

**Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts**

**Committee Inquiries Question on Notice**

**Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia**

**Inquiry into Northern Australia Workforce Development**

**IQ23-000091**

**Division/Agency:** DIV - Partnerships and Projects

**Hansard Reference:** Written (11 April 2023)

**Topic:** Submission - Impediments to economic growth and workforce development in Northern Australia.

**Ms Marion Scrymgour MP asked:**

Your submission outlined a number of impediments to economic growth and workforce development in Northern Australia. What specific, targeted measures is the Australian Government implementing to address these impediments, particularly:

- Connectivity;
- Infrastructure;
- Access to medical and care services; and
- Housing.

**Answer:**

*Connectivity*

The Government is investing in a range of programs to improve connectivity across rural and regional Australia, including under the Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia, which is providing \$656 million to improve mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience in rural and regional Australia. This includes:

- \$400 million to boost multi-carrier mobile coverage on regional roads, improve mobile coverage in under-served regional and remote communities, and increase the resilience of communications services and public safety communications facilities.
- \$200 million for two additional rounds of the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) to invest in place-based digital connectivity infrastructure projects in regional communities.
- \$30 million for on-farm connectivity, so farmers can take advantage of connected machinery and sensor technology.
- \$20 million to conduct an independent audit of mobile coverage to better identify black spots and guide investment priorities.
- \$6 million to boost funding for the Regional Tech Hub, which supports regional consumers to access advice and support on digital connectivity options.

Round 2 of the RCP is providing up to \$137.2 million, including \$69.6 million of dedicated funding for projects in Northern Australia under the Connecting Northern Australia initiative.

The Australian Government is providing \$2.5 million in funding over five years to establish the First Nations Digital Advisory Group to provide strategic advice to the Minister for Communications on issues relating to digital inclusion for First Nations people. An

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important regional benefit of the initiative will be to provide strategic advice on how to address remote challenges to First Nations digital inclusion in relation to access, affordability and digital ability.

#### *Infrastructure*

Through the October 2022-23 Budget, the Government announced a suite of new infrastructure investment for Northern Australia. These include:

- Additional \$2 billion for the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) which will enable the NAIF to continue investing in projects that support economic growth and positive Indigenous outcomes in Northern Australia.
- \$1.5 billion in planned equity to build marine infrastructure at the Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct near Darwin to help support the creation of a major new export hub for clean energy, including green hydrogen. This enabling infrastructure will allow more goods and services in and out of the region, and will provide a significant economic boost for Darwin and Northern Australia.
- \$440 million in planned equity to build new regional logistic hubs in Tennant Creek, Katherine and Alice Springs to support vital supply links to export sites like Middle Arm. These hubs will provide employment opportunities in Central Australia and provide support to the resources sector to move their goods to market.
- \$332 million towards the Northern Territory Strategic Roads Package.
- \$350 million for sealing of the Tanami Road and upgrading of Central Arnhem Road.
- \$565 million to invest in common user port facilities in the Pilbara to boost the region's readiness for new green hydrogen markets and its transition to renewable energy.
- \$434.2 million for a rolling program of upgrades to seal all of the Tanami Road, a nationally significant freight route in Western Australia.
- \$200 million to expand the Cairns Marine Precinct (CMP) (\$150 million) and to construct a new Central Queensland University (CQU) campus in Cairns' CBD (\$50 million). The Government's investment in the CMP has the potential to support Far North Queensland's capacity to meet the forecast increase in demand for marine-related services and further diversify the local economy. Support for CQU is expected to have a number of immediate and longer-term benefits for Cairns and Far North Queensland by providing better access to tertiary education and the development of skilled workers, and also improving liveability and creating new industries and opportunities for the local economy and community.
- \$210 million to upgrade the Kuranda Range Road, which will go towards widening lanes, installing additional guardrails and reinforcing roadsides to prevent landslides on the Kennedy Highway between Smithfield and Kuranda.
- \$400 million to Queensland Beef Corridors to upgrade beef road infrastructure across key roads in the network - sealing unsealed roads, and upgrading of heavy vehicle freight routes on the Dawson, Burnett and Leichhardt highways.
- \$200 million in Australian Government funding to upgrade the Bruce Highway between Gladstone and Rockhampton.

