

Regional Ministerial Budget Statement
Supporting Regional Recovery and Growth
2021-22

Statement by

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Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development

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Foreword

Australia’s regions – home to one in three Australians – are recovering from recent challenges and are again growing in strength and prosperity. After more than a year of unprecedented disruptions to established patterns of domestic and international economic activity and international trade and migration, our economy is rebounding. The resilience of our regions and our key regional industries forms the bedrock of this recovery trajectory.

Agricultural production has recovered strongly from the drought with gross value added growing 22.5 per cent in the year to December 2020. Agricultural production value is forecast to reach an all-time high of \$66 billion in 2020-21. Regional employment has also recovered, with regional labour force participation and unemployment rates returning to their pre-COVID-19 level and the unemployment rate consistently below the capital city rate throughout 2020 and into 2021.

Australia has been one of the most successful countries in the world in managing the spread of the COVID-19 virus across the population. In 2021, the successful management of that challenge, in combination with the ingenuity and resourcefulness of Australians in this uncertain environment, are allowing the economy to continue to recover and grow. This 2021-22 Regional Ministerial Budget Statement details the more than 170 major new packages and individual measures which the Australian Government is delivering to support regional communities and industries to drive this recovery.

Key elements of the Government’s new initiatives in 2021-22 continue to target industries and regions disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 limitations and constraints and by natural disasters and drought.

In 2020-21 my Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development portfolio has been leading the establishment of several support packages for regional communities under the \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. This Fund has been delivering targeted assistance to regions, communities and industry sectors including support for aviation, fisheries, tourism, events and the arts. The Government is continuing to back these sectors to recover and grow in 2021-22.

Of particular importance for regional communities have been the Fund initiatives supporting the aviation and airfreight sectors and stimulating domestic tourism. The Australian Government acted swiftly in 2020 to ensure support for regional aviation by guaranteeing connectivity and helping to ensure the economic viability of regional communities and regional products. Our Tourism Aviation Network Support Program Budget measure for 2021-22 builds on those initiatives, to continue to assist both the aviation industry and stimulate the domestic tourism economy.

Under this program, the Australian Government is subsidising 800,000 discounted airfares to key regions around the country to increase flights on selected routes to key tourism regions. In combination with the reduced airfares and other support measures for aviation and tourism, this program will improve airline sustainability with subsequent flow-on benefits for aviation workers elsewhere in the sector and tourism businesses through increased employment opportunities and supply chain benefits.

The Government is continuing to provide major new investments in transport infrastructure, bringing our total funds to a record \$110 billion over 10 years and \$153.2 million in further investments in communications infrastructure and projects to improve digital connectivity in regional Australia. Major infrastructure construction projects to be funded in 2021-22 include: \$400 million for the Inland Freight Route (Mungindi to Charters Towers) upgrades, delivering a long-term program of priority works improving freight movements between the New South Wales border and Queensland; \$200.0 million for Great Eastern Highway Upgrades in Western Australia; \$80 million for the Tasmanian Bass Highway Safety and Freight Efficiency Upgrades Package; \$2.03 billion for upgrades on the Great Western Highway to address a critical missing link in terms of access through, and congestion within, the Blue Mountains.

Further, as part of its continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government is continuing to support Australia's economic recovery by committing an additional \$1 billion to fund further local priority projects through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, bringing the total to \$2.5 billion over 2020-2023, and an additional \$1 billion over 12 months to the Road Safety Program.

The Government will continue to fund targeted, place-based solutions in regional, rural and remote Australia by committing a further \$84.8 million in funding to the Regional Connectivity Program.

My portfolio also includes NBN Co Ltd (NBN Co), the mission of which is to provide reliable, fast and affordable broadband to all Australians through the National Broadband Network (NBN). The network is now built and fully operational with more than 99.8 per cent of premises able to order NBN services as at February 2021. In 2021-22, NBN Co will be working with regional businesses and communities to deliver better outcomes for residential and business broadband consumers through its Regional Development and Engagement team which is focused on improving the digital capability of regional Australia. NBN Co Ltd has also established 85 Business Fibre Zones in regional areas. Businesses located within these Zones have access to ultra-fast connectivity at no upfront cost and at CBD prices, improving competition, productivity, and fostering innovation and growth for small and medium businesses.

The Australian Government is continuing the development of the National Water Grid through the National Water Grid Fund. Eight construction projects are now operational,

with seven of these having been completed since the establishment of the National Water Grid Authority in late 2019.

On 27 March 2021, the Government announced a new funding pathway within the Fund to drive the construction of smaller-scale projects. The Government will provide up to \$160.0 million over two years from 2021-22 to establish the National Water Grid Connections funding pathway to deliver small scale water infrastructure projects and provide short-term economic stimulus. Up to \$20 million per state and territory (and capped at \$5 million per project of Australian Government contributions) will be made available, for targeted projects that align with the Government’s strategic investment priorities. In addition, through the 2021-22 Budget, the Government is committing \$75.7 million in funding for new and augmented projects. These new initiatives will help shape the development of the National Water Grid, with benefits flowing to our regions sooner.

The Government’s regional development programs are also being boosted with an additional \$250 million for round six of the Building Better Regions Fund. These programs provide funding for a range of locally-driven projects that aim to strengthen our regions, their economies and the vibrant communities that live in them.

The Government is also providing \$5.7 million to deliver a new Rebuilding Regional Communities Program in partnership with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR). The program will provide microgrants to grassroots community organisations to assist communities in their recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020-21 the Australian Government began the rollout of foundational programs under the \$5 billion Future Drought Fund (FDF). The Fund provides secure, continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives. 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.

In the 2021–22 Budget, the Australian Government is announcing the next phase of FDF programs to commence on 1 July 2021. This phase is investing \$172.5 million over the next three years from 2021-22. This funding will deliver a range of activities that will extend foundational programs, providing farmers and farming communities with a ‘toolbox’ of capabilities and services to strengthen preparedness and resilience to future droughts.

In addition, on 5 May 2021 the Australian Government established the National Resilience and Recovery Agency (NRRRA) to champion resilience across the nation through targeted natural disaster risk reduction, and all hazards relief and recovery. NRRRA consolidates and builds on the success of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency

(NBRA), disaster risk reduction and recovery functions of the Department of Home Affairs and the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency (NDNQFRA). The Australian Government will provide \$66.7 million to ensure the Agency is resourced to support communities to withstand more intense and frequent natural disasters.

NRRA will maintain the strong focus on ensuring the needs of disaster-impacted communities are understood and communicated to decision-makers to support locally-led, locally-informed disaster risk reduction and preparedness before a disaster and integrated relief and recovery service delivery when a disaster happens.

NRRA will boast a strong network of Regional Resilience Advisers (RRAs) and State Resilience Coordinators who will work with partners across governments and sectors to build trust, capability and capacity. RRAs will be based across regional Australia, and continue to deliver the recovery and drought outreach support provided by existing NBRA and NDNQFRA networks. They will also bolster local resilience and recovery planning.

The Australian Government recognises that agriculture, resources and exports from these two industries are central pillars of the Australian economy and that regional Australians play the dominant part in their operations and success. Approximately 322,000 people are employed across Australia's agriculture sector, mostly in regional Australia, and 70 per cent of the value of Australia's agricultural production is exported. The resources sector employs more than 260,000 people and is the largest employer of Indigenous Australians, with many of these roles located in regional Australia. Any boost to the domestic resources sector will have flow-on effects through regional job creation and economic benefits in regional communities.

The Government is investing in both these key sectors in 2021-22 to ensure Australia's economic recovery and growth. These investments will significantly support Australians living in regional areas.

Under a new Agriculture 2030 Package, commencing in 2021-22, the Australian Government is supporting the Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector to achieve \$100 billion in farm gate output by 2030.

Further backing Australian farmers to expand their horizons in 2021, the Australian Government is investing \$72.7 million over three years from 2020-21 to help to expand and diversify farm export markets through the Agri-Business Expansion Initiative (ABEI). Complementing these initiatives in the resources sector, the Government is providing \$20.1m over two years from 2021-22 to deliver a Global Resources Strategy that will diversify and strengthen Australia's access to key export markets and reduce the risk of trade disruptions.

In the energy sector, the Australian Government will provide \$275.5 million over five years from 2021-22 to accelerate the development of regional clean hydrogen hubs, support legal and market reforms and support the implementation of a hydrogen certification scheme. Hydrogen hubs are expected to drive economic growth and create jobs, upskill regional workers and promote increased population in regional areas, supporting ancillary jobs and economic growth as regional towns grow to support the hydrogen hub activity.

Funding for certification trials and hydrogen related legal and market reforms will remove international trade barriers for export of low carbon fuels. This will create opportunities to expand trade centres around the country, unlocking further jobs and economic growth in regional areas located close to hydrogen hub export ports.

In 2021-22 the Government has decided to invest \$189.7 million in Australia's vast northern regions under the next five-year plan for Northern Australia: Our North, Our Future: 2021-2026. This builds on the 2015 White Paper on Developing Northern Australia and focuses on job creation through concentrated investment aligned to geographic regions of growth and initiatives to will enable greater digital connectivity in northern Australia; and support businesses to scale-up and diversify.

This includes \$9.3 million over five years from 2021-22 to pilot Regions of Growth in northern Australia locations, supporting on-ground specialists to focus effort on capitalising on the strengths of the region. Under the plan, the Government is dedicating \$68.4 million to improve digital connectivity in northern Australia under the Regional connectivity Program and the Mobile Black Spot Program. In addition, the Government is investing \$111.9 million over five years from 2021-22 to support northern Australian businesses to scale-up and diversify by providing co-investment grants to businesses for a range of activities including infrastructure, assets, feasibility studies and business planning. The investment will be supported by a Strengthening Northern Australia Business advisory service to build business capability and resilience, maximising the growth potential of businesses accessing the grant funding.

The Australian health care system has been crucial to ensuring the successful containment of the COVID-19 virus across the country. Government responses to the pandemic in 2020-21 included significant funding to health services targeted at regional, rural and remote communities which are being boosted again in 2021-22 for additional measures in health, aged care and disability care.

All Australians should have access to high quality health care services, regardless of where they live. Across much of regional Australia, this level access is becoming difficult to attain. That's why the Government's support for primary health services, hospitals and ageing and aged care and mental health services has been significantly boosted.

Building on the Government's 10-year Stronger Rural Health Strategy, new initiatives will commit \$11.6 million to extend rural training and retention of health workers in regional areas. The package of rural workforce initiatives will help deliver more health professionals into rural and remote areas.

For the first time the Government will provide \$65.8 million in additional financial incentives and support to rural-based registrars and doctors through increased Rural Bulk Billing Incentive payments based on remoteness. Scaling the Rural Bulk Billing Incentive will better recognise that doctors in rural and remote areas face higher operating costs, smaller patient populations, increased complexity in patient care, and carry a great burden of responsibility for the healthcare needs of people living in these communities.

The Government's response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care and Quality includes a comprehensive reform of the aged care sector creating a culture of respect and dignity by placing individuals at the centre – empowering senior Australians to have more control over their care and services as they age. The 2021-22 Federal Budget will commit \$17.9 billion over five years to set the path for reform in five critical areas including in-home care, residential aged care quality and safety, residential aged care provider sustainability, workforce and governance. This new investment will benefit regional and remote aged care providers and their clients.

The Government is committed to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The 2021-22 Budget commits around \$840 million to drive progress on this Agreement through improved mental health and wellbeing, suicide prevention, and better access to health and aged care services. This includes investment in antenatal and midwifery care, services to treat and prevent rheumatic heart disease and trachoma, and other targeted prevention activities. In addition to this, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) will be able to access specialist and allied health telehealth MBS items to ensure continuity of care and chronic disease management of Indigenous patients.

Senior First Nations people and older Australians with special needs including those who are homeless, living in rural and remote locations and persons living with dementia will benefit from increased, choice and sustainability of services, assistance with accessing aged care and improved infrastructure to meet consumer expectations. Workforce attraction and retention will also be supported by improved staff housing, training facilities and locum support.

In recognition of the need for improvements to support women, including regional women, in gaining access to justice, particularly in circumstances where they may be experience family violence, the Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$6.3 million in 2021-22 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.

The Government will also provide additional funding of \$44.6 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$11.3 million in 2021-22) to increase the accessibility of legal and mental health support services to women who have experienced family violence and are navigating the family law system. The Australian Government will establish five additional Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) and Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) in regional and remote areas of Australia, and enhance existing DVUs and HJPs by providing dedicated mental health support services. This is in addition to the 10 existing DVU and HJP locations established under the First Women’s Economic Security Package in 2018. DVUs provide specialist domestic violence legal assistance to women experiencing family violence, as well as wrap-around case management and support services such as financial counselling, trauma counselling, emergency accommodation and tenancy assistance. HJPs, which operate in healthcare settings such as hospitals, connect women who have experienced family violence with legal support, and provide cross-disciplinary training to health professionals on recognising and responding to domestic and family violence.

The Government continues to progress the regional decentralisation agenda. Further work will assess options to ensure that the Australian Public Service remains a competitive employer and staff can live and work in the regions, close to the communities they serve.

As at 31 December 2020, there were 148,736 staff across all agencies employed under the Public Service Act 1999, of which 21,321 were in locations outside Australia’s capital cities. While not employed under the Public Service Act, many other important government agencies, such as Australia Post and Medicare, also have offices and staff located in regional areas, while Defence bases and personnel are located all around Australia, including in remote areas. The Government is continuing to encourage both private and public sector entities to move to regional Australia, offering the individual staff of those entities, and their families, a new and rich environment in which to live and offering regional communities new opportunities for recovery 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 supports the Australian Government to enhance the important and interconnected areas of agriculture, water resources, heritage and the environment. This work is critical to the prosperity and quality of life of Australians in regional areas. The Portfolio has a diverse role as a policy advisor, researcher, program administrator and regulator, delivering outcomes for rural and regional communities across Australia.

The Portfolio works with partners across government, non-government, industry sectors and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deliver the Government's priorities to stimulate economic growth, create jobs and care for our country. This is achieved by improving and maintaining market access for primary producers, encouraging agricultural productivity in Australia's primary industries, supporting sustainable resource management, and conserving and maintaining Australia's environment and unique heritage.

Drought, bushfire and flooding events have tested resilience across regional Australia, and the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have profound effects on regional communities, in particular those that rely heavily on international tourism and trade. In 2021-22, the Portfolio will continue to deliver practical, on-ground actions across the country to drive recovery and support communities affected by these events.

The farming, forestry and fisheries sectors are important sources of economic growth and employment in regional Australia. The Government is setting the foundations for the agriculture industry to reach its goal of \$100 billion in production by 2030, and continue to recover from drought, bushfires and the impact of COVID-19. Significant initiatives to tackle emerging trade challenges, protect the country from pests and diseases, support industry resilience, promote innovation and encourage better land management and protect on-farm biodiversity are all important parts of this strategy for growth and are funded in this Budget.

The Portfolio negotiates and maintains trade and access to overseas markets for agricultural, forestry and fishery products. With almost fifty per cent of employment in the agriculture sector derived from commodities destined for export, this work to improve export opportunities is key to growth in the regions.

The Government is investing in efficient systems to manage changing biosecurity risks at Australia's borders, and to continue to deliver biosecurity services that support the safe movement of goods and people. The Portfolio manages the risk of the introduction and spread of pests, weeds and diseases into Australia, and works with State and Territory governments, industry and other stakeholders to drive Australia's ability to anticipate, prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from pest and disease incursions. This biosecurity system protects Australia's landscapes, including native

flora and fauna, agricultural production and exports, lifestyle value and tourism, with much of this value concentrated in regional areas.

The Government is committed to enhancing stewardship of our landscapes through partnering with our diverse range of land managers. Rewarding farmers for caring for their land will protect and improve future production, while growing resilience and delivering a diversified, drought-proof income stream. Through coordinated action for better soil health, the Portfolio is supporting growth in agricultural production while making the land more drought-resilient.

Through its commitment to global leadership in ocean and waste management and marine protection, the Government is making important investments to stimulate economic growth in the emerging blue economy, create jobs in marine conservation and management, improve environmental outcomes for key marine species and sites, and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Sea Country management. These investments will create direct employment in regions and communities, and economic growth in fisheries, tourism, and research.

Weather and climate forecasting and disaster preparedness are integral to the Portfolio's responsibilities. Climate change and its many consequences, including restriction of agricultural growing seasons, threats to heritage values, increased bushfire risk, and changes to species distribution, continue to put pressure on all aspects of the Australian environment. Weather and climate science will be critical in responding and adapting to threats and 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. This includes establishing the Australian Climate Service, which will transform the Australian Government's capacity to anticipate and prepare for crisis events, and inform risk reduction and resilience efforts. The Portfolio supports the delivery of the Government's climate adaptation and resilience measures, which are helping Australian businesses, communities and governments anticipate and manage climate risk.

Actions to drive a billion-dollar transformation of Australia's waste and recycling industry continue in 2021–22 under the *National Waste Policy Action Plan*. The Portfolio is partnering with industry on activities to increase recycling rates, tackle food and organic waste and support better waste management in sectors such as manufacturing. Taking responsibility for our waste and incentivising recycling will create jobs, including in regional Australia, and will improve access to resource recovery and waste management infrastructure across the country.

Water is critical to the future of agriculture and the wellbeing of the environment and Australian communities. The Portfolio supports the sustainable management and productive use of Australia's water resources, and works to improve the health of rivers and freshwater systems. The Portfolio provides national leadership and works with

relevant state governments to implement the *Murray–Darling Basin Plan* and account for and manage water resources in the national interest, including for the benefit of regional industries and communities. It also provides water for the environment, improving the health of rivers, wetlands and floodplains.

As at 31 December 2020, the Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio employed 9,608 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 5,314 staff (55 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 3,058 staff (32 per cent) in other capital cities and 1,236 staff (13 per cent) in regional areas.

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

New Initiatives

Supporting Trade – Australian global leadership to grow agriculture exports

The Government is investing \$15 million over four years from 2021-22 to enhance representation and promotion of Australia’s interests in international fora and standard-setting bodies that underpin Australia’s agriculture trade. A new international agriculture envoy will be appointed, dedicated to protecting and promoting Australia’s international agriculture interests.

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

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

This initiative supports Research and Development Corporations in generating data required to submit applications to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority.

By equipping Australian farmers with chemical management tools they would not otherwise be able to access, the program will support agricultural industries (especially those producing new and emerging commodities) in taking advantage of evolving markets and environmental conditions. If properly resourced, these industries will drive the creation of new markets and ensure that Australia maintains and creates vibrant economies in rural and regional Australia, supporting job growth.

Biosecurity – managing the risk posed by hitchhiker pests arriving in imported cargo

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

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

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

- Expanding industry arrangements, supported by assurance mechanisms, to manage lower-risk goods and containers, and expanding and improving existing arrangements to reduce interventions for highly compliant import pathways and animal and plant commodities.
- Enhancing data capture for pests, diseases and containers to accurately target imports posing hitchhiker risks, and enhancing data analytics to identify pests, including for new data types such as images and genomic sequencing.
- Engagement with logistics companies, wholesalers and retailers to develop stronger container tracing protocols for use in the event of hitchhiker incidents.

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

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

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

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

The RTT X-ray technology has proven three times more effective in identifying biosecurity risk than the current 2D X-ray. This initiative will support critical next steps towards keeping biosecurity risk offshore, while enabling the more efficient flow of people and goods across the border.

Keeping risks offshore and managing them effectively if they present at Australia’s borders is vital to protecting Australian agriculture, the natural environment, regional economies, social amenity and human health. It is a key enabler of both domestic agricultural productivity and export market access and growth.

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

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

- Additional technical experts providing specialist skills across eight government laboratories.
- Procurement of contemporary diagnostic tools and equipment such as field kits to improve the speed and accuracy of pest and disease identification.

- Greater investment in research to trial new ways of identifying pests and diseases and ensure methods are effective at confirming risks.
- Enhanced assurance and verification of Australia’s diagnostics processes to give confidence in regulatory decision making.

Biosecurity – better understanding how pests and diseases could enter Australia

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

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

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

The Government is providing \$67.4 million over four years from 2021-22, and \$13.1 million ongoing, to build, enhance and test Australia’s biosecurity preparedness, response and recovery capability. This includes:

- Exercising Australia’s national biosecurity emergency preparedness, response and recovery system to stress-test readiness to deal with a significant national pest or disease incursion.
- Funding for a biosecurity incident management system to support emergency response activities and systems management capacity.

- Further development of a national pest and disease surveillance information system with states and territories.
- Additional contingency funding to support national responses to plant, animal and environmental pest and disease incursions under the biosecurity emergency response deeds with State and Territory governments and industry.
- A feasibility study on a national system for preserving valuable livestock genetics, and contributing to the ongoing maintenance of the Australian foot-and-mouth disease vaccine bank.

Biosecurity – increasing community and business awareness

To help all Australians to understand the importance of biosecurity, the Government is investing \$3.9 million over four years from 2021-22 in awareness and engagement activities.

A communication and education strategy, commencing in July 2021, will enable participation and engagement with the community and industry, including travellers, online shoppers and those along the import supply chain. Activities under the strategy include:

- Building the Biosecurity Australia brand in collaboration with key stakeholders.
- Biosecurity education programs for schools and community groups.
- Targeted campaigns for biosecurity threats of national significance to raise awareness for specific risks and consequences.

Biosecurity – upgrading the Maritime Arrivals and Reporting System

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

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

Biosecurity – delivering digital capability for screening of incoming international mail

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

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

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

Biosecurity – continued protection from the risk posed by African swine fever

The Government will invest \$58.6 million over four years from 2021-22, and \$13.6 million ongoing for delivering continued capability to detect and manage the continuing and evolving threat of African swine fever (ASF) and other key biosecurity threats. This builds on Government efforts through the previous ASF response package to keep ASF out of Australia, through investing in detection technologies and frontline resources.

This measure will continue support for detector dogs, 3D X-ray, and digital capability, as well as frontline biosecurity officers and targeted compliance operations. It will also enable ongoing with industry and producers to undertake preparedness activities for a potential outbreak of emerging biosecurity threats, as was done in relation to ASF, and enhance capacity building and containment support for near neighbouring countries to manage and prevent incursions of priority exotic animal diseases.

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

The Government is providing \$29.1 million over four years to continue efforts to deliver better solutions to combat established pest animals and weeds posing a significant threat to Australian primary production, the environment and Australia's biodiversity. This investment recognises the impact of bushfires, flood and drought on their control and prevalence. From 2021-22 this investment will:

- Deliver on-ground support for land managers, including through indigenous ranger and national resource management groups.

- Fund research, development and extension grants for next generation control projects identified through the recent, oversubscribed Advancing Pest Animal and Weed Control Solutions Competitive Grant Round.
- Drive national coordination outcomes for critical focus areas.
- Continue to build greater understanding of the costs and distribution of these pests and weeds.

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

Innovation – an initial investment into Australia’s agricultural innovation through the National Innovation Agenda

The Government is committing \$4.2 million over four years from 2021-22 to strengthen leadership across Australia’s agricultural innovation system by establishing a *National Innovation Policy Statement* with new mission-oriented Innovation Priorities that support exports, climate resilience, biosecurity and digital agriculture.

This initiative delivers on the Government’s commitment to release the Policy Statement by mid-2021 as a key element of the *National Agricultural Innovation Agenda*. The initiative will provide \$1.5 million to Agricultural Innovation Australia to develop investment strategies that will support delivery of the Innovation Priorities. This initial investments will focus the agricultural innovation system to on drive collective action to help farmers, and the broader agriculture sector, to innovate, improve their productivity, address shared national challenges and take advantage of strategic opportunities.

Soil and Stewardship – Soils Package

The Australian Government is investing \$196.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to implement the *National Soil Strategy* and associated Action Plan. The proposal meets the Prime Minister’s commitment to announce the *National Soil Strategy* and associated measures as part of the Budget.

The proposal includes:

- A 20 year strategy to work with states, territories, industry and other stakeholders to improve soil health.
- A two year *Pilot Soil Monitoring and Incentives Program* to better understand Australia’s soil health and assess the impact of land management practices on soil condition. This element of the proposal will include rebates to land managers to encourage more comprehensive soil testing, a program to purchase existing privately held soil data, and the re-redevelopment of a publicly available soil information

system that will provide the data to help underpin the development of environmental markets that could allow farmers and other land managers to be rewarded for their soil stewardship activities.

- An accreditation program to provide further education and training for agronomists, extension officers and other trusted advisors to enhance soil science expertise and their ability to provide practical advice to farmers.
- *Soil Science Challenge grants* to help address key soil research gaps.
- A fund to fix gaps in Australia’s organic waste recycling capacity to divert organic waste from landfill to productive use on agricultural soils.

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

Soil and Stewardship – Delivering the Agricultural Biodiversity Stewardship Pilot

The Government’s *Agriculture Stewardship Package* will receive an additional \$32.1 million over four years from 2021-22 (and \$55.36 million over 10 years) to improve on-farm biodiversity and develop a mechanism to reward farmers for biodiversity outcomes.

Additional investment will strengthen the Package by:

- Trialling on-ground the *Enhancing Remnant Vegetation (ERV) Pilot* developed by the Australian National University (ANU) under the initial package. The ERV Pilot aims to ensure improved existing native vegetation on-farm. Farmers with target vegetation could apply to receive a price offer to undertake long-term protection and management actions.
- Developing a biodiversity trading platform to link buyers and sellers of biodiversity services and kick-start private sector biodiversity markets. This will help drive uptake in this emerging environmental market.
- Full implementation of the *Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme* developed by the ANU under the initial package. The scheme would help deliver a premium price and help Australia keep up with growing market demand for improved environmental credentials.

The additional investment will provide farmers with an alternative source of income separate from traditional farm revenue streams.

Improving employment opportunities – Attracting Australian workers to modern agriculture

This initiative will provide \$25.2 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to support the agriculture sector to attract people to modern agriculture job opportunities. The initiative includes:

- Seed funding for industry-led consortium to develop and pilot a structured employment program for school leavers to experience work in the agriculture industry.
- Co-funding for innovative industry initiatives aimed at supporting upskilling, career progression pathways and mentoring workers.
- Foundational work to better understand community perceptions of agricultural careers and to improve forecasting of agriculture labour force demand at the regional level.
- An update of agriculture occupations and an interactive career advice map to ensure career advice and data reflect modern agriculture.

Improving employment opportunities – Building improvements in agricultural workforce practices

This initiative will provide \$4.6 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to support agricultural employers and businesses build workforce management and planning practices. The initiative includes:

- Practical support to agricultural employers to help implement modern workforce management and planning practices.
- Funding to fast track horticulture growers' and business' participation and progress through the *Fair Farms program*.

Forestry and Fisheries - Optimising forestry and fisheries resources

Forestry

The Government is allocating \$11.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to support innovation in the forestry sector, including extending the work of the nine current *Regional Forestry Hubs* for a further three years and establish two new hubs in Eden, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, and to undertake a feasibility study to build on the work of the National Institute for Forest Products Innovation.

This support will continue and expand the regional forest hubs and their successful delivery of valuable detailed regional research and analysis about opportunities to grow the industry and pathways to realise those ambitions.

- The nine current hubs cover the north-east, central-west and the south-west slopes of New South Wales; Gippsland Victoria, the Green Triangle across Victoria and South Australia, south-east and north Queensland, south-west Western Australia, and Tasmania. The current funding for these existing hubs is ending in the 2021–22 financial year.
- The two new hubs will cover the forestry regions centred on Eden, New South Wales, and across the Northern Territory.
 - The Eden area covers the forestry sector working between Sydney and the Victorian border, and inland to Bombala/Cooma – an area that was severely impacted by the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires – and includes both native and plantation forest resources.
 - The Northern Territory hub will support forestry across a number of diverse enterprises, including Indigenous forestry operations on the Tiwi Islands, and forestry operations in areas where Indian sandalwood and African mahogany plantations are expanding.

This investment includes \$1.3 million in 2021-22 to conduct a feasibility study into a national-level approach to Australian forestry industry research and development, building on the regionally based National Institute for Forest Products Innovation and Forest and Wood Products Australia (the forest industries research and development corporation).

- The feasibility study will examine and report on priorities to underpin growth in the forestry industry through the research and development effort of industry, the research community and government.

Fisheries

A \$0.9 million expansion of the *Tuna Champions Program* aims to encourage responsible take by recreational fishers and underpins resource-sharing arrangements between the recreational and commercial sectors. An extension until 2023-24 will continue the program, including the successful operation of its online support tool, and expand its focus to include additional tuna species.

The clear gains exhibited by the program will continue for another three years, delivering responsible resource use among the community of recreational fishers.

Forestry and Fisheries – Plantation Development Concessional Loans

In 2021-22, \$37.5 million in existing loan funding will be made available for Plantation Development Concessional Loans to support plantation development in regional Australia in areas where commercial forestry is traditionally undertaken.

New plantations will help kick-start the growth of Australia’s stalled plantation estate and boost the future wood supply nationally. It will help support jobs and growth in forestry-dependent regions, and will support the future wood supply for wood manufacturing and other sectors including construction. Total national direct employment in the forestry sector was estimated to be 51,983 persons in 2016 (ABS Census data).

Australian Climate Service

The Australian Government is investing \$209.7 million over four years from 2021-22, \$37.3 million ongoing, to establish the new *Australian Climate Service*, a world class capability in sourcing and delivering climate information to support Australia’s disaster resilience and climate adaptation efforts. The Service will begin on 1 July 2021.

The Australian Climate Service will better connect and leverage the Government’s extensive climate and natural disaster risk data, information and capabilities. This will enable the Government to anticipate, manage and adapt to increasing climate change impacts. It will help the Government to better reduce risks and prepare for future natural hazards such as cyclones, bushfires and floods.

The Service will help us make better decisions about what to build and where, and help us build back better after natural disasters. The service will help monitor and evaluate the impact of Australia’s investments and build Australia’s resilience over time.

The Australian Climate Service will draw and build on the expertise of the Bureau of Meteorology, Geoscience Australia, CSIRO and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, creating a powerful new partnership to support this generation and the next. In addition it will:

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

The National Climate Service will implement the Government’s response to multiple recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, including the implementation of a national disaster risk information service capability. In the 2020-21 MYEFO the Government committed \$12.9 million in

2020-21 to undertake priority research and development to support the establishment of the Australian Climate Service by 1 July 2021.

Aviation and tourism support – Maintain meteorological services

The Government will provide \$55.8 million over two years (\$26.7 million in 2021-22) to supplement revenue for the Bureau of Meteorology's Aviation Meteorological Service Program following a downturn in aviation activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of its aviation meteorological services, the Bureau of Meteorology provides aerodrome forecasts for around 200 airports, most of which service regional areas. Emergency services, agricultural industries and the general public will benefit from ongoing flight activity facilitated by these services.

Ocean Leadership Package

The Government is investing in a package of measures that support the Prime Minister's vision for Australia as a global leader in ocean management.

At a cost of \$100.1 million, it includes four complementary initiatives that will build ocean health and resilience, while stimulating economic growth through job creation across regional Australia. It will deliver partnerships to support private sector investment in fisheries, tourism and research sectors, and facilitate Indigenous management of sea country. This includes:

- Practical action to restore, conserve and account for blue carbon ecosystems in Australia and overseas (\$30.7 million). This will improve and maintain the health of coastal environments, including tidal marshes, mangroves and seagrasses, leading to biodiversity, livelihood and climate outcomes. Over \$19 million will go to four major on-the-ground projects restoring coastal ecosystems across the country and enhancing regional employment opportunities.
- Partnerships for Australian Marine Park management that will support up to 60 new jobs and provide opportunities for engagement in marine park management with community and Indigenous groups, marine businesses and industry bodies, research organisations and the private philanthropic sector. They will also, include actions to support the health and sustainability of waters around Australia's Indian Ocean Territories (\$39.9 million).
- Recognise sea country in up to nine new or expanded Indigenous Protected Areas, providing social, cultural and environmental benefits, while increasing employment opportunities in remote communities (\$11.6 million).
- On-water and on-ground actions to protect iconic marine species, improve the sustainability of our fisheries through reducing bycatch, reducing the threat of

invasive species on island ecosystems and stimulating investment in our oceans and blue economy (\$18 million).

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 – Assessment and approvals

The Government is investing \$29.3 million over four years from 2021-22 to continue to deliver its commitment to a staged program of reforms aligned with the Independent Review of the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. This funding will progress priority reforms including necessary assurance mechanisms for single touch environmental approvals and a streamlined process that will remove duplication between national and state-level environmental assessments. It will also support regional planning to complement single-touch approval agreements, continuation of Indigenous heritage reform, and short-term funding to maintain on-time approvals of development proposals during the transition to single-touch approvals. These measures will accelerate Australia’s COVID-19 economic recovery and create jobs while maintaining environmental outcomes, with flow-on benefits for regional Australia. Funded measures include:

- \$9 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish and support an independent *Environment Assurance Commissioner*, which will ensure community confidence in the effective operation of the single touch approvals system.
- \$2.7 million over three years from 2021-22 to develop a pilot regional plan for a priority development region with a willing State or Territory government. This investment will provide businesses in the identified priority development region with greater certainty of their environmental approval requirements and will reduce their need to source and provide specific environmental information.
- \$0.5 million over 18 months from 2021-22 to engage with stakeholders, including Indigenous Australians, on models for improved Indigenous heritage protection.
- \$17.1 million over 12 months from 2022 to maintain on-time Commonwealth environmental approvals during the establishment and transition to single-touch approvals. This builds on the Government’s existing investments, including \$25 million over 18 months from January 2020 to June 2021 and \$12.4 million over six months from July 2021 to December 2021, to improve the timeliness of approvals.

Farm Household Allowance Business Income Reconciliation Debt Waiver

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

affected communities by enabling recipients to support local businesses by paying for household goods and services.

The Government is waiving FHA business reconciliation debts for around 5,300 farmers, which will remove a confusing and counterproductive element of past FHA settings, and align it to its present state. This aligns with the recommendations of and reforms resulting from the farmer-led Review of the Farm Household Allowance Program. Regional Australia has been hit hard by a succession of natural disasters including drought, flood, bushfire and the COVID-19 pandemic, and waiving the FHA-associated debt will help people who need it most, as well as improving business confidence across regional Australia.

The cost of this measure to underlying cash is \$14.7 million.

Supporting Trade – Funding projects in collaboration with the perishable agriculture goods industry to improve market transparency

The Government is committing \$5.4 million over four years from 2021-22 to improve market transparency in the fresh food supply chain. The new initiative responds to the recommendation of the Australian Consumer and Competition's, *Perishable Agricultural Goods Inquiry report* that governments and perishable agricultural goods (PAG) industries should explore measures to increase price transparency, in order to increase competition in these industries. It includes the delivery of workshops with industries to understand their specific market transparency requirements and grants to develop and implement tailored mechanisms to improve price and market transparency. The PAG industries comprise meat products (such as pork, lamb, beef and chicken), eggs, seafood, wine grapes, dairy and horticulture.

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

Future Drought Fund

The \$5 billion Future Drought Fund (FDF) provides secure, continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives. These initiatives support Australian farmers and communities to prepare for and become more resilient to the effects of future drought.

The FDF began with an initial credit of \$3.9 billion. Earnings are reinvested until the balance reaches \$5 billion (expected in 2028-29). \$100 million will be made available each year from the FDF, on an ongoing basis, to support Australian farmers and communities.

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.

The Australian Government began the rollout of foundational programs for the FDF in 2020-21, and is investing \$172.5 million over the next three years from 2021-22. This funding will deliver a range of activities that will extend foundational programs, providing farmers and farming communities with a ‘toolbox’ of capabilities and services to strengthen preparedness and resilience to future droughts.

Commonwealth Deregulation Agenda – Technological innovation to deliver fisheries deregulation

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

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

The \$10.1 million E-Fish program will modernise the Information Technology infrastructure and systems that underpin the collection of fisheries data. It will also support the integration of that data with data collected by other government agencies. For example, merging fisheries data with data from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and Bureau of Meteorology will increase flexibility for operators and reduce the costs of administration. Investment in this transformative program also provides scope to integrate data collected across the supply chain, supporting industry to meet traceability and provenance requirements.

Investing \$10 million in the *E-Monitoring Program* will expand and enhance the collection and use of fine-scale data for evidence-based decision making and risk assessment. Data collected through electronic monitoring allows fisheries managers to assess performance on an individual vessel level and incentivises the adoption of best practices by individual fishers to minimise, for example interactions with protected species.

Commonwealth’s Deregulation Agenda – Proof of concept trials for new third-party arrangements for imported cargo

The Government is investing \$3.2 million in 2021-22 to build and trial new industry arrangements to reduce red tape and regulatory costs for importers and agricultural businesses.

This proposal will involve the design and delivery of up to three pilots to test the ability to manage end-to-end biosecurity risks across importer supply chains. The pilots will act as proofs of concept and will inform work with the Australian Border Force towards an improved cargo intervention model and single trade window as part of the Government’s Simplified Trade System reform agenda.

If successful, the pilots will lead to more permanent arrangements that will reduce regulatory costs for high-volume importers with proven compliance track records and already invest heavily in commercial assurance systems. Faster clearance of imported cargo will provide downstream benefits throughout the agricultural and import supply chain, including to farm businesses, processors, wholesalers, and exporters, as well as brokers, freight forwarders and shippers. It will also benefit the broader community, including regional businesses seeking to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19, and help to drive business growth and job creation.

Farmers and producers accessing overseas markets rely on robust biosecurity controls to avoid costly exotic pests and diseases faced by overseas growers, which in turn boosts their profits. Streamlined biosecurity clearances will also improve access to goods needed to operate or advance their business where these are not manufactured or are in short supply within Australia.

Rural Financial Counselling Service – Funding increase

The Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) provides free and independent financial counselling to eligible primary producers who are experiencing, or at risk of, financial hardship. The Government is providing an additional \$5 million in 2021-22 to give RFCS organisations certainty to meet growing demand, enhance services and manage fluctuating client loads more effectively. This injection takes the total funding for the 2021 to 2024 program to over \$61 million.

Drought Communities Small Business Support Program Pilot extension

The Drought Communities Small Business Support Program pilot will be extended by six months to continue delivering free financial counselling, related support and professional services to small regional businesses affected by drought, the COVID-19 pandemic, and/or the 2019-20 bushfires. This \$3.5 million investment takes the total program funding to over \$16 million from 2019-20 to 2021-22, enabling more rural and regional businesses to remain resilient while facing a downturn and maintain the

capacity to rebound when normal trading conditions resume. The pilot is being delivered by existing providers across regional Australia and ends on 31 December 2021.

Murray-Darling Basin Integrated Basin Water Modelling Uplift Program

The Government is improving water modelling technology and water decision-making tools for managing the water resources of the Basin. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority will bring the current outdated and disconnected river modelling technology up to a modern standard that is integrated across Basin jurisdictions.

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

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

Response to the ACCC inquiry into Murray-Darling Basin water markets

The ACCC released its final report on the Murray-Darling Basin water markets inquiry on 26 March 2021. As an initial response, the Australian Government is investing \$3.5 million in 2021-22 to establish an Expert Panel to work with the Australian Government, Murray-Darling Basin states, industry and other stakeholders to develop a roadmap for water market reform. It is important that all water stakeholders are consulted as part of the reform process.

In the past two decades water trading in the Murray-Darling Basin has evolved into a complex water market worth more than \$1.8 billion per year. Tradeable water rights are a significant asset for many farmers. This initiative will facilitate a phased reform process that increases the transparency and efficiency of water markets, and delivers significant economic benefits to regional communities who depend on irrigated agriculture in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Off-Farm Efficiency Program

The Government has established the Off-Farm Efficiency Program to accelerate water recovery and deliver off-farm water infrastructure projects. The program will contribute towards the 450 gigalitres (GL) target of water recovery for the environment and will be funded through the Water for the Environment Special Account, which has funding available until 30 June 2024.

The Off-Farm Efficiency Program will provide:

- \$1.33 billion for state-led arrangements to deliver off-farm infrastructure improvements that will improve water use efficiency.

- \$150 million for Government-led grant opportunity for projects that may not be suitable for inclusion under state-led arrangements.
- \$60 million for state-led on-farm projects that can demonstrate community and industry support and positive socio-economic benefits.

This initiative will have positive economic impacts across regional Basin communities. It will enable the creation of jobs in regional areas through water infrastructure investment that will benefit local communities, the environment, irrigation industries, service providers and Indigenous communities. The Government has already committed \$177.5 million to modernise and upgrade ageing off-farm water infrastructure in the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District, creating hundreds of jobs and generating 15.9 GL of environmental water savings.

In the short to medium term, irrigation network operators and the surrounding communities will be positively affected by the investment in construction activities. Over the medium to longer term, benefits will flow to irrigation networks, irrigators, related secondary industries and surrounding communities. Benefits will include improved water delivery efficiency and greater economic activity, as well as being better able to manage a water-constrained future.

Economic benefits will also accrue to industries reliant on recreational fishing and tourism as more water is returned to the environment.

On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme – extension

The Australian Government is extending the On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme by twelve months to 30 June 2022. Extending this program will maximise the opportunity for drought-affected farmers to receive the rebate.

This scheme helps Australian farmers to better prepare, respond to and recover from drought. The scheme provided more than 7,700 rebates delivering over \$42 million to drought-affected farmers in the first round.

Primary producers and horticulture farmers can apply for rebates to buy and install on farm water infrastructure to water livestock and permanent plantings.

