

Regional Ministerial Budget Statement
2022-23
A secure future for regional Australia

Statement by

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Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

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Contents

Foreword.....	1
Agriculture, Water and the Environment	7
Attorney-General's	59
Defence	73
Education, Skills and Employment	99
Foreign Affairs and Trade	121
Health	131
Home Affairs	175
Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.....	185
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	213
Prime Minister and Cabinet	275
Social Services	295
Treasury	331
Veterans' Affairs	339

Foreword

Australia's regions – home to one in three Australians – are pivotal to making our nation as strong as possible as quickly as possible. We are faced with new international challenges which provide a major opportunity to turbocharge our regional economies so regional Australians can get the job they want, and pursue their dreams.

This budget is committed to building and growing our nation by supporting the communities and industries that produce wealth; and supports those that are recovering from recent challenges such as fires and floods. Australians have moved to the regions in significant numbers over the past two years: the net internal migration gain to regions has been over 10,000 a quarter since the start of 2020. Regional employment has also recovered, with regional labour force participation and unemployment rates returning to their pre-COVID-19 level.

Australia has been one of the most successful countries in the world in re-establishing a positive economic growth trajectory. After two years of unprecedented disruptions to established patterns of domestic and international economic activity and international trade and migration, our economy is rebounding. Australia's regions have always been a powerhouse of economic activity and income generation – providing resources, manufactured goods and food to the world. Through targeted, large-scale investments – in infrastructure, low emissions energy production, resources extraction and processing, and water infrastructure – my vision is to unlock new frontiers of production and growth at a scale of national significance.

The resilience of our regions and support for our key regional industries forms the bedrock of this recovery trajectory. Our investments will build on this foundation and establish new export industries such as hydrogen, and attract new sources of investment to Australia, making our nation wealthier and stronger. They will also support regions to capitalise on their growth potential.

The government's regional policy framework has guided our decisions on regional Australia. We have applied the framework principles, in providing funding to double down on opportunities for growing regions, to help regions in transition and to promote nation building for all regions.

This 2022-23 Regional Ministerial Budget Statement details more than 600 initiatives, including over 260 major new packages and individual measures, which the Australian Government is delivering to continue to boost regional communities and industries. These measures range across all areas of government responsibility, from infrastructure to health, from energy to education, from social services to tourism, from digital connectivity to defence. Taken as a whole these measures represent perhaps the highest single-year investment in regions undertaken by any Australian government.

Under this framework, my Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development portfolio will lead, as a centrepiece of the 2022-23 Budget, the government's \$7.1 billion *Energy Security and Regional Development Plan*. This will provide \$7.1 billion over 11 years from 2022-23 for nation-building infrastructure projects that will unlock the potential of key next generation energy hubs in the Northern Territory, in North and Central Queensland, in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, and the Hunter region in New South Wales.

These regions are poised for major growth at a scale that will boost our national prosperity. They offer opportunities across traditional industries (such as mining and agriculture), and are well-placed to seize opportunities in emerging industries such as low-emissions energy, critical minerals, and advanced manufacturing. They are also regions of geostrategic importance for Australia, our frontier to the fastest growing markets of the world economy. Investing in these regions will support existing and new industries to capture significant employment and export opportunities. Our investments will provide the road, rail, water, energy and other infrastructure needed to drive growth.

The multiple initiatives under the *Energy Security and Regional Development Plan* will boost regional and national income, strengthen export markets for higher value products and accelerate job creation to the benefit of all Australians for decades to come. They come on top of the Government's existing substantial investments in our regions that have made regional Australia an even better place to live and work.

In addition, our Government has also invested an additional \$2 billion over the next five years through the *Regional Accelerator Program*. This \$2 billion program will ensure that Commonwealth resources are better connected, coordinated and targeted to the priorities and needs of regional communities. Projects under this program will catalyse job creation, stimulate economic diversification and the creation of new industries and growth of existing industries in regional centres.

Recognising that digital connectivity is one of the foundations for regional growth, my portfolio will also lead a \$1.3 billion new investment in regional telecommunications. This responds to increasing demand for fast and sophisticated voice and data connections to serve regional businesses and communities. Our initiatives include the Government's response to the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review to expand mobile coverage, improve network resilience, connectivity and affordability, and improve community digital awareness and capability and additional funding for upgrading of non-commercial fixed wireless and satellite networks in regional and remote Australia by NBN Co.

Further in this Budget, the government is providing an additional \$17.9 billion for investments in land transport infrastructure that will support all Australian communities including those in regional and remote Australia, bringing our total

infrastructure investment pipeline to \$120 billion over 10 years. The Government's long-term infrastructure pipeline is connecting regions, supporting jobs and improving national freight links while ensuring Australians get home sooner and safer.

New funding in the 2022-23 Budget is being provided for the *Northern Australia Roads Program* (additional funding of \$380 million), which improves the reliability, resilience and productivity of key agricultural and commodities supply chains in Northern Australia by connecting regions to transport hubs and \$880 million in additional funding for the *Roads of Strategic Importance Initiative*, which helps connect regional businesses to local and international markets, and better connect regional communities.

One of the most significant nation-building projects that the government is continuing to support in 2022-23 is the upgrading of the Outback Way, a 2,720 km route linking Winton in Queensland with Laverton in Western Australia, via Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. \$1 billion since 2013 has been committed to seal and upgrade sections of this important route, including an additional \$678 million announced on 21 February 2022 to seal an additional 1,000 kilometres of road and deliver further upgrades. As part of the works, the remaining unsealed and substandard sections of Outback Way in Queensland and Western Australia will be sealed and additional priority sections on the Plenty Highway and Tjukururu Road in the Northern Territory will also be upgraded. The project will contribute to improved safety and access to remote areas of the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia. The project is designed to unlock the potential benefits of the Outback Way to Indigenous and remote communities and the broader economy, particularly in the areas of tourism, mining and freight.

These commitments are on top of the government's existing investments in regional Australia which include \$7 billion investment through the *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility*, a core element of the Government's Northern Australia agenda. We are also providing \$6.9 billion for the next tranche of water infrastructure projects through the *National Water Grid Fund*, bringing the total investment under this Fund to \$8.9 billion. These investments build water security and drought resilience, promote growth and sustainability of regional economies, and unlock primary industry potential.

Our regional development agenda is being supported by additional funding measures across all Australian government agencies, operating from different but complementary perspectives. In this way, the government is using multiple levers to assist the growth of Australia's regions, with each lever furthering the same ultimate purpose.

Examples of these complementary simultaneous levers are the provision of \$464 million for the establishment of *Clean Hydrogen Industrial Hubs* which will accelerate the development of our Australian hydrogen industry by co-locating hydrogen production and industrial uses, and building on the infrastructure and workforces of regional areas. Development of these Hubs will be further supported by a \$120 million *Hydrogen*

Utilisation Strategic Investment Fund which will focus on supporting projects that increase domestic use of hydrogen and associated technologies. Around \$2.2 billion is being committed through the *Emissions Reduction Fund* for projects in rural and regional Australia that reduce emissions through practical on-the-ground action, with an additional \$2 billion available through the *Climate Solutions Fund*. A further \$2 billion is being provided to support critical minerals extraction and processing projects get off the ground through the *Critical Minerals Facility*, administered by Export Finance Australia.

In addition to these industry-focussed, future-building projects, the government is committed to supporting and improving the everyday lives of regional Australians, to make their communities better places to live and work. The many new and continuing initiatives across multiple agencies outlined in this Statement ensure access to the government services that regional communities rely on to keep pace with their growth and support family and community quality of life.

To highlight a few such initiatives in health care, in the 2022-23 Budget, we are increasing the *Rural Bulk Billing Incentive* progressively from its current 150 per cent loading up to 190 per cent in very remote areas. In addition, from 1 January 2022, we have, for the first time, implemented a progressive incentive schedule for doctors to provide bulk billed services in rural and remote areas, with an estimated cost of \$65.8 million over the next four years.

We are also investing \$66 million to remove the longstanding magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment eligibility requirements, often referred to as ‘licencing’, in regional, rural and remote areas from 1 November 2022. It is estimated that more than 40,000 patients in regional, rural and remote areas will benefit from having increased access to affordable, high quality MRI services closer to home, with lower out-of-pocket costs and reduced travel times to obtain Medicare-funded MRI services.

We will further be investing \$150.4 million to build on measures to better manage the supply of medical school graduates by funding medical schools to deliver the full medical school program at rural campuses. This initiative is designed to both increase self-sufficiency and address maldistribution. The government is also working to encourage eligible doctors and nurse practitioners to live and work in rural, remote and very remote Australia. In the 2021-22 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO), the government provided \$19.9 million over four years to eliminate outstanding *Higher Education Loan Program* (HELP) debts for eligible doctors and nurse practitioners. The government has also continued to support training for General Practitioners and facilitating the migration of overseas health practitioners.

As further examples, initiatives to support mental health and suicide prevention continue to be a key area of Australian Government action. Building on the government’s record \$2.3 billion investment in mental health in the 2021-22 Budget, there are additional targeted measures in the 2022-23 Budget focused on strengthening

and improving mental health and suicide prevention services in regional, rural and remote Australia. This includes providing \$42.7 million to establish targeted regional initiatives for suicide prevention led by new suicide prevention regional response leaders across all 31 Primary Health Networks, \$8.6 million to establish the *National Closing the Gap Partnership on Social and Emotional Wellbeing* which will empower regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities to partner on initiatives to deliver on *Closing the Gap* targets, and \$8.3 million over three years from 2022-23 for the *Red Dust* program to provide culturally appropriate programs in the remote Northern Territory. The government is also investing \$60.7 million in measures to encourage more skilled mental health professionals to work in rural and remote areas, improving the distribution of the workforce and ultimately enhancing access to mental health services for Australians living in these areas.

The government is aware that housing prices are increasing in regional areas, as regional centres become more increasingly more attractive and Australians are opting to move out of our major capital cities to the regions. The government is expanding the *Home Guarantee Scheme* to establish a *Regional Home Guarantee*, providing up to 10,000 places each financial year from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to support aspiring homebuyers in regional areas to purchase or construct a new home sooner. This will support regional home ownership and help ease the pressures by encouraging the provision of new housing developments.

Our regional development programs, which provide funding for a range of locally-driven projects, are also being boosted. An additional \$100 million is being provided for an increase for Round Five of the *Building Better Regions Fund* on top of the \$250 million already allocated for Round Six of the Fund. In addition, the *Stronger Communities Programme* is receiving an additional \$29.2 million over two years, bringing the total commitment for this program to \$167.8 million between 2015-16 and 2023-24. These programs aim to strengthen the liveability of our regions, their economies and the vibrant communities that live in them.

In addition to the large range of direct programs outlined in this document, we are continuing to encourage both private and public sector entities to move to regional Australia, offering the individual staff of those entities, and their families, a new and rich environment in which to live and offering regional communities new opportunities for growth. The government is investing \$15.2 million over seven years to deliver regional APS Hubs to help locate APS staff closer to the communities they serve, while broadening and diversifying the APS recruitment pool.

As at 31 December 2021, there were 155,796 staff across all Australian Government agencies employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*, of which 22,518 were in locations outside Australia's capital cities. While not employed under the *Public Service Act*, many other important government agencies, such as Australia Post and Medicare, also have

many offices and staff located in regional areas, while Defence bases and personnel are located all around Australia, including in remote areas.

At the centre of the government’s economic plan is that we, as a country, grow together. Australia’s regions have been at the forefront of our success and prosperity at every critical juncture of our development as a modern and prosperous nation – from the Gold Rush and Australian wool to our cutting-edge agricultural production and competitive resources sector. As we move further into the information era and transition to a clean energy economy, the government will ensure that our regions continue to thrive, continue to be the cornerstone of our export economy, and continue to be great places to live and work.

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Agriculture, Water and the Environment

The Agriculture, Water and Environment Portfolio plays a key role in championing the Australian Government's commitment to enhance Australia's agriculture, water resources, heritage and the environment. The work of this portfolio is central to the nation's identity and touches the lives of all Australians, particularly those living in regional and remote areas. The portfolio has diverse roles and functions, including policy advice, science and research, program administration and regulation, provision of client services, natural resource conservation, biosecurity capabilities, and market access negotiation, to deliver outcomes for rural and regional communities across Australia.

Successful partnerships are central to the portfolio's stewardship of Australia's land, water and iconic places so they can be enjoyed today and by future generations. The portfolio works with partners across government, non-government, industry sectors, primary producers, research organisations, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deliver the Australian Government's and community priorities to stimulate economic growth, create jobs and care for country. These partnerships deliver on the collective responsibilities of all Australians to protect this country's unique environment, manage Country and Australia's natural resources, and build towards productive and enduring regional industries.

Major climatic events as well as COVID-19 continue to impact and test the resilience of communities across regional Australia. Despite these challenges, Australia's primary industries have continued to grow and are estimated to be worth a record \$87 billion in 2021-22, including \$5.5 billion from fisheries and forestry. In 2022-23, the portfolio is prioritising practical, on-ground actions across the country to not only drive recovery and support communities affected by these events in the short to medium term, but also build resilience to emerging and future events in the longer term that will promote growth and stronger regional communities.

The Australian Government continues to support Australian producers by creating the settings for the agriculture sector to reach its goal of \$100 billion in farm gate output by 2030. Achieving this goal will require a sustained, collaborative effort across industry, government and communities to make sure the foundations are strong, and regional industries and communities can capitalise on emerging opportunities. Significant initiatives in this Budget will help primary producers capitalise on export success while promoting responsible and transparent supply chains, encouraging innovation, and bolstering the long-term resilience and sustainability of Australia's primary industries, which are key to growth in the regions.

The Australian Government is committed to investing in initiatives to protect the integrity and longevity of Australia's environment and natural resources, while making it more efficient for industry to do business in the regions. Australia's world-class

biosecurity capabilities are a critical part of efforts to prevent, respond to and recover from pests and diseases that threaten the economy, human health and environment. This Budget provides targeted funding to high-risk biosecurity zones in regional areas including the northern Australia biosecurity frontline, and for producers to enhance their capability to manage on-farm biosecurity risk. Rewarding farmers for caring for their land by establishing a voluntary biodiversity stewardship market will protect and improve future production, while growing resilience and delivering a diversified, drought-proof income stream. The portfolio also continues to deliver the Australian Government's environmental reform initiatives to strengthen Australia's national environmental protection system, while streamlining development decisions to provide certainty for businesses investing in projects in regional Australia.

The Australian Government is working to deliver improved environmental outcomes, support economic recovery, create jobs across Australia, and boost regional growth. The Australian Government recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage is central to Australia's national story and the management of natural and cultural resources. Working collaboratively with state and territory governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and private landholders, the Australian Government is delivering initiatives that build on this commitment to care for Country and creating economic opportunities in regional and remote Australia. In 2022-23, the portfolio will focus on reforming and modernising Indigenous cultural heritage protections and continue to deliver the Australian Government's commitment to manage and protect the iconic World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef. These investments will offer economic opportunities in regional Australia including Indigenous employment opportunities, as well as for tourism and research.

The Australian Government is making significant investments to ensure regional centres are at the cutting edge of research and development, and that regional communities can reap the same technological and economic benefits as their urban counterparts. The portfolio is supporting the Australian Government's \$1 billion transformation of the waste and recycling sector through partnerships with states, territories and industry to improve plastics waste recycling technology in Australia. Further afield, Australia's Antarctic science program is one of the nation's most iconic and enduring endeavours. The Australian Government's investment over the next 10 years will cement Australia's leadership in the conservation of Antarctica, strengthen Australia's strategic and scientific capabilities in the region, and enhance Hobart's status as the premier Antarctic scientific research hub and logistics gateway. These investments will boost jobs and provide more opportunities for businesses in Tasmania and across Australia that contribute to this important work.

Water is critical to the future of Australia's agriculture, environment and regional communities. The Australian Government is committed to improving the sustainable management of the nation's water resources for the wellbeing of all Australians. The portfolio leads the water reform agenda across the country, providing national

leadership and working with relevant state governments to implement the Australian Government's plan to deliver a healthy, sustainable and more certain future, particularly for Murray-Darling Basin communities and rivers. The Australian Government's investments in this Budget will improve river health and water security while building community confidence in the governance of water management systems. This in turn will improve the economic, social and climate resilience of Basin communities, while also providing water for the environment and improving the health of rivers, wetlands and floodplains for future generations.

As at 31 December 2021, the Agriculture, Water and Environment Portfolio employed 9,939 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 5,660 staff (57 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 3,152 staff (32 per cent) in other capital cities and 1,127 staff (11 per cent) in regional areas.

The portfolio comprises the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment and 13 portfolio bodies. The portfolio has a regional footprint across Australia, its external territories and Antarctica. Employees span 182 locations (131 regional and remote locations and 51 major cities) and work in a diverse range of settings, including national parks, Antarctica, shipping ports and airports, mail centres, quarantine facilities, laboratories, abattoirs and offices in remote and regional centres, rural communities and cities. Staff are based in locations such as Mildura, Armidale, Orange, Hobart, Yeppoon, Murray Bridge, Townsville, Darwin, Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta, Booderee and Norfolk, Christmas and Thursday Islands, ensuring staff are close to the sites, communities and industries that they serve. Several portfolio bodies employ staff under their own legislation and most have staff in locations outside the capital cities.

New Initiatives

Future Drought Fund

The \$5 billion *Future Drought Fund* (FDF) provides secure, continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives. \$100 million is being made available each year from the FDF to support Australian farmers and communities to prepare for, and become more resilient to, the effects of future drought.

The Australian Government announced the foundational programs for the FDF on 1 July 2020, with further announcements in the *2020-21 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO) and 2021-22 Budget. Progress to date includes:

- Establishing eight regional *Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs*, to deliver regionally responsive development, extension, adoption and commercialisation support.
- 46 projects to support innovation in drought resilient farming practices and technologies.

- 80 projects underway to trial and demonstrate land management practices supporting agricultural production during and following droughts.
- 15 Regional Drought Resilience Plans under development through state and territory governments.
- Programs in each state and territory to build business planning and risk management capability of farmers to support proactive planning for drought.
- 93 projects to build community drought resilience.
- 425 people involved in a national drought resilience mentoring network and 221 people supported to become drought resilience leaders in eight regions.
- Launch of the Climate Services for Agriculture platform, providing access to regionally specific historical and projected climate information and analysis, to help farmers, agribusiness and communities understand and plan for drought and other climate risks.
- Launch of the Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool, enabling farmers to generate a farm-scale understanding of their drought risks and resilience, and options to improve.

In the 2022–23 Budget, the Australian Government announced a further \$95.4 million over six years from 2022–23 to consolidate the Drought Resilience Funding Plan in place under the *Future Drought Fund Act 2019*.

Drought Indicators for a Drought Early Warning System

In the 2021–22 MYEFO, the Australian Government committed \$4.1 million over two years from 2021–22 to an early warning system for drought, as part of ongoing reforms to help regional Australia better prepare for, manage and recover from drought. This package of reforms includes work on drought indicators and, through consultation, the development of a shared responsibilities framework.

This measure includes the development of:

- drought indicators that bring together a broader suite of the best available data, including rainfall, soil moisture, plant growth, farm profit and other socio-economic indicators
- a drought early warning system that collects and analyses drought indicator data to help forecast drought conditions and provide an accurate picture of the impacts of drought on farmers
- a drought decision-making framework that ensures climatic, social and economic data is verified with organisations, governments and industries in affected regions.

When complete, the warning system will provide real-time information to both governments and farmers, supporting a more prepared and resilient agricultural sector and more robust regional communities. The indicators will be available alongside *Climate Services for Agriculture* and the *Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool*.

Regional Investment Corporation

Since 2018-19, the Australian Government has provided over \$2.7 billion in concessional loan funding to farmers and regional small businesses through the Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) as part of a \$4.1 billion loan program.

The RIC delivers loans in a nationally consistent, prudent and timely manner. Loans are targeted at farm businesses and farm-related small businesses impacted by drought; new farmers looking to enter the farming business; and those that are in financial need that mainly supply, or intend to mainly supply, products into supply chains that are interstate or overseas. Loans are also targeted at forestry businesses to encourage new plantation developments and the replanting of bushfire-damaged plantation areas. The majority of these businesses are in regional areas.

From 2021-22, the government has reallocated \$336.5 million of existing loan funding over three years to 2025-26 to continue providing concessional loans to farmers, farm-dependent small businesses and forestry businesses through the RIC. The reallocation will provide certainty to regional areas that concessional loans will be available to drive innovation, growth and resilience building.

The Australian Government is also progressing a series of measures aimed at assisting new farmers. In 2021-22 this includes extending the eligibility for AgriStarter Loans available to farmers in leasing or share farming arrangements, effective from 1 April 2022.

Pathway to a Voluntary Biodiversity Stewardship Market

The Australian Government's Agriculture Stewardship Package seeks to create new stewardship market opportunities to diversify farm incomes and kickstart private sector investment in on-farm biodiversity. This investment includes \$34 million over four years from the 2019-20 Budget, and \$32.1 million over four years from the 2021-22 Budget. The Package comprises:

- The *Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot* (up to \$23.5 million over four years from 2019-20), to trial a market-based approach for rewarding farmers for biodiversity outcomes in combination with carbon planting projects under the Emissions Reduction Fund. In Round One of the Pilot (for which applications closed in June 2021), 65 offers were made to successful farmers, worth over \$4 million. Round Two applications closed on 4 March 2022 and offers are anticipated shortly.

- The *Enhancing Remnant Vegetation Pilot* (\$22.3 million over four years from 2021-22), to trial market-based arrangements to reward farmers for protecting, managing and improving remnant native vegetation on-farm. The first tranche of offers were made to successful applicants 24 March 2022 and a second tranche of offers is anticipated shortly.
- The *National Stewardship Trading Platform* (\$4.4 million over four years from 2021-22) provides a marketplace for advertising carbon and biodiversity projects and a spatial tool to assist in planning biodiversity projects. The platform launched in December 2021 for hosting Round Two of the *Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot* and associated project planning, and is open for buy and sell listings.
- The *Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme* (\$5.4 million over four years from 2021-22) will allow farmers to showcase best practice biodiversity management on their properties to markets and communities.
- The *Australian Agriculture Sustainability Framework* (\$4.0 million over four years from 2019-20), which is being developed to clearly communicate the sustainability status and goals of Australian agriculture to markets and the community. An advanced draft of the framework has been completed following industry consultations.

The Australian Government is investing an additional \$27.2 million over 11 years to address key capability gaps to help establish a voluntary agriculture biodiversity stewardship market. This builds on the existing agriculture biodiversity stewardship pilots.

This measure is expected to generate positive economic impacts on regional Australia by supporting private sector investment in emerging environmental markets, and supporting more farmers to participate. This will be achieved through:

- Improved methods for low-cost monitoring of biodiversity projects, through targeted funding for remote sensing and other innovations.
- Funding for all interested Natural Resource Management organisations across Australia to provide on-ground support to farmers to participate in carbon and biodiversity markets.
- An expanded *National Biodiversity Stewardship Trading Platform* including an automated trading system that will make market participation more transparent, making it easier for farmers to participate.
- Better and more secure information and models for credible, transparent and standardised assessment of biodiversity benefits.

Supporting Large Agricultural Trade Events

The Australian Government is investing \$12 million over four years from 2022-23 to sponsor large agricultural trade events across Australia. Events such as Beef Australia showcase Australian agriculture, improving domestic and international exposure of Australia's agriculture industries and facilitate trade and innovation opportunities. These trade events also provide significant economic and social benefits to regional Australia.

Support Regional Agricultural Shows

The Australian Government has committed \$15.4 million over two years from 2022-23 for Round Two of the *Agricultural Shows Development Program*. Funding will be available for repairs, upgrades, building or purchasing showground infrastructure or attractions at all Australian agricultural showgrounds except Capital City Royals. These projects provide support for regional economies, help agricultural shows operate during uncertain times and allow for improvements to showgrounds so they can continue to be a centrepiece of regional communities in the future.

Forest growers Research and Development

The Australian Government has agreed to a request from industry to increase the mandatory forest growers' levy. This support will deliver additional funding for research and development to improve innovation and encourage productivity growth for Australia's wood production forests and support additional biosecurity surveillance measures. Small forest growers (that produce under 20,000 cubic metres annually) will be exempt.

Up to \$2.5 million in 2022-23 and 2023-24 and ongoing annual funding of up to \$2.3 million thereafter is being provided by the Australian Government to match the additional funding for research and development expenditure made through Forest and Wood Products Australia – Australia's forestry rural research and development corporation – that will result from the increased levy collections.

The additional funding will support innovation and efficiencies in forestry, an industry located in regional areas, and provide new opportunities for regional researchers and universities.

Improve the Flexibility and Sustainability of the Forestry Industry and Accelerate Industry Innovation – Extending funding for three National Institute for Forest Products Innovation centres

The Australian Government allocated \$3.1 million from 2021-22 to 2022-23 in the 2021-22 MYEFO to extend the life of the regional National Institute for Forest Products Innovation (NIFPI) centres in Launceston, Mount Gambier and Gippsland. The South Australian Government is matching the funding of the Mount Gambier centre, and the Australian Government is seeking matching funds from relevant states for the other two centres.

These regional NIFPI centres fund forestry research in important forestry regions that drive innovation across the entire industry, from planting to harvest, and haulage to processing. They are delivering benefits to regional industry, and are providing opportunities for regionally-based researchers, and regional universities, including the University of South Australia in Mount Gambier and the Federation University in Churchill, Gippsland.

Improve the Flexibility and Sustainability of the Forestry Industry and Accelerate Industry Innovation – Support plantations establishment

The Australian Government committed \$86.2 million over five years from 2021-22 to support the establishment of new plantations within Regional Forestry Hub regions. The *Support Plantations Establishment* program will provide funding to landholders and foresters for the establishment costs of new plantations. The program will be delivered in partnership with states and territories and with private enterprise.

To meet the increasing demand for forest products in Australia, the plantation estate needs to grow. Supporting the expansion of the plantation estate will secure future wood supply for Australia, support forestry jobs in regional locations and provide certainty for other industries, such as construction, that require access to timber.

Strengthen Australia's illegal logging traceability and timber identification systems

The Australian Government is investing \$4.4 million in 2022-23 and 2023-24 to improve Australia's illegal logging traceability and timber identification systems. The investment will build timber testing capacity under Australia's illegal logging laws in order to expose illegally logged timber and false claims made by importers.

Improve the Flexibility and Sustainability of the Forestry Industry and Accelerate Industry Innovation – Construction softwood transport assistance

The Australian Government is investing \$15.1 million in 2021-22 and 2022-23 to provide support to the construction and forestry industries whose supply chains continue to be impacted by increased demand, global supply chain delays due to COVID-19, and the lasting impacts of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires. The primary focus of the program is to provide assistance to transport construction-grade bushfire salvage logs from Kangaroo Island to mainland Australia.

The program will have a positive impact on regional Australia, where timber shortages are an issue facing many communities. By working with participating states to lower transport costs for bushfire-affected wood, the Australian Government is helping forest industries in regional Australia meet strong demand for timber in the construction industry.

Improve the long term sustainability of the South East Trawl Fishery and support fishing communities

This measure provides \$24 million over three years from 2022-23 for structural adjustment assistance in response to catch reductions and area closures in the Commonwealth South East Trawl Fishery.

The South East Trawl Fishery, extending from Sydney, New South Wales around Victoria and Tasmania to Cape Jervis South Australia, is a key sector in the Commonwealth Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery and supports meaningful employment in regional towns.

This measure will provide fishers with critical financial support to transition out of the South East Trawl sector, minimising impacts on businesses and the regional economy while delivering a more viable and sustainable industry going forward.

Australian Export and Trade Support – Digital services to take farmers to markets

The Australian Government is investing \$199.9 million over three years from 2020-21 (and \$22.3 million ongoing from 2023-24) in the *Digital Services to Take Farmers to Markets* initiative.

The Australian Government will make an additional investment of \$127.4 million over three years from 2023-24. Building on the technology modernisation completed to date, this investment will further expand the digital platforms that support agricultural trade. This will simplify export regulation for businesses, enhance trust in Australian agricultural exports, and protect access to overseas markets.

The additional investment will enable greater automation in the clearance of goods, the increased use of risk-based assurance approaches, and improved management of third-party inspections in the supply chain. It will also continue improvements to export data and analytics capability, and provide the capability to respond quicker to changes in global trade markets.

The investment will provide a pathway for the re-use of agricultural trade digital platforms in the wider trade ecosystem, as a core component of the *Simplified Trade System* initiative.

Extending the Agri-Business Expansion Initiative

The Australian Government is investing \$85.9 million over three years from 2020-21 (including an additional \$13.2 million announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO) in the *Agri-Business Expansion Initiative* (ABEI) to help Australian farming, forestry and fishing exporters to expand and diversify their export markets.

This initiative is being delivered jointly by Austrade and the department. To date, the department has committed \$25.5 million of the \$43 million received under ABEI.

ABEI is benefitting regional communities by growing agricultural and food exports — helping to connect Australia’s regional agricultural industries to new markets and position them for long-term growth.

- ‘Surge’ Agriculture Counsellors have been deployed to Washington DC, Seoul and Riyadh to boost intelligence, build relationships and accelerate market access outcomes.
- Roll-out of \$22 million in grant funding provided for an expanded *Agricultural Trade and Market Access Cooperation grants* program is progressing well. Grants worth over \$10 million have been committed since ABEI commenced, to agricultural export industries including red meat, wine, grains, seafood, dairy, cotton, wool, nuts and berries.
- 23 separate technical market access activities and 15 projects supporting technical access or scientific cooperation have been undertaken.

Australian Trade System Support – Cultivating Australia’s Traceability – Promoting and Protecting Australian Premium Agriculture

The Australian Government is investing \$68.4 million over four years from 2021-22 to strengthen Australia’s agricultural traceability systems and increase access to premium overseas markets. The measure forms part of the *Simplified Trade System Package* announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO to revamp Australia’s trade systems.

Working with industry and state and territories, the measure will support the development of a national approach to improve traceability in agricultural supply chains. This will increase product value, which could add up to \$1 billion a year to the bottom line of Australia’s farmers. It will also reduce regulatory compliance costs, which could save businesses \$225-325 million a year by harmonising traceability frameworks and leveraging regulatory technology solutions to reduce paper-based processes. The funding will support three key initiatives:

- A *National Agricultural Traceability Alliance*, constituting a coalition between industry and government to provide national leadership on traceability initiatives.
- A *National Traceability Hub*, to provide a forum for industry groups and government to co-design traceability initiatives.
- The *Agricultural Credentials Initiative*, which will support industry to access more lucrative markets and achieve premium process for their goods.

Agricultural exports are central to regional Australian economies as around 70 per cent of Australian agricultural production is exported. The initiatives will positively impact regional communities by positioning producers for revenue growth, increased access to overseas premium markets, preventing and mitigating against biosecurity outbreaks, and reduced regulatory compliance burdens.

Supporting farmers to maximise farm gate output through traceability and on-farm biosecurity

The Australian Government is providing \$20.1 million over three years from 2022-23, contingent on commitments from states and territories, to strengthen on-farm biosecurity and traceability outcomes, with a particular focus on incentivising adoption of livestock traceability reforms. The funding will be used for a grants program, to be administered by interested states and territories and open to all agriculture industries, supporting activities that improve on-ground biosecurity and/or traceability infrastructure and systems.

Biosecurity is a key pillar of the government's Agriculture 2030 agenda, protecting on-farm returns and export market access from the potentially significant impacts of pests and diseases. Effective on-farm biosecurity practices and the ability to trace agricultural products and livestock is a critical part of the national biosecurity system. Through this measure, the Australian Government will be working with state and territory governments, who are the primary regulators in this area, to help Australian farmers and industry prepare for, mitigate against and respond to biosecurity threats.

Certifying Australian cosmetics exports

The Australian Government is providing \$8.5 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish export regulatory arrangements, including export certification, for non-traditional agricultural products, starting with Australian cosmetics. The funding will also be used to better tailor export regulation of some agricultural and food products to meet importing country requirements. This will help Australia respond to a growing number of trading partners requiring greater government assurances over more and more products, and extending requirements to other credentials such as environmental stewardship and animal welfare. Overall, the measure will enable a broad range of new and existing businesses across Australia to expand and diversify exports to emerging and growing markets now and into the future.

Australian Trade System Support – Digital upgrades to improve biosecurity clearance processes and facilitate crossborder trade – Biosecurity Self-Service Portal for Inspectors

This initiative provides \$13.2 million over two years from 2021-22 to simplify trade for businesses and minimise border congestion by implementing a biosecurity portal to allow the import industry to perform self-service functions – initially booking and managing the biosecurity inspection of cargo, or other goods of biosecurity concern.

Tangible business benefits are estimated at \$4 million. The initiative will help streamline the importation of goods used as inputs into Australia's agricultural industries.

Supporting Agricultural Industries and Communities – Biosecurity – Support National Horse Traceability Working Group

The Australian Government has allocated \$1.1 million over two years from 2022-23 to support the continued progress of the Victorian-led National Horse Traceability Working Group and as a contribution to the establishment of national horse traceability arrangements.

Horses are critical to Australia's rural social fabric, in particular to rural and regional communities and industries. At a broader scale, reliable horse identification and traceability supports good biosecurity, exports, food safety and animal welfare outcomes.

Boosting our northern biosecurity frontline

The Australian Government is investing \$61.6 million over four years from 2022-23 to enhance biosecurity capability in northern Australia and protect Australia's north from increasing biosecurity risks that can have devastating impacts on the agricultural sector and human health. This funding will be used to strengthen biosecurity, support agriculture and proactively de-risk investment and business into the future in identified high biosecurity risk regions in northern Australia. This includes urgent and targeted measures to safeguard against and prepare for the increasingly likely arrival of lumpy skin disease and other emerging vector-borne animal diseases.

Northern Australia is the frontline for biosecurity due to its nearness to Australia's northern neighbours such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste. Known biosecurity risks, including vector-borne animal and plant diseases in these neighbouring countries, the prevailing wind and sea conditions, and thousands of kilometres of remote Australian border, make this region a high-risk pathway into Australia's northern agricultural industries and communities. The region is also a rapid route through to the south. The recent incursion of fall armyworm via natural air currents and wind, and the rapid movement of Japanese encephalitis virus from northern Australia into Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, are clear examples of such risks. The recent emergence of lumpy skin disease in Indonesia represents a very serious threat to Australia's cattle industry, and immediate, concerted and collaborative preparedness action is critical. The news of these emerging diseases backs up the scientific assessment of the growing risk of a major animal disease reaching Australia in the next five years, noting African swine fever (see Current Initiatives) remains close by.

The measures in this proposal will go some way toward implementing the 2030 Northern Australia Biosecurity Strategy, which has been developed by Australia's northern governments to build a more integrated, stronger and coordinated northern biosecurity system in the face of this risk.

Japanese encephalitis virus – National Plan

Japanese encephalitis virus is a mosquito-borne viral disease that can cause reproductive losses in pigs, encephalitis in horses and cause serious disease in humans.

As part of a multi-portfolio response to the emergence of Japanese encephalitis virus, the Australian Government will support state and territory agriculture departments and affected animal industries with necessary surveillance and control activities. The department will also work with the Department of Health to develop and deliver a national communications campaign about the virus.

Biosecurity – For reduction and prevention activities to reduce the economic and environmental burden of established feral animals, pests and weeds

The Australian Government committed an initial \$29.1 million over four years in the 2021-22 Budget to continue efforts to deliver better solutions to combat established pest animals and weeds posing a significant threat to Australian primary production, the environment and biodiversity. An additional \$20 million was announced in January 2022 to leverage matched funding to deliver state and territory-led on-ground established pest animals and weed management activities to better protect Australia's agricultural productivity and natural resources. This investment recognises the impact of bushfires, flood and drought on their control and prevalence. From 2021-22 this investment will:

- Deliver support for land managers through on-ground reduction and prevention activities for problematic pests and weeds, including through Indigenous rangers, natural resource management groups and by leveraging up to \$20 million in matched funding from state and territory governments.
- Fund research, development and extension grants for next generation control projects identified through the recent, oversubscribed *Advancing Pest Animal and Weed Control Solutions* competitive grant round.
- Drive national coordination outcomes for critical focus areas and pest species.
- Continue to build greater understanding of the costs and distribution of these pests and weeds.

There is a strong focus on securing co-investment outcomes with key stakeholders, providing both immediate and longer-term solutions for land managers.

Building Horticulture Industry Resilience – Horticulture Netting Program

Australia's horticultural production is valued at over \$12 billion and employs 50,000 rural and regional Australians. Horticulture exports are valued at over \$2.2 billion each year.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government invested a further \$35 million over four years from 2021-22 in the *Horticultural Netting Program – Trial Expansion* which builds on the current \$25.9 million *Horticultural Netting Program – Trial*. The additional funding will extend the Trial nationally and include more horticultural crops.

The measure is providing matched funding of up to \$0.3 million to horticultural growers to install permanent or throw over netting. Crop netting provides a range of benefits for farmers including protection of crops from extreme weather impacts such as hail and sunburn, prevention of pest predation by birds and flying foxes and limiting water losses from evaporation. These benefits result in increased farm-gate returns for growers with increased yields, higher values for fresh produce and water cost savings.

Jurisdictions under the initial *Horticulture Netting Program – Trial* have paid over \$7.7 million to 187 farmers. This has enabled more than 1,518 hectares of horticultural crops to be protected with netting.

Building Horticulture Industry Resilience – Building resilience to Manage Fruit Fly

The Australian Government provided \$16.9 million over four years from 2018-19 to develop a nationally coordinated approach to manage fruit fly. An update of the Australian National Fruit Fly Management Protocols has begun, which underpins export market access.

The Australian Government is investing an additional \$30 million over three years from 2021-22 to build resilience into Australia's fruit fly management. Funded projects will focus on:

- Building resilience in our rural and regional communities to fight back against the significant impacts of fruit fly.
- Driving down pest pressure in vulnerable production areas and stopping the spread of fruit fly into new areas.
- Supporting Australian horticultural growers to achieve their export growth potential by providing more options to get their product to market and fetch premium prices.

Environment Restoration Fund – extension

The Australian Government committed \$100 million over four years from 2019-20 for the *Environment Restoration Fund*. Funding has been allocated to 77 projects to improve water quality and manage erosion in coasts and waterways, support the recovery and recycling of waste, and protect threatened species and their habitats.

In the 2022-23 Budget, an additional \$100 million over three years was announced to deliver projects aimed at protecting threatened and migratory species and their habitat, tackling pest animals and weeds, protecting Australia's coastal rivers and waterways, and greening Australia's cities.

The *Environment Restoration Fund* builds on the Australian Government's longstanding commitment to biodiversity and Natural Resource Management initiatives, including the *National Landcare Program*, *Bushfire Recovery*, and the *Oceans Leadership Package*.

Biodiversity Recovery Package – Koala conservation and protection

The Australian Government is providing \$50 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the recovery and conservation of the koala. It will support koala protection through monitoring, habitat recovery, and initiatives to improve koala health and care in response to natural disasters (such as bushfires) and disease.

The koala (combined populations of Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory) has been up-listed from 'vulnerable' to 'endangered' under the *Environment, Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The up-listing and imminent completion of the *National Koala Recovery Plan*, in close collaboration with Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory Governments, will provide enhanced protection and support recovery of this iconic species.

The \$50 million investment includes:

- \$20 million for large habitat restoration projects led by Natural Resource Management groups, non-government organisations and Indigenous groups. State and territory governments are also eligible where they provide matched funding.
- \$10 million to extend the *National Koala Monitoring Program*. The program will deliver improved data on the national koala population and fill key data gaps.
- \$10 million in grants for small-scale community projects and local activities in locations where the koala is listed (Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory), such as habitat protection and restoration, managing threats, citizen science, and health and care facilities.

- \$2 million in grants to improve koala health outcomes through applied research and the practical application of research outcomes to address fundamental health challenges.
- \$1 million to expand the national training program in koala care, treatment and triage.

The \$50 million initiative builds upon the \$18 million koala conservation package announced in 2020-21.

Streamlining Environmental Protections

The Australian Government is investing \$128.5 million over four years from 2022-23 to progress its environmental reform agenda to deliver improved environmental outcomes, support economic recovery and create jobs across Australia, including in regional communities. This funding will streamline development decisions and provide business certainty while delivering better environmental outcomes. Funded measures include:

- \$62.3 million over four years for an accelerated regional planning scheme to deliver up to 10 regional plans in priority development regions. This investment will streamline environmental approval decisions and provide greater certainty for regional businesses. This builds on the Australian Government's existing investment of \$2.7 million over three years from 2021-22 to develop a pilot regional plan, by providing additional support for the pilot plan and delivering up to nine additional plans. Work on the pilot plan is underway, with a framework to support the plan being developed in consultation with stakeholders and partners.
- \$12 million over three years to simplify and reform environmental offsets, which will deliver greater flexibility and certainty for businesses operating in regional areas, while protecting Australia's iconic species and landscapes. This will work alongside initiatives that encourage landowners to invest in the restoration of their land, which may create alternative income streams for farmers and other regional landowners while enhancing environmental outcomes in the regions.
- \$2 million over 12 months to review statutory committees to ensure environmental approval decisions are informed by the best advice. Well-informed decision-making will support economic activity and job creation in regional areas, make it easier to do business, and facilitate development and investment in new and emerging industries, while meeting high environmental standards.
- \$4.9 million over 12 months to undertake a review of protected animals and plants, including a systematic stocktake of data gaps. Greater data availability and reliability will help regional businesses meet environmental approval requirements, support approval processes, while ensuring community confidence that decisions are informed by the best available science and environmental information.

- \$10 million over 12 months to progress the delivery and implementation of single touch environmental approvals, which will remove duplication between national and state-level environmental approvals. This builds on the Australian Government’s existing investment of \$10.6 million over two years from 2020-21 to deliver single touch approvals. This has supported engagement with states and territories to establish approval bilateral agreements underpinned by National Environmental Standards and strong assurance, which will give confidence that strong environmental protection will be ensured regardless of whether the Australian Government or one of the states or territories approves a development.
- \$27.9 million in 2022-23 to sustain timely approval processes under Australia’s national environment laws. Delivering on-time environmental assessments and approvals continues to be a priority for the Government to deliver environmental outcomes while supporting Australia’s economic recovery.

New Deregulation Agenda –Digital Environmental Assessments Program, supported by a National Biodiversity Data Repository

The Australian Government committed \$52.5 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to digitally transform environmental assessment processes. This measure aims to reduce green tape for industry, protect the environment and improve transparency in project approvals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. By speeding up project assessments and reducing duplication between Australian Government and state and territory government processes, the program will make it easier to do business across Australia, including in our regions where large projects take place.

The government’s new commitment builds on the \$26.8 million it provided over three years in 2019-20 to develop and implement a pilot *Digital Environmental Assessments Program* with Western Australia. This second stage will roll out the solutions to the remaining states and territories, extending the economic benefits to the rest of Australia while maintaining high standards to achieve strong environmental outcomes.

Modernising Indigenous cultural heritage protections

The Australian Government is investing \$11 million over two years from 2022-23 to progress the modernisation of Indigenous cultural heritage protections in partnership with the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance and maintain timely decision-making under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (ATSIHP Act) during the modernisation process.

This funding builds on the Australian Government’s existing investment of \$0.5 million over 18 months from 2021-22 to engage with stakeholders, including Indigenous Australians, on models for improved Indigenous heritage protection. Significant engagement has been undertaken over the past year to support the reform process,

culminating in the signing of a strategic partnership agreement with the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance in November 2021. These investments will ensure the continued modernisation of Indigenous cultural heritage protections, informed by Indigenous Australians and other stakeholders including from rural and remote regions.

In addition, the funding to ensure timely decision-making under the ATSIHP Act builds on the Australian Government's existing investment of \$2.2 million over two years from 2020-21 to reduce the backlog of applications and support the timely administration of new applications under the ATSIHP Act. These investments will benefit regional communities by maintaining Indigenous cultural heritage protections and reducing delay costs and improving certainty for businesses and industry.

Supporting the management of Commonwealth National Parks

The Director of National Parks manages Australia's six Commonwealth National Parks, the Australian National Botanical Gardens, and a network of Australian Marine Parks. The Director of National Parks employs over 300 staff in regional Australia (as at 31 March 2021). The majority are located in and around Booderee in the Jervis Bay Territory, Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta national parks in the Northern Territory, and in Hobart. There are also small offices in the remote locations of Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

In July 2020, the Australian Government announced the largest ever single investment in Commonwealth National Parks, injecting \$233.4 million over three years from 2020–21 into critical tourism infrastructure. This will generate over 1,000 jobs in parks and the surrounding regions over three years. The investment will create new and improved tourism offerings and economic opportunities for Indigenous Australians to build on their vision for supporting tourism on their land.

The government is also investing \$38 million in 2021-22 to support the effective management and environmental conservation of Commonwealth National Parks and the Australian National Botanic Gardens, with an additional \$16.1 million committed in the 2022-23 Budget. The investment will affect the following regions:

- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and surrounding areas
- Booderee National Park and surrounding areas
- Kakadu National Park, Jabiru and surrounding areas.

The investment will have direct positive impact on the economies of surrounding towns and regions including through the attraction and retention of skilled workers and letting of service contracts to regional businesses. It will indirectly positively impact a range of small and medium businesses, which make up the majority of regional employers. They will service the directly engaged providers and serve tourists and other visitors to the parks.

Additionally, the Australian Government is providing \$10.6 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 (with \$2.6 million per annum ongoing) to support Traditional Owners and employment throughout the Commonwealth National Parks.

The investment will create 19 positions primarily across the jointly-managed National Parks which will lead to greater Indigenous employment outcomes and involvement in employment practices. These roles will enable better and more connected Traditional Owner engagement and increase diversity in Parks Australia's ranger programs, which will serve to improve regional employment. Creation of these opportunities for regional employment will have secondary economic benefits such as housing, education and community outcomes.

Great Barrier Reef Package

In January 2022, the Australian Government announced new funding of \$1 billion to protect the Great Barrier Reef and deliver on commitments under the Reef 2050 Plan, taking total Australian Government funding for the Reef to more than \$3 billion over 2014-15 to 2029-30.

The new funding will boost efforts to improve water quality, deliver world-leading reef management, support climate adaptation science and research, and provide funding to support Traditional Owner and community-led on-ground Reef protection projects. A healthy Reef, underpinned by strong management, will generate social and economic benefits to Queensland, and ensure reef-dependent industries and regional communities are supported as they recover from COVID-19.

The package includes a \$252.9 million investment in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's key programs over nine years, significantly strengthening its capacity to manage and protect this beautiful and diverse World Heritage ecosystem.

With this funding the Reef Authority will amplify efforts to protect the Reef and build its resilience in the face of climate change, focusing on management that will deliver the objectives of the Reef 2050 Plan and the Reef Authority's Reef Blueprint.

A significant proportion of the funding will be used to expand and accelerate a number of programs. Funding includes expansion of the *Crown-of-Thorns Starfish Control Program* out to 2030, and will reactivate the *Tourism Activation and Reef Protection Initiative* to 2023-24. These are two successful programs that deliver positive ecological and economic outcomes for the Reef and the communities and industries that rely on it.

The remaining funding will be used to extend the Reef Authority's ability to address pressures on the Reef through innovative and adaptive management, increased Traditional Owner involvement, enhanced protection of at-risk species and community education and communication.

Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Education at Reef HQ

The Australian Government committed \$80.1 million over four years from 2019-20 to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to improve educational offerings and tourism experiences for visitors to the Reef HQ Aquarium – the National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef in Townsville, Queensland. The Reef HQ Aquarium will showcase the diversity of marine life within the Reef and the efforts undertaken to ensure its protection for future generations through a range of immersive experiences and revitalised exhibits, including educational activities, hands-on experiences, onsite diving programs, scientific demonstrations and the use of interactive technology.

In the 2019-20 MYEFO, the Australian Government announced funding of \$26.9 million for critical infrastructure and health and safety upgrades to the Reef HQ Aquarium. In May and October 2020, \$7.6 million was committed from the *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* to upgrade animal life support systems and to improve visitor access and the service experience at the Reef HQ Aquarium. As part of the 2020-21 Budget, the government committed a further \$5.6 million over three years to improve the visitor experience to Reef HQ Aquarium. The funding includes an ongoing contribution of \$1.8 million per year from 2023-24 for maintenance and capital works. An additional \$40 million funding boost was announced in July 2021 to help transform the Reef HQ Aquarium into Australia's global centre of excellence for tropical coral reef education, making it a premium tourism destination. This brings the Australian Government's total investment in the redevelopment of Townsville's Reef HQ Aquarium to \$80.1 million.

To date the \$7.6 million has been spent on improvements to animal life support systems (such as sand filters, reverse osmosis machines and protein skimmers) and improving visitor access to Reef HQ for when the Aquarium reopens. A further \$4 million has been expended improving electrical infrastructure and addressing critical structural issues associated with building walls to ensure the facility can withstand the broader capital works that will begin soon. The concept design phase has been completed and a more detailed design is being developed over the coming months. A Traditional Owner content working group has been formed and is working through exhibit concepts for inclusion in the facility

Further revenue supplementation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

The Great Barrier Reef is a global icon and a World Heritage Area. It is one of the most complex natural systems on earth and an economic powerhouse that supports Australia's national economy, at both community and regional scales. Prior to COVID-19, the Reef facilitated employment of more than 64,000 full-time positions, predominantly in regional areas throughout Queensland. It generated nearly \$7 billion per annum in revenue predominantly through the tourism and commercial fishing sectors.

The Reef tourism industry has been one of the worst hit sectors during the pandemic. Visitation to the Reef collectively has declined by 52 per cent in 2020-21 and forward projections suggest continued uncertainty associated with market instability.

As part of the Australian Government's continued support for recovery of the visitor economy in regional Queensland, an additional \$12.4 million has been provided to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to allow for an extension of the existing waiver of the fees and taxes applied to tourism operators to 30 June 2023. This measure also provides budget certainty for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which is critical for ongoing effective management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and its World Heritage values.

This initiative is in addition to the existing Australian Government commitment to waive the Environment Management Charge and permit-related fees from 1 April 2020, up to 30 June 2022. This includes an investment of \$2.2 million for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to undertake a comprehensive review of the fee charging structure in place for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Strengthening Australia's leadership in Antarctica

Antarctica is a place of peace and science under the Antarctic Treaty system. Australian Government funding for the *Australian Antarctic Program* protects and advances Australia's longstanding national and scientific interests in Antarctica. The Australian Antarctic Division is based in Hobart and continues to bring economic benefits to Tasmania by supporting local jobs and businesses including procurement opportunities for Australian businesses, contractors and suppliers. This also positions the city as the premier scientific research hub and logistics gateway for East Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

Current key investments include \$1.9 billion over 30 years to build and operate the world-class icebreaker and research vessel, the RSV *Nuyina*. A celebration to mark the RSV *Nuyina*'s first voyage to Antarctica was held in Hobart in December 2021. The government has also invested \$450 million over 10 years for Australia's Antarctic research facilities under the Hobart City Deal, and \$48.8 million over 11 years to upgrade the Macquarie Island Research Station.

The Australian Government is also investing \$804.4 million over the next 10 years from 2022-23 to strengthen Australia's strategic and scientific capabilities in the Antarctic region and provide more than 100 direct new jobs in Tasmania. Over the next five years, through the *Australian Antarctic Program*, the Australian Government will deliver:

- \$136.6 million to support Australia's inland (Antarctic traverse) transport, critical charting activities, and allowing robust environmental protection measures

- \$60.6 million for unmanned aerial vehicles to map inaccessible and fragile areas of East Antarctica
- \$44.2 million in logistical shipping support to enable the new icebreaker, RSV *Nuyina*, to focus on extended science voyages
- \$35.0 million for four new long-range medium lift helicopters and an investigation into a future multi-engine helicopter fleet to improve the safety of operations
- \$17.4 million for marine science in the Southern Ocean and a new state-of-the-art krill aquarium in Hobart to extend on Australia's world-leading Antarctic science
- \$13.6 million for capability development to enhance Australia's reach inland including investigations into modern intracontinental aircraft
- \$14.3 million for environmental management including a 'Cleaner Antarctica Strategy' to remove legacy waste
- \$7.4 million for research focused on Antarctic ice sheet science to build global understanding of climate change impacts.

The Australian Government will further invest around \$92.3 million a year from 2026-27 to support Australia's ongoing Antarctic activities. This latest investment will deliver new research in marine science, and environmental protection and management. Funding for the *Australian Antarctic Program* enhances Australia's presence and research activities in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. It gives Australia continued leadership and influence in the Antarctic region and the Antarctic Treaty System, and strengthens Hobart's status as a premier Antarctic scientific research hub and logistics gateway.

Waste and Recycling – Recycling Modernisation Fund

The Australian Government is boosting its successful *Recycling Modernisation Fund* (RMF) through a new \$60.4 million Plastics Technology stream over four years from 2022-23. This stream of the RMF will deliver state of the art advanced recycling solutions for hard-to-recycle plastics.

Boosting Australia's plastic recycling capacity will create long-term, local solutions for the large challenges such as distances to recycling infrastructure and technological barriers that are particularly relevant for managing waste, including in regional and remote areas of Australia.

This investment builds on \$190 million committed over four years from 2020-21 that has already leveraged over \$700 million in total investment from state and territory governments and industry for new and upgraded recycling infrastructure. Of this existing investment, \$125 million is supporting 30 new projects in regional and remote areas. These projects are on track to create an additional 237,000 tonnes of recycling capacity in Australia by June 2024, along with 251 jobs.

Building Australia's Circular Waste Economy – Implementing a ReMade in Australia scheme

The Australian Government is investing \$8.2 million over four years from 2022-23 to establish a ReMade in Australia brand for use on products made from Australian recycling. Australians buying products labelled with the ReMade brand will be confident they are buying a product made by Australian manufacturers from recycled material. The ReMade brand will show Australians the importance of their recycling efforts, and the value of recycling as a resource.

Funding for the ReMade brand will support our regional manufacturing industry, which employs nearly a third of Australians in manufacturing. The brand will help create consumer demand for products made from recycled materials, including those manufactured in our regions.

Transitional resourcing for continued delivery of the Waste Export Ban

Australia's *Waste Export Ban* ensures that Australia is taking responsibility for managing its own waste; not sending it overseas where it often ends up polluting land and waterways. Bans are now in place preventing the export of unprocessed waste glass (from 1 January 2021), unsorted waste plastic (from 1 July 2021), and certain whole baled tyres (from 1 December 2021).

The *Waste Export Ban* means that Australia must recycle an additional 645,000 tonnes of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres onshore by 2024. As more waste will need to be processed prior to export, the ban is driving new innovation in recycling (see *Recycling Modernisation Fund*) and the use of recycled materials in manufacturing – including in regional Australia.

Further to the commitment of \$6.6 million over four years from 2020-21, the Australian Government is providing an additional \$4.4 million over two years in the 2022-23 Budget to support continued implementation of the export ban.

Water – Supporting the Murray-Darling Basin – Healthy Rivers and Healthy Communities

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$97 million over two years from 2022-23 for the *Healthy Rivers–Healthy Communities* initiative, which builds on the Australian Government's vision for the Murray-Darling Basin as set out in the *Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package* to improve river health and bring communities back to the centre of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The initiative will seek grant proposals from community groups, the irrigation industry, Basin stakeholders and state governments to deliver improved local river health, enhanced environmental outcomes, and stronger and more diverse regional economies and Basin communities.

Water – Supporting the Murray-Darling Basin – Modernising Murray River systems

The Australian Government's *Modernising Murray River systems* initiative of \$2.6 million over two years from 2022-23 will improve water security for all water users by optimising the management of rivers across the southern Basin. This will fund a systematic technical assessment of infrastructure to support environmental and economic outcomes in the southern Basin, and mitigate the impacts of future floods and droughts on communities. Funding will be used to establish a panel of independent experts from fields such as hydrology, engineering, infrastructure and ecology to analyse and identify opportunities to improve the operation of the river with clever and targeted infrastructure.

Water – Supporting the Murray-Darling Basin – Building trust and transparency in Murray-Darling Basin water markets

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) released its final report on the Murray-Darling Basin water markets inquiry on 26 March 2021. As an initial response, the Australian Government invested \$3.5 million in 2021-22 for an independent Principal Adviser, supported by an advisory group, to consider the ACCC's recommendations and develop a practical, phased and cost-effective plan (roadmap) for water market reform by 30 June 2022.

The Principal Adviser, Daryl Quinlivan AO, provided initial advice to the Minister for Resources and Water on 16 December 2021. That advice was made publicly available on 16 February 2022.

The Australian Government is committing a further \$2.1 million in 2022-23 for detailed development work to implement four early actions. This aligns with the Australian Government's essential services priority and was agreed in principle with Basin states in December 2021 as part of the development of the roadmap for water market reform.

The early actions include integrity measures that will improve public confidence in water markets, improved access to meaningful information on water markets, and the implementation of water market reform.

Water – Supporting the Murray-Darling Basin – Building community confidence in water compliance

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$3.2 million over two years from 2022-23 for a field officer network which will enable the Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance (IGWC) to further build relationships with regulated communities across the million square kilometres of the Basin to improve trust in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, strengthen compliance with the *Water Act 2007* and increase transparency in water management.

Funding will enable the IGWC to fulfil its legislative functions, including through an on-ground field operations team and an independent communication and engagement capability.

Water – Supporting the Murray-Darling Basin – Improving Murray Irrigation Limited delivery infrastructure

The Australian Government's initiative of \$35.1 million from 2022-23 to 2023-24 to improve existing water delivery infrastructure across the Murray Irrigation Limited network will fund the preparation of a detailed business case and the construction of a pilot project for water infrastructure upgrades to achieve better environmental outcomes while supporting economic sustainability.

Murray-Darling Basin – Improving Infrastructure and Environmental Outcomes – Commonwealth contributions towards critical renewal works for the Hume Dam on the river Murray

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$6.7 million over six years from 2022-23 for renewal works for the Hume Dam, which will make up 25 per cent of the total contribution to the project. This is based on the Ministerial Council agreed joint venture cost sharing arrangements between the Australian Government and the New South Wales, Victorian and South Australian governments. This work will ensure dam safety requirements are met and water entitlement holders continue to receive delivery of their water allocations through effective management and maintenance of Hume Dam.

Murray-Darling Basin Integrated Basin Water Modelling Uplift Program

The Australian Government is improving modelling technology and decision-making tools for managing the water resources of the Basin through investment of \$65.9 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25. As announced by the Minister for Resources and Water in January 2022, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will bring the current outdated and disconnected river modelling technology up to a modern standard that is integrated across Basin jurisdictions.

Improved Basin water models will enable more timely and effective water management decisions, improve transparency, and increase the availability of water information to Basin governments, communities and industry stakeholders.

Updated modelling capability will provide sophisticated scenario planning to inform government, and in turn communities, on water policy, planning, compliance and emergency response decisions.

Current Initiatives

Soil and Stewardship

The Australian Government is providing \$196.9 million over four years from 2021-22 (including the *Food Waste for Healthy Soils Fund*) to implement the National Soil Strategy and associated Action Plan. The National Soil Package meets the Prime Minister's commitment under the 20-year National Soil Strategy to work with states and territories, industry and other stakeholders to improve Australia's soil health.

The National Soil Package includes:

- A two-year *Pilot Soil Monitoring and Incentives Program* to better understand Australia's soil health and assess the impact of land management practices on soil condition. This element of the *National Soil Package* will provide low-cost soil sampling and testing to land managers to encourage more comprehensive soil monitoring, a program to purchase existing privately held soil data, and the redevelopment of a publicly available soil information system that will provide the data to improve understanding of Australia's soil condition, changes over time and the impact of land management practices.
- An accreditation program to provide further education and training for agronomists, extension officers and other trusted advisors to enhance soil science expertise and their ability to provide practical advice to farmers.
- *Soil Science Challenge* grants to help address key soil research gaps.

A further \$18 million of existing funding from the *National Landcare Smart Farms Small Grants* program has been directed towards soil extension activities to support the on-ground implementation of the *Pilot Soil Monitoring and Incentives Program*.

Soil and Stewardship – Deliver grants to states and territories through a Food Waste for Healthy Soils Fund

The Australian Government has provided \$67 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish the *Food Waste for Healthy Soils Fund*. The Fund will divert organic waste from landfill and create consistent, safe and high-quality recycled organic products for use in improving agricultural soils by providing infrastructure funding and by working to improve the quality, consistency and uptake of recycled organic products. Australia produces 14.3 million tonnes of food waste each year and currently only 49 per cent of this is recycled. The Fund will help to turn more organic waste into valuable resources to increase employment, improve Australia's soils and reduce greenhouse gases.

Regional areas are benefitting through the establishment of new or improved organics recycling infrastructure. Regions will have greater access to high-quality, consistent

recycled organic products for the improvement of soils used for agriculture, horticulture and domestic gardening. This is supported by the Fund through updates to Australian Standard 4454 (composts, soil conditioners and mulches) to improve the quality of products; community education initiatives to improve the quality of feedstocks; and increased awareness and education on the benefits of composts to the agricultural sector.

Projects funded under the first application intake will be announced in April 2022. The second application intake closed on 31 March 2022, with projects expected to be announced in June 2022.

Transforming Australia's Waste and Recycling Industry

The Australian Government is providing \$59.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to implement its commitments under the *National Waste Policy Action Plan* to improve national waste data.

The *National Waste Policy Action Plan* includes seven ambitious targets, underpinned by 80 individual actions, to deliver significant improvements in Australia's recycling and resource recovery performance. Several of these actions provide direct benefits to regional Australia. For example, the Australian Government is working with Dairy Australia and RM Consulting Group to reduce agricultural plastic waste. These projects include piloting two agricultural plastics stewardship schemes – for silage wrap and non-packaging agricultural plastics – in three remote communities in Victoria and Queensland. These projects are well progressed and will both be completed in 2023. They will support enhanced stewardship for agricultural plastics across regional and remote Australia.

Work led by the department to improve the quality and accessibility of waste and resource recovery data will assist in the identification of waste, recycle and recoverable materials in regional areas which will support opportunities for investment in new regional facilities. It will allow local, state and regional bodies to better target waste management interventions and support new innovations.

Rural Research and Development for Profit Program

The *Rural Research and Development for Profit Program* is a \$157.4 million program over nine years to 2022–23. It is providing rural research and development corporations with grants for collaborative research to improve productivity and profitability at the farm gate.

Grant funding provided to date comprises \$26.7 million for 12 projects under Round One, \$52.2 million for 17 projects under Round Two, \$35.8 million for seven projects under Round Three and \$39.6 million for ten projects under Round Four. These funds have been matched by almost \$170 million in cash and in-kind contributions from successful applicants and their partners, which has multiplied the impact of the projects. Twenty-three projects have been completed and are contributing to improving the productivity and profitability of the agriculture sector.

Streamlining and modernising agricultural levies legislation

The Australian Government has committed \$7.2 million over four years from 2020-21 to modernise the 30-year-old agricultural levies legislative framework into a business-friendly, fit-for-purpose and easy-to-use legislative framework that supports industry investment into key activities, including research and development, marketing and biosecurity. This will contribute to improved productivity and competitiveness for the sector, with clear flow-on benefits for regional Australia.

To date around \$4.6 million has been spent on this initiative. This has supported engagement with over 50 industry bodies, research and development corporations and collection agents, as well as policy development and drafting of the new legislation, which is well underway.

National Farm Safety Education Fund

The Australian Government committed \$3.5 million over four years at the 2019 election to improve farm safety outcomes. The *National Farm Safety Education Fund* is delivering on this commitment to increase awareness of farm safety and education to help prevent farm accidents.

With one in five workplace fatalities occurring on farms, improving farm safety awareness and education will benefit Australia's farmers, farm workers, their families and the regional communities they support.

Funding of \$1.9 million has been allocated to Farmsafe Australia from 2019-20 to 2022-23 (with \$1.5 million provided to date) to undertake a range of activities that will deliver on the government's commitment to safer farms and reduced on-farm injuries and fatalities. Farmsafe is updating and modernising resources to support worker induction on farms, and to educate young Australians about hazards on farms such as quad bikes, farm machinery and dams. Farmsafe has also consulted with farmers and industry groups to develop a *National Farm Safety Education Fund Strategy*. The Strategy was released on 17 March 2021 and has helped to guide Australian Government investment of the remaining \$1.6 million in the *National Farm Safety Education Fund*.

In November 2021, nine grant recipients were announced under the \$1.6 million *National Farm Safety Education Fund: Improving Farm Safety Practices* grant program. Projects are focused on education and capacity building in two priority areas: the next generation of farmers; and industry-endorsed training and continued learning. The intended outcome is that farmers and those that live and work on Australian farms and in related industries have a more positive attitude towards farm safety practices, and increased uptake of safe practices. Funding agreements are currently being finalised. As of February 2022, \$0.7 million in grant payments have been made.

Educating Kids about Agriculture

Australian agriculture makes a valuable contribution to regional communities and to the nation as a whole. Through the *Educating Kids about Agriculture* election commitment, the Australian Government is providing \$10.0 million over four years from 2019-20 to support two new programs to bring kids and farms together:

- Up to \$5 million is funding primary students to visit farms and primary production worksites to learn about agriculture through the *Educating Kids about Agriculture: Kids to Farms* grant program.
- Up to \$5 million is funding a practical, integrated farming platform (iFarm) in up to 80 urban schools through the *Educating Kids about Agriculture: iFarms* project.

These programs are providing opportunities for young Australians to engage with the agricultural sector to increase their understanding of where and how their food and fibre is produced, encouraging more young Australians to study agriculture.

Agriculture 2030 – Improving employment opportunities

This initiative provides \$29.8 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to help the agriculture sector secure, skill and build its workforce, including:

- Providing up to \$5.1 million seed funding to the National Farmers' Federation to lead an industry consortium for the *Ag-CAREERSTART* pilot program for young Australians to experience work in the agriculture industry. Placements for the first intake commenced in March 2022, with an additional intake expected to commence in early 2023.
- Co-funding innovative industry initiatives aimed at supporting upskilling, career progression pathways and mentoring workers through the \$10.1 million *AgUP* program. The first grant round closed in January 2022, with further grant rounds expected to open from 2022-23.
- Providing \$3.2 million to fast-track horticulture growers' and business' participation and progress through the *Fair Farms* program. This grant commenced in November 2021, with implementation across Australian horticulture to be delivered across 2022-23.

Farm Household Allowance Business Income Reconciliation Debt Waiver

The *Farm Household Allowance* (FHA) program is an uncapped, demand-driven income support payment that is only available to farmers and their partners in hardship who meet (and continuously meet) the income and assets tests. It is delivered by Services Australia on behalf of the department. The program delivers wide-ranging

benefits to drought-affected communities in regional Australia, enabling recipients to support local businesses by paying for household goods and services.

The Australian Government is running a project from the 2020-21 financial year through to 30 June 2024 to waive the recovery of most FHA business reconciliation debts for around 5,300 farmers at a cost of \$14.7 million. This aligns with the recommendations of and reforms resulting from the farmer-led *Review of the Farm Household Allowance Program*. Regional Australia has been hit hard by a succession of natural disasters including drought, flood, bushfires and COVID-19, and waiving the FHA-associated debt will help people who need it most, as well as improving business confidence across regional Australia.

Dairy Code of Conduct

In 2020-21, the dairy industry's farm-gate production was worth \$4.7 billion and over 37,400 people were directly employed on dairy farms and by dairy companies within Australia. The dairy industry is a key employer and contributor to Australia's regional economies and towns.

The Australian Government committed \$8.7 million over 11 years from 2019-20 to introduce a mandatory Code of Conduct for the dairy industry. The Code has helped re-balance bargaining power in the dairy supply chain by setting enforceable minimum standards of conduct for business practices between farmers and dairy processors. The Code is improving the transparency of transactions in the industry by setting out the key rights and obligations of each party. Implementation and enforcement of the Code will be the responsibility of the ACCC.

In 2021, the Australian Government completed the first review of the Code. The review found the Code is providing a crucial framework for the dairy industry, building confidence within the industry and operating as intended. While stakeholders were highly supportive of the Code, areas for improvement were identified. A second review of the Code will be undertaken on or after 1 January 2023.

Plantation Development Concessional Loans

The Australian Government announced a new concessional loan product in the 2021-22 Budget to support plantation development in regional Australia in areas where commercial forestry is traditionally undertaken, and to support plantation recovery following the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires. The loan opened for applications on 6 December 2021. The RIC (see New Initiatives) administers the concessional loans and is working with farmers and the forestry industry to grow Australia's plantation estate. To meet the increasing demand for wood products, Australia's plantation area needs to grow. The loans offer farmers and foresters support to expand Australia's plantation area, which will grow Australia's future wood supply, support jobs in regional locations and provide resources for industries, such as construction, that require wood. The loans also offer farmers an opportunity to diversify their income through farm forestry.

Establish new Regional Forestry Hubs

The Australian Government allocated \$10.6 million over four years from 2021-22 to support innovation in the forestry sector, including extending the work of the nine current *Regional Forestry Hubs* for a further three years and establishing two new hubs.

This funding supports the nine current hubs across the north-east and central-west of New South Wales, the Murray Region of New South Wales and Victoria, Gippsland Victoria, the Green Triangle across Victoria and South Australia, south, central and north Queensland, south-west Western Australia, and Tasmania. Funding for these existing hubs has been extended to the end of the 2024-25 financial year.

It also establishes two new hubs, each with total funding of \$1 million over four financial years from 2021-22 to 2024-25. These two newly established hubs extend across south-east New South Wales including the Australian Capital Territory, and across the north of the Northern Territory extending into the Ord Valley, Western Australia.

National Bushfire Recovery Fund – Forestry Recovery Development Fund

The impacts of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires on the Australian environment, agriculture and forestry industries were significant, unprecedented, and disproportionately affected rural and regional Australia. The Australian Government remains committed to helping regional Australia recover from the bushfires, with measures to support a sustainable forestry industry. A number of immediate relief and recovery support measures began delivery over 2019-20 and 2020-21.

The \$41 million investment (over 2020-21 to 2022-23), which is assisting privately-owned wood processing facilities to recover and rebuild through innovation and product diversification through the *Forestry Recovery Development Fund Program*, continues. The Program is supporting activities such as the construction of new buildings and purchasing of new equipment, the upgrade of power systems to replace those damaged in the bushfires and the future-proofing of production lines. This work is catalysing private sector investment worth an estimated \$95 million.

Fisheries Habitat Restoration

The Australian Government's \$8 million commitment over three years from 2020-21 is investing in projects that restore marine and estuarine fish habitats around Australia. Projects underway are addressing barriers to fish passage; rehabilitating wetlands and mangrove forests; and undertaking riverbank stabilisation works. These projects are being delivered in partnership with Regional Land Partnerships service providers in consultation with recreational fishing groups from across regional Australia.

Recreational Fishing and Camping Facilities Program

The Australian Government committed \$20 million over four years from 2019-20 to the *Recreational Fishing and Camping Facilities Program*, delivering on its election commitment to provide increased and improved opportunities for locals and visitors to regional areas to go fishing. The Program contributes to Australia's economic recovery by creating construction and maintenance jobs in local communities and boosting tourism. It is being delivered through partnership agreements with states and territories, under which local councils can apply to improve, maintain or build new boating, marine rescue, fishing and camping facilities such as boat ramps, jetties, and fish cleaning stations.

Commonwealth's Deregulation Agenda – Technological innovations to deliver fisheries deregulation

The Australian Government is providing \$20.1 million over four years from 2021-22 to reduce regulatory burden and improve services for approximately 1,220 Australian fishing businesses, mainly located in regional Australia. The investment includes the *Data Transformation* and *E-Monitoring* programs that will support fishers to cost-effectively meet their data provision requirements, minimise government duplication and reduce regulatory impacts and costs. It will also support evidence-based decision-making to maximise returns to regional businesses.

Fishing businesses operate from regional ports such as Cairns, Eden, Hobart, Kurumba, Lakes Entrance, Mooloolaba, Port Lincoln and Ulladulla. This investment will help Australian fishing businesses retain a competitive advantage and provide the information they need to maintain market access, diversify into new markets and seek price premiums for existing products.

The \$10.1 million *Data Transformation* program is modernising the information technology infrastructure and systems that underpin the collection of fisheries data. It also supports the integration of that data with data collected by other Australian Government agencies.

Since 1 July 2021, the governance arrangements, staff, stakeholder advisory committees and program planning has been undertaken. The Data Transformation project has developed electronic logbooks for all fishing methods, electronic catch documentation reports and has commenced the development of electronic observer data collection. This work is supporting streamlined and efficient service delivery and improving timely access to data for decision-making. The E-monitoring project has focused on the development of the standards based program, including internalising the footage review. The expenditure to date is \$1.8 million.

New Deregulation Agenda – Reducing regulatory burden and streamlining audit arrangements in the dairy sector

In the 2019-20 MYEFO, the Australian Government announced \$14.8 million over six years from 2019-20 for the *Dairy Export Assurance Program* to reduce the regulatory and cost burden on exporters in the dairy sector. The program is working with the dairy industry to identify gaps and opportunities in regulatory requirements, improving data, and supporting food safety.

The program consists of three projects that focus on raising export awareness, reducing regulatory burden and streamlining audit arrangements in the dairy sector. As at January 2022, \$2.5 million of the committed \$14.8 million has been expended.

Busting Congestion for Agricultural Exporters – Improving the ease of doing business

The Australian Government is investing in a suite of reforms to accelerate trade growth as agriculture recovers from drought, bushfires and COVID-19. These reforms are modernising existing systems and processes to give Australian agricultural exporters access to world-leading government services. The package, worth \$328.4 million over four years from 2020-21, is reforming export systems and streamlining administrative requirements while contributing to the industry's goal of \$100 billion in farm gate production by 2030. The package includes:

- \$222.2 million for *Digital Services to Take Farmers to Markets*, transforming export regulatory systems including through implementing a suite of contemporary and connected digital services for exporters. The government has now released a single export account for agricultural exporters to reduce administrative burden.
- \$14.3 million to improve regulation, including for the delivery of risk and compliance-based regulation for the seafood and live animal export sectors to grow their exports
- \$10.9 million for *Building a More Competitive Export Meat Industry* modernisation activities specifically designed for the meat processing sector. A package of modernisation proposals has been developed in conjunction with and supported by industry, which will streamline export and production costs to remain competitive.
- \$10.0 million for the *Harmonising and Streamlining Plant Export Regulation* program to simplify processes to support plant product exports, making it easier, cheaper and quicker for plant exporters to get their produce into overseas markets. It will also harmonise regulation for plant industries and streamline plant export audit intervention, making the rules more consistent and easier to navigate. A key achievement to date has been the enhancements made to the Plant Export Management IT System which streamlines the plant export inspection process for exporters.

- \$71.1 million over three years from 2020-21 to make the essential export regulatory services that the government provides more efficient and sustainable.

The reforms will lead to annual government fees and charges being over \$20 million lower than expected from 2023-24 and generating over \$200 million of other benefits to industry by 2030. Primary producers will also benefit through increased opportunities to have their products exported to high-value markets.

Supporting Trade – Representation and promotion of Australia’s interests in international fora and standard-setting bodies

The Australian Government is providing \$15 million over four years from 2021-22 to enhance Australia’s representation and promote Australia’s interests in international fora and standard-setting bodies that underpin global agriculture trade.

Ms Su McCluskey has been appointed as the Special Representative for Australian Agriculture. Ms McCluskey is working to develop coalitions of support to promote the importance of the multilateral trading system to free and open markets and the key role of international trade in providing global food security.

The initiative also strengthens Australia’s engagement in three key international standard setting bodies: International Plant Protection Covenant (IPPC), World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) and International Food Standards (CODEX). This includes the secondment of Australian technical staff to regional Pacific offices.

