

Regional Ministerial Budget Statement 2020-21

Growing a Strong and Resilient Regional Australia

Statement by

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Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

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# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>AGRICULTURE, WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT .....</b>	<b>6</b>
New initiatives .....	7
<b>ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S .....</b>	<b>28</b>
New initiatives .....	30
<b>DEFENCE.....</b>	<b>36</b>
New initiatives .....	39
<b>EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT .....</b>	<b>50</b>
New initiatives .....	50
<b>FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE .....</b>	<b>64</b>
New initiatives .....	65
<b>HEALTH.....</b>	<b>71</b>
New initiatives .....	72
<b>HOME AFFAIRS .....</b>	<b>91</b>
New initiatives .....	91
<b>INDUSTRY, SCIENCE, ENERGY AND RESOURCES .....</b>	<b>94</b>
New Initiatives .....	96
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS .....</b>	<b>123</b>
New initiatives .....	125
<b>PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET .....</b>	<b>152</b>
New initiatives .....	153
<b>SOCIAL SERVICES.....</b>	<b>159</b>
New initiatives .....	161
<b>TREASURY.....</b>	<b>176</b>
New initiatives .....	176
<b>VETERANS' AFFAIRS .....</b>	<b>181</b>
New initiatives .....	183

## FOREWORD

Australia's regions – despite all that's been thrown at them, are not only still standing, but are on the cusp of a great future.

With the right policy settings and under the right conditions, country, coastal, rural regional and remote Australia can only forge ahead.

Our vast regions, home to one in three Australians who choose to live outside the capital cities, have proven relatively safe and secure through the COVID-19 global pandemic. Case rates have been extremely low or non-existent in regional Australia through the crisis. Our agriculture and resources sectors have continued to not just survive but indeed thrive, as so many other sectors faltered due to the virus. Our mining sector, which produces 8.5 per cent of our domestic product, grew by 12.6 per cent over the 12 months to June 2020. Similarly, agricultural output increased by \$1 billion to a \$61 billion industry in the year, in spite of everything which befell farming, including the devastating drought.

The 2019-20 year has been one of the most difficult ever experienced by Australians. Our country has been hit by a sequence of major challenges which, in combination, have severely affected all of us, and perhaps especially some of our regions. This has not been a year of business as usual.

Starting with widespread drought conditions building up over an extended period, affecting agricultural production and our associated communities and businesses, many regions of the country then also experienced a bushfire season of an unprecedented intensity. The wide-ranging bushfires shattered communities and destroyed infrastructure in several states and territories. Elsewhere, there were devastating floods. And, from early 2020, the whole Australian community has been living through, and living with, the COVID-19 pandemic. We have had to manage both the health impacts and the consequential economic effects as extraordinary economic and social constraints have had to be imposed.

Meeting these challenges has required strong responses and many new interventions from Australian governments at every level. At the same time, as Australians would expect, the normal range of ongoing Government support for our Australian way of life in such key areas as education, health, social services and infrastructure provision have been continued.

The public is to be commended for the way it has, by and large, done what has been asked by the health experts. This is why our medical and economic outcomes have been among the very best in the world. If COVID has proven one thing, it is that with the proper connectivity you can work from anywhere, just as well as being in a Melbourne or Sydney CBD office high rise.

This 2020-21 *Regional Ministerial Budget Statement* details the more than 350 major new packages and individual measures which the Australian Government is delivering to respond to the challenges of drought, bushfires and floods and COVID-19 from late 2019 onwards, and the measures in Budget 2020-21 which are designed to strengthen regional communities and assist them to recover and grow their economies.

Working through the expanded National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency in the Prime Minister's Portfolio and through the Agriculture Portfolio, the Government has committed more than \$10 billion since 2018-19 to measures to assist farmers, regional businesses and communities experiencing drought, and to the implementation of a *National Drought Agreement and the Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan*. In July 2020, the Government announced the \$5 billion *Future Drought Fund*, to provide secure and continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives and help Australian farms and farming communities to prepare for the impacts of drought. To assist with recovery efforts the Government has established a local Regional Recovery Officer network, recruited from and based in regional communities across Australia, to work closely with communities in planning and natural disaster preparedness. In addition, also in July 2020, the Government provided a further \$2 billion in loan funding to the Regional Investment Corporation, doubling the availability of farm and small business loan funds to a total of \$4 billion for the 2020-21 financial year.

Complementing and collaborating with the drought and flood agency, a new National Bushfire Recovery Agency was set up on 6 January 2020 to lead and co-ordinate a national response to the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20, including the administration of a new *National Bushfire Recovery Fund* to assist recovery efforts across the country. The Fund was provided with an initial \$2 billion for its work to help primary producers, small businesses and communities with projects for the protection and recovery of the environment, native wildlife and community infrastructure such as tourism facilities. In May 2020, the Government announced further measures for bushfire recovery including placing recovery support officers in bushfire-affected communities to provide day-to-day advice on available support measures.

Further information about these agencies and specific initiatives which are being implemented under drought, flood and bushfire response packages right across Australian Government agencies is available in the chapters for the Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio, the Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio, the Health Portfolio, the Treasury Portfolio and the Social Services Portfolio.

From early 2020, as Australia began to experience cases of COVID-19, it became clear that there needed to be restrictions applied to normal working and living conditions to control the spread of the virus. As a response to the economic impacts of social distancing and other risk mitigation measures which have had to be applied to prevent or limit the spread of the virus, the Australian Government has been implementing unprecedented measures to support individuals and businesses and to keep the fundamental structure and capacity of the economy operating. These include the

economic support payments provided through the JobKeeper and the JobSeeker programs to all eligible Australians wherever they live and work.

In addition, commencing in March 2020, the Government has provided targeted support for regional communities and regional industries under the \$1 billion *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* administered by my Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.

This Fund provides support for a range of initiatives for regions, communities and industry sectors which have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 including regional aviation, regional arts and culture, fisheries, agricultural exports, forestry and major tourism sites. More details about the *Relief and Recovery Fund* and other COVID-19 responses which will assist regional and remote Australians, such as the \$250 million COVID-19 Creative Economy JobMaker package, can be found in the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications Portfolio chapter of this Statement.

The Australian Government's health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic also include funding to health services targeted at regional and remote communities. As the demographic profile of regional areas includes a larger proportion of older Australians, and of vulnerable Indigenous Australians, support for primary health services, hospitals and ageing and aged care and mental health has been significantly boosted.

Amongst many additional measures in the Health Portfolio responding to COVID-19, additional block funding has been allocated to states and territories to ensure the availability of services to rural and regional communities in small, rural and regional hospitals and a nation-wide network of 150 General Practitioner-led Respiratory Clinics – including 83 in rural and remote areas – has been established since March 2020 to provide dedicated testing and assessment services to people with mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms. Assistance is being provided to remote communities for community preparedness in case of exposure to COVID-19 and a special point of care testing program for 86 rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria is being established.

Further, and in addition to measures responding to the unprecedented challenges of 2019-20, the Government is increasing funding to many other initiatives of economic benefit for regional communities.

In the Agriculture, Water and Environment Portfolio, the Government is providing \$234 million for a package of measures to achieve a sustainable and certain future for the Murray-Darling Basin, its people, industries and environment. We are investing in our Commonwealth National Parks, injecting \$233.3 million over three years from 2020-21 to allow upgrades to critical tourism infrastructure. We are also committing \$11.6 million from 2020-21 to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to assist the Authority to continue its work of managing the Reef environment while also assisting

local businesses which have been significantly affected by the loss of tourism revenue due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions. Further, the Government has announced a *National Waste Policy Action Plan* with \$35 million to support particularly regional and remote communities to have access to waste management and processing facilities and assist in phasing out problematic waste materials.

Within the Industry, Science, Energy and Resources Portfolio, the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility — a major initiative under the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* — is a \$5 billion lending facility to provide finance to infrastructure projects in Northern Australia. The Government has announced it will extend the period in which the Facility can make investment decisions by five years from 30 June 2021 to 30 June 2026.

Within my own Portfolio, large investments are continuing to be made in planned major infrastructure projects directly benefiting regional communities and to existing programs for those communities. The Government is providing new major investments in transport infrastructure which bring the Government's investment in transport infrastructure to a record \$110 billion over 10 years. Funding for transport infrastructure is being targeted at priority shovel-ready projects and these are complemented by \$1.5 billion to fund local priority projects through the *Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program*.

These investments will support employment and business opportunities in regional Australia, helping our regions to recover from the pandemic and providing lasting benefits through safer roads and community facilities.

The Regional Airlines Network Assistance Program under the *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* has been particularly critical in maintaining our aviation links around regional Australia, complementing the International Freight Assistance Mechanism, also under the Fund, which has been central to keeping exports flowing from Australia's regions to market.

We are also investing in significant upgrades and improvements to communications infrastructure through the National Broadband Network, through a new \$37.1 million Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters package and an additional \$30.3 million to the Regional Connectivity Program.

For water infrastructure, the Government will develop a rolling 10-year investment schedule and provide an additional \$2 billion in grant funding for the *National Water Infrastructure Development Fund*.

Under our *Local Government Financial Assistance Grant* program, 50 per cent of the 2020-21 payments was brought forward into the 2019-20 year, providing a cash injection of more than \$1.3 billion to give councils vital support to assist with the combined impacts of drought, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government is also further supporting regional communities to implement their own local projects under



our regional assistance programs. The Government is providing an additional \$200 million for the fifth round of the *Building Better Regions Fund*, of which \$100 million will be targeting regional tourism projects, and \$22.7 million for the sixth round of the Stronger Communities Programme.

My Portfolio is also leading the Government's decentralisation agenda, which has been focused on moving Australian public service agencies and staff closer to the communities they serve, as a first step. As at June 2020, there were 150,474 staff across all agencies employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*, of which 22,294 were in locations outside Australia's capital cities. While not employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*, many other important government agencies, such as Australia Post and Medicare, also have offices and staff located in regional areas. The decentralisation agenda aims to encourage the relocation of both private and public sector entities to regional Australia, offering regional communities new opportunities for employment and growth.

**The Honourable Michael McCormack MP**  
**Deputy Prime Minister**  
**Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development**

## **AGRICULTURE, WATER AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

The Agriculture, Water and Environment Portfolio (the Portfolio) consists of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the Department) and 13 Portfolio bodies. The Department supports delivery of the Australian Government's policy agenda across the important and interrelated areas of agriculture, the environment and heritage, and water resources. These functions are critical to the prosperity and quality of life that Australians currently enjoy, especially in regional areas.

The purpose of the Portfolio is partnering and regulating to enhance Australia's agriculture, unique environment and heritage, and water resources. The Portfolio has a diverse role as a policy adviser, researcher, program administrator and regulator. Our work contributes to increasing, improving and maintaining market access for our primary producers, encouraging agricultural productivity in our primary industries, and supporting sustainable resource management, our environment and unique heritage.

Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry are multi-billion dollar industries that benefit from our regulation, research, policies and programs to improve their productivity, competitiveness and sustainability. The events of the past year have tested resilience in the regions. The Government has responded with support and new initiatives to drive recovery for communities affected by drought, bushfire and the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are working in partnership with industry to lift the value of Australia's agricultural production to \$100 billion by 2030 by continuing to grow our trade opportunities, improving regulation and regulatory processes, and supporting agricultural science. A priority for the Portfolio is busting congestion in our export systems, improving traceability, reducing the time it takes exporters to get their produce into high-value overseas markets and supporting growth and jobs in export industries.

The Portfolio manages biosecurity risks to the environment and to human, animal and plant health by ensuring the safe movement of people, vessels, aircraft and goods into Australia. Working with states and territories, and industry, we support Australia's ability to anticipate, prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from pest and disease incursions.

Our environment also faces a range of threats and challenges from catastrophic events such as the Black Summer bushfires. Effective environmental management, including through our Commonwealth National Parks, Australian Marine Parks and World Heritage Areas, helps to protect the country's most iconic natural destinations, Indigenous culture, unique ecosystem and biodiversity. Climate science and adaptation will be critical in building the nation's environmental resilience, with major initiatives

to continue to support climate and emergency risk management in all sectors of the Australian economy.

Water is critical to the future of agriculture and the wellbeing of the environment and our communities. We work to improve the health of rivers and freshwater systems, to ensure the sustainable, efficient and productive management and use of water resources. We lead the Australian Government's contribution to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and support regional economies and the environment through large-scale investment to improve returns to irrigators and the community, while providing water for the environment. The 2020–21 Budget delivers a package of reforms to bring communities back to the centre of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and improve compliance in the Basin.

The Portfolio has a presence across Australia, our external territories and Antarctica, employing a diverse staff of 9,651 under the *Public Service Act 1999* as of 30 June 2020. We work across 182 locations; 4,159 staff are employed in Canberra (43%), 1,168 in Sydney and Melbourne, 3,048 in all other capitals and 1,276 in regional areas and overseas.

Several Portfolio bodies employ staff under their own legislation and most have staff in locations outside the capital cities. The Portfolio's footprint includes offices in locations such as Mildura, Armidale, Orange, Hobart, Townsville, Darwin and Kakadu, ensuring staff are close to the sites, communities and industries that they serve.

## **New initiatives**

### **Busting Congestion for Agricultural Exporters**

The Australian Government has agreed to a suite of reforms to accelerate trade growth as agriculture recovers from drought, bushfires and COVID-19. These reforms will modernise the 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, will reform export systems and regulation and contribute to the goal of \$100 billion in farmgate production by 2030. The package includes:

- \$222.2 million for *Digital Services to Take Farmers to Markets*, which will modernise Australia's agricultural export systems by moving our systems online and providing a single portal for transactions between exporters and Government, streamlining processes for industry.
- \$14.3 million for improving regulation, including the *Targeted Interventions for Seafood and Live Animal Exporters* measure, which will build an exporters' capacity to explore market opportunities through the creation of dedicated case managers to assist new and existing exporters to expand their markets.

- \$10.9 million for *Building a More Competitive Export Meat Industry* to reform the export meat regulatory system by targeting higher-risk export processes and/or exporters and introducing flexible assurance methods aimed at reducing costs.
- \$10 million for *Harmonised and Streamlined Plant Export Regulation* 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.
- \$71.1 million over three years from 2020–21 to make the essential export regulatory services that the Government provides more efficient and sustainable. This initiative will lock in savings of at least \$21 million annually for exporters.

The package will generate wider benefits for industry of at least \$236 million over the decade. Rural and regional Australia will reap the largest benefits from this Budget measure. Building a stronger agricultural sector benefits all Australians, especially those in rural and regional areas. Australian farms employed 322,000 workers on average in 2018-19, and three in five agricultural jobs are linked to international trade activity. These people, and their communities, will all benefit.

### **Improved Access to Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals – Extension**

The Government is providing an additional \$2.1 million in 2020–21 to extend the grants component of the Improved Access to Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals program (the Program) by a further 12 months to June 2021. This brings the Government's total investment in this program to \$16.5 million over seven years from 2014–15.

The Program will continue to provide grants to rural research and development corporations to assist with data generation to support applications to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. Applications can be sought to gain, maintain or broaden access to agricultural and veterinary chemicals for minor uses.

The Program will continue to equip farmers with chemical management tools they would not otherwise be able to access, sustaining our established commodities and enabling the growth of new and emerging high-value industries. These industries will help drive the creation of new markets and ensure that Australia maintains and creates vibrant economies in rural and regional areas.

Evaluation of the existing Program by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences has shown an average economic return of \$117 per grant dollar expended. This is a return of \$17 million per project (over 20 years) and a potential \$1.5 billion production value increase per decade from the funded projects.

### **Improving Access to Medicines (Antimicrobial Resistance)**

The Government is progressing the *National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy – 2020 and Beyond*. Over two years from 2020-21, the Australian Government is supporting further surveys into antimicrobial resistance in farmed animals and veterinary practices to understand current antimicrobial usage in farmed and companion animals and help identify improvements. These surveys will be carried out in conjunction with the four-year expansion of the *Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia* (AURA) surveillance program.

Survey data is critical for assessing the risks and preserving the effectiveness of antimicrobials for treating human and animal infections. This measure will strengthen the Australian Government's national leadership in responding to antimicrobial resistance, help preserve the effectiveness of antimicrobials, and limit the spread of resistant organisms to ensure the safety of all Australians, including regional communities and those employed in the livestock and agriculture sectors.

### **Streamlining and Modernising Agricultural Levies Legislation**

The Australian Government is committing \$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 best 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.

The existing legislation is overly complex, inconsistent, ambiguous and a barrier to industries being able to innovate and adjust levy settings to respond to emerging risks and priorities. The modernised legislation will provide a more agile, transparent and efficient regulatory system with practical benefits for individual farm businesses and close to 8,000 levy collection agents – mostly located in regional Australia – such as stock agents, wholesalers or processors. The legislation will establish clear and consistent terms to help levy payers and collection agents understand what they are required to complete on levy return forms. Farm businesses and levy collection agents will face a reduced risk of, and penalty for, non-compliance through a reduction in the number of levy return forms, forms being integrated online, and a more tiered approach to enforcement.

### **Centre of Regulator Excellence Pilot Initiative: Training to Professionalise Export Regulators**

The Australian Government is providing \$6.5 million over three years to improve regulator capability and performance through a trial training program to be developed by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment and the Australian Public Service Commission, in conjunction with the new Centre of Regulator Excellence within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. A more capable regulatory workforce will improve trade outcomes for Australian exporters of food and agricultural

products by reducing time to market and supporting more consistent and predictable regulatory outcomes, while maintaining standards and further protecting Australia's reputation as a clean and ethical producer. Three in five agricultural jobs are linked to international trade and the majority of these jobs are in rural and regional Australia. Making it easier to get exports to market will benefit these workers and their communities.

### **Inquiry into Perishable Agricultural Goods**

On 26 August 2020, the Government announced it had commissioned a three-month Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry into perishable agricultural goods. The inquiry is taking a broad look at trading practices throughout supply chains, including relationships between farmers, processors and retailers. This covers commodities including meat products (pork, beef, lamb, chicken), fish and shellfish, eggs, dairy products, and horticultural produce not already covered by the *Horticulture Code of Conduct*. It is considering the extent to which any potential bargaining power imbalances can adversely impact the efficient operation of markets, and the role of market structures and regulations in delivering efficient and equitable outcomes. It is also examining the effectiveness of the *Dairy Code* and if it should be extended across the entire domestic supply chain to include retailers. The ACCC will report by 30 November 2020.

### **Supporting regions to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic**

Agriculture and tourism businesses have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to significant disruptions to international travel and supply chains, and commercial relationships with trading partners. The Australian Government has provided relief to these industries through the \$1 billion *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund*, commencing in April 2020. This support has allowed businesses to continue operations without finding the funds necessary to apply for licences and permits or pay other charges while they are re-building in light of the impacts of the pandemic. Within the package, measures include:

- \$10.3 million in 2019–20 for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority to waive the final two instalments of levies for Commonwealth-managed fisheries, reducing levies for the 2019–20 financial year by two thirds. This has supported fishers' cash flow during the outbreak, and helped them remain viable and able to return to full production when the outbreak subsides.
- \$4 million to Seafood Industry Australia to support the survival and recovery of Australia's seafood sector by delivering a 12-month national awareness campaign planned to commence in November 2020 that encourages Australians to eat more healthy sustainable Australian seafood.
- \$36.3 million to agricultural show societies and \$2.7 million to agricultural field days to alleviate cash flow pressures for organisers that cancelled their event in 2020 because of COVID-19.

- \$10 million to support Australian forestry industries in establishing storage facilities for timber and wood products to secure fire-affected resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- \$20 million to the *Reef Builder Coastal Communities Recovery Project* in 2020-21, which will restore shellfish reefs that support the aquaculture sector.
- \$33.5 million in 2020-21 for sustaining tourism at Australia's Iconic World and National Heritage sites. This includes improvements to visitor facilities and accommodation, accessibility and signage at sites in all States and the Northern Territory.
- \$11.2 million to waive Commonwealth National Park entry fees to the iconic Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta, and Booderee National Parks for 2020, providing additional incentives for travellers to visit these must-see destinations once travel restrictions are relaxed; and \$772,000 to waive or reimburse National Park commercial tour operator and permit fees.

Further to this, the Government provided \$15.3 million to support enhanced human health screening measures at airports in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The work benefited the agriculture industry by helping to maintain food supply chains and assist agricultural producers to get product to market, and supporting the movement of essential workers and commodities for agriculture.

### **Maintaining the Timeliness of the Environmental Assessment Process**

The Australian Government is investing \$36.6 million over two years from 2020-21 to continue its reforms to reduce green tape while maintaining protection of Australia's invaluable natural capital. This investment will improve the timeliness of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) approvals and clear the backlog of overdue cases under the EPBC Act and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*. The funding includes:

- \$12.4 million over two years from 2020-21 to maintain the momentum established in ensuring timely environmental assessments and approvals through the 2019-20 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* measure titled *Busting Congestion in the Environmental Assessment Process* (\$25 million over two years from 2019-20).
- \$10.6 million over two years from 2020-21 to progress negotiations with the states and territories on bilateral agreements for a single-touch approach to approvals, removing duplication by accrediting states to carry out environmental assessment and approvals on the Commonwealth's behalf.
- \$8.8 million over two years from 2020-21 to expedite the approval of 15 major infrastructure projects that are estimated to contribute more than \$72 billion in public and private investment and will support tens of thousands of Australian jobs.

### *Agriculture, Water and the Environment*

- \$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 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*.
- \$2.5 million in 2020-21 to support further policy work relating to environmental markets.

### **Supporting the Great Barrier Reef Tourism Industry**

The Australian Government is committing \$11.6 million over three years from 2020-21 to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). The initiative will support GBRMPA to continue its world-class management of the Great Barrier Reef (the Reef) whilst supporting local businesses in a region significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding includes:

- \$6 million over two years from 2020-21 to further support local tourism operators and encourage tourism to the Reef by extending the temporary waiver of the Environmental Management Charge for visitors and tourists until 30 June 2021.
- \$5.6 million over three years from 2020-21 to improve educational offerings and tourism experiences for visitors to Reef HQ Aquarium in Townsville, Queensland, through new and revitalised exhibits that showcase the diversity of marine life within the Reef and the efforts undertaken to ensure its protection for future generations.
- \$3.2 million in 2020-21 from the *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* to fund Great Barrier Reef Marine Park tourism operators to deliver in-water reef site maintenance and monitoring.
- Another \$5 million from the *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* will support critical capital works and capital projects to refurbish and replace external structures at Reef HQ.

At the July Economic and Fiscal Update 2020, the Australian Government announced additional funding to support the Reef, including:

- \$3.3 million over two years from 2019-20 to provide fee relief to local tourism businesses in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. This follows the Australian Government's decision to backdate the Environmental Management Charge waiver to 1 January 2020 and waive permit-related fees for Reef use until 30 June 2021.
- Another \$2 million over two years from 2019-20 for GBRMPA to support the core functions and continued employment of staff at Reef HQ Aquarium in Townsville during its temporary closure due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

At the 2019-20 Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government announced additional funding of \$26.9 million for critical infrastructure and health and



safety upgrades to the National Education Centre for the Great Barrier Reef in Townsville, providing a refreshed educational resource and tourism site.

### **Supporting Healthy Oceans**

Australia is a world leader in marine protection and our marine industries generate jobs and prosperity, with significant growth potential. The Australian Government is investing \$47.4 million over four years from 2020-21, and \$7.8 million per year ongoing from 2024-25, to support the health and management of oceans and territorial waters surrounding the Australian mainland and territories. Funding includes:

- \$28.3 million over four years from 2020-21, and \$7.8 million per year ongoing from 2024-25, to enhance the maintenance of Australia's marine park network, including increased science and monitoring activities, expanded Indigenous engagement in park management and more pro-active enforcement of compliance with marine park rules.
- \$14.8 million over four years from 2020-21 to remove ghost nets (lost, abandoned or discarded fishing gear) from Australia's northern waters.
- \$4.2 million over four years from 2020-21 to support Australia's engagement with the International Partnership for Blue Carbon and the Asia-Pacific Rainforest Partnership.

### **Bureau of Meteorology – Improved Security and Resilience**

The Australian Government will provide \$254.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau). The funding includes:

- \$225.6 million over three years from 2021-22, and \$143.7 million per year indexed and ongoing from 2024-25, to maintain a proactive asset maintenance schedule consistent with industry best practice and allow the Bureau to safely respond to multiple concurrent weather emergency events during times of natural disaster.
- \$29 million in 2020-21 to supplement revenue for the Bureau's aviation meteorological services program following a downturn in aviation activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Funding to improve the security, resilience and reliability of the Bureau's Observations Network infrastructure. The financial implications of this element are not for publication due to commercial-in-confidence sensitivities.

### **Recycling Modernisation Fund**

The Australian Government has committed \$190 million over four years from 2020-21 to a new Recycling Modernisation Fund (RMF). The RMF will generate co-contributions

from industry and State and Territory governments leading to \$600 million of recycling infrastructure investment that will transform Australia's waste and recycling capacity.

A number of investments under the RMF will be made in regional Australia, where recycling and remanufacturing facilities are often located. Projects under the RMF will be delivered under National Partnership Agreements through State and Territory governments. In some cases, these agreements specifically require states and territories to prioritise investment in regional and remote recycling facilities. In addition, the RMF will also fund a national solution for paper recycling infrastructure, where addressing impacts on regional and rural Australia is a priority.

The RMF will support waste recovery and processing infrastructure to respond to the ban on the export of waste paper, plastic, glass and tyres, agreed by all Australian governments in March 2020. The export ban will mean that Australia must recycle an additional 645,000 tonnes of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres onshore by 2024. This measure, combined with the *National Waste Policy Action Plan*, will create over 10,000 jobs over the next ten years, including in regional Australia, and prevent 10 million tonnes of waste from going to landfill.

### **National Waste Policy Action Plan**

In addition to the RMF, the Australian Government has invested \$59.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to implement its commitments under the *National Waste Policy Action Plan* (the Action Plan), improve national waste data and implement the ban on waste paper, plastics, glass and tyres.

The Action Plan includes seven ambitious targets, underpinned by 80 individual actions, to deliver significant improvements in Australia's recycling and resource recovery performance, including in regional Australia. It includes a commitment that all communities will have access to waste management and processing. Through the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation, all Australian governments will report on opportunities to promote regional collection and recycling of soft plastics through the expansion of the *Regional Model for Soft Plastics*. They will also work together to develop shared infrastructure and collection processes for packaging waste in remote and regional areas through the Remote and Regional Waste Collection Partnership.

Further, Australian, State and Territory and local governments will explore opportunities to leverage existing regional development programs to support better waste management and resource recovery, as well as increase access to resource recovery and waste management infrastructure for regional, remote and Indigenous communities in every state and territory.

The waste export ban progressively prohibits the export of certain types of waste, meaning that Australia must recycle an additional 645,000 tonnes of waste plastic, paper, glass and tyres onshore by 2024. The ban will create jobs, including in regional Australia.

As waste will need to be processed prior to export, the ban will also encourage the use of recycling and remanufacturing facilities, which are often located in regional Australia.

To implement the ban, the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment will administer a licensing and declaration scheme to enable the export of waste materials where it can be demonstrated that sufficient processing has occurred prior to export to prevent harm to the environment or human health overseas. Through this funding, the Australian Government will provide temporary implementation funding to defer charging to recover costs associated with administering the scheme until 1 July 2023. This interim funding will provide relief to businesses, including regional businesses, managing the dual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a new regulatory regime.

### **Murray-Darling Basin Communities Investment Package**

The Australian Government will provide \$269.6 million over four years from 2020-21, and \$9.8 million per year ongoing from 2024-25, for a package of measures to achieve a sustainable and certain future for the Murray-Darling Basin, its people, industries and environment. The investment package responds 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 targeted at bringing Basin communities back to the centre of the Basin Plan.

The package includes funding to invest in community resilience and river health, including:

- \$37.6 million over two years from 2020-21 to extend the *Murray-Darling Basin Economic Development Program* to support economic development projects in Basin communities impacted by water recovery under the Basin Plan.
- \$37.6 million over two years from 2020-21 to work with the South Australian Government to deliver projects that will sustain Riverland environments.
- \$24.5 million over two years from 2020-21 to fund community-driven grants for on-ground projects that will improve the health of rivers and wetlands.
- \$4.2 million over two years from 2020-21 to engage Indigenous River Rangers to increase Indigenous people's access to water for economic and social purposes, and embedding Indigenous participation in delivery of the Basin Plan.

This package also provides funding to build trust, transparency and accountability in the delivery of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, including:

- \$38.7 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$9.8 million per year ongoing) for compliance activities, including the establishment of a new statutory authority, the Inspector-General of Water Compliance.

### *Agriculture, Water and the Environment*

- \$25 million over four years from 2020-21 to improve metering systems in the Murray-Darling Basin, particularly the Northern Basin, through a National Partnership Agreement.
- \$7.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to track and monitor ecological, economic and social outcomes with conditions in the Basin due to water reform.
- \$6 million over four years from 2020-21 to improve and simplify access to water information such as water management, use and trade, and to develop a second-pass business case to modernise and integrate Basin river modelling.

The package also provides funding to improve implementation of the Basin Plan, including:

- \$70.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to work with Basin jurisdictions to accelerate planning and delivery of projects that are at risk of not being completed by 2024, and develop a new National Partnership Agreement with Basin jurisdictions to provide funding for new and ongoing activities required to implement the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.
- \$18 million over four years from 2020-21 for the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment to support the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

### **On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate**

The On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme is being extended and a further \$50 million of Australian Government funding will be available in 2020-21. The scheme is delivered jointly by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to farmers and improves their drought resilience through the installation of eligible water infrastructure. Since July 2018, a total of 7,659 applications have been approved and over \$41 million directly provided to drought-affected farmers. This has flow-on benefits to rural communities through the purchase of local materials and equipment, and the creation of regional jobs.

The additional funding, to be matched by the states and territories, will further expand the scheme, including to meet existing unmet demand of over 2,000 applications valued in excess of \$12.5 million. The additional commitment brings the Australian Government's investment in this initiative to a total of \$100 million over four years from 2017-18.

### **National Bushfire Recovery 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. Over 13 million hectares were burnt, with more than 700 species in the path of the fires. The loss of much-loved local

bushland has had a devastating impact on regional communities, including from the loss of tourism and recreational opportunities. Indigenous Australians have suffered deeply from the terrible impacts on culturally significant sites and species. More than two million hectares of productive forests in southern and eastern Australia were burnt, placing significant pressure on our people, businesses and communities that depend on those forests. With over 1.4 million hectares of agricultural land in bushfire-affected areas, many of our primary production industries have suffered sustained damage.

The Australian Government is committed to helping regional Australia recover from the Black Summer bushfires, with a range of measures to support the recovery of our wildlife and their habitat, invest in a stronger and more resilient agriculture sector and to support a sustainable forestry industry, including:

- \$53.4 million, available over two years from 2019-20, to assist with the immediate survival and recovery of affected animals and plants.
- \$149.7 million, available over two years from 2020-21, to support the sustained efforts required for the long-term recovery of our native animals and plants, including:
  - strategic on-ground support for the most impacted native species across seven bushfire-affected regions
  - projects to engage local communities in conserving their local environment and driving recovery of plants, animals and other natural assets from the bushfires
  - support for knowledge exchange on Indigenous Australians' approaches to fire and land management.
- \$141 million in 2019-20 and 2020-21 for grants of up to \$75,000 to help bushfire-affected primary producers, to deal with their immediate recovery and clean-up needs.
- \$31 million in 2020-21 for grants of up to \$120,000 per hectare to bushfire-impacted apple growers to help them re-establish apple orchards.
- \$5 million in 2020-21 for grants of up to \$10,000 to wine grape producers who experienced crop loss due to smoke taint from the Black Summer bushfires but are located outside of Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement Category C declared areas for the 2019-20 bushfires.
- An additional \$15 million over three years from 2019-20 for Rural Financial Counselling Service providers in bushfire-affected regions, enabling up to 60 additional rural financial counsellors and support workers to meet increased demand from bushfire-affected primary producers.

### *Agriculture, Water and the Environment*

- \$15 million in 2020-21 to support the forestry industries with the increased costs of transporting salvaged burnt logs further distances in the aftermath of the fires.
- \$41 million from 2020-21 to 2022-23 to assist privately owned wood processing facilities to recover and rebuild through innovation and product diversification through the *Forestry Recovery Development Fund Program*.
- \$10 million in 2020-21 to support the forestry industry in establishing storage facilities for timber and wood products to secure fire-affected resources.

### **Future Drought Fund**

The \$5 billion *Future Drought Fund* (FDF) provides secure, continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives, which will help Australian farms and communities prepare for the impacts of drought. The FDF's vision is an innovative and profitable farming sector, a sustainable natural environment and adaptable rural, regional and remote communities – all with increased resilience to the impacts of drought and climate change.

On 1 July 2020, the Australian Government announced the nine foundational programs for the FDF, with \$89.5 million available in 2020-21. The programs include:

- \$20 million for the *Farm Business Resilience Program*, to provide farm businesses with training to strengthen their strategic business management skills and develop farm business plans to build risk management capacity and drought resilience.
- \$10 million for the *Climate Services for Agriculture Program*, to fund the development and delivery of interactive digital 'climate information services' for the agriculture sector to help farmers to make real-time decisions.
- \$3 million for the *Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool*, to provide an online self-assessment tool for farmers to self-identify drought risks based on a range of social, economic and environmental indicators, and take action to build the drought resilience of their farm business.
- \$20.3 million for the *Drought Resilience Research and Adoption Program*, to establish two regionally located Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs, as well as Innovation Grants which will become available to research organisations, private sector, industry, not-for-profit organisations and community groups.
- \$5 million for the *Natural Resource Management (NRM) Drought Resilience - Landscapes Program*, to fund regional NRM bodies to undertake projects to build drought resilience of natural resources on agricultural landscapes.

- \$10 million from the *Natural Resource Management Drought Resilience - Grants* program to fund grants available to organisations, farmer groups and individuals to undertake NRM projects to build drought resilience of natural resources at a small scale.
- \$3.8 million for the *Networks to Build Drought Resilience Program*, to support community-driven projects that enhance drought resilience and strengthen networks, including small-scale infrastructure projects to make community facilities drought resilient.
- \$7.5 million for the *Drought Resilience Leaders Program*, which will develop leadership capability in communities and include a mentoring component to foster uptake of innovative practices to build drought resilience for farmers and their businesses.
- \$10 million for Regional Drought Resilience Planning, which will provide funding to groups of local councils or equivalent entities to develop Regional Drought Resilience Plans for agriculture and allied industries.

The Australian Government announced additional program funding on 28 August 2020, fully committing the annual \$100 million of FDF funding to programs in 2020-21. This expanded the *Drought Resilience Research and Adoption Program*, to establish a total of eight Adoption and Innovation Hubs across regional Australia for a total of \$86 million over four years.

The FDF is a national program, which will benefit rural, regional and remote communities across Australia. The nine programs will build the self-reliance, productivity and performance of farm businesses and strengthen the viability and wellbeing of rural and regional communities.

### **Financial Counselling to Support Small Regional Businesses**

The *Drought Communities Small Business Support Program* (DCSBSP) expanded in July 2020, with the Australian Government providing funding of to \$12.8 million over two years from 2019-20. The DCSBSP provides free financial counselling, support and professional services funding to small regional businesses affected by drought, the COVID-19 pandemic, and/or the 2019-20 bushfires. This support helps rural and regional businesses remain resilient while facing a downturn and maintain the capacity to rebound when normal trading conditions resume. The DCSBSP is being delivered nationally across regional Australia by the 12 existing Rural Financial Counselling Service providers and aims to support eligible small regional businesses to improve their financial capability. The DCSBSP ends on 30 June 2021.

### **Regional Investment Corporation**

The Australian Government provided an additional \$2 billion in loan funding to the Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) in July 2020 for the 2020-21 financial year. This funding doubles the farm and small business loan funds to a total of \$4 billion, in

response to unprecedented demand for farm and small business drought concessional loans.

In response to ongoing severe drought conditions in many parts of the country, the Government introduced the two-year interest free terms from 1 January 2020 for Drought Loans. The two-year interest free terms ceased on 30 September 2020. These concessional loans are a practical support mechanism for farmers and small businesses facing hardship due to the drought.

The Australian Government launched AgBiz Loans available to eligible small businesses that directly provide primary production-related goods and services to farm businesses in drought on 20 January 2020.

The terms of the concessional loans offered by the RIC enable rural businesses to save thousands of dollars a year on interest bills.

In order to process these critical loans the Government has provided the RIC with a further \$50 million in operational funding to deliver the additional loans and process the applications already on hand.

The AgriStarter Loan for the next generation of Australian farmers will open for applications from 1 January 2021, with an additional \$75 million allocated for loan applications this financial year.

### **National Waste Policy Action Plan**

The Australian Government has invested over \$30 million for three years from 2020-21 to deliver its commitments through the *National Waste Policy Action Plan* (the Action Plan). Implementing the Action Plan will support national recycled packaging targets, address impediments to a circular economy in Australia and phase out problematic waste materials with a focus on single-use plastics.

The Action Plan supports communities, particularly in regional and remote Australia, to access waste management and processing. For example, in partnership with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation, all Australian governments will report on opportunities to promote regional collection and recycling of soft plastics through the expansion of the *Regional Model for Soft Plastics*. They will also work together to develop shared infrastructure and collection processes for packaging waste in remote and regional areas through the Remote and Regional Waste Collection Partnership.

Further, Australian, State and Territory and local governments will explore opportunities to leverage existing regional development programs to support better waste management and resource recovery, as well as increase access to resource recovery and waste management infrastructure for regional, remote and Indigenous communities in every state and territory.



### **Investing in our Commonwealth National Parks**

In July 2020, the Australian Government announced the largest ever single investment in Australia's Commonwealth National Parks, injecting \$233.4 million over three years from 2020–21 into critical tourism infrastructure. This will generate over a thousand 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 Commonwealth National Parks investment includes:

- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park: Major upgrades to the cultural centre, renewal of walking tracks (including the Uluru Base Walk) and viewing platforms, upgrades to shelters and water stations at visitor sites, as well as \$51 million in infrastructure upgrades for the Mutitjulu community.
- Kakadu National Park: Upgrades to campgrounds including improved fresh water storage, improvements to the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre, road repairs, improved staff housing, workshop and utility buildings, improved fuel storage and supply facilities.
- Booderee National Park: A new visitor centre to welcome visitors and showcase Indigenous Australians' culture, upgrades to campground amenities, roads and car parks, the Murrays Beach Boardwalk and Boat Ramp, walking tracks and viewing platforms.
- Christmas Island National Park: New viewing platform at the Margaret Knoll Lookout, a popular birdwatching destination that overlooks the Indian Ocean.

Renewed infrastructure and tourist facilities will also help the tourism sector rebound once travel restrictions are lifted. This capital works program supports the ongoing commitment to promoting tourism through improved visitor experiences, resulting in increased visitor numbers and park revenue.

