

Michael McCormack MP

Delivering for the Riverina & Central West



November 2020

Regional Australia to play vital role

THE Nationals have stood with regional Australians throughout their most challenging times, including droughts and bushfires, and we will continue to stand with them as we build towards a COVID recovery.

The regions have always supported the growth of our nation and a thriving regional Australia is at the heart of the strong economy we are building.

The Riverina and Central West will play a vital role in building the road to our national economic recovery.

The recent Federal Budget invests heavily in regional Australia.

I am optimistic about regional Australia. Our regions are strong. Country people are tough. The regions have a great future.

The Federal Government has a plan which will create jobs, generate exports and ensure regional Australia continues to be the best place in which to live, work and raise a family – where people continue to experience what it means to be part of a connected and caring community.

More Australians are seeing regional Australia with new eyes, with tree-changers looking afresh at our regions.

People are realising the growing attraction of a quality of life second to none – less traffic, a home with big backyards, with reliable, well-paying jobs and affordable living.

If COVID-19 has proven anything – it is that you can work remotely and anywhere.



REGIONAL PLAN: *I delivered the inaugural annual Ministerial Statement on Rural and Regional Budget Outcomes during Budget week.*

We know increasing numbers of Australians are choosing to decentralise, to regionalise.

We want more businesses and public service agencies to take full advantage of the opportunities we now have by encouraging their employees to work from a regional or remote area.

I've lived my life in the regions ... worked in and raised a family in the Riverina.

Our regions are about people.

People want to be connected – through safe, accessible transport options and broadband and mobile technology.

People want their industries and businesses to be valued, viable and supported.

People want their regions to be friendly, liveable and welcoming places for hard-working people of any background.

People want opportunities for training, education and employment – for themselves, for their employees and their children.

Whether you are a veteran or serving member of our defence forces, a police officer, a nurse, a manufacturer, a tradesperson or whichever vocation you choose – regional Australia has something to offer.

I say of our regions and towns – they are big enough for a great cup of coffee, small enough to care.

Our Budget announcements – across infrastructure and transport, digital connectivity, water security, regional partnerships with states and supporting local jobs and local leaders – are designed to make every part of our country better.

Our regions have the drive, let's make them thrive.

Michael McCormack

**Michael McCormack MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport
and Regional Development
Leader of The Nationals
Federal Member for Riverina**

WHAT THE BUDGET MEANS FOR THE RIVERINA AND CENTRAL WEST: *Inside*



Eunony Bridge a win for regional freight



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: *The newly upgraded Eunony Bridge near Wagga Wagga will play an important role in the transport of freight to and from the future Riverina Intermodal and Freight Logistics Hub and its connection to the nation-building Melbourne-to-Brisbane Inland Rail.*

THE opening of the \$10.6 million Eunony Bridge near Wagga Wagga will boost freight movement and provide better access between the Sturt and Olympic highways.

The upgraded bridge is a key piece of infrastructure for the Wagga Wagga High Productivity Freight Route which is designed to take trucks off local Wagga Wagga streets with the new route created to cater for all trucks right through to road trains.

The new route can save up to 36 minutes or 21 kilometres for heavy vehicles on a round trip.

It will play such an important role in transporting freight to and from the Bomen Business Park, where the transformational

Inland Rail and the future Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics Hub will prove to be a game-changer for industry in the Wagga Wagga region.

I have worked with the local community and industry leaders over many years and am delighted to see this vital upgrade delivered. It will help reduce heavy vehicle traffic travelling through Wagga Wagga and improve safety for all road users.

We are investing in our post-pandemic future by delivering lasting infrastructure which will kick-start our economic recovery and benefit Australians for years to come.

The Federal Government contributed \$4.9 million towards the project through the Bridges Renewal Program.

STAGE 1 LEVEL PROTECTION COMPLETE

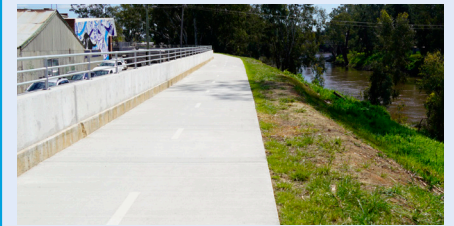
WAGGA Wagga's newly completed Main City Levee Bank will protect the city against a one-in-100-year flood event.

The levee, which includes two spillways for extreme flooding events, is an important investment in Wagga Wagga's safety and future prosperity.

Strengthening the levee system will help safeguard the central business district, many of the city's critical assets and thousands of homes.

This is a great local example of how the Australian Government's \$110 billion investment in nationwide infrastructure is supporting jobs at a time when it is needed most.

The Federal Government was asked to invest \$10 million towards the \$23 million project to upgrade the entire levee system, including the future upgrade of the North Wagga Wagga section of the levee bank.



