

MINISTERIAL FORUM ON NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

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; developing our natural and economic assets; 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 maximise 'buy local'.
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, unique tourism products and offerings, 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.

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8. By 2050, almost half the world's economic output is expected to come from the region directly to the north of Australia¹, 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, community and visitor 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.
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 for its natural and cultural destinations and experiences. **Balancing the preservation of environmental assets and biosecurity through the innovative use of emerging technologies with development is a priority.**
13. **The development of new tourism products and destinations, including investment in tourism infrastructure in northern Australia, is a priority to ensure the region can compete in the highly contested international tourism space.** The importance of increasing the connections and opportunities for domestic and international visitors to experience world class destinations should not be understated.
14. **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

¹ Source: Defence White Paper, p14

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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.

15. 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.