

Michael McCormack MP

Delivering for the Riverina



Newsletter – March 2025

Time to get Australia back on track

COST-OF-LIVING pressures are weighing heavily on the minds of hard-working families and struggling small business owners.

As Australia heads to a Federal election, people need to ask themselves: "Are we better off now than we were before this Labor Government took office?"

Disappointingly, the answer is easy.

It is an emphatic NO!

Regional communities, in particular, are hurting.

The cost of electricity, food, fuel and insurance has increased significantly over the past two-and-a-half years.

Housing affordability is a huge issue and rental properties are scarce and expensive.

There is a better way.

The Coalition has a plan to get Australia and the economy back on track.

The Nationals in Coalition with the Liberals have developed a comprehensive suite of policies which address the issues that matter most to you, such as the cost of living and housing, and will deliver the strong leadership on national security and foreign policy our nation needs.

I earnestly believe this nation's best days are ahead of us.

We are the best country in the world and the Riverina is the best region in Australia in which to live.

This is one of Australia's greatest food bowls as well as a defence, education, health and training area of great importance.

With the right Government, the right focus and the right policies, the Riverina's potential is unmatched.

I hope to have the great honour and privilege to continue to represent this remarkable region in the Federal Parliament.

Much has been achieved over the years – record funding to maximise the potential to secure the future of our Defence bases, the establishment of a rural medical school to address the doctor shortage and significant infrastructure projects, including main street upgrades which have beautified and improved local towns.

Each of these initiatives has improved quality of life and secured a brighter future for our region.

But more work needs to be done.

Generations young and old need the surety of an experienced representative with a long-term vision for the region.

I look forward to the challenges and opportunities which await.

The Riverina electorate boundaries were significantly altered by the Australian Electoral Commission in a 2024 redistribution with Snowy Valleys, Upper Lachlan and Yass Valley Local Government Areas becoming part of the Riverina as well as Boorowa and the eastern part of Hilltops Council, effective from this election. The AEC moved Bland, Forbes and Parkes Shires into the Parkes electorate. Size-wise, the Riverina is now the 15th largest of the 150 electorates in Australia and has nearly 128,000 voters.

Given this, what the reshaped Riverina electorate needs more than anything is a strong, dynamic and experienced voice who understands the issues and has the know-how to deliver for people right across this diverse and large region.

Please read more inside about the Coalition's plan for a better future.

Michael McCormack

The Hon. Michael McCormack MP
Federal Member for Riverina
Shadow Minister for
International Development
and the Pacific



**SEE MY RECORD OF
DELIVERY: Pages 8-9**

THE NATIONALS *for Regional Australia*



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Your experienced voice in Parliament

I AM proud to have lived and worked in the Riverina all my life. Raised on family farms at Marrar and Brucedale and attending school at Saint Michael's Regional and Trinity Senior high schools in Wagga Wagga, it was at a young age I learned the value of hard work.

My professional career began with a journalism cadetship with *The Daily Advertiser* newspaper in Wagga Wagga in 1981. I was assigned to report on everything from sport to court to Local Government, interviewing many influential and interesting newsmakers along the way. Appointed to the newspaper's editorship in 1991, at the age of 27, I was the youngest person appointed editor of a daily newspaper in Australasia at the time. During my career at the newspaper, I found great fulfilment in championing the issues and concerns of the community.

In 2002 I co-founded a media and publishing small business in Wagga Wagga, which I owned and operated in partnership until I was elected to Parliament on 21 August 2010.

In my inaugural speech to Parliament I made the following statement — "I have lived my life by this motto: I promise not to be silent when I ought to speak. That is my commitment to the people of the Riverina and to this Parliament."

Every day I have sought to fulfil this commitment, fighting hard for the wellbeing of communities, not just in the electorate, but across regional Australia. Indeed, since being elected, I have made the most of my voice in Parliament as one of its most consistent speakers, with more than 1,280 speeches recorded in Parliament's Hansard.



FIGHTING FOR THE REGIONS: *I have always spoken loudly and proudly to fight for a fair share for the regions. Pictured with outgoing Member for Parkes Mark Coulton MP.*

Throughout my time in Parliament, I have also had the privilege of serving in several Ministerial appointments including:

- Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance from 2013-15;
- Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister from 2015-16;
- Assistant Minister for Defence in 2016 (February to July);
- Minister for Small Business from 2016-17;
- Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel from 2017-18; and
- Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC from 2017-18.

On 26 February 2018, I was elected the 14th Leader of The Nationals and sworn in as Australia's 18th Deputy Prime Minister as well as the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport (and later also Regional Development) until 21 June 2021. It was whilst I was in this portfolio that I assisted in securing Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic through a record \$110 billion investment pipeline for infrastructure and nation-building projects.

After the 2022 Federal election, I was given the portfolio responsibility of International Development and the Pacific. As part of this portfolio, I have helped foster strong relations amongst our international allies and Pacific neighbours, secured HPV vaccines for Papua New Guinean women who otherwise would have been waiting decades, and successfully lobbied for reform to the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme for the benefit of both Australian farmers and Pacific Islander workers.

It is such a remarkable privilege to represent our community in Parliament and I would be honoured to continue to do so into the future. I have never forgotten where I come from and the people of the Riverina electorate will always be my first priority.



PROUD FATHER AND HUSBAND: *With wife Catherine and children Nicholas, Alexander and Georgina.*

New boundaries for Riverina electorate

THE Australian Electoral Commission has redistributed the boundaries of the Riverina electorate, to take effect at the upcoming election.

Bland, Forbes and Parkes Shires have been removed from the Riverina and have been redistributed to the electorate of Parkes.

Riverina has picked up the Snowy Valleys Council, a region I previously represented until the 2016 redistribution, and the Boorowa section of Hilltops Council as well as Upper Lachlan Shire and Yass Valley Council.

It has been such an honour and a privilege to serve the Local Government Areas leaving the Riverina. The wonderful communities of these areas epitomise the heart and soul of

regional NSW and I am proud to have delivered vital services and infrastructure projects to these communities which will make a lasting impact for generations to come.

It is with much enthusiasm and excitement that I embrace the new parts of the electorate.

I have already been on the road to meet residents and stakeholders to discuss the unique issues of concern to the new communities.

The redistribution also brings a great opportunity to show the new parts of the electorate just what National Party representation can do for them. It has been some time since the National Party contested and represented these regions.