FLOOD PROTECTION: *The upgraded Main City Levee at Wagga Wagga will ensure thousands of the city's residents and businesses are better protected from future flood events.*

DEFENCE KEY TO REGION'S PROSPERITY

I AM proud to be a part of a Government which has announced a \$1 billion investment package to boost Australia's defence industry and support thousands of jobs across the country.

The package is directed towards nationwide projects and jobs across Australia.

As I announced in July 2020 with the Minister for Defence, Wagga Wagga Defence sites will benefit from the Government's \$10 billion investment over the next decade into New South Wales Defence facilities.

The Government's redevelopment of Blamey Barracks – Kapooka and RAAF

Base Wagga will ensure Wagga Wagga's continued strategic importance to the defence of Australia.

As the Assistant Minister for Defence at the time, I was pleased to help deliver \$960 million over the next two decades for the Army Recruit Training Centre at Kapooka and the Royal Australian Air Force Wagga Base at Forest Hill in the 2016 White Paper. This acceleration in funding will build on this significant investment in our region.

Further detail will be announced as the projects develop and will include information to help local small businesses win work through the Government's Local Industry Capability Plan initiative.

Support measures

Increasing the employment of ADF Reservists who have lost their civilian income, with an allocation of up to an extra 210,000 days, and the targeted recruitment of an additional 500 ADF Reservists

Increasing employment opportunities for current and former ADF personnel and their families

A \$300 million national estate works program which will focus on regional areas (including bushfire affected regions), including Wagga Wagga RAAF Base and Blamey Barracks at Kapooka

TAX RELIEF FOR WORKERS

THE Liberals and Nationals in Government believe Australians should keep more of the money they earn. After all, it is your money.

We are delivering significant tax relief as part of our Economic Recovery Plan for Australia to create jobs, rebuild our economy and secure Australia's future.

Bringing forward Stage two of our Personal Income Tax Plan will see more than 11 million taxpayers get a tax cut backdated to 1 July 2020.

This means around 64,100 taxpayers in the Riverina and Central West will benefit from tax relief of up to \$2,745 this year as a result of the tax relief measures which have already passed Parliament.

Personal income tax cuts announced in the past two budgets helped put more money into the pockets of hard-working Australians and in the process strengthen our economy to respond to the impact of COVID-19.

As part of the 2020-21 Budget we will bring forward stage two of our Personal Income Tax Plan by two years.

The Government will also provide additional targeted support to low- and middle-income Australians. In 2020-21, low- and middle-income earners will receive a one-off additional benefit of up to \$1,080 from the low- and middle-income tax offset (LMITO). This rewards hard work.

From 1 July 2020

The low-income tax offset will increase from **\$445 to \$700**

The top threshold of the 19 per cent tax bracket will increase from **\$37,000 to \$45,000**

The top threshold of the 32.5 per cent tax bracket will increase from **\$90,000 to \$120,000**

These measures will help local businesses and create **50,000 new jobs**

SUPPORTING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

THE Federal Government is supporting our manufacturing industries with \$1.5 billion in new funding in the Budget for our Modern Manufacturing Strategy.

This will grow our manufacturing base in areas such as resources, technology and critical minerals processing, food and beverage manufacturing and defence industry – opening up new opportunities for regional Australia.

The 2020 Budget includes a commitment of \$62.8 million for the Local Jobs Program in 25 regions across Australia.

The program focuses on reskilling, upskilling and providing employment pathways to help people back into the workforce as the economy recovers.



GREAT START: With Zetifi Chief Executive Officer Dan Winson. Zetifi received \$644,370 from the Federal Government's Accelerating Commercialisation Entrepreneurs' Programme to support its development of technology to provide better connectivity for people in rural and remote areas.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE

- ✓ Around **64,100** Riverina taxpayers will benefit from tax relief of up to **\$2,745** this year as a result of the Federal Government's tax relief measures which have already passed Parliament
- ✓ To support new investment and increase business cash flow, the Government is providing a temporary tax incentive which will allow around **19,200** Riverina businesses to write off the full value of any eligible asset they purchase. This will build on the Government's extension to the successful Instant Asset Write Off measure announced earlier in the year
- ✓ The Government's JobKeeper payment has supported **6,100** Riverina businesses, supporting them through the pandemic and keeping them connected to their employees
- ✓ The Cashflow boost has helped around **6,100** small and medium businesses providing payments to help businesses in the Riverina to stay afloat
- ✓ Around **8,182** individuals in the Riverina have received the Coronavirus Supplement, which was added to JobSeeker to provide additional support through this crisis
- ✓ Around **20,326** age pensioners in the Riverina received support payments of **\$750** in April and July and will receive a further **\$250** payment in December and a further **\$250** from March next year
- ✓ Around **2,258** carers in the Riverina received support payments of **\$750** in April and July and will receive a further **\$250** payment in December and a further **\$250** from March next year

FOCUS ON HEALTHY OUTCOMES

THE Riverina and Central West will benefit from improved access to health services thanks to the Federal Government's \$1.2 billion investment to boost regional healthcare in the 2020-21 Federal Budget.

