

MICHAEL McCORMACK MP

Putting the Riverina first



July 2012

Riverina health boost

- ✓ Wagga Wagga Base begins
- ✓ Griffith's \$11.3m funding
- ✓ \$6m for Hillston Multipurpose
- ✓ New Temora Medical Complex

THESE are exciting times for the provision of better health services in the Riverina with several projects either now under way or funded.

The start of the new regional hospital at Wagga Wagga, made possible by a \$55.1 million Federal boost, is one of the best things to happen in the Riverina in recent years.

Concerted lobbying and an excellent submission, supported by key community and medical stakeholders, have resulted in \$11.388 million Federal support for Griffith's new hospital.

"This announcement is good for health, it's good for education, it's a real boost for our area which has been hit hard in recent years," said one of the chief proponents of the Griffith Community Private Hospital, John Casella.

St Vincent's Private Hospital Chief Executive Officer Robert Cusack was also thrilled, saying: "This is a truly remarkable outcome and significant investment in health care for Griffith and the surrounding community."

A strong supporter of Griffith's bid, I was thrilled to break the news of the hospital funding to Griffith Mayor, Councillor Mike Neville, who described it as "fantastic".

The tough economic and difficult political climate makes the Budget allocation that much more significant.

Another Federal investment as part of the latest Health and Hospitals Fund regional priority round was \$6 million for the Hillston Multipurpose Service Redevelopment.

The productive farming areas of Griffith and Hillston have both been under considerable pressure as a result of the uncertainty of future water availability and the health funding announcements were greeted with both delight and surprise.



BIG PLANS: Looking at the building blueprint for the new Temora Medical Complex with Temora Shire Council General Manager Gary Lavelle (left) and Chairman of the Council's Health Strategies Committee Cr Rick Firman, who is also Temora Deputy Mayor.

TEMORA COMPLEX ON SCHEDULE

TEMORA Shire Council's Health Strategies Committee is extremely pleased with the progress of the town's new medical complex.

Project manager Kris Dunstan, builder NW Bland & Sons and the various sub-contractors expect to have construction completed by early November.

The complex should be open for business from January 2013 and negotiations are continuing with local General Practitioners with a view to moving in.

The opening will be the realisation of a six-year dream for the committee and it is anticipated the new \$2 million facility, supported by Federal funding, will be a real drawcard for new doctors.

The complex features modern architecture and exceptional facilities including 12 consultation rooms, specialists' rooms, minor procedure areas and on-site pathology.

Temora's health services have also been enormously strengthened by Dr Ash Collins's ground-breaking TeleMedicine Australia, a tremendous e-health initiative.

I recently had the pleasure of briefing Federal Health Minister Tanya Plibersek about the wonderful work Dr Collins is doing for rural medicine in general and his Temora patients in particular.

For more information, visit telemedicineaustralia.com.au

Hospital to go ahead with \$11.3m boost

By TANYA PATTISON
THE city is in celebration mode after learning that this week's budget included an allocation of \$11.3 million for the construction of the Griffith Community Private Hospital.

Griffith mayor Mike Neville said he was ecstatic that Griffith's dream for a private hospital, which has been on the agenda for decades, would finally become a reality. "To receive news that funds have been secured to make it happen is incredible," Cr Neville said.

"Obviously for Griffith it's a fantastic outcome. It's good timing in terms of helping us build health services in Griffith. A significant amount of work and planning has gone into this project over the past few years and this effort has been recognised by the federal government in the announcement that it will fund what amounts to 50 per cent of the hospital."

"In the coming days we'll hold a series of meetings with stakeholders so we can get things moving as soon as possible."

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GRIFFITH SUZUKI real value

HEADLINE NEWS: Griffith's hospital funding was given front page prominence in The Area News.