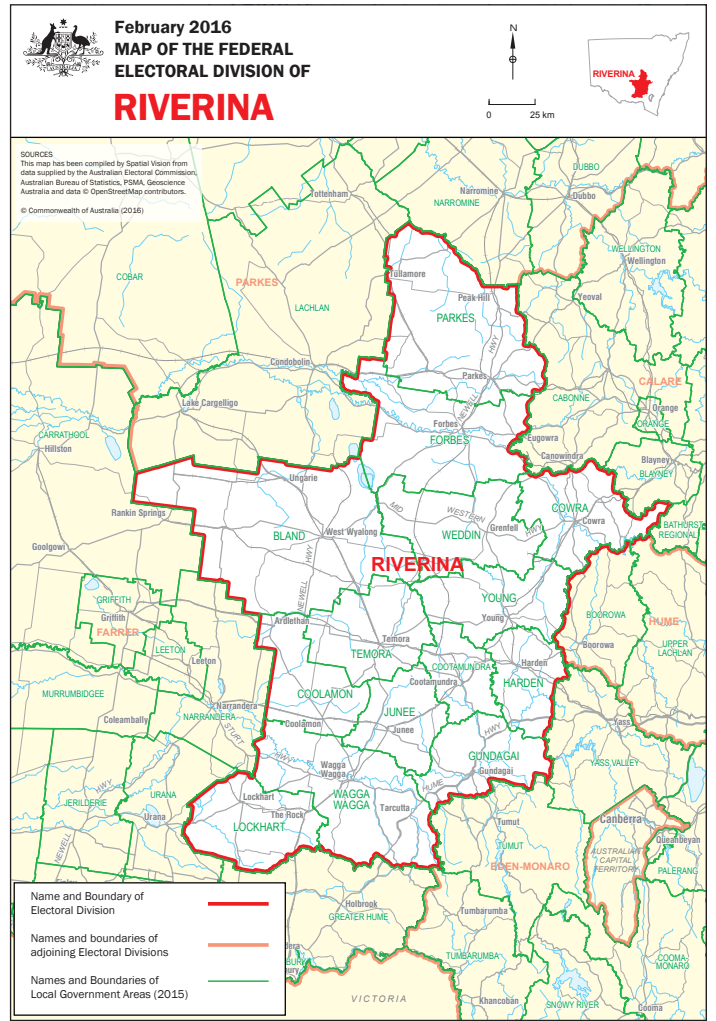
Engaging with local communities

SINCE the announcement of the redistribution, I have been pleased to receive correspondence and feedback from many residents in the new parts of the electorate. I am very appreciative to see the positive engagement these areas have with our political system.



COMMUNITY ASSET: Discussing future plans of the Yass and District War Memorial Pool with Yass Swimming Club President Hugh Rainger.

Riverina moves east



- Some of the local issues of concern which have been identified include:**
- Ensuring the Yass Valley has clean and high-quality drinking water;
 - Completing the Barton Highway Duplication which I committed \$100 million towards as Deputy Prime Minister in 2018;
 - Protecting prime farmland from large-scale renewable energy and transmission line projects;
 - Supporting the Snow Valleys' timber industry with bushfire recovery; and
 - Addressing local farm labour shortages with Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme reform and reintroduction of the Agriculture Visa.



CATASTROPHIC: The 2019-20 bushfires destroyed around 30 per cent of the Murray Region Forestry Hub log resources. The region's softwood plantation industry employs more than 5,500 people and contributes almost \$2.3 billion to the economy. Pictured with Snowy Valleys Mayor Cr Julia Ham.



OLD v NEW: A Federation seat, established in 1901, the Riverina's boundaries have changed much throughout its history.

Fighting for Wagga Wagga Airport and regional air services

SINCE the 2022 election campaign, I have consistently committed to delivering \$24 million towards an upgrade to Wagga Wagga Airport if the Coalition is elected to Government. Following the voluntary administration of Rex Airlines in July 2024, I have been at the forefront in the fight to keep Rex, and the vital air services it provides, in operation.

Airport upgrade urgently needed

WAGGA Wagga deserves a state-of-the-art airport, with modern and fit-for-purpose security measures.

During the 2022 Federal Election, the Liberals and Nationals made a commitment to deliver \$24 million towards an upgrade of the airport and its terminal if re-elected to Government. This is a commitment which I still stand by if re-elected and will be delivered if the Coalition is returned to Government in 2025.

Whilst in Government, the Liberals and Nationals delivered Wagga Wagga Airport more than \$1.7 million for updated lighting, \$405,000 for security screening equipment and offered Wagga Wagga City Council more than \$3.7 million for capital works associated with enhanced screening. Currently, \$590 million worth of upgrades to RAAF Base Wagga are budgeted, originally secured by the former Coalition Government whilst I was Assistant Defence Minister and also set to start this year. This will bring innumerable economic benefits to the region, as well as ensure the facility is up to modern standards and fit-for-purpose.

In the meantime, I have continued to advocate for the current Government to support upgrading the airport, and I have supported Council in its requests for Commonwealth funding under the Growing Regions Program and the Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program.

Rex flights a matter of life and death

REX'S air services are vital for regional communities and it cannot be allowed to collapse.

Wagga Wagga is Rex's birthplace, and around 150 locals are employed by the airline which contributes \$12 million alone in wages to the local economy through the maintenance hangar.

Without Rex, we'd have less competition on regional air routes and many country communities would be left without any air services.

With many having to fly to larger population centres to access medical care and other vital services, the fate of Rex Airlines is a matter of life and death for regional communities.

I have called upon the Government to ensure regional communities are not disadvantaged and that these vital air services are maintained. I have also spoken to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on the matter, who has given me an assurance the Government will act to ensure this is the case.

So far, the Government is underwriting Rex airfares — ensuring you either get your flight or a refund. It has also given Rex an \$80 million support package and has acquired \$50 million of its debt.

I will continue to advocate for a positive resolution to the Rex issue.



YOUTH ADVOCATE: *Discussing Wagga Wagga Airport with Karin Rezkalla.*

Wagga Wagga Airport interim lease extension secured

WAGGA Wagga City Council's 30-year lease of the airport from the Department of Defence was due to expire in June 2025. Originally seeking ownership of the airport, in May 2022 — whilst the Government was in caretaker prior to the Federal election — Council resolved to seek a 50-year lease renewal rather than outright ownership.

However, a lease of more than 20 years now necessitates it being put to public tender, unless the Finance Minister intervenes. Should a lease be subject to public tender, this could potentially lead to the airport falling into the hands of a large commercial entity that does not share the same commitment to community and affordability as Council does.

This is not an outcome the community, nor I, would like to see arise.

After persistent lobbying of the Defence Ministers on behalf of Wagga Wagga City Council and the broader community, I have secured a one-year lease extension, until 30 June 2026. This gives Council more time to liaise with Defence to find a workable outcome.

It continues to be my priority Council retains the lease of the airport. I am advocating for the maximum allowable lease period without the need to go to public tender, which may otherwise put the successful renewal in doubt or would drive up the price of the lease by having to compete with commercial entities.



TOO IMPORTANT TO LOSE: *A Rex Saab 340 outside the Australian Airline Pilot Academy, Wagga Wagga, which is also in limbo.*

Regional and rural health benefits from Wagga Wagga's UNSW Medical School

THE \$21 million University of New South Wales Biomedical Sciences Centre in Wagga Wagga is now supporting local medical students study, from start to finish, to be a doctor in the region. With students first moving into the facility in February this year, its state-of-the-art facilities are a big step up from Harvey House, originally built in 1936 as a nurses' home, which has long served local medicine students. The new facility forms part of the \$95.4 million Murray Darling Medical Schools Network, something which I had long called for and was proud to establish and deliver whilst Deputy Prime Minister in the former Coalition Government. As part of the network, we have seen five regional medical schools established across the basin, improving rural health outcomes and delivering more rural doctors. It was in 2021, as a result of the network, UNSW welcomed its first cohort of first-year students who would complete their entire course whilst based in Wagga Wagga. I spoke with second-year medical student, Wagga Wagga's Maddi Ingram, who told me how beneficial this medical school is for local students and that she intends to practise locally when she completes her studies. My work to deliver this project is all about ensuring country people have access to the same opportunities and outcomes as those in the cities — and that's what my National Party colleagues and I will continue to fight for.



