

MICHAEL McCORMACK MP

Putting the Riverina first



December 2011

Taking care as year draws to a close

THE year is almost over and what an interesting one it has been.

The minority Government managed to hang on but only because it sold out to the Greens and did deals with Independents in order for unpopular Prime Minister Julia Gillard to keep her job.

But the arrangements Labor has made are by no means cosy.

Many Labor MPs are seething about the influence of Greens' Leader Senator Bob Brown and have threatened to preference Coalition candidates above Greens at the next election ... may it be held soon!

Riverina voters have a healthy dislike for the Greens and with good reason ... two of the biggest decisions made this year will have a damaging and lasting effect on family budgets, incomes and jobs.

The Labor-Green-Independents' carbon tax will make many Australian industries (including agriculture) uncompetitive and will ultimately do nothing for the environment while Labor has also badly failed the water test.

Your voice is being heard in Parliament – I have spoken in more than 125 debates in the past year (among the highest number of any MP in the Parliament) including those of greatest concern to local people: health, education, the cost of living, jobs, our youth, defence, water and food security. I look forward to continue lobbying on your behalf in 2012 for our fair share.

As the year nears its end, thoughts turn to Christmas, parties and well-earned holidays.

With many people on the roads, please exercise care and caution. Obey the rules, buckle up, stay under the speed limits, do not drink and drive and be mindful to take regular rest breaks when travelling. That way everyone will arrive safely.

A timely warning regarding water safety: Never, ever be complacent.

Backyard pools can be deadly. Pool owners should make certain everything is compliant and secure, especially fences and gates. Learning how to resuscitate could save someone's life ... perhaps that of your own child.

Also, make sure to always be sun smart and slip, slop, slap.

With the weather getting warmer parents are reminded not to leave children in vehicles, even if only to duck into a shop for as little as five minutes.

It is dangerous and it is against the law. On a typical Riverina Summer day, the temperature inside a parked car can be up to 40°C hotter than the outside temperature.

You would not put your kids in an oven ... so why leave them in a locked car?

The Riverina has a bright future.

Wagga Wagga has no equal as an education and training centre in regional Australia.

The Murrumbidgee and Coleambally Irrigation Areas are the dinner plate of the nation.

Nowhere else in Australia grows the range and quality of the food produced in the west of our fine region.

To the east, and up into the Snowy Mountains, taking in Gundagai, Tumbarumba and Tumut Shires, a more picturesque area you would not find anywhere and it is no wonder these parts are such a tourist destination any time of year.

Out Coolamon, Ganmain, Junee, Marrar, Narrandera, Temora, West Wyalong and Ungarie way the crops and livestock are renowned for being the best when the seasons allow.

We are indeed fortunate to live in the best part of this great country.

So make the most of any well-earned downtime if you are able to get some and let's hope 2012 brings some welcome change and good times ahead.

Finally, have a happy and peaceful Christmas and I look forward to working for you and with you in the New Year.

Michael McCormack

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Federal Member for Riverina

REGION WELCOMES NEW RECYCLING PLANTS

TWO important recycling facilities were opened in the Riverina recently which will bring enormous benefits for the environment as well as creating new and long-term jobs.

It was a tremendous honour to participate in both events, on behalf of Valmar at Tumut and Kurrajong Waratah at Wagga Wagga.

Both organisations provide meaningful employment for many disabled members of the community who in turn play a significant role in reducing the amount of material going into landfill while generating vital and in some cases new income streams for the charities they serve.

Everyone wins: the community, the charities, the environment and the workers.

Kurrajong's Chaston Street e-waste site is situated alongside the aluminium, cardboard, glass and paper facility where the fortnightly household pick-ups are taken for recycling.

The new plant specialises in all things electronic from mobile telephones, to computers to the destruction of electronic data.

Valmar services Tumut and Tumbarumba Shires and last year collected 2700 tonnes to be processed.

The marvellous efforts by Valmar staff has substantially lessened the amount of material which would otherwise end up at the rubbish dump.



UNVEILED (left): Doing the honours at the Valmar opening with (from left) Chief Executive Officer Hugh Packard, then Tumut Mayor Trina Thomson and Plant Manager John Stanfield (obscured).

PROUD MOMENT: Admiring the official plaque following the opening of Kurrajong Waratah's new e-recycling centre with (from left) Business Services Manager Alan Larcombe, Chairman Michael Kennedy OAM and deputy chief executive officer Ray Carroll.



Why place Batlow at risk?

