

Cr Jack Bawden
Mayor, Carpentaria Shire
Council & NWQROC Chair

Cr Ernie Camp
Mayor, Burke Shire Council

Cr Greg Campbell
Mayor, Cloncurry Shire
Council

Cr Jason Ned
Acting Mayor, Doomadgee
Aboriginal Shire Council

Cr Warren Devlin
Mayor, Etheridge Shire
Council

Cr Jane McNamara
Mayor, Flinders Shire Council

Cr Belinda Murphy
Mayor, McKinlay Shire
Council

Cr Joyce McCulloch
Mayor, Mount Isa City
Council

Cr John Wharton AM
Mayor, Richmond Shire
Council

Dear Mayors

Thank you for your letter of 23 April 2019 providing the Liberal and Nationals campaign with the North West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils' (NWQROC) Six Point Plan for a Fairer Regional Deal for North West Queensland Communities.

The Liberal and Nationals Government support the broader aspirations of your six point plan for a fairer deal for rural and regional communities. I'm pleased that we have already announced a number of initiatives in your region that go some way toward that plan. As an example we recently announced a significant funding injection to boost a number of vital infrastructure projects in the north.

This includes \$1.7 billion in the northern component of the Roads of Strategic Importance program and funding toward a number of major and long overdue regional water projects, consisting of up to \$54 million for Hells Gates Dam including Rig Rocks Weir and up to \$182 million for the Hughenden Irrigation Scheme.

A new program to invest in micro grids and distributed energy solutions has also been announced in this year's budget and is noted in your plan. This comes on top of ongoing investments in communication, roads, water infrastructure, health and range of other regional programs designed to meet specific project objectives.

After the devastating weather events in your region, the Liberal and Nationals Government announced over \$1 billion for the North Queensland Flood Recovery Package. This is a significant investment locally and a substantial down payment on the sorts of priorities you have outlined.



There are a number of other items that are very worthy of further discussion, but we would like to see some of those developed in more detail before we can commit beyond our in-principle support. The attachment below sets out specific responses to the items identified in your plan.

In regard to the request for a specific 'Regional Deal' for North West Queensland, I can confirm that a re-elected Liberal and Nationals Government will pursue further deals in other parts of regional Australia following consultation with States, Territories and Local governments. This will include consideration of a regional deal for North West Queensland.


The Liberal and Nationals Government has led the way with providing a national approach to regional development through policies that encourage a region's government, businesses and the community to develop local strategies cooperatively.

We strongly believe decisions about the future of individual regions should be made by local people and supported by government, not the other way around. We understand that no one knows their regions better than the people who live and work there.

I trust that the commitments to date, my assurances in this letter and Minister Canavan's attendance reinforce our ongoing and collective support for the region.

Thank you for your ongoing work and advocacy for your communities. In addition to the strong range of commitments already made to your and other regions from my Government, I look forward to hearing more about the details and the specific priorities from you and the NWQROC.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Hindmarsh', with a large, stylized initial 'B'.

Ben Hindmarsh
Campaign Director

9/5/19

ATTACHMENT

Liberal and Nationals Government response to the North West Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils - Six-Point Plan for a Better Deal for North West Queensland

A safe, secure and prosperous North West Queensland depends on a strong and growing economy. A strong economy creates jobs, allows us to lower taxes for hard working Queenslanders, and to guarantee the high-quality essential services North West Queensland relies upon.

A re-elected Liberal and Nationals Government will build a stronger economy for all of North West Queensland, creating more jobs and allowing us to guarantee essential services. We have committed to:

- Invest in new infrastructure to grow the North West Queensland economy and improve road safety, including the Tennant Creek to Townsville corridor.
- Support a major flood recovery effort to rebuild affected communities, including Townsville, and rebuild the agricultural industry.
- Support new resource development in North West Queensland, having completed Commonwealth approvals required to commence the Adani Carmichael project with conditions to ensure protection of the environment.
- Tackle high youth unemployment with an industry training hub in Townsville.
- Boost funding for North Queensland healthcare, with new funding for hospitals, cancer services, preventative health and mental health.
- Invest in water infrastructure to expand agriculture, including the Hughenden Irrigation Scheme and Hells Gates Dam.
- Invest in Defence infrastructure and facilities providing opportunities for small to medium sized business to secure long-term work.
- Support veterans and their families with funding for The Oasis Townsville as part of our network of Veterans' Wellbeing Centres
- Keep communities safe by maintaining strong borders, increasing funding for Safer Communities, and implementing comprehensive plans to address drugs, domestic violence and online safety.

