

MICHAEL McCORMACK MP

Putting the Riverina first



November 2010

Future offers hope as well as challenges

AS CHRISTMAS approaches and 2010 draws to a close it is time to reflect on the past year and, more importantly, look to the future.

It has been an eventful year locally, nationally and across the world.

Mercifully, Mother Nature has finally again blessed us with wonderful rain and the summer crops have never looked better.

It is so pleasing for our long-suffering farmers who, besides being the best in the world, must also rank as the most resilient!

What those on the land do not need now is poor policy from Canberra which will prevent them from doing what they do best ... producing the food to nourish the nation.

They need to be helped, not hindered.

Taking over from the dynamic Kay Hull as Member for Riverina at the August 21 Federal election has certainly brought many challenges and expectations.

Kay served this region with much enthusiasm and delivered great outcomes in her 12 years in Parliament. On behalf of all the people she served so well I wish Kay, her husband Graeme and their family all the very best in the years ahead.

I have maintained Kay's former Griffith and Wagga Wagga office locations and the phone and fax numbers remain the same for the convenience of constituents. Contact details are on the back of this newsletter.

If there is a Federal matter which concerns you, please get in touch and one of my staff members or I will endeavour to assist you.

Thank you for the confidence and faith you have placed in me to be your Federal

Member. Know that I will do my best and will always put the Riverina first.

There is no time quite like Christmas.

It is a season of goodwill which touches all ages and every community.

But there is also sadness, as many people think of loved ones who cannot be with them, through distance or loss.

Please think of someone who might be lonely this Christmas and show your caring spirit.

Remember too the real meaning of Christmas and that it is a time of hope and renewal.

We must not forget the many people in our essential services who will be working over the Christmas-New Year period and who deserve our gratitude.

Our thoughts should also be with our defence personnel who are serving so bravely in Afghanistan and particularly our local servicemen and women who are away from loved ones at this time.

In wishing everyone a happy holiday season, I urge people to keep safe on the roads (don't drink and drive and please take sufficient rest stops when travelling) and to take care in and around water, especially making sure to look after the most precious members of society - our children.

I look forward to working for you in 2011.

Have a happy, healthy and most importantly peaceful Christmas and New Year.

Michael McCormack

Federal Member for Riverina



SET FOR A START: Local Member Michael McCormack with (from left) Anne Maree Humphreys, Anthea Cooper, Jane Dean, Maddie Dean (at 11 years of age the youngest walker), Heidi Luff, Lisa Wilson and Fiona Matthews at the start of the Tremendous Trek.

A tremendous effort by Gundagai Trekkers

GUNDAGAI residents dug deep ... in more ways than one with the inaugural Tremendous Trek taking place on November 1-3.

What started out as a late night conversation in a pub turned into a wonderful walk for charity, raising more than \$104,000 for Can Assist, an organisation dedicated to helping country New South Wales cancer sufferers and their families.

Not only did people reach into their pockets to fund raise but also reached into their reserves of stamina by trudging 103 kilometres over hilly,

rough and rugged terrain from Uriarra Crossing near Canberra through the Brindabella Ranges to Gundagai.

I had great pleasure helping Steve Leddin, proprietor of major sponsor Gundagai McDonald's, cut the tape to send the 115 trekkers on their way.

Gundagai Councillor William Maslin did a marvellous job helping to ordinate the event and was ably assisted by so many enthusiastic volunteers. Well done to all concerned.

All the participants should feel enormously proud of what they achieved.

Come to the country and get more out of life

IT is difficult to understand why some people choose to live in over-crowded, smoggy, traffic-congested capital cities when they could quite easily move to a regional city or town and enjoy a better lifestyle and have more money.

They could have a similar job and much less travelling time to and from work which would mean less frustration and more family time.

Regional living has more affordable housing meaning more disposable income. Country air is cleaner, the pace of life is gentler and people are more caring and friendly.

It all adds up to better, healthier living.

That is why I was pleased to help launch Wagga Wagga's participation in the Evocities campaign on September 24.

Our wonderful city is one of seven throughout regional New South Wales taking part in this exciting concept.

The Evocity name derives from the fact Wagga Wagga and the other six centres are places of Energy, Vision and Opportunity.

The primary objective of the campaign is to entice capital city residents to make the move to an Evocity and invest in the opportunities the cities have to offer.

We all know the Riverina is very livable and once we secure funding and get a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital built and our water entitlements secured the future for what already is the best region in Australia will be guaranteed.



UNVEILING: Michael McCormack MP and Wagga Wagga Mayor, Councillor Wayne Geale, launch the city's Evocities campaign. Picture courtesy Brett Koschel, WWCC

Hospital funding case to be submitted

THE application for funding towards a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital will be submitted for the Regional Priority Round of the Health and Hospitals Fund.