This will be delivered through training more health professionals in country areas, more support for regional hospitals and increasing mental health support in rural areas.

The new models of primary care being funded through the 2020-21 Budget will use health services and professionals across similar communities and test how novel approaches, including governance and program management, can better deliver health services to small rural

communities. This investment builds on the rollout of the Murrumbidgee Model for Rural Generalist trainees announced in May 2020.

The Budget delivers record funding for health of \$93.8 billion in 2020-21; an increase of almost 43% since 2014-15.

The Budget also includes funding for new life-saving medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme – to treat leukaemia, melanoma and Parkinson's disease and to help women with ovarian cancer.

Importantly, \$5.7 billion is being provided to support mental health, including funding for critical frontline services and suicide prevention.

More support for seniors

TO support Age Pensioners, the Government provided \$750 payments in April and July.

Age Pensioners will now receive an additional \$250 payment in December and another \$250 payment in March 2021.

To support senior Australians who want to keep living at home, 23,000 more home care packages will be provided.

This brings the total to more than 180,000 places, three times the number of home care packages than when this Government was elected in 2013.

AVIATION VITAL TO REGIONS

DOMESTIC aviation is vital to the health of regional communities.

Extensions to Domestic Aviation Network Support and the Regional Airline Network Support have assisted the operation of more than 6,700 return services to more than 120 locations across Australia.

Some rural and remote communities would have had no access to essential air services without this support. This includes the carriage of face masks, personal protective, respiratory equipment and essential healthcare workers.



PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT



RECYCLING FOCUS: *Visiting the Kurrajong Recycling facility in Wagga Wagga with Kurrajong Recycling Manager Craig Salan and Environment Minister Sussan Ley.*

Increasing home ownership

AN additional 10,000 first home buyers will be able to purchase a new home sooner under our First Home Loan Deposit Scheme.

This builds on the 20,000 first home buyers we are helping to purchase a home this year with a deposit as low as 5 per cent under this Scheme.

An additional \$1 billion of low-cost finance will support construction of affordable housing, taking total concessional finance available to community housing providers to \$3 billion.

TO help our wildlife recover from bushfires and protect and enhance our natural environment, the Federal Government has committed \$1.8 billion in funding.

We are also investing \$250 million to modernise our recycling infrastructure, stop more than 600,000 tonnes of waste ending up in landfill and create a further 10,000 jobs.

Locally, a project to help native wildlife recover from the devastating impact of the recent summer bushfires has been given the green light from the Federal Government.

The large-scale freshwater project will assess the effects of the recent bushfires on freshwater biodiversity across south-eastern Australia, including in the Murrumbidgee River and Lachlan River systems.

The people of the Riverina have been deeply affected by the bushfires and seeing the environment recover around them along with the return of native animals is an important part of the recovery process.

We know the recovery will be a long one, but the Federal Government is committed to working with the local community to ensure our region gets through this in the best possible way.

INSTANT ASSET WRITE-OFF GAME CHANGER

BUSINESSES small and large have taken advantage of the historic Instant Asset Write-Off provisions boosted in the face of COVID. Now, the Liberals and Nationals have delivered the largest set of investment incentives ever provided by any Australian Government.

Some 99 per cent of businesses can write off the full value of any eligible asset they purchase for their business. This will be available to businesses with a turnover up to \$5 billion, until 30 June 2022.

This will mean a family-owned trucking company can upgrade or buy a whole new

fleet of trucks and write it off in the year of investment. A farmer can purchase that expensive harvester and write it off in the year it was purchased.

Small businesses will buy, sell, deliver, install and service these purchases.

This will unlock investment, expand the productive capacity of the nation and create tens of thousands of jobs.

To complement this full expensing, the Government will also temporarily allow companies with a turnover of up to \$5 billion to offset tax losses against previous profits on which tax has been paid.

This will provide a targeted cash flow boost which businesses desperately need.

The Government is also providing \$105 million in tax relief to expand access to a range of small business tax concessions by lifting the aggregated annual turnover threshold for these concessions.

Businesses with an aggregated annual turnover between \$10 million and \$50 million will be able to access up to 10 small business tax concessions.

The expanded concessions will apply in three phases, with the first phase starting from 1 July 2020.

REGIONS BUILDING ROAD TO RECOVERY



LOCAL PROCUREMENT: With Cootamundra-Gundagai Councillors (from left) Penny Nicholson, Mayor Abb McAlister and General Manager Phil McMurray on Gundagai's Sheridan Street which will receive a face-lift thanks to the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program. Cootamundra's Parker Street (bottom right) will also be upgraded under this program.

THE key to vibrant communities, reducing the costs of getting produce to markets and creating stronger job-creating industries in our regions is infrastructure.

The Federal Government is further accelerating its already record-setting work to deliver the right infrastructure in the right places, right now.

A record \$100 billion 10-year plan now becomes \$110 billion from this Budget, delivering a vast range of new projects. Of this, around \$36 billion directly builds regional infrastructure.