Eligible farmers can claim up to 25 per cent (of which at least 50 per cent of the rebate will be provided by the relevant State or Territory government) of expenses for on-farm water infrastructure up to a maximum total rebate of \$25,000. The scheme will close on 30 June 2022 or when the funding is exhausted, whichever occurs first.

The extended scheme will provide an immediate economic stimulus to boost local workforce participation and have a positive flow-on impact on supply-chains and other

regional businesses adversely affected by drought and bushfires. Over time, better efficiencies will also lead to sustainable enterprises and improved profit margins.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority – Supporting Tourism and Review of Current Charging Structure

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

Tourism visitation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park declined by 73 per cent between April and December 2020. As part of the Government’s response to the economic hardship experienced by regional tourism industries, a total of \$14.1 million will be committed over two years from 1 July 2021 to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to reduce the regulatory burden for tourist operators, enabling them to focus on the recovery of their businesses and to ensure continuing world-class management of the Reef. This new funding initiative:

- Provides \$2.2 million to undertake a comprehensive review of the fee charging structure in place for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, with the aim of decreasing regulatory and administrative burden for tourist operators.
- Provides \$11.9 million to supplement the Authority’s operational budget, removing its reliance on revenue from the Environmental Management Charge (EMC). This allows for regulatory amendments to remove the need for tourist operators to collect and remit the EMC for another twelve months.

This initiative is in addition to the existing Government commitment to waive the EMC up to 30 June 2021.

Strengthening biosecurity measures at the border

The Government is providing surge capacity to respond to the changing khapra beetle (*Trogoderma granarium*) threat. Urgent actions are being implemented in phases, supported by a \$14.5 million investment over 18 months from 2020-21, to safeguard Australia against this significant pest.

The funding will provide additional resourcing to:

- Expedite clearances of containerised cargo, some additional targeted surveillance operations, and progress the development of an overseas treatment provider assurance program.

- Streamline risk profile settings for better targeted and timely container intervention.
- Funding to scope new rapid diagnostic technology, including eDNA.
- A limited program of additional testing of containerised cargo.
- Provide operational system enhancements to support mandatory treatment of containers arriving from khapra-affected countries.

Backing Australian farmers to expand horizons in 2021

The Government is investing \$72.7 million over three years from 2020-21 to help Australian farming, forestry and fishing exporters to expand and diversify their export markets through the Agri-Business Expansion Initiative (ABEI).

Approximately 322,000 people are employed across Australia's agriculture sector, most in regional Australia, and 70 per cent of the value of Australia's agricultural production is exported. Agriculture and agricultural exports are a central pillar of regional Australian economies.

There are five elements to this initiative:

- \$42.9 million to support 2,000 agri-food exporters through the Austrade-led Excelerate program, providing targeted advice and trade missions to help exporters grow in new and existing markets.
- \$18.4 million over two years from 2020-21 to extend the Agricultural Trade and Market Access Cooperation program, to develop strategic partnerships with industry to support trade expansion and diversification.
- \$6.8 million over 18 months from 2020-21 to accelerate the negotiation of technical agreements to progress food safety, animal health and biosecurity protocols with trading partners by boosting Australia's scientific and technical capabilities.
- \$3.5 million over 18 months from 2020-21 for three new short-term agricultural counsellors, able to be rapidly deployed to pursue market access priorities with the greatest commercial prospects.
- \$1 million over 18 months from 2020-21 to boost to market intelligence capability to give exporters the information they need to grow their exports.

The ABEI will have a positive impact on agricultural and food producing and manufacturing regions across Australia. It will benefit regional communities by growing agricultural and food exports and diversifying into new markets – helping to overcome

challenges Australia’s regional agricultural industries face and position them for long-term growth.

Current Initiatives

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 Government has provided relief to these industries through the \$1 billion *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund*, established in March 2020 to support regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. This includes support that 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. Activities under some measures will continue into 2021-22, including:

- \$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 that encourages Australians to eat more healthy sustainable Australian seafood. This campaign commenced in November 2020 and will continue in 2021-22.
- \$20 million for the Reef Builder Coastal Communities Recovery Project in 2020-21, which will restore 13 shellfish reefs. Local industries will be engaged in the construction of these reefs that, once established, will help support the aquaculture and tourism sectors. Projects are expected to be undertaken into the 2021-22 financial year.
- \$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. Activities under this measure will continue into 2021-22.

Wine tourism and Cellar Door Grants

The *Wine Tourism and Cellar Door Grant* program provides wine producers who exceed their wine equalisation tax rebate cap access to a grant of up to \$100,000 for their eligible cellar door sales. The grant will be available through Wine Australia from 2019-20 to 2021-22 and the program is capped at \$10 million per year. Wine tourism is an important part of many regional economies. The grant is expected to have a positive economic and social impact on wine producers and tourism operators in regional Australia. It will encourage producers to invest in and build winery cellar doors, which may lead to more investment in tourism opportunities.

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. The Government remains committed to helping regional Australia recover from the bushfires, with a range of measures to support the recovery of wildlife and their habitat, invest in a stronger and more resilient agriculture sector and support a sustainable forestry industry. A number of immediate relief and recovery support measures were delivered over the 2019-20 and 2020-21 financial years. Continuing measures include:

- \$200 million to help native wildlife and their habitats recover from the devastating impacts of the fires.
 - An initial \$53.4 million investment for urgent intervention for two years from 2019-20 to assist with the immediate survival and recovery of affected animals and plants, with a number of activities to continue into 2021-22 to ensure more enduring recovery outcomes.
 - A further \$149.7 million investment over two years from 2020-21 to support the sustained efforts required for the long-term recovery of 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.
- \$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.

National Forest Industries Plan

The 2018-19 Budget included \$20 million over the four years from 2018-19 to 2021-22 to assist with the implementation of the *National Forest Industries Plan*.

The plan and its actions focus on growing the forestry, forest products and wood fibre industries across Australia, and benefitting the value chains and regional communities that rely on these industries.

In delivering against these four priority areas:

- Nine Regional Forestry Hubs have been established to identify factors that are limiting growth in the forestry industries.
- The Australian Government has amended the regulations for the Emissions Reduction Fund to make it easier for plantation expansion to occur in areas where water availability has been assessed.
- A new National Institute for Forest Products Innovation Centre in Gippsland, Victoria has been established to fund research to assist industry in maximising the value of forest resources and forest products.
- To assist community understanding of forest and wood resources the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences is mapping the extent of private native forestry, farm forestry and Indigenous owned or managed forests. The results of these assessments will be published in late 2021.

Busting Congestion for Agricultural Exporters

The Government is investing in a suite of reforms to accelerate trade growth as agriculture recovers from drought, bushfires and the 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 streamline administrative requirements while contributing to the industry's goal of \$100 billion in farm gate production by 2030. The package includes:

- \$222.2 million for Digital Services to Take Farmers to Markets, which will transform export regulatory systems including through implementing a suite of contemporary and connected digital services for exporters. This will reduce the administrative burden on Australia's agricultural exporters and producers.
- \$14.3 million to improve regulation, including for the delivery of risk and compliance-based regulation for the seafood and live animal export sectors and the introduction of case managers to assist new and existing exporters to grow their exports.
- \$10.9 million for Building a More Competitive Export Meat Industry modernisation activities specifically designed for the meat processing sector. A package of modernisation proposals has been developed in conjunction with, and strongly supported by, industry leaders – including senior representatives of the Australian Meat Industry Council and other export meat processing establishments. The modernisation proposals are designed to streamline export and production costs to remain competitive, and are centred on three key objectives:

- Mechanisms for improving meat safety outcomes and supply chain integrity.
- A reduction in regulatory costs without impacting regulatory compliance or market access outcomes and increasing global competitiveness and market reach.
- Maintaining Australia’s strong global reputation for a robust and verifiable regulatory meat export system.
- \$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.

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

New deregulation agenda

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

- \$21.4 million over three years from 2019-20 to implement a new trade information service for exporters, led by the Australian Trade and Investment Commission.
- \$14.8 million over six years from 2019-20 to reduce regulatory burden and streamline audit arrangements in the dairy sector under the Dairy Export Assurance Program. The program consists of three projects that focus on raising export awareness, reducing regulatory burden and streamlining audit arrangements in the dairy sector.
- \$29.2 million over four years from 2019-20 for export certification modernisation and digitisation.
- \$26.8 million over three years from 2019-20 for the digital transformation of environment approvals.

These measures focus on improving systems to enhance the Government’s service to stakeholders.

Modernising agricultural trade

Agricultural exports are a major contributor to Australia’s economic growth. To keep pace in a highly competitive international trade environment, the Australian Government is investing \$32.4 million over four years from 2018-19 in new initiatives to support exporters and modernise Australia’s export systems. Farmers and exporters around the country will benefit through increased opportunities to have their products exported to high value markets.

Information and support for farmers to help with the export process will improve the accuracy and accessibility of information provided to farmers and exporters on importing country requirements. This will help farmers to seize the export opportunities that are available through new free trade agreements and market access improvements.

The package also protects Australia’s clean, green brand through activities to provide assurance to importing markets, including development of streamlined and improved third party assurance arrangements that are more efficient, have a lighter regulatory burden and lower costs to exporters, and greater acceptance by Australia’s trading partners.

The Government is supporting agricultural exports through new information technology systems to streamline export certification and other administrative processes.

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 Government is supporting further surveys into antimicrobial resistance in farmed animals and veterinary practices to understand current antimicrobial usage in farmed and companion animals to help identify improvements. These surveys will be carried out in conjunction with the four year expansion of the Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia surveillance program. An antimicrobial resistance survey commenced in partnership with the chicken meat industry in 2020-21. Additional surveys in other animal sectors will commence in 2021-22. An antimicrobial prescribing behaviour survey in the animal health sector is currently being developed.

Survey data is critical for assessing the risks and preserving the effectiveness of antimicrobials for treating human and animal infections. This measure strengthens the Government’s national leadership in responding to antimicrobial resistance, helping preserve the effectiveness of antimicrobials, and limiting 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 Government has committed \$7.2 million over four years from 2020-21 to modernise the 30-year-old agricultural levies legislative framework into a business-friendly, fit-for-purpose and easy-to-use legislative framework that 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.

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

The Government is providing \$6.4 million over three years from 2020-21 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. In 2021-22, training at three different levels will be delivered: foundational, advanced regulatory practice, and leading regulators.

Pest and Disease Preparedness and Response Programs

The Australian Government continues to support the eradication of exotic animal and plant pests and diseases that, if allowed to establish and spread, would have serious economic and environmental impacts on agricultural industries, health and the environment. Through the National Partnership on Pest and Disease Preparedness and Response Programs, the Government is providing up to \$152.6 million over four years from 2019-20 to support nationally agreed eradication responses.

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

Centre for Invasive Species Solutions

The Australian Government is delivering on its 2016 election commitment to invest \$20 million over five years from 2017-18 to support the establishment and work of the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions.

The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions is a national collaborative research, development and extension organisation, formed to assist with the management of invasive species and the threat to agricultural industries and the environment. It brings together government, industry and research partners to create a coordinated, collaborative and innovative set of research and extension projects. The Government's investment in the work of the Centre is expected to leverage up to \$70 million cash and in-kind support from universities, State and Territory governments, the CSIRO and industry partners.

Established Pest Animals and Weed Management Pipeline

The Australian Government is investing \$30.3 million over four years from 2019-20 to continue the fight against established pests and weeds and help limit their impact on Australia's agriculture sector and the environment.

The objectives of the Pipeline program are:

- National prioritisation and better information – to gain a better understanding of the distribution/impact of priority established pest animals and weeds on Australia's agricultural sector and environment, to support targeted research, national coordination and information sharing.
- Priority pest innovative solutions – to focus longer-term research efforts on innovative solutions for a set of priority established pest animals and weeds, such as biological controls, genetic modification technologies, digital disruption technologies and building on web-based technologies and electronic resources.
- Farm-ready management techniques, national coordination and delivery – to increase the development and take-up of 'farm-ready' pest animal and weed management and control techniques through coordination, extension, adoption, and information sharing.

Red imported fire ants eradication program

The Australian, State and Territory governments are jointly investing \$411.4 million over ten years from 2017-18 to eradicate red imported fire ants from south-east Queensland. The Australian Government is contributing \$212.5 million over ten years as a part of this package.

Red imported fire ants are one of the world's worst invasive species due to their devastating economic, environmental and social impacts. If these ants were established in Australia, it would generate significant costs for all levels of government, including the public health system, schools, parks and wildlife, transport and roads, sport and recreation; as well as industry. Further, regional biodiversity and ecosystems would be irreparably damaged and quality of life in communities lowered.

Smart Fruit Fly Management

In the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2018-19 the Government committed to investing \$16.9 million over four years, starting in 2018-19, in a nationally coordinated approach to manage fruit fly. Funding was provided to develop and harmonise the management of fruit fly across Australia, including research and development into applied techniques to manage the pest, and research ways to prevent their spread and support their eradication.

This investment will reduce the significant impact of fruit flies, which currently cost Australian horticulture producers hundreds of millions of dollars annually in control measures and production losses.

Australia's horticultural production is valued at over \$12 billion and employs 50,000 rural and regional Australians. Horticulture exports were valued at over \$2.2 billion in 2016-17.

National Carp Control Plan

Carp are the worst freshwater aquatic pest in south-east Australia. They dominate the Murray-Darling Basin, where they can make up to 90 per cent of fish biomass, with significant detrimental effects on water quality and ecosystem health.

The Australian Government is investing \$15 million from 2016-17 for the development and potential implementation of the plan, which will determine the feasibility of using Cyprinid herpesvirus 3 (the carp virus) as a biological control agent for common carp, and ensure that the benefits, costs and risks are clearly understood. The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation is leading the development of the plan which is expected to be finalised in late 2021. The plan will be a critical input for subsequent decisions by all governments on whether or not to proceed with release of the virus. Should a decision be made to proceed, successful implementation of the plan will provide an opportunity to improve the health of Australia's inland waterways, bringing benefits to regional communities and water users, including farmers, recreational fishers and tourism operators.

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.

Relocation of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)

The Australian Government is providing \$25.6 million over six years, from 2016-17 to relocate the APVMA from Canberra, to Armidale located in New South Wales. The APVMA now employs approximately 140 people at its new premises in Armidale. An additional \$10.1 million over three years was committed in 2018-19 to deliver modern, digital business systems to transform the agency's Information Communication Technology environment to facilitate improved capacity and more efficient and effective business operations.

The APVMA has improved its timeframe performance from 58 per cent of all applications finalised within timeframe in 2016-17 to 96 per cent in the December 2020 quarter.

Rural Research and Development for Profit Program

The Rural Research and Development for Profit Program is a \$156.4 million program over nine years to 2022–23. It is providing rural research and development corporations with grants for collaborative research to improve productivity and profitability at the farm gate.

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

Regional Investment Corporation

The Australian Government provided an additional \$2.1 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 over \$4 billion in response to unprecedented demand for farm and small business drought concessional loans.

The Government introduced the two-year interest-free terms from 1 January 2020 for Drought Loans as a practical support mechanism for farmers and small businesses facing hardship due to ongoing severe drought conditions.

The AgriStarter Loan for the next generation of Australian farmers was launched on 1 January 2021, with an additional \$75 million allocated for that financial year. The AgriStarter loan is designed to support people establishing a new farm business, buying an existing farm business or undertaking succession arrangement.

The RIC received an extra \$50 million from the Australian Government over four years from 2020-21 in operational funding to deliver additional loans and process the significant demand for Drought Loans and AgBiz.

The RIC currently offer three loans to farmers: Drought Loans, Farm Investment Loans and AgriStarter; and one loan to drought-affected small businesses, AgBiz.

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.

Phase 1 commenced on 29 June 2020 with \$14.6 million available to South Australian growers. Phase 2 commenced in Western Australia (\$1.5 million) on 8 April 2021. Funding agreements with Victoria (\$4 million) and Queensland (\$1.5 million) were executed in March 2021.

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 is funding primary students to visit farms and primary production worksites to learn about agriculture through the Educating Kids about agriculture: Kids to Farms grant program, 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.

Dairy Code of Conduct

In 2019-20, the dairy industry's farm-gate production was worth \$4.8 billion and over 43,500 people were directly employed on dairy farms and by dairy companies within Australia. For regional Australia, the dairy industry is a key employer and contributor to regional economies and towns.

The Government has committed \$8.7 million over eleven years from 2019-20 to introduce a mandatory Code of Conduct for the dairy industry. The Code will assist to shift the balance in bargaining power towards dairy farmers by setting enforceable minimum standards of conduct for business practices between farmers and dairy processors. The code will improve the transparency of transactions in the industry by setting out the key rights and obligations of each party, which will help to build confidence in the dairy industry. Implementation and enforcement of the Code will be the responsibility of the ACCC.

In 2021 the Australian Government will complete the first review of the Dairy Code to ensure it is operating as intended.

National Farm Safety Education Fund

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

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

Funding of \$1.9 million is being provided to Farmsafe Australia from 2019-20 to 2022-23 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 National Farm Safety Education Fund Strategy. The Strategy was released on 17 March 2021 and will guide Australian Government investment for the remaining \$1.6 million under the election commitment to support improved farm safety outcomes.

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

Beef Australia 2021

The Government committed \$3.9 million over three years from 2019–20, to support the Beef Australia event in May 2021. The event is Australia’s largest trade show for the beef and cattle industries, held once every three years in Rockhampton, Queensland. It showcases the Australian beef industry to domestic and international trading partners. The last event, held in 2018, attracted over 100,000 visitors including over 1,200 international visitors from 43 countries.

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 reduce their decline. Due to delays caused by COVID-19 and the 2020 bushfires, the grant agreement was varied to extend the project for 12 months to June 2022.

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.

Seasonal Agricultural Labour Demand and Supply

The Government invested \$4.7 million over four years, starting in 2018-19, to better understand seasonal agricultural labour needs and inform future policy development. The program is providing more reliable information about workforce issues in the agriculture sector, including skilled and seasonal labour that is vital for the economic dividend that agriculture can provide to Australia’s rural and regional economies.

National Agricultural Workforce Strategy

The Government is investing \$1.9 million over four years, beginning in 2019-20, to develop a National Agricultural Workforce Strategy. The independent National Agricultural Labour Advisory Committee was appointed to develop the Strategy, which it has delivered to the Government. The Strategy aims to ensure farmers have access to a fit-for-purpose workforce into the future and recommends measures for improving the attraction, retention and skill development of the agricultural workforce.

Recreational Fishing and Camping Facilities Program

The Australian Government has committed \$20 million from 2019-20 to the Recreational Fishing and Camping Facilities Program, delivering on its election commitment to provide increased and improved opportunities for locals and visitors to regional areas to go fishing. The program is being 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 three years from 2020-21 for fisheries habitat restoration to restore marine and estuarine habitats. Projects are being delivered by Regional Land Partnership service providers in consultation with recreational fishing groups from across regional Australia and projects are expected to commence in 2021.

Supporting Healthy Oceans

Australia is a world leader in marine protection and Australia's 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 management 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 tackle the impacts of ghost nets (lost, abandoned or discarded fishing gear) in Australia's northern waters.
- \$4.2 million over four years from 2020-21 for international blue carbon and forest partnerships, supporting Australia's leadership of the International Partnership for Blue Carbon and delivering the 4th Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit 2022.

Supporting the Great Barrier Reef Tourism Industry

The Australian Government committed \$11.6 million over three years from 2020-21 to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The initiative will support the Authority to continue its world-class management of the Great Barrier Reef whilst supporting local businesses in a region significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, \$3.5 million has been provided. The remaining \$8.1 million of funding includes:

- \$2.8 million in 2021-22 due to the extension of 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 the 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.

In 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. This is part of the overall \$40.1 million provided to the Reef HQ Aquarium to renew exhibits, upgrade animal life support systems and improve visitor accessibility through 2022-23. The funding includes an ongoing contribution from 2023-24 at \$1.8 million per year for maintenance and capital works.

Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan

The World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's natural wonders, supporting tourism, fishing, recreation, traditional uses and research, and generating 64,000 jobs and \$7 billion to the Australia's economy each year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Reef is under pressure from a range of threats including climate change, poor water quality from land-based run-off, coastal development and direct uses such as fishing. The Government is deeply committed to protecting the Reef and has jointly developed and implemented with the Queensland Government the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, which focuses on supporting the Reef's health and resilience to climate change by reducing local and regional pressures. The Plan is reviewed every five years, and an updated version will be released in 2021.

The Australian Government is investing substantial funding to support the plan with more than \$1.9 billion allocated over 2014-15 to 2023-24 for initiatives such as water quality improvement, crown-of-thorns starfish control, science for reef restoration and adaptation, community engagement and improved monitoring. This includes through the \$443.3 million Reef Trust Partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. The Great Barrier Reef Joint Field Management Program is putting more field officers on the water, improving compliance, providing early warning of environmental stresses and

strengthening reef and island management. Further to this, the Government is financing clean energy projects in the Reef catchment area through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation's \$1 billion Reef Fund, which tackles the two biggest challenges: climate change and water quality.

During 2020-21, the Government announced over \$70 million in funding from the Reef Trust for programs that will focus on protecting the Great Barrier Reef. The funding helped support coastal habitat restoration, species protection and water quality improvement all while supporting regional jobs and empowering local communities. The Government also consulted with experts, stakeholders and the community during the review of the Reef 2050 Plan.

National Landcare Program

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

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

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

Under the Regional Land Partnerships component, \$450 million is allocated to 220 environmental and sustainable agriculture projects. A network of 50 service providers nationwide are working in partnership with communities to design and deliver on-ground environment and agriculture projects at a regional scale that support national priorities for natural resource management. Environmental outcomes include recovering species identified under the Threatened Species Strategy, protecting

threatened ecological communities, and reducing threats to Australia’s globally important wetlands and world heritage sites. Sustainable agriculture outcomes include improving soil, biodiversity and native vegetation on farms, and increasing the capacity of Australia’s farms to adapt to climate change and evolving market demands.

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

Environment Restoration Fund

The Australian Government committed \$100 million for the *Environment Restoration Fund* over four years from 2019-20. The Fund mobilises community and natural resource management organisations, local councils and other groups to deliver projects to protect and remediate Australia’s environment. To date funding has been allocated to 59 projects valued at \$59.3 million to improve water quality and manage erosion in coasts and waterways, support the recovery and recycling of waste, and protect threatened species and their habitats. Applications for further projects have been invited through an open grant round to establish safe havens for threatened species. An additional \$675,000 funding, to be delivered under the *Environment Restoration Fund*, was announced in the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2020-21* to enable four South Australian environment and conservation groups to undertake threatened species recovery activities.

Yellow Crazy Ant Control

The Government is supporting the control of yellow crazy ants in the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Site. These ants have devastating impacts on neighbourhoods, crops and biodiversity. The Government is providing \$9.2 million over four years from 2019-20 to expand on-ground management activities and improve community awareness. The funding provides economic benefits to the region by limiting the impacts of yellow crazy ants on local cane farmers, and protects the World Heritage Site.

Australian Heritage Grants Program

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

Commonwealth heritage places are found in regional Australia. The program will support owners and managers of heritage places, along with community groups and other non-government entities, to protect and promote the heritage values for which places are listed.

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 more than \$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 the National Partnership on Recycling Infrastructure through State and Territory governments. In some cases, these agreements specifically require states and territories to prioritise investment in regional and remote recycling facilities. To date, the Australian Government has provided co-funding of \$13.1 million to eight projects across four states, in regional Australia. 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. 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 Recycling Modernisation Fund, 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, 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. Working with the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation, the Australian Government will undertake a packaging waste partnership program and pilot it in two remote communities in Northern Territory. This will deliver a model that can then be applied to other areas in regional and remote Australia.

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 Government has established a licensing and declaration scheme (the Waste Export Licensing and Declaration Portal) 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 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.

The Waste Data Visualisation Platform will assist in the identification of large volumes of waste, recycle and recoverable materials in regional areas where no local recycling, reprocessing and remanufacturing facilities exist. This will identify opportunities for regional investment in new facilities which will support regional job growth. It will allow local, state and regional bodies to better target waste management interventions, support new innovations and foster entrepreneurship.

National Centre for Coasts, Environment and Climate

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

The Centre will be a world-leading interdisciplinary research facility on marine and coastal ecosystems, climate science and environmental management. The centre will leverage its Point Nepean location and its existing capabilities as an integrated ocean and atmospheric observation site.

National Environmental Science Program

The National Environmental Science Program is a long-term commitment by the Government. The program funds environment and climate research.

The first phase invested over \$145 million (2014-15 to 2020-21) into six research hubs and emerging priority research projects. The second phase will invest \$149 million (2020-21 to 2026-27) into four new research hubs which will draw on expertise from research and other institutions across Australia.

The program:

- Provides evidence for the design, delivery and on-ground outcomes for environmental programs.
- Helps decision-makers, including those from Indigenous communities, build resilience.
- Supports positive environmental, social and economic outcomes.

The second phase of the program facilitates place-based research and locally led solutions through local delivery regional centres (nodes). The program will also support the development of the science community in regional Australia.

Investing in Commonwealth National Parks

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

In July 2020, the Australian Government announced the largest ever single investment in 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 Muṯitjulu 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: Upgraded roads and a 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 as 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.

Parks Australia is well progressed on planning and procurement for this program. Approximately \$20 million in value of multiple urgent projects have commenced in the 2020-21 financial year. Key priorities for the next 12 months is commencement of the infrastructure upgrades for the Mutitjulu community and the refurbishment of existing and new construction of staff housing in Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Parks.

Securing the Future of the Jabiru Township

The Government has committed up to \$216.2 million over 10 years from 2018-19 to transition the Jabiru Township and Kakadu National Park to a post-mining future by growing the tourism economy and regional presence. Kakadu is a place of significant ecological and biological diversity with over 200,000 visitors per year on average prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The investment will ensure that Kakadu continues to be a world-class tourist destination that supports the local economy. The funded program is focused on improving access and upgrading infrastructure at key visitor sites throughout Kakadu, remediating the Jabiru Township and relocating the Kakadu Visitor Centre into Jabiru.

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

Two key planning documents under this program, the Kakadu Tourism Masterplan and the Kakadu Roads Strategy, were completed in 2020-21. Approximately \$22 million value of infrastructure projects from the Kakadu Tourism Masterplan have commenced.

Australia's Investment in Antarctica

Australian Government funding for the Australian Antarctic Program protects and advances Australia's long standing national interests in the Antarctic region. Basing the Australian Antarctic Division in Hobart continues to bring economic benefits to Tasmania, positioning the city as the premier scientific research hub and logistics gateway for East Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

Tasmania's Antarctic sector largely centres on the Australian Antarctic Division and represents a significant element of the state'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. The staging of Australian Antarctic Program shipping and aviation activity through the Hobart port and airport continues to boost the state economy, contributing to employment and local investment.

The Government is progressing key priorities in the Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20-Year Action Plan. The new \$1.9 billion world-class icebreaker, *RSV Nuyina*, will be home-ported in Hobart and is scheduled to commence operations during the 2021-22 Antarctic summer season. A final investment decision on constructing the first paved runway in Antarctica near Australia's Davis Research Station is expected in the first half of 2022.

The Government is also providing more than \$450 million over ten years for additional capital expenditure on Australia's Antarctic research stations. This investment supports the Hobart City Deal and is expected to create around 40 jobs in Tasmania. Separate funding of \$49.8 million over 11 years is also being provided to substantially upgrade Macquarie Island Research Station. Sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island is part of Tasmania and located in the Southern Ocean around 1,500 kilometres southeast of the state. These works and the ongoing operation of the station through the Australian Antarctic Program will bring economic benefits to Tasmania.

New Antarctic science funding was announced in the 2018-19 Budget, with the Special Research Initiative in Excellence in Antarctic Science awarded to Monash University (\$36 million over seven years) and the University of Tasmania (\$20 million over three years). This funding is additional to the \$5 million per year from 2019-20 awarded to the University of Tasmania to host the Australian Antarctic Program Partnership through the 10-year Antarctic Science Collaboration Initiative. The Australian Antarctic Division is working closely with these partnerships to develop detailed research programs and operational support plans to undertake research in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. These measures have a positive impact on the Antarctic science community through employment and research development opportunities, bolstering the status of Hobart as a premier research hub and benefiting the Tasmanian economy both directly and indirectly.

Funding for the Australian Antarctic Program and Antarctic science ensures critical functions that support Australia’s presence and research activities in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are maintained. This allows Australia to retain its leadership and influence in the Antarctic region, including through Hobart’s status as a premier Antarctic scientific research hub and logistics gateway.

Bureau of Meteorology – Improved Security and Resilience

The Australian Government will provide \$225.6 million over three years from 2020-21 and \$143.7 million per year indexed and ongoing from 2024-25 to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau) and the maintenance of its mainly regional observing systems infrastructure. The funding includes:

- 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.
- Improving the security, resilience and reliability of the Bureau’s Observing Systems Network infrastructure. The financial implications of this element are not for publication due to commercial-in-confidence sensitivities.

Bureau of Meteorology — Additional radars and rain gauges

The Australian Government is providing \$77.2 million over 23 years from 2019-20 to improve weather radar coverage in regional areas of Queensland and northern New South Wales. Funding will support the installation of new radars and associated rain gauges near Richmond and Greenvale in north Queensland; new radars near, Taroom and Oakey in the Western and Southern Darling Downs; and the relocation of a radar from Moree to Boggabilla in northern New South Wales.

Milestones for 2021-22:

- The Greenvale (upper Burdekin) radar is scheduled to be operational ahead of the onset of the 2021-22 severe weather season.
- The Taroom region radar is expected to be operational by December 2021.

The Government will also invest \$15.4 million in installation of a new radar in Tennant Creek to address gaps in coverage in the Barkly region of the Northern Territory. The new radar is part of the Barkly Regional Deal with an additional co-contribution of \$2.5 million from the Northern Territory Government. The new radar is expected to be delivered in late 2022.

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

Bureau of Meteorology — Commonwealth Water Functions

The Australian Government will provide \$300.1 million as ongoing funding over ten years from 2017-18 to continue the implementation of the Water Information Program. The funding provides essential information and services to the agricultural and water sectors, including physical water accounts and water trade data.

Under this Program the Bureau will continue to provide farmers, irrigators and rural water agencies with essential information and services that are critical to the profitability and productivity of Australian agriculture and support community wellbeing in regional Australia.

Essential information and services for farmers, irrigators, water supply agencies and policy makers will support national decision making on water security.

Murray-Darling Basin Communities Investment Package

The Australian Government is providing 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:

- \$34 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.
- \$20 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 to engage Indigenous River Rangers to undertake on-ground works over a 12-month period commencing 1 July 2021. The aim is to increase Indigenous people's access to water for economic and social purposes, and embedding Indigenous participation in delivery of the Basin Plan.

The package also includes funding to build trust, transparency and accountability in the delivery of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and to improve its implementation.

Healthy Rivers Program

The Australian Government's Murray–Darling Healthy Rivers Program will improve the health and ecological condition of rivers and wetlands across the Basin, while supporting economic development and jobs. This program was announced as part of the Murray–Darling Communities Investment Package.

The program will provide up to \$20 million over two years for community-led grants to implement on-ground projects across the Basin. Communities will be able to deliver practical, local solutions that both improve the local environment and deliver jobs in regional areas. Grant recipients will be encouraged to preference local and Australian made suppliers when sourcing project materials.

Goulburn Murray Water Connections Project Stage 2

The Goulburn Murray Water Connections Project Stage 2 is designed to save water by creating a world leading irrigation system to boost irrigator productivity, help communities and foster healthy waterways and wetlands. This project is the most significant investment in modernising irrigation infrastructure in Australia.

The Goulburn Murray Water Connections Project is a \$1 billion investment to upgrade irrigation infrastructure to ensure the future of irrigated agriculture and bolster the economy in northern Victoria. The project will provide strong regional stimulus benefits from investment in infrastructure, with long-term improvements in crop production and socio-economic outcomes.

Murray-Darling Economic Development Program

The Murray-Darling Economic Development Program is supporting economic development projects in identified Basin communities impacted by water recovery under the Basin Plan.

The program is supporting up to \$72.8 million in grants through three funding rounds delivered between 2019-20 and 2022-23. The third round of the program, which was announced as part of the Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package, closed for applications on 12 April 2021.

The program is supporting eligible communities to develop their economies, increase job opportunities and enhance their resilience to manage economic challenges. By end of April 2021, the Australian Government has successfully delivered \$23.8 million in funding, providing jobs and much-needed stimulus for businesses and regional communities in the Murray-Darling Basin.

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

The Basin Plan provides for a mechanism to adjust sustainable diversion limits to achieve equivalent environmental outcomes with less water recovery. This relies on the implementation of supply and constraint measures.

The Australian Government is providing up to \$1.4 billion over 10 years to 2023-24 for the implementation of these supply and constraints measures. Supply measures increase the quantity of water available for consumptive use by allowing environmental water managers to achieve outcomes more efficiently, reducing the amount of water needed for the environment. Constraints projects change physical structures or river management practices to enhance the delivery of environmental water.

Some supply and constraints measures involve the construction of infrastructure, providing investment and economic stimulus benefits to Basin regional communities.

Northern Basin Toolkit projects

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

The Australian Government is providing up to \$180 million over five years to 2023-24 for the implementation of Toolkit projects. To date 10 Toolkit projects have been approved, including:

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

The NSW and Queensland governments are responsible for implementing Toolkit projects.

This funding will provide a much-needed economic stimulus to regional communities and create improved environmental outcomes in the northern Basin. For all environmental works, the Government expects proponents to preference local and indigenous suppliers and employment.

Improving Great Artesian Basin Drought Resilience

The Australian Government is committed to improving water security outcomes and drought resilience in the Great Artesian Basin. The Improving Great Artesian Basin Drought Resilience Program provides jurisdictions (South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Northern Territory) with up to \$27.6 million of matching Australian Government funding over five years from 2019-20 to 2023-24).

Funding supports activities to improve water security and drought resilience through increasing artesian pressure and reducing wastage of the resource. These activities include bore capping and piping, education and communication programs to manage Basin water, and research to develop new management arrangements.

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

Flows for the Future

The Australian Government has committed up to \$32.5 million over seven years to help the Government of South Australia improve natural water flow patterns in the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges Water Resource Area.

The initiative aims to reinstate more natural flow patterns to improve the environmental health of the region, which in turn supports the sustainability of tourism and agricultural industries.

Basin Plan Commitments Package

The Australian Government agreed the Basin Plan Commitments Package with the Federal Opposition in May 2018. It provides a package of initiatives to support the implementation of Murray-Darling Basin Plan up to 2023-24.

The package of commitments is organised under five streams:

- Strengthening compliance and protecting environmental flows
- Strengthening compliance with Basin water laws
- Improving outcomes for Indigenous people, and addressing social and economic impacts of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan
- Improving confidence in Northern Basin Review data
- Strengthening the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism.

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.

Ensuring individuals, families and communities in regional areas can access the support and services they need is a key priority for the Australian Government. The Australian Government has committed more than \$460 million in 2021-22 for legal assistance services under the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-25 (NLAP). There are 11 priority client groups under the NLAP, one of which is people residing in rural or regional areas. NLAP funding delivers services in regional areas, though the amount of funding specifically dedicated to service delivery in regional areas cannot be quantified.

The 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 Programme 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 and online hearings 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.

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

The 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 31 December 2020, the Attorney General's Portfolio employed 7,917 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 6,001 staff (76 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 1,723 staff (22 per cent) in other capital cities and 193 staff (2 per cent) in regional areas.

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

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

New Initiatives

Women's safety

Separated parents who engage with the family law system frequently experience a range of complex issues, often including family violence. The Australian government will invest \$320.1 million over four years from 2021-22 through the Attorney-General's portfolio to address women's safety while they are interacting with the family law system. Key measures include:

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

The Australian Government will provide \$101.4 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$17.5 million in 2021-22) to increase access to Children's Contact Services (CCSs) for families across Australia who are unable to safely manage arrangements themselves for the contact and changeover of their children. The increase in funding to the existing 34 regional CCSs will boost access to these critical services for regional families. There will also be around 4-7 new CCSs located in regional areas funded through this measure. CCSs provide a safe, reliable and neutral place for supervised contact and facilitated changeovers, helping to minimise conflict between parents, and reduce the risk to women and children of ongoing family violence.

Maintaining and enhancing Family Advocacy Support Services

The Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$85 million over three years from 2022-23 for enhanced social supports through Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS). This funding will bolster services in existing registry and regional circuit FASS locations and establish 26 new locations in regional areas. This measure will enhance the capacity of victim-survivors of family and domestic violence – who are primarily women – to obtain access to justice and ongoing support while engaging in the family law system.

The FASS effectively fills a gap in legal and social service provision to family law clients with experience of family violence, providing supports and referrals for both victims-survivors and alleged perpetrators. The FASS also provides an alternative avenue for users to obtain legal assistance where they are unable to access other local

legal services due to a conflict of interest. This issue may arise more often in regional areas where legal service options may be limited.

Under the Third Action Plan 2016-2019 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, the Australian Government provided \$18.5 million for legal aid commissions to operate FASS. Following the FASS' positive evaluation, as part of the 2018-19 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided an additional \$25 million over three years (\$7.8 million in 2021-22) to extend the existing FASS from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2022.

Family Law System – improving access and safety for children and families

The Government will provide \$123.8 million over four years from 2021-22 to support women and families experiencing domestic and family violence through a number of measures to increase information sharing and support in the family law system. Key measures include:

A New Approach to Family Law Case Management

The Australian Government will provide \$60.8 million over four years (\$16.2 million in 2021-22) to the federal family courts to reform the family law case management process. to enable the federal family law courts to dispose of matters more efficiently, leading to better outcomes in terms of reduced costs and delays for Australian families who require the courts' assistance to resolve their disputes. It will do so through the engagement of additional Registrars, Family Consultants, Indigenous Liaison Officers, and legal and administrative support staff. The new approach will benefit Australians in regional areas, where the need to travel long distances to attend interim hearings will be reduced. This will occur through a greater presence of Registrars circuiting through regional Australia and through a greater number of Registrars being able to conduct hearings remotely. This proposal together with the Government's structural reforms (bringing together the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia into an overarching administrative structure) represents a holistic approach to reform of the family courts.

National Information Sharing Framework

The Australian Government will provide \$29 million over four years (\$3.3 million in 2021-22) to implement the National Strategic Framework for Information Sharing between the Family Law and Family Violence and Child Protection Systems. Improved information sharing will improve family safety outcomes in the family courts and through state and territory family violence and child protection systems, by ensuring decision-makers have prompt and timely access to all relevant family violence information. This measure will improve the exchange of information by moving away from a party-initiated, subpoena-based information gathering process towards a

streamlined, proactive process where family law courts initiate information requests to help manage and respond to family safety risk.

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

The Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$6.3 million in 2021-22 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 \$4.8 million provided by the Australian Government in the 2020-21 Budget, \$2.6 million in 2020-21 announced 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.

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

The Australian Government will provide additional funding of \$17.1 million over four years from 2021-22 (\$4.2 million in 2021-22) to increase the accessibility of legal and mental health support services to women who have experienced family violence and are navigating the family law system. The Australian Government will provide additional funding to States and Territories for selected Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) to provide outreach to regional and remote locations. The Government will also provide additional mental health funding to existing DVU locations (including 10 that are in regional or remote areas).

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

Current Initiatives

National Legal Assistance Partnership

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

The NLAP took effect from 1 July 2020. Through the NLAP, the Australian Government has committed over \$2.3 billion over five years for legal assistance services to provide legal help to vulnerable people facing disadvantage. The NLAP provides long term, quarantined and guaranteed funding to Legal Aid Commissions (LACs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS). The NLAP delivers baseline funding for those organisations, as well as specific funding for the specialist Domestic Violence Units (DVUs) and Health Justice Partnerships (HJPs) and Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) that some LACs and CLCs operate.

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

There are approximately 75 LAC offices across Australia, with around 76 per cent of offices located in regions outside of metropolitan areas. Approximately 75 per cent of CLCs are located in regions outside of metropolitan areas. There are seven ATSILS nationally which deliver services from 70 permanent locations, including regional and remote areas, court circuits, bush courts and outreach locations.

Expediting Family Law and Federal Circuit Court Matters

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

Maintain Family Law Services Funding under the Family Relationship Services Program

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided additional ongoing funding of \$87.3 million over three years from 2021-22 (\$28.7 million in 2021-22) to maintain funding for family law services under the Family Relationship Services Programme. This funding brings the total funding for the Family Relationship Services Programme to \$211.8 million in 2021-22, \$206.8 million of which will fund a range of post-separation

family law services under the Families and Communities Programme, administered by the Community Grants Hub of the Department of Social Services. This funding includes the funding provided to Family Relationship Centres to provide family law property mediation under the *2018 Women's Economic Security Package*.

The funded services are:

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

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

Additional Resources and Judges for the Federal Circuit Court

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$35.7 million over four years from 2020-21 (\$10 million in 2021-22) to increase judicial and Registrar resourcing in the Federal Circuit Court for family law as well as migration matters. The additional funding provided for family law matters under this measure is designed to reduce delays in the family law courts so that separating Australian families, including those in regional Australia, are able to resolve their disputes more quickly. The funding is supporting three additional federal law judges and one family law judge.

Addressing Regional Court Safety Requirements

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$5.4 million over four years from 2020-21 (\$4.7 million in 2021-22) to support the relocation and refurbishment of

Tasmania’s Launceston family law courts registry. This relocation will improve the safety and security of court users and staff accessing the family law courts in Launceston.