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- \$100 million for the Gladstone Port Access Road, providing an alternate route for heavy vehicles accessing the Port of Gladstone to increase freight efficiency and improve safety for local motorists.
- \$80 million for the National Aboriginal Art Gallery, Alice Springs.
- \$22 million toward the Lansdown Industrial Precinct, to bring the next generation of advanced manufacturing jobs and economic growth to Townsville and North Queensland. This brings the total Commonwealth investment in this ground-breaking project to \$34 million.
- \$2 million support for the Isaac Regional Council to establish a site for a future Resources Centre of Excellence near Mackay in Queensland, that will provide mine workers and communities with training and access to new technologies to help meet demand for new skills.
- \$71.9 million to establish a green Hydrogen Hub in the Townsville region. This investment will further support the development of Australia's green hydrogen industry.
- \$3.5 million for detailed design, approvals and construction support services for a water pipeline to provide a long-term water security solution for the Mount Morgan community.
- The government has committed \$107.5 million to new water infrastructure projects to address water security risks in Cairns.
- \$32 million to be transferred to the National Water Grid Fund for the planning and consideration of water infrastructure options in central Queensland and the Burdekin region.

Defence will contribute \$32.2 million to North Queensland Simulation Park (NQ Spark) over three years from 2022-23 to 2024-25 towards the construction of a collaborative industry hub that will include a military simulation training facility in Townsville, Queensland.

The Government will provide \$83.8 million over four years from 2022-23 to develop and deploy microgrid technology so First Nations communities can access cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy. It will give First Nations communities and organisations greater agency and ownership of their energy supply arrangements and is expected to support projects in regional and remote areas across Australia. Microgrids will improve electricity affordability, security and reliability, address technology gaps due to electricity supply constraints, and reduce carbon emissions in First Nations communities.

The Australian Government supports the communities of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (CKI) through the provision of essential services and funding for major infrastructure. Services are delivered by the Australian Government, either directly via agreement with the Western Australian Government or under contract to the private sector, including healthcare, education, power, water, ports, and airports. In 2022-23, the Australian Government is providing \$158.2 million in administered funding to support the delivery of these essential services. The Australian Government is also providing \$16.5 million in base capital funding across the non-self-governing Territories, which includes the Indian Ocean Territories for the improvement of Commonwealth infrastructure assets.

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Through the 2022-23 October Budget, the Australian Government has committed a combined \$1 billion for regional grants and partnerships. Growing Regions, a new community infrastructure program, will deliver strategic investment in the regions. Growing Regions will help drive regional economic prosperity by providing equitable and fair access to funding for capital works for community infrastructure across Australia's regions. The regional Precincts and Partnerships Program will provide a strategic, nationally consistent mechanism for larger-scale infrastructure investment, aimed at transforming regions, regional cities and rural communities.

The Australian Government is providing \$150 million of funding for projects under the Remote Roads Upgrade Pilot. The program targets road improvements for regional communities, and addresses significant deficiencies on key regional and rural roads that limit community access, pose safety risks and impact the economic development of the surrounding area. The program will assess the social and economic benefits to communities of undertaking these projects.

The Australian Government is providing at least \$85 million per year through the Bridges Renewal Program (BRP). The program supports the upgrading of bridges across the nation to deliver improvements in productivity and community access. Since it commenced in 2015, more than 85 per cent of funding under the BRP has gone to projects located in rural and regional areas.

The Australian Government is providing at least \$65 million per year through the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program (HVSPP), which provides funding to infrastructure projects that improve productivity and safety outcomes of heavy vehicle operations across Australia. More than 90 per cent of projects delivered through the HVSPP are in regional areas.

The \$100 million Regional Airports Program is a competitive grants program to support upgrades to infrastructure and deliver improved aviation safety and access to regional airports. The program runs until June 2025.

The Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program is a competitive grants program to support safety and access upgrades at airstrips in remote and very remote areas of Australia. For 2022-23, \$19.8 million in funding is allocated for grants from Rounds Six to Nine. \$3 million is allocated to the program in 2023-24.

##### *Access to medical and care services*

The Government is investing \$13.2 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to provide a long-term approach to alleviate medical workforce shortages in Northern Queensland through the establishment of a new medical training campus and Government-funded medical training places in Cairns, Queensland.

Funding will be provided to James Cook University to expand its rural medical training by establishing a full medical school program in Cairns. Funding will support capital works, establishment costs, recurrent funding and 20 new commencing medical Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs).

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The Government will also provide \$3 million over three years from 2023-24 (and \$31 million over 11 years) for up to 20 additional Government supported medical places per year for James Cook University (JCU), as part of the Department of Health-led measure Rural Health and Medical Training for Far North Queensland.

Australians living in remote Australia are better able to access doctors under the Remote Vocational Training Scheme (RVTS) Targeted Recruitment Pilot. The expanded RVTS is funded through to 2024 and delivers structured distance education and supervision to doctors while they provide medical services in First Nations communities and rural and remote locations throughout Australia. The pilot aims to assist in the provision of medical services to locations that have had difficulty in recruiting doctors and have been identified as having a high medical workforce need. The government will conduct an evaluation of the RVTS pilot, scheduled for 2024, to identify the impact of the initiative on attracting GP trainees to work and train in areas of high workforce shortage, and increase access to essential medical services.

Other health-related investments with benefits to Northern Australia includes

- \$114.2 million over four years from 2022-23 to better manage the supply of medical school graduates.
- \$12 million a year will restore a 50 percent loading to bulk-billed Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) services delivered by video telehealth to regional and rural patients.
- \$11.6 million for a Health Facility for Danila Dilba in Palmerston.
- \$19 million for to build 2 new clinics and renovate existing health facilities in Central Australia for Central Australian Aboriginal Congress.
- \$17.7 million for alcohol and other drug treatment services in the Northern Territory.
- \$20.9 million has been invested in the Djakamirr project in Galawin'ku, Northern Territory, delivered by the Molly Wardaguga Research Centre within Charles Darwin University, the Institute of Urban Indigenous Health's Birthing in Our Communities project in Queensland.
- \$2.8 million to build a Central Highlands Allied Health Clinic in Emerald, Queensland.

The Government is also making a range of other investments in the Health portfolio, which will benefit Northern Australia, including:

- \$74.1 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to boost the primary care workforce by increasing financial incentives to rural GPs and generalists with additional advanced skills to practice in rural and remote communities.
- \$29.4 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to improve the Workforce Incentive Program (WIP) – Practice Stream to increase access to nurses, allied health practitioners and First Nations health workers and practitioners working as part of multidisciplinary teams. This will be achieved through changes to the existing program, which provides salary support payments to allow primary care practices to employ health staff. The changes would commence on 1 November 2022, with first payments to be made in line with the WIP-Practice Stream February 2023 quarter payment.
- \$24.7 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to expand the existing Innovative Models of Care (IMoC) program to trial a broader set of innovative models aimed at addressing

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health workforce shortages and improving patient health outcomes in rural and remote Australia. The IMoC program supports organisations and communities to trial practical, sustainable, and locally supported proposals for new primary care models. It also contributes to the attraction and retention of rural health professionals – encouraging individuals to operate across their full scope of practice, the use of multidisciplinary teams, telehealth, different employment models, block funding, and shared healthcare resources between small connected communities.