Australian Government-funded projects under construction are expected to support more than 100,000 direct and indirect jobs across Australia over the life of the projects.

This is a jobs and infrastructure and regional budget.

An important component of this is the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program which is injecting much-needed money into local economies throughout the Riverina and Central West.

Some \$27 million has been delivered to the 12 Local Government Areas in the Riverina electorate to help create more local jobs and support local small businesses.

Local councils understand the immediate needs in their communities which is why this money is so important. It can be used for projects including constructing and improving bridges, street lighting and heavy vehicle facilities such as rest areas or weigh stations.

Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program - Funding for each Council

Bland: \$3,240,030

Coolamon: \$1,401,520

Cootamundra-Gundagai: \$1,937,919

Cowra: \$1,860,726

Forbes: \$2,298,007

Hilltops: \$3,443,282

Junee: \$1,155,565

Lockhart: \$1,497,287

Parkes: \$2,619,373

Temora: \$1,542,404

Wagga Wagga: \$5,133,260

Weddin: \$1,153,866



GROWING OUR FOOD AND FIBRE PRODUCTION

OUR primary industries, including agriculture, have been hit hard in recent years by the impacts of floods, drought, bushfires and now COVID-19 restrictions.

The Government is committed to supporting our primary industries.

Agriculture is capable of great adaptation and innovation – which is why we are working to support the farm sector's goal to become a \$100 billion industry by 2030.

Beyond our commitments to water security and drought resilience which will contribute to this ambitious goal, we've also announced several new measures in this year's Budget including a significant \$328.4 million package to support agricultural exporters.

This will generate wider benefits for industry of up to \$1.2 billion over the next decade, with rural and regional Australia reaping the largest benefits.

We are investing \$17.4 million in relocation support and \$16.3 million in temporary Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY eligibility changes to incentivise people to take up seasonal farm work this summer. This means relocation allowances of up to \$6,000 for Australians and up to \$2,000 for eligible visa holders are available from 1 November 2020 to undertake seasonal work in agriculture.

Under the Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY new criteria, a person who earns \$15,000 through employment in the agricultural sector in regional Australia between 30

November 2020 and 31 December 2021 will be considered as "independent" for the purpose of Youth Allowance (student) or ABSTUDY. This will significantly reduce the time needed for a young person to gain "independent" status and claim Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY faster than under the existing criteria.

The Federal Government is also investing a further \$9 million in the Seasonal Worker Programme to ensure employers can meet critical seasonal labour needs.

We have already provided visa extensions to allow temporary visa holders already here to continue to work in agriculture and for agriculture workers to stay with one employer for a longer period.

MORE SUPPORT FOR OUR VETERANS

I KNOW the Riverina electorate has many veterans, particularly in Wagga Wagga which is the only inland regional city with all three arms of the Australian Defence Force, including the Home of the Soldier at Kapooka.

The 2020-21 Budget measures are aimed at ensuring veterans and their families continue to have access to the support they need by helping them find a job after service and supporting their physical and mental health needs.

The Government has provided \$101.7 million over four years to further bolster mental health support.

Some \$23.7 million will also be invested in increased transition and employment support for veterans re-entering civilian life.



HONOUR: Presenting Forbes veteran Harry Coggan with a medallion thanking him for his service to our nation.



TRIBUTE: With Captain Matthew Deahm at the commemorative service held in Wagga Wagga to mark the 103rd anniversary of the World War I mounted Charge of the Light Horse Brigade. The National Servicemen's Association (Wagga Wagga and District Incorporated) will receive \$150,000 towards a memorial to Australia's iconic Light Horse soldiers and their mounts through the Saluting Their Service program. Other grant recipients include \$51,360 to Temora Aviation Museum Incorporated to enable an interactive online self-guided reality tour of the museum; \$10,000 to Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council to assist with an upgrade of the Albert Park Memorial precinct; and \$8,700 to the Coolamon Sub-Branch of the RSL to restore two WWI captured German guns. The project also includes repositioning the guns at the Coolamon War Memorial.

Funding for veteran mental health includes:

\$94.3 million over four years to improve mental health outcomes and ensure high-quality care for our older veterans and their families and to better support their transition to civilian life by increasing fees paid to mental health, social work and community nursing providers;

\$2.4 million over four years to expand eligibility for the Co-ordinated Veterans' Care program, which provides GP-led team-based care to White Card holders with an accepted mental health condition; and

\$5 million over four years to expand the 24/7 Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling, especially in regional and remote areas.

I WAS pleased to announce as part of this Budget a commitment of \$200 million to Round Five of our Building Better Regions Fund.

BBRF delivers regional development and communities throughout the Riverina and Central West have benefited from this program.

Most recently, I was in Parkes to officially open its Central Business District revitalisation project which was partly funded through a \$4,234,992 Round 2 BBRF grant. That money is also contributing to the building of a multipurpose centre at Cooke Park.