HOMELESS: Still displaced from their residence many months after floodwaters swept through Ungarie are Brad and Lisa Croft and their children (from left) Ryan, 8, Colby, 9, Shay-Lee, 1, Brogan, 6 months, Tyler, 2, and Jack, 7. They are pictured on 5 March outside the West Wyalong Sports Stadium which had been set up as an emergency evacuation centre. Brad is still in his RFS uniform. **TOP RIGHT:** The debris in the trees indicates just how high the waters rose in Humbug Creek at Ungarie, now back to a mere trickle. **ABOVE:** Brad Croft points out where floodwaters have left a huge crack between the floor and wall of his Ungarie home, months after the devastating flood.

Floods still taking their toll

THE flooding which devastated much of the Riverina, southern and south-west New South Wales in late February and early March continues to cause considerable heartache for many locals.

Flood-affected residents in nine of the 13 local government areas (LGAs) within the Riverina electorate received Centrelink assistance from the Commonwealth after the NSW Government asked for help.

Unfortunately, four shires – Bland, Carrathool, Junee and Temora – missed out.

Statewide, the weather events were so severe that a natural disaster was declared in 63 LGAs and Category C assistance was made available in 18 of those.

The Federal Government also announced the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP), with limited eligibility to affected individuals and families, within the LGAs which had Category C declarations.

One of the worst affected villages in the 2012 flood, not just for Riverina but the whole State, was Ungarie – population 399 – in the Bland Shire, 200 kilometres north-west of Wagga Wagga and 44km NW of West Wyalong.

The swollen waters of Humbug Creek gave Ungarie residents scant warning on that grim night on Sunday 4 March, with most getting out with little more than the clothes they were wearing.

Some, including Brad and Lisa Croft and their six young children, are still displaced.

The water came in the front door of the Crofts' tiny Wollongough Street home as quickly as it rushed through from the rear of the house having been banked up at the railway line.

Brad is a dedicated community volunteer and on the fateful night was helping with emergency efforts as deputy captain of Ungarie's NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) when Lisa called him frantically to help evacuate his own home and family.

Their 1920s fibro railway house, with only two bedrooms, has been left uninhabitable with gaping and warped floorboards and walls and a thick layer of silt throughout. "It is just heart-breaking," said Brad who, as if contending with his family's flood woes is not bad enough, has also had some health problems lately requiring hospitalisation.

The Crofts were making do living in Ungarie's squash courts as a temporary measure until recently but have had to move out and may have to go into a caravan until costly repairs are done to restore their home to some sort of livable condition.

The State Government's first formal request for Federal help for Ungarie was made at the end of May in an undated letter from Minister for Police and Emergency Services Michael Gallacher to the Federal Attorney-General Nicola Roxon, the Minister for Emergency Management.

In his letter, Mr Gallacher stated: "Demographic data identifies a wide range of pre-existing social vulnerabilities for Ungarie residents including a proportionally higher number of lower income families. The township of Ungarie experienced widespread inundation of houses, loss of and damage to personal property, isolation, and loss of access to essential services including the closure of schools for significant periods.

"Impact assessments indicate that Bland Shire is not likely to reach Category C threshold and therefore Category C cannot be activated. Furthermore, Category C cannot be targeted at individual communities such as Ungarie separate from the overall local government area."

Member for Farrer Sussan Ley and I co-signed a 30 May letter to Ms Roxon asking for the process of Federal funding for flood recovery grants to be reassessed.

In our letter, we pointed out: "... it is unacceptable the AGDRP can currently be approved or declined depending on reporting procedures, rather than the actual disaster impact on individuals within a town and community, farms and small businesses."

The letter continued: "Residents of flooded Ungarie, all but washed away by a torrent of water from Humbug Creek, received no AGDRP assistance, yet those in central Wagga Wagga, who had the inconvenience of having to move out

ASSISTANCE DEADLINES LOOM

THERE are deadlines for eligible people within those Riverina LGAs granted AGDRP status to lodge claims.

The cut-off date is 20 September 2012 for those in Griffith, Leeton, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera and Wagga Wagga.

