

# Ministerial Forum on Northern Development

Northern Australia fact sheet



Developing Northern Australia is critical to Australia's national security and future prosperity. The Ministerial Forum on Northern Development (MFND) brings Australian Government Ministers, and Ministers from the Territory, Western Australian and Queensland governments together to progress the development of the North, and to continue the implementation of the 2015 **Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing the North**.

The Forum has been held over the past two years in Darwin (September 2017), Kununurra (April 2018) and most recently in Mount Isa (November 2018). The next Ministerial Forum will be held in Katherine in December 2019.

The Ministerial Forum provides the Territory with a vital opportunity to advocate to the highest level of federal government about the opportunities and challenges of growing Northern Australia; and to leverage the Ministerial Forum for the benefit of the Territory.

## Forward Works Plan

A key outcome of the Ministerial Forum is the **Forward Works Plan** - an action plan to address issues and leverage opportunities that are common across Northern Australia. By working together on shared priority's the Forward Works Plan drives progress and provides a strong, cohesive voice to developing the North.

The Forward Works Plan addresses the key pillars of Northern Development:

- A northern trade and investment gateway
- A diversified economy
- Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses
- World-class infrastructure
- Investment in water infrastructure
- World-leading research and innovation.

The Forward Works Plan is managed by the Office of Northern Australia (ONA), and implemented through the Northern Australia Senior Officials Networking Group (NASONG).

The intent of the Ministerial Forum on Northern Development is outlined in the [Development Statement for Northern Australia](#)<sup>1</sup> (Attachment A).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/development-statement-for-northern-australia>

Some of the key activities on the current Forward Works Plan include:

## **A northern trade and investment gateway**

- Commissioning of a study to identify policy settings that incentivise investment in Northern Australia.
- Extension of CSIRO's Transport Network Strategic Investment Tool (TraNSIT) to include road based tourism. The study will model the impacts of road improvements on travel time and cost on specific tourist roads in Northern Australia.
- Providing strategic advice on the recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee for Northern Australia's inquiry into the opportunities and methods for stimulating tourism in Northern Australia.

## **A diversified economy**

- Building on the joint Northern Australia and Defence Statement "A strong north, makes for a more secure Australia" to strengthen the north's economy (Attachment B).
- Work with Cooperative Research Centre for Northern Australia (CRCNA) to progress Industry Situational Analysis for beef, horticulture, aquaculture, cropping, rice, forestry and bushfoods; and health service delivery research.

## **Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses**

- Working with the Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) to implement their recommendations to maximise the economic opportunity and contribution of Northern Australian Indigenous businesses, individuals and communities.

## **World-class infrastructure**

- Advocating to Infrastructure Australia for the development of an infrastructure assessment tool that is suitable for appraising projects in Northern Australia.
- Working to funnel quality economic infrastructure projects into the Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund (NAIF) pipeline.
- Providing input into the Infrastructure Australia Audit 2019.

## **Investment in water infrastructure**

- Considering CSIRO's Northern Australia Water Resource Assessments (NAWRA) to identify future opportunities.

## **World-leading research and innovation**

- Promoting and assisting the development of research proposals for Cooperative Research Centre for Northern Australia (CRCNA)

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## Attachment A

### Development Statement for Northern Australia

1. As Ministers responsible for developing northern Australia, we have agreed the following statement of intent that will continue to grow the northern economy.
2. **To achieve a more prosperous and secure future, for all Australians, we must continue to grow the northern economy.** The Australian Government's *2015 White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* sets out a vision and framework for this nation-building agenda, focussed on the north's untapped potential, its abundant resources and highly-skilled people. Much has been achieved through the measures already delivered under the White Paper, creating a new environment to underpin and foster growth in the north. Across all northern jurisdictions we continue to work together to encourage further growth and future jobs in this already successful economy.
3. As well as our aspirations for growing our separate economies, **we have a shared vision and goals for creating new jobs and enduring prosperity.** We want to diversify and strengthen the north's economy by: capitalising on the north's strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region and proximity to Asia; encouraging investment; optimising our resources; increasing the participation of Indigenous Australians in the economy; and ensuring that vital infrastructure is world class and fully funded.
4. **The north will only maximise its full potential with the participation of all its people.** We want everyone who lives and works in the north to benefit from this growth agenda. We want the families of northern Australia to have the confidence that their children can stay in the north with fulfilling, well-remunerated jobs. We are committed to building the skills of the local workforce and using government procurement processes to 'buy local' as much as possible.
5. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians of the north share these ambitions for a thriving and diverse economy and for strengthening culture and intergenerational prosperity. We recognise the important assets that Indigenous Australians bring to our shared economic growth agenda – their significant land holdings, contemporary and traditional knowledge and skills, and drive and determination to secure better futures. **Indigenous leaders and government are committed to further developing the Indigenous business sector, increasing Indigenous land owner involvement in development, and supporting Indigenous innovation.**
6. We have good reasons to be confident about the north's future. **The north is Australia's gateway** to the economically and strategically important Indo-Pacific region and has strong ties with the ASEAN countries. As the geo-political dynamics in the region change, northern Australia will continue to play an important role in Australia's economic prosperity, safety and security well into the 21st century.