Introduction and Criminal Enforcement of New Federal Family Violence Orders

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$1.8 million over four years from 2020-21 (\$0.2 million in 2021-22) 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. The Government introduced the *Family Law Amendment (Federal Family Violence Orders) Bill 2021* in the Commonwealth Parliament on 24 March 2021. The Bill will establish the criminally enforceable FFVOs, which 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 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.

Women’s Economic Security Package

Under the First Women’s Economic Security Package, announced on 20 November 2018, the Australian Government invested \$98.4 million in new funding over four years from 2019-20 for family law services and initiatives to support women and their families to recover financially after separation. This funding will provide separated families in regional Australia with access to affordable and timely assistance and support services.

In 2021-22, the Package includes:

- \$16.5 million in funding for family law property mediation:
 - \$13.6 million will be provided to the 65 Family Relationship Centres across Australia in 2021-22 to provide mediation services to help families to reach agreements about splitting their property after separation without having to go to court.
 - \$3 million will be provided for Legal Aid Commissions in 2021-22 to complete a two year trial of lawyer-assisted mediation for families with a property pool of up to \$500,000 (excluding debt). The trial will finish in December 2021.
- \$1.9 million in funding for the federal family courts to continue a two-year pilot of simpler and faster court processes for dividing small claim property disputes between separating couples. The pilot is occurring at four locations across the country from January 2020 to December 2021.

- \$10.7 million to existing Australian Government funded specialist Domestic Violence Units and Health Justice Partnerships to continue existing services and provide financial support services such as financial advice, counselling and literacy.
- \$2.4 million to continue the Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme. Under the Scheme, Legal Aid Commissions in each state and territory will be funded to provide legal representation to all self-represented parties subject to the ban on direct cross-examination in the *Family Law Act 1975*.

Family Advocacy and Support Services – Dedicated Men’s Support Workers

In the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$7.8 million over three years from 2019-20 (\$2.7 million in 2021-22) to employ dedicated men’s support workers in Family Advocacy and Support Services registry and circuit locations. Dedicated men’s support workers provide access to appropriate support services for both male victims and alleged perpetrators of family violence with matters before the family law court, such as parenting programs and men’s behavioural change programs.

Eleven of the registry locations, and all circuit locations, in which the Family Advocacy and Support Services operates are in regional areas. Funding dedicated men’s support workers, particularly in regional areas, has a positive impact by filling a gap in the provision of support services to men with family law matters in the courts. Greater engagement by men with the court system, enabled by increased social support, will contribute to a reduction of court time spent on self-represented matters and support victim safety in regional areas.

Elder Abuse Service Trials – More Choices for a Longer Life – protecting older Australians

In the 2018-19 Budget, as part of the *More Choices for a Longer Life Package*, the Australian Government provided \$18.3 million over four years (\$5.3 million in 2021-22) to directly support the implementation of three types of specialist services that will be used to test the effectiveness of different service models to support older people and their families seeking help with elder abuse:

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

The new services will enhance Australia’s frontline service response to elder abuse by significantly expanding the practical support on offer to help older Australians and their families affected by elder abuse, including some in regional areas. Funding will be provided over the 2018-19 to 2021-22 financial years.

This funding includes administration costs for the service trials and a contribution to support the targeted elder abuse-related work of the Age Discrimination Commissioner.

The Elder Abuse Service Trials builds on the Australian Government's 2016 election commitment, 'Our Plan to Protect the Rights of Older Australians', and contributes to addressing key findings of the Australian Law Reform Commission Report: *Elder Abuse - A National Legal Response* (ALRC Report 131).

Community Legal Services Program

The Community Legal Services Program is a nationally focused discretionary grants program, supporting the provision of legal assistance to the community by funding national service delivery projects, innovative pilot programs and program support activities. The Australian Government will provide \$7.2 million to the Community Legal Services Program in 2021-22.

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

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

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

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$2.5 million over two years (\$1.4 million in 2021-22) 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 were temporarily suspended due to the pandemic. The courts have also subsequently expanded the types of matters on the COVID-list, to include disputes that have arisen

or may arise as the pandemic continues, such as parental disputes around COVID vaccinations for children.

Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme

The Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme provides assistance for individuals or groups, including pastoralists, graziers and fishers, to have equitable access to legal representation in the resolution of native title proceedings where their interests are likely to be affected. Funding for the Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme in 2021-22 is \$1.7 million.

Federal Circuit Court of Australia – Administered Fund

The Court utilises a dedicated administered fund to provide private property mediations. Its major focus is to provide services to litigants, particularly in regional areas in support of the Court's circuit work. The fund, which totals \$0.9 million in 2021-22, enables the Court to deliver improved access to justice and creates assistance to litigants by providing:

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

The use of the fund in this manner also enables the Court to reduce the cost of Registrars travelling to circuit locations. The fund is an innovative way of delivering access to justice to litigants in regional Australia where Court-based services are limited.

Defence

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

As at 31 December 2020, the Defence Portfolio employed 17,831 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 9,614 staff (54 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 5,587 staff (31 per cent) in other capital cities and 2,630 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 extensive bases and associated employment and community engagement activities.

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

Defence 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 15,950 reservists).

The Defence estate consists of 400 owned properties and approximately 958 leases. Facilities include 72 major bases, training areas and ranges, research facilities and office accommodation including Defence Force Recruitment Centres. Construction and maintenance activity associated with Defence facilities in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities.

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 through initiatives and assistance programs to provide them the opportunity for meaningful work.
- Defence industry development, through activities undertaken across Australia to support the vital role that the Australian defence industry plays in delivering leading edge technologies and capabilities required to generate and sustain the future force.
- The economic activity associated with Defence capability and estate projects undertaken in the regions.
- Defence environmental management and cooperation on heritage issues in regional Australia.

Of the total Defence workforce (2020-21), including both those employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* and members of the ADF and Reservists (an estimated average full-time total workforce of 76,996 and a headcount of 21,185 Reservists) approximately:

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

Figure 1 below depicts the Defence footprint across Australia.



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

Defence Housing Australia

Defence Housing Australia (DHA) administers Defence housing policy and provides housing and related services for ADF members and their families. The DHA maintains offices in capital cities, major regional centres and on some ADF bases and establishments around Australia, with: 34 per cent of staff located in Canberra Head Office, 7 per cent located in Sydney CBD Office, 44 per cent located in Regional Offices and 15 per cent located in Contact Centres situated in Adelaide, Brisbane, Townsville and the Hunter Valley.

The DHA manages more than 18,000 properties in capital cities, major regional centres and remote locations of Australia where the ADF has a presence. The majority of properties are integrated throughout the community, close to ADF bases and establishments, and close to a range of amenities and services such as transport, shopping facilities and schools.

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

The DHA has two residential development projects in progress in regional Australia. These projects are located in Ipswich, Queensland. The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$137 million. Subject to receiving the necessary planning approvals, DHA will undertake further residential development projects in Newcastle, New South Wales. The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$104.6 million.

The DHA also manages a multi-million dollar Defence-funded upgrade, construction and redevelopment program. The DHA is managing five current projects in regional Australia. They are located in Katherine, Northern Territory (three projects), and Puckapunyal, Victoria (two projects). The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$48.4 million. The DHA anticipates undertaking an additional three future Defence-funded projects in regional locations including Woomera, South Australia, Frankston, Victoria and Kapooka, New South Wales. The estimated value of these future projects on completion is \$55.8 million.

New Initiatives

Defence Industry Development in Regional Areas

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

The Defence Innovation Hub was launched on 5 December 2016 as part of the Australian Government's \$1.6 billion investment in growing the capability and capacity of Australia's defence industry and innovation sector. The Defence Innovation Hub is funded at \$800 million to 2030 and manages a portfolio of Defence innovation investments and provides a single innovation development pipeline for defence industry and research organisations to develop new and innovative capability. It brings together Defence, industry, academia and research institutions from across Australia to collaborate on innovation technologies that can be developed into advanced capability for Defence.

The Defence Innovation Hub has awarded contracts totalling over \$10.2 million with organisations based in regional Australia. The following details the innovation contracts entered into the 2020-21 financial year:

- 04/08/2020 - 01/02/2022 \$1.5 million Low Profile Body Armour, Dandenong South, Victoria.
- 26/08/2020 - 26/09/2021 \$2 million Alternative Small and Light Projectile System, The Vines, Western Australia.
- 23/09/2020 - 01/06/2021 \$1.6 million Lightweight Modular Shotgun System, Dandenong South, Victoria.
- 16/10/2020 - 08/10/2021 \$2.7 million Future Soldier System – Integrated Digital Soldier Systems, Queanbeyan West, New South Wales.
- 08/12/2020 - 23/11/2021 \$2.2 million Abrams Main Battle Tank Engine Inlet Upgrade, Bundamba, Queensland.
- 04/01/2021 - 12/10/2021 \$0.3 million Combustion Engine Inhibiting Smoke, Dandenong South, Victoria.

New Capital Equipment Projects delivered in Regional areas in 2021-22

ARMY Safety Watercraft

On 24 March 2021, the Australian Government announced that a contract has been awarded to two Cairns-based businesses in Far North Queensland, Tropical Reef

Shipyards and BME NQ. The contract cost is \$4.1 million and will produce seven new watercraft to strengthen the Australian Army's amphibious capability. The project has commenced and is expected to be completed by January 2023. The award of this contract provides growth opportunity for these Cairns-based businesses. BME NQ currently employs 17 staff and will now bring on an additional six employees, to work on the watercraft including an apprentice.

New Estate and Infrastructure Projects delivered in Regional areas in 2021-22

Defence's Enterprise Estate and Infrastructure Program has 165 active projects (with initial Government approval) in Australia with an approximate total construction value of \$29.5 billion. Estate and infrastructure projects are required to obtain final (Second Pass) Government and Parliamentary approvals prior to commencing construction. 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 currently around 76 per cent, or 1,752 of all sub-contracts, at around \$1.9 billion, being awarded to local companies and businesses, on those projects with an LCIP.

Newcastle Airport Improvements

The Government will provide \$66.1 million over two years from 2021-22 to 2022-23 to upgrade the Newcastle Airport runway to accommodate long range aircraft and facilitate international flights, as part of planned upgrades to the airport.

Puckapunyal Military Area Mid Term Refresh

This \$45.8 million project will address condition, capacity and compliance issues with existing infrastructure at the Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria including remediating and upgrading engineering services and constructing a new storage facility. This project is scheduled to commence construction by mid 2021 for completion in late 2022. The appointed contractor will be required to prepare and implement an LCIP, which details its approach to maximising opportunities for local subcontractors to be involved in the works.

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

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

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

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

- Tranche One will take place in 2021-22 and is valued at \$31.7 million. Tranche One will deliver additional car parking, interim security accreditation works, site preparation for future works and the construction of a solar power farm.
- Tranche Two is expected to receive Parliamentary approval in early 2022. Tranche Two will deliver a collaboration facility, on-site accommodation and amenities, and an extension to the existing main operations building.

Current Initiatives

Current Capital Equipment Projects delivered in Regional areas in 2021-22

SEA 2400 – Hydrographic Data Collection Capability

Project SEA 2400 – Hydrographic Data Collection Capability includes the HydroScheme Industry Partnership Program (HIPP). The HIPP is a partnership with industry for delivery of the national hydrographic survey requirement to meet Defence's legislated responsibilities for the provision of hydrographic services within the Australian Area of Charting Responsibility. The HIPP was approved by the Australian Government in December 2019, with initial funding of \$154 million over five years from 2019-20. The first HIPP survey commenced in May 2020. The HIPP Initial Operational Capability is scheduled for 2021 with the first hydrographic survey conducted under the program incorporated in navigation products on 21 January 2021. COVID-19 travel restrictions have impacted the HIPP with additional survey areas to compensate and mitigate interstate mobilisation risk. Since the HIPP launch in February 2020, 13 hydrographic surveys have been contracted at \$36.8 million. Budgeted expenditure in 2021-22 of \$31.5 million for six to seven hydrographic surveys reflects the maturing of the program, and confidence in industry partners, with the issue of larger hydrographic survey tasks.

Protected Mobile Fires Project (LAND 8116)

Following an election commitment by the Australian Government in April 2019, the Government has allocated \$0.9 - \$1.3 billion over eight years for the acquisition of Protected Mobile Fires from 2020-21 to 2029-30, and work is planned to commence in Geelong, Victoria, before the end of 2022-23. The Government agreed to Defence's planned release of a single supplier limited tender to Hanwha Defense Australia in

August 2020. The outcomes of this approach to market are planned to be considered by the Government by 2022. The project will maximise Australian industry participation, creating regional employment opportunities, with details to be confirmed through the tendering process and contract negotiations. Benefits to Geelong, will include warehousing, transport, supply chain participation, maintenance, generation of a skilled Australian workforce and facilities construction.

Evolutionary Digital Ground Environment (EDGE)

In December 2020, the Australian Army invested \$31.9 million in the second phase of a defence communications proof-of-concept referred to as Command, Control Communications Enhanced Digital Ground Environment (C4 EDGE). C4 EDGE involves eighteen sovereign Australian companies designing and manufacturing a prototype mobile tactical communications system, informing future options for Defence projects. C4 EDGE reinforces the Government's commitment in the 2020 Force Structure Plan to build a resilient and internationally competitive defence sovereign industrial base and increase sovereign participation in future Integrated Investment Projects, such as Project Land 200 Phase 3 Battlefield Command System. C4 EDGE is scheduled to finish in December 2021, and will generate up to 57 technical and engineering jobs across six states and the Australian Capital Territory, with several companies located in regional areas, including Newcastle, New South Wales, Derwent Park, Tasmania and Toowoomba, Queensland. Outcomes from the C4 EDGE initiative will inform future opportunities for local design and manufacture of communications capabilities from across Australia.

Strategic Domestic Munitions Manufacturing

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.

Munitions Manufacturing Arrangement

NIOA Munitions (NIOA) and the Australian Government have signed a new 10-year contract establishing NIOA as a direct tenant to Defence alongside Thales Australia for part of the Benalla Munitions facility in Victoria, commencing 1 July 2020. NIOA has commercial arrangements with world leading munitions suppliers and plans to introduce and produce new munitions types for the ADF and for export. NIOA has announced it is planning to employ up to 100 new staff at Benalla over the life of the agreement.

Current Estate and Infrastructure Projects delivered in Regional areas in 2021-22

The Australian Government is investing approximately \$3.4 billion over four years from 2021-22 in estate and infrastructure projects as listed below. Defence estate and infrastructure investment is funded by the Defence Integrated Investment Program via Defence's existing annual appropriation. Approved regional projects include the following.

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

This \$1.5 billion project provided new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the Joint Strike Fighter at RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales, and RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory with support facilities and infrastructure at Defence Establishment Myambat, New South Wales. This project commenced construction in early 2015. The majority of the works are complete with the exception of final demolition works, which are scheduled for completion in mid 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$19.2 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$5.5 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

DEF101 Data Centre Upgrade

This \$131.5 million project is providing infrastructure to support and ensure ongoing communications capability at HMAS *Harman*, Australian Capital Territory, through expansion and fit out of existing facilities. This project commenced construction in mid 2020 and is scheduled for completion in early 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$76.6 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$25.7 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

RAAF Base Williamtown Redevelopment Stage 2

This \$274 million project is sustaining and improving the functionality and capability of RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales, including upgrading or replacing critical ageing infrastructure to meet future requirements. This project commenced construction in early 2016 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$19.8 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$5.1 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

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

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

Hunter Class Frigate Program Facilities (SEA 5000 Phase 1)

This \$918.8 million project is providing upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the new Hunter Class Frigates to replace the current Anzac Class Frigates at various locations including HMAS *Watson* and the Garden Island Defence Precinct, New South Wales; St Kilda and Osborne Naval Shipyard, South Australia and HMAS *Stirling* and Henderson Maritime Precinct, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2026. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$49.9 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$110.3 million.

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

This \$918.5 million project is providing berthing, training, maintenance, logistics, and support facilities to support the introduction into service of new OPVs at HMAS *Coonawarra* and RAAF Base Darwin, Northern Territory, HMAS *Cairns*, Queensland, HMAS *Stirling* and Henderson Maritime Precinct, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2026. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$16 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$120.2 million.

Maritime Operational Support Capability Facilities (SEA 1654 Phase 3)

This \$220.5 million project is providing new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the Supply Class Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment vessels at HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia, and Randwick Barracks and the Garden Island Defence Precinct, New South Wales. This project commenced construction in late 2018 and is scheduled for completion in mid 2024. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$39.8 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$21.5 million.

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

This \$1.2 billion program is addressing functional deficiencies, capacity constraints and non-compliances with facilities and infrastructure, and delivering airfield improvements at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory. This program of works

commenced construction in late 2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2027. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$71 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$123.7 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Armoured Fighting Vehicles Facilities Program Stage 1

Stage 1 of this program, at \$235.1 million, is providing fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure to support, sustain, and train Army personnel on, the next generation of Armoured Fighting Vehicles capability at Lavarack Barracks, Queensland; Edinburgh Defence Precinct, South Australia; and Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria. Stage 1 commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in mid 2023. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$35.9 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$87.3 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Point Wilson Waterside Infrastructure Remediation Project

This \$218.9 million project is remediating waterside infrastructure at Point Wilson, Victoria to enable the recommencement of bulk explosive ordnance importation operations. This project will refurbish the existing 2.4 kilometre jetty, and provide an entirely new wharf, amenities building, landside infrastructure and engineering services. This project commenced construction in early 2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$55.8 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$70.3 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

AIR555 Phase 1 Airborne Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Warfare Capability Facilities Works

This \$294.5 million project is providing fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction into service of the MC-55A Peregrine Airborne Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Electronic Warfare capability at RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia; RAAF Base Darwin, Northern Territory; RAAF Base Townsville, Queensland; and Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. This project commenced construction in late 2020 and is scheduled for completion in mid 2024. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$33.6 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$35.8 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

LAND 121 Phase 5B Facilities Project

This \$183.3 million project will provide fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure at various bases to support and sustain vehicles, modules, and trailers being procured through the Land 121 Vehicle Acquisition Program. The bases include Robertson Barracks, Northern Territory; Lavarack Barracks and Gallipoli Barracks, Queensland;

Derwent Barracks, Tasmania; Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria and Campbell Barracks, Western Australia. This project is scheduled to commence construction by mid-2021 and scheduled for completion in mid-2024. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$4.1 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$36.6 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Shoalwater Bay Training Area Remediation Project

This \$135.4 million project redeveloped the Shoalwater Bay Training Area, Queensland to support the introduction of amphibious capability, and ensure sustainability into the future through airfield, road and creek crossing upgrades, and new camp, field hospital infrastructure, and training facilities. This project commenced construction in early 2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$70.7 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$30 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Singleton Mid-Term Refresh

This \$42.2 million project is remediating trunk infrastructure, and delivering new and refurbished buildings for base support and logistics in the Singleton Military Area, New South Wales. This project commenced construction in late 2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$23.7 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$9.8 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Holsworthy Mid-Term Refresh

This \$29.5 million project is addressing power supply reliability issues, serviceability of high voltage infrastructure, and serviceability of training living-in-accommodation at Holsworthy Barracks, New South Wales. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in early 2023. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$9.7 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$13.4 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

SEA 1397 Phase 5D Nulka Assembly and Maintenance Facilities Project

This \$31.6 million project will construct new purpose-built facilities at Defence Estate Orchard Hills, New South Wales to assemble, maintain, test and store decoy capability. This project is scheduled to commence construction by mid-2021 for completion in early 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$6.2 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$17.6 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Larrakeyah Defence Precinct Redevelopment Program

This \$495.6 million program is upgrading critical base infrastructure, improving the working environment, delivering new facilities, and supporting future growth on the Larrakeyah Defence Precinct, Northern Territory. This program is also delivering a new wharf, fuel storage and refuelling capabilities to support Navy's major surface combatant ships operating in the north of Australia. This program of works commenced construction in late 2018 and is scheduled for completion in mid 2023. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$136.4 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$89.6 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Robertson Barracks Close Training Area

This \$7.6 million project is providing perimeter fencing, signage, fire break installations; clearing rubbish; and removing asbestos to ensure the Robertson Barracks Close Training Area, Northern Territory, is suitable for Defence use. This project commenced construction in mid-2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$5.7 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$1.4 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Mulwala Decommissioning and Demolition

This \$47.3 million project is decommissioning and demolishing 116 aged and contaminated redundant factory buildings at the Mulwala Propellant and Explosives Facility, New South Wales. This project is scheduled for completion in mid-2023. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

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

This \$29.6 million project is providing vehicle storage, workshop extension, heavy vehicle weighbridge, access gate automation, and remediation of vacated facilities to accept training modules at Borneo Barracks, Queensland to support deployable electronic warfare capabilities. This project commenced construction in mid-2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$12.3 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$9.5 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Puckapunyal Health and Wellbeing Centre

This \$39.8 million project will replace obsolete, unsafe and non-compliant training facilities with a new-fit-for purpose health and wellbeing centre at the Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria. This project is scheduled to commence construction by late 2021

for completion in early 2023. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$5 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$21.4 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Oakey Mid-Term Refresh

This \$31.3 million project will upgrade engineering services and demolish redundant buildings at Swartz Barracks, Queensland. This project is scheduled to commence construction by mid-2021 for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$3.1 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$11.9 million. This project will maximise opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Airfield Capital Works P0006 (Curtin, Tindal and Townsville)

This \$95.3 million project is providing major maintenance to aircraft pavements and airfield lighting at RAAF Bases Curtin Western Australia, Tindal Northern Territory and Townsville Queensland. This project commenced construction in early 2016 and is scheduled for completion in late 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$6 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$8 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

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

This \$50.7 million project is providing new facilities and infrastructure to support the mid-life upgrade of JORN capability, with priority works at the JORN Radar 3 Receive (Mount Everard) and Transmit (Harts Range) sites near Alice Springs, Northern Territory. Supplementary works are located at Murray Bridge Training Area in South Australia, and RAAF Learmonth and Kojarena in Western Australia. This project commenced construction in mid-2019 and is scheduled for completion in early 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$5.9 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$3.7 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Maritime Patrol Aircraft Replacement (AIR 7000 Phase 2B)

This \$792.6 million project is providing new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the P-8A aircraft at RAAF Base Edinburgh, SA, RAAF Base Townsville, Queensland, RAAF Base Pearce, Western Australia, and RAAF Base Darwin, Northern Territory, as well as additional explosive ordnance facilities at HMAS *Stirling*, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2016 and is scheduled for completion in late 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$114.1 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$75.3 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

HMAS Cerberus Redevelopment

This \$465.6 million project is upgrading engineering services, refurbishing living-in-accommodation, constructing a new logistics precinct, upgrading the School of Survivability and Ship Safety, upgrading the gym, refurbishing training facilities and galley, and demolishing redundant buildings at HMAS *Cerberus*, Victoria. This project commenced construction in early 2018 and is scheduled for completion in mid-2023. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$75.4 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$51.4 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

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

This \$409.9 million project provided facilities in support of replacement Air Traffic Management Surveillance, Command and Control Systems under AIR 5431 Phases 2 and 3, incorporating the replacement of aged and degraded Air Traffic Control Towers, at various bases. The bases included HMAS *Albatross*, RAAF Williamtown, New South Wales, RAAF Darwin and RAAF Tindal, Northern Territory, RAAF Amberley, Army Aviation Centre, Oakey and RAAF Townsville, Queensland, RAAF Woomera and RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia, RAAF East Sale, Victoria and RAAF Gingin and RAAF Pearce, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in mid-2016 with construction work at all bases complete excluding minor works at RAAF Base Amberley and HMAS *Albatross*, which are scheduled for completion in mid-2021. The staged demolition of redundant facilities is scheduled for completion in late 2024. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$19.2 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$7.9 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Battlefield Airlifter Facilities (AIR 8000 Phase 2)

This \$370.4 million project provided facilities at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland to accommodate and support the operation of the new C-27J Battlefield Airlifter aircraft. This project commenced construction in mid-2016 and the works are complete except for resolving minor defects, which are scheduled for completion by mid-2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$14.1 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$0.2 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

LAND 121 Stage 2A

This \$276.5 million project is providing facilities across bases to sustain the B-vehicle fleet in accordance with the Basis of Issue for Army, the Royal Australia Air Force, and Joint Logistics Command. The bases include RAAF Williamtown and Holsworthy Barracks, New South Wales, Robertson Barracks and RAAF Darwin, Northern Territory, Lavarack Barracks, Gallipoli Barracks, RAAF Townsville and RAAF Amberley, Queensland, RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia, Puckapunyal Training Area, Victoria,

and Campbell Barracks, Western Australia. These facilities will maintain (workshops and repair parts storage), support (fuel points, loading ramps, wash points and weighbridges), and sustain (shelters and hardstand) the LAND 121 vehicles. This project commenced construction in mid-2016 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$13.7 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$6.5 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Joint Health Command Garrison Facilities Upgrades

This \$212.5 million project is providing fit-for-purpose, contemporary Garrison Health Facilities around Australia. This project commenced construction in late 2018. The works are complete except for those at Robertson Barracks, Puckapunyal Training Area, Royal Military College, Russell Offices, RAAF Townsville, Simpson Barracks, and Gallipoli Barracks, which are progressively scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$68.5 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$11.7 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Airfield Capital Works P0007 (East Sale, Gingin and Oakey)

This \$149.0 million project is providing major maintenance to aircraft pavements and airfield lighting at RAAF Bases East Sale Victoria, Army Aviation Centre Oakey Queensland, which are both complete, and Gingin Western Australia. This project commenced construction in mid 2019 with the remaining works scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$27.2 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$9.9 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Naval Guided Weapons Maintenance Facilities Project

This \$95.5 million project is delivering new facilities at Defence Establishment Orchard Hills, New South Wales to enhance the maintenance of existing and new guided weapons. This project commenced construction in early 2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$48.1 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$1.4 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Defence High Performance Computing Centre

This \$68.8 million project is providing facilities to house high performance computing equipment as well as meeting, auditorium, and training facilities at RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia. This project commenced construction in late 2019 and is scheduled for completion by mid-2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$35.3 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$0.4 million. This project maximised

opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

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

This \$16.7 million project is providing new and refurbished facilities, including training and storage facilities at 14 bases to support Australian Defence Force CBRND activities. The bases include Majura Range and HMAS *Creswell*, Australian Capital Territory, Holsworthy Barracks, Kapooka Military Area, RAAF Base Wagga, New South Wales, Robertson Barracks, Northern Territory, Lavarack Barracks, Gallipoli Barracks, RAAF Amberley, Queensland, RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia, HMAS *Cerberus* and Dutton Air Weapons Range, Victoria, and HMAS Stirling and Bindoon Training Area, Western Australia. This project commenced construction in early 2021 and is scheduled for completion in early 2022. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$12.2 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$8.7 million. This project is maximising opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

RAAF Pearce – Upgrade of Potable Water

This \$7.5 million project is providing a compliant base-wide potable water system modification at RAAF Base Pearce, Western Australia, to address potable water supply and infrastructure issues that are critical to the ongoing operations of the base. This project commenced construction in early 2020 and is scheduled for completion in late 2021. The revised estimate for 2020-21 was \$3.6 million and the budget estimate for 2021-22 is \$0.1 million. This project maximised opportunities for local industry to be involved as subcontractors throughout the construction of the works.

Defence Base Service Contracts

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

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

In the 2020 calendar year, Defence, through its ten Base Services Contractors, engaged 1,862 Small and Medium Enterprises across Australia with expenditure totalling \$843 million. During the same period, 82 Indigenous businesses were engaged with total expenditure of \$163 million. In the 2020 calendar year, 832 businesses were engaged by the Base Services Contractors in regional areas across Australia with expenditure totalling \$310 million.

Current Communication Technology delivered in Regional areas in 2021-22

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. 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

Sustainment of the DEF799 Phase 1 capability is delivered through a number of arrangements with companies across regional and remote Australia. Approximately \$3.7 million was spent with Australian industry in 2020-21, of which a small but significant, percentage was for goods and services in regional and remote locations. Delays to procurement activities, primarily caused by COVID-19 travel restrictions, meant that the project could not engage local service providers in the manner originally intended. Approximately \$7 million is planned to be spent with Australian industry in 2021-22. This expenditure will include a locally engaged maintenance workforce in regional and remote locations across Australia.

Other

Tasmanian Defence and Maritime Innovation and Design Precinct

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

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

To date, \$3 million has been spent on the 2020-21 design and definition phase. In 2021-22, \$15 million has been budgeted for significant infrastructure upgrades and

capital works, with a further \$12 million in 2022-23 for further significant infrastructure and capital works.

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

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

Pentarch Industrial – New Ammunition Container Contract

Defence signed a six-year contract of up to \$15 million with Pentarch Industrial at the end of May 2020 for the supply of new and refurbished ammunition boxes.

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

Defence Economic Stimulus package

On 26 August 2020, the Australian Government announced a \$1 billion, two-year investment package to boost Australia's defence industry and support jobs across Australia. The Defence Economic Stimulus package was announced for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 financial years.

Given the scope and scale of the Defence Economic Stimulus package, many initiatives span the life of the package. Over the two financial years the redirected investment initiatives are providing additional opportunities to the Australian defence industry and support to an estimated 4,000 Australian jobs.

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:

- A \$300 million national estate works program that is helping to support the construction industry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on regional

areas (including bushfire affected regions) such as Jervis Bay and Eden, RAAF Bases East Sale, Pearce, Wagga and Amberley, the Albury Wodonga Military Area and Blamey Barracks.

- 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 is engaging ex-Qantas and Virgin technicians.
- Advancing approximately \$190 million of investment in approved infrastructure projects in the Northern Territory across Robertson Barracks, RAAF Base Darwin, Larrakeyah Defence Precinct and Delamere Air Weapons Range.
- Increased funding of \$110 million for Defence innovation, industry grants, skilling and micro credentialing and cyber training for defence industry.
- Accelerating important ADF capability development projects, targeting key manufacturing, construction and high-tech sectors, including:
 - 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 its Australian supply chain of more than 140 Australian companies.
- 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.
- Enhancing the employability of current and former ADF personnel and supporting the partners of ADF personnel who may be out of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is achieved through initiatives such as the Partner Employment Assistance Program (PEAP) which aims to assist eligible ADF partners to find employment. PEAP provides funding towards initiatives such as professional employment services and re-registration to improve employability. Eligibility criteria for this program has been temporarily expanded in response to COVID-19 so that partners of ADF members can access PEAP at any time during the posting cycle, rather than following a recent relocation.

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

COVID-19 Assist – March 2020 - Present

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

The scope and scale of Defence support is coordinated through Emergency Management Australia. Over 17,000 ADF personnel have so far deployed on Operation COVID-19 Assist. At its peak, more than 3,500 ADF personnel were supporting the Australian, State and Territory governments response to COVID-19.

In the 2021-22 financial year, ADF is supporting the Department of Health's Vaccine Operation Centre in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines to the staff and residents of aged and disability care facilities in regional and metropolitan Australia. This includes support to locations that may face unique pressures in terms of remoteness and difficulty in contracted solutions provided the necessary assistance.

In addition to supporting public health efforts, to support Australians and Australian businesses, Defence has modified existing and future Defence infrastructure contracts to allow for cost and time relief to businesses whose obligations are impacted by COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Defence COVID-19 Industry Support Cell (the Cell) has worked to strengthen the Defence and industry partnership, while also supporting the whole-of-government response to COVID-19. The Cell monitors and engages with industry to provide ongoing advice and guidance on safe business practices, supply-chain constraints and COVID-19-related industry proposals and support. Additionally, it advises on Defence capability impacts of State and Territory governments work and travel restrictions. As part of the ongoing support, from

March 2020 to April 2021 Defence has paid more than \$24.3 billion of invoices earlier than the contracted payment terms and ensured cash flow to Australian small business contractors and into the Australian economy.

Further to this, Defence initiated a Recovery Deed option that allowed Defence industry to continue to safely meet contractual obligations while dealing with the uncertainty caused by disruptions to domestic and international travel, supply chains and local restrictions. The Deed was in effect from March to December 2020 and focused contractors on performance rather than having to consider whether they needed to

invoke contractual mechanisms to seek relief. Contractors who signed the Recovery Deed provided recovery plans that were used to negotiate contract changes.

Defence is currently assessing the cost and schedule impact of COVID-19 on procurement, and will respond as the situation demands.

Support to the economy is one of four lines of effort set out in the Defence COVID-19 Strategy which outlines the key ways Defence is working to support the whole-of-government response to COVID-19. Defence is working with contractors to engage local people who have been made redundant as a result of COVID-19. Since March 2020 when Defence COVID-19 Taskforce was established and the industry support cell was set up as a key part of Defence's support to the economy, more than 1,150 small-to-medium regional enterprises have been engaged under this approach. Companies across Australia have benefitted and come from a range of sectors, including 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 New South Wales.

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

Over the course of the pandemic, Defence industry has been reassured by the Australian Government's commitment to bring forward investment in Defence capability, and has continued to expand its operations, including the civil aviation sector. For example, Northrop Grumman Australia (NGA) employed 34 ex-airline staff to support the C-27J platform, of which 23 were former Qantas staff (comprising of 19 engineering and four technical officers) who are based in New South Wales. The other 11 employees were ex-Virgin maintainers and supported NGA with deeper maintenance activities in Amberley Queensland. Over the first half of 2021-22, seven ex-Qantas airline staff will continue providing engineering support to the C-27J platform. Airbus Australia Pacific employed nine staff from the airline industry, who are now supporting the MRH-90 sustainment platform. Airbus Australia Pacific also established a short-term contract with Burrana, a small to business in Brisbane that delivers airline entertainment systems, to engage eight engineers. This work was completed in November 2020. BAE Systems Australia employed 25 aviation technicians, including apprentices to support the Hawk Lead-In-Fighter and the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program at RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales. Following their training, 21 aviation technicians and logisticians will support the maintenance of the Australia's F-35 fleet while four workers are supporting the Hawk Lead in Fighter at BAE's facility.

Education, Skills and Employment

The Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio's purpose is to contribute to Australia's economic prosperity and social wellbeing by creating opportunities and driving better outcomes for people through education, skills and employment pathways. The Portfolio works to ensure Australians can experience the social wellbeing and economic benefits that quality education, training and employment provide.

The Portfolio works with other Australian Government entities, industry, business (including small business), state and territory governments, and a range of service providers to provide high quality policy advice and services for the benefit of all Australians. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the Department) supports its Ministers through policy advice and implementation of a range of programs that deliver benefits to Australians living in regional and rural communities.

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

As at 31 December 2020, the Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio employed 4,091 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,589 staff (88 per cent) were employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 443 staff (11 per cent) in other capital cities, and 59 staff (1 per cent) in regional areas.

New Initiatives

Early childhood education and care

Improving affordability and access to child care

The Government will provide \$1.7 billion through this Budget to increase support for families with children in child care. From 11 July 2022, the Government will increase the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) by 30 percentage points up to a maximum CCS rate of 95 per cent, for the second child and subsequent children aged five and under in centre-based child care, family day care, and outside school hours care. In addition, from 1 July 2022 the Government will remove the annual cap on the CCS, which is currently \$10,560 for each child. These measures will reduce out-of-pocket costs and support parental choice for families with children in child care, including those in regional and remote areas, as well as help to reduce the workforce disincentives faced by these families.

These measures build on the Government's 2018 *Jobs for Families Child Care Package*, with the Government investing record and growing funding in child care.

Investing in early childhood education

Building on its longstanding commitment to supporting access to preschool, including in regional and remote areas, the Government will make an ongoing contribution to preschool nationally by providing \$1.6 billion over four years and then \$589.0 million each year ongoing from 2025–26. The Australian Government will offer states and territories \$2 billion for a new preschool national partnership, covering the 2022 to 2025 preschool years. The new agreement will continue support for universal access to 15 hours of preschool each week (600 hours each year) for children attending preschool in the year before they start school. This will contribute to improving participation and better preparing children for school.

The Government will also provide \$28.7 million over four years from 2021–22 to improve preschool data collection and develop a new performance framework to support this reform.

Schools

Supporting Indigenous students from regional and remote Australia

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

Supporting Australia's teacher workforce

The Government will invest \$9.8 million over four years to improve the quality of teaching to lift school and student performance, including in regional, rural and remote areas, with a focus on current and emerging areas of need. This includes \$5.8 million for the Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection and \$4.0 million over four years to continue the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students. Ongoing investment for these programs will contribute to building a quality teaching evidence base and help to improve teacher workforce planning and outcomes.

Supporting students' personal and professional development

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

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

Higher education, research and international

Support for Australia’s international education sector

The Government will provide \$74. million from 2021–22 to support Australia’s international education sector which continues to be disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government is extending regulatory fee relief for education providers, beyond that provided in last year’s Higher Education Relief Support Package. Innovation funding for eligible independent English language and higher education providers to pivot to online and offshore education delivery, an extension of the FEE-HELP loan fee exemption to support non-university higher education providers, and an extra 5,000 short course places to be available in 2021–22 to non-university higher education providers.

Further support for this sector will also include revised cost recovery arrangements for registrations on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students. This was previously scheduled for introduction from 1 July 2021 and will now commence from 1 January 2022.

Cost recovery for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) will also be deferred by six months to 1 January 2022.

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

There will be further consultation with higher education and skills and training providers on TEQSA and ASQA’s revised cost recovery models.

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

Skills and training

Boosting skills development across Australia

Australians in regional areas will benefit from the Australian Government's measures to boost skills development throughout Australia.

Under the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform, to support the future growth and prosperity of the nation, the Australian, state, and territory governments have committed to work collaboratively on improvements to the vocational education and training (VET) system. A strong skills system is critical for Australia's long-term economic recovery.

In line with commitments, the Australian Government will continue to negotiate a new National Skills Agreement with the states and territories, to replace the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development.

The key priorities for the Government for a new National Skills Agreement include increasing investment and transparency under a new funding model; improving access to, and support for, Foundation Skills; improving VET data collection, use and analysis; and harmonising and modernising apprenticeships to boost completion rates, support businesses and improve labour mobility.

As part of the Australian Government's commitments under the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform, the Government will provide \$149.2 million over four years from 2021–22 to enhance the role of industry in the VET system through the establishment of new Industry Clusters. The clusters will ensure a strong, strategic industry voice, drive collaboration across sectors by breaking down silos, address strategic workforce challenges, and improve the speed to market of qualifications to meet evolving industry needs. Strengthening the role of industry in the VET system will mean qualifications are aligned to the skills that are in demand by employers, increase workforce productivity, and get more learners into jobs.

The Government will provide \$12.1 million to provide a more consistent approach to apprenticeships and traineeships and improve mobility of the skilled workforce. The measure will also support the development and implementation of systems to better connect individuals, businesses and industry to wage subsidy and apprenticeship incentives information.

These reforms will ensure VET is high quality and accessible and meets the current and future skills needs of employers and learners.

Extending and expanding the JobTrainer Fund

Regional Australians will benefit from the extension and expansion of the \$1.0 billion JobTrainer Fund, signed up to by all jurisdictions under the Heads of Agreement for

Skills Reform. The Government will provide an additional \$500.0 million in funding to be matched by state and territory governments. The enrolment period will be extended to 31 December 2022 and eligibility will be expanded to include additional select cohorts including aged care workers. This measure will deliver around 163,000 additional free or low-fee training places in areas of skills need, with around 33,000 of these places to support aged care skills needs and around 10,000 places for digital skills courses.

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

Increasing apprenticeship commencements

The Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements (BAC) program, announced in the 2020–21 Budget, provided a 50 per cent wage subsidy to support 100,000 new apprenticeships. Reflecting its success in supporting school leavers and job seekers, especially women, looking to upskill or reskill from across Australia, including those in regional Australia, the BAC program was fully subscribed within its first five months.

Building on this success, the Government will provide an additional \$2.7 billion over four years from 2020–21:

- \$1.2 billion to uncap the program and extend the wage subsidy period to 12 months from the date of commencement, as announced on 9 March 2021
- \$1.5 billion to further extend the BAC wage subsidy for an additional six months from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and support an evaluation of the program.

The measure will support apprenticeship and traineeship commencements as the economy continues to recover.

The Government will also provide \$2.6 million in 2021–22 for the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network to deliver 5,000 additional Gateway Services to women and provide in-training support services for women commencing in non-traditional trade occupations. These services ensure that prospective apprentices are matched with apprenticeships or traineeship pathways suited to their skills and are supported to undertake their training.

This builds on the 2020–21 Budget measure: *JobMaker Plan – boosting apprenticeships wage subsidy*.

Boosting foundational and digital skills

As part of the Australian Government’s commitment to providing stronger support for foundation skills under the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform, the Government will provide \$16.6 million to expand eligibility for, and uncap the number of hours job seekers are able to access within, the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE)

program. The Government will also provide \$3 million to expand the outreach role of the Reading Writing Hotline. The Government is also providing \$4.0 million over two years from 2021–22 to support projects to better incorporate digital skills training for job seekers in the SEE program. The measure will support more job seekers, including those in regional and remote areas, to improve their language, reading, writing, mathematics and digital skills to boost their employment prospects.

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

Supporting women's skills, training and career development

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

The Government will also reform the Mid-Career Checkpoint program to extend support to a larger target cohort, provide a capped \$3,000 training grant to participants, and extend the pilot to Victoria. The pilot period will also be extended by 12 months to 30 June 2022. The program provides free professional skills and career advice to Australians returning to work after a break to undertake caring responsibilities, with a strong focus on women aged 30 to 45 years, and is expected to support local labour market needs, including in regional areas.