- \$8.4 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to increase support for Rural Generalist (RG) and General Practitioner (GP) registrars and doctors in regional, rural and remote Australia to attain advanced skills through funding 30 new advanced skills training posts. This proposal will increase the number of highly skilled GPs and RGs in rural areas who can provide extended clinical skills to their communities.
- \$45 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to deliver to 30 four-chair dialysis units. This amount includes up to \$15 million for dialysis related small scale water infrastructure to ensure appropriate quality of water supply to the dialysis units.
- \$48 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 (\$54.3 million over five years from 2022-23) to support up to 500 First Nations trainees to undertake Certificate III or IV accredited training as First Nations health workers or practitioners.
- \$33 million from 2020-21 to 2023-24 for the Health Workforce Scholarship Program (HWSP). The HWSP increases access to health services in rural and remote areas that are experiencing skill shortages, by providing scholarships and bursaries to health professionals committed to rural service.
- \$62.2 million from 2019-20 to develop the National Rural Generalist Pathway (the Pathway) – a medical training pathway to attract, retain and support doctors in regional, rural and remote areas.
- \$100 million under the Indigenous Australians Health Program from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to support ear and hearing health activities for First Nations peoples. Improving the ear and hearing health of First Nations peoples is critical to achieving better health, education and employment outcomes.

##### *Housing*

The National Housing Accord aims to address housing supply and affordability. The October Budget provided \$350 million in additional Federal funding to deliver 10,000 affordable homes over five years from 2024.

Under Priority Reform One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement), the Australian Government is committing \$7.5 million over three years from 2022-23 to establish the Housing Policy Partnership. Target 9a commits to increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent. The Housing Policy Partnership will provide a forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a genuine say in the design and delivery of housing services including policy issues and programs that impact remote, rural and regional communities.

From 2022-23 to 2023-24, the Government is investing significantly in Northern Territory homelands and remote housing to assist with housing pressures and overcrowding. The measure provides for an immediate boost of \$100 million (\$25 million in 2022-23 and

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\$75 million in 2023-24) to Northern Territory homelands to address urgent housing and essential infrastructure needs, based on recommendations of the Northern Territory homelands audit. This may include improvements to water, power and community facilities, as well as housing upgrades, extensions, and new builds.

The Department of Social Services is developing a National Housing and Homelessness (NHHA) Plan that will provide a comprehensive national vision for housing and homelessness reform in Australia, in line with broader Australian Government priorities in housing and homelessness. The plan will:

- be developed in collaboration with industry experts, state and local governments, and other non-government organisations and will complement existing state housing and homelessness plans.
- provide a better understanding of housing and homelessness in Australia and will provide avenues to explore collaborative approaches that will alleviate pressures on Australia's housing insecure population.
- link with other Australian Government initiatives including the 'National Housing Accord', 'National Housing Infrastructure Facility', 'Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee' and 'Help to Buy'.

\$13.4 million over four years from 2022-23 to develop a National Housing and Homelessness Plan (the Plan). The Plan will identify areas of need across Australia, including regional areas. The Government's commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap will also ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote, rural and regional Australia are positively impacted by policy development and actions that arise from the Plan.

The Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee, providing up to 10,000 places each financial year from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to support aspiring homebuyers in regional areas to enter the market sooner. Places under the Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee are available to eligible homebuyers with a minimum 5 per cent deposit. This is in addition to an expansion of the First Home Guarantee to 35,000 places per year and the Family Home Guarantee to 5,000 places per year to the end of 2024-25.

Support for regional Australians into home ownership through the Help to Buy shared equity scheme. Eligible home buyers will be able to access an equity contribution from the Government to support their purchase. This will mean Australians can buy a home with a smaller deposit and mortgage

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**IQ23-000094**

**Division/Agency:** DIV - Partnerships and Projects

**Hansard Reference:** Written (11 April 2023)

**Topic:** Matter of urgency for Northern Australia

**Ms Marion Scrymgour MP asked:**

What is the Office of Northern Australia focusing on as a matter of urgency for Northern Australia

**Answer:**

The Office of Northern Australia (ONA) within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts is the Australian Government's area of expertise on northern development and coordinates policy and initiatives to deliver a whole-of-government approach to developing Northern Australia. The current focus of ONA's work is outlined below.

*Northern Australia Ministerial Forum priorities*

At the inception meeting of the re-established Northern Australia Ministerial Forum (ministerial forum) in October 2022, members agreed to a collaborative approach to achieve liveable, safe, sustainable and healthy communities in the north, focused on three key priorities: human capital, enabling infrastructure, and economic development and diversification.