Expenditure to date is estimated at \$600,000, with COVID-19 disruptions proving a challenge to the secondment of officers overseas.

Supporting Trade – Extend the Improved Access to Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals program

This initiative provides \$9 million over four years from 2021-22 to boost farm productivity and resilience through safe and sustainable pest and disease management. The extension of the *Improved Access to Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals* program will ensure continued support for farmers’ access to safe and effective agricultural and veterinary chemicals. These pest and disease management tools are essential to boost farm productivity, strengthen resistance management strategies, manage potential biosecurity incursions, maintain trading competitiveness and achieve the target of \$100 billion in value for Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry by 2030.

By equipping Australian farmers with chemical management tools they would not otherwise be able to access, the program will support agricultural industries (especially those producing new and emerging commodities) in taking advantage of evolving markets and environmental conditions.

Supporting Trade – Fund projects in collaboration with the perishable agricultural goods industry that improve market transparency in the sector

The Australian Government has committed \$5.4 million over four years from 2021-22 for industry-based projects to improve market transparency in the fresh food supply chain. This initiative responds to the recommendation of the ACCC's *Perishable Agricultural Goods Inquiry* report that governments and perishable agricultural goods industries should explore measures to increase price transparency, in order to improve competition in these industries.

These projects will enable fresh food supply chain participants to make choices based on accessible and credible market information and will increase the effectiveness of markets, improve perceptions of fairness and build trust among supply chain participants. This will lead to greater capital investment on farms, supporting job security and creation in rural communities, and overall rural economic improvement.

Biosecurity – better understanding how pests and diseases could enter Australia

Globally, the spread of devastating pests and diseases is accelerating, with increased movements of people and products around the world, supply chain complexity, climate and land use changes. The Australian Government is providing \$34.6 million over four years from 2021-22 to address these compounding threats. Funded measures are focusing on:

- Increasing collaboration with state and territory governments, regional neighbours, private veterinarians, industry representative bodies and producers, to build and bolster strategic partnerships to tackle these threats.
- Enhancing the data-driven and qualitative intelligence essential for managing Australia's biosecurity and animal health status.
- Harnessing scientific expertise in the university and research sector.
- Strengthening surveillance and detection outcomes in the marine environment such as remotely operated vehicles and automated image analysis to help address the biosecurity risks posed by vessels, including biofouling.
- Targeted capacity building with Pacific Island near neighbours to improve prevention, preparedness, recovery and resilience against animal disease events.
- Development of an integrated animal and plant pest and disease research program.

Biosecurity – modern technologies and diagnostic tools to improve the speed and accuracy of pest and disease identification at the border

The Australian Government is providing \$25.5 million over four years from 2021-22 to expand diagnostic capabilities and invest in additional technologies to facilitate the streamlined movement of plant and animal-based goods across the border while managing biosecurity risks. This will benefit Australia's agriculture producers, particularly in the horticulture sector. As at end of February 2022, \$2.3 million has been expended. Funded measures focus on improving the speed and accuracy with which pests and diseases can be identified.

Biosecurity – supporting Australia's preparedness, response and recovery capability

Australia's favourable animal, plant and environmental health status provides a competitive trade advantage for Australian farmers and regions internationally. The Australian Government committed \$67.4 million over four years from 2021-22, and \$13.1 million ongoing, to build, enhance and test Australia's biosecurity preparedness, response and recovery capability. This included:

- A two-year national exercise program, with state and territory and Australian Government counterparts, to enhance Australia's response capability by stress-testing the national biosecurity system in response to a significant national pest or disease incursion. This program is underway along with efforts to have a new incident management system in place in the second half of 2022.
- Further steps toward a comprehensive national pest and disease surveillance information system with states and territories. Arrangements to take this work forward are in place, building on the current AUSPestCheck plant pest surveillance system.
- A feasibility study for an Australian livestock genebank, which will be concluded in mid-2022. This will be used to identify the scope and governance structure for a potential new Australian facility.
- Funding to maintain the foot-and-mouth vaccine bank, which remains ready to support Australian producers during a foot-and-mouth response should it ever be required.
- Additional contingency funding to support national responses to plant, animal and environmental pest and disease incursions under the biosecurity emergency response deeds with state and territory governments and industry.

Biosecurity – Trial pre-border biosecurity screening technology on travellers and air cargo

This initiative provides \$19.5 million over two years from 2021-22 to support ground-breaking trials in the use of remote approaches across traveller, mail and air cargo pathways to screen for biosecurity risks before they reach Australian shores and to continue existing work on auto-detection algorithms for biosecurity risk material.

This builds on the Australian Government's earlier investment in screening technology at the border for people and goods, with the successful development of a world-leading auto-detection algorithm using the 3D Real Time Tomography (RTT) X-ray to detect fruit, meat and seafood.

The RTT X-ray technology and algorithm has proven to be up to three times more effective in identifying biosecurity risk than the current screening technology. This initiative will support critical next steps towards keeping biosecurity risk offshore, while enabling the more efficient flow of people and goods across the border. This initiative is on track and to date, \$4.7 million has been spent.

Biosecurity – Upgrade the Maritime Arrivals and Reporting System

The Australian Government is providing \$28.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to improve Australia's ability to manage biosecurity risk posed by vessels, aircraft and non-commercial vessels arriving in Australia. This measure expands and updates the existing *Maritime Arrivals Reporting System* to capture all international air and sea vessel arrivals, creating a nationally consistent data repository for all conveyances.

It is also streamlining biosecurity reporting arrangements for commercial airlines and non-commercial vessel operators, improving compatibility and interoperability with other biosecurity risk information systems used by external border agencies and industry, and enhancing the system's ability to collect data, enabling better targeting of biosecurity inspection activities, compliance and enforcement action.

As of January 2022, \$3.6 million has been spent, and the budget for 2021-22 is on track to being fully expended.

Biosecurity – Deliver digital capability for biosecurity screening of incoming international mail through new technology

The Australian Government is providing \$31.2 million over four years from 2021-22 and \$1.5 million ongoing to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of biosecurity interventions in the international mail pathway.

International mail is a key pathway for biosecurity risk material, such as African swine fever and seeds, so appropriate interventions are an important component of an efficient, effective and resilient biosecurity system.

System investments will provide for automated workflow with integrated risk assessment allowing effective targeting of high biosecurity risk. Coupled with investment in additional 3D X-rays for this pathway, which have proven to be three times more effective in detecting risk material than current X-ray capability, this will increase resource use efficiency while reducing delivery times for international mail.

This initiative is on track and to date, \$2.1 million has been spent. Contracts are in place with suppliers for 2021-22 funding to be fully expended by June 2022. Achievements include commencement of site works for a first X-ray unit at Sydney Gateway Mail facility, scheduled to be operational in the first half of 2022 (pending no access issues).

Biosecurity – To manage the biosecurity risk posed by hitchhiker pests arriving in imported cargo

The Australian Government is providing \$96.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to strengthen and boost offshore and border biosecurity arrangements to protect Australia from the devastating agricultural and environmental pests that can hitchhike on or in goods and containers destined for Australian shores.

This measure enables a more systematised approach to managing ‘hitchhiker’ pests before they reach Australia’s borders, including by expanding the offshore treatment provider program, quality systems and supply chain assurance schemes, and improving pest identification to ensure effective application of offshore treatments. Improved acquisition and greater use of data and new technologies will support more accurate and rapid targeting of problem containers. This investment also supports the development of more sophisticated modelling to prioritise intervention efforts and a partnership approach with like-minded countries to monitor global hitchhiker movements and improve shipping container hygiene.

At the border, targeted inspections and surveillance will increase the ability, without undue delay, to intercept high-risk goods and containers. Implementation of innovative detection technologies, such as eDNA, will support rapid and accurate detection of the presence of pests.

By strengthening biosecurity and supporting better-targeted interventions, this investment will reduce the threat of pests entering Australia, avoiding the significant costs to Australian agricultural producers of pest incursions, maintaining market access, and ensuring faster clearance of consignments on arrival for compliant importers.

As of February 2022, \$9.1 million has been expended on this initiative. Key achievements to date include:

- Establishing and progressing 17 projects which will address the risk of hitchhiker pests by making changes to Australia’s biosecurity policy and IT systems, and investing in innovative detection approaches.

- Completing a draft risk analysis outlining the potential biosecurity risks associated with sea containers.
- Establishing contracts with providers to develop ICT capabilities and progressing six innovation projects that aim to improve pest detection and diagnostic capabilities.
- Engaging the Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis to analyse the consequences of the proposed changes to the management of sea containers.
- Establishing the Industry Advisory Group with senior representatives from key international industry bodies to consider alternative sea container designs to minimise hitchhiker pest risks.
- Engaging with shipping industries and data aggregators to source container data history.

Biosecurity – Continue to protect Australia from the biosecurity risk posed by African swine fever

The Australian Government is providing \$58.6 million over four years from 2021-22 and \$13.6 million ongoing to deliver continued capability to protect Australia from the continuing and evolving threat of African swine fever (ASF) and other significant diseases. This builds on Australian Government efforts through the previous ASF response package to reduce the likelihood of ASF entering Australia and to enhance preparedness to respond to any incursions.

This measure is continuing support for the following activities:

- strengthening border control measures via additional frontline screening by biosecurity officers, detector dogs and 3D X-ray machines
- undertaking targeted operations and product testing to check non-compliance activity
- actioning specific recommendations from ASF simulation exercises involving state and territory governments and industry representatives
- engaging with industry and key trading partners to enhance domestic preparedness and develop market access strategies to maintain export trade and import supply chains should an outbreak of ASF occur in Australia
- capacity-building with near-neighbours and technical support for preparedness, response and recovery from ASF.

Pest and Disease Preparedness and Response Programs

The Australian Government continues to support the eradication of exotic animal and plant pests and diseases that, if allowed to establish and spread, would have serious economic and environmental impacts on agricultural industries, health and the environment. Through the *National Partnership on Pest and Disease Preparedness and Response Programs*, the government is providing up to \$175.8 million over four years from 2021-22 to support nationally agreed eradication responses.

The government also continues to strengthen Australia's ability to prepare for, detect and respond to emergency and emerging priority pests and diseases through the *Priority Pest and Disease Planning and Response Program* (\$17.6 million over four years from 2020-21). This program funds development and implementation of national action plans to address the risks posed by priority pests and diseases to trade, the environment and public health together with developing innovative approaches to improve surveillance activities and maintaining and improving Australia's diagnostic capacity and capability for emergency and emerging pests and diseases

Pest Animals and Weeds Management (through the Established Pest Animals and Weed Management Pipeline)

The Australian Government allocated \$30.3 million over four years from 2019-20 to continue the fight against established pests and weeds and help limit their impact on Australia's agriculture sector and the environment. \$28.5 million has been committed to deliver activities that support:

- National prioritisation and better information – to improve the understanding of the distribution and impact of priority established pest animals and weeds on Australia's agricultural sector and environment, to support targeted research, national coordination and information sharing. This includes conducting the third national animal pest and weed management survey in 2022 that will measure the awareness and management of pest animals and weeds by agricultural land managers.
- Priority pest innovative solutions – to focus longer-term research efforts on innovative solutions for a set of priority established pest animals and weeds. In February 2021, the Minister for Agriculture and Northern Australia announced \$13 million for 19 successful grantees through the *Advancing Pest Animal and Weed Control Solutions Competitive Grant Round*.
- Farm-ready management techniques, national coordination and delivery – to increase the development and take-up of 'farm-ready' pest animal and weed management and control techniques through coordination, extension, adoption, and information sharing, including feral pig management and priority pest animal and weed management and capacity-building projects with state and Northern Territory agencies.

Red imported fire ants eradication program

The Australian Government contributes to a number of nationally cost-shared pest and disease eradication response programs. Pest and disease incursions are a major threat to Australia's agricultural industries and the environment, potentially impacting access to export markets and undermining the livelihood of Australian communities. The Australian and state and territory Governments are jointly investing \$411.4 million over 10 years from 2017-18 to eradicate red imported fire ants from south-east Queensland. The Australian Government is contributing \$212.5 million as a part of this package. This eradication program is being delivered by Queensland. Following an independent 'fit for purpose' review, advice to ministers on the future of the program is expected in early 2023.

Red imported fire ants are one of the world's worst invasive species due to their significant economic, environmental and social impacts. If these ants were established in Australia, it would generate significant costs for all levels of government and industry, damage regional biodiversity and ecosystems, and lower the quality of life of individuals in affected communities.

Management of Established Pest Animals and Weeds – South Australian Dog Fence

At the 2019 election, the Australian Government committed to help the South Australian Government upgrade 1,600 kilometres of its ageing dog fence, adding to the \$1 million already committed from the *Established Pest Animal and Weed Management Pipeline* program. The total \$10 million in funding is being matched by the South Australian Government, with an additional \$5.0 million from industry (\$25 million in total). The Department of Primary Industries and Regions, South Australia is leading this substantial rebuild of the 2,400 kilometre fence, which protects South Australia's \$4.3 billion livestock industry from dogs and dingoes.

As of November 2021, 355 kilometres of rebuilt fence have been completed as per the project plan, with 391 kilometres currently underway, the progress of which has been impacted by weather events and COVID-19. All funding has been committed with \$4.0 million to be paid against future milestones.

National Landcare Program

The Australian Government is investing \$1.1 billion over six years from 2017-18 in the *National Landcare Program*. The Program will continue to improve natural resource management to protect Australia's iconic places, plants and animals, secure agricultural productivity gains and farm-gate returns and strengthen regional economies. The funding will ensure the valuable work of Regional Natural Resource Management bodies, Landcare groups and Indigenous communities delivering on-ground biodiversity and sustainable agriculture outcomes continues.

The Smart Farms component of Landcare includes the following three elements:

- *Smart Farming Partnerships* (\$57.5 million over five years) which supports 26 large, multi-year grants for projects with organisations working in partnership to develop, trial and implement new and innovative practices and tools that support uptake of sustainable agriculture practices.
- *Smart Farms Small Grants* (up to \$43.5 million over five years) which has to date supported 384 projects worth \$25.5 million through four annual grant rounds to develop and extend new tools and technologies that help farmers, fishers, foresters and regional communities increase their capacity to adopt best practice land management.
- *Building Landcare Community and Capacity* (\$35 million over six years) which has to date supported 36 projects worth \$32 million to support the sharing of knowledge and achievements and community leadership in adopting sustainable agricultural practices.

Under the Regional Land Partnerships component, \$450 million is allocated to 225 environmental and sustainable agriculture projects. A network of 50 service providers nationwide are working in partnership with communities to design and deliver on-ground environment and agriculture projects at a regional scale that support national priorities for natural resource management. Environmental outcomes include recovering species identified under the *Threatened Species Strategy*, protecting threatened ecological communities, and reducing threats to Australia's globally important wetlands and World Heritage sites. Sustainable agriculture outcomes include improving soil, biodiversity and native vegetation on farms, and increasing the capacity of Australia's farms to adapt to climate change and evolving market demands.

The Australian Government has also provided \$15 million to expand Indigenous Protected Areas, in addition to \$93 million to support existing Indigenous Protected Areas (administered by the National Indigenous Australians Agency). This investment delivers benefits to the environment and local communities by safeguarding the biodiversity of the nation's remote areas for present and future generations; protecting the cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their region; and providing employment, education and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in remote areas.

National Environmental Science Program

The *National Environmental Science Program* is a long-term commitment by the Australian Government to fund environment and climate research.

The first phase invested over \$147 million (2014-15 to 2020-21) in six research hubs and emerging priority research projects. The second phase is providing \$149.0 million (2020-21 to 2026-27) to four new research hubs: Climate Systems, Resilient Landscapes, Marine and Coastal, and Sustainable Communities and Waste.

As of February 2022, the second phase of the Program has invested \$11.5 million into research co-designed with government, industry and the community, which includes Indigenous partnerships, place-based research and locally-led solutions delivered through regional nodes. The hubs are working in urban, rural and remote areas to help improve knowledge and achieve on-ground outcomes for the environment. The Program will also support the development of the science community in regional Australia. Over the past six years, the first phase of the *National Environmental Science Program* has informed environmental management across a wide range of situations in every state and territory; for example, land and Sea Country, World Heritage Areas, national parks, marine protected areas, coastal reefs, urban areas and waterways.

Australian Heritage Grants Program

The Australian Government is providing an ongoing \$5.3 million per year from 2018-19 through the flagship *Australian Heritage Grants Program* to support the management of National Heritage places. The program is supporting management, conservation and promotion activities for places in Australia recognised for their natural, Indigenous or historic heritage values. Many of the National Heritage places are found in regional Australia.

The program supports owners and managers of heritage places, along with community groups and other non-government entities, to protect and promote the heritage values for which places are listed. Projects funded under the Program help create jobs and increase visitation to regional heritage places through strengthened recognition, management, conservation and public engagement.

Securing the Future of the Jabiru Township

The government is providing up to \$216.2 million over 10 years from 2018-19 to transition the Jabiru Township and Kakadu National Park to a post-mining future by growing the tourism economy and regional presence.

Kakadu is a place of significant ecological and biological diversity with over 200,000 visitors per year on average prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The investment ensures that Kakadu continues to be a world-class tourist destination that supports the local economy. The funded program is focused on improving access and upgrading infrastructure at key visitor sites throughout Kakadu, remediating the Jabiru Township and relocating the Kakadu Visitor Centre into Jabiru.

The investment in Jabiru and Kakadu has significant benefits for the region, providing employment and economic opportunities for Traditional Owners to build on their vision for supporting tourism on their land.

Approximately \$8.5 million has been spent as of December 2021, with planning, design and procurement well advanced for several key programs, including remediation of Jabiru housing and the Cahill's Crossing viewing platform.

Oceans Leadership Package

The Australian Government has committed to a package of measures that support the Prime Minister's vision for Australia as a global leader in ocean management.

The \$100.1 million investment over five years (starting 2021-22) includes four complementary initiatives that are building ocean health and resilience, while stimulating economic growth through job creation across regional Australia. It will deliver partnerships to support private sector investment in fisheries, tourism and research sectors, and facilitate Indigenous management of Sea Country.

Implementation of the Oceans Leadership Package is progressing well. Approximately \$2.0 million has been expended, primarily on the establishment, planning and design of the elements of the package. Three grant rounds (Blue Carbon Ecosystem Restoration Grants, Indigenous Protected Areas for Sea Country and Our Marine Parks Grants) to be delivered this year have closed with activities scheduled to commence during 2021-22.

Oceans Leadership Package – Sustainable Ocean Action

The *Sustainable Ocean Action* measure delivers on-water and on-ground actions to protect iconic marine species and improve the sustainability of Australian fisheries through reducing bycatch, reducing the threat of invasive species on island ecosystems and stimulating investment in Australia's oceans and blue economy (\$18.1 million over four years from 2021-22). This measure includes establishing a Blue Finance Unit, which is working with leaders in marine restoration and coastal infrastructure to catalyse private sector investment in the restoration of coastal ecosystems to build resilience of coastal assets and communities, and enhance blue carbon and biodiversity. Development of an implementation plan for rolling out National Ocean Accounts is also progressing with relevant stakeholders.

The *Sustainable Ocean Action* measure will also fund on-ground activities to protect threatened and migratory marine species. The programs will boost fisheries production and ecotourism while seeking to reduce bycatch of threatened and migratory species, contribute to Indigenous ranger work programs and support the priorities and targets to be identified in the new *Threatened Species Strategy's* first five-year Action Plan.

The measure is supporting eradicating invasive cats on Christmas Island, with approximately 160 cats removed since the program commenced in July 2021. A number of future projects and grant programs are in the design phase, including the *Bycatch Mitigation Program* to fund new and innovative practical measures to avoid and mitigate bycatch of threatened and migratory species and the *Threatened and Migratory Marine Species Program* to address key threats to species such as marine turtles, cetacean, beach nesting birds and handfish. These projects and future grant programs will support a diverse suite of on-ground management improvements by working with communities, government, Indigenous Rangers, industry, scientists, and the research community.

Oceans Leadership Package – Ocean Accounting and On-the-Ground Restoration Activities to Restore Blue Carbon Ecosystems

This initiative is funding practical action to restore, conserve and account for blue carbon ecosystems in Australia and overseas (\$30.7 million over four years from 2021-22). This will improve and maintain the health of coastal environments, including tidal marshes, mangroves and seagrasses, leading to biodiversity, livelihood and climate outcomes.

Over \$15 million is going to at least four major projects restoring coastal ecosystems across the country and measuring biodiversity, climate and livelihood benefits. The projects will enhance regional employment opportunities in restoration work and data collection, and will provide accounting tools to enable management and financial decision-making that will support fishing and tourism operators who rely on these ecosystems to be healthy. The *Blue Carbon Ecosystem Restoration Grants* will deliver projects on a variety of ecosystem types (mangroves, seagrass and tidal marshes) and socio-economic contexts.

Oceans Leadership Package – Australian Marine Park Partnership – Indian Ocean Territories

This initiative is providing opportunities for community and Indigenous groups, marine businesses and industry bodies, research organisations and the private philanthropic sector to engage in and support marine park management (\$39.9 million over five years from 2021-22).

This measure is funding a third and fourth round of the Our Marine Parks Grants program. This program supports and empowers Australia's ocean communities and industries, building their capacity to take an active role in the management of Australian Marine Parks while protecting Australia's unique marine environment.

The *Ocean Discovery and Restoration Program*, also funded under this measure, was launched in December 2021. This program seeks philanthropic and corporate partners to deliver discovery and restoration projects that improve understanding and management of Australian Marine Parks.

This measure is also supporting the transition to new marine parks in the pristine waters around Australia's Indian Ocean Territories. On 20 March 2022, the Minister for the Environment announced the establishment of two new marine parks at Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands, following significant consultation with Indian Ocean Territory communities and other stakeholders during 2021. Funding will support delivery of a grant program to support local business and affected stakeholders, and to implement a range of management actions (including scientific research to establish baselines).

Oceans Leadership Package – Expanding Indigenous Protected Areas to include Sea Country

This measure creates new Sea Country Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) and expands existing terrestrial IPAs to include seas, providing social, cultural and environmental benefits, while increasing employment opportunities in remote communities (\$11.6 million over four years from 2021-22). The grants provided under the Sea Country IPAs program will support new and expanded Sea Country IPAs across Australia, providing funding for Indigenous-led activities that will protect Australia's unique marine and coastal biodiversity.

Supporting Healthy Oceans – Expanding and Enhancing Management of Australia's Marine Parks

The Australian Government is providing \$28.3 million over four years from 2020-21, and \$7.8 million per year ongoing from 2024-25, to enhance the management of Australia's marine park network, including increased science and monitoring activities, expanded Indigenous engagement in park management and enhanced surveillance. As of January 2022, \$5.5 million has been expended, with significant progress in conducting monitoring and health assessments across priority parks; formalising partnerships with Traditional Owners and Indigenous ranger groups; and establishing partnerships for increased compliance patrols, implementation of an audit program and testing of new surveillance technologies, including a drone trial.

Supporting Healthy Oceans – Tackling ghost nets in the Gulf of Carpentaria

The government is providing \$14.8 million over four years from 2020-21 for action to address the challenge of ghost nets (lost, abandoned or discarded fishing gear) and plastic litter in the waters and beaches of the Gulf of Carpentaria, a globally recognised ghost nets and marine debris hotspot. \$2.2 million has been expended to date, which has included trialling GPS tracking devices attached to large ghost nets, undertaking beach clean-ups with Indigenous ranger groups, a scoping study for ghost net retrieval and recycling opportunities, and an analysis of ghost net occurrence.

National Centre for Coasts, Environment and Climate

The Australian Government is providing \$25 million over four years from 2019-20 to Monash University and the University of Melbourne to establish a coasts, environment and climate science research and education centre at the Quarantine Station Precinct at Point Nepean, Victoria.

A comprehensive business plan was accepted by the department in June 2021. To date \$13.0 million in payments have been made against progress towards milestones in the business plan. On completion, the centre will be a world-leading interdisciplinary research facility on marine and coastal ecosystems, climate science and environmental management. The Centre will leverage its Point Nepean location and its existing capabilities as an integrated ocean and atmospheric observation site.

Australian Climate Service

The Australian Government has committed \$209.7 million over four years from 2021-22, and \$37.3 million ongoing, to establish the new *Australian Climate Service*, a world-class capability in sourcing and delivering climate information to support Australia's disaster resilience and climate adaptation efforts. The Service began on 1 July 2021. The Service is better connecting and leveraging the government's extensive climate and natural disaster risk data, information and capabilities. This will enable the government to anticipate, manage and adapt to increasing climate change impacts. It will help the government to better reduce risks and prepare for future natural hazards such as cyclones, bushfires and floods.

The Service aims to help communities make better decisions about what to build and where, and help Australia build back better after natural disasters. It also helps monitor and evaluate the impact of investments and build Australia's resilience over time.

The Service draws and builds on the expertise of the Bureau of Meteorology, Geoscience Australia, CSIRO and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, through a powerful partnership to support this generation and the next. In addition, it will:

- Develop new and updated national climate projections to understand how Australia's climate is changing at local and regional scales.
- Provide new location data to target recovery assistance to businesses and people affected by natural disasters, no matter how far away or how small their town might be.
- Assess freight and transport disruption and anticipate flow-on impacts for communities and businesses before natural disasters occur to minimise possible economic harm to Australian communities and vital agricultural regions.

The Service implements the government's response to multiple recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, including the implementation of a national disaster risk information service capability

Bureau of Meteorology — Additional radars and rain gauges

The Australian Government has committed \$77.2 million over 23 years from 2019-20 to improve weather radar coverage in regional areas of Queensland and northern New South Wales. Funding will support the installation of new radars and associated rain gauges at Flinders Catchment near Richmond and upper Burdekin (Greenvale) in north Queensland; new radars near Taroom and Toowoomba/Oakey in the Western and Southern Darling Downs; and the relocation of a radar from Moree to Boggabilla in northern New South Wales.

Milestones for 2021-22 include:

- the Greenvale (upper Burdekin) radar which became operational on 30 November 2021
- the Taroom region radar which is expected to be operational in early to mid-2022.

The government will also invest \$15.4 million in installation of a new radar in Tennant Creek to address gaps in coverage in the Barkly region of the Northern Territory. The new radar is part of the *Barkly Regional Deal* with an additional co-contribution of \$2.5 million from the Northern Territory Government.

The radars and rain gauges will provide real-time information on rainfall, hail and dust storm events to enable communities and farmers to prepare for extreme weather events and make more informed decisions on how best to manage their land and businesses.

Bureau of Meteorology — Commonwealth Water Functions

The Australian Government has committed \$300.1 million as ongoing funding over 10 years from 2017-18 to continue the implementation of the *Water Information Program*. The funding provides essential information and services to the agricultural and water sectors, including monitoring and reporting on the status and availability of water resources, water forecasts, water market information and decision support services for water managers and water users.

Under this program, the Bureau of Meteorology will continue to provide water agencies, water users and communities with essential information and services that support the productivity, resilience and wellbeing of Australian businesses and communities. This essential information also supports national decision making on water security.

Off-Farm Efficiency Program

The Australian Government established the *Off-Farm Efficiency Program* to accelerate water recovery and deliver off-farm water infrastructure projects (efficiency measures). It replaces previous arrangements for funding efficiency measures. The Program will contribute towards the 450 gigalitres target of water recovery for the environment and is funded through the Water for the Environment Special Account created in 2014 and with funding available until 30 June 2024.

The *Off-Farm Efficiency Program* (\$1.5 billion over four years) is providing:

- \$1.3 billion for state-led arrangements to deliver off-farm infrastructure improvements that will improve water use efficiency
- \$150 million for government-led grant opportunities for projects that may not be suitable for inclusion under state-led arrangements
- \$60 million for state-led on-farm projects that can demonstrate community and industry support and positive socio-economic benefits.

This initiative provides for job creation Murray-Darling Basin communities through water infrastructure investment that benefits local communities, the environment, irrigation industries, service providers and Indigenous communities.

The *Off-farm Efficiency Program* was opened to all state-led proposals from 9 August 2021 with the \$150 million *Off-farm Efficiency Grant Program* open from 24 November 2021. To date, Victoria's Goulburn-Murray Water Efficiency Project has been approved for \$177.5 million to recover 15.9 gigalitres of water for the environment. The program is also funding the \$126.5 million New South Wales' Murrumbidgee Automation Finalisation Project to recover around 6 gigalitres of water for the environment.

Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package

The Australian Government is providing \$269.6 million over four years from 2020-21, and \$9.8 million per year ongoing, for a package of measures to achieve a sustainable and certain future for the Murray-Darling Basin, its people, industries and environment. The *Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package* is responding to the findings of the Independent assessment of social and economic conditions in the Murray-Darling Basin and the First Review of the Water for the Environment Special Account and is bringing Basin communities back to the centre of the Basin Plan.

The Department, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the National Indigenous Australians Agency are jointly delivering this package.

Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package – Northern Murray-Darling Basin Metering Program

Work has commenced on the \$25 million *Northern Murray-Darling Basin Metering Program* in New South Wales and Queensland. This Program is helping regional water users in New South Wales and Queensland to improve compliance with state metering requirements. As of December 2021, \$4 million has been paid to the states for implementation of the program.

In New South Wales, First Nations metering traineeships will increase employment opportunities in regional areas. In addition, rebates will be offered to water users in regional areas, to assist them in meeting their compliance obligations.

In Queensland, initiatives will improve measurement, monitoring and use of water in the Murray-Darling Basin, and eligible regional water users will be able to apply for rebates to install telemetry.

The \$25 million metering program is in addition to the \$35 million *Hydrometrics and Remote Sensing Program* in the northern Basin.

Basin Plan Commitments Package – Hydrometrics and Remote Sensing Program

The *Hydrometrics and Remote Sensing Program* in the northern Basin is supporting the use of remote sensing, drones, satellites and other technologies to monitor water storages, flows and use and increase information availability for regional water users. The Program, initially announced as part of the Basin Plan Commitments Package, was enhanced through subsequent measures to bring total funding to \$35.0 million.

Basin Plan Commitments Package – Murray-Darling Basin Plan, Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism: Supply and Constraints measures

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan provides for a mechanism to adjust sustainable diversion limits to achieve equivalent environmental outcomes with less water recovery. This relies on the implementation of projects that improve water efficiency of irrigation infrastructure associated with the use, delivery, storage or drainage of Basin water resources.

The *Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism* has reduced the Basin Plan's environmental water recovery by 605 gigalitres, enabling this water to remain in agricultural use, benefitting regional communities in the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Australian Government is providing up to \$1.4 billion over 10 years to 2023-24 to implement supply and constraints measures. As of December 2021, \$582 million had been committed and \$132 million spent.

Basin Plan Commitments Package – Northern Basin Toolkit projects

The Australian Government is working with the New South Wales and Queensland Governments to implement environmental works and measures identified in the Northern Basin Review, collectively known as the *Northern Basin Toolkit*.

The government is providing up to \$180 million over five years to 2023-24 for the implementation of Toolkit projects. Ten environmental works projects have been approved under the Toolkit and as of December 2021, close to \$94 million has been committed to support their development and implementation including:

- \$86.5 million to implement four environmental works projects
- \$3.2 million for the development of a further six environmental works business cases
- \$5 million for feasibility and early on-ground works associated with elements of the 10 approved projects.

The 10 Toolkit projects include:

- promoting fish movement and habitat (such as building fishways) and improving environmental flows to wetlands (such as Macquarie Marshes)
- removal of flow constraints in the Gwydir catchment to improve flows to the Gwydir wetlands.

The New South Wales and Queensland Governments are responsible for implementing Toolkit projects. As of December 2021, \$8.7 million has been spent on Toolkit projects.

This funding commitment also includes up to \$15 million to New South Wales to upgrade the Wilcannia Weir. This project aims to improve outcomes for Indigenous Basin communities and address the social and economic impacts of the Basin Plan, including improving water security, enhancing opportunities for cultural gatherings and providing for low impact water recreation activities.

This funding is providing a much-needed economic stimulus to regional communities and creating improved environmental outcomes in the northern Basin. For all environmental works, the Australian Government expects proponents to preference local and Indigenous suppliers and employment.

Implementing Water Reform in the Basin

The Australian Government is providing \$65 million to the Basin state and territory governments to implement water reform in the Murray-Darling Basin including the Basin Plan.

The funding comprises \$60 million for a new Federation Funding Agreement for the period 2021-22 to 2023-24, and \$5 million in 2020-21 for a one-year extension to the previous *National Partnership Agreement on Implementing Water Reform in the Murray–Darling Basin*, which expired on 30 June 2020. Improving the efficiency of water markets and the management of Basin water resources will benefit communities, water users and the environment.

Improving Great Artesian Basin Drought Resilience

The *Improving Great Artesian Basin Drought Resilience Program* supports the delivery of strategic investment in immediate and long-term measures to improve water security and drought resilience in the Great Artesian Basin. This will ensure the long-term success of \$12.8 billion in economic activity annually from industries reliant on the Great Artesian Basin for water and provides further support to increased water demand from new or expanding industries.

The program provides jurisdictions (South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Northern Territory) with up to \$27.6 million of matching Australian Government funding over five years from 2019-20 to 2023-24. Funding supports activities to improve water security and drought resilience through increasing artesian pressure and reducing wastage of water resources. These activities include bore capping and piping, education and communication programs to manage the Great Artesian Basin water, and research to develop new management arrangements.

The *Improving Great Artesian Basin Drought Resilience Program* has now delivered investment of \$3.7 million. This investment saw 38 projects completed across the Great Artesian Basin, saving over 3,000 megalitres per year. This included 22 infrastructure projects which installed 108 kilometres of water piping among others, and 16 non-infrastructure projects such as groundwater numerical models and bore surveys.

Attorney-General's

The Attorney-General's Portfolio comprises the Attorney-General's Department (the department) and 21 portfolio entities. The portfolio delivers programs and policies to maintain and improve Australia's law, justice, security and integrity frameworks and to facilitate jobs growth through the promotion of fair, productive and safe workplaces. This work spans a range of significant areas and affects the lives of many Australians, including those in regional and remote communities.

Ensuring individuals, families and communities in regional areas can access the support and services they need is a key priority for the Australian Government. The Australian Government has committed more than \$506.6 million in 2022-23 for legal assistance services under the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-25 (NLAP). There are 11 priority client groups under the NLAP, one of which is people residing in rural or regional areas. NLAP funding delivers services in regional areas, though the amount of funding specifically dedicated to service delivery in regional areas cannot be quantified.

The portfolio manages legal assistance services and alternative pathways to formal legal processes to provide greater avenues to justice for Australians in regional communities. The *Family Relationships Services Program* delivers a range of post-separation services to families in regional communities. The Commonwealth Courts Portal and the Federal Court of Australia's eLodgement service improve regional access to legal processes by providing Federal Court and Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia resources online and enabling online lodging of divorce applications. The Administrative Appeals Tribunal (the Tribunal) continues to develop its online portal and online hearings to enhance the ability of users in regional Australia to interact with the Tribunal online. The portfolio is also leading work to protect the rights of older Australians through Specialist Elder Abuse Services, including in some regional communities.

Entities falling within the industrial relations portfolio play an important role in contributing to the strength of the Australian economy. Industrial relations reform has a significant impact on driving jobs and wage growth, boosting productivity and strengthening the economy while ensuring the protection of employees' rights. Entities such as the Fair Work Commission, the Fair Work Ombudsman and Comcare have offices across Australia in addition to providing assistance to regional Australia via telephone and online services.

The portfolio has a geographic footprint in every state and territory, and engages the perspectives of regional Australians to inform its work. As at 31 December 2021, the portfolio employed 8,155 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 6,169 staff (76 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 1,752 staff (21 per cent) in other capital cities and 234 staff (3 per cent) in regional areas.

The portfolio's footprint includes office locations such as Adelaide, Albury, Bendigo, Brisbane, Bunbury, Cairns, Canberra, Coffs Harbour, Darwin, Dubbo, Gold Coast, Hobart, Launceston, Lismore, Melbourne, Mount Gambier, Newcastle, Orange, Parramatta, Perth, Rockhampton, Sydney, Toowoomba, Townsville, Traralgon, and Wagga Wagga.

The High Court of Australia employs staff under its own legislation and has staff distributed around Australia.

New Initiatives

Women's Safety

The Australian Government has made investments in, and implemented significant reforms to, the family law system to make it more safe, accessible and easier for people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. To support implementation of the first five-year action plan of the next *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*, the Australian Government will invest \$1.3 billion over six years from 2022-23 to address women's safety. Key measures for the portfolio are outlined below.

Expansion of the Lighthouse Project and culturally responsive support for First Nations Australians

The Australian Government will provide \$87.9 million over four years from 2022-23 (\$25.9 million in 2022-23) to continue and expand the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia's family safety risk screening and specialised case management pilot known as the *Lighthouse Project* and enhance culturally responsive support for First Nations Australians.

This measure will expand the *Lighthouse Project* from three to 15 registries, including seven registries in regional areas, which will have a positive impact on people in regional areas who are involved in family law proceedings, particularly women and children experiencing or at risk of family violence.

This measure includes funding for the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia to employ Indigenous Liaison Officers and establish specialist Indigenous Lists and culturally responsive case management processes, which will benefit First Nations people in regional areas who are involved in family law proceedings.

This measure also includes \$24.2 million over three years for additional legal assistance services to support the expansion of the *Lighthouse Project*, which will be provided to states and territories for Legal Aid Commissions.

This measure builds on funding of \$13.5 million over three years provided by the Australian Government in the 2019-20 *Mid-Year Economic Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO) measure *Supporting Victims of Family Violence in the Courts*.

Maintaining protection against cross-examination by family violence perpetrators

The Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$52.4 million over four years from 2022-23 (\$13 million in 2022-23) to state and territory Legal Aid Commissions under the *Family Violence and Cross-examination of Parties Scheme* (the Scheme). The Scheme helps to protect victims of family violence – who are primarily women – in family law proceedings. The Scheme enables victims of family violence, including those in rural and regional areas, to pursue family law outcomes that prioritise their safety and future economic security.

This measure builds on the following funding provided by the Australian Government:

- \$6.3 million in 2021-22, announced in the 2021-22 Budget measure, *Family Law System – improving access and safety for children and families*
- \$4.8 million in 2020-21, announced in the 2020-21 Budget measure, *Expediting Family Law and Federal Circuit Court Matters*
- \$2.6 million in 2020-21, announced in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update measure *COVID-19 Response Package – Attorney-General's*
- \$2 million in 2019-20, announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO measure, *Supporting Victims of Family Violence in the Courts*
- \$9.4 million over three years from 2019-20 with ongoing funding of \$2.4 million per year, announced as part of the 2018-19 MYEFO measure *Women's Economic Security Package*.

Advice and support services for women who experience sexual harassment and other workplace issues

The Australian Government will provide \$1.8 million over three years from 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2024 for Working Women's Centres (WWCs) to deliver information, advice and assistance to women who experience workplace sexual harassment and other workplace issues. Funding will be provided through a non-competitive grant process to the Northern Territory Working Women's Centre (NTWWC) and Working Women Queensland (WWQ).

This funding follows separate interim funding allocations in 2021-22 to NTWWC and WWQ of \$0.2 million and \$0.35 million. From 2021, the Working Women's Centre South Australia is separately receiving \$0.35 million in Commonwealth funding per year for four years under the *Community Engagement Program* (CGEP), which is a competitive grant program administered by the Fair Work Ombudsman.

This funding is intended to have a positive impact on communities across the Northern Territory and Queensland including those that are regional, rural and remote. With offices in both Darwin and Alice Springs, NTWWC's operations are wholly focused on supporting women in rural, regional or remote areas. Many of WWQ's clients are also based in regional areas, and in 2019-20, 399 WWQ clients lived in rural, regional or remote areas of Queensland. WWCs play a unique role in these jurisdictions, by providing tailored, specialist support on workplace-related matters.

Funding for the above measures builds on \$320.1 million over four years from 2021-22 announced by the Australian Government in the 2021-22 Budget measure *Women's Safety*. Key measures in the *Women's Safety* package with continuing effect in regional areas include:

Significant investment in Children's Contact Services to reduce safety risks to family law system users

The Australian Government is providing \$101.4 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$25.3 million in 2022-23) to increase access to Children's Contact Services (CCSs) for families across Australia who are unable to safely manage arrangements themselves for the contact and changeover of their children. The increase in funding to the existing 34 regional CCSs will boost access to these critical services for regional families. This funding will also establish 20 new CCSs across Australia, including a significant increase to the number of services located in rural, regional and remote areas of the country. CCSs provide a safe, reliable and neutral place for supervised contact and facilitated changeovers, helping to minimise conflict between parents, and reduce the risk to women and children of ongoing family violence.

Maintaining and enhancing Family Advocacy Support Services

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government announced additional funding of \$85 million over three years from 2022-23 (\$27.6 million in 2022-23) for enhanced social supports through Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS). This funding will bolster services in the 16 existing court locations and eight regional circuit FASS locations, including maintaining access to dedicated men's social support worker. This funding will also extend all existing services offered by the FASS. The expansion aims to ensure that all family law court registries with a permanent family law judge, and all circuit locations, have access to the FASS. This measure will enhance the capacity of victim-survivors of family and domestic violence, who are primarily women, to obtain access to justice and ongoing support while engaging in the family law system.

The FASS effectively fills a gap in legal and social service provision to family law clients with experience of family violence, providing supports and referrals for both victims-survivors and alleged perpetrators. The FASS also provides an alternative avenue for users to obtain legal assistance where they are unable to access other local legal services due to a conflict of interest. This issue may arise more often in regional areas where legal service options may be limited.

Under the *Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, the Australian Government provided \$18.5 million over three years (2016-2019) for legal aid commissions to operate FASS. As part of the 2018-19 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided an additional \$22.6 million over three years to extend the existing FASS from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2022. Following an evaluation of the FASS in 2018, \$7.8 million was provided under the 2019-20 Budget to employ dedicated men's social support workers in all FASS registry and circuit locations for three years from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2022. This funding aligned with the commitment made under the *Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

Closing the Gap

The Australian Government is providing \$1.1 billion over four years from 2021-22 for a range of measures to support the new *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. Key measures to be delivered by the Attorney-General's portfolio include:

Legal assistance for complex litigation and coronial inquiries

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided \$9.3 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$2.6 million in 2022-23) to fund the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS) to support clients involved in complex litigation and to provide legal assistance to families of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals in coronial inquiries. The ATSILS provides services to regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people through regional offices and outreach services.

Funding for culturally safe and appropriate family dispute resolution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Under the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, all Australian governments have committed to reducing the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and youth held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent and at least 30 per cent respectively by 2031.

To achieve these targets, it is necessary to address the social factors that lead individuals towards engagement with the justice system. In 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided funding of \$8.3 million over three years from 2021-22 (\$2.8 million in 2022-23) for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to resolve post-separation

parenting and property disputes through culturally safe and appropriate family dispute resolutions. There are strong links between family violence, child safety, and involvement in the justice system. Building on the strengths of ACCOs to support kinship mediation and family restoration will help reduce family conflicts and contribute to achieving the justice targets.

Further information on *Closing the Gap* can be found in the Prime Minister and Cabinet chapter.

Flood Package

In the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government announced that \$5.4 million over two years in additional funding will be provided to states and territories for existing legal assistance providers operating within affected communities. This funding will provide experienced, trauma-informed legal assistance services to assist individuals, small businesses and primary producers to navigate through the legal issues that arise in the immediate and longer-term aftermath of the catastrophic floods.

Further information on the flood package can be found in the Prime Minister and Cabinet chapter.

Pacific Labour Mobility – reforms

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government announced funding of \$81.3 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the *Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme* to increase Pacific labour mobility to address workforce shortages in regional Australia. Of this amount, the Fair Work Ombudsman will receive \$9.4 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$2.4 million in 2022-23) and \$2.4 million per year thereafter to continue to provide education and proactive checks to ensure workers are paid in accordance with Australian laws and Fair work conditions.

Further information on this scheme can be found in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade chapter.

Australian Agriculture Visa

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government announced funding of \$87.2 million over four years from 2021-22 to introduce the *Australian Agriculture Visa* (AgVisa) to respond to workforce shortages in the agricultural and primary industry sectors. The AgVisa scheme allows workers to take up opportunities in rural and regional Australia across a range of agricultural industries, including meat processing and the fishery and forestry sectors.

This measure includes \$8.7 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$1.9 million in 2022-23) and \$2.8 million per year thereafter for the Fair Work Ombudsman to ensure that employees under the AgVisa scheme are protected by the same workplace rights and

laws as Australian employees, regardless of their citizenship or visa status. The Fair Work Ombudsman will ensure that employers pay wages and entitlements as set by law and provide a safe workplace.

Further information on this scheme can be found in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade chapter.

Ageing and Aged Care – Specialist Elder Abuse Service

The Australian Government is providing \$24.4 million over four years from 2022-23 (\$6 million in 2022-23) to continue three types of specialist services that support older people and their families seeking help with elder abuse:

- specialist elder abuse units
- health justice partnerships
- case management and mediation services.

These services enhance Australia's frontline service response to elder abuse by significantly expanding the practical support on offer to help older Australians and their families affected by elder abuse, including some in regional areas. Regional service locations include Peel, Kununurra and Broome in Western Australia, regional Tasmania, Darwin and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, and the Riverina Murray region of New South Wales.

The specialist elder abuse services build on funding of \$22 million over five years from 2017-18 provided under the 2018-19 Budget measure *More Choices for a Longer Life* and the Australian Government's 2016 election commitment, *Our Plan to Protect the Rights of Older Australians*.

This funding contributes to addressing key findings of the Australian Law Reform Commission Report: *Elder Abuse – A National Legal Response* (ALRC Report 131), and implements a core Commonwealth commitment under the *National Plan to Protect the Rights of Older Australians* (2019-23).

Attorney-General's portfolio – additional court resourcing

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided \$6 million over four years from 2021-22 and \$1.9 million per year thereafter for judicial resources in Hobart and Perth. Additional judicial resources help to service regional areas by ensuring regional court users do not need to travel to the mainland or interstate to access court services. With additional judicial resources, the availability of judges to circuit to regional locations also increases.

Maintaining a judge in the Federal Court of Australia in Tasmania

The Australian Government has provided additional funding of \$3.2 million over three years from 2022-23 (\$1.1 million in 2022-23) and \$1.1 million per year thereafter to the Federal Court of Australia to maintain a permanent judicial position in the Tasmanian registry of the Federal Court of Australia. The Federal Court has experienced significant year-on-year increases in caseload in the Tasmanian Registry in recent years. The funding enables the Federal Court to maintain an uninterrupted judicial presence in Tasmania, to address increases in filings, and assist with the finalisation and resolution of a growing volume of matters across Tasmania. Without a permanent judicial resource in Tasmania, regional Tasmanian court users would be forced to travel to the Australian mainland to access Federal Court registries in Sydney or Melbourne. Therefore, this measure helps to meet the needs of regional Tasmanian communities who access the Registry to resolve their general federal law matters.

Additional judge for the Family Court of Western Australia

The Australian Government funds the Family Court of Western Australia (FCWA) pursuant to an agreement with the Western Australian Government under section 41 of the *Family Law Act 1975*. The Australian Government provided additional funding of \$2.8 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$0.8 million in 2022-23) and \$0.8 million per year thereafter to enable the appointment of an additional judge to the FCWA. The FCWA has operated with five judges since 1976. This additional judge will assist the FCWA to respond to increases in the volume and the complexity of family law cases across Western Australia. This will benefit Australians in regional areas as FCWA Judges and Magistrates travel to the following areas for circuit hearings throughout the year: Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Geraldton, and Kalgoorlie.

Current Initiatives

Women's Economic Security Package

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$1.8 billion over five years from 2020-21 to improve women's workforce participation and economic security. Of this amount, the Australian Government announced \$10.7 million over two years from 2021-22 for the portfolio, comprising of:

- \$7.2 million to extend a trial of lawyer-assisted mediation through Legal Aid Commissions to help families with a property pool of up to \$500,000 (excluding debt) to divide their property after separation
- \$3.5 million to extend a pilot of a simpler and faster court process for dividing property of up to \$500,000 between separated couples.

The extension of these pilots to June 2023 ensures service continuity for many vulnerable separated women and enables the government to consider the findings of the independent evaluation reports of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), which are due in June 2022.

This measure builds on funding provided under the *First Women's Economic Security Package*, announced on 20 November 2018. The Australian Government invested \$98.4 million in new funding over four years from 2019-20 for family law services and initiatives to support women and their families to recover financially after separation. In 2022-23, funding of \$13.8 million is being provided for Family Relationship Centres across Australia to provide mediation services to help families to reach agreements about splitting their property after separation without having to go to court. Additionally, \$10.8 million in 2022-23 is being provided for specialist Domestic Violence Units and Health Justice Partnerships to continue existing services and provide financial support services such as financial advice, counselling and literacy. This funding provides separated families in regional Australia with access to affordable and timely assistance and support services.

National Legal Assistance Partnership

The Australian Government is committed to funding legal assistance services in regional Australia. In 2020, the Australian Government entered into the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-25 (NLAP) with states and territories to provide legal assistance services across Australia.

The NLAP took effect from 1 July 2020. Through the NLAP, the Australian Government has committed over \$2.4 billion over five years from 2020-21 (\$506.6 million in 2022-23) for legal assistance services to provide legal help to vulnerable people facing disadvantage. The NLAP provides long term, quarantined and guaranteed funding to Legal Aid Commissions (LACs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs), and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS). The NLAP delivers baseline funding for those organisations, as well as specific funding for the specialist Domestic Violence Units and Health Justice Partnerships and Family Advocacy and Support Services that some LACs and CLCs operate.

The NLAP provides for vital legal assistance to keep everyday Australians, families and communities safe. People residing in rural or remote areas are recognised as a national priority client group under the NLAP. The NLAP requires legal assistance services to plan and target resources to national priority clients, recognising that people facing disadvantage are more likely to experience legal problems, are less likely to seek assistance and less able to access services.

There are approximately 75 LAC offices across Australia, with around 76 per cent of offices located in regions outside of metropolitan areas. Approximately 75 per cent of CLCs are located in regions outside of metropolitan areas. There are seven ATSILSs

nationally which deliver services from 70 permanent locations, including regional and remote areas, court circuits, bush courts and outreach locations.

Expediting Family Law and Federal Circuit Court Matters

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government announced \$132.1 million over four years from 2020-21 to expedite family law and Federal Circuit Court matters. Key components include:

Maintain Family Law Services Funding under the Family Relationship Services Program

The Australian Government provided additional ongoing funding of \$87.3 million over three years from 2021-22 (\$29.1 million in 2022-23) to maintain funding for family law services under the *Family Relationship Services Program*. Funding for the *Family Relationship Services Program* in 2022-23 is \$242.8 million, \$235.5 million of which will fund a range of post-separation family law services. This also includes the funding provided to Family Relationship Centres to provide family law property mediation under the 2018 *Women's Economic Security Package*.

The services are:

- Family Relationship Centres
- Family Relationship Advice Line
- family dispute resolution
- regional family dispute resolution
- children's contact services
- parenting orders/post-separation cooperative parenting
- supporting children after separation
- counselling.

These services provide alternatives to formal legal processes and assist families which are separated, separating or in dispute to resolve disputes in a way that is in the best interests of children. The services are located throughout Australia. Information and resources are also available online through Family Relationships Online, in a way that is accessible to regional Australia. As approximately 36 per cent of all clients that access family law services do so in a regional or remote area, this funding will have a positive impact for regional Australia.

Additional Resources and Judges for the Federal Circuit Court

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$35.7 million over four years from 2020-21 (\$10 million in 2022-23) to increase judicial and Registrar resourcing in the Federal Circuit Court for family law as well as migration matters. The additional funding provided for family law matters under this measure is designed to reduce delays in the family law courts so that separating Australian families, including those in regional Australia, are able to resolve their disputes more quickly. The funding is supporting three additional federal law judges and one family law judge.

Federal Circuit Court – Improved safety and security

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$5.4 million over four years from 2020-21 (\$0.2 million in 2022-23) to support the relocation and refurbishment of Tasmania's Launceston family law courts registry. This relocation will improve the safety and security of court users and staff accessing the family law courts in Launceston.

Family Law System – improving access and safety for children and families – A New Approach to Family Law Case Management

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$60.8 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$14.8 million in 2022-23) and \$1.7 million per year thereafter to the federal family courts to reform the family law case management process. The reformed case management process enables the federal family law courts to dispose of matters more efficiently, leading to better outcomes in terms of reduced costs and delays for Australian families who require the courts' assistance to resolve their disputes. It will do so through the engagement of additional Registrars, Family Consultants, Indigenous Liaison Officers, and legal and administrative support staff. The new approach will benefit Australians in regional areas, where the need to travel long distances to attend interim hearings will be reduced. This will occur through a greater presence of Registrars circuiting through regional Australia and through a greater number of Registrars being able to conduct hearings remotely. This measure together with the government's structural reforms (bringing together the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia into an overarching administrative structure) represents a holistic approach to reform of the family courts.

Mental Health – Legal and mental health supports for women experiencing family violence in regional and remote communities

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government provided additional funding of \$17.1 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$4.3 million in 2022-23) to increase the accessibility of legal and mental health support services to women who have experienced family violence and are navigating the family law system. Of this amount, a portion is being allocated to at least seven existing Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) locations (one in each state and territory, except for the Australian Capital Territory) to provide outreach (such as online services) to women in rural, regional and remote Australia.

This measure builds on funding provided for DVUs and Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) under the *First Women's Economic Security Package*, announced on 20 November 2018. Between 2015 and 2025, the Australian Government is committing \$102.1 million to maintain and expand 21 specialist DVU and HJP locations across all of Australia's states and territories. DVUs provide specialist domestic violence legal assistance to women experiencing family violence, as well as wrap-around case management and support services such as financial counselling, trauma counselling, emergency accommodation and tenancy assistance. HJPs, which operate in healthcare settings such as hospitals, connect women who have experienced family violence with legal support, and provide cross-disciplinary training to health professionals on recognising and responding to domestic and family violence.

Community Legal Services Program

The *Community Legal Services Program* is a nationally focused discretionary grants program, supporting the provision of legal assistance to the community by funding national service delivery projects and program support activities. The Australian Government will provide \$7.6 million to the *Community Legal Services Program* in 2022-23.

Under the *Community Legal Services Program*, funding is provided to three national community legal centres: Youth Law Australia (formerly National Children's and Youth Law Centre), the Arts Law Centre and the Financial Rights Legal Centre, which delivers specialised information, legal advice and representation to disadvantaged individuals across Australia. Services are delivered through an innovative mix of telephone, email, video conferencing and face-to-face client contact to reach those most in need in all metropolitan, rural and remote areas of Australia.

The *Community Legal Services Program* also delivers a national Self-Representation Service, which assists people to represent themselves in the Federal Court and Federal Circuit and Family Court. The Self-Representation Service ensures that self-represented parties, who do not have access to legal assistance and advice through other sources, are provided with legal assistance and referrals to alternative dispute resolution. The Self-Representation Service is delivered through telephone, email and video conferencing facilities.

The *Community Legal Services Program* also funds the Australian Pro Bono Centre to promote pro bono work, administer and promote the national pro bono target and elevate pro bono work with the Australian legal profession.

Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme

The *Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme* provides assistance for individuals or groups, including pastoralists, graziers and fishers, to have equitable access to legal representation in the resolution of native title proceedings where their interests are likely to be affected. Funding for the *Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme* in 2022-23 is \$1.7 million.

Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia – Administered Fund

Division Two of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia uses a dedicated *Administered Fund* to provide private property mediations. Its major focus is to provide services to litigants, particularly in regional areas in support of the Court’s circuit work. The Fund, which totals \$0.9 million in 2022-23, enables the Court to deliver improved access to justice and creates assistance to litigants by providing:

- Property mediation where the external provider is located in the same area as the litigants and in a position to offer more timely interventions.
- Services that would otherwise be limited to Registrar circuits or require the parties to travel to capital cities.
- Timely services that provide an opportunity for the early resolution of matters.

The use of the fund in this manner also enables the Court to reduce the cost of Registrars travelling to circuit locations. Due to the impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns, these services have been substantially provided by electronic means rather than face-to-face over the last two years. The fund is an innovative way of delivering access to justice to litigants in regional Australia where Court-based services are limited.

Defence

The Defence Portfolio includes the Department of Defence (Defence), Defence Housing Australia and the Australian Signals Directorate.

As at 31 December 2021, the Defence Portfolio employed 17,137 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 9,407 staff (55 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 5,353 staff (31 per cent) in other capital cities and 2,377 staff (14 per cent) in regional areas.

Department of Defence

Defence, including the Australian Defence Force (ADF), has a significant footprint in regional Australia, with extensive bases and associated employment and community engagement activities.

Defence both employs and serves the local people in our regions. Defence members and their families are an integral part of regional communities, interacting on official duties and at community activities and events. They contribute to economic activity through spending in regional economies. Defence recognises the economic impact that engaging local contractors and suppliers, where there is the capacity and capability available in the local market, has on regional economies.

Defence maintains strong links with regional Australia through Army personnel undertaking service with Reserve units. Many of Army's Reserve units are headquartered in regional centres with staff and soldiers based in surrounding districts (Army has approximately 15,262 reservists).

The Defence estate consists of 637 owned properties¹ and approximately 416 domestic leases.² Facilities include 70 major bases, training areas and ranges, research facilities and office accommodation including Defence Force Recruitment Centres. Construction and maintenance activity associated with Defence facilities in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities.

¹ The increase in number of Defence owned properties from 400 in 2021 to 637 in 2022 is a result of two factors: Defence registering a number of small islands in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, as assets as per the ANAO Closing Letter for the Department of Defence for the financial year ended 30 June 2021; and, the reconciliation of data across multiple data systems.

² The decrease in number of leases on the Defence estate from 958 in 2021 to 416 in 2022 is due to real property activity fluctuations.

Other Defence support provided to regional, rural and remote Australians includes:

- The economic activity stimulated through Defence exercises and major training activities, including joint exercises and collective training with our overseas allies and partners in Australia.
- Defence Assistance to the Civil Community, where Defence provides both emergency support (such as natural disasters) and non-emergency support (such as Public Events of Significance) across Australia.
- Defence Member and Family Services activities to build the capacity of local, urban and regional communities in support of Defence member families.
- Defence engagement with regional indigenous communities, predominantly through employment.
- Defence Youth Programs conducted across Australia as an essential element of nation building.
- Engaging people with disabilities through initiatives and assistance programs to provide them the opportunity for meaningful work.
- Defence industry development, through activities undertaken across Australia to support the vital role that the Australian defence industry plays in delivering leading edge technologies and capabilities required to generate and sustain the future force.
- The economic activity associated with Defence capability and estate projects undertaken in the regions.
- Defence environmental management and cooperation on heritage issues in regional Australia.

Of the total Defence workforce (2021-22), including both those employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* and members of the ADF and Reservists (an estimated average full-time total workforce of 75,863 and a headcount of 20,773 Reservists) approximately:

- 40 per cent are located in Canberra, central Sydney and central Melbourne
- 28 per cent are located in other capital cities
- 31 per cent are located in other regional areas
- 1 per cent are located overseas.

A map and list depicting Defence's footprint across Australia is on pages 4 and 5 below.

Defence Housing Australia

Defence Housing Australia (DHA) administers Defence housing policy and provides housing and related services to ADF members and their families. The DHA maintains offices in capital cities, major regional centres and on some ADF bases and establishments around Australia, with: 33 per cent of staff located in Canberra Head Office, 11 per cent located in Sydney (Parramatta) Office, 39 per cent located in Regional Offices and 17 per cent located in Contact Centres situated in Adelaide, Townsville and the Hunter Valley. In March 2022, DHA moved the Head Office and Canberra Regional Office to Gungahlin, a regional town centre within the ACT.

The DHA manages more than 17,500 properties in capital cities, major regional centres and remote locations of Australia where the ADF has a presence. The majority of properties are integrated throughout the community, close to ADF bases and establishments, and close to a range of amenities and services such as transport, shopping facilities and schools.

To complement its leasing program, the DHA acquires property sites throughout Australia to construct suitable accommodation to meet ADF requirements. DHA currently has a number of regional development or construction projects underway which will deliver housing, providing construction work to local communities.

The DHA has two residential development projects in progress in regional Australia. These projects are located in Ipswich, Queensland. The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$122.6 million. Subject to receiving the necessary planning approvals, DHA will undertake further residential development projects in Newcastle, New South Wales. The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$101.8 million.

The DHA also manages a multi-million-dollar Defence-funded upgrade, construction and redevelopment program. The DHA is managing seven current projects in regional Australia. They are located in the ACT (three projects), the Northern Territory (two projects), and Puckapunyal, Victoria (two projects). The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$42.1 million. DHA anticipates undertaking an additional three future Defence-funded projects in regional locations including Woomera, South Australia, Frankston, Victoria and Kapooka, New South Wales. The estimated value of these future projects on completion is \$42.6 million.

Figure 1 and the detailed list below depicts the Defence footprint across Australia.



EAST & WEST ZONE	NORTHERN & CENTRAL ZONE	SOUTH EAST ZONE
Australian Capital Territory Australian Defence College Australian Defence Force Academy Brindabella Park Offices Campbell Park Offices HMAS <i>Harman</i> HQ JOC Bungendore Majura Range Fairbairn RMC Duntroon Russell Offices New South Wales Beecroft Weapons Range Beersheba Barracks Tamworth Bullecourt Barracks Adamstown Defence Business Centre – Raymond Terrace Defence Establishment Orchard Hills Defence Plaza Sydney DSTG Redfern Garden Island Precinct – Fleet Base East – Garden Island – HMAS <i>Kuttatubul</i> HMAS <i>Albatross</i> HMAS <i>Creswell</i> HMAS <i>Penguin</i> HMAS <i>Waterhen</i> HMAS <i>Watson</i> Liverpool Military Area – Holsworthy – Moorebank Mulwala Myambat RAAF Williamtown RAAF Glenbrook RAAF Richmond Randwick Barracks Singleton Military Area Victoria Barracks Sydney Wollongong Hydrographic Office Victoria Benalla Western Australia Campbell Barracks Fleet Base West – Garden Island Harold E Holt Irwin Barracks Leeuwin Barracks Palmer Barracks RAAF Curtin RAAF Learmonth RAAF Pearce Yampi Sound Training Area	Northern Territory Bradshaw Field Training Area Defence Establishment Berrimah Delamere Range Facility HMAS <i>Coonawarra</i> Larrakeyah Barracks Mt Bunday Training Area RAAF Darwin RAAF Tindal Robertson Barracks Shoal Bay Receiving Station Queensland Army Aviation Centre – Oakey Borneo Barracks Cabarlah Canungra Training Area Cowley Beach Training Area Damascus Barracks Meeandah Gallipoli Barracks Enoggera Greenbank Training Area HMAS <i>Cairns</i> HMAS <i>Morten</i> Joint Defence Establishment – Thursday Island Jungle Training Wing (Tully) Kokoda Barracks Canungra Lavarack Barracks Mount Stuart Training Area Porton Barracks RAAF Amberley – Evans Head Air Weapons Range RAAF Scherger RAAF Townsville Rockhampton Ross Island Barracks Shoalwater Bay Training Area Townsville Field Training Area Victoria Barracks Brisbane Wide Bay Training Area South Australia Cultana Training Area DSTG Edinburgh Hampstead Barracks Keswick Barracks Murray Bridge Training Area Proof & Experimental Establishment Port Wakefield RAAF Edinburgh Warradale Barracks Woodside Barracks Woomera	New South Wales Blamey Barracks Kapooka Defence Service Centre – Cooma RAAF Wagga Tasmania Anglesea Barracks Buckland Military Training Area Derwent Barracks DSTG Scottsdale Fort Direction Stony Head Training Area Victoria Defence Plaza Melbourne AGO Bendigo DSTG Fishermans Bend Fort Queenscliff Gaza Ridge Barracks North Bandiana Gaza Ridge Barracks South Bandiana HMAS <i>Cerberus</i> Latchford Barracks Bonegilla Maygar Barracks Oakleigh Barracks Puckapunyal Military Area RAAF East Sale RAAF Williams Laverton/Point Cook Simpson Barracks Victoria Barracks Melbourne Wadsworth Barracks East Bandiana

New Initiatives

United States Force Posture Initiatives (USFPI) Northern Territory Training Areas and Range Upgrades

This \$747 million project is providing upgraded range facilities and associated infrastructure at the Bradshaw Field, Kangaroo Flats, Mount Bunday and Robertson Barracks Close training areas, Northern Territory. This includes range control, training camp accommodation, small arms and ranges, roads, and supporting facilities and infrastructure. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in late 2025. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$39.5 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$117.1 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement a Local Industry Capability Plan (LICP), which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

Facilities to Support LAND19 Phase 7B Short Range Ground Based Air Defence

This \$266.1 million project will provide new working accommodation, operational support, storage, training and living-in-accommodation facilities to support new air defence capability in South Australia. This project is forecast to commence construction in early 2023 and is scheduled for completion in late 2024. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$5.1 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$15.5 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

Anglesea Paterson Project

This \$57.4 million project will upgrade engineering services and refurbish buildings at Anglesea Barracks and Youngtown Depot, Tasmania and construct new facilities in North Launceston, Tasmania. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in late 2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$3.5 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$39.8 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

Facilities to Support SEA 2273 Fleet Information Environment Modernisation Project

This \$56.2 million project will provide an upgraded information system that supports maritime and naval operations at HMAS *Kuttabul* New South Wales, HMAS *Cerberus* Victoria, HMAS *Stirling* Western Australia, HMAS *Coonawarra* Northern Territory and HMAS *Cairns* Queensland. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in late 2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22

is \$12.4 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$30.7 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

Puckapunyal Combined Arms Heritage and Learning Centre

This \$41.2 million project will provide exhibition space, storage, restoration and administration facilities to support heritage collections, and demolish existing redundant facilities at the Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2024. The budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$16.3 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

North Queensland Mid-Term Refresh Program: RAAF Townsville Mid-Term Refresh Project

This \$72.8 million project will upgrade engineering services including potable water and power, refurbish working accommodation, and provide additional transit living-in accommodation at RAAF Townsville, Queensland. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in early 2024. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$6.3 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$28.7 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

North Queensland Mid-Term Refresh Program: Townsville Field Training Area Mid-Term Refresh Project

This \$22.8 million project will upgrade engineering services including power, sewerage, stormwater and ICT, and construct a new entry point at the Townsville Field Training Area, Queensland. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in early 2024. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$3.4 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$17.3 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

North Queensland Mid-Term Refresh Program: HMAS *Cairns* Mid-Term Refresh Project

This \$15.6 million project will upgrade engineering services including firefighting systems, potable water, sewerage and stormwater, and deliver minor building refurbishment works at HMAS *Cairns*, Queensland. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in early 2024. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$2.4 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$11.1 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which

details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

Space Domain Awareness Project Mirror Recoating Facility

This \$9.3 million project will construct a Mirror Recoating Facility and Tool Storage Facility to recoat Space Surveillance Telescope mirrors co-located with the Space Surveillance Telescope at Naval Communications Station at Harold E Holt, Western Australia. This project will significantly reduce the risk of damage to the unique Space Surveillance Telescope mirrors during the recoating process and thereby minimising the subsequent capability loss. This project is forecast to commence construction in mid-2022 and is scheduled for completion in early 2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$7.9 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$0.6 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

Mulwala Administration Complex Replacement

This \$11 million project will replace four existing 1940s administration type buildings that have been identified for demolition through the Mulwala Decommissioning and Demolition Project that have surpassed their useful life. The project will progress through planning and design during 2021-22 with completion of delivery phase planned for 2022-23. It is anticipated local industry will be utilised throughout the delivery phase via sub-contract arrangements.

Mulwala Renewable Energy (solar farm) Project

This \$12.1 million project will plan and deliver a 5MwH ground mounted solar system within the boundary of the Mulwala Explosives Factory, New South Wales. It is estimated the system will reduce energy consumption from the grid by 37 per cent. The project commenced planning in 2021-22 and forecasts delivery phase completion by 2023-24. Current forecasts see expenditure of \$5.3 million in 2022-23 and \$6.6 million in 2023-24. It is anticipated local industry will be utilised throughout the delivery phase via sub-contract arrangements.

North Queensland Army Training Centre

In December 2021, a Townsville defence company, Cubic Defence Australia, signed a \$319.8 million contract to continue its delivery of training support to the Australian Army's Combat Training Centre for up to 14 years. Cubic will continue to provide and support the integrated live simulation, range instrumentation and information systems used to run major national and international exercises in Townsville. The contract would create nine new jobs in Townsville and support the ongoing employment of 35 Australians, most of whom are ADF veterans.

Additional CH-47F Chinook procurement and Ongoing Sustainment

In May 2021, the Australian Government approved the procurement of an additional four CH-47F Chinook helicopters that will be based in Townsville, Queensland with the existing fleet of 10. The expanded fleet is expected to increase the number of contracted positions in Townsville and Oakey on top of the 51 positions from Boeing Defence Australia, CAE, Sigma Bravo and Collins Aerospace that currently support the CH-47F Chinook fleet. The introduction into service plan for this expanded capability is currently under review, with decisions on specific workforce requirements and associated investment in the region to be confirmed.

Regional Maintenance Centre North East

In January 2022, a five-year, up to \$70 million-dollar contract was awarded to NORSTA Maritime, a 100 per cent Australian owned and controlled joint venture between Norship, Tropical Reef Shipyard, Nova Systems and Secora, as the new Regional Maintenance Provider – North East. NORSTA is charged with managing the maintenance of Royal Australian Navy and other government vessels in Cairns, Queensland. The Regional Maintenance Centre North East coordinates, schedules and manages maintenance for the current and future Navy vessels based in Cairns and Pacific Island Countries. Support for the Cape class patrol boats will commence from mid-2022. The Regional Maintenance Centre North East will tap into the talent of the more than 4,000 people employed in the Cairns' maritime precinct and create additional jobs for local workers.

Regional Maintenance Centre North – Darwin

The stand-up of the Regional Maintenance Centre – North that will service Navy vessels in Darwin, Northern Territory will commence in early 2022. Establishment of a multiyear contract for the Regional Maintenance Provider – North, the industry partner responsible for coordinating and scheduling maintenance and developing local industry, is on track for the end of 2022. The estimated value of the contract is expected to be approximately \$160 million over the first five years. The Regional Maintenance Centre – North will lift local business capabilities and is expected to utilise the capabilities of the more than 130 local businesses currently supporting the Darwin maritime industry and create additional jobs for local workers.

Search and Rescue at HMAS *Albatross*

A \$12 million contract has been signed with a New South Wales, Nowra business, OPSTAR Pty Ltd, that is providing crucial search and rescue services at HMAS *Albatross*, securing the jobs of the company's 50 employees.

The contract will allow OPSTAR to continue providing aviation emergency response and land-based rescue services at HMAS *Albatross* until mid-2023, with the option of two one-year extensions.

Defence Marine Support Services

In October 2021, three contracts commenced with Serco Defence, Teekay Shipping Australia and Svitzer Australia to deliver critical services through the Defence Marine Support Services Program. The Defence Marine Support Services Program delivers auxiliary maritime services and support for training, logistics, trials, rescue, and Fleet ship movements nationally. The program valued at over \$512.8 million over six years will contribute approximately 250 seafaring, maintenance, and support jobs across Australia; including Rockingham Western Australia, Darwin Northern Territory Cairns Queensland, Jervis Bay Australian Capital Territory, Westernport Victoria and Sydney New South Wales together with services from a range of smaller ports around Australia. The program ensures the strong continued support to the Royal Australian Navy, whilst providing the long-term foundation and partnership with industry from which to enable investment in local training and skills in key maritime and regional locations across Australia.

Current Initiatives

Defence Industry Development in Regional Areas

Australia's defence industry plays a vital role in supporting Defence and delivering leading edge technologies and capabilities required to generate, mature and sustain the future force.

Between 5 December 2016 and 22 February 2022, the Defence Innovation Hub has awarded 60 contracts totalling over \$101.7 million to organisations based in regional Australia, accounting for almost 25 per cent of all contracts awarded since the Hub was established. Over 82 per cent of these contracts have been awarded to small to medium sized businesses and 10 per cent to regional universities. These contracts have supported approximately 500 jobs for regional Australians. Thirteen Defence Innovation Hub projects for regional businesses and universities, worth a total of \$30.4 million, are expected to remain active into the 2022-23 Financial Year. This includes seven contracts in the Australian Capital Territory (valued at \$16.8 million), three in regional New South Wales (valued at \$5.1 million), one in regional Queensland (valued at \$2.2 million), one in regional Victoria (\$5.1 million) and one in regional South Australia (valued at \$1.1 million).

These contracts include: a \$5.1 million contract with Deakin University in Geelong, Victoria developing a highly sophisticated augmented and virtual naval firefighting system for the Australian Defence Force; and a \$2.1 million contract with Hawkesbury-based engineering consultancy Aerospace & Mechanical Consulting Engineers to continue its development of a unique lightweight armour for the C-130J Hercules airlifter aircraft.

Since its launch in 2018, the *Sovereign Industrial Capability Priority (SICP) Grants Program* has supported opportunities to drive Australian innovation, making small businesses more competitive and supply chains more secure. As at January 2022, 113 *Sovereign Industrial Capability Priority Grant* applications have been approved across Australia to the value of \$70.2 million. 10 of these *Sovereign Industrial Capability Priority Grants* have been awarded to small businesses in regional and rural Australia to the value of \$5.7 million.

As at February 2022, 66 *Defence Global Competitiveness Grant* applications have been approved across Australia to the value of \$10 million. Nine of these *Defence Global Competitiveness Grants* have been awarded to small businesses in regional and rural Australia to the value of \$1.4 million. Since its launch in 2019, the *Defence Global Competitiveness (DGC) Grants Program* has supported the development of a stronger, more sustainable and globally competitive Australian defence industry by supporting eligible Australian SMEs to build export capability.

Launched in 2020, the *Skilling Australia's Defence Industry (SADI) Grants Program* has supported Australian businesses to invest in their workforces through skilling and re-training. As at 31 January 2022, across Australia, 98 SADI applications have been approved to the value of \$6.3 million (GST inclusive). Nine of these SADI Grants have been awarded to small businesses in regional and rural Australia to the value of \$0.3 million (GST inclusive).

On 26 November 2021, the Office of Defence Industry Support (ODIS) was officially opened, replacing the Centre for Defence Industry Capability as the one-stop shop for Defence industry support and guidance.

The core function of ODIS, through its offices in capital cities and regional locations across Australia, is to provide advisory, guidance and mentoring services to Australian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) looking to enter or expand their footprint in Defence industry. This includes a dedicated regional SME support team to ensure there is a focus on regional businesses in Defence. ODIS also works with State and Territory agencies, industry associations and Defence business partners, to position the Defence industry to deliver capability that equips and sustains the Australian Defence Force.

ARMY Safety Watercraft

On 24 March 2021, the Australian Government announced that a contract has been awarded to two Cairns-based businesses in Far North Queensland, Tropical Reef Shipyards and BME NQ. The contract cost is \$4.1 million and will produce seven new watercraft to strengthen the Australian Army's amphibious capability between April 2022 and October 2022. The project has commenced and is expected to be completed by January 2023.

TRADOC – Future Ready Training System Program

The Future Ready Training System Program (FRTS) is delivering up to \$10 million of development annually across regional Army units and training centres. This includes the provision of training resources to unit hubs in Townsville, Brisbane, Queensland and Darwin Northern Territory, and in regional training centres such as Puckapunyal and Albury-Wodonga, Victoria. The FRTS allocates funds to various other capability programs across Army in accordance with respective milestones to enable training and sustainment. The majority of FRTS funding will be expended from 2025 as recipient programs are realised.