FAR FROM APPLES AS DISTRICT THREATENED



NZ DELEGATION: Inspecting an Australian export-approved Hawke's Bay region apple orchard with (from left) Pipfruit New Zealand Chief Executive Peter Beaven, Shadow Agriculture Minister John Cobb, Member for Wannan Dan Tehan and Member for Murray Dr Sharman Stone.

Fire blight can destroy an entire orchard in a single growing season. An outbreak would devastate Australian horticulture, cause considerable environmental harm and be impossible to eradicate.

Now that Labor has opened the way for apples to be imported from New Zealand, every possible precaution to protect Australia's disease- and pest-free status must be taken and vigorously maintained.

It is of grave concern that three out of the first 13 consignments of New Zealand apples were denied entry. That is a damning rejection rate. Australia originally barred apple imports after discovering in 1919 the bacterial disease fire blight in fruit from New Zealand.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard, addressing the New Zealand Parliament on 16 February this year, announced Australia would lift the 90-year ban.

By 18 August, just a day after the all clear was given, seven permits had already been issued to New Zealand orchardists.

Later that same month, a live insect pathogen and potentially fire blight-carrying leaf matter had already been found in one of the first consignments of New Zealand apples bound for Australia.

The news justifiably angered many, especially those in the industry who campaigned against Labor's decision, prompted by a World Trade Organization ruling. The industry warned this would expose crops to crippling diseases, such as fire blight and pests.

One of the very first consignments was refused after a small piece of leaf matter which can carry disease, and an insect, an apple leaf curling midge, were found during inspection in New Zealand. Alarmingly, the live insect was found four to five months after the fruit was harvested. The midge eats leaves and can defoliate trees, depriving them of nutrients. Australia does not have leaf curling midge and strong chemicals are needed to control it.

A recent Coalition delegation to the Hawke's Bay region on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island heard some disturbing remarks from one of the country's largest apple growers who openly admitted in response to questioning about the incidence of fire blight: "If you look hard enough for long enough you'll find some" as well as "half of our orchards have never had fire blight."

Fire blight is not a notifiable disease in New Zealand. Every safeguard is taken against it, including sophisticated warning systems linked with weather updates, but when it does occur treatments include Streptomycin, an antibiotic not registered for use in Australia.

Water used in processing fruit headed to Australia is often the same as that which washes Streptomycin and other contaminants from apples destined for other countries as New Zealand orchardists are required to change the water only every 48 hours.

The Australian Government needs to urgently review its quarantine protocols to ensure our biosecurity measures are the tightest and toughest they can be. Too much is at stake not to do this. Australia's reputation as a fresh food producer, thousands of livelihoods and the future of our own export markets are all at risk.

We cannot have our proud, sustainable and viable industries, indeed whole towns, ruined because our Federal Government did not do more under WTO rules which would have made quarantine protocols far more stringent than they are now.

Our apple industry is not scared of competition ... in fact it has been investing heavily to gear up for the arrival of New Zealand apples. However, our growers are extremely concerned they will be unnecessarily exposed to the risk of pests and diseases when more can be done within the WTO rules to reduce that risk.

There is something to be said for States declaring quarantine areas (similar to fruit fly zones) in fruit-growing regions such as around Batlow and the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas.

As if Batlow's apple industry was not in the grip of enough uncertainty, a devastating hail storm which lasted 20 minutes on the night of 9 November caused estimated damage of more than \$20 million.

Despite the blow, defiant growers say Australia's apple industry will be able to meet market expectations without more fruit needing to be imported.



ENDANGERED (below left): Batlow's future is threatened by New Zealand apple imports and potential diseases and pests they could bring.

PROCESSED (centre): Leaf matter, having escaped the wash process, must be detected by packing house staff or as part of a random quarantine sample, otherwise it will make its way to Australia.

DISEASED (below): This fire blight, on a pear tree branch, was found after little more than two hours into the New Zealand delegation's orchard inspections.



BATLOW is the apple capital of Australia and should not have its future jeopardised by a Government which puts trade before quarantine.

Apple orchards have been vital to the town's economy for 120 years. In 1922, the first cool stores in New South Wales were built at Batlow. At the same time a railway was constructed from nearby Tumut. These developments facilitated Batlow's trade with Sydney and beyond. In times of this nation's greatest need, the dark days of World War II, the district served an essential role by supplying troops with dehydrated fruit and vegetables.

These days, 39 apple growers at Batlow provide employment, directly and indirectly, for 2500 people. All hard workers ... all taxpayers.