SUPPORTIVE AT EVERY STEP: Celebrating the facility reaching its construction peak in 2024 with students, staff and stakeholders.



INSPECTING PROGRESS: With Wagga Wagga cardiologist Professor Gerard Carroll AM at the UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre.



FUTURE REGIONAL DOCTOR: Wagga Wagga local and second-year medicine student Maddi Ingram explains how regional students will benefit from UNSW's new Biomedical Sciences Centre.

Bulk billing and regional doctor recruitment worsens under Labor

WHILST the Coalition and I advocated consistently for improvements to regional health, under Labor's watch we have seen a startling decline in bulk billing rates across Australia as well as a concerning rise in average out-of-pocket costs for GP consultations.

According to online healthcare directory Cleanbill's 2025 Blue Report, we have seen:

- ➔ **NSW's bulk billing rate drop from 49 per cent in 2023 to 37.2 per cent in 2024 and 34.5 per cent in 2025, and**
- ➔ **NSW's average out-of-pocket cost increase from \$41.06 in 2022 to \$42.24 in 2023 and \$44.05 in 2025.**

The situation is so dire that more than 1.5 million Australians didn't go to see a GP in 2023-24 because of concerns surrounding costs. This should not be happening in Australia, yet it is because of Labor's mismanagement of the health system and its cost-of-living crisis. It is imperative that we reverse this concerning trend.

The Nationals and I are always advocating for better health services and access to GPs and will invest \$9 billion into Medicare to fix this crisis, if elected to Government.

I have consistently spoken in Parliament against Labor's changes to the Distribution Priority Areas which were implemented in 2022. These changes have, in effect, put regional and rural communities in the same basket as the outer suburbs of major cities when it comes to prioritising doctors. The end result? GPs in regional and remote areas started leaving for big cities and it has become far more difficult for regional communities to attract doctors. The changes were roundly criticised by the Rural Doctors Association of Australia and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, yet Labor didn't listen.

THE PREVIOUS COALITION GOVERNMENT'S RECORD ON HEALTH:

- ✓ Increased Medicare funding every year;
- ✓ Increased hospital funding by 86%;
- ✓ Delivered record bulk billing rates;
- ✓ Made 2,900 new or amended medicines listings;
- ✓ Doubled the number of Medicare subsidised mental health sessions; and
- ✓ Delivered a world-leading pandemic response.

Our plan to get Australia back on track

THE Nationals and Liberals have put together a comprehensive suite of policies to get Australia back on track after the hardships ordinary Australians have suffered over this term due to Labor's mismanagement.

Now, more than ever, it is essential we secure a Coalition-majority Government for Australia to set our path straight.

We know a re-elected Labor Government will mean more of the same decline, but now there is a very real risk of a Labor-minority Government held together with the support of The Greens and Teals (who have been described as Greens with trust funds). Such a situation would mean a Government held hostage to their radical agendas to change the fabric of our nation.

See a brief overview of our 12 priorities.

1. Fight cost-of-living pressures

A Coalition Government will:

- Rein in wasteful Government spending that is fuelling inflation and get interest rates down
- Deliver cheaper energy through our balanced energy plan, including renewables, gas and zero-emissions nuclear
- Keep supermarkets from exploiting suppliers and consumers through new competition policy, including divestiture powers and a supermarket commissioner



EVERYDAY EXPENSES: Discussing the cost of living with the Tsomo family of Wagga Wagga.

2. Build a stronger economy

A Coalition Government will:

- Provide lower, simpler and fairer taxes to boost economic growth
- Support our mining and resources sector by cutting red and green tape to extract more resources to power our economy, boost our balance of payments and pay for the hospitals and schools we need in a thriving society
- Increase export opportunities for Australian farmers and businesses by negotiating new free trade agreements

3. Back small business

A Coalition Government will:

- Reverse the damaging aspects of Labor's complex industrial relations reforms, including returning to a simple definition of a casual worker
- Curtail union militancy in Australian workplaces and reintroduce a tougher Australian Building and Construction Commission
- Cut red and green tape that is stopping businesses from getting ahead

4. Deliver reliable & affordable energy

A Coalition Government will:

- Deliver lower energy bills for families and businesses and save Australians up to \$263 billion through to 2050 compared to Labor's plan
- Establish a civil nuclear program in Australia, including operating nuclear power plants in seven locations (all retiring or retired coal sites) across the country
- Avoid the overbuild of transmission lines and greenfield industrial solar and wind projects that regional communities don't want

5. Fix the housing crisis

A Coalition Government will:

- Boost housing supply to alleviate the shortages that have shut new buyers out of the market
- Fund essential infrastructure such as water, power and sewerage at housing development sites
- Implement a two-year ban on foreign investors and temporary residents purchasing existing homes in Australia



HOUSING NEEDED: A housing development under way in Wagga Wagga.

6. Rebalance our migration system

A Coalition Government will:

- Urgently address the record levels of yearly net migration, which is almost equal to the population of Canberra, by reducing the permanent migration intake by 25 per cent
- Reduce the number of foreign students studying at metropolitan universities
- Properly plan and invest in our infrastructure and housing needs so that the level of migration into our country is no higher than what is sustainable



LOCAL BUSINESS: At Wagga Wagga café Meccanico with my wife Catherine and the coffee shop's staff member Zahli O'Brien.

7. Keep Australians safe

A Coalition Government will:

- Make Defence capability acquisition decisions to equip our Defence Force with the best platforms they need and deserve at speed and scale
- Increase the Defence budget to address the cuts and delays by Labor
- Back the Defence industry sector as a key partner in delivering capabilities

8. Deliver quality healthcare

A Coalition Government will:

- Guarantee the growing funding of Medicare with a \$9 billion investment to fix Labor's healthcare crisis
- Grow our GP workforce to address increasing shortages through new incentive payments, entitlements and training support
- Support regional health worker attraction, recruitment and retention initiatives to ensure those living outside our metropolitan centres are not disadvantaged



STATE OF THE ART: With Medicine Student Maddi Ingram and Professor Tara Mackenzie outside the new UNSW Biomedical Sciences Centre in Wagga Wagga.

9. Grow a stronger regional Australia

A Coalition Government will:

- Invest in roads, rail and local infrastructure for communities and economic production
- Fund enabling infrastructure to unlock new housing in regional and rural Australia such as water, sewerage and access roads
- Protect jobs and businesses in traditional local industries such as timber, salmon and mining that are under threat from Labor and The Greens



MEGA PROJECT: Construction of the \$287.2 million 10.5-kilometre Newell Highway upgrade, Parkes Bypass, in progress.

