

Talking Tablelands

with **Adam Marshall** MP
your Member for Northern Tablelands



Merry Christmas

IT'S ALMOST the end of another busy and productive year for Northern Tablelands communities and most people are wondering where the year has gone and looking forward to a holiday break. When we look back over the last 12 months we can see many achievements around our region and if we look forward to next year there are still many projects to be undertaken.

We are fortunate to live in this part of the world with its natural beauty and cohesive communities. I am always struck by the friendliness of people as I travel the electorate and the enthusiasm to get behind local projects and make progress. We have a strong sense of community and there is no better evidence of this than the number of volunteers who give thousands of hours each year to help others. They show great generosity of spirit and are major contributors to our quality of life here in the country.

Our rural community continues to struggle with the uncertainties and harsh trials of one of the most severe droughts seen in this region. Sadly last month offered nothing more than a few scattered showers and record heatwave temperatures which left us all wondering what happened to spring. Everyone is looking toward the skies, hoping for a turnaround in conditions over the Christmas period.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the community on so many projects and issues this year and shortly, together with the Armidale and Inverell communities, I will be leading a campaign for significant capital investment from the government to redevelop the Armidale and Inverell Hospitals, which are in dire need of attention. We have many professional and dedicated medical staff in the Northern Tablelands who provide wonderful care to their patients, however these ageing hospitals limit the scope of health services which can be provided in our region. This must be rectified and I'm determined to see the Armidale and Inverell communities gain their hospital redevelopments. This will dramatically improve health care right across the electorate.

As this will be my last newsletter for the year, I wish everyone in the Northern Tablelands a very Happy (and wet) Christmas and a safe and prosperous New Year.

Adam Marshall MP



Spencer Hall and daughters Bridie and Gabby with Uralla Shire Deputy Mayor Bob Crouch at the site of the new bridge.

Construction in full swing on new Emu Crossing Bridge

I'M PLEASED to report that work on the new \$4 million Emu Crossing Bridge at Bundarra is well underway and weather permitting, will be completed by the end of June next year.

It was certainly a momentous occasion for Bundarra and the region when the first sod was turned in July as the local community have been asking for a new bridge for more than 70 years. As early as 1935, the then Gostwyck Shire Council began making representations to

the State Government for financial assistance to replace the existing low-level crossing, built in 1919.

With the NSW Government's large funding commitment as well as a contribution from Uralla Shire Council, the new bridge will be a two-lane, 150-metre long structure. At 15 metres above the river bottom the bridge will be able to cope with a 1 in 50 year flood event.

Adam Marshall MP

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ACCC brought to heel over high Armidale fuel prices



I WAS very pleased that after sustained community pressure, the ACCC backflipped on its initial refusal to conduct an investigation into Armidale's ridiculously high fuel prices. Not so coincidentally, since that announcement, fuel prices in Armidale have dropped considerably, by 11 cents a litre on average. It just goes to show what community pressure can achieve.

I initially raised this issue in State Parliament and wrote to ACCC asking for an inquiry into Armidale's uncompetitive fuel prices but I was appalled by their original response – a two-page letter full of placating remarks and motherhood statements. They hadn't even bothered to seriously look into the valid concerns and allegations which were brought to their attention. The following week I took to the floor of Parliament again on behalf of the community and lambasted the

ACCC, labelling it as an "anti-competition eunuch".

To say their response fell far short of my expectations is an understatement so I was very pleased to have Nationals Senator John Williams take up the matter with ACCC at a Senate estimates hearing in Canberra where he shared the Armidale community's concerns directly with them. This was critical, together with pressure from the local community and media, in having the competition watchdog change its mind and investigate. I now look forward to the investigation outcome and will be keeping the pressure on the fuel retailers.

In the meantime I urge the community to remain vigilant and if you wish to make a complaint, call the ACCC's toll-free number 1300 302 502 or go to the website www.accc.gov.au and submit your views online.

Rebuilding NSW and Northern Tablelands

PREMIER Mike Baird and Deputy Premier Troy Grant have announced a \$20 billion plan to turbocharge infrastructure in NSW. I am particularly pleased to see details released of the \$6 billion regional infrastructure plan and you can be assured that I will be pushing hard for the Northern Tablelands to get its fair share.

This funding will become available if the NSW Government is returned at next year's election and the 49 per cent lease of the State's metropolitan electricity businesses proceeds.