The submission, prepared by the NSW Health Infrastructure Board, will be put in before the December 3 deadline.

I have met Federal Minister for Health and Ageing Nicola Roxon twice in recent weeks to push WWBH's case.

Hospitals have also been promised at Bega, Dubbo, Forbes, Lismore, Northern Beaches, Parkes, Port Macquarie and Tamworth among others.

There is no doubt WWBH qualifies for the \$1.8 billion funding pool on a "most-in-need" basis.

WWBH has had an announcement (by the State Government), \$90 million already allocated and a start date (February 2011) which helps its cause.

I am encouraging the Health Infrastructure Board to apply for the full amount to ensure the project gets completed and I will continue to work with Member for Wagga Wagga Daryl Maguire, Mayor Cr Wayne Geale and doctors Gerard Carroll and Richard Harrison as part of a taskforce to push the funding case.

I highlighted Riverina's health shortcomings in my October 21 inaugural speech to Parliament, saying:

"One project of vital importance to the entire Riverina is a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. It was first promised in 1980 but the people are still waiting. They are good people in the Riverina. They are tolerant. They are generous. They helped to fund their own cancer care centre. But while their spirit of giving will never wane, their patience is certainly wearing thin. They too rallied in their thousands recently to demand action for a new regional referral hospital. Wagga Base is terribly run-down. Local physician-cardiologist,

Doctor Carroll, describes it as 'dangerous'. Whilst the building is dilapidated, staff members at the hospital continue to be caring, conscientious and consummate professionals in the most trying of conditions. They are to be admired for the extraordinary feats they perform in the less than ordinary working environment they are forced to endure. The current Wagga Wagga Base Hospital was first promised in 1958 and officially opened just over four years later – four short years. It has now been 30 long years since the first pledge was made to rebuild. Both sides of state politics, it must be said, have reneged on promises made. But, you know, for a mother with a sick child lying limp in her arms or an age pensioner waiting in pain for surgery, they neither know nor care about political sides or whether it is Federal or State funding – they just desire and deserve to be treated in a facility similar in standard to those many metropolitan people take for granted. There is an opportunity in this Parliament to end the wait for the long-suffering Riverina residents and medical fraternity who ought to be given – and who need – a facility offering the very best in modern health. I commit myself to doing what I can to help this process. Health is so important. It is for most people the No. 1 priority."



OUTDATED: Wagga Wagga Base Hospital is in urgent need of replacement.

ACCC Petrol Commissioner invited to city

THE uniformly high fuel prices Wagga Wagga motorists have endured for too long should again be investigated.

I have invited Australian Competition and Consumer Commission Petrol Commissioner Joe Dimasi to the city to look into the situation.

Mr Dimasi is responsible for overseeing formal price monitoring and investigating petrol prices, including scrutinising documents and other information from participants in the petrol supply chain.

This gives him the perfect opportunity to get to the bottom of why Wagga Wagga's unleaded fuel price is generally at or near the highest in the State whereas the price at Albury (or most other places for that matter) is significantly lower.

For instance, on November 13 the average price for unleaded in Wagga Wagga was 129.8 cents per litre whereas at Albury it was 116.5.

Associate Professor of the School of Business Law and Taxation at the University of New South Wales, Frank Zumbo, is a fuel watchdog and a strident advocate for fairer pricing.

He maintains the oft-cited transport/storage excuses simply do not stack up and that Wagga Wagga motorists are being "ripped off".

The ACCC held a public hearing into Wagga Wagga petrol prices on September 10, 2007, with its chairman Graeme Samuel, describing the amount of interest shown as "surprising".

Nothing eventuated from that gathering and then unfortunately the Labor Government wasted millions of dollars of taxpayers' money with its failed FuelWatch scheme.

The cost of fuel remains high and local businesses and household budgets are being stretched as a result.

The high cost of diesel should also be on Mr Dimasi's agenda when, hopefully, he accepts the invitation to visit.



FUEL TALKS: Discussing high petrol prices are (from left) Member for Hughes Craig Kelly, Associate Professor, School of Business Law and Taxation at the University of NSW, Frank Zumbo, and Michael McCormack MP.

Fight to save our water

BENEREMBAH farmer John Bonetti spoke for many if not all when he told the Murray-Darling Basin Authority: "If you think this is the end you're wrong ... the fight has only just begun."

Mr Bonetti, a food producer in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area for nearly half a century, spoke passionately at the November 9 MDBA community information session at Narrandera.

Like all others in the MIA, Mr Bonetti is desperately worried about the future if cutbacks to water allocations in the order of up to 43 per cent proceed under the controversial Basin Plan.

He has been integral in the MIA's strong united voice against what Federal Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities Tony Burke calls the "guide to a draft to a plan".