### **Capacity Building for Fisheries Representatives**

The Capacity Building for Fisheries Representatives measure delivers on the Australian Government's election commitment of \$400,000 over four years from 2019–20 to deliver capacity-building tools to ensure relevant fishing sectors are included in decision-making and to maximise their contribution. Delivered through an experienced fisheries consultant, the measure started in early 2020. Participants will gain a well-developed understanding of the regulatory, scientific and economic drivers of fisheries management, which builds on the work of the National Fishing Advisory Council and Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

### **Recreational Fishing and Camping Facilities Grant Program**

The Australian Government has committed \$20 million to the *Recreational Fishing and Camping Facilities Grant Program*, delivering the Australian Government's election commitment to provide increased and improved opportunities for locals and visitors to regional areas to go fishing. The program will be delivered through partnership agreements with states, under which local councils can apply to improve, maintain or build new boating, marine rescue, fishing and camping facilities (such as boat ramps).

### **Fishing Habitat Restoration**

The Australian Government has committed \$8 million over four years from 2019-20 for fisheries habitat restoration, working with fishing clubs to restore marine and estuarine habitats. The Department is considering applications for projects received from Regional Land Partnership service providers, in consultation with recreational fishing groups, from across regional Australia. Projects are expected to commence in 2020.

### **National Horticultural Netting Program Trial**

The Australian Government announced the \$25.9 million *National Horticulture Netting Program Trial* in the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. The Trial provides grants of up to \$300,000 to eligible horticultural growers for the purchase and installation of protective netting over their crops. The use of protective netting has been shown to improve the quality and quantity of produce otherwise subject to adverse weather and animal predation, and to reduce water usage.

Grants are currently available in South Australia, and the Department is in discussion with states and territories to expand the program.

### **Starting Farm Co-operatives**

In 2018-19, there were over 2,000 co-operative and mutual enterprises in Australia, many of them regionally based. Co-operatives and other collaborative business arrangements have potential to hand more control back to farmers while reducing costs and improving production efficiencies.

Under the Starting Farm Co-operatives election commitment, the Australian Government is providing \$3 million over two years from 2019-20 to help primary producers learn more about co-operative approaches and their benefits. The measures include provision of an information hotline, workshops, educational material and financial assistance to cover fees for training courses relevant to establishing co-operative business models. The initiative builds on the Government's \$15.2 million Farming Together Pilot Program and supports the goal of growing a \$100 billion agricultural sector by 2030.

The measures are being delivered by the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals and Southern Cross University.

## **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 million over three years from 2019-20 to support two new programs to bring kids and farms together:

- Up to \$5 million will fund primary and secondary school students to visit farms and primary production worksites to learn about agriculture through the Educating Kids about agriculture: Kids to Farms grant program, delivered by state farming bodies (also known as state farming organisations).
- Up to \$5 million will establish and test a practical, integrated farming platform or 'mini farm' in urban schools through the Educating Kids about Agriculture: Farms to Kids program, delivered by iFarm Australia Pty Ltd.

These programs will provide 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.

## **Further Support for the Australian Dairy Industry**

In 2018-19, the dairy industry's farm-gate production was valued at \$4.4 billion, with over 46,200 people directly employed on dairy farms or by dairy companies in Australia. The sector is a key employer and contributor to regional Australian economies and towns.

The mandatory *Dairy Industry Code* (the Code) came into effect on 1 January 2020 following over 12 months of extensive engagement and consultation with Australian dairy farmers, processors, industry bodies and government agencies. The Code was a key recommendation from the 2018 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry into the dairy industry. The ACCC is responsible for regulating the Code, including by checking farmers' and processors' compliance with the code and taking enforcement action where appropriate.

The Code provides a fairer process for negotiating contractual arrangements between dairy farmers and dairy processor and sets out the key rights and obligations of each party. These requirements have improved transparency and certainty within the industry. Since the Code's implementation, processors for the first time have publicly released their standard forms of agreement, including the minimum prices they are offering farmers for milk. This requirement increases visibility of prices to farmers and competition amongst processors, ultimately leading to better options for farmers.

Through the Further Support of the Australian Dairy Industry election commitment, the Australian Government is providing \$950,000 over three years from 2019-20 for measures to increase the sustainability of dairy farmers, and provide them with greater transparency and more say over how they sell their milk.

The measure includes: investigating and supporting new marketing and trading options; real-time, secure and transparent payments to farmers to assist with cash flow and business planning; the development of business calculators to allow farmers to capture their production costs and compare them against different processors' payment structures; and an industry-agreed template for a short-form milk agreement that incorporates the requirements of the Mandatory Dairy Code of Conduct.

The measures are being delivered through Australian Dairy Farmers and Dairy Australia.

### **Farm Safety Education Fund**

The Australian Government committed to \$3.5 million over four year years at the 2019 election to improve farm safety outcomes. The *National Farm Safety Education Fund* will deliver 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 provided to Farmsafe Australia to undertake a range of activities that will deliver on the Government's commitment to safer farms and reduced on-farm injuries and fatalities. A core component of this grant is consultation with farmers and industry groups to develop a *Farm Safety Education Fund Strategy*. The strategy will guide Australian Government investment for the remaining \$1.6 million under the election commitment to support improved farm safety outcomes.

Farmsafe will also update and modernise resources to support worker induction on farms, and educate young Australians in about hazards on farms such as quad bikes, farm machinery and dams.

### **Promoting the Importance of Bees to Agriculture**

The Australian Government committed \$1.5 million over two years at the 2019 election to deliver the Promoting the Importance of Bees to Agriculture initiative. The initiative, delivered by AgriFutures Australia, will promote the role of bees and their impact on the entire food chain, to help protect bees and to reduce their decline.

This initiative includes support for the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council and state associations to develop resources and build engagement capacity to raise awareness of honeybees among professional and recreational beekeepers and the public, as well as development of a virtual resource library for beekeepers and support for research.

The honeybee industry, particularly through pollination services, is an important contributor to regional communities, supporting regional employment and economies as well as national food security.

### **South Australian Dog Fence**

At the 2019 election, the Australian Government committed to assist 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 Australian Government funding is being matched by the South Australian Government, with an additional \$5 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.

### **Communities Combating Pests and Weed Impacts during Drought Program**

At the 2019 election the Government committed to help producers and graziers manage established pest animals and weeds in drought-affected areas. Funding of \$10 million over 2019-20 and 2020-21 has been allocated from Round 2 of the program to 23 projects across 33 local government areas, following a competitive grant round that closed in February 2020.

The program intends to reduce the detrimental economic, social and environmental effects associated with pest animals and weeds during droughts, increase innovative natural resource management and simulate local economies.

### **African Swine Fever Response Package**

African swine fever (ASF) is a fatal disease that affects pigs and is spreading rapidly though Asia. ASF would cause significant damage to Australia's \$5.2 billion pork industry and the communities it employs. The Australian Government has provided \$66.6 million over two years from 2019-20 to heighten screening for illegally imported pig products through additional staff and screening technology, support for industry and government preparedness activities and increased collaboration on global efforts to stop the spread of ASF.

### **Farm Household Allowance**

The Australian Government has been investing more than \$2 million each week over the last 12 months into rural communities through the *Farm Household Allowance* (FHA). Since the 2019-20 Budget, the Government has made significant changes to FHA, including expanding and simplifying eligibility arrangements, providing a single rate of payment, and strengthening the case management approach to support farmers in hardship. Between 1 July 2019 and 30 September 2020, recipients who ended their first four years of payment received a lump sum equivalent to six months' FHA. Additional income support has also been made available to FHA recipients during the COVID-19 pandemic: the first \$750 Economic Stimulus payment; the \$550 Supplement (which decreased to \$250 from the end of September 2020); and FHA recipients who are working for other people (in addition to running their farm) may also qualify for the JobKeeper payment.

The Government also committed to permanently increase the FHA asset threshold to \$5 million at the 2019 federal election. This change was delivered at the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. The FHA relief payment was also extended to farmers and their partners coming off their fourth year of the FHA prior to 1 October 2020.

### **New Deregulation Agenda**

In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government announced several measures to make it easier for food exporters to reach new markets and to streamline environmental assessments, including:

- A new trade information service for exporters, led by the Australian Trade and Investment Commission, with funding of \$21.4 million over three years from 2019-20.
- Reducing regulatory burden and streamlining audit arrangements in the dairy sector with funding of \$14.8 million over six years from 2019-20.
- Export certification modernisation and digitisation with funding of \$29.2 million over four years from 2019-20.
- Environment approvals digital transformation with funding of \$26.8 million over three years from 2019-20.

These measures focus on improvement to the Department's systems to enhance the service it provides to stakeholders.

### **Disaster Preparedness**

The Bureau of Meteorology received \$3 million in 2019-20 to deliver a quality control service for third-party weather observations data, designed to support development of a parametric insurance market. This will benefit farmers by reducing the financial volatility caused by weather and water variability.

Climate science and adaptation will be critical in building the nation's environmental resilience, with major initiatives for the Bureau of Meteorology in the 2020-21 Budget continuing to invest in platforms that will enable the Bureau to support and improve resilience in service of all sectors of the Australian economy.

### **Strengthening the Australian Antarctic Program**

Australian Government funding for Antarctic science and environmental management continues to boost the Tasmanian economy, as our operational work out of Hobart contributes to employment and local investment.

In December 2019, the Australian Government announced \$65.7 million over three years from 2019-20 for the Australian Antarctic Program, including \$58.8 million for

expediting a detailed planning phase to construct a paved runway near Davis Research Station. The runway will support our scientific capabilities in Antarctica and enable international collaboration with other Antarctic nations. The Government also provided \$6.9 million at the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2019-20 to support the retrieval of a million-year ice core by ensuring the capacity to extensively traverse the Australian Antarctic Territory, reaching remote locations in the harshest of polar conditions.

The funding ensures critical functions that support Australia's presence and scientific research activities in Antarctica are maintained, and Australia retains its influence in the Antarctic region. The Antarctic sector largely centres on the activities of the Australian Antarctic Division and represents significant elements of Tasmania's knowledge-based economy, including through employing and retaining staff in highly skilled jobs in scientific and research fields in Hobart, and local specialised service industries.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S

The Attorney-General's Portfolio comprises the Attorney-General's 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.

The Attorney-General's Portfolio has a geographic footprint in every state and territory, and engages the perspectives of regional Australians to inform its work. As at 30 June 2020, the Attorney-General's Portfolio employed 7,931 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 6,038 staff (76.1 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 1,704 staff (21.5 per cent) in other capital cities and 189 staff (2.4 per cent) in regional areas.

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

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

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 Attorney-General's 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 Circuit Court's eFiling service similarly improves regional access to legal processes by providing Federal Court, Family Court and Federal Circuit Court resources online and enabling online lodging of divorce applications. The Administrative Appeals Tribunal continues to develop its online portal to enhance the ability of users in regional Australia to interact with the Tribunal online. The Attorney-General's Portfolio is also leading work to protect the rights of older Australians through *Elder Abuse Service Trials*, including in some regional communities.

The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner provides assistance with privacy and freedom of information matters via telephone and online services to ensure regional Australians can access regulatory assistance. The Australian Human Rights Commission continues to investigate and conciliate complaints about discrimination and breaches of human rights and tracks the geographic range of its activities including engagement events, conducting training and workshops and commissioning research. The Australian Financial Security Authority has moved away from a reliance on counter



services to online services/electronic channels while retaining post and telephone options accessed via their National Service Centre. The National Archives of Australia is continuing to invest in its corporate website, online learning resources and proactive digitisation of records, including at-risk collections, to improve regional and remote Australians access to National Archives' services and will continue the *National Touring Exhibition Program* to make the national archival collection accessible to audiences throughout the country.

In July 2019, industrial relations functions were incorporated into the Attorney-General's Portfolio. This included a number of industrial relations Portfolio agencies with a regional footprint. The industrial relations group plays an important role in contributing to the strength of the Australian economy, including regional Australia. Industrial relations reform has a significant impact on driving jobs and wage growth, boosting productivity and strengthening the economy while ensuring the protection of employee's rights. The industrial relations group has increased the Portfolio's number of staff located outside Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has a presence in all states and territories including offices in all capital cities and some regional areas. The Ombudsman's regional footprint includes staff located in Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Darwin, Cairns, Gold Coast, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Mount Gambier, Hobart, Launceston, Bendigo, Traralgon, Warrnambool, and Bunbury.

The Fair Work Commission has a presence in eight locations around Australia including offices in all capital cities and some regional areas, including Darwin and Hobart.

Comcare has offices located in Sydney, Newcastle, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia, and established new offices in Darwin and Launceston from 1 January 2020 to align with where its clients are based.

The Australian Government has also committed more than \$398.3 million in 2020-21 for legal assistance services under the National Legal Assistance Partnership (2020-25) (NLAP). There are eleven priority client groups under the NLAP, including people residing in rural or remote areas. Similarly, additional funding of \$31.1 million in 2020-21 to support frontline legal assistance services during COVID-19 will be distributed to the states and territories to allocate to legal assistance services to address specific demand as a result of COVID-19. Many providers receiving both NLAP and COVID-19 legal assistance funding deliver services in regional areas, though the amount of funding specifically dedicated to service delivery in regional areas cannot be quantified.

## New initiatives

### Securing Agreement to the National Legal Assistance Partnership

The Australian Government is committed to funding legal assistance services in regional Australia. Following on from the *National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services 2015-20* (NPA), the Australian Government has entered into a new partnership with states and territories to provide legal assistance services across Australia.

Through the NLAP, the Australian Government has committed over \$2 billion over five years from 1 July 2020 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 Commission (LACs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS), and specialist Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) and Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs).

The NLAP provides for vital legal assistance to keep everyday Australians, families and communities safe, including Australians in regional and remote communities. 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, less likely to seek assistance and less able to access services.

Developed in collaboration with the states and territories, the NLAP builds on the NPA and incorporates recommendations from reviews of the NPA and the *Indigenous Legal Assistance Program (2015-20)*.

The \$2 billion in funding includes:

- \$1.2 billion in funding for LACs
- \$284 million for CLCs
- \$441 million for ATSILS
- \$51 million for DVUs and HJPs
- \$20 million for Family Advocacy and Support Services
- \$20 million for state and territory governments to administer the NLAP.

Under the NLAP, the Australian Government has committed more than \$248 million in additional funding, including: the permanent restoration of \$150.6 million in legal assistance funding that would have been subject to reductions based on decisions of consecutive governments; an increase in baseline funding for legal assistance services of \$51.6 million; and additional funding of \$25.8 million for frontline legal assistance

services for family law and/or family violence. This funding will allow LACs, CLCs and ATSILS to provide essential services across Australia, including regional communities.

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

### **Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Australian Government will provide \$170.9 million over five years from 2019-20 to the Attorney-General's Portfolio to assist Australians and Australian businesses to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Key measures include:

#### **COVID-19 Response Package – Attorney-General's**

In the July Economic and Fiscal Update, the Australian Government announced that it will provide \$134.1 million over five years from 2019-20 to support legal services and workplace advice to individuals and businesses affected by COVID-19, including those living in regional, rural and remote Australia. The support includes:

- \$49.8 million over two years from 2019-20 to support additional frontline legal services to respond to COVID-19. Forty per cent of this funding will be for additional legal services related to domestic violence.
- \$13.5 million in 2019-20 to ensure the legal assistance sector can maintain and scale up virtual service delivery in response to the impact of COVID-19, improving the accessibility of services for individuals living in regional, rural and remote Australia.
- \$2.6 million in 2020-21 for the *Family Violence and Cross Examination of Parties Scheme*, which helps protect victims of family violence in family law proceedings.
- \$15.8 million over four years from 2020-21 to the Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner to continue ensuring safety on Commonwealth funded building projects, particularly as they accelerate as part of COVID-19 economic recovery.
- \$46.3 million over three years from 2019-20 for the Fair Work Ombudsman to enhance its advice and education services for businesses and employees about workplace laws, including in the context of COVID-19.

#### **COVID-19 Response Package – Attorney-General's Portfolio Entities – Additional Resources**

The Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$35.3 million over two years from 2020-21 to support the timely processing of claims under the *Fair Entitlements Guarantee Scheme*, which injects money back into local communities where workers have lost their employee entitlements due to their employers' liquidation.

The Australian Government will also provide additional funding of \$5.1 million over two years from 2020-21 to the Fair Work Commission, to deal with the increase in the Fair Work Commission's current and projected workload as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding will also be used to redevelop the Commission's online capabilities, including its website and digital tools, to ensure that employers and employees, including those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, have access to workplaces services and information. This funding boost, particularly the improvements to the Commission's online resources and digital tools, will benefit employers and employees all around Australia, including those located in regional areas, by making it easier to access workplace information and services.

#### **COVID-19 Response Package – Federal Family Law Courts – Specialised Court Lists for Urgent Matters Arising from COVID-19**

The Australian Government will provide \$2.5 million over two years from 2020-21 to the family law courts, to support the operation of specialised court lists, which have been established to manage a surge in urgent applications arising from circumstances relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The specialised lists operate across Australia on a national basis and are supported by electronic filing and hearings. This measure, while national, is critical to ensuring that Australians living in regional areas can continue to be provided with quick access to the courts during the COVID-19 pandemic, including those affected by family violence. This is particularly important given that face-to-face circuits to a number of regional and remote locations have been temporarily suspended due to the pandemic.

#### **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 will provide additional ongoing of \$87.3 million over three years from 2021-22 to maintain funding for family law services under the *Family Relationship Services Program*. Family Law Services assist vulnerable families and children to deal with issues associated with family separation and to resolve their parenting and property issues without having to go to court. Services provided include Family Relationship Centres, Children's Contact Centres, Family Dispute Resolution, Parenting Orders Programme, and Regional Family Dispute Resolution. The range of services affected by this proposal provide supports including information, advice, counselling, supervision and dispute resolution. 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**

The Australian Government will provide \$35.7 million over the forward estimates 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.

### **Addressing Regional Court Safety Requirements**

The Australian Government will provide \$7.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to support the relocation and refurbishment of Tasmania's Launceston family law courts registry and Queensland's Rockhampton Federal Circuit Court registry. These relocations will improve the safety and security of court users and staff accessing the family law courts in Launceston and Rockhampton.

### **Additional Funding for the Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme**

The Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$4.8 million in 2020-21 to state and territory Legal Aid Commissions under the *Family Violence and Cross-examination of Parties Scheme* (the Scheme). The Scheme helps 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 proposal builds on additional funding of \$2.6 million announced by the Australian Government in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update measure titled *COVID-19 Response Package – Attorney-General's*, \$2 million in 2019-20 announced by the Australian Government in the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) measure titled *Supporting Victims of Family Violence in the Courts* and funding provided as part of the 2018-19 MYEFO Measure titled *Women's Economic Security Package*.

### **Introduction and Criminal Enforcement of New Federal Family Violence Orders**

The Australian Government will provide \$1.8 million over four years from 2020-21 to support the introduction and enforcement of new federal family violence orders (FFVOs), and importantly, the ongoing enforcement of FFVOs under the *National Domestic Violence Order Scheme*. This measure supports a Council of Australian Governments agreement to ensure that family law personal protection injunctions are criminally enforceable by state and territory police. FFVOs will be available to families with a matter before a family law court circuiting in a regional area or a permanent, regional family court registry. This would reduce the need for vulnerable families in these areas with a family law matter on foot from having to initiate separate proceedings in a state or territory court for a criminally enforceable family violence protection order. Navigating multiple courts may be particularly difficult in regional areas due to the geographical distances between court locations.

## **Bushfire Response**

The Australian Government will provide \$38.7 million over two years from 2019-20 to the Attorney-General's Portfolio to conduct a Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, and to assist Australians and Australian businesses to respond to and recover from the Black Summer bushfires. These measures include:

### **Bushfire Response Package – Royal Commission into Bushfires**

On 20 February 2020, the Australian Government established the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. The Australian Government has allocated \$30 million over two years from 2019-20 to fund this Royal Commission. The Royal Commission is examining the responsibilities of, and coordination between, Australian governments relating to national disaster arrangements. The scope of the inquiry includes governments' preparedness for, response to, resilience to, and recovery from, natural disasters and the arrangements for improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions. The Royal Commission's recommendations will inform national natural disaster arrangements, including in regional and rural Australia.

### **Legal Assistance for Communities Affected by Bushfires**

In the July Economic and Fiscal Update, the Australian Government announced \$2 billion for the *National Bushfire Recovery Fund* (NBRF) to assist communities and businesses to recover and rebuild following the 2019-20 bushfires. The NBRF will provide funding of over \$8.7 million over two years from 2019-20 in payments to legal assistance providers to assist with bushfire response and recovery. Funding has been specifically targeted to regional, rural and remote communities impacted by the bushfires within New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. This funding includes:

- \$5.2 million for services to individuals
- \$3.5 million for services to small businesses and primary producers.

This funding is in addition to funding available under existing disaster recovery assistance arrangements.

### **JobMaker Plan – Second Women's Economic Security Package**

Under the Second Women's Economic Security Package, the Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$2.1 million over three years from 2020-21 for the Attorney-General's Department to implement key recommendations in the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. The report found that factors such as geographic isolation, lower population density and cultural dimensions can increase the risk of sexual harassment in regional, rural and remote areas and create barriers to reporting or challenging these behaviours.

This measure includes funding to develop an online platform to provide free, practical information, education and resources for employers and workers through a single online portal that all Australians can access, including individuals and businesses in regional areas.

## DEFENCE

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

As at 30 June 2020, the Defence Portfolio employed 18,000 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 9,608 staff (53 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 5,667 staff (32 per cent) in other capital cities and 2,725 staff (15 per cent) in regional areas.

### Department of Defence

Defence including the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has a significant footprint in regional Australia, with an extensive network of bases and associated employment and community engagement activities. Of the total Defence workforce (2019-20 Estimated Actual of 75,238 average full-time workforce and 21,189 headcount of Reservists), approximately:

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

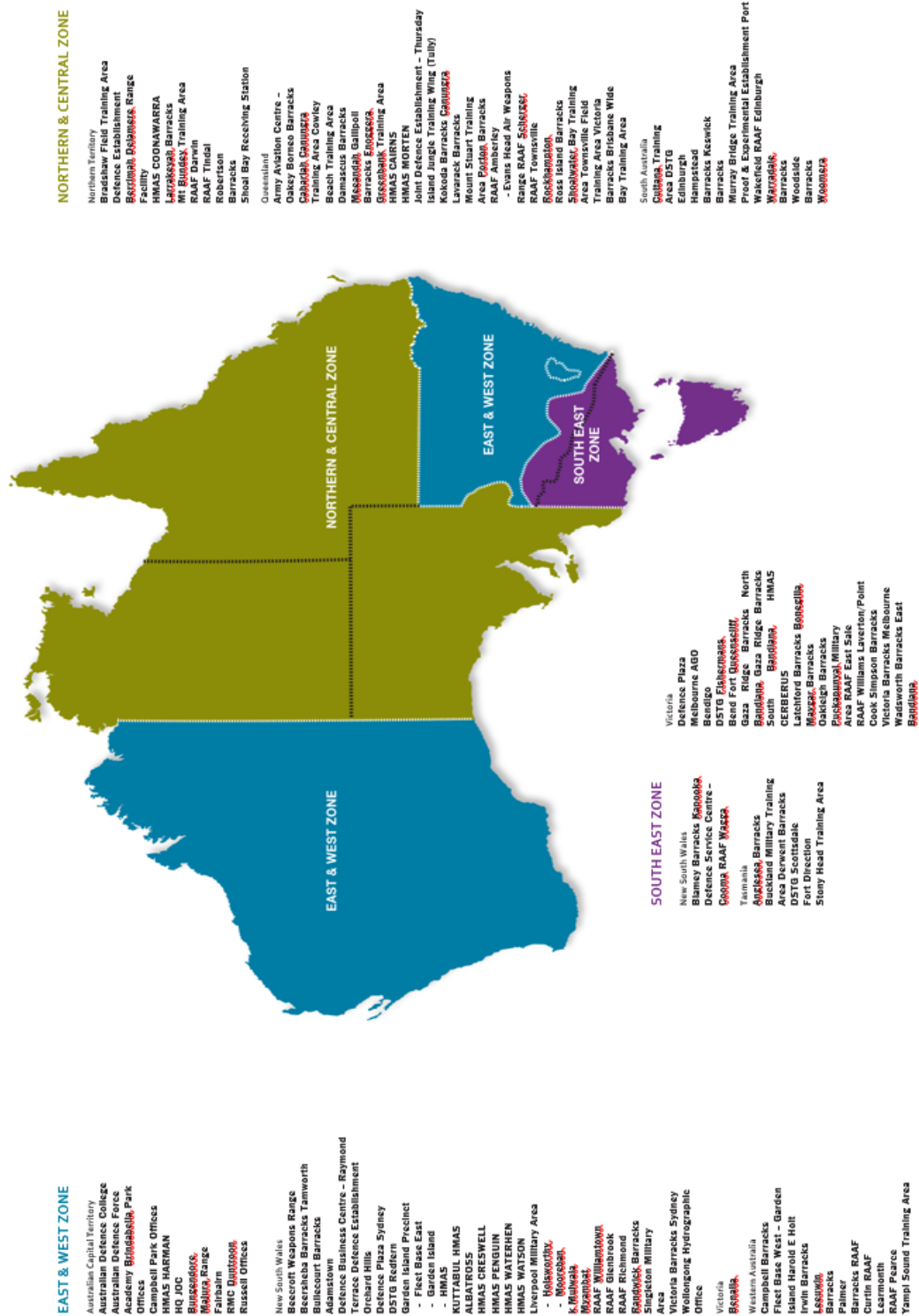
Defence both employs and serves the local people in our regions. Defence members and their families are an integral part of regional communities, interacting on official duties and at community activities and events. This includes contributing to the spending and services in regional economies. Defence recognises that there are clear benefits to drawing support from local contractors and suppliers, where there is the capacity and capability available in the local market.

Defence also maintains strong links with regional Australia through Reserve units and individuals. Many of Army's Reserve units are headquartered in regional centres with staff and soldiers based in surrounding districts (Army has approximately 15,500 reservists).

The Defence estate consists of 400 owned properties and approximately 406 leases, including bases (72 major bases), training areas and ranges, research facilities and office accommodation including Defence Force Recruitment Centres. The construction and presence of Defence facilities in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities. [Figure 1](#) depicts the Defence footprint across Australia.



**Figure 1: Location of major Defence facilities across Australia**



## *Defence*

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 Community Organisation 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 to support regional communities to provide people with intellectual disabilities 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.

### **Defence Housing Australia**

Defence Housing Australia (DHA) administers Defence housing policy and provides housing and related services for ADF members and their families, including those located in regional areas.

DHA maintains offices in capital cities, major regional centres and on some ADF bases and establishments around Australia, employing 577 employees, with:

- 37 per cent located in Canberra Head Office
- 11 per cent located in Sydney CBD Office
- 37 per cent located in Regional Offices.

- 15 per cent located in Contact Centres situated in Adelaide, Brisbane, Townsville and the Hunter Valley.

DHA manages 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, DHA acquires property sites throughout Australia to construct suitable accommodation to meet ADF requirements where there is no existing market or stock available. DHA currently has six regional development or construction projects underway which will deliver 872 lots, providing construction work to local communities.

As at 30 June 2020, DHA managed over 18,000 properties which were either owned and leased by DHA, owned by Defence, or annuity properties. In financial year 2019–20, these properties generated over 200,000 maintenance work orders which were performed by local businesses and tradespeople where possible.

## **New initiatives**

### **Operation Bushfire Assist / Bushfire Response Package**

Australia's intense 2019–20 bushfire season saw fires engulf more than 12.6 million hectares of land and destroyed more than 3,000 homes. Defence's support began on 6 September 2019 and Operation BUSHFIRE ASSIST 2019–2020 continued until 26 March 2020.

At the operation's peak, some 6,500 Australian Defence Force (ADF) members provided support to emergency services and authorities in six states and territories. 3,000 Reservists provided support—the first compulsory call out of Reserve forces in Australia's history. This assistance was augmented by hundreds of Defence public servants, contractors, industry partners and over 400 international service personnel. With its nation-wide infrastructure, unique capabilities and strengths in logistics, planning and personnel support, Defence was called upon to support national relief, response and recovery efforts in various ways. Over the summer, Defence personnel also worked behind bushfire front lines, in the sky and on the sea, and in offices and operational backrooms to support their fellow Australians.

Parts of the Defence estate—like the Albury Wodonga Military Area, Puckapunyal and Simpson Barracks in Victoria; RAAF Base Wagga in New South Wales (NSW); and HMAS *Harman*, Duntroon, the Australian Defence Force Academy, and the Majura Training Area in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)—became shelters and joint task force command centres. These facilities provided refuge for evacuated and displaced civilians and their pets, while also accommodating police, firefighters, paramedics, Red Cross workers and RSPCA staff alongside military personnel.

## *Defence*

Navy, with Army personnel embarked, directly supported Operation Bushfire Assist by tasking HMAS *Choules* and ADV *Sycamore* to assist 4,000 tourists and citizens of Mallacoota unable to leave as bushfires had cut off means of support and evacuation. Medical support, technical assistance and Humanitarian and Disaster Relief stores were provided before embarking in excess of 1,000 evacuees and 100 pets for transfer to Westernport on the Mornington Peninsula. This evolution was the largest domestic amphibious evacuation in Australia's history.

HMAS *Adelaide* provided similar assistance to the citizens of Eden also cut off from terrestrial support by the fires. HMAS *Albatross* provided emergency accommodation to stranded citizens and tourists, delivered sustained ADF flying operations for bushfire reconnaissance and supported foreign military and Rural Fire Service air assets conducting firefighting operations.

Army logistics played a critical role during Operation Bushfire Assist providing life support functions from late 2019. Specifically, the provision of catering and transportation contributed to the success of the initial emergency management response. A total of 15 Australian Army helicopters were deployed in support of the operation, including eight MRH-90 Taipan, six CH-47F Chinook and three S-70 Blackhawks. They collectively flew more than 600 hours in support of search and rescue operations and fire spotting missions. These activities provided a range of support to multiple regions in NSW, Victoria, and South Australia. In addition to crews supporting firebreak construction and debris clearance, Army provided water purification in support of Bega Valley Shire Council, supported state and local authorities to assess fire damage impacts on key routes in the Kempsey and in the Hawksbury region of the Gopspers Mountain Ranges, and provided ambulances, crews and familiarisation training for ACT ambulance officers. These fires had a significant impact on wildlife; our teams provided veterinary and general support to Kangaroo Island in South Australia, and various locations across the fire grounds of Victoria and NSW.

Air Force aircraft assisted in moving firefighters, ADF and civilian personnel, stores, supplies (including retardant from the United States of America) and wildlife from state to state and into various fire ground locations. Defence's airfields and naval bases – like RAAF Base East Sale and HMAS Cerberus in Victoria – provided critical infrastructure from which aerial firefighting efforts and rescue operations were launched. Under the Air Force Search and Rescue contract with Canadian Helicopter Corporation, aircraft were also utilised in evacuation and supply operations, transport of Police, medical and communications personnel, and search and rescue operations.

Legislation has been introduced to enhance the ADF's capacity to provide assistance in relation to natural disasters and other emergencies by; streamlining the process to call out Reserve members, providing ADF members with similar immunities to state and territory emergency services personnel, and appropriately covering members for superannuation and other benefits.

### **Protected Mobile Fires Project (LAND 8116)**

Following an election commitment by the Australian Government in April 2019, the Government has allocated \$1.1 billion for the acquisition of Protected Mobile Fires from 2020-21 to 2027-28, and work is planned to commence in Geelong, Victoria, before the end of 2022-23. The Government agreed to Defence's first pass submission in August 2020, which approved the planned release of a single supplier limited tender to Hanwha Defense Australia. The outcomes of this approach to market are planned to be considered by Government by Quarter 1 2022. The project will maximise Australian industry participation and support up to 350 Australian jobs, with details to be confirmed through request for tender negotiations. Benefits to Geelong will include warehousing, transport, supply chain participation, maintenance, generation of a skilled Australian workforce and facilities construction.

### **Tasmanian Defence and Maritime Innovation and Design Precinct**

Following an election commitment by the Australian Government in April 2019, an agreement was signed with the University of Tasmania in July 2020 committing \$30 million to develop the new Defence and Maritime Innovation and Design Precinct at the University of Tasmania 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.

An estimated 50 additional jobs are expected to be created during construction and the development will create further employment opportunities as researchers and industry visit the region 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 University of Tasmania organisational entities to meet the growing research and development needs of Defence, and its industry supply chains.

### **Cyber Enhanced Situational Awareness and Response Package**

The Australian Government will invest \$1.4 billion over the next decade from 2020-21 for the new Cyber Enhanced Situational Awareness and Response (CESAR) package, to enhance the cyber security capabilities and assistance provided to all Australians. The CESAR package will enable ASD to identify more cyber threats, disrupt more foreign cybercriminals, build more partnerships with industry and government and provide a greater level of cyber protection to Australians, including those in regional Australia. This overall CESAR package is one part of the Australian Government's \$15 billion investment in information and cyber warfare capabilities that will form part of the

## *Defence*

Defence Force Structure Plan to address the rapidly evolving cyber threat landscape. CESAR also forms part of the Government's \$1.7 billion Cyber Security Strategy 2020.

### **Defence Economic Stimulus package**

On the 26 August 2020, the Australian Government announced a \$1 billion investment package to boost Australia's defence industry and support jobs across Australia.

The \$1 billion of redirected investment initiatives will provide additional opportunities to Australian defence industry and support an estimated 4,000 Australian jobs, over the 2020-21 and 2021-22 financial years.

Defence is focusing on providing support to sovereign industrial capabilities and regional Defence infrastructure, which will help to support Australian businesses and jobs in a time of considerable economic uncertainty. The package is directed towards nationwide projects and jobs across Australia including:

- Increasing the employment of Australian Defence Force (ADF) Reservists who have lost their civilian income, with an allocation of up to an extra 210,000 days, and the targeted recruitment of an additional 500 ADF Reservists.
- Increasing employment opportunities for current and former ADF personnel and their families, and supporting those families with partners who may be out of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A \$300 million national estate works program that will help support the construction industry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on regional areas (including bushfire affected regions). The \$300m will be spent equally across two financial years for 2020-21 and 2021-22.
- Accelerating the sustainment of ADF platforms and capabilities, including the upgrade of Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicles, modernisation of ADF uniforms; and additional C-27J military transport aircraft maintenance, which will engage ex-Qantas and Virgin technicians.
  - C-27J military transport aircraft supplementary maintenance workforce – Aircraft maintenance staff affected by the aviation industry downturn have been engaged through contractors at RAAF bases Amberley and Richmond to provide support to Royal Australian Air Force C-27J aircraft maintenance and technical tasks, totalling approximately \$7 million.
- Increased funding of over \$110 million for Defence innovation, industry grants, skilling and micro credentialing and cyber training for defence industry.

- A \$20 million contract with a Canberra-based company DATAPOD (Australia), to provide Defence with portable, containerised data systems which can be rapidly deployed by sea, air or road. This investment will help to protect up to 27 direct and up to 80 supply chain jobs.
- A \$94 million contract with Queanbeyan-based company Electro Optic Systems to supply Defence with 251 Remote Weapon Stations to increase the lethality of the ADF's protected mobility vehicles. This investment draws upon Australian-owned intellectual property, with more than 80 per cent of the parts sourced through their Australian supply chain of more than 140 Australian companies
- Bringing forward approximately \$190 million of investment in approved infrastructure projects in the Northern Territory.
- Accelerating important ADF capability development projects, targeting key manufacturing, construction and high-tech sectors.

These initiatives complement the ongoing modernisation of the Australian Defence Force, proposed under the *2020 Force Structure Plan*.

### **COVID-19 Assist**

These are extraordinary times, and the Australian Defence Force is ready to help when asked by the Australian Government. The ADF is providing customised support to state and territory authorities, which has to date included a range of logistical, medical and personnel support.

The scope and scale of Defence support is coordinated through Emergency Management Australia. During Operation COVID-19 ASSIST, around 3200 Defence personnel have been supporting the Government's response to COVID-19 at any one time.

To support Australians and Australian businesses, Defence has modified existing and future Defence infrastructure suite of contracts to allow for cost and time relief to industry that experience COVID-19 impacts to their obligations.

As part of COVID-19 ASSIST, ADF personnel have been assisting regional communities stay safe and continue to support State and Territory efforts. Defence personnel supported a regional Victorian company - Australia's only producer of surgical face masks - with production, machine operations, training, maintenance, repair and warehousing to boost production capacity from two million surgical face masks per year to up to 50 million per year. As part of an AUSMAT-led Commonwealth response, the ADF deployed 50 personnel to the North West Regional Hospital in Burnie for two weeks to allow staff to return after self-isolation. The team provided essential health services to more than 400 patients. ADF personnel also assisted in protecting our Indigenous communities from exposure by working with local authorities.

## *Defence*

Defence is currently working with estate construction prime contractors in assessing and engaging both skilled and unskilled people on a part time basis, for a minimum of six months, through various capital facilities projects. These opportunities are for people made redundant as a result of COVID-19.

Defence is also working with contractors to engage local people who have been made redundant as a result of COVID-19. To date, over 1,150 small to medium regional enterprises have been engaged under this approach, including (for example) a landscaping business in Tasmania, the Snowy Mountain Cookies Company in Jindabyne, Dynamic Catering Solutions in Western Australia and CMJ Catering, a small Indigenous owned catering company in NSW.

### **Support to COVID-19 impacted personnel in the Civil Airline Industry**

Defence and its prime aerospace contractors have sought to encourage those stood-down or redundant personnel to explore work in the defence industry sector, where their skills are readily transferable to Defence related projects in the aerospace domain. Defence identified these contractors as being the key targets for the engagement based on the location of affected civil airlines personnel, the likely skill sets, and the relevant Defence work in the Hunter Valley region. Each of the Defence prime contractors hold significant contracting arrangements with Defence for capability delivery and/or sustainment. Defence has agreed to provide a capped level of financial contribution to the contractors up to \$1.1 million to date from 2020-21, in order to cover the costs associated with the engagement. This may relate to industry open days, training seminars or other like activities that encourages and enable workforce transition. Defence hopes that by undertaking these placements, defence industry can create a larger pool of skilled workers it can draw on, while also continuing to deliver important support to the ADF.

### **New Facilities and Infrastructure Projects delivered in Regional areas in 2020-21**

Defence's Enterprise Estate and Infrastructure Program has 155 active projects (post-First Pass Government Approval) in Australia with an approximate total construction value of \$24.3 billion. Following the implementation of Local Industry Capability Plans (LCIP) in January 2018, there has been a steady increase in the rate of local industry participation across the program with around 73 per cent, or 3,286 of all sub-contracts being awarded to local companies and businesses, and a total sub-contract value of around \$3.7 billion across the Portfolio.



This is further broken into total Portfolio and LICP:

Subcontractor Packages			
State	Percentage	\$' million	LCIP Implementation
ACT	57%	\$56.3	50%
NSW	78%	\$740.2	78%
NT	77%	\$759.1	83%
QLD	64%	\$698.4	75%
SA	74%	\$384.7	75%
TAS	89%	\$2.6	89%
VIC	53%	\$397.9	64%
WA	89%	\$639.2	90%

**Navy Capability Infrastructure Sub-Program (combining facilities for SEA 1654 Phase 3 Maritime Operational Support Capability, SEA 5000 Phase 1 Future Frigates, and SEA 1180 Phase 1 Offshore Patrol Vessels Project)**

This \$2.1 billion Navy Capability Infrastructure Sub (NCIS) Program will provide new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure around Australia to support the introduction into services and sustainment of new Frigate, Offshore Patrol and Maritime Operational Support vessels. There are multiple contracts awarded or planned under the NCIS Program with the Local Industry Capability Participation Plan targets. Procurements for NCIS-4B Stirling, NCIS-6A RAAF Darwin, NCIS-7A St Kilda SA, and NCIS-8A Cairns are occurring in Q3 2020 and Q4 2020. LICP targets will be confirmed as part of contract negotiations. The program achieved Parliamentary approval on 5 December 2019 and is scheduled for completion by early 2027.