The ONA is working collaboratively with northern jurisdictions to develop a program of joint actions to progress these shared priorities. The ONA's work in providing evidence-led information on the challenges and opportunities of Northern Australia and advice on the development of policy and programs across Australia Government agencies also supports delivery of these priorities.

*Refresh of the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*

The ONA is leading a refresh of the 2015 *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* (White Paper) White Paper to align the direction of the developing Northern Australia agenda to current government policies and priorities including those agreed by the ministerial forum. The refresh will also strengthen First Nations engagement and outcomes, focus on climate action and address the recommendations of the Senate Select Committee into the Effectiveness of the Australian Government's Northern Australia agenda.

The refresh is being progressed through the ministerial forum and will be informed by stakeholder consultation.



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##### *Review of the Indigenous Economic Development Accord*

The ONA is undertaking a review of the 2019 Northern Australia Indigenous Development Accord to ensure the Accord reflects the needs and aspirations of First Nations communities.

The review is being progressed through the ministerial forum and includes northern jurisdictions and First Nations people as partners.

##### *Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group priorities*

The ONA is supporting the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group to progress its agreed priorities for 2023:

- strengthening Indigenous business outcomes from Governments' Indigenous procurement policies;
- improving the disaster resilience and recovery of Indigenous businesses and communities; and
- supporting place-based, people centred initiatives to support First Nations youth.

##### *Closing the Gap Community Infrastructure Target*

The ONA is supporting the department's role in delivering the new community infrastructure target (9b) to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap which will deliver comparable essential services (power, water, wastewater and solid waste) to households in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that meet the target definition and in and around towns (e.g. Town camps or Town reserves). Preliminary data estimates that around 207, or close to 85 per cent of locations across Australia with more than 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 50 per cent or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander residents, are situated in Northern Australia.

##### *Northern Australia Investments and Projects Branch*

Alongside the ONA, the department's Northern Australia Investments and Projects (NAIP) supports the operation of the Northern Australia infrastructure Facility to ensure its investments benefit local communities and lead to the creation of new jobs across the north. NAIP also supports development of large-scale projects in Northern Australia including:

- Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct in the Northern Territory (NT), with a focus on renewable hydrogen and minerals processing.
- Regional Logistics Hubs in Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek (NT) to connect these regions to Middle Arm and other export facilities.
- Common user port facilities in the Pilbara to boost the region's readiness for new green hydrogen markets and its transition to renewable energy.

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**IQ23- 000095**

**Division/Agency:** DIV - Partnerships and Projects

**Hansard Reference:** Written (11 April 2023)

**Topic:** Working with remote communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

**Ms Marion Scrymgour MP asked:**

How does the Department consult with people in the north and co-design policies and programs to foster workforce development in Northern Australia?

- How are you working with remote communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

**Answer:**

The department works with First Nations people and communities across Northern Australia to deliver on its portfolio objectives.

*Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group*

The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) provides policy advice to the Minister for Northern Australia and the Minister for Indigenous Australians on practical measures to increase the economic prosperity of First Nations Australians in accordance with their aspirations.

The IRG comprises seven First Nations leaders from across Northern Australia, appointed for their business acumen and economic development expertise. The department's Office of Northern Australia provides secretariat and policy support to the IRG.

The IRG has identified seven priority areas requiring further exploration to practically improve Indigenous prosperity in Northern Australia. These centre on:

- ensuring Indigenous businesses and communities in the north are supported, connected and thriving.
- ensuring pathways for First Nations economic participation and maximising local opportunities, and supporting Indigenous leadership in the north, and
- improving connectivity and ensuring the basic needs of Indigenous people are met through improved social infrastructure.

The IRG has supported First Nations workforce development through their submissions to the Jobs and Skills Discussion Paper (February 2023), the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia inquiry on Northern Australia's Workforce Development (January 2023) and the Australian Government's Employment White Paper (December 2022) and in

meetings with the National Indigenous Australians Agency's Remote Employment Taskforce in relation to reform of the Community Development Program.