Boosting youth skills

The Government will expand the Commonwealth Scholarships Program for Young Australians to enable an additional scholarship round providing up to 240 scholarships. These scholarships will support young people aged 15 to 24 years in ten disadvantaged regions across Australia to improve their skills and employment opportunities.

Better careers information for youth

Australians from regional areas will benefit from the \$7.6 million over two years in this Budget to extend the National Careers Institute's (NCI) 1800 CAREER Information Service, which supports young people aged 15 to 24 years, to 30 June 2023. Government funding will also extend and expand the NCI's Partnership Grants Program to provide partnership grants for projects that target the needs of young people. The NCI provides

careers information and support, to support informed decisions about education, training, and career pathways.

Employment

Supporting job seekers to return to employment

The Government is supporting economic recovery and jobs growth by fostering a stronger, more competitive, and resilient economy. A key element of the plan is supporting Australians, including those in regional Australia, back into jobs. This is particularly important in regional Australia which has tended to experience relatively higher unemployment and lower participation rates than major cities.

The Government will deliver the New Employment Services Model from 1 July 2022. This model will create a modern and sophisticated service, replacing jobactive and delivering an effective, efficient digital service supported by enhanced face-to-face servicing by providers where needed.

The new model will allow job-ready job seekers to self-manage their job search efforts and pathway to employment, allowing for increased investment in disadvantaged job seekers who need extra help to find a job through providing personal, tailored assistance delivered by providers. Safeguards will ensure job seekers are receiving servicing based on their needs.

For employers, including regional employers, the new model will provide better applicant matching and servicing based on employer needs, and will focus provider efforts on working with employers to support job seekers who need additional support to find and sustain employment. The Government is committed to delivering tailored support to meet the workforce needs of identified key industries and large employers, helping them connect to suitable job seekers.

The Government will invest \$80.8 million in the Digital Services Contact Centre as part of the new model. The Digital Services Contact Centre will continue to support job seekers in Digital Services to self-manage their way back to employment by providing information, technical support and case management support, and access to person-to-person support where needed.

The Government will also redesign and streamline self-employment and small business support under the new model. The Government will continue to provide free self-employment and small business support programs to job seekers, micro-business owners and veterans, including those in regional Australia. Self-employment and small business support will be simplified, and eligibility and places expanded to support the Government's priority to get Australians back into work through a business-led economic recovery.

Employers and employees in regional Australia will also benefit from the Government's \$15.6 million investment in 2021–22 to increase all wage subsidies available through *jobactive*, *Transition to Work*, and *ParentsNext* to \$10,000. This will increase the incentives for employers to hire eligible disadvantaged job seekers registered with employment services. Streamlining wage subsidies to \$10,000 will simplify arrangements for employers and help disadvantaged job seekers into jobs as the economy recovers.

Supporting youth employment

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

The Government is providing an additional \$481.2 million over four years to expand and strengthen the successful youth employment services program, *Transition to Work*, to be the dedicated youth employment service in the New Employment Services Model. *Transition to Work* will provide intensive, time-limited assistance to young people aged 15 to 24 years who are at risk of not transitioning into employment or further education. The service will continue to help disadvantaged young people to make positive transitions from school to work by promoting work experience and training participation and providing intensive assistance to young people experiencing multiple barriers to achieving successful labour market participation.

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

Providing additional support to job seekers

This Budget includes \$15.5 million over two years from 2020–21 to provide more people the opportunity to explore and start their own small business by providing an additional 1,000 places under the New Business Assistance with New Enterprise Incentive Scheme program and the Exploring Being My Own Boss Workshop program. This will assist people, including those in regional areas, to consider whether self-employment is the right path for them and provide additional small business assistance, training and mentoring.

The Government will also amend *jobactive* provider eligibility for outcome payments and provide \$7.9 million over three years from 2020–21 to incentivise *jobactive* providers to service job seekers referred from Online Employment Services and assist them into work as quickly as possible, minimising the risk of long-term unemployment.

Supporting workforce participation

The Government is providing a further \$2.6 million over three years from 2021–22 to extend the *Career Revive* program until 2023–24 and expand the program to support

women’s workforce participation. The measure will support an additional 60 regional and metropolitan businesses to develop action plans to attract and retain women returning to work after a career break.

Australians in all regions will benefit from the \$213.5 million investment in this Budget to expand the *Local Jobs Program* to all 51 employment regions around Australia, and extend the program until 30 June 2025. The *Local Jobs Program* is currently in place for 25 regions, and supports regions to coordinate employment and training solutions at a local level with a focus on reskilling, upskilling and employment. This measure will assist job seekers in the additional regions to return to work more quickly.

To further support job seekers across Australia to prepare for and find employment as part of the economic recovery, the Government is providing \$6.2 million to extend the *Jobs Fairs* program and deliver a combination of up to 26 physical and virtual *Jobs Fairs* across Australia between June 2021 and June 2022. Jobs Fairs help connect job seekers with employers, employment services providers and recruitment agencies and provide an opportunity for job seekers to learn about jobs, training and career options in their area.

The Budget includes \$1.6 million over two years from 2020–21 to support the delivery of AgMove (*Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job* for short-term agricultural work). The Government has also extended eligibility to 17-year-old school leavers and modified eligibility requirements to accommodate shorter harvest seasons and encourage more job seekers to give agricultural work a try.

Strengthening mutual obligations

The Government will support the entry of job seekers into employment and reduce the likelihood of long-term reliance on unemployment benefits. The Government will provide \$213 million to strengthen the mutual obligations requirements of job seekers in receipt of unemployment payments, improve detection of non-compliance with requirements, and improve *jobactive* provider performance in supporting job seekers to find employment.

The Government will also extend the temporary Earn and/or Learn measure for 6 months from 31 December 2021 to 30 June 2022 to align with the commencement of the *New Employment Services Model*. Earn and/or Learn was introduced on 28 September 2020 as part of the Government’s response to COVID-19 and provides job seekers, including those in regional areas, with more flexibility to count study or training towards their mutual obligations, helping them to become more competitive as the economy recovers.

Current Initiatives

Early childhood and child care

Child Care Subsidy

The Government is investing record and growing funding in child care. This Budget includes around \$10 billion in 2021–22 for the child care system, including expected Child Care Subsidy (CCS) spending of \$9.5 billion in 2021–22.

The CCS is designed to ensure greater support for those families who earn the least and work the most. Support for rural and remote families is an important feature of the payment.

The Child Care Safety Net aims to give the most vulnerable children a strong start and includes specific funding through the Community Child Care Fund to assist vulnerable or disadvantaged families and communities. From July 2021, enhancements to Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) will improve access to child care for vulnerable and disadvantaged families, through making more time available for decisions on assistance to be made without impacting families' ACCS entitlements, extending the length of ACCS determinations for children on long term protection orders, and allowing the use of provider eligible enrolments for children in foster care.

The Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) program is delivering a total of \$328 million over five years to around 980 services, of which \$224 million has been allocated to more than 480 services in regional and remote areas. This represents almost 70 per cent of the allocation to all services. The \$328 million comprises CCCF Open Competitive (\$119 million) and CCCF Restricted Non Competitive (\$209 million).

The Government allocated nearly \$3 billion to support early childhood education and care services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department continues to carefully monitor the situation and has tools in place to target assistance in regional and rural areas if required. These include making local area emergency declarations and providing targeted financial support payments, available to respond proportionately to support families and services affected by future lockdowns or restrictions.

Schools

Schools funding

As at the 2021–22 Budget, the Government will provide \$24.1 billion in 2021–22 and \$315.2 billion from 2018–2029 under the Government's Quality Schools Package for recurrent funding to Australian schools distributed on the basis of need. The Student Resource Standard includes a loading which provides additional funding for schools in regional and remote locations. This is in recognition of the additional costs of educating students in regional and remote schools. The loading is based on a school's Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia score, a measure of the remoteness of

accessibility of every location in Australia, as a percentage of the Student Resource Standard funding amount and the school's size loading.

Additional support for Northern Territory schools

The Government is providing an additional \$78.5 million in transition support for Northern Territory government schools from 2018 to 2027 to support school education. The additional funding is intended to support students in the Northern Territory to achieve their best, in recognition of the greater challenges they face in comparison to other states and territories.

Good to Great Schools Pilot Program

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

Arts education

As announced in the 2019–20 Budget, the Government is investing in three school-based arts education programs: Bell Shakespeare's National Education Program, the Song Room's Transformational Learning through Creativity, and the Education Music Tour Bus Foundation's F.A.M.E project (previously known as the Mobile Music Education Program). Together, the three programs cover all five elements of the Arts learning area of the Australian Curriculum – music, drama, dance, visual arts and media arts – and will promote student engagement and support students' social and emotional wellbeing.

This funding was expected to support an estimated 786,000 students and teachers in Australian schools and support delivery of these arts programs throughout Australia, with a focus on improving access to arts education for disadvantaged schools in regional and remote areas or low socio-economic areas.

Rural Inspire Initiative

The Government is providing \$2 million over three years from 2019–20 to 2021–22 to the Country Education Partnership's Rural Inspire Initiative to support young people living in rural communities to set their sights high and achieve their goals by developing leadership skills and knowledge. The initiative explores education challenges and opportunities facing rural youth and was announced in the 2019–20 *Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook*.

Teach for Australia Future Leaders Program – additional funding

The Government is providing \$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 commitment is being implemented by Teach for Australia through two initiatives:

- An extension of the High Achieving Teachers program for an additional cohort of 120 participants in regional, rural and low socioeconomic communities in 2022 (\$7.5 million).
- A new Future Leaders Program pilot to provide innovative training and development to aspiring leaders in regional, rural and remote schools in 2021 and 2022 (\$7.5 million).

Higher education, research and international

More job-ready graduates and support for regional Australia

Announced in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, the Job-ready Graduates Package 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, and stronger links with industry, as well as improved transparency and accountability for the higher education sector.

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

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

- \$175.3 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.
- \$146 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 CSP at a higher education provider.
- \$0.7 million over four years from 2019–20 to gain access to Fares Allowance so eligible students can visit their homes and families more often.
- 21 million over four years from 2020–21 (and \$76.4 million over 10 years to 2030–31) to strengthen the Regional University Centres program by establishing a central support network, evaluation program and additional centres throughout

regional Australia. This builds on the \$15 million over four years from 2019–20 for additional Regional University Centres, announced in the 2019–20 MYEFO.

- \$7.1 million over four years from 2020–21 (and \$1.8 million each year ongoing) to create a new Regional Partnerships Project Pool to support regional higher education outreach projects. The Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program has also been refocused to provide more support to Indigenous students and students from regional and remote areas.
- \$48.8 million over four years from 2020–21 (and \$195.4 million to 2030–31) to establish new partnerships between regional universities and other higher education providers or industry to undertake innovative research projects.
- \$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.

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

The measures commenced 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. The funding for this is a percentage increase on non-medical bachelor funding, based on the proportion of students at campuses in regional, high-growth metropolitan and low-growth metropolitan areas. Funding increases each year by 3.5 per cent for regional campuses, 2.5 per cent for campuses located in high-growth metropolitan areas, and 1 per cent for campuses located in low-growth metropolitan areas.
- Greater flexibility for universities to determine their allocation of CSPs to increase options and pathways for students to higher education.
- Fairly sharing the costs of higher education between students and taxpayers, with course fees better aligned to teaching costs and lower student contributions in priority areas such as science, teaching, nursing, agriculture and mathematics.
- \$800 million over four years from 2020–21 (and \$239.9 million per year ongoing) to establish a National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund to increase partnerships between universities and industry to ensure more students gain industry experiences and job ready skills.

- Consolidating funding from existing programs to establish the Indigenous, Regional and Low SES Attainment Fund, which will encourage universities to improve higher education attainment among regional, Indigenous and low-socioeconomic status students.
- Reducing the FEE-HELP loan fee for students from 25 per cent to 20 per cent to align with loan fee costs in the vocational education and training sector.
- Revised indexation for the CGS 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.

In the 2020–21 Budget, the Government announced it was providing \$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 benefitting students and universities in regional areas 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.
- \$251.8 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 CSP 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 FEE-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.

- 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 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.

Central Coast Health and Wellbeing Precinct

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

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

Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships program has provided four rounds of scholarships since 2018 to support 3,181 students from regional and remote Australia to study undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational education courses from Certificate IV to PhD level. The scholarships are valued at up to \$18,000 each and assist scholarship recipients with the costs of study for the duration of their course. A further \$500 is available to scholarship recipients to support an internship. Round five of this program includes 700 scholarships to be awarded for study commencing in 2021.

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

Creative Arts scholarships

Since the 2020–21 Budget, the Government has announced \$1 million for 50 Creative Arts scholarships in 2021 valued at up to \$18,000 each. The scholarships are for students from regional and remote areas undertaking bachelor level creative arts

qualifications. The scholarships build on the Government's \$250 million Creative Economy JobMaker program.

Promoting regional study – Destination Australia Program

Announced in the 2019–20 Budget, the Government will build diversity in Australia's international education sector and support students' access to study in the regions through the Destination Australia Program. This incentive will offer scholarships worth up to \$15,000 per student to incentivise both domestic and international students to study in regional Australia.

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

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

The 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.

General Sir John Monash Foundation

Announced in the 2019–20 *Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, the Government provided \$10 million in 2019–20 to the General Sir John Monash Foundation to establish the Bob Hawke John Monash Scholarship and the Tim Fischer John Monash Scholarship programs. Scholarships 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 Government will provide \$2.4 million over four years from 2019–20 to extend the removal of HELP debt for teachers working in very remote locations of Australia to include early childhood teachers. From 2019, HELP debts for early childhood teachers will be extinguished after four years of employment in very remote locations of Australia. Additionally, indexation on HELP debt will no longer accrue for early childhood teachers while working in these locations.

This measure was announced in the 2019–20 MYEFO and builds on the 2019–20 Budget measure 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 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.

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.

The Government helped businesses keep apprentices and trainees employed through the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy, which has supported employers to keep 129,502 apprentices and trainees in employment as at 29 April 2021.

In the 2020–21 Budget, the Government introduced a 50 per cent wage subsidy for all businesses who take on new apprentices from 5 October 2020. At that time, the Government provided \$1.2 billion for the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidy. This subsidy was available for up to 100,000 new apprentices and paid 50 per cent of wages paid between 5 October 2020 to 30 September 2021, up to \$7,000 per quarter.

The Government’s \$1 billion JobTrainer Fund, announced in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, was jointly established with states and territories, with the Australian Government contributing \$500 million to provide around 300,000 Australians with access to free, or low fee, training places in areas of skills need.

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. This initiative to trial new place-based support for adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills training in remote communities has been extended by 12 months to 30 June 2023.

The Government is providing \$29.6 million for the National Careers Institute (NCI) to support ongoing work. The NCI will provide people with access to personalised, authoritative and accurate careers information to enable them to actively manage their career pathways irrespective of their age or career stage. The NCI will also promote partnerships between industry and education and training providers through activities such as its Partnerships Grant Program.

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

Energising Tasmania

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

Training is available in project and resource management, civil construction, water industry operations, and engineering. Individuals are also eligible for up to \$1000 per person to cover the costs of non-tuition costs and charges, such as books and materials and student amenity fees, as required by the course.

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

Industry Training Hubs

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

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

Training Hubs have been established in: Burnie, Tasmania; Maryborough and Townsville, Queensland; Port Pirie, South Australia; and Shepparton, Victoria. Further Training Hubs will be established in 2021 in Grafton and Gosford, New South Wales; Wanneroo and Armadale, Western Australia; and Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

Commonwealth Scholarships Program for Young Australians

As part of the 2019–20 Budget, the Commonwealth Scholarships Program for Young Australians will provide up to 400 scholarships to support young Australians in regions experiencing high youth unemployment, low rates of economic growth, and with low adaptive capacity. The Government is investing \$8.2 million over three years from 2019–20 in scholarships intended to assist young people into VET with strong pathways to jobs in areas of skills need. Scholarships are available in the same ten regions as the Industry Training Hubs.

Australian Apprentice Wage Subsidy Trial – expansion

Announced in the 2019–20 MYEFO, the Government is providing \$60 million over four years from 2019–20 to expand the successful Australian Apprentice Wage Subsidy Trial bringing to a total of \$120 million in support for small businesses across rural and regional Australia.

With this expansion the trial is benefitting up to 3,260 apprentices undertaking full-time apprenticeships at the Certificate III and IV levels in rural and regional areas, and in areas of skills need as identified by the National Skills Needs List.

Employment

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, upskill, reskill and enjoy fulfilling careers. This forms an essential element of the Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and social and economic recovery.

Supporting stronger employment outcomes

Announced in the 2020–21 Budget, the Government is providing funding to support Australia’s transition to a New Employment Services Model from July 2022. The Government is providing \$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 job-ready job seekers to manage their job search requirements online and allow more resources to be directed to providing personal, tailored support 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 is also being 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 include those in identified areas of skills needs, including subsidised training in the vocational education and training system, and courses delivered under the JobTrainer Fund as these become available. Job seekers enrolled in eligible courses can have their job search mutual obligation requirement reduced to take their study or training into account.

Supporting young job seekers

To support young people to connect with employment and skills opportunities, including in regional areas, the 2020–21 Budget included \$21.9 million over four 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 provided funding through the 2020–21 Budget to support people to relocate for ongoing work or to relocate to a regional area to take up agricultural work, in addition to 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. 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 measures to support regional employment

Other measures currently supporting stronger regional employment outcomes included in the 2020–21 Budget are:

- 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 in 2020–21 and 2021–22 to better support people to start their own business, including in regional areas. The *New Business Assistance with New Enterprise Incentive Scheme program* eligibility has been expanded to people undertaking part-time work, study and/or with caring responsibilities. Existing micro-businesses impacted by COVID-19 can receive assistance until 30 June 2022 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, in the July 2020 *Economic and Fiscal Update* as part of the Government's COVID-19 response, to support job seekers affected by the pandemic, including:

- \$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.

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 emergence of COVID-19 has caused significant disruptions to people, to health systems and economies around the world. DFAT continues to assist whole-of-government responses during the COVID-19 pandemic and is undertaking the largest and most complex consular response in Australia's history to help Australians to return. Australia is relying heavily on DFAT's foreign affairs, trade and development capabilities to protect and promote Australia's national interests during these crises. The Portfolio is supporting COVID-19 vaccine access and roll out in our immediate region, the Pacific and Southeast Asia, helping to purchase and safely distribute COVID-19 vaccines.

The Australian Government, including through Australia's embassies, high commissions and consulates around the world, continue to work with airlines and other governments to help Australians, to return on scheduled and facilitated 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. The Portfolio has continued to work through all channels to reduce barriers to trade for Australian exporters and importers; and to assist businesses in regional areas to pursue commercial opportunities overseas. Through EFA, the Portfolio provides financial expertise and solutions to help regional businesses take advantage of overseas export and investment opportunities. The Portfolio also develops marketing campaigns to attract tourists to Australia, including into regional areas.

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

Drawing on market insights from the DFAT global network, DFAT has commenced delivery, in partnership with the Export Council of Australia, of a pilot six-part digital Global Market Insights seminar series to promote market expansion and diversification opportunities to businesses, including regional businesses, with 636 participants in the first 3 seminars in the series, 37 per cent from regional Australia

As a further contribution to Australia's economic recovery, DFAT has launched a pilot capacity-building program in partnership with the Regional Australia Institute for economic development officers in local government areas across regional Australia, focussing on bringing the benefits of international trade, foreign direct investment and international tourism to regional Australia.

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. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has 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. Australia reshaped its development program to meet the profoundly changed needs of the region, including pivoting existing investments to respond to COVID-19. A safe, healthy and prosperous region is firmly in Australia's national interest and will provide flow-on benefits to regional Australia.

The Portfolio's efforts to support rural and regional Australia, through our engagement with the Pacific, is most visible through access to a reliable and productive workforce through the Pacific Labour Scheme and the Seasonal Worker Programme (administered by Department of Education, Skills and Employment). Faced with COVID-19 and border closures, which presented unprecedented challenges to labour mobility, the Portfolio has dedicated significant resources to ensuring Pacific workers have been able to enter every state and territory across Australia (except for the Australian Capital Territory) in support of critical industries including agriculture, horticulture, tourism and aged care in rural and regional locations.

The Portfolio also employs a significant number of contracted staff in regional areas, where they work alongside staff employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* to understand local issues and support the needs of local communities and businesses, including through the TradeStart program accessible at <https://www.austrade.gov.au/Australian/How-Austrade-can-help/Trade-services/TradeStart>.

As at 31 December 2020, the Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio employed 4,520 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,470 staff (77 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 189 staff (4 per cent) in other capital cities. The Portfolio also employs 861 staff overseas as at 31 December 2020.

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 is based in Hobart and Austrade has offices in Wollongong and Newcastle.

New Initiatives

Strengthening our engagement in the World Trade Organization

The multilateral rules-based trading system, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core, is critical for the next stage of our COVID-19 pandemic economic recovery and future prosperity. The Government is boosting its resources to support Australia's engagement in the WTO. To ensure the system continues to serve Australian interests, particularly for producers and exporters in regional Australia.

New resources will also support Australia's continued use of the WTO's dispute settlement system to address trade disagreements when they arise, so that Australian businesses can compete fairly in markets around the world. Enforcing existing and new rules in the WTO will help support businesses in regional areas that rely on a stable, predictable rules-based system for global trade.

Improving Australia's Trade Diversification

The Government will provide funding to work with Australian businesses wanting to expand and diversify their markets, and maximise opportunities for exporters in regional Australia. DFAT will coordinate a whole-of-government effort, working closely with Austrade.

DFAT is focused on keeping global trade markets open and functioning including through the WTO, G20 and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. The Government is persistent in securing an edge for our regional exporters through our expanding network of FTAs. International trade and investment are central to regional Australia's prosperity and our recovery from the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Agri-Business Expansion Initiative

The Agri-Business Expansion Initiative (ABEI) is a targeted measure to help Australian farming, forestry and fishing exporters expand and diversify their export markets and support agri-food sectors that have been most impacted by trade disruptions in 2020. The Government announced the \$72.7 million package on 23 December 2020, to be delivered over 2 and a half years from 1 January 2021.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Simplified Trade System

The Government will invest \$37.4 million between 2021-22 and 2024-25, including \$19.9 million for Austrade, to progress implementation of the Simplified Trade System (STS) agenda. An STS Implementation Taskforce will be established to lead a review and reforms of Australia's trade and border regulations and supporting information and communication technology systems. The STS reform agenda will have a positive impact

on regional Australia by reducing trade and border related regulatory costs, and facilitating trade. Many Australian traders are based in regional Australia, especially food exporters.

Reimagining the Visitor Economy Expert Panel

The Government has established the Reimagining the Visitor Economy Expert Panel which will help chart a course for sustainable long-term growth of the Australian visitor economy after the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be led by the Hon Martin Ferguson AO. Over the next six months the Panel will conduct extensive stakeholder consultations on what industry and governments can do to position the visitor economy for success over the next ten years. The Panel will provide advice on the actions needed to ensure Australia maintains a competitive visitor economy, informing development of the next ten-year strategy for the visitor economy, which encompasses domestic and international tourism, including international students, business and leisure travellers, business and major events, and short-term overseas workers, as well as associated industries such as hospitality, aviation, and accommodation.

Current Initiatives

Export Market Development Grants

The Government will invest \$157.9 million in 2021-22 and \$137.9 million in 2022-23 in the Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) scheme. The EMDG is the key Australian Government financial assistance scheme for exporters, operating since 1974. Administered by Austrade, it provides financial assistance to aspiring and growing small to medium-sized exporters for marketing expenses related to promoting their Australian products offshore. Claimants are able to access up to eight years of assistance. Austrade's TradeStart network, which delivers services through local and state governments, industry organisations and business chambers throughout Australia, supports access to EMDG. TradeStart Advisers work with a broad range of exporters and many Advisers are located in regional Australia.

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

The EMDG scheme is being reformed to reorient it to a more traditional grants program with upfront funding certainty provided to eligible SME applicants through two to three year funding agreements. Eligible small medium enterprise exporters will be able to apply for grants when they are exporting for the first time, when they are expanding,

and when they are making a strategic shift in their export activities, including to diversify into new markets. The program is also being simplified and streamlined to reduce the regulatory burden on SME exporters. The new EMDG scheme will commence on 1 July 2021.

Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

The Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA) entered into force on 5 July 2020. The IA-CEPA secures preferential access for Australian exporters for a range of key agricultural goods. For example, cattle producers in Northern Australia are benefitting from reduced tariffs on live cattle and beef. Under IA-CEPA, agricultural products—including mandarins from Queensland and other citrus from the Riverina—have improved access into the Indonesian market and reduced tariffs.

The Government has committed \$40 million over five years from 2021 for an economic cooperation program supporting IA-CEPA implementation. This will support linkages between Australia’s agriculture, services and advanced manufacturing sectors to better position Australian businesses to supply the rapidly growing Indonesian consumer market. For instance, the program supports grain growers across Australia, including those in regional Western Australia, through a grains partnership between Australia and Indonesia.

Pacific Labour Mobility

Pacific labour mobility, and the contribution of Pacific workers to Australian regional and rural industry, remains a high priority issue for the Government. This is reflected in the high level of interest and agreement on Pacific labour initiatives by the National Cabinet over the past 12 months. 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 Australian Government has confirmed these arrangements will remain in place until April 2022 in recognition of the ongoing impact of border closures and lack of flight connectivity across the Pacific region. Following an August 2020 National Cabinet decision to re-start recruitment through these Pacific labour mobility programs, more than 4000 Pacific workers have arrived in Australia. 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) commenced in late 2020 and delivered sustained benefits to the region and support for long-term growth. DFAT is providing support in readiness for Pacific island countries to ratify PACER Plus.

Supporting Australia’s Exhibiting Zoos and Aquariums

Through the Supporting Australia’s *Exhibiting Zoos and Aquariums Program*, the Government announced \$94.6 million 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 in place to limit the spread of COVID-19. Of the 140 eligible zoos and aquariums under the program, 113 are regional-based businesses (outside the metro regions of Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane). As at April 2021, approximately \$45 million had been paid out to assist businesses with fixed operational costs associated with caring for animals, and helping zoos and aquariums remain viable and ready to welcome tourists when restrictions are eased. On 11 March 2021, the Government announced an extension to the Program for a further six months to September 2021.

National Tourism Icons Program

The National Tourism Icons Program is a \$50 million 2019 election commitment for five regional infrastructure projects. In Queensland, \$8 million is being provided for the Wangetti Trail, in New South Wales \$7.5 million for the Northern Rivers Rail Trail, in Western Australia \$17.2 million for Rottnest Island, in Victoria \$10.1 million for Sovereign Hill and in Tasmania \$7.2 million for Freycinet National Park. The funding to develop these iconic experiences will provide a catalyst to drive international and domestic tourism to regional Australia and boost local communities by creating jobs and diversifying regional economies. All projects are tracking well and are due for completion by June 2022.

Recovery for Regional Tourism

The Government has invested \$50 million over two years from 2020-21 through the Recovery for Regional Tourism package to assist nine Australian regions that are most reliant on international visitors.

This program will help businesses and regions heavily reliant on international tourism to create and retain jobs by driving visitation, increasing demand and improving product diversity to attract visitors. The assistance delivered under this program will help regions make the most of the opportunities presented by the domestic tourism market and also help ensure there is a vibrant, internationally-focused tourism industry in place when international visitors return. The Government is working closely with State and Territory governments and local tourism authorities to design packages tailored to the needs, visitor demographic and geography of the region.

International Freight Assistance Mechanism

The Australian Government has committed a total of \$781.7 million to 30 September 2021 to keep global air links open and reconnect supply chains by maintaining international airfreight routes and flights in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this, the Government is providing an additional \$112.8 million to extend the *International Freight Assistance Mechanism* (IFAM) from 30 June 2021 to

30 September 2021 as businesses continue to adjust to the ongoing effects of the pandemic and transition to a recalibrated international trading environment.

As an island nation, it is essential that Australia maintains air connectivity to key markets. As at 14 March 2021 IFAM has assisted the movement of perishable goods, including salmon, beef, lamb, pork, live lobsters and fish, native flowers, dairy products and various fruit and vegetables to 66 international locations in Asia, the Americas and Europe. IFAM also helps secure the import of equipment and goods critical to Australia's national interest and COVID-19 response, and is assisting in the logistical planning required for vaccine production and distribution. Over 27 tonnes of products have been imported under the national interest objectives of IFAM, including: ventilators, personal protective equipment, input supplies for mask and ventilator manufacture, infrared thermometers, critical medicines and blood products, radioactive medicines, reagents for genomic testing, live mice for COVID-19 vaccine research.

The IFAM supports regions reliant on international airfreight for perishable, time dependant, agricultural and seafood products by keeping broken air links open. Some examples include producers of:

- tropical rock lobsters in Cairns and broccoli in Gatton, Queensland
- oysters in Pambula and tuna in Ulladulla, New South Wales
- asparagus in Koo Wee Rup and meat in Warrnambool, Victoria
- abalone in Port Lincoln and brussels sprouts in Mount Barker, Nairne, and Langhorne Creek, South Australia
- meat in Tammin and rock lobster in Geraldton and Cervantes, Western Australia
- mangos in Northern Territory
- dairy in King Island and meat in Cressy, Tasmania.

Tourism Bushfire Recovery Package

The Government's \$76 million *Tourism Bushfire Recovery Package*, announced on 19 January 2020, included \$71 million 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

repositioned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on driving domestic recovery.

From a domestic perspective, Tourism Australia continues to roll out new bursts of the 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. The campaign continues 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 the COVID-19 pandemic. Campaign activity features several regional destinations and icons, such as Uluru, and the Great Barrier Reef. Tourism Australia's international activity also features 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. In 2020-21, 148 projects were approved with funding agreements in place to a total value of \$8.9 million. Nine projects are complete with the remainder scheduled for 2021-22. All projects funded through the Program are located in regional Australia. Applications for grants are closed and the Program will finish on 30 June 2022.

National Experience Content Initiative

Tourism Australia has launched the \$12 million *National Experience Content Initiative* (NECI) aimed at supporting tourism businesses across Australia in their recovery and driving increased visitation by helping them to better market their experiences and attractions.

The NECI will provide a suite of new visual imagery for up to 1,800 tourism experiences from around 57 regions across Australia to ensure that operator's marketing materials and online product listings stand out in search results and are booked more often by domestic and international travellers.

Health

The health and wellbeing of Australians living in regional, remote and very remote Australia is a priority for the Australian Government. The 2021-22 Federal Budget builds on existing health workforce and training programs and reforms to secure jobs, invest in key health sectors and advance service system innovations identified through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australians, no matter where they live, deserve access to high quality health care services. The Australian Government will contribute \$800.3 million to build the rural health, mental health, aged care and disability care workforce. Delivering more doctors, nurses and allied health workers outside of our capital cities and into rural, regional and remote areas is a focus to ensure equity of access for all Australians. This continues core reforms under the 10 year \$550 million *Stronger Rural Health Strategy 2018-19*, which has already seen an increase of more than 700 additional doctors and 700 additional nurses in regional Australian communities.

For the first time the Government will provide \$65.8 million in additional financial incentives and support to rural-based registrars and doctors through increased Rural Bulk Billing Incentive payments based on remoteness. Scaling the Rural Bulk Billing Incentive will better recognise that doctors in rural and remote areas face higher operating costs, smaller patient populations, increased complexity in patient care, and carry a great burden of responsibility for the healthcare needs of people living in these communities.

The Government continues to build and expand the rural training pathway by investing \$12.4 million through the new John Flynn Prevocational Doctor Training Program to expand training rotations in rural general practice. Prevocational doctors will be exposed to primary care settings earlier in their medical training which will support the rural medical workforce and improve access to medical services for residents in rural, regional and remote communities.

The Government is investing \$2.2 million over five years to rural and remote communities to develop and trial innovative approaches to alleviate ongoing workforce shortages in a way that recognises local knowledge and opportunities to improve health outcomes. This will allow innovative approaches across several towns in a region, and support multidisciplinary care delivered through hospitals, primary care, aged care and disability care.

To support allied health professionals to work in rural areas the Government will invest \$9.6 million to expand the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway. Recognising the varied nature of rural health, the Pathway will better equip allied health professionals to deliver a broad range of care based on community needs and improve capabilities to manage complex patients in rural healthcare settings. To recognise the role of allied

health care within primary care, and support allied health professionals to participate in case conferencing, the Government is providing \$14.2 million to support multidisciplinary care for patients. The Government remains committed to delivering the Rural Generalist Pathway and will develop a new streamlined program expand the scope of existing programs to support rural generalist GPs (General Practitioners), vocationally registered GPs and registrars to maintain their range of advanced skills and encourage practice in rural and remote communities.

Initiatives to support mental health and suicide prevention continue to be a key priority of the Government. The 2021-22 Federal Budget will increase the Government's already significant support for mental health, responding to the recent reports of the Productivity Commission and the National Suicide Prevention Advisor. It includes \$79.0 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health national crisis services and support, \$111.2 million to ensure all Australians, including those in regional, rural and remote areas, have greater access and choice in engaging with high quality, free and low cost digital mental health services, and \$58.8 million to build and strengthen the mental health workforce with initiatives focusing on regional and rural Australia.

The Government's response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and safety includes a comprehensive reform of the aged care sector creating a culture underpinned by the principles of respect, care and dignity by placing individuals at the centre – empowering senior Australians to have more control over their care and services as they age. The 2021-22 Federal Budget will commit \$17.7 billion over five years from 2020-21 to set the path for reform in five critical areas including in-home care, residential aged care quality and safety, residential aged care provider sustainability, workforce and governance. New investment will benefit regional and remote aged care providers and their clients \$668.4 million will be used to strengthen regional aged care governance, provide better connection to services, and enable equitable access to aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other special needs groups.

The Government is committed to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The 2021-22 Federal Budget commits significant funding to drive progress against this Agreement through improved mental health and wellbeing, suicide prevention, and better access to health and aged care services, to be designed and delivered in partnership with Indigenous Australians with a focus on regional and remote areas. This includes investment services to treat and prevent rheumatic heart disease and trachoma, and other targeted prevention activities. In addition to this, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) will be able to access specialist and allied health telehealth Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items to ensure continuity of care and chronic disease management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients.

The Government's health care response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine, has kept Australians in regional and remote locations safe and supported. It has also presented opportunities to innovate and trial potential health system reforms. The 2021-22 Budget will fast track elements of the *Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan* to be released for consultation in 2021-22. Specifically, the Government seeks to strengthen digital health, establish targeted support for diverse population groups, and maintain telehealth access for the community. Telehealth has improved responsiveness and access to quality primary health care particularly for population groups that experience barriers due to distance or mobility, such as rural and remote Australians, Indigenous Australians, people with disability and senior Australians.

As at 31 December 2020, the Health Portfolio employed 6,480 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 5,567 staff (86 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 908 staff (14 per cent) in other capital cities and 5 staff (0.08 per cent) in regional areas.

New Initiatives

COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments – Vaccine Roll-Out

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines into regional, rural and remote communities is a vital part of the Australian Government's vaccine strategy to protect our regional, rural and remote communities. To date, the Australian Government has committed more than \$7.2 billion to support to vaccine rollout.

The Australian Government also recognises advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation on who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19, or of serious illness if they contracted COVID-19, which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is why we are continuing to take expert advice on the best ways to protect our communities, especially those in rural, regional and remote Australia.

Vaccination locations have been established across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia.

To ensure accessible and quality services, vaccination providers in regional, rural and remote Australia include:

- hospital hubs
- General Practitioners (GPs)
- COVID-19 GP respiratory clinics (GPRCs)
- State and Territory vaccination clinics

- ACCHS
- the Royal Flying Doctor Service
- in-reach 'surge' vaccination teams.

Following the recalibration of the vaccine program, National Cabinet agreed that the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine could be used for all whole-of-community vaccination approaches in remote communities where the use of two vaccines is impractical, regardless of age cohorts. This will streamline vaccination of vulnerable people and communities by limiting the need to transfer workforce and relevant materials and assists with issues associated with distribution and access of two vaccines.

An additional vaccine workforce has been established by the Australian Government to support the delivery of Australia's COVID-19 Vaccination Program. The workforce will support and supplement existing services and assist in outreach in areas such as aged care, remote, and Indigenous communities working with existing providers. They have also partnered with States and Territories, peak organisations and other providers to assist in administering the vaccine to harder-to-reach populations.

Prioritising Mental Health – Strengthening Access to and Connection between Mental Health Services via Digital Means

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$111.2 million to support a range of initiatives to ensure all Australians, including those in regional, rural and remote areas, have greater access and choice in engaging with high quality, free and low cost digital mental health services. This includes continued funding support for digital mental health services, and additional funding in 2021-22 to help services manage increased demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019-20 bushfires. This measure will also support the development of a new national mental health platform and the implementation of the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards to improve the quality of digital mental health service provision, and protect service users.

Prioritising Mental Health – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health National Crisis Services and Support

The Australian Government is investing \$79.0 million over four years from 2021-22 to address the devastating and disproportionate impact of suicide and mental ill-health on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes preventive action designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and implementation of key initiatives under a renewed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy. Specific initiatives include:

- the establishment of regional suicide prevention networks

- the implementation of culturally-sensitive, co-designed aftercare services through regionally-based organisations, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations being preferred service providers
- the establishment of a culturally-appropriate 24/7 crisis line to be governed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- a review to examine the capacity of, and ways to strengthen, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector to deliver mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- funding to support the inclusion of people with lived experience in the co-design, implementation and evaluation of suicide prevention activity.

This measure will contribute to significant and sustained reduction of suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as we work towards zero as part of the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms (Target 14: people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing). It also responds to key recommendations of the National Suicide Prevention Adviser and the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into Mental Health.

Prioritising Mental Health – Building the Mental Health Workforce

The Australian Government is investing \$58.8 million over two years from 2021-22 to grow and upskill the mental health workforce in Australia. Ensuring an appropriately skilled and distributed mental health workforce is available to meet demand for mental health services is a key foundation of the Australian Government’s mental health reforms.

This measure includes specific initiatives to attract, train and retain skilled workers in the mental health workforce through promoting mental health as a career option, supporting professional collaboration, improving access to training, and providing more opportunities for training in non-acute settings. In particular, it includes specific initiatives to increase training places and support regional and remote training pathways for psychiatrists, support greater representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the mental health workforce by boosting the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme, and identifying practical approaches to boost the child mental health workforce, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Prioritising Mental Health - Enhancement and expansion of youth mental health services

The Australian Government is continuing to invest \$278.6 million over four years from 2021-22 in expanding and enhancing the national headspace network and other youth mental health services, including in partnership with State and Territory governments. This will address a number of gaps in the current delivery of youth mental health services to high needs groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander,

LGBTIQ+, and culturally and linguistically diverse young people. Further, the measure will contribute to addressing the 'missing middle' in mental health services and work to enhance the provision of a strengthened care continuum, increased clinical service capacity and a more stable mental health workforce.

Prioritising Mental Health – Ensuring Continuity of Psychosocial Support for Australians with Severe Mental Illness Not Supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme

The Australian Government is investing \$112.4 million over four years from 2021-22 for the continuation of psychosocial support services for people with a severe psychosocial disability who are not eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This includes a regional loading applied consistently across the psychosocial support program, in recognition of the higher costs of service delivery in regional, rural and remote communities. This is intended to incentivise service commissioning and improve service availability for people with severe mental illness living in these communities.

Strengthening Primary Care – Health Workforce Reform

In 2021-22, the Australian Government is focusing on improving investment in the health workforce with a broad reform package announced through the 2021-22 Budget. This is the next step in building on the Government's Stronger Rural Health Strategy announced in the 2018-19 Budget. It maintains the momentum of our reforms, streamlining and better connecting programs to create more cohesive and visible support for rural and remote health practitioners. The package provides a foundation for future data and evidenced based reform and investment across our programs that teach, train, incentivise and support health professionals – with a key focus on continuing to build our regional, rural and remote health workforce.

Strengthening Primary Care – Delivering Innovative Rural Health

The Australian Government is investing \$2.2 million over five years in the Delivering Collaborative Rural Health Models measure, which funds the trial of innovative, multidisciplinary primary care approaches aimed at alleviating ongoing workforce shortages and improving health outcomes in rural communities.

This measure funds implementation of community-supported multidisciplinary team models that make best use of existing resources to deliver services in a more effective and sustainable way within a region or sub-region, allowing services to be coordinated across primary care, hospital care, disability care and aged care. Funding supports governance and implementation activities, with service delivery to be self-sustaining.

This proposal builds on the Government's \$3.3 million investment in the 2020-21 Budget through the Innovative Models of Primary Care to Address Rural Workforce Shortages measure, which funded five early trials in New South Wales. This provides an opportunity for communities outside of New South Wales to trial sustainable, practical,

community-supported models of care. This further investment reflects the high level of interest and support within rural communities for trialling locally-designed solutions to ongoing health access issues.

This funding complements the National Rural Health Commissioner Primary care Rural Innovative Multidisciplinary Models program, which will progress new designs for innovative rural service models.

Strengthening Primary Care - Streamlining and expanding support for rural GPs with advanced skills to align with the Rural Generalist Pathway

The Government is providing \$0.3m in 2021-22 to undertake a consultation and design process which will develop a new streamlined program from the Rural Procedural Grants Program and the Practice Incentives Program Procedural GP payments. The new program will expand the scope of the existing programs to support rural generalists, vocationally registered GPs and registrars practising in MM3-7 locations, to maintain or enhance their range of advanced skills. Improved support for rural generalists with skills to provide primary care, emergency medicine and other procedural and non-procedural advanced skills, including mental health skills, will improve access and quality of care for those in regional and rural communities.

