July 2014

Talking Tablelands

BUDGET REPORT

with Adam **Marshall** MP

your Member for Northern Tablelands

Record roads spend in Northern Tablelands

LAST month's budget has been good news for the Northern Tablelands, with a record spend of more than $64.3 million on local roads and transport infrastructure. The windfall is part of the NSW Government's commitment to boost infrastructure and services across regional NSW.

I am particularly pleased to see the allocation of the remaining funds to construct the replacement Emu Crossing Bridge at Bundarra – something I pursued vigorously on behalf of the community during last year's by-election campaign.

This dovetails neatly with other strategic road upgrades across the Tablelands allocated funding in the budget.

The re-alignment of the New England Highway at Bolivia Hill will receive an additional $5 million and the Tenterfield Heavy Vehicle Bypass will also receive another injection of funds.

The NSW Government is also supporting businesses to grow with a further reduction to WorkCover premiums, with employers to benefit from an average premium rate reduction of five per cent. This is on top of the average 12.5 per cent rate reductions delivered in 2013.

There will also be a massive $24 million spent on improving the condition of State roads and some large amounts to rebuild and repair sections of the Waterfall Way, Gwydir and New England Highways. Local councils too will benefit with money to maintain regional roads.

With details released on the allocation of $13 million to support the rollout of the new national drought program, I'm pleased that as our farmers battle through a difficult winter period, there is now clarity around what assistance will continue to be available and where to source it.

I now look forward to working closely with all the communities in the Northern Tablelands to ensure our interests get the attention they deserve over the next 12 months and beyond.

Adam Marshall MP

Budget highlights

Roads

- ✔ **$5 million** to progress the realignment of the New England Highway at **Bolivia Hill**
- ✔ **$24 million** for road maintenance of Northern Tablelands state roads
- ✔ **$900,000** to continue the planning for the **Tenterfield** Heavy Vehicle Bypass
- ✔ **$3 million** for the construction of the **Emu Crossing Bridge** at **Bundarra**
- ✔ **$2.68 million** for resurfacing of the **New England Highway** at various locations

Infrastructure upgrades

- ✔ **$982,000** to refurbish government office buildings in **Inverell**, **Armidale**, **Glen Innes** and **Warialda**
- ✔ **$515,000** for upgrades to Court Houses in the electorate

Community Services

- ✔ Over **$960,000** for community transport providers throughout the **Northern Tablelands**
- ✔ **$915,000** for social housing upgrade across the electorate
- ✔ **$800,000** for commencement of two 5 bedroom group homes in **Armidale** for people living with a disability
- ✔ State Government has committed over **$2 million** to three specialist homelessness services in the **Northern Tablelands**

Environment

- ✔ **$2.92 million** for upgrades to fishways downstream of **Copeton Dam**

What next for Armidale Hospital

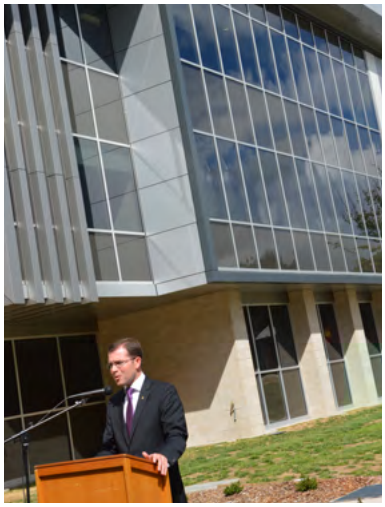
THE best news coming from the budget was the prioritisation of the long-awaited Armidale Hospital redevelopment, which, pending the finalisation of the planning later this year, will receive a share of the $50 million Regional Health Infrastructure fund.

Earlier this year the Health Minister Jillian Skinner announced $400,000 to undertake planning and final costing of the project, which is progressing well.

This work should be concluded in early December at which point I will push again for our share of this new fund and funding from the State and Commonwealth capital health budgets.

While it's far too early to pop the champagne corks, this is very positive news and the strongest sign we've had that this project will proceed.

This is my top priority for the electorate and I remain absolutely determined to see this critical infrastructure project delivered.



Armidale Hospital Ambulatory Care opening

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Poles and wire secured– now to claim our fair share

AFTER some very robust discussions with my coalition partners last month, I was thrilled to announce that our region's poles and wires network will continue to remain entirely in public hands. Essential Energy will be excluded from the partial long-term lease of the electricity distribution networks in NSW. The protection of our network will be enshrined in legislation.

While there was a great deal of pressure on Nationals MPs to agree to the networks' lease, I am proud to say that my colleagues and I stood firm in defending the interests of country NSW.

