Honouring our community champions an Australia Day honour

What a day Australia Day was across the Northern Tablelands. And what a privilege it was to share in so many local celebrations. I joined in ceremonies and activities at Uralla, Armidale and Ben Lomond on the day and attended the Guyra local celebration on the eve of Australia Day. All of those events honoured community treasures and champions and I salute them, along with welcoming our newest Aussies in citizenship ceremonies at a number of centres.

As well, I offer my congratulations to eight Northern Tablelands residents named in this year’s Australia Day Honours list, acknowledging their outstanding record of community service across the communities of Armidale, Glen Innes, Guyra, Ben Lomond, Bingara and Moree.

Seven of the eight have been honoured as recipients of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the General Division, reflecting contributions across more than 40 different community groups and volunteer and professional sectors.

Graeme Andrews, Douglas Crocker and Dr John Flynn, of Armidale, Dorothy (Dot) Every of Ben Lomond, Noel Schmidt of Glen Innes, Margaret (Lee) Estens of Moree and Marilyn Dixon from Bingara, have played significant roles in a long list of organisations over an extended period of time.

The late University of New England academic, Professor Larry Smith, was named posthumously as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in this year’s list for his significant service to the vocational and education and training sector and to professional organisations.

These awards are an official recognition of the outstanding contributions these citizens have made to their respective communities, and these honours are a testament of what a priceless value they have given so selflessly to so many others.

We are very fortunate to have them and our communities, and the various groups, organisations and causes they have supported are richer for their work, most of it voluntary.

For many of them there’s been recognition through other awards and civic honours over the years, but this is a national honour they can take tremendous pride in and we can celebrate as well. Good on them, and good on those who nominated them for honours and for the support so many others give to their communities.

Old rail line about to re-open for Moree freight transport

A project investing $2 million to reinstate a disused section of rail line at Moree, enabling hundreds of thousands of tonnes of grain, cotton and pulses to be railed to Newcastle instead of being sent by truck to Queensland, has been completed.
I hosted Deputy Premier John Barilaro on an inspection of the work this month. The project has been funded by the NSW Government, and links Broadbent Grain’s receival facilities, which are on the former abandoned Moree-Inverell rail line, with the main line servicing Moree.

The new 2.8 kilometre line will take its first train on Monday, 13 February, which will carry grain from Moree to Newcastle.

This means that about 250,000 tonnes of grain and 6,400 twenty foot containers of cotton and pulses – the equivalent of 6,000 trucks – per year can be moved by rail to Newcastle instead of having to go by road to Queensland ports.

It’s a big win for Moree’s rural economy and for jobs in country NSW. It’s an investment in appropriate transport options, better roads, and greater efficiency.

**Gonski gives our kids an advantage over disadvantage**

New Premier Gladys Berejiklian this week repeated her commitment to Gonski education funding, saying she’d act as the ‘strongest advocate’ for it, and as a long term supporter I welcome the Premier’s public advocacy.

Ms Berejiklian has made it very clear that the NSW Government is fiercely committed to receiving every cent of Gonski funding and will also ensure that the Federal Government sticks to its commitments in relation to Gonski.

Gonski funding provides more resources, a fairer distribution, higher standards and a better education for every child. In 2013, I was extremely proud when NSW became the first State to sign up to the Gonski model with the Federal Government.

Since its inception, Gonski has delivered more than $12 million extra funding each year to the 59 Northern Tablelands public schools.

This electorate is the second largest beneficiary of the Gonski needs-based funding in the whole state – and that has been a tremendous outcome for our kids, and I’ll continue to fight to maintain and retain that model.

**Eight public schools share in $1million Christmas holiday makeover**

Eight public schools across the Northern Tablelands have shared in a total $1.08 million works program to get them ready for the 2017 school year. The biggest project was at Uralla Central School where the State Government funded some $318,000 for works including upgrades to the toilet and shower block, bathroom, ramps and the construction of a drop off zone, to cater for students with disabilities.

I visited Inverell’s Macintyre High School earlier this week to meet with Principal Lindsay Paul to see at first-hand the upgrades completed over the break. The Northern Tablelands program ranged from the major works at Uralla Central to the painting of external walls at the Thalgarrah Environmental Education Centre, just east of Armidale, where $4,000 was spent.
This investment over the holidays is very welcome and will make those schools even more inviting and comfortable for students and staff.

I’m delighted these schools have had improvements works completed and will continue to work with all school principals and the Department of Education to ensure other schools can also benefit.

At Yetman Public School, $248,000 was spent on constructing a drop-off zone outside the school and new accessible toilets, while Inverell High School has seen the installation of air conditioning and new furniture at a cost of $189,000. At Macintyre High School $153,000 has been invested to construct a new accessible toilet and storage facilities between two multi-categorical classrooms.

At Inverell Public School, $107,000 was spent providing accessible toilet facilities, while projects at Glen Innes Public and Ross Hill Public schools have seen $30,000 at each to repaint parts of Glen Innes Public and build a new covered outdoor learning area at Ross Hill Public.

**Funding available for local artist and arts groups**

This year’s ClubGRANTS Category 3 program is open and I’d urge regional art galleries and art groups to consider submitting regional ideas and projects for potential funding under this $2.5 million State Government program.