It was the machinery shed on Mr Bonetti's family farm which was the venue for the important October 22 meeting of MIA community leaders and industry representatives with Mr Burke.

The Minister flew to Griffith following the rowdy MDBA public meeting on October 14 attended by as many as 7000 at which emotions were high and copies of the guide were burnt in protest.

The mood of the MIA is understandable given the awful uncertainty now unfairly lingering over the entire district as a result of the guide and the Federal Government's mishandling of the whole water issue.

This Labor Government took six months to get to a water policy, 18 months to set up the MDBA and 36 months to determine there needed to be a proper analysis of the social and economic effects – the human cost – of any water reform.

Make no mistake, it was the sheer turnout and mass frustration at the Yoogali forum which forced the Government to act and act quickly.

Within hours of the meeting, a Parliamentary Inquiry into the socio economic impact of any proposed changes had been called.

Not long after Minister Burke made his trip to listen to key stakeholders and had also sought legal interpretation from the Australian Government Solicitor – advice which the Minister said allowed the 2007 Water Act to give full consideration of the social and economic impacts of water reform.

Throughout the consultation process the MDBA has stuck firm to the line that it is merely working within the wording of the Act and that a minimum additional 3000 gegalitres and, to use its figure, preferably 7600GL are required for the environment.

This is despite the fact no-one from the Government, MDBA, Wentworth Group or anyone else can categorically state how much water the environment

actually needs, what any water set aside for the environment will be used for and what any redirected water would ever actually achieve.

In spite of this, the MDBA has insisted at subsequent public hearings, including that at Narrandera which attracted more than 1000 concerned locals, that the environmental aspects of the Act were paramount.

Remember that Minister Burke gets the final say. He gets to sign off on the plan before it goes to Parliament and he is the one who needs to be convinced that our MIA, the food bowl of this great and growing nation, will not accept bad policy (a man-made drought) for the sake of maintaining what is, essentially, a man-made environment.

The Minister needs to come out and confirm that he will only implement a triple-bottom line approach – a balance of the environmental, social and economic outcomes. It is an absolute disgrace that in the two-and-a-half years since Labor announced its water policy, its own Minister and its own Authority are not on the same page.

We all want a healthy river system – no-one wants this more than the family farmer who relies on water to grow the food to sustain the nation.

Productive water is needed to grow food (the Australian Farm Institute says every Griffith farmer feeds 150 Australians and 450 foreigners each year), to maintain farms, to consolidate viable regional communities and for our future food security.

The Coalition set aside \$5.8 billion under the Act for water savings infrastructure; Labor has spent \$700 million more than expected on buybacks, but \$350 million less than planned on infrastructure improvements. Not one cent of this money has actually hit the ground in the MIA yet despite some funding announcements earlier in the year.

Despite this underwhelming record, Labor's recent Budget updated foreshadowed the deferral of a further \$450 million in investments to beyond 2015.

Yet the Government is running an expensive and unnecessary print and electronic advertising campaign at present which serves only to insult basin communities.

Another insult is the fact the MDBA has estimated about 800 jobs will go as a result of boosting environmental flows when, in truth, the number would be at least 10 times that with leading water economist, Professor Quentin Grafton, even suggesting as many as 10,000 could be put out of work.

The MDBA has been at pains to point out water will be bought only from willing sellers, but we all know desperate times produce desperate sellers.

Having endured a decade or more of the worst ever drought conditions and now at long last facing the prospect of a decent season, the MIA just needs some certainty and a break – not to have its future ripped away on the basis of a flawed document which puts the environment 1st, 2nd and 3rd with people running a poor last.

Are we really a country which would allow the destabilisation of food production and entire communities in the name of the environment? Worse still without a plan for what will be achieved with that water nor real evidence that these billions of litres are required? Do we want to become a net importer of food? I think not. The many thousands of people who turned up at the MDBA community meetings don't agree and I believe the vast majority of Australians don't agree either.

This plan needs a complete rethink with the needs of the environment, our economy and communities put on an equal footing.



BATTLE LOOMING: The warning is clear.



HELP NEEDED: Hanwood children (from left) Teneeka and Brendan Andrezza and Annabelle, Jessica and Douglas Arthur appeal for a future for their family farms.

Tell your story

EVERYONE and anyone who has a stake in the future of the MIA is encouraged to send a submission to the newly-formed House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia.

The committee is conducting an inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in regional Australia.

I am a member of the committee and will do everything in my power to ensure the needs of regional communities come first.

The committee invites interested organisations and individuals to make written submissions to the inquiry by December 20, 2010.

Site inspections and public hearings will be held in affected communities.

I would urge people to write to the committee and tell those who need to know, straight from the heart, precisely what the guide's suggested water cutbacks will do to your community, your family and your future.