We also successfully demanded that country NSW gain a 30%, or $6 billion share of the revenue from the 49% lease of the largely metropolitan distribution networks. This money will be spent on infrastructure projects in rural and regional areas.

So with the battle won and our country (Essential Energy) poles and wires safe from privatisation, I have called a meeting of the regions' councils to prioritise a number of projects important to the region and secure as much of the proposed infrastructure funding as we can get.

We need to prepare a compelling case for these proposals when submissions go before the Rebuilding NSW Consultation Group later in the year. I've already been in discussions with a number of Mayors and community leaders and I know we'll have no shortage of roads, water and health infrastructure projects worthy of consideration.

This is a very exciting opportunity for our region and we don't want to miss out on a once-in-a generation chance to secure a large slice of pie.

State stumps up cash to look after our seniors

Armidale's Seniors Week Award winner Norm Dare with his grandchildren Teal and Charlie and Deputy Mayor Jenny Bailey.

PRIOR to last month's Budget, I lobbied the Treasurer and Minister for Ageing to make sure we protected concessions for seniors and I was delighted with the additional $107 million to fill the pensioner concession shortfall left by the recent Federal Budget.

Lobbying will continue from the NSW Government to have the Federal Government restore the long-standing agreement but in the meantime this is fantastic news for the more than 18,000 over 60s in the Northern Tablelands.

This additional State contribution to concessions for the 2014-15 year will go towards discounted public transport fares, cheaper energy and water bills, council rates and vehicle registration.

Back on track with drought assistance

LATE last month I welcomed the announcement that the NSW Government would honour its commitment to fund all eligible applications lodged for the NSW Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate for work completed on or before 30 June.

Earlier that week I made urgent representations to the Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson after the NSW Rural Assistance Authority (RAA) announced that the popular scheme had been fully subscribed, despite many farmers in the region not having yet made their claims.

The news that the claims would be honoured came as a great relief to the many farmers who called or emailed my office during the week. I'm very proud that together we were prepared to stand up and argue the case, which was heard favourably by the Minister.

The rebate guidelines required primary producers to submit invoices for costs incurred and many had been waiting for contractors to complete the works before submitting applications, on the basis that they had until the end of June. In good faith, Northern Tablelands farmers undertook works which were eligible under the scheme, with some going out on a limb financially to employ contractors, purchase piping and pumps anticipating they would be compensated – now they certainly will.

NSW Local Land Services Drought Co-ordinator Tim Johnston, Stuart Blake (Winterbourne, Walcha), Northern Tablelands LLS General Manager Paul Hutchings and LLS Senior Bio-Security Officer Geoffrey Green. In February Mr Blake had 500 head of his Wagyu breeders grazing on a Travelling Stock Route east of Walcha.

Applicants were given till Friday 4 July 2014 to lodge their applications to the RAA, with invoices dated on or before 30 June 2014. Infrastructure installed after 30 June 2014, which was not granted pre-approval, is not eligible for the rebate.

The NSW Government's temporary emergency assistance package, including the Transport Assistance Reimbursement, concluded on 30 June 2014 ahead of the commencement of the new national drought program from 1 July 2014.

For more information about NSW Government and Commonwealth drought support measures available from 1 July 2014 visit www.daff.gov.au/assistance or www.dpi.nsw.gov/agriculture/emergency/drought

Energy rebate increased

ANOTHER highlight of the budget was the $228 million allocated to ease energy costs on households. The government will increase the NSW Family Energy Rebate to $150 per year from 1 July, up from $125.

When I stood as a candidate for the seat of Northern Tablelands last year, I committed to fighting hard to help put downward pressure on the cost of living of residents across our region and that is what we're delivering.

The Low Income Household Rebate will increase to $235 per year, up from $225 and will be funded with $193 million in 2014-15. This is available to eligible Commonwealth concession card holders.

Assistance in the Medical Rebate will rise to $235 per year up from $225. $2 million will be available in the fund for residents who cannot self-regulate body temperature and have an eligible Commonwealth concession card.

Popular First Home Owners Grant boosted

I AM very pleased the threshold for the $15,000 NSW First Home Owners Grant will be boosted to $750,000 – an increase of $100,000 – and making it the most generous first home buyers grant in the country.

With the Northern Tablelands projected to grow by 7,500 in the next 17 years and with new housing opportunities across the region, we are presenting ourselves more and more as an attractive place to live and invest.

New funding opportunity for local libraries

THE Budget contained an increase in public library funding with almost $15 million extra over four years via a competitive grants scheme.

This will help local public libraries better meet the changing demands of their communities.