SEA 2400 – Hydrographic Data Collection Capability

Project SEA 2400 – Hydrographic Data Collection Capability includes the *HydroScheme Industry Partnership Program* (HIPP). The HIPP is a partnership with industry for delivery of the national hydrographic survey requirement to meet Defence's legislated responsibilities for the provision of hydrographic services within the Australian Area of Charting Responsibility. The HIPP was approved by the Australian Government in December 2019, with initial funding of \$154.4 million over five years from 2019-20. The first HIPP survey commenced in May 2020. The HIPP Initial Operational Capability was scheduled for 2021 with the first hydrographic survey conducted under the program incorporated in navigation products on 21 January 2021. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$37.3 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$36.7 million.

Protected Mobile Fires Project (LAND 8116)

In 2019, the Australian Government announced Defence would acquire a new self-propelled artillery system to be produced in the Geelong region, Victoria. The Protected Mobile Fires project (LAND 8116 Phase 1) was approved by government on 6 December 2021, and acquisition and support contracts with Hanwha Defense Australia were signed on 13 December 2021. The first regiment of Protected Mobile Fires will comprise 30 Self-Propelled Howitzers and 15 Armoured Ammunition Resupply Vehicles, providing persistent, lethal, mobile, survivable and networked indirect fire capability that delivers artillery effects in support of armoured and mechanised forces in mid to high-intensity warfare. Hanwha Defense Australia is building an armoured vehicle centre of excellence at Avalon, Victoria. The \$1 billion Protected Mobile Fires LAND 8116 Phase 1 project will create a minimum of 300 jobs spread across facility construction, acquisition and maintenance, as well as generating ongoing support opportunities for Australian industry until the late 2040s.

Strategic Domestic Munitions Manufacturing (SDMM)

Commencing on 1 July 2020, Thales Australia and the Australian Government signed a 10-year Strategic Domestic Munitions Manufacturing contract for \$1.4 billion. The contract is for the ongoing management and operation of Australia's munition factory in Benalla, Victoria, and explosive factory at Mulwala, New South Wales providing job

certainty for more than 650 highly skilled regional workers. The agreement provides surety of supply for key munitions and components to the ADF, and guarantees the Australian manufacture and supply of selected strategic munitions to the ADF and enables Thales to manufacture and export munitions, explosives and munitions components to over 17 countries around the world.

Approximately \$92.6 million is being spent in 2021-22 for facilities operation, asset and facilities works renewal. Facilities operating costs include labour, utilities and maintenance resulting in the bulk of this expenditure to local jobs and businesses. In addition, there is a further forecast outcome spend of \$40.4 million for munitions orders for Defence. The financial priorities for 2022-23 includes projected spend of \$98 million

(\$87.9 million facilities operations, \$10 million asset and facilities works) and \$52.1 million of contract orders for Defence. The focus for 2022-23 is the establishment of further new manufacturing capability in consultation with Defence stakeholders, including end users of munitions products and the Defence Capability Manager.

Munitions Manufacturing Arrangement

Commencing on 1 July 2020, NIOA Munitions (NIOA) and the Australian Government signed a new 10-year contract establishing NIOA as a direct tenant to Defence alongside Thales Australia for part of the Benalla munitions factory in Victoria. This contract is for facility operations and minor facilities projects with NIOA currently employing 14 personnel at their Benalla factory tenancy, the bulk of expenditure utilising local businesses within regional Northeast Victoria for repair and maintenance services.

In 2021-22 NIOA undertook facilities remediation works for Defence with their Benalla tenancy at a planned cost of \$2.5 million. In addition, NIOA remediated ADF owned munitions at a cost of \$0.4 million. The focus for the NIOA Benalla tenancy in 2022-23 will be further planned facilities works for Defence of \$1.5 million, the commissioning of new capability and then manufacture of new munitions for Defence. NIOA will also undertake a small expansion of their tenanted area at Benalla. This pre-positions it well for further manufacturing of new munitions for Defence and for the commercial market, increasing the capacity and skills capability for Defence should it so require.

Helicopter Contract Expansion at Nowra NSW

The Australian Government announced the \$10 million expansion to the MH-60R Romeo multi-mission helicopter sustainment and support contract. This contract expansion sees Sikorsky Australia deliver more sustainment support and maintenance to Australia's Romeo helicopter fleet at their state-of-the-art maintenance, logistics and repair facility and has created ten new jobs in the Shoalhaven region of New South Wales.

DEF799 Phase 1 Geospatial Intelligence Satellite capability-enhanced Commercial Access

Sustainment of the DEF799 Phase 1 capability is delivered through a number of arrangements with companies across regional and remote Australia. Approximately \$5.5 million was spent across Australian industry in 2021-22 and a further \$5.5 million is forecast to be spent in 2022-23 – with a focus on maximising the procurement of goods and services across regional and remote locations.

Tasmanian Defence and Maritime Innovation and Design Precinct

Following an election commitment by the Australian Government in April 2019, Defence signed an agreement with the University of Tasmania (UTAS) in July 2020 committing \$30 million over three years to develop the Defence and Maritime Innovation and Design Precinct at the UTAS Australian Maritime College campus in Launceston.

The commitment is supporting the implementation of new, updated or modified capabilities at the Australian Maritime College, including fit for purpose laboratories and workshops that can be used for both Defence and the wider Maritime Community, with a focus on the Southern Ocean and Antarctic environments.

To date, \$18 million has been spent, with \$3 million in 2020-21 on the design and definition phase, and \$15 million spent in 2021-22 spent on significant infrastructure upgrades and capital works. In 2022-23, \$12 million has been budgeted for further significant infrastructure and capital works.

An estimated 50 additional jobs are expected to be created during construction and the development will create further employment opportunities across a broad range of science and technology capabilities beyond maritime-specific solutions, drawing researchers and industry from across the country to use the world-class facilities and promote collaboration between Defence, academia and industry.

This commitment is to build additional infrastructure over 2021-2024 in the form of a new Engineering Service Centre at the Australian Maritime College. The three-year program expands the capability of the Australian Maritime College and other UTAS organisational entities to meet the growing research and development needs of Defence, and its industry supply chains.

Pentarch Industrial – New Ammunition Container Contract

Pentarch Industrial is a regional Victorian company based in Wangaratta, employing 13 full-time and three casual staff across both Oaklands, New South Wales and Wangaratta, Victoria. The company provides services to Defence in ammunition container refurbishment, recycling and disposals. This service enables containers to be reused many times, rather than Defence having to import new containers from overseas every time they are needed.

At the end of May 2020, Defence signed a six-year contract valued up to \$15 million with Pentarch Industrial for the supply of new and refurbished ammunition boxes. Expected expenditure for 2021-22 against this contract is around \$6 million for various disposal activities and refurbishment of ammunition containers. The anticipated expenditure for 2022-23 is \$6.5 million which includes disposal activity and ammunition container refurbishment. All disposal activity is executed by the Single Disposal Organisation (SDO) under a standing panel arrangement, of which Pentarch is an approved supplier.

COVID-19 Assist – March 2020 – Present

These are extraordinary times, and the ADF is ready to help when asked by the Australian Government, or the states and territories. The ADF is providing customised support to state and territory authorities. This includes planning and logistics support, frontline medical assistance and other roles that keep Australians safe by limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Since March 2020, approximately 19,500 ADF personnel have conducted over 27,000 deployments nationally under Operation COVID-19 ASSIST providing support to the national COVID-19 response across Australia. Under Operation COVID-19 ASSIST the ADF provide customised support to state and territory authorities. Defence assistance has included planning and logistics support, contact tracing, COVID-19 testing, border control measures, support to government-sponsored hotel quarantine compliance monitoring and support to the aged care sector.

In addition to supporting public health efforts, to support Australians and Australian businesses, Defence has modified existing and future Defence infrastructure contracts to allow for cost and time relief to businesses whose obligations are impacted by COVID-19. Defence brought forward a number of projects including around \$870 million worth of estate project works, first announced in May 2020 that were released to the market throughout 2020 to create new jobs and business opportunities across Australia.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Defence COVID-19 Industry Support Cell (the Cell) has worked to strengthen the Defence and industry partnership, while also supporting the whole-of-government response to COVID-19. The Cell continues to monitor and engage with industry to provide ongoing advice and guidance on safe business practices, supply chain constraints and COVID-19-related industry proposals and support. Additionally, it advises on Defence capability impacts of state and territory governments work and travel restrictions. As part of the ongoing support, from March 2020 to April 2021 Defence has paid more than \$24.3 billion of invoices earlier than the contracted payment terms and ensured cash flow to Australian small business contractors and into the Australian economy.

Further to this, Defence initiated a Recovery Deed option that allowed Defence industry to continue to safely meet contractual obligations while dealing with the uncertainty caused by disruptions to domestic and international travel, supply chains and local restrictions. The Deed was in effect from March to December 2020 and focused contractors on performance rather than having to consider whether they needed to invoke contractual mechanisms to seek relief. Contractors who signed the Recovery Deed provided recovery plans that were used to negotiate contract changes.

Defence continues to monitor and assess the cost and schedule impact of COVID-19 on procurement, and will respond as the situation demands.

Support to the economy is one of four lines of effort set out in the Defence COVID-19 Strategy which outlines the key ways Defence is working to support the whole-of-government response to COVID-19. Since March 2020 when Defence COVID-19 Taskforce was established and the Cell was set up as a key part of Defence's support to the economy, more than 1,150 small-to-medium regional enterprises have been engaged under this approach.

Current Estate and Infrastructure Projects delivered in Regional areas in 2022-23

The Australian Government is investing approximately \$17.1 billion over four years from 2022-23 in Enterprise Estate and Infrastructure projects, which consist of approved and unapproved projects. Defence estate and infrastructure investment is funded by the *Defence Integrated Investment Program* via Defence's existing annual appropriation. Approved regional projects include the following:

Newcastle Airport Improvements

This \$181.3 million project will provide an upgrade to the Newcastle Airport runway to accommodate long range aircraft and facilitate international flights, as part of planned upgrades to the airport. This project is forecast to commence construction in early 2022 and is scheduled for completion in late 2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$46.8 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$102.6 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works. The government will provide \$66.1 million over two years from 2021-22 to 2022-23 to upgrade the Newcastle Airport runway to accommodate long range aircraft and facilitate international flights, as part of planned upgrades to the airport.

Puckapunyal Military Area Mid Term Refresh

This \$45.8 million project is addressing condition, capacity and compliance issues with existing infrastructure at the Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria including remediating and upgrading engineering services and constructing a new storage facility. This project commenced construction in mid-2021 and is scheduled for completion in early 2023. The

revised estimate for 2021-22 was \$22.7 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$8 million. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LICP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

Plan MURA — General John Baker Complex Capability Assurance Project (Public Private Partnership)

Ensuring a secure and resilient Australia requires modernising Joint Operations Command (JOC). Plan MURA will be the means of this modernisation, and will provide JOC with pathway to continuous modernisation. This project is delivering the infrastructure to modernise JOC facilities as a component of Plan MURA. This will include extensions, upgrades and new inclusions, and will create a world's best practice, fit-for-purpose site that will enable efficient and effective support for operational constructs. The purpose-built facility will be specifically designed to house the future workforce, securing the JOC capability out to 2035 and beyond.

The facilities at the New South Wales Bungendore site were originally constructed, and continue to be operated, through a Public Private Partnership (PPP) with Praeco Pty Ltd.

Consistent with the PPP arrangement, the funding allocation is spread over 20 years (2020-21 to 2039-40). The project is being delivered in two tranches. Tranche One was approved by the Minister for Defence on 1 July 2020 and by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works on 5 February 2021.

- Tranche One work commenced in February 2022 and is valued at \$31.7 million. Tranche One will deliver additional car parking, interim security accreditation works, site preparation for future works and the construction of a solar power farm.
- Tranche Two is expected to receive Parliamentary approval in 2022. Tranche Two will deliver a collaboration facility, on-site accommodation and amenities, and an extension to the existing main operations building.

New Air Combat Capability Facilities Project (AIR 6000 Phase 2A/B)

This \$1.5 billion project provided new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the Joint Strike Fighter at RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales, and RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory with support facilities and infrastructure at Defence Establishment Myambat, New South Wales. This project commenced construction in early 2015. The majority of the works are complete with the exception of final demolition works, which are scheduled for completion in early 2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$6.2 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$2 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

DEF101 Data Centre Upgrade

This \$131.5 million project is providing infrastructure to support and ensure ongoing communications capability at HMAS *Harman*, Australian Capital Territory through expansion and fit out of existing facilities. This project commenced construction in mid-2020 and the facility is scheduled for completion in mid-2022, with subsidiary electrical assets to be completed by mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$37.4 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$23 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Navy Capability Infrastructure Sub-Program Maritime Operational Support Capability (SEA 1654 Phase 3), Hunter Class Frigate Program Facilities (SEA 5000 Phase 1), and Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) Facilities (SEA 1180 Phase 1)

This \$2.1 billion program of works is providing new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure around Australia to support the introduction into service and sustainment of new Frigate, Offshore Patrol, and Maritime Operational Support Capability vessels. This program is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works. This program includes:

Hunter Class Frigate Program Facilities (SEA 5000 Phase 1)

This \$918.8 million project is providing upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the new Hunter Class Frigates to replace the current Anzac Class Frigates at various locations including HMAS *Watson* and the Garden Island Defence Precinct, New South Wales; St Kilda and Osborne Naval Shipyard, South Australia and HMAS *Stirling* and Henderson Maritime Precinct, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2026. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$135.6 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$219.9 million.

Arafura Class Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) Facilities (SEA 1180 Phase 1)

This \$918.5 million project is providing berthing, training, maintenance, logistics, and support facilities to support the introduction into service of 12 new Arafura class offshore patrol vessels at HMAS *Coonawarra* and RAAF Base Darwin, Northern Territory; HMAS *Cairns*, Queensland; and HMAS *Stirling* and Henderson Maritime Precinct, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2027. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$89.7 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$218.8 million.

Maritime Operational Support Capability Facilities (SEA 1654 Phase 3)

This \$220.5 million project is providing new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the Supply class replenishment ships at HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia, and Randwick Barracks and the Garden Island Defence Precinct,

New South Wales. This project commenced construction in late 2018 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$31 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$20.4 million.

RAAF Base Tindal Redevelopment Stage 6 and United States Force Posture Initiatives RAAF Base Tindal Airfield Works and Associated Infrastructure

This \$1.2 billion program is addressing functional deficiencies, capacity constraints and non-compliances with facilities and infrastructure, and delivering airfield improvements at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory. This program of works commenced construction in late 2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2027. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$174.1 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$176.8 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Armoured Fighting Vehicles Facilities Program Stage 1

This \$235.1 million project is providing fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure to support, sustain, and train Army personnel on the next generation of Armoured Fighting Vehicles capability at Lavarack Barracks, Queensland; Edinburgh Defence Precinct, South Australia; and Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria. Stage 1 commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$117.8 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$91.4 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Point Wilson Waterside Infrastructure Remediation Project

This \$218.9 million project is remediating waterside infrastructure at Point Wilson, Victoria to enable the recommencement of bulk explosive ordnance importation operations. This project is refurbishing the existing 2.4 km jetty, and providing an entirely new wharf, amenities building, landside infrastructure and engineering services. This project commenced construction in early 2020 and is scheduled for completion in early 2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$85.4 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$44.8 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

AIR555 Phase 1 Airborne Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Warfare Capability Facilities Works

This \$293.7 million project is providing fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction into service of the MC-55A Peregrine Airborne Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Electronic Warfare capability at RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia; RAAF Base Darwin, Northern Territory; RAAF Base Townsville, Queensland; and Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. This project commenced construction in late 2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2024. The revised

estimate for 2021-22 is \$59.4 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$105.2 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

LAND 121 Phase 5B Facilities Project

This \$183.3 million project will provide fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure at various bases to support and sustain vehicles, modules, and trailers being procured through the Land 121 Vehicle Acquisition Program. The bases include Robertson Barracks, Northern Territory; Lavarack Barracks and Gallipoli Barracks, Queensland; Derwent Barracks, Tasmania; Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria, Campbell Barracks, Western Australia, and Porton Barracks, Queensland. This project commenced construction in mid-2021 and scheduled for completion in early 2024. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$68.9 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$73.7 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Shoalwater Bay Training Area Remediation Project

This \$135.4 million project redeveloped the Shoalwater Bay Training Area, Queensland to support the introduction of amphibious capability, and ensure sustainability into the future through airfield, road and creek crossing upgrades, and new camp, field hospital infrastructure, and training facilities. This project commenced construction in early 2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$53 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Singleton Mid-Term Refresh

This \$42.2 million project is remediating trunk infrastructure, and delivering new and refurbished buildings for base support and logistics in the Singleton Military Area, New South Wales. This project commenced construction in late 2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$9.2 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$5.4 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Holsworthy Mid-Term Refresh

This \$32 million project is addressing power supply reliability issues, serviceability of high voltage infrastructure, and serviceability of training living-in-accommodation at Holsworthy Barracks, New South Wales. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$12.1 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$5.4 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

SEA 1397 Phase 5D Nulka Assembly and Maintenance Facilities Project

This \$31.6 million project will construct new purpose-built facilities at Defence Estate Orchard Hills, New South Wales to assemble, maintain, test and store decoy capability. This project commenced construction in mid-2021 and is for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$23.6 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is approximately \$0.1 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Larrakeyah Defence Precinct Redevelopment Program

This \$495.6 million program is upgrading critical base infrastructure, improving the working environment, delivering new facilities, and supporting future growth on the Larrakeyah Defence Precinct, Northern Territory. This program is also delivering a new wharf, fuel storage and refuelling capabilities to support Navy's major surface combatant ships operating in the north of Australia. This program of works commenced construction in late 2018 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$157.7 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$60.1 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Robertson Barracks Close Training Area

This \$7.6 million project is providing perimeter fencing, signage, fire break installations; clearing rubbish; and removing asbestos to ensure the Robertson Barracks Close Training Area, Northern Territory, is suitable for Defence use. This project commenced construction in mid-2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$4.4 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Mulwala Decommissioning and Demolition

This \$47.3 million project is decommissioning and demolishing 116 aged and contaminated redundant factory buildings at the Mulwala Propellant and Explosives Facility, New South Wales. This project is scheduled for completion in mid-2025 through a number of tranches. This project maximises opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

LAND 555 Phase 6 Force Level Electronic Warfare, Signals Intelligence and Vehicles

This \$29.6 million project is providing vehicle storage, workshop extension, heavy vehicle weighbridge, access gate automation, and remediation of vacated facilities to accept training modules at Borneo Barracks, Queensland to support deployable electronic warfare capabilities. This project commenced construction in mid-2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$9.8 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Puckapunyal Health and Wellbeing Centre

This \$39.8 million project will replace obsolete, unsafe and non-compliant training facilities with a new-fit-for purpose health and wellbeing centre at the Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria. This project commenced construction in mid-2021, and is scheduled for completion in early 2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$16.6 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$18 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Oakey Mid-Term Refresh

This \$31.3 million project is upgrading engineering services and demolishing redundant buildings at Swartz Barracks, Queensland. This project commenced construction in mid-2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$19.3 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$3.4 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Airfield Capital Works P0006 (Curtin, Tindal and Townsville)

This \$95.3 million project is maintaining aircraft pavements and airfield lighting at RAAF Bases Curtin Western Australia, Tindal, Northern Territory and Townsville, Queensland. This project commenced construction in early 2016. The works at Curtin and Tindal are complete while the remaining works at Townsville have been reprogrammed to align with similar works under related projects to minimise operational disruptions, and are scheduled for completion in late 2025. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$0.3 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

AIR 2025 Phase 6 Jindalee Operational Radar Networks (JORN) Facilities Project

This \$60.3 million project is providing new facilities and infrastructure to support the mid-life upgrade of JORN capability, with priority works at the JORN Radar 3 Receive (Mount Everard) and Transmit (Harts Range) sites near Alice Springs, Northern Territory. Supplementary works are located at Murray Bridge Training Area in South Australia, and RAAF Learmonth and Geraldton Australian Defence satellite Communications, Kojarena in Western Australia. This project commenced construction in mid-2019 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$7.8 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$0.1 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Maritime Patrol Aircraft Replacement (AIR 7000 Phase 2B)

This \$792.6 million project is providing new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the P-8A aircraft at RAAF Base Edinburgh SA, RAAF Base Townsville Queensland, RAAF Base Pearce Western Australia, and RAAF Base Darwin Northern Territory, as well as additional explosive ordnance facilities at HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2016. The majority of works remain on track for completion in mid-2022, while those at Townsville have been reprogrammed to align with similar works under related projects to minimise operational disruptions, and are scheduled for completion in late 2025. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$83.7 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$57.6 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

HMAS Cerberus Redevelopment

This \$465.6 million project is upgrading engineering services, refurbishing living-in-accommodation, constructing a new logistics precinct, upgrading the School of Survivability and Ship Safety, upgrading the gym, refurbishing training facilities and galley, and demolishing redundant buildings at HMAS *Cerberus*, Victoria. This project commenced construction in early 2018 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$58.7 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$41.3 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Air Traffic Control Complex Infrastructure Project and Fixed Base Defence Air Traffic Management and Control System (AIR 5431 Phases 2 and 3)

This \$409.9 million project is providing facilities in support of replacement Air Traffic Management Surveillance, Command and Control Systems under AIR 5431 Phases 2 and 3, incorporating the replacement of aged and degraded Air Traffic Control Towers, at 13 bases. The bases included HMAS *Albatross*, RAAF Williamtown and RAAF Richmond New South Wales; RAAF Darwin and RAAF Tindal, Northern Territory; RAAF Amberley, Army Aviation Centre Oakey and RAAF Townsville, Queensland; RAAF Woomera and RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia; RAAF East Sale, Victoria and RAAF Gingin and RAAF Pearce, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in mid-2016 with construction work at all bases complete excluding minor works at RAAF Base Amberley and HMAS *Albatross*, which are scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$6 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$0.5 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Battlefield Airlifter Facilities (AIR 8000 Phase 2)

This \$370.4 million project is providing facilities at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland to accommodate and support the operation of the new C-27J Battlefield Airlifter aircraft, which has been winding down and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised

estimate for 2021-22 is \$3.5 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$1.1 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Joint Health Command Garrison Facilities Upgrades

This \$241.1 million project is providing fit-for-purpose, contemporary Garrison Health Facilities around Australia. This project commenced construction in late 2018. The works are complete except for those at the Royal Military College, Russell Offices, Australian Capital Territory, and those relating to the recent approval of a new facility at RAAF Darwin, Northern Territory, which are scheduled for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$25.4 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$19.6 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

LAND 2110 Phase 1B – Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence (CBRND) Facilities

This \$16.7 million project is providing new and refurbished facilities, including training and storage facilities at 14 bases to support Australian Defence Force CBRND activities. The bases include Majura Range and HMAS *Creswell*, Australian Capital Territory; Holsworthy Barracks, Kapooka Military Area, RAAF Base Wagga, New South Wales; Robertson Barracks, Northern Territory; Lavarack Barracks, Gallipoli Barracks, RAAF Amberley, Queensland; RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia; HMAS *Cerberus* and Dutson Air Weapons Range, Victoria; and HMAS Stirling and Bindoon Training Area, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in late 2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$10.7 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$1.8 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

High Performance Computing Centre Integration Works

This \$5.5 million project is providing works to support the integration of high-performance computing capability at the Edinburgh Defence Precinct in South Australia. This project commenced construction in late 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022. The revised estimate for 2021-22 is \$5.2 million and the budget estimate for 2022-23 is \$0.1 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Defence Base Service Contracts

Defence has a number of base service contracts that support the management of the Defence estate and the daily activities of Defence bases across Australia. Where services are delivered to bases located in regional and remote areas, the base services contractors generally draw their workforce from local employment areas as well as accessing local business suppliers. The services provided include estate maintenance, hospitality and catering, range and training area support, living-accommodation and housekeeping,

transport, access control, waste management services, land and environment management, pest and vermin management, firefighting, airfield operations and aircraft refuelling.

The Base services contractors are required to demonstrate a commitment to Indigenous employment, including the use of Indigenous business suppliers. Base services contractors must have a current Indigenous Training, Employment and Supplier Plan.

In the 2021 calendar year, Defence, through its ten Base Services Contractors, engaged 2,336 Australian based businesses with expenditure totalling \$1.7 billion, which included 770 businesses engaged in regional areas across Australia with expenditure totalling \$437.3 million. During the same period, 88 Indigenous businesses were engaged with total expenditure of \$357 million of which 44 were engaged in regional areas across Australia with expenditure totalling \$169 million. In the 2020 calendar year, 833 businesses were engaged by the Base Services Contractors in regional areas across Australia with expenditure totalling \$311.4 million.

Education, Skills and Employment

The Education, Skills and Employment's Portfolio's purpose is to contribute to Australia's economic prosperity and social wellbeing by creating opportunities and driving better outcomes for people, through education, skills and employment pathways.

The portfolio provides advice to its Ministers and effectively implements government policies and programs. In doing this, it draws on the best available research, evidence and data.

The portfolio works closely with other government agencies, state and territory governments, international organisations, regulators, businesses, education institutions, peak bodies, providers, industry and the community. This engagement and strong working relationships ensure policy development, program delivery, services and evaluation are grounded in, and reflect the needs of, the sectors, stakeholders and the Australian public, including those living in regional and remote communities.

As at 31 December 2021, the Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio employed 4,369 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,820 staff (87.4 per cent) were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 489 staff (11.2 per cent) in other capital cities, and 60 staff (1.4 per cent) in regional areas.

The department has a presence across Australia including all capital cities and a regional footprint with staff located in Alice Springs, Bendigo, Newcastle, Orange, Mackay, Rockhampton and Townsville.

New Initiatives

Regional Education Commissioner

In the 2020 July Economic and Fiscal Update, the government allocated \$6 million to establish and support Australia's first Regional Education Commissioner (the Commissioner). The Hon Fiona Nash commenced in the role in December 2021 with a broad remit across a student's educational lifespan, from early childhood through schools to tertiary education, including university and vocational education and training. The Commissioner brings a national focus and direction to regional and remote education so all people in rural, regional and remote Australia, regardless of where they live, can access the education they need to reach their full potential.

Supporting National Disaster Response

The government is increasing the *Community Child Care Fund* (CCCF) *Special Circumstances* from \$4 million each year to \$22.4 million in 2021-22 and \$7.7 million in 2022-23 to assist child care services to recover from recent catastrophic flood events and ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

The government is providing \$6.9 million to provide sector-specific support payments to assist an estimated 650 early childhood education and care services affected by the floods. Grant payments of \$10,000 are available for approved child care providers in flood affected areas where they have been closed for more than seven days. More severely impacted services will also be able to apply for CCCF *Special Circumstances* grants.

Supporting access to child care in the regions

The government will run an additional grants round of the CCCF *Open Competitive Program* specifically targeting areas where there are gaps in the supply of child care in disadvantaged regional and remote communities. This will support the establishment of up to 20 new services nationally, facilitating engagement in early childhood education, care outcomes for local children, and increasing workforce participation in these regions.

Increased access to quality boarding and scholarship support

The government is continuing to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students from predominately remote and very remote areas to access school education and enable boarding providers to best support the wellbeing and engagement of students with funding of \$29.4 million over four years.

Funding of \$17.3 million will support a one-year extension of the *Indigenous Boarding Providers* grants program to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students and improve their educational outcomes. This builds on the 2021-22 Budget measure *Schools and Youth – supporting students, teachers and young Australians* cross-portfolio package.

The government will provide \$10.9 million over four years to establish a *Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program*. The scholarship program will support the families of 200 students from low socio-economic status regional and remote communities with the cost of boarding school fees. Scholarships will provide \$15,000 per year for three years.

Closing the Gap in education

The government announced \$1.1 billion for a range of measures to support the new *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, including initiatives to improve educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the 2021–22 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO) the government:

- provided a further \$81.8 million over four years to expand the *Connected Beginnings* program by an additional 27 sites, helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be safe, healthy and ready to thrive in school by the age of five
- expanded the *CCCF Restricted* program with \$29.9 million to fund an additional 20 child care services in predominantly remote and very remote communities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- provided \$9 million over four years to establish four trial sites to replicate the *Early Years Education* program to improve school readiness and educational and health outcomes for young children facing family stress and social disadvantage
- provided \$1.9 million over three years to design, implement and evaluate a hybrid instructional model trial of explicit instruction and play-based learning in two early learning centres with a proportionately large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending
- provided \$74.9 million over four years from 2021–22 to build three new boarding schools and enable the upgrade of a fourth facility in remote areas under the Studio Schools Australia model, providing more options for local secondary education on Country
- provided \$25.9 million over three years from 2021–22 to establish City-Country Partnerships between high performing independent schools and remote schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- provided \$23 million over four years from 2021–22 for evidence-based literacy and numeracy programs to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Support for research and commercialisation outcomes in the regions

In the 2021–22 MYEFO, the government provided \$188.4 million over four years from 2021–22 (and \$55.1 million in 2025–26) for four trailblazing universities to build new research capabilities and invest in new industry engagement opportunities, which are aligned to the National Manufacturing Priorities. At least one of the selected Trailblazer projects will be in a regional location.

Investing in the regional medical workforce

In the 2022–23 Budget, the government is investing \$11.3 million over the forward estimates to commence a competitive process to allocate up to 80 new commencing Commonwealth Supported Places each year from 2023–24 for universities with existing medical schools to deliver full medical school programs from new or existing rural training locations. This measure builds on the 2018–19 Budget measure *A Stronger Rural Health Strategy* to better manage the supply of medical school graduates.

To support doctors delivering primary care in rural and remote Australia, in the 2021–22 MYEFO the government reduced *Higher Education Loan Program* (HELP) debts and waived indexation for eligible medical or nurse practitioners who meet length of service requirements while working in a rural, remote or very remote location in Australia. The government is also committed, subject to legislation, to extending the existing *FEE-HELP* loan fee exemption by 12 months in response to COVID-19. This exemption allows undergraduate students in full-fee paying courses to access Australia's world class higher education loan scheme without paying a fee for access to that loan. Regional students studying full-fee paying courses will benefit from this extension.

Expanded access to the Tertiary Access Payment

More regional and rural students are eligible for the *Tertiary Access Payment* (TAP) that helps Year 12 school leavers with the costs of relocating to study a higher level tertiary qualification (Certificate IV or above). From 1 January 2022, eligibility has been expanded to include students in inner regional areas, as announced on 17 December 2021. Eligible students who move from inner regional areas will receive a single payment of \$3,000 from 1 January 2022. Eligible students from outer regional and remote areas continue to be able to access up to \$5,000 paid in two instalments. The TAP will support students in their first year of study with the cost of relocating from their family home to their place of study.

Ensuring a strong pipeline of apprentices

The government is investing \$2.4 billion over five years to introduce a new *Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System* (AAIS), designed to increase commencements and completions in priority occupations and support employers around Australia to fill skill shortages. Around 36 per cent of apprenticeships and trainees supported through the new system live and work in regional and remote areas.

From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024, employers of apprentices in priority occupations, including those in regional and remote Australia, will be able to access a wage subsidy set at 10 per cent for first year apprentices, 10 per cent for second year apprentices, and 5 per cent for third year apprentices.

Apprentices in priority occupations will receive a direct payment – *the Australian Apprentice Training Support Payment* – to support them in completing their apprenticeship with \$1,250 paid every six months over the first two years of their apprenticeship, up to a total amount of \$5,000. Employers of apprentices in non-priority occupations will also receive a \$3,500 hiring incentive.

From 1 July 2022, young apprentices (aged 15 to 20 years) will receive additional support to complete their apprenticeship. All newly commencing young apprentices will receive a follow up call within three months of commencing, to ensure any issues are identified early. In addition, the Government will fund 2,500 more in-training support places for young Australian apprentices.

As part of the AAIS, several payments from the *Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program* will continue, including the *Living Away From Home Allowance*, *Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support*, and the off-the-job *Tutorial, Mentor and Interpreter Assistance* available to apprentices with disability.

From 1 July 2024, support will transition to target employers and apprentices in priority occupations, including a \$4,000 hiring incentive for employers and an Australian Apprentice Training Support Payment of up to \$3,000 paid to apprentices.

Supporting women to undertake non-traditional trade apprenticeships

In line with its priority to improve women’s workforce participation and economic security, the government is providing additional support with \$38.6 million over the forward estimates for women who commence in eligible trade occupations on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List, in order to boost historically low levels of participation for women in non-traditional trades. The government is increasing access to comprehensive wraparound support through the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network including personalised advice and information on career options and apprenticeships pathways, pastoral care, career and industry mentoring, counselling and mediation. With women comprising around 27.5 per cent of apprentices and trainees in regional and remote Australia, this measure will support more of them to consider careers in areas of high skills needs in the regions, such as construction.

Investing in skills reform

Building on the success of *JobTrainer* and the Australian Government’s record levels of investment in skills, the government has committed up to \$12 billion over five years from 2022-23 for a National Skills Agreement (NSA) with state and territory governments. In addition to the \$8.3 billion *National Skills and Workforce Development Specific Purpose Payment*, the Budget includes provision for a further \$3.7 billion to support the NSA.

The NSA will transform the way the states and territories support vocational education and training (VET), ensuring investment decisions are evidence-based and linked to skills need, funding is transparent, and greater consistency applies across jurisdictions.

The NSA has the capacity to deliver around 800,000 additional training places over five years. It will reduce the number of students facing unreasonably high fees and improve access to free and low-fee training for priority students including people with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and for select priority courses. It will make the VET system simpler and fairer for students, including the approximately 1.1 million students from regional and remote Australia who study VET.

All governments remain committed to major reform of the VET system through the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform, which was signed by First Ministers in August 2020. The Australian Government is continuing to negotiate in good faith with jurisdictions and remains committed to securing agreement to the NSA with all states and territories by mid-2022 in line with the National Cabinet deadline.

Meeting future workforce needs and opportunities

The government has developed a National Workforce Strategy that will sit at the centre of a new workforce policy environment. The Strategy will guide the national effort to build the workforce and ensure that a more coordinated and joined up approach to addressing workforce issues is sustained, including in regional Australia. The Strategy outlines a new vision for a more dynamic, responsive and capable workforce to be realised through its guiding principles, which will benefit employers across Australia in all regions. The Strategy will inform and shape the development of workforce policy and sector-specific workforce strategies across Commonwealth agencies.

The National Workforce Strategy highlights the need to support mobility into regional areas to meet workforce demand and for data disaggregated by location to ensure that the labour market and workforce operate as efficiently as possible. The Strategy also underlines the importance of sector-specific strategies and workforce policy reflecting government priorities, including regionalisation.

The care and support sector is facing a number of workforce challenges at a time when demand for workers is at record highs, including in regional and remote areas. In light of these challenges, the government has developed a new Care and Support Workforce Strategy.

To support Australia's aged care workforce, the government is investing a further \$48.5 million over two years from 2022–23, contingent on matched funding from the states, to expand the successful *JobTrainer* program to provide 15,000 additional free and low-fee training places for aged care related qualifications.

Getting Australians into jobs

To respond to Australia's workforce challenges, including increases in long-term unemployment (despite the low aggregate unemployment rate), particularly for vulnerable cohorts, the government is transforming employment services to deliver better services for employers and job seekers in the most significant reform in decades. This is particularly important in regional Australia which has tended to experience relatively lower employment rates and participation rates than major cities.

Workforce Australia, the new employment services model, commences on 1 July 2022. Workforce Australia is transforming the government's employment services and improving support for job seekers and employers. This includes a modern digital platform that is designed to become a single front door for all government employment and skills programs and initiatives, and a refreshed and refocussed network of providers to deliver tailored case management.

Workforce Australia centres on helping Australians to find and keep a job, change jobs or create their own job, connect employers with job seekers, and access to an enhanced network of providers. Underpinned by a digital and data ecosystem, the new model reduces red tape, increases employer engagement, promotes personal responsibility by job seekers, maintains mutual obligations, and will improve alignment with skills and training.

Regional employers will benefit from the digital platform that will streamline recruitment and decrease the time to fill vacancies by delivering better connections to job seekers and supporting improved matching, pre-screening and validation of job applications.

The government will also provide \$10.7 million to encourage and support employers and job seekers to engage with Workforce Australia, including through the new digital platform.

Building workforce capability

Building on the six-month trial of the measure included in the 2021–22 MYEFO, regional Australians will also benefit from the government extending the *Career Advice Access* pilot for a further six months within the digital services offering in the new Workforce Australia employment program, extending the provision of career guidance to job seekers aged 25 and over. Extending the career guidance service will ensure all digital job seekers, including those in regional, rural and remote locations, have up-to-date, accurate advice about career options, including in relation to emerging workforce opportunities.

The government will invest \$42.1 million over four years to deliver *ReBoot*, a new pre-employment program to help an estimated 5,000 young people aged 15 to 24. The program will support disadvantaged Australians to overcome obstacles to find work.

The government will provide \$3.2 million to extend the *Time to Work Employment Service* program for 12 months to provide continued in-prison pre-employment services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners.

Support for local labour markets

The government will expand the eligibility for access to the Local Recovery Fund under the *Local Jobs Program* to include job seekers self-managing through digital services in Workforce Australia from 1 July 2022. This builds on the 2021–22 Budget measure to expand the *Local Jobs Program* to 51 employment regions across Australia and extend the program for three years from 30 June 2022 to 30 June 2025. The program develops tailored workforce solutions at the local level to accelerate reskilling, upskilling and employment pathways.

As part of the 2021–22 MYEFO, the government provided \$74.7 million over four years from 2021–22 for the expansion and extension of the *Launch into Work* program to 30 June 2028. The expansion will support a larger number of registered job seekers into employment, and support the workforce needs of industries experiencing strong growth in entry-level employment, including in regional areas.

The government provided \$3.8 million in funding in the 2021–22 MYEFO to strengthen compliance action and job matching, helping job seekers into employment and alleviating labour and skills shortages in their local areas, including in regional Australia.

The government will also invest a further \$1.7 million in 2022–23 to extend the *AgMove* pilot program to 31 December 2022, which supports relocation of job seekers and temporary visa holders to regional Australia to boost the seasonal horticultural workforce.

Current Initiatives

Investing in early childhood education

Building on its longstanding commitment to supporting access to preschool, including in regional and remote areas, the Australian Government is providing \$2 billion in funding over five years from 2021–22, including \$1.9 billion to states and territories, under the new Preschool Reform Agreement. The agreement covers the 2022 to 2025 preschool years and will support continued universal access to at least 15 hours of preschool each week (600 hours per year) for children in the year before they start school.

The new agreement will ensure that all children benefit from Commonwealth funding regardless of the setting they attend. It also aims to improve preschool enrolment and attendance as well as outcomes for children.

Improving affordability and access to child care

Australians in regional and remote areas will benefit from the government providing record funding through the child care system, with \$11 billion estimated to be spent in 2022–23, including \$10.7 billion in *Child Care Subsidy* (CCS) expenditure.

Announced as part of the 2021–22 Budget, the government's higher CCS for families with multiple children is supporting Australian families by reducing out-of-pocket expenses for those families who currently pay the most – those with multiple children aged five or under.

On 7 March 2022, CCS rates for families using care for two or more children aged five years or under increased by 30 percentage points for their second child and any younger children, to a maximum rate of 95 per cent. These changes benefit Australians families, including those in regional and remote areas, and reduce the workforce disincentives faced by these families.

CCCF grants will provide \$432.5 million over the next four years to child care services in vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. In 2022–23, there are 824 services of which 403 services are in regional and remote Australia, receiving 65 per cent of CCCF funding.

The government allocated around \$3.2 billion to support early childhood education and care services during COVID-19. The government has also provided additional allowable absences for families and services are able to waive a family's gap fee and claim *Child Care Subsidy* in prescribed circumstances.

On 9 March 2022, the government announced a \$10,000 *Flood Support Payment* for services that had to close for eight or more days during the February–March 2022 New South Wales and Queensland floods.

Schools funding

The government continues to provide record needs-based funding to schools. The government will provide a record of \$25.3 billion in 2022, and \$318.9 billion over 2018 to 2029 under the government's *Quality Schools Package* for recurrent funding to Australian schools allocated on the basis of need. Recurrent funding for schools includes a loading which provides additional funding for schools in regional and remote locations, in recognition of the additional costs of educating students in regional and remote schools. The loading is based on a school's Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia score – a measure of the remoteness of accessibility of every location in Australia, as a percentage of the Schooling Resource Standard funding amount and the school's size loading. Additionally, \$217 million over 2020–2029 of the *Choice and Affordability Fund* is quarantined to specifically support non-government schools in regional and remote locations.

Supporting Indigenous students from regional and remote Australia

The government is supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students from predominantly remote and very remote areas to access school education and enable boarding providers to best support the wellbeing and engagement of students. Funding of \$16.6 million in 2021–22 was provided in the 2021–22 Budget through the National Indigenous Australians Agency to assist boarding providers with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students during the COVID-19 recovery period.

Supporting Australia's teacher workforce

The government invested \$9.8 million over four years in the 2021–22 Budget to improve the quality of teaching to lift school and student performance, including in regional, rural and remote areas, with a focus on current and emerging areas of need. This includes \$5.8 million for the Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection and \$4 million over four years to continue the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students. Ongoing investment for these programs will contribute to building a quality teaching evidence base and help to improve teacher workforce planning and outcomes.

Supporting students' personal and professional development

The government provided \$8.1 million over four years from 2021–22 in the 2021–22 Budget for Together for Humanity to deliver a program to educate students, teachers and parents so they are equipped for diversity, and to foster greater inter-cultural understanding and a sense of belonging. The program operates across Australia, including in regional and remote areas. Students, teachers and parents across Australia will have the opportunity to participate in events and activities as part of the program either face-to-face or through online learning.

The government also provided \$3 million in the 2021–22 Budget to enable people aged 14 to 24 years who require additional assistance to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh International Award over three years (2021–22 to 2023–24). This measure, the *Disadvantaged Youth Program*, provides additional support to young people with disability, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, disadvantaged young people from refugee backgrounds, regional and remote communities, and marginalised youth to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. The government also provided \$1.2 million over four years to co-sponsor the Young Australian of the Year award.

Additional support for Northern Territory schools

The government is providing an additional \$78.5 million in transitional support for Northern Territory Government schools from 2018 to 2027 to support school education. The additional funding is intended to support students in the Northern Territory to

achieve their best, in recognition of the greater challenges they face in comparison to other states and territories.

Good to Great Schools Pilot Program

The 2020-21 Budget provided \$5.8 million over four years from 2020-21 to develop, implement and evaluate a pilot program by Good to Great Schools Australia to support up to 10 remote and very remote schools to expand their *Direct Instruction* literacy program to include numeracy and science.

Arts education

As announced in the 2019-20 Budget, the government is investing in the school-based arts education program *Bell Shakespeare's National Education Program* to provide live theatre performances at schools, professional development opportunities for teachers including a regional teacher mentorship program, and a suite of digital resources aligned to the Australian Curriculum for classrooms. Annually, the program reaches 30,000 students and teachers in regional and remote areas and delivers a minimum of 350 live performances in schools across Australia.

Support for Australia's international education sector

The government continues to support Australia's international education sector which was disrupted by COVID-19.

The government extended regulatory fee relief for education providers, beyond that provided in the previous year's *Higher Education Relief Package*. Innovation funding for eligible independent English language and higher education providers to pivot to online and offshore education delivery, an extension of the *FEE-HELP* loan fee exemption to support non-university higher education providers, and an extra 5,000 short course places to be available in 2021-22 to non-university higher education providers were elements of the package.

Further support for this sector also includes revised cost recovery arrangements for registrations on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students, which commenced on 1 January 2022.

Cost recovery for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) will now commence on 1 January 2023 and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) will start on 1 July 2022.

TEQSA's cost recovery will be phased in over three years and will include reductions to course accreditation fees for providers with less than 5,000 enrolled students (equivalent full-time student load).

These measures provide a platform for education providers, including education providers in regional areas, to broaden their business models and contribute to a strengthened and more sustainable sector.

More job-ready graduates and support for regional Australia

Announced in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, the Job-ready Graduates Package is strengthening the higher education system through better university funding arrangements with targeted investment in areas of national priority, more opportunities for regional, rural and remote students, and stronger links with industry.

The government is providing more than \$400 million over four years from 2020-21 to increase higher education access and attainment for regional Australians and to support higher education providers in regional Australia to grow their local economies.

These measures respond to the recommendations of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy final report and includes:

- \$159.1 million over five years from 2019-20 (and \$43.9 million per year ongoing) for eligible school-leavers from regional or remote areas to apply for a TAP of \$5,000 to assist with the cost of moving closer to their tertiary education institution. This initiative was expanded as announced on 17 December 2021, allowing students from inner regional areas to apply for a \$3,000 payment
- \$146 million over four years from 2020-21 to increase *Commonwealth Grant Scheme* funding for regional university campuses by 3.5 per cent a year
- providing a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) to an eligible higher education provider to all Indigenous students from a regional or remote area
- \$0.7 million over four years from 2019-20 to gain access to Fares Allowance so eligible students can visit their homes and families more often
- \$21 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$76.4 million over 10 years to 2030-31) to strengthen the *Regional University Centres* program by establishing a central support network, evaluation program and additional centres throughout regional Australia. This builds on the \$15 million over four years from 2019-20 for additional Regional University Centres, announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO, and the initial investment of \$24.2 million for 16 Regional University Centres and \$14 million for additional CSPs for students being supported by the Centres, from 2018-19
- \$7.1 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$1.8 million each year ongoing) to create a new *Regional Partnerships Project Pool* to support regional higher education outreach projects. The *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* has also been refocused to provide more support to Indigenous students and students from regional and remote areas

- \$48.8 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$195.4 million to 2030-31) to establish new partnerships between regional universities and other higher education providers or industry to undertake innovative research projects

The *Job-ready Graduates* package also aims to deliver more job-ready graduates in the disciplines and the regions where they are needed most and help drive the nation's economic recovery following COVID-19.

The measures commenced from 1 January 2021 and include:

- expanding access to higher education by increasing the number of CSPs, especially in regional Australia, with an additional 100,000 places provided by 2030. This includes places from funding based on the proportion of students at campuses in regional, high-growth metropolitan and low-growth metropolitan areas. Funding increases each year by 3.5 per cent for regional campuses, 2.5 per cent for campuses located in high-growth metropolitan areas, and 1 per cent for campuses located in low-growth metropolitan areas
- greater flexibility for universities to determine their allocation of CSPs to increase options and pathways for students to higher education
- fairly sharing the costs of higher education between students and taxpayers, with course fees better aligned to teaching costs and lower student contributions in priority areas such as science, teaching, nursing, agriculture and mathematics
- \$800 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$239.9 million per year ongoing) to establish a *National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund* to increase partnerships between universities and industry to ensure more students gain industry experiences and job ready skills
- consolidating funding from existing programs to establish the *Indigenous, Regional and Low SES Attainment Fund*, which will encourage universities to improve higher education attainment among regional, Indigenous and low-socioeconomic status students
- reducing the *FEE-HELP* loan fee for students from 25 per cent to 20 per cent to align with loan fee costs in the vocational education and training sector
- revised indexation for the *Commonwealth Grant Scheme* (CGS) to reflect the Consumer Price Index (CPI)
- *Transition Fund Loading* to support universities to adjust to the new funding arrangements, ensuring that university revenue for Commonwealth supported students is not lower than it would have otherwise been for three years from 2021.

Building on these measures in the 2020-21 Budget, the government announced a further \$903.5 million over four years from 2020-21, with measures benefitting students and universities in regional areas such as:

- reducing the student contribution amounts for students studying units as part of a pathway to qualifications as a Clinical Psychologist or Social Worker
- \$251.8 million over two years from 2020-21 for an additional 50,000 subsidised higher education short course places. This initiative was extended as part of the 2021-22 MYEFO, to allow eligible universities and non-university higher education providers to continue delivery of short courses in 2022
- \$298.5 million over four years from 2020-21 for an additional 12,000 CSPs in national priority areas to further meet demand for higher education
- \$0.4 million over four years from 2020-21 (including \$0.3 million in capital funding), and \$1.2 million over 10 years to 2029-30, to ensure students maintain a reasonable completion rate and do not take on excessive study loads and *FEE-HELP* debt
- extending exemptions for eligible students from paying loan fees under the *FEE-HELP* and *VET Student Loans* (VSL) programs to December 2021. This exemption was extended in the 2021-22 MYEFO, subject to legislation
- expanding the Tuition Protection Service from 1 January 2021 to provide services to full-fee paying domestic higher education students, as well as waiving the 2020 *HELP* and VSL Tuition Protection Service from 1 January 2021. This exemption was extended in the 2021-22 MYEFO to waive levies in 2021.

The government also guaranteed *Commonwealth Grant Scheme* (CGS) payments for higher education providers from 2021 to 2023 using pre-Job ready Graduates CPI rates at a cost of \$238.9 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$2 billion over 10 years to 2029-30). In addition, the government has legislated to ensure CGS funding caps will be at or above previous years' levels from 2025.

Central Coast Health and Wellbeing Precinct

Announced in the 2017-18 Budget, the government is providing \$12.5 million over six years from 2017-18 for the Central Coast Health and Medical Campus of the University of Newcastle, to assist with the establishment of the Central Coast Medical School at Gosford Hospital. The funding builds on the government's 2016 election commitment to provide \$32.5 million capital support for the construction and fit-out of the new Central Coast Health and Wellbeing precinct.

This measure is supporting jobs and increasing higher education accessibility and participation in the region. The medical school precinct will build regional health workforce capacity and provide access to world class facilities to meet the health care demands of the Central Coast's growing and ageing population.

Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships

The *Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships* program has completed five rounds of scholarships since 2018 to support 4,180 students (including through 50 Creative Arts scholarships) from regional and remote Australia to study undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational education courses from Certificate IV to PhD level. The scholarships are valued at up to \$18,000 each and assist scholarship recipients with the costs of study for the duration of their course. A further \$500 is available to scholarship recipients to support an internship. Round Six of this program includes more than 1,000 scholarships to be awarded for study commencing in 2022.

The program, announced in 2016, aims to improve education opportunities and attainment for regional and remote Australians by supporting students undertaking higher level tertiary study.

Promoting regional study – Destination Australia Program

Announced in the 2019-20 Budget, the government builds diversity in Australia's international education sector and supports students' access to study in the regions through the *Destination Australia Program*. This incentive offers scholarships worth up to \$15,000 per student to incentivise both domestic and international students to study in regional Australia.

Ensuring all parts of Australia share in the benefits of tertiary education is essential in building vibrant communities and promoting better outcomes for individuals. This program supports up to 1,200 domestic and international students per annum with the costs of studying at a higher education or VET campus in regional and remote areas. This encourages domestic and international students to consider alternative study locations, helping to spread the economic and other benefits of Australia's higher education sector to more regional communities.

Central Queensland School of Mining and Manufacturing – Gladstone and Rockhampton

The government is to provide \$30 million over three years from 2020-21 to the School of Mines and Manufacturing at Central Queensland University. The project supports construction of two new purpose-built facilities at the Rockhampton School of Mining and Gladstone School of Manufacturing and for the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment to support the skill training, education, research and workforce development needs of the mining, resources and manufacturing sectors. Construction of the schools

are also expected to create a range of jobs, directly benefiting the Gladstone and Rockhampton regions. This measure was announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO.

Tim Fischer Scholarship

The Tim Fischer Scholarship is offered to scholars from regional or rural backgrounds. Announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO, the government provided \$10 million in 2019-20 to the General Sir John Monash Foundation to establish the Bob Hawke John Monash Scholarship and the Tim Fischer John Monash Scholarship programs. Scholarships have been awarded from 2020 for postgraduate scholars to study at a leading international university. Funding is held in perpetuity by the Foundation, with scholarships to be awarded annually.

Higher Education Loan Program – encouraging Early Childhood Teachers to work in very remote areas

The government is providing \$2.4 million over four years from 2019-20 to extend the removal of *HELP* debt for teachers working in very remote locations of Australia to include early childhood teachers. From 2019, *HELP* debts for early childhood teachers will be extinguished after four years of employment in very remote locations of Australia. Additionally, indexation on *HELP* debt will no longer accrue for early childhood teachers while working in these locations.

This measure was announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO and builds on the 2019-20 Budget measure *Closing the Gap refresh – Indigenous Youth Education Package* to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to quality education.

Skills and training

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Australia's economy and on the workforce in all states and territories, including in regional communities.

The government will ensure continued support for students and job seekers through amendments to the delivery of existing skills and training programs in response to COVID-19, including extending the termination date of the *Foundation Skills for Your Future Remote Community Pilot*. This initiative is to trial new place-based support for adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills training in remote communities has been extended by 12 months to 30 June 2023. Four unique pilot programs are being delivered in four remote communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and northern Queensland.

The government is providing \$29.6 million for the National Careers Institute (NCI) to support ongoing work. The NCI will provide people, including those in regional and remote Australia, with access to personalised, authoritative and accurate careers information to enable them to actively manage their career pathways irrespective of

their age or career stage. The NCI will also promote partnerships between industry and education and training providers through activities such as its *Partnerships Grant Program*.

The government has also provided additional support to the NCI to deliver dedicated personalised advice to young people about the training and employment options that suit their interests and prepares them for the jobs of the future.

Support apprenticeships commencements and completions in the regions

The *Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements* (BAC) program, initially announced in the 2020-21 Budget, supports businesses to engage a new apprentice or trainee, creating opportunities for school leavers and job seekers, especially women, looking to upskill or reskill from across Australia, including those in regional Australia.

The *Completing Apprenticeships Commencements* (CAC) provides transitional support for BAC eligible employers by providing transitional support for the second and third year of an Australian Apprenticeship.

The BAC and CAC are currently supporting 73,245 employers. This has contributed to the record high number of in trade apprentices in training at around 220,000 and total in-training numbers of 352,020 across a range of trade and non-trade occupations, and reflects 238,360 commencements in the 12 months since the BAC commenced. Over 30 per cent of apprentices and trainees supported through the BAC wage subsidy are located in regional and remote areas. We estimate that a similar proportion of apprentices and trainees supported through the CAC wage subsidy will be located in regional and remote areas.

The additional funding provided in this Budget and 2021-22 MYEFO brings the total funding provided through the BAC and CAC to \$5.8 billion, and extends the BAC to 30 June 2022 and the CAC to 30 June 2027.

The government helped businesses keep apprentices and trainees employed through the *Supporting Apprentices and Trainees* wage subsidy, which, as at 28 February 2022, has supported 74,939 employers to keep 152,859 apprentices and trainees in employment. Over 35 per cent of apprentices and trainees supported through the measure are located in regional and remote areas.

Extending and expanding the JobTrainer Fund

Regional Australians will benefit from the extension and expansion of the \$1 billion *JobTrainer Fund*, signed up to by all jurisdictions under the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform. The government provided an additional \$500 million in funding in the 2021-22 Budget to be matched by state and territory governments. The enrolment period was extended to 31 December 2022 and eligibility expanded to include additional select cohorts including aged care workers. This measure will deliver around

163,000 additional free or low-fee training places in areas of skills need, with around 33,000 of these places to support aged care skills needs and around 10,000 places for digital skills courses.

In this Budget, the government is investing a further \$48.5 million over two years from 2022-23, contingent on matched funding from the states, to expand the successful *JobTrainer* program to provide 15,000 free and low-fee trainee places for aged care related qualifications.

This builds on the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update measure *COVID-19 Response Package – JobTrainer Fund – establishment*.

Increasing apprenticeship commencements

The government provided \$2.6 million in 2021-22 for the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) to deliver 5,000 additional Gateway Services to women and provide in-training support services for women commencing in non-traditional trade occupations, including those in regional and remote Australia. These services ensure that prospective apprentices are matched with apprenticeships or traineeship pathways suited to their skills and are supported to undertake their training. This builds on the 2020–21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – boosting apprenticeships wage subsidy*.

In addition, the government will boost regional women's participation in non-traditional trades with funding of \$38.6 million in this Budget to provide additional support for women in non-traditional trade occupations on the Apprenticeships Priority List, in order to boost the level of participation in these roles. This support will include:

- Gateway Services providing personalised advice and information on all aspects of career options and apprenticeship pathways, designed to ensure that prospective apprentices are supported to find a suitable employer
- guaranteed In-Training Support from their Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) for women commencing an apprenticeship in a non-traditional trade occupation. This tailored support will address barriers to retention and completion, and may include a range of services including pastoral care, career and industry mentoring, counselling and mediation, as well as referrals to specialist services
- AASN providers will deliver ongoing peer support and build networks, through specialist mentors across Australia focusing on women in non-traditional trade occupations.

Boosting foundational and digital skills

As part of the Australian Government's commitment to providing stronger support for foundation skills under the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform, in the 2021-22 Budget the government provided \$16.6 million to expand eligibility for, and uncap the number of hours job seekers are able to access within, the *Skills for Education and Employment* (SEE) program. The government has also provided \$2 million to expand the outreach role of the Reading Writing Hotline, and provided \$4 million over two years from 2021-22 to support projects to better incorporate digital skills training for job seekers in the SEE program. The measure has supported more job seekers, including those in regional and remote areas, to improve their language, reading, writing, mathematics and digital skills to boost their employment prospects.

Also in the 2021–22 Budget, the government provided \$10.7 million over three years from 2021-22 to trial up to four industry-led pilots to develop new and innovative pathways to increase the number of Australians with high-level digital skills through cadetships. The cadetships will be in emerging and high technology digital fields, comprising formal and on-the-job training, and will be targeted at cohorts seeking to upskill or cross-skill to adapt to new digitally-advanced employment opportunities.

Supporting women's skills, training and career development

The government provided \$12.2 million over two years from 2021 22, in the 2021-22 Budget, to extend and expand the NCI's *Partnership Grants Program* to provide partnership grants for innovative projects to support women's workforce participation. The measure supports women across Australia, including women in regional and rural areas, to make informed decisions about education and career pathways, and enhance partnerships between industry, employers, schools, and tertiary providers to assist women into further learning and career opportunities.

The government has enhanced the *Mid-Career Checkpoint* program to extend support to a larger target cohort, providing up to \$3,000 to help participants to access accredited training, and extend the pilot to Victoria. The pilot period has been extended to 31 December 2022. The program provides free professional skills and career advice to eligible Australians returning to work after a break to undertake caring responsibilities, with a strong focus on women aged 30 to 45 years, and is expected to support local labour market needs, including in regional areas.

Better careers information for youth

Australians from regional areas benefit from \$7.6 million over two years in the 2021-22 Budget to extend the NCI's 1800 CAREER Information Service, which supports young people aged 15 to 24 years, to 30 June 2023. Government funding has also been provided to extend and expand the NCI's *Partnership Grants Program* to provide partnership grants for projects that target the needs of young people. The NCI provides

careers information and support, to enable Australians to make informed decisions about their education, training, and career pathways.

Energising Tasmania

The *Project Agreement for Energising Tasmania* provides fee-free training and support to ensure Tasmania can train a skilled workforce in current and future priority areas. This includes the *Battery of the Nation* initiative and, more broadly, the renewable energy and related sectors.

Training is available in project and resource management, civil construction, water industry operations, and engineering. Individuals are also eligible for up to \$1,000 per person to cover the costs of non-tuition costs and charges, such as books and materials and student amenity fees, as required by the course.

The agreement was signed on 23 December 2019 and will provide funding of \$16.2 million over five years to 30 June 2023.

Industry Training Hubs

Announced in the 2019-20 Budget, the government is investing \$50.6 million over four years from 2019-20 to trial Industry Training Hubs in 10 regions across Australia. Industry Training Hubs aim to improve opportunities for young people in regions with high youth unemployment, targeting Year 11 and Year 12 students. Each Training Hub will be managed by a full-time Career Facilitator, providing an on-the-ground presence while delivering Training Hub services.

Career Facilitators will work with and encourage young people to build skills and choose occupations in demand in their region, creating better linkages between schools and local industry and repositioning vocational education and training as a first-choice option. Through this work, the Industry Training Hubs will help eliminate persistent high youth unemployment in regional areas.

Industry Training Hubs have been established in: Burnie, Tasmania; Maryborough and Townsville, Queensland; Alice Springs, Northern Territory; Grafton and Gosford, New South Wales; Wanneroo and Armadale, Western Australia; Port Pirie, South Australia; and Shepparton, Victoria.

Commonwealth Scholarships Program for Young Australians

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, the government committed \$8.2 million for the *Commonwealth Scholarships Program* for young Australians to provide up to 400 scholarships over three rounds to support young Australians in regions experiencing high youth unemployment, low rates of economic growth, and low adaptive capacity. The Program is intended to assist young people into VET with strong pathways to jobs in areas of skills need. Scholarships are available in regions aligned to

the Industry Training Hubs. The 2021-22 Budget committed a further \$2.93 million to fund an additional 240 scholarships in a fourth application round.

Supporting youth employment

The government is committed to providing targeted support to improve youth employment outcomes. The youth unemployment rate is higher than for the general population, including in regional Australia.

In the 2021-22 Budget the government provided an additional \$481.2 million over four years to expand and strengthen the successful youth employment services program, *Transition to Work*, to be the dedicated youth employment service for young people needing assistance from a provider in Workforce Australia. *Transition to Work* provides intensive, time-limited assistance to young people aged 15 to 24 years who are at risk of not transitioning into employment or further education. The service will continue to help disadvantaged young people to make positive transitions from school to work by promoting work experience and training participation and providing intensive assistance to young people experiencing multiple barriers to achieving successful labour market participation.

These services benefit disadvantaged young people in regional areas and support regional employers to recruit young employees and access support in implementing youth-focused employment pathways.

Supporting workforce participation

The government is investing \$4.1 million over five years from 2019-20 in the *Career Revive* program to support 90 medium and large businesses, across a diversity of industries and locations, to attract and retain women returning to work after a career break or long period out of the labour force. Following a successful pilot, which provided support to 30 regional businesses, *Career Revive* was expanded in the 2021-22 Budget. Under this program a business consultant works with each participating business to co-design a tailored action plan to help women enter and thrive in the workplace.

Australians in all regions are benefitting from the \$213.5 million investment in the 2021-22 Budget to expand the *Local Jobs Program* to all 51 employment regions around the country, and extend the program until 30 June 2025. Total funding will be \$276.3 million over five years. As part of this expansion, the \$50 million *National Priority Fund* (\$12.5 million per year) has also been established. It will fund innovative initiatives that help address structural or other barriers to employment and/or complement job creation to get Australia jobs seekers into work. The *Local Jobs Program* supports regions to coordinate employment and training solutions at a local level with a focus on reskilling, upskilling and employment. This measure assists job seekers to connect with employment and training opportunities and helps employers to fill job vacancies. In this

Budget, the government will expand eligibility for access to the *Local Recovery Fund* under the *Local Jobs Program* to include job seekers self-managing through digital services in Workforce Australia from 1 July 2022.

Regional Australians will also benefit from \$24.7 million over four years from 2020-21, provided in the 2020-21 Budget, to streamline the successful *Parents Next* program to better support parents to plan and prepare for a return to employment by the time their youngest child reaches school age.

Harvest Trail Services

The government continues to address critical shortfalls in the agricultural sector workforce in regional Australia, in particular through the ongoing demand-driven Harvest Trail Services (HTS), that delivers specialised job placement services for the horticulture industry. \$24.1 million was provided over four years in the 2019-20 Budget to reform HTS and encourage more Australian job seekers to take up seasonal work. As a result, from 1 July 2020, the HTS coverage was expanded from 11 to 16 harvest areas.

The HTS were supplemented by the *AgMove* program, a temporary program to support relocation of job seekers and temporary visa holders to regional Australia to boost the seasonal horticultural workforce.

Support for relocation for ongoing and seasonal work

The Government provided \$17.4 million in the 2020-21 Budget to modify the existing *Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job* program. There are two elements in this measure:

- \$2 million funding from 1 December 2020, to remove the 12-month waiting period and provide immediate access to relocation support for eligible job seekers who move to take up an ongoing job
- \$15.4 million in the 2020 21 Budget for the *AgMove* initiative to support the agriculture sector, by making relocation assistance available to job seekers and temporary visa holders who temporarily relocate to take up short-term agricultural work in Australian regions.

The government has subsequently announced additional funding, including in this Budget, to support the extension of *AgMove* to 31 December 2022.

Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio works to make Australia stronger, safer and more prosperous. The portfolio comprises the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade), Export Finance Australia (EFA), the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), Tourism Australia, and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), and the Simplified Trade System (SIS) Implementation Taskforce (Taskforce).

COVID-19 has caused significant disruptions to people, to health systems and economies around the world. DFAT continues to assist whole-of-government responses to COVID-19. Australia is relying heavily on DFAT's foreign affairs, trade and development capabilities to protect and promote Australia's national interests. The portfolio is supporting COVID-19 vaccine access and roll out in our immediate region, the Pacific and Southeast Asia, helping to purchase and safely distribute COVID-19 vaccines.

The Australian Government, including through Australia's embassies, high commissions and consulates around the world, continue to work assisting Australians overseas impacted by COVID-19.

Trade, tourism and investment remain crucial to Australia's economic prosperity. The portfolio has continued to work through all channels to reduce barriers to trade for Australian exporters and importers; and to assist businesses in regional areas to pursue commercial opportunities overseas. Through EFA, the portfolio provides financial expertise and solutions to help regional businesses take advantage of overseas export and investment opportunities. The portfolio also develops marketing campaigns to attract tourists to Australia, including into regional areas.

The portfolio negotiates trade and investment agreements and supports the effective implementation and utilisation of Australia's Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). Australia currently has 15 FTAs in force with 26 countries, providing new trade and investment opportunities for regional businesses. Australia is seeking to expand the current FTA network by negotiating and implementing new agreements, including with the United Kingdom and the European Union. Australia's FTA network opens new export opportunities for Australia's producers and makes the overseas-sourced inputs used in Australian production more affordable. Australia's FTAs also deliver a greater range of goods and services to Australian consumers at more competitive prices. The government will continue to promote awareness and use of FTAs through active engagement with stakeholders.

The government has launched Australia's first Services Exports Action Plan to support services businesses, including services exporters from rural and regional Australia, gain greater export opportunities and remain internationally competitive. DFAT leads the

implementation of this whole-of-government initiative in partnership with the services industry. This Action Plan is a practical tool that serves to uncover and highlight the barriers Australian services exporters face domestically and internationally, prioritise actions by governments, regulators, and industry bodies to address these barriers, and increase much needed transparency on the various actions underway to address those barriers. Transparency is provided through www.services-exports.gov.au.

Drawing on market insights from our global network, DFAT continues to deliver, in partnership with the Export Council of Australia and Austrade, virtual Global Market Insights seminars, to promote market expansion and diversification opportunities to businesses, including regional businesses. There have been 1,449 participants in over eight seminars, with at least a third of participants from regional Australia.

As a further contribution to Australia's economic recovery, DFAT is running the third in a series of capacity-building programs for economic development officers across rural and regional Australia. In partnership with the Regional Australia Institute, the program guides the participants through the development of international trade, tourism and investment attraction strategies.

The Australian Government also works to secure and maintain access for our agricultural products under other countries' technical and biosecurity regulations. The government continues to lead whole-of-government efforts to remove non-tariff barriers, assisting exporters in accessing new markets and further expanding into existing ones. Throughout COVID-19, the government has worked closely with key trading partners to minimise the impact of, and remove, export restrictions on important supplies.

In response to COVID-19, the Australian Government launched the development strategy *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*, which has a greater focus on working with our near neighbours, especially in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, to support health security, economic recovery and stability in our region. Australia reshaped its development program to meet the profoundly changed needs of the region, including pivoting existing investments to respond to COVID-19. A safe, healthy and prosperous region is firmly in Australia's national interest and will provide flow-on benefits to regional Australia.

The portfolio is also supporting rural and regional Australia by facilitating access to reliable and productive workforce through the *Pacific Labour Scheme and the Seasonal Worker Programme*. COVID-19 has presented unprecedented challenges to labour mobility and significant resources have been dedicated to ensuring Pacific workers have been available to work in critical industries including agriculture, horticulture, tourism and aged care in rural and regional locations.

As at 31 December 2021, the Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio employed 5,027 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,761 staff (75 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 306 staff (6 per cent) in other capital cities and 960 staff (19 per cent) in all other locations.

The portfolio also has staff in each state and territory, working from offices in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Hobart, and Thursday Island and Austrade has offices in Wollongong and Newcastle.

The portfolio, as part of the *TradeStart*, also maintains a significant number of contracted staff in 25 regional and 15 metro locations, where they work alongside staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* to understand local issues and support the needs of local communities and businesses.

New Initiatives

Strengthening Australia's Agriculture and Primary Industry Workforce

The Australian Government will provide \$87.2 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 (and \$23.4 million per year ongoing from 2025-26) to introduce the *Australian Agriculture Visa* program to respond to workforce shortages in the agricultural and primary industry sectors. The program allows workers to take up opportunities in rural and regional Australia across a range of agricultural industries, including meat processing and the fishery and forestry sectors. The establishment of the program delivers on the government's commitment to put in place a broad ranging visa to support the long-term future of Australia's agricultural and primary industries. It provides a basis for the ongoing growth of Australia's primary industries as they strive to reach \$100 billion in value by 2030. The *Agriculture Visa Program (AgVisa)* is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade leveraging its experience with the successful *Pacific Labour Mobility (PALM)* scheme. The Department of Home Affairs is responsible for processing all visa and sponsorship applications, as well as providing operation support with the Australian Border Force to ensure ongoing visa integrity. The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment is responsible for ensuring that the needs of relevant primary industry sector are being met. The Fair Work Ombudsman is responsible for ensuring employee protections and upholding worker's rights.

Critical Minerals Facility

On 28 September 2021, the government announced the creation of a \$2 billion financing facility for Australian critical minerals projects. The facility will help to fill private finance gaps in critical minerals projects and is part of the government's wider *Critical Minerals Strategy*. Growing Australia's critical minerals sector will help secure the vital supplies of resources needed to drive the new energy economy and will support resources jobs of the future in regional areas.

The \$2 billion Critical Minerals Facility will be managed by Export Finance Australia and report to the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment. It will operate on the National Interest Account for 10 years or until finance equivalent to \$2 billion has been provided.

Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement

The Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement was signed on 17 December 2021. The government is now working to bring the Agreement into force so that both countries secure the maximum benefit from it. The Agreement contains commercially significant commitments that will support farmers and regional Australia by eliminating tariffs on over 99 per cent of Australian goods exports to the UK. For example, producers across the country will benefit from immediate elimination of tariffs, on produce, food and beverages including wine, short and medium grain rice, honey, nuts, and olive oil. Other gains include immediate access to duty free transitional quotas for key agriculture products, including beef and sheep meat, sugar, wheat and barley, and dairy, with eventual tariff elimination. The Agreement will also further support agriculture and agribusiness in regional Australia by outlining visa pathways to facilitate mobility for those involved in agricultural work.

Simplified Trade System

The Simplified Trade System (STS) is a whole-of-government microeconomic reform agenda to simplify and streamline Australia's cross-border trade system. The whole-of-government STS Implementation Taskforce (Taskforce) was established on 1 July 2021 and reports directly to the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment. The Taskforce is leading this agenda with key agencies. The STS agenda will have a positive impact on regional Australia by reducing trade and border related regulatory costs and facilitating trade. Many Australian traders are based in regional Australia, especially agricultural exporters.

The government has committed \$187.1 million over four years in the 2022-23 Budget to deliver a world class cross-border trade system for Australia. This includes:

- \$26.9 million for the Taskforce, Australian Border Force and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment to develop a second pass business case for a 'Tell Us Once' Trade System to simplify trade interactions with government
- \$11.7 million to expand the Trade Information Service to cover approximately 6,300 products across priority export sectors.

This continued investment by government in the STS agenda will support making trading easier and less costly for close to 200,000 Australian businesses through improved user experiences for businesses, simplified regulations, and more modern digital systems.

Other Budget STS measures include proposals to: build a technical foundation for modernising Australia’s core trade systems for the new ‘Tell Us Once’ trade system, further investment improved delivery of export regulatory services for agricultural export under the *Digital Services to Take Farmers to Markets*, and a review of the tariff concession framework to cut cross-border trade costs for Australian businesses. These will be led by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Australian Border Force, the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.

This builds on the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2021-22 (MYEFO) Australian Trade System Support* package announced by the government on 16 December 2021, which committed \$154.5 million over four years to support Australian exporters, modernise Australia’s trade system and streamline border clearance services. Austrade received \$31.7 million as part of this package, with \$17 million to provide advisory services for Australian exporters to adapt to evolving global market environments and \$14.6 million for the Taskforce to:

- improve alignment across whole-of-government cross-border processes
- develop a whole-of-government cross-border data sharing by default framework
- that enables business to ‘Tell Us Once’
- support broader coordination and implementation of the STS agenda.

Other MYEFO STS initiatives included: developing a biosecurity self-service portal, a digital verification platform to facilitate cross-border trade and paperless trading, improvements to customs processes, digitising shipping information management, cultivating Australia’s agricultural traceability systems, and further development of the biosecurity targeting and enhanced processing system. These initiatives were led by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Australian Border Force, and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.

Backpacker and Student Campaign

The government committed to \$3 million in 2021-22 for Austrade to continue to foster the Australia tourism industry, focusing on recovery tourism marketing initiatives to promote international and domestic tourism. Announced on 18 January 2022, these initiatives aim to drive international visitation and to protect Australia’s reputation as an international tourism destination. Prior to COVID-19, the visitor economy saw a 66 per cent growth rate driving regional growth and directly or indirectly supporting 1 in 12 jobs and 1 in 8 businesses.

These activities will include a domestic and international backpacker and student campaign, International Media Hosting, Australian Tourism Exchange Open for Business, and a regional tourism events and promotion package.

Additional funding to attract International Visitors

On 22 March 2022, the government announced it will provide an additional \$60 million over two years from 2022-23, to bring back international visitors to regional areas hardest hit by international border closures. The package includes \$15 million for Tourism Tropical North Queensland and \$45 million for Tourism Australia to help get international tourist back to regional destinations affected by the loss of international tourism.

The funding for Tourism Tropical North Queensland will help bring tourists back to North Queensland and promote the Great Barrier Reef. The funding for Tourism Australia will support advertising in crucial international markets to support regions most reliant on international tourists, and direct marketing partnerships with tourism trade wholesalers, airlines and media to drive the return of international visitors to regional areas.

Current Initiatives

Strengthening our engagement in the World Trade Organization

The multilateral rules-based trading system, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core, is critical for the next stage of our COVID-19 economic recovery and future prosperity. Part of the government's funding 2021-22 Budget measure *Enhanced Trade and Strategic Capability* (\$198.2 million over four years and \$33 million ongoing) is helping to strengthen Australia's engagement in the WTO, including reform of the dispute settlement system and the negotiation of new trade rules in the national interest, particularly for producers and exporters in regional Australia.

These resources are also supporting Australia's continued use of the WTO's dispute settlement system to address trade disagreements. Enforcing existing and new rules in the WTO helps Australian businesses in regional areas that rely on a stable, predictable rules-based system for global trade and allows Australian businesses to compete fairly in markets around the world.

Agri-Business Expansion Initiative

The *Agri-Business Expansion Initiative* (ABEI) is a targeted measure to help Australian farming, forestry and fishing exporters expand and diversify their export markets and support agri-food sectors that have been most impacted by trade disruptions. The government announced the \$72.7 million package on 23 December 2020, to be delivered over two and a half years from 1 January 2021 until June 2023.

The agri-business industry operates outside the metropolitan regions and underpins rural economies. The initiative delivers services to exporters across diverse sub-sectors of the industry including, but not limited to, grains, seafood, wine, forestry, horticulture, dairy, red meat, packaged food, cotton and wool. ABEI reaches and benefits exporters in every Australian state and territory.

