Australian Government

Office of Northern Australia

Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029:

Annual Progress Report

2026



© Commonwealth of Australia 2026
November | INFRA7401

ISSN 3083-0312X (Print)

ISSN 3083-0311 (Digital)

Ownership of intellectual property rights in this publication

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights, if any) in this publication is owned by the Commonwealth of Australia (referred to below as the Commonwealth).

Disclaimer

The material contained in this publication is made available on the understanding that the Commonwealth is not providing professional advice, and that users exercise their own skill and care with respect to its use, and seek independent advice if necessary.

The Commonwealth makes no representations or warranties as to the contents or accuracy of the information contained in this publication. To the extent permitted by law, the Commonwealth disclaims liability to any person or organisation in respect of anything done, or omitted to be done, in reliance upon information contained in this publication.

Use of the Coat of Arms

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet sets the terms under which the Coat of Arms is used. Please refer to the Commonwealth Coat of Arms – Information and Guidelines publication available at http://www.pmc.gov.au.

Creative Commons licence



With the exception of (a) the Coat of Arms; (b) the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts photos and graphics; (c) content supplied by third parties; and (d) content otherwise labelled; copyright in this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons BY Attribution 4.0 International Licence.

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence is a standard form licence agreement that allows you to copy, communicate and adapt this publication provided that you attribute the work to the Commonwealth and abide by the other licence terms.

Further information on the licence terms is available from https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

This publication should be attributed in the following way:
© Commonwealth of Australia 2026

Contact us

This publication is available in hard copy, PDF format and Word format. All other rights are reserved, including in relation to any departmental logos or trademarks which may exist. For enquiries regarding the licence and any use of this publication, please contact:

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

Email: northernaustralia@infrastructure.gov.au
Website: www.northernaustralia.gov.au

Table of contents

Acknowledgement of Country iv

Ministerial Foreword 1

Progress on the Action Plan 2

Northern Australia Profile 3

Policy Priority Area 1:
Activating the northern economy **8**

Policy Priority Area 2:
Infrastructure to unlock growth **13**

Policy Priority Area 3:
A safe and secure north **18**

Policy Priority Area 4:
Growing the Northern Australia workforce **21**

Policy Priority Area 5:
Liveable, healthy and resilient communities **24**

Policy Priority Area 6:
Protecting the north's environment and cultural heritage **31**

Research, knowledge and evidence 33





Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands, waters and seas across Northern Australia and pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Elders past and present.

We recognise the strength, diversity and enduring contribution of the world's oldest continuing cultures, and the deep connections Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain with Country, language, culture and community.

As we report on progress under the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029, we reaffirm our commitment to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, listening to their voices and supporting place-based opportunities that reflect local aspirations and priorities.



Senator the Hon Nita Green
Assistant Minister for Northern Australia

The Hon Madeleine King MP
Minister for Northern Australia

Ministerial Foreword

Northern Australia is central to Australia's future prosperity, resilience and security. Through the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029, the Australian Government is working with communities, industry and state and territory governments to unlock the region's extraordinary potential.

This second Annual Progress Report highlights the progress made over the past year and demonstrates our continued commitment to delivering practical outcomes across Northern Australia. While significant work remains, we are seeing momentum across each of the Action Plan's six policy priority areas.

Over the reporting period, governments have continued to support investment, strengthen enabling infrastructure, grow workforce opportunities, improve services and connectivity, and build more resilient communities. We have also advanced initiatives that support Northern Australia's important role in a Future Made in Australia, as well as Australia's energy transition, economic development and strategic future.

Australia has of course faced challenges too. The conflict in the Middle East and closure of the Strait of Hormuz created a global economic shock. Our government responded quickly to secure more fuel and strengthen our supply chains, including a dedicated effort to boost supply in regional Australia. We continue to work hard to ensure our country comes out of this stronger and more resilient.

There is a strong pipeline of projects and this year we passed legislation to secure another decade of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF), which will help continue this trajectory. The *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Amendment Bill 2026* continues the NAIF's investment period to 30 June 2036. This extension provides certainty to the north and will enable the NAIF to continue investing in energy, affordable housing, agriculture and infrastructure developments that are transforming the north. This extension reflects the important role NAIF plays in Northern Australia, with over $4 billion now contractually committed for projects that create jobs, strengthen communities and support economic development.

Our government continues to be ambitious in the face of adversity, with significant progress achieved through the introduction of long-overdue environmental law reforms. Northern Australian communities will benefit from the greater certainty and transparency the reformed *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* will deliver, helping to protect our environment and boost productivity in our economy.

The achievements outlined in this report reflect the determination, innovation and leadership of Northern Australians, as well as the value of collaboration between governments, industry, First Nations peoples and local communities.

We acknowledge the important contribution of Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, Minister for Indigenous Australians, whose ongoing involvement in the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum and Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group continues to strengthen partnership and engagement across Northern Australia.

Delivering the Action Plan is a shared endeavour. We acknowledge and thank our partners in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, along with local governments, industry, First Nations organisations and communities across the north. We look forward to continuing this work together.

Progress on the Action Plan

The Australian Government remains committed to delivering the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029. Developed in partnership with stakeholders across the north, the Action Plan provides a coordinated framework for Government action across six policy priority areas:

1. Activating the northern economy
2. Infrastructure to unlock growth
3. A safe and secure north
4. Growing the Northern Australia workforce
5. Liveable, healthy and resilient communities
6. Protecting the north's environment and cultural heritage

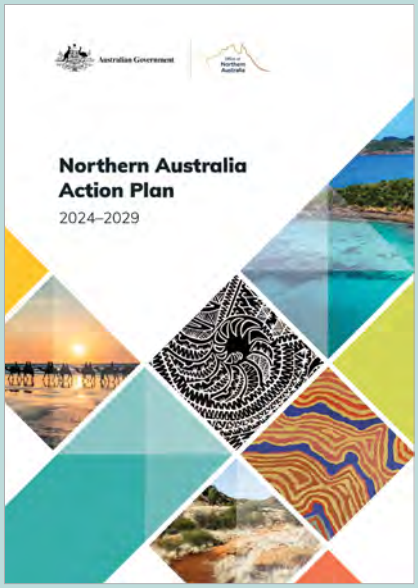
To support progress across these priority areas, the Action Plan identified 17 areas for continued Government focus over the short to medium term. Together, these actions are helping to drive sustainable economic development, strengthen communities and improve outcomes for Northern Australians.

What this report covers

This Annual Progress Report outlines progress made during the second year of the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029. It highlights actions undertaken by the Australian Government within the 2025–26 financial year to deliver commitments under the Action Plan, as well as new initiatives and investments that support its objectives.

As a five-year plan, progress will continue to vary across priority areas depending on the complexity, scale and timing of individual initiatives. Some actions are delivering tangible outcomes now, while others involve longer-term investments that will continue to build momentum over coming years.

By reporting annually, we support transparency and accountability while ensuring the experiences, priorities and aspirations of Northern Australians remain at the centre of implementation and future decision-making.



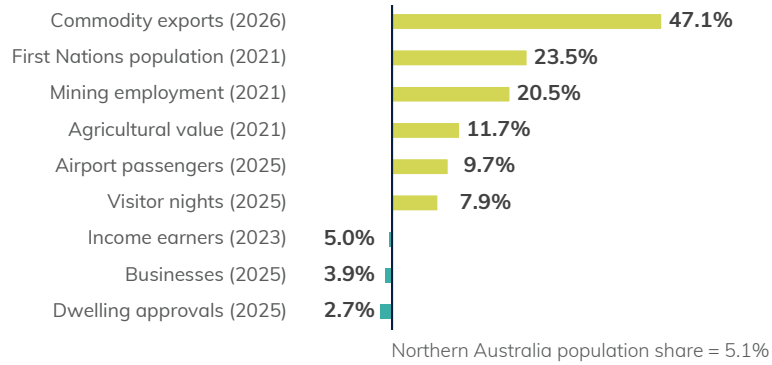
To view the Northern Australia Action Plan: 2024–2029 visit **northernaustralia.gov.au** or scan the QR code.

Northern Australia Profile

Latest available statistics

Northern Australia is home to **1.4 million people**, representing **5.1%** of Australia's population.

Northern Australia's share of national total



Northern Australia economy

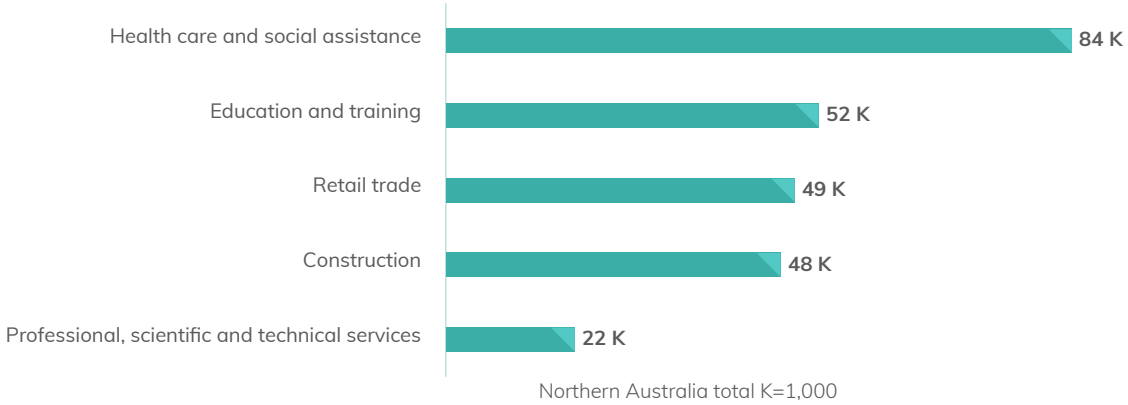
$245.54 B
Commodity exports (2026)
% of Australian total 47.1%

$8.21 B
Agricultural value (2021)
% of Australian total 11.7%

$179–241 B
Gross Regional Product (2021)
% of Australian total 8.5%–11.5%

43 K
Employing businesses (2025)
% of Australian total 4.3%

Northern Australia top 5 employing industries



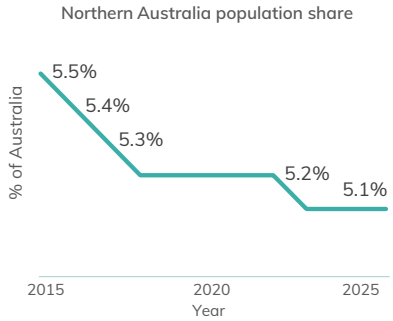
Northern Australia at a glance

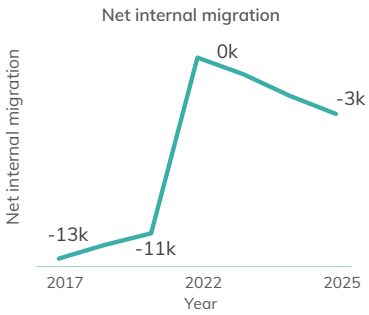
231 K
First Nations population (2021)
% of Australian total 23.5%

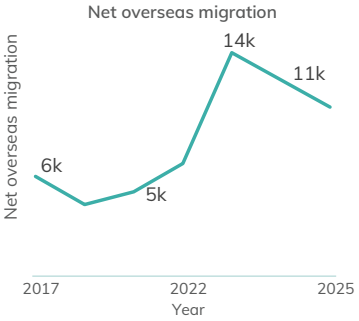
30.29 M
Visitor nights (2025)
% of Australian total 7.9%

