Record budget spend for the region

SCHOOLS, hospitals, and roads across the Northern Tablelands have seen an unprecedented level of funding thanks to a huge 2017-18 NSW Budget package of $220 million, almost doubling last year’s record budget of $117.8 million.

The package funds big ticket items such as $30 million for the Inverell Hospital redevelopment; $65 million for the Armidale Future School and $29.5 million to complete Armidale Hospital’s redevelopment.

More than $46 million is being spent on major projects and upgrades on the Newell, Carnarvon and Gwydir Highways and Waterfall Way. This includes major works to increase vehicle weight limits around Moree and Boggabilla and provide additional overtaking lanes.

This huge amount of funding has come after extensive consultation with communities and councils and acknowledges the Northern Tablelands as a vital arterial route for transport in NSW.

In addition to these big ticket items, dozens of projects identified by communities, council and the government as a priority, are receiving the funds needed to get them underway.

Our region is a vital driver of the State’s cultural and economic landscape and this budget is helping move our region forward. I’ll ensure we keep that momentum going.

Rewards flow for regional growth

IN the last few months I have been working hard to ensure our region receives its fair share of the $1.3 billion the NSW Government has committed to the new Regional Growth Fund.

This once-in-a-lifetime funding boost will ensure continued investment in roads, hospitals, schools, sporting and cultural facilities.

The $11.3 million Stronger Country Communities Fund for infrastructure will go towards projects such as playgrounds, community centres, halls and local parks. This funding will be felt in virtually every community across the Northern Tablelands, big and small.

Country sporting facilities will also get a free kick for major upgrades with $100 million for new infrastructure set to boost fields, pitches and tracks across the Northern Tablelands.

This Regional Sports Infrastructure Fund will help country areas develop a more professional sporting presence. Sport forms a core part of the identity of our regional communities helping to build town pride, improve fitness, and drive local economies.

The new $100 million Regional Cultural Fund will provide a shot in the arm for arts and cultural needs in the bush and help fund major projects that are often overlooked in favour of metropolitan areas.

It will provide recreational and educational benefits and encourage increased tourist visitation, which in turn helps art practitioners expand their networks and enter new markets.

I encourage councils and groups to visit www.nsw.gov.au/regionalgrowth and check out funding opportunities.

Discussing the new Regional Growth Fund with Uralla Shire Mayor Mick Pearce.

2017-18 NSW Budget highlights for the Northern Tablelands:

- $46 million to upgrade and repair the region’s road network.
- $65 million to build a 1,500 student school in Armidale.
- $30 million for Inverell Hospital to fast-track construction.
- $29.5 million to complete fit-out of Armidale Hospital.
- $1.23 million to upgrade Aboriginal Housing.
- $1.84 million to upgrade social housing.
- $40.79 million in Restart NSW funding.
- $4 million to replace the bridge over Nee Nee Creek north of Moree.
- $2.5 million for Newell Highway overtaking lanes.
- $940,000 to upgrade Newell Highway south of Moree.
- $1.4 million for repairs on Waterfall Way at Wollomombi.
- $1.6 million for repairs to the New England Highway.
- $2.89 million to Inverell Shire Council for road maintenance.
- $1.87 million to Moree Plains Shire Council for road maintenance.
- $1.89 million to Gwydir Shire Council for road maintenance.
- $1.42 million to Armidale Regional Council for road maintenance.
- $1.17 million to Uralla Shire Council for road maintenance.
- $694,000 to Glen Innes Severn Council for road maintenance.
- $396,000 for community transport for the aged and those with disabilities.
- Service NSW centres to be built in Glen Innes and Moree.
- $100,000 upgrades on the Carnavon Highway.
- $100,000 upgrades on the Newell Highway north of Moree.
IN the wake of current federal political debate about the value of renewable energy, I want to reassure the community of my strong support for renewables, a strong energy generation mix and the development of current and future projects in the Northern Tablelands.

Despite some of the State’s largest wind and solar projects under construction or in operation, the region has only “scratched the surface” of the enormous potential and opportunities for renewable energy projects.

The Moree Solar Farm and the Inverell and Glen Innes windfarm projects are tangible examples of progress being made in the region by the renewables sector.

The NSW Government has also just given approval for a 400,000 panel Metz Solar Farm near Armidale and a few weeks ago I visited a 3.6 megawatt solar facility which has just been completed outside of Boggabilla.