Strengthening Primary Care – John Flynn Prevocational Doctor Program

The Australian Government is investing \$12.4 million over four years from 2021-22 through the new John Flynn Prevocational Doctor Training Program which will fund rotations in rural primary care settings for prevocational doctors. This investment will improve access to medical services for residents in rural, regional and remote communities and help build the rural medical workforce by providing prevocational doctors with positive, well-structured experiences early in their careers.

The program builds on existing Government investment in prevocational doctor training, incrementally increasing the number of rural primary care rotations from 440 rotations (or at least 110 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) places) in 2022, to 800 rotations (or 200 FTE places) from 2025. This increase will enable an additional 360 hospital-based prevocational doctors to complete a clinical rotation working in a rural primary care setting, fostering interest in the speciality of general practice and working as a rural doctor.

Under the program rural hospitals and rural primary care settings partner to provide prevocational doctors with experience through a rotation in a primary care setting. Funding will support delivery of the primary care rotation, contributing towards salary costs for prevocational junior doctors, clinical supervision and other costs linked to training in the rural primary care setting. The program will support prevocational doctors from postgraduate years one to five, targeting those in their first two

postgraduate years and will include a limited pool of rotations available to metropolitan hospital based prevocational doctors.

Strengthening Primary Care – Flexible Approach to Training in Expanded Settings

The Australian Government is investing \$29.5 million over four years from 2021-22 to create a new innovative funding pool for non-GP medical specialist training commencing in 2022 that will help overcome identified barriers to deliver better distribution and supply of specialists matched to local community health needs.

The pool will fund innovative activities such as small scale trials of networked training models, expanded setting supervision and innovative supervision models to enhance training system quality and capacity, and support for junior specialists in training to transition to practise rurally.

This measure will better target the Australian Government’s existing investment in non-GP medical specialist training, through the Specialist Training Program, by providing increased flexibility to support and promote growth in specialist medical training in settings where the workforce is needed.

Strengthening Primary Care – Rural Bulk Billing Incentive

From 1 January 2022, the Australian Government will, for the first time, implement a progressive incentive schedule for doctors to provide services in rural and remote areas, with an estimated cost of \$65.8 million over the forward estimates.

By increasing the Rural Bulk Billing Incentive according to remoteness, the Government recognises the challenges of delivering healthcare in smaller rural communities and remote communities. The Rural Bulk Billing Incentive will be increased in rural and remote areas (MM3-7) progressively from its current 150% loading up to 190% in very remote areas.

This proposal will also amend the geographic eligibility for claiming MBS Item 10992 (bulk billing incentive for after-hours services). This extends the 2018-19 Budget measure, which updated geographic eligibility criteria using the Modified Monash Model classification system. All doctors regardless of their location will still be eligible for a Medicare bulk billing incentive for after-hours services.

Strengthening Primary Care – Allied Health Case Conferencing

The Australian Government is providing \$14.2 million over four years to support allied health practitioners to participate in case conferencing when organised by a patient’s GP.

This proposal better supports multidisciplinary care for patients that need it, by financially recognising the role of allied health care as part of the primary care team. The items will incentivise allied providers to contribute to care planning processes, leading to improved care coordination, reduced acute care utilisation and better health and functional outcomes for patients. This measure particularly benefits people living in regional and remote areas, whose care providers may be geographically dispersed.

From 1 November 2021, new items will enable allied health practitioners who are providing chronic disease management services to eligible patients to receive a fee for participating in case conferencing when organised by the patient's GP. A similar item will be created to enable allied health practitioners involved in the treatment and support of patients under 13 years of age with autism or another pervasive developmental disorder who are under the care of a psychiatrist or paediatrician.

Guaranteeing Medicare - Strengthening primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The Government is investing \$22.6 million to improve quality of care and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by re-designing the Practice Incentives Program - Indigenous Health Incentive (PIP IHI). The changes will commence from 1 January 2023, through a two year transition period, with full implementation by 1 January 2025.

The changes include removing and redirecting the annual registration payment to better incentivise the provision of high quality chronic disease care. The program will also be expanded to include children aged 0-14, who had been previously ineligible under the PIP IHI. The measure will encourage better chronic disease management, mental health care planning, and continuity of care for patients.

The measure will reduce administrative burden and simplifying the PIP IHI to maximise use by clinicians and their practices, by moving towards a one-off registration process.

Guaranteeing Medicare – MBS telehealth

This measure provides \$204.6 million to maintain MBS telehealth items as an extended COVID-19 health measure to 31 December 2021. The COVID-19 MBS telehealth items have helped maintain access to essential health care services for people across Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic and have been particularly welcomed by people in regional, rural and remote Australia. The telehealth items include GP services, nurse practitioner attendances, midwifery and equivalent obstetric services, nurse attendances, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner services, specialist consultations and allied health services.

In addition, a range of new temporary telephone services will be created to support access to GP services for sexual and reproductive health and prescribing of highly

specialised drugs. New services for nicotine cessation, including by telehealth, will also be introduced to support the Government's commitment to reduce smoking prevalence to under 10 per cent by 2025.

Patients will continue to have access to telehealth services (phone and video) provided by procedural specialists, consultant physicians, paediatricians, psychiatrists, neurosurgeons, anaesthetists, geriatricians and public health physicians.

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

Guaranteeing Medicare – Support for replacing old diagnostic imaging equipment

The Australian Government is providing up to \$20.7 million to assist diagnostic imaging practices in regional, rural and remote areas to replace older diagnostic imaging equipment. Practices with current exemptions in regional, rural and remote areas will be able apply for grants of up to 50 per cent of the average cost of diagnostic imaging equipment to replace equipment that will be out of date by 1 May 2022. It is expected that this proposal will benefit some 80 regional, rural and remote practices.

Transforming Digital Health – Next Wave of My Health Record

The Australian Government is investing \$301.8 million over two years from 2021-22 to build the next wave for My Health Record (MHR) and strengthen the digital enablement of healthcare in Australia.

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

There are almost 23 million registered users of the My Health Record system, making it one of Australia's most subscribed Government services. The system plays a central role in health services delivery and has seen a widespread uplift in use in the last 12 months:

- 89 per cent of all Australian's My Health Record now have critical healthcare data in them.
- Public hospital usage of MHR has increased 172 per cent in the last 12 months.
- Outside of the hospital setting, there has been a 110 per cent increase in cross-healthcare settings viewing of MHR data amongst different healthcare providers, creating a burgeoning 'network effect'.

Enhancing the MHR, and increasing the ways it can securely and reliably assist consumers and health professionals to manage their care day-to-day, will increase confidence, trust, and use of the system, and will pave the way for broader digital transformation across the country. Australia will subsequently become one of the first countries in the world to enable its people to truly hold their healthcare in their hand, with MHR as the backbone for the future of modern healthcare.

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.

Ageing and Aged Care – Providing More Home Care Packages

The Australian Government is continuing to increase its support for senior Australians to stay in their homes for longer by investing in additional Home Care Packages (HCPs). A further \$6.5 billion over four years from 2021-22 has been committed in the 2021-22 Budget for the release of an additional 80,000 HCPs.

Since the 2018-19 Budget, the Government has invested a total of \$12 billion in new funding to deliver more than 163,000 additional HCPs, including the 80,000 HCPs announced in the 2021-22 Budget and 10,000 HCPs announced in the 2020-21 MYEFO.

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 - Reforms to Residential Care Funding to Drive Better Care and a Viable System

The Government will introduce a new funding model for residential aged care, the Australian National Aged Care Classification (AN-ACC) from October 2022. The AN-ACC is a significant reform that will drive better care and establish a more sustainable, efficient and more transparent system. Residential aged care providers in remote and very remote areas will have a better funding outcome under the AN-ACC model, facilitating the provision of higher quality aged care. The Australian Government is investing \$7.8 billion as part of Budget 2021-22 over four years from 2021-22.

Under AN-ACC the Government will fund support services to meet the Royal Commission recommended 200 minute average care time standard (including 40 minutes of registered nurse time). This represents a significant shift into how care is delivered in residential aged care facilities, including in rural and remote areas which

will have access to the same amount of mandated care time as facilities in metropolitan areas. The total care staffing mix and the care time provided on a per resident per day average basis will be reported to Government and this information will be used to determine a case mix adjusted staffing star rating for each service to be published on MyAgedCare.

The role of the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority is being expanded to include providing advice to the Minister responsible for Health and Aged Care on the price of care in residential aged care. Part of the role of the independent pricing authority will be to continually assess costs of providing care in regional, remote and very remote areas.

The Australian Government is also providing interim funding support in 2021-22 prior to the commencement of AN-ACC. Regional, rural and remote providers will benefit from the continuation of the 30 per cent increase in the viability and homeless supplements, as well as a new \$10 per resident per day Government Basic Daily Fee Supplement paid monthly from 1 July 2021 to 30 September 2022.

In addition, lump sum residential care support supplement payments of around \$760 per resident in metropolitan areas, and \$1,145 per resident in non-metropolitan areas were paid in April 2021 to approved providers of residential aged care as part of the initial response to the Royal Commission's Final Report. The Residential care support supplement is 50 per cent higher in non-metropolitan areas in recognition of the higher costs experienced by providers in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. Services located in rural and remote areas received 41 per cent of the overall residential care support supplement funding.

Ageing and Aged Care – More equitable access to aged care for First Nations people and special needs groups

The Australian Government is investing \$630.2 million over five years from 2020-21 in more equitable access to aged care. Senior Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and those living in rural and remote locations will benefit from increased choice and sustainability of services, assistance with accessing aged care and improved infrastructure to meet consumer expectations.

This funding includes an investment of \$396.9 million over four years from 2020-21 to enable aged care providers to make needed improvements to their buildings and build new services in areas where senior Australians currently have limited access or where staff caring for their needs do not have suitable housing. Communities will benefit significantly from construction projects and increased aged care services. Projects will provide around 1400 construction jobs and benefit 471,000 senior Australians living in rural and remote locations.

This funding will allow evaluations of this measure to identify service gaps within regional, rural and remote Australia to assist with addressing areas of greatest demand, giving particular focus to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and consumers with special needs.

These capital infrastructure measures are ongoing, with \$130 million per annum to be made available from 2025-26.

An investment of \$106 million over four years from 2021-22 has been allocated to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumer experience, uptake and access to aged care and disability services by procuring an Indigenous workforce to provide face to face support. This will assist 60,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to better navigate and access aged and disability care.

The current funding model for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care program will also be updated. This includes: \$62 million over four years (from 2021-22) to support delivery of viable, high quality care to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. From 1 July 2021, funding will be provided to ensure residential aged care consumers can stay connected to Country and culture, as well as meeting the travel costs of any people needed to provide clinical or other assistance to a resident.

An investment of \$64 million will be provided over four years from 2021-22 to support delivery of viable, high quality integrated care to older Australians in regional and remote locations by broadly aligning the funding for Multi-Purpose Services with the new AN-ACC funding model.

Aged care service providers located in remote areas or who provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be given professional support to improve the organisations workforce capability and financial sustainability. This will be made available through a \$5 million investment in 2021-22 to expand the Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel.

The Government will also invest \$35 million over four years from 2024-25 to assist rural and remote aged care providers experiencing high turnover and sudden departures by expanding the Rural Locum Assistance Program to provide:

- access to a surge locum workforce for an interim period while recruitment is undertaken.
- assistance with recruiting permanent staff with the requisite skills and experience.
- a new incentive scheme to increase the retention of permanent staff.

These initiatives promote sustainability in the aged care sector for services in regional and remote Australia. They also assist the sector where high costs of delivering care are limiting the ability to invest in infrastructure, where workforce challenges are undermining viability and continuity of care, where choice and uptake of services is limited and where intervention is required to make mainstream models fit for purpose.

This investment coincides with and complements the extension of the viability supplement across residential aged care, and the rollout of the AN-ACC funding model, and supports senior Australians in regional and remote Australia who have expressed a strong preference to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

Preventive Health – Elimination of Trachoma in Indigenous Communities – Extension

The Australian Government is investing \$19.1 million over four years from 2021-22 to continue and improve the Australian Government's trachoma elimination program by extending agreements with Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Australia has established a new target of 2022 (previously 2020) to eliminate trachoma. This funding enables continued investment in jurisdictions to support the screening and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in remote communities. It also improves delivery by ensuring closer connection with Primary Health Care providers through remote health services, which ensures greater continuity of effort in communities.

Preventive Health – Rheumatic Fever Strategy Continuation

The Australian Government is investing \$12 million over four years from 2021-22 to continue and improve the Rheumatic Fever Strategy by extending National Partnership Agreements with Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The funding continues to support primary prevention and long-term secondary prevention treatment to reduce the incidence of recurrent Acute Rheumatic Fever and the related development or worsening of Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) in remote communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The delivery arrangements are continuing to be co-designed with the sector, including State and Territory organisations, to align with and support the priority reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. There will be shared decision-making with Indigenous leaders, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will guide the design and implementation of RHD prevention strategies.

Preventive Health – Support for Surf Life Saving Training and Beach Safety Equipment

The Australian Government is providing \$6.6 million in funding to Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) over two years from 2020-21 to enhance its ability to protect beachgoers.

Commencing in 2016-17, the Government has previously provided \$10 million over four years for this initiative to boost SLSA's capacity to deliver preventative safety measures at local beaches. Further funding allows SLSA to continue to provide vocational education and training to volunteers to save lives on Australia's beaches and build on their organisational capability.

Furthermore, the Australian Government is providing \$3.1 million over two years from 2020-21 through the Water and Snow Safety Program, to support SLSA's Beach Safety Equipment Fund (BSEF).

SLSA currently receives funding through the Australian Government's Water and Snow Safety program for the BSEF to provide 314 Surf Life Saving Clubs (SLSCs) across Australia with \$5,000 per annum. This funding is used to purchase vital rescue equipment including rescue boards, life jackets, rescue manikins inflatable rescue boats, all-terrain vehicles, defibrillators, and first aid and medical supplies. This funding provides SLSCs with a total of \$10,000 per annum to support the purchase of new patrol equipment and replacement of old and damaged equipment.

Funding supports all 314 SLSCs around Australia, which includes 136 clubs in regional areas and 7 clubs in remote areas.

Preventive Health – Sporting Schools

The Australian Government is investing a further \$40.8 million over two years from 2021-22 to continue the flagship sport and physical activity program for children, Sporting Schools for the 2022 calendar year. Sporting Schools provides grants to schools nationwide to deliver free, high quality programs to get Australian children of all abilities more physically active and establish a foundation for lifelong healthy behaviours. The program will seek to increase its presence in specific regional and remote locations where registration rates are low.

This initiative extends on the 2020-21 Budget initiative, Continuation of Sporting Schools.

Current Initiatives

Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Australia is leading the world out of the global COVID-19 pandemic and recession. As COVID-19 vaccines roll out across the nation, protecting Australians from the ongoing threats of the pandemic remains a priority. The Australian Government's COVID-19 Emergency Health Response has focused on protecting all Australians, sustaining contingent capacity in the health sector, and supporting the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine throughout 2021.

The Australian Government's COVID-19 suppression strategy has focused on containing the virus through clear communication with the Australian people, rapid testing and contact tracing, implementation of boarder and travel measures, building and investing in the capacity of our health system and collaborating with States and Territories and the health sector to contain outbreaks and stop the spread of COVID-19.

Key measures continue to support regional Australia focusing on the safety, surveillance, diagnosis and treatment of Australians in these communities. Measures also complement other COVID-19 responses that have ensured the safety and protection of regional communities and economies, specifically remote travel restrictions.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than \$25 billion has been committed as part of the Australian Government's health response to COVID-19. This includes more than \$7 billion to support the COVID-19 vaccine roll out and over \$1.1 billion to extend key measures associated with the national COVID-19 health response and suppression strategy throughout 2021.

Strengthening Primary Care – COVID-19 General Practitioner Led Respiratory Clinics

As part of the COVID-19 pandemic response, the Australian Government has invested \$465 million over three years from 2019-20 to 2021-22 to establish up to 150 General Practitioner led Respiratory Clinics (GPRCs) and continue their operation through the pandemic. This includes the Government's announcement on 14 March 2021 for a further \$87.5 million to extend the measure to 31 December 2021. Over half of these clinics, 83, were established outside of metropolitan areas. To date, the GPRCs have provided assessment services to patients from 2,420 postcodes, covering more than 99 per cent of the Australian population.

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. Given its broad geographic coverage, the GPRC network is also a key delivery mechanism for the vaccine roll-out. The network is providing equitable and safe access to vaccine services, particularly within rural and remote areas, where GPRCs may be the only primary care delivery platform.

As part of this funding, \$18.2 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.

Primary Health Networks have also been funded \$43.4 million to provide sector support through the pandemic, including distribution of personal protective equipment to primary care providers, dedicated support to identify, establish and maintain the GPRCs, and assistance with the vaccine roll-out within general practices, aged and disability care facilities.

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

Part of the additional \$1.1 billion to extend the national COVID-19 health response and suppression strategy to 31 December 2021, included the repurposing of a forecast \$17 million underspend by the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). Underspend funds will be used to:

- extend RFDS services to 31 December 2021
- expand RFDS services to include vaccine administration in remote areas
- extend the Point of Care Testing program (\$10.7 million).

The Remote Community Preparedness and Retrieval 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 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.
- Provides grants for rural and remote areas enabling communities to engage in preparedness activities as prioritised and determined by the community. These grants have been used to connect Elders to the broader community through

technology, ensure food security and pharmacy supplies, enhance screening protocols, make minor adjustments to service waiting areas and provide more on-the-ground health staff.

Additionally, of the \$52.8 million aeromedical support package, \$2 million has been allocated to the Northern Territory Government's Top End Health Service and Central Australian Health Service to assist with vaccine roll-out in remote communities.

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

As part of the extension of the national COVID-19 health response and suppression strategy, \$10.7 million has been allocated to continue the successful COVID-19 Point of Care Testing (POCT) Program for remote and rural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including \$4 million announced in September 2020 and the extension announced on 14 March 2021.

POCT utilises the same gold standard polymerase chain reaction testing used for laboratory based COVID-19 testing and provides a test result within 45 minutes.

This measure ensures primary care services are no more than two to three hours' drive away from a testing location, whether POCT or conventional.

The 86 sites are located in the Northern Territory (32), South Australia (9), Victoria (2), New South Wales (5), Queensland (18) and Western Australia (20). A further 67 services are acting as spoke sites, increasing the reach of the program to over 150 remote communities.

Without access to rapid testing through the POCT program, it's possible that an entire community could be infected before the early cases are detected. Having point of care testing available means more remote communities are protected from COVID-19, by ensuring people can access accurate testing in or close to their home community.

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

The Australian Government has invested \$100.8 million over two years from 2020-21 to provide up to 10 additional Medicare-subsidised psychological sessions under the *Better Access* initiative until 30 June 2022. Under this measure, people in regional Australia will continue to be able to access essential mental health treatment and support, including via telehealth where it is safe and clinically appropriate to do so.

In 2021-22 the Government will conduct a rigorous evaluation of Better Access, in line with the recommendation from the Productivity Commission in its Inquiry into Mental Health. This will include consideration of the effectiveness of Better Access in increasing access to mental health support in regional areas. Future reforms to the program will be

guided by the evaluation findings as well as the recommendations of the Productivity Commission and the report from the MBS Review Taskforce.

Prioritising Mental Health – Supporting the Mental Health of Australians through the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Australian Government continues to support the introduction or scaling up of critical mental health services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 29 March 2020, the Government announced \$74 million over two years for preventative mental health and crisis support services. This included funding to Beyond Blue to establish a dedicated COVID-19 Mental Wellbeing Support Line operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and funding for a range of digital services and targeted supports for vulnerable groups.

On 15 May 2020, the Australian Government announced a further \$48.1 million, to support the delivery of the immediate priorities of the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan – enhanced data and modelling of the mental health impacts of the pandemic, support for at risk groups such as older Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and funding to improve service connectivity.

On 6 August 2020 and 17 August 2020, the Government invested \$12.0 million and \$31.9 million, respectively, to provide additional mental health supports for Victorians and support for national measures. This included funding to establish 15 mental health clinics across Victoria (\$26.9 million) in 2020 with six of these being located in regional Victoria. A priority for 2021-22 will be to continue to fund and evaluate the clinics. In addition, the Government’s digital mental health gateway, Head to Health, has expanded to provide further access to free and low cost phone and online mental health services and supports irrespective of geographical barriers.

On 14 March 2021, the Government announced an additional \$7.1 million to fund an extension of the COVID-19 Mental Health Wellbeing Support Service until 31 December 2021.

Through the 2021-22 Budget the Australian Government has also provided additional funding in 2021-22 to digital mental health service providers to support continued increase demand related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These key measures continue to support regional Australia, enhancing access to digital and mental health supports, complemented by the Government’s decision to expand the Better Access national initiative to provide additional Medicare-subsidised psychological sessions.

Bushfire Health 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 bushfires. This includes support to regional Australians through:

- Provision of immediate frontline emergency distress and trauma counselling sessions.
- New MBS 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 training to organisations managing frontline emergency staff to identify personnel at risk.
- Bushfire Trauma Response Coordinators 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.

On 11 May 2020, the Government invested a further \$13.4 million in services to provide critical, localised, non-clinical mental health supports for bushfire-affected communities through Primary Health Networks in regional and rural Australia

As part of these packages the Government has provided \$3.8 million to Lifeline Australia to establish a dedicated helpline (13HELP) for individuals impacted by the 2019 bushfire crisis, including the development of communication activities to promote this service. Funding was also provided to Kids Helpline to boost the capacity to respond to increased demand as a result of the bushfire crisis. This is providing 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 locations.

- During 2021-22 this funding will continue to support a number of priority areas impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires. Bushfire Trauma Response Coordinators will continue in nine severely fire affected Primary Health Network regions to provide a

single point of contact for individuals and communities along with the provision of immediate frontline emergency distress and trauma counselling sessions. Community participation and wellbeing, training for frontline workers and delivery of the first National Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework will continue as priority area in 2021-22.

Strengthening Primary Care – Indigenous Australians’ Health Programme

Approximately \$4.1 billion will be provided over four years through the Indigenous Australians’ Health Programme (IAHP) from 2021-22 to 2024-25, building on our work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve health outcomes.

Through this program, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have access to effective health care services in areas of need (including medical outreach to rural and remote areas), targeted initiatives to improve prevention and primary health care management of chronic diseases, and maternal and child health.

Under the IAHP, funding is allocated for primary health care services, with \$546.6 million to be provided to 164 organisations (including 130 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs)) in 2021-22, to provide culturally appropriate comprehensive primary health care. ACCHS play a critical role in supporting the health system, particularly in regional and remote areas.

A further \$36.5 million over three years from 2020-21 to 2022-23 is also being provided, for the expansion of primary health care services. This funding will support the sector to expand access to comprehensive primary health care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by investing in priority health areas in regions of high health need or high population growth, taking into account gaps in existing service delivery. This investment complements the additional \$90 million provided under the IAHP Primary Health Care Funding Model, which commenced 1 July 2020, which was co-designed with the sector, to distribute funding fairly and transparently, based on activity levels, the cost of delivering services and the relative health needs of locations.

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 sites across regional New South Wales 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 is supporting well developed proof-of-concept pilots to transition into fully operational models, customised to address the primary care issues in each trial site.

Trials are commencing in the 4Ts (Tullamore, Trangie, Tottenham and Trundle); Lachlan region (Parkes-Forbes); Canowindra and surrounding hamlets; Snowy Valleys (Tumut, Tumbarumba, Batlow and Adelong) and in the Wentworth area.

The trials 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 New South Wales, to support development of 'trial ready' and localised innovative models of care through the Primary care Rural Innovative Multidisciplinary Models (PRIMM) program. 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 is investing \$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 continuing and expanding the office of the National Rural Health Commissioner (the Commissioner).

Legislation to support the ongoing and expanded role for the Commissioner came into effect on 1 July 2020. The current National Rural Health Commissioner, Professor Ruth Stewart, was appointed on 3 July 2020 for a two year term.

The expanded National Rural Health Commissioner Office now includes two Deputy Commissioners to support the Commissioner and provide expertise across a range of vital rural health disciplines such as nursing and allied health.

Funding for the Commissioner's Office includes an investment of \$2.5 million over four years from 2020-21 for the PRIMM program, to enable the development of community-supported models of care to a point where they are ready to trial. This investment complements the *Innovative Models of Primary Care to Address Rural Workforce Shortages* measure, which was announced as part of the 2020-21 Budget. Rural health workforce and communities living in rural and remote areas benefit from the development and implementation of innovative models of primary care and the improvements to the delivery of health services in their region.

The Commissioner has actively supported the ongoing rural response to COVID-19, advised on the impact on the health workforce in regional, rural and remote Australia, and continues to support implementation of the National Rural Generalist Pathway.

Strengthening Primary Care - National Rural Generalist Pathway

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, the Government committed \$62.2 million to commence development of the National Rural Generalist Pathway (the Pathway) – a medical training pathway to attract, retain and support doctors in regional, rural and remote areas. This funds three core initiatives:

- creation of Coordination Units in each State and the Northern Territory for rural generalist training
- an expansion of the Rural Junior Doctor Training Innovation Fund to support the Pathway
- application to the Medical Board of Australia for specialist recognition of Rural Generalist Medicine within the specialty of General Practice.

The National Rural Health Commissioner plays a key role supporting implementation of the Pathway.

Rural Generalists are general practitioners who provide primary care, as well as emergency medicine and other specialist services in regional, rural and remote areas. Growing a Rural Generalist workforce will broaden the range of locally available medical services for rural Australians, supporting these communities to access the right care, in the right place, at the right time, as close to home as possible.

Strengthening Primary Care – Extension of the Rural Health Workforce Support Activity

The Australian Government is investing \$53.4 million over two years from 2020-21 to extend the Rural Health Workforce Support Activity administered by Rural Workforce Agencies. The program:

- Supports quality, continuous primary health care access for rural and remote communities
- Contributes to addressing health workforce shortages and maldistribution through workforce assessment and planning
- Provides a contemporary and jurisdictional approach to the specific issues and concerns in attracting, retaining training and supporting the health workforce.

Strengthening Primary Care – Health Workforce Scholarship Program

The Australian Government has invested \$33 million over three years from 2020-21 for the Health Workforce Scholarship Program (HWSP). The HWSP aims to increase access

to health services in rural and remote areas that are experiencing skill shortages, by providing scholarships and bursaries to health professionals committed to rural service.

Scholarships and bursaries are prioritised to address local needs and increase the skills, capacity and/or scope of practice of existing health professionals. Most scholarship types also include a return of service obligation to provide a greater return on investment.

Strengthening Primary Care – Remote Vocational Training Scheme

Australians living in rural Australia will have better access to doctors with the expansion of the Remote Vocational Training Scheme (RVTS) Targeted Recruitment Pilot. The Government has agreed to additional funding for RVTS in 2021 to provide salary incentives to the doctors as they train towards GP Fellowship. The scheme delivers structured distance education and supervision to doctors while they provide medical services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and rural and remote locations throughout Australia. The pilot aims to assist in the provision of medical services to regions that have had difficulty in recruiting doctors and have been identified as having a high medical workforce need.

Guaranteeing Medicare – Rural Procedural Grants Program

The Government provides more than \$19 million each year to the Rural Procedural Grants Program. This program enables vocationally recognised procedural GPs and registrars practising in rural and remote locations to access grants to attend training and up-skilling in emergency and procedural medicine. Grants are also available for GPs working in emergency medicine to maintain their skills in emergency mental health. The Government is also exploring options to streamline and expand the scope of this program.

Guaranteeing Medicare – Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program Infrastructure

The Government is investing \$48.3 million over three years from 2021–22 in the long-standing Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) Program. This investment builds the rural training pipeline for health students, with a focus on allied health students to deliver health, aged care and disability services in rural communities. The RHMT program has a direct economic benefit to communities and regions: for every dollar spent under the RHMT program, another dollar is generated in the local economy.

The package provides for capital works and recurrent funding and includes:

- Funding one new University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) to increase RHMT coverage.

- Funding up to seven projects through existing UDRHs to increase training in more remote settings from large rural towns (MM3) through to Modified very remote communities (MM7).
- Funding up to seven projects through existing UDRHs to partner with aged care services to provide dedicated teaching spaces focusing on the training of allied health and nursing 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 access to innovative clinical trials for Australians living in rural, regional and remote areas. The Rural, Regional and Remote Clinical Trial Enabling Infrastructure Program removes barriers to participating in clinical trials by:

- improving facilities, equipment, services and systems in rural, regional and remote Australia
- reducing the burden, costs and risks for patients and their families related to clinical trial participation
- increasing research capacity.

This grant program, funded under the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF), is giving patients access to clinical trials where they live.

Guaranteeing Medicare – Remote Area Health Corps program

The Government is providing \$18.7 million from 2019-20 to 2021-22 to continue the Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) program. This program aims to increase access to primary health care services in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Northern Territory, by addressing identified workforce shortages. The RAHC program provides short-term placements of 3 to 12 weeks of urban health professionals in remote health clinics in the Northern Territory.

Guaranteeing Medicare - Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement Rural Support Programs

The Government funds a range of rural and other pharmacy programs under the Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement (7CPA) including the Rural Pharmacy Workforce Programs, which aim to support the recruitment, training and retention of pharmacists in rural and remote areas. The 7CPA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Programs aim to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacy workforce, access to medicines and the quality use of medicines.

The 7CPA also outlines a shared intent to increase the investment in regional, rural and remote pharmacies through an increased investment in the Regional Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance (RPMA) program. This increase investment in the RPMA program was implemented 1 January 2021.

Guaranteeing Medicare - Section 100 Remote Area Aboriginal Health Service Program

The Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services (RAAHS) Program enables people living in remote communities, who may have limited access to a community pharmacy, to access essential Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines from their AHS upon consultation, at no cost and without a PBS prescription. In 2019-20, more than 1.7 million PBS items were supplied to approved RAAHS at a total cost of \$39.3 million.

Guaranteeing Medicare – Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health

The Australian Government is investing a further \$32.3 million in 2021-22 to support the Government's contribution to the 2018-2022 Intergovernmental Agreement on National Digital Health (the IGA). This investment will enable progress and completion of the commitments in accordance with the IGA, to ensure Australia's national digital health infrastructure and interoperability principles can contribute to improving health system quality and safety, accountability, transparency and patient centred care.

The IGA is signed by the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments and supports national digital health foundations including implementation of Australia's National Digital Health Strategy - Safe, Seamless and Secure (the Strategy). Implementation of the Strategy supports capability (such as better enabling virtual care) that is leading to significant improvements in the quality and safety of healthcare provided to healthcare recipients, the efficiency of the Australian health system and the health and wellbeing of all Australians. This is of particular importance for regional Australians as digital tools continue to support the delivery of safe, quality healthcare services and outcomes irrespective of geographical barriers.

Guaranteeing Medicare – 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.

Stronger Rural Health – guaranteeing rural and remote access to dental, mental health service and emergency aeromedical services through the Royal Flying Doctor Service

The Government is providing more than \$327 million over four years (2018–19 to 2021–22) for the RFDS to provide a range of primary care and outreach services, including mental health services, in rural and remote areas beyond the normal medical infrastructure and in locations of market failure. Locations for these services are determined through a comprehensive needs assessment process undertaken by the RFDS in consultation with local communities and health care providers. Approximately \$20.4 million of the total funding is being provided for mental health services in rural and remote Australia.

Stronger Rural Health – Heart of Australia

The Government is supporting regional, rural and remote Australians to access cardiac investigation, diagnosis and consultation services through Heart of Australia. Two mobile specialist clinics – Heart 1 and Heart 2, deliver services across Queensland. The Government is providing \$12 million over three years to 30 June 2022 to further expand the operational capacity of the mobile health clinics and support the purchase and fit out of a third government-funded mobile clinic (Heart 4). Heart 4 was launched on 29 April 2021.

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 \$6.1 billion over five years from 2020–21 in block funding contributions to States and Territories to support services provided by small, rural and regional hospitals. This funding ensures rural and regional communities continue to have access to vital public hospital services.

Supporting Our Hospitals – Community Health and Hospitals Program and other 2019-20 Budget Measures

The Government is investing \$1.25 billion over seven financial years from 2018-19 in the Community Health and Hospitals Program (CHHP), in addition to more than \$669 million through other 2019-20 Budget measures to fund projects and services in every State and Territory, to support patient care while reducing pressure on community and hospital services. Through delivery of the 92 CHHP and 60 other 2019-20 Budget measures projects, \$204.9 million and \$92.7 million, respectively, is committed in the 2021-22 financial year and will provide improved health facilities and services in a number of regional and remote communities.

The CHHP program emphasises a commitment to ensuring a high quality, sustainable health system, with investment in public hospitals, Primary Health Networks, community organisations and other health providers, to ensure all Australians can access health services where and when they need them.

Over 50 per cent of the projects funded through the CHHP and other 2019-20 Budget Measures contribute to infrastructure and services in rural and regional areas to support health priorities such as cancer, palliative care, eating disorders, chronic disease, injury, mental health, maternal and paediatric services and hospital infrastructure.

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

The Disability Support for Older Australians (DSOA) Program replaces the Commonwealth Continuity of Support (CoS) Programme from 1 July 2021. The Australian Government is investing an additional \$125.3 million over 2020-21 to 2023-24 to meet the growing demand from providers and consumers for funding higher needs.

With this increased funding, the DSOA program will deliver a more client-centred program to around 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.

Fighting Cancer – Regional Cancer Treatment Centres for Radiation Therapy

Through the Fighting Cancer – Regional Cancer Treatment Centres for Radiation Therapy program, the Australian Government is investing \$45.5 million over five years

from 2020-21 to expand cancer treatment capacity throughout regional Australia by enhancing existing and investing in new health infrastructure.

The objectives of the program are to:

- Work in partnerships to improve and update health infrastructure in rural and regional Australia
- Provide improved access to health facilities and services in a number of regional and remote communities.

The Government will work in collaboration with States and Territories and the broader health sector to ensure the health infrastructure for regional cancer treatment centres provide improved access to radiation therapy services and treatment closer to home for patients living in regional areas. Funding will enable the establishment of new radiation therapy services across ten regional areas within New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia.

Funding and activities for this program will commence in 2020-21 with \$9.8 million to be paid upon execution of funding agreements, followed by \$8.9 million allocated each year from 2021-22 to 2023-24 and \$9 million in 2024-25.

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 benefits all Australians who are hard of hearing. It includes:

- Supporting rural service delivery through a workforce audit and a rural hearing health workforce summit, to improve long-term planning and delivery of services in rural and remote areas.
- A national hearing awareness and prevention campaign over three years from 2020-21, targeted at populations most vulnerable to hearing loss. The campaign focuses on the prevention of avoidable hearing loss, promoting practices to prevent hearing damage, destigmatising hearing loss, and encouraging people experiencing hearing loss to seek treatment, and targeted preventive messaging directed at the agricultural sector amongst others.
- Development and adoption of new tele-audiology standards so hearing services can be delivered through this medium without compromising the outcomes for clients. For regional Australians this will mean less travel and related costs to hearing appointments.

- In 2020-21 work has been undertaken to improve early identification of hearing and speech difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A total of \$2 million has been made available to provide quiet spaces in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services suitable for audiologists to provide hearing assessments. A further \$3 million has been provided to Hearing Australia to implement the Listen to Learn Program which will focus on children in the Early Childhood Education and Care and Primary School settings. Staff will be upskilled to identify hearing and communication problems and take early action.
- Pilot initiatives in the aged care sector have commenced, to improve the capability of the aged care workforce to support people with hearing loss.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), has been engaged to develop an evidence base for effective treatment, service delivery and prevention of hearing loss. In 2020-21, the NHMRC conducted consultations with key stakeholders of the hearing health sector and researchers to identify research gaps and priorities. The outcomes of the consultations will inform grant guidelines for a peer reviewed competitive grant opportunity to be open in early 2021-22.

Preventive Health – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Hearing Health

The Australian Government is investing \$9 million in 2021-22 for the Hearing Assessment Program – Early Ears Program. Announced in the 2018-19 Budget, this initiative provides \$30 million over 2018-19 to 2021-22 for audiology assessments and follow up treatment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children before they start school.

Additionally, under the National Partnership Agreement on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI), \$4 million is provided in 2021-22 to reduce the prevalence of ear disease and hearing problems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Northern Territory. Total investment for hearing health under the NTRAI is \$33.4 million over 10 years from 2012-13 to 2021-22.

Medical Research – Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study

The Australian Government is funding the Australian Bureau of Statistics \$89.5 million from 2020-21 to 2022-23 to undertake the Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study (IHMHS).

The IHMHS is the largest health study undertaken in Australian history. It will provide the most complete picture of Australia's physical and mental health. The IHMHS will cover mental health, health status, conditions, risk factors, nutrition, physical activity and biomedical health status for both the general population and specifically for the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The IHMHS will include four national studies:

- National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing
- National Health Study – including the National Health Survey and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
- National Nutrition and Physical Activity Study – including the National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey
- National Health Measures Study – including the National Health Measures Survey and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Measures Survey.

Approximately 60,000 Australians in urban, rural, remote, very remote areas and Indigenous communities will be included in study components.

The information collected by the IHMHS will enable the Government to monitor changes in health conditions and behaviours over time of all Australians including those that live in regional, rural and remote areas.

Medical Research – Medical Research Future Fund

As part of the 2019-20 Budget, the Government committed to a \$5.1 billion Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) 10-year investment plan across four themes: Patients, Researchers, Missions and Translation.

The impact of location on access to health care and outcomes is acknowledged in the MRFF's Australian Medical Research and Innovation Strategy 2016–2021, and health and medical research investment to support better rural health outcomes has been embedded in a range of MRFF open and competitive grant opportunities through the 10-year investment plan. This includes the MRFF:

- 2020 Rapid Applied Research Translation Grant Opportunity, which will provide up to \$27.5 million for translational health and medical research conducted by organisations based in rural areas
- 2020 Primary Health Care Research Data Infrastructure Grant Opportunity, which includes a dedicated funding stream for research based in rural-led General Practices.

It is anticipated that all Australians will benefit from the outcomes of research funding by the MRFF both in terms of improved health outcomes through access to new therapies, drugs and devices and the associated outcomes through access to business that follows the translation and commercialisation of research.

Home Affairs

The Department of Home Affairs provides strategic policy leadership and central coordination to support the Home Affairs Portfolio. The Portfolio comprises the Department of Home Affairs, including 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.

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, multicultural affairs and trade related functions. A strategy-led and coordinated approach ensures the Portfolio delivers outcomes for Australia's rural and regional community on behalf of the Australian Government.

The Portfolio provides programs and services that have tangible economic and social benefits for Australians living in rural and regional areas. In 2020, the Portfolio played a lead role in protecting Australian communities across the country by coordinating the whole-of-Government response to the non-health aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including supply chains and transport links. Home Affairs is supporting economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring the retention of skilled workers for critical sectors and facilitating investment and innovation, so important for the regions.

Changes to the temporary activity visa allows more flexibility to encourage temporary visa holders to support Australian farmers struggling to find workers during COVID-19. The simplification of trade regulation is helping businesses, especially food exporters in the regions, by cutting costs and facilitating trade.

The Portfolio's various functions also support the safety and security of Australia's regional communities, including by protecting national borders, supporting law enforcement and responding to national emergencies. Australians living in regional areas, and sectors such as mining, transport and agriculture, will benefit from the Government's efforts to increase the cyber security of the Australian economy and improve the security and resilience of critical infrastructure and systems of national significance. The National Flood Mitigation Program will help local communities reduce the impact of severe floods, boost economic development and job creation in regional Australia. The Portfolio is also boosting national law enforcement efforts to combat child sexual abuse in regional Australia and Indigenous communities and providing increased access to relevant services.

As at 31 December 2020, the Home Affairs Portfolio employed 15,232 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 10,615 staff (70 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 4,200 staff (28 per cent) in other capital cities and 417 staff (3 per cent) in regional areas. The Home Affairs Portfolio has a footprint in over 50 locations nationally, including all Australian capital cities, and staff deployed geographically to regional centres and remote regional areas.

Since mid-2020, both the Australian Border Force and the Australian Federal Police have deployed senior leaders at the Assistant Commissioner level to Perth, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. Staff in regional areas play a critical role in delivering Government priorities, and are critical to the Home Affairs Portfolio's contribution to the Australian Public Service's Surge Reserve. The Home Affairs Portfolio will continue to consider relocation opportunities that are aligned with operational demands.

New Initiatives

Enhance National Law Enforcement Child Protection Capability

The Australian Government will allocate \$59.9 million to the Australian Federal Police (AFP) over four years from 2021-22 to boost frontline national law enforcement efforts to prevent, disrupt, investigate and combat online child sexual abuse and exploitation. Law enforcement initiatives led by the AFP will have a positive impact on regional Australia and Indigenous communities through education programs to raise child safety awareness. This funding will also enhance capabilities, alongside efforts by the AFP-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation in driving a collaborative national response to counter the exploitation of children.

2021-22 Migration and Humanitarian Programs

The 2021-22 Migration Program will build on Australia's success in managing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by driving economic recovery and social cohesion outcomes. This will be done by maintaining the Migration Program planning ceiling at 160,000 places, with around 50 per cent of the program dedicated to skilled visas, and giving priority to highly skilled migrants in the employer sponsored Business Innovation and Investor Program and Global Talent visa cohorts. Continued flexibility to shift skilled migration places will ensure the program can readily adapt in an uncertain COVID-19 impacted environment.