Wagga Wagga's Botanic Gardens and Murrumbidgee Creek at Harden-Murrumburrah are some of the other worthy recipients of funding through Round 4 of this program. The Botanic Gardens has received \$4,288,879 of Federal funding towards renewal works at the precinct, including the construction of a new exhibition hall, museum refurbishment and an upgrade to public outdoor spaces. Some \$1,836,446 has been granted to Hilltops Council for it to beautify the Murrumbidgee Creek precinct as a key recreational corridor for the community.

These projects make a huge difference for the regions and there's so much more opportunity directly ahead.

In Round 5 of BBRF we will include a specific stream for tourism-related infrastructure, worth \$100 million. This recognises tourism has been hit hard during COVID-19.

This round will complement other actions the Government has taken to support regional tourism through the Relief and Recovery Fund as well as the \$50 million Regional Tourism Recovery initiative.



POPULAR TOURIST SPOT: With Wagga Wagga Deputy Mayor Dallas Tout after announcing the Botanic Gardens was to receive \$4,288,879 in Federal Funding for the Botanic Gardens Precinct Renewal project.

Federal funding in the Riverina and Central West includes:

RECIPIENT	PROJECT	FEDERAL FUNDING
Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 4		
Hilltops Council	Murrumbidgee Creek Beautification	\$1,836,446
Wagga Wagga City Council	Botanic Gardens Precinct Renewal	\$4,288,879
Community Investments Stream – Round 4		
Cowra Shire Council	Word: using performing arts to focus on improving rural mental health	\$20,000
Destination Riverina Murray	Destination Inspiration and Activation	\$44,765
Yalballinga Boori Day Care Centre	Solar infrastructure	\$20,000
Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 3		
Cowra Japanese Gardens and Cultural Centre	Upgrading roofs of the cultural centre and bonsai house	\$307,442
Forbes Shire Council	New commercial precinct over five locations (new gardens and green spaces, upgrading signs, new banners, line-marking bike stands, new seats)	\$867,241
Temora Shire Council	Upgrade Temora aerodrome runway and associated main apron and taxiways	\$5,353,151
Community Investments Stream – Round 3		
Bland Shire Council	Bland Shire Council Business Workshop Program	\$18,170
Matriark Theatre Inc	The Secret World: Cootamundra, a night festival hosted by young people	\$15,000
Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 2		
Cowra Shire Council	Upgrade Kendal Street footpath between Brisbane and Lachlan streets	\$829,619
Parkes Shire Council	Parkes main street revitalisation and Cooke Park multipurpose centre	\$4,234,992
Whiddon Group, Temora	Extension of the Whiddon Group's Temora Aged Care facility	\$3,685,009
Community Investments Stream – Round 2		
Destination Riverina Murray Ltd	Riverina Murray Tourism Accelerator Program	\$25,000
Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 1		
Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council	New sewage treatment works at Gundagai	\$3,500,000
House With No Steps – Forbes	Relocate Aussie Biscuits factory to a larger location	\$210,000
Weddin Shire Council	Grenfell Medical Centre	\$950,000
Community Investments Stream – Round 1		
Coolamon Shire Council	Launch pads and modular pumptrack	\$45,800
Eastern Riverina Arts	Community arts venues audit and database	\$19,350
Forbes Shire Council	Agriculture Strategic Plan	\$70,000
Wagga Wagga City Council	Fusion Festival sustainability study	\$18,400
Total BBRF funding (Rounds 1 to 4):		\$26,359,264

CONTINUED ASSISTANCE FOR BUSHFIRES

HARD on the heels of extreme drought conditions, we responded swiftly to the Black Summer of bushfires – including establishing the National Bushfire Recovery Agency which is delivering \$2 billion worth of support measures for primary producers, small businesses and communities.

Now, as part of our continued efforts to help rebuild these devastated communities, applications are now open for a \$250 million program to fund Bushfire Local Economic Recovery projects across New South Wales, including in Cootamundra-Gundagai and Wagga Wagga within the Riverina electorate.

Businesses and communities can now apply with grants co-funded by the Australian and NSW Governments.

Grants can be between \$20,000 and \$20 million and will be available to organisations such as councils, businesses, joint organisations, business chambers,



COMMUNITY EFFORT: *At the Kildare Bushfire Donation and Collection Centre with organiser Karen Murray in January. The whole community joined together to assist those affected by the devastating bushfires.*

charities, local Aboriginal Land Councils and state government agencies to deliver successful projects.

The open application round will close at 2pm on Friday 11 December 2020.

For more information, including guidelines, visit www.nsw.gov.au/blerfund

Additional to this open call for project proposals, shovel-ready projects are already being identified in bushfire-affected areas so they can be fast tracked to provide community and economic benefit as quickly as possible.

Overall, more than \$500 million in joint funding from the Australian and NSW Governments will be provided to support projects driving local economic, community and industry recovery in bushfire-affected communities.

To date, more than \$1.8 billion in Australian Government support has been provided to help bushfire-affected communities, including \$1.2 billion spent so far from the National Bushfire Recovery Fund.