For the first time in our region’s history, we are on the cusp of being a net exporter of energy, reversing the historic trend and building wealth in our communities – we are fast becoming the renewable energy hub of NSW and Australia.

I believe it’s vital that governments at all levels continue to support the development of current and future renewables projects.

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Transport & roads funding secured

- **$3 million** for Gwydir Shire Council for the construction of the Warialda bypass.
- **$1.5 million** for Moree Regional Airport technology and tarmac upgrades.
- **$4.6 million** for Moree Plains Shire Council to drought proof Boggabilla and Toomebal.
- **$2.9 million** loan for Inverell’s sewerage treatment plant.
- **$560,000** for Moree Plains Shire Council to upgrade truck wash facilities at Moree Saleyards.
- **$315,000** to Inverell & Yetman RFS for a new tanker.
- **$208,321** to refurbish the Dhiiyaan Aboriginal Centre in Moree.
- **$180,000** to Glen Elgin RFS for a new tanker.
- **$150,000** to Uralla Shire Council for staff training.
- **$140,000** for Armidale homebuilder Uniplan to assist with construction of more affordable housing.
- **$130,227** for Moree Plains Shire Community Recycling Centre.
- **$125,000** to Elsmore RFS for station expansion.
- **$50,000** for a new public amenities block at Ebor Showground.
- **$50,000** to Hillgrove Progress Association for picnic area upgrade.
- **$40,000** to Wooloombi Hall Trust for deck and BBQ slab.
- **$30,000** to Glen Innes Showground Trust for a new roof for the Stud Cattle Pavilion.
- **$364,000** for Gwydir Shire Council to upgrade Trucking Hub.
- **$65,550** for Glen Innes Severn Council for three new pedestrian crossings.

Essential services

- **$4.6 million** for Moree Plains Shire Council to drought proof Boggabilla and Toomebal.
- **$2.9 million** loan for Inverell’s sewerage treatment plant.
- **$364,000** for Gwydir Shire Council to upgrade Kempsey Road.
- **$47,860** to build a pedestrian crossing on the Carnarvon Highway at Mungindi.
- **$440,000** for Armidale Regional Council to upgrade Kempsey Road.
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Justice and support services

- **$320,000** for Moree Courthouse upgrades.
- **$243,000** to Moree’s Miyay Birray Youth Service for a new transport vehicle.
- **$161,000** to Inverell Rural Outreach & Support Services for domestic violence support.
- **$20,000** for Beyond Empathy aboriginal arts and cultural activities.
- **$5,000** for Armidale & District National Servicemen’s Association to help keep in touch with its members.

Education

- **$7 million** for school maintenance across the Northern Tablelands.
- **$569,376** to expand Armidale’s Minimbah Preschool.
- **$15,000** to Armidale RSL Sub Branch for memorial plaques.
- **$6,500** for a Soup Kitchen for the Armidale Community CareVan.
- **$41,000** for Armidale Legacy House for building renovations.
- **$26,458** for Armidale Meals on Wheels’ learning café.

Communications

- **$63,734** for Glenn Innes Severn Council to improve radio frequency identification.
- **$7,835** to Glenn Innes Community Radio for a new radio antennea at Deepwater.
Working for all Northern Tablelands’ communities

**Sports**
- $166,200 for new shared pathway along the Newell Highway to the Boggabilla Sportsground.
- $52,590 for Grahame Racecourse to rebuild the historic grandstand.
- $50,000 for Armidale Gymnastics Club to construct a new training room.
- $42,000 for Guyra Campdraft Club to upgrade cattle yards at Guyra Showground.
- $41,800 to New England Mountain Bikers for UNE mountain bike trail.
- $40,000 to Wards Mistake Tennis Club for a new amenities block.
- $29,015 for Emmaville Rifle Range to improve comfort and safety at the range.
- ✔ $26,000 for Bingara Sporting Club to purchase a specialist greens mower.
- ✔ $25,000 for Guyra Sports Council.
- ✔ $24,102 for Armidale Men’s Shed to upgrade targets.
- ✔ $14,630 for Guyra Junior Rugby League.
- ✔ $70,000 for Inverell Shire Council to extend the cycleway network.
- ✔ $29,500 for Inverell Lapidary Club’s to upgrade to assist with Colour Me Kamilaroi picture book.
- ✔ $29,000 for Inverell Shire Council to extend shared footpath and cycleway network in Guyra.
- ✔ $20,000 for Armidale PCYC for new air conditioning units.
- ✔ $10,000 for the new Armidale Learner Driver Mentor Program.
- ✔ $9,000 to Armidale Men’s Shed for a dust extractor, to improve safety and hygiene.
- ✔ $15,000 for Armidale Montessori Playschool’s new outdoor learning area.
- ✔ $15,234 to Armidale PCYC for new air conditioning units.
- ✔ $50,000 to Armidale’s University of the Third Age for building upgrades.
- ✔ $44,000 for Wongwibinda Hall for upgrades to walls and windows.