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##### *First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group*

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group provides advice to the Minister for Communications on issues relating to digital inclusion for First Nations people, including those living in Northern Australia. The Advisory Group works in partnership with First Nations people and communities. Their advice is guided by the objective and priorities set out in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – the importance of shared decision-making in the design, implementation and monitoring of digital inclusion measures and progress. The department works with the Advisory Group to consider policy proposals and program design relevant to closing the digital divide.

##### *National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Projects*

Through the National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Projects (NPA) the department requires states and territories to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to foster workforce development across Australia, including in Northern Australia.

Underpinned by the NPA, the Department's Indigenous Employment and Supplier Use Infrastructure Framework (the framework), mandates the inclusion of an Indigenous Participation Plan (IPP) for all projects funded under the NPA at \$7.5 million or more, or any Roads of Strategic Importance projects in Northern Australia regardless of Australian Government contribution.

Based on the Indigenous working age population in a project's locality, the IPP requires that all state and territory projects proponents set and maintain Indigenous employment and supplier use participation targets for the terms of a project.

##### *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership*

The department's Office of the Arts works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the north through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages Policy Partnership (the Languages Policy Partnership), and through the recent consultation process for Australia's new *National Cultural Policy, Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*.

The *Languages Policy Partnership* is one of five policy partnerships established under Clause 38 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The primary function of these partnerships is to identify opportunities to work more effectively, reduce gaps and duplication and improve outcomes under Closing the Gap. The Languages Policy Partnership

includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives from remote and very remote communities, including in the Northern Territory, and is comprised of nine government members, one from the Australian Government (the co-chair) and one from each state and territory government, five Coalition of Peaks organisations, and five independent First Nations members, selected by the Coalition of Peaks (in an open and transparent Expression of Interest process).

The first Languages Policy Partnership meeting was held in Hobart on 20-21 March 2023. Representatives began discussions on priorities for a national approach for

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, including sector strengthening and workforce development and training in the languages sector.

The Australian Government released its landmark National Cultural Policy - Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place on 30 January 2023. The policy is structured around five interconnected pillars – the first pillar is First Nations First: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture. Revive recognises the importance of self-determination and that First Nations stories are told by First Nations people and First Nations programs are designed by and with First Nations people and organisations. Revive aims to advance First Nations agency, financial and creative control and provide opportunities for First Nations work – both traditional and contemporary. The establishment of a First Nations-led board within Creative Australia, the Government's principal investment and arts advisory body, is critical to these ambitions and extensive consultation will take place ahead of the creation of this body.

Revive was informed by a national consultation process. Sixteen town hall meetings were held in every state and territory and online including in Northern Australia locations (Broome, Cairns and Darwin). Over 1,200 submissions were received. The two online meetings were held with First Nations participants, noting that First Nations people also attended town hall events and provided submissions. Submissions were reviewed by five expert Review Panels and a Policy Advisory Group provided overarching strategic advice. Members of the Review Panels and Policy Advisory Group identified as First Nations. The First Nations First Review Panel consisted of First Nations people who reviewed submissions and the policy to ensure that Revive recognised and respected the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture

Through the new National Cultural Policy - Revive, the Australian Government has committed to a number of actions, including:

- Working with First Nations peoples to establish stand-alone legislation to recognise and protect First Nations traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.
  - The Government will provide \$13.4 million, over four years, to introduce stand-alone legislation to protect First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions, including addressing the harm caused by fake art, merchandise and souvenirs. This work will include consideration of protections for communally-held knowledge and all forms of First Nations cultural expressions handed down between generations. Critically this work will involve the establishment of an Indigenous knowledge partnership to enable shared decision making, including First Nations leadership on further engagement with First Nations creators, experts and communities on developing new legislation.
- Supporting and protecting First Nations art by continuing to invest in First Nations art centres, as well as pivotal sector organisations, through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program
  - The IVAIS program supports a professional, viable and ethical Indigenous visual arts industry that features strong participation, and provides opportunities for First Nations artists. Some of Australia's most dynamic visual art is produced in Indigenous art centres, often located in remote and very remote communities,

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which enable artists to create new art, earn income, develop professional skills and connect to the art market.