1. Fair Funding for our beef, freight and tourism roads and railways

A stronger North Queensland economy will need more infrastructure investment to unlock economic potential, ensure Queenslanders get to their destinations quickly and safely, and help businesses efficiently transport goods and products around the state.

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, we have locked in a further \$4 billion over the next decade for land transport infrastructure in Queensland, bringing our total investment to over \$25 billion. New projects that will benefit North Queensland include:

- Up to \$864 million for five corridors under the Northern Australia component of the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative, including:
 - \$254 million for the Mt Isa to Rockhampton corridor
 - \$270 million for the Tennant Creek to Townsville corridor, (with \$200 million in Queensland)
 - \$100 million for the Townsville to Roma corridor
- A further \$425 million in projects from our \$10 billion Bruce Highway upgrade program, including \$144 million to the Townsville Ring Road Stage 5

We will also ensure North West Queensland gets its fair share of our \$2.2 billion National Road Safety Package, which includes additional funding of \$1.1 billion for the Roads to Recovery Program; \$550 million for the Black Spots Program; \$275 million for the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program; and \$275 million for bridges renewal funding.

2. Power Policy for the real world including remote Australia

The Liberal and National Government is backing investment in new power generation – improving competition by underwriting new reliable energy. The Government has selected a shortlist of 12 projects – six renewable pumped hydro, five gas and one coal upgrade. Together, they represent around 4,000 megawatts of new generation (the equivalent of powering one million homes).

Only the Liberal and National Coalition has committed to evaluate baseload power projects in north and central Queensland. This includes a new HELE coal project in Collinsville, upgrades of existing generators as well as gas and hydro projects.

The Government's \$50.4 million Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund will support 50 off-grid and fringe-of-grid communities to investigate whether establishing a micro-grid is cost-effective, and whether existing off-grid capabilities can be upgraded with modern technology. Where feasibility studies find that micro-grids are economically viable, communities can upgrade existing diesel generation or take advantage of new local generation and storage opportunities. The fund will also guide communities towards additional support, including through the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

The Morrison Government will fast track development of Copperstring to the value of \$4.74m for final engineering and development works.

This will enable the efficient supply of cost effective electricity to critical industrial manufacturers with common user infrastructure development. The Coalition Government will hold the Palaszczuk Government to account over their \$386m Powering NQ plan. The NW Minerals Province is the largest economic zone in Eastern Australia not connected to the NEM. The Coalition Government will work with Copperstring to assist this process.

3. Investing in Water Infrastructure and Dams

The Liberal and Nationals Government is delivering priority water infrastructure projects that will drive economic growth and support local communities in North West Queensland. Earlier this year we increased the Water Infrastructure Development Fund by more than \$500 million, bringing our investment to fast-track water infrastructure to over \$1.3 billion. North West Queensland is benefiting from this investment, including:

- Up to \$200 million to secure Townsville's long-term water supply through Stage 2 of the Haughton Pipeline extension;
- Up to \$182 million for the Hughenden Irrigation Scheme; and
- Up to \$54 million for the first stage of the Hells Gates Dam project, Big Rocks Weir.

We have established a dedicated North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority to provide the strategic planning and coordinated needed to deliver water security and boost agriculture throughout North and North West Queensland.

4. Build and sustain our productive regions with sustainable populations through immigration incentives and correct tax arrangements

The Liberal and Nationals Government has introduced a number of measures in this area:

Regional provisional visas

Under two new regional visa categories, skilled migrants will be priority processed and afforded access to a larger pool of jobs on the eligible occupation lists compared to those who live in our major cities. Extra points will be awarded for migrants living and working in regional Australia, and States and Territories can request access to an increased allocation of dedicated regional migration places.

The Liberal and Nationals Government will also simplify and broaden the definition of regional Australia for all skilled migration visas. Regional Australia will encompass all of Australia outside of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane/Gold Coast, and Perth, relieving pressure on the big capitals and making skilled workers available to fill critical regional skills gaps. Skilled migrants will have the opportunity to become established in regional communities and contribute to local economies. Visa recipients will need to live and work in regional Australia for three years before becoming eligible to apply for permanent residence.