Eligible flood victims in Coolamon, Gundagai, Tumbarumba and Tumut have until 11 October 2012 to make a claim.

of their home for 24 hours – but were not flooded – did receive the household grant.

"In Hay, another town evacuated but not inundated, a number of residents received the same payment while their neighbour was rejected, with no apparent difference in circumstances.

"Minister, these people neither know nor care whether assistance requires a state government assessment or is fully state or federally funded, they just need help.

"... it is red tape and irregularities such as these which exasperate people at a very difficult time when they are looking for their governments to lead the way."

State Member for Murrumbidgee Adrian Piccoli is also frustrated with the whole process, saying: "The disaster relief system is unreasonable and unfair."

That said, Ms Roxon's office dealt with any State request efficiently and quickly and I was pleased that she took the time in her busy schedule to visit the Riverina on 4 May to talk to State Emergency Service Murrumbidgee Controller James McTavish, local council officials and some residents of flood-ravaged yet resilient North Wagga.

Hopefully, common sense will prevail in emergency situations in future with people who most need assistance able to access it rather than the hit-and-miss way grants have been allocated in floods of recent years.

This will still, however, not help the Croft family nor all those others at Ungarie and elsewhere who have been let down badly by a flawed system.

Forum looks at future of high speed rail



EXPERT PANEL: With guest speakers at the high speed rail forum (from left) Central Japan Railway Company Representative Manager, Sydney Office, Tomokazu Minesaki, Dale Budd & Associates Pty Ltd Managing Director Dale Budd, University of Sydney's Professor of Management and Director of the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies Dr David Hensher, Australasian Railway Association Chief Executive Officer Bryan Nye and Siemens Executive Manager Matt McInnes.

HIGH speed rail could transform the way regional people live their lives and open up all manner of new opportunities, a forum I hosted in Wagga Wagga was told recently.

More than 80 attendees heard all about the wonderful benefits such a rail service could and would bring to the Riverina and other regions.

Of course, cost (in the order of \$100 billion) is the prohibitive factor but a nation not looking to build for the future is a nation which will not just stand still, it will go backwards.

The Government's feasibility study, also a Coalition commitment prior to the 2010 Federal election, and the recent seminar are steps in the right direction to making high speed rail a reality one day.

Australia needs nation-building infrastructure projects such as better transport networks and dams to store water for farmers to grow food in dry times and for flood mitigation.

At the forum the Australasian Railway Association Chief

Executive Officer Bryan Nye released a report detailing the benefits high speed rail could bring, including attracting employee talent to regional areas and increasing productivity and competitiveness of country-based businesses.

Mr Nye was keen to point out that investment in building a Sydney to Melbourne high speed rail line would be spent over a number of years and that "it's the kind of infrastructure project that bolsters job creation and will foster greater domestic and international inbound tourism."

High speed rail would certainly ease road congestion thereby reducing pollution and would act as a significant economic driver.

An Access Economics report for the association, which represents the rail industry in Australia and New Zealand, found a high speed network would cut emissions, as one passenger train could take 525 cars off the road.

Wagga Wagga City Council is factoring a high speed rail link in its airport master plan with provisions being made to identify and retain possible rail corridors.

\$14.5M FUNDING FOR INTERMODAL FREIGHT HUB

A \$14.5 MILLION Federal injection has certainly put the Riverina Intermodal Freight and Logistics Hub well on track.

Wagga Wagga City Council was successful in acquiring funding, announced by Federal Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government Simon Crean, for this key piece of infrastructure as part of the Regional Australia Development Fund.

This project, worth \$58 million overall, involves the construction of new major rail and road infrastructure

and a freight terminal on 80 hectares of land at Bomen, a growing industrial and manufacturing area.

The intermodal hub will be a key economic stimulant for the city, the region and for inland Australia.

As part of the construction of additional rail infrastructure, a new master siding, five kilometres in length, will allow freight trains to safely pull off the main rail line to load and unload materials.

