Australian Government

Statement by the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia,

the Hon Madeleine King MP

Annual Statement to the Parliament on Northern Australia

Tuesday 24 November 2026

Introduction

I rise to make the Annual Statement on Northern Australia.

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we meet on today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples.

And I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands stretching across Northern Australia.

I pay my respects to their Elders, to their customs, and to their enduring connection to Country.

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

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.

That covers over than 7 and a half million square kilometres.

Northern Australia represents more than half of that seemingly eternal vastness, and 60% of its remarkable coastline.

But it is home to just 5 per cent of Australia's population.

This scale brings a magnitude of challenges and opportunities so varied that it is important to have a team working together to serve the North.

Accordingly, I thank the Minister for Indigenous Australians, and Senator for Northern Territory, the Honourable Malarndirri McCarthy and Assistant Minister for Northern Australia, and Senator for Queensland, Nita Green.

Both work diligently every single day serving the nation and Northern Australia.

Today, the members of the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group join us here in the Federal Parliament.

I thank them all, for their commitment to the North, to their communities, and for their participation in this important forum that informs the work of Government.

They have each travelled from across Northern Australia to be here today.

I would like to thank everyone at the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, the Office of Northern Australia and the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia.

These are all important organisations, doing excellent work, contributing to the shared objective of developing the North.

Here in the Parliament, the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia continues its work following the release of its Interim Report into preparing for emerging industries across Northern Australia.

The Government is considering the report, and I thank all members and the secretariat for their efforts.

Resources

From Exmouth in Western Australia, to Darwin in the NT, across to Gladstone in Queensland, the strategic importance of the North cannot be overstated.

For generations, the coal, gas and iron ore of the North have helped drive Australia's economy.

These resources power Australia's economy and, for the most part, come from the North.

They power our domestic industries across the North and the South – in addition to contributing to the energy security of our regional neighbours.

The critical minerals needed for our pathway to net zero, and for our national security, and that of our security partners, also lie in the North.

Agriculture

And much of the food, fibre, and protein that contributes to the wellbeing of both Australians and our regional neighbours, and our exceptional agricultural trade, comes from the North.

The beef of Australia's North is the best in the world.

And I remind everyone that there are just 159 days to go until Beef 2027.

This epic triennial gathering is a remarkable display of Australia's cattle industry, drawing people from around the country, and the world, to Rockhampton.

The Albanese Labor Government is deeply proud of its commitment to the cattle industry, and to Beef 2027, providing $12 million to make it happen.

Our protein exports are something that Australians can be proud of – and Australian beef is highly prized across the world.

That's why the Albanese Government's EU Free Trade Agreement, negotiated by our outstanding Trade Minister Senator Don Farrell, will see Australia's beef quota increased eight-fold once the deal is ratified.

The North is cattle country.

And Northern Australia stands to benefit greatly from a Free Trade Agreement with eh European Union; for beef exports, and for tariff-free exports of critical minerals.

Gateway to the world.

The North is our gateway to the world.

It's where we engage most closely with our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific, where so much of our nation-building trade revenue is produced and exported, and where we fortify our nation against any foreign threat.

That makes the North not only special to the people that call it home, but fundamental to the prosperity and security of our entire nation.

And that is why its development is a priority.

Action Plan Update

In 2024, I launched the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024—2029.

Today, I am publishing the second annual progress report, setting out what we have delivered across the six priorities of the Action Plan.

The progress report shows how we are creating jobs and driving growth, investing in infrastructure and national security, and protecting the North's unique environment and cultural heritage.

It also shows how we are ensuring that First Nations aspirations and economic empowerment remain at the heart of our work.

This is imperative, because, after all, the North has been at the heart of a deep, unbroken connection to Country and Culture for many First Nations communities for tens of thousands of years.

Indigenous Reference Group

The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group plays an instrumental role in advising the Government on how First Nations communities can benefit from economic change.

I thank the IRG for their work, and for their advocacy seeking improved access to education, training, jobs and opportunities for First Nations businesses.

With an emphasis on developing better data collection and analysis to track those benefits over time, the IRG is ensuring communities share in opportunities being created across the North.

CRCNA

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

The CRCNA has made vital contributions, and as it approaches the end of its ten-year term in June 2027, everyone involved can take enormous pride in having become a trusted partner and source of expertise.

Its work has spanned research across the three jurisdictions of the North, leading to aquaculture advancements for native oyster and fish hatcheries, agricultural diversification for cotton and legume crops in the Ord Valley, and developing a simple, robust telehealth system for remote communities.

For example, the CRC recently collaborated with Indigenous Malak Malak Rangers in the Northern Territory to combine Traditional knowledge with western science to monitor floodplain health and protect aquatic ecosystems.

This work has produced remarkable outcomes, such as rescuing critically endangered Largetooth Sawfish from drying billabongs.

This productive collaboration builds local skills and helps Traditional Owners manage Country, while protecting and conserving Australia's unique and astounding fauna.

I thank the CRCNA for their decade of dedication and for the enduring regional expertise and capability they have built.

As it approaches the end of its ten-year term, work is underway on what comes next for this important research and capability.

I look forward to seeing what the future holds.

Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility

Mr Speaker, the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility is an important vehicle for government investing in the North.

2026 has been pivotal in the history of the NAIF.

Following the recommendations of the Review of the NAIF Act, tabled in August 2025, the Government introduced legislation to extend the ability of the NAIF to invest for a further decade, to 30 June 2036.