Changes to working holiday maker program

Farmers in regional and rural areas will now receive more support to resolve labour shortages with changes to the working holiday maker program. The Liberal and Nationals government has:

- Introduced a third year visa option for all Working Holiday Makers who from July 2019 carry out 6 months of specified work in regional areas
- Increased the period in which all Working Holiday Makers can stay with the same agricultural (plant and animal cultivation) employer, from 6 to 12 months.
- Lifted the caps in 2018-19 on Work and Holiday visas from Chile, Israel, Peru, and Spain, with further negotiations underway.
- Increased the eligible age from 30 to 35 years for Working Holiday visa applicants, commencing with Canada and Ireland from November 2018.
- Commenced a new Work and Holiday arrangement the Greece in March 2019.

The Liberal and Nationals Government has also delivered a range of initiatives to encourage young people to continue their education in regional areas, including in agriculture-related fields. In 2016, the Government committed \$152 million over four years to a Regional Student Access to Education Package, including:

- \$24 million for 1,200 new Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships, for scholarships for people from regional and remote Australia to improve access to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), agriculture and health courses
- \$83 million to improve access to Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY living allowance for regional and remote students
- \$45 million for isolated children's education

The Government provided more than \$1.6 billion in base funding in 2017 for Commonwealth supported students at regionally headquartered universities, with an additional \$70 million regional loading each year to help universities maintain regional campuses.

An additional \$134.8 million investment was announced in November 2018, providing Australians living in regional and remote communities with greater access to higher education. This included:

- \$34.1 million for an additional 1,955 STEM scholarships for regional and remote students over four years, more than doubling the 1,200 scholarships currently available (total funding

now of \$58.1 million for more than 3,150 scholarships for regional and remote Australians to study STEM)

- \$92.5 million to support more students at five regionally focused universities over four years. This includes \$9.1 million for James Cook University
- \$7.5 million to support 16 Regional Study Hubs in 22 locations over four years.

An Expert Regional Education Advisory Group will also be established to drive the National Regional, Rural and Remote Higher Education Strategy and advise Government on the ongoing education and training needs of regional communities. The Advisory Group, to be chaired by The Hon Denis Naphine, will prepare a National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Report to Government on priority recommendations for action, including advice on the merits of establishing a Rural Education Commissioner to oversee implementation of the strategy

The Destination Australia scholarships program will incentivise students to live and study in regional Australia. The program will support up to 1200 students a year – half domestic and half international – with scholarships of up to \$15,000, commencing in 2020.

5. First telecommunications and connectivity

Improved digital connectivity is critical to the future of North West Queensland - enabling the growth of industries like agriculture and tourism, supporting health and education services and helping connect regional communities to the rest of Australia and the world.

The Liberal and Nationals Government has strengthened digital and communications infrastructure, with the NBN now rolled out to over 78 per cent of Queensland, and an investment in 52 mobile blackspot base stations in North Queensland.

A re-elected Morrison Government will boost digital connectivity in regional Australia, including eliminating mobile blackspots across 1 million square kilometres by 2025.

Under the first four rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program we have generated investment of more than \$760 million Australia-wide, with a commitment to deliver a total of 1,047 new base stations across Australia. This will deliver close to half a million square kilometres of new or improved coverage, benefiting around 40,000 premises and over 8,500km of major roads.

We are committed to doing even more. A re-elected Morrison Government will deliver our \$220 million Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package which is fully funded in the 2019-20 Budget.

This will deliver two new rounds of the Mobile Black Spot Program, a new place-based Regional Connectivity Program to provide targeted investments in improving telecommunications infrastructure, a digital tech hub to improve digital literacy and trials of alternative voice services that, in time, could replace the ageing high capacity radio concentrator (HCRC) network in remote areas.

We have secured new policy initiatives and commitments from NBN Co and Telstra to further improve services in the regions. Greater access to mobile services in regional Australia improves the ability to keep in contact with family and friends, allows better access for farmers to online services and digital agriculture, and helps local businesses grow by making these areas more attractive to tourists.

The Liberal and Nationals \$60 million Regional Connectivity Program – part of the Stronger Regional Digital Connectivity Package – is a new place-based program that will provide targeted investments

to areas in need of telecommunications infrastructure improvements. Funding from the program will also be used to develop a Digital Literacy Hub to improve digital literacy.

