

Michael McCORMACK MP

Delivering for the Riverina & Central West



Federal Budget newsletter – June 2023

Regions feel brunt of Labor Budget

The recent Federal Budget was a missed opportunity for families and businesses across the Riverina and Central West.

At a time when cost-of-living pressures are mounting, the Budget did little to provide relief for those struggling to make ends meet.

Federal Labor came to Government with Anthony Albanese having promised 97 times prior to the 21 May 2022 election there would be a \$275 cut in power bills. Those reductions have not occurred.

In fact, quite the opposite.

The increase to the Default Market Offer which takes effect from 1 July 2023 ensures almost a million households across New South Wales will be worse off by \$594 a year.

More than 150,000 small businesses will see their electricity bills go up by \$1,310 per year.

Labor blames the increase on events outside of its control, including the war in Ukraine – but continued to make the promise – many times after the 24 February 2022 Russian invasion.

The awful reality is that in 12 months of Labor in office ...

- Interest rates have risen 11 times, from 0.35 per cent to 4.10 per cent sending the average home mortgage repayments skyrocketing.
- Prior to the June rate rise, the interest payable on the average mortgage increased by \$22,273 a year, or \$1,856

✓ Business write-offs, which were unlimited, now capped at \$20,000 but still available

✓ Bulk-billing relief for low-income families

✓ Expansion of Parenting Payment (Single) so it will now be available to single parents until their youngest child turns 14, rather than eight years of age

✗ Infrastructure freeze on programs and projects

✗ Regional funding cut

✗ Dam investment shelved or paused

✗ Truckie tax imposed

✗ Groceries to cost more



a month. That's a cruel blow to people trying to pay off their home and juggling all the other bills.

- Unemployment has gone up by 0.2 per cent – at a time when the Regional Australia Institute tells us there are 88,800 vacancies in country areas.
- Inflation continues to increase, making it especially tough for middle Australia with affording everyday items including fuel and groceries.
- Regional funding has been slashed. So many programs (Building Better Regions Fund, Drought Communities Programme, Local Roads and Community Infrastructure and Stronger Communities to name just a few) have been abolished or substantially altered and the people who will suffer as a result

are those who live in the regions.

- Infrastructure has been placed on death row. There has been a ministerial direction to pause every project, large and small, whilst a 90-day review is conducted on all builds – except those Labor promised in the seats it won at the election! Yet in Treasurer Jim Chalmers's Budget speech he did not mention infrastructure – not once! It was the first time in a quarter of a century a Treasurer has failed to utter the word infrastructure in the Budget address.

Michael McCormack

**Michael McCormack MP
Federal Member for Riverina**

THE NATIONALS for Regional Australia

Committed to continue fighting for water infrastructure funding

Labor has abandoned water security projects worth \$872.5 million, including kicking the funding for the raising of the Wyangala Dam wall into the Never-Never.

We now have a Federal Government not interested in water infrastructure. It has shelved Dungowan Dam, it has deferred the Wyangala Dam wall-raising project and it will never see the light of day under a Labor Government.

Water infrastructure needs the will of both the Federal and State Governments. The New South Wales Government Water Minister Rose Jackson has stated the State Government is not interested in raising Wyangala Dam wall, it is just going to build better Forbes escape routes. This is insulting to those whose homes, farms and businesses have

been flooded – several times in some instances in recent years – downstream of the Wyangala Dam.

Raising the Wyangala Dam wall by 10 metres would add an additional 650 gigalitres of water storage – the equivalent of Sydney Harbour plus 60,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools – for agriculture boosting and flood proofing.

Central West residents know all too well the Newell Highway closes when there is a significant Lachlan River flooding event, which grinds local communities and economies to a halt and wreaks havoc on our road transport industry which uses this highway – the longest highway in New South Wales – as a major connection to Victoria and Queensland.

WATER SECURITY: Raising the Wyangala Dam wall by 10 metres would help protect communities downstream from flooding events as well as provide additional water for agriculture.