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

This \$1.1 billion project will provide critical base infrastructure, trunk-engineering services (power, water, sewage) and some living-in-accommodation to ensure reliability of essential base services at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory. The project will deliver airfield improvements, including lengthening the runway, constructing a new air movements terminal, aircraft apron and aviation fuel farm. The primary contractor Lendlease's Local Industry Capability Plan is targeting 70 per cent to be awarded to local industry. This project achieved Parliamentary approval on 14 May 2020 and the whole program is scheduled for completion by late 2027.

### **Armoured Fighting Vehicles Facilities Program: Stage One**

This \$235.1 million project will provide facilities and infrastructure upgrades to support the Australian Army's armoured fighting vehicles capability. The proposed scope includes upgrading facilities and training areas at various sites around Australia. The primary contract is yet to be awarded, with a Local Industry Capability Plan forming part of the contract. This project achieved Parliamentary approval on 18 June 2020 and is scheduled for completion by late 2023.

### **Point Wilson Waterside Infrastructure Remediation**

This \$218.9 million project will provide remediation to the Point Wilson Explosives Area waterside infrastructure in order to enable the recommencement of bulk explosive ordnance importation operations. The primary contractor CPB Pty Ltd's Local Industry Capability Plan is targeting 95 per cent to be awarded to local industry. This project achieved Parliamentary approval on 19 September 2019 and is scheduled for completion by late 2022.

### **AIR555 Airborne Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Warfare Capability Facilities Works**

This \$293.6 million project will provide fit for purpose facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction into services of the MC-35 Peregrine Airborne Intelligence Reconnaissance Warfare Capability at RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia; RAAF Darwin, Northern Territory; RAAF Townsville, Queensland; and Cocos Islands, Indian Ocean Territory. The primary contract is yet to be awarded, with a Local Industry Capability Plan forming part of the contract. This project achieved Parliamentary approval on 31 August 2020 and is scheduled for completion by mid-2024.

### **LAND 121 Phase 5B Unit Sustainment Facilities**

This \$183.3 million project will provide facilities and infrastructure upgrades to support the ADF's LAND 121 sustainment and the associated capability at various sites around Australia. The scope of work includes workshops and storage facilities, fuel and wash points, loading ramps and weighbridges, vehicle shelters and hardstand. The primary contract is yet to be awarded, with a Local Industry Capability Plan forming part of the contract. This project achieved Parliamentary approval on 18 June 2020 and is scheduled for completion by mid-2024.

### **Shoalwater Bay Training Area Remediation Project**

This \$135.4 million project is remediating 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. The primary contractor's, joint venture of Downer EDI Works Pty Ltd and FK Gardner and Sons Pty Ltd, Local Industry Capability Plan is targeting 80 per cent to be awarded to local industry. This Project achieved Parliamentary approval on 5 December 2019 and is scheduled for completion by late 2021.

### **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. The primary contractor WATPAC's Local Industry Capability Plan is targeting 58 per cent to be awarded to local industry. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 19 September 2019 and is scheduled for completion by late 2021.

### **Facilities to support SEA 1442 Phase 6 Protected Satellite Communications**

This \$24.4 million project is providing infrastructure works, namely footings and slabs; supporting services connections; and perimeter fencing at HMAS *Harman*, Australian Capital Territory, and HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia. The primary contractor St Hilliers' Local Industry Capability Plan is targeting 80 per cent to be awarded to local industry. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 19 September 2019 and is scheduled for completion by December 2020.

### **Defence Technology Acceleration Collab Fit-Out Project**

This \$7 million project will provide a facility to support Defence to explore possibilities in artificial intelligence and emerging technology. The facility will be an unclassified, agile space located at Fairbairn, Australian Capital Territory, that will enable Defence to collaborate across different areas of Defence, as well as engaging directly with industry leaders and academia. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 19 September 2019 and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2020.

### **Facilities to Support the LAND 154 Phase 2 Weapons Technical Intelligence Capability**

This \$5.9 million project is providing infrastructure, including hardstands, services, amenities and security fencing, to support new capability at Gallipoli Barracks, Queensland, and Edinburgh Defence Precinct, South Australia. Whilst a Local Industry Capability Plan was not applicable to the procurement (under required Budget threshold), the primary contractor St Hilliers' is targeting 100 per cent to be awarded to local industry. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 28 November 2019 and is scheduled for completion by early 2021.

### **Mulwala Decommissioning and Demolition Project**

This \$47.3 million project will decommission and demolish 116 aged and contaminated redundant factory buildings at the Mulwala Propellant and Explosives Facility, New South Wales. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 28 November 2019 and is scheduled for completion by mid-2022.

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

This \$29.6 million project will provide 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. The primary contractor St Hilliers' Local Industry Capability Plan is targeting 70 per cent to be awarded to local industry. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 28 November 2019 and is scheduled for completion by late 2021.

### **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. The primary contract is yet to be awarded, with a Local Industry Capability Plan forming part of the contract. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 18 May 2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2022.

### **Oakey Mid-Term Refresh**

This \$31.3 million project will upgrade engineering services and demolish redundant buildings at Swartz Barracks, Queensland. The primary contract is yet to be awarded, with a Local Industry Capability Plan forming part of the contract. This project achieved approval through a Public Works Committee Medium Works Notification on 14 May 2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2023.

## **New Major Capital Equipment Projects delivered in Regional areas in 2020-21**

### **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 Exclusive Economic Zone. The HIPP was approved by the Australian Government in December 2019, with initial funding of approximately \$150 million over five years from 2019-20. The first HIPP survey commenced in May 2020, and two hydrographic surveys are complete. The HIPP will have 12 hydrographic surveys under contract by December 2020 through the Program. COVID-19 travel restrictions have impacted the HIPP with additional survey areas being released to compensate and mitigate interstate mobilisation risk. As of September 2020, the majority of higher priority national hydrographic tasking is in the coastal waters off Australia's North and North West.

### **Evolutionary Digital Ground Environment (EDGE)**

In June 2020, the Australian Army invested \$3.85 million in the first phase of a four phase defence communications proof-of-concept, which reinforces the Government's commitment in the 2020 Force Structure Plan to build a resilient and internationally competitive defence sovereign industrial base. The seventeen sovereign Australian companies involved in the project will design and manufacture a prototype mobile tactical communications system, informing future options for Defence projects. If all four phases are completed by the end of 2021, up to 47 technical and engineering jobs may be created across six states and the Australian Capital Territory over 18 months from June 2020.

### **Strategic Domestic Munitions Manufacturing (SDMM)**

Thales Australia and the Australian Government have signed a 10-year Strategic Domestic Munitions Manufacturing contract for \$1.1 billion commencing on 1 July 2020. The contract is for the continued management and operation of Australia's munition factories in Benalla, Victoria, and Mulwala, New South Wales providing job certainty for more than 650 highly skilled workers. The agreement provides surety of supply of key munitions and components for the ADF, and guarantees the Australian manufacture and supply of strategic munitions to the ADF. Thales continues to build long-term relationships with hundreds of Australian suppliers, building Australia's self-reliance and the capability of the broader Australian manufacturing sector.

### **New Information Communication Technology delivered in Regional areas in 2020-21**

Information communication technology (ICT) in Defence is delivered through a number of large contracts supporting Defence capability, which includes the provision of localised ICT services and support at Defence bases and sites throughout Australia as listed at [Figure 1](#). Delivery of localised ICT services through these contracts is provided through a locally engaged workforce across capital cities, regional and remote locations in Australia.

### **DEF799 Phase 1 Geospatial Intelligence Satellite capability-enhanced Commercial Access**

DEF799 Phase 1 capability sustainment and facilities management is delivered through a number of contracts throughout regional and remote locations in Australia. Contracts totalling approximately \$4 million are expected to be awarded in 2020-21 for provision of localised services at DEF799 Phase 1 facilities located on Defence bases and other sites. Delivery of localised services through these contracts is provisioned by locally engaged workforce across capital cities, regional and remote locations in Australia.

## **EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT**

The Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio's purpose is to help create an inclusive and prosperous Australia by maximising opportunity through national leadership on education, skills and employment policy development and implementation.

The Portfolio works with state and territory governments, other Australian Government entities and a range of service providers to provide quality policy advice and services for the benefit of all Australians, and through its range of programs, supports Australians living in regional and rural communities.

As at 30 June 2020, the Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio employed 4,005 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,493 staff (87.2 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 450 staff (11.2 per cent) in other capital cities and 62 staff (1.6 per cent) in regional areas.

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment has a presence across Australia including all capital cities, and a regional footprint with staff located in Bendigo, Alice Springs, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Newcastle and Orange.

### **New initiatives**

#### **Supporting the Child Care Sector through the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The 2020–21 Budget will invest funding in the child care system of \$10.3 billion in 2020–21. This includes the continued easing of Child Care Subsidy (CCS) activity test requirements until 4 April 2021, to enable eligible families across Australia whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19 to receive up to 100 hours per fortnight of subsidised care. This will assist them to return to the level of work, study or training they were undertaking before the pandemic.

The Australian Government will also provide specific assistance to support Victorian Early Childhood Education and Care services to manage the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the CCS payments, these services will receive \$314.2 million to support them from 28 September 2020 to 31 January 2021, as restrictions ease. This is in addition to the \$51.7 million provided by the Australian Government in 2020–21 for Victorian services during the stage four lockdown restrictions.

These measures further build upon the *COVID-19 Response Package – Child Care* included in the Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020, with the Government investing \$2.6 billion over two years from 2019–20 through Business Continuity, Transition and Exceptional Circumstances payments to support the delivery and ongoing viability of Early Childhood Education and Care services throughout Australia during the pandemic.

### **Student Support Package – supporting students and teachers**

The Australian Government remains committed to supporting improved education outcomes for school students impacted by COVID-19, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students in regional and remote areas.

The Australian Government will provide \$21.5 billion in 2020-21 for recurrent funding to Australian schools distributed on the basis of need.

The Australian Government will provide a further \$146.3 million over five years from 2020-21 to improve school education outcomes of young Australians, particularly disadvantaged students, regional students and those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as contribute to social cohesion. The package includes:

- \$39.8 million over four years from 2020-21 for the Clontarf Foundation to enhance the education and employment prospects of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, with up to 12,500 participants in 2023. The National Indigenous Australians Agency will deliver increased funding in the 2021 and 2022 calendar years, and the Department in the 2023 calendar year.
- \$38.2 million over four years from 2020-21 for The Smith Family to extend support through its Learning for Life program to a further 76,000 disadvantaged young Australians as they complete secondary school and move into work, training or further study.
- \$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.
- \$27.3 million over five years from 2020-21 to foster science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills in early learners and school students through a range of proven STEM programs, including: the Australian Academy of Science's STEM programs; The Smith Family's Let's Count program; Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) STEM Professionals in Schools, Froebel Australia's Little Scientists; and, the Early Learning STEM Australia (ELSA) program delivered by the University of Canberra.
- \$6 million over four years from 2020-21 to support social cohesion, including funding for the expansion of the Anti-Defamation Commission's Click Against Hate program that will focus on digital Holocaust education, and expansion of the Islamic Museum of Australia's online education programs.

### *Education, Skills and Employment*

- \$25 million over five years from 2020-21 to establish a program to enable the Government to respond flexibly and quickly with targeted responses to emerging education priorities arising from COVID-19.

These measures build upon the *COVID-19 Response Package - Support for Non-Government Schools and School Funding – Additional Support for Students and Teachers* measures in the Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020.

### **Research Package**

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government will provide \$1 billion in 2020-21 to safeguard Australia's research sector against the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, through measures that protect university research funding and better align research investments with Australia's future economic priorities, while continuing to support ground-breaking Australian research and the higher education sector.

New investments in university research and key research infrastructure include:

- An additional \$1 billion in 2020-21 through the *Research Support Program* to support universities to continue the delivery of world class research.
- \$41.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to establish a *Strategic University Reform Fund* to bring together universities and local industries to partner on innovative reform projects.
- \$20 million over four years from 2020-21 to establish a Centre for Augmented Reasoning at the University of Adelaide to improve the application of machine learning in Australia.
- \$5.8 million in 2020-21 to undertake a scoping study of potential options to accelerate the translation and commercialisation of research, including through new partnerships between universities and industry and opportunities for investments.

The Government will also deliver the *2020 Research Infrastructure Investment Plan* (RIIP 2020) to continue implementation of the *2016 National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy* (NCRIS) *Roadmap*. RIIP 2020 maintains the Government's \$1.9 billion, 12-year funding envelope for national research infrastructure (NRI) and provides funding for four new NRI projects in national research priority areas.

These new projects will be met within the RIIP funding envelope, and include:

- \$36.3 million over three years from 2020-21 for the early implementation of the Sea Simulator project to support the Great Barrier Reef Restoration and Adaption Program.
- \$8.9 million over three years from 2020-21 to increase the capabilities of the Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences and Indigenous e-research platforms.



- \$8.3 million over three years from 2020-21 to establish new synthetic biology research infrastructure to facilitate rapid responses to emerging disease and biosecurity risks and address critical gaps in technological platforms and informatics.
- \$7.6 million over three years from 2020-21 to upgrade the Australian Community Climate and Earth System Simulator (ACCESS) to increase Australia's capacity to respond to future climate disasters and emergencies.

This measure builds on the 2018-19 Budget measure: *National Research Infrastructure Investment Plan – implementation of Government response*, and the 2019-20 MYEFO measure: *Pilot Programs to Enhance Collaboration between Universities and Industry*; and complements the *Higher Education Reform – more job ready graduates*; *Higher Education Reform – additional support for regional Australia*; and *Higher Education – Additional Support* measures.

### **Higher Education – additional support**

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government will provide \$903.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to provide more places and support for students, and to establish new quality protections for the higher education system as it recovers from the impacts of COVID-19. The funding includes measures such as:

- Creating disciplines of Professional Pathway Psychology and Professional Pathway Social Work to reduce the student contribution amounts for students studying units as part of a pathway to professional qualifications.
- \$251.9 million over two years from 2020-21 for an additional 50,000 subsidised higher education short course places across a range of discipline areas.
- \$298.5 million over four years from 2020-21 for an additional 12,000 Commonwealth supported places in national priority areas to further meet demand for higher education.
- \$19.2 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$45.1 million over 10 years to 2029-30), including service delivery, to revise the allocation method for the \$5,000 Tertiary Access Payment and to enable universities to administer the payment to eligible outer regional, rural and remote commencing students who relocate for their studies.
- \$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 Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt.
- Extending exemptions for eligible students from paying loan fees under the FEE HELP and VET Student Loans (VSL) programs to 30 June 2021.

### *Education, Skills and Employment*

- 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 to further support their recovery from COVID-19.

The Government will also guarantee *Commonwealth Grant Scheme* (CGS) payments for higher education providers from 2021 to 2023 as they transition to new funding arrangements as part of the job-ready graduates' reforms, and will maintain CGS funding caps at or above previous years' levels from 2025 at a cost of \$238.9 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$2 billion over 10 years to 2029-30) and will support universities in managing the economic instabilities created by COVID-19.

This measure complements and builds upon the *Higher Education Reform – more job ready graduates*; *Higher Education Reform – additional support for regional Australia*; and complements the *Research Package* measures in this Budget.

### **Higher Education Reform – additional support for regional Australia**

Announced on 19 June 2020, the Australian 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.

This measure responds to the recommendations of the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* final report and includes:

- \$159.1 million over four years from 2020-21 to provide a Tertiary Access Payment of \$5,000 to eligible school-leavers from outer regional or remote areas to assist with the cost of moving closer to their tertiary education institution.
- \$145 million over four years to increase *Commonwealth Grant Scheme* funding for regional university campuses by 3.5 per cent a year.
- \$17.1 million over four years from 2020-21 (including \$0.5 million in capital funding and \$13.9 million per year ongoing) to ensure all Indigenous students from regional and remote communities who meet admissions standards can gain access to a Commonwealth supported place at a higher education provider.
- \$0.7 million over four years from 2020-21 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 \$79.4 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.

- \$7.1 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$1.8 million per year ongoing) to refocus the *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program* (HEPPP) to provide more support to Indigenous students and students from regional and remote areas, including supporting more projects in regional areas to encourage students into higher education.
- \$48.8 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$195.4 million by 2030-31) to establish new partnerships between regional universities and other higher education providers or industry to undertake innovative research projects.
- \$6 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$14.7 million over 10 years to 2030-31) to appoint a dedicated Regional Education Commissioner to monitor implementation of the reforms and encourage increased participation in higher education throughout regional Australia.

This measure complements the *Higher Education Reform – more job ready graduates*; *Higher Education – Additional Support*; and *Research Package* measures.

### **Higher Education Reform – more job-ready graduates**

Announced in the July Economic and Fiscal Update, the Australian Government will strengthen 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, stronger links with industry, as well as improved transparency and accountability for the higher education sector.

This package aims to deliver more job-ready graduates in the disciplines and regions where they are needed most and help drive the nation's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reforms will be implemented from 1 January 2021 and include:

- Expanding access to higher education by increasing the number of Commonwealth supported places (CSPs), especially in regional Australia, with an additional 39,000 places provided by 2023 and an additional 100,000 places provided by 2030.
- 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.
- \$900 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.

## *Education, Skills and Employment*

- 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* to reflect the Consumer Price Index.

To support universities and students transitioning to the new arrangements, the Government will guarantee university funding at current levels for three years from 2021 and will put in place grandfathering arrangements for current students studying courses where student contributions will increase from 2021.

This measure also includes \$12.5 million over three years from 2020-21 to establish a new *Special Research Initiative* grant scheme under the Australian Research Council's *National Competitive Grants Program* (NCGP) for research into Australia's distinct history, society and culture, providing between \$20,000 and \$100,000 each year to about 40 projects for up to three years. This initiative will be offset by redirecting existing 2019-20 funding allocated to the NCGP.

This measure complements the *Higher Education Reform – additional support for regional Australia; Higher Education – Additional Support; and Research Package* measures.

## **Skills and Training**

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

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Government will introduce a 50 per cent wage subsidy for all businesses who take on new apprentices from 5 October 2020. The \$1.2 billion *Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements* wage subsidy will support 100,000 new apprentices and will apply for the period 5 October 2020 to 30 September 2021. This measure builds upon the Government's \$1 billion JobTrainer Fund and the \$2.8 billion *COVID-19 Response Package - supporting apprentices and trainees* measure published in the Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020.

The \$1 billion JobTrainer Fund will be jointly established with states and territories, with the Australian Government to contribute \$500 million to provide up to 340,700 Australians with access to free, or low fee, training places in areas of skills need.

The Government is also helping businesses keep apprentices and trainees employed through the \$2.8 billion *Supporting Apprentices and Trainees* wage subsidy, which is expected to support 90,000 employers to keep 180,000 apprentices and trainees in employment and training.

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 the COVID-19 pandemic, including extending the termination date of the Foundation Skills for Your Future Remote Community Pilot by 12 months to 30 June 2023 to support adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills training in remote communities.

The Government will invest a further \$49.5 million over two years from 2020-21 for up to an additional 14,485 places in the *Skills for Education and Employment Program* so that new job seekers have access to foundation level language, literacy and numeracy skills training, so that they can be competitive in the labour market.

The Government is providing \$29.6 million for the National Careers Institute (NCI) to support the ongoing work of the NCI. The NCI will provide people with access to 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 advice to school leavers about the training and employment options that suit their interests and prepares them for the jobs of the future.

## **Supporting Job Seekers and Employers**

The Australian Government is committed to supporting job seekers and employers to help people find and keep a job, create their own job, change jobs, reskill and enjoy fulfilling careers. This forms an essential element of the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and social and economic recovery. Measures benefiting regional communities include:

### **Local Jobs Program**

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Government is providing funding of \$62.8 million to 30 June 2022, for the *Local Jobs Program*, which will be rolled out in 25 regions across Australia, including in regional areas. The program will focus on reskilling, upskilling and employment pathways to assist people back into the workforce as the economy recovers. The *Local Jobs Program* puts in place local Employment Facilitators, creates Local Jobs and Skills Taskforces and provides Local Recovery Funds to support small scale projects in the 25 regions.

### **Supporting Stronger Employment Outcomes**

The Government is also providing funding in the 2020-21 Budget for a range of measures to support stronger employment outcomes, including in regional Australia.

The Government will provide funding to support Australia's transition to a *New Employment Services Model* from July 2022. The Government will provide \$295.9 million over four years to develop and implement the digital platform to support the *New Employment Services Model*.

The new model will allow most job-ready job seekers to manage their job search requirements online and allow more resources to be directed to providing personal, tailored help to disadvantaged Australians who need access to crucial skills and training to break into the workforce. 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 support improved matching, pre-screening and validation of job applications.

The Government is also investing \$183.1 million over three years from July 2020 to fast-track and expand the current Online Employment Service platform to ensure job-ready job seekers can gain access to the information and support they need to secure their own way back into work.

Further support will be delivered through the introduction of a more flexible approach to counting study and training courses of less than 12 months toward meeting mutual obligation requirements. Eligible courses will be in identified areas of skills needs and will include subsidised training in the Vocational Education and Training system, and courses delivered under the \$1 billion *JobTrainer Fund* as they become available.

### **Supporting Young Job Seekers**

To support young people to connect with employment and skills opportunities, \$21.9 million will support initiatives over two years from early 2021 to connect more young Australians to youth specialist employment services and targeted assistance. This includes:

- reducing the waiting period for early school leavers who are not in receipt of income support to gain access to the youth specialist Transition to Work service from 1 January 2021
- providing young people receiving online employment services up to three advisory sessions with a Transition to Work provider
- developing and delivering online learning modules to young people to help them develop job-ready skills and succeed in the labour market.

### **Support for relocation and for Seasonal Workers**

The Government is providing funding to support people to relocate for ongoing work or to relocate to a regional area to take up agricultural work, and is supporting the welfare of Pacific and Timor-Leste workers:

- \$9 million to support the Seasonal Worker Programme over three years from 2020-21, ensuring the welfare of Pacific and Timor-Leste workers is protected and that Australian farmers have access to the workforce they need.
- \$17.4 million over two years from 2020-21 to assist individuals to relocate for employment opportunities, by funding modifications to the existing *Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job* program to make it available to individuals who temporarily relocate to a regional area to take up short-term agricultural work of at least six weeks' duration (of at least 120 hours). Modifications will also include temporarily removing the waiting period to provide all job seekers in employment services access to assistance to relocate to take up full-time ongoing employment in any industry.

### **Further Support Measures**

Other measures to support stronger regional employment outcomes include:

- A further \$3.9 million in 2021-22 to extend the Time to Work Employment Service by a further 12 months to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners to gain access to the support they need to better prepare them to find employment and reintegrate into the community upon their release from prison.
- \$24.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to streamline the successful *ParentsNext* program to better support parents to plan and prepare for a return to employment by the time their youngest child reaches school age.
- \$35.8 million injection to the *Employment Fund* in 2021-22 to ensure all new job seekers continue to attract higher *Employment Fund* credits, as has been the case since July 2020.
- \$5.7 million to assist more job seekers to start their own business, including in regional areas, the New Business Assistance with *New Enterprise Incentive Scheme* (NEIS) program eligibility is being expanded to individuals undertaking part-time work, study and/or with caring responsibilities. Changes will also allow existing micro-businesses impacted by COVID-19 to receive assistance to refocus their business to meet new areas of demand or to keep their business running.

These measures build upon \$159.5 million provided over three years from 2019-20, announced earlier in 2020 in the Government's COVID-19 Response, to support job seekers affected by the pandemic, including:

### *Education, Skills and Employment*

- \$115.1 million to ensure job seekers get the support they need and can be connected to employment services at the earliest opportunity.
- \$41.7 million to the Career Transition Assistance program to enable JobActive providers to more readily refer mature-age job seekers to the program.
- \$2.7 million to extend Regional Employment Trials by a further 12 months to 30 June 2021 to ensure approved projects continue in the selected regional areas.

### **Investing in Regional Australia – additional Regional University Centres**

The Australian Government will provide \$15 million over four years from 2019-20 to support higher education in regional Australia by establishing a further five Regional University Centres (formerly known as Regional Study Hubs). The additional funding will increase the number of Regional University Centres from 16 to 21 to provide more opportunities for students to undertake higher education while remaining in their local communities.

This measure was announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO and builds on the 2018-19 MYEFO measure titled *Strengthening Higher Education in Regional Australia – additional support for students and universities*.

### **New Central Queensland School of Mines and Manufacturing – Gladstone and Rockhampton**

The Australian Government will provide \$30 million over three years from 2020-21 to the new School of Mines and Manufacturing at Central Queensland University. The new school will provide training in traditional trades and emerging technologies to support Australia's growing resources sector. Construction of the school is expected to create more than 300 jobs, directly benefiting the Gladstone and Rockhampton regions. This measure was announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO.

### **Rural Inspire Initiative**

The Australian Government will provide \$2 million over three years from 2019-20 to the *Country Education Partnership's Rural Inspire Initiative* to support young people living in rural communities to set its sights high and achieve its goals by developing leadership skills and knowledge. The initiative also aims to explore education challenges and opportunities facing rural youth and was announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO.



### **Teach for Australia Future Leaders Program – additional funding**

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$15 million over three years from 2019-20 to support more high achieving teachers to become high-quality school leaders in rural, remote and disadvantaged schools.

This measure was announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO and builds on the 2018-19 Budget measure titled *High Achieving Teachers Program*.

### **Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program – extension**

The Australian Government will provide \$1.8 million over two years from 2019-20 to extend the *Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program* pilot into the 2020 school year to help improve literacy outcomes by continuing to trial flexible teaching methods.

This measure will be offset by redirecting funding from the National Schools Reform Fund, which was part of the 2017-18 Budget measure titled *Quality Schools – true needs-based funding for Australia's schools*.

This measure was announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO and builds on the 2018-19 MYEFO measure titled *School Funding – additional support for students*.

### **General Sir John Monash Foundation**

Announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO, the Australian 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 will be provided from 2020 for postgraduate scholars to study at a leading international university. The Tim Fischer Scholarship will be offered to scholars from regional or rural backgrounds.

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

The Australian Government will provide \$2.4 million over four years from 2019-20 to extend the removal of *Higher Education Loan Program* (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 titled *Closing the Gap refresh – Indigenous Youth Education Package* to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to quality education.

### **Pilot Programs to Enhance Collaboration between Universities and Industry**

Announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide funding over two years from 2019-20 to bring together universities and industry to partner on innovative projects. Projects benefiting regional cities include:

- \$2 million to the University of Wollongong to establish an Industry 4.0 Hub in Nowra to drive productivity and growth in areas of agribusiness and manufacturing in the Shoalhaven area.
- \$2 million to Deakin University to establish a hydrogen fuel cell and supply chain pilot program in the city of Warrnambool.

### **Australian Apprentice Wage Subsidy Trial – expansion**

Announced in the 2019-20 MYEFO, the Australian Government will provide \$60 million over four years from 2019-20 to expand the successful Australian Apprentice Wage Subsidy Trial to provide additional support for small businesses across rural and regional Australia.

The expansion will benefit up to an additional 1,630 new apprentices undertaking full-time apprenticeships at the Certificate III and IV levels in rural and regional areas, and in areas of skills needs as identified by the National Skills Needs List.

### **National Bushfire Recovery Fund (Cross Portfolio)**

The Australian Government committed \$2 billion to a *National Bushfire Recovery Fund* (NBRF) to assist communities and businesses to recover and rebuild following the 2019-20 bushfires. The NBRF is in addition to funding provided through existing disaster recovery assistance arrangements. This includes specific measures for this Portfolio:

#### **Bushfire Response Package – Assisting families by exempting them from the Child Care Subsidy activity test debt for 2019-20**

The families of more than 90,000 children in bushfire-declared local government areas (LGAs) will be exempt from Child Care Subsidy activity test debt for the 2019-20 financial year.

Families can still claim the Child Care Subsidy even if their work, study or volunteering hours have been impacted by the bushfires.

**Bushfire Response Package – Mental Health Support for School Communities and early childhood services**

The Government is providing an additional \$8 million for mental health support through Beyond Blue to fund an extra 25 Beyond Blue liaison officers and supporting clinicians to work with local schools and early childhood services in bushfire-affected communities. The Government also offered extra funding, available to state and territory governments on request, for school chaplains.

**Bushfire Response Package – Back to school support payment**

The Government provided a range of measures to support bushfire affected communities, including an additional \$400 (a total of \$800) for each child who qualified under the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment, to help families with education expenses.

**Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan – further support for farmers and communities in drought (Agriculture, Water and the Environment)**

The Australian Government provided an additional \$10 million in 2019-20 for Special Circumstances funding for eligible drought-affected schools experiencing financial difficulties, to help ensure the viability of these schools, increasing the total support in 2019-20 to \$20 million.

## **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).

The Portfolio pivoted its resources to support whole-of-government responses to the national bushfires over the summer of 2019-20 and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. DFAT undertook the largest and most complex consular response in Australia's history to help Australians to return, and drew heavily on Australia's foreign and trade policy capabilities to protect and promote Australia's national interests during these crises.

The Australian Government, including through Australia's embassies, high commissions and consulates around the world, continue to work with airlines and other governments to help Australians, including those from regional areas, to return on commercial flights. Consular officials are also assisting Australians overseas impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trade, tourism and investment remain crucial to Australia's economic prosperity, as set out in the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*. The Portfolio has continued to work bilaterally, and through multilateral channels, to reduce barriers to trade for Australian exporters and importers; and to assist businesses in regional areas to pursue commercial opportunities overseas. Through Export Finance Australia, 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 14 FTAs in force, providing preferential market access to 20 economies. Australia's FTA network opens new export opportunities for Australia's regional 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 regional Australian consumers at more competitive prices. The Government will continue to promote awareness and use of free trade agreements through active engagement with stakeholders. Between October 2019 and March 2020, Austrade held seven regional FTA seminars with 235 business people in attendance. Due to COVID-19, Austrade commenced delivery of a 12-part digital FTA seminar series from 26 May 2020. Nine national digital seminars have currently been conducted with 736 attendees from regional Australia, representing 17 per cent of total participants.

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

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government launched a new 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. The Portfolio is continuing to implement Australia's stepped-up engagement with the Pacific to support a more resilient region and provide flow-on benefits to regional Australia.

As at 30 June 2020, the Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio employed 4,536 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999* (excluding locally engaged staff). Of this total, 3,453 staff (76 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 177 staff (3.9 per cent) in other capital cities. DFAT also employs 906 staff overseas as at 30 June 2020.

The Portfolio also employs a significant number of contracted staff in regional areas, where they work alongside staff employed under the *Public Service Act* to understand local issues and support the needs of local communities and businesses, including through the TradeStart program (<https://www.austrade.gov.au/Australian/How-Austrade-can-help/Trade-services/TradeStart>).

The Portfolio has staff in each state and territory, working from offices in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Hobart, and Thursday Island. In addition, the Australian Passport Information Service (APIS) is based in Hobart.

## **New initiatives**

### **Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement**

The Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA) entered into force on 5 July 2020. We are now working to fully implement the Agreement so that both countries secure the maximum benefit from it. The Agreement secures preferential agreements for Australian exporters for a range of key agricultural goods. For example, cattle producers in Northern Australia are set to benefit from improved access including reduced tariffs on live cattle and beef. Agricultural products from regional areas, including mandarins from Queensland and other citrus from the Riverina will also have improved access and reduced tariffs under IA-CEPA.

The Australian Government has committed \$40 million over five years from 2020-21 for an economic cooperation program supporting IA-CEPA which will build linkages between Australia's agriculture, services and manufacturing sectors to better position Australian businesses to supply the rapidly growing Indonesian consumer market. For instance, the program will support grain growers across Australia, including those in regional Western Australia, through a grains partnership between Australia and Indonesia. The first initiative under the partnership will be a feed grains demand study to support the duty free export of wheat, sorghum and barley under IA-CEPA's tariff rate quotas.

### **Expanding and Diversifying Trade to Contribute to Australia's Post-COVID-19 Recovery**

As part of the JobMaker Plan, the Australian Government will invest \$6.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to support the recovery of Australian businesses from the COVID-19 pandemic by expanding and diversifying trade through increasing the share of two-way trade covered by FTAs and by bolstering international regional digital trade. New FTAs may boost trade opportunities for exporters in regional Australia and provide opportunities for market expansion. The Regional Digital Trade Strategy will have a positive impact on e-commerce and digitally-enabled businesses in regional Australia, including through increased ease of doing business.

### **Pacific Labour Mobility**

Pacific workers already in Australia under the *Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme* had their visas extended for 12 months in April 2020 to enable continued availability of workers in regional Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government has also announced in August 2020 a National Cabinet decision to re-start recruitment through these Pacific labour mobility programs, and has supported a successful pilot recruitment of 162 workers from Vanuatu to the Northern Territory in September 2020. Pacific labour mobility is a win-win for Australia and our Pacific family, providing much needed labour for Australian rural and regional industries experiencing a shortage of workers, and generating employment and remittances from earnings for communities in Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste. The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus) is expected to enter into force in late 2020 and will deliver sustained benefits to the region and support long-term growth. DFAT is providing support in readiness for Pacific island countries to ratify PACER Plus.

### **Measures under the \$1 billion Relief and Recovery Fund**

As part of the COVID-19 Response Package, the Australian Government has established a \$1 billion *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* to support regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiatives announced under the Fund are supporting industries including aviation, agriculture, fisheries, tourism and the arts.

### **Recovery for Regional Tourism**

The Australian Government will invest \$50 million over two years from 2020-21 through the Recovery for Regional Tourism package to assist Australian regions that are most reliant on international visitors. This package will support tourism businesses and help retain and create jobs in these regions by delivering integrated packages of support tailored to the needs of the regions. Measures will help drive domestic visitation to those regions and ensure there is a vibrant, internationally focused tourism industry still in place when visitor numbers return to more normal levels, and when international borders reopen. The Australian Government will work closely with state and territory governments and local tourism authorities to design a tailored package of support measures for each region. The package will assist tourism businesses in those regions by delivering assistance measures tailored to the needs, visitor demographic and geography of the region.

### **International Freight Assistance Mechanism**

The Government is providing \$317 million in the 2020-21 Budget to extend the International Freight Assistance Mechanism (IFAM) until 30 June 2021. This is in addition to over \$350 million already invested since 1 April 2020. The Government established IFAM as a temporary emergency mechanism to support international supply chains during COVID-19. Since April, IFAM has brought in vital medical supplies including gloves, goggles, surgical gowns, N95 masks and ventilators to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. As at 30 June 2020, IFAM has delivered over 85,000 tonnes of fresh Australian produce including salmon, beef, lamb, live lobster, pork and strawberries to key export markets, including in Asia and the Middle-East. IFAM has assisted Australian exporters of premium, perishable products to deliver on their trade commitments, maintaining hard-won market share. IFAM has also helped ensure that, despite the pandemic, Australian fresh food supplies have been able to reach our trading partners contributing to regional and global food security, despite serious disruptions to the air-freight and logistics sectors from restrictions on international travel.

### **Business Events Grants Program**

The Government has invested \$50 million in the *Business Events Grants Program* (the Program) to generate demand for events, conferences and trade exhibitions, including those in regional Australia. The Program, funded through the *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund*, will support exhibiting at events in 2021, with payments finalised by 30 June 2021. Australian businesses participating at an approved business event in 2021 will be able to apply for upfront grants to cover up to 50 per cent of their costs of \$10,000 up to \$250,000. By directly supporting exhibitors, the Program enhances supply chain resilience and enables businesses across priority sectors of the economy to pivot back to the domestic market while international markets are disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Program stimulates jobs in tourism and other sectors of the economy by encouraging Australians to undertake domestic business travel, and shop and spend locally when safe to do so, including for events held in regional Australia. It will improve connectivity with regional Australia by growing people-to-people links,

innovation through the sharing of ideas, and the facilitation of direct business-to-business economic cooperation. The pivoting of businesses to the domestic market will support regional businesses in sectors that have had international markets disrupted, which are disproportionately represented in regional Australia.

### **Supporting Australia's Exhibiting Zoos and Aquariums Program**

Through the *Supporting Australia's Exhibiting Zoos and Aquariums Program*, the Government announced \$94.6 million funded by the *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund*, to provide vital funding to exhibiting zoos and aquariums whose tourism revenue stream has stopped as a result of the travel and social distancing restrictions.

Of the 140 eligible zoos and aquariums under the program, 113 are regionally-based businesses (outside the metro regions of Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane). By October 2020, regional recipients are expected to have received a total of over \$21.2 million through the program for the period April to September 2020.

This funding has assisted businesses with fixed operational costs associated with caring for animals, and helps zoos and aquariums remain viable and ready to welcome tourists when restrictions are eased.

### **Tourism Australia Funding**

In 2020-21 the Australian Government will deliver funding of \$191.9 million to Tourism Australia. An additional \$39.7 million in 2020-21 has been authorised, bringing Tourism Australia's total available funding to \$231.6 million. This will assist in driving the recovery of Australia's tourism industry in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, through targeted and strategic marketing initiatives. Of this funding, \$29.5 million has been specifically allocated to support those regions both directly and indirectly impacted by last summer's bushfires, by driving domestic demand and encouraging tourists to get back into areas that need it most.

### **Tourism Bushfire Recovery Package**

The Australian Government's \$76 million tourism bushfire recovery package, announced on 19 January 2020, included \$61 million in funding for Tourism Australia for a national domestic campaign in partnership with the states and territories (\$20 million); funding for an international recovery campaign (\$25 million); an increase in international media hosting activities (\$9.5 million); and increased support to the tourism sector through the Australian Tourism Exchange (\$6.5 million). The domestic campaign (*Holiday Here This Year*) was launched on 23 January 2020 and the international campaign (*There's Still Nothing Like Australia*) in February 2020. Some of this activity has been paused due to COVID-19, however Tourism Australia plans to resume activity when the time is right.



From a domestic perspective, Tourism Australia will roll out the next iteration of its Holiday Here This Year campaign, which seeks to galvanise Australians to support the tourism industry and help businesses get back on their feet by booking a domestic holiday if they have the means to. The campaign will continue to showcase some of the worst-hit bushfire areas, along with popular tourism destinations that have been badly impacted as a result of widespread and negative media coverage of the bushfires and of COVID-19. Upcoming campaign activity will feature several regional destinations and icons, such as Uluru, and the Great Barrier Reef. Tourism Australia's international activity will also feature content initiatives that showcase several regional destinations, such as Baird Bay, South Australia; Hervey Bay, Queensland; Esperance, Western Australia; Daintree Rainforest, Queensland; Great Ocean Road, Victoria; Arnhem Land, Northern Territory; Rottnest Island, Western Australia; and the Blue Mountains, New South Wales.