The Migration Program will benefit regional communities through dedicated state and territory nominated and regional visa categories, and a focus on migrants who fill critical needs and contribute to economic recovery. The number of places available to Family visa categories will be set at 77,300 places for 2021-22.

The Humanitarian Program will continue at a ceiling of 13,750 places for 2021-22, the same level as in 2020-21. This will ensure that Australia remains one of the most

generous humanitarian resettlement countries in the world, maintaining the Australian Government's long-term commitment.

National Flood Mitigation Infrastructure Program

On 10 December 2020, the Government established a *National Flood Mitigation Infrastructure Program*, providing \$50 million from the 2020-21 pre disaster resilience component of the *Emergency Response Fund* to support State, Territory and local governments to reduce the impact of severe flood events on communities. An additional \$50 million will be provided in 2021-22 as part of the 2021-22 Budget.

The program will help fund essential public assets including dams, levees, weather radar systems and flood warning infrastructure. The program will fund essential public assets across the nation that will:

- reduce the impacts of floods on Australian communities
- contribute to reducing eligible expenditure under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
- encourage positive change in the insurability of infrastructure
- address relevant household or local government insurance affordability.

The program is expected to stimulate regional and national economic growth and local job creation.

Securing Australia's Future Connectivity

The Australian Government will provide \$31.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the initiative *Securing Australia's Future Connectivity*. The initiative will support the 'Secure G' Connectivity test lab, modelled to undertake testing on measures, protocols, standards and software-based technologies that form part of 5G's security architecture. Funding will also support the 6G research and development program which will accelerate the commercialisation of secure connectivity technologies and security offerings by providing the foundational research and incentives to build sovereign, exportable offerings upon.

Cyber threats and security risks to Australia's digital connectivity ultimately affect whether regional Australians can access, and businesses can trade within, the digital economy. The initiative will benefit Australians in regional areas, including small and medium sized businesses, by ensuring that they can securely harness the economic and social benefits presented by ultra-fast, secure connectivity. This ties into the Government's overall priority to bridge the digital divide between metropolitan and regional Australia.

The initiative will economically benefit industries that rely upon ultra-fast connectivity, who will be able to securely leverage 5G's productivity benefits. In particular, the initiative will benefit regional sectors, such as mining and agriculture which use 5G and future connectivity to support the Internet of Things and smart regions applications.

Current Initiatives

National Aerial Firefighting Capability

The Australian Government provided an additional \$11 million per year, indexed, from 2020-21, to a total of \$26.2 million in 2021-22, 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.

Australian Federal Police Funding Model

The Australian Federal Police commenced a new funding model in 2020-21 at a cost of \$300.2 million over four years from 2020-21 (\$18.4 million in 2021-22). The model ensures the AFP maintains its frontline policing capacity, enhances its surge capacity, and provides for a healthy and agile workforce. The model also provides the AFP with enhanced planning certainty; 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 enforcing travel restrictions into remote Indigenous communities.

Extension of North West Point Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island

The North West Point Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island was reactivated in August 2020 to accommodate unlawful non-citizens including those released from prisons, but unable to be deported due to COVID-19 travel and border restrictions. This measure is to address capacity challenges in the immigration detention network and increase community safety while removal operations, including prison-to-plane removals are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (the Department) and its Portfolio agencies drive long-term economic and productivity growth, and job creation across Australia. The Department has a central role in positioning Australia to recover from the ongoing economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and helping businesses and industry respond to a shifting global environment. The Department does this by building on Australia's comparative strengths, removing obstacles to growth, and unlocking new opportunities for long-term productivity and prosperity.

The Industry, Science, Energy and Resources Portfolio (the Portfolio) is committed to improving the business environment of Australian industry, with a particular focus on businesses with a strong base in regional Australia. The Portfolio has policy responsibilities for a number of sectors that underpin the Australian economy including resources exploration and extraction, the energy supply chain, and manufacturing. These sectors continue to be major contributors to business and employment opportunities in regional Australia. Ensuring that regional Australians benefit from projects that improve Australia's digital capability, secure scientific capacity, and invest in existing and emerging low emissions technologies is also a key priority.

The Portfolio delivers a number of initiatives to support the business environment in regional Australia to ensure Australian businesses have the capacity to innovate and excel in a range of markets. The Department's Outreach Network consists of 28 Regional and Business Development Managers located across regional centres and capital cities who deliver front line, face-to-face services. The network provides local businesses with information about programs, grants, and services available from all levels of government. The network is in a unique position to gather insights from the business community and economic environment on current and emerging regional issues, which then feed into policy and program design.

The Government's decentralisation agenda is supporting programs and projects such as the *Modern Manufacturing Strategy*, the *Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Radio Telescope Project* and Australian Industrial Power's *Port Kembla gas power station project*, all of which help regional businesses and sectors to stimulate opportunities for employment and skills development. The Government also continues to support regional communities involved in the site selection process for the Australian Radioactive Waste Management Facility through the extension of the Community Benefit Program Fund into 2021-22.

The Portfolio is working with Australian businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The *Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF)* is a fundamental part of the Government's approach to emission reduction and more than \$2 billion has already been committed to projects in regional and rural areas. Additional funding is available through the \$2 billion *Climate Solutions Fund* to build on the success of the ERF and

continue investment in practical projects that deliver low-cost abatement. The Portfolio also administers the annual *Low Emissions Technology Statement* which complements the activities of the ERF. The Statement aims to accelerate the development and commercialisation of technologies such as hydrogen production, carbon farming, and carbon capture, use and storage, which will reduce emissions and create jobs, many of them in regional communities.

The Government is investing in energy security, supporting jobs and improving energy affordability for Australian families and businesses. It is accelerating the development of new gas resources and investment in gas infrastructure to guarantee Australia's gas supply. This will stimulate the economy following the COVID-19 pandemic. By unlocking gas supply, helping to deliver an efficient pipeline and transportation market, and empowering gas customers, the Government will create a more competitive and transparent Gas Trading Hub for the east coast. Targeted investments in energy generation and transmission infrastructure as well as consumer focused energy market reforms will continue to deliver affordable, reliable and secure energy to all Australians.

Australia's resources sector continues to generate wealth for all Australians. Comprising over half of Australia's total exports, the Portfolio works to ensure that Australia's resources sector can operate in attractive, predictable, and efficient business conditions. The Portfolio is responsible for encouraging exploration, maintaining a strong regulatory framework, investing in the resources of the future including critical minerals, and supporting a globally attractive mining equipment, technology, and services (METS) sector. The Portfolio, through the Critical Minerals Facilitation Office, is the central coordination point to grow the critical minerals sector and position Australia globally as a secure, reliable, and ethical supplier of critical minerals.

The *Rum Jungle Rehabilitation project* will address historical environmental contamination and hazards from the former Rum Jungle mine site in the Northern Territory, and will create significant employment and local supply opportunities. Aside from the significant employment and local supply opportunities, this project will also create training opportunities, and engage the site's traditional owners and surrounding regional communities.

The *Next Five Year Plan for northern Australia* will stimulate economic recovery and create jobs in northern Australia by piloting a new strategic approach which targets designated 'Regions of Growth'.

Across regional Australia, the Portfolio is helping industry to adapt to global and local market shifts by diversifying supply chains, strengthening local resilience to future disruptions, and capitalising on export opportunities.

The Portfolio is also committed to improving the productivity and competitiveness of Australian industry, including in the regions through high quality service delivery.

AusIndustry, the Government's principle agency for delivery assistance, programs and services, connects the Portfolio with regional industry and businesses. AusIndustry is well represented across regional Australia through the Department's Regional Offices.

To develop the skills and knowledge needed to ensure regional communities and businesses thrive in the 'workplaces of tomorrow', the Portfolio is supporting programs to build science, technology, engineering and mathematics capabilities (STEM). In regional and rural areas, outreach measures offered by Questacon – The National Science and Technology Centre guide young Australians toward STEM professions, support teachers in the classroom, and boost regional tourism through low cost touring exhibitions.

In support of the Portfolio's responsibility for northern Australia, the Department's Office of Northern Australia (ONA) coordinates the northern Australia economic development agenda. ONA has officials in Cairns and Townsville in addition to officials in Darwin, Brisbane, Canberra and Sydney. From its headquarters in Cairns, the Northern Australian Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) boosts regional employment and economic and population growth. Through the NAIF, the Portfolio is unlocking the productivity and potential of regional northern Australia by encouraging and complementing private sector investment.

Portfolio agencies are undertaking a range of projects and initiatives in regional Australia. The Australian Institute of Marine Science continues a broad research program supporting sustainable coastal ecosystems and industries in regional Australia. The Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the Clean Energy Regulator, and the Climate Change Authority all provide policy and program support to Australia's fast growing renewable and low emission technology industries.

Additionally, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) covers a wide variety of sectors including agriculture and mining that are major contributors to Regional Australia. Geoscience Australia's \$225 million Exploring for the Future program is providing the pre-competitive information for the next major mineral discoveries in Australia and the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority continues to facilitate a strong regulatory framework for the oil and gas industry particularly in regional Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Victoria. Snowy Hydro continues to have a strong employment footprint in Regional Australia which will grow with the delivery of Snowy 2.0.

As at 31 December 2020, the Industry, Science, Energy and Resources Portfolio employed 5,565 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 4,867 staff (87 per cent) of Portfolio staff are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne, and central Sydney, 642 staff (12 per cent) in other capital cities, and 56 staff (1 per cent) in regional areas.

Outside of capital cities, the Department has Regional Offices in:

- **New South Wales** – Newcastle, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga and Wollongong.
- **Queensland** – Bundaberg, Mackay, Toowoomba, Southport and Townsville.
- **South Australia** – Mount Gambier and Port Pirie.
- **Tasmania** – Launceston.
- **Victoria** – Geelong, Bendigo and Traralgon.
- **West Australia** – Mandurah.

The Portfolio's agencies work around the country and employ 6,946 staff under their respective legislation. Of this total, 939 are located in Canberra (14.0%), 673 (10.0%) are in Sydney and 1059 (15.0%) are in Melbourne. These Portfolio agencies also have locations in other capital cities that employ 3228 (46.0%) staff, whilst 1047 (15.0%) employees work in other regions across Australia.

New Initiatives

Our North, Our Future – Next Five Year Plan for Northern Australia

The Government is investing \$189.7 million over five years from 2021-22 through the *Next Five Year Plan for Northern Australia*. The plan builds on the 2015 White Paper on Developing Northern Australia and focuses on job creation through concentrated investment aligned to geographic regions of growth. It includes initiatives that will enable greater digital connectivity in northern Australia; and support for businesses to scale-up and diversify.

Regions of Growth

The Government is investing \$9.3 million over five years from 2021-22 to pilot Regions of Growth in northern Australia locations. The investment will support on-ground specialists to focus effort on capitalising on the strengths of the region, including critical minerals, advanced manufacturing, and agriculture/aquaculture; and data compilation to better understand economic potential.

Connecting Northern Australia

The Government is providing \$68.5 million over 2 years from 2021-22 in dedicated funding to improve telecommunications infrastructure across northern Australia through the *Regional Connectivity Program* and the *Mobile Black Spot Program*. The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications is responsible for the delivery and administration of this initiative.

The investment supports telecommunications infrastructure projects which maximise economic and social opportunities in regional, rural and remote northern Australia. The investment will improve the commercial viability of telecommunications projects in high cost, low population density locations including remote Indigenous communities.

Northern Australia Development Program

The Government is investing \$111.9 million over five years from 2021-22 to support northern Australian businesses to scale-up and diversify by providing co-investment grants to businesses for a range of activities including infrastructure, assets, feasibility studies and business planning. The investment will be supported by a *Strengthening Northern Australia Business advisory service* to build business capability and resilience, maximising the growth potential of businesses accessing the grant funding.

Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) – Expansion

In the 2020-21 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, the Government provided an additional \$18.6 million over 4 years from 2020-21 (and \$215.9 million from 2024-25 to 2026-27) to simplify the NAIF's use of debt instruments and allow the NAIF to make limited equity investments.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility – extension and enhancements* and strengthens the NAIF's impact across northern Australia.

Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project

The Government is funding rehabilitation of the former *Rum Jungle* mine site in the Northern Territory. Rehabilitation activities will address environmental contaminants and hazards resulting from historical uranium and copper mining at Rum Jungle.

The Government's investment will deliver a significant economic impact in the Batchelor/Coomalie region, supporting jobs and create significant indirect employment and local supply opportunities. Training, employment and other engagement opportunities for the site's traditional owners will support their participation in delivery of works and land management.

This investment builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project – additional funding*.

Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Radio Telescope Project

The Government is investing \$387 million over 10 years from 2021-22 to 2030-31 (with \$29.6 million in 2031-32 and \$29.5 million per year ongoing from 2032-33).

The Government's investment provides Australia's share of construction and operations of the SKA telescopes, supporting 350 jobs during construction and a further 230

ongoing jobs, the majority of which will be based in Western Australia's Mid-West region. The SKA telescopes will help Australian scientists make vital scientific breakthroughs – such as a better understanding of the origin and future of stars and galaxies, and the structure of the universe. The investment will also support Australia's hosting of the SKA-Low telescope by:

- Establishing the Australian SKA Regional Centre which will enable the SKA's high value science and data activities to be carried out in Australia.
- Ensuring Australia meets its commitment to provide the SKA Observatory with an appropriate site to build the SKA-Low telescope.
- Installing a fibre optic link from the existing SKA fibre link (which runs from Geraldton to the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory [MRO]) to the Pia Wadjarri Remote Aboriginal Community (which lies within eight kilometres of the link) and the Murchison Settlement (which lies within 52 kilometres of the link).

Australia's Global Resources Strategy

The Government is providing \$20.1 million over 2 years from 2021-22 to deliver a *Global Resources Strategy* that will diversify and strengthen Australia's access to key export markets and reduce the risk of trade disruptions.

The resources sector employs over 260,000 people and is the largest employer of Indigenous Australians, with many of these jobs located in regional Australia. Any boost to the domestic resources sector will have flow on effects through regional job creation and economic benefits in regional communities.

Junior Minerals Exploration Incentive (JMEI) – extension

The Government has allocated \$100 million to extend the JMEI for 4 years from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2025. This measure is estimated to cost \$77.6 million over the four years from 2023-24. This investment will continue the Government's support and encouragement of greenfield mineral exploration across Australia and brings total investment in the JMEI to \$200 million.

Greenfields mineral exploration underpins Australia's mining industry by finding new mineral deposits and ensuring a strong investment pipeline. Exploration predominately occurs in remote and rural areas across Australia, providing jobs and economic activity in regional communities. The extension of the JMEI will encourage more exploration activity, supporting future resources development.

Delivering accelerated exploration in the Beetaloo sub-basin

In the 2020-21 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Government provided \$52.1 million over 3 years from 2020-21 to accelerate gas development in the Beetaloo sub-basin in the Northern Territory. The funding includes:

- \$50.6 million over three years from 2020-21 for the Beetaloo Cooperative Drilling Program, launched on 18 March 2021, that provides grants to accelerate gas exploration activities in the Beetaloo sub-basin
- \$1.5 million over 3 years from 2020-21 to strengthen collaboration across government and industry to support the development of the sub-basin.

The Beetaloo sub-basin, approximately 500 kilometres south-east of Darwin, has the potential to be a world-class gas province. Development of the Beetaloo will provide a steady flow of jobs and economic activity in Top End communities, as well as unlocking downstream opportunities across the Northern Territory. Accelerating development activities in the Beetaloo will help to realise those benefits sooner.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – gas fired recovery*, which provided \$28.3 million over 3 years to establish 5 Strategic Basin Plans, and is a key measure of the Government’s *Unlocking the Beetaloo: The Beetaloo Strategic Basin Plan* released on 14 January 2021.

Strategic Basin Plans

The Government will provide \$15.8 million over three years from 2021-22 to drive economic opportunities and support strategic basin plans. Funding includes \$15.7 million in 2021-22 to support gas industry field appraisal trials in the North Bowen and Galilee basins, and \$2.2 million over three years from 2021-22 to build the capacity of the Northern Land Council to facilitate land use agreements and drive economic opportunities in the Beetaloo sub basin.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – gas fired recovery* and the Government’s *Unlocking the Beetaloo: The Beetaloo Strategic Basin Plan* released on 14 January 2021.

Advancing Australia’s Gas-Fired Recovery

The Government is providing \$58.5 million over four years from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to further advance Australia’s *Gas-Fired Recovery Plan* announced 15 September 2020. The funding includes support for the following initiatives:

- \$38.7 million over two years from 2021-22 to ensure the Government is well positioned to alleviate the potential gas shortfall on Australia’s east coast and support critical gas infrastructure projects.

- \$6.2 million over 3 years from 2021-22 to develop the Wallumbilla Gas Hub in Queensland into a more open and transparent gas trading hub.
- \$5.6 million over two years from 2021-22 to further strengthen the Government’s energy system planning framework and build on national gas infrastructure planning already completed and underway. This includes the delivery of an additional *National Gas Infrastructure Plan* in 2022 that identifies strategic priorities through an assessment of costs and benefits, and gas market modelling.
- \$4.6 million over 4 years to develop initiatives that empower gas reliant businesses to better negotiate competitive outcomes in their gas supply agreements.
- \$3.5 million in 2021-22 to design a framework to facilitate Australian Government investment in medium to longer term critical gas infrastructure projects, ensuring the reliable and secure supply of gas to Australian consumers.

The delivery of the *Gas-Fired Recovery Plan* will benefit regional Australia, including supporting regional jobs, where many gas production and infrastructure projects are located.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – gas fired recovery*.

Emissions Reduction and New Investments under the Technology Investment Roadmap

The Government will invest \$1.5 billion over 10 years from 2021-22 to incentivise private investment in new and emerging low emissions technologies and back the Government’s commitment to real and practical action to reduce emissions. It will enable ambitious international technology partnerships to be established and support the JobMaker agenda, creating 6,000 jobs, many in regional communities.

Increased investment in priority low emissions technologies – such as an emerging hydrogen industry, low emissions steel and aluminium and carbon capture storage – are expected to deliver significant employment and economic benefits to regional areas, where many of these industries are located.

The Government is investing \$1.2 billion over 10 years into a Technology Co-Investment Facility to incentivise private investment in new and emerging low emissions technologies identified as priorities in the *Technology Investment Roadmap’s first Low Emissions Technology Statement* and deliver international partnerships to accelerate low emissions technologies to parity with higher emitting alternatives.

This new funding to support the Facility, in combination with the previous \$1.4 billion over 12 years to support ARENA and \$95.4 million to establish the King Review

Technology Co-Investment Fund, both announced in the 2020-21 Budget, will support the Government's technology-based approach to reduce emissions.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – Investment in New Energy Technologies* and the 2019-20 Budget measure titled *Climate Solutions Package*.

Investment in new technologies to help farmers voluntarily reduce their emissions

The Government will invest \$59.6 million over five years from 2021-22 under the land sector investment stream of the Technology Co-Investment Facility to support voluntary action by farmers to lower emissions while growing their businesses. The package includes \$36.7 million for a National Soil Carbon Innovation Challenge to help lower agricultural emissions through better soil management, and \$22.9 million to develop and trial technologies to deliver low emissions feed supplements to grazing animals without imposing additional costs. This investment stream is estimated to deliver 190 jobs.

Regional Clean Hydrogen Hubs

The Government is supporting the growth of Australia's hydrogen industry as part of significant new investment to back technologies and projects that will help to reduce global emissions, boost jobs and support Australia's economic recovery.

To further embed hydrogen technologies in regional Australia, the Government will invest \$275.5 million through the 2021-22 Budget to support the development of four regionally located, additional clean hydrogen hubs. This funding is in addition to the \$70.2 million provided in the 2020-21 Budget, including \$55.7 million over four years to 2023-24, for a first hydrogen hub. Hubs will help to build opportunities for the domestic use of hydrogen while providing an avenue to create jobs and investment in regional centres. The *National Hydrogen Strategy* identifies hubs as a priority action, and there is recognition internationally that hubs are a cost-effective route to achieving scale. Development of hydrogen hubs will help the industry to scale up and work towards achieving the Technology Investment Roadmap's goal of 'H2 under \$2'.

Funding for certification trials and hydrogen related legal and market reforms will facilitate future international trade and remove barriers for export of low carbon fuels. This will create opportunities to expand trade centres around the country, unlocking further jobs and economic growth in regional areas located close to hydrogen hub export ports.

This investment builds on the \$383.4 million provided in the 2019-20 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* to support the national Hydrogen Strategy and establish the Advancing Hydrogen Fund within the Clean Energy Finance Corporation.

The Government's total funding commitment to establishing a hydrogen industry not exceeds \$850 million.

Carbon Capture, Use and Storage (CCUS) Hubs and Technologies

The Government will provide \$263.7 million over 10 years from 2021-22 to fund CCUS projects, establish hubs in proximity to high emitting industrial areas and provide support for research, development and commercialisation efforts. Projects will support emissions reduction across power generation, natural gas or hydrogen production and heavy industries.

Large scale projects supported through the CCUS Hubs and Technologies Program will primarily be located in regional or offshore Australia, which will provide enhanced economic opportunities to local communities. Deployment of CCUS will create jobs in regional Australia and enable new or expanded export opportunities in low-carbon hydrogen, LNG and carbon-recycled products.

This investment builds on the \$50 million allocated to support pilot and pre-commercial CCUS projects in Australia as part of the 2020-21 Budget.

Enabling industry to reduce energy waste, improve productivity and build skills for long-term change

The Government will provide \$26.4 million over four years from 2021-22 to support industries, including those in regional areas, adopt voluntary energy management systems. These systems will support ongoing reductions in energy consumption thereby improving global competitiveness for Australian businesses. Lowering ongoing energy costs for business will also stimulate regional economies through increased demand for local goods and services.

The investment will provide support and resources to businesses who make voluntary public commitments to reduce their energy use by providing access to dedicated expert facilitators to give them guidance and help find energy savings.

Improving Energy Affordability and Reliability

The Australian Government is providing support for investment in new dispatchable generation and affordable and reliable power for consumers.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – Improving Energy Affordability and Reliability*.

Hydrogen ready gas turbines

The Australian Government has committed \$24.9 million over three years from 2021-22 to support the development of hydrogen-ready gas generation infrastructure. Supporting upcoming gas generation projects to be hydrogen ready will enable these

generators to remain commercially competitive in the future, should clean hydrogen become comparable in cost to natural gas. These generators could also have broader regional benefits for hydrogen industry growth.

This funding will support hydrogen-ready capability for new gas generators through financial support for hydrogen-ready turbines or associated hydrogen supply infrastructure. Funding could also be provided for research, consultant studies, or similar components if there are complexities relating to infrastructure for projects to be hydrogen ready.

Supporting the Port Kembla Power Station

The Government is providing \$30.0 million over two years from 2021-22 to support Australian Industrial Power to undertake early works on its proposed power station at Port Kembla, New South Wales. The investment will go towards ensuring a final investment decision can be reached for the project. If it proceeds, the power station will support electricity reliability and lower prices in New South Wales.

Measures to Support the Northern Territory State Deal

The Australian Government is investing up to \$30 million in 2021-22 to increase energy security, reliability and affordability in the Northern Territory, while reducing emissions.

Up to \$15 million will be invested to help build a 35 megawatt big battery in Darwin to maintain security and reliability in light of increasing renewable energy in the Darwin-Katherine Interconnected System.

A further \$15 million will support deployment of microgrids with batteries in up to 10 remote Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory to reduce their reliance on diesel based generation.

This investment builds on the Northern Territory's Solar Energy Transformation Program (SETuP), which previously received \$35 million from ARENA, and the Australian Government's *Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund*.

Renewable Energy Microgrid in the Daintree Community

The Government is providing up to \$19.3 million over 3 years from 2021-22 to support the deployment of a renewable energy microgrid for the Daintree community in far north Queensland.

The microgrid will replace costly diesel generation with a renewable energy microgrid incorporating hydrogen in the northern side of the Daintree community. A cleaner energy supply is an important consideration for this world heritage site. The project will

also demonstrate innovative microgrid technologies, helping to accelerate the uptake of microgrids in other regional and remote areas.

Extension of the role of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

The Government will invest \$3 million over 5 years from 2021-22 to extend the role of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner to ensure community concerns over construction of large-scale energy projects and new transmission are taken into account. Most large scale renewable energy projects are deployed in regional areas due to the availability of space and the required quality of solar and wind energy resources. The Commissioner's office will continue to play a vital role in addressing concerns in regional areas. The Commissioner was formerly known as the National Wind Farm Commissioner.

Digital Economy Strategy – Artificial Intelligence Action Plan

The Government is investing \$124.1 million over six years through its *Artificial Intelligence Action Plan* (AI) to uplift capability, productivity and competitiveness of Australian businesses through the adoption and use of AI.

The Government's AI Action Plan is a key initiative under the Digital Economy Strategy that sets out how Australia will secure its future as a modern and leading digital economy and society by 2030. This includes accelerating the digital capability of Australian businesses, by supporting strategic investments in digital technology, skills and infrastructure, and finding digital solutions to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses.

Catalysing the AI Opportunity in our Regions

The Government is investing \$12 million over 5 years from 2021-22 in a pilot to co-fund up to 36 community based projects that solve regional challenges and increase AI capability. Projects will link AI practitioners with regional businesses or communities: raising awareness of the local opportunities to develop and adopt AI, while supporting the development of in-demand skills.

This measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure *JobMaker Plan – Digital Business Plan*.

Community Benefit Program Extension in Kimba – extension

The Government is investing \$2.4 million over 3 years from 2021-22 to extend the Community Benefit program in Kimba, South Australia. The program will deliver \$2 million in grants to support social-cohesion and economic development in the Kimba region of South Australia during the site selection process for the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility.

Australian Space Agency – Strengthening Regulatory Capacity

The Government will invest \$13.3 million over 4 years, commencing in 2021-22, and ongoing annual costs of \$3.3 million from 2025-26, to expand the Australian Space Agency to meet the increased demand for regulatory services from businesses seeking to undertake space activities, in turn helping to drive further growth of the industry.

This supports the Government’s goal to triple the size of the space sector to \$12 billion and create up to another 20,000 jobs by 2030. Firms interacting with the Australian Space Agency’s regulatory services are expected to be located in both metropolitan and regional areas.

This measure builds on the 2018-19 Budget measure *Australian Technology and Science Growth Plan – growing the Australian space industry*, the 2019-20 Budget measure *Space Infrastructure Fund*, and the 2020-21 Budget measure *Growing Australia’s Space Industry*.

Current 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 harnesses Australia’s manufacturing capability, boosts competitiveness, delivers transformation at scale and secures jobs for the future.

The 6 identified National Manufacturing Priorities (NMPs) – Resources Technology and Critical Minerals Processing, Food and Beverage, Medical Products, Recycling and Clean Energy, Defence, and Space – are playing an important role in regional Australia. Approximately 51 per cent of the resources workforce is located in regional and remote areas. Major regional inland and port towns in Australia have been developed on the strength of resources activities. Resources projects attract investment that helps drive a wider diversity of regional businesses. As an example, resources technology manufacturing and services provides strong opportunities for many regional areas.

As with earlier waves of major investment in energy production, regional Australians are also positioned to be key beneficiaries in emerging areas of clean energy and recycling. Manufacturing projects in processing and remanufacturing waste, equipment manufacturing for clean energy projects, and manufacturing low emissions industrial products (such as hydrogen and low emissions steel) are all growth opportunities for regional Australia.

The Australian Food and Grocery Council in 2019 estimated that over 107,000 jobs or 39.3 per cent of the food and grocery manufacturing sector are employed in regional areas. The sector both provides jobs and helps boost and sustain regional economies.

The scale, success, and geographic coverage of the food and beverage sector could transform manufacturing in regional Australia.

Modern Manufacturing Initiative

The Government is providing \$1.3 billion to industry over five years from 2020-21 through the *Modern Manufacturing Initiative* (MMI). The MMI addresses barriers to scale for Australian manufacturers and supports Australia's post-COVID-19 recovery by targeting private sources of capital to invest in manufacturing. The MMI will co-fund projects that will transform Australian manufacturing in the 6 NMP areas through the following 3 targeted streams:

- The *Manufacturing Collaboration Stream*, which 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*, which will provide co-funding for industry-led projects to translate good ideas into commercial outcomes.
- The *Manufacturing Integration Stream*, which will target the integration of local firms to deliver products and services into domestic and global value chains.

The MMI is open to applications for projects from across Australia. The Government's investment in the NMPs will support a wide range of regional businesses servicing our agricultural, food processing, mining and resources industries with manufactured goods that are sold locally and to international markets.

With manufacturing a key regional employer, the MMI will support regional businesses, job generation and local economies.

Currently, manufacturing employs more than 902,000 Australians, or around 6.9 per cent of the workforce. For many regions the proportion of employment in manufacturing is much higher; up to 14 per cent of the workforce are employed in manufacturing in some regions of Australia.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures indicate that over 31 per cent (or 266,000 people) of the total manufacturing employment is located in regional areas of Australia. For Tasmania, 59.2 per cent of manufacturing employment is in the regional areas and for Queensland it is 47.3 per cent.

Commercialisation Fund

The Government is supporting Australia's manufacturers to turn their good ideas into world-beating realities that create more local jobs, with a \$30 million fund delivered over 18 months to 30 June 2022. Consistent with all programs under the *Modern Manufacturing Strategy*, this fund will support projects within the 6 NMPs.

The fund is managed and administered by the Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre, in collaboration with the 5 other Industry Growth Centres: AustCyber, Food Innovation Australia Ltd, MTPConnect, METS Ignited and National Energy Resources Australia, and the CSIRO.

Supply Chain Resilience Initiative

The Government is providing \$107.2 million over four years from 2020-21 for critical supply chain analysis and funding to address identified gaps in the resilience of these supply chains through manufacturing, including in regional areas.

Activities under the Initiative include:

- Conducting a robust 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. *Sovereign Manufacturing Capability Plans* (SMCPs) will be developed and outline the domestic capabilities that would contribute to enhanced resilience for identified products.
- Grants for businesses to establish or scale a capability that addresses a critical supply chain vulnerability for a critical product or input identified in SMCPs.

The grants program will be rolled out from July 2021 and is expected to benefit manufacturing-related companies in regional and metropolitan areas who fall within the scope of the product categories identified within the SMCP. Initial product categories being examined are common medicines, personal protective equipment and agricultural production chemicals, with additional product categories to follow.

Manufacturing Modernisation Fund – establishment and round 2

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 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. In 2021-22, the MMF is providing \$9.8 million in support to 54 businesses in regional Australia to fund projects worth over \$43.6 million.

The Government expects projects under round one of the MMF to create thousands of 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.

On 1 October 2020, the Government announced a further \$52.8 million over three years from 2020-21 for a second round of the MMF. This second round will continue support to manufacturers across a wide spread of regions and NMP areas to fast-track Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second round of the MMF is part of the Government's \$1.5 billion *Modern Manufacturing Strategy*.

This measure extends the 2019-20 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook measure *Election Commitment - Manufacturing Modernisation Fund – establishment*.

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

On 23 June 2020, the Government provided an additional \$124.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to continue and expand the *Exploring for the Future program*, bringing total investment in the program to \$225 million.

The measure provides pre-competitive data about potential mineral, energy and groundwater resources across Australia. Eight new projects were announced in March 2021. They include three deep-dive projects in the geological regions of Officer-Musgrave in central-west Australia, Darling-Curnamona-Delamerian in south-east Australia, and Barkly-Isa-Georgetown in north-east Australia. The eight projects also include three continental-scale projects that have national applications but with a focus in southern Australia.

The program 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. As it has done over the last four years, Exploring for the Future will continue to unlock new resource-rich regions across the country. Development of those regions will provide ongoing economic growth across Australia and create short, medium, and long-term jobs in regional communities.

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

Steel Processing and Galvanising Plant in Whyalla – upgrade

The Government provided \$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 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook measure *Interconnector Funding – delivering reliable and affordable energy*.

Entrepreneurs Programme

The *Entrepreneurs' Programme*, delivered by AusIndustry, is the Government's flagship initiative for business competitiveness and productivity at the firm level. The program delivers advice and grants to enable high potential businesses, including in regional and remote areas, to strengthen, grow, innovate and commercialise nationally and globally. The program is ongoing with a value of \$454 million over four years from 2021-22, and provides businesses with access to tailored advice from a national network of over 170 industry experts and supporting grant funding.

This support is provided through a variety of service offerings, including Accelerating Commercialisation, Growth, Innovation Connections, and Strengthening Business. In addition to improving outcomes for clients, the program benefits the broader community, as well as regions, sectors and communities.

In particular, the program has been expanded to support businesses in regional Australia that have been impacted by the 2019-2020 bushfires through dedicated facilitators and targeted assistance.

National Bushfire Recovery Fund – Entrepreneurs' Programme – Regional Business Recovery and Resilience

The 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 is providing \$12.8 million over two years from 2020-21 to help businesses recover, rebuild and renew from the impacts of the bushfires.

Businesses have access to 22 independent business facilitators (including three digital solutions specialists) across 32 regional areas of New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. Facilitators focus on building resilience into all aspects of the business, particularly where digital systems and strategies would play a key role. Facilitators have strong community and small business backgrounds, are local to the regions they service, and work collaboratively with other small business and recovery organisations on the ground.

National Research Centre for Natural Hazards and Disaster Resilience

On 23 July 2020, the Government announced \$88.1 million to extend and scale up funding for critical research into natural hazards. The funding includes \$85 million over 10 years from 2021-22 for a new, world class research centre for natural hazard resilience and disaster risk reduction, which will deliver and scale up applied research to inform Australia's disaster recovery and resilience effort. The work of the new research centre will support businesses and communities across Australia, including in regional Australia. It is expected that this research will benefit regional Australia as the regional

landscape is at a heightened risk of impact from natural hazard events such as bushfires and flooding.

Nuclear Science and Technology, Including Nuclear Medicine Supply to Regional Australia

The Government provided \$93.8 million over four years from 2020-21, to the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) to support the production and supply of nuclear medicines used in services delivered all around the country. Nearly one third of ANSTO's customers are located in regional Australia and receive an estimated 3,000 patient doses of the most commonly used nuclear medicine, Technetium-99m, each week.

The investment is contributing to the maintenance of key productive infrastructure that supports domestic manufacture and distribution to ensure that Australians, in particular those in remote or regional locations, can continue to access these vitally important health products and associated services.

JobMaker Plan – Second Women's Economic Security Package

Boosting Female Founders Initiative – expansion

The Government has provided an additional \$35.9 million over five years from 2020-21 to expand the *Boosting Female Founders Initiative* and increase the number of co-funded grants provided to majority women owned and led start-ups. The expansion also introduced a new service to provide access to expert mentoring and advice for women entrepreneurs. Grant recipients of round one of the Initiative were announced in December 2020, with 51 women led start-up businesses sharing in approximately \$11.9 million in grant funding.

The Initiative offers more generous matched funding to underrepresented groups, such as women founders who are from regional or remote locations, to ensure greater support and access to capital. Round 2 of the Initiative is underway with approximately \$11.6 million in grant funding available. The mentoring service is also underway and being delivered to eligible applicants of round one of the Initiative.

Building Community Support for the Gas-Fired Recovery

The Government has committed \$13.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to continue the *Onshore Gas Social and Economic Research Fund*. The Fund provides independent scientific research to enable individuals and communities to form their own views of the social, economic and environmental impacts and benefits of gas development. This is done through the work of the CSIRO's Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance, which is a collaboration between the CSIRO, the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments, and industry.

Legislative Changes to Enable Growth of the Offshore Renewable Energy Sector

The Government provided \$4.8 million over two years from 2020-21 to develop a regulatory framework to provide investment certainty to offshore clean energy investors. Offshore clean energy regulation will enable private investments in commercially viable locations with exceptional wind resources, which are typically found near regional communities.

Future Fuels Package

The 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.
- Undertaking a study to ensure the transition to electric vehicle technology and infrastructure is planned and managed, so the electricity grid is prepared for increased electric vehicle charging.
- Funding research to model Australia's future transport fuel mix to ensure Australians have access to fuel when they need it.
- Updating the *Government's Green Vehicle Guide* website, including improved information on electric vehicles and charging infrastructure to help businesses and communities make informed choices.

The first funding round of the *Future Fuels Fund* was launched on 15 February 2021, and focuses on public electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Applications closed on 6 April 2021 with ARENA receiving 43 submissions under round one of the Fund.

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 electric vehicles and increase options for transport in regional areas.

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

The 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 a total of \$10.2 million in grants to small and medium sized hotels for use in upgrades to improve productivity and lower energy costs. Approximately 80% of eligible hotels (those with one to 99 rooms) are in regional locations. It is expected economic benefits beyond energy savings will be realised in regional Australia, with local suppliers and trades engaged to carry out the funded projects.
- The *Powering Communities Program* to provide \$67,700 of grants in each Federal electorate to assist not-for-profit community organisations to improve energy efficiency practices and technologies and better manage energy consumption. Total grant funding available is \$10.2 million. It is expected economic benefits beyond energy savings will be realised across Australia, including in regional areas, with local suppliers and trades engaged to carry out the funded projects.
- Improving the energy efficiency of residential and commercial buildings in Australia is expected to generate economic benefits. Energy savings will be realised across Australia, including in regional Australia.

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

Regional Australia Microgrid Pilots Program

The Government is providing \$53.6 million over 6 years from 2020-21 to support pilot studies for microgrids in regional and remote areas. This 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. The program will launch in 2021-22.

Critical Minerals Capabilities

On 14 November 2019, the Government announced \$16.1 million over five years from 2019-20 to support the development of Australia’s critical minerals capabilities, and boost Australia’s contribution to enhancing the stability and security of global critical minerals supply chains. Australia has world-leading reserves of critical minerals across regional areas. These present commercial opportunities for our businesses, as well as job creation potential in regional Australia.

The measure provided, over five years from 2019-20, \$9.4 million to establish a Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO) in the Department; \$4.5 million for *the Advancing Research and Development for Critical Minerals Program*, to be implemented by the Government’s scientific agencies, and \$2.2 million to Austrade to expand its program of critical minerals trade and investment facilitation.

The CMFO is providing a whole-of-government critical mineral policy coordination function; dedicated project facilitation service for strategic Australian critical minerals projects; and undertake international engagement to promote investment in Australia.

Former British Government Nuclear Testing Site at Maralinga, South Australia – funding support

On 8 July 2020, the 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 remote South Australia. The funding is enabling site investigations to inform a long-term remediation action plan for non-radiological materials at the site and construction of permanent accommodation for current and future Maralinga caretakers.

The 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 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.

Cooperative Research Centres Program

The *Cooperative Research Centres* (CRC) Program, established in 1990, is a competitive, merit-based grant program that supports industry led collaborations between industry, researchers and the community. The CRC Program has two funding streams:

- CRCs, which undertake medium to long term, industry-led high quality collaborative research

- CRC Projects (CRC-Ps), which undertake a short-term, industry-identified and industry-led collaborative research project.

Businesses investing in research and development through CRCs and CRC-Ps are increasing their income, competitiveness and productivity. The CRC Program continues to support CRCs and CRCPs that have impacts on rural and regional Australia.

Currently, the CRC stream has 27 CRCs nationally receiving over \$1 billion in grant funds over their terms and of these, several impact on regional and rural Australia. The CRC-P stream currently has 14 projects led by partners located in regional Australia which are receiving over \$27.3 million in CRC Program grant funding.

CRCs and CRC-Ps contribute to strengthening rural and regional development in areas such as agriculture and mining industries, farming systems and improving health outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Regional businesses (including small and medium-sized enterprises), Rural Research and Development Corporations, universities and other research organisations can be a part of CRCs and CRC-Ps and their activities.

Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia

The *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* included \$75 million over 10 years for a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Developing Northern Australia to help northern businesses generate new ideas and innovation that leverage the north's strengths and address its challenges. The CRC commenced operations in Townsville in 2017-18 and has three focus areas: agriculture and food (including aquaculture), northern Australia health service delivery and Traditional Owner-led business development. Industry situational analysis is occurring on the beef sector, broadacre cropping, aquaculture, horticulture, rice, forestry, bush foods, sugar and health sectors in Northern Australia. In November 2020, the CRC launched the State of the North 2020 report providing a roadmap to drive greater economic development across Northern Australia.

Measures to build STEM and cybersecurity skills

Each year outreach activities by Questacon and Portfolio agencies, delivered in person and online, provide thousands of regional young Australians, teachers, and families with access to STEM learning opportunities. Questacon commits \$2.4 million to these activities annually.

In the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$15.1 million over three years from 2019-20 to expand Questacon's outreach activities. This included \$8.9 million over 3 years to expand the delivery of Questacon's regional programs, enabling teachers to gain confidence with Engineering is Elementary and extending the Questacon Science Circus to reach more remote and regional communities.

The 2020-21 Budget measure *Australia's Cyber Security Strategy 2020* included a further commitment of \$8.7 million over 5 years for Questacon to deliver a new national cyber security education program, aimed at growing a cyber-skilled workforce including in Australia's regions.

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

The Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications portfolio contributes to the wellbeing of all Australians through the design and implementation of the Australian Government's regional development, infrastructure, transport, communications, digital economy and arts and culture policies and programs.