10. Focus on practical action for Indigenous Australians

A Coalition Government will:

- Focus Government efforts on delivering improvements in our most marginalised Indigenous communities
- Undertake a full audit of all Government programs and expenditure in Indigenous affairs to identify failed and/or unnecessary funding that can be reprioritised towards frontline solutions
- Launch a Royal Commission into Sexual Abuse in Indigenous Communities to shine a light on the horrors of these crimes and identify systemic reforms to be implemented that will end this scourge



STRAIGHT TALKER: With the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians and Shadow Minister for Government Efficiency, Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price.

11. Build strong and sustainable communities

A Coalition Government will:

- Give families greater choice around work and care, including allowing eligible parents to either receive superannuation contributions on Government funded paid parental leave (PPL), or an additional two weeks of funded PPL, or a one-off payment
- Deliver a back-to-basics education, through focusing on teaching young children the basics through explicit instruction, making reading, writing, mathematics and science a priority
- Combat the scourge of family and domestic violence, including through supporting the extension of emergency payments to support women and children fleeing domestic violence

12. Cut Government waste

A Coalition Government will:

- Halt the growth of the Canberra-based public service
- Deliver an efficient and responsive public service focused on the needs and priorities of Australians
- Scrap symbolic and pointless appointments and programs

Learn more about The Nationals' plan at www.nationalsplan.org.au or scan:



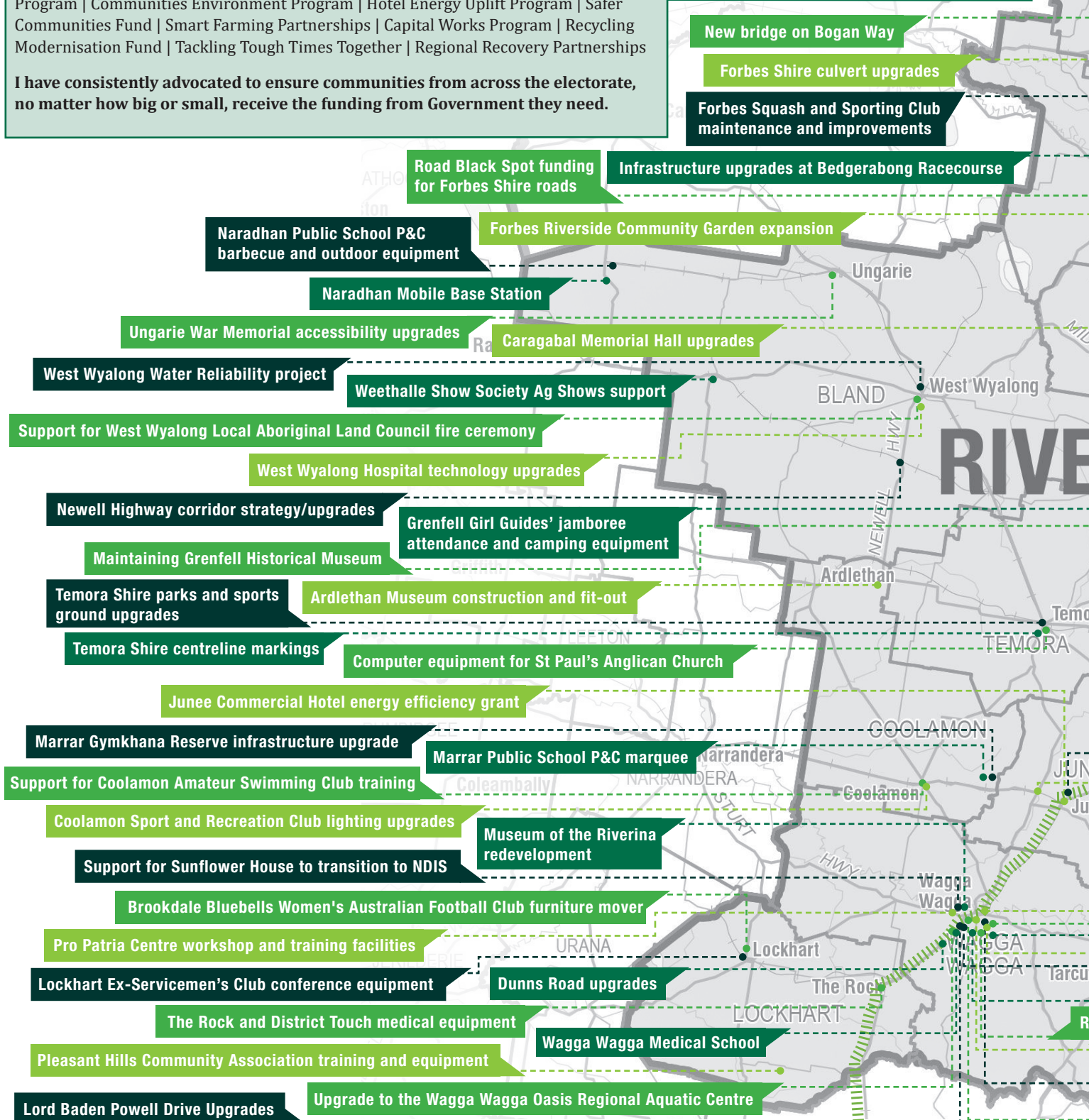
Snapshot of funding across the

Since being elected to Parliament, I have worked hard to deliver on many projects in the Riverina.