The new Public Library Infrastructure Grants will commence at $2.99 million in 2014-15, increasing to $3.99 million from 2015-16 to 2017-18. Applications for the fund will open soon.

Flying fox petition launched

EARLY in May I launched a petition in Inverell calling on the NSW Government to develop a better management strategy to deal more effectively with flying fox infestation in urban and built-up areas.

I would like to encourage residents who are supportive of this move to sign one of the many petitions that have been circulating throughout the community.

The ecological disaster caused by the roosting of a colony of flying foxes on the Inverell property of Blair Athol, a heritage-listed guest house, neighbouring properties and along the McIntyre River last year, led me to this decision.

I want to bring to the attention of the House the impacts that flying fox colonies have on the health and wellbeing of residents. The problem is existing legislation is too restrictive and does not provide effective solutions to give relief to residents when flying fox colonies roost on their properties.

Blair Athol Guesthouse proprietor Kim Kelleher.

Councils benefit from investment in infrastructure

LOCAL councils will continue to benefit from the NSW Government's Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme (LIRS) with a further investment of $17.6 million in the budget. The scheme provides councils with a 3 per cent interest subsidy for up to 10 years on loans to finance critical local infrastructure projects.

As a former Mayor, I understand the tough task councils face building for the future so I'm delighted this important scheme will be continued and allocated additional funding.

The scheme is now entering its third round, after unlocking more than $11.3 million in valuable infrastructure projects for councils in the Northern Tablelands over the first two rounds.

Inquiry underway into Regional Air Services

Rex Airlines Deputy Chairman John Sharp at the official launch of the Rex Service - Armidale to Sydney.

WITH public hearings of the NSW Parliamentary Regional Aviation Services Inquiry underway, I cannot emphasise enough the importance of air services to Armidale, the gateway to the Northern Tablelands for business, tourism and medical services.

I called for this inquiry in November last year when my office was inundated with calls and letters of complaint regarding the unreliable service being provided to our region by QantasLink. Frustration levels were high and it was time the airline was called to account.

Another critical issue that will certainly be front and centre of this inquiry is the absolute need to guarantee regional airlines have access to slots in peak times at Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport. Apart from having reliable services, we need to ensure regional services are not shunted out to Bankstown, or Badgerys Creek in the future.

It's unconscionable to imagine a day when international or interstate passengers fly direct into the heart of our State's capital, yet our own rural and regional citizens are relegated to landing in the relative 'boondocks' of Sydney.

When I used the floor of State Parliament last year to tell QantasLink to pull their socks up, my intent was to fight for an airline service for the Northern Tablelands that is timely, affordable and convenient; a reliable service that our region not only needs but deserves.

Use it or lose it

THE significance of the arrival of Rex Airlines in Armidale earlier in the year can't be underestimated.

The impact that competition brings to the market place is remarkable - flights have become more affordable and April figures show that there was a 10.6% growth in passenger numbers.

However it can't be stressed enough that both airlines need to be supported if we are to continue to enjoy the benefits of two viable airlines servicing this region.

The fact is passenger throughput in Armidale must grow by 20-25,000 in the next 12 months or risk losing one of the two carriers.

$4 million bridge gets the go-ahead

EARLY in May the Uralla Shire Council Mayor Michael Pearce and I announced Newcastle-based company Civilbuild Pty Ltd has been contracted to deliver a $4 million new bridge over the Gwydir River at Bundarra.

The project will replace the existing low-level Emu Crossing Bridge with a higher, longer and wider structure designed to cope with major flooding events and to keep the region's freight moving.

This stretch of road represents a key transport and freight route for the people and businesses of the Northern Tablelands, with approximately 550 vehicle movements across the bridge each day – 30 per cent of them trucks.

Thunderbolts Way is the only direct transport route between the towns of Bundarra, Bingara, Warialda and Inverell in the west, connecting to Armidale, including to the Armidale Airport and the state's road network.

The current single lane bridge was built in 1919 and is regularly closed during minor flooding, resulting in a 95 kilometre detour for road users, so this project saves motorists hours of travel time.

Civilbuild contractors David Tolmie and Jarrod Buttsworth, Uralla Shire Council Mayor Michael Pearce and General Manager Damien Connor, Bundarra General Store owner Melissa Lowell, Deputy Mayor Bob Crouch, Dave Lowell and Spencer Hall.

Order in the House

In the Speaker's chair with Speaker of the House Shelley Hancock.

WITH the resumption of Parliament after the April break and the subsequent reshuffle of !Ministers, I was honoured to be appointed to the Speaker's Panel as Assistant Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

I've chaired a lot of meetings in my time as Mayor but this is a new ball game. I'm enjoying plying an important role in the smooth running of the House. In terms of local representation, this new role will be confined to Parliamentary sessions and will not keep me in Sydney more often than before.