Further details are available on the National Bushfire Recovery Agency website at www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/local-recovery-projects

BUILDING DAMS HIGH PRIORITY



STORAGE BOOST: *The height of the Wyangala Dam wall, near Cowra, will be raised from 85 metres to 95 metres.*

TO build on regional Australia's potential – I say: just add water!

The newly established National Water Grid Authority is now advised by an expert eight-member National Water Grid Advisory Body of eminent Australians, headed by global senior executive Chris Lynch, providing independent, expert advice on water infrastructure policies, projects and investments to benefit agricultural and primary industries Australia-wide.

Now we're more than doubling the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund to a total of \$3.5 billion. The Fund will become a 10-year rolling program of priority water infrastructure investments.

We've changed our commitment from loan

to grant funding for the Wyangala and Dungowan Dams in New South Wales – taking the Commonwealth's investment in those dams to \$567 million and matched by the State Government. This will add the equivalent of 1.2 Sydney Harbour's worth of water to inland NSW.

We are increasing the inland water storage at Wyangala Dam to go to security for towns in the Lachlan River Catchment, including Cowra, Forbes, Grenfell, Parkes, Temora, West Wyalong and Young, as well as flood mitigation.

The Australian Government will continue to work, as we must, with the States to deliver Australia's water infrastructure of the 21st Century.

Critical steps to ensure economic recovery and jobs

WE are continuing to support trade, tourism and investment in the Budget to get more Australians into jobs.

With one in 13 jobs reliant on tourism, the Government has provided billions of dollars in economic support including through JobKeeper and the cash flow boost which provided tax credits of up to \$100,000 to sustain small and medium sized businesses during the pandemic, as well as tourism-specific measures through our \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund.

Tourism Australia will receive \$231.6 million for 2020-21 to ramp up domestic marketing activities to encourage Australians to travel again and ensure they are well placed to aggressively execute new campaigns to again attract international visitors when overseas travel is back on the agenda.

The Budget also provides an additional \$51 million through our Regional Tourism Recovery initiative to assist tourism regions which are highly reliant on international travellers.

This builds on our \$50 million business events grants program to restart this important sector by encouraging businesses to attend events, conferences and trade exhibitions.

WE STILL HAVE YOUR BACKS

OUR response to drought has been comprehensive, committing to initiatives worth more than \$10 billion since 2018-19.

Just as we are doing with the pandemic, we have invested in practical actions helping farmers, regional businesses and communities through drought now and building resilience for the future.

Some aren't on the other side yet, which is why the Government extended the Farm Household Allowance in June, making it simpler and easier to access and support some 12,000 farm families.

Our \$5 billion Future Drought Fund is about preparing for the future. The first suite of programs under this Fund have already been announced.

The Drought Communities Programme has injected much-needed funding into local government coffers across the Riverina and Central West which is helping to keep locals in jobs and keeping many local businesses open.

We know our regional communities still need support long after the rains come and I want you to know that the Federal Government understands this and will be with you every step of the way.

The Budget will support regional Australia's economic recovery by providing:

\$2 billion in concessional loans to help farmers overcome the drought;

Funding to support regional tourism;

A further **\$200 million** round of the Building Better Regions Fund;

\$317 million for Australian exporters to continue to access global supply chains;

\$2 billion in new funding to build vital water infrastructure as part of our National Water Grid including dams, weirs and pipelines; and

11 of the 12 LGAs in the Riverina electorate have received at least **\$1 million** in funding through the Drought Communities Programme.

ENSURING BETTER EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

REGIONAL Australians want the same quality educational opportunities as anyone else.

The Government has announced a \$146.3 million Student Support package which will improve education outcomes for young Australians, particularly disadvantaged students and regional students.

This complements our broader higher education reforms and commitments, including \$400 million over four years to increase higher education access and attainment for regional Australians and support higher education providers in regional Australia to grow their local economies. We want to develop more local leaders in our communities.

Wagga Wagga Medical School gains momentum



FUTURE VISION: An artist's impression of the Wagga Wagga Medical School. Picture: UNSW

WAGGA Wagga's Rural Medical School, a part of the Federal Government's Murray-Darling Medical Schools network, has reached a significant milestone moment.

It is anticipated construction will start in 2021 with the project now at the development application stage.

With the expansion to a new three-storey Wagga Wagga Biomedical Centre, this will enable students to study the full UNSW

Bachelor of Medical Studies/Doctor of Medicine degree in Wagga Wagga. Currently, only years three to six of the degree are taught in the region.

I am proud to be part of a Government which has put regional and rural healthcare at the top of its priority list.

A rural medical school for Wagga Wagga has been one of my primary goals since being elected to Parliament.

We know that if students train in the

regions they are more likely to practise in those local communities.

The inaugural group of first-year students will start their studies in Wagga Wagga in 2021 from Harvey House at the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, where years three to six currently study.