The ABEI is helping Australian farmers, fishers, and agri-food producers understand and mitigate risks in an increasingly uncertain trading environment. The initiative builds on the Australian Government's work to expand FTAs and market access for Australia's globally competitive and market-based agriculture sector.

The ABEI is being jointly delivered by Austrade and the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (DAWE). Austrade aims to deliver scaled-up support to over 2,000 agri-food exporters each year through Austrade's export services, including:

- one-on-one exporter services to 800 clients per annum
- group services delivered to approximately 1,500 clients per annum through a variety of mechanisms including 'one to many' and 'one too few' events, digital platforms and Austrade's Advisory Centre.

As at 31 December 2021, ABEI has achieved:

- 452 export outcomes — lead to \$418.9 million of export sales
- 694 agri-food exporters have received 'customised services'
- over 2,000 agri-food exporters have participated in 'group services'
- over 1,900 customised services have been provided to agri-food exporters
- over 6,000 food and agribusiness users have logged onto Austrade's digital services giving them access over 3,500 market profiles and intelligence reports.

These services have been designed and delivered in conjunction with industry organisations to provide targeted advice and events such as trade missions to help exporters expand their markets.

The balance of the program is being delivered by DAWE and includes expansion of the *Agricultural Trade and Market Access* program, expansion to the short-term Agriculture Counsellor network, investment in enhanced scientific and technical market access capability and improvements in the dissemination of practical market intelligence.

Business Events Grants Program

The business events sector saw almost a 100 per cent loss in revenue due to COVID-19. The program provides between \$10,000 and \$250,000 to cover up to 50 per cent of costs incurred in participating at pre-approved business to business events as exhibitors, buyers or sellers. 355 eligible events were published on the Schedule of Approved events. At the time of applications closing, the program was oversubscribed with 1,739 eligible applications requesting \$56,803,797.

In August 2021, the government committed an additional \$6 million for those eligible but unfunded applicants. A further extension was announced in September 2021 to allow postponed events to reschedule until 30 June 2023. There are currently 107 postponed events scheduled for 2022-23. As at February 2022, approximately \$54.1 million has been paid to 1,656 eligible applicants, while 83 applicants have withdrawn or were ineligible. 72 per cent of grantees are located in regional areas of Australia (with metropolitan being defined as Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne).

Export Market Development Grants

Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) is the key Australian Government financial assistance scheme for exporters. The government invested, \$157.9 million in 2021-22 and \$157.9 million in 2022-23 in EMDG which has been operating since 1974. The program is administered by Austrade and provides financial assistance to small and medium-sized exporters (SME) for marketing expenses related to promoting their Australian products and services offshore. Grantees are able to access up to eight years of assistance.

In 2020-21 under the reimbursement program, 906 rural and regional businesses applied for EMDG, representing around 18 per cent of all applicants. These rural and regional businesses represent 65 different industries and bring significant benefits to their regions, through export earnings and employment. Austrade estimates rural and regional EMDG grantees delivered \$781 million in exports and provided over 11,500 regional jobs in 2020-21.

From 1 July 2021, the EMDG scheme was reoriented to a more traditional grants program. The program has been simplified and streamlined to make it easier for businesses to apply. It also gives upfront funding certainty to eligible SMEs through a three-tier system, with each tier providing a different level of support as they grow their export markets. The three tiers provide grants for those exporting for the first time, for those expanding, and for those making a strategic shift in their export activities, including to diversify into new markets. Funding agreements are available over two years in Tier One and over three years in Tiers Two and Three.

Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

The Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA) entered into force on 5 July 2020. The IA-CEPA secures preferential access for Australian exporters for a range of key agricultural goods. For example, cattle producers in Northern Australia are benefitting from reduced tariffs on live cattle and beef. Under IA-CEPA, agricultural products – including sugar – have improved access into the Indonesian market and reduced tariffs. In the financial year that IA-CEPA entered into force (2020-21), the value of Australian raw sugar exports rose by 32.6 per cent.

The Government is rolling out a \$40 million five-year economic cooperation program *Katalis* – to support IA-CEPA implementation until 2025. Through *Katalis*, both governments are working together to help businesses identify and start new investments to create jobs, enhance inclusion, and increase prosperity in both countries. The program is currently identifying opportunities for Australian businesses in the electric vehicle industry, as well as supporting an Australian health provider to expand its presence in Indonesia.

Regionally-based and agricultural businesses seeking to diversify their export markets through opportunities in Indonesia will benefit from the Blueprint for Trade and Investment with Indonesia, which was launched by the Trade Minister in 2021. Complementing IA-CEPA, the Blueprint is designed to further strengthen commercial ties by providing practical and strategic guidance for Australian businesses to deepen their trade and investment with Indonesia.

Pacific Labour Mobility

In recognition of the contribution that Pacific and Timor-Leste workers make to regional and rural industries, and in light of the beneficial impacts for our partners in the region, the government agreed a range of initiatives over the past 12 months.

On 6 August 2021, the government announced it would double the number of Pacific workers in Australia under the *Pacific Labour Scheme* and the *Seasonal Worker Programme*. Strong progress has been made with more than 20,000 Pacific and Timorese workers in Australia at the end of January 2022, up from 12,500 in August 2021. Additional support has been provided to strengthen participating countries' ability to recruit and mobilise workers and to build stronger links with employers in Australia. Tailored support for Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu is helping to boost their sending capacity and engagement with the Pacific labour schemes. Workers have been recruited into new high-demand sectors including meatworks and aged care.

On 23 November 2021, the government announced the next stage of reforms to the *Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme* (PALM). The *Seasonal Worker Programme* and *Pacific Labour Scheme* will be consolidated and replaced by an improved PALM scheme. This announcement built on the government's previous announcement of

14 September 2021, which launched the PALM scheme brand and offered added flexibilities, expanded access to the programs, additional support to boost worker arrivals, and bolstered worker welfare measures. The changes follow an extensive public consultation process and responds to stakeholder calls for a consolidated, improved and more efficient Pacific worker scheme to benefit employers, workers, and participating countries.

COVID-19 Response Package – tourism support – continued

The government will provide \$58.6 million over two years from 2021-22 to continue support for the Australian tourism sector as part of the government's response to COVID-19. This measure was announced on 6 October 2021, and builds on the 2021-22 previous COVID-19 support measures. Because regional Australia has a greater reliance on tourism than the major cities, this funding would have had a particularly positive effect on regional jobs and growth opportunities.

National Tourism Icons Program

The *National Tourism Icons* is a \$50 million program involving five regional infrastructure projects. In Queensland, \$8 million is being provided for the Wangetti Trail, in New South Wales \$7.5 million for the Northern Rivers Rail Trail, in Western Australia \$17.2 million for Rottnest Island, in Victoria \$10.1 million for Sovereign Hill and in Tasmania \$7.2 million for Freycinet National Park.

The funding to develop these iconic experiences will provide a catalyst to drive international and domestic tourism to regional Australia and boost local communities by creating jobs and diversifying regional economies. State and territory governments are providing varying levels of matched funding.

COVID-19 has led to delays in all five projects. The Prime Minister approved a six-month extension to the program end date from 30 June 2022 to 31 December 2022. All projects are expected to be completed by 31 December 2022.

National Experience Content Initiative

Tourism Australia continues to roll out its *National Experience Content Initiative* (NECI) aimed at supporting tourism businesses across Australia in their recovery and driving increased visitation by helping them to better market their experiences and attractions.

The NECI provides a suite of new visual imagery for up to 1,300 tourism experiences from around 57 regions across Australia to ensure that operator's marketing materials and online product listings stand out in search results and are booked more often by domestic and international travellers.

Health

The health and wellbeing of Australians living in regional, remote and very remote parts of the country remains a core priority for the Australian Government. In 2022-23, the government is delivering on its commitment to ensuring equitable access to Australia's world class health system regardless of where one lives.

Continued modernisation and investment into Medicare underpins the success of the Australian health care system. It plays a fundamental role in providing accessible and affordable health care to all Australians, regardless of their circumstances or where they live. The broad availability of telehealth through Medicare, following the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, is the most significant reform since Medicare's introduction. It has improved access to all types of health care and removed the obstacle of distance and remoteness for many Australians to reach the care they need, when they need it, throughout the pandemic.

From 1 January 2022, Medicare telehealth services have been permanently retained, assisting many Australians, including those living in rural areas, to access care when they need it – which was not previously universally available, particularly for primary care services. This is the key measure in our *Primary Health Care 10-Year Plan* to date.

The Australian Government is implementing a further range of measures to support Australians in regional, rural and remote areas to access healthcare in the 2022-23 Budget. From 1 November 2022, improved access to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) services will occur in regional, rural and remote areas through expanding Medicare funded MRI services and removing the longstanding equipment eligibility requirements. The government is also providing support for aeromedical services that offer critical connections to health services, regardless of the distance from other medical services through a commitment to an historic 10-Year Strategic Partnership and funding to the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), CareFlight and Little Wings. In addition, the government has extended funding for four years to Heart of Australia to operate five mobile health clinics in Queensland, allowing Heart of Australia to provide outreach services to 32 communities across regional, rural and remote Queensland.

The government continues to invest in measures to support and build the nation's health workforce, with a strong focus on supporting regional and rural Australia. This will support regional, rural and remote areas grow the number of local doctors, nurses and allied health workers.

In the 2022-23 Budget, the government will invest \$150.4 million to build on measures to better manage the supply of health graduates for regional, remote and rural area. The government will fund medical schools to deliver the full medical school program at rural campuses. The government is also working to encourage eligible doctors and nurse practitioners to live and work in rural, remote and very remote Australia.

In the 2021–22 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO), the government provided \$19.9 million over four years to eliminate outstanding *Higher Education Loan Program* (HELP) debts for eligible doctors and nurse practitioners. The government also continued to support training for General Practitioners (GPs) to grow our health workforce.

In line with the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, the government is committed to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. \$4.3 billion is being invested through the *Indigenous Australians' Health Programme* over four years, including \$336 million announced with the release of the *Closing the Gap Implementation Plan* in July 2021 to improve infrastructure in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, and to improve healthy birthweight outcomes. In addition, \$781.1 million was invested through the 2021–22 Budget, predominantly to improve aged care and mental health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These measures will be designed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising the specific needs and circumstances for those living in regional and remote areas.

Building on the government's record \$2.3 billion investment in mental health in the 2021–22 Budget, there are additional targeted measures in the 2022–23 Budget focused on strengthening and improving mental health and suicide prevention services in regional, rural and remote Australia. This includes providing \$42.7 million to establish targeted regional initiatives for suicide prevention led by new suicide prevention regional response leaders across all 31 Primary Health Networks; \$8.6 million to establish the *National Closing the Gap Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Mental Health) Policy Partnership*, which will advise on ways to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental ill-health and suicides, including support to regional, rural and remote Indigenous communities; and \$8.5 million over three years from 2022–23 for the *Red Dust* program to provide culturally appropriate support in remote Northern Territory communities. The government is also investing \$60.7 million in mental health workforce measures, including to encourage more skilled mental health professionals to work in rural and remote areas, improving the distribution of the workforce and ultimately enhancing access to mental health services for Australians living in these areas.

The Australian Government is continuing to focus on increasing support for the aged care sector, through our response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, including in regional and remote Australia. In the 2022–23 Budget, the government will invest \$37.6 million to support all aged care providers, regardless of location, to enhance the training of their nursing staff to improve infection, prevention and control capabilities to limit the spread of infectious diseases. The government will also invest \$50.4 million to build foundational capability for residential aged care providers to take the lead in delivering vaccine services, and provide vital protection to residents and workers and other visitors from the potential effects of combined COVID-19 and influenza outbreaks.

The government's health care response to COVID-19, including the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine, has kept Australians in regional and remote locations safe and supported. General Practitioner led Respiratory Clinics (GPRCs) have provided in excess of 2.75 million respiratory assessments and 2.4 million tests to people coming from 99.8 per cent of all postcodes. The *Remote Point of Care Testing* (POCT) program provides POCT for over 150 rural and remote communities. This builds on \$183.6 million provided by the government for the *Living with COVID* package and the ongoing support for the COVID-19 vaccine roll out.

The government is committed to support the health of Australians who have been impacted by the recent floods in New South Wales and Queensland. \$31.2 million will be invested over two years to provide mental health support, to ensure immediate and longer term services are available for individuals, families and communities impacted by the disaster and to support communities to recover and build resilience. A further \$4.7 million will also be provided to ensure primary care services are engaged directly in the emergency response and recovery at the local level.

As at 31 December 2021, the Health Portfolio employed 7,695 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 6,535 staff (85 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 1,153 staff (15 per cent) in other capital cities and 7 staff (0.09 per cent) in regional areas.

New Initiatives

Guaranteeing Medicare and Primary Care

Ongoing telehealth

The government provided \$106 million over four years from 2021-22 to permanently retain Medicare telehealth services that were introduced in response to COVID-19. This measure was implemented on 1 January 2022, and is the centrepiece of action under the *Primary Health Care 10-Year Plan*.

Telehealth services are available for GPs, nurse practitioners, midwives, nurses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners, specialists and allied health professionals. Primary care telehealth services have continued largely unchanged with the reintroduction of specific Medicare items for GP telephone consultations longer than 20 minutes for patients in Modified Monash Model (MM) 6 to 7 regions. Ongoing medical specialist and consultant physician telehealth services have been consolidated, with ongoing video and telephone consultations available nationally, replacing the video consultations introduced in 2011, targeted to patients living outside major cities.

Throughout the COVID-19 response, Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) telehealth items have helped maintain access to essential health care services for people across Australia. The response to the Omicron wave of the pandemic relied heavily on telehealth

arrangements, allowing the health system to manage a much larger number of lower severity cases in the community, rather than in the hospital system.

Temporary telephone services introduced in July 2021 were extended to 30 June 2023 to support access to GP services for sexual and reproductive health and prescribing of highly specialised drugs. New services for nicotine cessation, including by telehealth, were extended to 31 December 2023 to support the government's commitment to reduce smoking prevalence to under 10 per cent by 2025.

Telehealth has been found to increase accessibility, reduce travel time, and reduce waiting times for patients, leading to increased productivity. Importantly, telehealth also assists many Australians, such as those living in rural and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, and residents of aged care facilities, to access care which may have otherwise been unavailable.

Supporting patient access to Magnetic Resonance Imaging

The Australian Government will invest \$66 million to remove the longstanding magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment eligibility requirements, often referred to as 'licencing', in regional, rural and remote areas from 1 November 2022. From 1 November 2022, patients in regional, rural and remote areas will be able to access Medicare-funded MRI services on any MRI machine located at an accredited practice in a Modified Monash Model (MM) 2 to 7 area that also offers at least x-ray, ultrasound and computed tomography services. Patients will benefit from having increased access to affordable, high quality MRI services closer to home, with lower out-of-pocket costs and reduced travel times to obtain Medicare-funded MRI services.

It is estimated that more than 40,000 regional, rural and remote patients per year will benefit from this initiative.

Royal Flying Doctor Service – Strategic Partnership and Additional Funding

The Australian Government will enter into a 10 year Strategic Partnership with the RFDS and is providing additional funding of \$33.3 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 (\$81.1 million over 10 years) for the RFDS to:

- fund up to 25 per cent of the cost of replacing 21 RFDS aircraft over the next 10 years
- increase the RFDS funding base for primary health clinics and emergency primary aeromedical evacuation including indexation.

This builds on the Australian Government's existing annual investment of \$84 million in the RFDS to provide primary aeromedical evacuations, primary health clinics (including Bass Strait Islands), dental and mental health services across Australia in areas beyond normal medical infrastructure and in areas of market failure.

Supporting Indigenous Health in the Northern Territory – Guaranteeing Rescue Services and Emergency Aeromedical Services through Careflight

The Australian Government is providing \$18 million in 2022-23 to fund CareFlight for the purchase and modification of a rescue helicopter and aeromedical jet to increase their rescue capacity in the top end of the Northern Territory.

An additional Careflight rescue helicopter in the Northern Territory will increase Careflight's emergency rescue coverage across the Territory (\$10 million in 2022-23). An additional Careflight aeromedical jet will increase capacity to respond to natural disasters and crisis events (\$8 million in 2022-23).

Careflight is the primary provider of aeromedical services and emergency medical evacuations in the Top End of the Northern Territory and will support Careflight to provide a dedicated aeromedical rapid response capability, including in crisis events such as COVID-19 deployments across northern Australia and the Northern Territory region.

Little Wings – Hospital Flights and Medical Wings Program

The Australian Government is providing \$4.1 million over four years to fund Little Wings to maintain existing services and to deal with the growth in services across New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland. This includes operational funding for five years and one-off funding in 2022-23 to purchase a fourth aircraft.

Little Wings is a non-profit organisation that provides free, professional and safe flight and ground transport services for seriously ill children (*Little Wings Hospital Flights Program*) and outreach services (*Medical Wings Program*).

This funding will support Little Wings to increase its capacity and reach through:

- vital transport services for seriously ill children for treatment in hospitals where the capacity to receive care in local communities does not exist
- medical specialist and health care teams to isolated areas in regional and rural regional communities.

Heart of Australia

The Australian Government is providing \$17.2 million over four years to extend funding to Heart of Australia to operate five mobile health clinics in Queensland. Heart of Australia provides outreach services to 32 communities across regional, rural and remote Queensland. This includes the use of mobile clinics and static clinics to provide specialist medical consultations in cardiology, endocrinology, sleep medicine, psychiatry, geriatric medicine, immunology, general medicine, neurology, gastroenterology and gynaecology.

This measure supports Heart of Australia to continue to provide these essential specialist services to regional, rural and remote Queenslanders. Heart of Australia delivers diagnosis, treatment and follow-up services on a monthly basis across three well established and defined routes in Queensland, this ensures the regular provision of specialist services throughout their serviced communities.

Improving Access to Allied Health Services: Improving access to allied health services for deaf and non-English speaking Australians

Language barriers can limit the health and economic outcomes of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians and those with a hearing impairment.

The Australian Government is investing \$2 million over four years from 2022-23 to allow privately employed allied health providers to access the Australian Government's Free Interpreting Services (FIS), which is currently available only to doctors and pharmacists. This will enable the services to reach 280,000 people in targeted populations identified as having low English proficiency, many of whom live and work in regional, rural and remote areas. This forms part of early action on the *Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan*.

People with significant hearing impairments also find it difficult to access health care, including allied health services. While there are a number of government funded services available for deaf people, these services are not always accessible when needed. The government will invest \$0.6 million in 2022-23 to undertake a scoping study for improvements to Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and general spoken language interpreting services, with a focus on improving access to primary health care. Outcomes of this study will affect the approximate 30,000 Auslan users who live all around Australia, including those in regional communities.

Increasing Stillbirth Autopsies and Investigations

To improve access to stillbirth autopsies, the Australian Government is investing \$13.7 million from 2022-23 to 2024-25 towards establishing a dedicated perinatal pathologist in each state and territory, a perinatal pathologist scholarship to fund scholarships to undertake the necessary qualifications to perform stillbirth autopsies, and enabling families living in rural and remote areas to access support when travel and transport costs are a barrier for arranging an autopsy for their stillborn baby.

Support for women experiencing miscarriage and stillbirth

The Australian Government is investing \$5.1 million from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to provide support programs for women experiencing miscarriage and stillbirth, and an additional \$4.2 million over the same timeframe to extend the *Hospital to Home* program to ensure women experiencing stillbirth have access to intensive individualised support. These support programs will be available to all women and their families, regardless of where they live. Grants will be available to organisation demonstrating innovative and tailored approaches to ensure women from rural and remote areas can access these programs.

Rural Bulk Billing Incentive

From 1 January 2022, the Australian Government has for the first time implemented a progressive incentive schedule for doctors to provide bulk billed services in rural and remote areas, with an estimated cost of \$65.8 million over the next four years.

By increasing the *Rural Bulk Billing Incentive* according to remoteness, the government recognises the challenges of delivering healthcare in smaller rural communities and remote communities. The *Rural Bulk Billing Incentive* has been increased in rural and remote areas (MM 3 to 7) progressively from its current 150 per cent loading up to 190 per cent in very remote areas.

Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health

The Australian Government is investing a further \$32.3 million from 2022-23 to support the government's contribution to the 2018-2022 Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health (the IGA). This investment will enable progress and completion of the commitments in accordance with the IGA, to ensure Australia's national digital health infrastructure and interoperability principles can contribute to improving health system quality and safety, accountability, transparency and patient centred care.

The IGA is signed by the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments and supports national digital health foundations including implementation of Australia's *National Digital Health Strategy – Safe, Seamless and Secure* (the Strategy). Implementation of the Strategy supports capability (such as better enabling virtual care) that is leading to significant improvements in the quality and safety of healthcare provided to healthcare recipients, the efficiency of the Australian health system and the health and wellbeing of all Australians. This is of particular importance for regional Australians as digital tools continue to support the delivery of safe, quality healthcare services and outcomes irrespective of geographical barriers.

Health Workforce

In 2022-23, the Australian Government is delivering on its commitment to ensuring equitable access to Australia's world class health system regardless of where one lives.

With further investments under the *Stronger Rural Health Strategy* (SRHS), this package supports more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to practice where they are most needed: regional, rural and remote Australia. Previous investments in planning, teaching and training, attraction and retention of the rural health workforce are delivering results, but there is more targeted work to do to improve the supply, distribution and quality of our rural health workforce to meet the needs of Australia's diverse communities.

Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program – New University Departments of Rural Health

The Australian Government is investing \$36.2 million over four years for expansion of the *Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training* (RHMT) program to fill geographic gaps in the network of University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) by adding two new UDRHs. This measure responds to the national evaluation of the RHMT program, completed in 2020, which identified geographic gaps in the UDRH network (South West and Goldfields regions of Western Australia and Central Queensland). The new UDRHs will focus training activities in MM 3 to 7 (large rural towns to very remote communities), and strengthen the ongoing participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in activities across the RHMT program.

In addition, a grant opportunity process is to be held in late 2022 to select an administrator to continue the *National Rural Health Students Network* (NRHSN).

Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Care Workforce

The government is investing \$13.9 million over two years from 2022–23 to deliver 150 additional scholarships each year under the Puggy Hunter Memorial scholarships Scheme, including for students from regional and remote areas. The scholarships support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to gain care and support qualifications and entering the health workforce. Each year up to 150 additional scholarships will be awarded, worth \$15,000 for fulltime students and \$7,500 for part time students.

Building on the Government's Investment in Rural Medical Training

The Australian Government is investing \$114.2 million over four years from 2022-23 to build on the 2018-19 Budget measures to better manage the supply of medical school graduates.

This measure involves establishing a competitive process, using the Assessment Framework, to fund existing medical schools to deliver the full medical school program at rural campuses. This will help increase self-sufficiency in training local doctors and address maldistribution of the medical workforce. An additional 80 Commonwealth Supported Places will support the establishment of up to eight fully rural medical programs.

Funding will also be allocated for:

- the RHMT program to Charles Sturt University (CSU) to deliver a Rural Clinical School
- establishing an ongoing evaluation of the Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network (MDMSN).

HELP debt reduction for rural doctors and nurse practitioners

Eligible doctors and nurse practitioners will be encouraged to live and work in rural, remote or very remote areas of Australia, with an offer from the Australian Government to reduce their outstanding Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt, provided they meet the eligibility criteria and their obligations to complete the required amount of eligible work.

The 2021-22 MYEFO allocated \$19.9 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to waive outstanding HELP debts for eligible participants who meet program requirements.

Whilst eligibility commenced from 1 January 2022 – with updates to outstanding HELP debts processed annually through the taxation system – this initiative is subject to the passage of legislation.

Reform of the Distribution Priority Area System and Exceptional Circumstances Review

The 2021-22 MYEFO allocated \$5.3 million investment from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to expand the current Distribution Priority Area (DPA) indicator and provide automatic DPA status to all GP catchment areas in MM 3 to 4 areas, previously only applied to MM 5 to 7 areas and the Northern Territory.

The automatic DPA rule change, which took effect from 1 January 2022, resulted in a number of locations now eligible for additional government programs and support.

Funding is also supporting the Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs) and the department to undertake DPA Exceptional Circumstances Reviews in outer metro MM 1 and large regional centre (MM 2) locations. Reviews will ensure that the DPA applies to certain areas where current information reflects on-the-ground local circumstances have a services access need. Since the establishment of the exceptional circumstances review process in late 2021, over 190 applications have been considered by the Distribution Working Group, with outcomes published on the department's website.

The Government will further improve access to GP workforce distribution programs and incentives following consideration of the recommendations of the Review of the DPA Classification System. This will include a review of the Modified Monash Model, an update to GP catchment boundaries, and an annual recalibration of the DPA calculation to ensure it accurately reflects on-the-ground GP service access circumstances.

Supporting GP Training

The 2021-22 MYEFO *Supporting GP Training* measure will help to ensure we have a sustainable supply of well-trained GPs throughout Australia. It includes two components:

- Nationally consistent payments for GP training – direct payments to registrars, supervisors and practices involved in GP training, including scaled rural loadings to encourage training in rural and remote areas.
- Specialist advice on design options for an employment portability scheme for GP registrars.

Addressing access and workforce issues facing maternity services in rural and remote Australia

The Australian Government will consult and map current collaborative maternity service models and develop options to integrate these models into current and emerging General Practice (GP) practice models. These link with the *Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan*.

The Australian Government will engage a Senior Midwifery Advisor to improve midwifery expertise within the department and improve the quality of policies and programs that seek to implement the *Woman-centred care: Strategic directions for Australian maternity services* strategy. The Senior Midwifery Advisor will also work with the National Rural Health Commissioner and other medical and nursing advisors on the integration of:

- midwifery group practices, including optimal funding models to support sustainability
- continuity of maternity services models of care (including Birthing on Country models) within the National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) to properly support their viability through infrastructure, service delivery, training with service benchmarks and appropriate Key Performance Indicators.

This work will inform government planning and service delivery decisions to ensure rural and remote communities have access to the high quality maternity services, supported by a skilled workforce.

Implementing the 10 Year Mental Health Workforce Strategy

The Australian Government is investing \$60.7 million over four years from 2022-23 to build a sustainable workforce that is skilled, supported and appropriately distributed so all Australians can access the right care whenever and wherever they need. The government will fund a pilot of the *National Mental Health Pathways to Practice Program*

which will provide nursing and allied health (including provisional psychologists) student and graduate placements in the mental health sector across rural, remote and metropolitan areas. The government will also provide up to 30 additional psychiatry training posts, with priority being given to high need areas including rural locations, as well as support for the rural and remote psychiatry training pathway. These measures will encourage more skilled mental health professionals to work in rural and remote areas, improving the distribution of the workforce and ultimately improve access to mental health services for Australians living in rural and remote areas.

Closing the Gap

Closing the Gap Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Mental Health) Policy Partnership

The Australian Government is committed to supporting culturally safe and responsive support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be at risk of suicide and experiencing suicidal ideation or other mental health crises.

The Australian Government is investing \$8.6 million over three years from 2022-23 to establish the National Closing the Gap Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Mental Health) Policy Partnership (the Partnership) to maintain momentum in reducing the devastating and disproportionate impact of mental ill-health and suicide on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities. The Partnership will advise on policy and implementation of actions to address social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* targets.

Closing the Gap in Life Expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – Health Infrastructure

On 5 August 2021, the Prime Minister announced \$254.4 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to address seriously deteriorating or non-existent health infrastructure for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) sector.

The measure will comprise two streams of work: the annual *Service Maintenance Program* (SMP) – minor capital and the *Major Capital Program*, both of which will strengthen the ACCHS sector through improved infrastructure.

Through the SMP, priority is being given to projects in remote and very remote Australia. The *Major Capital Program* supports clinical staff housing in outer regional, remote and very remote Australia in addition to supporting new and refurbished health clinics nationally.

It is anticipated that the infrastructure measure will deliver up to 120 new clinics, housing and major refurbishments, as well as up to 230 small scale repair, maintenance and security projects.

The measure has been co-designed with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) on behalf of the ACCHS sector.

Closing the Gap in Life Expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – Healthy Mums, Healthy Bubs

On 5 August 2021, the Australian Government announced the *Healthy Mums, Healthy Bubs* Budget Measure as part of the Commonwealth's *Closing the Gap Implementation Plan*. This measure provides \$45 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and babies and contribute to achieving *Closing the Gap Target Two*, that babies are born healthy and strong.

As part of the *Healthy Mums, Healthy Bubs* measure, the government is expanding the existing *Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program* (ANFPP) to two additional sites, from 13 to 15 sites. The ANFPP is a strengths-based, intensive, nurse home visiting program that supports women pregnant with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander baby during pregnancy and continuing until their child is two years old.

This investment will also support further expansion of Birthing on Country models of care that provide culturally safe continuous midwifery care to women pregnant with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander baby.

The department is working in partnership with the NACCHO and key sector stakeholders to deliver these activities and co-design maternal and child health policies and programs that best support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to thrive.

Indigenous Australians' Health Programme

Approximately \$4.3 billion will be provided through the *Indigenous Australians' Health Programme* (IAHP) from 2021-22 to 2024-25, building on our work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve health outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Remote areas have an avoidable mortality rate of more than double the rate of those living in Major cities and 1.7 times the rate of those living in Regional areas. As such, the IAHP has a strong focus on improving health outcomes in rural and remote areas, this includes:

- funding for specific initiatives to address the prevalence of preventable diseases, such as acute rheumatic fever, rheumatic heart disease and trachoma, that disproportionately affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders living in regional and remote areas
- dedicated support to services outside major cities, through funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in regional, rural and remote areas which deliver high quality comprehensive primary healthcare to the communities they serve
- medical outreach to improve access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with chronic disease, particularly those living in regional, rural and remote areas

- specific initiatives to support children and families to thrive, including in regional and remote contexts where additional barriers exist, such as the *Connected Beginnings* program, the *Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program* and activities to improve children’s ear and hearing health.

The government recently announced an immediate \$54.7 million boost in funding and longer-term rolling agreements for ACCHS throughout Australia. The introduction of four-year rolling funding agreements and yearly increases in available funding from 1 July 2023 will ensure greater certainty and stability for the sector. This investment complements the additional \$90 million provided under the IAHP Primary Health Care Funding Model, which commenced 1 July 2020, which was co-designed with the sector, to distribute funding fairly and transparently, based on activity levels, the cost of delivering services and the relative health needs of locations, in particular regional and remote areas

Mental Health

Regional, rural and remote mental health

The Australian Government is investing \$8.5 million from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to continue the existing *Red Dust* program to provide culturally appropriate support in remote Northern Territory communities. Services will focus on social and emotional wellbeing, sexual health, relationships, alcohol and other drugs, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and targeted programs for men and women. The program also provides employment and professional training, which will continue to build a skilled Indigenous mental health workforce in remote communities, and promote mental health pathways and careers.

Targeted regional initiatives for suicide prevention

The Australian Government is investing \$42.7 million from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to establish targeted regional initiatives for suicide prevention through Primary Health Networks (PHNs). It builds on advice from the Prime Minister’s National Suicide Prevention Adviser and the momentum and lessons from the National Suicide Prevention Trial (the trial), strengthening the capacity for communities, including communities in regional, rural and remote locations, to implement system wide responses to reduce the risk of suicide in their region. This investment will facilitate transition from the trial environment where the specific investment has been targeted in 12 regions, to building the capacity of all areas to implement systems-based, person centred and community led regional approaches to suicide prevention across Australia, including in regional, rural and remote locations.

Protecting the mental health of, and preventing suicide in young Australians

The Australian Government is further investing in initiatives to reverse the decline in mental health of children and young Australians. These initiatives will have a positive impact on children, young people and their families in regional, rural and remote areas where they may not have access to other supports.

Protecting the mental health of young Australians

The Australian Government is investing up to \$47 million over four years from 2022-23 to ensure young Australians can continue to access critical mental health services that have been severely impacted by COVID-19. This measure will grow and enhance the youth mental health workforce and address a number of gaps in the current delivery of youth mental health services to high needs groups, including those living in rural and remote areas.

This investment includes funding for targeted headspace programs to provide critical mental health services to young Australians, including those in rural and remote areas, such as the headspace *Schools Suicide Prevention Activities* (SSPA) program and the headspace *Digital Work and Study* (DWS) program to provide services to support young Australians in need. It also includes an expanded investment in the *Flying headspace Program* which is an initiative between the RFDS and headspace delivering support to young people in remote South Australia.

These child and youth mental health programs are critical to preventing increasing gaps in service availability for a vulnerable cohort of Australians experiencing increasing mental ill-health and psychological distress. This includes young Australians living in rural and remote regions with limited service access who are at greater risk of poor health and wellbeing outcomes.

This measure also seeks to build the clinical workforce across the headspace network to address a critical workforce shortage and ongoing structural workforce challenges within the youth mental health sector driven by significant increases in service demand from young people experiencing increasingly complex mental ill-health. This includes attracting and retaining more GPs at headspace centres in regional and rural locations¹ by enabling them to receive a minimum salary in addition to claiming Medicare benefits through an exemption to Section 19(2) of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*.

¹ Services located in MM 2 – MM 7 regions per the Modified Monash (MM) Model.

Eating disorder treatment and support

The Australian Government is investing \$24.3 million over four years from 2022-23 to provide continuing support for a range of existing services and implement a new pilot program of specialised eating disorder treatment services delivered in the community setting. The pilot program will entail an open, competitive grant opportunity to identify innovative and evidence-based models of care to best address local need. People in rural, regional and remote areas will benefit from grants that include delivery of virtual treatment programs to provide treatment options for people who currently do not have ready access to essential treatment services due to geographic barriers.

Supporting Mental Health Nationally through additional Psychological Therapies

The Australian Government has invested \$100.8 million from 2020-21 to 2022-23 to provide up to 10 additional Medicare-subsidised psychological services under the *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule* (MBS) initiative (Better Access), allowing eligible people to access up to 20 individual sessions per calendar year. This was followed by a \$32.7 million investment to extend eligibility for Better Access services to aged care residents, in recognition of the pronounced mental health impact of the pandemic on this cohort and that sector more broadly.

On 13 December 2021, the government committed a further \$58.8 million to extend the additional 10 Better Access sessions and the aged care expansion for a further six months from their initial end date of 30 June 2022 until 31 December 2022. The \$106 million investment in permanent telehealth arrangements also means all Australians, including people in regional areas, can continue to access their Better Access sessions via telehealth where safe and clinically appropriate.

Preventive Health**Extension of the National Ice Action Strategy**

The government is providing \$343.6 million from 2022-23 over four years under the *National Ice Action Strategy* (NIAS) to extend critical prevention, treatment and research activities. Ice use impacts rural communities at disproportionate rates when compared to urban communities, with these communities facing greater difficulties in accessing treatment and support services. Factors that contribute to higher rural alcohol and other drug use in general include lower educational attainment, low socio-economic status, higher unemployment and isolation. NIAS funding is weighted towards rural and regional areas in acknowledgement of this impact. Under the NIAS, more than 600 additional drug and alcohol treatment projects have been made possible to date, greatly increasing access across Australia. This continued investment will help ensure communities receive treatment for the drug or alcohol use, helping to improve health and social outcomes.

Reducing Harms from Alcohol and Other Drugs

The Australian Government is committed to building safe and healthy communities by reducing the impacts associated with drug and alcohol use to individuals, families and communities. This includes a commitment to funding drug and alcohol prevention activities.

The government is investing \$9.2 million in 2022-23 to continue the prevention of alcohol and other drug uptake reducing personal, family and community harms, allowing better use of health and law enforcement resources, and generating substantial social and economic benefits.

Extending the funding for these critical drug and alcohol prevention programs builds on the initial Australian Government investment into the programs, notably enhancing online support which is essential for rural and regional areas where access to local support may be limited.

Sporting Schools

The Australian Government is investing \$79.6 million over two years from 2022-23 to extend the flagship sport and physical activity program for children, *Sporting Schools*, for three calendar years until 31 December 2024. This builds on the \$40.8 million investment in the 2021-22 Budget.

Sporting Schools provides grants to schools nationwide to deliver free, high quality programs to get Australian children of all abilities more physically active and establish a foundation for lifelong healthy behaviours. The program will seek to increase its presence in specific regional and remote locations where registration rates are low.

Preventive Health – FIBA Women’s Basketball World Cup legacy program

The Australian Government is investing \$2.6 million in 2022-23 for Basketball Australia to deliver a *FIBA Women’s Basketball World Cup legacy program* to create employment opportunities in sport for women, increase participation, gender equality and social inclusion targeting women, girls, First Australians, refugees, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, and communities in lower socio-economic regions, including across regional and remote Australia.

Ageing and Aged Care

Aged Care Infection Prevention and Control Training Measure

This Australian Government initiative (\$40 million over two years from 2022-23) will support all aged care providers, regardless of location, to enhance the training of their nursing staff to improve infection, prevention and control capabilities. It may also reduce barriers to nurses in regional and remote locations undertaking additional training.

Authorised Nurse Immuniser Training

The Australian Government is providing funding (\$55.9 million over four years from 2022-23) to build foundational capability for residential aged care providers to take the lead in delivering vaccine services, and provide vital protection to residents and workers and other visitors from the devastating effects of COVID-19 and influenza. The measure will support all aged care providers across Australia, to upskill employed registered nurses to develop and maintain capabilities as authorised nurse immunisers including backfilling arrangements to cover nurse training leave.

Reforms to Residential Care Funding to Drive Better Care and a Viable System

The government will introduce a new funding model for residential aged care, the Australian National Aged Care Classification (AN-ACC) from 1 October 2022. The AN-ACC is a significant reform that will drive better care and establish a more sustainable, efficient and transparent system. The government will invest a further \$20.1 million into the AN-ACC Transition Fund in this Budget.

The AN-ACC supports rural, remote and very remote services by providing additional funding in line with the extra cost of delivering care in these areas. It also removes an issue within the current funding model, whereby limited access to allied health professionals outside of metropolitan areas restricted their funding levels.

Aged care workforce bonus

On 1 February 2022, the government announced that an aged care workforce bonus of up to \$800 will be paid to eligible aged care staff in government subsidised home care and residential care. This is the fourth bonus paid in recognition of the significant commitment aged care workers have made to the care of senior Australians during the pandemic. It is also being provided as an incentive for those who are returning to the workforce to supplement the current staff during the Omicron wave. This measure will cost \$215.3 million over two years, and it is anticipated 265,000 workers will benefit from the bonus, including workers delivering rural and remote services.

Continuation of Life Checks for 45 to 65 years olds

This \$2 million initiative extends the operation of the *Life Checks* program, launched by the government in 2018-19 to assist Australians to plan for a healthy, independent and longer life. *Life Checks* is targeted at people aged 45-64 and 65+ and encourages them to consider their health, finances, work and social life in the context of planning for their future. Since its inception, over 575,000 users have visited the *Life Checks* website. The extension of this program in 2022-23 ensures ongoing access by people in regional Australia to tailored information and resources to help them better prepare for the future.

Workforce Advisory Services Program

A new *Workforce Advisory Services Program* for residential aged care and home care service providers has been established as part of an expanded Business Advisory Services Program. The program was launched in October 2021 with \$5.9 million in funding over two years from 2021-22 to assist providers, particularly those in regional, rural and remote areas where there are thin markets to develop more coordinated approaches to workforce planning, including:

- developing service-level workforce training and skills plans to ensure workers have the right skills and knowledge to meet the care needs of senior Australians
- developing strategies to attract and retain workers from a diverse range of environments
- supporting existing workers through optimising employment arrangements and strengthened human resources management processes
- identifying supports that are available to increase the skills of the workforce.

Through this service, advisors will use common planning tools and best practice guidance from industry to work with providers to undertake a needs analysis that will:

- identify the profile of their care recipients and care requirements (for example, clinical needs, characteristics and lived experiences)
- identify trends in quality indicators, accreditation or audit feedback
- document skills and qualifications of the care and leadership team.

COVID-19

COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments – Vaccine Rollout

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines into regional, rural and remote communities continues to be a vital part of the Australian Government's vaccine strategy to protect our regional, rural and remote communities. The Australian Government has already invested a total of over \$17billion on Australia's vaccine and COVID-19 treatment supply as part of the COVID-19 health response, with an additional \$578 million committed in 2022-23.

On 8 June 2021, the Prime Minister appointed Lieutenant General John Frewen, DSC, AM as Coordinator General of the National COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce, known as Operation COVID Shield. The goals were to ensure public confidence in the Australian vaccine rollout and to ensure as many Australians are vaccinated as early as possible. The Taskforce supports and supplements existing services and assists in outreach in areas such as aged care, remote, and Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander communities working with both new and existing providers. Operation COVID Shield has also partnered with states and territories, peak organisations and other providers to assist in administering the vaccine to harder-to-reach populations.

Australia is now one of the most highly vaccinated countries in the world. As of 6 March 2022, over 18 million doses (both primary courses and boosters) have been delivered in rural and remote areas (MM 2 to 7). Funding is being continued to ensure that newly eligible cohorts can receive a vaccination in line with the best medical advice. This may include further doses, subject to advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation.

The Australian Government will continue to focus on ensuring Australians in regional and remote communities are protected with their primary course and booster doses, especially with the threat of new and emerging COVID-19 variants.

The Australian Government is continuing funding to 31 December 2022 to enhance *Vaccine Administration Partners Program* services to deliver targeted vaccinations for priority populations, including vaccination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, especially in remote and very remote locations, people with disability and aged care residents.

The Australian Government is also extending the operation of Commonwealth Vaccination Clinics (CVCs) to meet continued demand for vaccinations, particularly in rural, regional and remote communities where CVCs are key drivers of vaccinations. From 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, CVCs provided 1.7 million vaccinations. Funding of \$13.9 million will be provided to 31 December 2022 to ensure CVCs can continue to provide vaccinations in remote locations.

COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments – Distribution of Oral Antiviral Treatments

The government has made significant investments to ensure Australians have access to a range of COVID-19 treatments to manage different stages of disease.

The first oral treatments for COVID-19 in Australia, Lagevrio® (molnupiravir) and Paxlovid® (nirmatrelvir + ritonavir), were provisionally approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) on 18 January 2022. To ensure the oral treatments are readily accessible in rural and remote regions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the treatments will be provided to state and territory governments, residential aged care facilities, ACCHO and the RFDS.

On 1 March 2022, Lagevrio® was listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) meaning that Australians can now access this treatment via community pharmacies. This will support access to the treatment in regional and remote areas across the country until 31 January 2024.

Extension of the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response

The Australian Government is investing \$984 million from 2022-23 to extend the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response.

The Partnership:

- supports state and territory governments to deliver COVID-19-related care outside of hospital, and for medical related transport costs for rural, remote and/or indigenous patients through the State Public Health Payment
- ensures the equitable distribution of vaccines in regional Australia and supports outreach activities to administer primary course and booster dose vaccinations in rural and remote communities
- provides remote communities with greater access to COVID-19 tests through the provision of Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and Rapid Antigen Tests.

COVID-19 General Practitioner Led Respiratory Clinics

As part of the COVID-19 response, the Australian Government is continuing its investment in General Practitioner led Respiratory Clinics (GPRCs) with funding of \$834.5 million provided over the period March 2020 to 30 September 2022.

The GPRCs are playing a key role in the *Living with COVID* response, providing dedicated assessment and testing services for people with COVID-19 symptoms.

More than half of GPRCs have been established in regional/remote areas and since their inception in early 2020 GPRCs nationally have provided in excess of 2.8 million respiratory assessments and 2.4 million tests across 99.8 per cent of all postcodes.

In addition to the GPRC funding, \$19.5 million in 2021-22 was provided to the NACCHO to support its Sector Support Organisations member services and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services to coordinate efforts around Australia's COVID-19 response, and in particular facilitate cultural safety measures in the respiratory clinics. An additional \$10.9 million to NACCHO in 2022-23 will continue to support Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services respond to the pandemic and vaccine rollout to 31 December 2022.

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) have also been funded \$23.1 million in the six months from July to December 2022 to provide primary care sector support and assist vulnerable populations' access to vaccines. This funding will deliver a range of services including distribution of personal protective equipment to primary care providers, initiatives aimed at increasing the take of vaccines amongst target populations, dedicated support for GPRCs, and assistance with the vaccine rollout within general practices, aged and disability care facilities.

Living with COVID measures

The \$183.6 million *Living with COVID* package announced on 29 October 2021 included a number of measures to support GPs and pharmacists to manage patients with mild or moderate COVID-19 symptoms in the community in all areas of Australia. These measures include: *National COVID triage, management and escalation infrastructure* – the infrastructure has been developed in consultation with participating states via Healthdirect. The national triage, assessment and connection service operates as an extension of the National Coronavirus Helpline (NCH) and connects COVID-positive people to appropriate care, including their regular GP. Such triaging is of particular benefit in regional and rural areas where access to GPs may be limited, and hospitals lack capacity to manage all COVID-19 cases in the community.

COVID-positive care pathways have been developed and are being maintained in every region of Australia through collaboration between the PHNs and their corresponding local hospital networks. These provide clear plans on where and how COVID-positive people will be managed through primary and community services or through hospitals. These ensure that clinical pathways are relevant to local availability of health care services.

Funding for PHNs to commission home visits to COVID-positive patients, with a particular focus on regional and rural areas. Funding may be used to commission visits from medical deputising services, GPs, Aboriginal Health Workers, nurse practitioners and practice nurses. Patients can be seen for treatment of COVID symptoms, or for other medical needs that cannot be delivered by telehealth.

Provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and pulse oximeters from the National Medical Stockpile (NMS) supplies (excluding the costs to the NMS of purchasing PPE/pulse oximeters) – distributing NMS supplies of pulse oximeters and PPE for general practice, with a focus on strengthening the supply chain for rural and remote practices. Between March and May 2022, over 20 million units of PPE will be provided for primary care, including nine million p2/n95 masks for GPs and three million for pharmacists across Australia. These are being prioritised for rural, regional and remote areas where access to PPE can be challenging. Shipments began before Christmas and are continuing nationwide.

Additional funding of \$50.9 million announced on 11 March 2022 will extend four key measures of the *Living with COVID* package: Healthdirect's national assessment, triage and connection infrastructure until 31 December 2022; PHN's Community Care Pathways until 31 December 2022; PHN's Commissioned Home Visits until 31 December 2022; Delivery of PPE and pulse oximeters to GPs and pharmacists until 30 September 2022.

COVID-19 Remote Community Preparedness and Retrieval

COVID-19 continues to disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Part of the additional funding to extend the national COVID-19 health response to 31 December 2021 included \$43.3 million for the ongoing support to rural and remote communities to respond to outbreaks of COVID-19 and transitioning of response to living with COVID-19.

The Transitioning of COVID-19 Remote and Indigenous Response measure:

- Provides ongoing funding to the RFDS for the *Remote Community Preparedness and Retrieval* measure. The measure assists with early retrieval and evacuation for people with potential COVID-19, staffed mobile respiratory clinics and remote health service support. The early evacuation of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases allows isolation of cases where no or minimal quarantine facilities exist, which is essential to effectively managing outbreaks in locations with minimal health services.
- Supports in community testing via continuation of the *Remote Point of Care Testing (POCT) Program*. The program provides POCT for over 150 rural and remote communities.
- Provides critical supports and services that assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities to access COVID-19 tests and vaccines, provides critical support for access to COVID-19 services including testing and vaccination supported by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and funding for the NACCHO to support COVID-19 preparedness, response and vaccine rollout in the community controlled sector and in remote communities.
- Provides funds for tailored communication resources and public relations activities to continue primary course and booster vaccinations encouraging people in regional and remote areas to come forward for their vaccination opportunity and informing communities of options to access a vaccination.
- Supports rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities living with COVID-19 whilst ensuring there is a renewed focus on other infectious disease health risks.

Natural Disaster Response

Providing mental health and primary care support for Australians impacted by floods

The Australian Government is investing \$31.2 million over two years from 2021-22 for mental health support for Australians impacted by the recent flood emergency in New South Wales and Queensland to ensure immediate and longer term services are available for individuals, families, and communities impacted by the disaster and to

support communities to recover and build resilience. This package includes support for local mental health services to ensure immediate psychological needs of communities can be met; dedicated measures to support the mental health of children and young people; and providing *Wellbeing and Resilience Grants* that allow communities the opportunity to choose their own way to respond to the losses, anxiety and distress they have experienced, as well as actively participate in their recovery.

The Australian Government is also investing \$4.7 million to ensure primary care services are engaged directly in emergency response and recovery at the local level in eight PHNs in the flood-impacted regions across New South Wales and Queensland. Locum support and temporary business premises for general practice and pharmacy will be provided in the Lismore region to bolster the local workforce and assist in providing continuity of access to healthcare for the community.

Research

Medical Research Future Fund

The Australian Government will disburse \$6.3 billion from the *Medical Research Future Fund* (MRFF) between 2022-23 and 2031-32, through a refreshed 10-year Investment Plan announced as part of the 2022-23 Budget. The 10-year Investment Plan provides funding for 21 initiatives across four themes: Patients, Researchers, Missions and Translation.

The *Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2021–26* acknowledges the importance of funding research in areas of unmet medical need as a guiding principle, with a focus on achieving equity in health outcomes, including for people in rural and remote communities. Research investment to support better rural health outcomes has been embedded in a range of MRFF open and competitive grant opportunities through the 10-year Investment Plan. This includes the:

- 2022 *Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Grant Opportunity*, which includes a stream worth up to \$9 million for implementation research focused on addressing inequalities in uptake of prevention activities to support healthy ageing and quality of life for three priority populations: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; rural, regional and remote populations; and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.
- 2021 *Primary Health Care Grant Opportunity*, which will provide up to \$5 million for projects that test the effectiveness of new point-of-care testing delivery models in rural, regional and/or remote areas and/or through mobile delivery.

It is anticipated that all Australians will benefit from the outcomes of research funding by the MRFF both in terms of improved health outcomes through access to new therapies, drugs and devices and the associated outcomes through access to business that follows the translation and commercialisation of research.

Current Initiatives

Guaranteeing Medicare and Primary Care

Allied Health Case Conferencing

The Australian Government is providing \$14.2 million over four years from 2021-22 to support allied health practitioners to participate in case conferencing when organised by a patient's GP. This forms part of actions to boost access to multidisciplinary care under the *Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan*.

This measure better supports multidisciplinary care for patients that need it, by financially recognising the role of allied health care as part of the primary care team. Changes to Medicare incentivise allied providers to contribute to the care planning processes, leading to improved care coordination, reduced acute care utilisation and better health and functional outcomes for patients. This measure particularly benefits people living in regional and remote areas, whose care providers may be geographically dispersed.

From 1 November 2021, new Medicare items have enabled allied health practitioners who are providing chronic disease management services to eligible patients to receive a fee for participating in case conferencing when organised by the patient's GP.

Regional Cancer Treatment Centres for Radiation Therapy

Through the *Fighting Cancer – Regional Cancer Treatment Centres for Radiation Therapy* program, the Australian Government is investing \$45.5 million over five years from 2020-21 to expand cancer treatment capacity throughout regional Australia by enhancing existing and investing in new health infrastructure.

The objectives of the program are to:

- work in partnerships to improve and update health infrastructure in rural and regional Australia
- provide improved access to health facilities and services in a number of regional and remote communities.

Funding is enabling the establishment of new radiation therapy services across 10 regional areas within New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. Funding agreements are now in place with four applicants across five regions in New South Wales. The government continues to work with states and territories and the broader health sector to ensure the health infrastructure for regional cancer treatment centres provide improved access to radiation therapy services and treatment closer to home for patients living in the remaining regions.

Funding and activities for this program commenced in 2020-21 with \$9.8 million to paid upon execution of funding agreements, followed by \$8.9 million allocated each year from 2021-22 to 2023-24 and \$9 million in 2024-25.

Implementation of Roadmap for Hearing Health

The Australian Government is investing \$21.2 million from 2020-21 to 2025-26 to implement measures from the *Roadmap for Hearing Health* and adjust *Hearing Services Program* settings to ensure consumer focused hearing services for all Australians.

The measure benefits all Australians who are hard of hearing. It includes:

- Supporting rural service delivery through a workforce audit and a rural hearing health workforce summit, to improve long-term planning and delivery of services in rural and remote areas with a white paper expected by May 2022.
- A national hearing awareness and prevention campaign over three years from 2020-21, targeted at populations most vulnerable to hearing loss. The campaign will focus on the prevention of avoidable hearing loss, promoting practices to prevent hearing damage, destigmatising hearing loss, and encouraging people experiencing hearing loss to seek treatment, and targeted preventive messaging directed at the agricultural sector amongst others.
- Development and adoption of new tele-audiology standards so hearing services can be delivered through this medium without compromising the outcomes for clients. For regional Australians this will mean less travel and related costs to hearing appointments.
- In 2020-21, work was undertaken to improve early identification of hearing and speech difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A total of \$2 million was made available to provide quiet spaces in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services suitable for audiologists to provide hearing assessments. A further \$3 million has been provided to Hearing Australia to implement the *Listen to Learn Program* which will focus on children in the Early Childhood Education and Care and Primary School settings. Staff will be upskilled to identify hearing and communication problems and take early action.
- Pilot initiatives in the aged care sector have commenced, to improve the capability of the aged care workforce to support people with hearing loss.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), has been engaged to develop an evidence base for effective treatment, service delivery and prevention of hearing loss. In 2020-21, the NHMRC conducted consultations with key stakeholders of the hearing health sector and researchers to identify research gaps and priorities. The first round of grant applications opened in October 2021 and closed in December 2021 and outcomes will be announced in mid-2022.

Support for replacing old diagnostic imaging equipment

The Australian Government allocated \$20.7 million in the 2021-22 Budget to assist diagnostic imaging practices in regional, rural and remote areas to replace older diagnostic imaging equipment. In 2021, practices with exemptions in regional, rural and remote areas were able to apply for grants of up to 50 per cent of the average cost of diagnostic imaging equipment to replace equipment that will be out of date by 31 December 2022. By the end of 2021, grant offers were sent to 33 successful practices for 47 pieces of diagnostic equipment.

Next Wave of My Health Record

The Australian Government is investing \$301.8 million from 2021-22 to 2023-24 to build the next wave for My Health Record (MHR) and strengthen the digital enablement of healthcare in Australia.

MHR is operated by the Australian Digital Health Agency and helps improve health outcomes and better coordinate healthcare through increased availability and quality of health information.

There are more than 23 million registered users of the MHR system, making it one of Australia's most subscribed government services. The system plays a central role in health services delivery and has seen a widespread uplift in use in the last 12 months:

- 89 per cent of all Australian's MHR now have critical healthcare data within.
- Public hospital usage of MHR has increased 172 per cent in the last 12 months.
- Outside of the hospital setting, there has been a 110 per cent increase in cross-healthcare settings viewing of MHR data amongst different healthcare providers, creating a burgeoning 'network effect'.

Enhancing the MHR, and increasing the ways it can securely and reliably assist consumers and health professionals to manage their care day-to-day, will increase confidence, trust, and use of the system, and will pave the way for broader digital transformation across the country. Australia will subsequently become one of the first countries in the world to enable its people to truly hold their healthcare in their hand, with MHR as the backbone for the future of modern healthcare. It has been a useful investment for those affected by natural disasters and unable to access their normal GP practices and records, including during the recent floods on the east coast of Australia.

The MHR system benefits regional Australians by providing a digital summary of a person's key interactions with the healthcare sector. It can be viewed anywhere, anytime by the consumer and healthcare providers involved in their care. This particularly benefits Australians living in rural and remote Australia who may need to travel away from their home community to access healthcare, require virtual care services, or are regularly serviced by multiple healthcare providers.

Health Workforce

Extension of the National Rural Health Commissioner Office

The Australian Government is investing \$11.2 million from 2020-21 to 2024-25, and \$2.1 million per year on an ongoing basis from 2024-25, to continue and expand the office of the National Rural Health Commissioner (the Commissioner).

The expanded National Rural Health Commissioner Office now includes two Deputy Commissioners to support the Commissioner and provide expertise across a range of vital rural health disciplines such as nursing and allied health.

The Commissioner has actively supported the ongoing rural response to COVID-19, advised on the impact on the health workforce in regional, rural and remote Australia, and continues to support implementation of the National Rural Generalist Pathway.

Health Workforce Reform

In 2022-23, the Australian Government is continuing to focus on improving investment in the health workforce with a broad reform package announced through the 2021-22 Budget, building on the government's *Stronger Rural Health Strategy* announced in the 2018-19 Budget. It maintains the momentum of our reforms, streamlining and better connecting programs to create more cohesive and visible support for rural and remote health practitioners. The package provides a foundation for programs that teach, train, incentivise and support health professionals – with a key focus on continuing to build our regional, rural and remote health workforce.

Delivering Innovative Rural Health

The Australian Government has invested \$2.2 million from 2021 to 2026 in the *Rural Health Models for Trial* measure, which funds the trial of innovative, multidisciplinary primary care approaches aimed at alleviating ongoing workforce shortages and improving health outcomes in rural communities.

This measure funds implementation of community-supported multidisciplinary team models that make best use of existing resources to deliver services in a more effective and sustainable way within a region or sub-region, allowing services to be coordinated across primary care, hospital care, disability care and aged care. Funding supports governance and implementation activities, with service delivery to be self-sustaining.

This built on the government's \$3.3 million investment in the 2020-21 Budget through the *Innovative Models of Primary Care to Address Rural Workforce Shortages* measure, which funded five early trials in New South Wales. It provides an opportunity for communities outside of New South Wales to trial sustainable, practical, community-supported models of care. This further investment reflects the high level of interest and support within rural communities for trialling locally-designed solutions to ongoing health access issues.

This funding complements the National Rural Health Commissioner *Primary Care Rural Innovative Multidisciplinary Models* program, which is progressing new designs for innovative rural service models.

Streamlining and expanding support for rural GPs with advanced skills to align with the Rural Generalist Pathway

The Australian Government continues to undertake a consultation and design process which will develop a new streamlined program from the *Rural Procedural Grants Program* and the *Practice Incentives Program* procedural GP payments. The program expanded the scope of the existing programs to support rural generalists, vocationally registered GPs and registrars practising in MM 3-7 locations, to maintain or enhance their range of advanced skills. Improved support for rural generalists with skills to provide primary care, emergency medicine and other procedural and non-procedural advanced skills, including mental health skills, will improve access and quality of care for those in regional and rural communities.

John Flynn Prevocational Doctor Program

The Australian Government has invested \$12.4 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 through the new *John Flynn Prevocational Doctor Training Program* which is funding rotations in rural primary care settings for prevocational doctors. This investment will improve access to medical services for residents in rural, regional and remote communities and help build the rural medical workforce by providing prevocational doctors with positive, well-structured experiences early in their careers.

The program builds on existing government investment in prevocational doctor training, incrementally increasing the number of rural primary care rotations from 440 rotations (or at least 110 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) places) in 2022, to 800 rotations (or 200 FTE places) from 2025. This increase will enable an additional 360 hospital-based prevocational doctors to complete a clinical rotation working in a rural primary care setting, fostering interest in the speciality of general practice and working as a rural doctor.

Under the program, rural hospitals and rural primary care settings partner to provide prevocational doctors with experience through a rotation in a primary care setting. Funding supports delivery of the primary care rotation, contributing towards salary costs for prevocational junior doctors, clinical supervision and other costs linked to training in the rural primary care setting. The program supports prevocational doctors from postgraduate years one to five, targeting those in their first two postgraduate years and includes a limited pool of rotations available to metropolitan hospital based prevocational doctors.

Flexible Approach to Training in Expanded Settings

The Australian Government invested \$29.5 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to create a new innovative funding pool for non-GP medical specialist training in 2022 that helps overcome identified barriers to deliver better distribution and supply of specialists matched to local community health needs.

The pool funds eight projects focussing on innovative activities such as small scale trials of networked training models, expanded setting supervision and innovative supervision models to enhance training system quality and capacity, and support for junior specialists in training to transition to practise rurally.

This measure better targets the government's existing investment in non-GP medical specialist training, through the *Specialist Training Program*, by providing increased flexibility to support and promote growth in specialist medical training in settings where the workforce is needed.

Extension of the Rural Health Workforce Support Activity

The Australian Government is investing \$53.4 million from 2020-21 to 2023-24 to extend the *Rural Health Workforce Support Activity* administered by Rural Workforce Agencies. The program:

- supports quality, continuous primary health care access for rural and remote communities
- contributes to addressing health workforce shortages and maldistribution through workforce assessment and planning
- provides a contemporary and jurisdictional approach to the specific issues and concerns in attracting, retaining training and supporting the health workforce.

Health Workforce Scholarship Program

The Australian Government has invested \$33 million from 2020-21 to 2023-24 for the *Health Workforce Scholarship Program* (HWSP). The HWSP increases access to health services in rural and remote areas that are experiencing skill shortages, by providing scholarships and bursaries to health professionals committed to rural service.

Scholarships and bursaries are prioritised to address local needs and increase the skills, capacity and/or scope of practice of existing health professionals. Most scholarship types also include a return of service obligation to provide a greater return on investment.

Remote Vocational Training Scheme

Australians living in rural Australia are better able to access doctors due to the expansion of the *Remote Vocational Training Scheme (RVTS) Targeted Recruitment Pilot*. The expanded RVTS is funded through to 2024 and delivers structured distance education and supervision to doctors while they provide medical services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and rural and remote locations throughout Australia. The pilot aims to assist in the provision of medical services to regions that have had difficulty in recruiting doctors and have been identified as having a high medical workforce need. The government will conduct an evaluation of the RVTS pilot, scheduled for 2024, to identify the impact of the initiative on attracting GP trainees to work and train in areas of high workforce shortage, and increase access to essential medical services.

Rural Procedural Grants Program

The Australian Government provides more than \$19 million each year to the *Rural Procedural Grants Program*. This program enables vocationally recognised procedural GPs and registrars practising in rural and remote locations to access grants to attend training and up-skilling in emergency and procedural medicine. Grants are also available for GPs working in emergency medicine to maintain their skills in emergency mental health. The government is also exploring options to streamline and expand the scope of this program.

Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program

The long-standing *RHMT* program aims to improve the recruitment and retention of health professionals in rural and remote Australia. In the 2020 calendar year, there were over 14,200 allied health, nursing and dentistry placements across Australia – equating to over 65,000 placement weeks in rural and remote Australian communities. There were over 1050 graduating rural medical students that undertook a year or more of rural clinical training. The recent evaluation found the RHMT program has successfully supported rural training experiences for students across a wide range of health disciplines for the past two decades, demonstrating the capacity of universities to provide students with high quality clinical training in locations outside of metropolitan locations. The evaluation also found that the program is an appropriate response to addressing rural health workforce shortages, and strengthening the social and economic fabric of communities. The RHMT program supports 21 universities, currently forming a national network of 19 Rural Clinical Schools (RCSs), 17 University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) and 26 Regional Training Hubs to provide infrastructure and academic networks for teaching and training medicine, nursing, allied health and dentistry students and to support pathways to rural practice, as well as funding activities under the *Northern Territory Medical Program*.

A new agreement has been reached with all participating universities for the next three calendar years (2022-24), that will see a total of \$625.2 million provided.

The government has previously invested \$48.3 million in the 2020-21 Budget from 2021-22 to 2024-25 for an expansion of UDRH activities, including the establishment of the 17th UDRH (James Cook University) and multiple activities in more rural and remote locations and aged care facilities.

National Rural Generalist Pathway

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$62.2 million from 2019-20 to develop the *National Rural Generalist Pathway* (the Pathway) – a medical training pathway to attract, retain and support doctors in regional, rural and remote areas. This funds three core initiatives:

- coordination units in each state and the Northern Territory for rural generalist training
- expansion of the *Rural Junior Doctor Training Innovation Fund* to support the Pathway
- an application to the Medical Board of Australia for specialist recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine within the specialty of General Practice.

All elements of the Pathway have been or are currently being implemented. An external evaluation of the Pathway commenced in May 2021 to develop an evaluation framework and collect baseline data and conduct a preliminary evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the Pathway in the short term (2–3 years) with a final report due 30 June 2023. This will link with the improvement of primary care under the *Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan*.

A governance structure has been established to consult and coordinate actions on the remaining recommendations of the Pathway. The Commissioner plays a key role supporting implementation of the Pathway.

Building the Mental Health Workforce

The Australian Government's additional investment in the mental health workforce through the 2022-23 Budget, builds on and extends the \$77.3 million invested through the 2021-22 Budget to support the mental health and suicide prevention workforce and the mental health of the health workforce. Ensuring an appropriately skilled and distributed mental health workforce is available to meet demand for mental health services is a key foundation of the Australian Government's mental health reforms.

The 2021-22 Budget measures include specific initiatives to attract, train and retain skilled workers in the mental health workforce through promoting mental health as a career option, supporting professional collaboration, improving access to training, and providing more opportunities for training in non-acute settings. In particular, the government is delivering specific initiatives to increase training places and support regional and remote training pathways for psychiatrists, support greater representation

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the mental health workforce by providing \$13.9 million over four years from 2022-23 to boost the *Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme*, to encourage more students to choose a mental health career and identifying practical approaches to boost the child mental health workforce, particularly in rural and remote areas.

The government is also supporting GPs and other medical practitioners, including those working in rural and remote areas, by providing specialised training and resources to enhance their capacity to address mental health concerns of patients, and additional tailored mental health supports to reduce the stigma associated with health practitioners seeking help.

Remote Area Health Corps program

The Australian Government is investing up to \$6.3 million in 2022-23 to continue the *Remote Area Health Corps* (RAHC) program. This program aims to increase access to primary health care services in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Northern Territory, by addressing identified workforce shortages. The RAHC program provides short-term placements of 3 to 12 weeks of urban health professionals in remote health clinics in the Northern Territory.

Remote Health Workforce Surge Capacity Program

The Australian Government provided \$6 million in 2020 for establishment of the *Remote Health Workforce Surge Capacity Program* (RHWSCP) to respond to the potential impact of COVID-19 in remote and very remote Indigenous communities across Australia. The program is in place until 30 June 2023.

The RHWSCP funds emergency response health workers who are able to be placed into approved remote Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services across Australia where critical need has been identified.

Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement Rural Support Programs

The Australian Government funds a range of rural and other pharmacy programs under the Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement (7CPA) including the *Rural Pharmacy Workforce Program*, which aims to support the recruitment, training and retention of pharmacists in rural and remote areas. The 7CPA *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce programs* aim to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacy workforce, access to medicines and the quality use of medicines.

The 7CPA also outlines a shared intent to increase the investment in regional, rural and remote pharmacies through an increased investment in the *Regional Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance* (RPMA) program. This increased investment in the RPMA program was implemented 1 January 2021.

Rural, Regional and Remote Clinical Trial Enabling Infrastructure Program

The Australian Government is investing \$125 million from 2020-21 to 2024-25 to improve access to innovative clinical trials for Australians living in rural, regional and remote areas. The *Rural, Regional and Remote Clinical Trial Enabling Infrastructure Program* removes barriers to participating in clinical trials by:

- improving facilities, equipment, services and systems in rural, regional and remote Australia
- reducing the burden, costs and risks for patients and their families related to clinical trial participation
- increasing research capacity.

This grant program, funded under the MRFF, is giving patients access to clinical trials where they live.

Block Funding for Small Rural and Regional Hospitals

The Australian Government, together with the state and territory governments, signed the Addendum to the National Health Reform Agreement for the years 2020-21 to 2024-25 which will provide an additional \$33.7 billion for public hospitals.

Under the new five-year Addendum, the government is investing an estimated \$6.1 billion over five years from 2020-21 in block funding contributions to states and territories to support services provided by small, rural and regional hospitals. This funding ensures rural and regional communities continue to have access to vital public hospital services.

Community Health and Hospitals Program

The Australian Government has been investing \$1.25 billion over seven financial years from 2018-19 in the *Community Health and Hospitals Program* (CHHP), in addition to more than \$669 million through other 2019-20 Budget measures to fund projects and services in every state and territory, to support patient care while reducing pressure on community and hospital services. Through delivery of the 92 CHHP and 60 other 2019-20 Budget measures projects, \$247.6 million and \$136.3 million, respectively, will be committed in the 2022-23 financial year and will provide improved health facilities and services in a number of regional and remote communities.

The CHHP emphasises a commitment to ensuring a high quality, sustainable health system, with investment in public hospitals, PHNs, community organisations and other health providers, to ensure all Australians can access health services where and when they need them.

Approximately 30 per cent of the projects funded through the CHHP and other 2019-20 Budget measures contribute to infrastructure and services in rural and regional areas to support health priorities such as cancer, palliative care, eating disorders, chronic disease, injury, mental health, maternal and paediatric services and hospital infrastructure.

Closing the Gap

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health National Crisis Services and Support

As part of the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government announced investment of \$79 million to address the devastating and disproportionate impact of suicide and mental ill-health on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This included actions designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and will align to key initiatives under a renewed *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* (once agreed).

Work is progressing on the implementation of these measures, including:

- establishing the 24/7 national crisis telephone support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, led by Lifeline and Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (Gayaa Dhuwi), and designing the accompanying evaluation
- continuing funding to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre based at the Black Dog Institute to support the inclusion of people with lived experience in the co-design, implementation and evaluation of suicide prevention activity
- implementing regional suicide prevention networks and Indigenous aftercare services, in partnership with the NACCHO
- investing in Gayaa Dhuwi as the national peak for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, suicide prevention and social and emotional wellbeing.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Capability Review* will commence in mid-2022 which will examine the capacity of, and ways to strengthen, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector's delivery of mental health services for community members. In 2022-23, funding will also be provided to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre based at the Black Dog Institute to support the inclusion of people with lived experience in the co-design, implementation and evaluation of suicide prevention activity.

Strengthening primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

As highlighted above, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, compared with people living in metropolitan areas. The Practice Incentives Program – Indigenous Health Incentive aims to promote best practice, culturally safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with chronic disease by providing eligible ACCHS and general practices with a range of financial incentives, which includes those delivering services in rural and remote areas.

Elimination of Trachoma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities – Extension

The Australian Government is investing \$19.1 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to continue and improve the Australian Government’s trachoma elimination program by extending agreements with Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

These agreements enable continued investment in jurisdictions to support the identification, screening, treatment, management and prevention of trachoma and trichiasis for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, with the aim of eliminating trachoma as a public health issue in Indigenous communities by 2022.

Rheumatic Fever Strategy Continuation

The Australian Government is investing \$12 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to continue and improve the *Rheumatic Fever Strategy* by extending National Partnership Agreements with Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The funding continues to support the delivery of improved detection, monitoring and management of Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians through coordinated disease register and control programs. The agreements support a collaborative effort between the Australian Government and states for the delivery of the *Rheumatic Fever Strategy*.

The *Rheumatic Fever Strategy* embodies the principles of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* and gives practical effect to its priority reforms through implementation of a sector-led, nationally coordinated strategy.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Hearing Health

The Australian Government is investing \$100 million under the *Indigenous Australians Health Program* from 2022-23 to 2026-27 to support ear and hearing health activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Improving the ear and hearing health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is critical to achieving better health, education and employment outcomes.

This investment will support the continuation of six existing ear and hearing health programs, including the *Hearing Assessment Program – Early Ears* that provides audiology assessments and follow up treatment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children before they start school, specialist outreach services, ear health coordination, specialist training, provision of equipment and health promotion activities.

In line with commitments under the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, this investment will enable greater participation in program design and delivery by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector, represented by the NACCHO. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ear and Hearing Health Partnership Committee has been established, comprising representatives from the department, NACCHO and Hearing Australia as well as experts in the field, to drive a strategic approach to delivering long term outcomes.

Additionally, the Australian Government is continuing its investment for a further two years to 30 June 2024 under the National Partnership Agreement on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI) to reduce the prevalence of ear disease, hearing problems and oral health problems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Northern Territory. The extension of the NTRAI will enable the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, to undertake an evidence-informed exercise to inform future arrangement options. Total investment for hearing and oral health under the NTRAI is \$61.3 million over 10 years since 2012-13.

Remote Area Aboriginal Health Service Program

The *Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services* (RAAHS) Program enables people living in remote communities, who may have limited access to a community pharmacy, to access essential PBS medicines from their Aboriginal Health Service upon consultation, at no cost and without a PBS prescription. In 2020-21, more than 1.6 million PBS items were supplied to approved RAAHS' at a total cost of \$41.6 million.

Mental Health

Strengthening Access to and Connection between Mental Health Services via Digital Means

The Australian Government continues to invest in a range of initiatives to ensure all Australians, including those in regional, rural and remote areas, have greater access and choice in engaging with high quality, free and low cost digital mental health services. This includes ongoing core funding for digital mental health services regional Australians depend on, including continued funding for eheadspace to support the mental health of young people aged 12-25 years, as well as ongoing core funding for Lifeline Australia's telephone, text and online crisis service, which is accessible from anywhere in Australia. The government has also extended emergency funding to help digital mental health service providers manage increased demand due to COVID-19.

This measure is also supporting the development of a new national mental health platform and the implementation of the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards to improve the quality of digital mental health service provision, and protect service users.

Enhancement and expansion of youth mental health services

The Australian Government is investing \$1.4 billion in the national headspace network over the next five years from 2021-22. This investment includes \$278.6 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to expand and enhance the network and other youth mental health services, including in partnership with state and territory governments. The network of services will grow to 164 by 2025-26. This will address a number of gaps in the current delivery of youth mental health services to priority groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This measure will also contribute to addressing the increasing complexity of young people presenting to headspace services will work to further stabilise the youth mental health workforce and increase access and availability of services, with particular focus on boosting support in rural and remote regions.

Ensuring Continuity of Psychosocial Support for Australians with Severe Mental Illness Not Supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme

The Australian Government is investing \$237.8 million from 2021-22 to 2023-24 for the continuation of psychosocial support services for people with a severe mental illness who are not supported by the NDIS. This includes a regional loading to funding for PHNs to commission services under the *Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program*. The regional loading is in recognition of the higher costs of service delivery in regional, rural and remote communities. It is intended to incentivise service commissioning and improve service availability for people with severe mental illness living in these communities.

Preventive Health

Funding for Regulation of Medicinal Cannabis Research, Cultivation and Manufacture with Charging Consistent with the Australian Government Charging Framework

The Australian Government is investing \$1.7 million in additional funding from 2020-21 to 2023-24 for the regulation of the *Medicinal Cannabis Scheme* (the Scheme) under the *Narcotic Drugs Act 1967*, which allows for the cultivation, production and/or manufacture of cannabis for medicinal or research purposes.

This Scheme provides a direct benefit to regional Australian businesses providing funding to subsidise the costs of travel for inspections that are associated with an application. This approach was taken to ensure that companies located in regional Australia are not unfairly impacted by higher costs that often result from travel to regional and remote communities.

This measure also supports the government's commitment to growing local industry by prioritising medicinal cannabis projects that make a significant contribution in the areas of supply to the domestic market, exports and industry development. Up to 5,000 direct and indirect jobs in regional areas can be attributed to the Scheme.

Support for Surf Life Saving Training and Beach Safety Equipment

The Australian Government is providing \$6.6 million in funding to Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) from 2020-21 to 2021-22 to enhance its ability to protect beachgoers.

Commencing in 2016-17, the government had previously provided \$10 million over four years for this initiative to boost SLSA's capacity to deliver preventative safety measures at local beaches. Further funding allows SLSA to continue to provide vocational education and training to volunteers to save lives on Australia's beaches and build on their organisational capability.

Furthermore, the government is providing \$3.1 million from 2020-21 to 2021-22 through the *Water and Snow Safety Program*, to support SLSA's Beach Safety Equipment Fund (BSEF).

SLSA receives funding through the government's *Water and Snow Safety Program* for the BSEF to provide 314 Surf Life Saving Clubs (SLSCs) across Australia with \$5,000 per annum. This funding is used to purchase vital rescue equipment including rescue boards, life jackets, rescue manikins inflatable rescue boats, all-terrain vehicles, defibrillators, and first aid and medical supplies. This additional funding provides SLSCs with a total of \$10,000 per annum to support the purchase of new patrol equipment and replacement of old and damaged equipment.

