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**Submission to Senate Economics References Committee**

**Re: Governance and operation of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF)**

The governance and operation of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF), with particular reference to:

- a. the adequacy and transparency of the NAIF's governance framework, including its project assessment and approval processes;
- b. the adequacy of the NAIF's Investment Mandate, risk appetite statement and public interest test in guiding decisions of the NAIF Board;
- c. processes used to appoint NAIF Board members, including assessment of potential conflicts of interest;
- d. the transparency of the NAIF's policies in managing perceived, actual or potential conflicts of interest of its Board members;
- e. the adequacy of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act 2016 and Investment Mandate to provide for and maintain the independence of decisions of the Board;
- f. the status and role of state and territory governments under the NAIF, including any agreements between states and territories and the Federal Government; and
- g. any other related matters.

As a health professional with interest and qualifications in public health, I wish to comment on the adequacy of the public interest test, the processes used to appoint NAIF board members and the management of potential conflicts of interest.

I urge the Committee to ensure the NAIF 's public interest considerations include public health as a clear priority in the "public interest test". The current process uses definitions of "public benefit" that are manifestly inadequate. Long term health impacts need to be included in evaluations of all projects. There is a clear duty of care when allocating public funds to ensure they will not result in detrimental health outcomes to the local region, to Australians and to the wider global community. Criteria for evaluation of projects need to be expanded to include health and environmental risks.

The White paper: '[Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia](#)' lacks sufficient consideration of public health impacts, both in the short and long term and both regionally, nationally and internationally.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has stated that climate change is among the biggest health threats of this century.

The proposed Carmichael coal mine is a high risk undertaking and will worsen carbon emissions globally. The NAIF Board needs to have policies that are able to take into account this obvious and major detrimental outcome when evaluating any application to support processes that involve assisting development of this mine. Public health criteria are clearly lacking in the current evaluation of potential projects.

Good governance process mandates that Board membership appointment processes need to be transparent. Conflicts of interest must be recognised, publicly declared and measures taken to excluded conflicted board members from decision making.

The board needs to include a suitably qualified individual with public health expertise to be able to evaluate the implications of proposals and assist with providing expert information to inform the decisions made by the board.

The current NAIF Board has major flaws and it is to be hoped that this inquiry can rectify these issues.

Thank you for your consideration of these very important matters.

Yours sincerely

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