The scope of the portfolio's work touches the lives of every Australian. It underpins the economic and social activity of our community nation-wide, from the transport and communications networks that Australians use every day, to our cultural expressions. It supports services and entities delivering crucial national economic infrastructure, such as national road, rail, aviation and shipping infrastructure, 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 for programs and initiatives that assist regional communities around the country, and also supports services to Australia's territories such as Norfolk Island and Christmas and Cocos Islands.

A significant focus for the Government as a whole and the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications Portfolio in particular over the 2020-21 year has been responding to several major domestic and international challenges. COVID-19 impacts on top of previous natural disasters such as bushfires and floods, as well as the response to earlier drought conditions have posed additional demands and have required specially-tailored response initiatives 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 2021-22. Detailed in the New Initiatives below are significant investments in the 2021-22 Budget, which boost the Portfolio's contribution to key outcomes for regional Australia and provide stimulus for regional recovery and growth. These include new major investments in transport infrastructure which bring the Government's investment in transport infrastructure to a record \$110 billion over ten years, and more than \$84 million in further investments in communications infrastructure, including upgrades for regional connectivity.

Inland Rail is a key initiative of the Australian Government's \$110 billion infrastructure pipeline that includes major road and rail upgrades that are expected to better connect regional communities to domestic and international markets. Inland Rail is delivering a

competitive freight service that is expected to increase national productivity and boost regional economies along the corridor in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

In 2020-21 the portfolio led the establishment of several support packages for regional communities such as the \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. This Fund has delivered targeted assistance to regions, communities and industry sectors disproportionately affected by COVID-19, including support for aviation, fisheries, tourism, events and the arts. Of particular importance for regional communities have been the Fund initiatives supporting the aviation and airfreight sectors. Several of these initiatives, which have been vital to the continued economic viability of regional communities and regional products, are being continued into 2021-22.

Air connectivity is critical to many regional and remote communities across Australia, enabling the transportation of workers and freight and facilitating the delivery of medical and other essential services. The Australian Government provides assistance to the owners of regional airports across Australia to undertake essential works, promoting aviation safety and access for these communities. The Australian Government also provides targeted support for aerodrome infrastructure and air services to remote areas of Australia, where they are not commercially viable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the aviation industry. The Australian Government acted swiftly to respond, and has implemented several major support packages to support the industry through the crisis and assist economic recovery post COVID-19. This includes support for regional aviation by guaranteeing minimum connectivity, providing financial support for security screening costs, and stimulating demand on selected routes to key tourism regions.

The portfolio also includes NBN Co Ltd (NBN Co), the mission of which is to provide reliable, fast and affordable broadband to all Australians through the National Broadband Network (NBN). The network is now built and fully operational with over 99.8 per cent of premises able to order NBN services as at February 2021. In 2021-22 will be working with regional businesses and communities to deliver better outcomes for residential and business broadband consumers through its Regional Development and Engagement team which is focused on improving the digital capability of regional Australia. NBN Co has also established 85 Business Fibre Zones in regional areas. Businesses located within these Zones have access to ultra-fast connectivity at no upfront cost and at CBD prices, improving competition, productivity, and fostering innovation and growth for small and medium businesses.

The Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development portfolio also delivers the Australian Government's regional development programs. The Government is providing an additional \$250 million for round six of the Building Better Regions Fund. This and other regional programs provide funding for a range of locally-driven projects

that aim to strengthen our regions, their economies and the vibrant communities that make up regional Australia.

In 2020-21, the Government committed \$100 million from 2020-21 to 2021-22 to fund Regional Recovery Partnerships to coordinate investments with other levels of government. The Partnerships are supporting 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. This funding continues into 2021-22.

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 at 31 December 2020, the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications Portfolio employed 3,219 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,057 staff (95 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 109 staff (3 per cent) in other capital cities and 53 staff (2 per cent) in regional areas.

The portfolio's regional footprint includes office locations such as Wollongong, Newcastle, Orange, Toowoomba, Dubbo, Albury-Wodonga, Moree, Port Augusta, Broome, Coffs Harbour and Junee, as well as offices in the Indian Ocean Territories, Norfolk Island and the Jervis Bay Territory to deliver vital infrastructure and essential services in Australia's Territories.

Several portfolio agencies employ staff under their own legislation. Some Portfolio Agencies, such as Air Services Australia, have a considerable presence around Australia supporting aviation movements outside the capital cities. NBN Co has a significant presence in regional areas with the NBN available across Australia.

The Portfolio also has oversight responsibilities for Australia Post, which maintains a retail network of over 4,000 Post Offices, including more than 2,500 in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority employs 443 staff, of which 288 are located in Canberra, 71 in other capital cities, and 84 are based in regional offices. The staff in regional offices support the safe operation of shipping in regional ports and domestic commercial vessel operators (such as fishing and tourism operators) in these locations.

New Initiatives

Tourism Aviation Network Support Program

Aviation and tourism have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The tourism sector's recovery will be driven by Australians holidaying at home. The Australian Government will continue to support Australia's recovery, including by subsidising 800,000 discounted airfares to key tourism regions around the country. This will not only support jobs in the aviation industry but will have an economic multiplier effect through tourism in regional Australia, as travellers spend money on accommodation, food and activities and stay longer in these regions. Discounted airfares will be made available for travel in the period from April 2021 up to 30 September 2021.

The program will also provide funding to airlines to increase flights on selected routes to key tourism regions. In combination with the reduced airfares, and other support measures for the aviation **and tourism** industry, this program will improve airline sustainability with subsequent flow-on benefits for aviation workers elsewhere in the sector and tourism businesses through increased employment opportunities and supply chain benefits.

Domestic Airports Security Costs Support

Australia's aviation sector continues to be negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the need to continue to meet ongoing operational costs despite reduced revenues. The Australian Government has committed \$90 million through the Domestic Airports Security Costs Support (DASCS) program to provide assistance to eligible domestic airports to take some of the costs out of the sector as it recovers from the pandemic. The program will run from 29 March to 30 September 2021.

Typically airports incur significant ongoing operating costs, including costs related to mandatory security screening requirements, regardless of the number of passengers being serviced. This measure will provide direct funding to eligible airports to meet costs related to passenger and baggage security screening obligations required by the Australian Government.

Airports typically recover security screening costs by charging airlines, which ultimately flow through to end users, including travellers. DASCS grant funding is conditional on grant-funded costs cannot be passed on to airport users.

A considerable number of eligible airports are located in regional Australia. The measure will benefit regional Australians by helping to reduce the cost burden of security regulation on airports and by extension airlines, and ultimately the travelling public, as the sector continues its fragile recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

Infrastructure Investment – Major Projects

The Australian Government is continuing its support for job-creating, economy boosting infrastructure. This \$110 billion investment over 10 years through the rolling infrastructure plan will see regional Australia bounce back stronger than ever following the global COVID-19 pandemic. This investment will support local jobs and businesses, help meet our national freight challenge, and get Australians home sooner and safer.

Through the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government has committed to new projects that bring our investment in regional Australia to over \$50 billion from 2013-14 to 2030 - 31. This commitment will help get more regional Australians back to work and keep business' doors open through the return to a new normal. As Australia moves to the next phase of post COVID-19 economic recovery the Government is focusing on new investments in productivity driving infrastructure across Australia, committing to key projects in regional areas including:

- \$400.0 million for the Inland Freight Route (Mungindi to Charters Towers) Upgrades, delivering a long-term program of priority works improving freight movements between the New South Wales border and north Queensland;
- \$400.0 million for Jervis Bay Road to Sussex Inlet Road - Stage 1, to improve the Princes Highway in New South Wales between Jervis Bay Road and Hawken Road, and a further \$100.0 million towards a new intersection at Jervis Bay Road, as part of the Government's now \$900 million commitment to upgrading this corridor in NSW to improve safety for all road users and reduce congestion;
- \$200.0 million for Great Eastern Highway Upgrades - Coates Gully, Walgoolan to Southern Cross and Ghooli to Benari in Western Australia to deliver upgrade works such as realignment, widening, bridge replacement or improvement, passing lanes, intersection improvements, rest areas and improvements to drainage;
- \$161.6 million for Truro Bypass to improve the regional connection between Adelaide and the Riverland region for freight, tourism and local commuters, and \$32.0 million for the Kangaroo Island Road Safety and Bushfire Resilience Package in South Australia;
- \$150 million for Northern Territory National Network Highway Upgrades (Phase 2) to provide a better quality and more efficient road network, allowing for growth in traffic volumes, as well as improving road safety;
- \$80 million for the Bass Highway Safety and Freight Efficiency Upgrades Package in Tasmania.

A number of other projects also received additional funding as part of the 2021-22 Budget to continue to deliver safety and connectivity benefits across regional Australia,

driving employment and supporting Australia's economic recovery. This includes an additional \$27.6 million for the Overpass at Port Wakefield and Township Duplication project in South Australia, \$24.0 million for the Tasmanian Freight Rail Revitalisation - Tranche 3 - Port of Burnie Shiploader Upgrade, and \$16.0 million for Western Australia's Regional State Road Safety Improvement Program.

Great Western Highway Upgrade – Katoomba to Lithgow – Construction of East and West Sections

To facilitate growth in the New South Wales central west region the Australian Government has committed \$2.03 billion for upgrades on the Great Western Highway corridor between Katoomba and Blackheath, and between Little Hartley and Lithgow. This upgrade forms part of a broader upgrade of this corridor, and will address a critical missing link in terms of access through, and congestion within, the Blue Mountains. It will separate local and through traffic, improving freight access, network efficiency, safety and community outcomes.

Bruce Highway Upgrade Program

As part of its continued investment, the Australian Government has committed a further \$400.0 million at the 2021-22 Budget to the Bruce Highway Upgrade Program to support freight efficiency and connectivity along the Queensland coast. This more than \$13.0 billion combined total investment to the Bruce Highway is providing critical linkages for freight movements between inland production areas and eleven coastal ports and major regional centres. The new investment will deliver a program of priority works between Gladstone to Rockhampton and Mackay to Proserpine.

Roads of Strategic Importance Initiative

The Australian Government is committing more than \$4.9 billion from 2018-19 to upgrade key freight routes through the Roads of Strategic Importance (ROSI) initiative. The rolling nature of the investment over 10 years ensures the ROSI initiative delivers substantial social and economic benefits, including ongoing opportunities for greater regional employment and business growth. This initiative ensures that our key freight roads efficiently connect agricultural and mining regions to ports, airports and other transport hubs.

Through the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government has committed an additional \$80.0 million for the Tasmanian Roads Package - Bass Highway Safety and Freight Efficiency Upgrades Package - Future Priorities to further enhance freight efficiency, safety and connectivity on the Bass Highway, and \$32.0 million of new funding for Upgrades to Hargraves Lane and Federation Street along the Toowoomba to Seymour corridor in New South Wales. This project will enhance connectivity between Inland Rail and the Newell Highway, as well as enhancing the liveability and function of Gilgandra by diverting heavy vehicles away from the town centre.

The Australian Government has committed \$173.6 million for the Northern Territory Gas Industry Roads Upgrades. The investment in this new corridor will support the development of gas resources in and around the Beetaloo Sub-basin.

To support industry and agriculture in Victoria, additional funding of \$20.0 million and \$15.0 million respectively has also been committed across the Green Triangle and Melbourne to Mildura corridors. A further \$14.4 million in additional funding has been added to the West Australian section of the Port Augusta to Perth corridor for the Great Eastern Highway – Walgoolan to Southern Cross and Coates Gully to deliver widening works and improve safety.

Additionally, through the 2021-22 Budget the Australian Government has allocated funding to projects on Roads of Strategic Importance corridors across Australia, including:

- projects along the Toowoomba to Seymour corridor across New South Wales and Victoria to address issues that are impacting the performance of this critical freight corridor, be ready for changing freight dynamics from Inland Rail and open up access to essential freight networks in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria;
- two projects along the Tenterfield to Newcastle corridor in New South Wales, which will upgrade important linking roads to the required standard to support safe and efficient freight movements;
- three projects on the Tennant Creek to Townsville corridor which will deliver works such as widening on priority sections of the Flinders Highway between Julia Creek and Cloncurry and new overtaking lanes south-west of Townsville, and;
- two projects on the Alice Springs to Darwin corridor, which will include works such as the construction of a new section of approximately 2.8km of the Arnhem Highway to improve the flood immunity of the highway at the Adelaide River flood plain.

Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program

As part of its continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government is continuing to support Australia's economic recovery by committing an additional \$1.0 billion to fund further local priority projects through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, bringing the total to \$2.5 billion over 2020-2023. The Government's investment will support local governments to deliver community infrastructure projects, supporting an estimated 9,000 jobs across Australia over the life of the program, and supporting local business across the nation.

As at 1 May 2021, more than \$1.24 billion has been allocated to over 5,200 projects nationwide to quickly stimulate regional economies, support local job opportunities and deliver community infrastructure projects. Projects include new or upgraded bicycle

and walking paths, community halls, picnic shelters and barbeque facilities at parks as well as projects to support tourism and accessibility in regional areas. The projects delivered under this program are contributing to making regional communities safer, stronger and more sustainable.

Road Safety Program

As part of the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to improving road safety for all Australians an additional \$1.0 billion over 12 months has been committed to the Road Safety Program. This funding will include two additional six-month tranches, extending the program from July 2022 to June 2023.

The Road Safety Program projects will be rolled out over 30 months in five six-month allocations, the first tranche of projects commenced in January 2021. Over \$890 million has been allocated to projects in regional areas in tranche 1.

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.

Major Project Business Case Fund

As part of the 2021 Budget, the Australian Government has allocated \$10 million towards the Orrong Road Expressway - Graham Farmer Freeway to Leach Highway Planning project in Western Australia. This investment will fund planning works for an expressway that connects the Graham Farmer Freeway to Leach Highway along Orrong Road, including the development of a business case to assess the scope, design and cost of the expressway.

This forms part of the \$250 million Major Project Business Case Fund, which enables the Australian Government to partner with state and territory governments in the development of nationally significant projects

Advanced Train Management System

In February 2021, the Australian Government announced a further \$220 million for the Australian Rail Track Corporation to plan and design the roll out of Stage 3 of the Advanced Train Management System (ATMS) between Melbourne and Perth, as well as develop and install ATMS train-borne units. These works are expected to take place between mid-2021 to mid-2023. The system is expected to provide a number of benefits for regional communities by improving productivity, efficiency, track capability, safety and reliability as well as employment and supply benefits.

The roll out is expected to:

- Support 300 direct and 700 indirect local jobs
- Provide for greater capacity on existing rail infrastructure by allowing trains to run closer together
- Improve access to and from regional markets for businesses, in particular agricultural business, through transport of agricultural commodities, lower freight costs and by enhancing completion and service offerings in the rail freight market
- Provide safety benefits through the ability to automatically safely slow and stop trains.

Narrabri to Turrawan Line Upgrade

In December 2020, the Australian Government announced the commitment of \$44.7 million for the Australian Rail Track Corporation to upgrade 35km of Narrabri to Turrawan Line between the Hunter Valley Coal Network and Inland Rail. The upgrade is expected to be completed by mid-2023, allowing longer and heavier freight trains travelling from Northern NSW – transporting grain and cotton – to access the ports of Newcastle and Sydney. By maximising the freight volume of each train traveling on the line, the upgrades are expected to result in reduced transport costs and enhance the competitiveness for Australian exports. Australian Rail Track Corporation is consulting with local communities and the Department on the final scope of the proposed upgrades, including the interface between the line and Inland Rail.

Southern Highlands Overtaking Opportunities

The Australian Government committed \$41.6 million through the MYEFO 2020-21 budget update for Australian Rail Track Corporation to provide overtaking facilities on the Southern Highlands Line in New South Wales. Track and signaling infrastructure improvements are expected to enable faster services to overtake freight trains of up to 1,800 metres in length. Providing more overtaking opportunities is expected to reduce transit time for direction modal freight between Melbourne and Sydney and enable

mode share shift from road to rail to encourage growth and increase customer satisfaction. The project is expected to be completed by mid-2023.

Melbourne Intermodal Terminal

To unlock freight efficiencies in Victoria and the broader national network, the Australian Government committed up to \$2.1 billion for a new intermodal terminal in Melbourne. The Melbourne Intermodal Terminal will improve supply chain productivity, and drive further benefits for regional producers and communities accessing goods and freight through an enhanced national network. Construction of the terminal is expected to support up to 1,350 jobs during construction and will be delivered in time for the commencement of Inland Rail operations, with the first trains expected to operate between Melbourne and Brisbane in 2027.

Establishment of the National Freight Data Hub

The Australian Government has committed \$16.5 million over four years to establish the National Freight Data Hub. This builds on the investment in the 2019-20 Budget of \$5.2 million to work closely with industry and others to settle the design of a National Freight Data Hub and to build a prototype website.

The prototype website is an important first step to demonstrate the value of improved freight data. The website showcases government and industry cooperation on a number of projects and allows users to search for data relevant to their business. Over the next four years, the National Freight Data Hub will build on the prototype website to enhance the collection and access to freight data across all modes and supply chains. It will provide a data driven approach to strategic planning and investment, and support day-to-day operations.

Strategic Local Government Asset Assessment Project Phase 2

The \$12 million for Phase 2 of the Strategic Local Government Asset Assessment Project (SLGAAP) builds on the success of the SLGAAP Phase 1 pilot, due to be completed in June 2021. On a national basis, Phase 2 will increase the knowledge of local government road managers on the capacity of local government road assets. This can result in a wider range of heavy vehicles having greater access to the road network without requiring infrastructure upgrades and investment. Local governments across regional Australia have shown strong support and willingness to participate in Phase 2 with around 800 assets registered from approximately 90 councils through the Phase 1 process.

Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme

The Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme (TFES) was introduced by the Australian Government in 1976 to support the Tasmanian economy and regional Australia. It provides financial assistance for the cost incurred by shippers of eligible non-bulk goods moved by sea between Tasmania and mainland Australia, and between the main island

of Tasmania and King Island or the Furneaux Group, to help reduce the higher cost of shipping across Bass Strait. The TFES also provides assistance to eligible goods leaving Tasmania that are being trans-shipped via mainland Australia. The objective of the Scheme is to provide Tasmanian industries with equal opportunities to compete in other markets, recognising that, unlike their mainland counterparts, Tasmanian shippers do not have the option of transporting goods interstate by road or rail.

In August 2019, the Government announced a suite of improvements to the TFES, including increased assistance for high density goods, reduced claims processing times and interest payments for late claim payments.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$67.7 million over four years to provide assistance under the TFES for the shipment of imported goods to Tasmania via the mainland, where proof can be provided that there is no Australian equivalent good. This extension of the southbound component of the TFES further reduces the added cost of shipping across Bass Strait inputs to manufacturing, mining and primary production, ensuring Tasmanian businesses can compete on a level playing field with their mainland counterparts. It will help Tasmanian businesses keep producing at this critical time and is a definite action to keep Tasmanians in jobs and businesses producing as the economy recovers from the impacts of COVID-19.

Regional Connectivity Program Expansion

The Australian Government will continue to fund targeted, place-based connectivity solutions in regional, rural and remote Australia through the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP).

Under the first round of the RCP, the Government committed up to \$90.3 million in grants to deliver new or upgraded digital connectivity to regional, rural and remote Australians. This funding is generating a total investment of over \$180 million in telecommunications infrastructure in regional Australia.

Round 1 of the RCP was oversubscribed with applicants seeking more than \$270 million in Commonwealth funding for over 200 proposals. The Government will continue to build on the success of this program by committing a further \$84.8 million in funding to the program.

Similar to Round 1, RCP Expansion will target investment in telecommunications infrastructure projects which respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and remote Australian communities and businesses. Funded projects will complement the NBN and the Mobile Black Spot Program by delivering new and improved access to broadband and mobile connectivity in areas of high economic and social value outside of the NBN fixed-line footprint.

The Government is also providing \$68.5 million in dedicated funding to improve telecommunications infrastructure across Northern Australia through the Regional Connectivity Program and the Mobile Black Spot Program.

Community Broadcasting Program

The Government has provided additional funding of \$4.0 million per annum over two years from 2021-22 to support the community broadcasting sector, through the Community Broadcasting Program (CBP). This is in addition to the Australian Government's ongoing, indexed funding of \$16.1 million per annum to the CBP from 2021-22.

More than 450 non-profit, community based organisations deliver community broadcasting services across Australia – with 70% of these stations located in regional or remote areas. Community radio supports communities in regional Australia by broadcasting local news, telling local stories, and providing a platform for local voices and music. The Government is committed to supporting community broadcasting to continue to realise these benefits for Australian communities.

Funding for eSafety Commissioner to protect Australians online

The Australian Government will provide \$24.0 million over four years from 2021-22 for the eSafety Commissioner to continue its work protecting Australian women and their children from online harms.

The package includes \$15 million over two years for eSafety to increase its investigations capability for serious online harms. This will allow eSafety to recruit new staff to investigate and respond to reports of cyber abuse and other forms of harmful online content.

\$3 million over two years will fund a pilot program to implement technologies that identify intimate images that have been shared without consent, and assist in the rapid removal of image-based abuse material. The project will enhance eSafety's image-based abuse scheme and allow eSafety to provide greater support to victims.

\$3 million over four years will allow eSafety to develop a new program of resources to combat the growing threat of technology-facilitated abuse involving children. This program will allow the creation and provision of new resources for front-line domestic violence workers, children and young people, adult victims who are parents of affected children and child welfare services.

\$3 million over four years will be used to boost community resilience to child sexual abuse. eSafety will expand its existing suite of education resources with the addition of new, specialised content on child safety and online abuse for parents and families. The products will provide practical guidance for parents and carers to support children and young people including recognising and preventing harmful behaviours online.

In addition, the Government will provide \$5.2 million in 2021-22 to fund a National Online Safety Awareness Campaign. Following its passage through the Parliament, the Online Safety Bill will further extend Australia's world-leading online safety framework by creating new and strengthened schemes to keep Australians safe when things go wrong online. The funding will provide a targeted online advertising campaign and supporting public relations activities to inform Australians about the complaints based schemes that will become available through the eSafety Commissioner.

National Messaging Service

This proposal is to develop a design for a cell broadcast National Messaging Service (NMS) which will provide the Government with a cell broadcast capability to send messages to all mobile phones in the country or within a geo-location.

The NMS is intended to complement the Emergency Alert, which sends voice messages to landlines and mobile phones. If implemented, the NMS will enable the government to quickly and reliably deliver information to the Australian public in relation to events of national significance, including disaster events impacting regional communities.

Measuring Broadband Australia

This measure will continue funding for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to deliver the Measuring Broadband Australia (MBA) program. The MBA program, which was established in 2017, provides public reporting of the performance and reliability of fixed-line broadband services to help inform consumers while keeping industry accountable for their broadband speed and performance claims. The importance of the program's renewal is accentuated by the launch of new higher speed NBN products and the increased reliance on broadband due to COVID-19.

Extending the program to areas covered by NBN fixed wireless and the emerging market for fixed wireless broadband connections based on 4G and 5G technology, will support consumers, including regional consumers, to make informed decisions between these products and NBN broadband services. This extension will provide competition and transparency benefits to this important and growing segment.

- Over the forward estimates, the cost of the program (\$7.7million) will continue to be recovered in full via the Annual Carrier Licence Charge (ACLC), administered by the Australian Communications Media Authority.

National Water Grid Fund

On 27 March 2021, the Government announced a new funding pathway within the Fund to drive the construction of smaller-scale projects. The Government will provide up to \$160.0 million over two years from 2021-22 to establish the National Water Grid Connections funding pathway to deliver small scale water infrastructure projects and provide short-term economic stimulus. Up to \$20 million per state and territory (and

capped at \$5 million per project of Australian Government contributions) will be made available, for targeted projects that align with the Government's strategic investment priorities. This new initiative will help shape the development of the National Water Grid, with benefits flowing to our regions sooner.

Through the 2021-22 Budget the Government has committed \$75.7 million in funding for the new and augmented projects:

- Eurobodalla Southern Storage (New South Wales) - \$51.2 million. This project is expected to improve water availability and security, as well as increase storage for downstream irrigators and stock watering.
- Werribee Irrigation District Modernisation (Victoria) - \$11.0 million. This project will replace an inefficient channel-based irrigation network to reduce water losses and improve reliability.
- Recycled Water on the Bellarine (Victoria) - \$5.5 million. This project will upgrade an existing water reclamation plant to improve quality and volume of supply and productive reuse of important waste streams.
- Warwick Recycled Water for Agriculture – Recycled Water Treatment Upgrade (Queensland) - \$0.5 million. This project will upgrade an existing recycled water treatment plant by constructing a new complete filtration system to provide an increased daily supply of recycled water.
- An additional \$7.5 million for Rookwood Weir (\$183.6 million in total) to enhance our existing investment in delivering water security in north Queensland by raising the weir wall a further 700 millimetres, which will yield an additional 10,000 megalitres of water.

The Government has also committed a further \$22.3 million for the development of business cases for an additional eight projects nationally. These business cases will help inform the Government's investment decisions in new water infrastructure as part of the National Water Grid Investment Pipeline.

The eight additional business cases are: Lostock Dam to Glennies Creek Dam Pipeline (New South Wales); Nyngan to Cobar Pipeline (New South Wales); Pakenham Cora Lynn Recycled Water Scheme for Agriculture (Victoria); Coliban Regional Modernisation (Victoria); Sunbury-Bulla-Keilor Agricultural Rejuvenation (Victoria); Tyabb-Sommerville Recycled Water Irrigation Scheme (Victoria); New Water Infrastructure to the Barossa (South Australia); and the South East Integration Project (Tasmania).

Collectively, the Government's investments under the Fund will help support resilient water supplies in these regions as part of developing the National Water Grid.

We are investing a total of \$3.5 billion through the National Water Grid Fund to build vital water infrastructure across the country. The National Water Grid Fund replaces the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund and better reflects the relationship between the Australian Government's commitment to the National Water Grid and the National Water Grid Authority's role in overseeing delivery.

Building Better Regions Fund

In the 2021-22 Budget the Australian Government has announced an additional 250 million towards a sixth Round of the *Building Better Regions Fund* (BBRF), bringing the total commitment for this program to \$1.29 billion from 2017-18 to 2024-25.

The Building Better Regions Fund supports regional and remote communities by funding shovel-ready infrastructure projects up to the value of \$10 million, which will create jobs and drive economic growth. It also funds up to \$1 million for new or expanded events, strategic regional plans, or leadership and capability strengthening activities which provide economic and social benefits across the relevant region. Local governments and incorporated not-for-profit organisations are eligible to apply.

The first Four Rounds of Building Better Regions Fund supported 995 projects, delivering benefits across regional and remote Australia, such as:

- Replacement of the tanker jetty to help revitalise the waterfront precinct in Esperance, Western Australia (\$4 million);
- Expansion of the Temora Aged Care Facility, New South Wales (\$3.6 million);
- Construction of the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre in Cairns, Queensland (\$4.5 million);
- Upgrade of radio communications at Flinders and Cape Barren Islands, Tasmania (\$7.8 million)
- Development of the Clare & Gilbert Valleys Cultural Tourism Strategy in South Australia (\$7,260).

Stronger Communities Programme

In the 2021-22 Budget the Australian Government has announced a further \$22.7 million to deliver a seventh round of the Stronger Communities Programme (SCP), bringing the total commitment for this program to \$145.1 million between 2015-16 and 2021-22.

The Stronger Communities Programme provides funding to small capital projects which deliver important social benefits to communities across Australia. Around 12,000 community-based projects have secured funding under the first five rounds of the program. Round six is currently being implemented.

Funding of up to \$150,000 will again be available in each of the 151 federal electorates. Members of the House of Representatives will continue their role in identifying important community projects, with funding of between \$2,500 and \$20,000 available for eligible projects.

Input from the community is a key element of the Stronger Communities Programme. Each Member of Parliament is required to establish a community consultation committee to identify projects for consideration under the program.

Rebuilding Regional Communities Program

The Australian Government will provide \$5.7 million to deliver the *Rebuilding Regional Communities Program* in partnership with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR).

The program will provide microgrants across two streams to grassroots community organisations to assist communities in their recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- The Micro Projects stream – will provide small grants of up to \$10,000 for communities in regional Australia with fewer than 50,000 people to help sustain local organisations and their work;
- The COVID Recovery stream – will provide up to \$50,000 for larger projects which enhance the process of recovery of communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community groups play a critical role in supporting and sustaining local regional communities. These grants will help local groups restart activities and avoid lasting loss to the social fabric of regional towns.

Supplementary Local Roads Funding for South Australia

In addition to the funding provided to local governments in South Australia under the *Financial Assistance Grant* program, the Australian Government is providing additional supplementary funding of \$40 million over two years to South Australia to address the disadvantage experienced by South Australian local councils in maintaining and upgrading their local road network.

Regionalisation and Decentralisation

The Australian Government is continuing to deliver its Regional Decentralisation Agenda, commissioning two pieces of work to underpin business and employment activity in the regions:

- A targeted study which will identify Australian, state, territory and local government regulations impacting business relocation to the regions, and quantify the cost of

those regulations. The study will inform work to remove regulatory barriers and reduce the cost of doing business in regional Australia.

- A scoping study into the establishment of Australian Public Service Hubs in regional Australia, which would support the Australian Public Service as an employer of choice and allow employees to work within the communities they serve. The study will inform further consideration by the Government of the feasibility, cost and benefits of regional Hubs.

Local Government Financial Assistance Grant

The Local Government Financial Assistance Grant program is established under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995* and provides untied financial assistance to local governments across Australia to enable them to meet local priorities. The Australian Government is continuing the Financial Assistance Grant program, which will provide an estimated \$9.6 billion to local government over the period 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The funding is untied and consists of two components:

- A general purpose component distributed between the states and territories according to population.
- An identified local road component distributed between the states and territories according to fixed historical shares.

The Australian Government will make an early payment in the 2020-21 financial year of approximately 50 per cent of the 2021-22 Financial Assistance Grant estimate. This cash injection of \$1.3 billion will give councils vital support to assist with the combined impacts of drought, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Services to Territories Program

The Australian Government has responsibility for delivering “state-type” services to the non-self-governing territories including funding for essential infrastructure, refurbishment of key assets by the National Capital Authority (NCA), support for essential services on Norfolk Island and economic diversification in the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT).

Services to Norfolk Island

The Australian Government will provide \$42 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the provision of essential services and infrastructure maintenance to Norfolk Island. This funding will be used for the provision of the following:

- Child protection and family wellbeing social services on Norfolk Island, including supporting the development of a holistic sexual assault service, domestic and family violence response and other community wellbeing programs.
- Managing and supporting court and legal proceedings for Norfolk Island both on Norfolk Island and on the mainland.
- Providing additional staffing resources at the Norfolk Island Central School to deliver learning support, library and science laboratory assistance, technology support, Norfolk Language delivery and other general support services.
- Support for the Norfolk Island Residential and Aged Care Services (NIHRACS) by providing critical Information and Communications Technology infrastructure and systems, commercial accounting resources to assist with their financial functions and corporate governance, and supporting NIHRACS achieving the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards Accreditation.
- Continue the eradication program of the highly invasive Argentine Ant on Norfolk Island.
- Promoting Norfolk Island to the domestic Australian tourism market to better support small businesses.
- Develop a Ports Management Strategy Business Case in preparation to upgrade port infrastructure to increase reliability of the Island’s primary freight service.
- Address water scarcity and improve water quality on Norfolk Island by improving fresh and waste water management.
- Develop a Record Authority to retain or destroy records on Norfolk Island for all Commonwealth records, subject to the Archives Act 1983.
- To address the recommendations stemming from the independent audits for the governance, operations, financial performance and sustainability of the Norfolk Island Regional Council.

Indian Ocean Territories Economic Diversification

The Australian Government will provide funding of \$2.3 million over two years from 2021-22 to promote economic diversification and growth in the Indian Ocean Territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. This funding will be used for the provision of the following:

- Performing a water security assessment which includes identifying the capacity of existing water sources, as well as providing advice for the infrastructure required to further enhance future water security;
- Developing a waste management strategy by identifying barriers to waste management as well as opportunities to work and partner with the Shires, communities, and industry to better manage waste in the region.; and
- Grant funding of \$0.5 million for trialling niche agricultural methods on Christmas Island to reduce the community reliance on expensive imports.

COVID-19 Response – arts and culture initiatives

On 25 March 2021, the Australian Government announced an additional \$125 million, for the successful Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund. \$100 million of this additional funding is provided in 2021-22, and \$25 million was provided in 2020-21. This funding will support around 230 projects and up to 90,000 jobs through competitive project grants towards the costs of putting on activities such as festivals, concerts, tours, productions and events, including in regional areas. An additional \$10 million from the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund will be provided to the charity Support Act, building on the \$10 million investment announced on 9 April 2020.

On 26 March 2021, the Government announced funding of \$20 million from the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund to provide business support to the independent cinema sector through the Supporting Cinemas’ Retention Endurance and Enhancement of Neighbourhoods (SCREEN) Fund. Administered by Screen Australia, the SCREEN Fund will assist independent cinema operators, including in regional areas, that have experienced significant declines in revenue due to the pandemic by providing one-off business continuity grants.

On 11 April 2021, the Government announced a six month extension of the \$50 million Temporary Interruption Fund for the local film and television sector so it can continue to secure funding for production. Some production will take place in regional areas, benefiting local communities and businesses.

On 19 April 2021, the Government announced \$5 million from the COVID-19 relief and Recovery Fund for the Playing Australia Regional Recovery Investment administered by the Australia Council, to support performing arts touring in regional and rural communities as they rebound from the effects of COVID-19.

On 29 April 2021, the Government announced a new \$3 million Culture, Heritage and Arts Regional Tourism (CHART) grants program, administered by the Australian Museums and Galleries Association, to help community museums, galleries and historical societies continue to offer appealing cultural tourism experiences in the

regions that foster increased visitor stays, support local jobs and contribute to a sense of place.

Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Innovation and Growth Funding Package

Increased funding of \$5 million per annum indexed and ongoing is being provided to support innovation and growth in the Indigenous visual art sector, with more detail to follow with the release of the National Indigenous Visual Arts Action Plan in mid-2021.

In 2021-22, the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program will contribute \$21.5 million to the operations of around 85 Indigenous-owned and governed art centres, with 73 per cent of art centres in remote or very remote areas. It will also support a number of art fairs, regional hubs and industry service organisations that, with Indigenous art centres, are at the heart of Australia's internationally renowned Indigenous visual art movement. Together these organisations enable the development, production and marketing of Indigenous visual art. They provide professional opportunities for more than 8,000 Indigenous artists and 500 Indigenous arts workers to generate income and participate in the nation's economy. In 2019-20, art centres and art fairs funded through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program sold artworks to a value of \$30.4 million.

The Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program supports a professional, viable and ethical Indigenous visual arts industry, with strong participation by and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Bundanon Trust – funding increase

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$3 million per annum in operational funding for 2021-22 and 2022-23, and an additional \$1.1 million for capital works in 2021-22, to create greater access to Bundanon Trust's collection, increase visitation and secure Bundanon as a leading attraction in regional Australia.

This follows the provision of \$22 million in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to fund the Bundanon Trust Masterplan. The Masterplan, which is expected to be open to the public from early 2022, includes a subterranean gallery and storage, to protect and display the Trust's \$43 million art collection. It creates world class facilities for students and artists, will expand education and public programs and provide additional on-site accommodation.

The Bundanon Trust is a wholly owned Australian Government company limited by guarantee, established in 1993 to own and manage the properties and art collection donated by Arthur and Yvonne Boyd "as a means of a gift to the nation". Including the increase in funding, the Australian Government will provide \$4.5 million in operational and \$1.1 million in capital funding to the Trust in 2021-22.

The Bundanon Trust supports arts practice and engagement with the arts through a diverse range of programs such as its artist in residence, education, performance and

environmental programs which have long-term cultural, economic and social benefits for the Shoalhaven region and beyond.

Current initiatives

The Remote Air Services Subsidy (RASS) Scheme

The Remote Air Services Subsidy (RASS) Scheme is part of the Australian Government's Regional Aviation Access Program (RAAP). RASS subsidises a regular weekly air transport service for the carriage of passengers and goods such as, educational materials, medicines, fresh foods and other urgent supplies to communities in remote and isolated areas of Australia. Due to the distances involved and with road access to many communities often cut for several months during the wet season, a regular air service offers the only reliable means of transport. Mail is carried on these flights under a separate contract with Australia Post.

The RASS Scheme provides some 375 communities in remote and isolated areas of Australia with improved access through the subsidy of a regular air transport service. This includes 269 directly serviced locations and a further 106 neighbouring communities that receive mail through RASS ports. The 269 directly serviced locations include 87 Indigenous communities.

Regional Airports Program

In the 2019-20 Budget the Australian Government committed \$100 million over four years to 2022-23 to establish the Regional Airports Program, a competitive grants program to support upgrades to infrastructure and deliver improved aviation safety and access to regional airports.

The program helps improve the safety of aircraft, operators and passengers using regional airports or aerodromes, helps meet the operational requirements of aeromedical and other emergency services, facilitates improved delivery of essential goods and services such as food supplies, health care and passenger air services and improves the connectivity of Australia's regions to domestic and global market opportunities.

In June 2020, 61 successful projects were announced by the Australian Government with \$41.2 million in funding under round one of the program. One project has subsequently withdrawn. As at 30 April 2021, five round one projects have been completed. Applications under round two are currently under consideration, with projects to be delivered by the end of 2022-23 financial year.

Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program

In the 2018-19 Budget the Australian Government committed \$24 million over four years to 2021-22 to provide a further three rounds of the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program, a

competitive grants program to support safety and access upgrades at airstrips in remote and very remote areas of Australia.

Projects funded under the program improve the safety of aircraft, operators and passengers. Safe, operational airstrips are vital for the delivery of essential goods and services in remote communities, particularly where road access can be disrupted for extended periods due to seasonal weather conditions. The airstrip supports the delivery of health care services such as those provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service or other aeromedical providers and provides access to work and education opportunities for remote communities.

Successful projects under round six of the program were announced by the Australian Government in March 2019, with 34 projects approved at a cost of \$10.2 million. One project has subsequently withdrawn. As at 30 April 2021, 26 projects have been completed. Successful projects under round seven were announced in May 2020 with 45 projects approved at a cost of \$9.0 million. Three projects subsequently withdrew. As at 30 April 2021, eight projects have been completed. Applications under round eight are currently under consideration, with projects to be delivered by the end of the 2021-22 financial year.

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 domestic 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 program covers the top 50 routes, by passenger capacity flown in the 2018-19 year.

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, through to 30 September 2021.

The DANS Program ensures a minimum level of flights can continue, while also supporting flexibility and responsiveness so that 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 throughout the pandemic, and that airlines are in a position to respond quickly to domestic travel demand as the situation changes and improves.

On 11 March 2021, the Government announced the extension of the program through to 30 September 2021.

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 three financial 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 have received 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.

Regional Airports Screening Infrastructure Program

The Government is providing \$66 million for the Regional Airports Screening Infrastructure (RASI) Program, to support enhanced security screening costs at regional airports. 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.

In 2020-21 the full \$66 million of funding was awarded to grantees. The RASI program will run through to 2022-23.

Infrastructure Investment – Major Projects

The Australian Government's \$110 million rolling ten year infrastructure investment plan is continuing to deliver on the Government's economic plan for a stronger and more resilient Australia. As at March 2021, there were more than 360 regional projects in planning, underway or under construction, with 47 additional projects in progress which will benefit regional and urban communities.

The Government is continuing to support investment to assist in getting regional Australia back in business following the pandemic through a number of priority projects including:

- \$1.5 billion invested over three years from 2020-21 to Shovel ready projects and targeted road safety works for priority regional and urban transport infrastructure to support local jobs and economic recovery. This investment includes \$500 million to deliver smaller but critical projects to improve road safety and bolster the resilience of our road networks to improve safety across the country. Funding for regional Australia under this initiative totals more than \$970 million;
- \$1.6 billion to the M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace project. The project will deliver a 15 kilometre dual carriageway extension of the M1 Pacific Motorway connecting the motorway at Black Hill to the Pacific Highway at Raymond Terrace. It will also include a 2.6 kilometre bridge over the New England Highway and Hunter River, and upgrades to the surrounding network, including the Hexham Straight widening to three lanes;
- \$682 million to the Bunbury Outer Ring Road (stages 2 and 3) in Western Australia to facilitate the development of the Bunbury Port and south-west industry, improving access to industrial areas, reducing congestion on the existing network, and improving travel times and road safety;
- \$591.6 million committed to the Newell Highway Upgrade programs. This corridor is a key route for the agricultural and mining sectors, and provides important connections to freight networks in New South Wales from the Queensland border to the Victorian border;
- \$447.7 million committed to the Gippsland Rail Line Upgrade to deliver level crossing upgrades and replacement of corrugated steel drainage pipes along the corridor, with major delivery works involving additional level crossing and pedestrian crossing upgrades, rail control system upgrades, upgrades to four stations, and associated works along the rail corridor. In March 2021, the contract to deliver the project's major package of works was awarded, with major construction to commence between Pakenham and Traralgon from mid-2021;

- \$330 million from 2013-14 to 2028-29, committed to upgrade up to 730km of the Outback Way across Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. These upgrades are aimed at improving the reliability, access and connectivity of the route to benefit Indigenous and remote communities, and support industries including tourism, mining and freight;
- \$452 million from 2013-14 to 2023-24 for upgrade of the Midland Highway to improve safety on the highway and achieve a minimum 3 Star AusRAP Safety Rating;
- \$180 million committed to the Central Arnhem Road Upgrade towards sealing, reconstructing, widening, and flood immunity improvements to priority sections of the route to a fit-for-purpose standard. Of this, \$28.6 million is allocated to 2021-22 which will support the completion of two early works projects. The overall project is improving travel reliability and access to Nhulunbuy which in turn is helping support the communities and industries who rely on this link, and;
- \$160 million has been committed to the Joy Baluch AM Bridge to duplicate the existing two lane bridge as well as widening the approach roads to allow for two lanes in both directions. Construction work has commenced, and the new bridge is expected to open to traffic in 2022.