I am pleased that the Parliament supported this legislation in a multi-partisan manner, demonstrating the widespread support in this place for the NAIF and the work it is doing, and its enduring role in the future of the North.

In 2026, the NAIF reached a significant milestone, with funding drawn down for nation-building projects across the North, passing $3 billion.

In a region where it is notoriously difficult to attract investment, the NAIF has been the catalyst to get projects of national consequence and great local significance, off the ground.

From Australia's first urea plant in Dampier, to a barramundi farm in Humpty Doo, to the Kimberley cotton gin in Kununurra.

As of 30 September 2026, the NAIF is supporting 33 projects.

These investments are forecast to generate more than $33 billion in economic benefits, while also supporting thousands of jobs across the North.

The benefits also flow well beyond the projects themselves, supporting local businesses, communities and First Nations employment.

NAIF Investment Update

NAIF has continued to invest in new projects throughout the year.

In Darwin, NAIF financing of $74 million will enable Charles Darwin University to build more student accommodation.

The project will provide more than 400 new beds, supporting local jobs, the Territory's higher education sector and helping ease pressure on Darwin's tight rental market.

I had the opportunity to see the development first-hand when I was in Darwin in September. The day before, I had watched gas from the Beetaloo

Basin flow to Darwin for the first time. The next day, I was seeing another kind of investment in the Territory's future taking shape.

That is what developing the North looks like: backing the infrastructure, industries and communities that will support its growth for decades to come.

Arafura Rare Earths Nolans Project

In the context of the annual Northern Australia Ministerial Statement, it is impossible not to reflect on one of the most important projects underway in this country.

A project of enormous significance to Alice Springs, but also to the whole nation, and, I am proud to say, a NAIF investment.

The Arafura Rare Earths Nolans' Bore Project is now taking place 135km to the north of the Alice.

Alongside our trade minister, and the Member for Lingiari, I was profoundly pleased to attend the official groundbreaking ceremony on 9 October.

It marked the beginning of work to make the Nolans Rare Earths project Australia's first integrated ore-to-oxide rare earths facility, mining the rare earths that are the gift of our geology, and processing them here in Australia as well.

Once operational, the facility will supply around five percent of the world's demand for rare earths to go into high-performance magnets that power everything from EVs to fighter jets and submarines.

Five per cent may not sound like much. But in a global supply chain subject to extraordinary concentration and trade distortions, it is enormously significant.

The groundbreaking marked not only the beginning of construction, but the culmination of decades of exploration, discovery, project development, consultation, and financing.

The Albanese Government backed Nolans with a $200 million investment from NAIF, a further $200 million from the National

Reconstruction Fund, and substantial support through the Critical Minerals Facility and Export Finance Australia.

Most recently, the Nolans Project became the first to receive support from the Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve, which enabled it to move to construction.

The Nolans Project will deliver significant economic and community benefits, including around 600 jobs during construction and approximately 350 ongoing roles once operational.

Arafura Rare Earths has engaged deeply with Traditional Owners and the opportunities this project creates for local First Nations economic participation are significant.

I want to take the opportunity to say here in the nation's parliament what I said to the Traditional Owners under a tin roof in the stormy humidity of the nation's heart:

My thanks to each and every one of the Traditional Owners for their contribution to the Nolans Rare Earths project.

Their contribution, providing access to their land and participating in this project, is significant not only for their people and future

generations of Traditional Owners, but for the Territory and indeed the whole country.

It truly is a gift these First Nations communities are giving to us as a nation, and to a global supply chain dependent on resources that have lain beneath their feet for tens of thousands of years.

I thank them all so very much for what they are doing for our country.

Beetaloo

Mr Speaker, being the Minister for Resources as well as the Minister for Northern Australia, it is clear to me the wealth of opportunity that our North holds for the industries that have made our nation prosperous.

I've spoken already about iron ore, coal and critical minerals.

But I also want to discuss natural gas.

LNG is one of Australia's largest exports, and our energy exports are vital to the energy security of our partners, particularly in North Asia.

And some of the most significant remaining gas resources in Australia lie beneath our North.

In September this year, I attended the 'first gas' event at Tamboran Resources and Daly Waters Energy's Shenandoah South Pilot Project in the Beetaloo sub-basin in the Northern Territory.

Gas flowing into the Northern Territory market represents a significant moment for the Northern Territory and for the nation.

It will support economic development as more gas means more industry, jobs and prosperity for the Territory.

And it will secure economic empowerment for the First Nations communities that live there and whom I was privileged to meet on site on Shenandoah Station in September.

Gas has an important role to play as we transition to net zero, supporting renewables through peaking and firming, while remaining essential for industrial processes where there is currently no viable substitute.

And as our national domestic gas reservation legislation progresses through the parliament, I thank all those who have

been constructively working with us to ensure we secure more Australian gas for Australian families and Australian industry, at affordable prices.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, the Albanese Government is committed to doing the hard yards to unlock the potential of Australia's North.

For all Australians who call the North home, we are delivering improved services, renewed infrastructure, more jobs, healthier environments, and greater opportunities for First Nations communities.

Piece by piece, we are building economic prosperity for the North.

A strong North is a strong Australia.

A safe and secure North is a safe and secure Australia.

This work reminds us that while our nation is vast, our future is shared.

And, Mr Speaker, more and more of that future is being forged in Northern Australia.

Thank you.

[ENDS]
2,275 Spoken Words = 17 minutes