7. The significant investment being made in **defence capability across northern Australia must be leveraged and integrated where possible** so that it continues to contribute to the economic and social development of communities across the north. The defence presence and investment in northern Australia will support the development of a more capable and high tech force, and the growth of a competitive and advanced local industry and technological base.
8. By 2050, almost half the world's economic output is expected to come from the region directly to the north of Australia<sup>2</sup>, and with this growth comes rising living standards and increased demand for goods and services. For the northern Australian food and resources industries to grow market share it is critical that **access to these markets is improved through world-class supply chains**. Northern businesses and industry, which already contribute much to Australia's success, will also benefit from export trade agreements, further enhancing Australia's competitive advantage.
9. To ensure that northern Australia **capitalises on the growing demand for high-quality services** on our doorstep, we are diversifying and strengthening the tourism and hospitality, international education, and healthcare, medical research and aged care sectors.
10. Northern Australia is a safe and secure environment for investors. We continue to improve the **attractiveness of northern Australia as an investment destination** by promoting it to investors, helping them to identify and refine opportunities and reduce or mitigate risk. We do this by bringing investors, opportunities and proponents together, supported by the results of a program of science and research; alignment of policy; streamlining regulation; improving the information available to investors (including for mineral and groundwater resources, regulatory requirements, land tenure and government plans for major investment); and increasing the skilled and unskilled workforce across the north. Improving connections between investors and project proponents and increasing the number of investment-ready projects across the north are important longer-term goals.
11. **High-quality infrastructure will underpin our efforts to unlock the north's economic potential**, both through initial job creation during construction and by facilitating economic activity in the longer-term. A planned, regular schedule of infrastructure projects (publicly and privately funded) is critical to ensuring sustained employment opportunities and community benefits in all regions. Industry and community access to world-class infrastructure for transport, logistics, energy, communications and water, as well as services such as education and health, is necessary for broad-based economic growth.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Defence White Paper, p14

12. Northern Australia is renowned globally for its pristine environmental assets. Australia has competitive advantages in biosecurity, as an exporter of high-quality, clean and safe agricultural produce, and as a tourism destination. **Balancing the preservation of environmental assets and biosecurity through the innovative use of emerging technologies with development is a priority.**
13. **Fostering a high-tech medical research industry and encouraging productivity improvements** in northern-based businesses and industries will increase the north's competitiveness. Northern Australia is already a centre of excellence for tropical health research and other research focussed on tropical environments. It is well placed to expand this role, given it is home to a number of internationally recognised tropical research hubs.
14. By working together on these priorities, we can **maximise the north's potential to contribute to Australia's future prosperity and ensure it is an even more attractive place to live and do business.** Population growth will support industry and workforce availability, and encourage investment in social infrastructure that enhances liveability. **Through innovation, collaboration and cooperation, northern Australia can become an economic powerhouse** in its own right, delivering real economic and social benefits to all Australians.

## Attachment B

### Northern Australia and Defence Statement: A strong North, makes for a more secure Australia

1. Northern Australia is strategically important to the security of Australia and has long played a critical role in maintaining our sovereign borders, supporting a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and deploying humanitarian assistance. Proximity to the Indo-Pacific region makes Northern Australia a focal point for Australia's national security, including energy, resources, maritime, biosecurity, economic and trade, immigration, and border control.
2. Northern Australia has a long and proud history in working with and supporting the defence presence and activities in Northern Australia and beyond our borders. Defence is part of the fabric of our communities and our industries. We want defence families (serving and ex-serving) to have the confidence that their partners and children can come to the north with quality education and health services and fulfilling, well-remunerated jobs.
3. A strong northern economy is fundamental to the ability of Northern Australia to build its capacity and capability to support Defence. Northern Australian industries are a fundamental input to Defence's capability through construction and the provision of maintenance and support services. Indigenous people and businesses play a key role in building the capacity and capability of our Defence industry across the north.
4. Defence is making infrastructure-related investments of approximately \$28 billion over the next two decades in Northern Australia. We recognise the efforts of Defence through the pilot Local Industry Capability Plans (LICP) to increase opportunities for local northern Australia businesses. We are committed to working with the Department of Defence and industry to move LICPs from pilot to policy and to identify other measures. This includes our commitment to building the skills of the local workforce and using government procurement processes to maximise 'buy local'.
5. Engaging the Department of Defence on long-term planning in Northern Australia will ensure future Defence needs are factored into infrastructure (e.g. road, maritime infrastructure, rail and digital infrastructure), industry and workforce development plans.
6. An ongoing regular strategic dialogue between the Department of Defence and northern Australia jurisdictions, to understand better Defence's investment priorities and plans and future industry and workforce needs, will build the capacity and capability of the jurisdictions to better support Defence.