Wagga Wagga deserves better Veteran services

The Wagga Wagga Veteran community is demanding a Veterans' Well-Being Centre, which the Coalition promised \$5 million towards before the May 2022 election.

This much-needed funding would be so important because we owe it to our Veterans to be able to provide the funding that is going to give them the future they deserve.

In light of evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran

Suicide, it beggars belief that Labor would not make sure that \$5 million was delivered to our city which has such strong military ties.

I have been lobbying Minister for Defence Richard Marles and Minister for Veterans' Affairs Matt Keogh and will continue to advocate for this important funding for Veterans.

It was a commitment the Coalition made, not on a partisan level, not on a party level. It was made for the Veterans.

Charles Sturt AgriPark – worthy investment for the regions

The former Coalition Government committed \$20 million to grow the AgriPark precinct at the Charles Sturt University's Wagga Wagga campus to build research and development infrastructure, collaboration and innovation spaces and shared accommodation facilities.

The world-class AgriPark precinct working with the private sector is delivering cutting edge research which is helping drive growth and improved practices in agriculture.

I will continue advocating to the Government so it realises the importance of this investment which would benefit rural and regional Australia for generations to come.

Gateway to region needs an upgrade

The former Coalition Government committed more than \$20 million to go towards an upgrade of the Wagga Wagga Airport terminal.

We need a new airport terminal. I have been working with Wagga Wagga City Council on the airport precinct.

When visitors first come to town, many of them come through the airport. I appreciate the terminal needs to be brought into the 21st Century which is why I fought to ensure funding was committed by the former Government. Unfortunately, it was not matched by the now Labor Government.

I will continue to fight to ensure this funding is put back on the table.



FLIGHT FIGHT: Announcing a \$20 million-plus commitment from the Coalition for the Wagga Wagga Airport upgrade.

\$21-million doctor training school construction under way

The \$21-million Wagga Wagga Medical School is one step closer to a reality with the site being fenced off and construction works under way.

The Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network, which I established when I became Deputy Prime Minister, also comprises schools in Dubbo and Orange in New South Wales, and Bendigo, Mildura and Shepparton in Victoria.

It is hoped the facility will be up and running by the second half of 2024.



MILESTONE: With University of New South Wales Vice-Chancellor and President Attila Brungs at the sod-turn event for the Wagga Wagga Medical School.



TAKING SHAPE: Construction has started at the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital precinct for the Wagga Wagga Biomedical Centre. (Right) An artist's impression of the medical school.

Volunteer Grant Program recipients in the Riverina Electorate

Organisation	Funding amount	Purpose
Ardlethan CanAssist	\$1,400	Purchase gazebos and trestle tables
Barmedman Tennis Association	\$5,000	Purchase defibrillator, gardening equipment and fuel vouchers for volunteers
Coolamon Amateur Swimming Club	\$1,700	Training for five volunteer coaches
Cootamundra Lions Club	\$2,500	Purchase new equipment and update existing equipment for catering van
Forbes Family History Group	\$3,784	Purchase two computers
Gasworks Motorsport, Illabo	\$4,989	Purchase new colour laser printer, beverage coolers, outdoor gas heaters, 244-piece tool chest kit and assorted power tools and gardening equipment
Grenfell Girl Guides	\$4,785	Attendance at 2023 Jamboree, purchase camping equipment
Gundagai Historical Society	\$1,508	Purchase repair and maintenance equipment. Purchase a sit/stand desk for volunteers to use for sorting, labelling and cleaning donated artefacts
Junee RSL Sub-Branch	\$5,000	Purchase heavy duty marquee with walls and accessories to protect audio-visual equipment during commemorative services
Marrar Public School P&C Association	\$1,000	Purchase pop up marquee to be used by P & C when fund-raising
Muttama Creek Landcare Group	\$2,930	Purchase tree planning equipment
Parkes Bowling and Sports Club	\$5,000	Purchase new electric greens lawn mower
The Herd of Hope, Parkes Hospital	\$5,000	Help meet transport costs of volunteers with a disability, fuel costs of volunteers, background screening checks of volunteers
Urangeline Peace Hall	\$4,972	Upgrade electrics in the hall and purchase flood lighting, purchase mobile phones for volunteers
Wagga Wagga Community Media (2AAAFM)	\$5,000	Construction of weather shade over disabled car parking
West Wyalong Hospital Auxiliary	\$1,786	Purchase electronic tablet, contactless chip reader and laptop to provide for EFTPOS at fund-raising events, purchase portable record-keeping equipment

Volunteers are what makes our regional, rural and remote communities the wonderful places they are to live, work and raise a family.