That wonderful history and those jobs have been placed at risk by a Government which could and should have done more to look after its own.

Instead, as with most things agricultural and many things of importance to regional Australia, Labor either caved in or did nothing.

The same could be said about Labor's inaction on the Asian beef incursion, mouse plague, live cattle exports and its abysmal failure to give good governance on the water issue.

Australia is at present free of fire blight.

Fire blight is a contagious disease which particularly affects apples, pears, quinces and some ornamental plants. The disease is so named because it describes the appearance of an affected area of the plant which is left blackened, shrunken and cracked, as though scorched by fire.



No water: no food!

RECENT reports suggested irrigators – the people who grow the food and fibre to feed and clothe this nation – will be forced to deliver even more water to the Murray-Darling.

This follows a decision by the Labor Government to secretly undercut the value of irrigators' water.

Water Minister Tony Burke cut exchange rates on water bought under the Government's \$3.1 billion water purchasing program. Bureaucrats, it seems, slashed the average annual volume of water irrigators' high and general security entitlements delivered to the environment, yet failed to notify irrigators or even state governments.

The reductions in the environmental value of water were 12 per cent for the Murrumbidgee and nine per cent for New South Wales Murray irrigators. Not only does this erode the value of water already recovered, it effectively means irrigators must now deliver even more to meet the basin plan of an additional 2800 gigalitres for the environment.

As NSW Irrigators' Council chief executive officer Andrew Gregson said: "Just like the guide (to the basin plan), this was done entirely without consultation. Like the guide, it will not be received well by the tens of thousands whose jobs rely on this, by the family farms that risk closure or by the fresh food buyer whose weekly shopping bill goes up."

The draft basin plan's contents were deliberately leaked by the independent Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Griffith, Coleambally, Hillston, Leeton, Yanco and other irrigation communities will not sit idly by whilst Labor and the MDBA

go about destroying the very reason for the existence of those wonderful and once booming towns ... nor should they.

Meanwhile, the report from the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia headed by Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor, which was tabled on 2 June, still awaits formal recognition, and its 21 recommendations have not been acted upon.

Every day, despair and uncertainty grow in the Coleambally and Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas. Every day, more investment is put on hold. Just the other day I was told of a significant Riverina development which has been held over – for who knows how long – because of genuine fears about future water availability and security.

When will Labor stop giving in to the Greens, whose uncostered, irresponsible policies would destroy regional communities, place our ability to feed ourselves at real risk and ultimately do nothing for the environment?

This is not based on good science. It is based on a Labor cover-up and a Greens' con. The Gillard Government has spent more than \$4.5 million on water buybacks in the Murrumbidgee but does not expect those purchases to deliver any extra water to the environment, according to radically altered data on the basin buyback scheme.

Shadow Water Minister Senator Barnaby Joyce has called for the Auditor-General to investigate the buybacks. This is the proper course of action. This Government continues to hurt farming families and refuses to strive for a triple-bottom-line approach.

Two recent e-mails from Riverina constituents highlight just how much locals are suffering. Virginia Tropeano of Hanwood wrote: "When Tony Windsor's report came out it looked as though someone had listened and maybe there would be some action. But what has happened? Nothing. Tony Burke is still continuing with his buybacks, and sham science is still being used to make preposterous claims about river health."

Carolyn Robertson of Bilbul had this say: "My husband Chris and I were watching the *Today* show this morning, the 26th of October, and saw Julia Gillard in Western Australia announcing to the world that Australia is supporting developing nations by removing tariffs on imported products. I am sorry to admit it, but my eyes filled with



WORRIED: Chris and Carolyn Robertson survey their Bilbul rice paddies as they contemplate a possible future with less water.

tears. For many years now, we have faced the drought and alienation from Australians because we are those 'horrid rice farmers' who take all the water. How lucky at this stage we are such an affluent nation we do not have to rely on eating rice, but, oh, spare a thought for the millions worldwide who do."

"Once we used to help feed these people. In the Griffith area, as I know you are well aware, morale is rock-bottom. How could a Prime Minister put sustainable food on an agenda and then ignore her own country? I am sorry to bother you with an emotional e-mail from a very disheartened farmer's wife, but I would encourage you to continue to represent us as best you can so the nation sees we are part of it and once upon a time had a valuable contribution to make, even though it was using irrigation water."

Those are heartfelt words indeed from people who not only care about their own futures but have the nation's best interests at heart, unlike those who would have all the water run wastefully, unused, down the rivers and eventually out to sea.