Funding supports all 314 SLSCs around Australia, which includes 136 clubs in regional areas and 7 clubs in remote areas.

Regional Sport Events Fund

The Australian Government has invested \$1.9 million to establish a *Regional Sport Events Fund* to support the staging of sporting events in regional Australia. More than 400 eligible Local Government Areas (LGAs) across remote and regional Australia can apply for funding of up to \$50,000 to support hosting of small and large sporting events.

The *Regional Sport Events Fund* will support communities to host sporting events ranging from 'come and try days' to larger events including elite sporting exhibitions and state and national level competitions that engage the broader community. The program will encourage greater visitation to regional Australia, reinvigorate local economies and provide opportunities for community members to reconnect to support the recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. Funding will be delivered to LGAs in 2021-22, with events able to be held up to 31 December 2022.

Ageing and Aged Care

More equitable access to aged care for First Nations people and special needs groups

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$630.2 million over five years from 2020-21 in more equitable access to aged care. Senior Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and those living in rural and remote locations will benefit from increased choice and sustainability of services, assistance with accessing aged care and improved infrastructure to meet consumer expectations.

This funding includes an investment of \$396.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to enable aged care providers to make needed improvements to their buildings and build new services in areas where senior Australians currently have limited access or where staff caring for their needs do not have suitable housing. Communities will benefit significantly from construction projects and increased aged care services. Projects will provide around 1400 construction jobs and benefit 471,000 senior Australians living in rural and remote locations. The first round of funding in 2021-22 has been targeted at National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Services.

This funding will allow evaluations of this measure to identify service gaps within regional, rural and remote Australia to assist with addressing areas of greatest demand, giving particular focus to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and consumers with special needs.

These capital infrastructure measures are ongoing, with \$130 million per annum to be made available from 2025-26.

An investment of \$64.1 million is also being provided over four years from 2021-22 to support the delivery of viable, high quality integrated care to older Australians in regional and remote locations (\$19.6 million is available in 2021-22).

The funding model for the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program* has been updated, including an additional \$62 million over four years from 2021-22 to support delivery of viable, high quality care to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. From 1 July 2021, funding is being provided to ensure residential aged care consumers can stay connected to Country and culture, as well as meeting the travel costs of any people needed to provide clinical or other assistance to a resident.

An investment of \$64 million is also being provided over four years from 2021-22 to support the delivery of viable, high quality integrated care to older Australians in regional and remote locations by broadly aligning the funding for Multi-Purpose Services with the new AN-ACC funding model.

Aged care service providers located in remote areas or who provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be given professional support to improve the organisations workforce capability and financial sustainability. This has been made available through a \$5 million investment in 2021-22 to expand the Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel.

The government will also invest \$25.1 million over three years from 2021-22 to assist rural and remote aged care providers experiencing high turnover and sudden departures by expanding the *Rural Locum Assistance Program* to provide:

- access to a surge locum workforce for an interim period while recruitment is undertaken
- assistance with recruiting permanent staff with the requisite skills and experience
- a new incentive scheme to increase the retention of permanent staff.

These initiatives promote sustainability in the aged care sector for services in regional and remote Australia. They also assist the sector where high costs of delivering care are limiting the ability to invest in infrastructure, where workforce challenges are undermining viability and continuity of care, where choice and uptake of services is limited and where intervention is required to make mainstream models fit for purpose.

This investment supports senior Australians in regional and remote Australia who have expressed a strong preference to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

Providing More Home Care Packages

The Australian Government will release an additional 40,000 Home Care Packages (HCPs) in 2022-23 to support senior Australians to stay in their homes for longer. These HCPs form part of the additional 80,000 HCPs announced in the 2021-22 Budget.

Thirty-thousand of the additional 80,000 HCPs have been allocated to 29 March 2022, of which around 7,400 have been allocated to people living in rural and remote areas (MM 3to7).

Since the 2018-19 Budget, the government has invested a total of \$12 billion in new funding to deliver more than 163,000 additional HCPs.

This release of an additional 40,000 HCPs in 2022-23 will see wait times fall and support senior Australians in regional and remote areas who have expressed a strong preference to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

The release of additional home care packages is supported by the *Home Care Workforce Support Program* which aims to attract 13,000 new personal care workers to home care including in regional and remote areas. The Australian Government committed \$91.8 million for two years from 2021-22 for the delivery of this program. Six organisations are being provided funding to deliver this program with an additional dedicated grant focussed on growing the Indigenous workforce.

Multi-Purpose Services

The Australian Government continues to support 179 Multi-Purpose Services (MPSs) to deliver flexible aged care across rural and remote Australia in all states and territories (except the Australian Capital Territory) and Norfolk Island. The Multi-Purpose Service (MPS) program is a joint initiative of state and Commonwealth governments to provide health and aged care services in thin markets. The government funds MPS aged care services under the *Aged Care Act 1997*, and the states and territory governments fund the health services.

In 2021-22, through its payment agreements with 29 providers which are largely state and territory health departments, the department is providing funding of \$238.9 million to support the MPS program.

Disability Support for Older Australians – funding to older people with disability

The *Disability Support for Older Australians* (DSOA) program replaced the *Commonwealth Continuity of Support (CoS) Programme* on 1 July 2021. The Australian Government is investing an additional \$229.3 million over 2021-22 to 2022-23 to meet the growing demand from providers and consumers for funding higher needs.

With this increased funding, the DSOA program will deliver a more client-centred program to around 2,600 clients.

Like CoS, DSOA is a closed program that support older people with a disability who were in state administered care and not eligible for the NDIS.

Providers in regional areas for these programs will continue to deliver specialist disability services to clients in their local region. Maintaining providers in regional areas provides more choice to those clients.

Continue Regional Stewardship of Aged Care

This measure will continue the regional stewardship of aged care governance model for a further six months with \$6.1 million building on the \$13.4 million provided in the 2021-22 Budget initiative titled *Governance – Strengthening regional stewardship of aged care*.

This program ensures that national planning and policy development is informed by an understanding of local issues and needs where these align in a genuinely regional approach.

Structural Adjustment Program

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government announced a new *Structural Adjustment Program* to run until 30 June 2023. Building on the \$101 million that has already been awarded through the *Business Improvement Fund*, an additional \$66.1 million has been invested to support residential aged care providers to improve their operations, or where appropriate, to sell or close their business.

The program primarily supports regional, rural and remote approved aged care providers to help them transition to a more competitive market and improve the sector's sustainability and capability. The program is delivered through two separate grant opportunities:

- The *Business Improvement Fund for Residential Aged Care – Round 2* to support providers to improve their financial viability.
- The *Structural Adjustment Fund* to support providers to sell, transition or exit from the residential aged care sector.

The intended outcomes of the program are to:

- support providers, with priority given to regional, rural, and remote Australia, to ensure they are financially viable to continue to deliver residential aged care services in their local community
- ensure service continuity and quality care for senior Australians should a provider decide to sell to another residential aged care provider
- ensure residents are transitioned in a safe and orderly manner to a new residential aged care facility if their provider exits the market.

Natural Disaster Response

Supporting the Mental Health of Australians Affected by Bushfires

The 2021-22 Budget provided \$4 million to PHNs in bushfire impacted areas to continue to commission mental health trauma and distress counselling sessions for individuals impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires to 31 December 2021.

The Australian Government extended activities under the package to 30 June 2022 to align with the *Community Wellbeing and Participation* measure. Nine PHNs have sought, and been granted, an extension of funding until 31 December 2022, due to delays caused by COVID-19.

Bushfire MBS items were introduced in January 2020 to ensure access to MBS-subsidised mental health services for individuals, including first responders, whose mental health was adversely affected by bushfires. These items have been extended to 30 June 2022 to provide the continuation of mental health support for a further six months to aid recovery from the bushfires.

Research

Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study

The Australian Government is funding the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) \$89.5 million from 2020-21 to 2022-23 to undertake the Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study (IHMHS).

In 2020-21 the ABS conducted the first cohort of the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing (NSMHW). Information collected in the NSMHW will be used to help understand the mental health of Australians, including their use of services and their social and economic circumstances. First insights from the NSMHW were released on 8 December 2021.

More comprehensive results will be released in mid-2022, including the number of Australians with mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. Further detailed analysis of state and territory estimates using a second (2021-22) cohort of the NSMHW is expected to be published in mid-2023.

In addition to the IHMHS, the government has also committed funding to measure mental health in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The survey will be co-designed and implemented with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to ensure it is culturally appropriate and meets the needs of the community.

The National Health Survey (NHS) component of the IHMHS commenced in January 2022, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducting interviews in 23,000 households across Australia, in all States and Territories. Interviews and data collection undertaken in remote, rural, and regional Australia is an important part of this study and will support better understanding of the health needs of people living in these communities.

The NHS includes the National Health Measures Survey which invites eligible participants to voluntarily provide blood and/or urine samples by visiting their local participating pathology collection centre. This survey supports important research into the prevalence of chronic illnesses, and better understanding of the links between lifestyle, risk factors and disease. This information enables governments to assess current public health policies and develop new policies to help prevent illness and promote good health practices.

Eligible participants will also be asked to provide blood and/or urine samples for longer term storage in the Australian Health Biobank which is being set up to provide a national collection of biological samples from the Australian population. This will provide a unique resource for researchers in the future to undertake a wide range of research projects to improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

Home Affairs

The Department of Home Affairs is responsible for the centralised coordination, strategic and policy leadership of the Home Affairs Portfolio (the portfolio).

The portfolio comprises the Department of Home Affairs including the Australian Border Force (the department), the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, and the Office of the Special Investigator.

The portfolio has diverse responsibilities in supporting a prosperous, secure and united Australia, including functions related to cyber and critical infrastructure resilience and security, federal law enforcement, national and transport security, criminal justice, emergency management, multicultural affairs, immigration, citizenship, social cohesion and border management related functions. A strategy-led and coordinated approach ensures the portfolio delivers outcomes for Australia's rural and regional community on behalf of the Australian Government.

The portfolio continues to play a leading role in supporting and protecting Australia's communities from the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 through coordination of the whole-of-government response to the non-health aspects of the pandemic, including re-opening the international border.

The re-opening of Australia's international border was a significant step in the nation's post-pandemic economic recovery. Increased migration planning levels for regional, state and territory nominated visa categories, new and streamlined visa options for seasonal and agricultural workers, and changes to working holiday visas will support Australia's regions and facilitate economic growth.

The portfolio is investing in national emergency management capabilities to ensure Australia is prepared for, and resilient to, all hazards. Significant uplift to the Australian Government's capacity to alert Australians to emergencies and matters of national significance will ensure all Australians, including those in regional and rural communities, are informed of emerging threats and risks regardless of their telecommunications provider. Further, the establishment of a critical disaster stores stockpile will enhance the resilience of regional communities to natural disasters.

The portfolio's functions include supporting the safety and security of communities and strengthening Australia's social cohesion. Through new pilot and community support programs, grants that promote deeper integration of multicultural communities across Australia, and enabling greater access to services for migrant and refugee women in regional communities, the portfolio is supporting economic security and safety of migrants and refugees throughout regional Australia.

The portfolio is also supporting communities to raise awareness and build resilience to better reintegrate and rehabilitate violent extremists in custody or the community. Significant investment in new programs, as well as expansion of existing Countering Violent Extremism intervention programs will support rural and regional communities in dealing with the ongoing security threat of extremism.

As at 31 December 2021, the portfolio employed 14,579 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 9,786 staff (67 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 4,338 staff (30 per cent) in other capital cities and 455 staff (3 per cent) in regional areas. The portfolio has a footprint in over 50 locations nationally, including all Australian capital cities, and staff deployed geographically to regional centres and remote regional areas.

New Initiatives

2022-23 Migration Program

The *2022-23 Migration Program* will deliver 25,000 permanent regional visas and 20,000 state and territory nominated visas, almost doubling the planning levels of 2021-22. The significant increase in regional visa and state and territory nominated visa places, in conjunction with the introduction of the new *Australian Agricultural Visa* and the streamlining of the *Seasonal Workers Programme* with the *Pacific Labour Mobility* schemes, will help address workforce shortages in regional areas, and support the delivery of the government's regionalisation agenda. The increased planning levels for the regional and state and territory nominated visa categories reflect the capacity for growth in regional Australia and will help deliver access to services and infrastructure across our non-metropolitan areas. An increase in regional population through skilled migration will create demand for essential services, which can draw further skills to the regions, create opportunities and jobs, and revitalise regions in transition or decline over the long term.

Australian Agriculture Visa

The *Australian Agriculture Visa* (AgVisa) scheme is designed to provide a long-term, reliable workforce to support ongoing growth of Australia's critical agricultural industries as they strive to reach \$100 billion in value by 2030. The AgVisa scheme is open to low-skilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers from a range of countries negotiated through bilateral agreements.

Visa holders will fill short and long-term positions, not able to be filled locally, in rural and regional Australia across a range of agricultural industries, including horticulture, meat processing, dairy, wool, grains, fisheries (including aquaculture) and forestry.

In December 2021, the Australian Government announced \$87.2 million over four years from 2021-22 (and \$23.4 million per year ongoing from 2025-26) for the *Australian*

Agriculture Visa. The department received \$15 million for operational staff over four years through to 2024-25. This will fund an increase in deterrence and enforcement activities aimed to combat worker exploitation and minimise rates of non-compliance under the scheme.

Further information on this scheme can be found in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade chapter.

Pacific Labour Mobility – reforms

From 4 April 2022, the two existing Pacific Labour Mobility initiatives, the *Seasonal Worker Programme* and *Pacific Labour Scheme*, will be consolidated and operated under a single *Pacific Australia Labour Mobility* (PALM) scheme, administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Pacific Labour Mobility reforms respond to industry needs and assist employers to engage workers from nine Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste where Australian workers are not available.

Pacific labour remains the priority source of temporary migrant workers for meeting Australia's agricultural workforce shortages in rural and regional Australia. In December 2021, the Australian Government announced \$81.3 million over four years from 2021-22 (and \$18.9 million in 2025-26) for the Pacific Labour Mobility reforms, including supporting an additional 12,500 workers by March 2022 to fill workforce shortages in rural and regional Australia. This is expected to increase visa receipts by \$25 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

Further information on this scheme can be found in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade chapter.

Addressing Workforce Shortages

The Australian Government announced several visa related measures to support the reopening of Australia and associated economic recovery by making it easier for highly skilled migrants to remain in Australia and continue working in critical sectors. Visa changes include improving access to permanent residence for:

- Existing Temporary Skill Shortage (subclass 482) visa holders in the short-term stream
- Legacy Temporary Work Skilled (subclass 457) visa holders who no longer meet the age requirement.

The measures also include the extension of visas for skilled regional (Provisional visa) holders (subclass 489, 391 and 494) in recognition that this cohort has been adversely affected by COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

The return of skilled migrants supports Australian business in regional Australia fill skills shortages where no suitably qualified Australians are available, contributing to the economic recovery of regional Australia.

COVID-19 Response Package – Working Holiday Maker program arrangements

From 5 March 2022, former Working Holiday Maker (WHM) visa holders who were onshore on 20 March 2020 can apply for a replacement visa, without associated visa application charges. The government will also implement new WHM arrangements for a number of participating countries including increases in annual placement caps and age limits.

The WHM program provides substantial benefits to the Australian economy, including tourism revenue and job creation. The program supports Australian employers including employers in regional Australia with their labour needs, as working holiday makers can work at any skill level and in any occupation without the need for formal employer sponsorship. There are incentives for WHM to undertake periods of 'specified work' in areas of regional, northern, remote and very remote Australia, in order to qualify for second and third visas. These incentives help address labour market shortages in key industries and sectors including the agricultural, mining and construction, forestry and fishing and tourism and hospitality sectors. The nil visa application charge initiatives will encourage those working holiday makers already onshore to remain in Australia and the changes to participating country arrangements will expand the program, providing a larger pool of working holiday makers looking to undertake specified work in regional areas.

Visa Application Charge Refund Settings for Student and Working Holiday Maker visa holders

The government will provide refunds of Visa Application Charge (VAC) to student and WHM visa holders who arrive in Australia between 19 January 2022 to 19 March 2022 (for students) and 19 January 2022 to 19 April 2022 (for WHMs). This measure is to encourage students and WHM visa holders to enter Australia and support economic recovery. As at 28 February 2022, over 22,000 claims had been received from the 66,839 eligible visa holders who have entered Australia since 19 January 2022. Students will attend educational institutions all around Australia, including in regional locations. WHMs can have an extended holiday and undertake work in locations around Australia. They are encouraged to take positions in regional locations to support the agriculture, mining, resources, tourism and hospitality sectors in northern and remote Australia.

2022-23 Humanitarian Program

The 2022-23 *Humanitarian Program* will be maintained at a ceiling of 13,750 places over the forward estimates, the same level as in 2021-22. This will ensure that Australia remains one of the most generous humanitarian resettlement countries in the world while recognising the impacts of COVID-19 on program delivery.

In recognition of our sustained commitment following Australia's two decades of operations in Afghanistan, 16,500 additional places for Afghan nationals under the *Humanitarian Program*, announced in the 2022-23 Budget, will be equally allocated over the next four years and delivered in parallel and in addition to the annual Humanitarian Program intake. As a result, the total number of places available for Afghan nationals will be 31,500 across the *Humanitarian* and *Migration Programs* over the forward estimates (including 10,000 already announced as arriving under the *Humanitarian Program* and 5,000 announced as arriving under the Family stream of the *Migration Program*) while ensuring there continues to be flexibility within the program to respond to global humanitarian needs.

The department is responsible for the primary settlement of humanitarian entrants that arrive in Australia on refugee visas, and current policy is to prioritise regional settlement where possible. Afghans have traditionally settled in metropolitan or larger regional locations, with the majority settling in the metropolitan and larger regional locations (i.e. Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane and Canberra). These locations have established settlement services and other supports in place to support new arrivals. Many Afghans declare family/friend links in existing settlement locations before they arrive in Australia, or chose to move post-arrival to reside more closely to identified family/friend contacts. It is departmental policy to settle humanitarian entrants close to their families and connections in Australia, as this provides new arrivals with valuable social support in their early settlement period. Humanitarian entrants are permanent residents and are able to move freely once they arrive in Australia. With broader humanitarian travel resuming, the department is working closely with service providers on exploring retention strategies in regional locations for this and other cohorts.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the government progressed visa applications from Ukrainian nationals as a priority, particularly those with Australian community connections, across temporary and permanent visa categories. The government will make available up to 4,000 Temporary Humanitarian Concern (subclass 786) visas to all Ukrainian temporary visa holders currently in Australia and those who may arrive in the coming months on a temporary visa. This visa will be valid for three years and allow people to work, access Medicare and appropriate associated support services.

School-aged children will also be able to continue their education, whilst in Australia. The government will work closely with the Ukrainian community to ensure appropriate permanent visa options are made available to this cohort at an appropriate time. For

budget purposes, this will be funded through the *Humanitarian Program* for the 2021-2022 financial year.

To support regional settlement, the government is committed to settling 50 per cent of humanitarian entrants in regional Australia by 2022. While the number of arrivals are significantly lower due to COVID-19, 58 per cent of entrants who received travel exemptions to travel to Australia settled in a regional location in 2020-21, while only 38.5 per cent of entrants settled in a regional location after their initial entry to Australia in 2019-20.

Reform of Settlement Strategies and Services

As part of the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to improving the settlement and integration outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants, \$9.2 million over four years is being invested from 2021 to implement reforms to the *Community Support Program* and establish the *Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot*.

From 1 July 2022, the government will reduce the visa application charge to 40 per cent of the current rate for primary applicants to the *Community Support Program* and remove it entirely for secondary applicants. It will also increase the number of places available in the program from 750 to 1,900 places by 2024-25.

Ensuring that communities from across regional Australia can participate directly in the settlement of refugees will be one of the key priorities for the *Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot*. Expenditure will facilitate community sponsorship of up to 1,500 refugees across Australia, to help refugees resettle with the support of trained community groups, faith-based groups and volunteers.

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children

The Australian Government will invest \$8 million over four years from 2022-23 to enhance the national response to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence.

Women in regional and remote communities, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are at increased risk of experiencing social isolation, settlement and integration stresses, and having limited access to critical support services. These interacting factors can hinder the ability of women and children in regional and remote communities to seek and access assistance when fleeing domestic, family and sexual violence situations, and exacerbate the risk of long-term disenfranchisement.

The department's measures under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children* will support increasing the capacity of the criminal justice system to better respond to sexual assault, promote a consistent response to gendered violence, uplift

law enforcement responses to domestic, family and sexual violence, and increase access to critical support services for vulnerable victim-survivors of forced marriage.

These measures will have a net positive impact for victim-survivors in regional and remote communities, by increasing their access to critical information and equitable criminal justice outcomes, and further prioritise embedding culturally sensitive and trauma informed practices across the criminal justice and law enforcement sector.

Countering Violent Extremism Initiatives

The Australian Government is allocating \$61.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to further strengthen national *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Initiatives* through five key measures:

- investing \$24.5 million to expand existing CVE intervention programs, including into rural and regional Australia
- establishing a \$13.8 million national program to rehabilitate and reintegrate violent extremists in custody or in the community, including those who have returned to Australia from overseas conflict zones
- establishing a Centre of Excellence for CVE Research, Risk Assessment and Training that will ensure frontline workers can access the best training and tools to do their jobs
- supporting communities to increase their awareness and build resilience to violent extremism, with particular focus on rural and regional Australia, through a new \$10.7 million *CVE Community Grants Program*
- strengthening strategic communications to address the rising threat posed by nationalist and racist violent extremist groups, and provide vulnerable people with positive, alternative narratives.

These initiatives will have a positive impact on CVE awareness and access to treatment services in regional areas through a targeted community engagement function and via the new *CVE Community Grants Program*. The online *CVE Strategic Communications Program* will continue to reach Australians across the country, taking a primary prevention approach to divert individuals from extremist ideologies before their beliefs become entrenched. State and territory governments are critical in the delivery of CVE programs to ensure an effective and cooperative national effort.

Social Cohesion Grants Program

In the 2021-22 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO)*, the government provided \$8.1 million in 2021-22 to continue the *Fostering Integration Grants Program* to promote social cohesion by supporting deeper integration of multicultural communities across Australia and strengthening their sense of belonging and participation in Australian society.

Cell Broadcast National Messaging System

As part of the *Emergency Management and National Resilience Package* the Australian Government has announced funding for the implementation of a *Cell Broadcast National Messaging System* (CBNMS) over three years. This system will allow messages to be sent to all compatible mobile phones in the country or within a geo-location in the event of a disaster, for example. CBNMS is intended to complement the existing Emergency Alert Platform, which sends messages to landlines and mobile phones.

CBNMS will enable timely and targeted messages to be sent to the community in relation to unfolding emergencies or disaster events, including events of national significance. This is particularly important for regional communities, and their visitors, who are often disproportionately impacted by emergencies and disasters. The system will provide a much-needed alert capability, and addresses the recommendations of the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements*, which identified the need to improve information and warning systems.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications is leading the implementation of CBNMS, along with Emergency Management Australia within the department, and in consultation with states and territories.

National Emergency Management Stockpile of Critical Disaster Stores

The government will invest \$10 million in 2022-23 for the initial establishment and implementation of a National Emergency Management Stockpile of Critical Disaster Stores (NEMS).

The NEMS will enhance national disaster preparedness and response capabilities in support of state and territory emergency management responses.

The NEMS will take a hybrid approach to the supply of critical disaster response resources, consisting of:

- a physical stockpile of key resources that are held and maintained (on behalf of the Australian Government) in warehouses for deployment
- an established panel of suppliers to enable rapid procurement of other disaster response resources as needed, for example food stores and water.

A physical stockpile guarantees immediate availability of key disaster resources that have a long shelf life, allowing their rapid deployment to emergency service organisations and in turn, the community and businesses.

Both the physically owned critical resources and rapidly procured perishable resources will be outsourced to the private sector under appropriate commercial arrangements. Physical stockpiles will be located in regional Australia, close to road and air transport channels. This approach is both flexible and builds opportunities for Australian industries and employment in regional Australia.

The NEMS will benefit all regional Australians, who are disproportionately impacted by emergency and disaster events, and often have fewer resources to support response and recovery.

Current Initiatives

First National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

The Australian Government allocated \$155 million to the Australian Federal Police (AFP) over four years from 2021-22, to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. Law enforcement initiatives led by the AFP will have a positive impact on regional Australia and indigenous communities, particularly through education programs to raise child safety awareness. This funding will also enhance capabilities, alongside efforts by the AFP-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation in driving a collaborative national response to counter the exploitation of children.

National Aerial Firefighting Capability

As part of the *National Aerial Firefighting Program*, the government has provided an annual funding boost of \$4 million per annum to base a Large Air Tanker (LAT) in Australia, ensuring a national aerial firefighting capability is available to reduce the impact of bushfires on Australian communities, particularly in regional areas. This brings the government's annual investment in aerial firefighting to more than \$30 million. The national LAT arrived in Australia on 23 December 2021 and was deployed to fight fires in Western Australia on 24 December 2021. The national LAT has significantly enhanced Australia's ability to combat earlier starting and later finishing fire seasons by reducing our reliance on overseas aircraft. This funding directly addresses recommendation 8.1 of the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* for a sovereign aerial firefighting capability. The National Aerial Firefighting Centre arrangements allow state and territory operational fire chiefs and commissioners flexibility in accessing the right type and mix of aircraft in line with the seasonal fire risk. The additional funding will increase access for jurisdictions to specialised aerial firefighting resources, including large air tanker capability.

Extension of North West Point Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island

The cohort profile at North West Point Immigration Detention Centre (NWPIDC) continues to comprise of males of mostly high or extreme security risk, including those identified as vulnerable due to the nature of their offending.

Due to the high risk cohort profile, NWPIDC remains the only facility within the Immigration Detention Network (IDN) that is available to accommodate this cohort. It is anticipated that NWPIDC will be required to hold up to 300 high risk detainees until 30 June 2023. The Australian Border Force continues to engage with Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and relevant Western Australian authorities, for staff and detainees transiting through Western Australia and arriving on Christmas Island, to manage concerns regarding COVID-19.

Securing Australia's Future Connectivity

The Australian Government has allocated \$31.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the *Securing Australia's Future Connectivity* initiative as part of its Digital Economy Strategy (DES) announced in the 2021-22 Budget. The initiative is supporting Australia's future connectivity through a number of programs, the two most prominent of which are the '*Secure-G*' *Connectivity Test Lab* and the *6G Future Connectivity and Development Program*.

When operational, the '*Secure-G*' *Connectivity Test Lab* will provide an environment for telecommunication network providers and vendors to undertake testing on measures, protocols, standards and software-based technologies that form part of Australia's 5G security architecture. In doing so, the program will encourage activity and innovation by supporting market and supply chain diversification achieved by reducing barriers to entry. This program is actively under development, involving close engagement with industry, academia and likeminded international partners to scope the specific nature of the '*Secure-G*' *Connectivity Test Lab* Operating Model to ensure it is fit for purpose.

The *6G Future Connectivity and Development Program* will accelerate the commercialisation of connectivity technologies and security offerings by funding foundational research into 6G technology requirements and identifying the market incentives to build sovereign, exportable findings upon which the development of future telecommunications will be based. This program is in its initial stages and due to finalise its research project proposals with the identified/preferred Service Provider.

The *Securing Australia's Future Connectivity* initiative will benefit the community and industry Australia-wide, including small and medium sized businesses in regional areas, by increasing innovation and competition in the telecommunications sector. This will help to ensure that all Australians, including those in regional areas, can leverage the productivity, economic and social benefits instantaneous, ultra-fast, high-bandwidth 5G mobile and wireless internet connectivity promises. This supports the government's overall priority to bridge the digital divide between metropolitan and regional Australia.

Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources and its portfolio agencies are securing our economic recovery and setting the foundations for Australia's future by building on Australia's strengths, supporting businesses to invest and create jobs, and driving long-term productivity, growth and sustainability. The health of our traditional industries is vital to regional Australia, and the portfolio plays a key role in providing a positive investment environment for businesses and industry to create economic growth and jobs in our regions.

The portfolio has responsibility for policy and programs for a number of sectors that underpin the Australian economy, including resources, energy, emissions reduction, industry and manufacturing, and science and technology. Initiatives to support and grow these sectors unlock investment, create jobs and have tangible economic benefits for Australians living in rural and regional areas.

Global trends will have an impact on Australia's resources and energy sectors over the longer term, but they will continue to play a major role in the wealth of regional Australia. In this Budget, a number of new resources and energy initiatives will provide opportunity for regional growth and economic recovery, including our investment in priority gas infrastructure projects which will expand major pipeline and storage capacity, and connect the Beetaloo Sub-basin to the east coast gas market. Growth opportunities for critical minerals and manufacturing are also supported in this Budget.

The Australian Government is investing to maintain energy security, affordability and reliability, while we reduce emissions. The department is also supporting the delivery of \$1.3 billion in energy and emissions reduction programs in Australia's regions, including \$1 billion announced as part of its \$7.1 billion *Energy Security and Regional Development Plan*.. The Australian Government's investments in low emissions technology will bring significant benefits for regional Australia. Supporting the next stage of the *National Hydrogen Strategy* will further support development of clean hydrogen hubs across Australia, accelerating growth of clean hydrogen and the workforce supporting this emerging market. This will stimulate additional private sector investment in the regions and support jobs in the hub locations, ensuring Australia's place, and regional focus, in the new low emissions economy.

Our portfolio agencies, including the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC), the Clean Energy Regulator, and the Climate Change Authority all continue to implement policy and programs for Australia's fast growing renewable and low emission technology industries. These investments continue to create jobs, including in regional areas, attract investment and help position Australia as a leader in low emissions technologies.

The deployment of microgrids in regional communities will give communities greater agency and ownership to improve the reliability, security and affordability of their energy supply. Microgrids will provide secure, reliable and affordable energy while reducing emissions, improving resilience and creating jobs across regional Australia.

New investment in innovative Australian soil carbon measurement technology will also assist farmers to improve the health and quality of soil and increase productivity of Australian farms, while reducing emissions through soil carbon sequestration. Increasing soil carbon also improves drought resilience.

Manufacturing is a key pillar in the Australian Government's plan for a strong, modern, and resilient economy. With over 30 per cent of Australia's total manufacturing employment located in regional areas of Australia, the *Modern Manufacturing Strategy*, the *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* and the *National Manufacturing Priorities* (NMPs) play an important part in creating high-value jobs and realising new sources of growth in a post-pandemic world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested Australia's supply chains. To meet these national challenges the Australian Government has expanded the *Supply Chain Resilience Initiative* (SCRI), which will build flexibility and resilience in our national and regional economies. All sectors of the economy will benefit, particularly those aligned with the *National Manufacturing Priorities*, which are critical to future economic growth and recovery.

The establishment of the *National Critical Minerals Research and Development Centre* will address barriers across the critical minerals sector and work with industry to focus research and development efforts on national priorities. This will help grow Australia's critical minerals sector and help it capture new opportunities, supporting economic development in remote and regional areas.

In addition, the *Critical Minerals Accelerator Initiative* will stimulate the development of the sector by investing in early to mid-stage projects in the regions that align with the *Critical Minerals Strategy* to overcome technical and market barriers.

Regional Australia will continue to benefit from the Australian Government's ongoing strategic investments in our growing space industry. A new partnership with international partners will secure access to sovereign Earth Observation capabilities. This will provide direct and indirect benefits to regional Australia through employing people in high-skill and high-value jobs such as building and designing satellites and ground stations.

A home-grown and owned capability to observe the Earth from space is also critical for national management of resources, maximising economic output for all sectors affected by weather, national security, and management of and recovery from natural disasters.

This is particularly important for the regions where Australia's mining, energy and agriculture sectors predominantly operate. Increasing Australia's sovereign satellite capability and investment will secure faster access to data and help build national resilience and recovery arrangements for natural disasters that impact all Australians, particularly in regional Australia.

In the science and technology field, remediation of the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) wharf in Townsville will future-proof its use by different research vessels, and deliver world leading marine science to support investment and job creation for Australia's Blue Economy and the ongoing sustainability of the Great Barrier Reef.

Importantly, access by regional businesses to information and opportunity across all portfolios and levels of government is enabled by the AusIndustry Outreach Network. The Network of 27 Regional Managers, located across regional centres and capital cities, deliver front line, face-to-face services to business. The Network provides local businesses with information about programs, grants, and services available across portfolios and governments. AusIndustry Regional Managers work closely with other local, state and Australian Government agencies in their regions to facilitate business and economic growth. The network is in a unique position to gather insights from the business community and economic environment on current and emerging regional issues, which then feed into policy and program design.

Additionally, the Department, through AusIndustry, is supporting communities and businesses to recover from the devastating 2022 floods in New South Wales and Queensland. This includes support through the *Entrepreneurs' Programme's Strengthening Business service*, which has been expanded to service areas impacted by the floods.

As at 31 December 2021, the Industry, Science, Energy and Resources portfolio employed 5,674 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 4,891 staff (86 per cent) were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne, and central Sydney, 724 staff (13 per cent) in other capital cities, and 59 staff (1 per cent) in regional areas.

Outside of capital cities, the Department has regional offices in:

- New South Wales – Newcastle, Tamworth, Griffith and Wollongong.
- Queensland – Toowoomba, Southport and Townsville.
- South Australia – Mount Gambier and Port Pirie.
- Tasmania – Launceston.
- Victoria – Bendigo.
- Western Australia – Pinjarra.

In addition, the portfolio includes various agencies that employ staff around the country under their own respective legislation, including AIMS, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), ARENA, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the CEFC.

As at 31 December 2021, these agencies employed 7,115 staff, of which 4,156 (58 per cent) were employed in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney, 2,051 (29 per cent) in other capital cities, and 908 (13 per cent) in regional Australia.

New Initiatives

Support for the Australian Space Industry

The Australian Government will invest \$1.3 billion to 2038-39, and \$38.8 million per annum ongoing, under the measure *Support for the Australian Space Industry*. This includes the below components with significant regional implications:

- Establishment of a *National Space Mission for Earth Observation* to secure access to key Earth Observation (EO) data streams, build Australia's sovereign capability and enter agreements with international partners, including for the procurement and operation of Australian Satellite Cross-Calibration Radiometer satellites.
- \$65.7 million over five years from 2021-22 to set the conditions to fast track access to space for Australian space businesses and researchers, setting the conditions to launch from Australia, and providing industry opportunities to grow capability and access global supply chains.

This measure builds on the 2021-22 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO) measure *Australian Space Agency – additional funding*.

National Space Mission for Earth Observation

As a key part of the *National Space Mission for Earth Observation*, the Australian Government will invest and work with industry to design, build, launch, operate and eventually de-orbit four Australian Satellite Cross-Calibration Radiometer satellites, providing secure access to sovereign EO capabilities. Assured access to EO data will enable downstream benefits, particularly in regional areas, delivering foundational geospatial information for our agriculture, infrastructure, environment, transport, mining and energy sectors.

This includes funding to upgrade the Geoscience Australia Alice Springs Reception Facility and to support the establishment, upgrade and maintenance of calibration and validation sites in regional Western Australia and Tasmania, Darwin and the Australian Capital Territory.

Fast Tracking Access to Space

As announced on 25 February 2022, funding of \$65.7 million over five years from 2021-22 will support activities including:

- government co-investment to support Australian spaceport development
- procurement and provision of spaceflights and associated access to space services for the Australian space sector
- investigating a framework to manage human spaceflight in Australia to capture the time limited opportunity to be a regional launch and returns hub for commercial human spaceflight
- the Australian Space Agency working with international counterparts to consider opportunities for a future Australian astronaut program
- a national student space challenge.

Many of these activities will need to be located in regional Australia to be situated close to launch and return sites.

Supporting regional marine science infrastructure

On 22 March 2022, the Australian Government announced it will invest \$63.6 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26, and \$1.5 million per annum ongoing thereafter to maintain critical capability and ensure the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) can continue to deliver world leading marine science. The funding includes:

- \$26.5 million to remediate the AIMS Cape Cleveland wharf in Far North Queensland, and ongoing resourcing of \$1.5 million per annum to maintain the wharf
- \$37.1 million over three years to ensure AIMS is resourced to continue its significant, and critical contribution to marine science that protects and preserves our oceans, including \$5.3 million for the detailed design of a replacement for the AIMS research vessel, the Research Vessel Cape Ferguson.

This will support investment and job creation in Australia's Blue Economy, particularly in regional areas – including the offshore oil and gas industry and North Queensland tourism sector. The investment will also support jobs during the wharf's design and construction, mainly in the Townsville region.

Establish a CSIRO Research Translation Start Program

The Australian Government will invest \$37.4 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to establish the new *CSIRO Research Translation Start Program* to help foster an entrepreneurial culture in the research workforce, and prepare and train researchers to take research out of the lab and into the market through the commercialisation of products and services.

All Australian universities, including regional universities, and science agencies, will be able to access advice to build the commercialisation capability of their researchers.

Questacon – additional funding

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide \$11.5 million over two years from 2021-22 to support Questacon to engage young Australians, families and teachers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), through continuation of Questacon's high impact travelling programs, exhibitions and activities. Regional, remote and low socio-economic areas, where Questacon's national activities are targeted, will benefit from continuation of face to face and online services. Under-served and disadvantaged communities will benefit from access to otherwise unavailable STEM learning and skills development programs and strengthened local learning networks.

Girls and women, youth, Indigenous Australians, schools and universities will benefit from Questacon's continued cultivation of STEM learning ecosystems that increase regional connections and support future participation in communities.

This funding builds on:

- \$15.1 million provided in the 2019-20 Budget to expand the remote and regional delivery of the *Questacon Science Circus* program and the *Engineering is Elementary* program, which supports teacher confidence in teaching STEM.
- \$8.7 million announced in the 2020-21 Budget as part of *Australia's Cyber Security Strategy 2020* to deliver a national cyber security education program, aimed at growing a cyber-skilled workforce, including in Australia's regions.

Critical Minerals Strategy – Implementation

Australia's critical minerals resources are predominantly located in remote and regional areas. As announced on 16 March 2022, the Australian Government will invest \$250.5 million from 2022-23 to 2025-26 to support implementation of the 2022 *Critical Minerals Strategy*. The 2022 *Critical Minerals Strategy* is a plan for a thriving critical minerals sector that supports Australian prosperity and security. Continuing to develop and diversify our resources sector strengthens our national economy, delivery jobs and growth opportunities, particularly in regional Australia.

Details of these investments are outlined below. This measure builds on the 2021-22 MYEFO measure *Critical Minerals – support for supply chains*.

Critical Minerals Accelerator Initiative

The Australian Government will invest \$200 million from 2022-23 to 2026-27 for the *Critical Minerals Accelerator Initiative*. The initiative will accelerate the development of Australia's critical minerals sector, by supporting early to mid-stage critical minerals projects that align with the *Critical Minerals Strategy* to overcome technical and market barriers.

The Australian Government will invest a further \$200 million into the *Critical Minerals Accelerator Initiative*, doubling the size of the program, under the *Regional Accelerator Program*.

These investments will create jobs and investment in regional Australia. The initiative will foster a steady pipeline of projects and will catalyse sovereign capability in downstream critical minerals processing.

Further information on the *Regional Accelerator Program* can be found in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications chapter.

Critical Minerals Virtual Research and Development Centre

The Australian Government will invest \$50.5 million from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to establish the virtual *National Critical Minerals Research and Development Centre* (the Centre). The Centre will build on Australia's world-leading research capabilities by drawing together expertise held within the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and ANSTO.

The Centre will address barriers across the critical minerals value chain and work with industry to focus research and development efforts on national priorities. Projects led by the Centre will help unlock new sources of economically viable critical minerals, build Australian intellectual property in critical minerals processing, and diversify supply chains of strategic interest to Australia. This will help grow Australia's critical minerals sector and position it to capture new opportunities, supporting economic development in remote and regional areas.

Critical Minerals – support for supply chains – International Engagement and Regional Critical Minerals Hubs and Precincts

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide \$34.7 million over five years from 2021-22 to support the development of competitive and reliable end-to-end critical minerals supply chains, focused on Australian extraction and processing, including:

- international engagement to secure strategic partnerships and promote Australia's high environmental, social and governance standards for critical minerals
- scoping work to establish regional critical minerals hubs and precincts in cooperation with states and territories.

This measure will build on the Australian Government's existing support for Australia's critical minerals industry. It will expand domestic processing capabilities through the operations of the Critical Minerals Facilitation Office and support through the *Critical Minerals Facility*, *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* and other initiatives.

These activities will help deliver the objectives of Australia's *Critical Minerals Strategy*, embedding Australia in global critical minerals supply chains. Noting critical minerals extraction and processing activities have a strong regional footprint, these measures will support resources jobs in regional Australia.

Strategic Basin Plans – additional funding

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide an additional \$62.4 million over four years from 2021-22 to unlock Australia's vast gas resources, benefitting domestic energy users and creating major new job opportunities and economic benefits, particularly across regional Queensland and South Australia. Funding includes:

- \$30.9 million over four years from 2021-22 for Geoscience Australia to deliver a *Data Driven Discoveries* initiative that will collect and publish new geoscientific data to drive exploration investment in the Cooper and Adavale basins.
- \$31.5 million over three years from 2021-22 for an *Optimise and Discover Program* to increase gas supplies from the Cooper and Adavale basins and test the large unconventional gas resources of both basins.

This measure builds on the 2021-22 Budget measure *Strategic Basin Plans*.

Former British Nuclear Testing Site at Maralinga – maintenance

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide funding over five years from 2021-22 for integrated assessment, remediation and revegetation works at the former British nuclear testing site on the Maralinga Tjarutja lands in South Australia. This supports Maralinga Tjarutja traditional owners to maximise the long term economic potential of the Maralinga site. Noting the remoteness of Maralinga, this measure is in line with regional and national efforts to diversify the area's economy.

Satellite Based Augmentation System – additional funding

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide an additional \$521.8 million over 20 years from 2021-22 to deliver the *Satellite Based Augmentation System* to provide precise positioning services across Australia and New Zealand, including in regional and remote areas. This funding will deliver significant benefits to regional and remote Australians, guaranteeing access to precise positioning even in areas without mobile or internet reception.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 MYEFO measure *Satellite Based Augmentation System*.

Modern Manufacturing Initiative – additional funding

The Australian Government will invest \$250 million nationally from 2022-23 to 2023-24 in additional funding for the *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* (MMI) to support high impact manufacturing projects. The Australian Government will also invest a further \$500 million in the MMI under the *Regional Accelerator Program*.

This builds on the \$1.3 billion the Australian Government is already providing to industry over five years from 2020-21 through the MMI, included under the 2020 -21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – Modern Manufacturing Strategy*.

Through the MMI, the Australian Government is investing in the six identified *National Manufacturing Priorities* (NMPs) – Resources Technology and Critical Minerals Processing, Food and Beverage, Medical Products, Recycling and Clean Energy, Defence, and Space.

Further information on the *Regional Accelerator Program* can be found in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications chapter.

Manufacturing Modernisation Fund – Round Three

The Australian Government will invest \$53.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to 2024-25 for a third round of grant funding under the *Manufacturing Modernisation Fund* (MMF) to accelerate technology uptake among high-potential small and medium manufacturing businesses across the six NMP areas.

This builds on the Australian Government's investment of \$52.8 million over three years from 2020-21 for a second round of the MMF, included under the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – Modern Manufacturing Strategy*. This round will continue support to manufacturers across a wide spread of regions and NMP areas to fast-track Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expanding the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative

The *Supply Chain Resilience Initiative* (SCRI) is being expanded with the Australian Government investing \$17.5 million from 2022-23 to 2023-24 to better map and monitor critical supply chains and proactively identify vulnerabilities before they arise. The Australian Government will also invest a further \$200 million in the SCRI under the *Regional Accelerator Program*. These investments will help improve supply chain resilience across the nation, including in regional areas.

These investments build on the \$107.2 million over four years from 2020-21 the Australian Government is already investing in the SCRI, included under the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – Modern Manufacturing Strategy*.

Further information on the *Regional Accelerator Program* can be found in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications chapter.

Supporting Women in Manufacturing

The Australian Government will invest \$4.7 million from 2022-23 to 2026-27 to attract and retain more women into high-value, high paid manufacturing careers. This funding will help to improve female participation in the manufacturing workforce, which currently stands at 29 per cent.

Currently, manufacturing employs around 6.3 per cent of the regional workforce. For many regions the proportion of employment in manufacturing is much higher; up to 14 per cent of the workforce are employed in manufacturing in some regions of Australia. The program will increase this impact through a range of activities, including a '*Women in Manufacturing*' event series across regional areas to support networking, and a mentorship program.

Energy and Emissions Reduction

As announced in the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government is committing \$1.3 billion to maintain energy security, and keep downward pressure on energy prices while reducing emissions.

These measures will further support affordable, reliable and secure energy and help Australia reach its target for net zero emissions by 2050, without imposing new taxes or financial burdens on households, businesses or industry.

This investment includes:

- \$247.1 million to support increased private sector investment in low emissions technologies including hydrogen, the continued development of a hydrogen Guarantee of Origin scheme, and the development of a Biodiversity Stewardship Trading Platform to support farmers to undertake biodiversity activities ahead of the introduction of a voluntary biodiversity stewardship market.
- \$50.3 million to accelerate the development of priority gas infrastructure projects consistent with the Future Gas Infrastructure Investment Framework and support investment in carbon capture and storage pipeline infrastructure.
- \$148.6 million to support more investment in affordable and reliable power, including the development of community microgrid projects in regional and rural Australia.

Subject to the completion of business cases that demonstrate net benefits and co-investment by relevant state and territory governments and the private sector, this also includes delivering \$1 billion in energy and emissions reduction programs in Australia's regions as part of its \$7.1 billion *Energy Security and Regional Development Plan*, including:

- \$300 million to support low emissions Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and clean hydrogen production at Darwin, together with associated carbon capture and storage infrastructure. Darwin is positioned to become one of the world's leading low-cost clean energy hubs, with access to excellent onshore and offshore natural gas and greenhouse gas storage resources, including the Beetaloo and Petrel basins and the Barossa and Bayu-Undan fields.
- \$200 million to increase onshore processing and value-add of iron ore exports, to support low emissions steel production in Indo-Pacific customer countries like Japan and Korea.
- \$200 million to enhance Australia's supply chain security through new low emissions manufacturing facilities (using hydrogen and hydrogen-derivatives like ammonia, as well as carbon capture utilisation and storage) in the Pilbara region.
- \$100 million to de-risk private sector investment in firm generation and grid infrastructure to increase system strength and capacity in the Pilbara region.
- \$100 million to support pre-Final Investment Decision activities and early works to make the Port of Newcastle 'hydrogen ready'.

Further information on the \$7.1 billion *Energy Security and Regional Development Plan* can be found in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications chapter.

Accelerating priority gas infrastructure

The Australian Government will provide up to \$50.3 million from 2022-23 to 2023-24 in support of priority gas infrastructure projects, to accelerate them towards a final investment decision, and to support investment in carbon capture and storage pipeline infrastructure. Support for these projects aligns with the *National Gas Infrastructure Plan* and will increase opportunities to unlock more Australian gas that businesses and households depend on, and deliver wider economic benefits including increased regional investment opportunities and support for local jobs.

This builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure to accelerate critical gas infrastructure priorities identified in the *National Gas Infrastructure Plan: Interim Report, 2021*.

Powering Regional Australia with the Community Microgrids Program

The Australian Government is investing in the development of community microgrid projects in regional and Rural Australia. Supporting the deployment of innovative microgrid solutions will deliver secure, reliable and affordable energy whilst reducing emissions and building resilience in regional and remote communities.

This measure builds on more than \$170 million in Australian Government funding committed since 2019, which is expected to support more than 60 microgrid projects.

Energy and Emissions Reduction (2021-22 MYEFO)

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government is providing an additional \$1.1 billion over ten years from 2021-22 to support further investment in clean energy and emissions reduction. This measure supports reliable energy supply in Australia and increase investment in technology to reduce emissions in Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. These efforts are part of Australia's plan to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and will, among other things, deliver regional benefits:

- \$500 million for the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) to establish a *Low Emissions Technology Commercialisation Fund*.
- \$177.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to expand the *Future Fuels Fund*, increasing the total quantum of funding available to \$250 million.
- \$158.7 million over five years from 2021-22 to support two additional hydrogen hubs, increasing the Australian Government's commitment to seven hubs.

- \$33.5 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the development and deployment of sustainable aviation and marine biofuels.
- \$14.0 million over four years from 2021-22 to increase total funding available under the *National Soil Carbon Innovation Challenge* to \$50.7 million.
- \$10.1 million over four years from 2021-22 to undertake analysis and modelling to ensure the electricity grid is ready for increased electric vehicle uptake, and support a program of regulatory reforms that will avoid unnecessary costs for consumers.

Details of these initiatives are outlined below. The Australian Government will also pursue reforms to accelerate critical infrastructure and provide additional underwriting support for early works associated with the HumeLink transmission proposal and Dinawan to Wagga Wagga transmission line uprating.

Low Emissions Technology Commercialisation Fund

On 10 November 2021, the Australian Government announced a \$1 billion *Low Emissions Technology Commercialisation Fund* (the Fund), which will combine \$500 million of new capital for the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) with \$500 million from private sector investors. The Fund will target early stage technologies with the potential to close the remaining gap to net zero under the Australian Government's *Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan*.

Many of the technologies that would be eligible for development under the Fund, such as soil carbon measurement and livestock feed technologies, will have direct benefits for employment and additional revenue streams in regional Australia.

Expanding the Future Fuels Fund

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government announced it was expanding the *Future Fuels Fund* by \$177.7 million to \$250 million to support an even bigger roll-out of enabling infrastructure in urban and regional Australia. The *Future Fuels Fund* was originally announced in September 2020 as part of the 2020-21 Budget with an initial \$71.9 million investment that aimed to support commercial and heavy vehicle fleet charging and public charging infrastructure for battery electric vehicles (BEVs), as well as hydrogen refuelling.

The *Future Fuels Fund* is expanding Australia's fast charging network to help remove barriers to electric vehicle (EV) uptake. Round One of the *Future Fuels Fund* was announced on 30 July 2021 and is investing \$24.6 million in new public electric vehicle fast charging stations around Australia. Five companies will build a total of 403 stations, all powered by renewable energy. This funding will accelerate the roll out of fast charging stations across all capital cities and key regional centres, including Geelong, Newcastle, the Central Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Wollongong. Each regional location will receive a minimum of eight new stations.

Up to \$127.9 million will be available under Round Two to support the integration of electric vehicle technologies into both light and heavy vehicle fleets, as well as to support the commercialisation of hydrogen as a transport fuel in fleets. Round Two and future rounds will continue to increase regional BEV charging capacity.

Clean Hydrogen Industrial Hubs

The *Clean Hydrogen Industrial Hubs* program aims to support the establishment of hydrogen hubs in regional Australia, and, in turn, support the growth of Australia's clean hydrogen industry. This will assist Australia to achieve its emission reduction goals while continuing to grow our export industries and expand choice for consumers.

Hydrogen hubs are regions where various producers, users and potential exporters of hydrogen across industrial, transport, export and energy markets are co-located. These Hubs are identified in Australia's *National Hydrogen Strategy* as an efficient early-stage approach to create demand and scale up the industry, which will help to support other existing industrial sectors in these regions.

The Australian Government's total funding commitment to establishing a hydrogen industry now exceeds \$1.5 billion.

Bioenergy Roadmap

The *Bioenergy Roadmap* lays out a vision for a sustainable bioenergy industry that delivers lower emissions, regional growth, energy resilience and waste management benefits for Australia. The *Bioenergy Roadmap* reveals that by the start of the next decade, the bioenergy sector could contribute around \$10 billion to Australia's GDP annually and create 26,200 new jobs, reduce emissions by about nine per cent, divert an extra six per cent of waste from landfill, and enhance fuel security. As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government is investing \$33.5 million for ARENA to support the implementation of the *Bioenergy Roadmap*.

The *Bioenergy Roadmap* highlights the opportunities bioenergy offers for regional development. Many of the bioenergy feedstocks come from agricultural activities, such as sugarcane waste and the livestock industries. As a majority of these industries are regional, bioenergy investment will support long-term regional employment, provide additional revenue streams for farmers and ultimately national economic growth.

Recognising the opportunities in the sector, the Australian Government has invested over \$469 million in bioenergy projects through ARENA and the CEFC. Projects span biofuels, biomass, biogas, and energy from waste, delivering lower emissions, regional growth, and waste management benefits for Australia.

Expanding the National Soil Carbon Innovation Challenge and investing in new technologies to help farmers to voluntarily reduce their emissions

The Australian Government is investing invest \$73.6 million over five years from 2021-22 under the land sector investment stream of the *Technology Co-Investment Facility* to support voluntary action by farmers to lower emissions while growing their businesses.

This includes \$50.7 million for a *National Soil Carbon Innovation Challenge* (including an additional \$14.0 million of this funding announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO) to help lower agricultural emissions through better soil management, and \$22.9 million to develop and trial technologies to deliver low emissions feed supplements to grazing animals without imposing additional costs. This investment stream is estimated to deliver 190 jobs.

The *National Soil Carbon Innovation Challenge* supports development of low-cost, accurate soil carbon measurement technologies. It will help deliver on the *Technology Investment Roadmap's* stretch goal to lower the cost of accurate soil carbon measurement to \$3 per hectare per year. Reducing measurement costs will address a key barrier to widespread adoption of activities that increase soil carbon on agricultural land.

Enabling an Electric Vehicle Ready Grid Package

The *Enabling an Electrical Vehicle (EV) Ready Grid Package* will support reforms to integrate battery electric vehicles into the electricity grid and ensure Australia is ready for the forecast rapid uptake of new vehicle technologies. As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government is investing \$10.1 million over four years from 2021-22 to improve understanding of EV infrastructure needs and charging impacts, including in the regions, and ensure investment in network infrastructure is efficient.

Snowy Hydro Limited – Hunter Power Project

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide up to \$600 million in equity over three years from 2021-22 to Snowy Hydro Limited to construct a 660 Megawatt (MW) gas plant at Kurri Kurri, New South Wales.

The *Hunter Power Project* helps deliver on the Australian Government's 1,000 MW target for new dispatchable electricity supply in New South Wales announced in September 2020, to avoid unacceptable price increases following the closure of the Liddell power station in 2023. The *Hunter Power Project* will also deliver an important economic boost to the Hunter region, creating up to 600 new jobs during peak construction and 1,200 indirect jobs across New South Wales, while safeguarding employment in traditional energy-intensive industries like aluminium smelting.

Supporting Regional Business Recovery from Bushfires, COVID-19 and Flood Emergencies

As announced in the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide an additional \$6.9 million in 2022-23 to continue recovery and resilience advice services for another year for regional businesses impacted by bushfire, COVID-19 and flood emergencies. This measure expands on the *Strengthening Business – Business Advice for Recovery and Resilience Program* that was introduced in 2019-20.

Businesses impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires, COVID-19 and flood emergencies will have access to 22 independent business facilitators (including three digital solutions specialists) across regional areas of New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. Facilitators focus on helping businesses to recover and strengthen their business systems, operations and strategies into the future.

Expanding Strengthening Business to support Flood-impacted SMEs in New South Wales and Queensland

The Australian Government is also providing \$7.0 million to 30 June 2023 to expand the existing business recovery and resilience service, *Strengthening Business*, into at least 30 flood-impacted regions of northern New South Wales and south-eastern Queensland to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Current Initiatives

Square Kilometre Array Radio Telescope Project

The Australian Government is investing \$387.2 million over 10 years from 2021-22 to 2030-31 (with \$29.6 million in 2031-32 and \$29.5 million per year ongoing from 2032-33). This investment provides Australia's share of construction and operations of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) telescopes, supporting 350 jobs during construction and a further 230 ongoing jobs, the majority of which will be based in the Western Australian Mid-West region. The SKA telescopes will help Australian scientists make vital scientific breakthroughs – such as a better understanding of the origin and future of stars and galaxies, and the structure of the universe.

The investment will also support Australia's hosting of the SKA-Low telescope by:

- establishing the Australian SKA Regional Centre to enable the SKA's high value science and data activities to be carried out in Australia
- meeting Australia's commitment to provide the SKA Observatory with an appropriate site to build the SKA-Low telescope
- installing a fibre optic link from the existing Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory (MRO) fibre link (which runs from Geraldton to the MRO) to the

Pia Wadjarri Remote Aboriginal Community (which lies within eight kilometres of the link) and the Murchison Settlement (which lies within 52 kilometres of the link).

Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project

Over 11 years from 2021-22 to 2031-32, the Australian Government is funding rehabilitation of the former Rum Jungle mine site in the Northern Territory. Rehabilitation activities will address environmental contaminants and hazards resulting from historical uranium and copper mining at Rum Jungle.

The Australian Government's investment will deliver a significant economic impact in the Batchelor/Coomalie region, supporting about 61 full-time jobs and create significant indirect employment and local supply opportunities. Training, employment and other engagement opportunities for the site's traditional owners will support their participation in delivery of works and land management.

Australia's Global Resources Strategy

As announced in the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government is providing \$20.1 million over two years from 2021-22 to deliver a *Global Resources Strategy* that will diversify and strengthen Australia's access to key export markets and reduce the risk of trade disruptions. The resources sector employs over 270,000 people and is also the sector with the highest proportion of Indigenous Australians, with many of these jobs located in regional Australia.

Junior Minerals Exploration Incentive – extension

The Australian Government has allocated \$100 million to extend the *Junior Minerals Exploration Incentive* (JMEI) for four years from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2025. This investment will continue the Australian Government's support and encouragement of greenfield mineral exploration across Australia and brings total investment in the JMEI to \$200 million.

Greenfields mineral exploration underpins Australia's mining industry by finding new mineral deposits and ensuring a strong investment pipeline. Exploration predominately occurs in remote and rural areas across Australia, providing jobs and economic activity in regional communities. The extension of the JMEI will encourage more exploration activity, supporting future resources development.

Delivering accelerated exploration in the Beetaloo sub-basin

In the 2020-21 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided \$52.1 million over four years from 2020-21 to accelerate gas development in the Beetaloo sub-basin in the Northern Territory. The funding includes:

- \$50.6 million over three years from 2020-21 for the *Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program*, launched on 18 March 2021, that provides grants to accelerate gas exploration activities in the Beetaloo sub-basin
- \$1.5 million over three years from 2020-21 to strengthen collaboration across government and industry to support the development of the sub-basin.

The Beetaloo sub-basin, approximately 500 kilometres south-east of Darwin, has the potential to be a world-class gas province. Development of the Beetaloo will provide a steady flow of jobs and economic activity in Top End communities, as well as unlocking downstream opportunities across the Northern Territory. Accelerating development activities in the Beetaloo will help to realise those benefits sooner.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – gas fired recovery*, which provided \$28.3 million over three years from 2020-21 to establish five *Strategic Basin Plans*, and is a key measure of the Australian Government's *Unlocking the Beetaloo: The Beetaloo Strategic Basin Plan* released on 14 January 2021.

Strategic Basin Plans – Gas well trials in the North Bowen and Galilee Basins and supporting Traditional Owners in the Beetaloo

The Australian Government is providing \$15.8 million over three years from 2021-22 to drive economic opportunities and support *Strategic Basin Plans*. Funding includes \$15.7 million in 2021-22 to support gas industry field appraisal trials in the North Bowen and Galilee basins, and \$2.2 million over three years from 2021-22 to build the capacity of the Northern Land Council to facilitate land-use agreements and drive economic opportunities in the Beetaloo sub-basin.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – gas fired recovery* and the Australian Government's *Unlocking the Beetaloo: The Beetaloo Strategic Basin Plan* released on 14 January 2021.

Community Benefit Program in Kimba – extension

The Australian Government is investing \$2.4 million over three years from 2021-22 to extend the *Community Benefit Program* in Kimba, South Australia. The program will deliver \$2.0 million in grants to support social-cohesion and economic development in the Kimba region of South Australia during the site selection process for the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility.

Unlocking Australia's Resources Potential – Exploring for the Future Two

On 23 June 2020, the Australian Government announced an additional \$124.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to continue and expand the *Exploring for the Future* program, bringing total investment in the program to \$225 million.

The measure provides pre-competitive data about potential mineral, energy and groundwater resources across Australia. Eight new projects were announced in March 2021. They include three deep-dive projects in the geological regions of Officer-Musgrave in central-west Australia, Darling-Curnamona-Delamerian in south-east Australia, and Barkly-Isa-Georgetown in north-east Australia. The eight projects also include three continental-scale projects that have national applications but with a focus in southern Australia.

The program is delivering on-the-ground data collection and field work activities in regional and remote Australia, including local contract positions in the mining, equipment, technology and services sector. *Exploring for the Future* will continue to unlock new resource-rich regions across the country. Development of those regions will provide ongoing economic growth across Australia and create short, medium, and long-term jobs in regional communities.

Critical Minerals Capabilities

On 14 November 2019, the Australian Government announced \$16.1 million over five years from 2019-20 to support the development of Australia's critical minerals capabilities, and boost Australia's contribution to enhancing the stability and security of global critical minerals supply chains. Australia has world-leading reserves of critical minerals across regional areas. These present commercial opportunities for our businesses, as well as job creation potential in regional Australia.

Through this measure, the government has provided, over five years from 2019-20, \$9.4 million to establish a Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO); \$4.5 million for the *Advancing Research and Development for Critical Minerals Program*, to be implemented by the Australian Government's scientific agencies, and \$2.2 million to Austrade to expand its program of critical minerals trade and investment facilitation.

The CMFO is providing a whole-of-government critical mineral policy coordination function; dedicated project facilitation service for strategic Australian critical minerals projects; and undertake international engagement to promote investment in Australia.

Advancing Australia's Gas-Fired Recovery

The Australian Government is providing \$58.5 million over four years from 2021-22 to further advance Australia's *Gas-Fired Recovery*, announced on 15 September 2020. The funding includes support for the following continuing initiatives:

- \$38.7 million over two years from 2021-22 to ensure the Australian Government is well positioned to alleviate the potential gas shortfall on Australia's east coast and support critical gas infrastructure projects.
- \$6.2 million over three years from 2021-22 to develop the *Wallumbilla Gas Hub* in Queensland into a more open and transparent gas trading hub.

- \$5.6 million over two years from 2021-22 to further strengthen the Australian Government's energy system planning framework and build on national gas infrastructure planning already completed and underway. This includes the delivery of an additional *National Gas Infrastructure Plan* in 2022 that identifies strategic priorities identified by gas market modelling.
- \$4.6 million over four years to develop initiatives that empower gas reliant businesses to better negotiate competitive outcomes in their gas supply agreements.

The delivery of the *Gas-Fired Recovery* initiatives will benefit regional Australia, including supporting regional jobs, where many gas production and infrastructure projects are located.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – gas-fired recovery*.

Onshore Gas Social and Economic Research Fund

The Australian Government has committed \$13.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to continue the *Onshore Gas Social and Economic Research Fund* (the fund). The fund provides independent scientific research to enable individuals and communities to form their own views of the social, economic and environmental impacts and benefits of gas development. This is done through the work of the CSIRO's *Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance*, which is a collaboration between the CSIRO, the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and industry.

Emissions Reduction and Investments in Low Emissions Technologies

Under the *Technology Investment Roadmap*, the Australian Government has committed to invest in \$22 billion in low emissions technologies over the decade to 2030. This investment will leverage on average over \$3 of co-investment for every \$1 of government investment over the decade to 2030 from the private sector and other levels of government. This will drive \$84-132 billion in total public and private investment and support 160,000 jobs across Australia, including in regional areas, backing the Australia Government's commitment to real and practical action to reduce emissions and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. It will enable ambitious international technology partnerships to be established and support the JobMaker agenda.

Increased investment in priority low emissions technologies, such as an emerging hydrogen industry, low emissions steel and aluminium, carbon capture storage and soil carbon management, are expected to deliver significant employment and economic benefits to regional areas, where many of these industries are located. This investment includes initiatives announced or expanded under the 2021-22 MYEFO measure *Energy and Emissions Reduction*, discussed in the 'New Initiatives' section.

The following investments with regional implications are also included in the expected \$22 billion in funding for low emissions technologies in the decade to 2030:

- support through the *Emissions Reduction Fund and Climate Solutions Fund*
- the *Carbon Capture, Use and Storage Hubs and Technologies Program*
- Clean Energy Finance Corporation support to renewable and low emission projects
- continued funding through ARENA, the CSIRO, Cooperative Research Centres and the Australian Research Council to support research, development and deployment of low emissions technologies.

Details on the *Emissions Reduction Fund*, *Climate Solutions Fund* and *Carbon Capture, Use and Storage Hubs and Technologies Program* are included below.

Emissions Reduction Fund and the Climate Solutions Fund

The Australian Government allocated \$2.6 billion to the *Emissions Reduction Fund* (ERF) in 2014-15, and in 2018-19 allocated a further \$2billion through the *Climate Solutions Fund* to build on the ERF's success and support additional low-cost abatement. To date, the Australian Government has committed around \$2.2 billion to projects that reduce emissions in rural and regional areas. These projects are providing new opportunities for land managers to increase agricultural productivity and generate revenue by earning credits for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The ERF now has over 1,100 projects delivering carbon abatement benefits across Australia and has already credited over 106 million tonnes of abatement. In 2021, there were record project registrations under the ERF, with record abatement of over 17 million tonnes delivered. Through the ERF, the Australian Government has underpinned significant growth in the carbon market with voluntary demand for purchasing Australian Carbon Credit Units increasing more than 40 per cent in 2021-22, relative to 2020-21.

Carbon Capture, Use and Storage Hubs and Technologies

As announced in the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government is providing \$263.7 million over 10 years from 2021-22 to accelerate the development of Carbon Capture, Use and Storage (CCUS) projects and hubs. Funding will help establish hubs in proximity to high emitting industrial areas and provide support for research, development and commercialisation efforts. Projects will support emissions reduction across power generation, natural gas or hydrogen production and heavy industries. A *National CCUS Technology Emissions Abatement Strategy* will also be developed to further enable large-scale deployment of CCUS.

Large scale projects supported through the *CCUS Hubs and Technologies Program* will primarily be located in regional or offshore Australia, which will provide enhanced economic opportunities to local communities. Deployment of CCUS will create jobs in

regional Australia and enable new or expanded export opportunities in low-carbon hydrogen, Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) and carbon-recycled products.

This investment builds on the \$50 million allocated to support pilot and pre-commercial CCUS projects in Australia as part of the 2020-21 Budget.

Improving Energy Affordability and Reliability

As announced in the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government is providing support for investment in new dispatchable generation and affordable and reliable power for consumers, including the below investments with regional impacts:

- supporting the development of hydrogen-ready gas generation infrastructure
- supporting the Port Kembla Power Station
- supporting the deployment of a renewable energy microgrid for the Daintree community in Far North Queensland
- extending the role of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – Improving Energy Affordability and Reliability*. Details of these investments are outlined in initiative descriptions below.

Hydrogen-ready gas turbines

The Australian Government has committed \$24.9 million over three years from 2021-22 to support the development of hydrogen-ready gas generation infrastructure. Supporting upcoming gas generation projects to be hydrogen-ready will enable these generators to reduce their emissions and assure supply to the national grid by incorporating clean hydrogen in the future, when it becomes cost competitive with natural gas. These generators could also have broader regional benefits for hydrogen industry growth. This funding will enable new gas generator projects to incorporate hydrogen-ready turbines or associated hydrogen supply infrastructure.

Supporting the Port Kembla Power Station

The Australian Government is providing \$30 million over two years from 2021-22 to support Australian Industrial Power to undertake early works on its proposed power station at Port Kembla, New South Wales. This investment is going towards ensuring a final investment decision can be reached for the project. If it proceeds, the power station will support electricity reliability and lower prices in New South Wales.

Renewable Energy Microgrid for the Daintree Community

The Australian Government is providing up to \$19.3 million over three years from 2021-22 to support the deployment of a renewable energy microgrid incorporating hydrogen for the Daintree community in Far North Queensland.

The microgrid will ensure the Daintree community has a more affordable, more reliable and a more resilient electricity supply. It will replace costly diesel generation and provide a cleaner, more reliable and affordable energy supply, an important consideration for this world heritage site. The project will also demonstrate innovative microgrid technologies, helping to accelerate the uptake of microgrids in other regional and remote areas across Australia.

On 7 March 2022, the Australian Government announced that it had awarded Volt Advisory Group \$18.8 million over three years from 2021-22 to develop a highly innovative renewable energy microgrid for the Daintree community, supporting more than 200 jobs in Far North Queensland.

Extension of the role of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

The Australian Government is investing \$3.0 million over five years from 2021-22 to extend the role of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner to ensure community concerns over construction of large-scale wind, solar and storage projects and new transmission are taken into account. Most large scale renewable energy projects are deployed in regional areas due to the availability of space and the required quality of solar and wind energy resources. The Commissioner's office continues to play a vital role in addressing concerns in regional areas. The Commissioner was formerly known as the National Wind Farm Commissioner.

Enabling Markets, Supporting Communities and Boosting Energy Productivity in the Building Sector

As announced in the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government is providing \$52.2 million over five years from 2020-21 to improve productivity and lower energy costs in the building and community sectors. This includes funding for:

- The *Hotel Energy Uplift Program*, which has provided a total of \$10.2 million in grants to small and medium sized hotels for use in upgrades to improve productivity and lower energy costs in 2021-22. Approximately 80 per cent of eligible hotels (those with one to 99 rooms) are in regional locations. It is expected economic benefits beyond energy savings will be realised in regional Australia, with local suppliers and trades engaged to carry out the funded projects.
- The *Powering Communities Program*, which has provided up to \$67,700 of grants for each Federal electorate to assist not-for-profit community organisations to improve energy efficiency practices and technologies, and better manage energy consumption

in 2021-22. The total grant funding available was \$10.2 million. It is expected economic benefits beyond energy savings will be realised across Australia, including in regional areas, with local suppliers and trades engaged to carry out the funded projects.

Improving the energy efficiency of residential and commercial buildings in Australia is expected to generate economic benefits. Energy savings will be realised across Australia, including in regional Australia. Improving energy efficiency will contribute to cost savings across the economy, will help lower energy bills and improve comfort for Australians, including those living in rural and regional communities.

Regional Australia Microgrid Pilots Program

The Australian Government is providing \$53.6 million over six years from 2020-21 to support pilot studies for microgrids in regional and remote areas. This will support feasible microgrid projects to undertake pilot demonstrations to resolve the remaining barriers to final investment and full deployment for those projects. Grants are expected to be between \$1 million and \$5 million and will fund up to 50 per cent of the project value and will be based on community needs and ability to pay. Applicants seeking more than \$5 million need to demonstrate exemplary merit with very broad benefit.

Projects are expected to be deployed in regional and remote communities, stimulating local economies and demonstrating the value of microgrids in areas prone to outages. Microgrids can provide increased energy security, resilience and affordability through integration of distributed energy resources. They can also contribute to lowering emissions, as regional households and businesses lower their reliance on diesel generators by adopting solar and storage systems.

This measure will benefit regional and remote communities connected to pilot sites. The program launched in September 2021.

Digital Economy Strategy – Artificial Intelligence Action Plan

The Australian Government is investing \$124.2 million over six years from 2021-22 through the *Artificial Intelligence Action Plan* (Action Plan). It sets out a vision for Australia to be a global leader in developing and adopting trusted, secure and responsible artificial intelligence. The Action Plan is a key initiative under the Australian Government's *Digital Economy Strategy* that sets out how Australia will secure its future as a modern and leading digital economy and society by 2030. This includes accelerating the digital capability of Australian businesses, by supporting strategic investments in digital technology, skills and infrastructure, and finding digital solutions to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses.

This includes \$12 million over five years from 2021-22 that the Australian Government is investing in the *Catalysing the Artificial Intelligence Opportunity in our Regions* program. The program funds collaborative projects supporting regional industries, businesses

and communities to realise the benefits from the development, adoption and use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. The program supports real-world applications of AI technologies that address challenges in regional areas in Australia.

The program is supporting the development of new partnerships between regional industries, businesses and communities with the Australian technology sector. It will help to realise the potential economic, productivity, social and environmental benefits of artificial intelligence in regional Australian economies and communities.

Digital Economy Strategy – Digital Atlas of Australia

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australia Government committed \$40.2 million over four years to build the *Digital Atlas of Australia*, as part of the *Digital Economy Strategy*. The *Digital Atlas of Australia*, led by Geoscience Australia, will be the front door to government data on geography, people, economy, and the environment. The *Digital Atlas of Australia* will bring together trusted datasets from across government in an interactive, secure, and easy-to-use online platform, using location as the connecting thread.

The *Digital Atlas of Australia* prototype will launch in late 2022. Exploring data by location will empower governments, businesses and communities to make better informed decisions about planning, infrastructure and investment at the local, regional and national level.

Cyber Security Skills Partnership Innovation Fund

As announced in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 Budgets, the Australian Government is investing \$81.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to grow the skilled cyber security workforce. This includes \$70.3 million in grant funding being delivered through the *Cyber Security Skills Partnership Innovation Fund*, which supports innovative local projects that are delivered in partnership with industry, academia and government to increase the pipeline of Australian cyber security professionals.

Round Two of the *Cyber Security Skills Partnership Innovation Fund*, announced in the *Digital Economy Strategy*, is specifically focussed on increasing the diversity of the cyber security profession, with a focus on applications that increase opportunities for women, Indigenous Australians, regional and remote based workers, and neurodiverse individuals.

Entrepreneurs' Programme

The *Entrepreneurs' Programme* delivered by AusIndustry, is the Australian Government's flagship initiative to build business competitiveness and productivity at the firm level. The program delivers advice and grants to enable high potential businesses, including in regional and remote areas, to strengthen, grow, innovate and commercialise nationally and globally. The program is ongoing with a value of \$477 million over

four years from 2021-22, and provides businesses with access to tailored advice from a national network of over 170 industry experts and supporting grant funding.

This support is provided through a variety of service offerings, including *Accelerating Commercialisation*, *Innovation Connections*, *Growth* and *Strengthening Business*. In addition to improving outcomes for clients, the program benefits the broader community, across regions, sectors and communities.

Over the 2020-21 Budget, 2021-22 MYEFO and 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$26.8 million to the *Strengthening Business* service over three years from 2021-22 to 2022-23. The service was established in response to the Black Summer bushfires, to support the recovery of businesses and local communities across bushfire-affected regions in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. The service has most recently been extended in March 2022 to include businesses in the most flood-impacted regions of northern New South Wales and south-eastern Queensland.

The program also administers the *Strengthening Northern Australian Business Advisory Service* (Advisory Service), announced in the 2021-22 Budget as part of the *Our North, Our Future: 2021-2026 Package*. The package includes a grant (the *Northern Australia Development Program* (NADP)) with an accompanying service for eligible grant recipients.

The Advisory Service is complementary to the NADP grant, and provided to eligible NADP grant applicants to help them build long-term resilience. It will comprise expert, independent business facilitators and digital specialists, who will be based in Northern Australia.

JobMaker Plan – Second Women's Economic Security Package – Boosting Female Founders Initiative – expansion

The *Boosting Female Founders Initiative* was announced with \$24 million of funding under the *2018 Women's Economic Security Statement*. It was then expanded as part of the Australian Government's *2020 Women's Economic Security Statement*.

With this expansion, announced in the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government is providing an additional \$35.9 million over five years from 2020-21 to increase the number of co-funded grants provided to majority women owned and led start-ups. The expansion also introduced a new service to provide access to expert mentoring and advice for women entrepreneurs. Grant recipients for Rounds One and Two have been announced, with 89 women led start-ups sharing in over \$23 million in grant funding. The mentoring service has delivered over 725 hours of mentoring to eligible applicants under Round One; mentoring for Round Two is underway.

