



01 Oct 2016

Townsville Bulletin, Townsville QLD

Author: Tony Raggatt • Section: General News • Article type : News Item
Classification : Regional • Audience : 25,650 • Page: 1 • Printed Size: 629.00cm²
Market: QLD • Country: Australia • Words: 640 • Item ID: 665254795

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EXCLUSIVE: NAIF boss refuses to leave Melbourne

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

TONY RAGGATT

COALITION MPs have demanded the boss of the \$5 billion Northern Australia infrastructure loan facility live in North Queensland, after revelations the interim CEO is based in Melbourne.

Interim CEO David Byrne has been based in the Victorian capital since the initiative was launched in July. A decision on a permanent CEO is yet to be

announced but it is understood many shortlisted candidates do not want to live in the North.

LNP MP Warren Entsch confirmed Mr Byrne had not wanted to shift North, but was adamant the permanent CEO would be based in Cairns, where the NAIF offices are located.

Queensland LNP senator Ian Macdonald said that the CEO lived in Cairns was “non-negotiable”.

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North base 'a must for NAIF chief'

**TONY
RAGGATT**



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NORTH Queensland Federal Coalition MPs have demanded the boss of the \$5 billion Northern Australian infrastructure loan facility live in Cairns after revelations the interim CEO is based in Melbourne.

Interim CEO David Byrne has been based in Melbourne since the facility was launched in July.

While a decision on a permanent CEO has yet to be announced, it is understood some of the shortlisted applicants don't want to live in Cairns.

Independent federal MP Bob Katter said yesterday he was surprised to find the Cairns NAIF office was empty when he visited the headquarters on Monday.

"We were very surprised, when we went to meet with the NAIF in Cairns, that with a 12th of the Government's life already gone (three of its 36 months have been expended) we find only empty offices in Cairns with a solitary, interim staff member answering telephones and a CEO with a banking background who is based in Melbourne," Mr Katter said.

"So NAIF (is) a rather curious vacant office and its board is full of corporate people from southern capital cities."

Cairns-based LNP MP Warren Entsch confirmed Mr Byrne was based in Melbourne and had not wanted to shift north but was adamant the

permanent CEO would be based in the northern city. He understood candidates had been shortlisted and that a decision by the NAIF board was imminent.

"One of the criteria needed to be ticked is that the successful applicant live in Cairns," Mr Entsch said. "I have absolute confidence that the whole criteria will be met."

Queensland LNP senator Ian Macdonald said that the NAIF CEO lived in Cairns was "non-negotiable".

"The CEO must reside in Cairns," Senator Macdonald said.

"We as a Government are encouraging people to move north and if we can't get a CEO who is prepared to join us in the north, then we've failed the basic test of developing the

North." NAIF officer Carol Bellettini yesterday referred media inquiries to the Federal Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, while the department did not respond to inquiries.

Minister for Resources and Northern Australia Senator

Matt Canavan said the Government's intent was that the permanent CEO be based in Northern Australia but that the decision was a matter for the independent NAIF board.

Senator Canavan said Mr Byrne had travelled extensively through Northern Queensland since his appointment and would travel to Western Australia next week.

He said the NAIF had received more than 70 inquiries from project proponents, with more than half of those coming from Queensland.

Mr Katter said he was not aware of a single application, leading him to believe all were "southern and foreign corporate applications who will take our assets off us and fly in our workers from down south and overseas".

Mr Entsch said he was talking drivel. "(Mr) Katter has absolutely no understanding whatsoever about this," Mr Entsch said.

"Any unqualified drivel that you generally hear from (Mr) Katter these days doesn't help in any way."

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David Byrne.



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Bob Katter.