



Senator the Hon Matt Canavan
Minister for Resources and Northern Australia

SPEECH

11 October 2016

Statement by the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia,
Senator the Hon Matthew Canavan

2016 Annual Statement on Developing Northern Australia

Opening remarks

I am very proud as the Minister for Resources and Northern Australia to present this first report on our progress implementing the white paper on developing northern Australia: Our North, Our Future.

Our great nation is a country of contrasts and diversity, and this government is determined to ensure we reach the full potential inherent in all parts of Australia. Our northern development agenda is a nation-building agenda. Northern Australia is already an economic powerhouse for Australia. Our government believes that the North's proximity to world economic growth has created an unprecedented opportunity to invest in the North, and by doing so make returns for all Australians. That is why we have released the first ever white paper to develop northern Australia.

While I have the great honour of delivering this first update, I only have that honour thanks to the drive and determination of others. I especially want to credit Senator Ian Macdonald, who is here in the chamber at the moment, for his tireless and successful efforts to put northern development on the nation's agenda. Also to Mr Warren Entsch and the members of his parliamentary committee whose report, Pivot North, helped guide the policies in our white paper.

Today I want to talk mainly about what we are doing because we have made significant achievements over the past year and the people of the North want action not just talk. Twenty-one of our policy initiatives are complete and much progress has been made on others. We are taking action and we are on track.

I am pleased to report we are building roads and major economic infrastructure in the North. Our plan helps the North unlock its inherent advantages in land, water and people by building infrastructure and supporting business development. On launching the white paper last year we announced more than \$6 billion worth of investment. Over the past year we have begun allocating that to specific projects that have begun. We have announced funding for projects worth more than \$350 million as part of the Northern Australia Roads Program. This includes investments to better connect Kununurra to its closest port at Wyndham, which will help support the development of the Ord irrigation scheme and also help to facilitate more than \$1 billion worth of proposed investments in aquaculture in the Northern Territory nearby. Other road projects include upgrading the Barkly, Flinders and Capricorn highways in Queensland—key freight routes linking important inland resources and agriculture areas with coastal ports; sealing the Hann Highway in Queensland to create a more reliable inland route from Cairns to

Melbourne; realignment at Coongan Gorge on the Marble Bar Road in Western Australia; and flood immunity improvements at the Adelaide River Floodplain on the Arnhem Highway in the Northern Territory. We have announced that we will continue the sealing of the Outback Way, which runs from Winton in Queensland to Laverton in Western Australia, to help establish another east-west link across our nation. We do need to begin thinking more 'eastwest', not just 'north-south' when we develop our country.

We have been working hard to identify investment priorities to improve the northern beef industry's productivity and resilience through the \$100 million Northern Australia Beef Roads Program, with three successful round table meetings of key representatives from the cattle and transport industries in Rockhampton, Kununurra and Darwin. Sixty per cent of Australia's rainfall falls on the 40 per cent of our land mass that represents northern Australia. Yet only around two per cent of that water is used at the moment. We have a great opportunity to expand food production in Australia and that opportunity will be concentrated in the North, given that many of the more fertile areas in southern Australia have already been developed. That is why we have committed \$174 million already to specific water projects in the North. This includes \$130 million to co-fund the Rookwood Weir on the Fitzroy River, a project that could kick-start an agricultural boom in Central Queensland in a water catchment that is the second largest in Australia, behind only the Murray-Darling. The CSIRO is leading work on foundational land and water resources assessments in the Mitchell River catchment in Queensland, in the Fitzroy River catchment in Western Australia, and in the Darwin region in the Northern Territory. This follows assessments completed on the North Queensland rivers Flinders and Gilbert in 2014.

This government's direct investments in infrastructure in the North will be complemented through the \$5 billion Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility. I recently launched that facility in Cairns a couple of months ago. The board held its second meeting in Western Australia just last week. The NAIF is one of the white paper's long term initiatives and it is now open for business. The NAIF will offer up to \$5 billion in concessional finance to encourage and complement private sector investment across northern Australia. The independent NAIF board is responsible for implementing the mandate that we have given them. The board is chaired by Ms Sharon Warburton, who is joined by six other directors with extensive experience across a range of sectors, including infrastructure, government, finance, construction and law. So far, the NAIF has received numerous applications, and of these, one project is already undertaking due diligence and another 13 are working towards a formal investment proposal. These projects already represent a total investment of over \$10 billion. Earlier today I announced the appointment of Ms Laurie Walker as CEO of the NAIF. Ms Walker is highly experienced. She understands the challenges facing infrastructure investment in this country. She will relocate and live in the Cairns region for this role. She will be based at the NAIF headquarters in Cairns and we are bringing a whole new industry to North Queensland by doing so.