15.56 M
Airport passengers (2025)
% of Australian total 9.7%

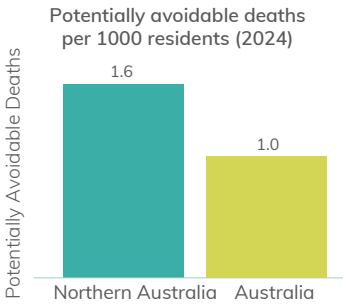
Population and migration

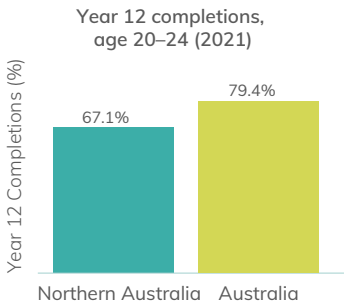


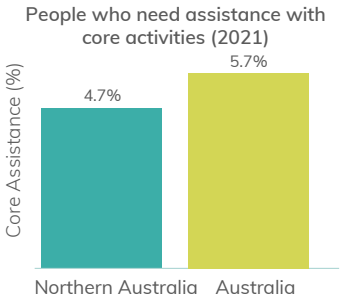




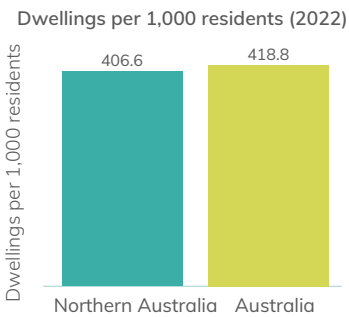
People and outcomes

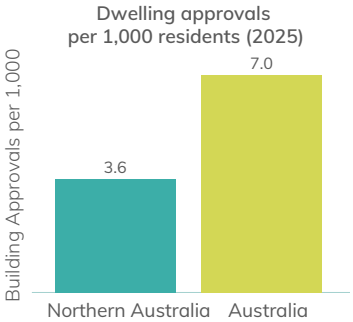


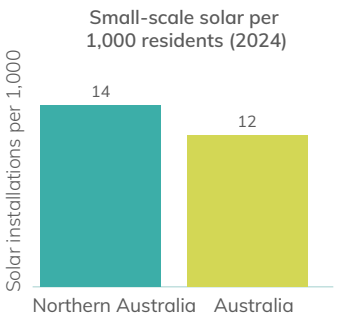




Housing and liveability

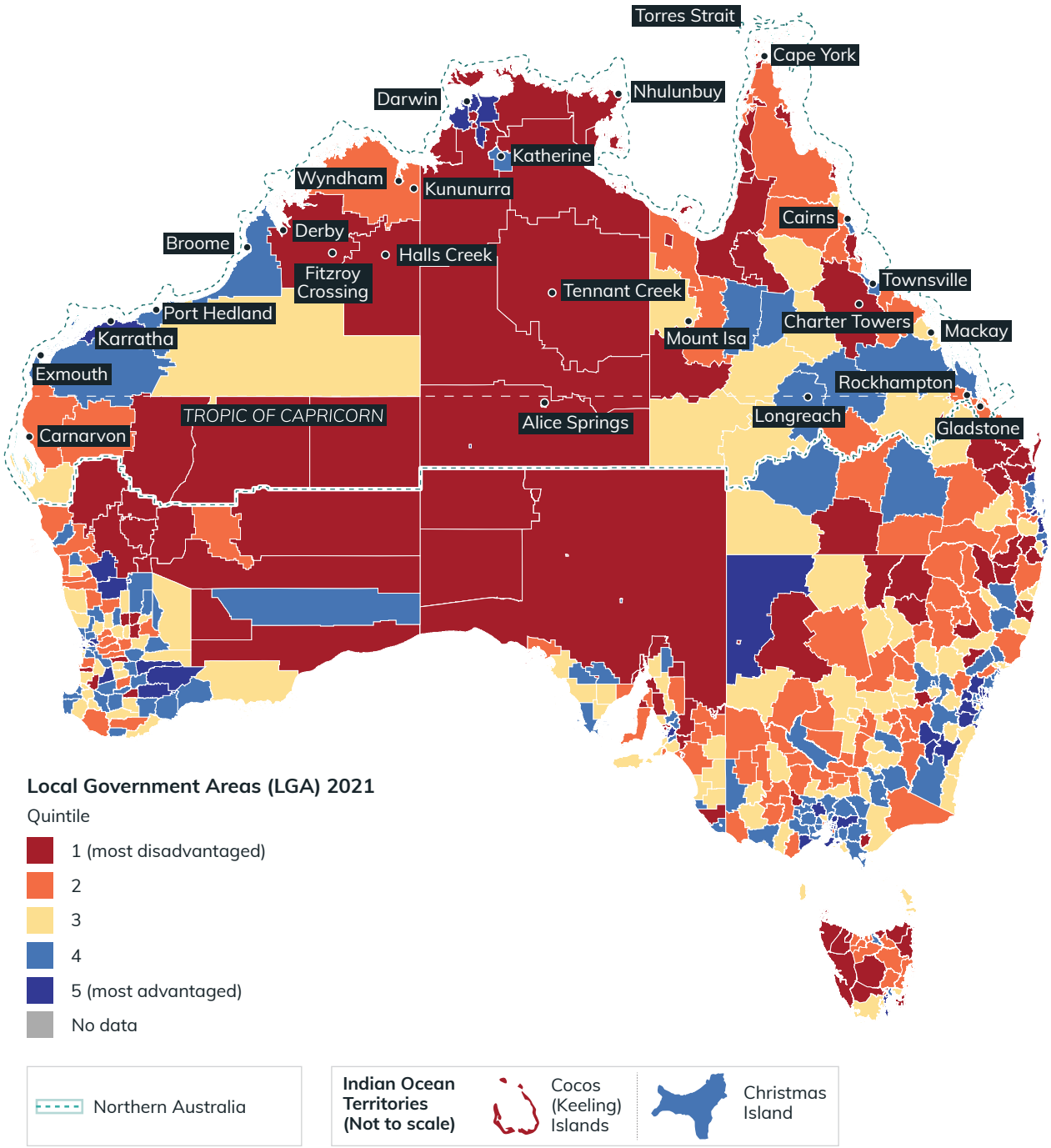






Index of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage (2021)

IRSAD quintile by LGA; 1 = most disadvantaged



"Northern Australia" as defined by the *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act 2016 (Cth)*.

2025–2026 Highlights

A snapshot of key achievements delivered across Northern Australia during 2025–26.

$3 billion accessed by NAIF proponents since 2016

10 year extension for NAIF[1]

401 homes delivered in remote Northern Territory communities since July 2024[2]

126,500 premises enabled for fibre broadband[3]

$1.3 bn committed to water infrastructure[4]

4,000+ biosecurity observations submitted[5]

3,900+ free TAFE enrolments in the Northern Territory[6]

27,000+ Job seekers supported in Northern Australia[7]

4 New Medicare Urgent Care Clinics with **16** in total now operating within Northern Australia

69 Disaster Ready Fund projects funded[8]

1,500+ students participating in Junior Rangers[9]

24 tonnes marine debris removed[10]

1. Parliament passed the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Amendment Bill 2026 extending the NAIF's investment period to 30 June 2036.
2. 401 houses delivered across 43 Northern Territory communities and three town camps through the Remote Housing Agreement since July 2024.
3. Around 126,500 connections through the NBN Co's fibre upgrade program which completed in December 2025.
4. $1.3 billion remains committed through the National Water Grid Fund for water infrastructure, planning and science projects across Northern Australia.
5. Through fee-for-service arrangements with 51 Indigenous ranger organisations, more than 4,000 biosecurity surveillance observations were submitted.
6. Free TAFE had supported more than 3,900 enrolments in the Northern Territory by 30 June 2026.
7. Remote Australia Employment Service supported more than 27,000 job seekers across Northern Australia.
8. 69 projects were awarded more than $151 million in Australian Government funding across the first three rounds of the Disaster Ready Fund.
9. The Junior Rangers Program is supporting more than 1,500 First Nations students each year through activities delivered across Northern Australia.
10. 24 tonnes of marine debris and 8 ghost nets removed from northern waters as part of the Ghost Nets and Marine Debris Initiative.



NAIF has committed a loan of up to $490 million for the BCI Minerals Mardie Salt Project in the Pilbara region, to produce and export high-quality salt from seawater using solar and wind energy.
Credit: BCI Minerals.

Policy priority area 1:

Activating the northern economy

Northern Australia continues to play an important role in Australia's economic development, supported by investment in critical minerals, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, agriculture and First Nations economic participation. Northern Australia has been positioned as a contributor to, and beneficiary of, the Government's Future Made in Australia agenda, with support for new clean energy industries, critical minerals development and strategic manufacturing opportunities.

Significant investments and policy reforms help strengthen supply chains, build sovereign industrial capability, and support economic participation. Progress during the year included commencement of the Net Zero Fund, continued development of critical minerals projects, expansion of environmental markets and implementation of initiatives supporting First Nations economic empowerment.

Key achievements



$1.2 billion Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve established



$33 billion in public benefit generated by NAIF investments since 2016



$5 billion Net Zero Fund commenced

Industry development

- NAIF investments as at 30 June 2026 have generated more than $33 billion in estimated public benefit across Northern Australia, supporting economic growth, infrastructure development and generating more than 18,600 jobs since 2016.
- The Australian Government is supporting major fertiliser and export infrastructure in the Pilbara, with NAIF committing up to $475 million across the Perdaman Urea Project, Burrup brine disposal scheme and Port Dampier expansion. Expected to be operational in 2027, the urea plant will produce 2.3 million tonnes annually and support Australian fertiliser exports.
- The $5 billion Net Zero Fund commenced on 20 April 2026 through the National Reconstruction Fund (NRF) Corporation to support large industrial facilities to decarbonise energy-intensive parts of their operations; and to support investment in scaling up domestic manufacturing of renewables and low emissions technologies.
- The Australian and Queensland governments are jointly investing $2 billion over ten years to transform Queensland's energy grid and secure the long-term future of the Boyne Island Aluminium Smelter, and aluminium smelting in Central Queensland. Rio Tinto will underwrite close to $7.5 billion of investment in new energy generation and transmission in Central Queensland. This investment supports Boyne's energy transition and decarbonisation, enables the production of green aluminium, and secures the future of aluminium smelting in Central Queensland.
- The Powering the Regions Fund is supporting 7 projects in Northern Australia, including around $195 million in Northern Australia investment to help decarbonise existing industries and support new clean energy opportunities.

Critical minerals and resource development

- This year, the Australian Government established the $1.2 billion Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve (CMSR) to secure supply of select critical minerals and maximise the strategic value of Australia's resources for our economy and national security. The CMSR draws on a range of financial tools to secure production and selectively stockpile critical minerals, helping strengthen supply security and resilience. It will ensure Australia remains central to global efforts to build stable and reliable supply chains.
- NAIF plays an important role in supporting critical minerals development by leveraging Australian Government and private sector investment to improve project bankability, strengthen critical minerals supply chains and support economic development across Northern Australia. To facilitate investment in strategically significant critical minerals projects, NAIF works closely with the National Reconstruction Fund and Export Finance Australia (EFA), which supports the $5 billion Critical Minerals Facility (CMF) and CMSR.
- Australian Government support through NAIF, the NRF, EFA and the CMSR, with international investment, helped Arafura's Nolans Rare Earths Project reach Final Investment Decision. Nolans is expected to support around 600 jobs during construction and more than 350 ongoing jobs. Located 135 km north of Alice Springs, Nolans is expected to supply 4–5% of global rare earths demand once fully operational.
- Traditional Owner participation was also central to Arafura's Nolans Rare Earths Project, with engagement supporting training and employment, business opportunities, respect for cultural rights and the protection of sacred land and heritage, helping to ensure development reflects local aspirations and delivers long-term benefits for Traditional Owners.
- In addition to the $200 million NAIF loan for Arafura's Nolans Rare Earths Project, NAIF has committed up to a further $635 million to support delivery of four additional critical minerals projects across Northern Australia. These include Alpha HPA's HPA First Project, Kimberley Mineral Sands' Thunderbird Mineral Sands Project, Pilbara Minerals' P680 Expansion and Strandline Resources Limited's Coburn Project.

Clean energy and the net zero transition

- The Net Zero Economy Authority (NZEA) continued place-based engagement with communities, workers and industry in priority regions, including Central Queensland to support regional economic diversification and industry growth. The NZEA has commenced a consultation process on the scheduled closure of Gladstone Power Station, to assess whether the Energy Industry Jobs Plan (EIJP) is required. The EIJP is a regulatory framework established under Part 5 of the *Net Zero Economy Authority Act 2024 (Cth)* to support workers affected by the closure of coal and gas-fired power stations.
- Reforms to the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme continued, including introduction of legislation to the Australian Parliament that strengthens consent requirements for projects on native title land and land subject to registered native title claims, including recognition of registered native title claimants in the consent process.