PUPPETS TO HAVE HAND IN TUMUT FUND-RAISER

THERE is something about puppets which brings out the inner child in all of us and with that in mind Hansie Armour may well have struck on a winner with her novel and timely fund-raising idea for Tumut District Hospital.

Hansie, who has a remarkable passion for progressing Tumut even though she lives near Yass, wants to raise \$30,000 for the hospital.

She arranged for friends in Nepal, where she does other charitable work, to make 1500 hand-made, hand-felted puppets in the form of a doctor and a nurse.

The woollen puppets come with a

stethoscope, each have a limited edition numbered certificate and sell for \$24.95 each or \$40 a pair.

An impressive list of regional medical executives and Tumut community leaders attended the recent launch, emphasising not only the support for Hansie's latest project but also the respect with which she is so widely held.

Anyone wishing to purchase a puppet for this great cause can pick one up from the hospital, or at Chicks With Attitude, CWA Rooms, 148 Wynyard Street, Tumut or get in touch with Hansie via e-mail hansie47@hotmail.com

They would make an ideal Christmas gift.



PLAY TIME: Having some fun at the puppets for progress launch are (back, from left) Jill Dodd, radiographer Stephen Race, Greater Southern Area Health Service Central Sector Manager Jill Ludford, Tumut District Hospital's Medical Scientist Geoff Allen, Hansie Armour, Riverina Division of General Practice Chief Executive Officer Nancye Piercy, Registered Midwife at Tumut Hospital Jeanette Wilson; (front) Tumut Rotary Club President Richard Sanderson, Tumut Hospital Nursing Manager Lorraine O'Sullivan and Tumut Chamber of Commerce's Lorraine Wysman.

Youth allowance fairness finally restored

STUDENTS residing in inner regional areas had struggled to qualify for the independent youth allowance since March 2010 when the Labor Government made changes to the eligibility criteria.

On 21 September 2011, after a hard-fought campaign from students, parents, education stakeholders, communities and Coalition Members of Parliament, the Gillard Government finally relented to pressure and reversed the legislation it implemented only 18 months ago.

In 2009, the then Education Minister Julia Gillard proposed tightening the criteria. This meant that students in inner regional areas had to work an average of 30 hours a week for 18 months over a two-year period. This resulted in some students being forced to defer their studies for up to two years and those who opted to go straight to university undoubtedly struggled to meet their work and study commitments.

Coalition MPs and Senators were swamped with letters, e-mails and phone calls when this change was made, and many examples of inner regional students missing out on much-needed assistance to afford tertiary study were brought into the limelight.

Nationals' MPs met with parents and guardians in forums, one-on-one meetings and were flooded with correspondence where they were told about the difficulty parents faced of having to choose which of their children they could afford to support at university. In some cases families were left with no choice but to tell their children they could not financially support them to attend university. It is outrageous that a Government left people in this situation.

To restore the equality between regional students the Coalition introduced a Bill which both Labor and the Independents, despite having many inner regional students in their electorates, deemed unconstitutional. Instead, the Gillard Government brought forward a review of student income support reforms, including the youth allowance.

Had the Labor Government not changed the independent youth allowance criteria in the first place, there would have been no need to spend the money on a review, and the time of the House of Representatives debating the change back.

It is yet another example of this Government's terrible economic management, and lack of understanding and failure to listen when it comes to regional matters.

From 1 January 2012, students from inner regional areas will be able to access the independent youth allowance under exactly the same rules which apply to students from outer regional, remote and very remote areas. Any employment undertaken over the period since a student has left school will be counted towards the independence test, even if that work was done prior to 1 January 2012.

School leavers of 2009-10, if they have been working during the period since they left school, will be able to count that toward the workplace criteria to qualify for the independent youth allowance in 2012.

These changes will enable students from areas in the Riverina including Wagga Wagga, Adelong, Batlow,

Coolamon, Gundagai, Junee, Mangoplah and Tumut to be eligible for the independent youth allowance.

Whilst this is a welcomed amendment to the legislation, the irony is that it will result in money being taken away from other youth allowance measures or be delayed, which will affect many students. These changes could have been implemented a whole lot earlier, if the Independents and the Government had supported the Coalition's calls to restore fairness on a number of occasions.

I am glad that the Government has finally put common sense into youth allowance. Hopefully it will be the start of this Government finally listening to reason and taking heed of what regional Australians expect and need ... fairness in policy making.