I can still speak on the floor of Parliament just as I have been during the last 13 months since my election and anyone who knows me would be well aware I would never be willing to forgo my say on the floor of the house.

Next step for New England Rail Trail

THE Guyra community's New England Rail Trail project took another step forward in last month's budget when $110 million was allocated to a new Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

This presents an exciting opportunity for well researched and locally supported proposals and Guyra's New England Rail Trail project ticks all those boxes.

The Steering Committee will meet the Minister in August to put forward their proposal which will be a first for NSW.

It includes a zero construction cost funding model, major stakeholder support and the maintaining of grazing rights of local landholders.

The plan would convert 34 km of disused railway track from Black Mountain Station to Ben Lomond via Guyra Station township into a cycling/walking trail.

Rail Trails have proved to be very popular throughout Europe and Canada and are now taking off in Victoria so it makes a great deal of sense for the New England to lead the way in NSW and open up this beautiful area to visitors.

Not only is it a great way to put an old railway line to good use, it would certainly create new business opportunities in the region and promote the New England as another destination for the adventure-seeking tourist and provide a new track for local cycling and walking groups.

New England Rail Trail Steering Committee Chairman David Mills discusses plans with Deputy Premier Andrew Stoner

Fixing country roads

I HAVE my sights firmly set on securing a fair share of the $39.7million set aside in the budget for the new 'Fixing Country Roads' program.

The NSW Government is partnering with local councils and industry to identify important infrastructure upgrades needed on council-owned and managed roads to improve safety, freight productivity and carrying capacity.

I've already had some preliminary meetings with Gwydir and Inverell shire council representatives and they've earmarked roads in the north of their shires that play a vital role in industry and development and need upgrading.

We will meet the Minister for Roads Duncan Gay soon to put forward our case for funding for these road upgrades. I've already had Walcha Council at Parliament House for meetings about securing funding to upgrade Thunderbolts Way.

It is a priority that we work to provide better connections to state-owned roads and highways, allowing goods to be transported faster and more efficiently from 'paddock to port' and make it easier and safer for people to visit our region.

Gwydir Shire Council General Manager Max Eastcott

Inverell Shire Council Mayor Paul Harmon and General Manager Paul Henry.

Budget allocation for highway upgrades

- ✔ **$2.6 million** for road widening on Fossickers Way north of the Gwydir River near **Bingara**
- ✔ **$1.9 million** for New England Highway road rebuilding south of **Dundee**
- ✔ **$1.8 million** to widen the Gwydir Highway west of **Delungra**
- ✔ **$1.7 million** to rebuild a section of the Waterfall Way west of **Ebor**
- ✔ **$1.5 million** for the upgrade of the Dry Gully Bridge on Fossickers Way south of **Bingara**
- ✔ **$1.5 million** to rebuild a section of Gwydir Highway west of **Glen Innes**
- ✔ **$1 million** to rebuild a section of the New England Highway north of **Armidale**
- ✔ **$1.7 million** to resurface sections of the **Gwydir** and **Oxley Highways** and the **Waterfall Way**
- ✔ **$300,000** for drainage upgrades on the **Gwydir Highway** at the Gibraltar Range
- ✔ **$240,000** for slip repairs on the Gwydir Highway at the **Gibraltar Range**
- ✔ **$67,000** for road repairs on the **Bruxner Highway**
- ✔ **$1.7 million** for local councils to maintain regional roads
- ✔ **$125,000** for school crossing supervisor
- ✔ **$27 million** for maintenance on State road

Working for the Northern Tablelands

MARCH

- ✔ **$100,000** for **Armidale Dumaresq Council** for floodplain management
- ✔ **$1,949** for **Walcha Historical Society** for textile storage boxes

- ✔ **$3,600** for Tenterfield **Sunnyside Seniors Biodiversity Project** for environmental protection work
- ✔ **Resurfacing** on sections of the **New England Highway** at Guyra, Glen Innes, Tenterfield and Uralla
- ✔ **Lobbying Minister for Health** for funds to upgrade Armidale Hospital redevelopment plans

APRIL

- ✔ New **$8 million Ambulatory Care** and Chemotherapy Building officially opened by Minister for Health Jillian Skinner

- ✔ **$400,000** funding allocated to upgrade **Armidale Hospital redevelopment plans**
- ✔ New TAFE training program **Drought Reach** launched to support drought affected farmers
- ✔ Former **Minister for Mental Health Kevin Humphries** visited **several Men's Sheds** while touring the electorate