I was delighted to deliver the wonderful news to the successful Volunteer Grants Program recipients in the Riverina electorate during National Volunteer Week recently.

Our volunteers do a power of remarkable

work to improve our local communities and I thank every one of them for their tireless efforts.

The Volunteer Grants Program provides community organisations with grants of between \$1,000 and \$5,000, which can be used to buy equipment for use by volunteers, reimburse volunteer fuel costs, meet training costs, transport volunteers with a disability or support promotional activities

on volunteering events.

These grants seem small but they can make such a tangible difference for local volunteer organisations to allow them to continue the invaluable work they do throughout the Riverina and Central West.

The Riverina Electorate grants were nominated following advice from a community consultative committee.

What the Federal Budget means for the Riverina and Central West

The Federal Budget handed down by Labor has forgotten regional, rural and remote Australians, ripping out billions of dollars in funding, raising taxes and failing to ease everyday pressures for families outside capital cities.

Labor stripped more than \$20 billion from the regions in the previous October Budget.

This time, Labor has put a razor gang to the \$120 billion infrastructure pipeline, under the guise of an “infrastructure review”, putting all regional programs in doubt.

The Budget will make life harder for the more than 8.8 million Australians who live in regional, rural and remote communities – that’s around 30 per cent of the population.

Here’s a brief overview of what the Budget means to residents in the Riverina and Central West.

Food tax for families

- The Labor Government’s Budget will introduce a new food tax on Australian families, right in the middle of a tough cost-of-living crisis.

- The new tax, a biosecurity levy on farmers, will be set at a rate equivalent of 10 per cent of the 2020-21 industry-led levies, which is estimated to increase receipts by **\$153 million** over three years from 2024-25.

- The new tax on farmers to pay for the biosecurity risk of international importers is senseless and will be passed on to consumers – it means even higher grocery bills for all Australians.

- It is unfathomable the Labor Government would ask farmers to pay for the biosecurity costs of importers from other countries, devaluing their own produce.

- The Nationals have given a commitment to abolish the fresh food tax and instead implement the container levy on importers that the former Coalition Government had planned to introduce at the end of last year, had it won the election.

Consumer prices also going up

- This means costs for many types of business, which are energy intensive, will continue to go up – not by 3 and 4 per cent each year – but by **very high double-digit figures**.

- They just can’t absorb that cost into their business.

- It has to be passed on to consumers and that’s why your grocery prices are going up and up under Labor.

Truckie tax is a tax on families

- This year’s Budget also includes a **19 per cent increase** over three years in road user charges on heavy vehicles (trucks and buses), for a **\$1.6 billion tax hike**.

- As a result, farmers and consumers will have to pay more because small trucking companies cannot absorb these extra costs.

Water security projects abandoned

- Labor has abandoned crucial water security projects worth \$872.5 million, including the Dungowan Dam in northern New South Wales and Emu Swamp Dam in Queensland, plus delaying funding for the **Wyangala Dam Wall raising in the Riverina and Central West** and Emu Swamp near Stanthorpe and Hughenden Irrigation Scheme in Queensland.

Super tax to hit farmers

- Labor is to tax farmers with its new superannuation tax, with a large number of family farms vulnerable.

- Farmers holding their land in superannuation funds for succession purposes could now be taxed the paper capital gains on the land’s value, which would harm agriculture.

Instant asset write-off

- I welcome any relief for small businesses struggling to cope with the cost of living, and the instant asset write-off will help to do just that.

- Small businesses, with aggregated turnover of less than \$10 million, will be able to immediately deduct the full cost of eligible assets costing **less than \$20,000** that are first used or installed ready for use between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024.