Austrade's *Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery Grants Program* is part of the tourism bushfire recovery package and commenced in February 2020. This program is intended to protect jobs, small businesses and local economies by encouraging tourists to travel into bushfire affected regions. The program has two funding streams, which together support events, concerts, festivals and visitor attractions in fire affected regions to assist with recovery efforts and encourage visitors to return.

### **Bushfire Recovery Package – International Surge Support**

As part of the tourism bushfire recovery package announced on 19 January 2020, the Australian Government allocated \$4.1 million to DFAT and \$0.9 million to Austrade respectively in 2019-20 to support the recovery of bushfire-affected areas of regional Australia. As at 30 July 2020, \$0.6 million of the \$0.9 million allocated to Austrade has been committed to International Sentiment Tracking. Under this initiative Austrade, in collaboration with DFAT and Tourism Australia, undertook quantitative and qualitative research to understand international perceptions, along with analysis of international media coverage and social media monitoring to understand, manage and address global perceptions of Australia during and post bushfires. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced a reset by DFAT of planned international promotions and communications activities. DFAT produced a bank of 'evergreen' communications content, and digital materials and initiatives to be used across key markets at the appropriate time. DFAT and the National Bushfire Recovery Authority worked with councils in bushfire-affected regions on promotional products for use at future events, directly benefiting those areas. The bushfire-related spend for DFAT and Austrade was \$3.3 million in 2019-20.

### **Supporting Australians Overseas**

When Australians face problems overseas, the Government will provide appropriate consular services focused on those most in need, including through the *Hardship Program* and the provision of Traveller Emergency Loans as part of the COVID-19 Response Package. The loans are intended to cover temporary accommodation and daily living expenses until they can return. Loans may also be available to help vulnerable Australians purchase tickets for commercial flights. These initiatives will benefit all Australians, including those in regional areas.

## HEALTH

The Australian Government continues to support Australians living in regional, rural and remote areas through a number of new initiatives funded in the 2020-21 Budget, including those in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing the barriers to accessing healthcare services and adequate distribution of doctors and health professionals continue to be the core focus for regional health. Australians, no matter where they live, deserve access to high quality health care services. In Australia our challenge is not about having an undersupply of doctors, but it is about getting doctors and health professionals to where they are most needed – outside of our capital cities and into rural, regional and remote areas.

The Government continues to build on a range of reforms, including the *Stronger Rural Health Strategy* and is committed to taking action to improve access to primary care and address workforce issues in rural communities. The 2020-21 Budget invests in innovative trials to test new ways of delivering health services across smaller connected communities. This will inform options for broader primary care reform in rural Australia. The trials recognise that new approaches to primary care rely on collaboration between locally based providers and communities, and governments sharing responsibility for supporting innovative and sustainable approaches. The National Rural Health Commissioner will play an integral role in the implementation and evaluation of these primary care trials.

The Government is committed to expanding rural training through the *Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program* which provides rural training opportunities that increases the likelihood of graduates staying in rural communities as health professionals. The existing network of 16 University Departments of Rural Health will be expanded to provide training to students across a range of health disciplines (nursing and allied health) and offer innovative learning opportunities across a range of health settings.

The expansion of telehealth has been a revolution in the delivery of primary care, particularly for regional communities. To date, more than 31 million telehealth services have been delivered, to over 10 million Australians since telehealth was included as part of the Government's initial COVID-19 response. This Budget extends the telehealth services for a further six months while the long term design is developed in conjunction with medical groups and the community. Telehealth for specialists and allied health has also been extended.

The Government is committed to rural and remote reform and is expanding and continuing the office of the National Rural Health Commissioner. The Commissioner will be assisted by Deputy Commissioner positions to provide further support and expertise across a range of rural health disciplines including nursing, allied health and Indigenous health. This expansion will ensure rural health initiatives are integrated and

## Health

achieving practical outcomes in regional Australia. The office will have a key role in strengthening the rural training pathway and provide advice on new multidisciplinary and integrated approaches to delivering primary care in rural and remote areas.

The Government is committed to investing in Aged Care services including \$422.9 million to support approved residential aged care providers including Multi-Purpose services and services under the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program* to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, \$191.6 million will fund *Commonwealth Home Support Programme* providers to deliver in-home aged care services to clients in Aged Care Planning Regions in metropolitan and regional areas across Australia.

Senior Australians in regional Australia will be helped to live at home for longer. The Government is investing \$1.6 billion to provide 23,000 more home care packages in response to the clear preference of many senior Australians to receive aged care in their own home. This brings the total number of additional home care packages to more than 73,000, an investment of \$4.6 billion, since the 2018-19 Budget.

Alongside increased investment for headspace and other mental health services in the 2020-21 Budget, there is specific funding to support the mental health and wellbeing of Australians affected by COVID-19. This includes an additional \$47.3 million to provide mental health support for Victorians including through enhanced telephone and online services and establishing dedicated mental health clinics across the greater Melbourne region and regional Victoria.

Those living in regional Australia are receiving the benefits of the \$377.5 million investment in this Budget to maintain up to 150 General Practitioner led respiratory clinics through to 31 March 2021. More than half of these clinics are located outside of metropolitan areas to ensure a geographical reach that covers 99 per cent of the Australian population. They are dedicated to assessment and testing services and play a significant role in containing COVID-19.

As at 30 June 2020, the Health Portfolio employed 6,334 people under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total 5,459 staff (86.2 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 872 staff (13.8 per cent) in other capital cities and three staff are in other locations.

## New initiatives

### **Strengthening Primary Care – Innovative Models of Primary Care to Address Rural Workforce Shortages**

The Australian Government is investing \$3.3 million over two years from 2020-21 to support five trials in multiple sites across regional New South Wales (NSW) to trial innovative, multidisciplinary primary care approaches aimed at alleviating ongoing

workforce shortages, ensuring access to health services and improving health outcomes in these communities.

This measure extends well developed proof-of-concept pilots into fully operational models, customised to address the primary care issues in each trial site. The trials will build on and better integrate existing resources to deliver services in a more effective and sustainable way within a region. This includes multi-disciplinary team approaches and different employment models ensuring appropriate access to health services in rural and remote communities.

The trials complement work by the Office of the National Rural Health Commissioner, who will work with a number of regions, including outside of NSW, to support development of 'trial ready' and localised innovative models of care. Together, these initiatives will support the development of a range of targeted and innovative approaches to the delivery of primary health care that reflect the unique needs of communities to address ongoing rural workforce challenges.

### **Strengthening Primary Care – Extension of the National Rural Health Commissioner Office**

The Australian Government invested \$11.2 million over four years from 2020-21, and \$2.1 million per year on an ongoing basis from 2024-25, demonstrating commitment to rural and remote reform by locking in and expanding the office of the National Rural Health Commissioner (the Commissioner).

The Commissioner will take a system-wide view of rural health, representing doctors, nurses and allied health professionals, to ensure rural health initiatives are delivering outcomes for Australians who live in rural, regional and remote areas. The expanded National Rural Health Commissioner Office will now include Deputy Commissioners to support the Commissioner and provide expertise across a range of vital rural health disciplines such as nursing, allied health and Indigenous health. The Commissioner will focus on developing tangible and innovative reform by working with stakeholders in the regions to develop proposals for trialling innovative models of primary care to address ongoing and acute workforce shortages.

The rural health workforce, and rural and remote communities, will benefit from this investment which places the health issues which affect them at the forefront of Government decision making.

New legislation to support this ongoing and expanded role for the Commissioner passed both Houses of Parliament on 18 June 2020 and received Royal Assent 25 June 2020.

The current National Rural Health Commissioner, Associate Professor Ruth Stewart, was appointed on 3 July 2020 for a two year term.

### **Guaranteeing Medicare – Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program Infrastructure**

The Government is investing \$50.3 million over four years from 2020–21 on the long-standing *Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) Program*. This investment will build the rural training pipeline for allied health students and graduates to deliver health, aged care and disability services in rural communities.

The national evaluation of the RHMT program was completed earlier this year and found that the program has a direct economic benefit to communities and regions: for every dollar spent on the program, another dollar is generated in the local economy. Evidence demonstrates that providing rural training opportunities increases the likelihood of graduates staying in rural communities as health professionals.

The existing network of 16 University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH), which are funded under the RHMT Program, will be expanded. UDRHs provide training to students across a range of health disciplines (nursing and allied health) and offer innovative learning opportunities in settings including aged care, disability and rehabilitation services, childcare, schools, community facilities, as well as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services.

The package provides for capital works and recurrent funding. The capital works projects will invest funding through purchase of housing for student accommodation and building works to add teaching facilities to aged care services. The four elements of the package are:

- Funding one new UDRH to increase RHMT coverage.
- Funding five projects to increase training in more remote settings (through existing UDRHs. These would range from Modified Monash 3 (large rural towns) through to Modified Monash 7 (very remote communities).
- Funding five projects in aged care services to provide dedicated teaching spaces and partner with one or more UDRH to manage the training of nursing and allied health students.
- Funding a feasibility study to identify best approaches to increase dental and oral health training in regional locations.

### **Guaranteeing Medicare and Access to Medicines - Rural, Regional and Remote Clinical Trial Enabling Infrastructure Program**

The Australian Government is investing \$125 million from 2020–21 to 2024–25 to improve the health of Australians in rural, remote and regional areas through access to innovative clinical trials. 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 *Medical Research Future Fund* (MRFF), is giving patients access to clinical trials where they live.

### **Supporting Our Hospitals – 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 \$33.6 billion for public hospitals.

Under the new five year Addendum, the Government is investing an estimated \$6 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.

### **Ageing and Aged Care – Providing More Home Care Packages**

The Australian Government is continuing to increase its support for elderly Australians to stay in their homes for longer by investing in additional home care packages. A further \$1.6 billion over four years from 2020-21 has been committed in the 2020-21 Budget for an additional 23,000 home care packages. This investment builds on:

- The 2019-20 MYEFO measure *Aged Care – response to the Aged Care Royal Commission Interim Report* and ongoing aged care reforms that provided an additional investment of \$496.3 million for 10,000 home care packages.
- The 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020 measure *Ageing and Aged Care* that provided an additional investment of \$347.4 million over five years from 2020-21 (including \$21.8 million in 2024-25) for the release of an additional 6,105 home care packages across three package levels.

The Government has now invested an additional \$4.6 billion in more than 73,000 home care packages since the 2018-19 Budget.

This additional investment will support 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.

### **Ageing and Aged Care – Commonwealth Continuity of Support Programme and Disability Support for Older Australians – funding to older people with disability**

The Australian Government is investing an additional \$153 million over four years from 2020-1 for both the *Commonwealth Continuity of Support (CoS) Programme* (\$27.7 million in 2020-21, announced on 27 July 2020), and its replacement from 1 July 2021, the new *Commonwealth Disability Support for Older Australians (DSOA) Program* (total of \$125.3 million).

In 2020-21, new funding to CoS is providing clients with increased needs access to higher levels of services, and extending the *CoS Accommodation Management Grant* until 30 June 2021.

From 2021-22, with increased funding, the DSOA program will deliver a more client-centred program to around 3,600 clients.

Both CoS and DSOA are closed programs that support older people with a disability who were in state administered care and not eligible for the *National Disability Insurance Scheme*.

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.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic Health Response**

#### **Ageing and Aged Care – Supporting Residential Aged Care**

The Australian Government is investing \$422.9 million over two years from 2019-20 on the COVID-19 pandemic support supplement that is paid to approved providers of residential aged care including Multi-Purpose services and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program*. This includes a lump sum of \$205.3 million in 2019-20 and \$217.6 million in 2020-21. The payments support the provision of residential aged care to senior Australians by supporting providers with the additional costs associated with COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic support supplement, announced on 20 May 2020, provided lump sum payments for each resident in care, with a higher amount paid in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. The first payment was made in June 2020 at a rate of around \$1,350 per resident in all areas of Australia outside major metropolitan areas compared with around \$900 in major metropolitan areas.

The second COVID-19 pandemic support supplement, announced on 31 August 2020, will be paid in October 2020 at a rate of around \$1,435 per resident in non-major metropolitan areas and around \$975 in major metropolitan areas.



### **Ageing and Aged Care – Aged Care Continuity of Workforce – Increase to the Viability Supplement in Residential and Home Care**

The Government is investing \$52.7 million over two years from 2019–20 in a temporary 30 per cent increase to the rate of viability supplement that is paid to approved providers of residential aged care and home care. An equivalent amount is paid to providers of Multi-Purpose services and to *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program* providers.

The viability support supplement is paid per care recipient per day for smaller, residential services located in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. It is also paid for home care recipients receiving care in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia.

- \$25.3 million was announced on 20 March 2020 for the first temporary 30 per cent increase to the viability supplement, paid from 1 March 2020 to 31 August 2020.
- An additional \$27.4 million was announced on 31 August 2020 for the continuation of the temporary 30 per cent increase to the viability supplement, paid from 1 September 2020 to 28 February 2021.

The temporary increases to the viability supplement rates recognises the additional costs involved in providing care to senior Australians in rural, regional and remote areas during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Ageing and Aged Care – Commonwealth Home Support Programme**

On 20 March 2020 and 31 August 2020 the Government announced \$120.2 million and \$71.4 million, respectively, to enable *Commonwealth Home Support Programme* (CHSP) providers to redirect their activities towards support for COVID-19 pandemic priorities, and provide in-home aged care services to CHSP clients in Aged Care Planning Regions in metropolitan and regional areas across Australia. Of this funding, \$70 million was available in 2019-20 and \$121.6 million is available for 2020-21.

As a demand driven program, the CHSP package includes a number of measures to support clients:

- \$70.2 million, announced on 20 March 2020, to fund short-term support for CHSP providers to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- \$50 million, announced on 31 March 2020, to support CHSP meals providers to increase their capacity to support older Australians who are isolated in their home with prepared meals.
- \$71.4 million, announced on 31 August 2020, to fund *Short-Term Home Support for Older Australians on Leave from Residential Aged Care*.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Supporting Mental Health Nationally through additional Psychological Therapies**

The Australian Government is investing \$100.8 million over two years from 2020-21 to provide additional Medicare-subsidised psychological sessions under the *Better Access* national initiative for Australians experiencing mental health issues because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will provide up to 10 Additional psychological therapy sessions each year for patients with an existing *Mental Health Treatment Plan*. This includes people in regional Australia to continue to access essential mental health treatment and support. This includes the \$7.3 million in 2020-21 announced by the Government on 2 August 2020 specifically to support Victorians to access these additional services.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Supporting the Mental Health of Australians through the Coronavirus Pandemic**

On 29 March 2020, the Australian Government announced \$74 million over two years from 2019-20 to support the mental health and wellbeing of Australians through the COVID-19 pandemic as part of a \$1.1 billion package to boost and support more mental health, Medicare, domestic violence services and emergency food relief. This package provides careful, targeted and practical measures to support Australians' mental health and wellbeing during this crisis, including those living in rural and regional areas.

A number of services were introduced or scaled up to support early intervention and vulnerable groups, including a range of digital health options, which are accessible to all Australians, but are particularly important in regional areas that have challenges accessing mental health supports face to face. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of trusted digital mental health services in supporting Australians living in rural and regional areas.

As part of the package an information campaign will reach rural and regional Australians on maintaining mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic; expand the Government's digital mental health gateway, Head to Health, which provides access to free and low cost phone and online mental health services and supports irrespective of geographical barriers.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Additional Mental Health Supports for Victorians**

The Government is investing \$47.3 million over two years to provide additional mental health support to Victorians. This package includes a component supporting regional Victorians through the establishment of six dedicated mental health clinics across regional Victoria, a dedicated 1800 triaging service and provides funding to support commissioned mental health services in Victorian Primary Health Network regions.

The measure also increases access to digital support for vulnerable groups, including people in regional Victoria experiencing significant challenges during the additional COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. A dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health support line (Yarning Safe and Strong) will expand to provide text based

support. Others supported through this measure are those experiencing an eating disorder and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex + community.

### **Strengthening Primary Care – COVID-19 GP Led Respiratory Clinics**

On 11 March 2020, the Australian Government announced it would invest \$206.7 million over two years from 2019-20 to establish 150 General Practitioner (GP) led Respiratory Clinics (GPRCs). Over half of these clinics, 83, were established outside of metropolitan areas. The placement of these GPRCs has ensured a geographic reach that covers 99 per cent of the Australian population. On 18 September 2020, the Australian Government announced it would invest a further \$170.8 million to extend this measure by six months to 31 March 2021, taking total investment to \$377.5 million.

The GPRCs were established to provide dedicated assessment and testing services to people with mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms. The GPRCs are a vital part of the Government's strategy to keep the health system functioning – providing a safe and specialised service for people who have respiratory symptoms while preserving hospitals for people with severe injuries and disease, and general practices for usual care and chronic disease management.

The 31 Primary Health Networks, which cover all regions of Australia including rural and remote areas, worked with local hospital networks, general practices and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to identify the best sites, and to develop mobile models where appropriate. The National Rural Health Commissioner also provided assistance to identify sites. Efforts were made to ensure the network of GPRCs complements the location and scope of state and territory testing clinics (GPRCs providing a full assessment, not just a testing service), with a particular focus on regional and rural areas where these clinics might be the only available service.

As part of this funding, \$8.3 million was provided to the National Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation 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 pandemic response, and in particular facilitate cultural safety measures in the respiratory clinics.

### **Strengthening Primary Care – COVID-19 Remote Community Preparedness and Retrieval**

On 13 March 2020, the Australian Government announced \$57.8 million over two years from 2019-20 (\$29.1 million in 2019-20 and \$28.7 million in 2020-21) to support rural and remote communities to minimise the likelihood of exposure to COVID-19, increase their capacity to evacuate early cases, and enable an effective response if an outbreak occurs.

## *Health*

The measure:

- Supports planning and preparedness activities in rural and remote communities, including increased screening protocols to reduce travel.
- Assists with early retrieval and evacuation for people with potential COVID-19, staffed mobile respiratory clinics and remote health service support.

The grants to rural and remote communities enable communities to engage in preparedness activities as prioritised and determined by the community. 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 contain any outbreaks in these locations.

### **Strengthening Primary Care – Central Patient COVID-19 Triage Hotline**

On 11 March 2020, the Australian Government announced it would invest \$50.7 million over two years from 2019-20 to establish a 24/7 national hotline to help triage patients with respiratory symptoms, or people who are concerned about contact with a possible COVID-19 case, to the appropriate setting. On 18 September 2020, the Australian Government announced it would invest a further \$6.8 million to extend this measure by six months to 31 March 2021, taking total investment to \$57.5 million.

Regional Australians who would otherwise be presenting at hospital emergency departments or GP clinics or who may not have close access to a physical facility are given advice over the phone by trained health professionals. Depending on their circumstances, people may be advised to attend a public hospital respiratory clinic, a Primary Care Respiratory Clinic, to self-isolate at home (in case of asymptomatic contacts of likely cases), to seek a medical practitioner telehealth consultation, or to take no further action.

The hotline will also provide facilities to support telehealth consultations, where providers or patients may not have access to the appropriate information and communications technology, and maintain a comprehensive national directory of available health services.

### **Strengthening Primary Care – COVID-19 Remote Point of Care Testing Program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities**

On 18 September 2020, as part of a \$2 billion package to extend critical health services across Australia, the Australian Government announced further investment to provide rapid testing for COVID-19 in 86 rural and remote communities in Western Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. The Australian Government is investing a further \$4 million in 2020-21, building on an initial investment of \$5.8 million for the *Point of Care Testing (POCT) Program* in 2019-20, bringing total funding over two years to \$9.8 million.

Key components of this program are to:

- Ensure primary care services are no more than 2-3 hours' drive away from a testing location.
- Reduce the need to transport suspect and/or confirmed COVID-19 patients from remote clinics to larger regional centres.

The POCT Program provides one of the key elements of remote community preparedness and response, enabling early identification of cases. The POCT Program also allows local health services to respond quickly and decisively if COVID-19 is detected in their communities, which is essential to effectively contain any outbreaks in these locations.

## **Prioritising Mental Health – Bushfire Response**

### **Supporting the Mental Health of Australians Affected by Bushfires**

On 12 January 2020, the Australian Government announced \$76.1 million over three years from 2019–20 to support primarily regional communities affected by the 2019-20 bushfires. The package includes the following key areas supporting regional Australians:

- Provision of immediate frontline emergency distress and trauma counselling sessions *New Medicare Benefits Schedule* items available for up to 10 face-to-face and/or telehealth Medicare-subsidised psychological therapy sessions.
- Training in trauma informed care and psychological first aid for frontline emergency staff and to organisations managing frontline emergency staff to identify personnel at risk.
- Bushfire Trauma Response Coordinators employed in nine severely fire affected Primary Health Network regions to provide a single point of contact for individuals and communities.
- Development of a *National Disaster Mental Health Framework* to guide national preparedness to deliver effective mental health supports in response to future national disasters.
- Expansion of mental health services through Primary Health Networks to meet increased demand and any specific local needs of bushfire-affected communities; and administer community grants of up to \$10,000 each to strengthen social connectedness and resilience.

### **Lifeline Australia and Kids Helpline – Boosting Support for People Affected by Bushfires**

On 30 January 2020, the Australian Government announced it would invest \$2 million in 2019-20 to enable Lifeline Australia to establish a dedicated helpline (13HELP) for individuals impacted by the 2019-20 bushfire crisis, including the development of communication activities to promote this service and to boost the capacity of Kids Helpline to respond to increased demand as a result of the bushfire crisis. This provides support for individuals affected by the bushfires, including in regional areas, to access the mental health support they need and provides easy access by phone from all localities.

The bushfire crisis has had a direct impact on regional Australia, and a major effect on the lives of individuals, children, families and communities. While targeted communication activities is occurring in bushfire impacted areas, the services are available to all Australians who have been impacted by the bushfires in some way. Boosting support to Lifeline Australia and the Kids Helpline service has increased responsiveness to the community in this time of need.

### **Community Wellbeing and Participation**

The Australian Government is investing \$13.4 million over two years from 2020-21 for Primary Health Networks to deliver the *Community Wellbeing and Participation* measure. Under this measure, nine of the most severely affected Primary Health Networks will increase the delivery of non-clinical supports in fire-affected communities based on the needs of the local region.

A significant proportion of the *Community Wellbeing and Participation* measure is being delivered in rural and remote areas of Australia including: South Eastern New South Wales; Nepean Blue Mountains, New South Wales; Gippsland (Victoria); and Country South Australia.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – headspace**

The Australian Government is continuing to invest in expanding and enhancing the national headspace network with a focus on regional areas. This includes investing:

- \$30 million over four years from 2020-21, to support the 2019 election commitment to provide 10 new or expanded headspace services primarily in regional locations across Australia.
- \$18.9 million over five years from 2019-20 to support a number of enhancements to the national headspace network such as upgrading satellite services in the regional towns of Emerald and Roma to full centres, and extending funding for the Schools Suicide Prevention Activities Program run by the headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation to June 2022.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Supporting Transition of Psychosocial Support Clients to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)**

The Australian Government is investing \$28.4 million in 2020-21 to continue to support former clients of ceased Australian Government community mental health programs with severe mental illness, and associated psychosocial disorders. These clients, will receive psychosocial support and assistance to develop an application to test their eligibility for the NDIS. The package also includes a regional weighting to funding to support service delivery in regional and remote areas.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Supporting Clients of National Psychosocial Support Programs**

The Australian Government is investing \$13.4 million in 2020-21 to support Australians with severe mental illness and associated psychosocial disorders access a level of support consistent with their needs.

Weightings are applied to funding for regional services to encourage service delivery in these communities. Clients of Australian Government psychosocial support programs in regional communities will also benefit from better integration of psychosocial services with other clinical and non-clinical supports through engagement with local service navigators.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Expansion of the StandBy Support after Suicide Service**

The Australian Government is investing \$10 million over two years from 2020-21 to expand the StandBy Support After Suicide (StandBy) Service, with the aim of increasing access to support for Australians bereaved by suicide.

The StandBy service is a community-based suicide bereavement service that provides direct support to individuals and communities affected by suicide. The service also connects people to services, groups and organisations within their local area as well as providing tailored community workshops and education programs to increase awareness of suicide and suicide bereavement.

The StandBy service currently operates in select locations of Australia. This measure will support the expansion of the service into new locations, including rural and regional areas of Australia.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Expansion of the Beyond Blue Way Back Support Service**

The Australian Government is investing an additional \$7 million over two years from 2020-21 to expand The Way Back Support Service (Way Back) aftercare model in Victoria. The expansion will enable an additional eight Way Back aftercare sites to be funded in selected Primary Health Network regions and in collaboration with the Victorian Government. This investment is in addition to \$37.6 million over four years

## *Health*

agreed in the 2018-19 Budget to the roll out Way Back in selected Primary Health Network Regions.

The Way Back is an aftercare model developed by Beyond Blue, designed to drive continuity of care by providing non-clinical, assertive outreach, follow-up care and practical support to individuals being discharged from hospital following a suicide attempt. Partnerships are formed with hospitals, which assess and refer people to the Way Back. Support Coordinators then contact the person within 24 hours and to help keep them safe and connected with support networks and health and community services during this period of high risk and vulnerability.

The expansion of the Way Back in Victoria will enable state-wide coverage of services which will benefit people who have attempted suicide or are experiencing suicidal crisis. It is anticipated that the location of the sites will include regional areas of Victoria which are currently being negotiated with the Victorian Government.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Extension of the National Suicide Prevention Trial Sites**

The Australian Government is investing \$12.4 million in 2020-21 to extend the National Suicide Prevention Trial (the trial), established through the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook measure, Strengthening Mental Health in Australia, by an additional year. The trial will now cease on 30 June 2021 and will support the safe and sustainable transition of existing trial activity.

The trial is led by Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and aims to improve the current evidence of how systems-based approaches to suicide prevention can be implemented at a local level for at-risk population groups.

There are 12 trial sites in the following locations:

- New South Wales: North Coast and Western PHNs
- Victoria: North Western Melbourne PHN
- Queensland: Brisbane North and Central Queensland, Townsville, Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay PHNs
- Western Australia: Perth South, Country Western Australia – Kimberley and Country Western Australia – Mid-West PHNs
- South Australia: Country South Australia PHN
- Tasmania: Tasmania PHN
- Northern Territory: Darwin PHN.



This measure will have a positive impact on regional communities where trial sites are located.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Suicide Prevention and Peer-Support for Young People**

The Australian Government is investing \$4.6 million in 2020-21 to improve social and emotional wellbeing outcomes of young people by: building resilience, help-seeking behaviour and hope; reduce the impact of depression, suicidal ideation and bullying; and improve student engagement and school attendance. This will be achieved by providing funding to:

- Deliver a best-practice early intervention and prevention mentoring program for Year 8 students through the Raise Foundation at public secondary schools across Australia, including regional areas.
- Increase the capacity of ReachOut's moderated peer support forums to address suicide and self-harm risk and to support the development of culturally safe prevention and early intervention services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to better help this group and prevent suicide.
- Further develop and test its YourCrew App which aims to increase the rate of effective help-seeking by young people by linking them to a community of their choosing and educating their community on sources of effective help.
- Promote the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians, including those affected by bushfires and drought through the Stand Tall event 2020.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Digital Mental Health – Operation of Head to Health and National Safety and Quality Standards**

The Australian Government is investing \$4.2 million in 2020-21 to fund the operation and enhancement of the Australian Government's digital mental health gateway (Head to Health), and fund the next phase in delivering the national and quality standards for digital mental health services (the standards).

This allows for enhancements and better positioning efforts to enable the gateway to reach its full potential, building on over one million sessions currently reached. Implementation of the standards is a key pillar of Australia's digital mental health agenda to ensure digital mental health services listed on Head to Health are assessed as safe, effective, appropriate and user-friendly.

Digital mental health services are of particular importance for regional Australians who either live too far away or do not want to seek face-to-face services to access mental health services. This measure will build community and health professional trust in digital mental health services by supporting the delivery of safe, quality mental health

services and outcomes irrespective of geographical barriers: driving, an increased digital mental health service uptake.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – Adult Mental Health Centre – Trial**

In the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government announced it would invest \$114.5 million over five years from 2020-21 for the planned trial of eight adult mental health centres, with one to be established in each state and territory commencing operations in 2022-23. Three of the centres will be commissioned by Primary Health Networks in regional areas, including: Townsville, Queensland; Launceston, Tasmania; and Greater Darwin, Northern Territory. In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government announced it would bring forward the planning of these centres, which will now be established in 2020-21 and will be operational for three years beginning in 2021-22.

The Government is also investing an additional \$6 million to extend the operation of the Greater Darwin Adult Mental Health Centre by an additional two years from 2024-25.

The centres will provide a welcoming, low stigma, ‘no wrong door’ entry point for adults to access mental health information, care and support. They will assist people in times of crisis, or as needs emerge, to have access to on-the-spot care without the need for a prior appointment.

### **Preventive Health – Implementation of Roadmap for Hearing Health**

The Australian Government is investing \$21.2 million over five years from 2020-21 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 positively impacts all Australians who are hard of hearing, including those in regional and rural communities.

Key priorities include:

- Supporting rural service delivery through a workforce audit and a rural hearing health workforce summit, with a particular focus on rural and remote areas and capacity to service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for long-term planning for delivery of services in rural and remote areas.
- 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.
- Voucher duration under the *Hearing Services Program* will be extended from three to five years to align with consumer expectations and improvements in technology and maintenance payments will be updated to better reflect manufacturer warranties.
- Work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector in rural and remote areas to improve early identification of hearing and speech difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Pilot initiatives in the aged care sector, to improve the capability of the aged care workforce to support people with hearing loss.
- An expert-led review of *Hearing Services Program* settings and how services can be improved in rural and remote areas is currently underway and will conclude in July 2021.
- A program of research through the National Health and Medical Research Council to develop an evidence base for effective treatment, service delivery and prevention of hearing loss.

### **Preventive Health – Streamlining Cancer Australia’s Tumour Specific Funding Streams**

The Australian Government is investing \$11.5 million over four years from 2020-21, within existing resources to consolidate Cancer Australia’s tumour-specific funding streams into a single flexible funding stream. This measure will enable the agency to better respond to emerging priorities and support initiatives for a broader range of cancer types.

Under the consolidated stream, initiatives will be undertaken for different tumour types in the areas of evidence-based best practice care, sustainable models of care and service development policy.

Addressing disparities in health outcomes for cancer patients in rural and regional areas of Australia will be a strong focus for Cancer Australia, along with other key priorities in the areas of: evidence-based best practice care; sustainable models of care; service development and policy; and consumer and health professional information and resources.

### **Strengthening Primary Care – National Partnership Agreement on Public Dental Services for Adults – One Year Extension**

The Australian Government is investing an additional \$107.8 million in 2020-21 to extend the National Partnership Agreement on Public Dental Services for Adults (NPA). This will help states and territories provide services to an additional 180,000 public dental patients.

This brings the total investment through NPA to \$458 million since it commenced on 1 January 2017, providing services to 763,000 public dental patients.

- This extension continues Australian Government support to improve access to public dental services for vulnerable groups.
- States and territories are responsible for the delivery of public dental services.
- The NPA will help regional Australians with concession cards who rely on public dental services.

### **Strengthening Primary Care – Primary Care Enhancement Program for People with Intellectual Disability**

The Australian Government is investing \$6.6 million over four years from 2020-21 for the development of a *Primary Care Enhancement Program for People with Intellectual Disability*. The Program:

- Provides greater support for General Practitioners (GPs) and other health professionals to provide more effective care to people with intellectual disability.
- Gives people with intellectual disability better access to appropriate, quality health services that meet their needs.
- Will be developed in the following four lead Primary Health Network (PHN) regions, with a view to national rollout:
  - Queensland: Central Queensland, Wide Bay, and the Sunshine Coast PHN
  - Victoria: Western Victoria PHN
  - Tasmania: Tasmania-wide PHN
  - New South Wales: Central and Eastern Sydney PHN
- Includes the development of national resources by the Council for Intellectual Disability, including a training module for PHN staff, resources for GPs and other primary care professionals, *National Disability Insurance Scheme* linkage tools, and health promotion materials for people with intellectual disability and their families.

The *Primary Care Enhancement Program* was established following a roundtable in August 2019, which considered the inequities in health system access and quality for people with intellectual disability. The Program is a key short term priority under the *National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for People with Intellectual Disability*.

### **Improving Access to Medicines – 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 measure 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.

### **Guaranteeing Medicare – My Health Record**

The Australian Government is investing \$167.7 million in 2020-21 to continue operations of the Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA) including the Government's commitment to operate the My Health Record system. This includes implementation of recommendations made by the Australian National Audit Office.

My Health Record is operated by ADHA and helps improve health outcomes and better coordinate healthcare through increased availability and quality of health information.

More than 90 per cent of eligible Australians now have a My Health Record. There are 22.82 million My Health Records, and over 86 per cent of all records have data in them.

The My Health Record 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.

### **Guaranteeing Medicare – Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health – National Digital Health Foundations**

The Australian Government is investing \$32.3 million in 2020-21 to support the Government's contribution to the 2018-2022 Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health (the IGA), to implement a range of national digital health initiatives such as electronic prescribing and interoperability.

The IGA is signed by all Australian governments – Commonwealth, state and territory - and supports national digital health foundations including implementation of *Australia's National Digital Health Strategy – Safe, Seamless and Secure* (2018-2022) (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.

## HOME AFFAIRS

The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) provides centrally coordinated strategy and policy leadership to support the Home Affairs Portfolio (the Portfolio). The Portfolio includes the Australian Border Force, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, and the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre. A strategy-led and coordinated approach ensures the Portfolio delivers outcomes for Australia's rural and regional community on behalf of the Government.

The Portfolio has diverse responsibilities in supporting a prosperous, secure, and united Australia. These responsibilities include: managing and responding to civil contingencies and national emergencies; domestic elements of national security; critical infrastructure security, including transport security; federal law enforcement; criminal justice; cyber security; intelligence; border control; immigration and citizenship; humanitarian issues; multicultural affairs; and trade related functions.

The Portfolio has a large and longstanding presence in regional Australia, delivering programs that provide tangible economic and social benefits to regional Australians including by delivering the security and social cohesion that underwrites economic prosperity. The Portfolio supports regional Australia through programs that protect rural and regional communities from evolving threats within and outside our borders, reduce the costs of doing business for exporters, attract international students and skilled migrants, and protect vulnerable workers and Australian jobs through compliance activities. The Portfolio will support the economic development and growth of regional Australia through continued investment in preparedness for, mitigating and recovering from natural disasters, such as bushfires.

The Home Affairs Portfolio has an operational presence throughout Australia, including in regional areas and remote locations, and in close proximity to international ports of entry to ensure Australia's border is protected. As at 30 June 2020, the Department, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission and the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre employed 15,207 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 10,542 staff (69 per cent) are located in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne, 4,183 staff (28 per cent) are located in other capital cities and 482 staff (3 per cent) are located in other areas around Australia and internationally, based on operational requirements to support intelligence led, risk based interventions.

### New initiatives

#### Simplified Trade System

The Australian Government will invest \$28.6 million over the forward years from 2020-21 (\$14 million in 2020-21) to enhance the efficiency of trade systems for Australia's exporters and importers. This Simplified Trade System will support growth in investment and jobs. These reforms will lay the foundation to reduce compliance

complexity for Australian businesses and make it easier for regional industries to be a part of global supply chains. The Simplified Trade System also encompasses the modernisation of export compliance systems through the Government's *Busting Congestion for Agricultural Exporters* agenda.

### **Migration and Humanitarian Programs 2020-21**

The 2020-21 *Migration Program* will drive economic recovery, encourage investment and support job creation. This will be done by giving priority to highly skilled migrants in the employer sponsored Business Innovation and Investor Program and Global Talent visa cohorts. The *Migration Program* will benefit regional communities through focussing on job-creating migrants and those who fill critical needs and contribute to economic recovery. The *Migration Program* planning ceiling of 160,000 places will be retained in 2020-21 with increased flexibility to shift skilled places to adapt to changing labour market and economic needs and will continue to include both regional components and state and territory nominated positions, which are frequently located in regional areas. The number of places available to Family visa categories will be increased to 77,300 places for 2020-21. Partner visas will be allocated a greater proportion of the program and partner applications sponsored by Australians in regional Australia will be prioritised.

Reflecting the Australian Government's focus on migration to support economic recovery and job creation for Australians, the 2020-21 *Humanitarian Program* will be reduced from 18,750 to 13,750 places. The size of the Program will be a ceiling, like the *Migration Program*, rather than a target, in recognition of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to the delivery of the Program. The offshore *Humanitarian Program* will continue to prioritise settlement in regional Australia with a goal of 50 per cent by mid-2022.

### **National Aerial Firefighting Capability**

The Australian Government will contribute an additional \$11 million per year, indexed, from 2020-21, to a total of \$26 million in 2020-21, to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre to ensure a national aerial firefighting capability is available to reduce the impact of bushfires on Australian communities, particularly in regional areas. 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.

### **Safer Communities Fund**

The Government will provide \$35 million over four years from 2020-21 to extend the *Safer Communities Fund* (SCF) for a sixth round. The SCF provides grant funding to local government and community organisations to address crime and anti-social behaviour and to protect schools and community organisations that are facing risks from racial or religious intolerance.



### **Australian Federal Police Funding Model**

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) will commence a new funding model in 2020-21 at a cost of \$300.2 million over the forward estimates (\$10.8 million in 2020-21). The model will ensure the AFP maintains its frontline policing capacity, enhances its surge capacity, and provides for a healthy and agile workforce. The model will also provide the AFP enhanced planning certainty and the ability to direct resources to the highest criminal risks and to strategically combat new or increasing risks to Australia and its national interests. COVID-19, for example, has required the AFP to take on new roles to support the integrity of Australia's borders and protect the community from infection, including remote Indigenous communities.

### **Reactivate North West Point Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island**

The North West Point Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island has been reactivated to receive 250 unlawful non-citizens including those released from prisons, but unable to be deported due to COVID-19 travel and border restrictions. This measure will address capacity challenges in the immigration detention network and increase community safety while removal operations, including prison-to-plane removals are impacted by COVID-19.

## **INDUSTRY, SCIENCE, ENERGY AND RESOURCES**

The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (the Department) drives economic growth and job creation for all Australians. The Department supports the growth and transformation of our regions, and the creation of jobs across Australia. The Department delivers on these objectives by investing in areas of competitive strength or emerging priority such as resources and the National Manufacturing Priorities, building on our strong science and technology capabilities, and supporting the provision of reliable, secure and affordable energy.

The Industry, Science, Energy and Resources Portfolio is committed to effective and mutually beneficial community and industry engagement, working across regional areas to ensure communication with, and engagement of, businesses, industry and all Australians. The Portfolio's 2020-21 Budget measures deliver further support for regional Australians in the areas of energy, science, regional infrastructure and small business.

The Portfolio has a broad regional footprint. As at 30 June 2020, the Portfolio employed 5,663 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 4,955 staff (88 per cent) are based in Canberra, central Sydney and central Melbourne, 648 staff (11 per cent) of staff are based in the wider metropolitan Sydney and metropolitan Melbourne areas, and the other capital cities, and 60 staff (one per cent) are based in other locations across Australia.