First Nations economic empowerment

- The Australian Government's new Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBC) Support program commenced on 1 July 2026 and is investing approximately $200 million in PBCs over 3 years to 2028–29, to support First Nations economic empowerment. The new program includes 3 streams of support – funding for PBC operations, establishment funding and strategic grants.

- The new PBC Support program will enable PBCs to take advantage of economic opportunities, leverage greater benefits from their Native Title rights and interests, meet their corporate and compliance obligations, and support them to engage with government and industry.
- The First Nations Economic Partnership advanced implementation of its inaugural work program through 2 working groups which focused on access to capital and institutional arrangements, and employment and career pathways. A steering committee has also been established with a focus on developing a First Nations economic framework.
- Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) continues to deliver a range of initiatives to improve access to finance, strengthen business capability, and help reduce the barriers and costs associated with establishing, growing and sustaining First Nations businesses across Northern Australia. These initiatives include:
  - Concessional and flexible finance, improving access to capital and reducing financing barriers and costs (for example competitive interest rates, no establishment or early payout fees).
  - Business capability and advisory support, reducing the cost and complexity of establishing and growing a business through no-cost access to IBA Relationship Managers and Business Development Officers, provision of IBA tailored business guidance, specialist advisory services and capability-building workshops delivered nationally. Targeted initiatives, including the forthcoming First Nations Women in Business Coaching Program, further strengthen business capability and sustainability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote communities.
  - Strategic partnerships and capability-building programs, helping businesses access expertise, networks and opportunities that may not otherwise be readily available. For example:
    - First Nations Economics place-based business workshops delivered nationally in 2026 including Darwin, Alice Springs, Cairns, and Townsville, to strengthen financial capability and business readiness.
    - The Northern Territory Aboriginal Tourism Accelerator Program, jointly delivered by IBA and the Northern Territory Government, which supports Aboriginal tourism businesses to build capability, strengthen sustainability and expand market opportunities.
- Reforms to the Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) to strengthen IPP eligibility criteria (51% or more First Nations owned and controlled) commenced 1 July 2026. In August 2026, the NIAA approached the market to select a new provider to implement the strengthened criteria. Transitional arrangements are in place meaning that Indigenous businesses will be eligible for the IPP if they meet either the strengthened criteria or the original IPP criteria (50% First Nations owned) during the transition period.

Sustainable industries and environmental markets

- The Australian Government is supporting First Nations-led participation in the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme, including making 2 new 2026 savanna fire management methods to account for carbon abatement from traditional fire management in Northern Australia. The Nature Repair Market is also exploring ways these methods could support First Nations-led biodiversity projects and creating new opportunities for investment in environmental outcomes across Northern Australia.
- The Australian Government is partnering with First Nations organisations to develop Indigenous-led methods, apply traditional knowledge and strengthen participation in environmental markets that deliver climate, environmental, cultural and economic benefits.

Costs of doing business in the north

- The Fee-Free TAFE Skills Agreement continues to provide funding to states and territories to deliver Free TAFE across the country reducing workforce search and training costs, addressing workforce shortages and improving skills availability for businesses in the north.
- Significant works to upgrade capacity, efficiency and market access continue at Northern Territory airports and Western Australia ports at Lumsden Point and in Ashburton. These projects will reduce transport and logistics costs for businesses.
- In the 2026–27 Budget, the $20,000 instant asset write-off became permanent, providing eligible small businesses greater certainty to invest and grow. The instant asset write-off allows eligible businesses to immediately deduct eligible assets costing less than $20,000, improving cash flow and reducing compliance costs.

Area of Continued Focus

1 **Future Made in Australia**

Progress update: Future Made in Australia initiatives continued to sustain and build long-term industrial capability and support the energy system's path to emissions reduction, and supply chain resilience across Northern Australia.

2 **Net Zero Opportunities**

Progress update: The $5 billion Net Zero Fund commenced, support continued for the Pilbara Hydrogen Hub, and the Net Zero Economy Authority progressed engagement in priority regions including Central Queensland. The NZEA has commenced an assessment process to understand what supports may be required for transitioning workers following the scheduled closure of Gladstone Power station.

3 **Scope a First Nations Economic Partnership**

Progress update: The First Nations Economic Partnership was established in 2025.

4 **First Nations Businesses and Community-controlled Organisations**

Progress update: Employment, procurement and business development initiatives continued to support First Nations participation in economic activity across Northern Australia.

5 **Cost of Doing Business**

Progress update: The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's 2026 cyclone reinsurance pool monitoring report shows the cyclone reinsurance pool has resulted in average premium reductions of 24% for small to medium enterprises at medium to high risk of cyclones and related flooding in Northern Australia.

Separately, there has been continued investment in logistics hubs, rail infrastructure, airports and ports that will improve transport efficiency, strengthen market access and lower freight and supply chain costs for businesses.

Making the $20,000 instant asset write-off permanent in 2026–27 provides businesses greater certainty to invest and grow, while improving cash flow and reducing compliance costs. Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) initiatives are improving access to finance, strengthening business capability, and helping to reduce the barriers and costs associated with establishing, growing and sustaining First Nations businesses across Northern Australia.



Rendering of the Northern Quartz Campus when complete.
Credit: Quinbrook.

The Northern Quartz Campus project

In March 2026, the Northern Quartz Campus (NQC), to be located in the Townsville region, was awarded Major Project Status, declaring it is of national significance and contributes to economic growth, regional development and employment in Australia. Supported in part by the Australian Renewable Energy Agency's (ARENA) Solar Sunshot Program, the Northern Quartz Campus will support domestic solar manufacturing, silicon supply chains, regional investment and significant employment growth in the north as a first-of-its-kind project in Australia.

The NQC is a series of advanced manufacturing, battery energy storage and renewable energy generation projects, which combine to create Australia's first integrated solar and electronic-grade silicon supply chain solution to convert Queensland-mined quartz into high-purity silicon products at the Lansdown Eco-Industrial Precinct, 40 km south of Townsville. The project is intended to meet global undersupply of clean, stable and geopolitically derisked high-purity silicon, and support the establishment of an Australian-made and sovereign solar photovoltaic supply chain.

Policy priority area 2:

Infrastructure to unlock growth

Reliable housing, transport, water and digital infrastructure are essential to Northern Australia's economic development and liveability. During 2025–26, the Australian Government continued to invest in infrastructure that supports growing communities, improves connectivity and unlocks economic opportunities across the region.

Progress during the year included delivery of new housing, enhancement of digital connectivity, investment in major freight and port infrastructure, and continued support for water security. Together, these investments are helping connect communities, support industry and strengthen the foundations for long-term growth.

Key achievements



401
Homes delivered in remote Northern Territory communities since July 2024



126,500
Premises enabled for fibre broadband



$1.3 billion
Committed to water infrastructure projects

Housing

- From 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2026, 401 houses were delivered across 43 Northern Territory communities and three town camps through the Remote Housing Agreement, contributing to reductions in overcrowding.
- As at 30 June 2026, across Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, 546 homes supported through the Social Housing Accelerator Program (SHAP) had been completed, 591 had commenced and 149 were committed. These additional SHAP homes will support at least 1,288 people once all homes have been completed.
- Across Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, 158 social and affordable homes supported through Round 1 and 2 of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) have been completed and a further 5,337 homes are in planning and construction as at 31 August 2026.
- Progress is continuing on the $200 million Housing Australia Future Fund Acute Housing measure for the repairs, maintenance and improvements of housing in remote Indigenous communities. The 2026–27 Budget released the remaining $100 million to support jurisdictions to continue projects that improve housing quality for First Nations Australians in remote communities in Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia.
- Under the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness, the Australian Government will provide the following funding over the 5 years to 2028–29:
  - Northern Territory: $66.9 million for general funding and $223.9 million for specified homelessness funding
  - Queensland: $1.48 billion for general funding and $383.2 million for specified homelessness funding
  - Western Australia: $830.3 million for general funding and $166.2 million for specified homelessness funding.

- NAIF approved a $74 million loan to support new student accommodation at Charles Darwin University, which will deliver a total of 402 new student beds, increasing the supply of affordable, high-quality student accommodation in Darwin's competitive rental market.
- As part of the 2026–27 Budget, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd will receive an additional $48.3 million to continue delivering critical short-term accommodation services.

Transport, freight and port infrastructure

- During 2026, the Australian Government strengthened fuel security and supply-chain resilience, supporting the reliable fuel supplies on which Northern Australia's communities, industries and essential services depend. This is particularly important for remote communities that rely on diesel generators for electricity and can be more exposed to supply disruptions and high transport costs. Working with industry, the Government secured almost 800 million litres of additional diesel and 150 million litres of additional jet fuel, helping to maintain domestic supply amid disruption to global energy markets.
- Longer-term resilience will be supported through the over $10 billion Australian Fuel Security and Resilience package, national investment to further fuel and fertiliser security and a government-controlled fuel reserve of around one billion litres. The package will strengthen Australia's ability to respond to supply disruptions, including regional stockouts and supply constraints affecting essential users. Northern Australia will benefit from these national measures, providing greater flexibility for suppliers that prioritise regional supply, and helping strengthen fuel access across the north's long and complex supply chains. The $1 billion Economic Resilience Program commenced on 20 April 2026 through the National Reconstruction Fund (NRF) Corporation to provide zero interest loans to fuel, fertiliser and other critical supply chains businesses. This kept trucks, trains and planes moving, and critical production activities online.
- Construction of new common-user port facilities at Lumsden Point in the Pilbara continued.
- Planning for the development of Regional Logistics Hubs along the Northern Territory rail network is progressing, with $10 million from the $440 million planned equity commitment being released to National Intermodal Corporation in 2026–27 to support the next stage of planning in partnership with the Northern Territory Government.
- The Australian Government is investing $1 billion to upgrade the Outback Way across Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland through the Infrastructure Investment Program. This investment will strengthen freight reliability, improve flood and disaster resilience, support Indigenous and local employment opportunities, and deliver long-term economic and community benefits across Northern Australia.
- The Australian and Queensland governments continued work on the Cairns Marine Precinct, including commencement of a market process to attract private sector participation. The Australian Government has committed $180 million to the development of this precinct.
- The Port of Broome was granted expanded First Point of Entry arrangements, increasing opportunities for international trade and shipping.
- The Australian Government is investing $406.3 million to duplicate Cairns Western Arterial Road between Redlynch Connector Road and the Captain Cook Highway.



Tanami Road Upgrade works in Western Australia. 54km of road has now been sealed with a further 18km expected by end of 2026. Credit: Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure of Western Australia.

Tanami Road and Great Northern Highway upgrades

These projects will strengthen connections between remote communities and economic centres across the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Improved safety, flood resilience and road reliability will support remote Indigenous communities through more reliable access to essential goods and services such as healthcare, while reducing travel disruption and improving freight efficiency for the mining, pastoral and tourism sectors.

The Australian Government has committed $1.1 billion towards sealing the Tanami Road between Alice Springs in the Northern Territory and Halls Creek in Western Australia and has committed $380.8 million towards delivering upgrades along the Great Northern Highway (GNH), including delivery of detailed business cases for the upgrade of all remaining vulnerable bridges along the corridor.

The Tanami Road Upgrade is also delivering strong local economic outcomes. Aboriginal people comprise 54% of the current Western Australian section's workforce, exceeding the project's 30% target, with almost 70% of those workers from the Shire of Halls Creek. Around 30% of the contracts awarded involve Aboriginal businesses. There are 17 Aboriginal businesses currently engaged, of which 13 are local, including 7 Traditional Owner businesses.

Along the GNH, Australian Government investment is improving freight reliability and flood resilience for communities and industries across the Kimberley. Major projects on the corridor (including Thunderbird Mineral Sands, Argyle Diamond Mine, and Project Sea Dragon) depend on the GNH for construction, workforce access, freight, and export logistics, and are expected to support more than 2,000 direct jobs. This builds on the nearly 10,000 jobs supported by the tourism industry across the Kimberley. Upgrades support more reliable access for mining, agriculture, tourism and other industries, while creating opportunities for local and Indigenous workers and businesses.