**Environment**
- ✔ $35,000 for Armidale Urban Rivercare Group and Armidale Tree Group for rehabilitation projects.
- ✔ $13,061 to Armidale Tree Group for an Education Centre.
- ✔ $26,000 for Inverell’s old Byron Street Premier Farmhouse building.
- ✔ $2,950 to New England Writers Centre for crime writing workshop.
- ✔ $3,000 to New England Bach Festival for ARTivate.
- ✔ $1,600 for 2 Rivers to help fund Crafternoon Tea in Ashford.
- ✔ $3,000 for Moree’s Mehigan Gallery and Studio to assist with Colour Me Kamilaroi picture book.
- ✔ $39,868 for fund a Poetry Slam for Moree Community Library.
- ✔ $100,000 to restore Inverell’s old Byron Street Premier Farmhouse building.
- ✔ $33,000 for Armidale PCYC to upgrade toilet facilities.
- ✔ $31,711 to Moree Aged & Disability Services for verandah upgrade to serve as respite room.
- ✔ $20,000 for Armidale Rifle Club for new amenity rooms and toilets.
- ✔ $17,422 to armidale Dumaresq State Emergency Services for new vehicle storage facility.
- ✔ $15,343 for Yetman Hall trustees to paint the interior and to sand and polish the floor.
- ✔ $9,000 to Armidale Montessori Playschool’s new outdoor learning area.
- ✔ $19,462 for Glen Innes Swimming Club for a new amenity rooms and toilets.
- ✔ $17,748 for Glen Initiative Garden to seal entrance, pathways and courtyard.

**Arts and culture**
- $46,656 for Australian Garden History Society's heritage rose garden at Saumarez.
- $31,000 to Inverell Shire Council for local heritage conservation projects.
- $28,000 for Glen Innes Shire Council to fund local heritage advisory service.
- $20,000 for Gayinyaga Aboriginal Advisory Committee for memorials.
- $5,000 for international food and music at Glen Innes Harmony Day.
- ✔ $50,000 to Armidale’s University of the Third Age for building upgrades.
- ✔ $14,783 to Macintyre Warriors Rugby League Club for grandstand and seating.
- ✔ $8,900 to Glen Innes Bowling Club for a new greens mower.
- ✔ $15,000 for the Inverell Mower Sports Club to help kickstart start the nation’s first mower racing track.

**Community Building Partnership Grants**
- ✔ $30,000 for new Mehigan Beach at the Moree Water Park.
- ✔ $15,000 for Moree PCYC to upgrade toilet facilities.
- ✔ $19,000 for the Inverell Lapidary Club’s showroom and workshop area.
- ✔ $30,000 for Inverell HACC to enclose its courtyard.

**Cycling and walking**
- ✔ $3,970 for Armidale and District Historical Society to publish journals.
- ✔ $17,422 to Armidale Dumaresq State Emergency Services for new vehicle storage facility.
- ✔ $10,000 for the new Armidale Learner Driver Mentor Program.
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- ✔ $44,000 for Wongwibinda Hall for upgrades to walls and windows.
New energy relief plan reduces household bills

HOUSEHOLDS across the region will save hundreds of dollars on their energy bills each year, with a new NSW Government assistance package offering far-reaching reforms that will put power back in the hands of consumers. The relief package will help small businesses save up to $1,900 a year and support for low income households and pensioners will increase by 20 per cent.

The energy affordability package includes:

- The Low Income Household rebate increased from $235 to $285 and the Family Energy Rebate increased from $150 to $180;
- Discounts on equipment upgrades for small business to save each business up to $1,900 on their yearly bill;
- Discounts for energy efficient lighting and air conditioning upgrades for all households;
- Discounts for up to 23,000 concession cardholders to upgrade old fridges and TVs;
- An end to unnecessary charges from retailers such as fees for paper bills;
- Penalties for retailers who don’t move rebate recipients to a better deal; and
- Energy saving upgrades for up to 16,500 public housing.

