

12 August 2018

Lithium mine road upgrade brings faster, safer trucking

NAIF's second Investment Decision to benefit Western Australia is to finance the upgrade of a public road leading to one of the world's largest lithium ore deposits. It will provide multi-user benefits for years to come.

The \$19.5m loan to a subsidiary of Pilbara Minerals Ltd (PLS) will upgrade the 70km Pippingarra Road from the PLS owned Pilgangoora Lithium-Tantalum project.

NAIF CEO Ms Laurie Walker said 'This is a great example of how NAIF can help where commercial lenders cannot and improve productivity in the north.

'The project avoids traversing three significant railway crossings and provides a safer alternative to the current trucking by keeping heavy vehicles off a large part of the Great Northern Highway.

'It also increases haulage payloads allowing larger road train configurations to be used and will mitigate extreme weather risks by providing an alternative route north to Port Hedland.

The road will remain in public hands and be available to all users with total public benefit over the 17-year life of the mine assessed at nearly \$27m.

'Public benefit is a mandatory criterion for all NAIF funded projects. Many private individuals and businesses, including pastoral stations, Indigenous communities, quarries, local residents, tourists and other mining companies will enjoy the benefits of improved access to remote locations in this part of the Pilbara region.

'Pilbara Minerals has also forged strong working relationships with the Traditional Owners of the region' said Ms Walker. 'This is vital as all projects that receive NAIF funding must have a strong Indigenous Engagement Strategy.

A key Indigenous joint venture, NPJV, has already been sub-contracted on preliminary roadworks. Other employment and contracting opportunities during construction and in ongoing maintenance will be offered to local Indigenous people and businesses.

The proposed financial assistance is subject to the finalisation of the Western Australian Government's consideration and agreement for the approved funds to be advanced.

'NAIF currently has 15 projects in due diligence across our jurisdictions of WA, NT and Qld. We have momentum as our pipeline of projects continues to grow', said Ms Walker. 'FY2018-19 is set to be our most significant year yet. NAIF is actively working to transform northern Australia.

[ENDS]

Media contact: 1300 466 243