



Speech By  
**Hon. Curtis Pitt**


**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

---

Record of Proceedings, 29 November 2016

**MOTION**

**Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility**

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Sport) (6.10 pm): I move—

That all words after 'House' be deleted and the following words inserted—

1. supports the policy agenda to develop Northern Australia and in particular North Queensland;
2. supports the establishment of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) to encourage investment in infrastructure that benefits Northern Australia, including, port, road, rail and water infrastructure; and
3. calls on the Palaszczuk government to support investment decisions by the NAIF to progress projects in North Queensland.

I have omitted the letters 'LNP', because the Palaszczuk government supports very strongly infrastructure investment in North Queensland. Since we came to office, we have been working very closely with the Commonwealth government to facilitate the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility—the NAIF—in North Queensland.

This project has had a long and winding road, mimicking the twists and turns of the federal coalition government in Canberra, including leadership changes. When the NAIF was first announced in the Hockey federal budget in 2015-16, although I was disappointed that it did not include a direct grants funding program, we got behind the concessional \$5 billion loan scheme. Despite the long and disorganised road to get the enabling legislation in place, the Palaszczuk government still gave its steadfast support. The NAIF became operational on 1 July 2016, despite it being more than 12 months after it was first announced. Today, I can confirm that we have supported the next step in the NAIF process. I have written to the Commonwealth Minister for Northern Australia, Senator Matt Canavan, and confirmed that we are ready to sign the master facility agreement. This is the agreement that will ensure that the Commonwealth funds can be sent to NAIF projects via a pass-through financial arrangement with the state government.

Under the Commonwealth's existing constitutional powers, it is unable to provide financial assistance directly to proponents within a restricted geographic area. As such, the implementation of the NAIF requires Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory to legally undertake the lending role on behalf of the Commonwealth. This will be undertaken by a master facility arrangement between the states and the Commonwealth. The master facility arrangement also ensures that the Commonwealth's borrowings for the NAIF project will remain on the Commonwealth balance sheet and not on Queensland's. That is a very important point that I hope those opposite understand.

Today is not the first time that those opposite have sought to use NAIF as a political plaything. Let us not forget the debate in this place in February, when those opposite accused the government of supporting a NAIF headquarters in Sydney. That was another attempt to inject petty politics into the

NAIF. We had the member for Whitsunday accusing the state government of sending NAIF south when it was the federal government shaping up to place the NAIF headquarters in Sydney. He then proceeded to give a geography lesson, pointing out that every provincial centre above—

**Mr COSTIGAN:** I rise to a point of order. I find the comments made by the Treasurer personally offensive and I think that he should—

**Mr SPEAKER:** And you ask that they be withdrawn?

**Mr COSTIGAN:** Absolutely. I ask that they be withdrawn.

**Mr PITT:** I withdraw. The member for Whitsunday was, at his usual best, checking every name under the sun, but never checking the facts.

After much lobbying from the Palaszczuk government, the headquarters for the NAIF is located in Cairns. I welcome the recent appointment of Ms Laurie Walker as the CEO of NAIF, who is now based in Cairns. The Palaszczuk government looks forward to working with Ms Walker to support the continued implementation of this scheme and seeks to realise the benefits from the development of North Queensland.

Another sleight of hand by the member for Whitsunday, among others opposite, is to cry out that we do not support Adani. It is through the NAIF facility, which the state wholeheartedly supports, that Adani can get the infrastructure support that it needs. Adani has indicated that it intends to apply for financial support from the NAIF. It started that many months ago—very early in the term of our government.

There are many worthy projects that are worthy of NAIF assistance, such as the Cairns Airport redevelopment, which can inject over \$800 million of economic benefits into the Cairns regional economy and which has great potential for tourism, agribusiness and aviation. I encourage other prospective proponents to consider how they can access the NAIF to support the development of important infrastructure in North Queensland.

Those opposite will seek to drive the wedge on NAIF. Sadly, they are unaware that all of us on this side of the House will engage in a bipartisan way—in the way that the Northern Australia policy was developed. An all-party parliamentary committee worked on the Northern Australia policy. I remember sitting with Tony Abbott when he announced the policy in Cairns. This was something where all sides of politics were acknowledged for their contribution. That is why it should not be considered the LNP's Northern Australia policy; it is the Australian government's policy, which has been supported by the Australian parliament.

I call on those opposite to stop their petty politicking. We on this side of the House know that, given that we have around 70 per cent of the population of Northern Australia in Queensland, we should be trying to aim to get 70 per cent of the funding, or at least certainly more than our lion's share. It is only fair that that comes to Queensland.

I call on the House to support the amendment that I have moved. This issue has to be free of politics. It has to be something that we can work collaboratively on, including with those opposite, to deliver good outcomes. This process and this policy will probably outlive the tenure of many people in this House. We should be focusing on developing and tapping into the untapped potential of North Queensland.

*(Time expired)*