- The Coalition in Government went several steps further by not limiting the amount small and medium businesses could claim under this provision and increasing those eligible to an aggregated turnover of **up to \$5 billion**.

Cuts and delays to infrastructure projects

- Through cutting and delaying road projects, Labor has also made it harder to get food from paddock to port or plate.
- Popular programs which benefited Riverina and Central West communities immensely, such as the Building Better Regions Fund and the Stronger Communities Programme, have been cut.
- Labor is forcing regional communities to wait two years to access grant programs. Local councils and community organisations will not be able to access grants for infrastructure this year, with funding delayed until 2024.
- Labor has pushed back critical funding needed for regional communities, whilst only targeting projects worth more than \$1 million. It means smaller projects such as sports ovals, playgrounds and libraries will be ineligible for funding.

Boost to bulk-billing

- Bulk-billing incentives for General Practices will be tripled which will help Riverina and Central West families to receive more affordable health care.

No new childcare places

- Labor's policies have failed to introduce one single new childcare place across the entire country.
- While **affordability** is having an impact on families, regional, rural and remote Australia needs **availability**.

Electricity costs going up

- Electricity prices are continuing to spiral out of control under Labor, with new increases of up to **25 per cent** for households and **29 per cent** for small businesses.
- The increase to the Default Market Offer and the Victorian Default Offer, which takes effect from 1 July 2023, will ensure almost one million households across Australia will be worse off by **up to \$594 a year** in New South Wales.
- More than 150,000 small businesses will see their electricity bills increase by **up to \$1,310 a year**.
- Labor repeatedly promised less than a month before last year's election that it would deliver cheaper electricity and an **annual cut of \$275** to electricity bills.
- Household budgets are coming last in Labor's priorities.

Coalition commitments to help build Australia's economic future

In the Coalition's Budget Reply, policies were announced which will:

- ✓ Help strengthen our economy;
- ✓ Help make sure that our hard-working middle class – the forgotten people in Labor's budget – do not become Australia's new working poor;
- ✓ Strengthen our society and our local communities;
- ✓ Stand against the Government's "Big Australia" policy; by sensibly managing migration in conjunction with proper infrastructure planning; and
- ✓ Help keep Australia safe and secure.

A Coalition Government will:

- ✓ Incentivise unemployed Australians to take up work by increasing how much they can earn before JobSeeker is reduced;
- ✓ Ensure age pensioners and Veterans will be able to work more and not affect their pension and use super to buy a house;
- ✓ Reinstate the Cashless Debit Card in communities that want and need it. This will mean welfare can be spent on food for children, not alcohol, gambling and drugs;
- ✓ Restore the number of Medicare-subsidised psychological sessions from 10 to 20;
- ✓ Provide \$4 million in funding for Ovarian Cancer Australia and undertake a review of women's health items available through Medicare and the PBS;
- ✓ Double the size of the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation;
- ✓ Impose more obligations on big digital companies to stop scams and fraud; and
- ✓ Restore the tax to GDP threshold. On the eve of Easter, Labor axed the former Coalition's low-and-middle income tax offset, meaning around 10 million Australians earning under \$126,000 will now be up to \$1,500 worse off. Labor has abandoned the Coalition's tax cap of 23.9 per cent; we will restore the cap.

Labor Takes An Axe To

Labor has put popular road and infrastructure programs at risk of being axed by sending them to a 90-Day Infrastructure Review.

Department officials at Senate Estimates confirmed the **Roads to Recovery** program, **Bridges Renewal Program**, road safety **Black Spot Program** and **Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program** were all at risk.

This is a scorched earth policy that Labor omitted to disclose on Budget night and hoped no-one would notice.

The road safety Black Spot Program has been fixing dangerous sections of road continuously since 1996-97 and Roads to Recovery has been essential in helping local councils maintain local roads since 2001.

The popular **Building Better Regions Fund** and the **Stronger Communities Programme**, both which have greatly benefited the Riverina and Central West, have been scrapped.