For more information please visit www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au/energy-consumers

Strong resistance to change of daylight saving

A PRIVATE Members Bill was introduced in State Parliament earlier in the year to bring daylight saving to an end a month earlier. To support that Bill, I launched a state-wide petition and in February, tabled more than 6,000 signatures which showed countrywide support for the change and trigger a debate in the Legislative Assembly.

Regrettfully, a motion to debate the Bill in Parliament was not successful and would not be supported if introduced into the Legislative Assembly. There is resistance against any changes by most, if not all of the colleagues representing the metro and coastal regions – they have the numbers but please be assured I have been working on this issue since I was elected as your MP early in 2013, and will keep at it.

Cheaper insurance for motorists

MOTORISTS across country NSW are now saving money and get better returns on their CTP Green Slip Premiums after I took the concerns of regional motorist to parliament.

Premiums had risen 85 per cent over the last decade to become the most expensive in Australia yet insurance companies were returning less than half of that in payouts.

In response, the NSW Government has introduced a bill that will make it easier to claim from insurers, while also cutting down on potential for fraud.

A 25-year-old motorist in Guyra will save $41 annually under the new scheme, while a Moree taxi driver will save a whopping $1,757, for a saving of around 40 per cent. If passed, the changes will come into effect in December this year.

Congratulations

Education

ARMIDALE hairdresser and business owner Louise Wall won a $15,000 scholarship to assist with her training and development.

Louise is still an apprentice and is running a very successful business in Armidale, so the scholarship was well deserved.

Arts scholarship

WELL done to Inverell’s talented Breanna Krauss who won a $10,000 NSW Government Arts Scholarship which will be used to pay for music and guitar lessons and vocal training.

Breanna is a tremendously talented, driven and passionate performer and will make the most of this incredible opportunity.

Premier’s award

ARMIDALE’S Ruth Blanch won the Premier’s Volunteer Award for her work with the NSW Country Women’s Association, Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, church groups and the region’s Special Olympics club.

She’s invaluable member to all of those groups and the award is a well-deserved honour.

Hidden treasures

CONGRATULATIONS to Julie Gittoes and Mary Gaston, two exceptional women who were included in last year’s ‘Hidden Treasure’ honour roll.

Julie Gittoes is the principal of Bald Blair Public School and runs after school care, giving students an additional chance to learn. She’s also the secretary for the Guyra Lamb and Potato Festival, and has trained hundreds of volunteers over decades.

MARY Gaston is a ‘Hidden Treasure’ thanks to her work with the Yetman Public School teaching decades of scripture, sewing and reading lessons.

She took a well deserved break a few years ago – but has heard the call, and started teaching kids again.

Agriculture

WELL done to Emma Doyle, one of just four finalists in the state’s RIRDC Rural Women’s Award.

Emma is pioneering a pilot program to mentor young women in agriculture, increase the retention of young people and close the gender gap in the industry.
Funding locked in for Warialda bypass

WARIALDA’S long awaited bypass is now just around the corner with the NSW Government committing $3.03 million from the Fixing Country Roads program to the $6.56 million project.

The 3.6 kilometre bypass will take heavy vehicles from the north of Warialda along a new route to the east of the township, over a new bridge on Warialda Creek and onto the Gwydir Highway. The route will also incorporate a new truck wash and effluent disposal point.

This will allow heavy vehicle traffic to avoid the challenging pinch point at the corner of Stephen Street and the Gwydir Highway. Currently B-doubles have to cross the centreline of both roads, which slows down traffic and presents a significant hazard to traffic and pedestrians.

Removing trucks from the centre of town will significantly improve the efficiency of the local freight industry, make local roads safer and reduce the amount of livestock effluent in the centre of town.

Another step forward for Inverell Hospital

AS a result of concerns which were raised at the recent community information session on the Inverell Hospital redevelopment, and at my request, Health Minister Brad Hazzard has agreed to facilitate a meeting onsite with representatives from NSW Health Infrastructure, Hunter New England Health, Inverell Shire Council and local clinicians.

Our local clinicians are an important part of the decision process. To that end, the decision makers met with the clinicians in Inverell and Mayor Paul Harmon and I were pleased to join the group and receive that input.

The $30 million redevelopment of Inverell Hospital is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to dramatically upgrade hospital infrastructure and health services for the Inverell district for decades to come.

I want the community to get maximum value from the project and get the very best long-term health service and clinical outcomes.

I’d also like to thank each and every local that contributed to that information session. After so many years fighting for a redevelopment, this is truly the community’s hospital and I’m glad to see the passion displayed by so many is as strong as ever.

