



# Minority Report – Australian Greens

## Introduction

Northern Australia is a region with unique landscapes and ecosystems, a diverse economy, and is largely owned and managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Supporting communities across Northern Australia is an important role of Government.

The outstanding natural values of the North are almost without parallel across the world. Its diverse landscapes include tropical rainforests, wetlands and mangroves, grasslands and desert. Many of these landscapes are globally significant and support rich biodiversity, with plant and animal species found nowhere else. As the Northern Australia Green paper states:

This is an important part of Australia’s international reputation and tourism offering. The north is home to seven World Heritage Sites with outstanding natural and scientific values: the Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics of Queensland, Kakadu National Park, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Ningaloo Coast, Purnululu National Park and the Riversleigh Australian Fossil Mammal Site.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian Greens are supportive of investments in appropriate infrastructure, safer communities, improved health, education, social services and employment. However, investments need to be carefully assessed to ensure long term sustainability.

Development must be targeted towards the needs and priorities of local communities. It should also take full account of environmental impacts, including climate change. Local communities and environmental resources shouldn’t be exploited for short term profits.

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<sup>1</sup> *Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia*, page 6  
<http://industry.gov.au/ONA/WhitePaper/Documents/Green-paper-report.pdf>

## No Fossil Fuel Developments

The Australian Greens staunchly oppose subsidies for polluting fossil fuels. We will not support the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) becoming a \$5 billion slush fund for polluting industries.

Projects such as the Adani coal mine and the other Galilee Basin mega coal mines are incompatible with a safe climate. Opening up these new coal mines would destroy any chance of keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees, which the global community committed to work towards at the Paris climate talks.

Scientists are telling us that we must transition to 100% clean energy as quickly as possible. That means keeping fossil fuels in the ground. The Greens are calling for an immediate ban on new coal mines and gas projects including fracking.

Not only would investment in fossil fuel projects be environmentally destructive, but economically reckless. Developing large, illiquid infrastructure for sunset industries would not be a good use of public finance.

Former Treasurer Joe Hockey hinted that the NAIF could be used to finance the disastrous Adani coal mine, rail and port proposal.<sup>2</sup> The Queensland government has actively pursued federal funding via the NAIF for Adani's Carmichael mega coal mine project.<sup>3</sup> Minister for Resources and Energy, Josh Frydenberg has hinted that the project could receive support,<sup>4</sup> before hinting that it would not after sustained political pressure.<sup>5</sup> The Federal government has repeatedly failed to rule out financing the Adani coal mine, rail and port proposal, or other Galilee Basin coal mines out of the NAIF.

The Adani mine, rail way and the Abbot Point coal port expansion would be environmentally disastrous and economically reckless. With the price of coal in structural decline, more than a dozen international and domestic banks have ruled out providing finance. Australia needs a rapid transition to job-rich clean energy.

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- 2 Sydney Morning Herald, 24 August 2015, Abbott government hints Adani could be considered for rail funding <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/abbott-government-hints-adani-could-be-considered-for-rail-funding-20150824-gj6ci9.html>
  - 3 Townsville Bulletin, 5 September 2015, State won't say why it wants federal funding for coal project <http://www.townsvillebulletin.com.au/news/townsville/state-wont-say-why-it-wants-federal-funding-for-coal-project/news-story/e3de3ce26174cc0663d3374f76756234>
  - 4 Sydney Morning Herald, 23 September 2015, Josh Frydenberg says \$5 billion northern Australia fund could be used to finance coal <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/josh-frydenberg-says-5-billion-northern-australia-fund-could-be-used-to-finance-coal-20150922-gjstnp.html>
  - 5 ABC Online, 19 October 2015, Carmichael mine: No federal subsidies for Adani but 'strong moral case' for coal, Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg says <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-18/no-federal-subsidies-carmichael-mine-strong-moral-case-for-coal/6863702>

The Adani mine is not the only piece of fossil fuel infrastructure threatening northern Australia. The proposed Northern Gas Pipeline which would open up the Northern Territory to dangerous fracking for shale gas is another example of an economically reckless project which may seek federal funding.

The Australian Greens oppose Federal government funding, including the NAIF, being used to support fossil fuel projects or nuclear projects, including mines, railways, pipelines, ports or electricity infrastructure. Global energy markets have rapidly moved on to 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies and public investment needs to be oriented towards reaping the benefits of sunrise industries. If we do not look to emerging trends, then the North will be saddled with last century's infrastructure while the rest of the country has moved on.

## Responsible Development

The Greens' vision for Northern Australia is a conservation and hybrid economy that captures a zero-carbon economy, ecotourism, communications, clean energy hubs and services.

A sustainable future for Northern Australia should support the existing robust small enterprise economy of horticulture and agriculture industries already thriving in the area.

Unfortunately, many of the current proposals for northern Australia would involve massive environmental destruction and depletion of precious resources. Large industrial agriculture requiring broad scale land clearing or new dams would be a major step backwards for the north.

Any proposals which receive support through the NAIF must be assessed against rigorous environmental criteria. Since States and Territories are likely to be the proponents of many proposals, they should not be trusted to ensure that the environment and local communities are protected.

## Dams and Water Infrastructure

It is important that investment in infrastructure not be used to fund environmentally damaging, unsustainable dams. As the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce noted in their final report:

Contrary to popular belief, water resources in the north are neither unlimited, nor wasted. Equally, the potential for northern Australia to become a 'food bowl' is not supported by evidence.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Northern Australia Land And Water Taskforce, [Final Report](#), December 2009, p. iii.

The Australian Greens do not support Government subsidies to environmentally unsustainable dams, which can damage Northern Australia's river systems and environmental resources.

**Recommendation 1: That the NAIF Bill be amended to exclude any proposal which is substantially linked with fossil fuel or nuclear projects, including mines, railways, pipelines, ports or electricity infrastructure.**

**Recommendation 2: That the NAIF Bill be amended to ensure all proposals are subject to a rigorous independent cost-benefit analysis which includes environmental, climate, cultural and social costs.**

**Recommendation 3: That the NAIF Bill be amended to ensure that the Federal government cannot delegate responsibility for project approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to State and Territory governments.**

**Recommendation 4: That the NAIF Bill be amended to ensure that the investment mandate for the NAIF includes the requirement that all proposals are consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.**

**Senator Rachel Siewert**

Senator for Western Australia