Here are just some of the many infrastructure projects I have committed to or delivered as the Member for Riverina:

Project	Funding amount
Wyangala Dam wall raising DELAYED	\$650 million commitment
Bundarbo Bridge replacement, Jugiong FUNDED	\$4.672 million
Wampanumba Creek Bridge BUILT	\$1.544 million
Newell Highway STARTED	\$400 million including \$149.7 million for the Parkes Bypass
Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program FUNDED	\$54.885 million
Roads to Recovery Funding ONGOING	\$79.18 million from 2019-20 to 2023-24
Lachlan River Water Supply Duplication Project FUNDED	\$6 million
Lockhart Community Hub and Conference Centre BUILT	\$200,000
Murrumbidgee Creek Precinct revitalisation FUNDED	\$1.836 million
Temora aerodrome upgrade COMPLETE	\$5.353 million
Parkes main street upgrade and Cooke Park multi-purpose centre BUILT	\$4.234 million
Gundagai sewage treatment works BUILT	\$3.5 million
Grenfell Medical Centre BUILT	\$950,000
Forbes Central West Livestock Exchange expansion COMPLETE	\$1.513 million
Parkes Regional Airport Business Park extension FUNDED	\$1.557 million
Gundagai main street redevelopment COMPLETE	\$915,490
Cunningar grain storage and handling facility upgrade BUILT	\$2.5 million
Temora medical precinct development BUILT	\$599,962
Parkes wastewater treatment plant and recycled water scheme BUILT	\$8.725 million
Wattamondara Community Hall BUILT	\$350,000



COMMUNITY INVESTMENT: (Top) The newly extended skatepark in Parkes was delivered through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program. (Bottom) With Temora Mayor Rick Firman OAM at the opening of the upgraded Temora aerodrome, delivered through the Building Better Regions Fund.

Stronger Communities Programme funding

Delivered more than \$1 million in small grants over 7 rounds, including:

- ✓ Skateparks for Coolamon Shire, Harden and Uranquinty.
- ✓ Barbecue facilities for Aria Park Preschool, Ganmain Football and Netball Sports Centre, Grenfell's Rotary Park, Parkes Golf Club and Wirrinya.
- ✓ Netball court upgrades at Cowra, Lockhart and Turvey Park.
- ✓ Commemorative Walkway renewal and Local History Walk at West Wyalong.
- ✓ Amenities (including bathroom, changeroom and kitchen) upgrades at Aria Park Showground Pavilion, Cootamundra Girl Guides, Cowra Netball Courts, Humula Citizens' Sports Club, Lake Albert Pony Club, Lillier Lodge at Wagga Wagga, Parkes Scout Hall, The Rock Meals on Wheels, Uranquinty Community Hall, Wagga Women's Health Centre, Waroo Hall and Young Child Care Centre.

Infrastructure Programs

Amongst the major Wagga Wagga infrastructure projects I helped secure during our time in Government include:

Project	Funding amount
Bomen roads enabling project BUILT	\$14.5 million
Dobney Avenue and Pearson Street rehabilitation COMPLETE	\$2.1 million
Dunns Road STARTED	\$5.8 million
Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (at Charles Sturt University) FUNDED	\$8 million
Equex stadium BUILT	\$4.4 million
Eunony Bridge replacement BUILT	\$4.9 million
Flipscreen business FUNDED	\$10.8 million
headspace FUNDED	\$1.2 million
Hildasid Farm COMPLETE	\$1.2 million
Kapooka bridge BUILT	\$27.5 million
Koorungal Road upgrade COMPLETE	\$2.1 million
Lake Albert Road rehabilitation COMPLETE	\$1.8 million
Levee bank BUILT	\$10 million – \$9 million for the main city levee with \$1 million remaining for the North Wagga levee bank upgrade
Wagga Wagga Light Horse Memorial Project FUNDED	\$150,000
Museum of the Riverina and Botanic Gardens BUILT	\$4.3 million
PCYC BUILT	\$10 million
Riverside precinct BUILT	\$3.1 million
Sunflower House FUNDED	\$388,000
Wagga Wagga Medical School STARTED	\$21 million
Zetifi business FUNDED	\$644,370



IMPORTANT INFRASTRUCTURE: (From top) This wonderful and recently completed mural at West Wyalong was delivered through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program; With Nationals' Leader David Littleproud at the state-of-the-art PCYC facility in Wagga Wagga; The Forbes indoor heated pool upgrade was delivered through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program. I acknowledge the long-standing advocacy for this project by Forbes local Dianne Decker AM and; A Building Better Regions Fund grant helped to deliver the impressive new facility which the Museum of the Riverina now calls home.