Digital and mobile connectivity

- The National Broadband Network (NBN) fibre upgrade program continues to improve access to full fibre broadband across Northern Australia. A major phase was completed in December 2025, enabling around 126,500 premises across the region to order an upgrade to full fibre broadband capable of speeds up to 2 gigabits per second. A further 54,000 premises across Northern Australia are expected to benefit from additional upgrades by December 2030.
- Through the Regional Connectivity Program, up to $139.3 million has been committed to 108 projects in Northern Australia, with 80 projects completed under the program.
- Community Wi-Fi services continued to expand across remote First Nations communities.

Regional and remote aviation

- Round 11 of the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program awarded 42 grants worth more than $24.6 million. Of these, 29 grants worth $18.6 million were awarded to projects in Northern Australia, supporting safer and more accessible aerodromes.
- Eight airport operators in Northern Australia received more than $950,000 through the Regional and Remote Airport Support Program.

Water infrastructure and security

- More than $1.3 billion remains committed through the National Water Grid Fund for water infrastructure, planning and science projects across Northern Australia, including 30 First Nations water infrastructure projects.
- In Queensland, Great Artesian Basin projects delivered estimated annual water savings of more than 2,000 megalitres through completed infrastructure and efficiency works.

Area of Continued Focus

7 Housing

Progress update: Across the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia, 546 homes supported through the Social Housing Accelerator had been completed and 158 social and affordable homes supported through Round 1 and 2 of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) as at 31 August 2026 have been completed. The Northern Australia Housing Working Group report was endorsed by the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum, identifying priority actions to address housing challenges across the north.

8 Infrastructure Priorities

Progress update: As at the 2026–27 Budget, $26 billion over 10 years remained committed to infrastructure projects across Northern Australia, including new investments in road and transport infrastructure.

9 Aviation Connectivity

Progress update: Twenty-nine projects received funding through Round 11 of the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program, while support continued for regional airports and remote air services.

10 Water Infrastructure and Planning

Progress update: More than $1.3 billion remained committed through the National Water Grid Fund, including support for 30 First Nations water infrastructure projects.



Construction of the Cairns Water Security Stage 1 project, Gordonvale south of Cairns, Queensland. Credit: Cairns Regional Council.

Investment in water infrastructure in Northern Australia

Strengthening water security to support communities, industry and regional growth

The Australian Government has committed more than $1.3 billion through the National Water Grid Fund to strengthen water security, support regional growth and improve essential water services across Northern Australia, including $137 million for 30 First Nations water infrastructure projects.

As part of this investment, the Cairns Water Security Stage 1 project reached a major milestone in September 2026, moving from construction to commissioning.

Once operational, the facility will supply up to 60 megalitres of treated water per day, supporting Cairns' growing population and improving long-term water security.

Construction is also delivering significant economic benefits, employing more than 1,340 people and generating over $144 million in spending with local businesses and suppliers.

The project includes a new water intake at the Mulgrave River, a water treatment plant and reservoirs at Gordonvale, connecting infrastructure, and flood resilience upgrades at the Behana Creek intake.

The $472 million project is jointly funded by the Australian Government, the Queensland Government and Cairns Regional Council.

Policy priority area 3:

A safe and secure north

Northern Australia's strategic location, extensive coastline and proximity to neighbouring countries make the region central to Australia's national security, biosecurity and border protection. During 2025–26, the Australian Government strengthened surveillance, preparedness and response capabilities across Northern Australia through investments in border security, biosecurity and public health.

Partnerships with Indigenous ranger groups, industry, jurisdictions and local communities continued to play an important role in safeguarding the region. Progress during the year included enhanced maritime operations, expanded biosecurity surveillance activities and the establishment of the Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC).

With a second national grant round, the Indigenous Rangers Program administered through the National Indigenous Australians Agency has further expanded from the 1,000 new Indigenous ranger jobs created in 2025 to create a further 900 new Indigenous ranger jobs across Australia, including in the north. The Indigenous Rangers Program is building capacity, improving resilience and strengthening early detection of exotic diseases, weeds and pests, while supporting on-Country regional jobs and knowledge sharing – with over 3,800 Indigenous rangers expected to be employed nationwide by 2028. In addition, the Australian Government has funded 69 existing Indigenous Ranger groups through fee-for-service arrangements and provided training to undertake biosecurity activities.

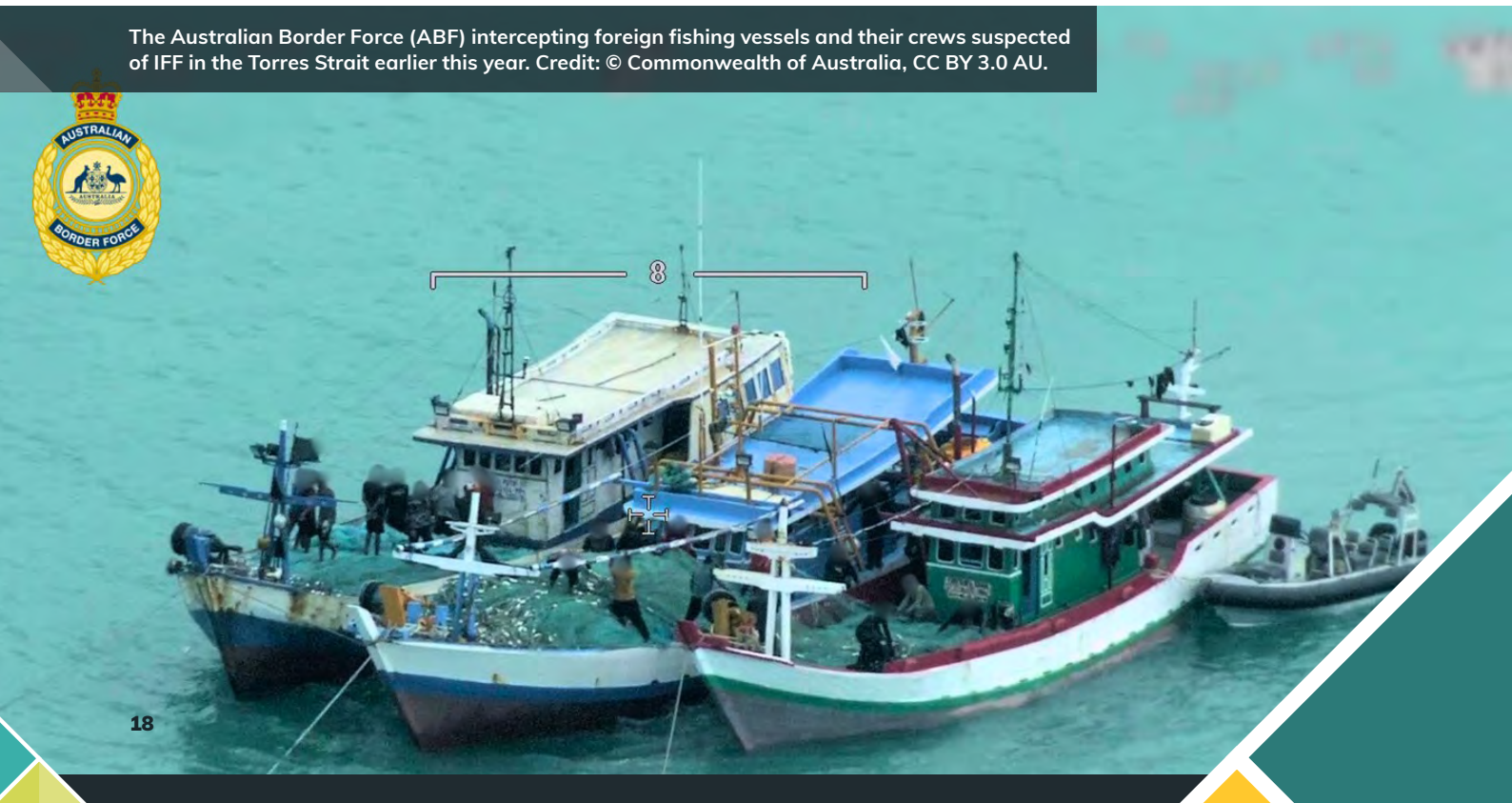
Key achievements

4,000
Biosecurity observations submitted

144
Rangers trained through the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program

New agency
Australian CDC became a standalone national agency

The Australian Border Force (ABF) intercepting foreign fishing vessels and their crews suspected of IFF in the Torres Strait earlier this year. Credit: © Commonwealth of Australia, CC BY 3.0 AU.



Maritime and border security

In February 2026, the Australian Border Force established Operation BROADSTAFF, a multi-agency operation targeting illegal foreign fishing (IFF) focused on northern Queensland and the Torres Strait. From February to August 2026, Operation BROADSTAFF has resulted in 13 interdictions, 3 legislative forfeitures, 10 vessel disposals and the seizure of approximately 3.5 tonnes of sea cucumber and 5.6 tonnes of salt used to preserve catch.

Additional funding of $55.8 million in the 2026–27 Budget was committed to continue and expand coordinated, whole-of-government operational efforts to detect, deter and disrupt IFF and protect Australia's maritime interests in the region.

Border agencies continued work to expand maritime and border service capability at strategic northern ports, including Port Hedland, Dampier and Wyndham.

Biosecurity surveillance and preparedness

- The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry delivers surveillance and early detection across Northern Australia for exotic animal, plant and aquatic pests and diseases.
- Through the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program (IRBP):
  - More than 40 Indigenous ranger groups undertook pest, weed and biosecurity surveillance activities across Northern Australia.
  - Through fee-for-service arrangements with 51 Indigenous ranger organisations, more than 4,000 biosecurity surveillance observations were submitted during 2025–26, supporting early detection and preparedness efforts.
  - A structured training pathway continued to build Indigenous ranger capability, with 144 rangers participating in biosecurity training activities.
- Through the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy:
  - The department delivered over 30 plant and over 250 animal surveillance activities since 2025, supporting early detection, response preparedness and evidence of Australia's pest and disease status.
  - Over 330 avian influenza monitoring activities were undertaken across remote Northern Australia and external territories.
  - The Northern Australia Biosecurity Surveillance Network (NABSnet) continued to strengthen animal disease surveillance and veterinary capability across Northern Australia, supporting a network of more than 300 members.
  - Delivery is underpinned by partnerships with First Nations communities, jurisdictions and other stakeholders.
- The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) continues to work closely with key partners including jurisdictional governments on animal biosecurity matters across Northern Australia. It also continues to collaborate with neighbouring countries, including Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Pacific island countries, to conduct regular collaborative animal and plant health surveillance, and build biosecurity system and workforce capability. These activities recognise the unique biosecurity risks faced in Northern Australia and the important role biosecurity activities serve both onshore and across the region, in maintaining a safe and secure Northern Australia. The Papua New Guinea (PNG) Biosecurity and Forestry Twinning Program is a key example of this collaboration, with a DAFF officer co-located with PNG's Biosecurity Authority in Port Moresby to partner on a range of animal, plant and border biosecurity capacity building activities.

Public health preparedness

- The Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC) commenced as an independent statutory agency on 1 January 2026. The CDC brings together national expertise, data and evidence to provide trusted, independent public health advice to government. The CDC supports prevention, preparedness and response through surveillance, analysis and expert guidance.

Regional Defence investment

Defence's northern capital works projects are achieving high levels of local industry participation inclusive of Indigenous participation achievements:

- The RAAF Base Tindal Redevelopment Stage 6 and United States Force Posture Initiative (USFPI) Airfield Works and Associated Infrastructure program has achieved 80% local industry participation to date.
- The Robertson Barracks Base Improvements Program has achieved 97% local industry participation to date.
- The RAAF Base Darwin Mid-Term Refresh has achieved 96% local industry participation to date.
- New Defence investments as part of the Airfield Capital Works program and pre-decisional RAAF Townsville Estate and HMAS Cairns Estate projects will support local industry across Northern Australia.

