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Don't sell Australia's copper future for scrap

Townsville Bulletin, Townsville

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Claudia Brumme-Smith



This week, North and Northwest Queensland stared down a devastating reality – one that could see our copper ecosystem collapse with the closure of the Mount Isa Copper Smelter and Townsville Copper Refinery.

To the workers and families in our communities we know this is a difficult time – we see you, we stand with you, and we will not stop fighting for a solution to keep our copper industry alive in North Queensland.

Let's be clear: this is not about politics, and it's not about Glencore. It's about people. It's about protecting our sovereign industrial capability and protecting thousands of jobs across North Queensland.

New economic modelling has exposed the cost of inaction: record-high unemployment, a broken regional economy, and 17,000 jobs lost across the copper supply chain. The warning couldn't be starker.

In the same breath, Glencore announced preparations to move the smelter and refinery into care and maintenance. Next week, it will shut the doors on the century-old Mount Isa Copper Mine, signalling the end of Glencore's strategic interest in copper in Queensland. While that chapter closes, the story of copper in this

region is far from finished.

Australia holds 10 per cent of the world's known copper reserves and the Mount Isa Smelter and Townsville Refinery are the only facilities that will take copper from mines all over the country for processing and manufacturing.

Copper is a strategic mineral – indispensable to clean energy, defence, technology and economic security. Demand is booming. The question is whether Australia will meet that demand – or send our potential and our jobs offshore?

We've seen governments step up to save smelters elsewhere. In South Australia, Whyalla Steelworks was saved. In Tasmania, the Nyrstar Smelter was kept open. Both were deemed critical to the national interest. North Queensland deserves no less – in fact, the stakes here are even greater.

This is not a handout. This is a call for parity. In Whyalla and Tasmania, hundreds of jobs were on the line. Here, it's 17,000. And the ripple effects will be far worse – from risking the shutdown of the fertiliser production at Phosphate Hill, to the collapse of supply chains that support small businesses and emerging mines across our region.

This is about more than industrial infrastructure. It's about people – workers, families and businesses who are staring into a void of uncertainty. The copper ecosystem in North Queensland is a delicate house of cards. Remove the smelter or refinery, and everything comes crashing down.

And this isn't just a regional issue – it's a national one. If these assets close, we lose the ability to process our own copper onshore. We lose the value, the jobs, and the strategic control. We give up a sovereign resource.

Next week, we'll be in Canberra with the mayors of Townsville and Mount Isa, united in our call to keep copper in North Queensland. We're not looking to assign blame. We're focused on finding a solution.

We know the path forward is complex. But we also know what's at stake if we don't act.

This isn't about Glencore or politics, it's about all parties reaching a deal in our local, regional and national interest.

Claudia Brumme-Smith is the CEO of Townsville Enterprise



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Townsville Enterprise chief executive Claudia Brumme-Smith with Dyno Nobel turnaround manager Matt Johnson discuss the importance of the Mount Isa copper smelter. Picture: Supplied