's key routes.

We're upgrading the Bruce Highway in Queensland with \$7.2 billion in investment, delivering \$1.1 billion for the Tanami Road in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, \$1 billion for the Outback Way across Queensland, the NT and WA, \$200 million to duplicate the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory, and \$400 million for Queensland's Beef Corridors.

And I note that there are now 524 days until Beef 2027 in Rockhampton.

All of these strategic projects will boost reliability, resilience, jobs, and long-term growth.

Aviation

We know too the importance of air travel across the north.

The north is where Australian aviation first began, and we are embedding it in the region's future.

To date, NAIF has supported four aviation and airport projects, with total funding of up to \$376 million.

NAIF is supporting upgrades at the Darwin and Alice Springs airports, as well as major upgrades in Cairns and Mackay, the redevelopment of Townsville Airport, and funding for the Alliance Airlines maintenance, repair and overhaul facility at Rockhampton Airport.

We also continue to subsidise flights to hundreds of remote communities across the north so that people can access health, education and other services.

Housing

No Australian should miss out on these opportunities because of where they live.
Mr Speaker, construction is underway on major housing projects across the north.

In Cairns, a \$140 million NAIF loan is helping deliver 490 social, affordable, and specialist disability homes.

At Mutitjulu, near Uluru, upgrades will provide reliable power, water, sewerage, and renewable energy storage.

Housing has been the top priority for the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum, which I Chair, and I thank my Ministerial Forum colleagues for their commitment to lasting prosperity across the north.

We are working closely with Minister for Housing, the Hon Clare O'Neil, to address unique housing challenges facing the north.

Water

Just like everywhere else, northern communities also need water.

And I'm pleased to report, Mr Speaker, that the Albanese Government has exceeded its \$150 million commitment to improve First Nations water access.

We are developing a new National Water Agreement and inland water targets to strengthen sustainable planning in collaboration with First Nations communities.

And with our investment of \$1.27 billion in northern water infrastructure, through the National Water Grid Fund, we're building the water security that underpins jobs, food production and sustainable growth for generations to come.

Digital Connectivity

Digital connectivity is also transforming what's possible in northern Australia.

We are delivering for the north through initiatives such as the Regional Connectivity Program, under which we completed 69 projects in northern Australia last financial year.

The Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation and the Regional Roads Australia Mobile Program are also set to deliver major boosts to connectivity in northern Australia.

Education and Health

With our partners at the Cooperative Research Centre for Northern Australia, we have been supporting research in the north since 2017.

In this time, the CRCNA has undertaken 107 projects with 272 project partners, leveraging the initial \$75 million in Australian Government funding into \$155 million of industry-led projects.

The Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program

We believe in partnership, especially with Indigenous Australians, through shared knowledge.

In biosecurity, First Nations knowledge is invaluable.

Our Indigenous Biosecurity Program now partners with 67 Indigenous ranger groups and two Indigenous cattle stations along 10,000 km of northern coastline.

Its footprint stretches from Cardwell in Queensland to Bidyadanga in Western Australia, strengthening early detection of diseases, weeds, and pests.

A Safe and Secure North

Mr Speaker, our government is acutely aware of northern Australia's strategic importance in our region – investing up to \$18 billion in our northern bases over the next decade.

Major projects include:

- upgrades at the Bradshaw Field, Kangaroo Flats, Mount Bunday and Robertson Barracks training areas in the Northern Territory, and
- upgrades to RAAF Bases at Tindal, in the Northern Territory,
- Learmonth in Western Australia, and
- Townsville in Queensland.

With high rates of local sub-contracting, these projects also deliver real benefits to local communities and businesses.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, by securing the north, we are securing the future of all Australians.

By driving sustainable development, we are creating jobs, supporting First Nations communities, building resilient infrastructure, and positioning Australia as a leader in critical industries.

Historian Henry Reynolds has said that "The true history of Australia begins in the north."

Today, I believe it is fair to observe that it is in the north, where we are writing Australia's future.

Thank you.