6. Funding and delivering community services in a way that works for remote communities

The Liberal and Nationals Government's health plan for Queensland will protect lives, improve lives and save lives. It builds on the record funding we have provided for Queensland public hospitals, with an 84 per cent increase in funding since 2013, record levels of bulk billing and more than 2000 new medicines subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Funding for Queensland public hospitals will increase from \$4.9 billion a year to \$6.8 billion under a new hospitals agreement. We will also deliver a significant Queensland Health Plan to strengthen Queensland's health system, providing affordable and accessible health services for more Queenslanders, where and when they need them. The plan delivers significant support for North West Queensland, including:

- Greater hospital and health services and infrastructure, with \$13 million for 33 additional beds at Townsville Hospital to help meet increasing demand and provide a new in-patient ward allowing for treatment closer to home and \$9 million for a new Maternity and Neo-Natal unit at the Mater Hospital to improve important health services for residents and people in the surrounding Townsville region.
- More cancer services with \$92.5 million for new MRIs across Queensland, including at Cairns Radiology and I-Med Thuringowa.
- \$2.75 million to Ronald McDonald House to support families travelling from Townsville, Cairns, Far North Queensland and Cape York to access life-saving cancer treatment.
- Access to new treatment and clinical trials through the \$100 million National Rural and Regional Clinical Trial Centre Program, with sites to be implemented that will improve access to new treatments for people in North Queensland.
- Better mental health support, with \$14 million for a new adult community mental health centre in Townsville to provide a supportive environment where people can receive mental health services without requiring a prior appointment. Support for people living in Northern and Western Queensland impacted by the recent floods, including through telehealth, with an investment of \$26.9 million.
- More funding for preventative health, with \$12 million for the Heart of Australia to support and expand mobile cardiology and other services, including a third mobile clinic to service Northern Queensland and the Cape.
- Drug and alcohol services, including \$700,000 for a new community residential withdrawal management service in Townsville. \$5.9 million for the Salvation Army to build a 10 bed detox facility in Townsville and fund an additional 8 residential rehab beds.
- Medical research, with \$60 million for James Cook University to build and deliver a world class medical research facility – the Cairns Tropical Enterprise Centre.
- Our \$550 million Stronger Rural Health Strategy is delivering 3,000 additional doctors and more than 3,000 additional nurses and allied health professionals, across Australia and in North QLD.

- Spinal cord injury \$24 million for a Queensland-wide program aimed at giving new hope and support to people living with brain and spinal cord injuries with a new rehabilitation centre developed in Townsville.

Other initiatives for North West Queensland

The Liberal and Nationals Government is supporting a major flood recovery effort

The recent North Queensland monsoon trough that caused such devastating flooding and damage was a disaster of national significance. The Liberal and Nationals Government has spared no effort in dealing with the event as it was happening and then dealing with the aftermath. The Liberal and Nationals Government took immediate action to:

- Activate the Australian Defence Force and Emergency Management Australia to provide direct support to local communities.
- Activate the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment and Allowance to provide immediate cash support to impacted families, with over \$110 million in payments to individuals and families.
- Support businesses and primary producers under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, with \$200 million in advance payments having been made to the Queensland Government.
- Provide \$11 million in payments to flood-affected local councils to enable them to undertake immediate relief and recovery activities
- The Liberal and Nationals Government also acted swiftly to support the rebuilding of agriculture in the flood-hit zones by developing a \$3.3 billion package. A new executive agency, the North Queensland Livestock Industry Recovery Agency, has been established to deliver the package that includes:
 - \$300 million for two grants programs to support restocking/replanting and to rebuild on-farm infrastructure.
 - \$1.75 billion in loans to banks to support interest rate relief for existing and new business loans.
 - \$1 billion of concessional loans through the Regional Investment Corporation for restocking and for debt refinancing.
 - \$28 million for new weather radars and rain gauges.
 - \$5 million to manage the spread and severity of the prickly acacia weed.
 - \$4 million for Special Circumstances funding for eligible North Queensland schools to help with education and boarding school costs.
 - \$1,000 per student currently receiving support through the Assistance to Isolated Children Scheme or ABSTUDY.
 - A range of mental health support options.

This comes on top of other measures supporting primary producers under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, including \$75,000 primary producers grants to help with a range of clean-up and reinstatement activities such as removing debris, disposing of dead livestock, salvaging crops, grain and feed and repairing plant and equipment.

Northern Australia Plan

The Australian Government has invested over \$6.2 billion through the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*. Forty one of the White Paper's 51 measures are now delivered. The remaining nine measures are on track for completion. The northern development agenda is focused on policy initiatives that support: simpler land arrangements for investment; developing the north's water resources; establishing business, trade and investment gateways; infrastructure to support growth; access to northern workforce's; and good governance. We are now over three years into the twenty year economic development agenda.