There will be a smaller cohort initially of about 10 students. The cohorts will increase in size over the following five years.

The facility is expected to be open by 2022.

Getting younger Australians back in to work

THE Budget includes several measures designed to assist job seekers gain employment and assist small and family businesses recover from the challenges presented by COVID-19.

The key measures for the employment, skills and small business portfolio include:

JobMaker Hiring Credit

The \$4 billion JobMaker Hiring Credit will be payable for up to 12 months for each new job and is available to employers who hire eligible employees aged 16-35.

The Hiring Credit will be paid quarterly in arrears at the rate of \$200 per week for those aged between 16-29 and \$100 per week for those aged between 30-35. Eligible employees are required to work a minimum of 20 hours per week.

To be eligible, employers will need to demonstrate an increase in overall employee headcount and payroll for each additional new position created.

Supporting new apprenticeships

We are providing funding for 100,000 new apprenticeships in the Budget to support

Extra support for job seekers:

\$49.5 million to fund an additional 14,485 places in the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program to ensure new job seekers who lack basic language, literacy and numeracy skills can access the training and support they need;

\$24.7 million to streamline the successful ParentsNext program to better support parents – mainly women – to plan and prepare for a return to employment before their youngest child starts school; and

\$3.9 million to extend the Time to Work Employment Service by a further 12 months to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners transition into work upon release.

the next generation of our skilled workers and to help job seekers get back into work.

The Government will introduce a new 50 per cent wage subsidy for all businesses that take on new apprentices over the period 5 October 2020 to 30 September 2021. The \$1.2 billion Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidy will support our next generation of skilled workers through 100,000 new apprentices.

The subsidy will be capped at \$7,000 per quarter for gross wages for new apprentices and trainees. This measure is in addition to financial support already

provided under the Government's \$2.8 billion Supporting Apprentices and Trainees package for existing apprentices and trainees, which is now expected to support 90,000 employers to keep 180,000 apprentices and trainees in employment and training.

The measures outlined in the Budget, along with those already implemented, demonstrate the Government is committed to creating jobs for more Australians and helping small and family businesses successfully recover and adapt as part of our economic recovery plan for Australia.

SAVING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

OUR COVID-19 response has been about saving lives and livelihoods.

Healthcare is a major concern for regional Australians.

We have allocated more funding to the states and territories to ensure the availability of services in small rural and regional hospitals.

We have established 82 General Practitioner-led Respiratory Clinics in rural and remote areas to provide testing and assessments, including in Cowra, Young and Wagga Wagga.

The swift expansion of Telehealth is providing new options for regional patients with more than eight million services provided and we've boosted testing in rural and remote Indigenous communities.

The Budget invests a further \$50.3 million through the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program for infrastructure to deliver new training across health disciplines from nursing to allied health, underpinning services to aged care, disability, rehabilitation, childcare and Indigenous health.

This will guarantee rural and regional communities will continue to benefit



COVID SAFE: Discussing the GP-led COVID-19 Respiratory clinic in Young with Boorowa Street Practice Principal GP Dr Asitha Wickramaratne.

from a skilled health workforce and have improved access to health services and facilities, including essential mental health and suicide prevention measures long after the pandemic has passed.

Our economic response to the pandemic has also been strong.

JobKeeper is a \$101 billion lifeline supporting around 3.5 million workers in more than 900,000 businesses – right across Australia.

We have backed small businesses with \$32 billion in cashflow boosts to around 800,000 businesses.

Many of these businesses faced and beat

drought – and I know regional Australians have the resilience to overcome the challenges of COVID.

From the outset of the COVID-19 crisis and as a result of the restrictions we had to put in place to protect our population, we saw the immediate need for targeted assistance for our regions.

This is why we quickly established the \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund to provide timely support when and where it was most critically needed.

Through this fund, we have provided significant assistance to a wide range of industries.

BYPASS BRING-FORWARD BOON FOR PARKES

AS the Member for Riverina, I know the Parkes Bypass has been talked about for a long time as a vital piece of infrastructure for the region, so I am proud to be part of a Government which has committed to making it a reality so soon for the community.

Infrastructure Australia announced recently it was adding the bypass to its priority list – backing the Government’s commitment and highlighting why it is vitally important we deliver the project.

In November last year, the Federal Government brought forward \$200 million of the \$400 million committed for the Newell Highway Upgrades package to further support construction of the Parkes Bypass.

I was on site just north of Parkes in September where early works have already begun. Full construction is expected to start in late 2021.

The Parkes Bypass is great news for locals, for businesses and for the future of the region, with many communities, farmers and businesses across the Central West, Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and western NSW relying on the highway to get their products to shelves, remain connected to jobs and vital services, such as health, and



GETTING ON WITH THE JOB: Early works have already started for the Parkes bypass on Nock Road, just north of the town.

to underpin their economies.

This critical bypass will allow more than 1,200 trucks per day to avoid the Parkes town centre where intersections, railway crossings and several 90-degree bends make the route difficult for heavy vehicles to safely navigate, hinders productivity and

increases travel times. It will make the town safer for both locals and visitors to enjoy.