Among the highlights of Rebuilding NSW is massive investment in country NSW, including:

- ✓ **\$3.7 billion** for regional roads and bridges;
- ✓ **\$1 billion** for water security projects;
- ✓ **\$400 million** for country rail;
- ✓ **\$300 million** to accelerate regional health projects;
- ✓ **\$300 million** for regional school renewals;
- ✓ **\$300 million** for regional tourism and environment projects; and
- ✓ **\$1.2 billion** for a sport and cultural fund.

I'm happy to report that our Northern Tablelands' councils are out in front with their applications following a meeting I convened with all Mayors and General Managers. Councils lodged their wish lists with the Rebuilding NSW committee in October.

Renewable Energy Target (RET) support

I HAVE publicly declared my strong support for the national Renewable Energy Target (RET) on many occasions. Just over a year ago, the State Government released its NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan which is a guide to the development of renewable energy in NSW and supports the national target of 20 per cent renewable energy by 2020. I fully support the NSW Government's vision for a secure, reliable, affordable and clean energy future for our State.

Despite the recent downward

trend in energy demand, to achieve our objectives, the RET is essential to attract the required private investment in renewables. Many project proposals across NSW, and particularly in the Northern Tablelands, have been pursued in good faith that the RET would be retained.

For the Federal Government to shift the goalposts significantly now would be to risk these projects being scuppered and a potential loss of economic and environmental gains for our region.

Chief Scientist's CSG report released and adopted

OCTOBER saw the release of the final Independent Report into Coal Seam Gas (CSG) Activities in NSW by the State's Chief Scientist Professor May O'Kane. I welcomed the report and immediately urged the government to adopt and implement all of Professor O'Kane's 16 recommendations.

I was very pleased to see Resources Minister Anthony Roberts recently announce that the government would be adopting all of the report's recommendations.

In addition, legislation passed through the parliament, which eliminated 16 pending CSG prospecting and exploration license applications, which covered around 45% of the State. This included an application by a

company known as Trough Exploration for a Petroleum Special Prospecting Authority (PSPA) across Gwydir Shire.

In the report, Professor O'Kane recommended the need for a more fair and adequate compensation scheme, not just for landholders directly affected by CSG operations, but also those residents indirectly impacted, as well as local councils.

One of the major concerns I had in my time as Mayor of Gunnedah Shire and now in the western areas of the Northern Tablelands electorate, is the uncertainty this industry creates for communities because there are no defined areas where it is inappropriate for the industry to develop.

\$7.94 million unlocked for council infrastructure

ONE of the issues that concerns me is the crippling infrastructure backlogs carried by local government so I was particularly pleased to announce in October three very generous loan subsidies from the NSW Government's Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme for Glen Innes, Inverell and Armidale councils.

Glen Innes Severn Council will now be able to proceed with a \$4 million program to accelerate the renewal and upgrade of 43 timber bridges and associated roads. Council will receive a three per cent interest subsidy on

the loan for up to 10 years, which will save ratepayers more than \$677,000.

Inverell Shire Council received a subsidy for its \$2.86 million revamp of the Inverell sewerage treatment plant. The interest subsidy will save council and the community more than \$357,000.

Armidale Dumaresq Council will proceed with a \$1.08 million upgrade of the Rologas Sports Fields, including the construction of a new amenities block and player change rooms, with a saving of around \$184,000 for ratepayers.

Glen Innes Severn Council General Manager Hein Basson and Mayor Col Price on the Furracabad Bridge at Glen Innes.



Working for the No

JUNE

- ✓ **\$757,280** for the upgrade of community recycling centres at **Glen Innes, Armidale, Walcha and Uralla**
- ✓ **\$1,415** for **Bingara Museum** to purchase a wire mannequin and display cabinet



- ✓ **\$6,970** for **Wandsworth Community Hall** all-purpose access ramp
- ✓ **\$35,000** for the upgrade of bus shelters at **Glencoe and Deepwater**
- ✓ **\$51,000** for the construction of three new bus shelters at **Inverell**
- ✓ **\$53,390** for the construction of a new bus shelter at **Tenterfield**
- ✓ **\$45,000** to **Uralla Shire Council** to establish the online planning system
- ✓ **\$510,000** for the upgrade of **Cameron Park** in **Inverell**



JULY

- ✓ **\$6,900** for **Ashford, Guyra and Tingha Local Aboriginal Lands Councils** celebrations as part of NAIDOC week
- ✓ **\$13,625** to assist **Inverell Shire Council** to rehabilitate 1km section of MacIntyre River
- ✓ **\$25,000** grant to repair Laura Creek Crossing at **Guyra**



