WEEKLY COLUMN

Friday, 2 October 2015

NSW Treasurer visits Armidale

It was tremendous to welcome NSW Treasurer Gladys Berijiklian to Armidale on Wednesday where she meet with local business owners and operators and addressed a luncheon, hosted by the Armidale Business Chamber, about the NSW Budget and the state of the economy.

It's not often we see Treasurers in our region but Gladys accepted my invitation to come and see first-hand some of the business success stories we have here and how we can do more to help create more jobs and support business growth. I wanted her to also understand our region better so as to help promote what we have to offer to people looking to invest, relocate and find a job.

New vehicles for our local emergency services

Late last week, I had the pleasure of handing over the keys of some new emergency response vehicles to our SES and RFS units in the region. The Inverell SES members were happy to get their new state-of-the-art storm truck and Ashford unit equally please to get the keys to their new Ford Ranger 4WD.

The Yetman and Gilgai NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) Brigades received a major boost on the eve of this year's fire season, taking delivery of brand new $180,000 Category 7 (CAT 7) fire tankers. The new trucks are priceless resources for the brigades, providing the latest and best equipment to keep volunteer members safe on the fire ground and help them do their job as best they can.

Joint regional councils meeting in Moree

I had the pleasure of addressing Mayors and General Managers of the Namoi Joint Organisation of Councils (NamoiJOC) at their meeting in Moree on yesterday.

I took the opportunity to talk about the NSW Fit for the Future reforms and other regional issues. Namoi JOC covers the local government areas of Tamworth Regional, Gunnedah Shire, Moree Plains Shire, Narrabri Shire, Gwydir Shire, Liverpool Plains Shire, Uralla Shire and Walcha Councils.

Co-payment cost burden removed for cancer and chronic patents

I have welcomed the announcement this week that patients with cancer and other chronic conditions will now receive a huge financial boost with the State Government scrapping of co-payments on some medicines. The government will cover the co-payments for public hospital patients receiving Section 100 (s100) Highly Specialised Drugs and Section 100 injectable and infusible chemotherapy medicines and will save patients an average of $1,400 per year.

This is wonderful news for many people across the region and throughout country NSW who are living with complex illnesses. They suffer enough without the stress and strain of having to find hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars for essential but expensive medication.

Bingara's Gwydir River & Halls Creek bridges to undergo major upgrade

NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) will soon begin a major **$1.7 million** bridge maintenance and upgrade project along Fossickers Way to improve

pedestrian and road safety in Bingara. As part of the project RMS will replace the existing pedestrian walkways and carry out maintenance work including bolt replacement, bridge approach improvements, water main replacement and re-seal the deck surface on both bridges.

Work on the 232-metre long Gwydir River Bridge and 55-metre long Halls Creek Bridge will be carried out at the same time to minimise the impact on locals and motorists. The work is expected to take seven months to complete, weather permitting. This is the first of many major road and bridge projects people will see across the Gwydir Shire – it's going to be a huge 12 months of work to improvement vital local infrastructure.

The projects and allocations in the budget include:

- $1.74 million to Gwydir Shire Council for road maintenance across the shire;
- $1.7 million to upgrade Gwydir River and Halls Creek Bridges at Bingara;
- $1.1 million to upgrade Fossickers Way between Bingara and the Gwydir Highway;
- $800,000 to upgrade Halls Creek Bridge north of Bingara
- $800,000 to upgrade Cobbadah Creek Brudge on Fossickers Way.

Waterfall Way set for $600,000 improvement works at Ebor

The uneven and rutted Waterfall Way road surface in the village of Ebor will undergo a **$600,000** upgrade from next week. The work will be carried out on a 700-metre between the Guy Fawkes River and Pipeclay Street. The project, which is being carried out on behalf of NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) by Armidale Dumaresq Council, will get underway on Tuesday, 6 October. Waterfall Way is a significant road for our region, providing a critical link between Armidale and the Pacific Highway and the coast, for tourists, freight and other motorists. Weather permitting the work will be completed by December.

Consumer rights road show visiting Moree next week

I'm encouraging Moree residents to take the opportunity to learn more about their consumer rights and responsibilities and attend the various forums that will be held in Moree next week (6-9 October) as part the NSW Fair Trading *My Place* program. This is the government's flagship compliance and education program which caters to diverse communities, including seniors, motor repairers, real estate agents, students, incorporated associations, and home building licenced contractors to name a few.

The highlight of the *My Place* program is the Gamilaroi Cup Career, Future Pathways and Wellbeing Expo, which will be held at the Boughton Oval on 8-9 October. The Gamilaroi Cup rugby league competition will also involve a Career Expo of community agency stalls with information to address the social and emotional issues faced by students daily. I'd also like to encourage Indigenous residents to attend a free funerals information session which will be held at the Pius X Community Hall. Practical advice on what to look for and how to protect yourself from dodgy funeral planners will be provided at the information session. To register visit www.events.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au or call 13 32 20.

New sun protection installed for Inverell pool users

I visited the Inverell Memorial Pool last Friday to inspect a new shade structure recently constructed by Inverell Shire Council with a **$7,462** State Government grant. The funding was provided to council as part of a program which has distributed $1 million for much-needed shade in community parks and recreation areas, sporting grounds, schools and clubs.

Up to 99 per cent of skin cancers in Australia are caused by exposure to the sun and providing sun protection helps protect our community from UV over exposure. Very wisely, Inverell Shire Council decided to build a roof over an area of the pool complex that local schools use to marshal their students during swimming carnivals. In the past, the schools have relied on temporary shade covering so this is a huge improvement and an excellent way to ensure students are kept out of the sun's harmful rays while waiting for their events.

New resource to help get men off the couch

I'm urging men across the region to get active and get involved with the NSW Government's *Real Men* Move initiative, a three-year program aimed at getting men over 40 off the couch. *Real Men Move* is a website designed to support healthy ageing and offers resources for partners and friends to encourage their loved ones to kick start an exercise regime. Real Men Move can be found at: www.realmenmove.org.au

The website caters for a variety of circumstances and preferences providing information including:

- Ideas on how older men can start exercising immediately in the comfort of their home;
- The social and health benefits of exercising in a group; and
- Resources for community groups such as Men's Sheds to get their members moving

Be vigilant on the roads this long weekend

I would like to urge local motorists to remain vigilant on the roads this October long weekend, as Operation Slow Down kicks into gear. Sadly, since the start of the year 259 people have died on NSW roads – 26 more deaths than the same time last year. Police will be out in force, targeting things that contribute to accidents such as drugs and alcohol offences, speeding, seatbelt offences, mobile phone use and fatigue. If you're heading to a game or to a pub to support your team, make sure you plan your travel, everyone needs to be accountable for their actions. There are few greater tragedies than losing a loved one in a road accident, so I am urging everyone to take responsibility and look out for one another.

Today and the weekend

This morning I toured Fairview Retirement Village Aged Care facility in Moree. It was a delight to meet the staff and residents of Fairview, which is a great community asset. I then had a few meetings with Moree constituents.

Tomorrow morning I will be attending and opening Hillgrove's Heritage Weekend. It should be a fabulous few days have been planned and I'd like to congratulate the committee on the work they've done to bring this event to fruition. In the afternoon I will head off to Bundarra for the annual and very popular thoroughbred races – another great community event and certainly one not to be missed.

ADAM MARSHALL
Member for Northern Tablelands