AT A GLANCE

From 1 January 2012

- Makes changes to the criteria under which youth allowance recipients from inner regional Australia are considered to be "independent".
- Adjusts the amount of the Relocation Scholarship – to \$4000 in the first year of study, \$2000 for each of the second and third year, and \$1000 for any subsequent years – to eligible higher education students from regional or remote areas who are required to live away from home to study.
- Reduces the amount of the Start-Up Scholarship to \$2050 for eligible students.

Around the Riverina ...



WALK FOR A CAUSE: Tumut Youth Council members (from left) Sam Hughes Rory Caddis, Alexandra Osgood, Katelyn Veitch and Scott Elliott helped raise a fantastic \$43,623.35 for cancer research by being among 361 participants in the Riverina Highlands Relay for Life.



DAZZLING DEBS: The Roaring 20s was the theme of the Tumbarumba All Saints Debutante Ball where I had the pleasure of receiving debs and their partners (from left) Miki McPherson and Jackson McIntyre, Emily Rhynehart and Rayden Brice, Kerryn Wake and Daniel Matthews, Letitia Leahy and Dale Christie, Grace Moroney and Nick Hine, Laura Walsh and Sam Hibbard, Danielle Ward and Kieran Arnold, Cora Harding and Mitchell Curry, Hannah Munday and Ben Bremner, Courtney Powell and Matthew Bremner, Jessie Oldfield and Jordan Dennis, Scarlett Houting and Mitchell Bramich, Tegan Land and Jacob Zabbia, Alice Foster and Michael Tuilau.



TOUR: Taking in Parliament House are Forest Hill Public School (standing, from left) Nickolas Ferraro, Georgia Browne, Waldo Steyn, Jack Loader, Kaylah Hull, Jessica Lorkin, Jessica Toyer-Birkin, Laine Wooden, Rhiana Plum, Pippa Heritage, Alana Tobin, Chloe Dean, Nathan Newcombe, Hamilton Cheney-Jenkins, Ben McGill, Regan Connor, Marc Tagalog, Tyler Brown, Aaron Chapman, Brandon Atkinson, Ruby McNamara-King, Dylan Lyons, Paris McNamara-King, Matty Donaldson, Trent Chessell, Brayden Nancarrow; (kneeling-sitting) Josh Lea, Monique Canty, Shiann Fisher, Tamsyn Browning, Nicola Browning, Kellie Bament, Sally Moore, Kyran Neale, Jacob Kearnes, Montanna Brownfield, Tom Canty, Jacob King, Kate Roberts, Reid Kemna, Lachlan Noble, Cameron Richie, Danielle Wheeler, Isabella Pearson, Cody Bramich, Makenna Lucus, Jade Caskie and teacher Vince Cattell.



SCHOOL VISIT: Enjoying their tour of Parliament House from Lake Wyangan Public are (back, from left) Principal Justin Dawson, teacher Leith Fry, Lily Mahoney, Jalen Robins, Sara Lodding, parent Steven Zambon, Calista Tuitavake; (next row) Liam Lico, Alice Polkinghorne, Adam Casey, Isaac Campbell, Joshua Ellis, Sebastian Lico, Shannara Bishell, Jayvir Grewal, Christian Webb, Jacinta Morris, Ursula Lodding; (second row) Cassandra Evans, Jenna Bowen, Pauline Bernardi, Xiaesha Kenningale, Ellie Castle; (front) Paige Wells, Thomas Zambon, Ella Goonry, Tyron Krause, Dylan Hately, Jesse James and Emma Clancy.



EXCURSION: Coleambally Central School Year 5-6 pupils during their visit to Parliament House (back, from left) Michael Gitsham, Andrew Evans, Keiran Mitchell, Daniel Connor, Jarod Brain, Jack Watts, Harry Firth, Otadan Evans; (third row) Annie Blackett, Chelsea Baumann, Crystal Griffiths, Paige Cooper; (second row) Cooper Smith, George Payne, Alana Robb, Harrison Tooth, Emma Dunbar, Tessa Evans; (front) Molly Young, Cassidy Gilbert, Jordan Leach, Seth Jackson and Lily Cooper.



MOMENTOUS: More than 600 people turned up to help the 10 pupils of Bongongo Public School celebrate its 125th anniversary at Adjungbilly. The children enthralled all with an entertaining historical play. New Principal Alison Brown and teacher Sally Keatinge did marvellously well. Here's the entire school population and the special plaque to commemorate the milestone (back, from left) Ryan Corby, Jack Graham, Tom Lucas, Drew Polson; (front) Kiandra Lucas, Joe Corby, Sam Graham, Isabella Lucas, Coby Whitby and Will Polson.

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