- ✓ **\$135,000** for the improvement of dangerous road sections for **Armidale and Tenterfield**
- ✓ **\$63,000** for **Backtrack** to expand its reach to encompass more schools and include girls in the programs



AUGUST

- ✓ **\$4,000** to assist the **Ashford** unit of the SES purchase furniture and fittings for the new Headquarters



- ✓ **\$970,000** to assist **Glen Innes Shire Council** address water security and supply issues
- ✓ **\$500** for **Armidale Historical Society** to produce its annual journal



- ✓ **\$500** for **Glen Innes Historical Society** to produce its annual journal
- ✓ **\$32,107** to assist **Inverell Shire Council** rehabilitate Upper MacIntyre region
- ✓ **\$99,898** for **Southern New England Landcare** revegetation project



- ✓ **\$5,000** for **Armidale and Glen Innes Men's Sheds**
- ✓ **\$22,000** for new **Inverell** footpath and cycleway

SEPTEMBER

- ✓ **\$7,500** for **Inverell Shire Council** to assist in preserving community heritage



- ✓ **\$1,120,333** for the **Northern Inland Weeds Advisory Committee** Action Program
- ✓ **\$4,000** for **Gwydir Shire Council** to help stage the North West Film Festival

OCTOBER

- ✓ **\$7,000** for the **Historical Society** to create a database record of artefacts stored at McCrossins Mill Museum



- ✓ **\$2.6 million** to upgrade 3.3km section of road on the **Fossickers Way** west of Ebor
- ✓ **\$26,531** to help the **Inverell Salvation Army** continue its work with the No Interest Loans Scheme assisting vulnerable families



Northern Tablelands

- ✓ **\$45,000** for **NERAM** to run its annual program of events



- ✓ **\$100,000** in arts funding for **Beyond Empathy** to conduct a program engaging marginalised and disadvantaged communities
- ✓ **\$14.7 million** allocated to the Northern Tablelands Rural Fire Service for operational expenditure
- ✓ Three per cent interest subsidy on a **\$2.8 million** loan for **Inverell Shire Council** to proceed with an upgrade of their sewerage treatment works
- ✓ Three per cent interest subsidy on a **\$4 million** loan for **Glen Innes Severn Council** to proceed with bridge and road renewal program
- ✓ Three per cent interest subsidy on a **\$1 million** loan for **Armidale Dumaresq Council** to upgrade the Rologas Sports Field

NOVEMBER

- ✓ **\$320,000** for **New England RFS** to build a new base at Armidale Airport



- ✓ **\$500,000** upgrade for Armidale Railway Station and bus interchange at the **Armidale Visitors Information Centre**
- ✓ New **GP Clinic** opened at Inverell Hospital
- ✓ **One-stop-shop** for **Service NSW** to open in Armidale
- ✓ **\$2,200** for **Glen Innes Bowling Club** to purchase a specialised lawn bowls wheelchair for disabled members



Sport and Recreation Participation and Facility Grants – March 2014

- ✓ **\$25,000** grant to **Gwydir Shire Council** to assist with the conversion of unused squash courts to a fitness centre at Finch Street Bingara
- ✓ **\$22,727** grant to **Inverell Rugby Club Inc.** to assist with Stage One of facility upgrade, earthworks and retaining walls at the Rugby Park
- ✓ **\$7,606** grant to the **Tingha Minor League Inc.** to assist with construction of a separate female change room at the Tingha Sport and Recreation Ground
- ✓ **\$6,350** grant to **BEST Employment Ltd** for the provision of sport and fitness programs in **South Inverell**
- ✓ **\$9,871** grant to the **Barbarians Rugby Union Football Club** to help increase 'safe' participation in Rugby at junior and senior levels
- ✓ **\$2,500** grant to the **Inverell Polocrosse Club** to help fund the 2014 Carnival in August
- ✓ **\$2,350** to **NSW Touch Football** to run their 2014 North West Touch Football Games

Grants from the Public Reserve Management Funds – \$268,000

- ✓ **\$85,319** to undertake major upgrades at **Inverell Showground**
- ✓ **\$107,165** for power supply upgrade at **Warialda Showground**



- ✓ **\$26,000** for upgrade of electricity safety switches at **Guyra Showground**
- ✓ **\$12,112** to improve holding yards at **Ashford Showground**
- ✓ **\$23,460** to upgrade **Armidale Showground's** stormwater drainage system
- ✓ **\$4,194** to the **Glen Innes Pistol Club** for weed control and pest management
- ✓ **\$9,750** to **Uralla Shire Council** for weed control at Wooldridge Fossicking Area

Online applications for Seniors Cards

OUR senior citizens can now apply online for their NSW Seniors Card. In order to make the process more efficient and accessible, a move away from paper-based application forms has been initiated.