Area of Continued Focus

11 Defence Investment and Local Benefits

Progress update: Defence continues to maximise local benefits from its capital works investment in the north, achieving over 80% local engagement across its largest capital works in Northern Australia. Significant Defence investment continues to occur with a new Airfield Capital Works program and Estate projects in Cairns and Townsville being considered.

12 Biosecurity

Progress update: DAFF continues to strengthen Australia's biosecurity system through its partnerships with Indigenous rangers and Northern Australian biosecurity stakeholders. More than 4,000 surveillance observations were submitted, while 144 Indigenous rangers participated in biosecurity training activities, enhancing early detection capability. The Northern Australia Biosecurity Surveillance Network (NABSnet) continues to strengthen animal disease surveillance across Northern Australia, with committed attendance at the annual Masterclass, training workshops delivering skills in disease investigations, including exotic emergency animal disease awareness. NABSnet has seen a ten-fold increase in animal disease investigations since NABSnet inception, with 49 investigations submitted in 2025.

Policy Priority Area 4:

Growing the Northern Australia workforce

Northern Australia's economic growth and delivery of essential services depend on a skilled, adaptable and locally connected workforce. During 2025–26, the Australian Government continued to invest in vocational training, employment services and education pathways to help meet workforce needs across the region.

Progress during the year included expansion of remote training and employment programs, continued investment in Free TAFE, and development of long-term workforce pipelines through education and skills initiatives. These measures are helping more Northern Australians access training and employment opportunities that respond to local needs and industry demand.

Key achievements



3,900
Free TAFE enrolments in the Northern Territory



27,000+
Job seekers supported in Northern Australia



18,600+ jobs
Generated by NAIF investments since 2016



$299 million
Funding to double the Remote Economic Development Program (RJED) to 6,000 jobs

Vocational education and remote training

- In April 2026 the Australian Government extended support for First Nations businesses across the country, with a $20.5 million investment in Indigenous Business and Employment Hubs.
- In March 2026, the first Central Australia Remote Training Hub commenced operations, supporting on-Country learning and strengthening pathways to training and employment for people living in remote communities. The Rodinga Hub, servicing the Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa), Titjikala, Finke (Aputula) and Amoonguna communities is the first delivered under the Australian Government's $30.2 million Remote Training Hubs Network investment in the region. Up to seven hubs will be established and supported by wrap-around services through to June 2028.
- As part of the Central Australia Remote Training Hub network, four mobile training units have commenced delivering industry-standard training across a range of sectors, including construction, hospitality, conservation and ecosystem management and natural resource management.
- As at 30 June 2026, Free TAFE had supported more than 3,900 enrolments in the Northern Territory.
- The Australian Government is investing $31 million to deliver Mobile TAFE. Mobile training units will enable vocational education and training (VET) providers to take skills on the road and train the next generation of workers in outer regional and remote communities. This new funding is expected to deliver up to 12 projects nationally, including 4 projects worth $6.9 million in the Northern Territory and 2 projects worth $5 million in Western Australia.
- The Australian Government is also supporting First Nations-led vocational education and training through the Indigenous Centre of Excellence (ICOVE) initiative. The ICOVE supports Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and First Nations organisations to strengthen training capability and improve access to culturally informed vocational education and training pathways.

- The Regional Workforce Transition Officer worked with training providers, industry and local stakeholders in Central Queensland to promote awareness of training pathways aligned to emerging industries and regional workforce needs, including opportunities associated with renewable energy, advanced manufacturing and other growth sectors.

Remote and First Nations employment

- The Government is committed to improving employment outcomes for people living in remote Australia and has replaced the Community Development Program (CDP) with the Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES) and the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program.
- The Government is investing $1.9 billion over 5 years for RAES to support remote job seekers to build skills, address barriers to employment and connect with available work.
- The Government is investing more than $950 million in the RJED program to support job seekers in RAES regions by creating real jobs for locals that communities want and need, with good pay and conditions, like superannuation and leave. Through the RJED program, the Government is committed to creating 6,000 new jobs in remote Australia by 2030.
- RJED has funded over 500 projects, including over 450 in Northern Australia. Over 3,000 jobs are being created through these projects, including around 2,700 in Northern Australia.
- The RAES is supporting more than 27,000 job seekers in Northern Australia through 28 locally based providers.
- As at 30 June 2026, NAIF financing has supported over 1,315 First Nations jobs and more than $279 million in First Nations procurement through its Indigenous Engagement Strategy requirements.

Employment pathways and participation

- Phase 1 of the Reconnection, Employment and Learning Program commenced in February 2026, with First Nations-led organisations delivering services in correctional facilities across Northern Australia.
- The Australian Government extended Yarrabah Employment Services until October 2028, supporting culturally responsive employment services in Far North Queensland.
- The Central Queensland Regional Workforce Transition Officer led early workforce transition planning associated with the potential closure of Gladstone Power Station in 2029, working closely with station leadership, union delegates and workers to identify workforce issues, inform transition planning and support workforce preparedness.

Education and workforce pipelines

- The Charles Darwin University (CDU) Medical School commenced in February 2026 with 42 students, including 40 Northern Territory residents.
- Twenty-four Northern Australian schools participated in evidence-based primary reading programs during 2026.
- The Central Australia Boarding Response Fund continued to support boarding facilities for First Nations students from remote communities.
- The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme continues to provide critical workforce support to businesses across Northern Australia. In June 2026, 32,645 PALM workers were employed across Australia. Of these, 17,015 were working in the NT, WA and QLD, many of whom were supporting the economic prosperity of Northern Australia. An Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) pilot has mobilised 14 early childhood educators from Papua New Guinea to work in early childhood centres in Katherine and Alice Springs for 4 years.

- The Regional Workforce Transition Officer supported future workforce pipeline development through collaboration with the Future Pathways Working Group in Rockhampton, school-industry engagement activities and student career information sessions.
  These initiatives connected young people with local employers and improved awareness of career pathways and employment opportunities in both emerging and established industries.

Area of Continued Focus

13 **Workforce and Skills**

Progress update: Free TAFE supported more than 3,900 enrolments in the Northern Territory, while the Remote Australia Employment Service continued supporting more than 27,000 job seekers across Northern Australia.

The Government continues to grow and strengthen the PALM scheme across key industries such as horticulture and child care.

PALM worker from Samoa.
Credit: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.



Policy Priority Area 5:

Liveable, healthy and resilient communities

Northern Australia's long-term development depends on access to quality healthcare, strong community infrastructure and resilience to natural hazards and other disruptions. During 2025–26, the Australian Government continued to invest in health services, First Nations wellbeing, disaster preparedness and community infrastructure across the region.

Progress during the year included expansion of urgent and primary healthcare services, investment in culturally safe First Nations-led health initiatives, delivery of disaster resilience projects and continued support for community infrastructure. Together, these initiatives are helping to build healthier, safer and more connected communities across Northern Australia.

Key achievements



16
Medicare Urgent Care Clinics now operating



69
Disaster Ready Fund projects



$760 million
Investment in Mount Isa copper smelter, Phosphate Hill fertiliser facility and Townsville copper refinery

Access to healthcare

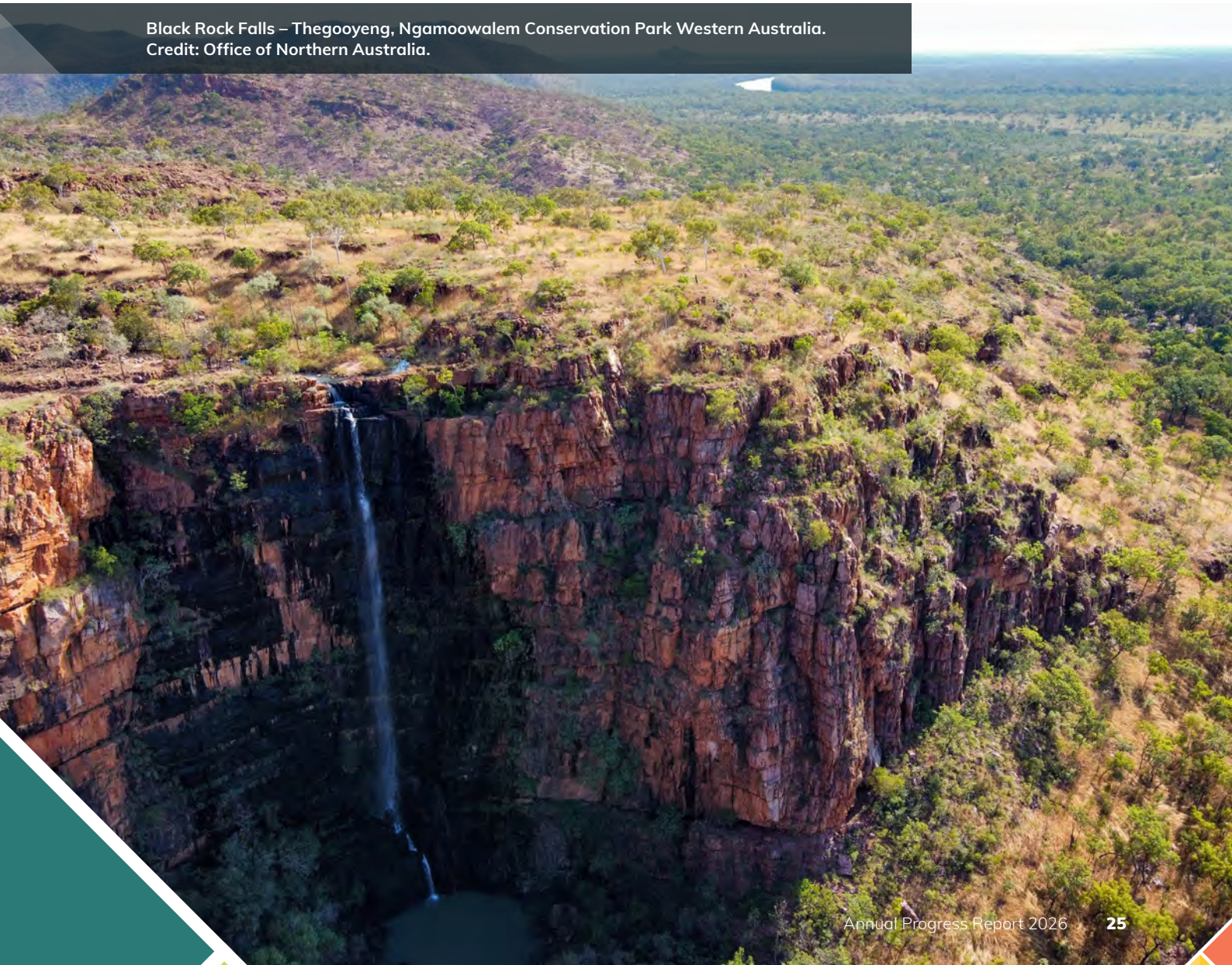
- During 2025–26, 4 additional Medicare Urgent Care Clinics were established, located in Gladstone, Mackay, Cairns North and Darwin, bringing the total number of clinics in Northern Australia to 16.
- The First Nations Health Infrastructure Program is supporting improved health outcomes across Northern Australia through investments of $170.21 million in new and upgraded health clinics, staff housing and associated infrastructure for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services.
- The Australian Government is continuing this investment through Round 3 of the Closing the Gap Major Capital Works Program, which opened in July 2026 and is making available up to $180 million for new builds, upgrades, repairs and maintenance of health infrastructure and housing for health professionals. An evaluation is underway and due for completion in early 2027. Early analysis shows Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services that have completed Major Capital Works projects on average increase full-time equivalents positions by 40% and episodes of care by 15%.
- Multidisciplinary primary care services commenced across northern Queensland and the Northern Territory, supporting people with chronic and complex health conditions.

First Nations health and wellbeing

- The Australian Government is expanding support for remote communities through an additional $27.4 million investment in the Low-Cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme announced in the 2026–27 Budget. This funding will build on existing efforts to reduce the price of essential food and household items in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, helping address ongoing cost-of-living pressures.
- Construction commenced on new dialysis facilities in Atitjere, Ti Tree and Borroloola, with planning and consultation continuing for additional facilities in remote communities.