The Committee Secretariat can be contacted at:

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Standing Committee on Regional Australia
PO Box 6021, Parliament House
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SIGN OF THE TIMES: Food for thought at Murrumbidgee!

Independent Youth Allowance must be fairer

Thousands of students living in "inner regional" areas cannot get the assistance because of changes the Federal Labor Government made to the eligibility criteria.

Inner regional covers much of the Riverina electorate.

Thousands of students living in inner regional areas currently miss out on the assistance because of changes to the eligibility criteria, made by the Prime Minister when she was Education Minister.

She limited the eligibility criteria so that these students now have to work for 30 hours a week over 18 months out of a two-year period, to qualify.

Students living in the inner regional area no longer have the option to qualify for Independent Youth Allowance through the gap year criteria.

This Government does not understand that a 30-hour per week requirement is very hard to meet in the regions. Finding full-time employment in regional areas and small communities is often very different.

Much of the employment available in the regions is

seasonal which doesn't fit with the Government's requirements.

The Coalition introduced a Notice of Motion calling on the Government to reinstate the original, and fairer, eligibility criteria aimed at helping rural students access youth allowance.

It was endorsed by the House of Representatives on October 28.

The Nationals have been campaigning for a fairer policy for a long time and pushed hard to have this motion passed.

In fact, this was only the second time since 1962 a motion has made it through the Lower House without Government support.

A Private Senator's Bill has also been introduced, aimed at forcing legislative changes to make the Independent Youth Allowance fairer. We hope for a favourable outcome to give regional students certainty as soon as possible.

Around the Riverina...

THE Lions Club of Temora commemorated its golden jubilee with a celebration dinner on October 30.

Special guest, charter member and former president Brian Kahlefeldt, had the honour of cutting the anniversary cake.

The club has some remarkable achievements, notably raising \$400,000 for charity since 1960 and handling 6000 tonnes of recycled material over the past 25 years.



SPECIAL OCCASION: Celebrating the 50th anniversary of Temora Lions Club are (from left) Michael McCormack MP, Brian Kahlefeldt OAM, president Robert Cartwright, N Districts co-ordinator of membership, extension, retention and leadership Steve Garratt, District Governor Richard Leonard and Temora Mayor, Councillor Peter Speirs.

COLEAMBALLY and Darlington Point have established the 40th Country Education Fund of Australia and it has been kick-started with some generous donations from very giving communities.

CEFA is a national not-for-profit organisation with a mission to ensure as many young people as possible from rural Australia have the opportunity to pursue their chosen area of tertiary study or vocation.

The fund began at Boorowa in 1993.



LAUNCH: At the information evening for the start of the Coleambally and Darlington Point Country Education Fund are (back, from left) Shelby Brain, Laura Gardiner, CEFA projects and communications manager Annabel Gay, Sarah Hardy, Michael McCormack MP, local fund chairman Keith Burge, Ellie Brain, CEFA executive officer Jocellin Jansson, Jessica Noack; (front) Andrew Noack, Cameron McFadyen, Cory McMillan and Bradley Meyer.

SCHOOL children love an excursion to Canberra and the opportunity to visit Parliament House is always an eye-opener.

Temora West Public School pupils, accompanied by principal Bill Godman and Year 4 teacher Maree New, enjoyed a tour on October 18.

The kids were most impressed with the size of the flag flying over the building!



SCHOOL VISIT: Taking in the sights and sounds of Parliament House are: (back, from left) Mr Godman, Mrs New, Tom Bushell, James Winkley, Luke Tier, Luke Freer, Corey Solway, Bailey Roberts, Michael McCormack MP; (third row) Bailey Hart, Emma Gerhard, Adam Barton, Kiralee Oliver, Karly Turner, Ben Miller, Ben Fairacre, Jack Sellick; (second row) Logan Bushell, Bridie Simpkin, Olivia Durham, Scarlett Denzel, Claire Heinjus, Hannah Gillard, Josh Iverson, Eve Reichstein; (front) Adam Ferguson, Lleyton Neven, Travis Cornford, Kyle Breust, Jade Poole, Katie McKinnon, Samantha Jordon and Samuel Connolly.

THE enthusiasm of the six National Green Jobs Corps graduates was wonderful to see at the September 14 graduation ceremony conducted by The Personnel Group.

Green Corps was an initiative of the former Coalition Government and provides young people with the opportunity to volunteer their time and effort to conserve, preserve and restore Australia's natural environment and cultural heritage.

It is a pathway to employment and I was pleased to present the certificates to six of the seven who completed the 12-month Wagga Wagga Community Environment Enhancement Project course.



GRADUATION DAY: Teacher Dave McEwan (back, left) and Michael McCormack MP with Green Corps graduates (back, from left) Daniel Hopper, Shane Hill, Luke Bradberry and (front) Mitchell Freebody, James Morgan and Jonathon Bobon.



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