People are eligible for the NSW Seniors Card when they are:

- 60 years of age or over when applying;
- A permanent resident of New South Wales;
- Working no more than 20 hours of paid work a week, calculated annually; and
- The holder of a valid Medicare Card.

There are many benefits from having a NSW Seniors Card, including discounts on public transport and special offers from thousands of businesses in NSW. Those who qualify for a Seniors Card can apply online at www.service.nsw.gov.au or simply by calling 13 77 88.

Apply now for up to \$250 off your electricity bill

I'M urging eligible households across the electorate to apply for the 2014-15 NSW Family Energy Rebate (FER) and receive up to \$150 towards the cost of their energy bills. The submission deadline is Tuesday, 16 June 2015. The \$150 rebate, which has increased from \$125 last year, is available to NSW households who currently receive the Commonwealth Government's Family Tax Benefit A or B.

Families also eligible for the NSW Government's Low Income Household Rebate could receive more support in the form of an annual combined capped rebate of \$250. To apply for the Rebate, type 'family energy rebate' into a search engine or apply online at: <https://applications.fer.trade.nsw.gov.au/>

New Armidale Service NSW Centre here in February

I AM delighted that construction will begin early in January to convert the current Armidale Roads & Maritime Services (RMS) motor registry in Rusden Street into the new Service NSW one-stop-shop. The new facility is due to commence operations in late February next year.

This is an exciting new development and a big win for the residents and businesses of Armidale and the Northern Tablelands region.

Service NSW will deliver more than 800 multi-government transactions such as driver licence applications, contractor licences, birth certificate applications, Seniors Cards and more. In recognition of expanded services and extended trading hours, including being open on Saturday mornings, the new centre will employ 13 staff, including an additional seven new positions. Meaning you can do your business with NSW government agencies at a time convenient to you.

Armidale Hospital a high priority

IN my last speech in the 55th NSW Parliament I again took up the cudgels about the desperate need for the Armidale Rural Referral Hospital to be redeveloped. The community has been pushing for well over a decade for this project and I made it clear to my colleagues, the government and the Health Minister that I plan to leave no stone unturned in my campaign to see the redevelopment become a reality.

At the time of writing, I am waiting for the design team to complete the upgrade to the redevelopment plans – a vital process to ensure we are ready with up-to date, state-of-the-art plans to move forward to the next stage to secure the more than \$60 million necessary for the upgrade. I can advise that the proposed redevelopment will likely accommodate a refurbished emergency department, operating theatres, intensive care unit, inpatient beds and medical ward.

I have worked hard to make sure the Health Minister understands this redevelopment is absolutely vital to improve health care in this region and ensure that people can meet their health care needs at an acute level on their doorstep without having to travel to Tamworth or to John Hunter Hospital at Newcastle.

We have some magnificent local health staff who go out of their way to treat patients but are being let down by infrastructure that has not kept pace with modern health care needs. I will keep the community informed as this progresses.

Inverell Hospital

I would also like to reassure Inverell residents that the Inverell District Hospital is on my radar and I will be seeking funding for an upgrade to the renal services, operating theatre and other areas.



New laws for flying fox management



FOLLOWING a lot of community support and a 10,000 signature petition in the Parliament, I was very pleased to welcome a recent announcement by Environment Minister Rob Stokes of a new NSW Government strategy to minimise the impacts of flying-fox camps in populated areas.

The proposed new laws will empower land managers, primarily local councils, to sustainably manage flying-fox camps and take reasonable steps to move the colonies on when they roost in urban areas.

This new and pragmatic approach, which we've been lobbying for, will address the frustration communities have felt and will deliver better outcomes for people and for the species.

Flying-foxes remain protected and under the new policy land managers will be able to get a five year license to:

Create buffer zones by removing vegetation to create a separation from populated areas and to disturb animals at the boundary of the camp to encourage roosting away from human settlement;
Carry out camp disturbance or dispersal by clearing of vegetation or dispersal of animals by noise, water, smoke or light; and
Undertake camp management such as removal of trees that pose a health and safety risk, weed removal (including removal of noxious weeds), trimming of understorey vegetation and the planting of vegetation.