This hub will connect the ports of Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane to road and rail networks and get materials

transported faster to regions throughout Australia.

Given the Riverina's diversity and volume of agricultural produce, this freight centre will play an important logistical role in the region's future development.

It will capitalise on Wagga Wagga's easy access to the Sturt and Olympic Highways thereby creating the "hub" between rail and road.

Up to 200 jobs will be created in the construction phase and potentially 65 positions once operational.

Farmers worried about rail, roads

RECENT soaking rains have Riverina crops looking as healthy at this time as they have in years and all signs point to a bumper harvest.

That is good news for district farmers whose past two crops, which followed a decade-long crippling drought, have suffered from unseasonable late rains.

Quantity of grain was high but quality down.

With the prospect of strong yields for canola, barley, oats and wheat, attention is being directed to how the expected heavy harvest will be freighted.

Regional roads are already showing distressed signs of wear and tear from the February-March floods and steady winter rains.

Local councils' road repair budgets are already stretched to the absolute limit.

Since the 2008 wheat market deregulation, there has been a steady chorus of complaint about bulk handlers' excessive control over the grain supply chain, particularly in rail transport, access to port terminals and getting ships loaded on time.

As Peter Hemphill wrote in *The Weekly Times* last year, "... with other complaints about rail networks falling into disrepair and roads crumbling as exporters move to heavy trucks to haul grain to port ... it appears grain export logistics is messy in eastern Australia".

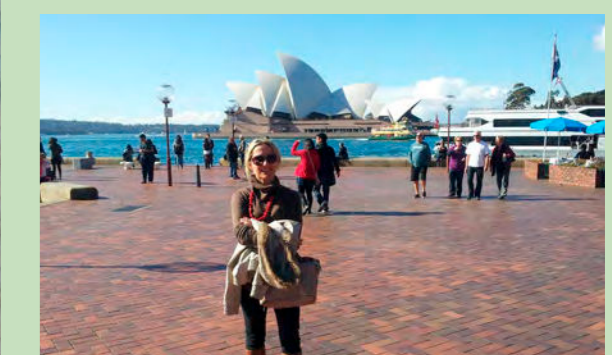
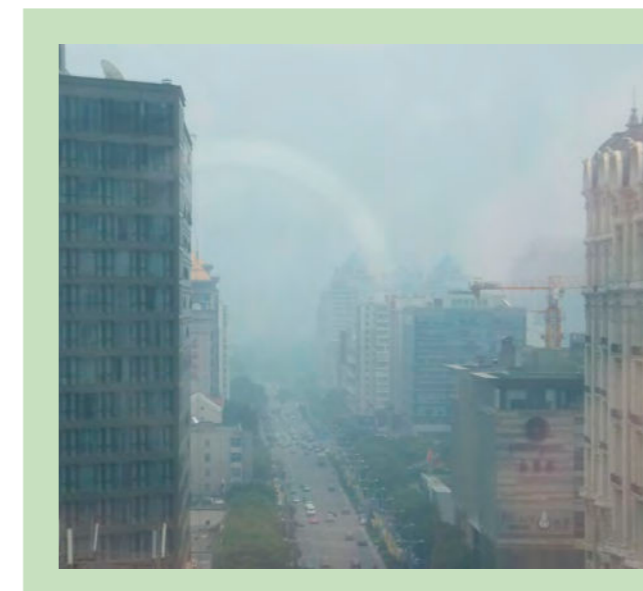
Riverina farmers' valid concerns about the inadequate level of investment in country rail and the condition of regional roads has prompted me to write to the relevant Federal and State Ministers to make them aware of the situation ... in advance of this year's anticipated abundant harvest.



POTHOLES: Ungarie Road near Calleen silos, midway between West Wyalong and Ungarie, is an example of the sad state of some Riverina roads.