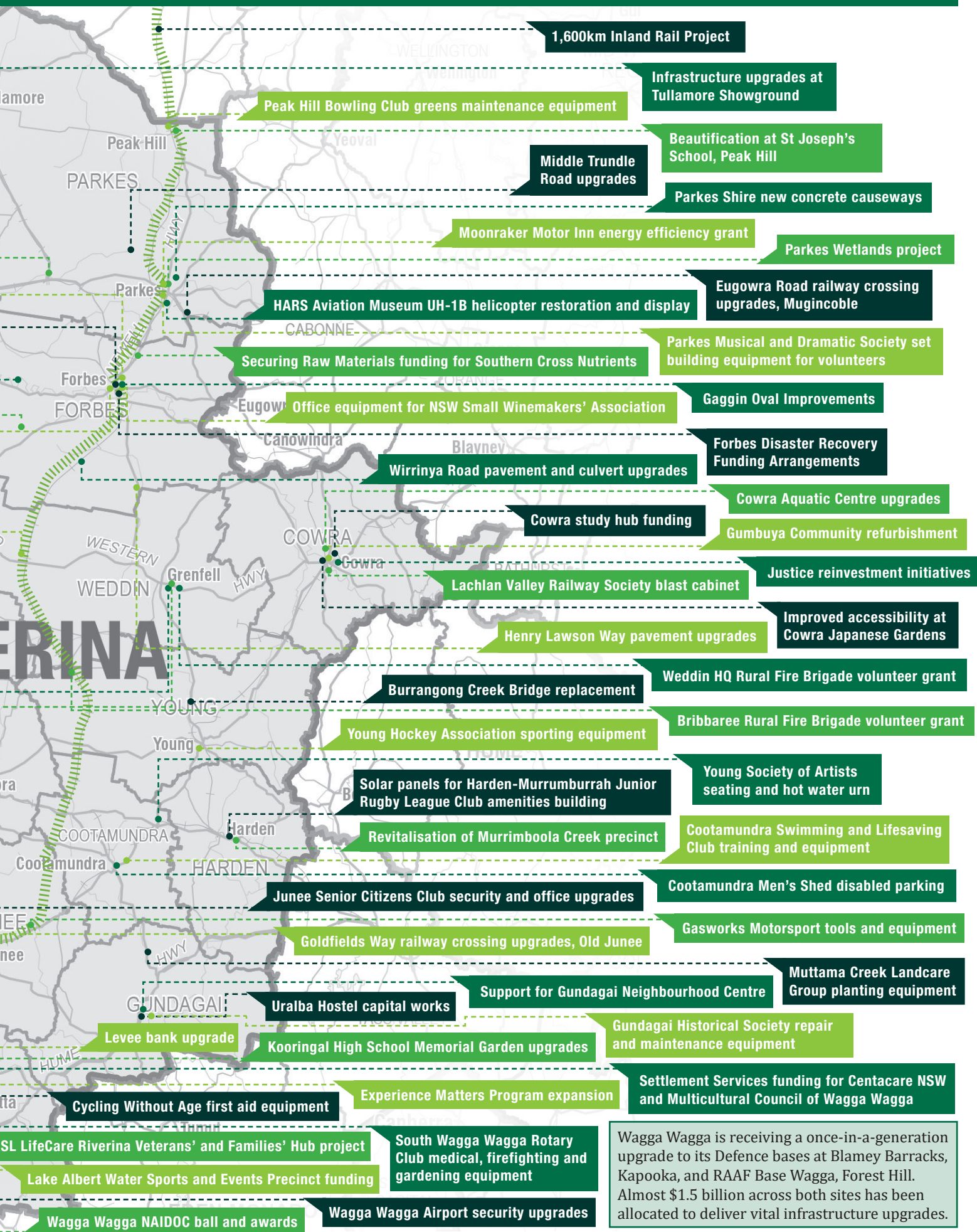
This map represents a small sample of the funding which has been delivered in recent years across the electorate, as per the outgoing boundaries. Funding programs from which the Riverina has benefited from includes, but is not limited to:

Regional Level Crossing Upgrade Fund | Energy Efficiency Grants for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises | Veterans Wellbeing Grants Program | Local Sporting Champions | Local Para Champions | Growing Regions Program | Culture and Capability Programme | Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program | Regional Transport Resilience Fund | Aged Care Capital Assistance Program | Bridges Renewal Program | Mobile Black Spot Program | Local Roads and Community Infrastructure | Drought Communities Programme | Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants Program | Powering Communities | Stronger Communities Programme | Volunteer Grants Program | Local Schools Community Fund | Supporting Agricultural Shows and Field Days Program | National Water Grid Connections Funding Pathways | Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund | Aged Care Approvals Round | Regional Arts Fund | Regional Airports Program | Community Child Care Fund | National Shed Development Programme | Building Better Regions Fund | Energy Efficient Communities Program | Communities Environment Program | Hotel Energy Uplift Program | Safer Communities Fund | Smart Farming Partnerships | Capital Works Program | Recycling Modernisation Fund | Tackling Tough Times Together | Regional Recovery Partnerships

I have consistently advocated to ensure communities from across the electorate, no matter how big or small, receive the funding from Government they need.



The Riverina and Central West



More than \$60 million delivered

ORIGINALLY established in 2014, the National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF), and its successor, the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF), delivered more than \$50 million in funding to support large and small projects across the Riverina electorate. After coming to Government in 2022, Labor scrapped the long-successful BBRF, which had delivered \$1.15 billion in grant funding to 1,293 projects. It was replaced by the Growing Regions Program (GRP). The GRP has delivered more than \$10 million to the region.

Growing Regions Program – Round 1

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Cowra Shire Council	Rebuilding and modernising the Cowra Aquatic Centre	\$4,890,218
Parkes Shire Council	Deliver bird-hides and boardwalks in the Parkes Wetlands	\$943,738
Wagga Wagga City Council	Develop the Lake Albert Water Sports and Event Precinct, remediate foreshore, install pumps, pipes and upgrade weir and spillway	\$4,493,776
TOTAL GRP FUNDING		\$10,327,732

BBRF Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 5

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Parkes Shire Council	Lachlan River Water Supply Duplication Project Stage 1	\$6,000,000
Lockhart Football & Netball Club Incorporated	Lockhart Community Hub and Conference Centre	\$200,000

BBRF Community Investments Stream – Round 5

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Destination Riverina-Murray Ltd	Riverina-Murray Visitor Economy Mentor Program	\$56,950

BBRF Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 4

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Wagga Wagga City Council	Renewal works to the Botanic Gardens precinct, including a new exhibition hall, museum refurbishment and upgrades to Lord Baden Powell Drive	\$4,288,879
Hilltops Council	Revitalise Murrumbidgee Creek Precinct	\$1,836,446

BBRF Community Investments Stream – Round 4

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Cowra Shire Council	Deliver a series of workshops and performances that will use performing arts to focus improving rural mental health	\$20,000
Destination Riverina-Murray (Wagga Wagga)	Deliver five tourism business support events across the Riverina-Murray region and mentor up to 15 recipients	\$44,765
Yalbillunga Boori Multi-Purpose Centre Solar Infrastructure	Install a 20kW solar power system at the Yalbillunga Boori Community Centre	\$20,000

BBRF Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 3

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Temora Shire Council	Upgrade Temora aerodrome runway and associated main apron and taxiways	\$5,353,151
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

BBRF Community Investments Stream – Round 3

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Matriark Theatre Inc	The Secret World: Cootamundra, a night festival hosted by young people	\$15,000
Bland Shire Council	Bland Shire Council Business Workshop Program	\$18,170

ed for regional infrastructure

BBRF Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 2

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Cowra Shire Council	Upgrade Kendal Street footpath between Brisbane and Lachlan streets	\$829,619
Parkes Shire Council	Parkes main street revitalisation and Cooke Park multi-purpose centre	\$4,234,992

BBRF Community Investments Stream – Round 2

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Destination Riverina-Murray Ltd	Riverina-Murray Tourism Accelerator Program	\$25,000

BBRF Infrastructure Projects Stream – Round 1

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
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

BBRF Community Investments Stream – Round 1

Recipient	Project	Federal Funding
Coolamon Shire Council	Launch pads and modular pump track	\$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		\$28,931,205

National Stronger Regions Fund

THREE rounds of the National Stronger Regions Fund were run between 2014 and 2016. Some notable projects funded under the NSRF include the multi-purpose stadium at Wagga Wagga's Equex Centre, Gundagai's main street redevelopment and construction of a wastewater treatment plant and recycled water scheme in Parkes Shire.

Across all rounds, the Riverina electorate received \$21,411,113 in funding from the NSRF.



INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY: (from left) At the Cowra Aquatic Centre with former Cowra Mayor Cr Ruth Fagan, with Parkes Shire Council representatives and stakeholders at the wetlands, and upgrades to Lord Baden Powell Drive at Wagga Wagga's Botanic Gardens precinct.