Push continues for new Inverell Police station

A NEW 24-hour police station for Inverell is a step closer to reality after Inverell Shire Mayor Paul Harmon and I received a firm commitment for a rebuild from NSW Police and Minister Troy Grant at meeting in NSW Parliament a few weeks ago.

I arranged the meeting, which included NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller and Deputy Commissioner Regional Field Operations Gary Worboys, to push the new Inverell Station up the priority list and seek urgent assistance to immediately address structural issues within the existing station.

The Minister saw first hand the urgent need for a new station when he visited Inverell last year and was firmly committed to the project. It was a very positive meeting.

We not only secured unanimous agreement for the new station in Inverell and for it to be delivered as quickly as possible, but also an immediate injection of more than $250,000 to undertake work to address some urgent problems that cannot wait.

Given the number of new stations and other major capital works projects NSW Police is already committed to delivering from the last election, realistically, the community is not going to see a new station in Inverell for at least another 12 months.

It’s not fair on our local police to ask them to work for another 12-18 months in a cramped and inadequate station while our new station is being planned, so I am delighted with the immediate injection of funds to address safety and operational issues within the station right now.

In no way does this diminish the case for the new station nor the urgency of it and I am determined to ensure the Inverell community gets the new police station it deserves.

Hydrotherapy pool vital health service for local community

MUCH to the relief of many in the community, Armidale’s Hydrotherapy Pool was reopened in late July after six months of closure for maintenance.

I was however extremely disappointed with comments made at the time by the Armidale Hospital manager, which played down the role of the pool and cast doubt over its future.

It’s great that the 40-year-old hydrotherapy pool has been brought back up to scratch and is now fully operational and while the health service has a view about a hydrotherapy pool not being ‘core business’ for them, a facility like this is definitely core business and vital to the local community.

I’ve since had a meeting with a number of passionate locals who’ve formed a Hydrotherapy Pool Working Group and have begun the process of planning for the construction of a new hydrotherapy pool in Armidale.
MOREE’S new intermodal freight terminal, located at Broadbent Grain, is now hard at work, cutting down freight costs for growers and reducing the number of trucks on the road. Carrying 2,200 tonnes of locally grown grain from Moree to the Port of Newcastle, the trains are replacing 56 B-double trucks that would usually be heading to Brisbane.

The NSW government contributed $1.6 million to the project as part of its Fixing Country Rail pilot program and construction ran $400,000 under budget. Every year, freight trains will shift 250,000 tonnes of grain and 6,400 cargo boxes of cotton and pulses to Newcastle, saving producers some $40,000 in freight each trip.

Additionally, it will cut 6,500 truck movements from local roads and the Newell Highway, improving safety and cutting maintenance for Moree Plains Shire Council.

The upgraded airport will cater to the growing demand for flights into Armidale.

REGIONAL travellers will be pleased to hear work on the expanded Armidale Regional Airport is expected to be completed by the end of November.

The $11 million upgrade, which includes the expansion of the airside parking apron and doubling the size of the existing passenger terminal, has been a great win for the local community. Airport users are already enjoying the new baggage handling facility and passenger lounge and visitors are getting a much better first impression of our region.

The new terminal has been essential to allow larger planes into Armidale and support growing visitor numbers. Our airport sees some 140,000 passenger movements per year which, considering its smaller catchment area, means it’s attracting passengers at a greater rate than larger hubs like Tamworth.

In addition to raising the capacity to 200,000 passengers per year, the airstrip upgrade will ensure incoming flights aren’t bottlenecked by plane movements on the tarmac which will lead to fewer delays.
Catching up with the students at Gravesend Public School.

Out and about in the electorate

Deputy Premier John Barilaro inspecting drone equipment at AgSkills in Moree.

It was good to get the Police Minister Troy Grant out to Moree to announce funding for Miyay Birray Youth Service.

The Glen Innes community hosted another successful Australian Celtic Festival in May.

Announcing funding for Bingara Cricket Association’s new practice nets provided me a great opportunity to pick up a cricket bat!

Visiting the small schools in my electorate is always a pleasure.

Glen Elgin NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers had a lot to celebrate when they were handed the keys to their new fire tanker.

Turning sods to kick off the construction of a new Homes North social and affordable housing complex in Armidale.

It’s always a pleasure to catch up with the Northern Tablelands High School captains when they visit NSW Parliament each year.

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