- The Better Renal Services for First Nations Peoples measure was extended to 2030, supported by an additional $53 million investment in the 2026–27 Budget.
- Continued investment in First Nations maternal and child health is being delivered in alignment with the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, with a strong focus on First Nations leadership, community control and strengthening the community-controlled sector. This includes an additional $44.4 million to extend Birthing on Country initiatives and, from 1 July 2026, the transition of the Australian Family Partnership Program (AFPP) to the community-led First Nations Maternal and Child Health (FNMaCH) program. Together, these initiatives support First Nations-led, culturally safe approaches to improving maternal and infant health outcomes, including healthy birthweight in line with Closing the Gap Outcome 2. Site-level data across these services indicates positive outcomes for mothers and babies across a range of measures, including preterm birth, antenatal care, birthweight, breastfeeding and smoking cessation.
- The National Justice Reinvestment Program is supporting 17 community-led initiatives in Northern Australia aimed at reducing contact with the criminal justice system. While long-term impact will take time to demonstrate, initiatives are showing strong early signs of progress including strengthened local coordination, increased youth engagement, improved access to culturally informed services, and early indicators of reduced interaction with the justice system.

Black Rock Falls – Thegooyeng, Ngamoowalem Conservation Park Western Australia. Credit: Office of Northern Australia.







Soap making classes were an effective community lead health promotion activity. Credit: Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

Australia eliminates trachoma as a public health problem

In April 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO) validated Australia as having eliminated trachoma as a public health problem, making Australia the 30th country globally to achieve this milestone. This achievement is particularly significant because trachoma had persisted in some remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities long after it disappeared from the broader Australian population.

Trachoma is a highly contagious bacterial eye infection caused by Chlamydia trachomatis. Repeated infections can scar the eyelid, causing the eyelashes to turn inwards and damage the eye. Without treatment, this can lead to irreversible vision loss and blindness. It remains the world's leading infectious cause of preventable blindness.

Australia's success reflects almost two decades of sustained effort following the establishment of the National Trachoma Management Program in 2006. The program implemented the WHO-endorsed SAFE strategy: Surgery for advanced disease, Antibiotics to treat infection, Facial cleanliness, and Environmental improvements such as better access to water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure. Regular screening, treatment, surveillance and health promotion activities were delivered through partnerships between governments, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), local health services and communities. Australia also adapted the global model to local conditions by using targeted treatment based on community-level data rather than mass drug administration.

The Australian Government invested $23.6 million over four years (2021–22 to 2024–25) to support trachoma elimination, including $19.1 million through Federation Funding Agreements with affected jurisdictions and $4.5 million for national surveillance, reporting and health promotion. A further $14.7 million over three years (2025–26 to 2027–28) has been committed to maintain surveillance and prevent re-emergence. Trachoma prevalence among First Nations children aged 5–9 years in at-risk communities fell from 14.9% in 2009 to 1.5% in 2024, demonstrating the impact of long-term, community-led action.

Mental health and community wellbeing

- Medicare Mental Health Centres are now operating across Northern Australia with centres in Gladstone, Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns, Mount Isa, Katherine and Darwin. Progress is being made on additional centres in Alice Springs, Mackay and another Far North Queensland location.
- Mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, and suicide prevention programs continued to be delivered through First Nations organisations and community-controlled partners across Northern Australia.

Disaster preparedness and climate resilience

- Across the first 3 rounds of the Disaster Ready Fund, 69 projects awarded more than $151 million in Australian Government funding have been completed or are underway in Northern Australia. As at 30 June, 18 projects have been completed or are nearing completion, with the remaining 51 projects underway.
- Nine projects awarded more than $34 million in Australian Government funding under the Coastal and Estuarine Risk Mitigation Program and National Flood Mitigation Infrastructure Program have been or continued to be delivered in Northern Australia in 2025–26.
- The Australian Government continues to support the North Australia and Rangelands Fire Information (NAFI) web service, providing fire information and mapping tools that assist land managers, Indigenous ranger groups, and emergency services to support bushfire preparedness and risk reduction across northern and central Australia.
- The first vessel joined the Strategic Fleet Pilot Program in May 2026, supporting preparedness for natural disasters, emergencies and supply chain disruptions.

Community infrastructure and regional liveability

- The Australian Government's $50 million Community Infrastructure Package under the Central Australia Plan continues to support community infrastructure and community assets across Central Australia. Tranche 2 projects are at various stages of planning and delivery, while planning for Tranche 3 is progressing through engagement with the Central Australia Plan Aboriginal Leadership Group.
- 12 projects in Northern Australia received over $29 million in funding through the Major and Local Community Infrastructure Program. Together, these investments will create safer, more accessible and sustainable places for sport, recreation, arts, learning and community programs across regional and remote communities in Queensland and the Northern Territory.
- In May 2026, the Australian Government announced a new successful project from the regional Precincts and Partnerships Program. The 'Heart of Doomadgee - Development of the CBD Precinct' will provide $2.5 million to the Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council to support planning and partnership development that will revitalise the local and regional economy through diversification into tourism, cultural tourism and arts, delivering an investment-ready CBD precinct.
- Construction on Stage 2 of the Wangetti Trail progressed in Tropical North Queensland, supporting tourism, employment and economic opportunities for local communities and Traditional Owners.
- The Australian and Queensland governments' joint $600 million investment for the Mount Isa copper smelter and Townsville copper refinery to alleviate immediate pressures and deliver a transformation study to examine the long-term future for the facilities, industry and workers of Mount Isa and North West Queensland.

- The Australian and Queensland governments' provided a joint $160 million loan for the Phosphate Hill fertiliser facility to lock in the ongoing operations of the facility for the future of North West Queensland industries and jobs. The loan will be used to support modernisation of the facility, and the package also includes additional targeted support to help the facility manage sulphur costs that have surged because of conflict in the Middle East.

Area of Continued Focus

14 **Equitable access to Government Investment and Coordination**

Progress update: An analysis of Australian Government grant funding is ongoing to improve understanding of investment across Northern Australia.

15 **Climate Adaptation**

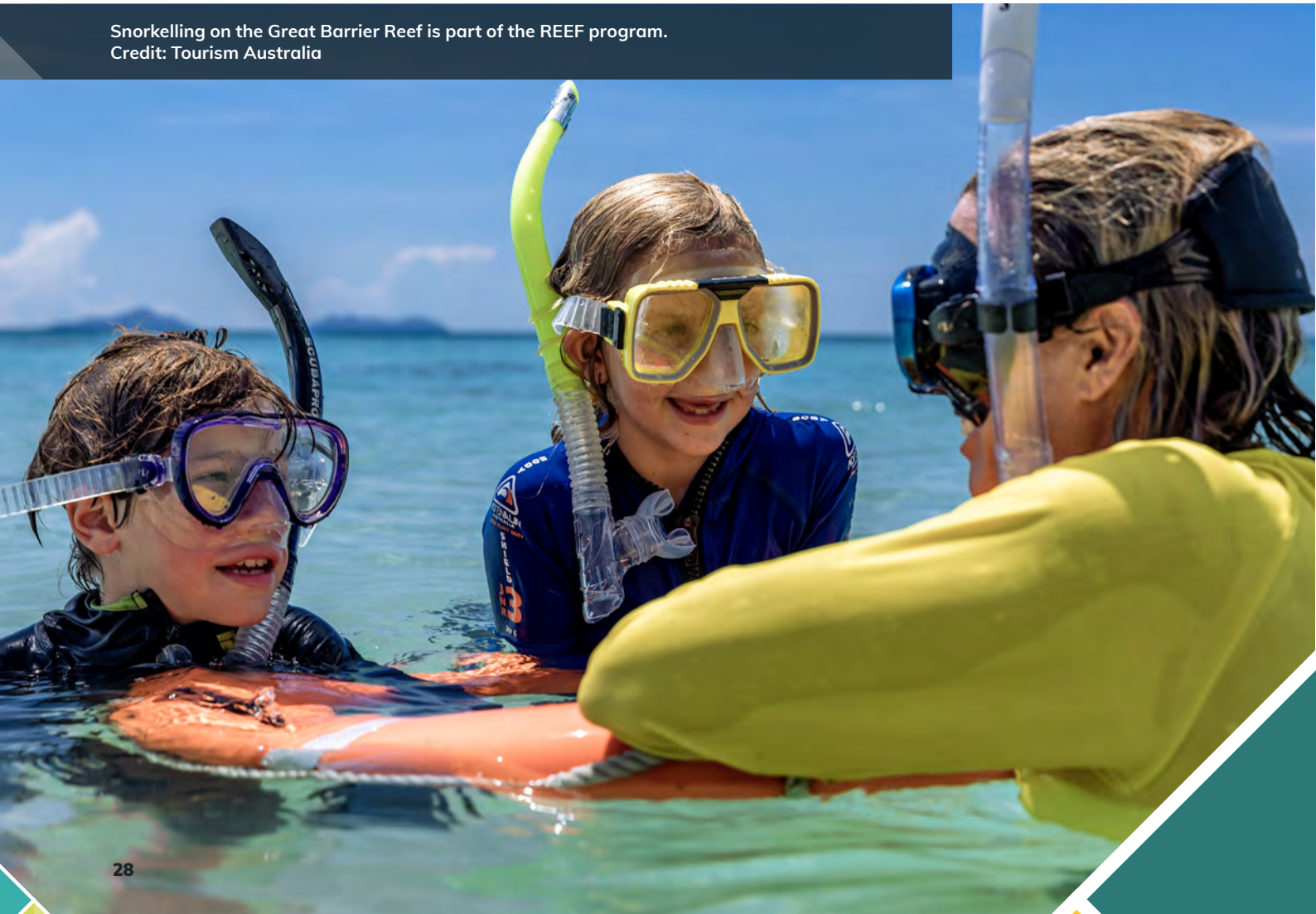
Progress update: Development of the National Adaptation Plan action agenda continued alongside climate resilience initiatives in the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area.

16 Continued investment in Disaster Ready Fund projects across the North

Economic Transition

Progress update: The Net Zero Economy Authority continued place-based engagement in Central Queensland to support regional economic diversification and workforce transition.

Snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef is part of the REEF program.
Credit: Tourism Australia





Uluru in the Red Centre. Credit: Tourism Australia.

Support for Red Centre and Reef tourism

What do the tourism industries in Central Australia and the Great Barrier Reef region have in common? Both are located in Northern Australia and benefiting from the Australian Government's $18.5 million Targeted Regional Tourism Support Package. An Australian Government election commitment, the Austrade-administered package began rolling out in late 2025 to these 2 iconic tourism regions.

Up to $8.5 million for the Red Centre includes:

- $2.5 million for operators to develop new and updated tourism products and experiences
- a $5 million marketing boost
- $1 million to support small tourism businesses.

Meanwhile, the $10 million Reef Educational Experience Fund (REEF) is supporting Queensland's tourism industry and making it easier for more Australians to connect with the Great Barrier Reef (GBR).

Launched this year, the $6 million 'Kids for the Reef' School Excursion Rebate Program provides rebates to schools taking an educational excursion to the GBR. It is supported by further investments of $1 million for tourism operators to help operators access the training, upgrades, checks and clearances to participate in the program and $3 million to support and drive sustainable international visitation to the GBR.



Labels are used to identify reduced cost products.
Credit: NIAA

Low-Cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme

The Australian Government is increasing support for remote First Nations communities through an additional $27.4 million investment in the Low-Cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme.
The funding, announced in the 2026 Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, builds on existing efforts to reduce the price of essential food and household items in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Through the Scheme, the cost of 30 essentials such as flour, UHT milk, canned foods and toiletries are reduced in participating remote community stores to levels comparable with urban supermarkets. More than 120 remote stores are already participating, improving access to affordable food and supporting healthier, more resilient communities across Northern Australia.

The Scheme was launched on 1 July 2025 and results are encouraging, with participating stores reporting customer savings of up to 50% on subsidised items.