Along with the NAIF we are working hard to attract interest in the North from major investors. Last year we held the first Northern Australian Economic Forum in Darwin. The forum opened a window on the scope and scale of opportunities for investment, particularly in agribusiness and food, resources and energy, infrastructure, tropical medicine and education. Since the forum, several international investors have made return on-site visits.

Northern Australia's unique position also gives it advantages when it comes to education and research. We are investing \$75 million in a Cooperative Research Centre to conduct research and development with a focus on agriculture, food and tropical medicine. The government will provide \$2 million over the next two years for the Tropical Disease Research Regional Collaboration Initiative. Just last Friday, we announced that Darwin's Menzies School of Health Research has been selected to advance research into the prevention, detection and treatment of multi-drug resistant malaria and TB.

The north will only truly achieve its true potential with the participation of all its people, including Indigenous Australians. Northern Australia is home to 30 per cent of Australia's Indigenous population. So any plan to develop the North must involve our first Australians. The government is supporting a number of land tenure pilots that broaden economic activity on land and demonstrate the benefits of reform to investors, Indigenous peoples and other stakeholders. Five pilot projects Darwin's Menzies School of Health Research has been

selected to advance research into the prevention, detection and treatment of multi-drug resistant malaria and TB.

The north will only truly achieve its true potential with the participation of all its people, including Indigenous Australians. Northern Australia is home to 30 per cent of Australia's Indigenous population. So any plan to develop the North must involve our first Australians. The government is supporting a number of land tenure pilots that broaden economic activity on land and demonstrate the benefits of reform to investors, Indigenous peoples and other stakeholders. Five pilot projects across the three northern jurisdictions have already been funded. We have also invested \$12.4 million in an Indigenous ranger program for the North. Tourism is a strong industry for northern Australia and it is experiencing a resurgence thanks to a lower dollar and more flights to Asia. We have established a \$13.6 million Northern Australia Tourism Initiative to help small and medium businesses in the tourism sector take their next steps in their business development.

With the release of the white paper, the government made a real commitment towards developing northern Australia, and since that time we have developed further our policies for the north. Our first ever City Deal will be in Townsville, the biggest city in northern Australia. We have announced \$100 million for more research into exploration for minerals and resources in northern Australia. This is of special importance given that the economy of northern Australia is more than half made up by our resources sector.

These investments we are making are building on an already successful, thriving and productive northern Australia. Too often people assume that northern development has failed in the past. That is bunkum. Cairns, Darwin, Townsville, Kununurra, Broome, Mackay, Rockhampton and the regions in between are all testament to the development we have already made in the north. As a nation, we should be proud of this progress, because we benefit from what we have already achieved there. Around five per cent of our population live in the north, but it generates nearly 12 per cent of our economic output. Our plan builds on this success and re-invests in a part of our nation that is already punching above its economic weight.

More than in the past, northern Australia now has the proximity to economic growth that creates opportunity for even bigger things for our north. By 2030, more than two-thirds of the world's middle class will be in Asia. This growth in our region promises to deliver dividends for all Australians. More than half of our exports leave from ports in northern Australia. We all have a stake in seeing the successful development of the North.

Our northern policy is an unashamedly regional development policy. Through developing the regions of our north, we can take pressure off the development of our major southern cities, while giving young Australians new opportunities for making a living and raising a family in northern Australia. The success of our policy will not be delivered by the government here in Canberra alone but by the people who live and work in northern Australia. Our policies aim to attract investment, invest in infrastructure and unlock the potential of the north's abundant land and water resources. It will be the dynamic people of northern Australia that create jobs, found businesses, start families and nurture their communities. As a government we can only create the foundation. It will be the more than one million people of northern Australia who build the house.

That is our vision for northern Australia—that, through our focus and our policies, we provide the tools to our north to make it a magnet for the entire country. Our goal is that, in the future, people will be attracted to stay in northern Australia and to move to northern Australia because of the opportunity that it manifestly presents. If we are successful at that, it will benefit all Australians.

We have made a good start, but there is much more to do. I thank the people of northern Australia for their continuing support and involvement in this nation-building endeavour. The white paper is the catalyst to help build the foundations to make the most of that hardworking, determined and optimistic outlook, which will ultimately enhance the north. All Australians will be more prosperous as a result.

I table the ministerial statement and seek leave to incorporate it in Hansard.