Significant investment into Defence in the Riverina Electorate

Royal Australian Air Force, Forest Hill and Kapooka Army Base upgrades – \$960 million **ONGOING**

Regional community pharmacies in Labor firing line, facing closure

Regionally based residents requiring prescriptions stand to lose under a city-centric Labor Government plan to change pharmacist dispensing rules.

The Government is doubling dispensing to 60 days, which would increase the amount of a prescribed drug allowed per prescription as well as extending the prescription period.

I have spoken with and listened to several local pharmacy operators about the plan, who are saying they face shutting up shop under the new rules.

My office has also been contacted

Your say on the Voice to Parliament

When the vote to change the Constitution goes before the people of Australia later this year, everyone will have the opportunity to individually have their say by way of a vote.

I urge and encourage people to cast their vote based on their own views formed by their own research into this issue and to please be respectful of others' views.

I remain deeply concerned about what the Voice will do to our country and the way in which we are governed.

My speech on this topic can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/3oYz0X9>

Fighting for better regional banking services

I will continue to fight for better outcomes for Riverina and Central West residents affected by regional bank closures.

It is not good enough that businesses and community groups are being forced to travel many kilometres to do their banking.

I have met with Junee Shire Mayor Neil Smith, General Manager James Davis and Chief Financial Officer Luke Taberner and many residents to listen to their concerns about banking in Junee. Other towns which have been affected by recent bank closures include Ardlethan, Coolamon, Cootamundra, Cowra, Forbes, Grenfell, Lockhart, Parkes, Temora, Wagga Wagga and West Wyalong.

many times by concerned residents who rely on their local pharmacists to receive the medication they need to live comfortably.

This is another ill-thought Labor policy which will cause calamity in the regions.

Local chemists say these proposed changes will cause significant drug shortages in the short term and likely lead to pharmacy closures in small communities which can ill afford to lose such a vital service.

Our most vulnerable people will suffer under this inept plan.



CONCERN: Listening to the concerns of well-known Wagga Wagga pharmacist Luke van der Rijt (left) and Robertson pharmacist Tim Hewitt.



COUNTRY CARE: Chatting with Aileen Stevens and Laurie Quinn at Allawah Lodge in Coolamon.

Aged care nurses: need to get the balance right

Labor's decision to implement the Royal Commission's recommendation on 24/7 registered nurses in aged care homes – in the middle of a workforce crisis – has placed enormous stress on the entire aged care sector.

The Government is pushing ahead on its plan for 24/7 nurses, which is unattainable in many centres – something I have been warning the Government since it flagged the policy whilst they were in Opposition.

The Minister for Home Affairs admitted in her recent National Press Club address it was unlikely the Australian health sector would have the capacity to deliver the Albanese Government's promise due to labour shortages.

I acknowledge the outcomes from the Aged Care Royal Commission, but policies need to be weighed against the practical realities of providing care in

regional and remote areas where there are labour shortages in every sector.

Country nursing homes are doing their best to provide excellence in care but cannot be allowed to close and therefore force people to move hundreds of kilometres away simply because of a rule which should not apply at any rate.

Community-run residential aged care facility operators tell me they face shutting down because there simply aren't enough nurses to cover Labor's nonsensical policy, particularly in the regions.

I have discussed this issue with aged care facility representatives from Coolamon, Cootamundra, Cowra and Junee.

Again, it's regional, remote and rural communities who suffer the most from Labor's short-sighted and city-centric focus.



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