Additional funding in the 2026–27 Budget removed the 152-store cap on participation and will enable the Scheme to support all approximately 225 eligible remote stores nationally. Since 1 July 2025, the Scheme has delivered an estimated $5 million in savings to customers through reduced prices on essentials at participating stores.

Policy Priority Area 6:

Protecting the north's environment and cultural heritage

Northern Australia is home to internationally significant ecosystems, extensive land and sea Country, and diverse First Nations cultures and languages. During 2025–26, the Australian Government continued to support environmental protection, cultural stewardship and First Nations-led land and sea management activities across the region.

Progress during the year included support for Indigenous language revitalisation, cultural heritage repatriation, Junior Rangers activities, marine debris removal and environmental stewardship initiatives. Together, these activities are helping to strengthen culture, protect biodiversity and support sustainable management of Northern Australia's unique natural assets.

Key achievements



1,500+
Students participating in Junior Rangers



24
Tonnes of marine debris removed



40
Cultural heritage items returned

Environmental protection, stewardship and sustainable land management

- The Australian Government is investing $99.6 million over two years to extend the Saving Native Species program, supporting threatened species recovery and biodiversity conservation. The funding will expand actions to protect vulnerable plants, animals and ecosystems, address key threats such as invasive species like the yellow crazy ant, and create economic opportunities through regional jobs, tourism and sustainable industries, while increasing First Nations-led conservation and care for Country.
- Through the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA), the Australian Government is strengthening Indigenous-led biosecurity across Northern Australia. The Protecting Country Against Invasive Species Program supports ranger groups to manage invasive pests and weeds, build local capability, adopt new technologies, and protect Country, culture and biodiversity. The program has already supported more than 30 ranger groups, delivered projects across three jurisdictions, and demonstrates the value of combining Indigenous knowledge with science-based biosecurity management.
- The Australian Government is providing an additional $91.8 million to support the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef. This commitment will accelerate delivery of the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan and Reef restoration projects, improve water quality monitoring and research, and provide additional funding for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
  - This includes $5 million for the Tourism Reef Protection Initiative to continue reef protection actions established through Site Stewardship Plans at 25 sites within the Great Barrier Reef. These include Crown-of-Thorns Starfish and Drupella snail control.

- The Nature Repair Market continued implementation, creating opportunities to attract investment into activities that protect and restore nature, including participation by First Nations organisations.
- The Climate-Smart Agriculture Program continued supporting adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and natural resource management activities across Northern Australia.

First Nations languages and cultural heritage

- Funding for 11 Indigenous Language Centres across Northern Australia continued to support language revitalisation, community language learning and intergenerational transmission of First Nations languages.
- In October 2025, the Warumungu community celebrated the return of 40 culturally significant items from international museum collections to Tennant Creek following several years of collaboration and advocacy.

Caring for Country

- The Junior Rangers Program is supporting more than 1,500 First Nations students each year through activities delivered at more than 50 sites across Northern Australia.
- Recent program expansion has supported activities at more than 25 additional Junior Ranger sites, strengthening opportunities for cultural learning and land and water management.

Sea Country and marine protection

- The Ghost Nets and Marine Debris Initiative continued to support First Nations organisations undertaking marine debris removal, recycling and research activities.
- During 2026, participating organisations removed eight ghost nets and more than 24 tonnes of marine debris from northern waters.

A green sea turtle on the Great Barrier Reef east of Cairns, Queensland.
Credit: Tourism Australia.



Research, knowledge and evidence

Northern Australia's long-term development depends on access to robust evidence, research and data. During 2025–26, the Australian Government continued to strengthen the evidence base for Northern Australia through research partnerships, geoscience programs and initiatives that support the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems into research and decision-making.

Research activities continued to improve understanding of Northern Australia's environmental, cultural and economic characteristics, while helping to inform policy development, investment decisions and long-term planning. Partnerships involving researchers, Traditional Owners, governments and industry remain central to this work.



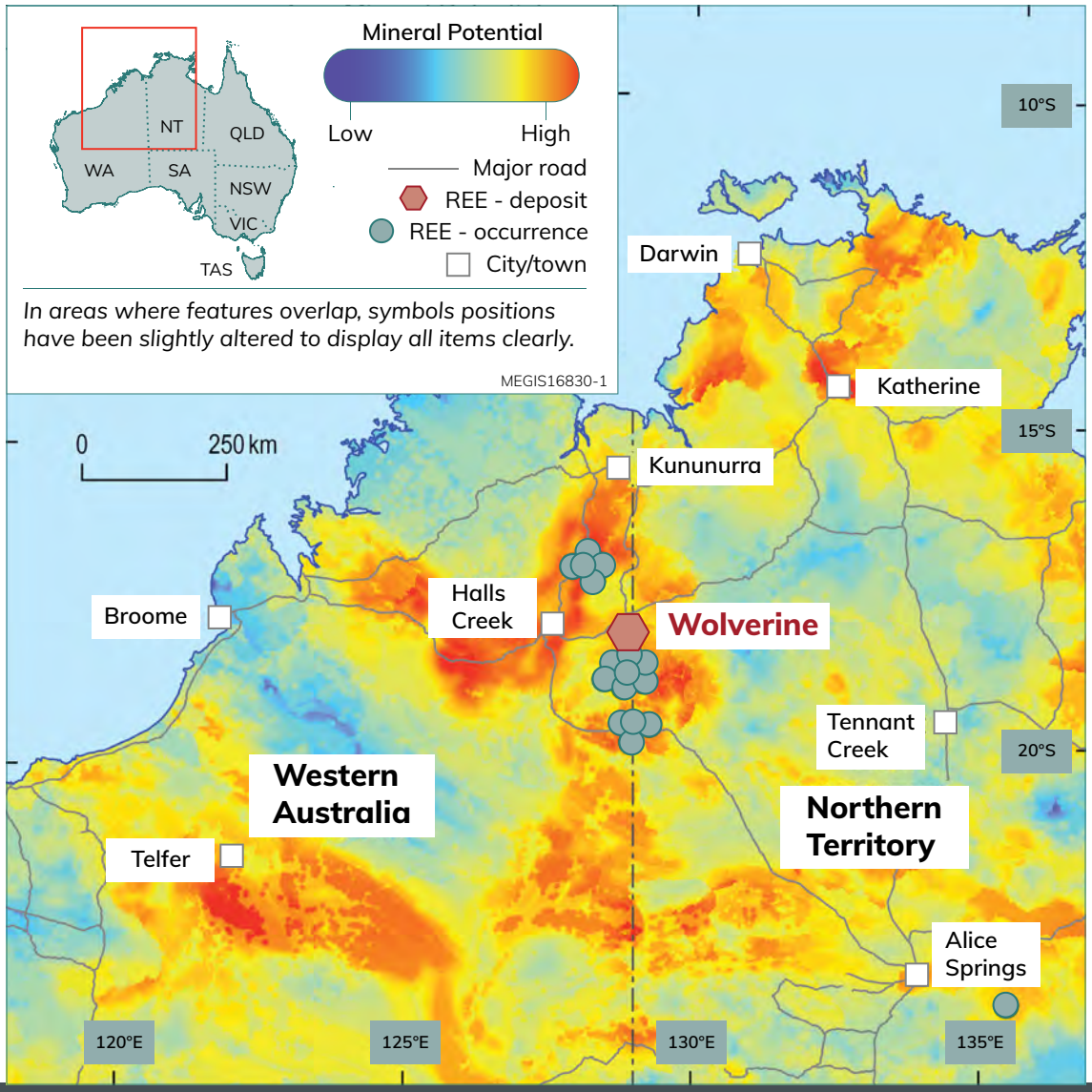
Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland. The elevated region is known for volcanic formations and productive agricultural land.
Credit: Office of Northern Australia.

Geoscience and strategic knowledge development

In February 2026, as part of Geoscience Australia's Resourcing Australia's Prosperity initiative (RAPi), geoscientific analysis identified several areas of high rare earth element (REE) prospectivity near the WA and NT border, including the Birrindudu-Halls Creek region. These findings improve understanding of the region's mineral potential and support Australia's long-term critical minerals development efforts and complement mineral security efforts undertaken through the Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve.

RAPi is a $3.4 billion initiative which supports Australia's long-term critical mineral security efforts by strengthening the evidence base for future critical minerals discovery and development and informing related Government initiatives.

Through the Critical Minerals National Productivity Initiative, the Australian Government partnered with the Northern Territory Government to co-fund a feasibility study for a copper and critical minerals common-user processing facility in Tennant Creek.



Visualisation of known rare earth element (REE) deposit locations, occurrences and areas of high REE mineral potential. Credit: Geoscience Australia.

Research partnerships and evidence generation

- Through the National Environmental Science Program, the Australian Government continued to support research partnerships across Northern Australia involving researchers, Traditional Owners, governments and industry. Research activities are contributing to Indigenous-led environmental management, biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Research projects underway include partnerships with First Nations communities to manage seagrass habitat that supports dugong, green turtle, fish and prawn populations, and work with Traditional Owners in Kakadu National Park to identify environmental knowledge gaps and research priorities.
- Geoscience Australia has established a First Nations Advisory Group under RAPi to provide culturally informed advice and guidance, supporting the development of meaningful partnerships and respectful engagement across all activities of the initiative.

Area of Continued Focus

17 **Research Priorities**

Progress update: Research partnerships continued through the National Environmental Science Program, while work progressed to elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and strengthen geoscience capability relevant to Northern Australia.

Integrating Indigenous knowledge systems

- The National Science and Technology Council provided advice to Government to support implementation of the National Science and Research Priority focused on elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems. This work was informed by an Indigenous-led project involving research, stakeholder engagement and development of implementation approaches.
- Communications products including videos and written case studies were developed to showcase examples where Indigenous knowledge and Western science have been successfully combined to support improved environmental, scientific and cultural outcomes.

Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group

The Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) provides key advice to government on the delivery of the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029, ensuring First Nations voices are central to decisions shaping the future of the north and the Australian Government's commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The IRG commenced under refreshed Terms of Reference in 2025, chaired by Professor Martin Nakata. Returning members Troy Fraser, Flora Warrior and Nini Mills bring valuable experience and continuity, while Damien Djerrkura and Alinta McGuire bring fresh perspectives.

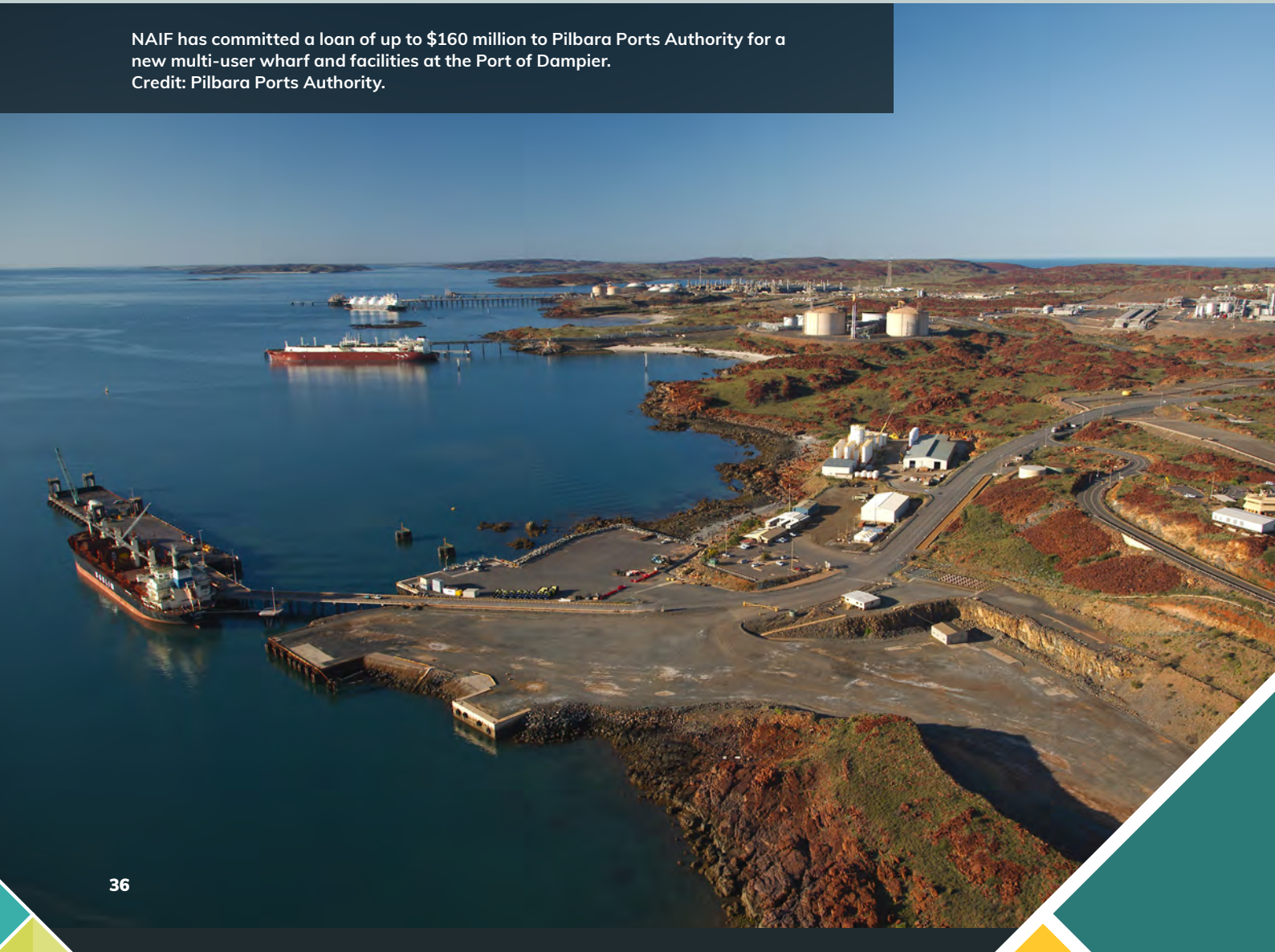
The IRG is working to progress three priorities:

- Supporting the education to employment pipeline to deliver economic empowerment
- Supporting First Nations enterprises
- Data collection, impact measures, and alignment of departmental expenditure to national commitments.

This IRG is also developing advice to government on supporting communities undergoing economic transition.

The group met virtually in March 2026, in person in Cairns in June and in August alongside the Developing Northern Australia Conference and virtually in September to progress their work.

NAIF has committed a loan of up to $160 million to Pilbara Ports Authority for a new multi-user wharf and facilities at the Port of Dampier.
Credit: Pilbara Ports Authority.



List of images

Cover
Bruce Highway works near Dallachy Road, south of Tully, Far North Queensland. Image supplied by Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads
© State of Queensland.

Page ii:
Whitsunday Islands. We acknowledge the Ngaro people as the Traditional Owners and first custodians of the Whitsunday Islands, and their enduring connection to Country and ongoing cultural heritage. Credit: ONA.

Page 7
NAIF has committed up to $490 million for the BCI Minerals Mardie Salt Project in the Pilbara region, to produce and export high-quality salt from seawater using solar and wind energy. Credit: BCI Minerals.

Page 12
Rendering of the Northern Quartz Campus when complete. Credit: Quinbrook.

Page 15
Tanami Road Upgrade works in WA. 54km of road has now been sealed with a further 18km expected by end of 2026.

Page 17
Construction of the Cairns Water Security Stage 1 project, Gordonvale, Cairns, Queensland. Credit: Cairns Regional Council.

Page 18
The Australian Border Force (ABF) intercepting foreign fishing vessels and their crews suspected of IFF in the Torres Strait earlier this year. Credit: © Commonwealth of Australia, CC BY 3.0 AU

Page 23
PALM worker from Samoa. Credit: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

Page 25
Black Rock Falls – Thegooyeng, Ngamoowalem Conservation Park Western Australia.
Credit: Office of Northern Australia.

Page 28
Snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef is part of the REEF program. Credit: Tourism Australia.

Page 29
Uluru in the Red Centre. Credit: Tourism Australia.

Page 30
Labels are used to identify reduced cost products.
Credit: NIAA.

Page 32
A green sea turtle on the Great Barrier Reef east of Cairns, Queensland. Credit: Tourism Australia.

Page 33
Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland. The elevated region is known for volcanic formations and productive agricultural land. Credit: Office of Northern Australia.

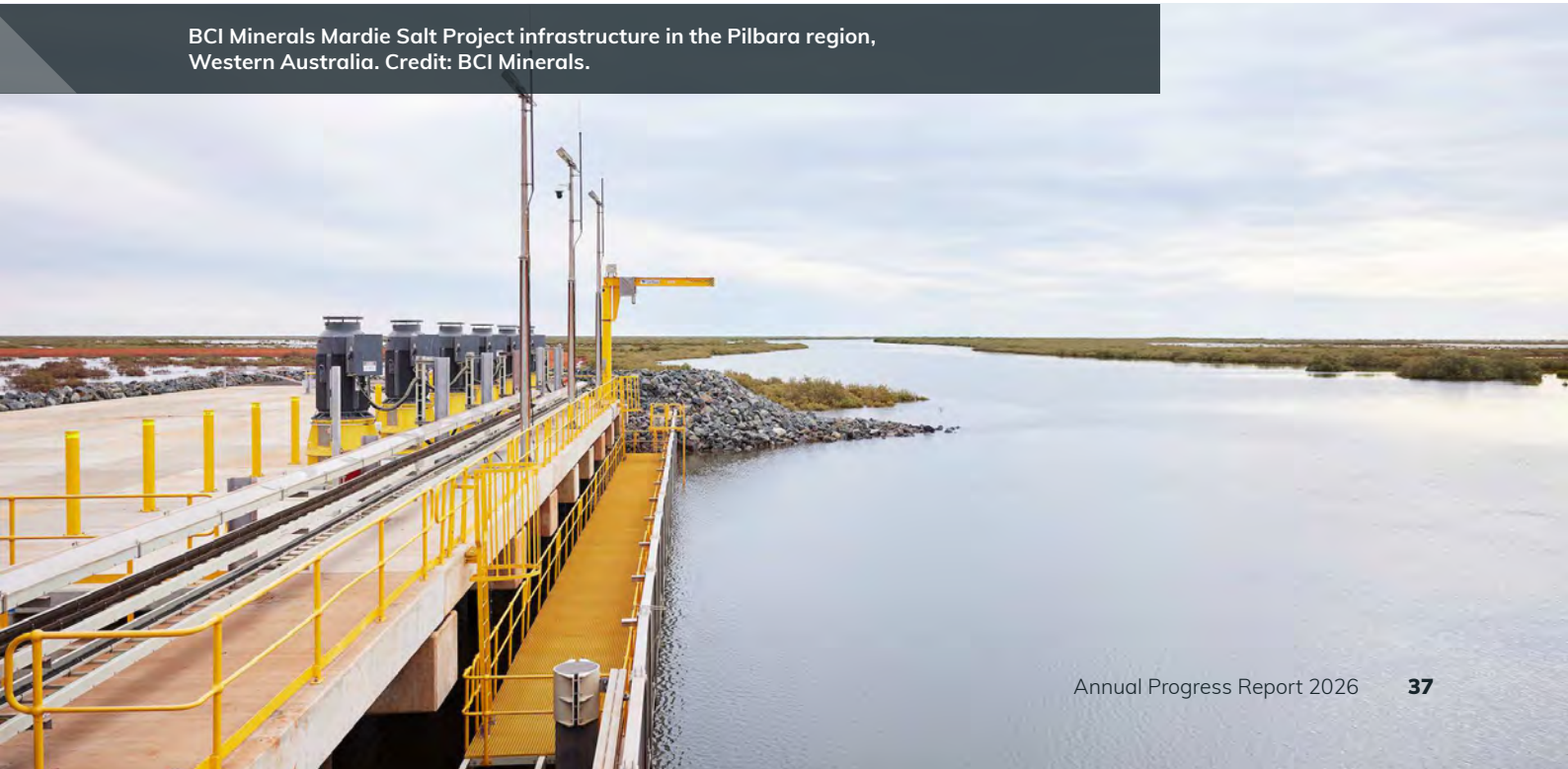
Page 34
Visualisation of known REE deposit locations, occurrences and areas of high REE mineral potential.
Credit: Geoscience Australia.

Page 36
NAIF has committed $160 million to Pilbara Ports for a new multi-user wharf and facilities at the Port of Dampier. Supplied by Pilbara Ports Authority.

Page 37
NAIF supported project BCI Minerals Mardie Salt Project in the Pilbara region, WA. Credit: BCI Minerals.

Figure 10
NAIF supported project BCI Minerals Mardie Salt Project in the Pilbara region, WA. Credit: BCI Minerals

BCI Minerals Mardie Salt Project infrastructure in the Pilbara region, Western Australia. Credit: BCI Minerals.



Northern Australia Profile sources and notes

Data used for charts on pages 3, 4 and 5.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 2021 Census of Population and Housing, General Community Profile – G16 [ABS Data API], accessed 22 October 2026, ABS Data API – C21_G16_SA2.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 2021 Census of Population and Housing, General Community Profile – G54 [ABS Data API], accessed 22 October 2026, ABS Data API – C21_G54_SA2.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), 2021 – Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) [ABS Data API], accessed 22 October 2026, ABS Data API – ABS_SEIFA2021_SA2.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2026) Data by Region, 2011–2025 – ASGS 2016 [ABS Data API], accessed 22 October 2026, ABS Data API – ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS2016.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2026) Data by Region, 2011–2025 – ASGS 2021 [ABS Data API], accessed 22 October 2026, ABS Data API – ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS2021.

Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (2026) analysis of Australian Border Force Integrated Cargo System (ICS) data provided by the Department of Home Affairs.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (August 2026) International Trade in Goods, ABS Website, accessed 22 October 2026, International Trade in Goods, August 2026.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026) Deaths in Australia: data – AIHW-PHE-229-MORT_SA3_2020_2024.xlsx [data set], accessed 22 October 2026, Deaths in Australia – Data.

Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (2026) Airport traffic data 1985 to 2025 (financial years) [data set], accessed 22 October 2026, Airport traffic data.

Tourism Research Australia (2026) Visitor nights [custom data supplied by Tourism Research Australia], accessed 22 October 2026. See Changes to Australian resident tourism statistics from 2025.

Geography and methodology

ONA analysis. Unless otherwise stated, Northern Australia estimates presented in the profile are Office of Northern Australia (ONA) analysis of the source data listed above. ONA analysis includes aggregating published data to approximate the Northern Australia boundary and, where required, calculating Northern Australia totals, shares, rates and other derived measures.

Northern Australia geography. The Northern Australia boundary does not align exactly with standard statistical geographies. ONA constructs Northern Australia estimates using the smallest appropriate geographic units available in each source and aggregating those units to provide the best fit to the Northern Australia boundary.

For most ABS regional data, this is undertaken using Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) data. Land area estimates use Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries. Tourism, aviation and export estimates use the geographic classifications available in their respective source datasets.

Reference periods. Data are presented for the latest available reference period for each indicator. Reference periods therefore vary between indicators and are shown where relevant.

SEIFA. The map presents the ABS Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) for 2021 at LGA level. SEIFA is an area-based measure derived from Census data and describes the relative socio-economic characteristics of areas, rather than the circumstances of individuals. IRSAD considers both relative advantage and disadvantage. The profile presents quintiles, with quintile 1 representing the most disadvantaged areas and quintile 5 the most advantaged. [abs.gov.au], [abs.gov.au]



Endnotes

Gross Regional Product. Gross Regional Product is presented as a range because SA4 boundaries do not align precisely with the Northern Australia boundary. The lower bound includes SA4s wholly within Northern Australia; the upper bound includes all SA4s wholly or partly within Northern Australia.

Potentially Avoidable Deaths. Potentially avoidable deaths are deaths among people aged under 75 from conditions considered potentially preventable and/or treatable within the current health system. ONA calculated the crude rate using potentially avoidable deaths data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and estimated resident population. The rate is not age-standardised and does not adjust for differences in population age structure; comparisons between Northern Australia and Australia should therefore be interpreted with caution.



