

Submission by Grusha Leeman to the Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry into governance and operation of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF)

The NAIF is reportedly *designed to help transform northern Australia through the construction of infrastructure*. If this is to be a beneficial transformation, then it must help address the difficult task we face in reaching the targets of the [Paris Agreement](#). It seems this public money is expected to be used to further the business as usual addiction to rampant mining and mass fossil fuel ventures where climate pollution is extreme. These types of projects are always to the detriment of northern Australia, and a beneficial transformation would steer clear of the fossil fuel industry.

The Australian Government recently released the latest [greenhouse gas emissions report](#), showing emissions have again risen in the past year. We are clearly still headed in the wrong direction and business as usual [projections](#) would see total emissions by 2030 at just 0.5% below 2005 levels, rather than the 26%-28% lower level we are aiming to achieve under the [Paris Agreement](#).

In order to wisely use the NAIF funds to the actual benefit of northern Australia, and do our bit to help realise the [Paris Agreement](#)'s commitments we signed up for, it will be necessary to readdress the assessment and approvals processes, such that the climate impacts of any projects are given top priority. Obviously, this must include the cumulative impacts (of say a rail line, pipeline or port that facilitates fossil fuel use). Projects that contribute to the production of renewable energy, enhance native vegetation and healthy soils, eliminate fugitive emissions, roll out the zero emissions transport sector, and other climate improving infrastructure MUST be given top priority. There is NO point in investing in business-as-usual infrastructure when we have already rising temperatures and sea-levels and the consequences of not addressing climate change is incompatible with a strong economy.

Climate change is currently neglected in the NT approvals processes. Unfortunately, you rely in your [Mandate](#) on our current inadequate laws:

15. Regulatory and environmental approvals

(1) The Facility may consider and approve Investment Proposals conditional upon the Project Proponent obtaining all relevant regulatory, environmental and Native Title approvals and arrangements as required by the relevant jurisdiction.

Consequently, the NAIF approvals processes are inherently flawed. We simply cannot continue to ignore the bounty a good climate awards us and the consequences of continuing to pollute it.

Disappointingly, the NAIF board is limited in its experience that is relevant to transforming northern Australia in a beneficial manner. Where are the Traditional Owners, pastoralists, the tourism industry, health workers, agriculturalists, horticulturalists, aquaculturists, rangers, scientists, environmentalists, educators, historians, artists and residents? Instead, most members of the board are reputed to have links with mining and the fossil fuels industry. The board must be replaced with wise individuals who don't have vested interests known to be detrimental to both the wellbeing of northern Australia and the achievement of the Paris Agreement. There are more jobs investing in renewable energy and sustainable agriculture than fossil fuel extraction activities.

In working with the local authorities and piecemeal assessments it appears there is no overall vision of what a transformed northern Australia would be. Instead of having one Senator, run the show it would be better to have a publically agreed plan. The Traditional Owners of this ancient land must be given front and centre of this vision and of course climate change mitigation and resilience must be the goal.

It is in Australia's *national interest* to drive ambitious climate action, and certainly also for those of northern Australia. We should be planning an economic decarbonisation strategy as well as integrating climate resilience far more seriously into planning and approval processes. The NAIF is no exception. Divestment from fossil fuel projects and related infrastructure must be a first step to transforming to a beneficial future.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Senate enquiry.

Grusha Leeman
Darwin
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