Several Portfolio agencies employ 7,032 staff under their own legislation, with 1,422 staff (20 per cent) based in Canberra, central Sydney and central Melbourne, 4,756 staff (68 per cent) based in the wider metropolitan Sydney and metropolitan Melbourne areas, and the other capital cities, and 854 (12 per cent) based in other locations across Australia. The AusIndustry Regional Network provides a presence across regional areas in all states and territories. After the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, AusIndustry employed 19 Strengthening Business facilitators to help bushfire affected businesses recover and re-establish themselves to be stronger and more resilient in the future.

The Australian Government is working to unlock northern Australia's untapped economic potential, helping to improve the livelihoods of our rural and regional communities. The reforms to the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility will empower it to better deliver on its key objectives – delivering economic and social benefits, population growth, development and jobs to our rural and regional communities in the north. These reforms include extending the investment window a further five years to 30 June 2026. Other projects and programs that regularly engage, support and service regional communities and businesses include the *Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project*, the Office of Northern Australia, and the Major Projects Facilitation Agency.

The newly established Australian Radioactive Waste Agency (ARWA) is leading the process to deliver Australia's National Radioactive Waste Management Facility (NRWMF) and continue community engagement. The NRWMF will be purpose-built to safely manage Australia's low-level and intermediate level radioactive waste, most of which is a by-product of the domestic production of life-saving nuclear medicine.

The Government is supporting secure, reliable and affordable energy, providing business and industry with the certainty they need to invest, compete and grow. This includes measures to progress important transmission infrastructure projects, which will drive new investment and job creation in regional areas. Funding will be available for pilot studies targeted at accelerating deployment of microgrids and microgrid technologies, and building resilience to extreme weather events and bushfires in regional and remote networks.

The Government is also backing new, clean energy technologies to support the transition to a low-emissions economy. Additional funding for the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) will support implementation of the Government's *Technology Investment Roadmap*. The Roadmap will unlock new opportunities and sources of competitive advantage across the country by focusing on low emissions technologies with the potential to deliver the strongest economic and emissions reduction opportunities for Australia. Projects funded by ARENA will help create jobs and stimulate the economy, including in regional and remote communities.

The gas-fired recovery will make energy affordable for families and businesses and support jobs as part of Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 recession. The Government will drive a gas-fired recovery by unlocking gas supply, delivering an efficient pipeline and transportation market, and empowering gas customers. Strategic basin plans, including the Beetaloo Basin in the Northern Territory and the North Bowen and Galilee Basins in northern Queensland, will support jobs growth for local communities in regional and remote areas, while identifying ways to accelerate gas to market and reduce field production costs. The Critical Minerals Facilitation Office develops Australia's potential as a world leader in the critical minerals sector and supports strategically important critical minerals projects.

The Government has tasked the Department to ensure that Australia has an enabling and competitive business environment that encourages productivity, business investment and job creation across Australia. Manufacturing is a key regional employer and directly influences local economies. The *Modern Manufacturing Strategy* will deliver targeted measures to boost the scale, competitiveness and resilience of Australian manufacturing, and support manufacturing businesses to create jobs – including in regional areas.

The *Digital Business Plan* supports job creation and increased competitiveness across the economy, by supporting businesses to adopt digital technologies and build their digital capability. The Department is also assisting regional businesses and communities to

develop future workplace skills and knowledge for tomorrow's industries, through programs that build science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) capabilities, such as Questacon's education and outreach programs, and measures supporting women's and girls' participation in STEM study and careers.

The Portfolio is committed to a high degree of community and industry engagement, including in regional Australia, through its agencies, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC), the Clean Energy Regulator (CER), the Climate Change Authority (CCA), the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Geoscience Australia (GA), IP Australia (IPA), the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA), the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF), and Snowy Hydro Limited. The Australian Space Agency, with its headquarters in Adelaide, will drive innovation and entrepreneurship that support the growth of Australia's space industry and the broader economy.

The National Measurement Institute (NMI) has recently increased its commitment to working in remote locations to improve awareness of trade measurement requirements, to ensure industry and consumers are not unfairly disadvantaged as a consequence of their locality.

The Department also administers a range of other measures which may benefit regional communities, but are not specifically directed at regional areas. These measures are in addition to the funding estimated above and included in the descriptions below.

## **New Initiatives**

### **JobMaker Plan – Modern Manufacturing Strategy**

Manufacturing is critical to a modern Australian economy and to economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. It has an important role in many supply chains and adds significant value to all sectors. The *Modern Manufacturing Strategy* will harness Australia's manufacturing capability, boost competitiveness, deliver transformation at scale and secure jobs for the future.

#### **Modern Manufacturing Initiative**

The Australian Government will provide \$1.3 billion over five years from 2020-21 to establish the *Modern Manufacturing Initiative*. The *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* will address barriers to scale for Australian manufacturers, targeting private sources of capital to invest in manufacturing and support Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Through three targeted streams, the *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* will co-fund projects that will transform the Australian manufacturing industry in the National Manufacturing Priority areas.

The three streams address different barriers to scale:

- The Manufacturing Collaboration Stream will provide co-funding for large-scale projects that support business to business and business to research collaboration, to build economies of scale.
- The Manufacturing Translation Stream will provide co-funding for industry-led projects to translate good ideas into commercial outcomes and increase investment in non-research & development innovation.
- The Manufacturing Integration Stream will target the integration of local firms to deliver products and services into global value chains. This stream will focus on supply chain opportunities for medium-sized manufacturers by offering co-funded grants, as well as supply chain engagement and facilitation through existing government programs.

The *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* will be open to applications from across Australia. Funding is expected to benefit regional Australia as manufacturing is a key regional employer. The *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* and its contracted delivery partners will support regional businesses, job generation and local economies.

### **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative**

The Australian Government will provide \$107.2 million over four years from 2020-21 for critical manufacturing supply chain analysis and funding to address identified gaps in these supply chains, including in regional areas.

Activities under the measure include:

- Conducting a robust needs-analysis of supply chains and working with industry to develop supply options to address vulnerabilities in domestic and international supply chains for identified critical products. The outcomes of this work will be published in *Sovereign Manufacturing Capability Plans*.
- Grants for businesses to establish or scale a capability that addresses a critical supply chain vulnerability for a critical product or input identified in *Sovereign Manufacturing Capability Plans*.

The outcomes of the need, vulnerability and capability mapping and *Sovereign Manufacturing Capability Plans* are expected to benefit the manufacturing sector in regional and metropolitan areas.

### **Manufacturing Modernisation Fund – establishment and round two**

The *Manufacturing Modernisation Fund* (MMF) is supporting manufacturers to become more competitive and create new jobs by co-funding capital investments that help them scale-up, invest in new technologies and develop new high-value products.

On 30 April 2020, the Australian Government announced a commitment of \$50 million through the MMF over three years from 2019-20, to support around 200 projects valued at more than \$215 million. The \$50 million includes \$10.9 million that will be provided to 59 businesses in regional Australia to fund projects worth over \$57.4 million.

The Australian Government expects projects under round one of the MMF to create around 2,600 new jobs across Australia over the life of the program and have a positive impact on the economy through increasing the competitiveness of Australian manufacturing businesses.

The Australian Government is expanding the MMF by providing a further \$52.8 million over three years from 2020-21. The second round of the MMF will continue support to manufacturers across a wide spread of regions and the National Manufacturing Priorities to fast-track Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The MMF provides grants, to be matched by industry contributions, to small and medium sized manufacturing businesses to support transformative investments in manufacturing technologies and processes. The second round of the MMF will support SME manufacturers, including those in regional and metropolitan Australia, to become more competitive and create more jobs.

This measure extends the 2019-20 MYEFO measure titled *Election Commitment - Manufacturing Modernisation Fund - establishment*.

## **Unlocking Australia's Resources Potential – Exploring for the Future 2**

On 23 June 2020, the Australian Government announced it is providing \$124.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to continue and expand the *Exploring for the Future* program. The expanded program will extend and expand the geoscientific mapping of the mineral, critical mineral, energy and groundwater resources from northern Australia into southern Australia. In both these regions there are large parts of the country where the resource potential is not well known. The program aims to reduce the risk of, and renew the appetite for, investment in mineral exploration, and help identify major new gas and minerals resources. Exploring for the Future 2 will lead to positive long-term impacts in southern Australia from resulting resources investment and development.

The program will deliver 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. Those activities will be intensified in two high-potential corridors stretching the length of the nation – from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Victoria, and from Darwin to the Great Australian Bight.

This measure builds on the 2016-17 Budget measure titled *National Resources Development Strategy – exploring for the future*.

## **Australia's Cyber Security Strategy 2020**

Australia's *Cyber Security Strategy 2020* will invest \$1.7 billion over 10 years to achieve the Government's vision of creating a more secure online world for Australians, their businesses and the essential services upon which we all depend.

### **Delivering the Cyber Security National Workforce Growth Program**

The Australian Government will reallocate \$37.7 million from the Australian Signals Directorate to the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources to deliver on the Australian Government's election commitment for a *Cyber Security National Workforce Growth Program*. With more businesses adopting digital technologies to engage with customers, employees and suppliers there is a greater need for Australian businesses, including in regional areas, to engage cyber security professionals to help them adopt secure digital business models.

The measure includes:

- A *Cyber Security Skills Partnership Innovation Fund* to support industry-led skilling projects that are directly relevant to their specific circumstances and local needs. This is a competitive grants program, and applications to meet regional needs may be received through this process.
- An expansion of Questacon's science, technology, engineering and maths programs for school students and teachers to include cyber security. Questacon has a national reach and will deliver programs in both metropolitan and regional areas.
- Policy reforms to strengthen the link between the cyber security industry and education providers.
- Collaborative work with universities and academia to encourage cyber security education in adjunct fields such as engineering and data science.
- Improved data collection on cyber security skills shortages.

### **Cyber Security Business Connect and Protect Program**

The Australian Government will provide \$8.3 million over two years from 2020-21 for a grant program to increase the cyber security capability and resilience of Australian small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Under the *Cyber Security Business Connect and Protect Program* grants will be provided to trusted organisations like chambers of commerce and business associations to raise awareness, increase the capability of SMEs, and promote action to address cyber security risks within their communities. The program also includes provision for improving the existing diagnostic self-assessment tools (available under the *Entrepreneurs' Program*) as a mechanism for grant recipients to determine SMEs' baseline cyber security posture.

Grant recipients will also be provided with best practice cyber security guidance from the Australian Cyber Security Centre to ensure the advice they provide to SMEs is accurate and up to date. To maximise the reach of the program, grants will be provided to trusted organisations across a balance of jurisdictions in metropolitan and regional areas.

### **JobMaker Plan – Digital Business Plan**

The Australian Government's *Digital Business Plan* will accelerate 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. The Plan includes initiatives to enable Australia's technology future, creating jobs in high growth potential sectors and supporting Australia's longer-term goal of becoming a leading digital economy by 2030. The Plan complements initiatives in Australia's *Cyber Security Strategy 2020* that supports a secure digital economy by building the cyber security resilience and capability of small and medium-sized enterprises.

### **Using Blockchain Technology to Reduce Business Compliance Costs**

The Australian Government will provide \$6.9 million over two years from 2020-21 to support two industry-led blockchain pilots related to critical minerals and food provenance. The pilots will demonstrate the application of blockchain technology to reduce regulatory compliance costs and encourage broader take up of the productivity boosting technology by Australian businesses. If successful, the technology will have a positive impact on regional mining and food businesses.

### **Accelerating the Digital Capability of Australian Businesses**

The Australian Government will provide \$3 million over four years from 2020-21 to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies by Australian businesses, including in regional Australia, to drive long term productivity growth, business resilience and build on the digital momentum gained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The measure consists of:

- Digital Readiness Assessment tool to assist businesses self-assess their digital maturity and provide direction and pathways to existing government programs and resources to pursue digital transformation.
- Digital Directors training package for the directors and leaders of Australian organisations to improve their digital investment decision making.

### **Digital Skills Finder Platform**

The Australian Government will provide \$2.5 million in 2020-21 to establish a platform that will enable Australian workers and small to medium enterprises to easily find digital skills training courses for reskilling and upskilling. This measure will help create pathways to jobs, accelerate the adoption of digital technologies by Australian



businesses, including in regional areas, and contribute to long term productivity growth and business resilience. This will benefit regional Australia as digital skills enhance the output of individual workers, a key contributor to regional productivity growth.

### **Supporting Small Business to go Digital Post-COVID-19**

The Australian Government will provide \$19.2 million in 2020-21 to expand the *Australian Small Business Advisory Service – Digital Solutions* (ASBAS-DS) program and launch a ‘Go Digital’ national advertising campaign to promote the benefits of digital technology. More than half of the small businesses currently receiving support from ASBAS-DS providers are located in regional areas. It is expected this level of service will remain broadly consistent under the expanded ASBAS-DS program. Regional and rural communities will be a target audience of the national campaign.

### **Growing Australia’s Space Industry**

On 21 September 2019, the Australian Government announced a \$150 million investment over five years from 2020-21 to accelerate the growth of Australia’s space sector. It is an investment in Australia to provide the opportunity for Australian businesses and researchers in regional and metropolitan areas to join the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) inspirational plan to return to the Moon and then go on to Mars. This initiative will support Australian businesses across the country to access national and international space supply chains, and leverage Australia’s areas of strength to attract international investment and lasting partnerships with global industry leaders. The investment will create jobs in Australia and support the growth of industries in regions and across the economy through the development and application of space technologies. In doing so, the initiative contributes to the Government’s aim of tripling the size of the space sector to \$12 billion and creating up to an additional 20,000 jobs by 2030.

In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government also provided an additional \$2.8 million over four years from 2019-20 to assist the Australian Space Agency to assess an increase in applications to undertake civil space activities under the *Space (Launches and Returns) Act 2018*. Applicants are expected to be located in both metropolitan and regional areas.

These measures build on the 2019-20 Budget measure titled *Space Infrastructure Fund* and the 2018-19 Budget measure titled *Australian Technology and Science Growth Plan – growing the Australian space industry*.

### **Steel Processing and Galvanising Plant in Whyalla – upgrade**

The Australian Government will provide \$15 million in 2020-21 to Ferretti International to upgrade its steel and galvanising plant in Whyalla, South Australia. The upgraded plant will allow an expanded range of steel to be processed in the Spencer Gulf for the Australian market, with flow-on benefits to the region.

This measure builds on the 2019-20 MYEFO measure *Interconnector Funding – delivering reliable and affordable energy*.

### **Advanced Manufacturing Facility and Vehicle to Grid Trial**

The Australian Government will provide \$5 million in 2020-21 to Australian Clean Energy (ACE) Electric Vehicle Group to establish an advanced manufacturing facility in South Australia to facilitate the manufacturing and assembly of electric vehicles. The funding will also support ACE Electric Vehicle Group to undertake a bi-directional vehicle-to-grid trial to examine the concept and operation of systems which support solar home charging, grid services and virtual storage infrastructure.

The manufacturing facility will have flow on benefits to the South Australian region where it is located, including the creation of jobs during the construction and operation of the facility, including in the automotive supply chain.

### **National Bushfire Recovery Fund – Entrepreneurs’ Programme – Bushfire Regional Recovery and Resilience**

The Australian Government committed \$2 billion to a *National Bushfire Recovery Fund* (NBRF) to assist regional communities and businesses to recover and rebuild following the 2019-20 bushfires. Through the NBRF the Government will provide \$12.8 million over two years from 2020-21 to provide recovery and resilience advice to businesses in regions impacted by the bushfires. Leveraging the existing Entrepreneurs’ Programme, tailored advice on how to access existing assistance, build business capability and develop sustainable business plans will support regional businesses to recover, while stimulating economic growth in the regions.

### **Australian Made Export Campaign**

In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided \$5 million over four years from 2019-20 to the Australian Made Campaign Ltd (AMCL) to develop and deliver an Australian Made Export Campaign for the benefit of Australian exporters, including those operating in regional areas. Funding will support AMCL to promote the Australian Made logo (the logo) on behalf of Australian businesses internationally, and register the logo as a trademark in additional countries, including where Australia has a Free Trade Agreement or where one is being developed.

This measure delivers on the Australian Government's election commitment.

### **Incubator Support Initiative – expansion**

In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided an additional \$5 million over four years from 2019-20 to expand the *Incubator Support Initiative* under the *Entrepreneurs' Programme* to assist first generation migrants and refugees to establish start-up businesses. Grant funding enables organisations to deliver targeted services including education, acceleration, incubation and mentoring, and to provide advice on how to establish and manage a start-up business. The measure is supporting businesses in regional areas through dedicated advisors and facilitators across Australia.

This measure delivers on the Australian Government's election commitment.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – emergency response**

As part of the Australian Government's emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government provided \$4 million to Med-Con, based in Shepparton, Victoria, to assist the company to supply surgical masks for the National Medical Stockpile. The grant supported the company to purchase seven new machines and employ additional staff. The new machines have been made by manufacturer Foodmach, based in Echuca, Victoria.

### **National Research Centre for Disaster Resilience**

On 23 July 2020, the Australian Government announced \$88.1 million over 12 years from 2020-21 to transition the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre into a new National Research Centre for Disaster Resilience, which will deliver and scale up applied research to inform Australia's disaster recovery and resilience effort. The work of the new National Research Centre for Disaster Resilience will support businesses and communities across Australia, including in regional Australia, with the regional landscape, which is at a heightened risk of impact from natural hazard events such as bushfires, drought and flooding.

### **JobMaker Plan – Second Women's Economic Security Package**

The Australian Government is committed to improving the economic security of women to help unlock the potential of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and entrepreneurship.

### **Boosting Female Founders Initiative – expansion**

The Australian Government will provide \$35.9 million over five years from 2020-21 to expand the *Boosting Female Founders Initiative* (the Initiative). The purpose of the Initiative is to support women to access the finance they need to achieve their entrepreneurial goals. The expanded Initiative will increase the number of co-funded grants provided to women-owned and led start-ups and introduce a new service to provide access to expert mentoring and advice for women entrepreneurs.

Acknowledging the disproportionate challenges faced by regional and indigenous women entrepreneurs, the Initiative offers more generous matched funding for these disadvantaged groups to ensure greater support and access to capital.

### **Ensuring Australia's Future Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics can contribute to the Australian Economy**

The Australian Government will provide \$14.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to secure positive employment and economic outcomes for women and girls over the long-term. This includes:

- Expanding the *Women in STEM and Entrepreneurship (WISE) Grants Program* to support a range of projects led by business, industry and the community that contribute to lasting systemic change by removing barriers to women's and girls' participation in STEM.
- Expansion of the *Girls in STEM Toolkit (GiST)* to support students to prepare for and engage in jobs of the future. This will enable development of resources for girls, teachers and their families focused on helping them to understand the STEM pipeline and the future career opportunities STEM skills can bring.
- Extension of the *Women in STEM Ambassador* initiative for an additional two years from 2022-23, to continue the substantial contribution made by the position while Australia recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

These measures build on the 2018-19 Budget measure titled *Encouraging More Women to Pursue STEM Education and Careers*, the 2019-20 Budget measure titled *Improving STEM Gender Equity in Australia* and the 2019-20 MYEFO measure titled *Encouraging More Women into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*.

### **JobMaker Plan – Improving Energy Affordability and Reliability**

The Australian Government is ensuring Australians have access to affordable, reliable and secure energy supply through a set of initiatives that support critical transmission projects, generation and battery projects. These measures will support Australia's energy transition through a period of significant change and support COVID-19 economic recovery efforts.

### **Support for CopperString 2.0 project**

To deliver on the Australian Government's commitment to support reliable energy infrastructure in north and central Queensland, the Government will provide a grant with CuString Pty Ltd for the CopperString 2.0 Project to enable the project to progress to a final investment decision. This is in addition to \$4.7 million the Government provided in 2018-19.

The proposed CopperString 2.0 Project would connect the North West Minerals Province near Mount Isa to the National Electricity Market (NEM) near Townsville

through a high voltage transmission connection. The project aims to allow major users in the Mount Isa region to access reliable and more affordable energy supply, encourage further investment in mining and processing in the region, and create opportunities to unlock additional renewable generation between Townsville and Mount Isa.

CuString Pty Ltd estimates the project would create around 750 direct jobs during the construction phase, approximately 30 direct ongoing operational and maintenance jobs, and stimulate economic development in north and central Queensland. Major energy users and prospective new users in the North West Minerals Province will be able to access market contracts and mechanisms in the NEM, contributing to pricing competition.

### **Delta Electricity's Vales Point Power Station**

To support lower electricity prices and strengthen reliability in the National Electricity Market, the Government will provide a grant to support an upgrade of Vales Point Power Station. This funding will allow the replacement of key components and allow the power station to generate up to its nameplate capacity when required, particularly during peak periods.

Vales Point is located in Lake Macquarie, in the Hunter region of New South Wales (NSW) and provided approximately 13 per cent of the state's dispatchable energy generation in 2019-20. Support for an upgrade to Vales Point will increase dispatchable supply in the NSW market, reducing the risk of supply shortfalls and extreme prices after Liddell exits the market in 2023. This project would benefit electricity consumers connected to the NEM, particularly in NSW, through increased competition, reliability, and dispatchable capacity.

The upgrade will support 29 direct jobs over the three year development and construction timeframe.

### **Measures to Support the Western Australia State Deal – SWIS Big Battery**

The Australian Government will provide two Commonwealth grants to the Western Australian (WA) Government, which will form part of a State Energy and Emissions Reduction Deal with WA. The grants include \$15 million for the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) Big Battery project, which will enable the WA Government, through Synergy, to install and commission a transmission connected Battery Energy Storage Solution (BESS). The project is expected to generate jobs during the construction phase, as well as ongoing operational jobs.

The WA Government estimates that Commonwealth support for the SWIS Big Battery Project will create 100 jobs during the construction phase and five permanent operational positions, once the battery is fully operational.

### **Supporting Critical Transmission Projects**

The Australian Government will work with state governments to agree support arrangements for critical transmission projects – Project EnergyConnect, VNI West and Marinus Link. Accelerating the delivery of these projects through Commonwealth support will lock in low prices for consumers, including those in the manufacturing sector, and strengthen energy security and reliability, which will support broader economic recovery.

Government support for these large transmission projects will generate significant direct and indirect employment opportunities. Construction of these projects will deliver over 4,000 direct jobs (both skilled and unskilled labour), and indirect employment opportunities (goods and services roles, food, beverage, accommodation, equipment and supplies, and other local services). Employment related to early works (for example, engineering design, environmental and economic assessment, and community consultation), as well as indirect employment opportunities would be supported immediately. Transmission projects will also help unlock new renewable energy investment and associated employment opportunities in regional areas, creating more opportunities for employment and skills development for regional areas and helping drive economic recovery.

### **Interconnector Funding – Delivering Reliable and Affordable Energy**

Through a bilateral energy and emissions reduction agreement, the Australian Government, in partnership with the New South Wales (NSW) Government, is accelerating transmission interconnector projects to ensure the delivery of reliable and affordable energy in the National Electricity Market (NEM).

Under this agreement, the Australian and NSW Governments are jointly underwriting the early works for an upgrade to the Queensland-NSW interconnector. The Australian and NSW Governments will also jointly underwrite the proposed HumeLink transmission line (up to \$65.7 million). Underwriting these works will support the reliability and security of the NEM as it transitions to lower emissions technology. These projects will deliver direct and indirect employment to regional areas and allow additional renewable energy generation to be built. In particular, HumeLink will provide load centres access to Snowy 2.0, which is scheduled to dispatch its first power in mid-2025.

### **Grid Reliability Fund – establishment**

On 30 October 2019, the Australian Government announced it will provide \$1 billion to establish a *Grid Reliability Fund* (GRF) to support investment in new energy generation, storage and transmission infrastructure to ensure the security of electricity and delivery of secure and reliable energy for Australian households, businesses and industries. The GRF will be administered by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC).

Eligible investments under the GRF will include energy storage projects, including pumped hydro and batteries, transmission and distribution infrastructure and grid stabilising technologies. The CEFC will also consider eligible projects that are shortlisted under the Underwriting New Generation Investments program.

The GRF will prioritise investments in jurisdictions where state and territory governments are working with the Commonwealth towards an agreed reliability goal and to ensure sufficient reliable generation capacity is available to meet periods of high demand.

### **Collinsville Feasibility Study**

The Australian Government has supported a feasibility study for Shine Energy Pty Ltd to assess the potential for new electricity generation in central and north Queensland. The \$3.3 million grant is to investigate the feasibility of a high-efficiency, low-emissions (HELE) coal plant at Collinsville south of Townsville, Queensland.

### **JobMaker Plan – Securing Australia’s Liquid Fuel Stocks**

The Australian Government is committed to improving Australia’s fuel security through a set of initiatives that will increase our domestic storage, support local refineries, and improve the efficiency and timeliness of fuel market information.

#### **Provide Certainty of Stocks and Refining Capacity in Australia**

The Australian Government will develop a policy framework for a minimum stockholding obligation. This will require the fuel industry to hold gasoline and jet fuel stocks at current levels and increase diesel stocks, with refineries only required to hold current levels of stock. This framework will involve design and negotiation of a market system that provides refineries an additional income stream that reflects their fuel security and sovereign capability value to Australia. This will see additional diesel storage built and a level of transport fuels maintained, improving our resilience to supply shocks.

Diesel fuels most of Australia’s industries. It keeps road freight moving goods around the country and is key to industries such as mining and agriculture. Securing fuel stocks and refining capability will provide regional Australians, as well as the small to large enterprises conducting business regionally, with the confidence that their fuel supplies will continue even in times of moderate to severe supply disruption. Security of fuel supplies will also help protect regional Australians from excessive price rises during fuel disruptions.

#### **Implementing Australia’s Fuel Storage Program**

As part of the package of measures to enhance Australia’s fuel security and bolster local industry, the Australian Government will invest \$200 million in a competitive grants program to help industry to transition to holding higher diesel stock levels.

The competitive grants program will have a focus on projects in strategic regional locations, and with connections to refineries and existing fuel infrastructure. An additional 780 megalitres of diesel storage is expected to be required to allow industry to meet the minimum stockholding obligation, and construction is expected to create around 1000 jobs, including in regional areas. The program is expected to launch by the first quarter of 2021.

Having adequate diesel storage will provide regional businesses with confidence that their fuel supply will not be disrupted. Diesel storage is also essential for emergency services and is the backup power source for electricity generation in critical services like hospitals, water and sanitation, as well as for electricity generation in remote communities.

### **Improving Fuel Market Information**

The Australian Government will provide \$3.3 million over four years from 2020-21 to modernise and enhance its Petroleum Statistics Information Management System (PSIMS) to improve reporting and transparency in Australia's liquid fuel market, as recommended in the *Liquid Fuel Security Review*. This will help improve efficiency and timeliness of fuel market information which will help governments, industry and consumers respond to and mitigate the risks of impacts from liquid fuel supply disruptions, track fuel supplies critical to Australia's economy, and inform investment decisions.

This measure will support regional economies by supporting government capability to respond to liquid fuel emergencies, support investment decision making and help reduce the risks of unemployment as a consequence of supply disruptions.

### **JobMaker Plan – gas fired recovery**

The Australian Government is coordinating short and longer term priority actions across the gas supply chain to unlock supply, deliver efficient transportation, and empower consumers. This will deliver reliable gas supply at affordable prices to all gas consumers and strengthen the economy. The Government's plan will build on the policy developments currently underway and guide the implementation of new policies, infrastructure development programs and market reform measures.

### **Australia's Gas Plan**

The Australian Government will provide \$10.9 million in 2020-21 to progress an *Australian Gas Plan* to support investment to increase supply, deliver lower cost transport, establish more liquid trading hubs, and support a more transparent and competitive market. The plan will deliver on the Government's commitment to deliver reliable gas supply at affordable prices to gas consumers in industry, business and households. Funding will support the following activities:



- The development of an interim *National Gas Infrastructure Plan* to identify strategic priorities for investing in the gas sector, and signal to the market the optimal gas supply and infrastructure development pathway for the east coast. The *National Gas Infrastructure Plan* will identify investment opportunities, gaps, and barriers in the gas market which could lead to economic development opportunities in the regions to address gas supply.
- Development of a strategy to boost the Wallumbilla Gas Supply Hub, in central Queensland, to create a more open and transparent trading system.
- Enhancing the pipeline capacity trading framework and empowering gas consumers.

The outcomes of the plan will benefit regional Australia, where many gas production and infrastructure projects are located and will encourage gas intensive businesses in manufacturing and processing to move to where gas supply is assured and transportation costs are minimised.

#### **Accelerating New Gas Supply to Market – Strategic Basin Plans**

The Australian Government will establish five *Strategic Basin Plans* to accelerate development of Australia's vast gas reserves, increase domestic gas supply, lower gas prices and avoid gas shortfalls. One *Strategic Basin Plan* is already underway for the Beetaloo Gas Basin in the Northern Territory. The Government will provide \$28.3 million over three years from 2020-21 to establish a further four *Strategic Basin Plans*, with the first for North Bowen and Galilee in Queensland. The plans will target resource basins located in regional and northern Australia in order to maximise regional jobs creation in the long-term, and support development of new manufacturing capacity and capabilities.

Each resource basin is unique, requiring detailed consideration of infrastructure needs, geographical characteristics, geological conditions, water availability, and environmental, Indigenous and community matters. Strategic Basin Plans will set out coordinated work plans and identify the roles and responsibilities of industry, communities, the relevant state or territory government and the Australian Government.

#### **Building Community Support for the Gas-Fired Recovery**

The Australian Government will provide \$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 Australians 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 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA), which is a collaboration between the CSIRO, the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and industry.

The new funding will support research projects which deliver robust, independent research to inform local communities in regional areas where gas development occurs, including in the identified strategic basins.

GISERA's research program includes: research on surface and ground water; greenhouse gas footprint; agricultural land management; health; and socio-economic impacts and opportunities. GISERA's research independence is ensured through the strong governance framework, which includes project approval from Regional Research Advisory Committees and CSIRO's peer review process. All research, communication outputs and meeting records for the regional research advisory committees for each collaborating jurisdiction, are available on GISERA's website: [gisera.csiro.au](http://gisera.csiro.au).

This measure builds on the 2016-17 MYEFO measure titled *Onshore Gas Social and Economic Research Fund - establishment*.

### **JobMaker Plan – Investment in New Energy Technologies**

The Australian Government is investing in new and emerging technologies that will support jobs, strengthen our economy and reduce emissions. A package of measures will provide incentives to boost productivity and competitiveness, expand clean technology industries and create jobs in targeted industries and regions. It will support the Government's technology-based approach by accelerating the next generation of energy technologies and driving emissions reductions, particularly in hard-to-abate sectors of the economy like transport, industry and agriculture. Measures will incentivise private sector action and support the adoption of transformational low emission technologies by addressing barriers, simplifying regulation and developing tools to support investment decisions.

### **Implementing the Technology Investment Roadmap**

The Australian Government will provide \$5.2 million over four years from 2020-21 to accelerate deployment of new and emerging priority technologies that have the highest abatement and economic potential for Australia. This funding enables the *Technology Investment Roadmap* (the Roadmap) to identify these priority technologies; deployment will be supported by \$1.4 billion for the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) and the *Technology Co-Investment Fund* which will support businesses to identify and adopt technologies that will reduce emissions and increase productivity. Centred on the implementation of the Roadmap, a Technology Investment Advisory Council will be established to support the development of annual low emissions technology statements. The statements set clear cost reduction goals for priority sectors and direct public and private sector investment to achieve these cost reductions.

Increased investment in priority technologies – such as an emerging hydrogen industry, low emissions steel and aluminium and carbon capture storage and use – are expected to deliver significant employment and economic benefits to regional areas, where many of these industries are located or where mature technologies like coal-fired generation can benefit from emissions reductions technologies. A conservative estimate indicates

the roadmap will support over 100,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2030, more than half of these in regional communities.

A focus on enabling technologies that allow long distance transmission of renewable energy is expected to provide remote and regional industries and communities with reliable, competitively priced energy. Investment in broader energy efficiency technologies will help boost productivity in agricultural, mining and manufacturing sectors.

### **Australian Renewable Energy Agency Funding**

To support implementation of the *Technology Investment Roadmap*, the Australian Government will provide \$1.4 billion over 10 years from 2022-23 for Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) funding. Funding will support research and development in the Government's technology priorities, and help to achieve cost reduction goals identified through the *Technology Investment Roadmap* including hydrogen, grid scale energy storage, low carbon steel and aluminium and soil carbon.

ARENA has a long-standing focus on delivering energy innovation in regional Australia. ARENA supports research, development and deployment and focuses on new and emerging technology investments which increase the affordability and reliability of energy for Australians, including those in regional communities.

ARENA has worked to bring the next generation of renewables to market through pilots, trials and studies in regional Australia. Examples include a hybrid wind, solar and storage facility at Kennedy Energy Park, Queensland, and the Battery of the Nation suite of projects, Tasmania. Since its inception ARENA has seen more than \$750 million invested in projects in regional Australia, creating approximately 8,200 direct and indirect jobs in these areas.

### **King Review Technology Co-Investment Fund**

The Australian Government will provide \$95.4 million over six years from 2020-21 to establish the *King Review Technology Co-Investment Fund* (the Fund) to support businesses to identify and adopt technologies that will reduce emissions and increase productivity.

The Fund will provide \$67.9 million for business co-investment opportunities to be delivered by ARENA, which will support:

- Companies in the industrial sector to source external experts and undertake detailed engineering studies to analyse opportunities to reduce energy costs.
- Transport companies to test and evaluate new technologies that improve energy efficiency.

The Fund will also provide \$27.5 million to improve knowledge sharing arrangements and simplify access to trusted information, including through:

- Industrial benchmarks to help Australia's manufacturing and construction industries identify energy productivity improvements and inform clean energy decisions.
- Detailed information on the outcomes of trials undertaken through the co-investment fund to help transport companies better understand the suitability of low emission vehicles and technologies that improve fuel efficiency for their businesses.
- Improved knowledge sharing with natural resource management groups and Indigenous land managers to enable greater participation in the Emissions Reduction Fund.
- Support for the implementation of new abatement technologies and data collection that increase soil carbon and carbon storage in vegetation and reduce livestock emissions.

The delivery of co-investment opportunities to support businesses in industrial, agricultural, transport and land management sectors is expected to drive commercial investment in regional areas where these sectors are primarily located.

#### **Legislative Changes to Enable Further Abatement and Growth of the Offshore Renewable Energy Sector**

The Australian Government will provide \$4.8 million over two years from 2020-21 to develop a regulatory framework to provide investment certainty to offshore clean energy investors and legislative amendments to simplify business participation in the *Emissions Reduction Fund* (ERF) as recommended by the *King Review*. These legislative reforms are intended to remove barriers to unlocking low-cost abatement, deliver emissions reduction across the economy, improve the capacity of regional industry to engage with emissions reductions programs and promote economic growth in regional areas through the creation of jobs and new industries. Offshore clean energy regulation will enable private investments in commercially viable locations with exceptional wind resources, which are typically found near regional communities. Proposed legislative reforms in the Climate Solutions (King Implementation and Other Measures) Amendment Bill will improve the capacity of regional businesses to access the ERF. Greater uptake of ERF projects in regional areas will also benefit participating farmers, landholders and Indigenous communities that will receive a stable diversified income stream and incentives to implement new and better land practices.

### **Future Fuels Package**

The Australian Government will provide \$74.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to implement the *Future Fuels Package* to assist businesses overcome barriers to incorporating new vehicle technology into their fleets, including charging and refuelling infrastructure, and to support long-term opportunities offered by future liquid fuels, electricity and hydrogen. The measure includes:

- The co-investment *Future Fuels Fund* to enable businesses to integrate new vehicle technologies using electricity, hydrogen or biofuels into their fleets, including support to install chargers at commercial bases for fleet cars and light commercial vehicles, and installation of chargers to address electric vehicle charging blackspots.
- A future fuels integration analysis to better understand Australia's future transport fuel use, and to assess the electrical standards and data mechanisms needed to effectively integrate electric vehicles into the electricity grid.
- Improved information on electric vehicles (EVs) and charging infrastructure for business and community to enable choice.

Support to install infrastructure for businesses choosing to integrate new vehicle technology into their fleets is expected to create jobs, many in regional areas, by accelerating the growth of clean vehicle technology industries. Improving access to chargers will also increase the ability of regional consumers to choose EVs and increase options for transport in regional areas.

### **Activating Regional Hydrogen Export Hubs**

The Australian Government will provide \$70.2 million over five years from 2020-21 for a grants program to boost Australia's hydrogen industry through creation of a regional hydrogen export hub, supported by research collaborations and international supply chain studies to demonstrate and deploy hydrogen technology in Australia.

Hydrogen hubs are regions where hydrogen users are co-located, creating efficiencies in supply and focal points for innovation and skills development. Export focused hubs are expected near Australian ports, to create global hydrogen supply chain linkages.

The program will initially provide grants focused on research collaboration and supply chain studies and progressively shift to providing funding for the construction of a hydrogen hub. It is expected the hydrogen hub will be located in regional Australia. Funding will be allocated through competitive processes, based on pitches from industry and other factors, including regional benefits.

The development of a hydrogen hub is expected to drive economic growth and create jobs in the regional centre where the hub will be located.

### **Enabling Markets, Supporting Communities and Boosting Energy Productivity in the Building Sector**

The Australian Government will provide \$52.2 million over five years from 2020-21 to improve productivity and lower energy costs in the building and community sectors. This measure includes funding for:

- The *Hotel Energy Uplift Program* to provide grants to small and medium sized hotels for use in upgrades to improve productivity and lower energy costs. It is expected economic benefits beyond energy savings will be realised in regional Australia.
- The *Powering Communities Program* to provide grants to assist not-for-profit community organisations to improve energy efficiency practices and technologies and better manage energy consumption. It is expected economic benefits beyond energy savings will be realised in regional Australia.

Improving energy efficiency will contribute to cost savings across the economy and will help lower energy bills for Australians, including those living in rural and regional communities.

### **The Carbon Capture, Use and Storage Development Fund**

The Australian Government is establishing a \$50 million *Carbon Capture, Use and Storage (CCUS) Development Fund* to promote carbon capture and storage (CCS) projects. Projects will support emissions reduction in power generation, cement, natural gas production or heavy industry. Projects will be selected through a competitive grant funding program. The *CCUS Development Fund* will assist projects transition from the research and development stage to commercial scale.

It is expected that projects will primarily be located in regional Australia and will provide employment opportunities to local communities. Deployment of CCUS has the potential to create not only jobs for regional Australians but also support innovative business opportunities in regional areas.

### **Measures to Support the Western Australia State Deal – Microgrids**

The Australian Government will provide two Commonwealth grants to the Western Australian (WA) Government, which will form part of a State Energy and Emissions Reduction Deal with WA. The grants include \$13.5 million for a WA-based microgrids program for remote communities, which will support the WA Government to extend an existing program to deliver solutions across remote Aboriginal communities and regional towns. This will support economic development and provide infrastructure to promote energy security and reliability.

Accelerating infrastructure projects through the Western Australia State Deal will support Australia's COVID-19 recovery by creating up to 385 jobs in remote regions. This measure will enable the WA-based microgrids program to extend to an additional seven remote communities and regional locations, supporting economic development and reducing disadvantage for community households. The WA-based microgrids program has typically created 40 jobs per site for a six month period. Doubling the program would deliver around 280 jobs for six month engagements. Providing communities with cheaper and more secure energy solutions will also have indirect job creation impacts, by supporting economic development and business creation.