CARBON TAX CONCERNS

THE Government's carbon tax came into effect from 1 July, raising fears among families, pensioners and businesspeople about its effect on the prices of everyday necessities such as energy, food and fuel. Results of my June electorate survey are still being collated and the daily mailbag has been full each day with completed forms, but an overwhelming number of Riverina respondents indicated they do not support the introduction of a carbon tax. Results of the wide-ranging survey will be announced when the thousands of returns are processed. Thank you to those who sent in their surveys and for those who are yet to fill one out, there is still time to return it. The two photos shown here were taken this month by Julian McLaren, the Wagga Wagga Business Chamber President, who writes: "... a photo of the view from my motel room in Beijing and a picture of (wife) Edwina in Sydney the week before. I ask you this ... 'One of these countries recently introduced a carbon tax to reduce pollution. Guess which one?'” Enough said!



Schools facing testing times

METHODS of teaching and learning, new technologies in schools and the many challenges facing modern education were just some of the topics discussed at an important forum at West Wyalong recently.

The Community of Schools National Curriculum Staff Development Day was convened by Weethalle Public School Principal Cheryle Glyde.

New South Wales Inspector for Primary Education Christine Taylor told the large gathering: "Let's try teaching children how to think instead of what to think."

School Development Officer Dr Brad Russell said it was important for classrooms at all times to engage in learning new things by making use of the vast array of online tools available.

The top-line educators gave engaging talks, impressing upon those present that quality teaching helped to transform students into lifelong learners which, as they said, was so important in the ever-changing world in which we live.

Schools face enormously trying times at present with the implementation of a National Curriculum and the findings of the Gonski Review in the spotlight.

These were issues which were also given an airing at the West Wyalong forum at which I gave the opening address.

NSW Minister for Education Adrian Piccoli, the Member for Murrumbidgee, is working hard to improve learning outcomes for students across the Riverina and the State and to maximise benefits at a local level of any available funding.

The Federal Coalition's view on a better education model is based on improving the quality of teachers, a robust curriculum and greater principal autonomy (local decision-making).

The National Curriculum for schools in all States and Territories, from Kindergarten to Year 12, is presently being developed. The first stages are scheduled to start in 2013.

The Gonski Review, released in February, recommended that the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments collectively increase school funding by \$5 billion per year (based on 2009 figures) and introduce a new funding model called the School Resource Standard.

The non-government sector has estimated an additional \$113 billion in new funds will be required over the 12-year life of the Gonski agreement if indexation is maintained at current levels.

This is a considerable amount but must be seen as an investment and a wise one because of all government

spending, health and education must always be prioritised.

If indexation is not maintained at present levels, over the long term, many schools could potentially lose funding.

Since the release of the report no financial commitment has been made by the Commonwealth to the additional expenditure required to implement the model.

School communities need funding certainty in order to confidently plan their own futures, for example in order to be able to have enough time to arrange the appropriate number of teaching positions at the school.

The Howard Government convened the Australian History Summit in April 2006 to begin the process of drafting a national history curriculum.

The summit recommended that Australian history be a compulsory part of the curriculum in all Australian schools in Years 9 and 10, something with which I heartily concur.

Students should be taught about the milestone events and the people who helped to shape our nation and make it the best country in the world.

Judging by the hundreds of entries submitted in the ANZAC Day in the Riverina writing competitions I have conducted in the past two years, the interest and passion of local schoolchildren in history, particularly Australia's past, is clear and encouraging.



WELL DONE: Willans Hill students took part in the ANZAC Day writing competition and were delighted to receive awards, especially Marcus McKenzie, 11, of Year 6 (front, centre) and 13-year-old Josh Schroder of Year 8 (second from right) who were presented book prizes for their entries. Others to earn certificates included (from left) Dominic Reynolds, Tasma Fisher, Lachlan Pendrick, Sam Cord, Tristan Rogers, Zac Chandler and Jordan Potts.