The *Boosting Female Founders Initiative* offers more generous matched funding to underrepresented groups, such as women founders who are from regional or remote locations, to ensure greater support and access to capital.

Cooperative Research Centres Program

The *Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program* is a competitive, merit-based grant program that supports industry-led collaborations between industry, researchers and the community. The *CRC Program* has two streams:

- CRCs, which undertake medium to long term, industry-led high quality collaborative research.
- CRC Projects (CRC-Ps), which undertake a short-term, industry-identified and industry-led collaborative research project.

Businesses investing in research and development through CRCs and CRC-Ps are increasing their income, competitiveness and productivity. The *CRC Program* continues to support CRCs and CRC-Ps that have impacts on rural and regional Australia.

Currently, the CRC stream has 24 CRCs nationally receiving over \$1 billion in grant funds over the life of project terms. Of these, several impact regional and rural Australia. The CRC-P stream currently has eight projects led by partners located in regional Australia which are receiving over \$13.9 million in *CRC Program* grant funding. In 2021-22, two additional CRC-Ps were awarded \$5.8 million to support the Australian Government's regionalisation agenda.

CRCs and CRC-Ps contribute to strengthening rural and regional development in areas such as agriculture and mining industries, farming systems and improving health outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Regional businesses (including small and medium-sized enterprises), Rural Research and Development Corporations, universities and other research organisations are part of a number of CRCs and CRC-Ps and their activities.

Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia

The *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* included \$75 million over 10 years for a *Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia* to help northern businesses generate new ideas and innovation that leverage the north's strengths and address its challenges. The *Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia* commenced operations in Townsville in 2017-18 and has three focus areas: agriculture and food (including aquaculture), northern Australia health service delivery and Traditional Owner-led business development. Industry situational analysis is occurring on the beef sector, broadacre cropping, aquaculture, horticulture, rice, forestry, bush foods, sugar and health sectors in northern Australia.

National Research Centre for Natural Hazards and Disaster Resilience

On 23 July 2020, the Australian Government announced \$88.1 million to extend and scale up funding for critical research into natural hazards. The funding includes \$85 million over 10 years from 2021-22 for a new, world class research centre for natural hazard resilience and disaster risk reduction, to deliver and scale up applied research to inform Australia's disaster recovery and resilience effort.

The work of the new research centre is supporting businesses and communities across Australia, including in regional Australia. This research will benefit regional Australia as the regional landscape is at a heightened risk of impact from natural hazard events such as bushfires and flooding.

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

The Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications portfolio contributes to the wellbeing of all Australians through the design and implementation of the Australian Government's regional development, infrastructure, transport, communications, digital economy and arts and culture policies and programs.

The scope of the portfolio's work touches the lives of every Australian. It underpins the economic and social activity of our community nation-wide, from the transport and communications networks that Australians use every day, to our cultural expressions. It supports services and entities delivering crucial national economic infrastructure, such as national road, rail, aviation and shipping infrastructure including water infrastructure, communication systems and services such as Australia Post and NBN Co and support for the Arts. In particular, the portfolio is responsible for national policy initiatives on regional development, providing for programs and initiatives that assist regional communities around the country including a focus on Northern Australia. The portfolio also supports services to Australia's territories such as Norfolk Island, and Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The new initiatives in the 2022-23 Budget detailed below have been designed to boost government investment in regional Australia, in order to build on the strengths and potential of Australia's regions and accelerate their growth.

Funding in the 2022-23 Budget includes \$17.9 billion in funding for road, rail and community infrastructure projects which increases the Australian Government's infrastructure investment pipeline to \$120 billion over ten years. These commitments are connecting regions, supporting jobs and improving national freight links while ensuring Australians get home sooner and safer.

After the enormous challenges of COVID-19, the Australian Government is now looking ahead to recovery and a stronger aviation sector in the long term. The government will continue to provide targeted support for air access to essential aviation services in regional and remote areas. Investment in regional aviation infrastructure will be central to the government's approach, with support for services to remote communities where flights are not commercially viable.

Key regional investments in infrastructure, including water infrastructure, and connectivity and economic development form the centrepieces of the Australian Government's 2022-23 Budget for regional communities.

The Australian Government is building on its existing commitments to regional Australia through a new *Energy Security and Regional Development Plan*. This will provide

\$7.1 billion over 11 years from 2022-23 for nation-building infrastructure projects that will unlock the potential of key regions in the Northern Territory, in North and Central Queensland, in the Pilbara in Western Australia, and the Hunter region in New South Wales.

In addition, the Australian Government has also invested an additional \$2 billion over the next five years through the *Regional Accelerator Program*. The \$2 billion package ensures Commonwealth resources are better connected, coordinated and targeted to the priorities and needs of regional communities. This investment in regional economic growth extends beyond infrastructure, helping to create diversified economic opportunities for communities that are primed for growth or facing new challenges from structural adjustment.

Complementing the government's infrastructure investments, the government is delivering \$1.3 billion to respond to the report of the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review, which was tabled in Parliament and published on the 14 February 2022. An investment of this scale from the government is needed to better position the regions for the future, particularly following the impacts of COVID-19, the recent increased growth of regional populations and changes in working patterns and demands on telecommunications networks.

Further, the government is announcing additional funding of \$6.9 billion to secure the future of the National Water Grid and continue supporting regional growth. This includes \$600 million to restore the Paradise Dam in Queensland to its full capacity, up to an additional \$433 million for the Dungowan Dam and Pipeline in New South Wales and \$300.6 million for Stage One of the Darwin Region Water Supply Infrastructure Program. The Australian Government has further committed \$5.4 billion through the National Water Grid Fund for the future construction of the Hells Gates Dam.

The Office of Northern Australia, which was transferred into the Infrastructure portfolio in 2021, coordinates the implementation of the government's Northern Australia policy agenda including the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*. To further support this policy agenda, the government has committed an additional \$2 billion in capital appropriation to the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (the Facility) to finance critical economic infrastructure projects in the north, increasing the amount available for investment through the Facility to \$7 billion.

The Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications portfolio also delivers the Australian Government's regional development programs. These programs provide funding for a range of locally-driven projects that aim to strengthen our regions, their economies and the vibrant communities that make up regional Australia. The government is providing an additional \$100 million to add to the funding of Round Five of the *Building Better Regions Fund* program on top of \$250 million for Round Six. The government is also boosting the *Stronger Communities Programme* by an

additional \$29.2 million over two years, bringing the total commitment for the latter program to \$167.8 million between 2015-16 and 2023-24.

The portfolio also includes key national cultural institutions such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the National Library (NLA), the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), and the Australia Council for the Arts. Regional communities across Australia are further supported in the 2022-23 Budget by a number of initiatives to assist the arts sector to get back in business following the disruptions caused by COVID-19. These initiatives invest in regional arts and cultural activities to support the recovery and growth of regional communities, and deliver programs to support artistic and cultural expression including for Indigenous Australians.

As at 31 December 2021, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications Portfolio employed 3,513 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,328 staff (95 per cent) were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 117 staff (3 per cent) in other capital cities and 68 staff (2 per cent) in regional areas.

The portfolio's regional footprint includes offices and staff locations such as Cairns, Townsville, Darwin, Hobart, Launceston, Wollongong, Newcastle, Orange, Toowoomba, Dubbo, Albury-Wodonga, Moree, Port Augusta, Broome, Coffs Harbour, Alice Springs and Junee, as well as offices in the Indian Ocean Territories, Norfolk Island and the Jervis Bay Territory to deliver vital infrastructure and essential services in Australia's Territories.

North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority (NQWIA) has relocated its headquarters from Canberra to Bowen in north Queensland. This will further drive the Australian Government's regionalisation agenda and the relocation means NQWIA is strategically located in the same region where the government is delivering critical water infrastructure for the north. The office of the CEO is now located in Bowen alongside a regional presence in Townsville.

Several portfolio agencies employ staff under their own legislation. Some portfolio agencies, such as Air Services Australia, have a considerable presence around Australia supporting aviation movements outside the capital cities. NBN Co has a significant presence in regional areas with the NBN available across Australia.

The portfolio also has oversight responsibilities for Australia Post, which maintains a retail network of over 4,000 post offices, including more than 2,500 in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority employs 443 staff, of whom 288 are located in Canberra, 71 in other capital cities, and 84 are based in regional offices. The staff in regional offices support the safe operation of shipping in regional ports and domestic commercial vessel operators (such as fishing and tourism operators) in these locations.

New Initiatives

Energy Security and Regional Development Plan

Through the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$7.1 billion over 11 years from 2022-23 under its new *Energy Security and Regional Development Plan* for an infrastructure-led approach to growing regional wealth.

This commitment will facilitate partnerships with industry, communities and other levels of government to progress investments in nation-shaping infrastructure that will position four key regions and the nation for the future. The investments will leverage competitive advantages; unlock opportunities for industry and business; harness emerging sources of wealth creation, including through building global competitiveness in developing export sectors like hydrogen; and protect Australia's sovereignty, including through strengthening our strategic global position.

Funding will be provided to:

- support new industry and manufacturing opportunities in the Northern Territory, and transform the region into a renewable energy and industrial hub that opens up more economic opportunities in north and central Australia
- unlock regional growth in North and Central Queensland, supporting agricultural opportunities and industry diversification
- enhance economic diversification in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, building on the regions existing economic strengths in mining, mineral processing and manufacturing
- support the Hunter region in New South Wales to fund transport infrastructure projects that will improve supply chain efficiencies and help diversify the economy building on the region's existing strengths and facilitating the development of new industries.

Regional Accelerator Program

In the 2022-23 Budget the Australian Government is announcing a range of measures to strengthen the government's regionalisation agenda and commitment to double down on growing regions. The \$2 billion provided for this *Regional Accelerator Program* over five years ensures Commonwealth resources are better connected, coordinated and targeted to the priorities and needs of local communities. By making better use of key Commonwealth levers, the Australian Government is committed to providing a once-in-a-generation funding opportunity to grow and transform regional communities. This will foster transformative economic growth through job creation, capacity building and attract private sector investment.

The *Regional Accelerator Program* will prioritise investments that address the strengths and challenges as identified by the regions, such as funding to:

- diversify and/or grow the economy
- create long-term, sustainable jobs
- attract more workers to regions that are facing skills and workforce shortages
- contribute to the resilience and liveability of local communities, e.g. by improving access to services in regions.

Funding will be delivered through dedicated *Regional Accelerator* rounds of Commonwealth flagship economic development programs that enable regions to bring forward proposals for transformative investments for their local communities.

These programs include:

- Regionalisation Fund
- Modern Manufacturing Initiative
- Critical Minerals Accelerator Initiative
- Supply Chain Resilience Initiative
- Australian Apprenticeships Initiatives
- Regional Trailblazer Universities Program
- Education Infrastructure in Regional Australia
- National Centre for Digital Agriculture and Innovation and Adoption Hubs
- Recycling Modernisation Fund
- Export Market Development Grant program
- Defence Capability Improvement Grant, and
- Sovereign Industrial Capability Priorities Grant.

Infrastructure Investment Program – major projects

The Australian Government's \$120 billion ten-year infrastructure investment pipeline is continuing to deliver on the government's economic plan for a stronger and more resilient Australia. This long-term plan is connecting regions, supporting jobs and improving national freight links while ensuring Australians get home sooner and safer.

Since 2013 the Government has committed \$52 billion towards 777 major Infrastructure Investment Program projects in regional Australia and as well as a further 82 projects which will benefit regional and urban communities.

As at 2022-23 Budget, the Government is providing more than \$34 billion supporting 429 ongoing major Infrastructure Investment Program projects in regional Australia, with a further 47 which will benefit regional and urban communities.

The Australian Government is continuing to support investment to assist in getting regional Australia back in business following COVID-19 through a number of priority projects including:

- \$1.68 billion to the M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace project (the Project) in New South Wales. This project will deliver a 15 kilometre dual carriageway extension of the M1 Pacific Motorway connecting the motorway at Black Hill through to the Pacific Highway at Raymond Terrace. It will also include a 2.6 kilometre bridge over the New England Highway and Hunter River, and upgrades to the surrounding network, including the Hexham Straight widening to three lanes in each direction. The government's commitment of \$1.7 billion includes an additional \$80 million allocated to this project in the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO) 2021-22. Construction for the M1 to Raymond Terrace section is currently planned to commence in 2023, subject to planning approvals, with it opening to traffic by mid-2028. Construction of the Hexham Straight Widening is expected to commence in 2024, and open to traffic by mid-2027. The project will support around 3,450 jobs at the peak of construction (2,700 jobs for the M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace and 750 jobs for the Hexham Straight Widening).
- \$1.5 billion invested over three years from 2020-21 to shovel ready projects and targeted road safety works for priority regional and urban transport infrastructure to support local jobs and economic recovery. This investment includes \$500 million to deliver smaller but critical projects to improve road safety and bolster the resilience of our road networks to improve safety across the country. Funding for regional Australia from the \$1.5 billion under this initiative totals more than \$1.2 billion, which supports a total commitment of \$2.1 billion.
- \$1 billion since 2013 has been committed to seal and upgrade sections of the Outback Way, a 2,720 km route linking Winton in Queensland with Laverton in Western Australia, via Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. This includes an additional \$678 million announced on 21 February 2022 to seal an additional 1,000 kilometres of road and deliver further upgrades. As part of the works, the remaining unsealed and substandard sections of Outback Way in Queensland and Western Australia will be sealed and additional priority sections on the Plenty Highway and Tjukururu Road in the Northern Territory will also be upgraded. The project will contribute to improved safety and access to remote areas of the Northern Territory, Queensland

and Western Australia. The project is designed to unlock the potential benefits of the Outback Way to Indigenous and remote communities and the broader economy, particularly in the areas of tourism, mining and freight.

- \$1 billion to the Bunbury Outer Ring Road (Stages Two and Three) in Western Australia that is currently under construction. This project will facilitate the development of the Bunbury Port and south-west industry, improving access to industrial areas, reducing congestion on the existing network, and improving travel times and road safety
- \$855.6 million committed to the Newell Highway Upgrade program in New South Wales. This corridor is a key route for the agricultural and mining sectors, and provides important connections to freight networks in New South Wales from the Queensland border to the Victorian border. Delivery commenced in late 2020 and is expected to complete in late 2025.
- \$447.7 million committed to the Gippsland Rail Line Upgrade in Victoria to deliver level crossing upgrades and replacement of corrugated steel drainage pipes along the corridor, with major delivery works involving additional level crossing and pedestrian crossing upgrades, rail control system upgrades, upgrades to four stations, and associated works along the rail corridor. Major construction commenced in mid-2021 with all works expected to be completed by the end of 2022.
- \$452 million from 2013-14 to 2023-24 for upgrade of the Midland Highway in Tasmania to improve safety on the highway and achieve a minimum three star Australian Road Assessment safety rating
- \$180 million is committed to the Central Arnhem Road Upgrade in the Northern Territory towards sealing, reconstructing, widening, and flood immunity improvements to priority sections of the route to a fit-for-purpose standard. This project is improving travel reliability and access to Nhulunbuy which in turn is helping support the communities and industries who rely on this link.
- \$160 million is committed to the Joy Baluch AM Bridge in South Australia to duplicate the existing two lane bridge as well as widening the approach roads to allow for two lanes in both directions. Construction work has commenced, and the new bridge is expected to open to traffic in 2022.

Roads of Strategic Importance Initiative

The Australian Government has committed more than \$5.8 billion over 13 years from 2018-19 to upgrade key freight routes through the *Roads of Strategic Importance* (ROSI) initiative.

The rolling nature of the investment ensures the initiative delivers substantial social and economic benefits, including ongoing opportunities for greater regional employment and business growth. This initiative ensures that our key freight roads efficiently connect agricultural and mining regions to ports, airports and other transport hubs.

Through the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government is committing an additional \$880 million to the following ROSI initiatives:

- \$336 million is being committed towards the Northern Roads Package – Stage Two and \$56 million for the Tasman Highway Sideling Upgrade – Stage Two projects, bringing the total Australian Government commitment for the Tasmanian Roads Package to \$872 million
- \$68.5 million for the existing Cooktown to Weipa Corridor in Queensland, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$258.5 million
- \$50 million for the existing Alice Springs to Halls Creek Corridor in the Northern Territory, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$210 million
- \$45 million for the existing Ballarat to Ouyen Corridor in Victoria, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$55 million
- \$30 million for the existing Tenterfield to Newcastle Corridor in New South Wales, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$170 million
- \$20 million for the existing Toowoomba to Seymour Corridor in New South Wales, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$320 million
- \$16.2 million for the existing Port Augusta to Perth Corridor in South Australia, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$116.2 million
- \$11.5 million for the existing Tennant Creek to Townsville Corridor in Queensland, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$211.5 million
- \$22.4 million for the Mid-West Secondary Freight Network in Western Australia
- \$178 million for the Pinjarra Heavy Haulage Deviation (Stages One and Two) project in Western Australia, bringing the total Australian Government commitment to \$200 million
- \$40 million for the Newman to Katherine Corridor – Great Northern Highway Upgrade – Newman to Port Hedland Overtaking Lanes in Western Australia
- \$6.4 million for the Great Southern Secondary Freight Network in Western Australia.

Northern Australia Roads Program Extension

The *Northern Australia Roads Program Extension* will continue the Australian Government's commitment to northern Australia. In the 2022-23 Budget, the government is committing \$380 million through this program for road projects in northern Australia, over four years from 2022-23 to 2025-26.

Projects delivered under this program will improve the reliability, productivity and resilience of key agriculture and commodities supply chains in northern Australia, reducing costs, improving efficiency and strengthening links to markets. They will enable Australia's freight to keep moving safely.

The program supplements the Australian Government's existing \$600 million *Northern Australia Roads Program* and the \$100 million *Northern Australia Beef Roads Program*, which are both nearing completion. Extension of the *Northern Australia Roads Program* will build upon the success of these programs by continuing to deliver required improvements to agriculture, resources and freight routes in northern Australia.

Unlocking the benefits of Inland Rail

Inland Rail is a nationally significant infrastructure project that is already enhancing our nation's freight and supply chain capabilities, complementing existing freight routes to support Australia's growth. Through an Australian Government commitment of up to \$14.5 billion in equity provided 2020-21, the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) will deliver 1,700 kilometres of rail line including 600 kilometres of new rail line and 1,100 kilometres of upgraded rail line within the existing rail corridor.

Comprising 13 sections, Inland Rail will complete the 'spine' of the national freight network, providing cost competitive and reliable transport between Melbourne and Brisbane in under 24 hours and improved access to and from regional markets.

The benefits of Inland Rail are already being realised as sections of track are built and become operational. In 2020, the 104 kilometres Parkes to Narromine section was completed and is now providing freight efficiencies flowing through supply chains that reach from Sydney to the east and Adelaide and Perth in the west. More than 1,800 people worked on this section, including 762 local residents. Nearly \$110 million was spent with 99 local businesses supplying and servicing Inland Rail – demonstrating the capacity of the project to stimulate regional economies and jobs immediately through construction.

The Narrabri to North Star section is currently in construction and has provided work for another 281 regional residents and injected more than \$72.2 million in local stimulus for businesses. In November 2021, 29 kilometres of track south of Moree was upgraded ahead of grain harvest season. This enabled farmers and producers to freight bulk grains

from North West New South Wales for export through the Port of Newcastle and Port Botany, helping to realise Australia's forecast record growth in agricultural exports.

At the peak of construction, Inland Rail is expected to support more than 21,500 jobs and provide significant stimulus to regional communities and businesses along the alignment in regional Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

Post construction, Inland Rail is expected to act as a catalyst for new and expanded regional investments providing thousands of jobs in food and fibre processing, manufacturing, and packing, distribution and transport businesses with the potential to boost gross regional product by \$13.3 billion over the first 50 years of operation.

To drive further value from Inland Rail's infrastructure, the Australian Government committed \$44 million in 2019-20 under the *Inland Rail Interface Improvement Program*, to support the development of 38 local project ideas that could increase the amount of freight on Inland Rail. A further \$150 million is being committed in 2022-23 to fund the delivery of priority infrastructure projects through the *Infrastructure Investment Program* that will deliver benefits to regional industries and communities along the Inland Rail corridor.

To be eligible for this funding, projects are required to have completed a strategic business case developed through the Australian Government's *Inland Rail Interface Improvement program*. They must also be able to demonstrate state government support (including a co-contribution), support of the asset owner to deliver the infrastructure work, confirming that work is not being delivered through other sources of funding, and is eligible for funding under the existing *Infrastructure Investment Program* as defined in the National Land Transport Act.

The types of infrastructure projects eligible for funding may include a mix of activities that complement Inland Rail, such as rail line reinstatement and rail upgrades, road and rail connections, intermodal terminals and/or freight precincts.

Toowoomba to Gladstone Inland Rail Extension

The Australian Government has agreed in principle to the extension of the Inland Rail from Toowoomba to the Port of Gladstone, subject to the outcomes of a business case demonstrating the project is economically beneficial. The Australian Government committed \$10 million in September 2021 towards the business case, to be completed in mid-2023.

The Toowoomba to Gladstone extension would build on the significant benefits of Inland Rail, creating more jobs during construction, unlocking new jobs and development opportunities in regional Queensland and better connecting the resources sector and agricultural producers to export markets through the Port of Gladstone.

Regional Queensland would benefit from increased jobs, connectivity, and export opportunities for the resource sector and agricultural producers. Further, the rail line could provide benefits to the broader Australian economy through freight efficiency improvements. This project is expected to support up to 4,900 direct and 7,000 indirect jobs.

The business case is expected to identify a preferred route, delivery approach, benefits and costs in order to optimise network connectivity through regional Queensland to the Port of Gladstone. The Business case will also explore commercial development and private sector funding opportunities.

Faster Rail Investment Program

Fast reliable transport connections to the regions are critical to supporting regional development and facilitating population shifts from congested capital cities to key regional centres.

There has been substantial progress in implementing the 20 Year National Faster Rail Plan since its release in 2019.

The Australian Government is committing a further \$3.72 billion to deliver the *Faster Rail Investment Program*. This brings the Government's commitments to faster rail projects to \$6 billion.

The program will fund capital projects including:

- \$1.6 billion for the Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast rail extension (Beerwah–Maroochydore). This project will deliver a new 37 kilometre rail line from Beerwah to the key regional centre of Maroochydore, including new proposed stations at locations such as Kawana and Caloundra. The new line will open up mass transit accessibility to the Sunshine Coast and deliver a step change in public transport services. This will reduce congestion on road transport corridors along the Sunshine Coast and to Brisbane. The project will be built along the Caloundra and Maroochydore Corridor Options Study (CAMCOS) corridor that was preserved in 2001 by the Queensland Government.
- \$1.12 billion for the Brisbane to the Gold Coast faster rail upgrade (Kuraby–Beenleigh). This project will upgrade the 19 kilometre section of passenger rail between Kuraby and Beenleigh. It will double capacity from two to four tracks, realign tracks to improve travel times, install new signalling, upgrade seven stations and relocate one, deliver new park 'n' ride capacity, improve safety by removing five level crossings; and invest in making it easier and safer to walk, cycle and drive to and from stations. The project will provide more reliable and frequent rail services (e.g. turn up and go services in the am peak). Addressing this bottleneck will be

critical to meet the demand of projected population growth and provide the transport support critical for the 2032 Brisbane Olympics.

- \$1.0 billion for the Sydney to Newcastle faster rail upgrade (Tuggerah– Wyong). This project involves constructing two new electrified tracks between south of Tuggerah and north of Wyong (approximately 10 kilometres), extra platforms and station upgrades at Wyong and Tuggerah, and new dual track rail bridges over the Wyong River. The project addresses a key capacity bottleneck and reliability constraint in the rail network and in doing so will double capacity on the existing 10 kilometre rail alignment, safeguard future frequent and fast rail services between Sydney and Newcastle, improve travel time and travel time reliability for existing passenger and freight services on the busy Sydney to Newcastle rail line and support growth and connectivity between Sydney, the Central Coast and Newcastle.

Remote Roads Upgrade Pilot Program

The Australian Government is providing \$150 million of funding for projects under the *Remote Roads Upgrade Pilot*. The program targets road improvements for regional communities, and addresses significant deficiencies on key regional and rural roads that limit community access, pose safety risks and impact the economic development of the surrounding area.

The program will assess the social and economic benefits to communities of undertaking these projects and highlight the significant gaps under the current arrangements to fund roads for regional communities using existing programs. Applications for funding can be made from state, territory and local governments.

Bridges Renewal Program

The Australian Government is providing almost \$900 million through the *Bridges Renewal Program* (BRP) from 2015-16 to 2025-26. In the 2022-23 Budget the Australian Government is committing \$40 million of additional funding over four years. This brings the annual commitment from 2023-24 to 2025-26 to \$95 million, with an ongoing commitment of \$85 million from 2026-27.

Since 2015, more than 85 per cent of funding under the BRP has gone to projects located in rural and regional areas. In that time, 730 projects have been funded with 495 complete.

The program supports the upgrading of bridges across the nation to deliver improvements in productivity and community access.

Regional Australia Level Crossing Safety Program

The Australian Government's *Regional Australia Level Crossing Safety Program* (RALCSP) will provide \$180.1 million over five years to improve safety at level crossings in

regional areas nationwide. Due to the growing freight task nationally, including demand for agricultural goods, which are primarily transported through regional Australia on trains and heavy vehicles, the risk of level crossing accidents is expected to increase.

The RALCSP includes funding for regional level crossing safety treatments like improved signage, boom gates, flashing lights and road rumble strips. The RALCSP will also support a national education and awareness campaign to improve level crossing safety in regional areas, data improvements to inform risk assessments of level crossings; and research and technology trials for low cost level crossing safety innovations that can be quickly deployed.

National System for Domestic Commercial Vessel Safety

Australia's domestic commercial vessel industries are mainly located in coastal and regional Australia and are an important part of tourism, transport and fishing.

On 3 December 2021, the Australian Government announced the Independent Review of Domestic Commercial Vessel Safety Legislation and Costs and Charging Arrangements (the Review).

The Review commenced in January 2022 and is being conducted in two phases, with the first focusing on the safety legislative framework (Phase One) and the second to consider national system delivery costs and future funding options (Phase Two). The Review will involve wide public consultation, with a final report expected by the end of 2022.

A review of the Australian Maritime Safety Agency's (AMSA) costs and charges was deferred as part of the 2021-22 Budget due to the impacts of COVID-19 on maritime businesses. A further deferral is necessary as safety findings from Phase One of the Review may impact consideration of delivery costs during the second phase.

To ensure AMSA can continue delivering vital safety regulation for our maritime industries, the Australian Government will provide \$12.6 million funding in 2022-23 for the national system while the review is being undertaken.

This further funding extends the Australian Government's 2018 commitment that no levy would be charged to industry for the first three years of AMSA's delivery of the national system services, by an additional 12 months, meaning no levy will be charged to industry in 2022-23.

National Water Grid Fund

Through the 2022-23 Budget the Australian Government has committed a further \$6.9 billion to the National Water Grid Fund, taking the total commitment to \$8.9 billion. The new and augmented projects include:

- Darwin Region Water Supply Infrastructure Program Stage One (Northern Territory)
 - Government funding of \$300.6 million will unlock over 7-gigalitres in additional water supply per annum and enable 14 gigalitres of storage capacity by returning Manton Dam to service and building the first phase of the new Strauss Water Treatment Plant.
- Don Irrigation Scheme (Tasmania)
 - Additional funding of \$13.73 million will enable the delivery of the project, which will construct two distribution networks providing a total 4,750-megalitres of irrigation water over 53 kilometres of pipeline each summer irrigation season.
- Dungowan Dam and Pipeline (New South Wales)
 - Additional funding of up to \$433 million, bringing the total Australian Government funding available up to \$675 million, subject to Infrastructure Australia's assessment of the business case, finalisation of environmental approvals and a co-investment decision by the New South Wales Government. This additional funding will enable delivery of the project, which will provide increased water security for Tamworth and the Peel Valley through a 22.5-gigalitre dam and 55 kilometre pipeline to the Calala Water Treatment Plant.
- Emu Swamp Dam (Queensland)
 - Additional funding of \$126.5 million. This additional funding will enable delivery of the project, which will construct a 12-gigalitre dam, five pump stations and a 117 kilometre pipeline network.
- Hells Gates Dam (Queensland)
 - Funding of \$5.4 billion, subject to the completion of the final stage of the business case and regulatory approvals. The project will deliver a 2,100-gigalitre dam and three downstream weirs, supporting a significant expansion of irrigation in the Burdekin region.
- Paradise Dam Improvement Project (Queensland)
 - Funding of \$600 million will restore Paradise Dam to its original 300-gigalitre capacity to support regional water security and agricultural growth.

The Australian Government has also committed \$483 million to the construction of Urannah Dam, subject to demonstration of value for money and sufficient public benefit for investment. The project will include the construction of the 970-gigalitre Urannah Dam and an approximately 200 kilometre pipeline network.

The Australian Government has also committed a further \$6.5 million to the new water infrastructure development projects listed below:

- Bicheno Recycled Water Scheme (Tasmania)
 - \$5 million to construct a distribution network for recycled water, including pipelines, pump stations and a 100-megalitre storage dam.
- Lake Leake Dam Life Extension Upgrade (Tasmania)
 - \$1.5 million to maintain 14.6-gigalitres per year of water for crop and livestock production by extending the dam’s life by a further 100 years.

The Australian Government has also committed a further \$27.5 million for the development of business cases for an additional 13 water infrastructure projects nationally. These business cases will help inform the Government’s investment decisions in new water infrastructure as part of the *National Water Grid Investment Pipeline*.

The Australian Government is continuing to deliver projects through the *National Water Grid Fund*. Nine construction projects are now operational, with eight of these having been completed since the establishment of the National Water Grid Authority (NWGA) in late 2019.

The nine completed projects are (figures represent the Australian Government contribution):

- South West Loddon (Victoria) – \$20 million
- Macalister Irrigation District Phase 1B (Victoria) – \$20 million
- Mitiamo and District Reticulated Water Supply Project (Victoria) – \$14.5 million
- Sunraysia Modernisation Project Two (Victoria) – \$3 million
- Mareeba-Dimbulah Water Supply Scheme Efficiency Improvement (Queensland) – \$11.6 million
- Warwick Recycled Water for Agriculture (Queensland) – \$0.3 million
- McLaren Vale Treated Water Storage (South Australia) – \$2.5 million
- Coolanie Water Scheme (South Australia) – \$0.7 million
- Scottsdale Irrigation Scheme (Tasmania) – \$25.3 million.

Sixteen projects are currently under construction (figures represent the Australian Government contribution), including six larger scale water infrastructure projects:

- Dungowan Dam and Pipeline (New South Wales) – work has commenced on the new Dungowan Pipeline

- Eurobodalla Southern Storage (New South Wales) – \$51.2 million
- Macalister Irrigation District 2030 Phase Two (Victoria) – \$31.3 million
- Rookwood Weir (Queensland) – \$183.6 million
- The Northern Adelaide Irrigation Scheme (South Australia) – \$45.6 million.
- Western Irrigation Network (Victoria) – \$48.1 million

Progress is underway for all projects funded through the Australian Government’s \$108 million National Water Grid Connections funding pathway (figures represent the Australian Government contribution) as detailed below:

- New South Wales Connection package (in planning) – \$15.8 million
- Victoria Connections package (under construction) – \$20 million
- Queensland Connections package (in planning) – \$4.8 million
- Western Australia Connections package (under construction) – \$20 million
- South Australia Connections package (under construction) – \$20 million
- Tasmania Connections package (under construction) – \$20 million
- The Northern Territory Connections package (under construction) – \$7.4 million.

Building on the projects completed and under construction, there are 16 larger scale projects in planning (figures represent the Australian Government contribution):

- Wyangala Dam (New South Wales) – \$325 million
- East Grampians Rural Water Supply (Victoria) – \$32 million
- Werribee Irrigation District Modernisation (Stage Four & Five) (Victoria) – \$11 million
- Recycled Water on the Bellarine (Victoria) – \$5.5 million
- Emu Swamp Dam (Queensland) – \$168.5 million
- Big Rocks Weir (Queensland) – \$38 million
- Hughenden Irrigation Scheme (Queensland) – \$170 million
- Warwick Recycled Water for Agriculture Upgrade (Queensland) – \$0.5 million
- Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme (Western Australia) – \$39.7 million

- Fingal Scheme (Tasmania) – \$35 million
- Northern Midlands Scheme (Tasmania) – \$25 million
- Sassafras-Wesley Vale Scheme Augmentation (Tasmania) – \$15 million
- Don Irrigation Scheme (Tasmania) – \$26.3 million
- Tamar Scheme (Tasmania) – \$12.5 million
- Bicheno Recycled Water Scheme (Tasmania) – \$5 million
- Lake Leake Dam Life Extension Upgrade (Tasmania) – \$1.5 million.

Collectively, the Australian Government’s investments under the National Water Grid Fund will support water security, and agricultural and primary industry growth in these regions as part of developing the National Water Grid.

North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority

In the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government is providing \$8.9 million of new funding for the North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority (NQWIA) over the next four years from 2022-23 (and \$2.7 million from 2026-27). This funding will secure the continuation of NQWIA for the next five years and enable it to take a more hands-on role by working closely with the Queensland Government on water infrastructure priorities across north Queensland. This builds on the 2019-20 Budget measure *Establishment of the North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority* where the Government provided \$9.6 million over five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

NQWIA was established to give specific focus to the development of major water infrastructure projects in north Queensland, including the Hughenden Irrigation Scheme, Hells Gates Dam and Big Rocks Weir. The development of these projects will help boost regional growth in northern Australia. If the Hughenden and Hells Gates irrigation schemes proceed to construction they will create significant economic value in the region, creating jobs both during construction and over the longer term across the agriculture sector.

Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility

In the 2020-21 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided an additional \$18.6 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$215.9 million from 2024-25 to 2056-57) to simplify the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility’s (NAIF) use of debt instruments and allow the NAIF to make limited equity investments.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility – extension and enhancements* and strengthens the NAIF’s impact across northern Australia.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO the Australian Government committed an additional \$2 billion in capital appropriation to the NAIF to finance critical infrastructure projects in the north, increasing NAIF's funds available for investment to \$7 billion.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, in recognition of the importance of the Indian Ocean Territories (IOTs) to Northern Australian development, the government agreed to amend the *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act 2016* to extend its geographical boundaries to include the IOTs. This definition will be applied to future programs, initiatives and funding opportunities for the north.

Legislative changes are required to implement these including increasing NAIF's capital appropriation by \$2 billion.

Government Response to 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

The 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review has emphasised the importance of reliable, modern, high quality telecommunications to our regional communities and their long term development, particularly in light of COVID-19 and recent natural disasters. The Review made 16 findings and 12 practical recommendations to create a more accessible, competitive and reliable regional telecommunications framework.

As part of its response to the Review, the Australian Government is providing funds to better position the regions for the future, particularly following the impacts of COVID-19, the recent increased growth of regional populations, and changes in working patterns and demands on telecommunications networks.

Two new Budget initiatives relate to the Review and are outlined below:

- \$811.8 million in funding across five years is provided for a new initiative, Connecting Regional Australia, as well as improving connectivity literacy, and associated departmental activities.
- \$480 million in funding is provided to expand and upgrade NBN Co's fixed wireless network with flow-on benefits for Sky Muster satellite services.

Connecting Regional Australia initiative

The \$811.8 million *Connecting Regional Australia* (CRA) initiative will deliver telecommunications investment to priority areas across regional, rural, remote and peri-urban Australia over a five year period.

The new initiative builds on the Australian Government's highly successful *Mobile Black Spot* and *Regional Connectivity Programs*.

This investment will strengthen existing regional connectivity to provide long lasting benefits to regional productivity, liveability and safety, while also supporting wider

government strategies in regionalisation, health, education, agriculture, and transport and disaster management.

As a flexible, large-scale multi-year fund program, CRA will enable a more structured, strategic and certain approach to investment in the digital future of the regions, reflecting the recommendations of the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review.

As noted below, regional consumers will be supported to make the most of better digital connectivity through further funding to expand and continue the *Regional Tech Hub*.

NBN Co Fixed Wireless and Satellite Upgrade

On March 2022 the Australian Government announced it will be providing a \$480 million contribution towards upgrade of the NBN fixed wireless network, with benefits also flowing to NBN Sky Muster satellite users. The Government's contribution is part of an overall \$750 million upgrade by NBN Co of these networks. The upgrade will improve services available to the more than one million premises able to access NBN fixed wireless and satellite services by 2024.

The upgrade will extend the reach of the fixed wireless footprint to cover an additional 120,000 premises that have previously been able to access the NBN via Sky Muster satellite services.

For the three-quarters of a million premises then able to access the NBN fixed wireless network, busy hour speeds will increase from a minimum of 6-megabits per second (Mbps) to typical busy hour download speeds of at least 50-Mbps. Peak wholesale speed plans available will increase to 100-Mbps with NBN Co also set to develop a new higher speed tier whereby 85 per cent of premises will be able to order speeds of up to 250-Mbps.

Fixed wireless premises will be able to access higher peak upload speeds, increasing to up to 20-Mbps for higher speed tiers.

With premises moving off the NBN Sky Muster service to fixed wireless, this will free up capacity for users remaining on Sky Muster, enabling NBN Co to almost immediately offer higher average data allowances of 55-Gigabytes (GB) – up from 50GB. Average data allowances for Sky Muster users will be further increased to 90GB once the fixed wireless upgrade is complete.

Automatic Dependent Surveillance – Broadcast Rebate Program

The \$33.5 million *Automatic Dependent Surveillance – Broadcast (ADS-B) Rebate Program* will provide grants from 2021-22 to 2022-23 to incentivise voluntary uptake of ADS-B-Out equipment in Australian-registered aircrafts operating under Visual Flight Rules (VFR), many of which operate in regional Australia. The Program will provide 50 per cent, or up to \$5,000 to aircraft owners for the purchase, installation and

certification of eligible equipment. The equipment will result in improved safety and efficiency of Australian airspace, through better situational awareness for pilots by improving visibility of nearby airborne VFR aircraft; enhanced search and rescue capabilities through improved air traffic information; and air traffic controllers having additional and accurate automated aircraft position information of VFR aircrafts. The technology offers particular safety benefits for general aviation pilots operating in regional Australia, who often rely on seeing and avoiding nearby air traffic.

Cell Broadcast National Messaging System

As part of the *Emergency Management and National Resilience Package* the Australian Government has announced funding for the implementation of a Cell Broadcast National Messaging System (CBNMS) over three years. This system will allow messages to be sent to all compatible mobile phones in the country or within a geo-location in the event of a disaster, for example. CBNMS is intended to complement the existing Emergency Alert Platform, which sends messages to landlines and mobile phones.

CBNMS will enable timely and targeted messages to be sent to the community in relation to unfolding emergencies or disaster events, including events of national significance. This is particularly important for regional communities, and their visitors, who are often disproportionately impacted by emergencies and disasters. The system will provide a much needed alert capability, and addresses the recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, which identified the need to improve information and warning systems.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications is leading the implementation of CBNMS, along with Emergency Management Australia within the Department of Home Affairs, and in consultation with states and territories.

Journalist Fund

The Australian Government has announced a total of \$10 million in grants over the 2021-22 and 2022-23 financial years to assist regional media organisations to hire new cadet journalists and upskill existing journalists. Funding will be provided to selected organisations through competitive, merit based selection processes allocated across two streams.

Stream One will support selected regional media organisations to employ new cadet journalists with a package of up to \$150,000 per cadet for a two year cadetship, under a co-contribution arrangement. Funding may be used for direct remuneration, relevant travel costs and training. Stream Two will support training to upskill existing journalists. Funding may be used for the purposes of developing and/or delivering new training material and courses, or to expand access to existing materials and courses for regional

journalists. A total of \$8 million will be available for hiring cadets and \$2 million is available for upskilling journalists.

These measures were part of the Australian Government's Media Policy Statement announced on 7 February 2022, which represents the response to the *Media Reform Green Paper* process.

Enhanced News Gathering program

On 7 February 2022, the ABC will receive new funding of \$45.8 million from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to strengthen local public interest journalism in regional communities through the continuation of the *Enhanced News Gathering* (ENG) program. ENG funding has been provided to the ABC since 2012-13, with \$43.7 million provided during the 2019-20 to 2021-22 funding triennium.

ABC will use this funding to support regional journalist positions in regional bureaux throughout Australia to deliver tailored, local news by across an array of digital channels as well as traditional TV and radio platforms. Funding will also support positions in capital cities responsible for delivering regional news.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation rural and regional activities reporting

The Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts has issued a Statement of Expectations to the ABC requesting annual reporting on key metrics related to its rural and regional activities and the specific activities funded by the ENG program. This additional reporting will provide increased transparency around ABC activities and services in regional and rural Australia.

Online safety initiatives to benefit regional Australia

For regional, rural and remote Australians, digital connectivity plays a critical role in supporting wellbeing and access to services. Australian women living in regional and remote areas are using online services to connect with others, to engage in the digital economy, to learn and be entertained. We also know that Australian women all across the country are at greater risk of experiencing online abuse in all its forms.

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$31.6 million from 2022-23 to 2026-27, for online safety initiatives that will provide real and tangible benefits for Australian women and children living in regional and remote areas. These measures are part of the Government's commitment to the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*. The funding will benefit regional Australians by establishing a new national service, community grants and communication activities to support women including:

- **Technology-Facilitated Abuse Phone Line Service** –\$16.6 million over four years (2022-23 to 2025-26) will allow the eSafety Commissioner to establish a team of experts with specialist expertise in detecting and addressing technology-facilitated abuse. The new phone line service will accept referrals from front line domestic and family violence workers to help victim-survivors of technology-facilitated abuse wherever they may live.
- **Online Safety Community Grants Program** – \$10 million over five years (2022-23 to 2026-27) will fund community grants to support online safety education and projects focussed on women and children. The grants program will provide opportunities for non-government organisations across the country, such as community groups, sporting groups and faith communities, to apply for funding to deliver online safety projects in areas of need.
- **Women’s Safety Communication Activities** – \$5 million over five years (2022-23 to 2026-27) will further increase awareness among women of the support and resources offered by the eSafety Commissioner under the Government’s new online safety laws. This extends the National Online Safety Awareness Campaign, which aired in 2021-22 to raise awareness across Australia of the new protections available for people who have experienced serious online abuse.

Albury Wodonga Regional Deal

\$80 million in Australian Government funding has been allocated for projects under the Albury Wodonga Regional Deal in the 2022-23 Budget. The funding will support projects that cover a range of priority areas identified by stakeholder consultations. This includes infrastructure in the health, economic development, tourism, indigenous and community sectors.

South East Queensland City Deal

The City Deal for South East Queensland (SEQ) is a 20-year agreement between the Australian Government, Queensland Government and Council of Mayors (SEQ) – demonstrating a shared commitment to transform SEQ and deliver region-shaping infrastructure. The SEQ City Deal will support the entire SEQ region, one of the fastest growing regions in the country, with 31 Deal commitments delivering:

- **Jobs:** investments to deliver high-value, knowledge-intensive jobs
- **Connectivity:** major infrastructure commitments as well as enabling productivity through enhanced digital infrastructure
- **Liveability:** effective waste management and recycling solutions, green infrastructure and enhanced natural spaces
- **Thriving communities:** investments to strengthen and develop the region.

The Australian Government's contribution to the \$1.8 billion SEQ City Deal is valued at \$667.77 million over 20 years.

Stronger Communities Programme

In the 2022-23 Budget the Australian Government will provide \$29.2 million over two years from 2022-23 for Round Eight of the *Stronger Communities Programme* (SCP) bringing the total commitment for this program to \$167.8 million between 2015-16 and 2023-24.

The SCP provides funding of between \$2,500 and \$20,000 for small capital projects that deliver social benefits for local communities across Australia.

Input from the community is a key element of the SCP. Each Member of Parliament is required to establish a community consultation committee to identify projects for consideration under the program. Funding of up to \$150,000 is available in each of the 151 federal electorates.

Over 12,000 community-based projects have secured funding under the first six rounds of the program. Applications for round seven closed in February 2022. After assessment, it is expected that contracts for approved projects will be awarded in the first half of 2022.

Local Government Financial Assistance Grant

The *Local Government Financial Assistance Grant* program is established under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995* and provides untied financial assistance to local governments across Australia to enable them to meet local priorities. The Australian Government is continuing the *Financial Assistance Grant* program, which will provide an estimated \$13.4 billion to local government over the period 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The funding is untied and consists of two components:

- A general purpose component distributed between the states and territories according to population.
- An identified local road component distributed between the states and territories according to fixed historical shares.

The Australian Government will make an early payment in the 2021-22 financial year of approximately 75 per cent of the 2022-23 Financial Assistance Grant estimate. This cash injection of \$2.1 billion will give councils vital support to assist with the combined impacts of floods and COVID-19.

Services to Norfolk Island

Since passing legislation which extended Commonwealth laws to Norfolk Island from 1 July 2016, the Australian Government has continued to invest in improvements to service delivery for the Norfolk Island community. In 2022-23 the Australian Government will provide \$81.6 million in base funding for essential services to Norfolk Island. The Australian Government will also provide \$15.6 million in base capital funding in 2022-23 across the non-self-governing Territories, which includes Norfolk Island, for the improvement of Commonwealth infrastructure assets.

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$118 million over four years from 2022-23 and ongoing funding of \$9.2 million per annum from 2026-27 to continue the provision of essential services and to maintain and improve existing infrastructure on Norfolk Island. This funding will deliver on:

- The provision of essential education and health support services provided by the Queensland Government as the new state partner for service delivery on Norfolk Island.
- Improvement of the internet bandwidth for the delivery of education and healthcare services.
- Procurement of detailed designs for a new wastewater treatment plant and critical and urgent upgrades to the sewer system in and around the Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area (KAVHA) world heritage site.
- Procurement of the basic infrastructure, equipment and container transfer vessels necessary to enable the handling and delivery of containerised freight to Norfolk Island.
- Essential upgrades to the Norfolk Island electricity grid and enable regular and reliable electricity supply.
- Continued delivery of essential services such as court services and legal proceedings, biosecurity and Argentine Ant eradication and Norfolk Island tourism and marketing.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government also provided an additional \$13.7 million over four years and ongoing funding of \$3.9 million per annum thereafter to support the provision of child and family wellbeing services and air freight services to Norfolk Island.

Services to the Indian Ocean Territories Program

The Australian Government supports the communities of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (CKI) through the provision of essential services and funding

for major infrastructure. Services delivered by the Australian Government, either directly via agreement with the Western Australian Government or under contract to the private sector, include healthcare, education, power, water, ports and airports. In 2022-23, the Australian Government will provide \$115.4 million in administered funding to support the delivery of these essential services. The Australian Government will also provide \$15.6 million in base capital funding across the non-self-governing Territories, which includes the IOTs for the improvement of Commonwealth infrastructure assets.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided additional \$17.4 million over two years from 2021-22 to improve both water security and the treatment of wastewater for the CKI community through the installation of a seawater reverse osmosis desalination plant and an upgrade to the existing wastewater treatment plant. The funding will support future economic development on the CKI, as well as providing essential infrastructure in support of the Department of Defence's upgrade to the CKI airfield.

Services to the Jervis Bay Territory

The Australian Government supports the community of the Jervis Bay Territory (JBT) by funding the provision of state-level and local government type services. In 2022-23 the Australian Government will provide \$8.4 million in funding for service delivery and will allocate \$15.6 million in base capital funding across the non-self-governing Territories, which includes the JBT for the improvement of Commonwealth infrastructure assets. State-level services, such as education, justice and welfare are delivered by the Australian Capital Territory Government under a service delivery agreement.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided an additional \$15.8 million over four years from 2021-22 and ongoing funding of \$0.1 million per annum thereafter to connect the JBT to the neighbouring Shoalhaven City Council (SCC) water networks and to provide a cost-efficient and sustainable solution to delivering these utilities in the JBT.

National Capital Authority Scrivener Dam

The Australian Government will provide \$38.5 million over four years from 2022-23 to undertake critical infrastructure upgrades to Scrivener Dam in the Australian Capital Territory.

The upgrades will remediate the structural issues and deficiencies of the Scrivener Dam dissipator, so that it is made to be fit for purpose and its life is extended for another 100 years. The upgrade will mitigate the risk of Scrivener Dam failing while creating jobs in the regional construction industry.

Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand Fund – Final Round

The *Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand Fund* (RISE) will provide an additional \$20 million through to 30 September 2022, for one final allocation of funding to assist the arts and entertainment sector recover from the effects of COVID-19. The RISE fund was introduced in 2020 due to the collapse of revenue experienced in the arts and entertainment sector in response to health restrictions. Through competitive project grants, the additional funding will support approximately 54 projects, providing 21,000 job opportunities and reaching an audience of 5.5 million people across all states and territories. Around half of all performances will take place in regional or remote locations.

Current initiatives

Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program

The Australian Government is continuing to support Australia's economic recovery funding local priority projects with \$3 billion for three phases of the *Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program* from 2020 to 2023. The government has again demonstrated its commitment to local government with a further \$500 million extension to Phase Three of the program. This program continues to assist every local government in Australia to deliver priority local projects, supporting an estimated 9,000 jobs across Australia over the life of the program, and local business across the nation.

As at 17 March 2022, councils have nominated nearly 7,900 projects using over \$2 billion funding nationwide to quickly stimulate regional economies, support local job opportunities and deliver community infrastructure projects. Projects include new or upgraded bicycle and walking paths, community halls, picnic shelters and barbeque facilities at parks as well as projects to support tourism and accessibility in regional areas. The projects delivered under this program are contributing to making regional communities safer, stronger and more sustainable.

Roads to Recovery Program

The *Roads to Recovery Program* (the Program) supports the maintenance of the nation's local road infrastructure asset, facilitating greater accessibility and improved safety, economic and social outcomes for Australians. The Program provides funding to all local government authorities, and states and territories in areas where there are no councils (unincorporated areas).

The Australian Government committed a total of \$6.2 billion to the Program from 2013-14 to 2023-24, with an on-going commitment of \$500 million each year following. Approximately \$500 million is expected to be paid to funding recipients in 2022-23.

Funding recipients have a set program allocation for each five-year program, and choose the projects on which they will spend their funding based on local priorities.

Roads to Recovery has funded more than 33,000 road projects between September 2013 and February 2022. The most common type of project is one that reconstructs, rehabilitates or widens a local road.

Black Spot Program

The Australian Government is providing \$1.2 billion to the *Black Spot Program* over 12 years from 2013-14 to 2024-25, to fund safety works in places where there have been serious crashes or where serious crashes are likely to occur. This includes \$128.9 million allocated for 2022-23. In 2021-22, the Australian Government approved more than 280 projects across Australia that will reduce crashes and save lives on Australian roads through works including the construction of roundabouts and crash barriers, and upgraded street lighting.

More than 60 per cent of road deaths and a significant proportion of serious injuries occur outside of metropolitan areas. In line with national road safety policy objectives, approximately 50 per cent of *Black Spot Program* funds in each state (other than Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory) have been set aside for projects in non-metropolitan areas. The *Black Spot Program* continues to deliver reductions to fatal and serious injury crashes at treated sites by up to 30 per cent. As at February 2022, more than 3,000 projects have been funded since 2013-14. Each state and territory receives a share of the total funding, based on crash data, population and vehicle kilometres travelled.

Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program

The Australian Government is providing more than \$650 million through the *Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program* (HVSPP) from 2013-14 to 2025-26, with an ongoing commitment of \$65 million per year, which will provide funding to infrastructure projects that improve productivity and safety outcomes of heavy vehicle operations across Australia. Since 2015, more than 90 per cent of funding under the HVSPP has gone to projects located in rural and regional areas. The 2022-23 allocation under the program is \$101 million.

In November 2021, the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the HVSPP would be moving to a rolling basis, with applications accepted all the time, and new projects announced on a regular basis. Australian Government funding of up to \$100 million is available for projects submitted in the first 12 months.

Increasing job and business opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Regional Australia

All states and territories agreed to the Australian Government's National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects in 2019, which introduced the Indigenous Employment and Supplier-use Infrastructure Framework. The Framework

aims to create opportunities for Indigenous job-seekers and businesses on Australian Government funded infrastructure projects under the *Infrastructure Investment Program*.

The Framework aligns with Outcome Seven and Eight of the National Agreement on *Closing the Gap*, by improving socio-economic participation through the provision of increased opportunities for Indigenous businesses and individuals to work in the road and rail construction industry.

Under the Framework, funding recipients (state, territory and local governments) are required to develop an Indigenous Participation Plan establishing employment and supplier-use targets for: new construction projects receiving \$7.5 million or more of Australian Government funding; projects funded under the ROSI initiative in Northern Australia; and where there is high potential to support Indigenous outcomes.

As at 1 February 2022 more than 200 projects under the *Infrastructure Investment Program* have agreed employment and supplier-use targets in place under the Framework. Over the life of the projects, this is estimated to represent more than 1,000 jobs for Indigenous Australians and hundreds of millions of dollars for Indigenous businesses.

Shovel Ready Projects and Targeted Road Safety Works

In June 2020 the Australian Government announced \$1.5 billion over three years from 2020-21 for priority regional and urban transport infrastructure to support local jobs and economic recovery. Funding for regional Australia under this initiative totals more than \$970 million. This includes shovel ready projects such as:

- \$178.2 million in additional funding for Regional Rail Revival Package projects in Victoria
- \$126.4 million for a number of smaller scale projects under the Regional Economic Enabling Fund in Queensland
- \$68 million for Stage One and Two of the Bussell Highway duplication project in Western Australia
- \$41.6 million for a Regional Road Network Package in South Australia
- \$8 million for State Road Network Enhancements in Tasmania completed in 2021.

This investment also includes \$500 million to deliver critical projects to improve road safety and bolster the resilience of our road networks. This includes:

- \$140 million towards a Safer Roads Program in New South Wales
- \$80 million Regional State Road Safety Improvement Program in Western Australia

- \$16 million to upgrade high-speed, high-risk regional intersections in Victoria
- \$8 million to install safety barriers at high crash sites in South Australia
- \$5 million to upgrade the Huon Highway and Sandfly Road Junction in Tasmania which was completed in 2021
- \$3.9 million for safety improvements on the Barkly Highway in the Northern Territory.

Grade Separating Road Interfaces in New South Wales

In October 2020, the Australian Government committed \$150 million in funding for a *Grade Separating Road Interfaces* project (the Project). An additional \$300 million commitment for the project was made as part of the 2022-23 Budget. The project is a joint venture between the Australian Government and the New South Wales Government. Subject to the New South Wales Government agreeing to commit an additional \$75 million in line with an 80:20 funding split (bringing its contribution to \$112.5 million) the total combined project funding will be \$562.5 million. The funding is expected to enable additional grade separations along the Inland Rail alignment in New South Wales. The Australian and New South Wales Governments are working constructively to implement the funding commitment.

Work in 2022 includes progressing the scoping phase of the Project which will consider the strategic merits of the 22 identified sites, with a detailed focus on the four highest priority projects already identified.

Northern New South Wales Inland Port – Narrabri

In October 2020, the Australian Government announced \$7.8 million to support the delivery of the *Northern New South Wales Inland Port* project, which is located in Narrabri. This project is expected to support improved freight productivity and connectivity between regional New South Wales and key markets. The project involves construction of an 1,800 metre-long rail siding with slip road infrastructure to facilitate rail loading and storage capability of the New South Wales Inland Port Logistics and Freight Hub. The Australian Government funding complements the existing New South Wales Government commitment of \$16.8 million to the hub. The project is in its early planning phase.

Narrabri to Turravan Line Upgrade

The Australian Government is providing \$44.7 million to the ARTC to upgrade 35 kilometres of the Narrabri to Turravan Line between the Hunter Valley Coal Network and Inland Rail. The upgrade is expected to be completed in the early 2023-24 financial year allowing longer and heavier freight trains travelling from Northern New South Wales – transporting grain and cotton – to access the ports of

Newcastle and Sydney. By maximising the freight volume of each train traveling on the line, the upgrades are expected to result in reduced transport costs and enhance the competitiveness for Australian exports. The ARTC has commenced design and materials procurement activities, and continues to consult with local communities and relevant approval authorities on the final scope of works to be delivered, including the interface between the upgraded line and Inland Rail.

Southern Highlands Overtaking Opportunities

The Australian Government is providing \$41.6 million to the ARTC to deliver overtaking facilities on the Southern Highlands Line in New South Wales. Track and signalling infrastructure improvements, including the installation of ‘double crossovers’, are expected to enable faster services to overtake freight trains of up to 1,800 metres in length. Providing more overtaking opportunities is expected to reduce transit time for rail freight services between Melbourne and Sydney, in addition to increased service reliability, and promote modal share shift from road to rail. The project is expected to be completed by late 2024.

Office of Road Safety

The Office of Road Safety (ORS) was established on 1 July 2019 to provide a national leadership role to reduce road trauma. ORS is responsible for driving road safety outcomes at a national level. ORS is contributing to the implementation of the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 (the Strategy), which was released in December 2021, and sets the national direction of Australia’s road safety objectives to 2030. Regional road safety, and remote road safety are two of the nine priorities under the Strategy.

ORS is focused on supporting the achievement of zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2050 by promoting innovation, and facilitating collaborative activities including research and awareness outcomes. ORS also delivers multiple programs of national significance, including the \$3 billion *Road Safety Program* which makes a significant contribution to proactively detecting and treating deficiencies in road infrastructure, including in regional areas. ORS is focused on the elimination of road trauma across all Australian environments, noting that two thirds of road deaths consistently occur in regional and remote areas.

Road Safety Program

As part of the Australian Government’s ongoing commitment to improving road safety for all Australians, \$3 billion has been committed to the *Road Safety Program* over three years from 2020-21.

The *Road Safety Program* is being rolled out over 30 months in five, six-month tranches. Tranche One commenced on 1 January 2021 and concluded on 30 June 2021, with around \$1 billion in road safety improvement works towards approximately 700 projects nationally. Tranche Two commenced on 1 July 2021 and concluded on

31 December and delivered a further \$490 million towards projects in regional and urban areas. Tranche Three, which commenced on 1 January 2022, is delivering approximately \$520 million in safety improvements in regional and urban areas of Australia and is set to conclude on 30 June 2022. To date this program has seen safety improvement works delivered to more than 19,000 kilometres of the national road network and has supported approximately 12,000 jobs.

This initiative will positively benefit the economy and is expected to materially reduce road casualty rates across predominantly regional communities, which disproportionately bear the brunt of fatal and serious injury road crashes. Regional communities suffer 10 deaths per 100,000 persons compared to metropolitan areas who suffer 2 deaths per 100,000 persons.

Road safety treatments include:

- shoulder sealing and installation of audio tactile line markings, to support the safe return of vehicles from the shoulder into the travel lane
- physical barriers to prevent run off road crashes
- median treatments to prevent head-on vehicle collisions.

The application of these road safety treatments is raising road safety standards across high risk roads.

Road Safety Innovation Fund

The *Road Safety Innovation Fund* (RSIF) is providing \$12 million in grants over four years with projects expected to be completed by July 2023.

The RSIF provides grants for innovative research and new and improved existing technologies and products that enhance road safety under the safe systems approach. This includes research and development in priority areas such as regional road safety, driver distraction from mobile devices, protecting vulnerable road users and reducing drug driving. Through two funding rounds, 53 projects have been approved. While funded projects will benefit all road users, three projects have specific application to regional Australia.

Keys2drive

The Australian Government has committed \$24 million from November 2017 to June 2023 to guarantee the delivery of the *Keys2drive* program.

The program is a national learner driver program which aims to improve the safety of young drivers by helping them gain effective driving experience before they graduate to a 'P-plate' licence. It contributes to road safety outcomes by providing a free theory

and practical lesson to learner drivers and supervisors. The program has been enhanced to expand uptake in regional areas where young drivers are over-represented in road crashes.

Australasian New Car Assessment Program

The Australian Government has committed \$6.7 million from July 2018 to June 2023 as part of the *Infrastructure Investment Program*, to support the *Australasian New Car Assessment Program's* (ANCAP) safety ratings.

ANCAP star ratings indicate the level of safety a vehicle provides for occupants and pedestrians in the event of a crash. The independent safety ratings provide consumers with independent information on the level of safety provided by new vehicles in the event of a crash.

National Road Safety Data Hub

The Australian Government has committed \$5.5 million to the establishment of a *National Road Safety Data Hub* (the Hub). The Hub was set up early in 2021 to bring together national road safety data. The Hub aims to provide data that is accurate, robust and available in a timely manner, which will inform best practice road safety policy, guide government investment in road infrastructure and measure the effectiveness of these efforts in reducing fatal and serious injuries, noting the majority of fatalities occur on regional roads.

The data will allow policies and programs to be targeted and agile, enabling faster identification of high risk roads and the delivery of interventions to save lives.

Road Safety Awareness and Enablers Fund

The *Road Safety Awareness and Enablers Fund* (RSAEF) contributes to reducing road trauma in Australia by increasing road safety awareness, education and collaboration nationally.

The RSAEF is providing \$4 million in grants over four years with projects expected to be completed by July 2023. Twenty projects have been funded over two rounds, with successful applicants including community organisations, road safety groups and local governments. Projects target a wide range of road users and road safety issues including rural and regional road safety, the impacts of speeding, driveway safety and sharing the road safely with all road users.

Regional Airports Screening Infrastructure Program

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$28.5 million over two years from 2021-22 through the *Regional Airports Screening Infrastructure* (RASI) *Program*, to assist with the cost of mandated security screening requirements enacted by the Department of Home Affairs through transport security regulations. This brings the

total funding available through the RASI Program to \$94.5 million. The RASI Program funds the minimum necessary capital works costs to accommodate enhanced security screening equipment funded under the Home Affairs' *Regional Airport Security Screening Fund* (RASSF), and a portion of initial operational costs.

While regional airports receive the funding it is ultimately regional communities that will benefit, as costs funded through grants cannot be passed on to airlines and, by extension, passengers. The Program commenced in 2020, with 71 grant agreements offered to 40 participating airports (35 for capital expenditure and 36 for operating expenditure). The program funding of \$94.5 million is split between \$50.2 million for capital works; and \$44.3 million for operating costs.

A number of capital works projects have been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. The availability of funding for operating costs depends on when individual airports have completed relevant capital works and commenced enhanced screening. The payment of RASI funding for operating costs was also paused to accommodate the *Domestic Airports Security Costs Support* (DASCS) program, which ended on 31 December 2021. This provided extended support for regional airports. Airports with access to RASI funding for operating costs may commence/resume drawing on these funds now that DASCS has concluded. The program is expected to conclude 30 June 2023.

The Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme

The *Remote Air Services Subsidy* (RASS) Scheme is part of the Australian Government's *Regional Aviation Access Program* (RAAP). RASS is an ongoing scheme with an annual appropriation of \$15.5 million in 2022-23. It subsidises a regular weekly air transport service for the carriage of passengers and goods such as educational materials, medicines and medical equipment, fresh foods and other urgent supplies to communities in remote and isolated areas of Australia. Due to the distances involved and with road access to many communities often cut for several months during the wet season, a regular air service offers the only reliable means of transport. Mail is carried on these flights under a separate contract with Australia Post.

There are 10 geographic regions under the RASS Scheme, with air operators contracted by the Australian Government to provide a regular air transport service to 270 remote and isolated communities in Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania, including many Indigenous communities.

Regional Airports Program

In the 2019-20 Budget the Australian Government committed \$100 million to establish the *Regional Airports Program*, a competitive grants program to support upgrades to infrastructure and deliver improved aviation safety and access to regional airports. In the 2021-22 MYEFO the Australian Government agreed to extend the program until

30 June 2025 to allow a further round to be undertaken and to allow projects additional time for completion due to the impacts of COVID-19 and recent natural disasters.

The program helps improve the safety of aircraft, operators and passengers using regional airports or aerodromes, helps meet the operational requirements of aeromedical and other emergency services, facilitates improved delivery of essential goods and services such as food supplies, health care and passenger air services and improves the connectivity of Australia's regions to domestic and global market opportunities.

In June 2020, 61 successful projects were announced by the Australian Government with \$41.2 million in funding under Round One of the program. As of February 2022, seventeen Round One projects had been completed.

In July 2021, 89 successful projects were announced under Round Two of the program. A third round of the program is being run in 2022.

Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program

The *Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program* is a competitive grants program to support safety and access upgrades at airstrips in remote and very remote areas of Australia. In the 2018-19 Budget the Australian Government committed \$28.34 million over four years to 2021-22 to provide for Rounds Six to Eight of the program. In the 2021-22 MYEFO the Australian Government announced \$15 million for Round Nine of the program, which was open for applications from 3 February to 17 March 2022.

Projects funded under the program improve the safety of aircraft, operators and passengers. Safe, operational airstrips are vital for the delivery of essential goods and services in remote communities, particularly where road access can be disrupted for extended periods due to seasonal weather conditions. The airstrip supports the delivery of health care services such as those provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service or other aeromedical providers and provides access to work and education opportunities for remote communities.

Since 2013, \$70 million has been approved for 344 remote airstrip projects.

Emerging Aviation Technology Partnerships Program

The Australian Government has committed \$32.6 million to establish the *Emerging Aviation Technology Partnerships Program* (the EATP Program). The objective of the EATP Program is to help fast-track the emerging aviation technology sector by encouraging the development and deployment of innovative emerging aviation technologies and demonstrating the benefits stemming from use of the technology for Australian businesses and communities, particularly in regional Australia. The EATP Program is intended to improve supply chain and market efficiency and improve connections with

regional and remote communities, with a particular focus on improving outcomes for Indigenous communities.

Under the EATP Program, the government is partnering with industry to test emerging aviation technology and the underpinning frameworks through pilot projects across five focus areas, all of which have a regional focus:

- digital farming
- connecting regional communities
- boosting regional supply chains
- improving outcomes for remote indigenous communities
- manufacturing in emerging aviation technology.

The National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy

The National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy sets an agenda for coordinated and well-planned government and industry action across all freight modes to 2040 and beyond. COVID-19 has highlighted how important reliable and efficient supply chains are, and feedback from industry is that the strategy's goals are more relevant than ever.

The International Supply Chain Benchmarking Project is a key Commonwealth action under the Strategy to provide better freight location and performance data. The project has made significant progress in improving access to supply chain benchmarking and performance data for Australian governments and businesses. Achievements include the development and release of the publicly-available Supply Chain Benchmarking Dashboard (the Dashboard) in October 2021. The Dashboard models Australian supply chains and provides a comprehensive set of benchmarks to assist performance evaluation and international comparison. The Dashboard was upgraded in February 2022 with enhanced geographic filtering, allowing for greater analysis of commodity movements of 150 commodities across regional Australia.

As part of the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government announced it will provide up to \$4.3 million to expand the Benchmarking tool and underlying Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) Transport Investment Strategic Investment Tool to include resilience analysis for critical supply chains.

The Australian Government has also commissioned and released 20 reports, comprising 10 sectoral assessments and 10 detailed commodity reports, which provide direct international comparisons with Australia's supply chain performance.

Establishment of the National Freight Data Hub

The Australian Government has committed \$16.5 million over four years commencing in 2021-22 to establish the *National Freight Data Hub*. This builds on the investment in the 2019-20 Budget of \$5.2 million to work closely with industry and others to settle the design of a *National Freight Data Hub* and to build a prototype website.

The Australian Government launched a prototype website in May 2021 as a practical demonstration of the value of a freight data resource. The prototype website has around 10,000 users and is being regularly updated, while an enduring website is built. The website showcases government and industry cooperation on a number of projects and allows users to search for data relevant to their business.

The *National Freight Data Hub* will build on the prototype website to enhance the collection and access to freight data across all modes and supply chains. It will help inform regional businesses and communities by building national freight datasets to answer important freight and supply chain questions. It will provide a data driven approach to strategic planning and investment, and support day-to-day operations.

National Heavy Vehicle Charging Pilot

The Australian Government has provided \$9.8 million in funding over five years until 2023 for the *National Heavy Vehicle Charging Pilot* (the Pilot). The Pilot forms a part of the broader Heavy Vehicle Road Reform agenda, focussing on alternative methods of road user charging. The Pilot is an industry partnership that aims to test if direct road user charging is feasible. Industry partners include a wide range of transport companies including buses, crane operators and long-haul trucking companies.

The Pilot was launched in 2018 and a proof of concept small scale trial was concluded in 2020. Two further trials will start in 2022 and these trials will test manual telematics technologies for the purposes of gathering distance and location data to calculate direct road user charges.

The trials will involve mock invoices and permits to demonstrate an alternative road user charge. However, no actual money is exchanged between the trial participants and the Australian Government. The trials include transport operators from regional and remote areas and will examine the potential impact of direct charges for these operators.

Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme

In 2022-23, the *Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme* (BSPVES) is forecast to provide \$54.5 million in rebates.

The BSPVES was introduced by the Australian Government in 1996. It supports the Tasmanian economy and regional Australia by assisting in reducing the cost of sea travel across Bass Strait for passengers accompanying an eligible passenger vehicle and the

transport of eligible passenger vehicles between King Island and the mainland. Assistance under BSPVES is provided in the form of a rebate which reduces the fare charged by a Bass Strait shipping Service Operator, for example TT-Line or Bass Island Line, for the transport of an eligible passenger vehicle.

Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme

In 2022-23, the *Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme* (TFES) is forecast to provide \$178 million in assistance for eligible goods.

The TFES was introduced by the Australian Government in 1976 to support the Tasmanian economy and regional Australia. It provides financial assistance for the cost incurred by shippers of eligible non-bulk goods moved by sea between Tasmania and mainland Australia, and between the main island of Tasmania and King Island or the Furneaux Group, to help reduce the higher cost of shipping across Bass Strait. The objective of the Scheme is to provide Tasmanian industries with equal opportunities to compete in other markets, recognising that, unlike their mainland counterparts, Tasmanian shippers do not have the option of transporting goods interstate by road or rail.

In August 2019, the Australian Government introduced a range of improvements to the TFES, including increased assistance for high density goods, reduced claims processing times and interest payments for late claim payments. In addition, in the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$67.7 million over four years to provide TFES assistance for imported goods shipped to Tasmania from the mainland, where proof can be provided that there is no Australian equivalent good. TFES imported good claims became eligible for payment on 1 October 2021.

Our North, Our Future – Next Five Year Plan for Northern Australia

The Australian Government is continuing its investment in Northern Australia, having provided \$189.6 million over five years from 2021-22 through the *Next Five Year Plan for Northern Australia*. The plan builds on the 2015 *White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* and focuses on job creation through concentrated investment aligned to geographic regions of growth. It includes initiatives that will enable greater digital connectivity in northern Australia; and support for businesses to scale-up and diversify.

Northern Australia Development Program

The Australian Government is investing \$111.9 million in the *Northern Australia Development Program* (NADP) to support northern Australian businesses to scale-up and diversify by providing co-investment grants to businesses for a range of activities including infrastructure, assets, feasibility studies and business planning. The investment will be supported by the Strengthening Northern Australia Business advisory service for eligible businesses to build capability and resilience and to maximise the growth potential of businesses accessing the grants. The *Northern Australia*

Business and Community Growth Program expands grant eligibility to a broader range of entities including northern based business and community organisations. It operates in parallel to, and shares a funding envelope with, the NADP.

Connecting Northern Australia

The Australian Government is providing \$68.5 million over 2 years from 2021-22 in dedicated funding to improve telecommunications infrastructure across *Northern Australia through the Regional Connectivity Program* and the *Mobile Black Spot Program*. The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications is responsible for the delivery and administration of this initiative.

The investment supports telecommunications infrastructure projects which maximise economic and social opportunities in regional, rural and remote northern Australia. The investment will improve the commercial viability of telecommunications projects in high cost, low population density locations including remote Indigenous communities.

Applications for Round Two of the *Regional Connectivity Program* closed on 10 February 2022.

Program guidelines for a *Mobile Black Spot Program* round with dedicated funding to improving mobile coverage in Northern Australia, are under development.

Investments in the National Broadband Network

NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) announced in its 2021-2024 Corporate Plan that it will invest \$4.5 billion by 2023 to deliver better outcomes for residential and business broadband consumers. These investments include:

- \$700 million Business Fibre initiative to offer wholesale symmetrical speeds up to one Gbps on-request at no up-front build cost to 90 per cent of business premises. This includes the establishment of 297 Business Fibre Zones to provide metro-equivalent priced enterprise grade broadband to around 850,000 businesses, of which 300,000 are located regionally.
- \$3.5 billion network upgrade program that will provide 75 per cent of NBN fixed-line premises with access to ultra-fast broadband (of up to one Gpbs) by 2023. By 31 December 2021, 42 per cent of the fixed line network had been upgraded.
- \$300 million development fund to co-invest with local, state and federal governments to boost connectivity in regional Australia

For regional Australia, the investments by NBN Co are expected to result in:

- around 950,000 Fibre-to-the-Node (FTTN) premises in regional areas having access to speeds up to one Gbps on demand by 2023
- around 300,000 regional businesses located in Business Fibre Zones with access to ultra-fast broadband capability and metro-equivalent wholesale pricing
- more fixed-line broadband infrastructure into the NBN Satellite and Fixed Wireless footprints
- an estimated 10,000 additional regional jobs and an estimated 2,800 new regional businesses by 2024
- an expected \$1.5 billion in additional gross domestic product annually for regional Australia by 2024
- a \$50 million FTTN line speed uplift program to resolve in-home wiring issues
- a commercial model to facilitate the creation of future Business Fibre Zones based on co-investing in partnership with local and state and territory governments.

NBN Co will fund these upgrades through existing and new private debt facilities.

Universal Service Guarantee

The *Universal Service Guarantee* (USG) provides premises across Australia with reasonable access to broadband, telephone and payphone services. Voice and payphone services receive \$270 million per annum under the *Telstra Universal Service Obligation Performance Agreement*, which runs to 2031-32. Under statutory infrastructure provider arrangements introduced from 1 July 2020, service providers must connect premises and supply services so that retailers can offer broadband services to consumers of at least 25/5 Mbps.

Regional Connectivity Program

Access to reliable, affordable and innovative digital services and technologies is critical for regional communities. Improving digital connectivity will support regional industries to continue to navigate recovery from COVID-19, capitalise on changed businesses conditions, and better engage in the digital economy.

The *Regional Connectivity Program* (RCP) targets investment in place-based telecommunications infrastructure projects which respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and remote Australians.

Round One of the RCP is providing up to \$117.9 million (GST inclusive) in Commonwealth funding for over 130 place-based telecommunications infrastructure projects across Australia, providing regional communities with significant upgrades to voice and data services. Construction of Round One funded projects has commenced and all projects are expected to be completed by quarter two of 2023.

Round Two of the RCP is providing an additional \$112 million (GST inclusive), including \$45.5 million (GST inclusive) of dedicated funding for projects in Northern Australia under the *Connecting Northern Australia* (CNA) initiative. Applications for Round Two closed on 10 February 2022 and an announcement on the successful projects is expected to be made in the first half of 2022.

Mobile Black Spot Program

The Australian Government has committed \$380 million (GST exclusive) from 2015-16 to 2022-23 to the *Mobile Black Spot Program* (MBSP), which provides funding to mobile network operators and infrastructure providers to invest in telecommunications infrastructure for improved mobile coverage and competition across Australia. To date, Rounds One to 5A of the MBSP is funding delivery of more than 1,270 new mobile base stations across regional, rural and remote Australia, with over 1,000 base stations now on air. The MBSP is supported by co-contributions from state and local governments, mobile network operators, businesses and local communities and has leveraged a total investment of more than \$875 million (GST inclusive).