The bypass will also ensure other commuters using the highway can get to their destination sooner and safer, spending more time at home and with the family, rather than stick in traffic.

Strengthening regional communication

OUR efforts to improve communications have opened regional communities and businesses like never before.

With more Australians than ever working, learning and socialising on the internet, the Government is also investing additional resources in the eSafety Commissioner to better protect and support Australians online.

We are investing in upgrades and improvements to communications with a new \$37.1 million package for Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) and an additional \$30.3 million for the Regional Connectivity Program.

As part of the STAND program, \$8.3 million will go towards boosting the resilience of communications networks in bushfire-prone areas of regional Australia. This means telecommunications companies will be able to purchase temporary, portable facilities which will be able to be rapidly deployed to communities and evacuation centres.

We’re fixing mobile phone black spots with more than 880 base stations already activated, and we’re investing \$4.5 billion in

new upgrades to the National Broadband Network.

The Federal Government will be calling for applications under round 5A of the Mobile Black Spot Program, which will focus on delivering improved mobile coverage in disaster-prone areas.

Upgrading the National Broadband Network (NBN)

The Government has approved NBN Co’s corporate plan, under which NBN Co will invest \$4.5 billion to bring ultra-fast broadband to millions of families and businesses. The investment will be financed through NBN Co borrowing in the private sector debt markets.

The network investment plan includes \$3.5 billion to make NBN Co’s highest wholesale speed tiers available, on demand, to up to 75 per cent of homes and businesses on the fixed-line network by 2023. Additionally, NBN Co will invest \$700 million to enable nine in 10 businesses to order high-speed fibre broadband at no upfront cost as NBN Co rolls out 240 Business Fibre Zones across Australia, 85 of which will be located in the regions, including at Wagga Wagga.



DELIVERING: The Nationals have helped to deliver more than 880 base stations across the country through the Mobile Black Spot Program, including this one at Wantabadgery.

Milestone moment for Inland Rail



MOMENTOUS: Putting the final pin in place at Peak Hill to mark the completion of the Parkes to Narromine section of the Inland Rail.
INSET: The gold commemorative pin.

OF course, one of the Federal Government's biggest infrastructure projects is Inland Rail, which is delivering jobs and investment in regional Australia when we need it most.

This Melbourne to Brisbane 1,700 kilometre corridor of commerce – using Australian steel – will become the new artery for trade and commerce along our Eastern Seaboard.



Just recently I was at Peak Hill to officially mark the completion of the first section of this transformational project – the Parkes to Narromine section.

We have invested \$25 million in ballast and capping (800,000 tonnes) from Parkes-based companies Calvani Crushing and Ausrock Quarries – a great example of how local procurement is at the heart of Inland Rail.

Parkes to Narromine fast facts

Upgrades to **98 kilometres** of existing corridor and **5.3 kilometres** of new rail

1,862 people worked on the project, **762** of these are local residents from the Parkes area

302 Indigenous people worked on the project, **197** of whom are local Indigenous workers

99 local businesses supplied to the P2N project, nine of which are Indigenous businesses

\$109.7 million total spend with local businesses, **\$14.1 million** of which has been spent with Indigenous businesses

\$20 million in steel rail (**14,000** tonnes supplied by Liberty OneSteel Whyalla, South Australia)

\$20 million awarded to Rocla, Mittagong, for **200,000** concrete sleepers

\$13 million worth of culverts weighing **26,625** tonnes from Holcim, Tamworth

365,000 rail clips from Pandrol, Blacktown

REMOVING CREDIT BARRIERS

THE Federal Government is simplifying access to credit for consumers and small businesses to reduce the cost and time it takes to access credit.

This means consumers can continue to spend and businesses can invest and create local jobs.

The Government will simplify the system by moving away from a “one-size-fits-all” approach while at the same time strengthening consumer protections for those in need.

We know the road back will be a challenging one, but the Liberals and Nationals' Government will be there to assist where it can for every step of our nation's journey – we are all in this together and we will get through it together.

Key elements include:

Removing responsible lending obligations from the National Consumer Credit Protection Act 2009, with the exception of small amount credit contracts (SACCs) and consumer leases where heightened obligations will be introduced.

Ensuring that authorised deposit-taking institutions (ADIs) will continue to comply with the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority's lending standards requiring sound credit assessment and approval criteria.

Adopting key elements of APRA's ADI lending standards and applying them to non-ADIs.

Protecting consumers from the predatory practices of debt management firms by requiring them to hold an Australian Credit Licence when they are paid to represent consumers in disputes with financial institutions.

Allowing lenders to rely on the information provided by borrowers, replacing the current practice of “lender beware” with a “borrower responsibility” principle.

Removing the ambiguity regarding the application of consumer lending laws to small business lending.

The Government will consult publicly with stakeholders before finalising any legislation required to implement the reforms.

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