MINISTER'S GREETING: Federal Minister for Education Peter Garrett dropped in to meet students from St Mary's Primary, Yoogali, during their visit to Parliament House. With Mr Garrett and I are (from left) teacher Annette Reginato, Jeremiah Dixon, Aislinn Gesuale, Sebastian Zantotto, Christina Pippia, Jessica Agresta, Joshua Zarins, Jordan Sarter, Elizabeth Barbaro, Keani Gatto, Danny Marando (obscured), Daniel Rossetto, Grace Piromalli, Dallas Torresan, Larah Beltrame, Jaeden Andreazza, Angela Zalunardo, Beatrice Gesuale, Issac Donadel, Chloe Faumuina and teacher Jodie Maginnity.



SCHOOLS' VISIT: Enjoying their Parliament House tour are pupils from Gundagai South and Nangus Public Schools including Nicole Meurs, Kimberley Dunne, Sophie Brunskill, Tanisha Dehnert, Jane Lemon, Zoe Collins, Kristina Meurs, Seth Eccleston, Kalem Makeham, Mitch Smart, Corey Longhurst, Tub Smart, Jake Eccleston, Tejay Angland, Braydon Worldon, Cory Willshire, Alauralee Bowditch, Courtney Hampton-Press, Claire Lievens, Zak Andersen, Dakota Anderson, Riley Bethune, Harri Ralph, Cassie French, Holly Young, Rory Anderson, Jamie Bonat, Ben Crooks, Louis Lievens, Kyle Monaghan, Felicity Iles, Anna McGuirk, Leonie Rolfe-Lanyon, Jayden Bonat, Jed Collier, Lilly Bowditch, Madison Jones, Tiarna Paton, Ella McGuirk, Peta Salmon, Ashleigh Sutton, Chelsea Wilson, Daniel Clark, Malcolm Clarke and Joe Collier with teachers Pip McAlister, Bronwyn Annetts, Sophie O'Hehir, Sue Armstrong and Warren Garnham.



COUNTRY SCHOOL: Small but caring, Ladysmith Public provided a warm welcome during a recent visit. Pictured are Adelaide Eady, Lana O'Donovan, Abbey Stanton, Teya O'Brien, Issac Cowley, Ashton Grimshaw, Zack Klump, Joshua Klump, Ryan Sim (Kindergarten); Marmie Field, Ruth O'Donovan, Thomas Clarke (Year 1); Abbey Clarke, Jessica Rutland, Natalie Sim, Shyanne Stanton, Alexandra Webber, Charli Whiting, Christopher Aslop, Eligh Field, Charlie Murphy (Year 2); Riley Cowley, Jake Eady, Kieran Eady, Cameron McDougall (Year 3); Georgia Clarke, Joannah McDougall, Blake Klump, Riley Wilson (Year 4); Benjamin Hann, Edward McDougall, James Pope, Lachlan Webber, Riley Whiting (Year 5); Jasmine Klump, Meaghan Eldridge, Sarah-Jane Pum, Michael Pope, Cody Smith (Year 6) and practicum teacher Trevor Robinson.



LEETON SUCCESS: Teresa Aloisi of Leeton won the secondary section of the ANZAC Day writing competition for the irrigation areas and received a book prize for her efforts which pleased Acting Principal Marni Milne. She is flanked by her Saint Francis de Sales Regional College Year 8 schoolmates Genia Cowell (left) and Susanna Ratnam who also received certificates for their entries.



BUDDING WRITERS: Ganmain is steeped in military history, with many brave men from the town and district having done their duty for Australia in wars past. The children from Saint Brendan's Catholic Primary School were active participants in the ANZAC Day writing competition and were pleased to receive their certificates (from left) Tom Sase, Mitchell Ryan, Erin Lenon, Adam Brill, Lizzie Evans, Piper Linsell, Sophie Quinn, Georgia Quinn, Magenta Little, captain Gemma Guthrie, Riley Corbett, Abbey Evans, Cameron Linsell, Jack Sase, captain Josh Petrie, Isaac Noble and Blake Ryan.

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