The outcome of the latest round of the MBSP, 5A announced on 23 July 2021, will deliver 67 base stations located in natural disaster prone areas and along major regional and remote transport corridors by June 2023. Round 5A will also focus on trialling new technologies and delivery models. Communities will have further opportunities to benefit from Round Six of the MBSP, with applications expected to open in 2022. Dedicated funding is also committed to mobile coverage projects through the \$68.5 million (GST exclusive) *Connecting Northern Australia* initiative announced in the 2021-22 Budget. This funding recognises the particular challenges involved in providing mobile and data services in this important region.

Mobile Network Hardening Program

The Australian Government has committed \$21.9 million (GST exclusive) from 2020-21 to 2022-23 to the *Mobile Network Hardening Program* (MNHP), which is increasing the resilience of regional telecommunications networks against the impacts of power outages and damage during natural disasters. The MNHP forms a key component of the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters package.

Stage One of the MNHP is providing \$12 million in funding to mobile network operators to improve network resilience by upgrading battery backup power at 467 base stations funded under Rounds One and Two of the *Mobile Black Spot Program*. These upgrades

will increase backup power to at least 12 hours of operation, consistent with base stations funded under later rounds of the *Mobile Black Spot Program*. The rollout of these upgrades is almost complete.

Stage Two of the MNHP is providing \$9.9 million in funding to mobile network operators to deliver 544 network resilience upgrades at mobile base station sites across regional Australia. These upgrades comprise the deployment of new portable and permanent power generators, upgrades to battery systems to increase power capacity, the addition of battery extension devices to enhance power capacity, improvements to transmission resilience within mobile network ‘clusters’, and the physical hardening of telecommunications sites against bushfire damage. Projects will be delivered over 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Regional Tech Hub

The *Regional Tech Hub* provides independent and factual information to help people in regional and rural Australia get connected and stay connected more easily. It is funded by \$3 million for a three year term commencing in 2020 as part of the government’s over response to the Regional Telecommunications Review 2018. The Hub includes a website, online helpdesk, phone support line and social media access through Facebook and Twitter.

The government response to the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review includes a further \$5 million over five years for the *Regional Tech Hub* to support better consumer awareness. Consumers will also benefit from better information about mobile coverage and performance.

Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters Package

In May 2020, the Australian Government announced a \$37.1 million package over two years to prevent, mitigate and manage telecommunications outages in natural disasters, known as the *Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters* (STAND) package. The package forms a key part of the government’s \$650 million *Regional Recovery and Development Program* for locally-led bushfire recovery. This initiative will increase network resilience and preparedness so communities can better deal with future emergencies and natural disasters.

The measures within the STAND Package include:

- \$10 million for temporary telecommunications infrastructure deployments, comprising a \$1.7 million tied grant to NBN Co for the purchase of five new NBN Road Muster satellite trucks and 12 portable satellite kits and competitive grants open to national carriers for facilities such as cells on wheels (COWS) and mobile exchanges on wheels (MEOWs)

- \$7 million to deliver NBN Co Sky Muster satellite services to rural and country fire service depots and evacuation centres across the country at locations nominated by state and territory governments
- \$2.1 million to improve government information to communities about access to telecommunications in emergencies.

Access to power continues to be a critical issue for communication networks: the April 2020 Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) report on the impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires found that 1,390 telecommunications facilities across Australia were impacted by the bushfires, and that network outages were overwhelmingly due to loss of power rather than fire damage. Information provided by telecommunications companies in 2021 and 2022 indicates power supply continues to be the main cause of outages in natural disasters, including during the March 2022 floods in New South Wales and Queensland.

The STAND measures have been successfully rolled out, with a number of assets already being used in regional communities impacted by natural disasters. Elements of the package were in place for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 peak bushfire seasons, including five NBN Roadmuster trucks, 12 Fly Away Kits, NBN Sky Muster Satellite facilities and resources developed under the communications component.

Other elements are being progressively deployed, such as further communications materials, more telecommunications temporary facilities and NBN Sky Muster Satellite Services. To allow sites nominated by state and territory governments to benefit from the program, the NBN Sky Muster Satellite Service component of STAND has been extended, with \$3.1 million in funding being moved into the 2022-23 financial year.

As part of the STAND Package, the Australian Government has also committed \$18 million for a new *Mobile Network Hardening Program* (MNHP) to keep mobile infrastructure operating for longer during emergencies, with a focus on strengthening back-up power supplies.

Stage One of the *Mobile Network Hardening Program* is providing \$13.2 million (GST inclusive) in government funding to improve network resilience by upgrading battery backup power at 467 base stations funded under Rounds One and Two of the government's *Mobile Black Spot Program*. These upgrades will increase backup operation to at least 12 hours.

The Second Stage of the program is providing \$10.9 million (GST inclusive) in government funding to deliver an additional 544 resilience upgrades to further strengthen other mobile base station sites and mobile network infrastructure across Australia.

Australian 5G Innovation Initiative

First announced as part of the Job Maker Digital Plan on 29 September 2020 and extended on 8 December 2021 under the Digital Economy Strategy, the Australian 5G Innovation Initiative (the Initiative) includes \$40 million in grant funding over four years from 2021–22. The next generation of mobile technology, 5G, offers higher speeds and reliability, lower latency, and supports a much higher number of connections. The Initiative supports case studies and trials to demonstrate the productivity-boosting applications of 5G technology, and help businesses better understand the ways they can benefit from and adopt 5G.

The outcomes of the Initiative's first round of grants were announced in August 2021, with 19 successful projects receiving grant funding in 2021–22 throughout Australia, including in regional areas. These include projects in the agriculture, construction, manufacturing, transport, and education and training sectors where applications of 5G have the potential to support economic development and productivity in regions across Australia. Projects funded under round one include 5G-enabled livestock counting, remote control of fire-fighting tanks in rugged terrain and 5G broadband network operations in an underground mine. Round Two of the Initiative, which opened for applications on 9 March 2022, will continue to demonstrate innovative 5G applications and the value of 5G to businesses and regions around Australia.

Measuring Broadband Australia

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has been funded to continue to deliver the *Measuring Broadband Australia* (MBA) program. The MBA program, which was established in 2017, provides public reporting of the performance and reliability of fixed-line broadband services to help inform consumers.

To date, the program has published 16 quarterly reports and has expanded to cover 11 NBN fixed-line Retail Service Providers (RSP) and one non-NBN fixed line network. The program commenced network-level reporting on NBN fixed wireless in March 2021, with this reporting to be expanded to RSP level reporting and non-NBN fixed wireless services by the end of financial year 2024. These expansions support consumers, including regional consumers, in making informed decisions about broadband services, and provide competition and transparency benefits to this important and growing segment.

During its operation the program has documented gradual increases in overall performance of NBN services, and it informed NBN Co's 2020 decision to implement overprovisioning, which provided a significant step improvement in download performance for the majority of NBN fixed-line services.

Over the forward estimates, the cost of the program will continue to be recovered in full via the Annual Carrier Licence Charge (ACLC), administered by the ACMA.

Australian Postal Corporation – supporting regional communities

The Australian Postal Corporation -Australia Post - provides essential postal services to consumers and businesses across Australia. Australia Post has the largest retail network in Australia and post offices provide access to a variety of vital products and services to communities across Australia, including rural, regional and remote areas. In addition to letter and parcels services, post offices also offer financial and banking services, identity services and a range of state and federal government services, including passport renewals.

Viewer Access Satellite Television

Over 220,000 households across Australia, primarily in regional and remote areas, rely on a *Viewer Access Satellite Television* (VAST) service for access to free to-air television. An additional 30,000 travellers also use the VAST service when travelling through areas where there is no signal from a broadcast transmission site. The Australian Government provides funding to the commercial broadcasters through grant agreements to support the provision of commercial free-to-air television services on VAST. ABC and SBS television and radio services are also available on VAST, which is supported through funding appropriations for the national broadcasters.

Australian Associated Press Newswire Service

The *Australian Associated Press* (AAP) *Newswire Service* has received a total of \$20 million under the *Public Interest News Gathering* (PING) program, consisting of \$5 million provided as part of the PING COVID-19 relief funding in September 2020 and a further \$15 million allocated in the 2021-22 Budget to continue to support these services over 2021-22 and 2022-23. AAP provides national, state and regional news to over 250 regional news mastheads across Australia. The funding allows those outlets to concentrate on local news stories important for their regional communities. The funding has enabled AAP opening bureaux in Townsville and Darwin.

Community Broadcasting Program

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$20.5 million in 2022-23 to support the community broadcasting sector, through the *Community Broadcasting Program* (CBP).

More than 450 non-profit, community based organisations deliver community broadcasting services across Australia with 70 per cent of these stations located in regional or remote areas. Community radio supports communities in regional Australia by broadcasting local news, telling local stories, and providing a platform for local voices and music. The Australian Government is committed to supporting community broadcasting to continue to realise these benefits for Australian communities.

Funding for the eSafety Commissioner to protect Australians online

The Australian Government provided \$24.0 million over four years from 2021-22 for the eSafety Commissioner to:

- Increase its investigations capability for serious online harms (\$15 million over two years). This funding allowed eSafety to recruit new staff to investigate and respond to reports of cyber abuse and other forms of harmful online content.
- Conduct a pilot program to implement technologies that identify intimate images that have been shared without consent, and assist in the rapid removal of image-based abuse material (\$3 million over two years). The project will enhance eSafety's image-based abuse scheme and allow eSafety to provide greater support to victims.
- Develop a new program of resources to combat the growing threat of technology-facilitated abuse involving children (\$3 million over four years). Under this program, new resources are being created and provided to front-line domestic violence workers, children and young people, adult victims who are parents of affected children and child welfare services.
- Boost community resilience to child sexual abuse (\$3 million over four years). eSafety is expanding its existing suite of education resources with the addition of new, specialised content on child safety and online abuse for parents and families. The products will provide practical guidance for parents and carers to support children and young people including recognising and preventing harmful behaviours online.

These initiatives benefit all Australians, including Australians living in regional and remote areas. A safe online environment is crucial for regional and remote communities, given the reliance of many of these communities on the internet to stay connected. Improvements to online safety will also encourage more regional Australians to connect using the internet confidently and safely, and promote greater health, education and economic outcomes in regional and remote communities.

City and Regional Deals

City and Regional Deals are long-term agreements between the three levels of government and the community, focussed on aligning planning, investment and governance to accelerate growth and job creation, stimulate urban renewal and drive economic reforms. City Deals are the primary mechanism for delivery of the Australian Government's cities agenda.

City Deals are being delivered in Townsville, Launceston, Darwin, Western Sydney, Hobart, Geelong, Perth, Adelaide and South East Queensland. Regional Deals are being delivered in the Hinkler and Barkly regions, with Deal negotiations are being finalised in Albury Wodonga following \$80 million Australian Government commitment, and these Deals will continue to drive jobs, economic growth and liveability in those regions.

The nine current City Deals and two Regional Deals are being delivered with a total Australian Government commitment of \$9.1 billion. The Australian Government commitment has leveraged an additional investment from City and Regional Deal partners of \$10.5 billion.

A focus of the deals in regional cities has been to coordinate efforts across governments to support urban renewal, stimulate industry and employment opportunities and improve liveability. City Deals which are targeting regional Australia are listed below.

Hinkler Regional Deal

Hinkler Regional Deal is a five-year partnership between the Australian Government, Bundaberg Regional Council and Fraser Coast Regional Council that integrates the major centres of Bundaberg and Hervey Bay and their surrounds. The Regional Deal focuses on facilitating innovation and new industries to ensure that the region can capitalise on its comparative advantages, enhancing local communities with new facilities to live, work and play, and unlocking regional transport to maximise economic opportunities for the region.

The Hinkler Regional Deal involves place-based opportunities to build on the area's strengths to boost economic growth and long-term employment. Implementation is well underway with four out of the 14 projects already completed. This includes work to revitalise the Hervey Bay Airport, construction of the Fraser Coast Hospice, establishment of the Bargara Ag-Tech facility (which is delivering demonstration trials of commercial ag-tech products on farms to support economic growth in the ag-tech sector), and construction of the Childers Road (Isis Highway) overtaking lanes. Progress over the next 12 months will include:

- construction of the common-user goods conveyor at the Port of Bundaberg
- construction of the Royal Flying Doctor Service flight simulation training facility at Bundaberg Airport
- completion of the Queensland Government's Bundaberg Integrated Transport Study, which is expected to inform the scope of two road projects under the Deal.

Geelong City Deal

The Geelong City Deal is a 10-year partnership between the three levels of government to secure the economic success of Geelong and its people. The Geelong City Deal supports the revitalisation of Central Geelong and the region's continued economic diversification, with particular focus on unlocking the significant economic potential of the visitor economy of the Great Ocean Road region.

In December 2021 the Victorian Government provided a further \$120 million to the Geelong City Deal, bringing it to \$502.5 million, deepening the investment in the

Geelong Convention and Exhibition Centre precinct. Construction is underway, including the Queenscliff Ferry Terminal building, work around the Deakin University Future Economy Precinct and vibrant work in the city centre on public realm projects under the Central Geelong Action Plan.

Five infrastructure projects are being supported with \$15.7 million in grants to enable private sector investment along Victoria's Shipwreck Coast, through the Geelong City Deal's *Private Sector Business Enablement Fund*. The five projects will invest in infrastructure that has the potential to stimulate over \$150 million in private capital investment to support the growth of the visitor economy.

Darwin City Deal

The Darwin City Deal is a 10-year partnership between the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and City of Darwin that is positioning Darwin as a vibrant and liveable tropical capital city, supported by a growing population and diversified economy.

Implementation is well underway, with several initiatives already complete. Construction of the centrepiece Education and Community Precinct project commenced in September 2021, supporting local jobs and, when complete, will improve vibrancy and amenity in the CBD. The Darwin Living Lab launched the 'Your Tropical City' website in early 2021 and continues to develop evidence-based approaches to tropical design, to improve liveability in the face of Darwin's hot climate. Upgraded and activated community spaces are contributing to city revitalisation, with over 4,000m² of new green space delivered in 2021. The Deal also provides support for the Larrakia people as the traditional owners of Darwin, through provision of funding for the design of a new Larrakia Cultural Centre, which reached 50 per cent completion in late 2021.

Townsville City Deal

The Townsville City Deal is a 15-year agreement between the Australian Government, Queensland Government and Townsville City Council to secure the economic success of the city by bringing together all relevant policy, program and funding levers to achieve a shared vision for Townsville as an economic gateway to Northern Australia and a lifestyle-rich city for residents and visitors alike. The Townsville City Deal is delivering jobs and supporting new and emerging industries through trilateral collaboration and targeted investments.

The Townsville City Deal originally comprised of 16 commitments, of which ten have been finalised. Five new commitments for the City Deal were announced in 2021:

- upgrade and expansion of the Reef HQ aquarium
- construction of a new Royal Flying Doctor Service 'super hub' at Townsville Airport

- construction of enabling infrastructure for the Lansdown Eco-Industrial Precinct
- detailed business case for a concert hall in Townsville
- feasibility study into recycled water infrastructure in Townsville.

Launceston City Deal

The Australian Government, Tasmanian Government, and the City of Launceston are working together to deliver the updated Launceston City Deal vision to make Launceston Australia's most livable and innovative regional city.

The Launceston City Deal reached a major milestone on 22 February 2022, when the Library and Student Experience building at Inveresk was officially opened. This is the first of three new academic buildings being constructed as part of the redevelopment of the University of Tasmania's Inveresk campus. The campus redevelopment is the centerpiece commitment of the Deal, supported by \$130 million in Australian Government funding. The broader project is on track for completion in 2024.

Barkly Regional Deal

The Barkly Regional Deal is the first regional deal in Australia: a 10 year, \$78.4 million commitment between the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and Barkly Regional Council to improve the productivity and liveability of the Barkly region by stimulating economic growth, improving social outcomes and supporting local Aboriginal leadership.

Implementation is well underway, with some projects already completed and a number due for completion in 2022, including new youth recreation centres in Ali Curung and Tennant Creek. An important achievement was the establishment of the Barkly Aboriginal Alliance, a stand-alone regional Aboriginal representative body enabling representatives from the 11 main language groups in the Barkly to collectively make decisions and determine priorities for the region.

The Australian Government has provided an additional \$6.3 million from the 2022-23 Budget towards the construction of a 40-bed Student Boarding Facility in Tennant Creek. It will provide secondary school children from across the Barkly with a culturally appropriate and safe place to live while undertaking their education in Tennant Creek.

Major Capital Cities Deals

Western Sydney City Deal

The Western Sydney City Deal is an \$11 billion, 20-year agreement between the Australian and New South Wales Governments and the eight local governments of the Western Parkland City to deliver jobs, connectivity, skills and education pathways, and improve liveability for the people of Western Sydney.

Perth City Deal

The Australian Government, Western Australian Government and the City of Perth are delivering the 10-year Perth City Deal partnership to deliver economic stimulus, jobs and liveability outcomes for Perth Central Business District (CBD). The centrepiece commitment is the delivery of the Edith Cowan University Cultural and Creative Industries CBD Campus. The Australian Government and the Western Australian Government have announced a further \$49 million each, along with \$60 million more from the Edith Cowan University for the City Campus project, bringing the value of the project to \$853 million.

Adelaide City Deal

The Adelaide City Deal, a 10-year partnership between the Australian and South Australian Governments and the City of Adelaide, is in the implementation phase. The City Deal will grow South Australia's innovation and cultural economy, and develop and maintain cultural and environmental assets in the surrounding region.

Hobart City Deal

The Hobart City Deal is a 10-year partnership that will provide the framework to guide and encourage further investment in the city by embracing opportunities for growth and addressing key strategic and infrastructure challenges. By working with the Tasmanian Government and the four Greater Hobart Councils, the City Deal aims to build on its position as a vibrant, liveable and connected city, while addressing key challenges such as traffic congestion and housing affordability.

Under the Deal, the Australian Government is investing \$628.8 million to deliver Bridgewater Bridge, which is the largest single transport infrastructure project in Tasmania's history. Construction will commence mid-2022 and is anticipated to be open for traffic in 2024.

Better Data Use to Support Delivery for Regional Australians

The Australian Government has invested \$13.7 million over four years commencing in 2020-21 for this program, which will provide government and community decision-makers with better economic, social and demographic data on regional Australia. As part of this program the Regional Data Hub (the Hub) will make location-specific data publicly accessible and searchable to improve outcomes for regional Australians, building on existing regional data resources such as the Progress in Australian Regions and Cities dashboard. The Australian Government undertook a nation-wide consultation in 2021 to identify the data and information priorities of people in Australia's regions. Over 120 responses came from Commonwealth, state, territory and local government officials and community and business leaders. An early version of the Hub is expected to be released in the first half of 2022 and the Hub is expected to be completed by 30 June 2024.

Building Better Regions Fund

In the 2021-22 Budget the Australian Government announced an additional \$250 million towards a sixth Round of the *Building Better Regions Fund* (BBRF). Additional funding of \$100 million toward Round Five of BBRF was agreed at 2021-22 MYEFO bringing the total commitment for this program to \$1.38 billion from 2017-18 to 2024-25.

The BBRF supports regional and remote communities by funding shovel-ready infrastructure projects up to the value of \$10 million, which will create jobs and drive economic growth. It also funds up to \$1 million for new or expanded events, strategic regional plans, or leadership and capability strengthening activities which provide economic and social benefits across the relevant region. Local governments and incorporated not-for-profit organisations are eligible to apply.

The first five rounds of the BBRF supported 1,293 projects, delivering benefits across regional and remote Australia, such as:

- development of the Centre for Innovation in Agriculture in North Dandalup, Western Australia (\$2.5 million)
- construction of the Samford Parklands Community Hub in Samford, Queensland (\$2.2 million)
- development of the South East Mountain Bike Strategy in Kelleve, Tasmania (\$20,000)
- redevelopment of the airport to cater for larger aircraft and air freight in Mount Gambier, South Australia (\$3.5 million)

Applications for Round Six of the program are being assessed during the first quarter of 2022.

Rebuilding Regional Communities Program

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$5.7 million over two years from 2021-22 to deliver the *Rebuilding Regional Communities Program* in partnership with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR).

Community groups play a critical role in supporting and sustaining local regional communities. This program is providing micro-grants to help local groups restart activities and avoid lasting loss to the social fabric of regional towns caused by the impacts of COVID-19.

There are two streams within the program:

- The Micro Projects stream will provide small grants of up to \$10,000 for communities in regional Australia with fewer than 50,000 people to help sustain local organisations and their work.
- The COVID Recovery stream will provide up to \$50,000 for larger projects which enhance the process of recovery of communities affected by COVID-19.

Securing Raw Materials Program

In the 2020-21 Budget the Australian Government announced \$35 million for the *Securing Raw Materials Program*. This program provides businesses with up to \$5 million to relocate or expand into regional Australia and partner with a regional university or research organisation to undertake research into, and/or development of, innovative and locally sourced raw material supplies (including establishing new suppliers or products and value adding to existing known supplies). The program recognises that establishing or securing a supply of raw materials is a crucial element of business success.

Outcomes of Round One were announced in early September 2021, with \$5 million being provided to two projects. A second round of the program was announced on 22 December 2021, and applications closed in late February 2022.

Regional Cooperative Research Centres Projects

Under the \$6 million stream of the *Regional Cooperative Research Centres Projects* (RCRC-P), two projects were announced in September 2021 with a completion date of 2024. The projects are intended to boost research and development activities in regional areas and spark economic growth and job creation locally, as well as contribute to global competitiveness. The projects will see space rockets (DefendTex) and future foods (Nourish Ingredients) manufactured in regional Australia to deliver benefits for local communities as part of the government's regionalisation policy.

Supplementary Local Roads Funding for South Australia

In addition to the funding provided to local governments in South Australia under the *Financial Assistance Grant* program, the Australian Government is providing additional supplementary funding of \$40 million over two years, to 30 June 2023 to South Australia to address the disadvantage experienced by South Australian local councils in maintaining and upgrading their local road network.

COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund

The Australian Government established the \$1 billion COVID-19 *Relief and Recovery Fund* (the Fund) in March 2020 to deliver targeted assistance to regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Through

the Fund, the Australian Government has supported industries including aviation, fisheries, tourism, events and the arts.

The Fund as a whole has been the responsibility of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, with each initiative under the Fund administered by the relevant department or agency with portfolio responsibility. The legislated end date of the Fund was 30 June 2021. The *Recovery for Regional Tourism* measure (\$50 million) has been extended to 31 December 2022 to meet ongoing need in the tourism sector. All other measures have ceased and or had their funding fully allocated under the Fund.

Regional Recovery Partnerships

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$100 million over two years from 2020-21 to fund *Regional Recovery Partnerships* (the Partnerships). The Partnerships coordinate investments with other levels of government to support recovery and growth in 10 regions across Australia, delivering jobs and economic diversification.

The regions are: the Snowy Mountains, Hunter and Newcastle; and the Parkes Regions in New South Wales; Cairns and Tropical North Queensland, Gladstone, and Mackay-Isaac, Whitsunday Regions in Queensland; the Gippsland Region in Victoria; Kangaroo Island in South Australia; the South West Region of Western Australia; and all of Tasmania.

As of March 2022, program funds have been fully committed, 27 projects have been announced spread across all 10 regions, to be completed by December 2023.

Drought Communities Programme Extension

The *Drought Communities Programme Extension* supports communities in regions impacted by and recovering from drought. \$297 million is being provided by the Australian Government to 180 eligible Local Government Areas (LGA) for projects which deliver an economic stimulus, use local resources, and support communities.

Over 520 projects have been funded across New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, with over 400 projects completed (at 10 February 2022). The program is closed to new entrants and remaining projects are to be completed by 30 June 2023.

Tackling Tough Times Together

The Australian Government has provided a \$15 million grant to the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal's *Tackling Tough Times Together* community grants program. Government funding is contributing to Rounds 11 to 22 of the program. Round 22 is the final round supported by government funding, with over \$1.2 million being provided for 38 drought recovery projects, located in remote, rural and regional communities. All projects are expected to be completed by 30 June 2023.

Building Resilient Regional Leaders Initiative (Pilot)

The Australian Government is investing in current and emerging regional leaders to further develop current leadership and resilience skills to support their local communities through future economic challenges. The *Building Resilient Regional Leaders Initiative* (Pilot) is investing \$5 million from 2021-22 to deliver place based leadership training in regional communities. Local leaders have a significant role to play in boosting the resilience and vibrancy of their community. Recent events, such as floods, bushfires and COVID-19 have tested local regional leaders in unprecedented ways and it is more important than ever to ensure leaders are supported to develop their skills and tenacity. Investing in the leadership capacity within regional communities by supporting resilience training and development for leaders will ensure adaptability and togetherness into the future.

Regional Australia Institute

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) *Intergovernmental Shared Inquiry Program* (ISIP) is a collaborative partnership between the RAI, governments with regional development responsibilities, and a select number of universities. The research and policy program explores opportunities and challenges facing regional communities, now and into the future, to better inform and coordinate government policy responses. The Australian Government committed \$400,000 in 2020-21 over two years towards the research program. Key themes of inquiry in 2020 and 2021-22 included disaster recovery and resilience, regional population dynamics and housing, and innovation and productivity in regional Australia.

The RAI's National Awareness Campaign *Move to More* contributes to the Australian Government's regionalisation agenda by promoting the benefits and opportunities of living in regional Australia, as well as understanding the key drivers and motivators for moving to, and living in regional communities. The Australian Government is providing \$4.6 million over two years towards the program which is delivering the Regions Rising Summit and Series for 2022, the development of the *Move to More* website, and a multi-faceted media campaign, including TV, print, radio, digital and outdoor advertising.

Regional Development Australia Committees

The Regional Development Australia (RDA) network comprises 53 Regional Development Australia Committees (RDAs) including the Indian Ocean Territories Regional Development Organisation (IOT RDO). They work with all levels of government, business, industry, educational institutions and community groups to support economic and workforce development, local procurement, strategic regional planning and inform them about government programs and infrastructure investments.

The charter for RDAs outlines this role and states that they:

- facilitate regional economic development outcomes, investment, local procurement and jobs
- promote greater regional awareness of and engagement with government policies, programs and research
- improve Commonwealth regional policy making by providing intelligence and evidence-based advice to the Australian Government on regional development issues
- coordinate the development of a strategic regional plan, or utilise suitable existing regional plans that align with the Commonwealth's regional priorities.

Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory

The Australian Government maintains and improves the overarching legislative framework of the self-governing territories of the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the Australian Government has retained policy responsibility for some planning and land management activities (administered by the National Capital Authority). The Australian Government will provide funding of \$2 million in 2022-23 to the Australian Capital Territory Government, to support Canberra's role as the national capital.

In the Northern Territory, the government appoints the Northern Territory Administrator and will provide funding of \$0.4 million in 2022-23 for the Administrator's salary and travel expenses.

Bundanon Trust – funding increase

The *Bundanon Trust* is a wholly-owned Commonwealth company limited by guarantee, established in 1993 to own and manage the properties and art collection donated to the Commonwealth by Arthur and Yvonne Boyd 'as a means of a gift to the nation'. The *Bundanon Trust* supports arts practice and engagement with the arts through a diverse range of programs such as its artist in residence, education, performance and environmental programs which have long-term cultural, economic and social benefits for the New South Wales Shoalhaven region and beyond.

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$3 million per annum in operational funding to Bundanon for 2021-22 and 2022-23, timed to coincide with construction and completion of its government-supported masterplan to create greater access to the collection, increase visitation and secure Bundanon as a leading attraction in regional Australia. The new facilities, which include a subterranean Art Museum and storage facility to display and protect the Trust's \$46 million art collection, and a Bridge

for Creative Learning that also incorporates visitor accommodation opened to the public on 29 January 2022.

Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Innovation and Growth Funding Package

Delivered through the *Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support* program, additional funding of \$5 million per annum indexed and ongoing was provided from 2021-22 to support innovation and growth in the Indigenous visual art sector. This funding is to implement the National Indigenous Visual Arts Action Plan 2021-2025, released in October 2021. The *Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support* program supports a professional, viable and ethical Indigenous visual arts industry, with strong participation by and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In 2022-23, the *Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support* program will contribute \$27.2 million to the operations of more than 85 Indigenous owned and governed art centres, with 73 per cent of art centres in remote or very remote areas. It will also support art fairs, regional hubs and industry service organisations that, with Indigenous art centres, are at the heart of Australia's internationally renowned Indigenous visual art movement. Together these organisations enable the development, production and marketing of Indigenous visual art. They provide professional opportunities for more than 8,000 Indigenous artists and 500 Indigenous arts workers to generate income and participate in the nation's economy.

Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme

Many cultural institutions and community organisations around Australia care for maritime items of historical and national significance. The *Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme* (MMAPSS) is an annual and ongoing Budget-funded program which is administered by the Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM). MMAPSS provides grants to regional museums and organisations involved in the preservation of Australia's maritime history. Grants support the collection, conservation and exhibition of Australia's rich maritime heritage by helping these groups undertake this important role. The program targets smaller collecting institutions around Australia

In 2022-23 the Australian Government will contribute \$105,000 and the ANMM will provide an additional \$20,000 towards the Scheme. MMAPSS provides grants of up to \$15,000 to cultural institutions and community organisations for collection management initiatives, including documenting and caring for collections; and presentation projects, including education programs and workshops. The ANMM may also provide in-kind support to successful MMAPSS applicants.

MMAPSS may also support interns, worth up to \$3,000 per recipient. The internship program supports staff or volunteers from remote or regional organisations to spend time learning specific skills and making valuable connections, either at the ANMM or another relevant institution.

The Australian Government has provided more than \$2.1 million to over 500 projects and over 70 internships under the Scheme, since its inception in 1995.

Australia Council

The Australia Council provides significant support to the arts in rural, regional and remote Australia with grants for individuals, groups and organisations, national touring programs, and strategic national development and capacity building programs. This includes supporting a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural activities in regional and remote areas. The Australia Council also supports artists and arts organisations based in metropolitan areas to deliver projects, tour and engage with regional communities.

Every year the Australia Council invests in artistic activities in regional Australia, increasing access for audiences, fostering the vitality of artists and arts organisations in regional and remote communities, and strengthening the mobility of diverse and excellent Australian work. In 2020-2021, the Australia Council invested \$21.8 million in artists and organisations based in regional Australia. This investment supported the creation of art with and by regional communities and artists; the operation of regionally based organisations; and touring of work by regional artists and organisations. The Australia Council is on track to deliver a similar level of investment to regional Australian in 2022-23.

Australian Museums and Galleries Association Bursary program

The *Australian Museums and Galleries Association* (AMaGA) *National Conference Bursary* (Bursary) program is an annual and ongoing Budget-funded program which is administered by AMaGA. This program provides funding to support the attendance of museum staff and volunteers from regional and remote areas in Australia and Indigenous Australians at AMaGA's annual National Conference as a delegate or a speaker. The 2021 National Conference was held from 7 to 10 June in Canberra, and AMaGA's next National conference is scheduled to be held in Perth, Western Australia, from 14 to 17 June 2022.

The Bursary assistance provides recipients with an opportunity for professional development, peer engagement and the sharing of knowledge. It also provides recipients with exposure to what is happening in the museums and galleries sector at a national level, an opportunity that may not otherwise be readily available to them.

In 2022-23 the Australian Government will provide \$22,000 to support the Bursary program. AMaGA distributes funding to eligible applicants to assist with paying conference registration fees and travel, and transfers and accommodation expenses for conference attendees.

Community Heritage Grants

The *Community Heritage Grants Program* will receive \$490,000 of Australian Government funding in 2022-23, along with support from the National Library of Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive, the National Museum of Australia and the National Archives of Australia. The Program will deliver grants of up to \$15,000 to community groups, including historical societies, regional museums, public libraries and Indigenous and migrant organisations, to support the preservation of publicly accessible heritage collections which are locally owned and nationally significant.

These collections contain a wide range of materials including artefacts, letters, diaries, maps, photographs and audio visual material. First-time recipients also receive expert preservation and archival training at support workshops provided by the National Library of Australia, the National Archives of Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive and the National Museum of Australia. Since 1994, approximately \$8 million in funding has been provided to over 1,550 projects across Australia, a significant proportion of which has gone to regional organisations.

Creative Partnerships Australia

Since its creation in 2013, *Creative Partnerships Australia* has delivered capacity-building and mentoring programs that assist artists and cultural organisations to diversify their revenue streams through philanthropy, sponsorship and fundraising. *Creative Partnerships Australia* also delivers matched funding programs for artists and arts organisations, and manages the *Australian Cultural Fund*, a fundraising platform that facilitates tax-deductible donations from arts supporters.

In 2022-23, the Australian Government will provide \$4.7 million to assist *Creative Partnerships Australia* to build the capacity of artists and arts organisations across Australia, including in the regions, to secure revenue from private sector giving.

Cultural Gifts Program

The *Cultural Gifts Program* (CGP) offers tax incentives to encourage donation of cultural items to Australian public collections. Donations include visual and decorative arts, Indigenous arts and cultural items, social history and scientific artefacts. The program helps eligible institutions to build their collections and benefits the Australian public by increasing access to culturally significant items, particularly in regional Australia.

In 2019-20, 719 donations were made with a total value of \$94.3 million. In 2020-21, 539 CGP donations were made (total value of \$110.3 million), with 18.7 per cent of these donations made to institutions in regional Australia (total value of \$6.9 million), and 37 per cent of donations were made by the artist or creator of the item.

Festivals Australia

The *Festivals Australia* program provides communities in regional Australia with access to a diverse range of high quality and innovative arts projects that grow audiences at festivals. In 2022-23, \$1.3 million will be provided to support arts projects that encourage partnership and collaboration across the arts sector and community participation in arts activities at festivals in regional and remote areas.

Indigenous Languages and Arts Program

The *Indigenous Languages and Arts* (ILA) program will invest \$27.5 million in 2022-23 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to express, preserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts activities throughout Australia.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the ILA program provides annual operational funding to a network of 20 Indigenous language centres, 17 of which are based in regional and remote communities. These place-based, Indigenous-led organisations, work with Indigenous language groups to capture, revitalise, maintain and promote traditional First Nations languages. The ILA program also supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop, produce, present, exhibit or perform Indigenous arts activities that showcase Australia's traditional and contemporary Indigenous cultural and artistic expressions.

The new *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* introduced on 30 July 2020, includes Target 16 that specifically nominates a target to increase the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken by 2031. The National Agreement also commits parties to establishing policy and place-based partnerships which respond to local priorities, including in regional Australia.

The ILA program funding in 2022-23 includes additional *Closing the Gap* investment of \$6.2 million to: increase annual operational funding for existing ILA-funded Indigenous language centres; establish three new Indigenous language centres; develop place-based partnerships between Indigenous language centres and local service delivery partners in health and early childhood; and increase support for projects that protect the most at-risk Indigenous languages.

The United Nations has designated the period between 2022 and 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The Australian Government is continuing to take a leadership role for the Decade and is on the Steering Committee of the Global Task Force for the Decade during its first three years from 2021 to 2023. Australia has acted as Co-Chair of the Steering Committee from March 2021. The Australian Government is also establishing an International Decade of Indigenous Languages Directions Group, comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives who will work in partnership with the government to shape Australia's involvement in the Decade.

Indigenous Repatriation

The *Indigenous Repatriation* program facilitates the return of Australian Indigenous ancestral remains in overseas collections, and Australian Indigenous ancestral remains and secret sacred objects held in seven state and territory museums and the National Museum of Australia, to their communities of origin. The Australian Government has supported repatriation of ancestors from overseas for over 30 years with more than 1,615 ancestors repatriated to Australia. Domestically, more than 2,850 ancestors and 2,330 objects have been returned to the custodianship of their community from eight major Australian museums since 1998. Many of these communities are located in regional and remote Australia.

National Cultural Heritage Account

The *National Cultural Heritage Account* (the Account) is established under the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*. It supports cultural organisations to acquire Australian protected objects for display and safe-keeping. In doing this, the Account helps to retain and protect Australia's cultural heritage for future generations and provide public access to important objects that tell a story about Australia's cultural identity.

In 2022-23 the Australian Government will provide funding of \$0.5 million for the Account, which is open all year.

The Australian Government understands the importance of preserving and displaying Australia's unique artefacts locally for current and future generations. Funding has supported national and state institutions as well as regional organisations across Australia, including museums, art galleries, libraries, archives, and historic buildings to purchase significant objects that they could not otherwise afford. Regionally-based organisations that have received assistance in recent years include the Narromine Aviation Museum (New South Wales), Trafalgar Holden Museum (Victoria), Orange Regional Museum (New South Wales), National Motor Museum in Birdwood (South Australia) and the Southern Tablelands Vintage Farm Machinery Club in Taralga (New South Wales).

National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program

Engagement with regional and remote communities is a longstanding priority for the National Collecting Institutions (NCIs). The NCIs deliver a variety of initiatives through a combination of on-site offerings, as well as physical and virtual outreach activities.

In 2022-23 the *National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach* (NCITO) Program will make available funding of \$1 million to assist the NCIs to develop and tour exhibitions from their collections. The Program also promotes international awareness of Australia's cultural heritage through touring material from NCI collections overseas, and expands

Australian appreciation of international cultural material by enabling NCIs to bring works from international collections for exhibition or touring within Australia.

The Program aims to make Australian and international cultural material accessible to all Australians, especially those in regional communities. From its commencement in 2009-10 to 2021-22, the Program has enabled the touring of over 130 unique exhibitions to more than 410 venues and audiences exceeding three million people, including in remote and regional Australia.

Regional Arts Fund

The *Regional Arts Fund* provides support for sustainable cultural development in regional and remote Australia. The program provides funding for a mix of quick response grants and project grants for arts projects, professional development for artists and arts workers, and community capacity building projects. The program also funds high priority strategic projects.

For 2022-23, the Australian Government has allocated \$3.7 million to the *Regional Arts Fund*. The program is delivered on behalf of the Australian Government by Regional Arts Australia and organisations in each state and territory.

Register of Cultural Organisations

The *Register of Cultural Organisations* is a list of over 1,900 cultural organisations that can receive tax deductible gifts. The Register aims to strengthen private sector support for the arts and encourages Australians to contribute to the nation's vibrant cultural life. Australian organisations, including those in regional areas where other sources of philanthropic funding may be more difficult to secure, can be listed on the Register if their principal purpose is to promote cultural activities in Australia.

Support for the Australian Music Industry

In the 2019-20 Budget context, the Australian Government announced investment of \$30.9 million over five years to grow Australia's thriving music industry, from 2019-20 to 2023-24. The programs are supporting the provision of live music to Australian communities and ensuring local artists can expand into lucrative international markets. The package includes funding for:

- a grants program to support live music venues to increase performance opportunities for musicians and regional audiences
- a development program for Indigenous musicians and bands to support touring, recording and the set-up of touring circuits
- a mentorship and training program aimed at empowering women working in the Australian music industry by assisting them to build skills and develop relationships

they need to get a foot in the door and take the next step to establish and build their careers.

Visions of Australia Program

The *Visions of Australia Program* improves access for Australians, particularly in regional and remote areas, to Australian cultural material held in a wide variety of national, state and local collections.

The Australian Government will provide \$2.6 million in 2022-23 through the *Visions of Australia Program* to cultural organisations towards the costs of developing and touring exhibitions of cultural material of historic, scientific, design, social or artistic significance, with a focus on touring to regional venues.

The program also encourages partnerships between organisations, particularly collaboration across the collections sector, to form curatorial partnerships and deliver professional development.

Since 2015, the *Visions of Australia Program* has committed support to 123 exhibitions that propose to visit over 841 venues, 66 per cent of which are in regional or remote locations. The total projected audience for these exhibitions is more than six million people.

National Library of Australia – Treasured Voices

The Australian Government has provided \$10 million over four years from 2019-20 to support the National Library of Australia's *Treasured Voices* program which will have far reaching positive benefits for the Australian regional community. The continued digitisation of the National Library of Australia's collection will provide free access for all Australians, via Trove, to a significant collection of material, including the digitised papers of eminent Australians including General Sir John Monash and Sir Robert Menzies. These papers would otherwise only be available for viewing on-site in Canberra.

Since its launch in 2009, Trove has become a fundamental piece of our national research infrastructure, providing widespread access to museum pieces and documents. In 2019-20 Trove recorded 25.32 million visitor sessions, demonstrating the ongoing success of the platform as a repository of Australian heritage material.

National Performing Arts Training Organisations

The Australian Government provides funding to support seven *National Performing Arts Training Organisations* to operate as national centres of excellence and provide world-class training and career pathways for Australia's most talented performing artists. In 2022-23 these organisations will receive approximately \$23 million in Australian Government funding. The organisations are:

- the National Institute of Dramatic Art
- the Australian National Academy of Music
- the National Institute of Circus Arts
- the Australian Youth Orchestra
- the Australian Ballet School
- the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College
- the Flying Fruit Fly Circus (FFFC).

As leaders in performing arts training, these organisations accept students from all states and territories and conduct annual auditions, some of which are held in regional areas. Those unable to attend auditions, due to geographic distance, are invited to submit digital applications. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students auditioning for NAISDA Dance College can seek support from *ABSTUDY* towards travel and accommodation expenses, ensuring students from remote and regional communities have equal access to auditions. FFFC and NAISDA Dance College are also located in regional Australia.

Location Incentive Program

The Australian Government is providing \$540 million over eight years from 2019-20 under the *Location Incentive Program* to attract large budget international screen production to Australia, bringing international investment and providing local employment and training opportunities. Some production will take place in regional areas, benefiting local communities and businesses through significant expenditure and employment opportunities, as well as potential tourism benefits. For example, *The Tourist* was filmed in regional areas of South Australia, showcasing its unique landscape to international audiences. *Australian Survivor* has filmed in Cloncurry and Charter's Towers. This put a fresh lens on these regional Queensland locations to domestic and international audiences, and provided significant work for Australian crew and local businesses.

Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) Portfolio improves the lives of Australians by providing high quality advice and support to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, portfolio ministers and assistant ministers. It takes a coordinated and innovative approach to the development and implementation of Australian Government policies, including those that impact on regional and remote communities. The portfolio coordinates and develops policy across the Australian Government on issues pertaining to women including economic security, safety and leadership; Indigenous affairs; child safety, economic, domestic and international issues; disaster recovery and resilience, digital transformation and public service stewardship.

As at 31 December 2021, the portfolio employed 4,715 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,576 staff (75.8 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 452 staff (9.6 per cent) in other capital cities and 687 staff (14.6 per cent) in regional areas.

The portfolio's footprint includes office locations in Alice Springs, Bega, Bendigo, Ceduna, Dubbo, Junee, Kalgoorlie and Kununurra, Newcastle, Orange, Port Augusta, Thursday Island, Top End and Tiwi Islands, Townsville, Wagga Wagga and Wollongong.

The portfolio is responsible for setting the direction of Indigenous affairs policy across the Australian Government as well as delivering a number of specific funding programs. It includes programs aimed at ensuring Indigenous Australians are able to take up the full range of opportunities our nation has to offer. Measures encouraging workforce participation, economic development, educational success and safety at home the foundations of successful communities, are some of these.

The portfolio works closely with local service providers and communities to design and deliver services to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians across metropolitan, regional and remote locations. Regionally-based staff are critical to service delivery as 63 per cent of Indigenous Australians live outside the major cities and more than 18 per cent live in remote and very remote locations.

The portfolio supports disaster and drought affected communities, leads national efforts to reduce disaster risk and limit the impact of future natural disasters, and assists the government's response and recovery to all hazards through the National Recovery and Resilience Agency. It will continue to work hand-in-hand with communities, all levels of government, not for profit organisations and other sectors to support Australians impacted by natural disasters, including the 2019 North Queensland floods, the 2019-20 bushfires, the 2021 Eastern Australia storms and floods and the 2022 Queensland and New South Wales floods. Agency Recovery Support Officers are located across Australia to advise communities on support available and how to access it, as well as to inform policy development and program delivery.

The portfolio supports regional Australia through new and ongoing initiatives, as outlined below.

New Initiatives

Closing the Gap Package

The *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* came into effect on 27 July 2020, which commits to building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector, recognising that services delivered by this sector can achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are often preferred over mainstream services.

At the 2021-22 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO), the government provided \$1.1 billion from 2021-22 to 2025-26 (and \$127.9 million in 2025-26) for a range of measures to support the new *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. The government will also fund a financial and wellbeing package (the *Closing the Gap Package*) to support Stolen Generation survivors from the Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory and the Jervis Bay Territory.

The *Closing the Gap Package* will have a positive impact on regional Australia. The measures included in this package are aimed at improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across urban, regional, and remote Australia. A larger proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in regional and remote areas compared to urban areas, with 44 per cent (283,476 people) living in regional Australia and 18 per cent (120,048 people) living in remote or very remote Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census).

Individual measures under the *Closing the Gap Package*, which are detailed below will result in increased employment opportunities in regional and remote areas, as well as improved education, childhood development, health and justice outcomes:

Justice Policy Partnership

The Justice Policy Partnership was established in 2021 and will focus on reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in incarceration and improving community safety for all Australians, including those in regional Australia.

Strengthening Indigenous Languages and Culture, and Creating Regional Jobs

This measure strengthens the network of Indigenous Language Centres, which currently encompass regional areas in all Australian states and the Northern Territory and supports artists in regional and remote Australia.

Health Infrastructure

This measure will improve access to comprehensive primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional, rural and remote areas through providing new or renovated health clinics and associated housing for health professionals. The national roll-out will include around 250 infrastructure projects targeted to areas with the poorest quality infrastructure and/or highest growth in population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Scaling up Success

This measure will expand access to programs that have been successful in addressing key drivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student education outcomes.

Remote School Partnerships

This measure incentivises and supports large, high-performing independent schools to engage in new formal partnerships with remote independent and government majority Indigenous schools. These formal partnerships may take different forms, from taking operational control of a school to agreeing to provide targeted support in key areas (for example, staffing or instructional coaching).

Improving Multidisciplinary Responses

This measure will address and reduce the drivers of child abuse and neglect in the home, working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Indigenous stakeholders in the re-design of services based on locally successful approaches.

Developing the Cultural Competency and Trauma Responsiveness Workforce

This measure focuses on building workforce capability in Department of Social Services (DSS) funded child and family support services including to ensure culturally appropriate services and to break down barriers to access DSS mainstream services.

Assessing the Needs and Increasing the Involvement of ACCOs in the Child and Family Sector

This measure will address barriers identified by ACCOs to having greater involvement in family support services and strengthen partnerships with mainstream organisations.

Culturally Safe Family Dispute Resolution for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

This measure will fund Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) services to Indigenous families in regional and remote areas of high need.

Preventing Harm in Prisons

This measure funds jurisdictions to ensure places of detention are regularly inspected and monitored to improve conditions for detainees across Australia in line with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services Support Coronial Inquiries

This measure provides additional funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) to represent clients, involved in complex and expensive litigation. It will also identify opportunities for justice system reforms through the coronial process to reduce levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration and deaths in custody.

Strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and other Drugs Treatment Services

This measure will provide investment to increase access to outcomes-focussed alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment services, infrastructure repairs and new services as well as strengthening the capacity of the AOD workforce.

Stage Three of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Project

At the 2021-22 MYEFO the government provided \$2.8 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to deliver the final stage of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Project* (the project). Project funding will support a national summit focused on women's leadership, decision-making and addressing family, domestic and sexual violence. In addition, the project will undertake research to identify effective strength based programs and approaches to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

This measure will have a positive impact on women and families including regional and remote Australian communities as it calls for empowerment of women's leadership at the local level, local and regional engagement, government responses' that focus on healing from intergenerational trauma and action to eradicate racism.

This measure will have a positive impact on access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families in locations with critical service gaps, including in regional and remote Australia.

Development of Future Support for Improved Outcomes of Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory

The Australian Government will provide \$173.2 million over two years to extend the current National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI) from 30 June 2022 to 30 June 2024.

This measure will have an overarching impact on the Northern Territory's Aboriginal population whom reside in remote areas, approximately 77 per cent of the Northern Territory's Aboriginal residents. The extension of NTRAI allows the government to focus investment in the continuation of critical services for Indigenous Australians in at least 60 remote communities.

The extension of the NTRAI will continue the engagement of services providers and maintain the capability and capacity of providers to deliver critical services in remote communities. It will also continue employment for around 440 people, including 200 Indigenous Australians mainly employed in remote communities.

Indigenous Voice – Local & Regional Voice Implementation

The Australian Government will provide \$31.8 million in 2022-23 to start the implementation of *Local & Regional Voices*, consistent with the Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Final Report (the Final Report). The decision to progress the establishment of *Local & Regional Voices* was publicly announced on 17 December 2021, along with the release of the Final Report.

The purpose of *Local & Regional Voices* is to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to have a say in policies, programs and laws that impact them. The network of *Local & Regional Voices* will cover all of Australia, providing opportunities for involvement for all Indigenous people, of whom over 62 per cent live in regional and remote locations. The Final Report recommends 35 *Local & Voice* regions nationally along with a breakdown of that number for each state and territory, with the details to be determined collaboratively by communities and governments at the start of implementation. *Local & Regional Voices* will be established progressively, through an inclusive, community-led process, following discussions between the Australian Government and other levels of government about how to progress these arrangements with the whole-of-government support.

Local & Regional Voice will contribute to the government's regionalisation agenda through a comprehensive network of Indigenous regional governance structures working in partnership with governments, businesses and others across a region to lead on their priorities and link up with other region-wide work.

Indigenous Rangers – Capacity Building

The Australian Government will provide \$636.4 million over six years to expand the *Indigenous Rangers Program*, supporting the nation's economic recovery, delivering jobs and skill development while bolstering disaster resilience and recovery, and delivering environmental outcomes for all Australians. The measure will fund open competitive approaches for grant opportunities to identify new ranger groups and to expand and diversify current ranger groups. The measure also invests in the development of ranger organisations to become more self-sufficient and able to provide land management and other services to a range of commercial clients.

As part of the package, the government is also providing funding for new junior ranger projects to support students engagement with their schooling and learn on-country. This will enable new generations of Indigenous Australians to connect to and care for Country, while completing their schooling and gaining qualifications.

The measure will impact a large number of regional areas nationally. In particular, regions that currently lack ranger presence and which are vulnerable to natural disasters, such as bushfires and floods, would be targeted.

The measure will have a positive impact through the creation of Indigenous ranger jobs, particularly in remote and regional areas where labour markets are thin and welfare reliance is pervasive. These jobs are in high demand among Indigenous job seekers and the investment will provide a meaningful opportunity for Indigenous Australian jobseekers in the regions to move from unemployment to work.

The measure will also have positive impact on regional communities' access to Indigenous ranger-led fire mitigation and land management services, enabling them to be better positioned to reduce or respond to future bushfire or other natural catastrophes.

Indigenous Business Mentoring/Governance Training

The Australian Government will provide \$21.9 million over four years from 2022-23 to support the next generation of Indigenous leaders. This investment would support thousands of Indigenous individuals and many organisations to realise their potential as participants in the rapidly expanding Indigenous sector. The measure includes:

- \$13.8 million for the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) to continue its operations and implement a strategic plan for expansion to support young Indigenous Australians to undertake leadership roles, further education and employment.
- \$6.4 million for Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) to develop and deliver culturally appropriate governance and capacity building activities for Indigenous organisations to improve their ability to participate effectively in the Indigenous sector.
- \$1.7 million to the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to provide scholarships for Indigenous Australians to undertake company directors' courses, and to monitor and evaluate the entire package.

Extension of Custody Notification Services

The Australian Government will fund an evaluation of the Custody Notification Services (CNS), to assess their contribution to reducing Indigenous deaths in police custody, and to identify any opportunities to strengthen the

program. The Australian Government will extend its funding of the CNS in Western Australia and the Northern Territory by one year, to allow time for the evaluation to inform improvements to the model prior to jurisdictions taking on full funding responsibility. The CNS supports all Indigenous people who are taken into police custody, including in all remote and regional communities.

Future of Prescribed Bodies Corporate

The Australian Government will provide \$39.1 million over four years from 2022-23 to build the capacity of Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs). This investment is critical for native title holders to draw greater economic benefit from their rights and interest and supporting Australia's economic recovery by enabling them to partner with industry on major economic projects such as mining and agriculture. \$32.6 million of this funding will be provided from existing resources in the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. The measure includes funding for:

- a PBC Steering group, comprised of a range of PBCs across jurisdictions to directly represent native title holders' voices, which will explore models which build a sustainable and efficient approach to resourcing PBCs and support PBCs to effectively manage native title rights and benefits
- targeted investment in regional PBC models in priority regions to bring together PBCs to share capacity and services. This will provide PBCs in a region with access to broader range of expert services in order to effectively manage their native title and realise economic opportunities from their rights and interests
- the extension and expansion of PBC Regional Forums and PBC management, operations and business training to increase the opportunities for PBCs to grow and share their skills, build networks and collaborate
- investment in the native title capability of the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations to undertake functions relating native title and provide PBCs with greater support for their corporate and native title obligations.

Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation – establishment

The Australian Government is establishing a new, Aboriginal-controlled corporate Commonwealth entity, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation (NTAIC). The NTAIC will decide on and administer grants and investments from the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) through amendments to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (ALRA) passed in December 2021.

The NTAIC puts the government's commitment to shared decision making under the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* into action, empowering Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to determine funding priorities for their communities. The NTAIC will receive annual grants funding and an endowment of \$500 million to spend on investments in the Northern Territory.

The NTAIC will increase economic activity in the Northern Territory by unlocking an initial \$500 million of ABA funding and \$60 million per annum for the next three years, with ongoing funding beyond the forward estimates, for projects that benefit Northern Territory Indigenous communities, with flow on benefits throughout the Northern Territory.

Women in Leadership

The Australian Government has introduced a range of measures to support women to reach leadership positions. The government is committed to encouraging more women into leadership positions in the private and public sector, including through programs that support women at all stages of the leadership pipeline to help create long-term cultural change.

Women living in regional Australia will benefit from programs such as *Future Women's Jobs Academy*. This program will provide online training and mentoring to enable women all over Australia to find a job, transition to a new career, upskill, gain more hours of work, or start their own business. The government is providing \$9.1 million over four years for this program under the Women's Leadership Package.

Through the Women's Leadership Package, the government is also providing \$9 million over three years to continue funding the *Future Female Entrepreneurs Program*, which supports women and young women in STEM and entrepreneurial fields. The expansion will target cohorts that are historically under-represented in business ownership, including young women and girls from regional and remote areas.

Coastal and Estuarine Risk Mitigation Program

On 13 February 2022, the Minister for Emergency Management and National Recovery and Resilience announced that \$50 million in funding from the Emergency Response Fund would be allocated to the *Coastal and Estuarine Risk Mitigation Program* in 2022-23. The program, administered by the National Recovery and Resilience Agency, targets high priority locally and nationally significant coastal and estuarine disaster risk mitigation projects.

Coastal hazards, such as inundation, storm surges and erosion threaten a diverse set of social, natural and cultural assets, including public and private property and valued recreational and tourist areas, with flow-on social and economic impacts. The program will help drive long term resilience and sustainability by delivering priority projects that mitigate the impact of disasters on communities and economies.

Areas of focus for the program include:

- adaptation and resilience actions, including investment in grey infrastructure and green blue infrastructure (which includes nature based solutions)

- planning, including local and regional risk assessments and mapping, business case development, preparation of community focused regional coastal management programs
- investment in monitoring infrastructure and activities to understand the coastal and estuarine zone over time.

The program opened for applications on 8 March 2022 and will close on 17 June 2022. Funding will be provided to successful applicants in 2022-23.

Flood Recovery and Resilience Package

A large number of regions and communities in Queensland and New South Wales were severely impacted by the flooding that occurred in February and March 2022 – nearly 10.5 million people live in the 81 Local Government Areas (LGAs) impacted by the event, with over 100,000 people residing within the path of the floods.

While the full impacts of the event will emerge over coming weeks and months, the government has already agreed a suite of measures to support and commence the short, medium and long-term recovery of affected communities.

In addition to the activation and delivery of a number of support programs through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, and Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payments and Disaster Recovery Allowance payments, the National Recovery and Resilience Agency is responsible for a number of other measures to support recovery including:

- Additional payments to LGAs catastrophically impacted by the flood events, in the form of special supplements to the *Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment*.
- \$10.4 million over two years to deliver, in conjunction with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the *Floods Package – Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative* to inform the identification of options and opportunities for mitigating risks, incorporating local experience to develop solutions to support recovery activities and strengthen resilience for future disasters in the Northern Rivers Region.
- Accessing the \$150 million recovery and post-disaster resilience component of the Emergency Response Fund to support activities in affected communities in both 2021-22 and 2022-23, with the funding in 2022-23 informed by the *Floods Package – Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative*.
- \$10 million over four years to support the mental health of school-aged children in the Northern Rivers regions affected by the recent flood event, under the *Resilient Kids* program.

- An additional \$0.8 million in 2022-23 for the extension of the *Regional Small Business Support Program* to support areas affected by the flood event.

Australian Public Service Hubs in Regional Australia

The government is investing \$15.2 million over seven years from 2022-23 to deliver regional Australian Public Service (APS) Hubs that address shifting labour market dynamics and enable the APS to remain an employer of choice.

The APS Hubs will provide multi-agency work spaces that accommodate staff and give them access to technology, digital connectivity and shared facilities. Up to four regional APS Hubs will locate APS staff closer to the communities they serve, while broadening and diversifying the APS recruitment pool.

Growing the APS footprint, particularly in regional areas, will build stronger linkages with local community and businesses, and facilitate closer engagement across levels of government, leading to better targeted policies and services for all Australians.

This initiative forms part of the government's regionalisation agenda.

Growing Regional Data and Digital Talent for Australia's Growth and Recovery

The government has committed \$18.6 million over three years from 2022-23 to pilot APS digital and data training and employment opportunities for people living in regional areas and areas outside Canberra.

The pilot establishes specialised digital and data APS Academy Campuses alongside universities that host the necessary talent, acting as a bridge from university into entry-level positions within the APS. Onsite supervisors will support the accelerated development of new talent in digital and data roles, alongside exciting opportunities to solve real world challenges while staying connected to their local community.

APS Academy Campuses will also be linked to the government's centrally coordinated entry-level programs, including new internships and cadetships, allowing students and recent graduates from diverse backgrounds to pursue a data or digital career without the need to leave their region.

This initiative forms part of the government's regionalisation agenda.

Current Initiatives

National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030

The Australian Government has committed \$307.5 million to support the initial implementation of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030* (National Strategy). The National Strategy is a 10-year, whole-of-nation framework to establish a coordinated and consistent approach to preventing and better responding to child sexual abuse in all settings, including in institutions, in families and online.

The National Strategy is initially being driven by two four-year (2021-2024) action plans:

- The First National Action Plan includes measures that the Australian, state and territory governments will deliver together. It focuses on priorities of shared responsibility between governments and those requiring national coordination, such as education and awareness raising.
- The First Commonwealth Action Plan includes measures that the Australian Government will largely deliver on its own. It focuses on Australian Government priorities and responsibilities, such as preventing and responding to online child sexual abuse.

Measures under both action plans will deliver positive impacts to regional Australians through new and enhanced policies and services focussed on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. People living in these communities are explicitly listed as a National Strategy priority group, and all relevant measures will be designed and implemented in a way that supports their engagement. Some National Strategy-funded measures of particular note for this group include:

- preventing child sexual abuse through building child safe capability in sporting organisations and delivering online safety education programs to prevent online harm and promote safe online practices for children and young people
- enhancing support for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, including expanding the national specialist trauma informed legal service, establishing a specialist national legal online chat service dedicated to young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, harm and sexual abuse, coordinating access to support services, resources and information, and developing trauma-informed and culturally appropriate resources and approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- bolstering law enforcement efforts to prevent, disrupt, investigate and combat child sexual abuse, including through community liaison police officers

- enhancing the Government's global partnerships, including to learn from international best practice on how to design and deliver education, support and prevention services for and to geographically dispersed groups and Indigenous peoples
- improving the evidence base on the prevalence, nature, causes and impacts of all forms of child maltreatment in Australia.

National Recovery and Resilience Agency

From July 2021, the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRA) has been at the forefront of disaster recovery efforts and ensuring Australian communities are better prepared for future disasters. The NRRA has a network of regional officers and brings together disaster risk management and program delivery expertise.

The NRRA advocates for transformative change across the Australian Government's disaster risk management continuum by providing guidance and supporting best practice activities, aiming to embed resilience into governance arrangements, policies, programs and practices.

The NRRA works collaboratively with all levels of government, third parties and communities to identify and design appropriate and effective mechanisms for recovery and long-term strategies to enable communities to be better positioned to respond to future disasters.

The NRRA collaborates with stakeholders to create and promote greater access to data to assist Australian communities in disaster recovery and preparedness, such as the NRRA's Online Recovery Map and Recovery Connect that provides localised data to individuals, communities and government. Data sharing is crucial to support the understanding of disasters and identify opportunities to increase resilience.

The work of the NRRA is critical in supporting all hazards recovery, and reducing the risk and impact of future natural disasters, throughout rural and regional Australia. In addition to programs detailed elsewhere in this Budget paper, since establishment the NRRA has worked to deliver:

- the \$600 million *Preparing Australia Program*, targeting public and private disaster risk mitigation, with the first stream – the *Preparing Australian Communities Program – Local* – closing for applications on 6 January 2022 and in the assessment phase as at the 2022-23 Budget
- the *Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants* program, supporting the medium-term recovery needs of communities impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires, with additional funding agreed for the program to bring total grant funding to \$391 million for 524 projects

- the \$40 million *North Queensland Strata Title Resilience Pilot Program*, with the Agency current working with the Queensland Government to commence the program in the 2022-23 financial year.

Jobs and Wealth Creation Package – Advancing Indigenous outcomes

The Jobs and Wealth Creation package will contribute to economic recovery and growth for Indigenous Australians following COVID-19 through building a robust and resilient economy, improving food security in remote Australia, and supporting Indigenous job seekers in remote areas into jobs through skill development and educational attainment. The package encompasses the following initiatives:

- \$36.7 million investment from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to expand the support provided to Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBCs) that hold and protect native title rights and interests. This will ensure PBCs can operate more effectively and allow traditional owners to take advantage of opportunities for economic development or engage in transactions involving land subject to native title (much of which exists over land in regional and remote Australia).
- \$42.8 million per year from 1 July 2022 for the *Indigenous Skills and Employment Program* (ISEP) which will be rolled out across Australia, including in regional areas to support Indigenous Australians into skills, jobs, and career advancement pathways. It will also support businesses to realise the potential of the Indigenous Australian workforce and provide locally-informed, placed-based investment to better suit local labour markets and respond swiftly to emerging employment opportunities. Consultations (including with regional Australia) were held over the second half of 2021 and the insights have informed the design of ISEP. Core design elements include a focus on regionally identified priorities to ensure investment is directed to where it can add most value.
- \$5 million grant program targeting the continuous and sustainable supply of food and essential items in remote community stores, which have low resilience to interruption in the supply-chain. The investment to purchase forklifts, electrical upgrades, satellite communications and ability to improve warehouse infrastructure for stock and merchandise will improve the performance and financial viability of remote stores most of which are small businesses operating in a very high cost environment to provide food security for remote Australians. It will reduce the need for future government emergency response coordination of the remote supply-chain (as was required during COVID-19), and government intervention to provide food assistance if natural disasters or abnormal seasonal weather impacts the supply chain.
- \$10 million grant program over two years targeted to activate economic opportunities by providing increased access for Indigenous enterprises and community organisations in remote Australia to reliable and affordable

infrastructure, such as off-grid solar power systems, and plant and equipment to support improved water security. The program will build local capacity, support Indigenous enterprises and help create jobs for Indigenous Australians in primary industry and land management.

- \$63.3 million investment from 2020-21 to 2024-25 to increase support for Indigenous Australian girls and young women to participate in girls' academies to achieve Year 12 attainment, which improves their long term employment opportunities and promotes social participation. The investment maintains 9,895 existing places, in addition to providing 2,700 new places by December 2023. Girls' academies are located in a variety of school locations nationally, with a large proportion of the academies located in regional Australia. The expansion will increase participant numbers at existing girls' academies located in regional areas and create new girls' academies in regional schools in Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

myGov Enhancements

The myGov platform is the Australian Government's largest digital platform, allowing users to securely access government services online through a central portal. myGov supports over 24 million accounts to connect to 15 government services and is the primary entry point to government services for many people, including people in regional and remote areas.

The Australian Government has committed to providing \$200.1 million over two years from 2021-22 for myGov enhancements which will deliver a modern platform, providing a more responsive, secure, and personalised experience of government services for all Australians. It will allow a seamless, linked-up experience designed around the key events in peoples' lives rather than how government is structured.

myGov enhancements will be more digitally inclusive by allowing those in regional and remote areas to easily access the essential services which they rely on online. It will reduce their need to travel extended distances to visit a regional service centre and allow people to find information and services through their channel of choice. Many more regional and remote Australians will be enabled to discover, access and manage services online quickly and safely, at a time and in a way that is convenient to them.

People in regional and remote areas will also benefit from personalisation and proactive engagement. myGov offers a digital inbox to allow connected services to send electronic mail to users, and through myGov enhancements, the Australian Government can send proactive near real-time information based on their home location. This includes information about disaster recovery payments and services, or financial support for regional areas affected by drought.

National Flood Mitigation Infrastructure Program

On 10 December 2020, the government established a *National Flood Mitigation Infrastructure Program*, providing \$50 million from the 2020-21 pre-disaster resilience component of the Emergency Response Fund to support state, territory and local governments to reduce the impact of severe flood events on communities. An additional \$50 million was agreed in 2021-22 for a second round of the program as part of the 2021-22 Budget.

The program will help fund essential public assets including dams, levees, weather radar systems and flood warning infrastructure. The program will fund essential public assets across the nation that will:

- reduce the impacts of floods on Australian communities
- contribute to reducing eligible expenditure under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
- encourage positive change in making insurance more affordable
- address relevant household or local government insurance affordability.

The program will stimulate regional and national economic growth and local job creation. States and territories were notified of projects funded under the first round of the program on 10 May 2021, with funding provided to them in late 2021. Applications for the second round closed on 4 February 2022 and will be assessed and announced in 2021-22.

Rural Financial Counselling Service

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) provides free and independent financial counselling to eligible primary producers who are experiencing, or at risk of, financial hardship. On top of an additional \$5 million provided in 2021-22 to give RFCS organisations certainty to meet growing demand, enhance services and manage fluctuating client loads more effectively, the Australian Government also provided an additional \$12.9 million to continue the *Regional Small Business Support Program Pilot*, including \$0.8 million in the 2022-23 Budget to provide additional support to flood-affected communities in Queensland and New South Wales. This additional funding provides over \$74.8 million of financial assistance to small businesses and primary producers.

Women@Work: Supporting Women's Workforce Participation

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government provided an additional \$38.3 million from 2021-22 to 2025-26 to expand the *Women@Work* measure to build on the existing *Women's Leadership and Development Program* (WLDP). Funded \$64.4 million from

2021-22 to 2024-25, the objectives of the WLDP are to improve outcomes for women across six key focus areas: Women’s Job Creation; Women’s Economic Security; Women’s Workforce Participation; Women’s Leadership; Women’s Safety; and International Engagement. The WLDP supports:

- 70 projects benefiting around 40,000 women and girls to improve their workforce participation, leadership, economic security and safety
- expansion of proven projects such as the Academy for Enterprising Girls and Women Building Australia programs
- six National Women’s Alliances which play a key role in advocating for women in Australia and collaborating with policymakers to inform Australian Government policies.

Remote Engagement Program

A new remote engagement program, designed in partnership with remote communities is planned to replace the *Community Development Program* (CDP) to better meet the current challenges and the changing job market.

The new national program will start rolling out in 2024 and will be informed by lessons learnt from locally co-designed trials in the Mid-West region and Ngaanyatjarra Lands regions (Western Australia); the Barkly region (Northern Territory); the Eyre region (South Australia); and Palm Island (Queensland).

As part of the local co-design process, Australian Government will bring to the table the following building blocks regions can choose to trial as part of their trial program:

- options to access non-vocational support like family or mental health services
- options to build vocational skills and training for job seekers
- an option to trial the *Remote Engagement Program* payment, a new supplementary payment in the social security system for eligible job seekers who participate in a placement in a local community service, such as in a school or in local government, to build skills and experience and provide a pathway to find a job in the open labour market options to support job seekers find jobs and apprenticeships.

Community Development Program

The *Community Development Program* (CDP) supports job seekers in remote Australia to build skills, address barriers and contribute to their communities through a range of flexible activities. The CDP covers 75 per cent of Australia’s land mass, comprising of 46 providers operating across 60 regions and over 1,000 communities.

The CDP is supporting around 42,000 job seekers, of whom approximately 84 per cent identify as Indigenous Australians. The CDP is designed around the unique social and labour market conditions in remote Australia and is an essential part of the Australian Government's agenda for increasing employment and breaking the cycle of welfare dependency.

The CDP is making steady progress to reduce welfare dependency in remote communities by enabling people to participate in meaningful activities that prepare them for work and improve community living standards. From 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2021, the CDP supported 32,354 remote job seekers into work, with 14,435 jobs filled continuously for at least six months.

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$98 million in 2022-23 to meet the costs associated with the increased number of job seekers being referred to the CDP as a result of COVID-19. This additional funding for the CDP will ensure that unemployed people in remote Australia continue to be properly supported to build skills, address barriers, and find employment.

A new remote engagement program, designed in partnership with the community, is planned to replace the CDP to better meet the current challenges and the changing job market. The new program will start rolling out in 2024 and will be informed by lessons learnt from locally co-designed trials across five regions in remote Australia. The trials will run until full roll out of the national program in 2024.

Return of Cultural Heritage

In July 2020, the Australian Government announced a commitment of \$10.1 million over four years to support the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to deliver the *Return of Cultural Heritage* (RoCH) initiative.

Preliminary research has identified over 302 overseas collecting institutions with Indigenous Australian cultural heritage collections. Over 112,000 Indigenous Australian objects have been identified in these overseas collections.

To date, some RoCH program highlights include the unconditional return of:

- 17 items, including sacred ceremonial objects, from an institution in the United States of America to their traditional owners – the Arrante, Walpiri and Warumungu peoples
- three decoy ducks from the Lower Murray region of South Australia from a private holder in the United States of America
- four items from private holders in New Zealand.

The initiative provides all Australians with the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of our nation's history and promotes learning, healing and reconciliation. Through the return of the culturally significant materials, the initiative will directly and indirectly contribute to the improvement of regional and remote Indigenous Australian's health and wellbeing.

Indigenous Protected Areas Program

The Australian Government has supported Indigenous Australians over two decades to voluntarily dedicate and manage their land and sea country as Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs). In 2021-22, the Australian Government will provide funding of \$17.7 million through 78 IPA projects. IPAs cover more than 74 million hectares, or 9.62 per cent, of Australia. The IPAs are exclusively in regional and remote areas where they assist Indigenous Australians to deliver sustainable environmental, cultural, social, economic and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, their families, and communities through the effective and sustainable management of their land and sea country. The IPAs contribute to the expansion and increased resilience of Australia's National Reserve System for the benefit of all Australians, and assists Australia in meeting its international obligations under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

Indigenous Business Australia – Regional Construction Stimulus

The Australian Government provided Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) with \$131 million in 2020-21 and 2021-22 as part of a \$150 million equity injection over five years for new construction home loans in regional Australia. The Australian Government continues to be committed to stimulating economic activity in regional Australia and helping local economies thrive by assisting up to 360 Indigenous Australians to construct new homes through the *Indigenous Home Ownership Program*.

While current market conditions may continue to create opportunities and challenges in the path to home ownership, this investment is also supporting over 1,000 jobs by unlocking financing for construction projects in regional locations. The equity injection complemented other initiatives such as *Home Builder*.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in regional Australia will benefit from high quality services delivered by stronger community-controlled organisations. There may also be indirect benefits from additional employment opportunities, skills improvement and culturally competent service provision.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

The Australian Government provides annual funding of around \$19.4 million per year to AIATSIS to preserve and strengthen Australia's Indigenous culture and heritage much of which is held by, or on behalf of, regional communities. This has remained consistent since 2014-15. The national Indigenous collection is vital to research across a

range of important areas for regional Australia, including native title, traditional ownership, land and water management, tourism, mining, agriculture, environment and higher education. In addition through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, AIATSIS is able to continue the *Return of Cultural Heritage Initiative* which enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise decision-making over their cultural heritage and assists with the promotion and resurgence of their cultures, societies, language and knowledge both at regional and national level.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) is a Commonwealth company that provides safe, culturally appropriate and affordable accommodation for Indigenous Australians who need to be away from home to access services and economic opportunities.

As at 28 February 2022, AHL operates 45 accommodation facilities providing up to 1,725 beds Australia wide. 96 per cent of these beds are located in regional and remote areas (740 beds per night in regional areas, 910 beds per night in remote areas and 75 beds per night in capital areas). The Australian Government will provide funding of \$35.9 million in 2022-23 to continue to deliver these services in remote and regional Australia.

Torres Strait Regional Authority

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is the peak representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the Torres Strait Region. The role of the TSRA is to work to close the gap and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the region to determine their own affairs based on the Ailan Kastom (island custom) of the Torres Strait. The TSRA does this by formulating, implementing and monitoring programs for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples living in the Torres Strait. The TSRA is in its 28th year in 2022-23.

The TSRA also performs separate functions under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) as the Native Title Representative Body for the Torres Strait region.

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation

The Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC) assists Indigenous Australians to realise economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits that ownership and management of land and water can bring. This includes economic independence (in particular, employment for Indigenous people); the delivery of social benefits; cultural identity and connection; and environmental sustainability. It does this through returning land and water-related interests to Indigenous Australians, and supporting them manage these in the pursuit of their own aspirations.

The ILSC tabled its inaugural Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategies for four bio-regions: Northern Australia; Desert; South West Australia and South-East Australia and is continuing to work under these for the current period. In 2022-23, the ILSC's acquisition and management functions will continue to support Indigenous Australians to: manage their country for future generations; grow the value of Indigenous-held land and water country; connect to country and preserve and protect culture; and drive policy and opportunities.

Digital Identity Future Rollout

The Australian Government is providing the Digital Transformation Agency with \$23.5 million over two years to build on the solid foundations the initiative has established, with further work to continue as additional services are on-boarded. This funding is part of the Australian Government's commitment of \$162.8 million over the next two years to the *Digital Identity* program. Partner agencies funded through this commitment include Services Australia, the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Tax Office, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and the Department of Finance.

Digital Identity is the Australian Government's single secure, trusted and consistent way to verify identity online. Once verified, people can transact as individuals and on behalf of businesses securely online across many services.

The *Digital Identity* program has continued to make good progress with people and businesses already using myGovID, the Australian Government's identity provider, to access a range of government services. Over 100 government services now use myGovID, and over 7.76 million people have created a myGovID account. Over 1.3 million ABN's have been linked to a myGovID, giving services and business greater assurance on who is accessing services. 1.9 million people have also linked their myGovID digital identity to myGov, allowing them to use services online that previously require lengthy offline processes, like applying for Centrelink payments disaster assistance, and Tax File Numbers.

Residents in regional and remote areas are particularly benefiting from Digital Identity through the removal of the need to visit a shopfront to prove their identity. Many more regional and remote Australians and businesses are now able to quickly and safely access services online, at a time convenient to them.

People affected by natural disasters also benefit from having a Digital Identity. With a Digital Identity established, people don't need to wait for replacement documents to apply for government assistance if these are lost in a disaster, so people can get the help they need more quickly. People can save up to four hours by using Digital Identity to apply for disaster assistance compared to previous processes, plus up to an additional four weeks from not having to wait for new identity documents to be provided before applying.

Social Services

The Social Services Portfolio comprises four non-corporate Commonwealth entities and two corporate entities. For the purposes of this statement, this includes the Department of Social Services, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Commission and Services Australia. Hearing Australia is not reported in this statement, as it is a Public Non-financial Corporation (Trading) entity.