- ✔ **$10,000** for new **Liberty Swing** for Victoria Park Inverell
- ✔ **$200,000** funding boost for **Regional Arts** organisations
- ✔ **$38,000** maintenance work on **Tenterfield** and **Armidale Public Schools**
- ✔ **$40,000** grant for fish habitat rehabilitation on the **Horton River**
- ✔ **Proposal** put forward to keep former **Armidale Courthouse** in community's hands
- ✔ New state-of-the-art **$1.2 million Connections Inverell** facility opened

Supplementary Grants from the Public Reserve Management Funds

- ✔ **$80,000** for the **Glen Innes Show Ground Trust** to assist with the replacement of the ring lights
- ✔ **$13,000** for **Bingara Showground Trust** to replace the ring fence
- ✔ **$13,000** for **Bundarra Showground Trust** for replacement of the septic system

MAY

- ✔ Contract awarded for new **$4 million Emu Crossing Bridge** at Bundarra, work to begin in **August**

- ✔ **$488,000** funding increase in **community transport** programs for the Northern Tablelands
- ✔ Two new **Police Officers** join the New England Local Area command in **Armidale**
- ✔ Paid tribute to the Northern Tablelands' **nurses and midwives** on the floor of **Parliament**
- ✔ Go ahead given for **one-stop-shop** for **government services** in **Armidale**
- ✔ **$500,000** work begins on **Waterfall Way** just east of Armidale
- ✔ **$100,000** repair work on drainage begins on **Gibraltar Range**
- ✔ **$1.5 million** to **Guyra Costa Tomato Farms** to assist with $45 million expansion creating **171 new full-time jobs**

JUNE

- ✔ **$757,280** for the upgrade of community recycling centres at **Glen Innes, Armidale, Walcha and Uralla**

- ✔ **$1,415** grant for **Bingara Museum** to purchase a wire mannequin and display cabinet

Sport and Recreation Participation and Facility Grants – March 2014

- ✔ **$21,000** for Ashford Rugby League Club for spectator seating, uniforms and registration
- ✔ **$8,575** for the Nullamanna Hall and Recreation Reserve for the upgrade of the arena fence
- ✔ **$8,250** to Inverell Shire Council to upgrade the cricket pitch at Cameron Park
- ✔ **$21,000** for the Glen Innes Showground Trust for a new disabled amenities block
- ✔ **$8,940** for the Pinkett Recreation Grounds to cover the children's sandpit and renew the boundary fence
- ✔ **$5,100** to Armidale Blues Rugby Union Club to develop rugby in the junior ranks
- ✔ **$5,600** to Inverell Golf Club to run their Seniors on the Green program
- ✔ **$5,850** for Armidale Rowing Club to fund their Learn to Row sessions
- ✔ **$5,904** for the Drake School of Arts Progress Association to purchase mats for their community sport and fitness programs
- ✔ **$2,000** for the Tingha Tigers to kick start their minor league competition

Out and about in the electorate

Clontarf Academy students at the Inverell High School: All the boys proved to be a little too good for me at the ping pong table. Next time!

State Heritage listing for Armidale's Anglican Cathedral: Former Minister for Environment Robyn Parker, New England Girls' School & Anglican Church archivist Jean Newell OAM and Dean Stephen Williams.

Yetman Public School: K-1 teacher Ruth Weatherall with her students and the school chaplain Rev Dan Avenell.

Black Mountain Public School: P&C President Jennifer Friend and Principal Belinda Baker with students.

Renovations for Coolatai Community Sports Hall: Tim Cox, Carol Coleman, Barb Walker and Colin Cuell.

Northern Tablelands Woman of the Year: Armidale mental health advocate and SANE Australia ambassador Sarah McFarlane-Eagle and Minister Pru Goward.

Sport and Recreation grant for Tingha Tigers: Tingha Tigers Minor League team at Kamilaroi Park with Robyn Dixon and Sharon Gates.

Grant for Ben Lomond outdoor gym: Ben Lomond Landcare President Graham Willis, Secretary Beth White, Guyra Shire Council Mayor Hans Hietbrink, General Manager Peter Stewart, and Heartmoves instructor Sue Adams.

Pathfinders pumpkin project: Pathfinders participants Jerry Boney, Mikey Speedy and Tully Bransby with Tillbuster steering committee member Rob Taber and Pathfinder CEO Alan Brennan about to head to Sydney to deliver pumpkins to a youth refuge.

Authorised by Adam Marshall MP.
Printed by Evans Printing, 215 Mann Street, Armidale NSW 2350 using Parliamentary entitlements.