Inland Rail to benefit Riverina

SPANNING more than 1,600 kilometres between Melbourne and Brisbane, Inland Rail is the largest freight rail infrastructure project in Australia and one of the most significant rail infrastructure projects in the world.

It is a visionary, nation-building project which since the beginning has been championed by The Nationals because of the tremendous benefit it will deliver to regional communities and our nation. Indeed, it was Wagga Wagga City Council which campaigned tirelessly to help bring Inland Rail to Wagga Wagga and receive its many benefits, including the Special Activation Precinct at Bomen and its multimillion-dollar enabling roads.

Inland Rail will further unlock the industrial potential of regional NSW by drastically improving freight efficiency between Melbourne and Brisbane and the communities in between.

Normally taking 33 hours, rail freight times between Melbourne and Brisbane will be reduced to less than 24 hours, cutting freight costs and making rail competitive with road.

Local businesses and residents will benefit from these reduced costs as well as improved access to both domestic and international markets.

If we want to continue to support our agricultural and manufacturing industries, this is exactly the project Australia needs.

The NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure approved the Albury to Illabo section of the project in October 2024. Works have now started.

How many more trains will there be?

CURRENTLY, an average of 12 freight trains travel through Wagga Wagga each day. These trains currently average 1,200 metres in length but may already be up to 1,800 metres long. After completion of the project, daily freight trains will gradually increase to 18 by 2040 on the Albury to Junee section of line, encompassing Wagga Wagga. Inland Rail infrastructure is designed to support double stacked trains at a maximum of 1,800 metres long.

How will traffic in Wagga Wagga be affected?

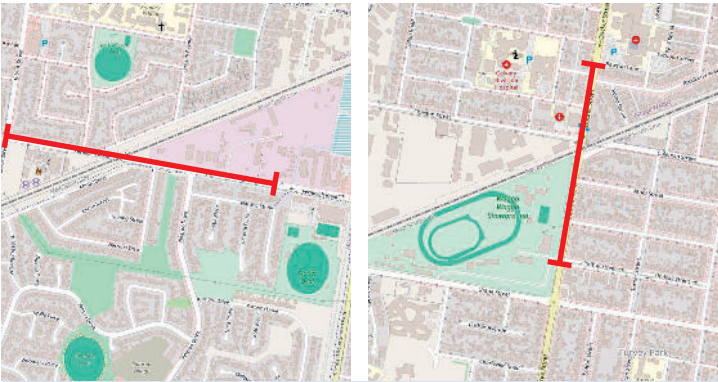
THERE are only two level crossings in Wagga Wagga, at Docker/Bourke Street and Fernleigh Road. Other crossings are grade separated. Traffic analysis from the *Albury to Illabo Preferred Infrastructure Report — Response to Submissions* (PIR RtS) has modelled the average increase in travel time for routes using these crossings, displayed on the below maps. Various factors including the increased frequency and length of trains, as well as increased traffic and population growth have been considered.

The table below demonstrates the average change in travel time for peak periods with Inland Rail operational in 2040, compared to base projected traffic in 2040.

Changes to travel times outside of peak morning and afternoon periods, such as peak midday, are even more marginal.

Peak Period	Level Crossing	Direction	Change in average travel time (seconds)
Morning (8.15-9.15)	Fernleigh Road	Westbound	+13.3
		Eastbound	+29.3
	Docker Street	Northbound	+15.0
		Southbound	+11.3
Afternoon (15.15-16.15)	Fernleigh Road	Westbound	+5.0
		Eastbound	+2.3
	Docker Street	Northbound	+2.6
		Southbound	+1.6

SOURCE: PIR RtS Appendix D Addendum Assessment to Technical Paper 1: Traffic and Transport



THOROUGH ANALYSIS: The Fernleigh Road and Docker Street routes modelled

The benefits in numbers

- Inland Rail has spent more than \$508 million with nearly 800 local business since 2018, including \$47 million spent with 37 First Nations businesses in regional Australia.
- It is expected more than 21,500 direct and indirect jobs will be supported by the project at the peak of its construction.
- Nearly 6,500 jobs have already been created by Inland Rail, with more than half of those employed local to the project.
- Each train using Inland Rail can carry the equivalent freight volume of 110 B-double trucks, reducing congestion and improving safety on our road networks.
- Rail freight is 16 times more fuel efficient than road freight, helping reduce the environmental impacts of the freight sector.

Albury to Illabo section common concerns – getting the facts straight

I UNDERSTAND whilst many in the community are excited for the benefits Inland Rail is delivering, there are some who hold understandable concerns about the project. Unfortunately, there is a degree of misinformation and misunderstanding about the project, particularly regarding its effects on Wagga Wagga.

The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) has extensively engaged with the community through the media, mailouts and consultation meetings to understand and allay common concerns. The predominant local concerns are addressed as follows.

THE ARTC has consulted with emergency services stakeholders and agencies on traffic impacts. According to the PIR RtS, five emergency service routes have also been assessed to determine possible impacts on the ability of emergency services to reach the emergency entry at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital in worst-case conditions during peak travel hours. By 2040, a maximum average increase of 40 seconds in the afternoon peak and 14 seconds in the morning peak was determined. No discernible difference in travel times was determined during the midday peak.

Further traffic assessments will also be undertaken, with the project approval requiring a Wagga Wagga Operational Road Network Performance Plan prior to commencement of operation. An Operational Road Network Performance review will be also required within 12 months and again at 10 years of operation to ensure traffic impacts perform as previously predicted.

Further information regarding traffic modelling can be found in PIR RtS Appendix D Addendum Assessment to Technical Paper 1: Traffic and Transport, accessible to download at the QR code:



How are noise and vibration concerns addressed?

INLAND Rail has committed to providing feasible and reasonable mitigation to properties at which operational noise and vibration modelling predicts exceedances of criteria set by the New South Wales Government. This may include noise barriers as well as at-property treatments, such as upgraded window glazing, acoustic upgrades to boundary fencing and sub-floor treatments.

Inland Rail notes the majority of mitigation is expected to be for operational rail noise as exceedances of vibration criteria from operational railways are very rare.

The NSW Government's planning approval requires several noise and vibration studies be undertaken, including an Operational Noise and Vibration Review (ONVR). The review will finalise Inland Rail's noise mitigation approach by conducting further assessment and identifying which mitigation option is best suited to each affected receiver. Community engagement on the ONVR and proposed operational noise mitigation is scheduled to begin mid-2025.

Inland Rail also recently advised, following community feedback, it collected more real-life data to further inform and update the Inland Rail noise model. Inland Rail also undertook additional noise and vibration monitoring along the project's alignment to be incorporated in the updated noise model for the ONVR.

Within 12 months and again at 10 years of operation, Inland Rail will conduct Operational Noise and Vibration Validation to ensure noise and vibration performance is performing as previously modelled.

It must also be noted each 1,800-metre Inland Rail train takes 110 B-double trucks off regional roads, improving efficiency and traffic whilst also decreasing noise pollution and road wear in our community.

What will happen to the Edmondson Street bridge?

INLAND Rail is designed to support double-stacked, up to 6.5-metre tall trains. This necessitates the raising of Wagga Wagga's Edmondson Street bridge as the tracks cannot be lowered due to proximity to Wagga Wagga Railway Station and complex utilities beneath the bridge.