- In 2022-23, the IVAIS program will contribute over \$27 million to the operations of more than 85 Indigenous art centres across Australia, including in remote communities in northern Australia. The program also supports a number of art fairs, regional hubs and industry service organisations that, with art centres, are at the heart of Australia's internationally renowned Indigenous visual art movement.
  - Together these organisations enable the development, production and marketing of First Nations visual art and provide professional opportunities for more than 8,000 Indigenous artists and 500 Indigenous arts workers to generate income and participate in the nation's economy.
  - The organisations funded through IVAIS together form the infrastructure that provides First Nations artists with studio space, materials, art development opportunities, marketing and exhibition support, as well as a range of professional support and services for artists, art centre staff and Directors.
  - The department engages with our IVAIS funded organisations and other key stakeholders, like the service organisations that support Indigenous art centres, about their achievements, upcoming events, governance and reports, issues, and other matters. Arnhem, Northern and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation (ANKA) are one such service organisation that support art centres and artists across Northern Australia.
- Reviewing the Indigenous Art Code to strengthen the protections for First Nations artists and consumers across the country.
    - Revive further provides safe guards for the future of First Nations artists, by supporting transparent, fair and ethical trade in artwork. In particular the Government is undertaking a review of the Indigenous Art Code to strengthen the protections for First Nations artists and consumers across the country. There will be a consultation process with stakeholders as part of this review, which will consider the Code's achievements, challenges and how it can be better supported and strengthened.

Other work with remote communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the department

##### **Regional Development and Local Government Division**

Regional Development Australia Committees (RDAs) work with government, business and community groups, including remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to support economic and workforce development, local procurement, strategic regional planning and inform government policies, programs and infrastructure investments.

The department is working with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) to provide COVID-19 recovery support to communities in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia, through the Rebuilding Regional Communities (RRC) stream of the FRRR's wider Strengthening Rural Communities (SRC) program. The RRC stream includes recently

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announced projects which relate to remote communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including for example:

- Addressing food security challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 and sustaining work through the installation of a commercial cool room storage unit in East Arnhem, remote Northern Territory, through a \$10,000 grant to the Gupulul Marayuwu Aboriginal Corporation (see joint media release from 30 March 2023<sup>1</sup>).
- Enhancing the process of recovery for the Pormpuraaw community from COVID-19 by delivering a three-week silkscreen, textile and fashion industry workshop, building new skills and creating additional income generation opportunities in the Aboriginal Shire of Pormpuraaw, remote Queensland, through a \$10,000 grant to the Pormpuraaw Art & Culture Centre Inc (see the joint media release from 18 January 2023<sup>2</sup>).
- Reducing social isolation and building resilience for Aboriginal girls in Kununurra, remote northern WA, by supporting the Art with the Stars program, through a \$50,000 grant to Glass Jar Australia Ltd (see the joint media release from 27 September 2022<sup>3</sup>).

#### Road and Vehicle Safety Division

The Road and Vehicle Safety Division is working with organisations in Northern Australia including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups and organisations by engaging with them through meetings, roundtables and written requests for submissions. This engagement is to develop road safety policies and programs. This engagement is ongoing.

#### Communications Services and Consumer Division

In delivering regional communications programs, including the Australian Government's \$1.1 billion Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia, the department strives to consult with communities and the telecommunications industry on program design through providing draft guidelines for public review and feedback before being finalised.

Since the 2022 October Budget, the department has conducted public consultation on four communications programs. The department has provided briefings to the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum, interested parliamentarians, local government associations and peak bodies, and representative groups like 'Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia'. Applicants under these programs (usually telecommunications providers) are also encouraged to consult with local communities and businesses as well as local government.

<sup>1</sup> [Nearly \\$900,000 in federal funding for rural, regional and remote COVID recovery projects](#), Joint media release Minister C King & Minister McBain, 30/03/2023.

<sup>2</sup> [More funding to strengthen remote, rural and regional communities](#), Joint media release Minister C King & Minister McBain, 18/01/2023.

<sup>3</sup> [Remote, rural and regional communities to receive over \\$800,000 in Australian Government funding](#), Joint media release Minister C King & Minister McBain, 27/09/2022.

**Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts**

**Committee Inquiries Question on Notice**

**Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia**

**Inquiry into Northern Australia Workforce Development**

**IQ23-000097**

**Division/Agency:** DIV - Partnerships and Projects

**Hansard Reference:** Written (11 April 2023)

**Topic:** Government initiatives to support Northern Australia

**Ms Marion Scrymgour MP asked:**

What initiatives does the Australian Government have in place to support Northern Australia to make the most of emerging economic and business growth opportunities?

**Answer:**

The Australian Government has committed to leading an agenda for developing Northern Australia that will focus on resilient and sustainable growth. Driving sustainable and resilient growth in Northern Australia requires a whole of government approach with cooperation from a range of portfolios, as well as collaboration with jurisdictions.

Economic development in Northern Australia continues to be supported by the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF). The NAIF de-risks investment by providing debt and equity finance to infrastructure projects, encouraging private investment in infrastructure, and supporting economic and business growth across the north. As part of the 2022-23 October Budget, the Government confirmed an additional \$2 billion for the NAIF, bringing the total capital appropriation for the NAIF to \$7 billion through to 30 June 2026.

The Australian Government invested \$111.9 million in the 2021-22 Budget towards the Northern Australia Development Program (NADP) and the Northern Australia Business and Community Growth Program (NABCG) to support northern Australian businesses, including First Nation businesses, to scale-up and diversify through grant funding and business advisory services. Both programs were fully subscribed after a first round, with a total of 30 grants across Northern Australia valued at nearly \$80 million awarded across a range of sectors. The successful grants are estimated to generate over 900 jobs with close to 100 of these being for First Nations employment.

The grants programs are supported by the Strengthening Northern Australia Business (SNAB) advisory service. Through the SNAB, facilitators work with applicants and provide advice on how to leverage growth opportunities, develop systems and processes, progress commercialisation opportunities and identify where management and leadership skills improvements can be made.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia is investing \$75 million of Commonwealth funds over ten years to support industry led co-funded research collaborations, disseminate research outcomes and provide decision makers with an evidence base to plan future investment for Northern Australia.

To support the resources sector, \$2 million is being invested to support the Isaac Regional Council to establish the Isaac Resources Excellence Hub in Moranbah in Queensland. This initiative will provide mine workers and communities with training and access to new technologies to help meet demand for new skills.

## **Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts**

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There are also a range of national initiatives that support Northern Australia to make the most of emerging economic and business growth opportunities, including:

- The \$15 billion National Reconstruction Fund, which will support diversifying and transforming Australian industry to drive sustainable economic growth through targeted investments in priority areas, including value-add in resources; value-add in agriculture, forestry and fisheries; and renewables and low emission technologies.
- Industry-led Australian research and development is being boosted through the Research and Development Tax Incentive and Cooperative Research Centres, supporting innovation and productivity growth across the economy.
- The new Critical Minerals Strategy, which will focus on the importance of stable supply of critical minerals through the development of new sources of supply and the establishment of robust, diverse supply chains. Australia has an opportunity to develop its significant critical minerals resources to meet massively increasing global demand.
- The Critical Minerals Development Program, which will provide \$100 million of co-funded grants to support early and mid-stage critical minerals projects to enable them to overcome market and technical barriers to development.
- The Critical Minerals Research and Development Hub will bring together our world-leading research and development capabilities and unlock Australia's critical minerals potential. A major focus of the Hub will be the minerals needed for clean energy to help Australia and other countries achieve net zero emissions.
- Delivering the Australian Made Battery Plan will create jobs and support regional development by manufacturing batteries end-to-end onshore. Under the plan, the Government will:
  - publish Australia's first National Battery Strategy to guide governments and industry towards a shared vision of end-to-end battery manufacturing;
  - partner with the Queensland Government to create a Battery Manufacturing Precinct, supported by up to \$100 million in Commonwealth equity funding; and
  - establish the Powering Australia Industry Growth Centre to help businesses manufacture, commercialise and adopt new renewable technologies.