### **Extending the Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund**

The Australian Government will provide \$53.6 million over six years from 2020-21 to extend the Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund (RRCRF) to support pilot studies for microgrids in regional and remote areas. The extension will support feasible microgrid projects to undertake pilot studies to resolve the remaining barriers to final investment and full deployment for those projects. Grants will fund 50 per cent of the project value up to a maximum value of \$5 million and will be based on community needs and ability to pay.

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.

### **Measures to Support the National Hydrogen Strategy**

In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided \$383.4 million from 2019-20 to support the *National Hydrogen Strategy*, including:

- Up to \$300 million in capital funding to establish the *Advancing Hydrogen Fund* within the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC). The fund is providing concessional finance to support projects and businesses that involve hydrogen technologies that have passed beyond the research and development stage but are not yet of sufficient maturity, size or otherwise commercially ready to attract sufficient private sector investment. This includes investments to support projects in regional Australia.
- \$70 million from 2020-21 for the Australian Renewable Energy Agency to support hydrogen electrolyser projects through the Renewable Hydrogen Deployment Funding Round.

- \$7.5 million over four years from 2019-20 to address regulatory barriers and undertake detailed economic and technical analyses to support decision making for Australia's actions in the global hydrogen market.
- \$5.9 million over four years from 2019-20 to increase engagement with international hydrogen forums and fund feasibility studies to determine the technological and economic conditions required for establishing successful supply chains with international partners.

### **JobMaker Plan – Deregulation Package**

The Australian Government will also provide \$24.6 million over four years from 2020-21, with \$2.6 million each year from 2024-25, for the Clean Energy Regulator to consolidate the development, implementation, and review of Emissions Reduction Fund methods, reduce transaction costs associated with selling Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs), and reduce timeframes for ERF project registrations and ACCU crediting. This will benefit business and individuals, emission reduction project developers and service providers, including in rural and regional areas, by lowering costs of participation in the ERF, providing greater recognition for voluntary action and reducing time and costs associated with investing in emissions reductions.

Over \$2.4 billion has been committed under the ERF supporting emissions reduction projects, with around \$2 billion flowing to rural and regional areas to date. Greater participation in the ERF means more investment to benefit regional economies and more jobs in regional areas.

### **Australian Recycling Investment Fund**

On 5 June 2019, the Australian Government committed \$100 million in funding from 2020-21 to establish an *Australian Recycling Investment Fund* (ARIF). The ARIF is administered by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) and funds investments in the manufacturing of lower emissions and energy efficient recycled content products, which will have impacts for both urban and regional areas.

This measure delivers on the Australian Government's election commitment.

### **Critical Minerals Capabilities**

On 14 November 2019, the Australian Government announced a \$16.1 million measure 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.

The measure provided, over five years from 2019-20, \$9.4 million to establish a Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO) in the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources; \$4.5 million for the Advancing Research and Development for



Critical Minerals Program, to be implemented by Australian Government 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.

### **Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility – extension and enhancements**

The Australian Government is committed to developing northern Australia, and ensuring investment in the region continues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 17 July 2020, the Australian Government announced it will extend the period in which the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) can make investment decisions by five years, from 30 June 2021 to 30 June 2026. The Government will provide \$36.9 million over four years from 2020-21 (and a further \$25.2 million for the two years to 2025-26), offset by fee and interest revenue, to support the extension of the investment window and to address recommendations of the statutory review of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF).

The reforms focus on an option to increase the NAIF's lending speed in certain circumstances, increase the risk appetite, expand its lending to a broader array and scale of projects, and strengthen governance.

The reforms include:

- The NAIF will have the option to lend directly to project proponents in certain circumstances, which will simplify the lending process and simplify and accelerate the lending process.
- Expanded eligibility criteria focusing on project outcomes. For example, the NAIF will be able to finance project elements such as plant and equipment that result in new construction and job creation, rather than financing the physical construction of infrastructure only.
- Adjusting the NAIF's risk appetite.
- Improved governance arrangements for the NAIF, supporting more efficient and effective lending processes.

The NAIF is a major initiative of the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*. It is an Australian Government \$5 billion lending facility to provide finance, which may be on concessional terms, to infrastructure projects in northern Australia.

The aim of the NAIF is to accelerate infrastructure development by providing finance that generates:

- Public benefit that is broad based and ensures benefits to the community beyond those captured by project proponents.
- Growth in the economy and population of northern Australia.
- Private sector participation in the financing of northern Australia's infrastructure needs.
- Sustainable Indigenous participation, procurement and employment outcomes.

As of September 2020, the NAIF had made 24 investment decisions and one conditional credit approval, committing almost \$2.4 billion of the \$5 billion available. These investments are contributing \$6.7 billion in net economic benefit.

Investment decisions to offer finance are made by the independent NAIF Board in accordance with the *NAIF Investment Mandate*. The NAIF can support projects across all sectors. Examples of the type of projects that may be eligible include ports, airports, rail, roads, water, energy and communications networks. Social infrastructure (including health, education, and research facilities, training and related accommodation facilities), processing facilities (including abattoirs and agricultural processing plants) and transshipment vessels may also be eligible.

This measure extends on the 2015-16 Budget measure titled *Developing Northern Australia – Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility*.

### **National Radioactive Waste Management Facility program – continuation**

On 21 July 2020, the Australian Government announced the establishment of the Australian Radioactive Waste Agency (ARWA). ARWA will be based in Adelaide. ARWA will be responsible for the siting, construction and operation of the Facility and for the development of an intermediate level waste disposal pathway. The Government will provide \$103.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to progress this critical work.

This important piece of national infrastructure is a significant regional economic development opportunity. The Facility will create a new, safe industry for the host community, including 45 jobs in community liaison, security, operations, administration and environmental monitoring. This will bring direct and indirect economic benefits to South Australia.

The Australian Government has committed the Facility will create local jobs, not fly-in-fly-out positions. Cadence Economics estimated the 45 full-time equivalent workers would earn, in total, a combined \$4.7 million in salary per annum, which would be a significant investment into the local economy.

The Australian Government is also committed to promoting research and development benefits for the agricultural sector in the host community.

### **Community Benefit Program for Hawker and Kimba, South Australia – establishment**

On 8 October 2019, the Australian Government announced the *Community Benefit Program* totalling \$4 million over two years from 2019-20 for the Hawker and Kimba communities of South Australia that were being considered for the site of the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility (the Facility).

The program, which is similar to payments made in comparable countries, was developed to assist in mitigating any potential impacts associated with the ongoing consultation period, and to build economic capacity, skills and resilience.

### **Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project – additional funding**

The Australian Government will provide, under a funding agreement, \$3.5 million over two years from 2020-21 to the Northern Territory (NT) Government to expedite land management works at the former Rum Jungle Mine site, located approximately 100 kilometres from Darwin. The project includes the removal of weeds, scrap and asbestos material and revegetation, and will create meaningful employment opportunities for the site's Indigenous community. Local and NT-based businesses will supply the project.

This measure builds on the Australian and NT governments' 2017 agreement to support ongoing site activities in consultation with Indigenous communities.

### **Former British Government Nuclear Testing Site at Maralinga, South Australia – funding support**

On 8 July 2020, the Australian Government announced it will provide \$2.5 million over four years from 2020-21 (\$0.4 million per year ongoing from 2024-25) to support monitoring and maintenance work at the former British Government nuclear testing site on the Maralinga Tjarutja lands in South Australia. The funding will also enable detailed site investigations to inform a long-term remediation action plan for non-radiological materials at the site, and support construction of permanent accommodation for current and future Maralinga caretakers.

Activities under this measure will take place on Maralinga Tjarutja lands in remote South Australia, with the title for Maralinga vested in the Maralinga Tjarutja through the *Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984* (SA). The activities will support the Traditional Owners to reconnect with traditional lands.

The Australian Government funds monitoring and maintenance activities connected to the British Government's nuclear testing program at Maralinga under the terms of the *2009 Handback Deed*. The Australian Government has provided annual funding for these activities since Maralinga's rehabilitation in the 1990s; this announcement provides

greater certainty to Indigenous communities by preserving ongoing funding.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – BusinessBalance – supporting the mental health of Australians in small businesses**

The Australian Government will provide \$7 million in 2020-21 to provide immediate, short-term support for small business mental and financial wellbeing through the response and recovery phases of the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- Providing free, accessible and tailored support for small business owners to help them manage the pressures associated with owning a business, particularly during COVID-19 by expanding *Beyond Blue's NewAccess* program in partnership with the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman.
- Building the 'mental health literacy' of trusted business advisers by expanding a free accredited professional development program that integrates mental health first aid training with a relationship-centred business mentoring approach, delivered through Deakin University.

Activities will be delivered and promoted nationwide. Small businesses will have equal access to the New Access program regardless of geographic location.

### **Payment Times Reporting Scheme – establishment**

In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided \$10 million over four years from 2019-20, and \$2.6 million in 2023-24, with \$2.4 million per year ongoing from 2024-25, to implement a reporting scheme requiring large businesses to publish information on payment behaviour, including how quickly small business suppliers are paid.

Eligible large businesses who carry on an enterprise in Australia and meet the income threshold of more than \$100 million per year are required to submit a report on their payment terms and practices twice a year. The reporting framework will benefit small business suppliers in regional communities that operate in supply chains with large businesses.

This measure builds on the 2018-19 MYEFO measure titled *Small Business Package – finance and cash flow*.

### **Payment Times Procurement Connected Policy**

The Australian Government will provide \$4.6 million over four years from 2020-21, and ongoing annual funding of \$1.3 million from 2024-25, to develop, implement and evaluate the *Payment Times Procurement Connected Policy* (PT PCP). The PT PCP will improve payment times from large to small businesses by requiring businesses with an annual turnover of at least \$100 million that are awarded government contracts to pay their subcontractors within 20 days. The policy will complement the *Government Supplier Pay on Time or Pay Interest Policy* and the *Payment Times Reporting Scheme*. The PT PCP

will benefit small businesses in regional areas that operate in supply chains of the large businesses within the policy scope.

### **Small Business Support Programs – extension**

In the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided \$5.7 million over two years from 2019-20 to continue the *Finance and Cash Flow* program, the *Making it Easier for Business* program and the *Small Business Digital Champions* program.

The *Finance and Cash Flow* program developed the *Payment Times Reporting Scheme*.

The *Making it Easier for Business* program expanded the 'Ahead for Business' trial sites, and provided digital communication enhancements. The national expansion of this program incorporated mental health initiatives to support small business owners, including regionally based small businesses to prioritise their mental health and wellbeing. The Ahead for Business Digital Hub was re-launched on 27 August 2020.

The *Small Business Digital Champions* program provided small businesses, including some in regional Australia, with a digital transformation for their business. Their success stories are being showcased among the small business community to inspire others to improve their digital potential. The project showcases how diverse small businesses are in Australia and how embracing digital technology can help improve any type of business.

As part of the project, 15 industry associations are promoting the benefits of 'going digital' and providing free, sector-specific digital advisory services to their small business members, including businesses located in regional areas. This advice will continue until April 2021 and ranges from technology trends, adoption, hardware, software, cyber security, digital training, planning and support.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – support for small businesses impacted by COVID-19**

On 23 March 2020, the Australian Government announced it would provide \$6.9 million over two years from 2019-20 to increase the operations at the business.gov.au Contact Centre to provide extended hours of support to small and medium businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The business.gov.au Contact Centre is helping businesses in regional Australia access the support they need to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and stimulate economic growth in their regions.

In addition, the Australian Government announced a grant of \$5 million over two years from 2019-20 to the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia to lead a national campaign to encourage Australians to purchase products and services from their local small business, including in regional areas. Supporting the small business sector in regional areas to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to positive impacts in these communities.

### **New Deregulation Agenda for Small Business**

As part of the *New Deregulation Agenda*, the Australian Government provided the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources \$8 million over two years in the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook to fund the *Employing Your First Person Taskforce*.

The Taskforce was established to make it easier for sole traders and micro businesses, including those in regional areas, to become first-time employers by helping them understand their responsibilities and provide them with confidence that they have met their employment obligations. As a first step, a consolidated online checklist was delivered in mid-2020.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS**

The Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications Portfolio was created in February 2020, combining the responsibilities of the previous portfolios of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities and Communications and the Arts.

The 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, water infrastructure, communication systems and services such as Australia Post and NBN Co. The Portfolio also includes key national cultural institutions such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Library of Australia, and the Australia Council for the Arts. In particular, the Portfolio is responsible for national policy initiatives on regional development, providing programs and initiatives that assist regional communities around the country, also including the territories of Norfolk Island and Christmas and Cocos Islands.

A significant focus for the Portfolio over the past year has been responding to several major domestic and international challenges. Natural disasters such as bushfires and floods, as well as drought and COVID-19 have demanded specially-tailored additional measures in order to keep our transport and communication systems operating and to support the most affected communities – particularly regional communities – in their recovery.

The Portfolio will continue to undertake its large range of Portfolio responsibilities throughout the coming year. Detailed in the New Initiatives below are significant investments in the 2020-21 Budget, which boost the Portfolio's contribution to key outcomes for regional Australia to provide stimulus and additional assistance for regional growth. These include new major investments in transport infrastructure which bring the Government's investment in transport infrastructure to a record \$110 billion over 10 years, \$2 billion investment in projects under the National Road Safety Strategy and further investment to extend fibre infrastructure and improve regional connectivity through NBN Co.

The Portfolio has led the establishment of several support packages for regional communities such as the \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. This Fund is delivering targeted assistance to regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, including support for aviation, fisheries,

### *Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications*

tourism, events and the arts. Of particular importance for regional communities are the Fund initiatives supporting the aviation and airfreight sector. These have been vital to maintain connection for regional communities, ensuring movement of regional exports to domestic and international markets through the pandemic.

The Government has provided \$37.1 million for a new Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters package and a further \$138.9 million additional Roads to Recovery funding for the Local Government Areas affected by drought.

The Portfolio also delivers the Australian Government's regional development programs. The Government is providing an additional \$200 million for round five of the Building Better Regions Fund, including \$100 million for tourism-related infrastructure projects, and a further \$22.7 million for another round of the Stronger Communities Programme. These programs provide funding for a range of locally-driven projects that aim to strengthen our regions, their economies and the vibrant communities which characterise them. Additionally, targeted funding for drought-affected communities is being provided through the Drought Communities Programme Extension and the Drought Community Support Initiative.

The Government is also committing \$100 million over two years to fund Regional Recovery Partnerships to coordinate investments with other levels of government. The Partnerships will support recovery and growth in 10 regions: the Snowy Mountains, Hunter and Newcastle and 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.

The Portfolio also leads the Government's decentralisation agenda, which is one of the initiatives supporting the Government's plan for Australia's future population and regional development more broadly. As part of this plan, the Department's Regional Programs Branch has been relocated to Orange, NSW.

As at 30 June 2020, the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications Portfolio employed 3,205 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total 3,051 staff were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 102 staff were in other capital cities and 52 staff were in regional areas. The Portfolio's regional footprint includes office locations such as Wollongong, Newcastle, Orange, Toowoomba, Dubbo, Wodonga, Port Augusta and June.

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.



The main contributor to the Portfolio's regional footprint is Australia Post, which has a network of over 2,500 regional outlets. NBN Co also has a significant presence in regional areas with the ongoing rollout of the NBN access network.

## **New initiatives**

### **COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund**

The Australian Government has established a \$1 billion *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* (the Fund) commencing March 2020, to deliver targeted assistance to regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Through the Fund, the Government has supported industries including aviation, fisheries, tourism, events and the arts.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications administers the Fund. The Department or agency with the relevant sector responsibilities administers each agreed initiative under the Fund.

The Fund includes the following initiatives administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications:

- Regional Airlines Funding Assistance (\$100 million)
- Regional Airline Network Support Program (\$198 million)
- Supporting Indigenous Visual Arts Centres (\$7 million)
- Crisis Relief for Regional Arts, and Support Act (\$10 million)
- Crisis Relief to Artists, Crew and Music Workers (\$10 million)
- Maritime Freight Underwriting for the Indian Ocean Territories (\$1.4 million)
- Regional Recovery Partnerships (\$83.4 million)

It further includes the following initiatives administered by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment:

- Commonwealth National Parks—Support for Tourism— Licence, Permit and Fee Waivers and reimbursements (\$12 million)
- Financial Counselling to Support Small Regional Businesses (\$4.8 million)
- Seafood sector COVID-19 support—“Eat Seafood Australia” Campaign (\$4 million)
- Supporting Agricultural Shows Package and Supporting Agricultural Field Days (\$39 million)

*Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications*

- Securing Forestry Resources for Economic Recovery (\$10 million)
- Temporary Oil Recycling Sector Support (\$7.8 million)
- Sustaining Tourism at Australia's Iconic World and National Heritage Sites (\$33.5 million).

Additionally, the Fund includes:

- The Temporary waiver of Environmental Management Change for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (\$8.1 million) initiative, the Renewing Reef HQ Aquarium (\$7.6 million) initiative, the Reef Builder – The Coastal Communities Recovery Project (\$20 million) and the Great Barrier Reef Tourism Industry Activation (\$3.2 million) initiative, which are administered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
- The Levy Relief for Commonwealth Fisheries (\$10.3 million), administered by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority.
- Support for essential agriculture, fisheries and forestry and tourism industries: International Freight Assistance Mechanism (an initial \$110 million); Additional Funding for the Export Market Development Grants Scheme (\$49.8 million); Supporting Australia's Exhibiting Zoos and Aquariums (\$94.6 million); Business Events Grants Program (\$50 million); and the the Recovery for Regional Tourism (\$50 million) – which are administered by Austrade within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Further information on individual COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund initiatives which are administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications is provided below.

### **Domestic Aviation Network Support Program**

Following the sudden and drastic capacity cuts by airlines in the initial response to COVID-19, the Australian Government moved quickly to re-establish minimum levels of aviation connectivity. This connectivity has allowed repatriated Australians to get to their homes and ensured critical workers, health supplies and freight continue to move to support the health pandemic needs across the country.

The Australian Government committed up to \$165 million on 16 April 2020 towards the first stage of the Domestic Aviation Network Support (DANS) Program. This supported networks servicing the most critical metropolitan and regional routes in Australia.

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded and travel restrictions continued to impact on passenger demand and ability to travel, the Government announced extensions of the DANS program from 1 July to 30 September 2020, and this Budget extends the support again from 1 October 2020 to 31 January 2021. The program was also refocused to the top 50 routes, by passenger capacity flown in the 2018-19 year.

Through the DANS Program, the Government is ensuring that a minimum level of flights can continue, while also supporting flexibility and responsiveness to ensure the airline networks can respond to meet community needs in what continues to be an uncertain environment. In this way, the Government is ensuring that Australian aviation networks are able to continue to operate through the current COVID-19 situation, and that airlines are in a position to respond quickly to domestic travel demand as the situation changes and improves.

### **Regional Airline Network Support Program**

Due to travel restrictions and border closures put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, very few domestic aviation services in regional Australia remained commercially viable. Air transport is critical for many regional communities.

The Australian Government has therefore committed up to \$198 million over two years from 2019-20, through the Regional Airline Network Support (RANS) Program. RANS is facilitating the continued operation of a minimum network of passenger flights to regional and remote communities across Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without the support of the Australian Government, many regional locations would not have air connectivity. More than 110 regional or remote locations across all states and territories are receiving flights under the Program.

RANS flights are carrying essential medical and service workers to remote areas, and enabling people living in regional locations to travel to major cities to access medical treatment and other services. A number of the flights service remote Indigenous communities, including island communities, which are particularly reliant on access to services via air.

RANS flights are also enabling essential workers to continue to travel to and from their work locations, supporting key industries such as mining and agriculture. Passenger flights are also a key means of carrying vital freight, including Australia Post parcels, medical supplies, and machinery parts, as well as supporting regional exporters to get goods to market. By facilitating the continued operation of regional airlines, the RANS Program is also supporting a range of suppliers, including ground handling suppliers, refuelling agents, travel agencies, and regional airports.

On 28 September 2020, the Government announced the extension of the program through to 28 March 2021.

### **Regional Airlines Funding Assistance Program**

The Australian Government is providing \$100 million in funding for the Regional Airlines Funding Assistance Program to give direct cash flow assistance to smaller regional air operators to help them remain financially viable, and continue to provide essential air connectivity to regional Australia, through the unprecedented downturn in aviation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Program provides last resort grant funding to domestic commercial airlines operating regular public transport services to regional and remote communities, and to a range of other essential air operators including aeromedical providers, subject to eligibility and financial need.

The Program will run to 31 December 2020 or until funding is expended, whichever occurs first.

### **Regional Airports Screening Infrastructure Program**

The Government is providing \$66 million in 2020-21, for the Regional Airports Screening Infrastructure (RASI) Program, to support enhanced regional security screening costs. For eligible regional airports across Australia, this funding will contribute towards the minimum necessary capital and initial operating costs of complying with enhanced security screening requirements enacted by the Department of Home Affairs through transport security regulations.

Regional airports eligible for the RASI Program are located all across Australia. Regional communities will benefit from this measure by avoiding security screening costs being passed on by airports to airlines, and ultimately to passengers. This initiative is expected to benefit a wide range of sectors dependent on air transport and regional airports across Australia.

### **Infrastructure Investment – Major Projects**

The Australian Government is investing a record \$110 billion over 10 years through the rolling infrastructure plan to meet our national freight challenge, get Australians home sooner and safer, and support regional jobs and investment at the time it is needed most. The Government's focus on delivering local priorities as part of the economic road to recovery will create regional jobs and draw on regional business to stimulate local economies. Improved transport connectivity for communities provides opportunities for agriculture producers in regional areas by better linking industries to domestic and international markets.

The Government's investment will support Australia's recovery. Australian Government funded projects under construction are expected to support around 100,000 direct and indirect jobs across Australia over the life of the projects. This investment will help get regional Australia back in business following the pandemic, and provide long lasting benefits for communities through safer roads and better facilities. Through the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government has committed to more than 40 new land transport infrastructure projects that support regional Australia.

This investment will support stronger regional economies, local jobs and local businesses, and includes:

- \$560 million for the New England Highway – Singleton Bypass and an additional \$43 million for the Bolivia Hill Upgrade to improve traffic flow, travel times, amenity and safety on the New England Highway.
- \$320 million for Shepparton Rail Line Upgrade – Stage 3, and \$208 million for Warrnambool Rail Line Upgrade – Stage 2, to improve the ride quality, reliability and resilience of passenger and freight rail services in Victoria.
- \$120 million for the Carpentaria Highway Upgrade in the Northern Territory to provide better freight links, and a more efficient and reliable means for the community to access key essential services.
- \$100 million to seal priority sections of the Strzelecki Track in South Australia to improve accessibility and connectivity of road networks.
- \$76 million for Riverway Drive Stage 2 (Allambie Lane to Dunlop Street) in Townsville, Queensland to deliver safety upgrades, duplication and three signalised intersections.
- \$40 million for the Tasmanian Roads Package – Bass Highway targeted upgrades between Deloraine and Devonport to improve a key link for freight, tourism and people movement.
- \$16 million for the Broome-Cape Leveque Road: Upgrading and Community Access Roads in Western Australia to improve connectivity between people with jobs and services, and goods with markets.

The Australian Government has also committed additional funding to projects across regional Australia, including:

- \$1.46 billion (including an additional \$490.6 million through the 2020-21 Budget) for the Coffs Harbour Bypass in New South Wales to deliver four lanes of divided highway to a motorway standard, including tunnels and bypassing the Coffs Harbour urban area, improving road safety for all road users.
- \$452 million (including an additional \$52 million through the 2020-21 Budget) for the Midland Highway Upgrade in Tasmania to deliver safety works such as flexible barriers and realigning tight curves.
- \$64.7 million (including an additional \$38 million through the 2020-21 Budget) for the Bruce Highway - Burdekin Bridge Upgrade in Queensland, including major work on the steel girders, removal of red-lead paint, rust elimination, painting and deck resurfacing.

### **Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government is providing \$1.5 billion to fund local priority projects through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program. This includes an additional \$1 billion through the 2020-21 Budget.

This investment will support an estimated 3,000 direct and indirect jobs over the life of the projects. The Government's investment will drive shovel-ready local priorities, supporting local jobs and local business. As at 2 October 2020, in total more than \$340 million has been allocated to local councils and more than \$155 million has already been provided under the Program to quickly stimulate regional economies and support community infrastructure projects such as new or upgraded bicycle and walking paths, community halls, picnic shelters and barbeque facilities at parks and off-road car parks such as those near sporting grounds.

### **Bruce Highway Upgrade Strategy**

The Australian Government has committed \$20 million in 2020-21 for the Bruce Highway Upgrade Strategy. This strategy will deliver a plan for future upgrades along the Bruce Highway in Queensland, including consideration of duplication of priority sections of the highway between Curra and Cairns. This work will be undertaken in partnership with the Queensland Government and industry.

The Australian Government has an existing commitment of \$10 billion over fifteen years towards the Bruce Highway Upgrade Program, with almost all of the funding allocated to projects. The program has improved safety, flood resilience and capacity along the length of the highway between Brisbane and Cairns.

### **Roads of Strategic Importance Initiative**

The Australian Government has committed more than \$4.6 billion from 2018-19 upgrade key freight routes through the Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI) initiative. The ROSI initiative will ensure that our key freight roads efficiently connect agricultural and mining regions to ports, airports and other transport hubs. Most importantly, the rolling nature of the investment over 10 years also ensures the ROSI initiative delivers substantial social and economic benefits, including ongoing opportunities for greater regional employment and business growth.

Through the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government has committed additional funding to support projects under the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative including the Wheatbelt Secondary Freight Network in Western Australia (\$150 million including an additional \$80 million through the 2020-21 Budget), and upgrades to the Midway Point Causeway (including McGees Bridge) and Sorell Causeway on the Hobart to Sorell Corridor in Tasmania (\$150 million).

The Australian Government is also allocating funding to projects on previously identified priority corridors, including \$41.6 million for the Coolgardie-Esperance Highway – Emu Rocks on the Port Augusta to Perth Corridor in Western Australia, and \$38 million for Cape York Community Access Roads on the Cooktown to Weipa Corridor in Queensland.

### **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 1 and 2 of the Bussell Highway duplication in Western Australia
- \$41.6 million for a Regional Road Network Package in South Australia
- \$8 million for State Road Network Enhancements in Tasmania
- \$7.6 million for strengthening and widening the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory.

This investment also includes \$500 million to deliver smaller but 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
- \$30 million to improvements on the Kennedy Highway in Queensland between Mareeba-Atherton
- \$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
- \$3.9 million for safety improvements on the Barkly Highway in the Northern Territory.

## **Roads to Recovery Program**

The Roads to Recovery Program supports the construction and maintenance of local roads to facilitate greater access for Australians and improve safety, economic and social outcomes. The Australian Government has committed a total of \$6.2 billion to the Program from 2013-14 to 2023-24. Around 50 per cent of this funding goes to rural and regional local councils.

On 6 November 2019, the Government announced a further \$138.9 million additional Roads to Recovery funding over the 2020 calendar year for the 128 Local Government Areas eligible for the Drought Communities Programme Extension. The 2020-21 Budget commits a further \$400 million additional Roads to Recovery funding in 2029-30 to maintain annual funding at existing levels on an ongoing basis.

Councils have a set program allocation and choose the projects on which they will spend their Roads to Recovery funding, based on local priorities.

## **Black Spot Program**

The Australian Government is providing \$1.1 billion to the Black Spot Program over 10 years from 2013-14, to fund safety works in places where there have been serious crashes or where serious crashes are likely to occur. In 2019-20, the Government approved 273 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. Over 57 per cent of Black Spot funding has been provided to rural and regional areas.

The 2020-21 Budget commits a further \$60 million additional Black Spot Program funding in 2029-30 to maintain annual funding at existing levels on an ongoing basis

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. As at September 2020, more than 2,700 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.

## **Road Safety Program**

The Australian Government will invest \$2 billion over 18 months commencing no later than January 2021 to create jobs and support the Government's new *National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030*. The initiative will provide around 9,000 widely distributed local jobs and support the Government's objectives on road safety through safety upgrades across the road network.

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 road injuries. Regional communities suffer 9.6 deaths per 100,000 compared to metropolitan areas who suffer 2.2 deaths per 100,000 persons.

Road safety treatments will 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; and, median treatments to prevent head-on vehicle collisions. The application of these road safety treatments will raise road safety standards across high risk roads. Approximately 3,000 kilometres of road will be upgraded nationwide.

A National Road Safety Data Hub (the Hub) will also be established costing \$5.5 million over four years, commencing in December 2020. The Hub will bring together road safety data to inform governments' investments in road infrastructure and measure its effectiveness, and provide a robust evidence base to facilitate best practice road safety policy outcomes. Having access to data that is accurate, robust and available in a timely manner allows policies to be targeted and agile providing for faster interventions that will make a difference and save lives sooner and help identify and improve high safety risk roads in regional areas.

### **Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program**

The Australian Government is investing a total of \$538 million over 10 years from 2013-14 to the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program, which will provide funding to infrastructure projects that improve productivity and safety outcomes of heavy vehicle operations across Australia. Nearly 94 per cent of funding under the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program has gone to projects located in rural and regional areas.

The 2020-21 Budget commits a further \$40 million additional Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program funding in 2029-30 to maintain annual funding at existing levels on an ongoing basis.

Projects funded under the Program include rest stops and parking bays, upgrading the capacity of roads, and technology trials aimed at improving heavy vehicle productivity.

During 2020, over 145 new projects were approved for funding under the Program. Around 90 per cent of these new projects are located in rural and regional areas.

### **Bridges Renewal Program**

The Australian Government is investing a total of \$676 million over eight years from 2015-16 to the Bridges Renewal Program, to provide funding for upgrades to bridges that enhance access for local communities and facilitate vehicle access to enhance the local economy. More than 80 per cent of the projects funded since 2015-16 through the first three rounds of the program have already been completed, with a further

90 underway. Around 85 per cent of funding under the Program has gone to projects located in rural and regional areas.

The 2020-21 Budget commits a further \$60 million additional Bridges Renewal Program funding in 2029-30 to maintain annual funding at existing levels on an ongoing basis.

During 2020, over 200 new projects were approved for funding under the Program. Over 90 per cent of these new projects are located in rural and regional areas.

### **Increasing job and business opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Regional Australia**

Indigenous Australians living in regional Australia will benefit from the Australian Government's Infrastructure Investment Program for land transport. On 1 July 2019, the Australian Government successfully negotiated a new National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects with all states and territories. The National Partnership Agreement includes the Indigenous Employment and Supplier-use Infrastructure Framework (the Framework) which aims to increase job and business opportunities for Indigenous Australians in the delivery of Australian Government funded land transport projects.

New road and rail projects receiving \$7.5 million or more in Australian Government funding, and projects with a strong potential to support Indigenous participation including those funded under the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative in Northern Australia, are required to have Indigenous participation targets. The Framework and the National Partnership Agreement is a five-year agreement, with state and territory governments responsible for project delivery.

### **Supporting National Freight and Supply Chain Priorities**

The Australian Government is committed to maximising the benefits of better connecting the national freight rail network with regional Australia. Strategic business cases will continue to be developed, identifying opportunities to support more productive rail-based supply chains at major regional centres. This will build capacity on key country rail lines enabling heavier, faster and longer country freight rail services.

The following new rail initiatives will also help contribute towards the Government's wider commitment to the *National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy and Action Plan* to address the need for safer and better freight performance:

#### **Northern New South Wales Inland Port – Narrabri**

The Australian Government will contribute \$7.8 million in 2020-21, to support the delivery of the Northern New South Wales Inland Port project, which is located in Narrabri. This project will improve regional connectivity and will complement the Inland Rail project. This project involves construction of a 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.

### **Grade Separating Road Interfaces in New South Wales**

The Grade Separating Road Interfaces project will receive a total of \$187.5 million in funding over four years from 2020-21, to improve public safety. The project is a joint venture between the Australian Government, who will contribute \$150 million, and the New South Wales Government, who will contribute \$37.5 million. This project interfaces with national, state and regional roads, and the provided funding will enable additional grade separations along the Inland Rail alignment in NSW.

### **Ettamogah Rail Hub**

The Ettamogah Rail Hub (ERH) project will deliver 5 kilometres of new arrival and departure sidings, so that trains calling at ERH can pull off the single track main-line. As of October 2020, trains stop on the main line to exchange wagons at the ERH. This procedure will no longer be an option once Inland Rail is operational. To support the completion of this project, the Australian Government will contribute \$2.6 million of grant funding in 2020-21. This funding will be in addition to \$9.6 million in existing funding for 2020-21 for the ERH: \$7.6 million provided by the New South Wales Government, and \$2 million provided from a private fund.

### **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.

Since July 2018, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) has been solely responsible for delivering the National System for Domestic Commercial Vessel Safety (the National System), achieving nationally consistent delivery of vessel safety regulation for the first time.

A review of all costs and charges for the National System was to be conducted in 2020-21 and involve wide public consultation. In recognition of the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australia's maritime industries, the Australian Government has decided to delay this review. The review is now expected to commence in mid-2021. The review will consider the appropriateness of charges for the national system, informed by data and public consultation.

To ensure AMSA can continue delivering vital safety regulation for our maritime industries, the Australian Government will provide \$11 million funding in 2021-22 for the National System while the review is being undertaken. Safety standards and services should not be compromised as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, or by deferring the charging review, so the Government is ensuring there is stable funding for AMSA.

This new funding extends the Government's 2018 commitment – that no levy would be charged to industry for the first three years of AMSA's delivery of National System services – by 12 months, meaning no levy will be charged to industry in 2021-22.

Total Government transition funding for the National System is now \$123.4 million.

### **Australian Postal Corporation – supporting regional communities**

Australia Post maintains a network of over 4,000 Post Offices, including more than 2,500 in regional, rural and remote Australia as of June 2020. Post Offices in rural and regional areas provide important financial services (Bank@Post) and identity services, with many operated in-conjunction with other small businesses.

Australia Post provides over the counter banking services on behalf of more than 70 financial institutions, via Bank@Post, which is a highly valued service in regional, rural and remote areas that do not have banking institution branches. In 2018-19, almost 27 million financial transactions occurred at Australia Post outlets in regional and remote communities.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government has temporarily relaxed letter delivery speed and frequency requirements, allowing Australia Post to redeploy thousands of its letters workforce to process and deliver parcels, which are at record levels. The changes came into effect in May 2020. The Government will assess the effect of these temporary arrangements before the end of 2020, and decide if they are to stay in place until 30 June 2021. The delivery frequency of regular letters in regional, rural and remote Australia is unchanged.

### **Regional Connectivity Program – additional funding**

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 the COVID-19 pandemic, capitalise on changed businesses conditions, and better engage in the digital economy.

As part of the Australian Government's Stronger Regional Connectivity Program, the Government committed \$52.6 million in the 2019-20 Budget for a new Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) to fund telecommunications infrastructure grants for targeted, place-based solutions in areas outside of the NBN fixed-line footprint

The Government has committed a further \$30.3 million to the RCP in the 2020-21 Budget. This additional investment will expand the number of eligible projects that can be funded under this program, and enable a broader range of regional communities and businesses to leverage the benefits of improved digital connectivity, including in key sectors such as agriculture, tourism, health and education.

### **New Investments in the National Broadband Network (NBN)**

NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) is investing \$4.5 billion 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 1 Gbps on-request at no up-front build cost to 90 per cent of business premises. This includes the establishment of 240 Business Fibre Zones to provide metro-equivalent priced enterprise grade broadband to more than 700,000 businesses.

*Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications*

- \$3.5 billion network upgrade program that will provide 75 per cent of NBN fixed line premises with access to ultra-fast broadband by 2023.
- \$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 FTTN premises in regional areas with access to speeds up to 1 Gigabit per second (Gbps) on demand by 2023.
- 250,000 regional businesses located in Business Fibre Zones with access to ultra-fast broadband capability and metro-equivalent wholesale pricing.
- By partnering with state, federal and local governments, the \$300 million co-investment fund will deliver more fixed-line broadband infrastructure into the Satellite and Fixed Wireless footprints.
- Investments are expected to create an estimated 10,000 additional regional jobs.
- Investments are expected to create an estimated 2,800 new regional businesses.
- Investments are expected to generate \$1.5 billion in additional gross domestic product annually for regional Australia by 2024.
- \$50 million Fibre-to-the-Node (FTTN) line speed uplift program to resolve in-home wiring issues.
- \$50 million Business Fibre co-investment fund to create more regional business fibre zones.

NBN Co will fund these investments from private debt. There will be no impact on the Budget.

**Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters Package**

The Australian Government has committed to a new \$37.1 million Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) Package to prevent, mitigate and manage telecommunications outages during emergencies. This initiative 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 up to 2000 NBN Co satellite services to rural and country fire service depots and evacuation centres across the country.
- \$2.1 million to improve Government information to communities about access to telecommunications in emergencies.

Access to power is 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. As part of the STAND Package, the Government has also committed \$18 million for a new Mobile Network Hardening Program to keep mobile infrastructure operating for longer during emergencies, with a focus on strengthening back-up power supplies.

The first stage of the Mobile Network Hardening Program will provide funding to upgrade mobile base stations built under Rounds 1 and 2 of the Mobile Black Spot Program, to increase back-up power to 12 hours, where feasible. The second stage will be a new competitive grants program that will improve the resilience of regional telecommunications infrastructure more broadly.

### **Australian 5G Innovation Initiative**

The next generation of mobile technology, 5G, offers higher speeds and reliability, lower latency, and supports a much higher number of connections. As well as improving mobile services for consumers, the technology can support novel industrial applications that can improve innovation, productivity, and Australia's international competitiveness. For instance, 5G supports autonomous farm machinery, networks of sensors to monitor crops and environmental conditions, and automated vehicles in the transport sector.

The Australian Government will provide \$22.1 million over three years from 2020-21 to support testbeds and trials of 5G technology. A grants program of \$20 million will focus on developing 5G applications in sectors where Australia has a competitive advantage, or where the productivity benefits are likely to be significant. The grants program will be open and competitive, and the projects that are funded will be dependent on the applications received. Projects are expected to include those in the agriculture, transport,

manufacturing and logistics sectors, where applications of 5G have the potential to support economic development and productivity in regional Australia.

### **Improved Spectrum Management**

The Australian Government will invest in improved systems to manage the allocation of electromagnetic spectrum. Timely allocation of spectrum is required to allow telecommunications providers to deploy 5G services throughout Australia, which will improve telecommunications services and support economic growth in regional areas. The Government will invest \$1.8 million over two years from 2020-21 on an updated spectrum auction system, so that high-value, 5G-suitable spectrum can be allocated efficiently.

The Government will also invest \$5.3 million over two years from 2020-21 on an updated and simplified digital licence system. Thousands of businesses, including many in regional Australia, rely on access to spectrum to support their operations, for example, to communicate with a helicopter mustering cattle, two-way communications running reef and rainforest tours, and in infrastructure such as remote irrigation systems or managing a grain silo. An updated licence system will make it easier for businesses to apply for and maintain radio communications licences.