The Edmondson Street bridge has already suffered a partial collapse on 13 November 2022. Though the bridge is owned by, and ordinarily the responsibility of, Wagga Wagga City Council, Inland Rail will benefit local ratepayers by bearing the cost of replacement.

The replacement bridge will be 2.8 metres higher than it is currently, however, the scope of the proposal is to modify existing infrastructure to provide the required clearances for the operation of double-stacked freight trains, using a like-for-like replacement approach, where feasible.

The vertical grade of the replacement Edmondson Street bridge was designed to avoid the requirement for adjustment or reconfiguration of adjacent intersections, including the Edward Street (Sturt Highway)/Best Street intersection.

The Edmondson Street bridge geometry, and that of its approaches, have been designed in accordance with the relevant Austroads guidelines for a design speed of 50 kilometres per hour. Sight distances and grades are also within the limits recommended by Austroads — a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organisation funded by Australian and New Zealand Government transport agencies to develop advice and technical guides on the design, management, engineering and operation of road transport networks, helping ensure efficient, reliable and safe transport solutions.

Will there be a bypass?

IN 2023, the Independent Review of Inland Rail was completed by Dr Kerry Schott AO. Recommendation 12 of the review stated that potential disruptions from additional train traffic should be addressed by appropriate modifications to limit noise and enable adequate cross-town access, if not already done. It further advises where Inland Rail traffic increases significantly, the possibility to bypass towns should be investigated and easements protected for a new bypass corridor. However, with current estimates, rail traffic is not expected to increase to a degree sufficient to justify a bypass of Wagga Wagga.

This position was endorsed by the current Federal Government. **Nonetheless, the Federal Government has allocated \$30 million to plan for a potential future rail bypass. Planning is set to begin this year and be completed by mid-2030.**

Any potential future bypass would likely encounter significant opposition and complications from affected landholders as a new rail corridor would have to be compulsorily acquired. This would also incur significant delays and cost increases to the project, and could place the railway station outside the CBD, from where it has been since 1879.

In accordance with Dr Schott's recommendation, I welcome further investigations into a possible bypass, to be delivered when and if necessary.

The responsibility to identify and preserve future transport corridors, as would be required for a bypass, rests with the NSW Government.

More detail regarding common concerns can be found in the *Albury to Illabo Preferred Infrastructure Report — Response to Submissions*.

Labor strips regional Australia of Mobile Black Spot funding

FIRST established in 2014 by the Former Coalition Government, the Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) generated more than \$1 billion in investment and has delivered more than 1,150 mobile base stations across Australia. Indeed, the Riverina now benefits from 22 mobile phone towers delivered under the program. However, Labor’s last Budget papers confirmed the scrapping of funding for regional mobile connectivity programs from 2027-28. This includes the Mobile Black Spot program and the Better Connectivity Plan which covers funding for a range of programs including for on-farm connectivity and the Regional Tech Hub. Funding to the Peri-Urban program, which provides important funding to improve mobile connectivity in bushfire priority areas along the edges of Australia’s major cities, is also being culled by Labor.

As part of what could be one of the last rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, I recently put a call-out for suggested locations at which members of the public believe need better mobile phone coverage. The overwhelming response I received confirmed that our mobile phone coverage has stagnated under the Labor Government. These locations were published on the MBSP Round 8 Project Noticeboard and will help mobile network operators and infrastructure providers determine which locations are most in need of improved services for which they can seek grant funding under the program.

22 Riverina locations benefiting from Mobile Black Spot Program funding delivered by the Coalition	
Bedgerabong	Mount McDonald
Billimari	Murringo
Bumbaldry	Naradhan
Cultowa	Noonbinna
Darbys Falls	Old Wagga Road South
Dirnaseer	Temora West
Gooloogong	Trungley Hall
Jemalong	Wantabadgery
Koorawatha	Warroo
Ladysmith	Weethalle
Monteagle	Woodstock

Local volunteers’ efforts supported

UNDER the 2022-23 and 2023-24 rounds of the Volunteer Grants program, more than \$100,000 has been delivered to support local volunteers with the remarkable work they do for our community. Grants of between \$1,000 to \$5,000 have been used to purchase office equipment, safety gear, outdoor equipment and more to ensure volunteers have the support needed to continue what they do. As always, thank you to all those who volunteer their time to make our region the best place in Australia to live, work and raise a family.

Volunteer Grant recipients	
Ardlethan Can Assist	\$1,400
Barmedman Tennis Association	\$5,000
Brookdale Bluebells Women’s Football Club	\$2,950
Coolamon Amateur Swimming Club	\$1,700
Cootamundra Lions Club	\$2,500
Cootamundra Swimming and Lifesaving Club	\$4,380
Cycling Without Age Wagga Wagga	\$4,912
Forbes Family History Group	\$3,784
Grenfell Girl Guides	\$4,785
Gundagai Historical Society	\$1,508
Illabo Motorsport Park	\$4,989
Junee RSL Sub-Branch	\$5,000
Lachlan Valley Railway Society	\$4,500
Marrar Public School P&C Association	\$1,000
Muttama Creek Landcare Group	\$2,930
Naradhan P&C Association	\$3,654
NSW Rural Fire Service Bribbaree Brigade	\$2,403
NSW Rural Fire Service Weddin HQ, Grenfell	\$2,350
NSW Small Winemakers Wine Show, Forbes	\$1,000
Parkes Bowling and Sports Club	\$5,000
Parkes Musical and Dramatic Society	\$5,000
Peak Hill Bowling Club	\$5,000
Pleasant Hills Community Association	\$5,000
Rotary Club of South Wagga Wagga	\$5,000
St Paul’s Anglican Church, Temora	\$1,850
The Rock and District Touch Association	\$3,064
Urangeline Peace Hall	\$4,972
Wagga Wagga Community Media (2AAA FM)	\$5,000
West Wyalong Hospital Auxiliary	\$1,786
Young Combined Hockey Association	\$4,000
Young Society of Artists	\$1,000
TOTAL	\$107,417

Dunns Road delivered

THE \$8.3 million investment to upgrade Dunns Road was delivered and officially opened in March 2024. Delivered in partnership with Wagga Wagga City Council, commuters in the southern Wagga Wagga area are now enjoying 3.3 kilometres of newly paved road as well as upgraded intersections with the Olympic Highway and the Holbrook-Lloyd Road. I have been steadfast in my support for this project, originally committing the requested \$2.5 million of Federal funding in the 2016 election and extending the Coalition's commitment to \$5.8 million at the 2019 election, whilst also increasing the scope of works. These much-needed new upgrades are now supporting a projected increase in road usage of up to 1,000 vehicles per day in which commuters will now enjoy safer and smoother journeys along this useful shortcut.

Backing those who defend us

THE Riverina has a long history with our Defence Forces, stretching back to the very first ANZACs and even 19th Century conflicts. Most notably, Wagga Wagga is host to the Home of the Soldier, Blamey Barracks at Kapooka and RAAF Base Wagga at Forest Hill. With all three arms of the Australian Defence Force conducting training in our region, the Riverina is proud to play its vital part in training generations of Defence personnel.

