

WEEKLY COLUMN

Friday, 20 February 2015

Armidale Service NSW centre open for business

Yesterday I was delighted to meet with the staff at the new Service NSW Centre in Armidale and have a sneak peak at this great facility on the eve of its opening. This fantastic new centre in Rusden Street (the old RMS office) not only offers a comprehensive range of services, but also extended opening hours for the convenience of busy locals – 8.30am to 5.30pm weekdays and 8.30am to 12pm Saturdays. These expanded services and opening hours will be a great boost for many customers and I know the new manager Barice Lewis and all the Service NSW team will provide an excellent service to the people of Armidale.

Being able to carry out multiple transactions in one place saves everyone time and money and to complement these one-stop shops, the government is making it even more convenient for customers by putting more transactions online. Service NSW delivers more than 800 government transactions such as driver licence applications, contractor licences, birth certificate applications, housing payments and more.

NSW greyhound racing industry investigation

I have welcomed news that the Greyhound Racing NSW Board has agreed to step down and also stand aside the CEO following an ultimatum from Deputy Premier Troy Grant. Like everyone in the community I was shocked and disgusted by the revelations earlier this week on the ABC's Four Corners program about the prevalence of live baiting in the greyhound industry .

This week I've spoken to a large number of people within and outside the industry who were disgusted and want heads to roll and reforms made to stamp out this awful and illegal activity and restore integrity and transparency to the sport. The board being disbanded and the CEO stepping aside are welcome first steps and I am very pleased that Justice McHugh's review of the industry will now be strengthened in light of the recent revelations. It is quite clear that self-regulation of the industry under the current structure and culture has failed.

Threat to Essential Energy electricity distribution network

This week I have called on all parties and candidates contesting the upcoming election to join with me and my Nationals colleagues in opposing the Australian Energy Regulator's draft electricity network determination, which could see hundreds of jobs slashed across the New England and North West. I'm very worried that all the hard work in fighting to keep our local poles and wires network in 100 per cent public ownership will be undone by a proposal of the Australian Energy Regulator, which would decimate Essential Energy

Despite the fact the regulator wants to cut Essential Energy's revenue by 27 per cent and its capital investment by 60 per cent over the next five years, meaning massive job losses and rural depot closures, no one is talking about it. This could result in the loss of around 50 jobs in the Northern Tablelands and the closure of several smaller depots.

In response to this threat we've seen the city-based Labor Party support the AER's draft determination and the Greens and other candidates stay mute,

which means they are either ignorant about the impacts on country communities or are simply happy to see people in rural and remote areas experience degradation in the reliability and safety of their electricity supply. The community needs to be aware of what is proposed and where our leaders, parties and candidates stand on this issue.

Fixing Country Roads funding in Northern Tablelands

I was happy to announce this week more than \$2.8 million in State government funding to assist four of the region's councils undertake major road and bridge improvements projects, valued at over \$4.8 million. The Armidale Dumaresq Council, Inverell Shire Council, Moree Plains Shire Council and Uralla Shire Council have been working hard to address their infrastructure backlogs and make their road networks more efficient for freight so I am delighted their programs will be funded through the \$42.85 million *Fixing Country Roads* funding initiative.

- Armidale Dumaresq Council will receive \$600,000 to seal a 1.6 kilometre section of the Rockvale Road, which joins the busy Guyra to Ebor Road.
- Inverell Shire Council will replace the ageing Tin Tot Bridge between Graman and Ashford with a modern concrete structure thanks to \$800,000 from the program.
- Moree Plains Shire Council will benefit from \$700,000 to assist with widening the road seal on the important freight route between Moree and Croppa Creek.
- Uralla Shire Council is celebrating the news of \$705,000 which means it will be able to undertake another major bridge replacement on Thunderbolts Way, this time the Abington Creek Bridge.

These councils have also made important funding contributions to the projects: Armidale Dumaresq Council (\$200,000), Inverell Shire Council (\$200,000), Moree Plains Shire Council (\$408,000) and Uralla Shire Council (\$43,000). I congratulate these councils for their vital funding commitments which represents a genuine working partnership with the NSW Government.

Big boost to regional tourism

I have also welcomed this week the NSW Government's \$123.35 million commitment of new money to secure more major events and boost the State's visitor economy by an estimated \$481 million if re-elected. Pleasingly, the additional funding includes \$40.6 million of new money for regional NSW. It brings the total tourism and major events budget to over \$643 million, which includes more than \$190 million for regional NSW.

This represents a 25% increase in tourism funding which is a big win for rural and regional NSW. Our local region has a variety of fantastic tourist attractions including the beautiful Ebor falls and gorges in the east to the natural artesian hot springs at Moree and variety of transport and art museums in between. This funding injection will give this vital local industry the extra competitiveness needed to continue to grow.

New truck for Armidale Fire Station

Fire protection and emergency response in Armidale has received a huge boost with the arrival of a brand new \$310,000 fire truck. I inspected the new Mercedes Benz fire truck, referred to as a 'Class 2' pumper, on Monday and

am pleased to see the latest equipment and technology will increase the capacity of Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) firefighters to deal with fires, accidents, chemical spills and other emergencies.

The truck has a larger cabin than previous trucks, providing greater comfort and safety for firefighters and the rear of the truck has also been remounted and modified to provide more room for equipment. Last year Armidale firefighters responded to more than 600 fire and emergency calls and took part in more than 240 activities designed to educate the local community about fire safety. There's hardly a day that goes by that our firefighters aren't called on to protect the community and they do a wonderful job.

Funding announcements

Staff at **New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM)** were delighted to receive news this week they'd been successful in an application for **\$2,200** funding from the NSW Government Country Arts Support Program to run their *Artful Antics* project, a creative day for older people in the community offering a range of fun and hands-on activities. I'm delighted this project has been recognised for the value and pleasure it will bring to participants. It has been designed to give seniors the opportunity to reengage with everything from music, art, theatre, fashion, singing and literature. I commend the gallery staff on their enthusiasm for the project and I hope all participants have an excellent day.

The small but industrious committee of the **Glencoe Community Hall** will soon be working on further improvements after receiving **\$17,980** in State Government funding. Last year the group received \$11,000 through the Community Building Partnership Fund to extend the hall and that this latest funding would be used to fully paint in interior and exterior of the well-used community building. Some of the old paintwork is peeling off and there are sections of the exterior that need to be replaced due to wood rot.

Today and the weekend

This morning I will attend the sod turning ceremony for the new Agricultural Education Building at UNE. Earlier in the week, I had the pleasure of meeting many new students who are enjoying their first week at University, a very exciting time for them and I wish them well in their studies.

I will also attend the induction of the new PLC Principal Nicola Taylor and then off to a 'Meet the candidate' forum being conducted by the Armidale National Seniors Australia Branch.

Tonight I have the pleasure of opening the Guyra Show and on Saturday I will be opening the Ashford Show. Hopefully by then we will have received several inches of rain and everyone one will be in a celebratory mood.

Also on Saturday I will be opening the new Warialda and Ashford SES stations.

ADAM MARSHALL
Member for Northern Tablelands