### **Viewer Access Satellite Television**

The Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) program provides funding through to 30 June 2024 for broadcasters to deliver commercial free-to-air television services to over 210,000 households, largely in regional and remote areas, who would otherwise not be able to receive free-to-air television services. The VAST service includes dedicated news channels carrying nightly bulletins from regional commercial television broadcasters. The VAST platform is also used by ABC, SBS and some community radio and television broadcasters to deliver broadcasts via satellite to a largely regional and remote audience.

### **Mobile Black Spot Program**

The Australian Government will continue to expand and improve mobile coverage in regional and remote Australia through the Mobile Black Spot Program. The first five rounds of this program have delivered more than 1,200 new base stations, over 870 of which are now on air. The Government has committed to a Round 5A of the Program, which will be used to test a range of different program designs. Funding for Round 5A will be drawn from the unused portion of the funding allocated to Round 5 in the 2019-20 Budget. The Government has consulted with industry and the community on options for the design of Round 5A, including a proposed focus on improving mobile connectivity along major transport corridors and in natural disaster-prone regions, as well as testing new technologies that support shared mobile coverage in regional areas. Round 5A will be launched in the coming months and outcomes from this round will then inform the design of Round 6, for which \$80 million was committed in the 2019-20 Budget and which will be rolled out in 2021.

### **Grainbelt Wireless Solutions Program**

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government provided up to \$2 million for a feasibility study to assess ways of improving digital connectivity in the Grainbelt region of Western Australia (WA). The feasibility study found that to some extent the increasing demand for connectivity in the region is being supported from the existing infrastructure and services, however there are opportunities in some areas to improve the capacity and reliability of services for local communities and agricultural businesses.

In response to the feasibility study the Government has committed \$1.8 million in funding over two years commencing 2020-21 towards a pilot grants program for Wireless Internet Service Providers to provide targeted solutions in the WA Grainbelt. This measure is consistent with the outcomes of the feasibility study and supports improved connectivity in the WA Grainbelt.

### **Public Interest News Gathering Grant Program and Public Interest News Gathering Grant Program – extension**

The Australian Government established the \$50 million Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program. PING is funded with the allocation of an additional \$18.4 million from the Government, and the repurposing of unallocated funds from the Government's Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package. PING grants support the provision of public interest journalism in regional Australia. The objective of PING is to support regional publishers and broadcasters to maintain or increase their production and distribution of public interest journalism in regional Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. On 29 June 2020, the Government announced that 107 regional publishers and broadcasters would share in \$50 million under the first stream of the PING Program.

On 18 September 2020, the Government announced that it would provide \$5 million to the Australian Associated Press Newswire (AAP) under the PING program. This will benefit regional Australia, as AAP provides services to more than 250 regional news mastheads, covering public interest content on national, state and regional news.

### **Support for regional commercial radio and regional and remote commercial television broadcasters**

On 15 April 2020, the Australian Government announced, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that it would provide \$41 million in spectrum tax rebates to all commercial television and radio broadcasters. This measure gave regional commercial television and radio broadcasters across Australia immediate financial relief for 12 months from 14 February 2020 until 13 February 2021.

The Australian Government has introduced a Bill that will ease the regulatory burden on regional commercial radio and regional and remote commercial television broadcasters.



The Broadcasting Services Amendment (Regional Commercial Radio and Other Measures) Bill 2020 includes a range of proposed deregulatory measures that will allow regional commercial radio broadcasters more flexibility to satisfy their local content obligations while retaining the amount of local content that regional commercial radio broadcasters are currently required to broadcast to regional Australians. The Bill also proposes to amend the Australian content multi-channel quota obligation, with the amended obligation requiring a regional or remote commercial television broadcasters to transmit on its multi-channels no less than the amount of Australian programming broadcast on equivalent multi-channels carried by its metropolitan affiliate broadcaster. The proposed measures will provide regional commercial radio and regional and remote commercial television broadcasters with more flexibility and certainty in delivering broadcasting services in regional areas, while maintaining obligations to provide material of local significance, upholding regional voices and preserving choice for regional audiences.

### **Keeping Australians Safe Online**

The Australian Government has provided additional \$10 million in 2020-21 for the eSafety Commissioner to assist the agency to keep Australians safe online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding will meet an increase in public demand for support to deal with the cyberbullying of Australian children and reports of image-based abuse. The funding will also continue the important work of eSafety in educating Australians, no matter where they live, with practical tips on how to stay safe online.

In addition, the Government's Online Safety Package will provide the eSafety Commissioner with sustainable and ongoing base funding to allow it to meet the needs of the community. Funding of \$39.4 million over three years will position the regulator to meet the growth in demand for support, to deal with an increase in prohibited online content, and to develop and deliver new schemes and industry requirements envisaged by legislative reform (a new Online Safety Act). Proposals for the new Act include:

- a new adult cyber abuse complaints and take-down scheme
- a new set of basic online safety expectations for industry that make clear how they should keep users safe online
- expanding the remit of the eSafety Commissioner's powers to capture relevant players such as overseas-based social media services, gaming platforms, app stores and search engines
- a new power for the eSafety Commissioner to act quickly in a crisis to ask internet service providers to block access to terrorist and extreme violent content
- greater powers to the eSafety Commissioner to issue take-down notices for seriously harmful content – no matter where in the world this is hosted.

### **Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund**

On 24 April 2020, the Australian Government announced the opening of a \$5 million grant program (with a maximum of \$400,000 per applicant), administered by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, to support regional and small publishers. On 5 August 2020, the Australian Government announced that 41 regional and small metropolitan publishers would share \$5 million to boost the sustainability and ongoing production of news in a modern media environment.

### **National Water Infrastructure Development Fund**

The Australian Government is currently developing a rolling 10-year investment schedule commencing in 2020-21 for water infrastructure projects, and is providing an additional \$2 billion in grant funding for the *National Water Infrastructure Development Fund* in the 2020-21 Budget. Investment in water infrastructure will increase from \$1.5 billion to \$3.5 billion, helping fast-track projects through the staged development of business cases to construction and completion, while helping support economic recovery.

The Australian Government's long-term strategic approach to funding water infrastructure projects will:

- Increase Australia's national water security, build resilience to future drought and support agriculture and primary industries.
- Identify priority water infrastructure projects through a strategic assessment of existing water plans, priority lists and feasibility studies; identify advice from the National Water Grid Advisory Body; and conduct scientific investigations to identify opportunities outside traditional agricultural areas of Australia.

### **Western Queensland Irrigation and Agriculture Scheme Assessment**

The Australian Government will provide \$3 million over two years, from 2020-21 to 2021-22, through the North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority to support potential new irrigation based development opportunities in regional northern and western Queensland.

This initiative will enable a technical and engineering assessment to identify prospective areas in Burdekin Basin and Flinders River Basin suitable for large scale irrigation through the provision of water infrastructure. The project complements the *Hells Gates Dam Scheme* detailed business case project.

### **Building Better Regions Fund**

The Australian Government has announced a further \$200 million towards a fifth round of the *Building Better Regions Fund* (BBRF). Round Five includes \$100 million for tourism related infrastructure while maintaining \$100 million for broader community

infrastructure and investment, bringing the total commitment for this program to \$1 billion from 2017-8 to 2023-24.

Partnering with governments and other stakeholders to realise the full potential of a range of economic and regional development opportunities, the BBRF supports regional and remote communities by funding investment-ready infrastructure projects that will create jobs and drive economic growth. It also funds new or expanded events, strategic regional plans, or leadership and capability strengthening activities that provide economic and social benefits to these regions. Local governments and incorporated not-for-profit organisations are eligible to apply.

The first four rounds of BBRF resulted in 995 projects being approved for funding, delivering a range of benefits to regional and remote Australia, such as:

- the provision of a grant to the Apollo Bay Aquatic Centre in Victoria upgrading the existing outdoor pool into an indoor heated facility for all year swimming (\$180,000)
- extension of Bogan Shire Medical Centre in Nyngan, New South Wales (\$350,218)
- construction of Ravensthorpe Cultural precinct in Western Australia (\$5,275,800)
- boosting the region of Murweh in South West Queensland, through the Morven Rail Hub project, with a grant of just over \$4 million.

Round 4 closed on 19 December 2019. On 5 June 2020, the Australian Government announced 163 successful projects with a commitment of \$207.1 million. A key priority of Round 4 is to help stimulate local economies and deliver jobs by investing in shovel ready projects in drought-affected regional communities.

### **Stronger Communities Programme**

The Stronger Communities Programme (SCP) provides funding to small capital projects which deliver important social benefits to communities across Australia.

The Australian Government will provide a further \$22.7 million in the 2020-21 Budget to deliver a sixth round of the SCP, bringing the total commitment for this program to \$122.5 million between 2015-16 and 2020-21. More than 10,000 community-based projects have secured funding under the first five rounds of the program.

The SCP provides funding of up to \$150,000 in each of the 151 federal electorates. Members of the House of Representatives will continue their role in identifying key, locally driven projects, with available funding of between \$2,500 and \$20,000 for eligible projects.

Input from the community is a key element of the SCP. Each Federal Member of Parliament is required to establish a community consultation committee to identify projects for consideration under the program.

In recognition of the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities, applications submitted in Round 6 by all incorporated not-for-profit organisations and/or incorporated trustees applying on behalf of a trust will be exempt from the normal 50 per cent co-funding requirement, and will be able to apply for funding of up to 100 per cent of their eligible projects costs.

### **Drought Communities Programme Extension**

The Drought Communities Programme (DCP) Extension supports communities in the most drought-affected regions of Australia. \$301 million has been committed by the Australian Government from 2018-19 to 2020-21, including \$205 million announced throughout 2019-20 for 180 councils. This includes \$14 million announced for 14 Local Government Areas during the April 2019 election. Projects will provide short-term support, use local resources, deliver an economic stimulus and support communities facing hardship.

Over 450 projects have been funded across New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, creating jobs, supporting local businesses and improving infrastructure used by communities.

### **Drought Community Support Initiative**

The Australian Government is investing \$181.5 million in the Drought Community Support Initiative (DCSI) to provide immediate financial assistance to farming households suffering the impacts of drought. Financial support of up to \$3,000 per household is available to eligible farmers, farm workers, farm suppliers and contractors in Local Government Areas (LGAs) eligible for the DCP Extension.

In 2019-20, the DCSI end date was extended from 30 June 2020 to 31 December 2020 to ensure that support continues to be provided to farming households impacted by drought. \$148.5 million was provided for Round 2, bringing total program funding to \$181.5 million. This includes \$33 million committed in September 2019, \$33 million committed in December 2019 and \$82.5 million committed in January 2020.

Round 2 of the DCSI has provided funding assistance to over 33,000 farming households impacted by drought in 180 LGAs across New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia.

### **Drought Communities Outreach Program**

In June 2020, the Australian Government provided \$5 million in grant funding to Rotary Australia World Community Service Limited (Rotary) from the Drought Communities Outreach Program. Through Rotary, the Government is providing \$500 vouchers to farming households facing hardship as a result of the drought. Rotary will also support the on-the-ground community outreach activities.

The program will improve economic activity in drought-impacted regions, as support to households is largely spent in local businesses.

### **Regional Recovery Partnerships**

The Australian Government has committed \$100 million over two years from 2020-21 to fund Regional Recovery Partnerships. The Partnerships will coordinate investments with other levels of government to support recovery and growth in 10 regions: the Snowy Mountains, Hunter and Newcastle and 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.

The partnerships seek to back-in existing regional plans by developing targeted initiatives with contributions from all levels of government to deliver jobs, economic recovery and economic diversification.

The identified regions offer a compelling contribution to national resilience and recovery as they have experienced the brunt of COVID-19 and they present significant emerging opportunities to diversify the region's economy to drive long term national growth and resilience.

### **Building Strong, Resilient Regional Leaders**

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 Strong, Resilient Regional Leaders initiative will invest \$5 million over three years from 2020-21 to engage a training provider to deliver place based leadership training. Local leaders have a significant role to play in boosting the resilience and vibrancy of their community. Recent events, such as floods, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic 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.

### **Continued Funding for the Regional Australia Institute**

The Australian Government will continue its investment to the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) Intergovernmental Shared Inquiry Program, committing a further \$400,000 over two years from 2020-21 towards the research program. The Intergovernmental Shared Inquiry Program is a collaborative partnership between 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 will also contribute \$4.6 million over two years from 2020-21 towards RAI's National Awareness Campaign. This will promote the benefits and opportunities of living in regional Australia, helping to recover from recent crises such as COVID-19, the summer bushfires, drought and flood events.

### **Regionalisation and Decentralisation**

The Australian Government is continuing to pursue its Decentralisation Agenda. The 2020-21 Budget includes two new components:

- The Securing Raw Materials Program (\$35 million over two years from 2020-21) will enable the Government to provide up to \$5 million of matched funding to support research and development activities associated with securing a reliable and commercially viable raw material supply for businesses that relocate to regional Australia from a metropolitan area. The program will target businesses that enter into research businesses partnerships with regional universities or other regionally-based research organisations.
- The Regional Cooperative Research Centres Project (RCRC-P) (\$6 million over three years from 2020-21) will provide one-off grant funding to eligible businesses for short-term industry-led collaborations to tackle issues in prominent regional industries.

As a pilot, grant recipients will receive matched funding of up to \$3 million for a period of up to three years. Eligible research projects must be based in regional Australia, and at least one collaborating entity must relocate from an excluded metropolitan area for the duration of the project. Based on the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources' Cooperative Research Centres Project (CRC-P) model, RCRC-P funding could be used to pay for research, salaries, student placements, commercialisation, or capital items.

### **Local Government Financial Assistance Grant**

The Local Government Financial Assistance Grant program was established under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995* and provides 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 \$9.2 billion to local government over the period 2020-21 to 2023-24.

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 made an early payment during the 2019-20 financial year of approximately 50 per cent of the 2020-21 Financial Assistance Grant funding. This cash injection of more than \$1.3 billion gave councils vital support to assist with the combined impacts of drought, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **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 the Better Data Use to Support Delivery for Regional Australians program, which will provide government and community decision-makers with better economic, social and demographic data on regional Australia, including publicly accessible and searchable location-specific information. Improving outcomes for regional Australians requires better tracking of data on the state of the regions, as well as better information for governments and local communities making decisions that affect those communities. The program will address the critical need for coordinated, comprehensive and accessible economic, social and demographic data on regional Australia. It will make more of this information publically accessible and searchable by location, helping government and community decision-makers improve targeting and delivery of projects and track progress in Australia's regional communities.

### **Darwin City Deal – Education and Community Precinct**

The Australian Government is bringing forward \$74.8 million, to be implemented over three years from 2019-20 to 2021-22, to fast-track the delivery of the Education and Community Precinct (the Precinct) in the Darwin City Deal for the Northern Territory. The Precinct project will be an important hub for the whole Darwin community and includes construction of a university campus, library and carpark in Darwin's city centre. Bringing forward the funding means that construction can start sooner, as early as October 2020. This will provide a boost to Darwin's economy, create jobs and support local businesses.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – External Territories**

The Australian Government will provide \$13.5 million in 2020-21 (including \$5.7 million in capital funding) for an infrastructure and tourism package to stimulate and support the economies of Norfolk Island and the Indian Ocean Territories during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **COVID-19 Response package – Relief and Recovery Funds**

The Australian Government has committed \$1.4 million in 2020-21 to maintain sea freight services to the Indian Ocean Territories as part of the Relief and Recovery fund to support regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

### **Services to Territories Program**

The Australian Government will provide \$61 million over four years from 2020-21 to proactively manage imminent emergency situations on Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay Territory and continue to deliver essential services for the community.

The Australian Government has responsibility for delivering state and Commonwealth services and infrastructure to the Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay Territory communities. This funding will be used for the following:

- Underwriting of passenger services and freight subsidies to support regular and reliable air services to Norfolk Island.
- Ongoing management and operation of the Norfolk Island Museum and research centre, as well as maintenance and repairs at the World Heritage Listed Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area.
- Managing and supporting court and legal proceedings for Norfolk Island both on Norfolk Island and on the mainland.
- Maintaining and managing Commonwealth owned assets, land and facilities such as the health facility, ports and community infrastructure.
- Conducting targeted quarantine surveys to enable informed biosecurity decisions to promote economic development while conserving Norfolk Island's unique environment.
- Acquiring and managing a fit-for-purpose marine search and rescue vessel for the Australian Federal Police, increasing the safety and protection of the Norfolk Island community and tourists.
- Assisting the Norfolk Island Regional Council to deal with pressures arising from the COVID-19 state of emergency.
- Continuing delivery of enabling services for Norfolk Island including information technology and connectivity, workers compensation and performance audits.
- Resourcing to support the ongoing emergency management functions related to bushfires and COVID-19 in the Jervis Bay Territory.

This initiative will build on the Australian Government's commitment of ensuring the Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay Territory communities remain resilient and economically sustainable.



The Australian Government will also provide \$28.9 million over 3 years from 2020-21 to manage the risks of stormwater, flooding, landslide and rockfall on Christmas Island, including \$27.8 million of capital funding.

The infrastructure upgrades will provide safe workplaces and protect the community and visitors living, working or visiting in the Flying Fish Cove precinct.

### **COVID-19 National and World Heritage Projects**

The Australian Government will provide \$0.8 million under the COVID-19 National and World Heritage Projects program to build new visitor information and interpretation infrastructure at the Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area (Kingston) on Norfolk Island.

Kingston is a place of outstanding heritage value to the people of Norfolk Island, the Australian and International communities. This project will present and communicate the Kingston's rich and complex natural and cultural landscape as a vibrant, living place.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – arts and culture initiatives**

The Australian Government is providing \$27 over two years from 2019-20 for an arts support package for regional arts, the charity Support Act and Indigenous art centres and Indigenous art fairs to provide crisis relief and targeted support to organisations, artists and arts workers. Arts organisations in regional areas, which are integral to regional economies and community cohesion need to maintain a core level of activity to support the people who rely on their contributions to Australian culture and creativity.

This support package comprises:

- An additional \$10 million for the *Regional Arts Fund* (the Fund), for artists and arts organisations to develop new work and to explore new business models. The Fund is administered through a national network of arts organisations, and managed by Regional Arts Australia, an established not-for-profit body with a strong understanding of the role and challenges that regional organisations face as a focal point for communities and their artistic and cultural identity.
- \$10 million for the music industry charity Support Act, to provide immediate crisis relief to artists, crew and music workers who are affected by the COVID-19 crisis and to boost its Wellbeing Helpline. Support Act is the only Australian charity delivering crisis relief and counselling services for people who work in the Australian music and broader arts industry, whose ability to work has been affected by ill health, injury, a mental health issue, or some other crisis.
- An additional \$7 million (\$3.5 million in the last months of 2019-20 and \$3.5 million in 2020-21) for the Indigenous art centres and Indigenous art fairs supported through the *Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support* (IVAIS) program to allow Indigenous art centres and Indigenous art fairs to continue their operations during the COVID-19

crisis. Indigenous art centres are often at the heart of community life and can be central to the social and economic wellbeing of communities, and facilitators for the intergenerational transmission of culture. As local employers, they support training and career pathways for Indigenous arts workers, enabling them to earn income and gain skills while remaining on Country.

### **COVID-19 Creative Economy JobMaker package**

In recognition of the economic, social and national importance of the cultural and creative sector, the Australian Government has provided a comprehensive \$250 million COVID-19 Creative Economy JobMaker package over 2020-21 to support the sector to get back in business following the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The package will benefit arts organisations, artists, arts workers and audiences across Australia, including in regional and remote areas.

The package includes:

- Support for up to \$90 million in loans in 2020-21 by establishing the *Show Starter Loan Scheme*, to assist arts and entertainment businesses to fund new productions and events. The loans will be delivered through commercial banks, backed by a 100 per cent Commonwealth guarantee.
- \$75 million in 2020-21 to establish the *Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund* to provide competitive grants to support new events or productions as social distancing restrictions ease. This Fund provides assistance for businesses in the arts and entertainment sector to develop and produce new works, including in regional and remote Australia. Regional economies benefit from the arts, which is inextricably linked with other industries including tourism, hospitality and transport. Domestic arts tourism supports jobs and the economy, particularly for communities in regional and remote areas of Australia.
- \$50 million in 2020-21 to establish a *Temporary Interruption Fund* for the local film and television sector so it can secure funding to commence production.
- \$35 million in 2020-21 to assist Commonwealth-funded arts and culture organisations facing threats to their viability. Losing creative and cultural businesses would reduce opportunities and experiences for all Australians, including those living in regional and remote Australia. Not only are many of these funded organisations based in regional Australia, but those based in metropolitan areas have reach beyond their place of residence. For example, performing arts companies engage in regional and remote Australia through touring shows, educational programs, digital initiatives and community development partnerships.
- A Creative Economy Taskforce to provide advice on the implementation of the COVID-19 Creative Economy JobMaker package. The Taskforce will involve industry experts with extensive creative sector knowledge, and from a variety of

areas of expertise, who will help guide assistance for Australia's creative sector as it adapts to and recovers from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Taskforce's focus will be helping Australia's creative sector, including in regional and remote communities, transition to a 'new normal'. Membership of the Taskforce was announced on 22 August 2020.

In addition to the COVID-19 Creative Economy JobMaker package, the Government will provide \$400 million over seven years from 2020-21 to extend the *Location Incentive Program* to attract international investment in the screen industry and provide local employment and training opportunities.

### **Bundanon Trust**

In addition to operational funding, the Bundanon Trust received \$1 million for losses and costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the January 2020 bushfires. As part of the \$8 million 2019-20 Budget measure *National Collecting Institutions – capital works funding*, the Bundanon Trust also received \$0.6 million in support.

The Bundanon Trust facilitates 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 Shoalhaven region, in New South Wales, and beyond.

## **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 in economic, domestic and international issues, Indigenous affairs, issues pertaining to women, including economic security, safety and leadership and public service stewardship.

As at 30 June 2020, the PM&C Portfolio employed 4,172 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,081 staff (74 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 406 staff (10 per cent) in other capital cities and 685 staff (16 per cent) in regional areas.

The Portfolio's footprint includes office locations such as Wollongong, Newcastle, Orange, Bendigo, Port Augusta, Junee, Bega, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Top End and Tiwi Islands, Alice Springs, Thursday Island, Townsville, Ceduna, Kalgoorlie and Kununurra.

The PM&C Portfolio is responsible for setting Indigenous Affairs policy direction across the Australian Government as well as some specific funding programs. It includes programs aimed at ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to take up the full range of opportunities our nation has to offer. This includes measures to encourage workforce participation, economic development, educational success and safety at home – the foundations of successful communities.

The PM&C 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 important and recognise that 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 PM&C Portfolio supports rural and regional communities that have been affected by severe weather events through the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency and the National Bushfire Recovery Agency. The Portfolio works hand-in-hand with communities, all levels of government, charities and agricultural organisations to support farmers and other rural and regional Australians living through the immediate and longer-term effects of drought, the 2019 North Queensland floods and the 2019-20 bushfires. Regional Recovery Officers and Recovery Support Officers are based across Australia to advise people on what support is available to them and how they can access it.

The PM&C Portfolio is supporting regional Australia through new and existing initiatives, as outlined below.

## **New initiatives**

### **National Bushfire Recovery Agency**

On 6 January 2020, the Prime Minister established the National Bushfire Recovery Agency (NBRA) within PM&C to lead and coordinate a national response to the 'Black Summer' bushfires of 2019-20, due to the sheer scope of devastation and scale of recovery effort needed.

NBRA is focused on connecting people, communities and businesses with services and assistance to help them heal and rebuild. NBRA works with all levels of government, industry, charities and other stakeholders to ensure those affected by the fires have ready access to meaningful recovery support. It is also responsible for building a long term plan for the recovery, rebuild and future resilience of bushfire affected communities.

NBRA is responsible for administering the *National Bushfire Recovery Fund* (the Fund), which supports recovery efforts across the country. An initial \$2 billion was allocated to this Fund. The NBRA website provides details of where these funds have been used. This is in addition to other services and support available under existing natural disaster support mechanisms. The funding is being used to support primary producers, small business, mental health for first responders and communities, attracting tourists, infrastructure projects and for the protection and recovery of the environment and native wildlife.

On 11 May 2020, the Government announced further measures for bushfire recovery as part of the Fund. This included \$448.5 million over three years from 2020-21, in *Local Economic Recovery* (LER) and *Complementary Project Funding*, for which NBRA has administrative responsibility. This money will assist bushfire-affected communities to rebuild and restore their local economies.

NBRA has also established Recovery Support Officers in these communities to help support the recovery and provide day-to-day advice on all the assistance available. NBRA also has staff embedded in state government disaster recovery offices to ensure close working relationships with state and local government agencies.

### **Women@Work Plan: Supporting Women's Workforce Participation**

The Australian Government is funding the \$50 million *Women@Work Plan* (the Plan) as part of the *2020 Women's Economic Security Statement* to support women who have been impacted by COVID-19 and to complement the Government's JobMaker Plan. *Women@Work* provides \$47.9 million over four years from 2020-21 to 2023-24 to expand the existing *Women's Leadership and Development Program* (WLDP), which is administered by PM&C. The objectives of the WLDP are to improve outcomes for Australian women.

The expansion of WLDP will: create a new Women's Job Creation priority under the WLDP to increase employment opportunities for women; boost existing priority areas, including women's safety by supporting women experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence to return to – and retain – work; and, further expand proven projects such as the *Academy for Enterprising Girls* and *Women Building Australia* programs. A grant round will be undertaken to disburse funding, with priority given to projects that complement the JobTrainer Fund. Projects that are scalable, transferable across industries and occupations, and those that focus on supporting women from different backgrounds (including rural, remote and regional women) will be strongly encouraged.

### **Deregulation Package**

The Deregulation Package will provide benefits to regional Australia by making it easier to do business through legislative reform, using technology to modernise regulatory processes, reducing red tape to assist Australia's care and support workforce and improving regulator performance and culture. Regional Australia will benefit from the Government's *Deregulation Agenda*, which is essential to Australia's recovery from COVID-19. Investing in a whole-of-government approach to regulation policy will help build an economy that is more resilient to future shocks.

The impacts for individual activities forming part of the Deregulation Package will be reported under each responsible Portfolio's chapter. The PM&C Portfolio includes the following initiatives:

- The Government will provide the Australian Public Service Commission with \$3.1 million over three years from 2020-21 to develop a pilot training program, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, with an initial focus of building capability and professionalising export regulators.
- On 15 June 2020, the Government announced the Deregulation Taskforce within PM&C would focus on two new priority areas to assist the COVID-19 economic recovery, including occupational licensing and registration requirements to allow Australians to take up job opportunities where their skills are needed, and modernising regulations governing business communications. The Government has provided PM&C with \$12.2 million over two years from 2020-21 to undertake this work.

The Government is supporting regulatory agencies to improve accountability and transparency, build capability, and drive a culture of regulator excellence, including \$2 million over two years from 2020-21 for a Centre of Regulator Excellence within PM&C.

### **Australia Day 2021 – COVIDSafe and Recognition Events**

The Australian Government will provide funding of \$15.5 million, from the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, to the National Australia Day Council in 2020-21 to support the successful delivery of Australia Day 2021 events and activities in a COVID safe environment. The program includes a grant stream of \$7.5 million for organisers of existing or new local events, including in regional locations, at \$20,000 per event.

Boosting local events on Australia Day 2021 will support the struggling production and events industry and drive economic activity for local businesses. In addition, it will allow communities to honour and thank the everyday Australian heroes who helped Australia through the challenges of 2020.

### **National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board**

In line with the Prime Minister's announcement of the renamed National COVID-19 Advisory Board (NCCAB) in late July 2020, the NCCAB is focused on providing strategic advice from a business perspective on economic recovery for all of Australia. The NCCAB provides advice on harnessing growth opportunities, including in regional Australia, across areas such as workforce and skills development, tourism, small and medium sized enterprises, and increased digital capability.

### **National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency – extension**

The Australian Government continues to support and provide assistance to flood affected regions in North Queensland, and areas across Australia impacted by drought, through additional funding of \$19.6 million in 2021-22 for the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency (NDNQFRA).

The NDNQFRA provides strategic leadership and coordination of the Australian Government's response and recovery assistance to communities affected by drought and the 2019 Monsoon Trough. It advises Government on the timeliness, effectiveness and delivery of existing programs that enable communities to be better positioned to respond to future droughts and natural disasters. The Australian Government has committed more than \$10 billion (since 2018-19) across 25 measures that support farmers, regional businesses and communities experiencing drought. These measures also contribute to the implementation of the National Drought Agreement and the Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan. To support the long-term recovery from the North Queensland flood event, the NDNQFRA has developed *2019 Monsoon Trough: A strategy for long-term recovery* to guide the recovery process and strengthen the region's resilience to future disaster events. This blueprint will also enable communities to better prepare for future events – such as flood, drought, fire or other economic disruption such as COVID-19.

NDNQFRRRA places a strong emphasis on locally led, locally understood and locally implemented solutions and engages with affected communities through its established Regional Recovery Officer Network, community engagement activities, and whole-of-government events to increase uptake of government assistance. The Regional Recovery Officers have been recruited from, and are based in, regional communities across Australia and work closely on the ground with other Australian Government agencies to assist people impacted by flood and drought. This on the ground presence can be readily leveraged to support broader recovery and preparedness activities in the regions, such as those associated with COVID-19.

### **National Emergency Medal and Upgrade to Honours System**

On 26 January 2020, the Prime Minister announced that the National Emergency Medal (NEM) would be awarded to eligible emergency responders who had given sustained or significant service during the 2019-20 bushfires. In addition to this emergency, on 10 February 2020, the NEM Committee declared two further national emergencies would be recognised: Tropical Cyclone Debbie in 2017 and the North Queensland Floods in 2019.

The Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General will be provided funding of \$11.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to facilitate the awarding of these medals and the upgrade and continued operation of the Honours system.

### **Closing the Gap – Partnering for Delivery**

The *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* came into effect on 27 July 2020, and it commits to building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector, recognising these services delivered by this sector can achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred over mainstream services. As part of the next phase of *Closing the Gap*, the Government will contribute \$46.5 million over four years from 2020-21 from the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* (IAS) to complement co-contributions from state and territory governments. The funds will be used to build the capability and capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector to deliver services to support *Closing the Gap*, some of which will be located in regional Australia.

The funding will be governed by a *Strategic Plan* which will be developed in partnership with and agreed by parties to the *National Agreement*. Projects will support sectors identified in the *National Agreement* including, early childhood care and development, housing, health and disability.

The Strategic Plan will set out a process to determine what support is needed to build the community-controlled sector and identify where funding would be most usefully directed, including national and cross-jurisdictional projects with jurisdictions to retain administrative control of their own funding. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 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.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – Support for Indigenous and Remote Communities**

The Australian Government will provide the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* (IAS) with \$19.8 million over two years from 2019-20 to support Commonwealth wholly-owned Indigenous subsidiaries that have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding provides support for the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Redfern, New South Wales; Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia Pty Ltd (operator of the Ayers Rock Resort in Yulara, Northern Territory, and the Mossman Gorge Centre in Cairns, Queensland); and the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park in Cairns, Queensland, ensuring continued business viability and securing jobs. A significant proportion of the revenue of these businesses relates to tourism and hospitality and has therefore been impacted by the significant reduction in visitor numbers.

The Government will provide funding in 2020-21 to support the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland with the cost of implementing COVID-19 related travel restrictions to remote communities. Funding will be provided from the existing resources of the IAS to offset some of the costs incurred by jurisdictions in the implementation of the determination made under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* to restrict travel into remote communities to minimise the spread and impact of COVID-19.

### **Remote Indigenous Housing in Queensland**

The Australian Government will provide \$100 million to be made as a one-off payment to the Queensland Government in 2020-21. This is in addition to the \$5 million already provided from the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* (IAS) in 2019-20. This measure implements the Government's election commitment for remote Indigenous housing in Queensland. The funds will go to 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils in Queensland to reduce overcrowding in remote Indigenous communities that will be locally-led and delivered by the Councils.

### **Return of Cultural Heritage**

The *Indigenous Advancement Strategy* (IAS) will provide the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) \$10.1 million over four years from 2020-21 to support the continuation of the *Return of Cultural Heritage* (RoCH) *Initiative*. This builds on the highly successful pilot conducted from 2018-19 which demonstrated high demand from both Indigenous Australians and overseas collecting institutions for the safe return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material.

The continued funding provides a vital resource for 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. During the two year pilot, direct funding of 25 per cent, and a further 50 per cent of indirect funding, went to supporting regional and remote Indigenous communities. It is anticipated that a similar proportion of funding will occur moving forward under the initiative.

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 Business Australia – Regional Construction Stimulus**

The Australian Government will provide Indigenous Business Australia with an equity injection of \$150 million over three years from 2020-21 for new construction home loans in regional Australia. The Australian Government is committed to stimulating economic activity in regional Australia and helping local economies thrive by assisting 360 Indigenous Australians to construct new homes through the *Indigenous Home Ownership Program* (IHOP). The investment will also support over 1,000 jobs by unlocking financing for pre-approved, shovel-ready construction projects in regional locations. The stimulus initiative will complement existing initiatives such as Home Builder.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

The Social Services Portfolio comprises five 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 Digital Transformation Agency, the National Disability Insurance Agency, the 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 achieves its mission of improving the wellbeing of individuals and families in Australian communities through the effective development, management and delivery of payments, policies, programs, and services. To do so, the Department of Social Services works in partnership with government and non-government organisations, including through a delivery network located within state, territory and regional offices.

The Department of Social Services administers around one quarter of the total Australian Government Budget, with effort particularly focused on vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, families and communities, including those in regional and remote areas.

The Department of Social Services is assisting the Australian Government in supporting Australians, including those in regional and remote areas, to get ahead and build a better life for themselves and their families through economic recovery and financial independence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australian Government is providing \$16.8 billion to pay a Coronavirus Supplement to eligible income support recipients, including JobSeeker Payment, student payments, Farm Household Allowance and Parenting Payment recipients, and to enable broader and faster access to payment for those whose employment has been affected by COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the Australian Government has provided \$9.4 billion to pay two separate \$750 Economic Support Payments to social security, veteran and other income support payment recipients, and to eligible Commonwealth concession card holders. In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government will provide another \$2.6 billion towards two additional Economic Support Payments of \$250 each to around 5 million eligible recipients. This payment recognises the ongoing financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Along with the significant COVID-19 response, the Department of Social Services is also providing support to Australians impacted by the devastating bushfires by delivering emergency relief and vital support services in bushfire-affected areas, which were mainly in regional areas.

As at 30 June 2020, the Department of Social Services had 2,333 staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 1,981 staff (84.9 per cent) are employed in

## *Social Services*

Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 340 staff (14.6 per cent) in other capital cities and 12 staff (0.5 per cent) in regional areas. The Department of Social Services' footprint includes office locations such as Newcastle, Orange, Bendigo, and Townsville.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies had 96 staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*, all of whom are located in Melbourne, Sydney and Townsville.

The Digital Transformation Agency had 245 staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*, all of whom are located in Canberra and Sydney.

As at 30 June 2020, the National Disability Insurance Agency had 4,394 staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 466 staff (10.6 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 1,894 staff (43.1 per cent) in other capital cities and 2,034 staff (46.3 per cent) in regional areas. The National Disability Insurance Agency is spread across 142 different towns or suburbs; 33 across New South Wales, 31 across Victoria, 31 across Queensland, 15 across South Australia, 21 across Western Australia, five across the Northern Territory, three across the Australian Capital Territory, and three across Tasmania.

As at 30 June 2020, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission had 219 staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 156 staff (71.2 per cent) were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, and 63 staff (28.8 per cent) were employed in other capital cities.

Services Australia collaborates with other Commonwealth and state and territory jurisdictions, providers and businesses to deliver convenient, accessible and efficient services to individuals, families and communities, including those in regional and remote Australia. Services are delivered through face-to-face, telephone and digital channels, and include payments and services for social welfare, Medicare, aged care, child support and crisis recovery programs.

The urgency and scale of the COVID-19 response has reaffirmed the importance of the Services Australia vision to make government services simple so people can get on with their lives. To help Australians access financial support in light of COVID-19, a number of changes have recently been made to the JobSeeker Payment, including an improved JobSeeker Payment claim for people who have simple circumstances and need financial support. Further digital transformation initiatives have also been undertaken by Services Australia in direct response to COVID-19, including updated processes to prioritise claims from customers, improved in-app messaging for students, tailored telephone messaging, and enabling authenticated customers to connect myGov to their Centrelink account within the voice messaging system.

In 2020-21, Services Australia will continue to improve and expand its digital services so people can engage at a time and place that suits them, without the need to travel to a service centre. Customers can claim a payment or concession, and update their personal details or report changes in circumstances, through faster and earlier self-service options

online. Services Australia is also increasing its reach across regional Australia by connecting customers through myGov and the development of a digital identity. Residents in regional and remote areas will particularly benefit through reducing the need to visit a shopfront. Many more regional and remote Australians and businesses will be able to quickly and safely access services online, at a time convenient to them.

Services Australia continues to provide face-to-face services through its regional and remote service centres, network of agents and access points, remote servicing teams and Mobile Service Centres, for those who prefer to use those channels.

Services Australia will continue to be the first point of contact for the Australian Government across rural and regional Australia. Along with Services Australia's significant COVID-19 response, it will provide ongoing support to Australians impacted by the devastating bushfires last summer. Services Australia has been working with the National Bushfire Recovery Agency to deliver Recovery Connect, a service finder that helps people locate and connect to additional support after a bushfire.

Services Australia's service delivery responsibilities require a flexible, capable and connected workforce across the country, including in rural, regional and remote areas. Services Australia has maintained its commitment to jobs and a physical presence in regional Australia. As at 30 June 2020, Services Australia had 31,808 staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 5,573 staff (17.5 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 15,683 staff (49.3 per cent) in other capital cities and 10,552 staff (33.2 per cent) in regional areas.

## **New initiatives**

### **COVID-19 Response Package – income support for individuals and JobSeeker Partner Income Test measures**

The Australian Government is providing \$18.8 billion to pay a Coronavirus Supplement to eligible income support recipients, including JobSeeker Payment, student payments, Farm Household Allowance and Parenting Payment recipients, and to enable broader and faster access to payment for those whose employment has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The measures include:

- A Coronavirus Supplement of \$550 per fortnight from 27 April 2020 to 24 September 2020, and \$250 per fortnight from 25 September to 31 December 2020.
- Expanded access to JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (other), including to permanent employees who are stood down or lose their employment and sole traders, the self-employed, casual workers and contract workers who meet the income and assets tests, until 31 December 2020.

## *Social Services*

- Waiving the assets test and certain waiting periods from 25 March 2020 to enable earlier access to payment, and reinstating the assets test and Liquid Assets Waiting Period from 25 September 2020 to ensure appropriate targeting of income support as economic circumstances improve.
- From 25 September 2020, changes to the personal income test for JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (other) to allow recipients to earn more before their rate of payment is affected and take up work as the economy recovers.
- Temporary relaxation of the partner income test taper for JobSeeker Payment.

These initiatives have a beneficial impact on regional Australia as they provide greater access to income support for those adversely affected by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, around 9,000 people receiving Farm Household Allowance have shared in additional payments totalling around \$40 million through the Coronavirus Supplement.