It provides golden opportunities for local groups to get a government grant boost for arts and cultural infrastructure and is designed to help increase arts industry participation and drive cultural tourism. It offers between $100,000 and $300,000 in grants to develop and enhance arts and cultural facilities.

There’s no denying the importance of art and culture in so many of our region’s communities and this program provides extra investment for local communities to get more infrastructure that can increase the appeal of what they’re offering to more people across a wider spectrum.

Since the program was established it has invested millions in local arts and culture redevelopments and upgrades from theatres, to literary institutes, to museums, to craft and artisan centres. Arts and culture play an important role in driving tourism and supporting local economies and the funding offered by this grant program is one I’d encourage many groups and individuals to consider looking at.

**Apprentice Louise Wall is really a cut above the rest**

Armidale apprentice hairdresser Louise Wall has enjoyed her work so much, and has been so good at it, that she’s become the head girl when it comes to cutting and styling at her salon.

Louise works at Kristies Hair and Beauty Boutique and is now an owner-partner but she’s also clipped another workplace award too. Louise really is ‘a cut above the rest’ when it comes to apprenticeship performance and that work ethic and her skills have won her this year’s Bert Evans Apprentice scholarship.
We’ve heard the stories of employees who liked the business so much, they bought it, and that adage perfectly fits Louise’s approach to her work; she’s a great advertisement for the very ideals of what this scholarship is all about.

She is still an apprentice and is running a very successful business in Armidale, so this scholarship is well deserved and appropriate. The 21-year-old started her apprenticeship at the end of 2015, and because technically she can’t “own” the place she’s apprenticed to, she talked her partner Kenny Hamilton and her mum Kerrie Allen into the business.

The scholarship gives Louise a $15,000 boost to her training and development over three years.

Moree PCYC flushed with success over funding splash

It’s been great to announce a $15,000 grant for the Moree PCYC this week which will allow it to update and remodel dated amenities at the Boston St centre that caters for scores of local young kids.

The grant will enable the club to modernise dated toilet facilities for a club which is open six days a week and caters for various sports and social programs provided by police and local groups. Acting PCYC manager Tayla Macey has described the grant funding as “great news” that will improve the centre and give children modern facilities they can use in a more pleasant environment.

A previous state government grant helped kick start a bathroom and change room upgrade three years ago but the latest funding will help them complete more of the renovations. The project will now see work to replace old tiles, ceiling tiles and vanities in both boys and girls toilet areas and make them compliant to standards and give them a new paint job in modern and bright colours.

Moree PCYC lays claim to the highest PCYC membership per head of population in NSW and is the biggest sports facility in the town. The PCYC conducts activities for many people there including the disabled, the disadvantaged and other ‘at-risk’ young people and children, as well as providing services for adult members.

It’s integral as a place for young kids to hang out and participate in activities they can’t get anywhere else or at no cost or a low cost to take part. The club is open seven days a week and sees up to 800 users or visitors a week.

But the amenities are 35 years old in places; they look grubby and unhygienic and the shower areas can’t be used at present because they don’t comply with child protection and privacy laws. This funding will go a long way to fixing those problems.

Public comment period extended for Roxy Theatre heritage listing

The timeframe for public comment about a proposed heritage listing for the iconic Roxy Theatre and cafe building in Bingara has been extended to allow more time for community feedback.
I had asked the NSW Department of Environment and Heritage to extend the timeframe for submissions about a plan to list the main street complex on a heritage register and they’ve agreed with my reasoning – so the deadline is now February 7.

The Roxy Theatre and Peter’s Cafe are well loved in the Bingara area and throughout this region for its historic place in our architectural and cultural life and I think the original closing date was far too short a time to give enough people an opportunity to comment.

The NSW Heritage Council gave notice of its intention to consider listing the building complex on the State Heritage Register in December which would preserve it but also importantly give access to maintenance and preservation funding in the future.

Written submissions about the listing proposal can be sent to heritage@heritage.nsw.gov.au by close of business on February 7 and details are also available on the NSW Department of Environment and Heritage’s website.

**Glen Innes club bowled over by $8,900 greens mower funding**

A new lawn mower mightn’t inspire too much emotion in too many women – but I have to admit Glen Innes Bowling Club secretary manager Catherine Donald recently was over the moon with news of a grant funding announcement.

Ms Donald told me that “when you’ve got one 20-year-old one that’s falling to bits, it’s very exciting to find out you’re being given some funding to help you buy a brand new, you-beaut model. The bowling club has three mowers – all of them very, very old and the club has been repairing them for years – but the new mower will mean the end of regular repairs and using bits from the other two to keep one functioning.

**Today and the weekend**

This afternoon I’ll be in Bundarra to officially open the three-day annual show and to enjoy the rodeo with what is anticipated to be a huge crowd of locals. Tomorrow I’ll head across to Bingara for the annual Bingara Cup races and on Sunday I’ll be taking in all the action at Sport UNE as Armidale plays host to the 2017 Mountain Bike National Series, rounds 3 & 4. Good luck to the large contingent of riders from our region taking part.

Adam Marshall
Member for Northern Tablelands