The Department of Social Services is assisting the Australian Government in supporting and delivering essential social services to Australians, including those in regional and remote areas. The Australian Government is providing \$1.5 billion in 2021-22 to pay a \$250 *Cost of Living Payment* to around 6 million Australians. The payment will be delivered progressively from late April 2022 to those who have a payment entitlement or hold a card on 29 March 2022.

In the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government is providing new funding to support the safety of women and children. A series of new funding commitments for women's safety will drive outcomes under the forthcoming *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*. The investment prioritises actions and targets across four National Pillars: Prevention, Early Intervention, Response and Recovery. The Australian Government is investing in initiatives that take into account the diverse lived experiences of victim-survivors.

From 2023, the Australian Government is committing to deliver a single combined payment under the *Paid Parental Leave* scheme to give families, including those in regional and remote areas, an increased choice and flexibility. This change will increase eligibility for financial support for working parents encouraging women's workforce participation and improving gender equality.

The Australian Government has committed to support the delivery and implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 to help drive change for people with disability over the next decade. Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 is Australia's framework to reduce child abuse and neglect and drive change through collective effort across governments and sectors that impact the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. The Department of Social Services is also supporting the Australian Government in providing emergency and food relief and financial counselling to aid the recovery of communities affected by the 2022 Queensland and New South Wales floods.

As at 31 December 2021, the Social Services Portfolio employed 41,202 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 9,192 staff (22 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 19,219 staff (47 per cent) in other capital cities and 12,791 staff (31 per cent) in regional areas.

In addition to staff located in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne, the Department of Social Services has staff located in other capital cities such as Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and Hobart and in regional areas such as Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa in Queensland, Bendigo in Victoria, and Orange, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong, Charlestown and Batemans Bay in New South Wales.

The NDIA is spread across 140 different towns or suburbs: 34 in New South Wales, 29 in Victoria, 28 in Queensland, 16 in South Australia, 22 in Western Australia, six in the Northern Territory, two in the Australian Capital Territory, and three in Tasmania.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission has staff located in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney and in other capital cities such as Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Darwin and Hobart.

Services Australia works closely with Australian Government agencies, state and territory jurisdictions, providers and businesses to deliver high quality, accessible services and payments to individuals, families and communities. Services Australia will make around \$225 billion in payments on behalf of the Australian Government in 2021-22, and provides services to almost every Australian at some point in their lives, including those in regional and remote Australia.

Services Australia is committed to making government services simple so people can get on with their lives. As part of this, Services Australia is focusing on improving its digital service offering, so that Australians can engage with government services at a time and place that suits them. Services Australia is expanding virtual servicing through video chat to connect with customers. Improvements to digital services particularly benefit regional and remote Australians, as digital servicing reduces the need for customers to travel to visit a Service Centre.

For customers with complex needs who require face-to-face services, Services Australia has a significant presence across Australia with many regional and remote Service Centres, a network of agents and access points, 21 remote servicing teams and three Mobile Service Centres. The Mobile Service Centres travel to rural and regional communities to ensure that those communities have access to the same range of services that are available at other Service Centres in Australia. The Mobile Service Centres also assist with emergency on-the-ground support for Australian Government disaster recovery efforts.

Services Australia also provides critical support to Australians in need of urgent assistance, delivering payments and services on behalf of the Australian Government across regional and remote Australia, to people impacted by COVID-19 and by natural disasters such as the 2022 Queensland and New South Wales floods.

Services Australia's service delivery responsibilities require a flexible, capable and connected workforce across Australia, including in rural, regional and remote areas. Services Australia has maintained its commitment to jobs and a physical presence in regional Australia. As at 14 February 2022, Services Australia had a total of 318 Service Centres across Australia:

- four in the Australian Capital Territory
- 103 in New South Wales
- 16 in the Northern Territory
- 69 in Queensland
- 24 in South Australia
- 10 in Tasmania
- 60 in Victoria
- 32 in Western Australia.

A significant number of these Service Centres are located in regional locations.

At 14 February 2022, Services Australia also had 367 contracted Agents and 216 contracted Access Points throughout rural, remote, and very remote locations. Access Points provide free self-service facilities for customers to conduct their business. Customers can access internet-enabled computers and printers, upload documents to their customer record, call Services Australia on the self-service phone, and access free Wi-Fi to use their own devices. Agents also provide a face-to-face information service, identity document certification, and assist customers to use self-service.

New Initiatives

Cost of Living Payment

The Australian Government is providing \$1.5 billion in 2021-22 to pay a \$250 *Cost of Living Payment* to around 6 million Australians. The payment will be provided to eligible payment recipients and concession card holders residing in Australia, including pensioners, allowance recipients, recipients of *Carer Allowance and Double Orphan Pension*, holders of a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card or Pensioner Concession Card, and certain Department of Veterans' Affairs payment recipients and concession card holders.

The payment will be delivered progressively from late April 2022 to those who have a payment entitlement or hold a card on 29 March 2022 and will provide timely support to Australian households, including those in regional Australia.

Women's Safety

The Australian Government, in conjunction with states and territories, is finalising the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (National Plan) and funding initiatives that will work to achieve its ambitious aim of driving the rates of gender-based violence in Australian communities towards zero.

The Australian Government and all states and territories have agreed that the National Plan will be supported by four pillars – Prevention, Early Intervention, Response and Recovery. These pillars are underpinned by four foundation principles – gender equality, diverse lived experiences of victim-survivors informing policies and solutions, *Closing the Gap*, and intersectionality. The draft National Plan includes action areas that will support people across Australia, including in regional and remote locations.

Australian Family Domestic and Sexual Violence Commission

The Australian Government will invest \$22.4 million over five years from 2022-23 to establish a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (the Commission). The Commission, to be established by 1 July 2022, will support the Australian Government by providing national leadership, fostering relationships across the Commonwealth, states and territories and embedding a coordinated and cooperative approach to ending violence. The Commission will monitor accountability and evaluation frameworks under the National Plan and will oversee its implementation across all levels of government.

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

The Department of Social Services is assisting the Australian Government in implementing a range of initiatives across the four pillars – Prevention, Early Intervention, Response and Recovery in order to drive outcomes under the forthcoming National Plan:

The key prevention initiatives include:

- \$104.4 million over five years from 2022-23 to support the national primary prevention organisation Our Watch to support it to continue its important work under the National Plan. This funding will enable Our Watch to boost its efforts in prevention for LGBTIQ+ people, women with disability and migrant women, and develop further resources to educate young people about consent.

- \$46 million over four years from 2022-23 to deliver phase five and six of the Stop it at the Start campaign which will continue to drive population level change in people's attitudes towards violence.
- \$32.2 million over four years from 2022-23 will be provided for a consent campaign focusing on young people aged 12 and older and their parents, building on \$10.7 million already allocated in the 2021-22 Budget for this campaign.

The following key initiatives are aimed at the early intervention and prevention of all forms of family, domestic and sexual violence:

- \$100 million over five years from 2022-23 to continue and expand counselling services to assist individuals, couples and families, including those in regional and remote locations, who are experiencing, witnessing or at risk of family or domestic violence including a focus on supporting children impacted by family and domestic violence.
- \$47.9 million over five years from 2022-23 for a new campaign that focuses on confronting the attitudes and expectations of some men which can condone or excuse violence.
- \$39.7 million over five years from 2022-23 to extend DV-alert training, which supports non-specialist frontline workers to recognise, respond and refer women experiencing or at risk of family, domestic and sexual violence. The Australian Government will also invest \$14.8 million over five years from 2022-23 to continue providing accredited sexual violence response training to community frontline workers, health professionals and the legal sector.
- \$30 million over five years from 2022-23 to build and maintain links between Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 and the next National Plan. Further details on this measure are provided under the 'Safe and Supported: the National Framework to Protect Australia's Children 2021-2031' initiative in this chapter.
- \$10.5 million over four years from 2022-23 to enable No to Violence to continue national coverage for the Men's Referral Service, a direct telephone and online support for men who use violent and controlling behaviour, and the Brief Intervention Service, telephone-based counselling for men who use violence. As this service can be delivered virtually, it also supports men living in regional Australia.
- \$6.7 million over five years from 2022-23 for the *Helping Children Heal* program, a pilot program of trauma-informed services for mothers and children aged 6-12 years.

The following response initiatives will support women and their children who are experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence:

- \$240 million over three years from 2023-24 to extend the current trial of the *Escaping Violence Payment*, which provides emergency financial and in-kind support to women escaping family, domestic and sexual violence. An additional \$40 million in 2021-22 is being provided to meet the high demand for the pilot to date. The government has also announced a place-based trial in Cairns, Queensland, to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing violence.
- \$100 million over five years from 2022-23 to extend the *Safe Places Emergency Accommodation* program, for building, renovation or purchase of emergency accommodation for women and children escaping family and domestic violence. This will fund around 720 new safe places for women and children across Australia.
- \$54.6 million over five years from 2022-23 to support up to 30,000 victim-survivors, including those in regional and remote locations, to stay safe in their own homes through security assessments and upgrades including cameras, bug sweeps and safe phones.
- \$20 million over five years from 2022-23 to establish a fund for states and territories to trial electronic monitoring of high-risk and persistent family and domestic violence offenders. This may include trials in regional locations.
- \$8 million over five years from 2022-23 for the *Support for Trafficked People Program* to extend and enhance support for victims of human trafficking.

Enhanced Paid Parental Leave

In the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government is committing \$346.1 million over five years from 2021-22 to deliver a single combined payment under the *Paid Parental Leave* scheme. From 2023, families will have increased choice and flexibility, to decide what is best for them in managing work and care. These changes will increase eligibility for financial support for working parents encouraging women's workforce participation and improving gender equality. Key changes comprise:

- combining the current *Dad and Partner Pay* (DaPP) and *Parental Leave Pay* (PLP), increasing PLP from 18 weeks to 20 weeks
- making all PLP entitlements fully flexible, to be shared between primary carers
- amending the income test, to allow those who do not meet the individual income threshold (currently \$151,350 per annum) to still qualify for payment if they meet a family income threshold of \$350,000 per annum.

The government-funded *Paid Parental Leave* scheme is available to support families, with around 170,000 births each year, including parents in regional areas. Subject to the passage of legislation, all PLP recipients, including those from regional areas, will benefit from the additional two weeks of payment rolled from DaPP into PLP from 2023.

This initiative forms part of the Australian Government's 2022-23 Budget *Women's Economic Security Package* measure.

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031

More than one in six Australians have disability, of which around 1.4 million people are in regional Australia.

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 (the Strategy) was launched on 3 December 2021 and sets out a plan to improve the lives of people with disability in Australia over the next ten years. The Strategy's vision is for an inclusive Australian society that ensures people with disability can fulfil their potential, as equal members of the community.

The Australian Government announced an initial investment of \$250 million over the life of the Strategy to support its implementation. This initial investment lays the foundation for real change and will deliver tangible actions that make a difference in the lives of people with disability across Australia.

Under the Strategy, all governments have committed to improve access to services for people with disability, including those living in regional Australia. The Strategy seeks to improve transport, communication and services to people with disability in regional Australia.

The Strategy also has a strong focus on increasing the employment of people with disability, including in regional Australia, which is lower than in major cities. The employment rates for people with disability is lowest in inner regional areas at 44.2 per cent, followed by outer regional and remote areas (46.3 per cent), with the highest rate in major cities (49.7 per cent).

Individual Advocacy Services

Under the Strategy, there is a \$9.9 million investment to improve individual advocacy services. This includes:

- piloting a telephone service to provide and expand individual disability advocacy, including in regional and remote areas, accessed through the Disability Gateway phone and internet resources
- establishing a Program Management Centre to improve access to, and quality of, individual advocacy services, including by introducing best practice service delivery models.

The Program Management Centre will support the 59 National Disability Advocacy Program providers to develop the workforce, identify and enable best practice service models, and manage and report on demand. This includes providers working in regional and/or remote areas. In 2021-22, twenty-four National Disability Advocacy Program providers delivered services in inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote Australia.

Disability Gateway

A key priority under the Strategy is to assist all people with disability, their families and carers to locate and access information, supports and services in their communities to meet their needs.

The Australian Government is providing ongoing funding, including \$81.2 million over 10 years, for the *Disability Gateway* to improve its functionality and ensure people with disability, their families and carers can continue to navigate and find the services they need, including those in regional and remote areas.

The Disability Gateway website and 1800 phone service provides a single point of connection and referral to information and services for people with disability, their families and carers. It is a free national service, available to people of all ages, irrespective of whether the person is eligible for the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS) or not. The Disability Gateway 1800 phone service also provides callers with disability-specific information regarding COVID-19 supports and vaccines.

Targeted Action Plans

Targeted Action Plans (TAPs) have been established by Australian, state and territory governments to support the implementation of the Strategy and provide short-term strategic investments to ensure specific deliverables. TAPs aim to improve outcomes for people with disability, including people with disability in rural and remote communities.

The first five TAPs are for the period 2021-22 to 2023-24 and will deliver action against community attitudes, employment, early childhood, safety and emergency management. The Australian Government is investing \$76.8 million over the life of the Strategy for TAPs, including \$21.7 million over the next three years:

- \$7.6 million to deliver actions to improve paid employment outcomes for people with disability
- \$3.3 million to deliver actions to improve community attitudes towards people with disability to influence behaviour

- \$8.3 million to strengthen early identification, information, supports and service pathways for young children, from infancy to school age, with disability or developmental concerns and their families
- \$2.5 million to deliver actions to strengthen system design and supports to enable people with disability to receive high quality and safe services, including improving the outcomes of people with disability affected by national emergencies.

Closing the Gap Package

On 5 August 2021, the Australian Government announced the Commonwealth *Closing the Gap Implementation Plan*, including the following four measures led by the Department of Social Services that address the *Closing the Gap* Targets on out-of-home care (Target 12) and family violence (Target 13).

Improving Multidisciplinary Responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families with Multiple and Complex Needs

The Australian Government is committing \$49 million over four years from 2022-23 to support Target 12 by working in partnership with state and territory governments and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to redesign and test effective multidisciplinary service responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with multiple and complex needs.

This Commonwealth-led work will contribute to better understanding of cost effective, impactful and potentially replicable approaches that lead to better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including those living in regional, remote and very remote Australia. Complementing this approach is the engagement of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to ensure appropriate cultural governance and to build service delivery capacity.

Developing the Cultural Competence and Trauma Responsiveness of the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Child and Family Sector Workforce

The Australian Government is providing \$7.7 million over three years from 2021-22 to deliver training and professional development to family and children service providers to build organisational and workforce cultural competency and capabilities. The program will aim to ensure organisations and workers are better able to deliver prevention and early intervention services that are culturally driven and trauma and healing-informed. This measure supports Target 12 and aims to:

- assist service providers to break down barriers experienced by Indigenous children and families accessing family and community services
- train up to 500 family and community service providers nationally over the course of the program, with program and workshop delivery to be flexible and include

options to ensure service providers in rural and remote locations are able to access the program

- create a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families accessing family and community support services in a range of urban, rural and remote locations.

Stronger Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, Stronger Families

This measure supports Target 12 by assessing the needs, and increasing the involvement of ACCOs in the child and family sector. The Australian Government is committing \$3.2 million over two years from 2021-22 to implement:

- a research project inquiring into the strengths, opportunities, needs and barriers of ACCOs in delivering child and family services, including Family and Children Activity programs
- a trial to identify how ACCOs can effectively partner with non-Indigenous organisations to deliver Family and Children Activity programs.

Outcomes and Evidence Fund

The *Closing the Gap: Outcomes and Evidence Fund* (the Fund) will provide up to \$38.6 million over three years from 2021-22 to projects that contribute to *Closing the Gap* Targets 12 and 13.

The Fund will provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including families at risk of child protection investigation/intervention, and women and children at risk of experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. ACCOs and other local service delivery organisations will deliver projects.

An Expert Panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and ACCOs will guide the design of the program. Invited organisations will submit project proposals through a process determined in partnership with the Expert Panel and participate in a project co-development process for specific project and service delivery details.

Health Delivery Modernisation Program – phase three

The Australian Government is investing \$72 million over four years from 2022-23 for Phase Three of the *Health Delivery Modernisation Program*. This measure will deliver new digital health services and modernise Services Australia's critical health payment system for all Australians, including those in rural and regional Australia. The measure will also expand health system capabilities to deliver health policies and reforms.

New digital services to be delivered include Medicare enrolment and re-enrolment, Medicare Entitlement Statement application, Medicare complex care plan status, Medicare Provider Number registration for allied health professionals, an enhanced digital service offer for *Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme* written authorities and digital claiming for the *Continence Aids Payment Scheme*. Australians will no longer have to visit a Service Centre, phone Services Australia, or undertake paper-based processes in order to access a range of health services.

Safe and Supported: the National Framework to Protect Australia's Children 2021-2031

Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 (National Framework) is Australia's framework to reduce child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts. It builds on the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020, which laid the critical foundation for national collaboration on protecting Australia's children. It will drive change through collective effort across governments and sectors that impact the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The National Framework will be delivered by two, five-year Action Plans, including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific Action Plan. It will have close linkages with the next National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, and will align with the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030 and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy. The National Framework will also support commitments under *Closing the Gap* and its four Priority Reform areas.

The Australian Government is providing \$30 million over five years from 2022-23 to support the implementation of the first five-year Action Plans through initiatives that will provide support to children and families, including to those in regional and remote Australia:

- Establish a *Virtual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support* – to bring evidence-based and outcomes-focused approaches to the development and delivery of policies and programs affecting vulnerable and/or disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and will inform and drive practical change to prevent and reduce harm to children.
- National Child and Family Investment Strategy with an Innovation Fund – to support the child and family service system to shift away from crisis driven responses towards preventative and early supports. The innovation fund will directly benefit people by enabling the National Child and Family Investment Strategy to be practically implemented and assessed in select locations, including in regional areas.

- Establish a *National Advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People* – the Indigenous Children’s Advocate will be responsible for monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of actions to implement the National Framework to ensure it delivers real and tangible outcomes for children and young people.
- *Target Communication and Support to Improve Parenting Practice* – to raise awareness of strength-based parenting practices and provide supports and resources for parents and non-parent carers. This initiative builds on previous and existing work to enable parents and non-parent carers to understand the importance of child development and learned parenting, and reduce the stigma associated with families seeking support to improve their parenting practices.
- *Improve Support for Non-parent Carers* – to develop a nationally consistent approach to how states and territories operate carers registers and build on previous responses to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommendations for a nationally consistent approach. This will improve support for grandparent, foster and kinship carers (non-parent carers), including help to move across jurisdictions as they can be easily verified, and have the potential for their qualifications and experience to be recognised.

In addition, the Australian Government also provided \$6.5 million in the 2021-22 Mid- Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) to support the National Framework through:

- *Supporting Quality Engagement with Children* – to increase the capacity of the National Children’s Commissioner to consult with children and young people on the effectiveness of government programs
- *Grandparent Adviser Line* – to promote and extend this service to all non-parent carers across Australia. The Grandparent Adviser Line provides assistance with navigating available government and community support services.

Flood Package – emergency and food relief and financial counselling support

The Australian Government is providing \$25 million in 2021-22 for emergency relief, food relief and financial counselling to support the recovery of communities affected by the February-March 2022 floods in Queensland and New South Wales.

This funding will assist providers delivering these services in flood-affected communities to deliver more financial or material aid to people in immediate financial crisis. Financial counselling services will also assist vulnerable people to address their financial problems, manage debt and build longer-term capability to budget and manage their money as they recover from the financial impacts of the floods.

This initiative forms part of the Australian Government's *Flood Package* in the 2022-23 Budget, with funding to be distributed to areas of need and informed by the sector-led National Coordination Group.

Additional Funding for the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government provided an additional \$19.3 million over five years from 2022-23 to continue to deliver the *Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters* (HIPPY), and to support program reforms. This brings the total Australian Government investment in delivering HIPPY over the five years to around \$156 million.

HIPPY is a two-year home-based parenting and early childhood program that helps parents and carers to be their child's first teacher. It builds the confidence and skills of parents and carers to create a positive learning environment in the home and helps families transition their child into school, as well as offering some parents and carers a supported pathway to employment. HIPPY is delivered in 100 communities across Australia, including 50 Indigenous-focused sites, targeting approximately 4,000 children each year. In the 2021 calendar year, 66 of the 100 sites were regionally based, with around 2,544 children in the target age group attending the program. Over the next five years, the HIPPY program will:

- shift the focus to children aged three and four years (currently the focus is on children aged four and five years)
- build the capacity and number of ACCOs delivering the program and improve culturally appropriate delivery.

Continuation of Funding for the Fathering Project

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the Australian Government committed an additional \$4.1 million over two years from 2022-23 to continue delivery of *The Fathering Project*. This brings the total Australian Government investment in the *Fathering Project* since 2018-19 to almost \$9.5 million.

The *Fathering Project*'s father figure peer-support groups, parenting education and other programs aim to improve child development outcomes by inspiring and equipping fathers and father figures to engage more effectively with their primary school aged children.

The *Fathering Project* delivers digital and face-to-face parenting education specifically designed to engage fathers, as well as school-based student wellbeing programs, and family and community capacity building programs. These aim to improve family relationships and children's social, emotional and cognitive wellbeing.

The *Fathering Project* benefits around 300,000 children and 290,000 families each year and is now being delivered in over 700 school communities across Australia, including in regional, rural, remote and very remote communities.

Get Skilled Access – improving health outcomes for people with disability

Disability Inclusive Health Practices

The Australian Government is providing \$1.3 million over 18 months from January 2022 to promote accessible and inclusive healthcare practices for Australians with disability.

A new pilot program for health professionals will be run across five hospitals in regional and metropolitan sites to develop the most effective way to increase disability inclusion and awareness across the hospital sector. A range of online resources, face-to-face seminars and training programs will be designed and delivered by people with disability and utilised as part of the program. This pilot program aligns with priorities identified in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission).

Sport4All expansion

The Australian Government is providing \$1.4 million over 18 months from January 2022 to expand the *Sport4All* program to boost community participation in sport for Australians with disability. The *Sport4All* expansion program will be launched across more than 500 schools and local clubs to increase sporting participation among people with disability from regional and remote communities and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Sport4All aims to increase the participation of people with disability in sport by delivering educational programs at the grassroots level to schools and local sporting clubs across Australia. In addition, a person with disability or lived experience of disability will be engaged to run the program in each local council.

National Disaster Resilience and Support

Services Australia operates a fleet of three Mobile Service Centres supporting rural and regional Australians by efficiently delivering high quality, accessible services and payments on behalf of government. The Mobile Service Centres offer similar services as provided by the Services Australia's Service Centres and are designed to deliver a digital first approach for those who require extra assistance.

As part of the 2021-22 MYEFO *National Disaster Resilience and Support* measure, the Services Australia fleet of three Mobile Service Centres and all-terrain vehicles will be expanded in late 2022 to include one additional Mobile Service Centre and all-terrain vehicle in Western Australia, one additional all-terrain vehicle in Northern New South Wales, and one additional all-terrain vehicle in South Australia.

National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration

The Australian Government is providing up to \$2.6 million over two years from 2022-23 to commence foundational work to inform the establishment of a National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration.

The National Centre, once established, is intended to support existing and emerging place-based initiatives around Australia, but will initially focus on Commonwealth programs and initiatives, with a plan for scaling up and extending its support over time.

The government will engage a Foundation Partner to consult broadly to build consensus for, and design, a fully operational National Centre. The Foundation Partner will also deliver a range of foundational infrastructure, including support for communities engaging in place-based work.

Currently, there are over 130 communities across Australia which have partnered with the Australian Government in driving community-led, place-based reform. Many of these programs and initiatives are operating in regional and remote locations, ensuring that local needs and issues are prioritised. The benefits of place-based approaches include harnessing local leadership and community capacity to drive change at the community level, an emphasis on localised, flexible service delivery and funding models, and a commitment to apply localised efforts within a long-term vision to support community change.

The work of the Foundation Partner will amplify the effects of place-based approaches in a more cohesive way, benefitting the many communities across Australia committed to place-based ways of working.

Current Initiatives

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Since 1 July 2020, the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS) has been available everywhere in Australia, including in the Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The NDIS is now supporting more than 500,000 people with significant and permanent disability, regardless of where they live in Australia, and it is projected to reach around 670,000 by 30 June 2025. Approximately one third of NDIS participants currently reside outside the major cities. The NDIS is operating under full scheme agreements in all jurisdictions other than Western Australia, which is still under a transition agreement. Full scheme in Western Australia is scheduled to commence in 2023.

The NDIS workforce is expected to grow to 353,000 workers by 2024 (an increase of 83,000 workers). Of the total workforce, around one-third will be in regional and remote areas.

On 28 October 2021, the Australian Government introduced the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Participant Service Guarantee and Other Measures) Bill 2021 (the Bill), with proposed reforms to the NDIS. If passed, the Bill will legislate the new NDIS Participant Service Guarantee. The Guarantee sets new service standards and clear timeframes for decision making by the NDIA. The Bill includes amendments to enable better support for people where services are not readily available, such as in remote and regional areas, by giving additional ability for market intervention. The reforms in the Bill put people with disability at the centre of the NDIS and make it easier for participants and their families to navigate the NDIS, including people living in regional and remote communities.

National Disability Insurance Scheme Appeals Program

The Australian Government has committed around \$9 million in 2022-23 to the NDIS Appeals program. NDIS Appeals was set up in 2013 to ensure that people with disability affected by reviewable decisions of the NDIA, have access to support when they are seeking a review of those decisions in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. While the focus of NDIS Appeals is the provision of advocacy support, funding for legal assistance is available where there is wider community benefit and/or a disadvantage that would substantially benefit from legal representation.

NDIS Appeals support is available across Australia including in most regional areas with offices in towns such as Broome, Albany, Kalgoorlie, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Broken Hill, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Mildura, Shepparton, Mt Isa, Cairns and Rockhampton.

National Disability Insurance Scheme – continuity of support

The Australian Government has committed to provide *Continuity of Support* to people with disability receiving Australian Government services, who are ineligible for the NDIS. *Continuity of Support* commenced in April 2021 and provides eligible clients with access to a level of support consistent with that which they were previously receiving. As part of the Continuity of Support arrangements, the Australian Government implemented funding agreements and/or variations with relevant service providers in 2020-21 to ensure seamless delivery of *Continuity of Support* for Commonwealth Government clients, including those in regional and remote Australia.

Continuity of Support arrangements continue for existing and new clients of the *National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service* who are aged 65 years or over. Mobility Allowance is still open to new clients. Individuals funded through the Disability Employment Assistance program also transitioned to the *Disability Employment Continuity of Support* program from 1 April 2021.

National Disability Insurance Scheme – Jobs and Market Fund

In 2018, the Australian Government committed to establish the *Jobs and Market Fund* to support the growth of the NDIS market and workforce in capacity and capability to meet the needs of NDIS participants. In 2021, the *Jobs and Market Fund* was extended to 2023-24 to support the implementation of initiatives in the NDIS National Workforce Plan 2021-2025.

An open grant round, hosted in 2019, funded 16 projects across the disability sector relating to workforce attraction, education and training that targeted under-supplied (thin) markets in relation to particular geographic areas (regional and remote locations), support types and participant groups.

In addition, the Department of Social Services has commissioned projects to enable market and workforce development. This includes the development of the NDIS Demand Map, the Thin Markets Framework and the Capability Framework, as well as projects to implement initiatives in the NDIS National Workforce Plan 2021-2025. The *NDIS Ready* project is supporting capability building and helping strengthen culturally safe NDIS services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, including those in regional and remote areas.

Boosting the Local Care Workforce

The Australian Government is committed to supporting jobs in regional and remote Australia. By 2024, around 45 per cent of the additional 83,000 jobs in the NDIS sector are expected to be in regional and remote areas. With around one-third of aged care providers also operating in the disability and/or the veterans' care sectors, alignment of regulatory arrangements will benefit providers and encourage new providers to work across sectors.

The *Boosting Local Care Workforce* program has built significant infrastructure and capability in regional and remote areas since December 2017, including:

- establishing provider network within the care and support sector across the country
- establishing networks of up to 25 regional coordinators, located across the country
- developing the Boosting the Local Care Workforce website, resources and Demand Map.

In 2020, the Australian Government provided an additional \$16.8 million over three years from 2020-21, including \$8.1 million in 2022-23, to extend the *Boosting the Local Care Workforce Regional Coordinator* initiative. This included expansion of the *Boosting Local Care Workforce* program to include Aged Care and Veterans' Care sectors, providing support to the care and support sector by assisting organisations to address workforce challenges, ensuring market growth to meet the needs of people with disability, older Australians and veterans in regional and remote areas.

Through the established regional Coordinator Network, the *Boosting Local Care Workforce* program continues to:

- build relationships with service providers, peak bodies and other stakeholders of the care and support sector to gather intelligence on workforce and business challenges and identify opportunities for engagement, collaboration and partnerships to respond to challenges
- assist service providers in the care and support sector to address key workforce and business challenges so that they are better equipped to meet the needs of consumers
- gather and relay market intelligence from the care and support sector in an impactful way to help inform policy, administration, information and coordination actions.

Extending the *Boosting the Local Care Workforce* program has also strengthened the focus on connecting employment service and training providers with care and support providers.

Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program

The *Information, Linkages and Capacity Building* (ILC) program provides funding to organisations to deliver projects in the community that benefit all Australians with disability, their carers and families. These projects create connections between people with disability and the communities they live in. Projects aim to build the knowledge, skills and confidence of people with disability, and improve their access to community and mainstream services.

The ILC program will provide around \$153 million in funding in 2022-23, which will be delivered across four streams:

- *Individual Capacity Building* – focused on enabling systemic, nationwide access to peer support, mentoring and other skills-building for people with disability, their families and carers. Also under this program, Disabled Peoples Organisations and Families Organisations are strengthened in their capability to deliver services for people with disability.
- *National Information Program* – focused on providing information on supports and services to people with disability, their families and carers through consistent national information programs and products.
- *Economic and Community Participation* – focused on improving pathways to employment and increasing participation by people with disability.

- *Mainstream Capacity Building* – focused on improving the capacity of mainstream services to respond to and include people with disability, increasing accessibility and use of mainstream services.

ILC is a national program, with projects delivered throughout Australia, including in regional and remote locations.

A National Early Childhood Program for Children with Disability or Developmental Concerns

Service delivery under the *National Early Childhood Program for Children with Disability or Developmental Concerns* (NECP) is expected to commence in late 2022. This follows a co-design process with stakeholders in 2021-22 to develop the design of the NECP.

The NECP will provide a range of disability specific information and community supports for Australian children aged 0 to 8 years, regardless of where they live, with a focus on regional and remote areas.

The NECP will be also open to children before a formal diagnosis is attained, which can be a particularly protracted process in regional areas. The program will strengthen connections to the community, and existing supports and services, including those delivered by the NDIS.

Disability Employment Services

The *Disability Employment Services* (DES) program provides specialist employment assistance to people whose primary impediment to employment in the open labour market is disability, injury or a health condition. The Australian Government will provide around \$1.4 billion in 2022-23 to support this important initiative.

In 2020-21, the Australian Government invested more than \$420 million in the DES program to assist people with disability in regional Australia seeking employment in the open labour market. Subject to labour market conditions, a similar amount is expected to be spent in regional areas in 2021-22.

In regional Australia, 42 organisations are currently delivering the DES program from 1,568 locations. As at the end of January 2022, regional Australians comprised 32 per cent (or about 99,000 out of 311,000) of those receiving support through the DES program.

From the commencement of DES in March 2010 until January 2022, over 300,000 participants in regional Australia have been placed in a job.

In 2021, the Australian Government announced changes to the DES program to empower DES participants to have greater say over their employment. The proposed changes enable job seekers with disability to choose digital services, and link education outcomes to skills shortages in the Australian labour market.

From 1 July 2021, eligibility was tightened to job seekers on income support with an assessed work capacity of less than 30 hours a week. This was done to better support job seekers with disability most in need of specialised support.

From 1 January 2022, job seekers assessed as being job-ready have the option to choose to participate in mainstream digital employment services instead of DES. As digital connectivity and inclusion increases in regional areas, digital access to employment services will better connect regionally situated job seekers to information regarding their job search and employment support, and will reduce the need to travel to attend in-person.

As of January 2022, education placements have been prioritised toward training courses that are relevant to recognised skills shortages with education outcome payments limited to courses that develop skills for occupations identified as being in demand by the National Skills Commission.

Support Services during the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

The Australian Government has established free and independent supports for people engaging with or affected by the Disability Royal Commission, including:

- a trauma-informed national telephone counselling and referral service, delivered by Blue Knot Foundation (the National Counselling and Referral Service)
- in-person counselling services for people who have more complex needs and require more in-depth support
- Indigenous-specific counselling services, advocacy support and sector development
- individual advocacy support for people with disability who need significant support to tell their story and assistance in drafting submissions
- systemic advocacy support.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the government further committed \$71.4 million over three years from 2021-22 to support the extension of the Disability Royal Commission to 29 September 2023 as part of the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability – extension measure*.

Counselling Services

The Australian Government has allocated \$16.5 million in 2022-23 for counselling supports for people engaging with or affected by the Disability Royal Commission.

Supports are available across Australia, including outreach support to regional and remote areas. Counselling providers under this program have a total of 59 outlets located in inner regional, outer regional and remote Australia.

As at 13 February 2022, the National Counselling and Referral Service has received 14,617 calls, delivered 7,383 counselling sessions and made 4,277 referrals.

As at 31 December 2021, in-person counselling services have been accessed by 2,309 individual clients across 32,315 sessions, and 282 group clients across 223 sessions. This includes people who live in regional and remote areas.

Advocacy Services

The Australian Government has allocated \$16.3 million in 2022-23 for advocacy supports for people engaging with the Disability Royal Commission.

Over 2,400 people have received individual advocacy support to date under the Disability Royal Commission advocacy program. This includes 589 people from regional areas. Advocacy providers under this program have a total of 54 outlets located in inner regional, outer regional, and remote and very remote Australia.

National Disability Advocacy Program

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring people with disability have access to effective disability advocacy that promotes, protects and ensures their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights, enabling full community participation. Through the commitment to Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, all levels of government are responsible for supporting disability advocacy.

Funding of \$24.1 million in 2022-23 is committed to 59 advocacy agencies across Australia, including in most regional locations, under the National Disability Advocacy Program. Approximately 13,800 people received individual support in 2020-21 including around 5,000 from regional areas. A search option available on the Department of Social Services website enables people to identify their nearest National Disability Advocacy Program agency.

Ensuring a strong future for supported employment

In 2019, the Australian Government committed \$67 million over five years from 2018-19 to support the Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) sector once the Fair Work Commission finalises its review of the Supported Employment Services Award 2020 (the Award).

The majority of supported employees working at ADEs are employed under the Award. Approximately one third of ADEs are located in regional, remote or rural areas, providing important employment opportunities and support for people with disability in areas where other opportunities may be limited.

Young Carer Bursary Program

In 2022, the Australian Government will continue to support young carers in regional Australia through the *Young Carer Bursary Program*. Bursaries are currently valued at \$3,000 each.

The *Young Carer Bursary Program* assists young carers, aged 12 to 25 years, in greatest need across Australia, including in regional areas, to continue to study and to relieve the financial pressure on them to undertake part-time work in addition to their educational and caring responsibilities.

In 2022, a total of 303 Young Carer Bursary Program recipients were from regional Australia.

Integrated Carer Support Service

In 2020, under the *Integrated Carer Support Service*, a national network of 10 Carer Gateway service providers commenced delivering carer support services across 16 Carer Gateway service areas. The 16 Carer Gateway service areas are aligned to existing Primary Health Network regions to ensure the servicing of carers in regional and remote Australia as well as metropolitan areas. The total grant funding provided to Carer Gateway service providers is approximately \$195 million in 2022-23.

The *Integrated Carer Support Service* delivers a consistent approach to carer support services with tailored and targeted early intervention, preventative and skill building supports available at the national, regional and remote levels. There are approximately 243,500 carers living in outer regional and remote areas who could benefit from this initiative.

Individual Placement and Support

In 2020, the Australian Government provided \$45.7 million to deliver the *Individual Placement and Support* (IPS) program in 50 *headspace* sites nationally, 28 of which are in regional and remote locations. The IPS program targets vulnerable young people aged 12 to 25 years with mental illness helping them to enter or remain in education or employment.

The IPS program uses an evidence-based model, integrating employment and vocational support with clinical mental health and other non-vocational support. Professional employment specialists located in *headspace* sites will provide vocational and employment assistance, in tandem with clinical support.

From 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, the IPS program supported 1,314 young people who required mental health support to get into employment or further education each year.

The IPS program is complemented by *headspace National's Digital Work and Study Service* (DWSS). The DWSS provides work and study support via a digital platform to young people aged 15 to 25 who are unsure about where to start when looking for a job or who have questions about what they want to study. From 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, 347 young people were supported by DWSS.

In 2021, the Australian Government provided \$5.7 million over three years to further enhance the IPS Program as part of the 2021-22 Budget *Mental Health* measure, including:

- the IPS *Adult Mental Health* pilot which will take place over three years in the two regional sites of the eight Adult Mental Health Centres
- the IPS *vocational peer support* pilot which aims to assess whether IPS participants achieve better and more sustained outcomes with vocational peer support in place. Four IPS services participating in the pilot are located in regional areas
- ongoing evaluation to measure the effectiveness of the IPS program.

National Redress Scheme

The Australian Government is implementing a number of improvements to the National Redress Scheme (the Scheme) in response to the Second Year Review of the Scheme (the Review).

In 2021, the government provided funding of \$132.6 million over four years from 2021-22, including \$38.5 million in 2022-23, to better support the increased scale, scope and complexity in delivering redress for survivors, including those in rural and regional Australia. This funding also included more than \$80 million to implement new measures in response to the Review, including to:

- establish a \$10,000 advance payment for applicants who are elderly or terminally ill; all existing eligible applicants have been offered an advance payment since the measure took effect
- improve the way indexation of a prior payment is applied
- removing the requirement for a witnessed statutory declaration in the application form, which could be difficult for people in regional areas to complete
- develop and implement through a co-design process a Survivors' Service Improvement Charter

- allow payments in instalments to give survivors choice and control over how they receive their payment
- expanding funder of last resort arrangements, enabling more survivors to have access to redress
- establishment of regional offices in Batemans Bay, Wollongong and Wagga Wagga.

These measures align with the Australian Government's commitment to ongoing improvement of the Scheme, including improving the survivor experience with the Scheme and are in addition to \$104.6 million over four years to 2023-24 provided by the government in the 2020-21 Budget, including \$73.1 million to deliver Redress Support Services across Australia.

Cashless Debit Card

The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) continues to support communities in the regional areas of Ceduna in South Australia; the East Kimberley and Goldfields in Western Australia; Bundaberg, Hervey Bay and Cape York in Queensland; and the Northern Territory.

The CDC is a useful budgeting tool that supports income support payment recipients to direct their funds to essential items. The CDC also supports efforts to reduce social harm in communities by restricting access to alcohol, drugs and gambling products.

The passage of the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Act 2020* meant that the 25,000 existing Income Management participants in the Northern Territory have the choice to remain on Income Management or to transition to the CDC. This measure ensures that those who choose to remain on Income Management will continue to be supported. The measure also ensures potential participants have the information they need to choose between Income Management and the CDC.

This measure is also supporting additional investment in CDC technologies to improve the experience for participants and businesses where the CDC is used, including in regional areas.

An economic and employment support package is also being delivered across CDC sites including the regional areas of Ceduna, the East Kimberley and Goldfields regions; and the Bundaberg and Hervey Bay regions.

This package is supporting regional CDC sites by investing in services to uplift and upskill people to be job ready, and where the community is sufficiently economically advanced, create and provide employment opportunities. In addition, a data collection strategy is informing regional engagement and decision-making and measuring the impact of the CDC.

This package is also supporting regional communities in reducing social harm caused by alcohol and drug use, complementing the support provided by the CDC in reducing access to products that can cause social harm. To support CDC participants, funding is being invested over four years in drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities in these regional CDC sites.

Place Based Income Management

In 2021, the Australian Government extended Place Based Income Management in existing locations to 31 December 2023. This ensures around 2,500 financially vulnerable welfare recipients will continue to be supported in meeting essential needs across the regional and remote locations of: Greater Shepparton (Victoria); Rockhampton and Logan (Queensland); Playford and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands (South Australia); Ngaanyatjarra lands, Kiwirrkurra community, Peel and Kimberley regions (Western Australia); as well as metropolitan Bankstown (New South Wales), Adelaide and Perth.

Through this measure, Income Management participants can have access to budgeting support and income support payments.

Families and Children Activity

The Department of Social Services delivers a range of programs under the *Families and Children Activity* that seek to support families, improve the wellbeing of children and young people, strengthen relationships, and enhance family and community functioning, as well as increase the participation of vulnerable people in community life.

The Australian Government is investing more than \$395 million per year from 2022-23 under the *Families and Children Activity* for programs and services across Australia, with an extensive footprint in regional areas.

In 2020-21, of the total 3,042 outlets delivering *Family and Children Activities* nationally, 1,422 were located in regional and rural Australia, and supported 95,787 clients (37 per cent of total national clients). Those regions providing the largest number of services to clients included Rockhampton (3,952 clients), Dubbo (3,165 clients), Townsville (3,477 clients) and Albany (2,625 clients).

In an effort to provide certainty and build capability within the service sector, and ensure continuity of high-quality services to families, the Australian Government has extended a large proportion of grants under the *Families and Children Activity* for a further five years until 30 June 2026.

This significant investment of around \$1.6 billion over four years from 2022-23 will support children, families and local community organisations right across Australia, including many in regional areas. Services receiving funding extensions include:

- Family and Relationship Services, Communities for Children Facilitating Partners and Family Mental Health Support Services (to 30 June 2026)
- Budget Based Funded Services and Children and Parenting Support Services (to 30 June 2023).

Family Mental Health Support Services

The Australian Government is investing more than \$259.5 million over five years to continue Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS) to 30 June 2026, including funding \$51.8 million in 2022-23.

FMHSS are community-based mental health services that provide early intervention support for children and young people with early symptoms of mental ill-health, or who are at particular risk of developing mental illness later in life. FMHSS is currently delivered through 239 outlets across Australia. The regional and remote locations delivering FMHSS to the largest number of individual clients include the Goldfields Region in Western Australia (591), Broken Hill and Far West in New South Wales (318) and Outback North in Queensland (282).

FMHSS can be accessed by participants either on an individual basis or as part of a group session. Of the 17,261 participants accessing FMHSS on an individual basis in 2020-21, 9,200 or 53 per cent were located in regional and remote Australia.

1800RESPECT

The Australian Government has committed to ongoing funding for 1800RESPECT, Australia's counselling, support and information service for people in communities across Australia, including those in regional Australia, affected by domestic, family and sexual violence.

Services delivered by 1800RESPECT include:

- telephone and online counselling support services, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- a website with information, resources and referrals for those affected by domestic, family and sexual violence, the community and frontline workers
- mobile phone applications, which provide information on local domestic and family violence and sexual assault services, and ways for women with a disability to assess their safety with respect to domestic and family violence
- sector support through a range of online resources, such as a digital frontline workers' toolkit.

No Interest Loans for Women at Risk of Family and Domestic Violence

The Australian Government has provided \$20.1 million over four years from 1 July 2020, including \$5.1 million in 2022-23, to expand No Interest Loans for women experiencing family and domestic violence.

No Interest Loans of up to \$1,500 are offered to people on low incomes (women experiencing domestic and family violence can access up to \$2,000 for household items) as an alternative to other high-risk, high-interest products such as payday loans. No Interest Loans are provided in conjunction with financial literacy education to improve capacity and greater self-reliance.

In rural, regional and remote communities, the challenges and impacts of violence against women and children can be more complex to address. Helping women regain control of their finances is important, given it is harder to gain employment and the challenges with mobility due to lack of public transport infrastructure in regional areas.

No Interest Loans are available at over 600 locations including in regional areas such as Shepparton, Wagga Wagga, Bathurst and Port Macquarie and are delivered by around 170 local community organisations.

Volunteer Grants

In 2022-23, the Australian Government will provide \$10 million for Volunteer Grants. Volunteer Grants provides small grants of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to help not-for-profit organisations to support their volunteers through the purchase of small equipment items, the reimbursement of fuel costs or to assist with the cost of volunteer training. The funding will be equally distributed, across the 151 electorates in Australia.

Financial Wellbeing and Capability

The Australian Government is supporting people under financial stress by providing ongoing funding for Commonwealth Financial Counselling including specialist financial counselling supports and the National Debt Helpline and Microfinance services (such as no and low interest loans, matched savings and small microenterprises), at a cost of over \$150 million from 2021-22 to 2023-24. In 2022, the Australian Government committed \$2 million over three years from 2021-22 to maintain and expand the service offer of the National Debt Helpline.

This commitment is ensuring the ongoing delivery of frontline social services to vulnerable people across Australia, including individuals and families in regional areas.

In addition to existing clients, these services are supporting a new cohort of vulnerable Australians facing financial hardship and loss of income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The continuation of these measures will have positive impacts on regional Australia, through:

- supporting people who are unable to pay their bills or are at imminent risk of not being able to pay their bills, to identify options to address their financial situation
- improving financial capability by helping people gain basic budgeting skills and financial education
- assisting clients to navigate life transitions and/or financial stress or crises, which may negatively impact their wellbeing
- improving financial resilience and pathways to mainstream financial services by providing access to savings products and affordable credit products.

Digital Skills for Older Australians (Be Connected)

The Australian Government has invested a further \$28.3 million over four years to 30 June 2024, including funding of \$9.4 million in 2022-23, to make sure older Australians can continue to access the successful *Be Connected* program through the established network and online resources.

The Be Connected program helps older Australians aged over 50 keep safe online and navigate evolving technology, resulting in improved capacity to use online government platforms and other online services. It also helps isolated older Australians remain connected with family, friends and their communities.

The Be Connected network has provided personalised and small group coaching to 392,000 older Australians since the initiative was launched in 2017, with over 15,000 digital mentors supporting the program.

Approximately 57 per cent of the network of local organisations delivering Be Connected services in the community are in outer regional and remote locations.

Home Equity Access Scheme

The Pension Loans Scheme was renamed the *Home Equity Access Scheme* on 1 January 2022. This ensures all senior Australians of Age Pension age, who own real estate in Australia and meet certain residency requirements, are able to participate in the *Home Equity Access Scheme*.

In the 2021-22 MYEFO, the government provided \$2.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to improve the uptake of the Home Equity Access Scheme and reduce borrowing costs for current users by reducing the annual interest rate from 4.5 per cent to 3.95 per cent on 1 January 2022.

ABSTUDY

ABSTUDY is an ongoing program to help address educational disadvantages faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. *ABSTUDY* helps eligible Indigenous students and apprentices, many from remote areas, with study, living, and travel expenses, including if they need to study away from home. In 2021-22, *ABSTUDY* supported around 20,000 Indigenous secondary students and 10,000 Indigenous tertiary students. This includes around 4,700 Indigenous secondary students from remote areas who need to board away from home to access secondary schools.

In 2022-23, expenditure on *ABSTUDY* secondary allowances is estimated to be \$184.3 million, while *ABSTUDY* tertiary allowances will be \$133.2 million.

Emergency and Disaster Provisions

In December 2021, the Australian Government announced additional provisions to support *ABSTUDY* recipients who are living away from home to study to access Fares Allowance and other assistance if they are affected by emergency events outside their control such as natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. This additional support ensures boarding students can travel home in emergencies, and back to school when possible, and will minimise disruptions to their studies.

COVID-19 Provisions for Boarding Students

The Australian Government extended temporary COVID-19 provisions for boarding payments for Terms 1 and 2 in 2022 for *ABSTUDY* and *Assistance for Isolated Children* recipients. These provisions ensure the boarding sector can maintain continuity of education services and provide support to boarding students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as ensure students' boarding places are maintained until they are able to return to boarding.

Regional and Remote Student Access to Education

The Australian Government is addressing barriers to education for regional and remote students. Tertiary students from regional areas who need to move away from home to study benefit from 'concessional' workforce independence criteria designed to increase the participation rates of regional students in higher education. Provided their parental income is under a certain threshold, these students can be considered independent if they have:

- worked at least 15 hours each week for at least two years, or
- over a 14 month period, earned 75 per cent or more of Wage Level A of the National Training Wage Schedule.

While many regional students meet the 14-month criterion by working during their gap year, there is no requirement that the student must be employed full time for the entire 14-month period. Instead, the student must demonstrate that they have earned the required amount.

From 1 January 2019, changes to the parental income cut-off for the Youth Allowance workforce participation independence criteria has made it easier for regional students to qualify, with:

- increased threshold to \$160,000, with the threshold further increasing by \$10,000 for each additional child in the family to take into account the extra costs of raising larger families
- students have additional certainty about whether they will meet the parental income cut-off, as the year in which the parental income is assessed is now the financial year preceding the beginning of the student's '14 month self-supporting period'.

The Australian Government has provided \$25 million from 2020-21 to 2023-24, including \$1.2 million in 2022-23, to support young people whose gap year employment was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. From 1 January 2021, the six-month period between 25 March 2020 and 24 September 2020, will automatically be recognised as contributing to existing workforce independence criteria for *Youth Allowance* (student and apprentice) and *ABSTUDY*. This means young people will automatically be assumed to have earned the qualifying amount for this six-month period, unless their actual earnings were higher in which case the higher amount will be assessed. Young people will be able to use the initial six-month period as part of their claim up to 24 September 2022.

Assistance for Isolated Children

Families in isolated areas incur additional costs to educate their children. In 2021-22, the *Assistance for Isolated Children* scheme assisted around 13,000 students unable to attend an appropriate state school on a daily basis because of geographical isolation or medical or disability reasons. In 2022-23, expenditure under this program is estimated to be \$91.4 million.

In 2022, depending on the student's circumstances, the *Assistance for Isolated Children* scheme provides:

- *Basic Boarding Allowance*, \$8,856 per annum
- *Additional Boarding Allowance*, \$2,540 per annum
- *Second Home Allowance*, \$257.98 per fortnight (limited to a maximum of three students in a family)
- *Distance Education Allowance*, \$4,428 per annum.

Provision of Remote Services – continuation

The Australian Government will continue to provide people living in remote areas with access to government payments and services via telephony services, dedicated remote servicing teams, and the Agent and Access Point network.

The Australian Government's ongoing investment of \$24.9 million per year will support the continued delivery of tailored support to Australians with limited or no access to Service Centres due to geographical, connectivity, or other barriers.

During times of emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government maintains its tailored and ongoing support to individuals and community third party organisations via a dedicated telephony service staffed by remote servicing specialist staff.

Farm Household Allowance

Services Australia delivers the *Farm Household Allowance payment* (FHA) on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. FHA is a time-limited payment that can be paid for up to four cumulative years (1,460 days) in each ten-year period. FHA customers are required to complete a Farm Financial Assessment and enter into a Financial Improvement Agreement that aims to improve their financial self-reliance and the viability of their farming business.

From the commencement of the program in 2014 up until 31 December 2021, more than 16,000 customers have been granted FHA.

National Agent and Access Points Program

Australians in regional locations benefit from the Services Australia *National Agent and Access Point Program*. Agents and Access Points provide essential services to customers in locations where accessing Service Centres is difficult. As at 24 February 2022, Services Australia has 367 Agents and 216 Access Points across regional and remote locations. Access Points provide free self-help facilities for customers to access government services through a digitally focused self-service offer. This includes internet enabled computers, upload document functions (for scanning to customer records), free customer Wi-Fi, telephone, photocopying and fax facilities. At Agents and Access Points, customers can also have identity documents certified.

Agents provide the same digital self-service facilities as the Access Points as well as face-to-face customer support and assistance in digitally engaging with government. Specified personnel at an Agent site can respond to customer enquiries, provide assistance, guidance and referrals as appropriate.

Services Australia has invested in improved infrastructure and connectivity across the Agent and Access Point service delivery footprint ensuring regional and remote customers receive a consistent service offer to those in metropolitan areas.

Mobile Service Centres

Services Australia operates three Mobile Service Centres that travel to regional communities, providing information and access to Australian Government services. These fully equipped mobile offices travel across regional Australia to communities located more than 50 kilometres from a Service Centre.

Mobile Service Centres are also an important part of Services Australia's emergency response service delivery capability, and were utilised as part of the January/February 2020 bushfire response efforts in New South Wales and Victoria and during the 2021 bushfires in Western Australia. All three Mobile Service Centres were deployed in March 2021 to deliver services to affected communities during the New South Wales floods. All three Mobile Service Centres have also been deployed to deliver services to communities in South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales that were impacted by flooding in early 2022.

Regional Citizenship Testing

Services Australia delivers citizenship tests in regional locations on behalf of the Department of Home Affairs. Each week, about 690 tests take place in 40 Service Centres in regional areas across Australia, from Kalgoorlie in Western Australia to Mackay in Queensland. Previously, the Department of Home Affairs staff visited regional centres to conduct tests, usually on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

National Indigenous Coalition

The National Indigenous Coalition (NIC) is Services Australia's peak strategic and advisory forum on the effective delivery of payments and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Where payments and services have a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers or staff the NIC is consulted to provide Indigenous insight and perspectives to improve and support better outcomes, including in regional and remote areas.

Online Servicing

Services Australia's website (servicesaustralia.gov.au) is a convenient way for regional and remote Australians to access information and conduct their government business online. In 2020-21, the website received 281 million web page views. The Payment and Service Finder tool, available on Services Australia's website, helps people identify payments and services relevant to them.

In 2021-22, a large proportion of transactions will be completed online or via the Express Plus mobile apps. This is particularly valuable for Australians in regional and remote Australia, as they can conduct many of their transactions with Services Australia online at a time and place convenient to them. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, Services Australia saw an ongoing higher than usual surge in demand for online, contactless support. To help keep our customers and staff safe, Services Australia has focused on ensuring online access for new customers so that they can complete claims for emergency assistance without having to visit a Service Centre. In particular, new online claims for the Australian Government *Disaster Recovery Payment and Disaster Recovery Allowance* emergency payments were deployed for use in response to multiple flooding events in 2021 and 2022.

A range of Centrelink payments can be claimed online, with customers able to take advantage of a streamlined process that uses dynamic questioning to ensure that only necessary questions are asked. Over 95 per cent of Youth Allowance claims for students are now lodged online.

Services Australia also assists regional and remote Child Support customers to undertake several self-service activities online. The enhanced Child Support Online system enables customers to view payment details, securely provide documents via the Upload documents service, and advise or update their details and those of their authorised representatives.

A range of Medicare Services are also available online including submitting claims, updating personal information (including bank account details), viewing immunisation history statements and viewing digital copies of a Medicare card. This allows customers to access these services without having to visit a Service Centre.

myGov and Digital Identity

myGov is the Australian Government's largest government digital platform, allowing users to securely access government services online through a central portal. As at 28 February 2022, myGov is supporting over 24.6 million accounts to connect to 15 government services and is the primary entry point to government services for many people, including people in regional and remote areas. For these people the ability to access multiple government services online is a convenient way to do business and update their details, minimising the need to travel to regional Service Centres or to deal with multiple government agencies.

myGov also offers a digital inbox allowing connected services to send electronic mail to users, which is a convenient way for regional and remote users to receive information securely from government.

As part of the Digital Economy Strategy, the Australian Government is investing \$200.1 million dollars to deliver an enhanced myGov platform.

myGov is now integrated with the Australian Government's Digital Identity System. People have the option of linking their myGovID digital identity to their myGov account and using their digital identity to sign into myGov.

Digital identity provides an option for myGov users to apply two-factor authentication for signing into myGov. Signing into a myGov account using a digital identity provides people an alternative to SMS-based two-factor authentication. This is particularly useful for customers travelling overseas or in regional or remote areas where mobile phone access or mobile coverage is limited.

myGov App

Services Australia is developing a myGov app. This app will be free to download and available via the App Store and Google Play. The first public release of the myGov app is scheduled for mid-2022.

The myGov app will allow customers to use rapid access methods, such as Face ID and Touch ID. This will provide access to a range of Medicare, Centrelink and Child Support payments and services via a single app.

myGov Code Generator App

The myGov Code Generator App (formally called the myGov Access App) is a smart device App (offered via the App Store and Google Play). The myGov Code Generator App is currently another option for myGov users who choose to apply two-factor authentication for signing into myGov. Similar to Digital Identity, this feature provides an alternative to SMS-based two-factor authentication, which is particularly useful for customers travelling overseas or in regional or remote areas where mobile phone access or mobile coverage is limited.

Express Plus Apps

Services Australia's Express Plus mobile apps for Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support services, which can be downloaded free onto mobile phones and tablets, continue to be a popular and convenient way for people to transact digitally with Services Australia without the need to travel to a Service Centre or telephone Services Australia particularly benefiting those in regional and remote areas. Using mobile apps, customers can upload documents, report employment income to Centrelink, claim Medicare benefits, view Child Support account balances and access a range of other services. Services Australia's apps are due to be replaced by the new myGov app, with transactions being transitioned throughout the course of 2022-23.

Digital Assistants

Finding clear, relevant and easily located online help is particularly important to Australians in rural and remote locations. Services Australia currently offers Digital Assistants to help customers to find information and to use our online services at any time of the day or night:

- The Services Australia website allows people to ask general questions about a range of payments and services.
- The Centrelink online account digital assistant helps customers with a range of online claims and services specific to their circumstances.
- The Express Plus Centrelink mobile app digital assistant provides help ‘on the go’.

Together, the Services Australia Digital Assistants provide help to students, job seekers, families, parents, carers, people with disability, older Australians and people in emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters. The Services Australia website digital assistant also provides support for Medicare and Child Support customers.

The Services Australia website and Centrelink online claims digital assistants have answered more than 13 million customer questions since March 2017. The Express Plus Centrelink mobile app was released in late 2018 and has since responded to 10.8 million questions.

The questions and answers provided by these Digital Assistants are regularly reviewed and refined to align with customer needs and any peaks in customer demand. This ongoing refresh of content ensures we continue to improve a customer’s digital experience.

Additionally, the myGov Digital Assistant was released in October 2018, providing targeted assistance to citizens using myGov. The service is available 24 hours a day and seven days a week, improving access for all Australians, including in regional and remote areas. Since its release, it has answered 16.9 million questions. This will enable staff to assist customers who need greater support with more complex queries.

Electronic Claiming of Medicare Benefits

Electronic claiming from point-of-service is the most convenient way for people to lodge claims for Medicare benefits. The Australian Government is actively working with medical practitioners, software vendors, financial institutions, health insurers and members of the public to increase the availability and use of electronic Medicare claims, including in regional and remote areas. In the period from 1 July 2021 to 31 January 2022, 99.7 per cent of Medicare services were lodged digitally at the point of service.

Treasury

Treasury's role is to support and implement informed decisions on policies for the good of the Australian people, consistent with achieving strong, sustainable economic growth and fiscal settings.

The Treasury has offices in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. It undertakes regional engagement, including through visiting the regions, to deepen its understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing regional economies.

There are a number of entities in the portfolio that are nationally dispersed, such as the Australian Taxation Office and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Office locations for these entities include Albury, Burnie, Geelong, Gosford, and Townsville. The ABS also hosts the National Data Acquisition Centre in Geelong and maintains a field interviewer workforce of approximately 500 people located in communities across Australia.

The ABS produces a range of data about Australia's regions through the Census of Population and Housing, and other household and business collections. Much of this data is available through its regional data portal (Data by Region). Recently, the ABS has expanded the range of regional statistics in response to the need for information to support regional recovery from recent events including bushfires and COVID-19. These statistics include detailed regional data on housing, health and disability. The 2021 Census will provide detailed regional data, including at small area level, from the first release in June 2022.

As at 31 December 2021, the Treasury Portfolio employed 27,186 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 10,773 staff (40 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 13,340 staff (49 per cent) in other capital cities and 3,073 staff (11 per cent) in regional areas.

Further details are provided in the Treasury Portfolio Budget Statements.

New Initiatives

Regional Home Guarantee

The government recognises that homeownership is important to the economic and social wellbeing of Australians. That is why the government is expanding the Home Guarantee Scheme to introduce a *Regional Home Guarantee*, providing up to 10,000 places each financial year from 2022-23 to 2024-25 to support aspiring homebuyers in regional areas to purchase or construct a new home sooner. Places under the *Regional Home Guarantee* will be made available to eligible homebuyers with a minimum 5 per cent deposit. This is in addition to an expansion of the First Home Loan Deposit Scheme (to be renamed the *First Home Guarantee*) to 35,000 places and the *Family Home Guarantee* to 5,000 places per year.

Supporting the Delivery of More Affordable housing

Since its establishment in 2018, the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) has supported more than 15,000 new and existing affordable dwellings through the provision of low-cost loans to Community Housing Providers. During the 2020-21 financial year, NHFIC provided loans to support the development of affordable housing projects in regional towns across Australia, including Port Augusta, Port Macquarie and Geelong.

In support of the provision of more social and affordable housing and the government's response to the recommendations of the Statutory Review of the Operation of the *National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Act 2018*, in the 2021-22 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* (MYEFO) the government increased NHFIC's liability cap from \$3 billion to \$3.5 billion. To build on this commitment, the government is increasing NHFIC's liability cap by an additional \$2 billion to \$5.5 billion. This increase in NHFIC's lending capacity is expected to support around 10,000 more social and affordable dwellings for vulnerable Australians, including those in regional areas.

Expanding the Patent Box to the Agricultural Sector

To support practical, technology-focussed solutions in the agricultural sector the government is encouraging additional investment in Australian innovations by extending the recently developed patent box regime to certain activities in the agriculture sector.

The expanded Australian patent box will tax eligible income derived from new plant breeder's rights and agricultural and veterinary chemical patents at a concessional corporate tax rate of 17 per cent. This will encourage businesses to undertake their research and development in Australia and to retain profits associated with these innovations here. This initiative will also help to ensure that products are developed and commercialised in Australia to meet the needs of Australian farmers.

The government will consult with industry before settling the detailed design and administration of this patent box extension. This measure is estimated to decrease the underlying cash balance by \$23.4 million over the forward estimates period. Further information on this measure is available in the 2022-23 *Budget Paper No. 2*.

Expanding the Patent Box to the Low Emissions Technology Sector

The Australian Government is committed to a technology-led approach to reducing emissions while growing our economy. To support the development and innovation of Australian technologies aimed at reducing emissions, the government will also extend the recently developed patent box to the low emissions technology (LET) sector.

The expanded Australian patent box will tax eligible income derived from new LET patents at a concessional corporate tax rate of 17 per cent. This will encourage businesses to undertake their research and development in Australia, and to retain patent-associated profits here.

This initiative will help to accelerate the development and commercialisation of new and emerging LETs, such as clean hydrogen, low emissions materials and ultra low-cost solar. It will also encourage businesses to invest in Australian technologies and help achieve the government's goal of net zero emissions by 2050.

The government will consult with industry before settling the detailed design and administration of this patent box extension. This measure is estimated to decrease the underlying cash balance by \$96.2 million over the forward estimates period. Further information on this measure is available in the *2022-23 Budget Paper No. 2*.

Providing concessional tax treatment to primary producers on carbon abatement and biodiversity stewardship income

The government is encouraging primary producers to undertake carbon abatement and biodiversity stewardship activities on their land, helping Australia deliver net zero by 2050, and supporting primary producers to diversify their sources of income.

From 1 July 2022, eligible primary producers will be able to treat the proceeds from the sale of Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) and Biodiversity Certificates generated from their primary production land as primary production income for the purposes of the Farm Management Deposit scheme and tax averaging.

The taxing point for ACCUs and proposed Biodiversity Certificates held by eligible primary producers will also be set to the year of sale, instead of being taxed based on changes in the value of credits each year.

This measure is estimated to decrease receipts by \$100 million over four years from 2022-23. Further information on this measure is available in the *2022-23 Budget Paper No. 2*.

Enhancing the framework for transparent fundraising and reporting during natural disasters

The government is providing \$0.1 million in grant funding to Fundraising Institute of Australia (FIA) in 2022-23 to enhance its framework for natural disaster fundraising and reporting and extend coverage to non-member charities. The enhanced framework will support the recovery of regional communities impacted by natural disasters by helping charities to show donors and the wider public how donations are funding critical activities, and building public understanding of the recovery process. Strong public trust will encourage donations, supporting charities providing crucial services to recovering regional communities.

Specifically listing Community Foundations as deductible gift recipients

The government is making it easier for Community Foundations to access donations, by granting them deductible gift recipient (DGR) status through specific listing. Up to 28 entities related to community foundations affiliated with the peak body Community Foundations Australia will be listed, and most of these organisations operate in regional areas. Entities will be listed if their governing rules reflect the DGR categories in the relevant tax law, and they can demonstrate that they will maintain minimum annual distributions.

Taxpayers may claim an income tax deduction for donations of \$2 or more to DGRs, so DGR status will help Community Foundations attract donations. This helps foundations to give back to their communities through support for bushfire and flood recovery, COVID-19 assistance, and funding for mental health initiatives, domestic violence support, extracurricular education for students, and community arts events.

Current Initiatives

Home Guarantee Scheme

Since commencement, the government's Home Guarantee Scheme – comprising the *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme*, the *New Home Guarantee* and the *Family Home Guarantee* – has enabled almost 60,000 first homebuyers and single parents with dependants to enter the housing market sooner.

The *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme* commenced on 1 January 2020 and provides up to 10,000 guarantees per financial year, enabling first home buyers to purchase a modest home sooner. The *New Home Guarantee* made available up to 10,000 places per year in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 financial years for eligible first home buyers building or purchasing new homes. The *Family Home Guarantee* support eligible single parents with dependants to enter the housing market sooner with a deposit of as little as two per cent.

Of the guarantees issued to 31 December 2021 across the *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme*, the *New Home Guarantee* and the *Family Home Guarantee*, more than one-third have supported those purchasing or constructing a home in regional areas.

Cyclone and Related Flooding Reinsurance Pool – Implementation

The government has introduced legislation to establish a reinsurance pool for cyclones and related flood damage to improve the accessibility and affordability of home and business insurance in cyclone-prone areas. The reinsurance pool will be backed by a \$10 billion government guarantee and be administered by the Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation from 1 July 2022.

Over 880,000 residential, strata and small business property insurance policies in northern Australia are expected to be eligible to be covered by the reinsurance pool for the risk of cyclone and related flood damage.

The pool is expected to reduce insurance premiums by up to \$2.9 billion for eligible household, strata and small business insurance policies over 10 years. In addition, the government is providing \$18.6 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the implementation and oversight of the pool and to monitor premiums and savings that are passed on to policy holders. Funding includes:

- \$15.4 million over four years from 2021-22 for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to prepare and conduct a price monitoring role in relation to the insurance industry, with a focus on evaluating the impact of the cyclone reinsurance pool and whether the savings from the reinsurance pool are being passed through to policyholders
- \$3.2 million over four years from 2021-22 for the Treasury to establish, oversee and evaluate the pool.

Aligning the Excise Refund Scheme for brewers and distillers with the producer rebate for wine producers

As part of the 2021-22 Budget, the government increased the available support to brewers and distillers by aligning the benefit available under the *Excise Refund Scheme* for alcohol manufacturers (the Scheme) with the *Wine Equalisation Tax Producer Rebate*.

Eligible brewers and distillers now receive a full remission (up from 60 per cent) of any excise paid, up to a cap of \$350,000 (increased from \$100,000).

The changes to the Scheme are providing additional support to small distillers and brewers affected by COVID-19; assisting the growth of Australia's craft brewing and distilling industry; and reducing inconsistencies in support arrangements for alcohol producers.

The Scheme built on the 2020-21 MYEFO measure titled *Alcohol Taxation – automatic remission of excise duty for alcohol manufacturers* which introduced an automatic remission of alcohol manufacturers' excise refund entitlements. The Scheme reduces participants' administrative burdens and increases the financial benefit they are entitled to receive.

Of the approximately 600 brewers and 400 distillers in Australia currently, around two-thirds operate outside major cities. Additional support to largely regionally-based distillers and brewers across the country is serving as much needed relief for those severely impacted by COVID-19 and will assist in growing and developing Australia's alcohol manufacturing sector.

Temporary full expensing and temporary loss carry-back

JobMaker Plan – temporary full expensing to support investment and jobs

In the 2020-21 Budget, the government introduced a time-limited investment incentive that allows eligible businesses to fully expense the cost of eligible depreciating assets. This lowers the after-tax cost of business investment and encourages businesses to bring forward, rather than delay, capital expenditure.

To be eligible for temporary full expensing, businesses must:

- have an aggregate annual turnover of less than \$5 billion, or be a corporate tax entity that meets the alternative income test requirements
- purchase eligible depreciating assets from 7:30pm (AEDT) on 6 October 2020 and first use or install the assets by 30 June 2023. The cost of improvements to existing eligible depreciable assets made during this period can also be deducted in full, as long as those improvements are first used or installed by 30 June 2023.

Businesses with an aggregate annual turnover of less than \$50 million may also fully expense the purchase of eligible second-hand depreciating assets.

JobMaker Plan – temporary loss carry-back to support cash flow

In the 2020-21 Budget, the government also introduced a time-limited cash flow support measure that allows companies with annual turnover less than \$5 billion to offset tax losses against previously taxed profits derived in 2018-19 or later income years, generating a tax refund in the loss year.

Temporary loss carry-back complements temporary full expensing in supporting cash flow and encourages eligible companies, including in regional areas, to invest by providing them with earlier access to refundable tax offsets generated by deductions under the *JobMaker Plan – temporary full expensing to support investment and jobs* measure.

To be eligible to carry back losses, the company must satisfy several conditions, including:

- having an aggregated turnover less than \$5 billion
- incurring a tax loss in the 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22 or 2022-23 income year
- having sufficient franking credits so as not to generate a franking account deficit.

The measures *JobMaker Plan – temporary full expensing to support investment and jobs* and *JobMaker Plan – temporary loss carry-back to support cash flow* were both extended in the 2021-22 Budget.

JobMaker Hiring Credit

The Australian Government continues to support both businesses and young job-seekers through the *JobMaker Hiring Credit*, including those in regional areas. The *JobMaker Hiring Credit* supported growth in employment during the COVID-19 recovery by giving businesses incentives to take on young job-seekers.

The Hiring Credit scheme began on 7 October 2020 and eligible employers can continue to claim for their newly hired eligible employees who joined the scheme prior to 7 October 2021, with support under the scheme continuing until October 2022. Employers receive \$200 per week if they hired an eligible employee aged 16 to 29 years, or \$100 per week if they hired an eligible employee aged 30 to 35 years, for up to 12 months, provided they continue to meet all the eligibility requirements.

The *JobMaker Hiring Credit* has helped unemployed young people in regional areas access job opportunities and rebuild their connection to the labour force as the economy recovers.

Veterans' Affairs

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) has supported veterans and their families for more than a century, empowering them to continue life after service within a society that understands their commitment and values their ongoing contribution to the community.

Many of the veterans and families that DVA supports are located in regional, rural and remote communities.

DVA also has offices in regional centres around Australia and DVA staff are co-located with Services Australia in a number of regional offices.

DVA and the Department of Defence also work together to support Australian Defence Force members to access their DVA entitlements. This includes DVA Veteran Support Officers working from major Defence bases and routinely visiting small Defence bases in a hub and spoke model of service delivery that extends to rural and remote locations across Australia.

As at 31 December 2021, the Veterans' Affairs Portfolio, which includes the Australian War Memorial, employed 2,409 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 1,511 staff (63 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 847 staff (35 per cent) in other capital cities and 51 staff (2 per cent) in regional areas.

New Initiatives

Wellbeing Centre Network Expansion

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$50 million to further expand the network of Veteran Wellbeing Centres across Australia in partnership with ex-service organisations and state and territory governments.

The existing Wellbeing Centre Network is comprised of six operating centres operating in Darwin, Townsville, Perth, Nowra, Wodonga and Adelaide, with funding provided in the 2021-22 Budget to expand the network to Tasmania and South East Queensland.

Sustaining a Care and Support Workforce for the Veterans' Community

The Australian Government is supporting veterans to maintain access to the services and support they need to remain independent in their home longer, through additional funding to support the viability of Veteran Home Care providers. The 2022-23 Budget is providing \$70.5 million over four years to temporarily increase the base rate fee by a rate of \$0.80 per kilometre of distance travelled between clients for 157 Veteran Home Care service providers. This will improve the delivery of domestic assistance and personal care services to over 37,000 Veteran Home Care clients.

Current Initiatives

Veteran Wellbeing Centre Network, Including Expansion to Tasmania and South-East Queensland

In 2019–20, the Australian Government committed \$30 million over three years to establish a national network of six Veteran Wellbeing Centres in regional locations: Townsville, Perth, Darwin, Nowra, Adelaide and Wodonga. The program delivers integrated support to veterans and their families from all levels of government, business and community partnerships. The Centres will help connect veterans and their families to a range of services including support for transition, employment, health and social connection.

The 2021–22 Budget included an additional \$10.7 million over four years from 2021–22 to expand the national network into Tasmania and South-East Queensland. Service delivery supported by this funding is expected to begin from the 2022–23 financial year.

Non-Liability Rehabilitation Pilot

The government invested \$2.3 million to conduct a two-year pilot which commenced on 1 January 2022. The aim is to raise awareness of the benefits of early engagement with rehabilitation and encourage voluntary participation. A post-implementation evaluation will gather information to inform future initiatives on removing barriers to veterans accessing rehabilitation, including any findings on the quality and accessibility of metropolitan and regional services.

Expanded Family Support Package

This initiative provides simpler access to a greater range of support for more veterans' families. Subject to the passage of the Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment (Enhanced Family Support) Bill 2022, from 1 July 2022, eligibility will be extended beyond families and widowed partners of veterans covered by the current legislation and will include veterans at risk of crisis and widowed partners. It no longer ties eligibility to a veteran's type of service, nor the participation in rehabilitation, and includes the families of recipients of the veteran payment.

Around two in five DVA clients reside in regional or remote Australia (December 2021 Regional Profiles Database). This initiative enables more families in these locations to access existing services in their region, which will have a positive impact particularly in areas of high veteran population.

Care Workforce Fee Increase

The Australian Government is continuing to improve access to health services by supporting occupational therapists and podiatrists, including those in regional and remote locations, with increased fees for the services they provide to veterans. This

initiative, which also includes a comprehensive review of the veterans' care and support sector, is aimed at ensuring sustainable access to DVA funded services and strengthening the viability of businesses operating under DVA arrangements.

This fee increase is expected to positively impact more than 50,000 DVA card holders and 1,600 occupational therapists and podiatrists who live and work in regional or remote locations. The review element of this measure will also develop recommendations to streamline veterans' care and support arrangements and address many of the non-price factors that may impede business viability, particularly those factors that disproportionately impact regional providers.

Expansion of Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling

The two additional Open Arms Community Engagement Teams provided for under this initiative are now delivering services, increasing the lived experience peer support and case management services available to veterans and their families. The new teams are operating in Maryborough, Queensland and Nowra, New South Wales, significantly increasing the regional reach of the *Open Arms Community and Peer Program*. The \$3.4 million funding for this initiative is delivered as part of the \$5 million provided over four years from 2020-21 to expand and evaluate existing mental health and suicide prevention services delivered by Open Arms, including increased community and peer support in regional Australia.

Community engagement and peer support services will be further expanded via the introduction of national web-based forums for vulnerable veterans with specific needs. The \$1.1 million initiative will improve accessibility of care and has the potential to support up to 4,000 veterans and their families in rural and remote areas or whose experiences might lead to social isolation.

The remaining \$0.5 million has procured an epidemiologist-led evaluation team to develop and implement an Outcomes Monitoring Framework to monitor, assess and improve Open Arms service delivery.