Native vegetation codes released but much more to be done

LAST month I welcomed the release of three new self-assessable native vegetation codes, which will make life easier for farmers by cutting some red tape and allowing them to get on with managing their farms without the need to wait for government assessment and approval.

These new regulations will deliver improved outcomes for landholders in the short-term while the government continues to move towards substantial long-term reform through its review of the Native Vegetation Act and other pieces of biodiversity legislation.

Personally, I'm looking forward to the completion of the review so we can get about making the changes the farming sector has long desired – to remove the millstone, that is the Native Vegetation Act, from around their necks.

While these new codes help landholders make some headway, I will continue to champion this issue until

meaningful and more extensive reform is made.

The three new self-assessable codes, which have been tested on the ground with rural landholders, are:

- Invasive native scrub – this code relates to native plants that have regenerated thickly or invaded vegetation communities where they did not previously occur. The code allows for management of these species by clearing of dense infestations, including by using heavy earth moving equipment.
- Isolated paddock trees in cropped areas – this code allows a paddock tree (or a group of three paddock trees) in a cropped area that is smaller than 80 centimetres in diameter and further than 50 metres away from another tree to be removed without any approval being required.
- Thinning of native vegetation – this code allows for the removal of trees and shrubs of thick native vegetation.



Clinical trial for medical cannabis a step forward

THE campaign to legalise the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes continues to gather momentum with Premier Mike Baird opening the recent very successful Tamworth symposium last month and reiterating his support for the clinical trial established by the government.

Earlier this year, I publicly declared my support for the medicinal use of cannabis for the terminally ill and it is my hope that this trial will bring further clarity to the issue, enhance the community's understanding of the medical use and benefits of cannabis and increase the already strong support we have gathered across the State.

I will continue to campaign together with the Haslam family and my colleagues for the laws to be changed in NSW – what would be an Australian first.

Common sense prevails on bull bar rules

IN August, I took up cause of many locals unwittingly caught in the crosshairs of a regional blitz on what were being interpreted as 'non-compliant' vehicle bull bars.

Many people across the electorate were issued with defect notices or warnings from police for having bull bars on their vehicles which didn't comply with Australian Standards, which have been in place since 2003. The standards were out-dated and also unclear and open to an interpretation that 'five-post' bull bars, those that lean forward from the vehicle and protrude well above bonnet height or the side of the vehicle were illegal. This was despite the bars being manufactured and fitted by fully licenced professionals.

After bringing the issue to the attention of the Minister for Roads Duncan Gay and speaking on the floor of Parliament, I was very pleased that the Minister introduced a two-year moratorium for vehicle owners who inadvertently purchased a 'non-complying' bull bar. A working group has also been formed to review the bull bar rules within the next two years.

This action was followed by Ministerial Order which has given clear guidelines detailing the types of bull bars allowed on vehicles on NSW roads. The Order will be in place for two years and a guide will be released that includes diagrams and clearly explains NSW's bull bar rules as well as the interim tolerances that have been approved.

Out and about in the electorate



Highlands Schools Leadership luncheon: Student leaders and principals from Guyra Central, Black Mountain, Bald Blair, Ebor, Chandler and Ben Lomond schools at Rafter's in Guyra.



New fire station for RFS: The Black Mountain community celebrated the official opening of its brand new \$125,000 NSW Rural Fire Service Station shed.



Bonshaw Public School: A special Education Week assembly with the school's nine students and someone's little sister.



Carers Week Award: Acknowledging her exceptional contribution to the long-term care of a family member, Glen Innes resident Yvonne Lightfoot received a Carers Week Award.



Vegetable Creek MPS fete: Alice Clifford, long time Emmaville resident and former community leader opened the fete.



Black Mountain Public School: Students with Principal Belinda Baker and classroom teacher Emma Lindeman.



Funding for weed control program: Uralla Shire Council Mayor Michael Pearce at Wooldridge Fossicking Area.



BEST Food Garden Inverell: Spring planting.



Tingha MPS Hospital Auxiliary: Back row from left: Regional Representative of the United Hospital Auxiliaries (UHA) of NSW Lesley Croft (Gunnedah), Val Needer, Adam Marshall, Lesley Scholz, Audrey McArdle, Shirley Shaw. Front row from left: President Vicki McGrath, Brenda Baxter, Jenny Hayden and Patron Edna Roberts.