Our region's respect for our Defence Forces can be no better signified than with the remarkable turn-out we display each year on ANZAC Day. Whether in Wagga Wagga or in the towns and villages of the electorate we consistently see a strong showing of all walks of life — young and old and everyone in between.

I am an adamant defender of the ANZAC legacy and have consistently advocated for initiatives to help honour and support those who have served. It was my honour to play a part in the advocacy involved in posthumously awarding Private Richard Norden, of Gundagai, the Victoria Cross for Australia. Our region truly is the home of heroes, which speaks of the calibre of its residents and their commitment to their community and nation.

Record local Defence infrastructure investment

ALMOST \$1.5 billion has been budgeted for the upgrades to Blamey Barracks, Kapooka and RAAF Base Wagga as part of the Riverina Redevelopment Program.

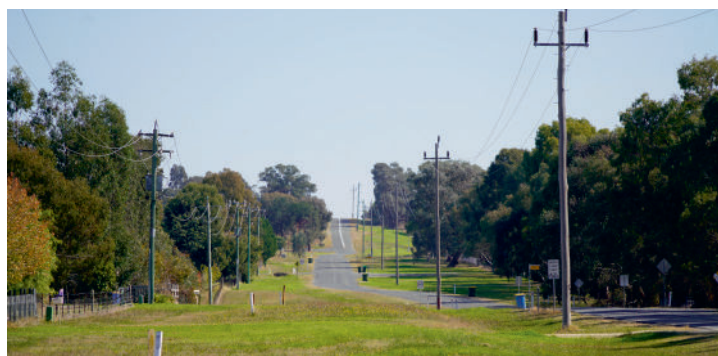
It was in 2016, soon after I was appointed Assistant Minister for Defence, the former Coalition Government secured funding for this once-in-a-lifetime upgrade to these important military training facilities.

The aim is to future-proof the bases by delivering modern, world-class facilities for the training of young men and women tasked with protecting the security of our nation. Both bases date back to World War II and whilst they have served our nation faithfully, our Defence personnel deserve state-of-art facilities befitting a first-class Defence Force.

The new upgrades will deliver new working, instructional and physical training facilities as well as accommodation. Construction will support hundreds of jobs across the region, with a target of 80 per cent local industry participation for construction.

A total budget of \$889.2 million and \$590 million has been allocated to Blamey Barracks, Kapooka and RAAF Base Wagga, respectively.

Construction will be staged to ensure local trades are not overwhelmed and both projects are set to start delivery this year and be completed by the mid-2030s.



SAFE ROADS SAVE LIVES: Drivers now enjoy safer and smoother journeys on Dunns Road.



LIGHTHORSE ENSHRINED: Persistent advocacy secured \$150,000 in Federal funding to establish the Light Horse Memorial in Wagga Wagga's Victory Memorial Gardens.



LOCAL VETERANS SUPPORTED: Almost \$1.8 million secured for local Veterans services helped deliver the new Defence Shed, a multidisciplinary activity and workshop space, at Wagga Wagga's Pro Patria Centre.



AIR POWER STARTS HERE: With members of the Public Works Committee, inspecting RAAF Base Wagga's current facilities.

Coalition to overturn Labor's ban on live sheep exports

FROM May 2028, live sheep exports by sea will be banned by legislation pushed through the Parliament by Labor. With 3,000 people working in the trade, this legislation is a grave threat to farmers and workers in the industry as well as the economies of rural and regional communities.

And whilst the ban on exports directly affects Western Australia, from where the overwhelming majority of live sheep exports by sea are made, the ancillary effects on the rest of the livestock industry will be significant. Let's not forget 2011, when Labor temporarily banned live cattle exports to Indonesia, causing cattle prices to crash, even in southern markets such as Wagga Wagga.

Sheep farmers have had a tough enough time as it is, with local sheep prices reaching as low as a dollar per head when Labor decided to make it even tougher in the past couple years. For Labor to make things worse perfectly epitomises its lack of understanding and disregard of regional and rural Australia.

As usual, this anti-farmer, anti-regions legislation came about through the unholy alliance of Labor, The Greens and the Teals who would rather pander to inner-city social justice warriors than those wonderful people who grow our food and fibre.

Local main streets redeveloped

WE ALL know how important a beautiful main street is for regional towns. They are the heart of the community, where many of us meet, eat, shop and work. For the many small businesses lining them, it is vital they are well maintained and are an inviting place for locals and tourists to explore.

That's why I secured funding for main street upgrades in the following towns:

- Cootamundra
- Grenfell
- Cowra
- Gundagai
- Forbes
- Parkes

It is fantastic to see what a difference these upgrades have made to local communities and businesses.



FRESH PAVEMENT: Officially opening Grenfell's Main Street Renewal project which has delivered new pavement, underground services and streetscape upgrades whilst preserving its historic charm. With (from left) Project Engineer Mike Ryan, State Member for Cootamundra Steph Cooke MP, former Weddin Mayor Craig Bembrick, Weddin General Manager Noreen Vu and Project Engineer Bob Cohen.

Australia is a world leader in animal welfare standards and is the only country exporting live animals that regulates standards of animal welfare in other countries and invests in training and auditing to ensure those standards are met. Nonetheless, Labor chose ideology over facts.

I was proud to join with farmers and some of my Coalition colleagues protesting on the lawns of Parliament House against the ban as part of the Keep the Sheep campaign. Farmers travelled from near and far, some thousands of kilometres, to voice their concern and justifiable anger at the ban. It is disappointing, but unsurprising, the protesters received no reception from Members of the Government.

If elected to Government, The Nationals and Liberals commit to overturning the export ban to give farmers back their livelihoods.



FRIENDS OF FARMERS: At the Keep the Sheep Rally with Leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton, Leader of The Nationals David Littleproud and other Coalition representatives.

Truckies and tradies in Labor's sights

NEARLY everything we grow, make, buy or sell, at some point in its journey travels on a truck. That's why Labor's truckie tax is bad policy which has exacerbated our cost-of-living crisis. Labor's truckie tax imposes an additional 6 per cent on the Road User Charge and registration fees, each year, for three years, from July 2023 to July 2026. These costs inevitably get passed on to the consumer and add to inflation. There's little wonder why the Reserve Bank has been so hesitant to cut rates when it is official Government policy that is making it worse.

In a similar vein, Labor has also put its sights on tradies as well as anyone looking to buy a new car or ute by imposing significant taxes as part of its New Vehicle Efficiency Standards. The scheme, which commences this year, imposes penalties on vehicle suppliers where their vehicles do not meet increasingly stringent CO2 targets. For each gram beyond the limit an inflation-indexed \$100 penalty will be incurred. For example, a V8 Nissan Patrol will incur a penalty worth \$11,600 as per the 2025 emission standards, but as standards become even more stringent over time, even a Toyota RAV4 Hybrid will be incurring penalties by 2029. Unless the suppliers can offset their emissions, these costs will be passed on to consumers, dissuading many from upgrading to newer, safer cars.

The Coalition opposes these poorly designed taxes which make everyday life more expensive.



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