These measures were published in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – payments to support households**

The Australian Government has provided \$9.4 billion to pay two separate \$750 Economic Support Payments to social security, veteran and other income support payment recipients, and to eligible Commonwealth concession card holders. Assistance for households was designed to support confidence and domestic demand in the economy. The first payment was made to over 7 million recipients from 31 March 2020 and the second payment was made to around 5 million recipients from 13 July 2020. Coronavirus Supplement recipients were not eligible for the second Economic Support Payment.

This initiative has a beneficial impact on regional Australia as the two payments provided additional support to Australian households and local economies, including those in regional Australia.

This measure was published in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – further economic support payments**

The Australian Government will provide \$2.6 billion towards two additional Economic Support Payments of \$250 each to around 5 million eligible recipients. The payment recognises the ongoing financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The initiative will provide direct economic support in communities across Australia, including those in regional Australia.

The payment will be made to:

- recipients of Age Pension, Disability Support Pension, and Carer Payment
- recipients of Carer Allowance and Family Tax Benefit including Double Orphan Pension (not in receipt of a primary income support payment)
- eligible Department of Veterans' Affairs payments and Gold Card holders
- holders of a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card and certain Pensioner Concession Card holders (not in receipt of a primary income support payment).

The first payment will be made to eligible recipients from 30 November 2020, if they are eligible for their payment or card on 27 November 2020. The second payment will be made to eligible recipients from 1 March 2021, if they are eligible for their payment or card on 26 February 2021.

## **COVID-19 Response Package – Social Services**

### **Emergency Relief and Food Relief**

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$200 million over two years from 2019-20, under the Community Support Package (CSP). The CSP provides funding to more than 300 charities and community organisations to support Australians, including individuals and families in regional areas, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic economic downturn. More than half of this funding has already been allocated, with the remaining funding to be allocated based on emerging need. Under the CSP, additional funding has been provided to:

- Around 200 Australian Government-funded Emergency Relief providers, to provide financial or material aid to people in immediate financial crisis, including temporary migrants. Of these, around 140 providers have received around \$17 million to deliver services in regional areas.
- The three Australian Government-funded Food Relief providers, Foodbank Australia, SecondBite and OzHarvest, to increase Australian Government-funded Emergency Relief providers' access to a cost-effective supply of food items.
- Financial counselling providers, including the National Debt Helpline, to increase service capacity, as well as build the capability of the sector through funding to Financial Counselling Australia.
- Good Shepherd, to increase access to their No Interest Loan Scheme as an alternative to high interest products.

The Australian Government has established the sector-led National Coordination Group to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and provide advice to Government on the allocation of further funding to where it is most needed.

### **Domestic Violence Support Package**

On 29 March 2020, the Australian Government announced a \$150 million *Domestic Violence Support Package* to respond to expected increases in demand resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that 23 per cent of women and 6.6 per cent of men in rural and remote Australia report experiencing partner violence, compared to 15 per cent of women and 5.9 per cent of men in Australia's major city areas.

Under the *Domestic Violence Support Package*, the Australian Government has provided \$130 million to state and territory governments through the *National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses* to invest in services to support women and children who are experiencing or at risk of violence during the pandemic. This funding was allocated to states and territories on the basis of population, with a proportion of the funding having an additional loading of around \$0.8 million for remote and very remote populations.

Commonwealth, state and territory Women's Safety Ministers agreed the National Partnership funding should be directed to support services considering the needs of particularly vulnerable cohorts, such as people living in regional, rural and remote locations. The National Partnership also includes a focus on providing assistance for specialist frontline services to respond to the unique challenges of delivery in regional, rural and remote locations.

The remaining \$20 million was directed to existing or new Commonwealth programs, which are available to people across Australia, including in regional, rural and remote areas. These programs focus on primary prevention, early intervention, crisis response and recovery as well as including a national communications campaign.

### **Disability Support Package**

The following initiatives were committed to, to increase services and support available to people with disability, and businesses providing employment supports and services to people with disability:

- \$61 million to provide Disability Employment Service providers, in locations across Australia, with an advance payment of six weeks on service fees (to be repaid before 30 June 2021) to help job seekers with disability to keep their current job, or be ready for new opportunities as the economy recovers.



- \$27.7 million for Australian Disability Enterprises, ensuring they can continue to provide employment to people with disability, while dealing with the economic effects of COVID-19, and help them successfully transition to new business opportunities as the economy recovers.
- \$2 million to develop a dedicated phone line to provide accessible information, supports and outreach services to assist people with disability, their families and carers across Australia, including in regional and remote areas, to address their concerns about COVID-19, which includes establishing a dedicated Disability Information Helpline.

### **Family and Community Based Services**

The Australian Government has committed up to \$64.2 million to 31 March 2021 for the extension of essential service grant agreements administered by the Department of Social Services, where funding was due to cease by 30 June 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. These extensions are designed to minimise disruption to community services and allow funded providers to continue to support Australians, including in regional areas, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *COVID-19 Response Package – Social Services* was published in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update.

### **Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation – tranche four**

Tranche four of the *Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation Program* builds on the success of previous tranches and provides \$539.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to progress the modernisation of Australia's social payments system.

When fully implemented, tranche four will provide all Australians, including those in regional and remote areas, with simple, helpful, respectful, and transparent services. Previously released digital services for job seekers, older Australians, carers and disability payment customers will be extended to families and include functionality such as improved document upload services and enhanced income and assets capabilities that make it more convenient for customers to access services remotely.

The Payment Utility released in tranche four implements improvements to how the Australian Government makes payments. This will give Services Australia greater flexibility to support the Government response in times of emergencies.

### **Expanding Digital Identity**

The Australian Government is providing \$256.6 million over two years from 2020-21 as part of the *JobMaker Plan – Digital Business Plan* measure to deliver the expansion of Digital Identity. Digital Identity is the Australian Government's single secure, trusted and consistent way to verify identity online, through the digital equivalent of a 100-point ID check. Once verified, people are able to transact as individuals and on behalf of businesses securely online across many services.

## *Social Services*

*Expanding Digital Identity* will transform how people and businesses access services in Australia, improving the user experience for all Australians who transact with government online, including those in regional and remote areas. *Expanding Digital Identity* will see additional government services connected to Digital Identity. State and Territory services will be on-boarded for the first time, maximising choice for people and businesses.

Residents in regional and remote areas will particularly benefit from the initiative through the removal of the need to visit a shopfront to prove their identity. Many more regional and remote Australians and businesses will be enabled to quickly and safely access services online, at a time convenient to them.

This measure builds on the \$5.9 million provided in 2019-20 to continue the development of the Digital Identity program, as part of the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) measure *Whole-of-Government Digital Initiatives*.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – supporting job seekers**

The Australian Government will provide \$159.5 million over three years to support job seekers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This includes \$52.6 million over two years to ensure New Enterprise Incentive Scheme participants can choose to access the Coronavirus Supplement if they are in receipt of an eligible income support payment, including participants in regional and remote Australia.

This is a component of the *COVID-19 Response Package – supporting job seekers* measure led by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, published in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update.

### **Ongoing Funding for Frontline Social Services Impacted by the Cessation of the Social and Community Services Special Account**

The Department of Social Services programs play a key role in regional communities by supporting families, improving children's wellbeing and increasing social and economic participation of vulnerable people in community life to enhance family and community functioning.

From 1 July 2021, to ensure these programs continue to support vulnerable Australians, including in regional areas, ongoing funding will replace Social and Community Services (SACS) supplementation following the cessation of the SACS Pay Equity Special Account on 30 June 2021. Funding of \$132.6 million over four years from 2020-21 will be included in base funding for the Department of Social Services grant programs.

Services in regional areas often face additional challenges including:

- increased costs of service delivery due to inability to achieve economies of scale across large geographical areas
- recruitment and retention of appropriate staff
- increased cost of living.

The ongoing funding will enable organisations that provide services in regional, rural and remote locations to continue to deliver critical services for vulnerable Australians.

### **Concessional work test arrangements for Paid Parental Leave in response to the impacts of COVID-19**

As part of the *JobMaker Plan – Second Women's Economic Security Package* measure and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, \$130.4 million will be provided over three years from 2020-21 to revise the Paid Parental Leave work test period for a limited time. This will enable people to access Parental Leave Pay and Dad and Partner Pay who do not meet the current work test provisions because their employment has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This initiative has a beneficial impact on people across Australia, including those in regional Australia, as it provides greater access to Paid Parental Leave for families with a genuine work history pre-COVID-19.

Currently parents must have worked 10 of the 13 months prior to the birth of their child to qualify but that is being temporarily extended to 10 months out of the 20 months for births and adoptions that occur between 22 March 2020 and 31 March 2021.

This measure is estimated to allow about 9,000 mothers to regain eligibility for Parental Leave Pay and allow a further 3,500 people to claim Dad and Partner Pay.

### **Future National Redress Funding**

In 2019-20 MYEFO, the Australian Government committed an additional \$11.7 million in 2019-20 to increase the capacity of Redress Support Services to support survivors of institutional child sexual abuse and further assist applicants during the claiming process. This funding improved access to the National Redress Scheme (the Scheme) by delivering additional support for people living in remote and regional areas, and increased servicing options for male survivors of child sexual abuse, survivors with disability, and Indigenous survivors. It also strengthened the overall capability of Redress Support Services to deliver trauma informed practice through the development and delivery of additional training and resource materials.

The *Future National Redress Funding* measure builds on the 2019-20 MYEFO measure and will provide a further \$104.6 million to 2023-24 to sustain the operations and outcomes

of the Scheme for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse. This measure builds on the Australian Government's commitment to improve the operation of the Scheme, improve the survivor experience with the Scheme and address public concerns and expectations.

A key component of this measure is that it delivers Redress Support Services across Australia (\$73.1 million over the next four years from 2020-21 to 2023-24). Redress Support Services play a critical role in providing timely, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support to survivors. This includes providing emotional support for survivors, as well as practical support to complete an application and interact with the Scheme.

Survivors should not need to navigate their redress experience alone. Redress Support Services provide critical care and support to people who have already experienced significant trauma, free of charge. This measure will improve the ability of Redress Support Services to deliver support to survivors living in regional Australia and includes additional funding for outreach activities. This funding will minimise the number of people applying without support and ensure that appropriate assistance is available to Scheme participants regardless of their geographic location.

## **National Bushfire Recovery Fund**

### **Emergency relief and financial counselling for affected communities**

In January 2020, the Australian Government announced an additional \$50 million in 2019-20 to increase the delivery of vital support services in bushfire-affected areas, which were mainly in regional areas. This additional funding included:

- \$40 million for Emergency Relief services in bushfire-affected communities
- \$10 million to increase services delivered by Australian Government funded financial counselling services, including the National Debt Helpline, in bushfire-affected communities.

The Australian Government is committed to assisting people and communities impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires.

This measure is a component of the *National Bushfire Recovery Fund* measure published in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update.

### **Extension of Funding for Financial Wellbeing and Capability Measures**

The Australian Government is supporting people under financial stress by providing ongoing funding for Microfinance services (such as no and low interest loans, matched savings and small microenterprises), Money Support Hubs and Problem Gambling Financial Counselling.

This commitment will ensure the ongoing delivery of frontline social services to vulnerable people across Australia, including individuals and families in regional areas.

These services are critical given the growing number of Australians experiencing loss of income and financial hardship 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.

The 2020-21 Budget measure builds on the 2019-20 MYEFO measure *Extension of Funding for Financial Wellbeing and Capability measures*, which provided \$10.2 million in 2020-21, and extends funding on an ongoing basis from 2021-22 at a cost of \$44.4 million to 2023-24.

### **National Disability Information Gateway**

In the 2019 election, the Australian Government committed \$45 million over three years from 2019-20 to develop a National Disability Information Gateway (Disability Gateway).

The Disability Gateway is a three-year project to deliver a multi-channelled service for people with disability, and their friends, family and carers. The Disability Gateway is being developed in consultation with people with disability to assist people to navigate disability service systems and help people find out about support and services they may be able to access.

The Disability Gateway Service will start in early 2021 and include a website and dedicated 1800 phone number to connect people to information and services. This national service will be available to regional and remote Australians with disability, their families and carers.

This measure was published in the 2019-20 MYEFO.

### **Prioritising Mental Health – continued support**

The Australian Government is providing \$45.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to expand the Individual Placement and Support program which assists young people up to the age of 25 with mental illness to participate in the workforce.

Following a successful trial at 24 sites, this additional funding will expand the program on an ongoing basis and establish another 26 locations taking the total to 50 sites nationally supporting about 2,500 young people each year. The new sites will be co-located with headspace offices, including in disadvantaged, regional and remote areas. The funding will support an additional 1,000 young people who require mental health support to get into employment or further education each year. The program is complemented by headspace National's Digital Work and Study Service which offers education and employment support services online to young people with mental health issues across all of Australia.

This measure builds on the 2015-16 Budget measure Youth Employment Strategy – intensive support for vulnerable job seekers.

### **Digital Skills for Older Australians**

The *Digital Skills for Older Australians* measure bridges the digital divide between older Australians and other Australians. The Be Connected program helps older Australians 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 trial established a network of some 3,000 local organisations and 9,800 digital mentors who have assisted more than 580,000 older Australians since October 2017, using online tools and resources hosted by the eSafety Commissioner. Approximately 42 per cent of the local organisations delivering *Be Connected* are in regional and remote locations.

Originally a 2016 election commitment, a one-year extension at a cost of \$9.3 million was provided for 2020-21, in the 2019-20 MYEFO measure titled *Digital Literacy for Older Australians – extension*, to continue the trial as an evaluation was being completed. The 2020-21 Budget measure builds on the 2019-20 MYEFO measure, by extending funding for the measure (\$28.3 million over four years from 2020-21 to 2023-24).

### **COVID-19 Response Package – recognising the impacts of COVID-19 for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY independence**

The Australian Government will provide \$25 million to over four years from 2020-21, to 2023-24, to ensure that young people working towards the independence work requirement for Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY will not be disadvantaged by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From 1 January 2021, a 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 or ABSTUDY. Without this assistance, around 4,000 young people may not have been able to meet independence criteria and may therefore be unable to access income support.

Young people whose family home is in regional or remote Australia who are required to live away from home to study will benefit significantly from this measure.

### **More Opportunities for Regional Students: Improved Fares Allowance**

The Australian Government will provide \$0.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to support students receiving Youth Allowance, Austudy or the Pensioner Education Supplement to access Fares Allowance so they can visit their homes and families more often.

The National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy report (Naphthine Review) found that transport costs can be a major issue for students who relocate to study (Recommendation 2, Action 11).

Improving Fares Allowance arrangements will mean that students who receive Youth Allowance, Austudy or Pensioner Education Supplement will be able to access Fare Allowance for the mid-year break in their first year of study. This will also keep students connected with family and community supports to reduce regional student drop-out rates.

This is a component of the *Higher Education Reform – additional support for regional Australia* measure led by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, published in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update.

### **Services Australia – provision of remote services – continuation**

The Australian Government continues 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. Access Points provide free self-help facilities such as internet enabled computers, telephones, and free Wi-Fi, and Agents offer the same facilities, and in addition offer general advice regarding payments and services and provide assistance in accessing digital services and complete online forms.

The Government's investment of \$24.7 million in 2020-21 supports 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.

## **Australia's Care and Support Workforce Package**

Australia's Care and Support Workforce Package will support jobs in regional and remote Australia – around 30 per cent of the additional 90,000 jobs in the National Disability Insurance Scheme sector by 2024 are expected to be in regional and remote areas. The package will include communication activities that will improve the perception and understanding of work in the care and support sector, including in regional Australia.

### **Boosting the Local Care Workforce**

As part of the 2019-20 MYEFO measure Supporting People with Disability, the Australian Government provided an additional \$9.1 million to extend the 2017-18 Budget measure titled *Boosting the Local Care Workforce*. This measure continues to provide supports to the disability sector by employing regional coordinators to assist organisations to address workforce challenges, ensuring continuous market growth to meet the needs of people with a disability.

The program has a particular focus on boosting local job opportunities in rural, regional and outer suburban areas and includes the expertise of a rural and remote subject matter specialist who provides detailed policy advice to the program. In addition, the program deploys up to 25 Regional Coordinators to work with existing local service providers to assist them in preparing their organisation to deliver services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Building on the 2019-20 MYEFO measure, the Australian Government will provide an additional \$16.8 million over three years from 2020-21 to expand the Boosting the Local Care Workforce program to include Aged Care and Veterans' Care sectors. Coordinators will provide educators and employment service providers with information on demand for workers and support them to connect with providers in the care and support sector. Regional Coordinators provide localised support, gather intelligence on local issues, facilitate workshops and connect stakeholders with complementary programs and initiatives in the care and support sector.

### **Care Sector Market Information**

The Market Information website will provide projected market demand and supply information across the care and support sector. It is expected data will be available by postcode across Australia, therefore supporting regional providers in their decision-making, such as where to expand operations. The initiative will cost \$2.4 million over two years from 2021-22.

### **National Disability Insurance Scheme Community Connectors – national expansion**

The Australian Government is providing \$20 million over two years from 2019-20 to expand the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Community Connectors Program.



This initiative has a beneficial impact on regional Australia, as it will support engagement with people who might not otherwise participate in the NDIS, including people with disability from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, those with a psychosocial disability, and ageing parents or carers of children with disability.

This measure was published in the 2019-20 MYEFO.

### **Incentives to Encourage Young Australians to Undertake Seasonal Work**

The Australian Government will invest \$16.3 million over two years from 2020-21 to create temporary incentives in the income support system to encourage recent school leavers to undertake seasonal agricultural work and help address the expected critical workforce shortages across the industry for the upcoming harvest season.

A person who earns \$15,000 through employment in the agricultural industry between 30 November 2020 and 31 December 2021 will be considered as independent for the purpose of Youth Allowance (student) or ABSTUDY, subject to the Parental Income Threshold, which is \$160,000, plus \$10,000 for each additional child.

Young people, including those who live in regional or remote areas, will benefit significantly from this proposal if they are seeking to meet the independence test through work before furthering their education to improve their future employment prospects. Agricultural farms, which are predominantly located in regional and remote areas, will also benefit from this measure.

### **Enhancing the Pension Loans Scheme**

The Australian Government is providing \$9.6 million over four years from 2020-21 and \$1.4 million ongoing from 2024-25 to enhance the Pension Loans Scheme (PLS) to improve the customer experience and make it easier for Senior Australians to draw on their real estate assets to maximise their retirement incomes, if they want to.

This measure provides investment in the IT systems that support delivery of the PLS to improve the administrative and governance systems to ensure Services Australia is able to accommodate growth in PLS demand.

This initiative has a beneficial impact on regional Australia, as it will improve the customer experience for senior Australians in regional areas to assist them in accessing the equity in their real estate assets, should they wish to do so.

This is a component of the *Social Services Portfolio – additional resourcing* measure.

### **Placed Based Income Management – continuation**

The Australian Government will invest \$9.6 million in 2021-22 to ensure that Income Management participants continue to have access to budgeting support and ensure that

## *Social Services*

funds are directed to essential items that benefit participants, and their families and children.

Funding for Place Based Income Management will be extended for 12 months in existing locations, until 30 June 2022. This will ensure recipients continue to be supported in meeting the essential needs of children, individuals and families.

This proposal will have a positive impact on regional Australia as it maintains support for vulnerable welfare recipients on Income Management in regional areas and ensure regional communities are not impacted by welfare-fuelled social harm.

### **Cashless Debit Card – ongoing funding**

This measure provides ongoing funding for the existing Cashless Debit Card (CDC) sites of Ceduna region, South Australia; the East Kimberley and the Goldfields regions, Western Australia; and the Bundaberg and Hervey Bay region, Queensland and for the Northern Territory, and the Cape York region in Queensland (pending the transition of Income Management to the Cashless Debit Card in these regions).

Additional funding will also be allocated to support the transition of Income Management participants to the CDC in the Northern Territory, and the Cape York region in Queensland, over two years to 2022. This will ensure that Income Management participants in the Northern Territory and Cape York region, who benefit from Income Management, are supported in their transition to the CDC.

This will continue the positive impacts and effectiveness of the CDC and provide certainty for participants and stakeholders in CDC regions.

Additional investment in CDC technological enhancements will improve the user experience for CDC participants and businesses, and ensure the CDC works as effectively as possible, delivering budgeting support, improved financial literacy and reductions in social harm.

### **Sustainable Funding for 1800RESPECT**

1800RESPECT is Australia's counselling and support service for people affected by domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Ongoing funding will ensure 1800RESPECT continues to provide a range of national services (which are also available to regional Australia) such as:

- 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 and family violence and sexual assault, the community and frontline workers.

- The DAISY and Sunny 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.

The Department of Social Services will conduct a competitive procurement process to secure a provider to deliver 1800RESPECT into the future, commencing in late 2020.

This is a component of the *COVID-19 Response Package – Additional Funding for Domestic and Family Violence Support* measure.

### **National Disability Insurance Scheme – transition to full Scheme**

From 1 July 2020, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is available everywhere in Australia, including in the Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The NDIS will support an estimated 500,000 people with significant and permanent disability within the next three years, regardless of where they live in Australia. A third of NDIS participants currently reside outside the major cities.

The NDIS workforce is expected to grow by up to 90,000 workers over the next five years to a total workforce of up to 300,000 workers. Of the total workforce, around 30 per cent will be in regional and remote areas.

Full scheme arrangements, putting in place long-term funding and governance arrangements for the NDIS, commenced in Queensland from 1 October 2020. 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.

On 28 August 2020, the Australian Government announced a substantial package of reforms to the NDIS. This includes the implementation of the Australian Government's response to the 2019 Independent Review of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* and the new NDIS Participant Service Guarantee setting new service standards and clear timeframes for decision making by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The reforms will make it easier for participants and their families to navigate the NDIS, including people living in remote communities.

This measure was published in the 2019-20 MYEFO.

## TREASURY

Treasury provides advice, analysis and legislation to Government to deliver economic policies and programs, supporting the effective management of the Australian economy.

The Treasury has offices in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. It has been increasing regional engagement 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 450 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.

As at 30 June 2020, the Treasury Portfolio employed 26,800 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 10,364 staff (38.7 per cent) were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney; 13,721 (51.2 per cent) were employed in other capital cities; and 2,715 staff (10.1 per cent) in other locations (including international posts).

Further details are provided in the Treasury Portfolio Budget Statements.

### New initiatives

#### **Bushfire Response Assistance – tax treatment of disaster recovery and volunteer firefighter payments**

In recognition of the extraordinary 2019–20 bushfire season, the Australian Government made relief and recovery payments and benefits, as well as support payments to volunteer firefighters, free from tax.

Australian governments provide a range of disaster assistance payments and benefits to entities, including individuals, but typically not all of these payments are tax-free. This initiative ensures relief and recovery payments made by all levels of government, for the purpose of providing relief or assisting in the recovery efforts of entities and individuals affected by the 2019-20 bushfires, are free from income tax.

Additionally, this measure ensures the payments made to eligible volunteer firefighters, to compensate them for loss of income as a result of volunteering, are free from tax.

This measure formed part of the Government's *Bushfire Response Package* in the *Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020*.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – introducing the backing business investment incentive**

The Australian Government has introduced a time limited investment incentive that temporarily allows businesses with aggregated turnover of less than \$500 million to deduct capital allowances for eligible depreciating assets at an accelerated rate. This initiative has been designed to encourage business investment, including in regional areas.

Generally, to be eligible to apply the accelerated rate of deduction, the depreciating asset must satisfy a number of conditions, including that the asset be:

- new and not previously held by another entity (other than as trading stock or for testing and trialling purposes)
- first held on or after 12 March 2020
- first used or first installed ready for use for a taxable purpose on or after 12 March 2020 until 30 June 2021
- not be an asset to which an entity has applied the instant asset write off rules or depreciation deductions.

Eligible businesses with an aggregated turnover of less than \$500 million can deduct an additional 50 per cent of the asset cost in the year of purchase.

This measure formed part of the Government's *COVID-19 Response Package* in the *Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020*

### **COVID-19 Response Package – boosting cash flow for employers**

The Australian Government is providing tax-free cash flow boosts of between \$20,000 and \$100,000 to eligible small and medium businesses and not-for-profit organisations that employ individuals. Eligible entities automatically receive payments upon lodgement of relevant activity statements for the March to September 2020 reporting periods. This supports the connection between employers and employees and has helped entities continue to operate through the economic downturn associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

This measure formed part of the Government's *COVID-19 Response Package* in the *Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020*.

### **COVID-19 Response Package – increasing and extending the instant asset write-off**

The Australian Government has increased and extended the instant asset write-off to provide more support for businesses to invest.

The instant asset write-off threshold was increased to \$150,000 (up from \$30,000) with access expanded to include businesses with aggregated annual turnover of less than \$500 million (up from \$50 million) until 31 December 2020.

Around 3.5 million businesses, including in regional areas, with aggregated annual turnover of less than \$500 million are eligible to access the \$150,000 instant asset write-off. Eligible businesses can immediately deduct purchases of eligible assets costing less than \$150,000 from 12 March 2020 until 31 December 2020. The threshold applies on a per asset basis, so eligible businesses can instantly write-off multiple assets.

This measure formed part of the Government's *COVID-19 Response Package* in the *Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020*.

### **HomeBuilder**

The Government's HomeBuilder program, introduced on 4 June 2020, is supporting jobs in the residential construction sector by providing eligible owner-occupiers with a grant of \$25,000 to help towards building a new home or substantially renovating an existing home. HomeBuilder is available to assist eligible owner-occupiers in regional Australia, including those affected by bushfires, floods and other natural disasters.

### **JobKeeper Payment**

On 30 March 2020, the Australian Government took decisive action to address the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing unprecedented support to impacted Australian businesses and their employees through the JobKeeper Payment.

The Government provided \$1,500 per fortnight per eligible employee where a business or not-for-profit projected a monthly or quarterly turnover decline of 30 per cent decline in their turnover, if their annual turnover was under \$1 billion; or a 50 per cent decline, if their annual turnover was over \$1 billion in a relevant month or quarter. Registered charities were able to receive support where they projected a 15 per cent decline in turnover.

The JobKeeper Payment is one of the largest fiscal and labour market interventions in Australia's history. To date the Jobkeeper Payment has supported more than 3.8 million individuals, in over one million businesses. It has provided support to businesses and individuals across all sectors and all parts of the country.

On 21 July 2020, the Government announced it was extending the JobKeeper Payment for a further 6 months from 28 September 2020 to 28 March 2021, with the payment

tapered and targeted to those businesses that continue to be most significantly impacted by the economic downturn.

On 7 August 2020, the Government announced further changes to the JobKeeper Payment, in response to the evolving COVID-19 situation in Victoria, which resulted in an additional estimated cost of \$15.6 billion. The changes to the JobKeeper Payment eligibility criteria, which related to the employment reference date and turnover decline, ensured businesses and employees most affected by the COVID-19 related shut-downs continue to receive support. Overall, the JobKeeper Payment is now estimated to cost \$101.3 billion.

### **JobMaker Hiring Credit**

The Australian Government will provide support to both businesses and young job seekers through the JobMaker Hiring Credit, including for those in regional areas. The JobMaker Hiring Credit will help to accelerate growth in employment during recovery by giving businesses incentives to take on younger employees.

The JobMaker Hiring Credit will be available to employers from 7 October 2020 for each new job they create over the next 12 months, when they hire an eligible young person aged 16 to 35 years. This will help young people in regional areas access job opportunities as the economy recovers.

For up to 12 months from the date of employment of an eligible new hire, eligible employers will receive \$200 per week if they hire an eligible employee aged 16 to 29 years, or \$100 per week if they hire an eligible employee aged 30 to 35 years.

To be eligible, the employee will have to have received the JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance (Other) or Parenting Payment for at least one of the previous three months at the time of hiring. Employers must demonstrate that they have increased their overall employment to receive the JobMaker Hiring Credit. Eligible employees will need to work for a minimum of 20 hours per week, averaged over a quarter.

### **First Home Loan Deposit Scheme – extension**

The Australian Government is building on the success of the First Home Loan Deposit Scheme by introducing an additional 10,000 places in 2020–21 to allow first home buyers, including those in regional Australia, to obtain a loan to build a new dwelling or purchase a newly built dwelling with a deposit of as little as 5 per cent.

### **National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC)**

The Australian Government is supporting the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) by increasing its guaranteed liabilities cap from \$2 billion to \$3 billion. This will allow NHFIC to continue providing low-cost finance to improve housing supply, particularly for social and affordable housing, including in our regions.

### **Small Business Bushfire Financial Counselling Support Line**

As part of the Australian Government's National Bushfire Recovery Fund (NBRF) to help Australians recover from the 2019–20 bushfires, \$3.5 million has been allocated over two years commencing 2019-20 to establish a financial counselling support line service. The support line provides free, confidential and independent advice for small businesses affected by the bushfires who are experiencing financial difficulties. This supports small businesses in Regional Australia to manage the financial impact of the bushfires.

### **Perishable Agricultural Goods Inquiry**

The Government has directed the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to undertake a three-month inquiry into bargaining power in supply chains for perishable agricultural products in Australia. The inquiry will take a broad look at trading practices throughout supply chains, including the relationships between farmers, processors and retailers.

The ACCC will review the extent to which any potential bargaining power imbalances in these relationships can adversely impact the efficient operation of these markets, and the role of market structures and regulations in delivering efficient and equitable outcomes.



## **VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

The purpose of Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) is to support the wellbeing of those who serve or have served in the defence of our nation, and their families, by:

- Partnering with organisations and individuals to help design, implement and deliver effective programs and benefits, which enhance the wellbeing of veterans and their families.
- Providing and maintaining war graves and delivering meaningful commemorative activities to promote community recognition and understanding of the service and sacrifice of veterans.

DVA provides support and services to current and former members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their families, including those living in regional and remote communities.

As at 30 June 2020, the Veterans' Affairs Portfolio employed 2,080 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 1,396 staff (67 per cent) were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 638 staff (31 per cent) in other capital cities and 46 staff (2 per cent) in regional areas.

The Australian War Memorial is part of the Veterans' Affairs Portfolio and of the 2,080 staff they accounted for 334 staff, all of whom were employed in Canberra.

DVA's footprint includes regional office locations in Newcastle, Townsville, Lismore, Maroochydore and Launceston.

Measures outlined in the Budget aim to ensure veterans and their families across Australia, including those in regional and rural areas, have access to the support they need during challenging times and beyond. New and expanded measures focus on helping veterans find a job after ADF service and supporting their whole-of-life health and mental health needs.

The Australian Government will promote better mental health care outcomes for veterans by increasing fees paid by DVA to mental health, social work and community nursing providers; and by providing training opportunities in veteran and military mental health for the psychiatry workforce. Eligibility for the Coordinated Veterans' Care program is being expanded to allow access by White Card holders with a chronic mental health condition which DVA has accepted as being related to their military service.

Civilian employment opportunities for veterans will be boosted, and more support will be provided for veterans seeking to start their own business or explore entrepreneurial opportunities. The Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program is being broadened

to further promote the wide ranging skills of veterans to employers and reward businesses for initiatives that support veteran employment.

A Joint Transition Authority established in Defence will ensure transition services and support mechanisms are working together to support ADF members and their families. This will give around 6,000 transitioning ADF members and their families the best opportunity for a successful transition into the civilian community each year.

As an extension of Veteran Wellbeing Centre network (connecting veterans and their families to a range of core services that will include support for transition, employment, health and social connection), DVA is undertaking two separate feasibility studies in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) to determine the need for further veteran wellbeing services in both regions. Outcomes from both studies are expected to provide further insight into potential options to inform future policy development.

In addition, expanding the Open Arms - Veterans and Families Counselling (Open Arms) Community and Peer Program to two additional regional locations - Maryborough and Nowra, will increase access to mental health support in areas of high demand for vulnerable or at-risk veterans and families. This will mean all Veteran Wellbeing Centres currently being established will have the support of a Community and Peer Team.

The DVA Psychiatric Assistance Dog Program provides eligible veterans with a specifically trained psychiatric assistance dog as an adjunct to treatment and management of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The scheme has national coverage, and providers are able to assist eligible and suitable veterans in regional areas with travel to undertake matching and training with a dog.

DVA's Veteran Centric Reform Program, in partnership with Services Australia, will continue to transform the way DVA operates by modernising and providing faster, simplified and easier access to services and support. The way veterans and their families connect with DVA is continually being improved, particularly for those who are vulnerable or located in rural and regional areas, with 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372) introduced as the primary access number for DVA and regular upgrades made to DVA's online service, MyService.

While more veterans are engaging with DVA online, there are more than 170 face-to-face access points across all states and territories of Australia, including in regional and rural areas via a network of government service centres and agents.

In addition to Services Australia's Mobile Service Centre, DVA also offers outreach services including support for community-based activities such as grants, day club visits, men's health peer education, visits to more than 40 ADF bases, and gives presentations on services and entitlements.

## **New initiatives**

### **Defence Services Homes Insurance Scheme – expanding eligibility**

As an election commitment, the Australian Government expanded eligibility from 1 July 2019 for coverage under the Defence Service Homes Scheme (the Scheme) to all current and former ADF members with at least one day of service.

Expanding the Scheme's eligibility requirements will address the disparity in current eligibility criteria, ensure the Scheme supports all ADF members and veterans in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our nation, and provide greater peace of mind for both the deploying member and remaining spouse and family should an adverse event occur and an insurance claim is warranted.

The Scheme offers competitive home building insurance premiums, which are, on average 35 percent lower than that provided by other general insurers. This will assist in easing the cost of living for ADF members and veterans, and their families, especially those located in regional and northern Australia, where the ADF has a large presence and other insurers can charge high premiums for home building insurance.

### **Exempting Totally and Permanently Impaired (TPI) Pension Recipients from Allied Health Treatment Cycle – additional funding**

As an election commitment, in the 2019–20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook the Australian Government provided \$17.4 million over four years from 2019–20, including \$3.9 million in 2020–21, to exempt TPI pensioner from aspects of new allied health referral arrangements, known as the treatment cycle. Under this measure, TPI pensioners continue to access unlimited clinically appropriate physiotherapy and exercise physiology services under either an annual or ongoing referral.

### **Veterans' Wellbeing Centres**

As an election commitment, in the 2019–20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook the Australian Government provided \$30 million over three years from 2019–20, including \$10 million in 2020–21 to establish a national network of six Veteran Wellbeing Centres in Townsville, Queensland; Perth, Western Australia; Darwin, Northern Territory; Nowra, New South Wales; Adelaide, South Australia; and Wodonga, Victoria. The program seeks to deliver integrated support to veterans and their families from all levels of government, business and community partnerships. Once established, the Centres will help connect veterans and their families to a range of core services that will include support for transition, employment, health and social connection.

## **COVID-19 Response Package – maintaining support for Veterans**

### **Supporting Veteran Wellbeing through Early Access to Medical Treatment**

In the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, the Australian Government provided \$2.9 million over two years from 2020–21 to extend the trial of the Provisional Access to Medical Treatment Program. This program provides access to medical and allied health treatment for eligible veterans on a provisional basis for one or more of the 20 most commonly accepted conditions. The program contributes positively to veteran wellbeing by providing provisional access to treatment while their claim is being considered.

### **Support for Highly Vulnerable Veterans through the Wellbeing and Support Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, the Australian Government provided \$2.8 million in 2020–21 to provide support to vulnerable veterans and their families with complex medical and or psychosocial needs to access their DVA entitlements and health services to support their independence in the community. Each veteran has access to intensive community-based case management to support engagement with health and rehabilitation services.

## **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention for Veterans**

### **Specialist Client Coordinators to Support Younger Veterans Aged 30 Years or Under**

In the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, the Australian Government provided \$6.4 million over four years, including \$1.6 million in 2020–21, to deliver tailored case management support for veterans who are administratively or medically discharged to ensure access to DVA entitlements and relevant health services.

### **Establishing a Veteran Family Advocate**

In the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, the Australian Government provided \$2 million over four years, including \$0.5 million in 2020–2021 to directly engage with the families of veterans and be their voice to help shape policy and improve the design of veteran programs and services provided through the Veterans' Affairs Portfolio, including those relating to veteran mental health. The Veteran Family Advocate will also work closely with the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention so that recommendations made by the Commissioner can be rapidly translated into advice to the Australian Government on policies and programs that better support veterans and their families. The Veteran Family Advocate is a member of the Repatriation Commission and, subject to the passage of legislation, will be appointed to the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.

## **Mental Health Support for Veterans and Their Families**

The Australian Government is committed to putting the wellbeing of veterans and their families first by providing a package of initiatives in the 2020-21 Budget to support veterans' mental health and wellbeing.

This package included:

### **Increasing DVA Fees to Improve Access to Mental Health Support for Veterans**

\$94.3 million over four years, including \$11.8 million in 2020-21, to provide for a one-off fee increase and fee simplification for mental health providers, social workers and community nurses, as well as additional training places for psychiatry registrars in military and veteran mental health. The wellbeing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are particularly acute for vulnerable cohorts, including veterans with ongoing mental health concerns, veterans requiring aged care support, and ADF members transitioning to civilian life. Targeted funding in these priority areas will strengthen the capacity of the healthcare workforce to provide timely and high quality services to veterans and their families. This measure will benefit veterans and providers across Australia, including in regional areas. In particular, this measure aims to improve health services in regional and remote areas by strengthening the viability of providing treatment in traditionally thin markets and giving veterans a greater choice of mental health and community care providers.

### **Expansion of Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling**

\$5 million over four years, including \$0.8 million in 2020-21, has been allocated to expand and evaluate existing mental health and suicide prevention services delivered by Open Arms, including increased community and peer support in regional Australia.

This includes funding of \$3.4 million to expand the Open Arms Community and Peer Program to two additional regional locations – Maryborough, Queensland, and Nowra, New South Wales. This will increase access to mental health support in areas of high demand for vulnerable or at-risk veterans and families. The two Community and Peer Teams will increase the case management services available to 6,000 veterans and their families in these regions.

The \$5 million also includes \$1.1 million to introduce web-based Community and Peer Forums nationally for vulnerable veterans with specific needs especially when caring for an individual at risk of suicide or experiencing suicide bereavement, and will improve accessibility of care for veterans and their families in rural and remote areas. The online web forums have the potential to support up to 4,000 veterans and their families in highly vulnerable cohorts.

**Expansion of the Coordinated Veterans' Care Program to White Card Holders**

\$2.4 million over four years, including \$0.3 million in 2020–21, has been allocated to expand eligibility for the Coordinated Veterans' Care (CVC) program from 1 July 2021 to White Card holders with a mental condition accepted as being related to military service. This proposal also seeks to review the CVC program's payments and structure to take into account the findings of the Productivity Commission. Eligible veterans in all parts of Australia, including regional areas, can participate in the program.

This initiative will strengthen health outcomes for vulnerable veterans with complex health needs through access to the benefits the CVC program has to offer, including effective management of their chronic mental health condition, improved quality of life and reduced unplanned hospital admissions.

**Broadening the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program**

This measure provided \$6 million over four years, including \$1.1 million in 2020–21, is provided to broaden the services and support available through the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program. The funding will provide for continued awareness raising of the benefits of employing veterans, including through annual Awards. It will provide training support for ADF transitioning members choosing to consider small business and entrepreneurship, and will build the evidence base for future veteran employment initiatives. This measure will benefit veterans and their families across Australia, including in regional areas