Northern Australia Roads Program

The Australian Government has committed \$600.0 million, from 2016-17 to 2022-23, to the Northern Australia Roads Program to deliver upgrades for priority road projects in northern Australia that are essential to the movement of people and freight to support economic development. Works include upgrades, as well as safety and productivity improvements such as widening, overtaking lanes and pavement renewal.

This commitment includes \$59.99 million for the Capricorn Highway - Rockhampton to Gracemere Duplication project in Queensland to duplicate five kilometres of the Capricorn Highway to four lanes. This project will support the movement of people and freight and will support the development of northern Australia.

The Northern Australia Roads Program is well advanced with 11 projects completed, 8 projects underway and the final project (Peak Downs Highway) is expected to commence in mid-2021. This project will deliver targeted road safety improvements, including wide centrelines, audiotactile linemarking, shoulder widening, installing safety barriers as appropriate, and removing roadside hazards.

Developing Northern Australia – Improving Northern Cattle Supply Chains (Northern Australian Beef roads Program)

The Australian Government is investing \$100.0 million from 2016-17 to 2023-24, including \$80,000 in 2021-22, towards the Northern Australia Beef Roads Program, to

provide targeted upgrades to key roads to improve the reliability, productivity and resilience of cattle supply chains in northern Australia, reducing freight costs and strengthening links to markets.

Under the Northern Australia Beef Roads Program 17 projects across Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia are complete, with the remaining project, widening of the Gregory Development Road south of Charters Towers, to commence in 2021. The project will widen approximately 1.6km of road, and replace culverts on the southern and northern approaches of the Gregory Developmental Road in Queensland.

The Australian Government is also working with jurisdictions to maximise Indigenous employment and supplier use opportunities for all northern Australia road projects, funded under both the Northern Australian Roads and Beef Roads programs.

Roads to Recovery Program

The Roads to Recovery Program contributes to the Infrastructure Investment Program by supporting maintenance of the nation's local road infrastructure asset. This, in turn, facilitates greater access for Australians and improved safety, economic and social outcomes. The Program provides funding to all local councils and states/territories in areas where there are no councils (unincorporated areas).

The Australian Government has committed a total of \$6.2 billion to the Program from 2013-14 to 2023-24, with an on-going commitment of \$500 million each year following. The 2021-22 allocation is around \$500 million. Around 50 per cent of this funding goes to rural and regional local councils.

As part of the Government's response to the enduring drought, the 128 drought-declared Councils eligible for funding under Drought Communities Programme Extension were provided with \$138.9 million in additional funds under the Program in 2020.

Councils have a set program allocation and choose the projects on which they will spend their funding based on local priorities. Projects range in size from thousands of dollars, to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Black Spot Program

The Australian Government is providing \$1.22 billion to the Black Spot Program over 11 years from 2013-14 to 2024-25, to fund safety works in places where there have been serious crashes or where serious crashes are likely to occur. This includes \$137 million allocated for 2021-22. In 2020-21, the Government approved 372 projects across Australia that will reduce crashes and save lives on Australian roads through works including the construction of roundabouts and crash barriers, and upgraded street lighting.

More than 60 per cent of road deaths and a significant proportion of serious injuries occur outside of metropolitan areas. In line with national road safety policy objectives, approximately 50 per cent of Black Spot Program funds in each state (other than Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory) have been set aside for projects in non-metropolitan areas. The Black Spot Program continues to deliver reductions to fatal and serious injury crashes at treated sites by up to 30 per cent. As at April 2021, 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.

Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program

The Australian Government is investing a total of \$538 million over 10 years from 2013-14 to 2023-24 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. Since 2015, more than 90 per cent of funding under the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program has gone to projects located in rural and regional areas. The 2021-22 allocation under the program is around \$77 million.

Seven funding rounds have been successfully completed under the Program. Under Round Seven, announced late 2020, 146 projects seeking over \$140 million in Australian Government funding were successful.

Bridges Renewal Program

The Australian Government is investing a total of \$676 million over eight years from 2015-16 to 2023-24 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. The 2021-22 allocation is around \$89 million. Around 85 per cent of funding under the Program has gone to projects located in rural and regional areas.

Five funding rounds have been successfully completed under the Program. Under Round Five, announced late 2020, 205 projects seeking over \$140 million in Australian Government funding were successful.

Increasing job and business opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Regional Australia

All states and territories agreed to the Australian Government's National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects in 2019, which introduced the Indigenous Employment and Supplier-use Infrastructure Framework. The Framework aims to create opportunities for Indigenous job-seekers and businesses on Australian

Government funded infrastructure projects under the Infrastructure Investment Program.

The Framework aligns with Outcome 8 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, by improving socio-economic participation through the provision of increased opportunities for Indigenous businesses and individuals to work in the road and rail construction industry.

Under the Framework funding recipients (state, territory and local governments) are required to develop an Indigenous Participation Plan establishing employment and supplier use targets for new road and rail construction projects receiving \$7.5 million or more of Australian Government funding; projects funded under the Roads of Strategic Importance in Northern Australia; and where there is high potential to support Indigenous outcomes.

As at 1 May 2021 over 140 projects under the Infrastructure Investment Program have agreed employment and supplier use targets in place under the Framework. This represents an estimated 900 jobs and hundreds of millions of supplier-use spend for Indigenous Australians over the life of the projects.

Office of Road Safety

The Office of Road Safety (ORS) was established on 1 July 2019 to provide a national leadership role to reduce road trauma. ORS is responsible for driving road safety outcomes at a national level, improving coordination and leadership across all levels of government. ORS is focused on supporting the achievement of zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2050 by promoting innovation, and facilitating collaborative activities including research and awareness outcomes. ORS also delivers multiple programs of national significance, including the \$2 billion Road Safety Program which will make a significant contribution to proactively detecting and treating deficiencies in road infrastructure, including in regional areas. ORS is focused on the elimination of road trauma across all Australian environments, noting that two thirds of road deaths consistently occur in regional and remote areas.

Road Safety Innovation Fund

The Road Safety Innovation Fund is providing \$12 million in grants over four years until 2022-23. The Office of Road Safety is administering the program. Round 2 opened in February and is expected to close in late-March to early-April 2021. Priority areas include improving road safety in regional and remote areas, reducing driver distraction and drug driving, improving safety for vulnerable road users, and supporting road safety research and initiatives specific to the Australian context.

Keys2drive

The Australian Government is providing a \$16 million total funding commitment over four years to 2023 to the successful Keys2Drive program. Keys2drive provides a free theory and practical lesson to learner drivers and their supervisors, as well as providing access to a website with resources and information. The program will continue to have a focus on improving the reach of Keys2Drive into regional and underserved communities.

Australasian New Car Assessment Program

The Australian Government is continuing to encourage the purchase of safer vehicles through the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) with a funding commitment of \$6.64 million over five years until 2022-23.

National Road Safety Data Hub

The establishment of a National Road Safety Data Hub (the Hub) costing \$5.5 million over four years commenced in late 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, including in regional Australia which is overrepresented in road fatalities. 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 roads with high safety risk in regional areas.

Awareness and Enablers Fund

The \$4 million Road Safety Awareness and Enablers Fund announced in the 2019-20 Budget has been finalised, with 20 projects funded over up to four years (seven projects were election commitments and 13 projects were awarded through an open grants round held in late 2019). Funded projects include the Rural Road Safety Month Campaign and Driver Reviver Revitalisation Project to provide drivers with locations to rest and recharge across Australia.

Inland Rail

The Australian Government has committed up to \$14.5 billion in equity for the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) to deliver Inland Rail. The 1,700km rail line will complete the 'spine' of the national freight network, providing cost competitive and reliable transport between Melbourne and Brisbane in under 24 hours, while connecting major ports and all mainland State capitals.

Inland Rail is nationally significant infrastructure involving the construction of 600km of new rail track and the upgrade of 1,100km of the existing rail corridor. ARTC is

expected to deliver the most complex section between Gowrie to Kagaru in Queensland through a Public Private Partnership.

At its peak in 2023-24, construction is expected to support more than 21,500 jobs and provide significant stimulus to regional communities and businesses along the alignment in Victoria, New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland. Approximately \$3.6 billion is expected to be invested locally on wages and with local businesses to deliver the supplies, materials and services that support construction of Inland Rail.

The project is expected to deliver a boost of more than \$18 billion to Gross Domestic Product during construction and the first 50 years of operation.

In September 2020, trains commenced operation on the Parkes to Narromine section of Inland Rail. More than 1,800 people worked on the Parkes to Narromine project, including 762 local residents. Nearly \$110 million was spent with 99 local businesses supplying and servicing Inland Rail – demonstrating the capacity of the project to stimulate regional economies and jobs immediately through construction.

Construction of the second section between Narrabri and North Star began in November 2020. The remaining 11 sections of Inland Rail, including those in Victoria and Queensland, are expected to be under construction by 2023 following State environmental approvals. The first trains to run the full Melbourne to Brisbane alignment are expected to operate in 2027.

Inland Rail is expected to act as a catalyst for new and expanded regional investments in food and fibre processing, manufacturing, packing, distribution and transport, supporting a further 2,500 full time jobs for regional Australia in the 10th year of operation.

The Australian Government is developing business cases with the Victorian and Queensland governments to explore options for the development of intermodal terminals capable of meeting the Inland Rail service capability in Melbourne and Brisbane respectively. With the delivery of fit for purpose terminals at the end points of Inland Rail, the infrastructure is expected to deliver improved access to and from regional markets, reduced costs for business and improved linkages within the national freight network.

To drive further value from the Inland Rail infrastructure the Australian Government has provided business case support for the development of 38 local project proposals under the \$44 million Interface Improvement Program.

Regional Officers in Toowoomba, Moree, Dubbo and Wodonga continue to provide a direct connection between the Australian Government and regional communities and industry to maximise the benefits of Inland Rail. They connect people with

opportunities and information to help realise the jobs, investment and supply chain enhancements.

The complementary investments and business expansions expected alongside Inland Rail are estimated to provide a further boost of up to \$13.3 billion to Gross Regional Product (GRP) in the first 50 years.

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. It is expected that strategic business cases will continue to be developed, identifying opportunities to support more productive rail-based supply chains at major regional centres. This is expected to build capacity on key country rail lines enabling heavier, faster and longer country freight rail services.

The following rail initiatives are expected to 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:

Grade Separating Road Interfaces in New South Wales

In October 2020, the Australian Government committed \$150 million in funding over four years for a Grade Separating Road Interfaces project. The project is a joint venture between the Australian Government and the New South Wales Government. New South Wales is contributing \$37.5 million to the project, taking the total combined funding to \$187.5 million. The project interfaces with national, State and regional roads. The funding is expected to enable additional grade separations along the Inland Rail alignment in New South Wales. The Australian and New South Wales governments are working constructively to implement the funding commitment. Work in 2021 includes the identification, prioritisation and agreement of interfaces to be investigated under a project proposal report.

Northern New South Wales Inland Port – Narrabri

In October 2020, the Australian Government announced \$7.8 million to support the delivery of the Northern New South Wales Inland Port project, which is located in Narrabri. This project is expected to support improved freight productivity and connectivity between regional New South Wales and key markets. The project involves construction of 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. The Australian Government funding complements the existing New South Wales Government commitment of \$16.8 million to the hub. The project is in its early planning phase.

Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme

On 7 January 2021 the Australian Government announced \$6 million in assistance under the Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme (BSPVES) to fund a temporary higher rebate which will make the sea transport of an eligible car or bus across Bass Strait free of charge. The increased rebate will also reduce the transport of other eligible passenger vehicles under the scheme during the applicable travel period 1 March 2021 to 30 June 2021. The temporary higher rebate will help accelerate Tasmania's economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 through increased sea passenger numbers and tourism. In 2021-22 the BSPVES is budgeted to provide \$52.6 million in rebates to eligible passenger vehicles.

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 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 further 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.

Universal Service Guarantee (USG)

The USG provides people across Australia with access to telephone, payphone and broadband services on reasonable request, using infrastructure provided by NBN Co, Telstra and other statutory infrastructure providers. The telephone and payphone components of the USG are delivered by Telstra, through the historical universal service obligation (USO). While the USG and USO apply nationally, they are particularly

important in rural and remote areas, where the cost of service delivery means support is required. The Department manages the USO contract with Telstra, under which Telstra is paid \$253 million per annum in support of the delivery of telephone services and \$44 million per annum in support of payphone services. This contract runs to 2032. The broadband component of the USG is largely delivered by NBN Co, which receives support through the Regional Broadband Scheme.

Australian Postal Corporation – supporting regional communities

Australia Post has the largest retail network in Australia and through this network is able to provide essential services to communities across Australia, including those in rural and regional areas. Post Offices provide access to a variety of vital products and services including letter and parcels services, financial and banking services, identity services, and a range of State and Federal Government services, including Passport renewals. In particular, Australia Post's Bank@Post service provided a valuable service to regional communities when more than 400 bank branches temporarily closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Post Offices operate in-conjunction with other small businesses.

Regional Connectivity Program

Access to reliable, affordable and innovative digital services and technologies is critical for regional communities. Improving digital connectivity will support regional industries to continue to navigate recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, capitalise on changed businesses conditions, and better engage in the digital economy.

The Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) targets investment in place-based telecommunications infrastructure projects which respond to local priorities and maximise economic opportunities and social benefits for regional, rural and remote Australians.

Under Round 1 of the RCP, \$82.1 million in Commonwealth funding has been allocated towards 81 communications infrastructure projects to provide new or improved connectivity across regional Australia. This is leveraging a total investment of over \$180 million in telecommunications infrastructure in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The Government also committed funding of up to \$3 million for the Regional Tech Hub through the 2019-20 Budget as part of the RCP. The Government entered into a contractual agreement with the National Farmers' Federation to manage and operate the Hub in partnership with the Australian Communications and Consumer Action Network. The Hub launched in December 2020 and provides independent advice to regional, rural and remote Australians on how to make the most of the digital connectivity available in their area. The contract for the operation and management of the Hub is in place until September 2021 with the option to extend the contract for an additional 12 months.

The RCP is also funding the Government's \$2 million Alternative Voice Services Trials, which are designed to identify, test and demonstrate new ways to deliver voice services, more in line with changing consumer preferences, in rural and remote areas. Grants have been awarded to Concerotel, NBN Co, Optus, Pivotel, Telstra and Zetifi. The Trials run to June 2022.

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 has committed \$380.0 million to the Mobile Black Spot Program, which has leveraged a total investment of more than \$836 million in telecommunications infrastructure that improves mobile coverage and competition across Australia, making it the largest government investment to improve mobile coverage in regional and remote Australia in our history. The first five rounds of this program have funded the delivery of more than 1,200 new base stations, over 922 of which are now on air.

The latest round of the Program, Round 5A, includes a 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. Funding for Round 5A will be drawn from the unused portion of the funding allocated to Round 5 in the 2019-20 Budget. The application process for Round 5A closed on 5 March 2021 and applications received from Mobile Network Operators and infrastructure providers are currently being assessed. The outcomes from this round will inform the design of Round 6, which will commence in the second half of 2021. \$80 million has been budgeted for Round 6.

Investments in the National Broadband Network (NBN)

NBN Co Limited (NBN Co) announced in its 2021-2024 Corporate Plan that it will invest \$4.5 billion by 2023 to deliver better outcomes for residential and business broadband consumers. These investments include:

- \$700 million Business Fibre initiative to offer wholesale symmetrical speeds up to 1 Gigabits per second (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

- \$3.5 billion network upgrade program that will provide 75 per cent of NBN fixed-line premises with access to ultra-fast broadband (of up to 1 Gpbs) 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 Fibre-to-the-Node (FTTN) premises in regional areas having access to speeds up to 1 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 NBN Satellite and Fixed Wireless footprints
- Investments are expected to create an estimated 10,000 additional regional jobs by 2024
- Investments are expected to create an estimated 2,800 new regional businesses by 2024
- Investments are expected to generate \$1.5 billion in additional gross domestic product annually for regional Australia by 2024
- \$50 million FTTN line speed uplift program to resolve in-home wiring issues
- \$50 million Business Fibre co-investment fund to create more business fibre zones, including in regional areas.

NBN Co will fund these upgrades through existing and new private debt facilities. There will be no impact on the Commonwealth Budget or the Commonwealth's funding of the company.

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

As part of the Job Maker Digital Plan announced on 29 September 2020, the Australian Government allocated \$22.1 million over three years from 2020-21 to deliver the Australian 5G Innovation Initiative (the 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 enhancing mobile services for consumers, the technology can support novel industrial applications that can improve innovation, productivity, and Australia's international competitiveness. 5G has a range of potential applications, including for autonomous farm machinery, networks of sensors to monitor crops and environmental conditions, and automated vehicles in the transport sector.

The Initiative will provide up to \$20 million in for trials of 5G technology that support emerging commercial uses in key industry sectors, bringing forward the potential economic and productivity benefits of 5G to the Australian economy. The grants program is open and competitive, and the projects that are funded are 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 including in regional Australia.

Improved Spectrum Management

As part of the Job Maker Digital Business Plan announced 29 September 2020, the Australian Government committed to investing 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 is investing \$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 is also investing \$5.3 million over two years from 2020-21 under the Job Maker Digital Business Plan 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.

Online Safety Grants Program

The Online Safety Grants Program enables non-government organisations to apply for grant funding to deliver projects that improve online safety of Australian children, including in regional communities. In the first round in 2020-21, eight grants were awarded totalling over \$2.2 million which included two projects specifically targeting rural, remote and regional communities. This program will continue in 2021-22, with the second round of the Program having \$4.5 million in grant funding available.

Public Interest News Gathering Grant Program

On 29 June 2020, the Australian Government announced that 107 regional publishers and broadcasters would share in \$50 million under the Public Interest News Gathering (PING) Program. The objective of the PING Program is to support regional broadcasters and publishers to maintain or increase their production and distribution of public interest journalism in regional communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 brought about unprecedented circumstances in regional media, triggering significant drops in advertising revenue affecting the sustainability of regional broadcasters and publishers. Grantees are using the funds for a range of activities including journalist and staff wages, training and technology upgrades that will allow them to keep delivering quality news to their local communities.

As at 29 April 2021, a total of \$48.6 million in PING funding has been paid out to grantees to maintain or increase their production of public interest journalism to regional Australian communities. The Department is currently assessing six month reports which indicate that grantees under the PING Program have increased both the number of journalists employed in regional Australian communities and the number of mastheads which are being produced.

Keeping Australians Safe Online

The Australian Government's Online Safety Bill will deliver new and strengthened schemes to keep Australians safe online. Due to become law in 2021, the new legislation will strengthen and extend Australia's world leading online safety framework for Australians – no matter where they live – including:

- 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.

In the 2020-21 Budget, the eSafety Commissioner was provided with \$39.4 million over three years from 2020-21 to support the introduction of this important legislation and to keep Australians safe online.

Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund – 2020 Round

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. On 12 November 2020, the ACMA awarded funding to an additional 2 publishers. This was possible due to a reduction of grant funding to an existing 2020 Round grant recipient.

As at 30 April 2021, the ACMA has paid \$3.15 million (GST exclusive) in grants of financial assistance.

In 2021-2022, the ACMA will analyse post-grant information submitted by grantees to assess the benefits and outcomes of the grants.

City and Regional Deals

City and Regional Deals are long-term agreements between the three levels of government and the community, focussed on aligning planning, investment and governance to accelerate growth and job creation, stimulate urban renewal and drive economic reforms. City Deals are the primary mechanism for delivery of the Australian Government's Cities agenda.

City Deals are being delivered in Townsville, Launceston, Darwin, Western Sydney, Hobart, Geelong, Perth and Adelaide. A commitment has been made to develop City Deals in South East Queensland, North West Melbourne and South East Melbourne, and a pilot Regional Deal in Albury-Wodonga. The delivery of the Hinkler and Barkly Regional Deals will continue to drive jobs, economic growth and liveability in key urban centres and regions.

Eight City Deals and three Regional Deals are being delivered with a total Australian Government commitment of \$8.28 billion. The Australian Government commitment has leveraged additional investment from deal partners of \$8.93 billion.

Updates on the progress of all City and Regional Deals is available at <https://infrastructure.gov.au/cities/>

A focus of the Deals in regional cities has been to coordinate efforts across governments to support urban renewal, stimulate industry and employment opportunities and improve liveability. City Deals which are targeting regional Australia are listed below.

Albury Wodonga Regional Deal

The pilot Regional Deal in Albury Wodonga is currently under negotiation. The Statement of Intent for the Deal was signed on 10 July 2020 between the Australian Government, New South Wales Government, Victorian Government, Albury City Council and the City of Wodonga Council.

The Regional Deal is an opportunity to ensure that Albury Wodonga prospers over the next decade by supporting population growth and economic development while also ensuring it remains a nationally-significant, liveable and prosperous region.

Hinkler Regional Deal

The Hinkler Regional Deal is a five year partnership between the Australian Government, Bundaberg Regional Council and Fraser Coast Regional Council that integrates the major centres of Bundaberg and Hervey Bay and their surrounds. The Deal focuses on facilitating innovation and new industries to ensure that the region can capitalise on its comparative advantages, enhancing local communities with new facilities to live, work and play, and unlocking regional transport to maximise economic opportunities for the region.

The Hinkler Regional Deal involves place-based opportunities to build on the area's strengths to boost economic growth and long-term employment. Initiatives underway include the redevelopment of the Hervey Bay Airport, establishing a new hospice in Hervey Bay and an Agricultural Technology facility in Bargara. Future projects under the Hinkler Regional Deal also include the redevelopment of the Hervey Bay City Centre (\$40 million), the construction of a multi-use conveyor belt for the Port of Bundaberg (\$10 million) and various road upgrades in the region (\$85.7 million).

Barkly Regional Deal

The Government is providing \$45.4 million from 2019-20 for the Barkly Regional Deal.

The Barkly Regional Deal is the first regional deal in Australia – a 10 year, \$78.4 million commitment between the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and Barkly Regional Council to improve the productivity and liveability of the Barkly region by stimulating economic growth, improving social outcomes and supporting local Aboriginal leadership.

The funding includes \$15.4 million for the installation of a new weather radar near Tennant Creek, with a co-contribution of \$2.5 million from the Northern Territory Government; and \$7.6 million for community infrastructure projects funded through the Building Better Regions Fund.

South East Queensland City Deal

The City Deal for South East Queensland is currently under negotiation. On 15 March 2019, the then Minister for Cities, Urban Infrastructure and Population, the Queensland Deputy Premier and the Chair of the Council of Mayors SEQ co-signed a Statement of Intent outlining a shared 20 year vision for the Deal.

Western Sydney City Deal

The Western Sydney City Deal is a 20 year agreement between the three levels of government to deliver jobs, connectivity, skills and education pathways, and improve liveability for the people of Western Sydney through 38 commitments, including the Western Parkland City Liveability Program and the Western Sydney Housing Package.

Geelong City Deal

The Geelong City Deal is a 10 year partnership between the three levels of government to secure the economic success of Geelong and its people. The Geelong City Deal supports the revitalisation of Central Geelong and the region’s continued economic diversification, with particular focus on unlocking the significant economic potential of the visitor economy of the Great Ocean Road region.

Perth City Deal

The Perth City Deal is a 10 year partnership to deliver economic stimulus, jobs and liveability outcomes for Perth CBD. The Deal has 15 commitments, with the centrepiece being a commitment to deliver the Edith Cowan University Cultural and Creative Industries CBD Campus.

Darwin City Deal

The Darwin City Deal is a 10 year partnership that will position Darwin as a vibrant and liveable tropical capital city. As the centrepiece, the Education and Community Precinct will transform the city centre and increase vibrancy. The Darwin Living Lab will help to cool and green the city by establishing best-practice in tropical urban living. The Deal also provides support for the Larrakia people as the traditional owners of Darwin, through funding for the design phase of a new Larrakia Cultural Centre.

Adelaide City Deal

The Adelaide City Deal is a 10 year partnership between the Australian and South Australian Governments and the City of Adelaide to grow South Australia’s innovation and cultural economy and to develop and maintain cultural and environmental assets in the surrounding region. Deal partners are investing in Lot Fourteen as a hub for research, innovation, and entrepreneurialism in technology and the arts; and support cultural and environmental projects in Adelaide’s suburbs.

Hobart City Deal

The Hobart City Deal is a 10 year partnership that will provide the framework to guide and encourage further investment in the city by embracing opportunities for growth and addressing key strategic and infrastructure challenges. By working with the Tasmanian Government and the Clarence, Glenorchy, Hobart and Kingborough Councils, the City Deal will ensure Hobart can get ahead of the curve on population growth by tackling traffic congestion and housing affordability.

Townsville City Deal

The Townsville City Deal, signed in December 2016 by the Australian Government, Queensland Government and Townsville City Council, is a 15 year plan to secure the economic success of the city by bringing together all relevant policy, program and

funding levers to achieve a shared vision for Townsville as an economic gateway to Northern Australia and a lifestyle-rich city for residents and visitors alike.

Launceston City Deal

The Australian Government, the Tasmanian Government and the City of Launceston are delivering in partnership on the Launceston City Deal's ten year vision to make the city one of Australia's most liveable and innovative regional cities. A key initiative under the City Deal is the relocation and redevelopment of the University of Tasmania's Launceston campus to Inveresk in the city's CBD. A suite of projects to improve the health of the Tamar Estuary is already in progress.

National Water Grid Fund

The Australian Government is continuing delivery of the National Water Grid. Eight construction projects are now operational, with seven of these having been completed since the establishment of the National Water Grid Authority (NWGA) in late 2019.

- The eight completed projects are (figures represent the Australian Government contribution): South West Loddon (Victoria) - \$20 million, Macalister Irrigation District Phase 1B (Victoria) - \$20.0 million, the Sunraysia Modernisation Project 2 (Victoria) - \$3 million, the Warwick Recycled Water for Agriculture 1 (Queensland) - \$0.8 million, McLaren Vale Treated Water Storage (South Australia) - \$2.5 million, Coolanie Water Scheme (South Australia) - \$0.7 million, the Scottsdale Irrigation Scheme (Tasmania) - \$25.3 million and Mitiamo (Victoria) which has reached practical completion- \$14.5 million.
- A further five projects are currently under construction (figures represent the Australian Government contribution): Western Irrigation Network (Victoria) - \$48.1 million, Macalister Irrigation District 2030 Phase 2 (Victoria) - \$31.3 million, Rookwood Weir (Queensland) - \$183.6 million, Mareeba-Dimbulah (Queensland) - \$11.6 million, and the Northern Adelaide Irrigation Scheme (South Australia) - \$45.6 million.
- With nine projects currently in planning (figures represent the Australian Government contribution): Wyangala Dam (New South Wales) - \$325 million, Dungowan Dam and Pipeline (New South Wales) - \$242.0 million, the East Grampians Water Supply (Victoria) - \$32.0 million, Emu Swamp Dam (Queensland) - \$42 million, Big Rocks Weir (Queensland) - \$30 million, Hughenden Irrigation Scheme (Queensland) - \$180 million, Myalup-Wellington (Western Australia) - \$140 million, Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme (Western Australia) - \$39.7 million, and the Tasmanian Irrigation Tranche III Phase 1 (comprising multiple schemes in Tasmania) - \$100 million.

Western Queensland Irrigation and Agriculture Scheme Assessment

In 2020-21 and 2021-22, the Australian Government is providing \$3 million through the North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority to support potential new irrigation based development opportunities in regional northern and western Queensland. This initiative is enabling a technical and engineering assessment to identify prospective areas in Burdekin and Flinders River Basins suitable for large scale irrigation through the provision of water infrastructure. The project complements the \$24 million Hells Gates Dam Scheme and \$10 million Hughenden Irrigation Project detailed business cases which are due for completion in early 2022.

COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund

The Australian Government established the \$1 billion *COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund* (the Fund) in March 2020 to deliver targeted assistance to regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Through the Fund, the Australian Government has supported industries including aviation, fisheries, tourism, events and the arts.

The Fund is administered by the Department, with each initiative under the Fund administered by the relevant department or agency with portfolio responsibility.

The following Fund initiatives administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications have been agreed since Budget 2020-21 or announced as being extended to provide support into 2021-22:

- Supporting Cinemas' Retention Endurance and Enhancement of Neighbourhoods (SCREEN) Fund (\$20 million)
- Playing Australia Regional Recovery Investment (\$5 million)
- Support Act – Further support for artists, crew and music workers (\$10 million)
- Regional Airline Network Support Program (\$198.0 million)

Other measures that are administered by another department or agency that the Government has announced as extended into 2021-22 to meet the continued need of the tourism and trade sectors include:

- Supporting Australia's Exhibiting Zoos and Aquariums (\$94.6 million)
- Business Events Grant program (\$50.0 million)

Regional Recovery Partnerships

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$100 million over two years from 2020-21 to fund *Regional Recovery Partnerships*. The Partnerships coordinate investments with other levels of government to support recovery and growth in 10 regions: the Snowy Mountains, Hunter and Newcastle; and the Parkes Regions in New South Wales; Cairns and Tropical North Queensland, Gladstone, and Mackay-Isaac, Whitsunday Regions in Queensland; the Gippsland Region in Victoria; Kangaroo Island in South Australia; the South West Region of Western Australia; and all of Tasmania.

As of May 2021, projects have been announced in a number of regions. Commitments for projects to be delivered in Queensland include \$10 million for the Cairns Gallery Precinct, \$5 million for a hydrogen knowledge centre and \$5 million for the Auckland Hill economic development in Gladstone, and \$3.2 million to upgrade the Clermont Saleyards and Showgrounds in the Isaac Region. In Gippsland Victoria, \$10 million has been committed to seven community-based projects to boost the visitor economy, such as the East Gippsland Rail Trail.

Drought Communities Programme Extension

The *Drought Communities Programme Extension* supports communities in regions impacted by and recovering from drought. \$297 million is being provided by the Australian Government to 180 eligible Local Government Areas for projects which deliver an economic stimulus, use local resources, and support communities.

Over 520 projects have been funded across New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, with 343 projects completed (at 22 April 2021). The program is closed to new entrants and remaining projects are to be completed by 30 June 2022.

Drought Communities Outreach Program

The Australian Government has provided \$7.5 million in grant funding to Rotary Australia World Community Service Limited (Rotary) from the Drought Communities Outreach Program to support farming households facing hardship as a result of the drought. Rotary is providing \$500 vouchers to meet immediate household expenses and supporting the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency's outreach activities. The program ends on 31 December 2021.

Tackling Tough Times Together

The Australian Government provided a \$15 million grant to the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal's Tackling Tough Times Together community grants program. Government funding is contributing to Rounds 11-22 of the program. The outcomes of Round 22 are expected to be announced by December 2021.

Building Resilient Regional Leaders Initiative (Pilot)

The Australian Government is investing in current and emerging regional leaders to further develop current leadership and resilience skills to support their local communities through future economic challenges. The Building Resilient Regional Leaders Initiative (Pilot) is investing \$5 million over two years from 2021-22 to 2022-23 to deliver place based leadership training in regional communities. Local leaders have a significant role to play in boosting the resilience and vibrancy of their community. Recent events, such as floods, bushfires and 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. It is expected providers will be engaged in the second half of 2021.

Continued Funding for the Regional Australia Institute

The Australian Government is continuing its investment in the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) Intergovernmental Shared Inquiry Program (ISIP), 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 Regional Australia Institute, 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 Intergovernmental Shared Inquiry Program is an ongoing program of work for Regional Australia Institute, which is collaborating with its partners on future research priorities.

The Australian Government is contributing \$4.6 million over two years from 2020-21 towards Regional Australia Institute's National Awareness Campaign. This is to 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. The Regional Australia Institute's National Awareness Campaign, Move to More, was officially launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in March 2021. Expected activities for 2021-22 include the launch of the Population Mobility tool, the Annual Regional Jobs Report and the Regions Rising Summit and Series for 2022.

Regional Development Australia Committees

The Regional Development Australia (RDA) network comprises 52 Regional Development Australia Committees (RDAs) and the Indian Ocean Territories Regional Development Organisation (IOT RDO). They work with all levels of government, business, industry, educational institutions and community groups to support economic and workforce development, local procurement, strategic regional planning and inform government programs and infrastructure investments.

To further strengthen the Regional Development Australia network the following improvements to the program came into effect on 1 January 2021:

- Regional Development Australia Committees have been given greater role clarity through a streamlined Charter with a focus on growing strong and confident regional economies.
- The role of Capital City Regional Development Australia Committees has been refocused to support economic development of regions by advocating for pro-regional policy, planning and decentralisation opportunities, influencing state capitals and city based businesses on regional issues.
- Regional Development Australia Committees are required to facilitate the development of regional strategic plans, to help align effort and identify key regional priorities and catalytic projects to support economic growth.
- The term of Regional Development Australia Committees' funding agreements has been extended from 3 to 4 ½ years to provide a sustainable medium term operating environment.
- Funding indexation has been reintroduced in line with the Regional Development Australia program appropriation.

The Australian Government is providing \$77.2 million for the Regional Development Australia Program over the period 2020-21 to 2023-24.

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 program, which will provide government and community decision-makers with better economic, social and demographic data on regional Australia. As part of this program the Regional Data Hub will make location-specific data publicly accessible and searchable to improve outcomes for regional Australians, building on existing regional data resources such as the Progress in Australian Regions dashboard. The Government has begun consulting with data users and providers to identify use cases that meet the data needs of regional Australia and in 2021-22 will begin progressively incorporating data into the Hub.

Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory

The Australian Government maintains and improves the overarching legislative framework of the self-governing territories of the ACT and NT.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the Australian Government has retained policy responsibility for some planning and land management activities (administered by the National Capital Authority). The Australian Government also provides funding to the

ACT Government for National Capital Functions, to support Canberra’s role as the national capital \$2 million 2021-22.

In the Northern Territory, the Government appoints and funds the salary and travel for the Northern Territory Administrator \$429,000 in 2021-22.

Services to Indian Ocean Territories

The Australian Government supports the communities of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands through the provision of essential services and funding for major infrastructure. Services delivered by the Australian Government – either directly via agreement with the Western Australian Government or under contract to the private sector – include healthcare, education, power, water, ports and airports. In 2021-22, the Australian Government is providing \$113.4 million in administered funding and allocated \$10 million in capital funding support to the Indian Ocean Territories.

Services to Norfolk Island

Since passing legislation which extended Commonwealth laws to Norfolk Island from 1 July 2016, the Australian Government has continued to invest in improvements to service delivery for the Norfolk Island community. In 2021-22 the Australian Government is providing \$67.6 million in funding for essential services to Norfolk Island. The Australian Government has also allocated \$5.0 million in capital funding in 2021-22 for the maintenance of Commonwealth assets.

Services to Jervis Bay Territory

The Australian Government supports the community of the Jervis Bay Territory by funding the provision of state-level and local government type services. In 2021-22 the Australian Government is providing \$6.5 million in funding for service delivery and allocated \$0.5 million in capital funding. State-level services, such as education, justice and welfare are delivered by the Australian Capital Territory Government under a service delivery agreement.

Australia Council

The Australia Council provides significant support to the arts in rural, regional and remote Australia with grants for individuals, groups and organisations, national touring programs, and strategic national development and capacity building programs.

This includes supporting a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural activities in regional and remote areas. The Australia Council also supports artists and arts organisations based in metropolitan areas to deliver projects, tour and engage with regional communities.

Every year the Australia Council invests in artistic activities in regional Australia, increasing access for audiences, fostering the vitality of artists and arts organisations in

regional and remote communities, and strengthening the mobility of diverse and excellent Australian work. In 2019-2020, the Australia Council invested \$20.9 million in artists and organisations based in regional Australia. This investment supported the creation of art with and by regional communities and artists; the operation of regionally based organisation; professional development for regional leaders; and touring of work by regional artists and organisations. The Australia Council is on track to deliver a similar level of investment to regional Australian in 2021-22.

Australian Museums and Galleries Association Bursary program

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) National Conference Bursary (Bursary) Program provides funding to support the attendance of museum staff and volunteers from regional and remote areas in Australia and Indigenous Australians at AMaGA's annual National Conference as a delegate or a speaker. The 2021 National Conference will be held from 7 to 10 June in Canberra, and AMaGA's next National conference will be held in the first half of 2022.

The bursary assistance provides recipients with an opportunity for professional development, peer engagement and the sharing of knowledge. It also provides recipients with exposure to what is happening in the museums and galleries sector at a national level, an opportunity that may not otherwise be readily available to them.

In 2021-22 the Australian Government will provide \$22,000 to support the Bursary Program. AMaGA distributes funding to eligible applicants to assist with paying conference registration fees and travel, and transfers and accommodation expenses for conference attendees.

Community Heritage Grants

The Community Heritage Grants Program will receive \$490,000 of Australian Government funding in 2021-22, along with support from the National Library of Australia, National Film and Sound Archive, National Museum of Australia and National Archives of Australia. The Program will deliver grants of up to \$15,000 to community groups, including historical societies, regional museums, public libraries and Indigenous and migrant organisations, to support the preservation of publicly accessible heritage collections which are locally owned and nationally significant.

These collections contain a wide range of materials including artefacts, letters, diaries, maps, photographs and audio visual material. First-time recipients also receive expert preservation and archival training at support workshops provided by the National Library of Australia, the National Archives of Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive and the National Museum of Australia. Since 1994, 1,506 projects across Australia have received over \$7.65 million in funding, a significant proportion of which has gone to regional organisations.

Creative Partnerships Australia

Since its creation in 2013, Creative Partnerships Australia has delivered capacity-building and mentoring programs that assist artists and cultural organisations to diversify their revenue streams through philanthropy, sponsorship and fundraising. Creative Partnerships Australia also delivers matched funding programs for artists and arts organisations, and manages the Australian Cultural Fund, a fundraising platform that facilitates tax-deductible donations from arts supporters.

In 2021-22, the Australian Government will provide \$4.7 million to assist Creative Partnerships Australia to build the capacity of artists and arts organisations across Australia, including in the regions, to secure revenue from private sector giving.

Cultural Gifts Program

Under the Cultural Gifts Program (CGP), the Australian Government offers a tax incentive to encourage taxpayers to donate culturally significant items to Australian public collections for all Australians to access.

In terms of dollar values, the CGP produces the following outcomes:

- In the financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20, 863 donors donated \$127 million worth of cultural items to 182 public collecting institutions;
- On average, approximately \$6.5 million worth of cultural items are donated to the collections of regional and remote public institutions each year.

Festivals Australia

The Festivals Australia program provides communities in regional Australia with access to a diverse range of high quality and innovative arts projects that grow audiences at festivals. In 2021-22, \$1.3 million will be provided to support arts projects that encourage partnership and collaboration across the arts sector and community participation in arts activities at festivals in regional and remote areas.

Indigenous Languages and Arts Program

The Indigenous Languages and Arts Program will invest \$20.8 million in 2021-22 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to express, preserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts activities throughout Australia. For Indigenous languages, the Program provides annual operational funding to a network of 20 Indigenous language centres, 17 of which are based in regional and remote communities. These place-based, Indigenous-led organisations, work with Indigenous language groups to capture, revitalise, maintain and promote traditional First Nations languages. The Program also supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to

develop, produce, present, exhibit or perform Indigenous arts activities that showcase Australia's traditional and contemporary Indigenous cultural and artistic expressions.

The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap introduced on 30 July 2020, includes Target 16 that specifically identifies Indigenous languages – By 2031, there is a sustained increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken. The National Agreement commits parties to establishing policy and place-based partnerships which respond to local priorities, including in Regional Australia.

The United Nations has designated the period between 2022 and 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The Australian Government is continuing to take a leadership role and has secured a place on the Global Task Force for the decade.

Indigenous Repatriation

The Indigenous Repatriation program facilitates the return of Australian Indigenous ancestral remains in overseas collections, and Australian Indigenous ancestral remains and secret sacred objects held in seven state and territory museums and the National Museum of Australia, to their communities of origin. The Australian Government has supported repatriation of ancestors from overseas for over 30 years with more than 1,610 ancestors repatriated to Australia. Domestically, more than 2,710 ancestors and 2,240 objects have been returned to the custodianship of their community from eight major Australian museums since 1998. Many of these communities are located in regional and remote Australia.

Location Incentive Program

The Government is providing \$505 million over eight years from 2019-20 under the Location Incentive Program to attract large budget international screen production to Australia, bringing international investment and providing local employment and training opportunities. Some production will take place in regional areas, benefiting local communities and businesses through significant expenditure and employment opportunities, as well as potential tourism benefits.

Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme

Many cultural institutions and community organisations around Australia care for maritime items of historical and national significance.

The Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme (MMAPSS), which is administered by the Australian National Maritime Museum (ANMM), is a grants program which collects, conserves and exhibits Australia's rich maritime heritage by helping these groups undertake this important role. The program targets smaller collecting institutions around Australia.

In 2021-22 the scheme will receive \$105,000 from the Australian Government, with the ANMM providing an additional \$20,000. The scheme provides grants of up to \$15,000 to cultural institutions and community organisations for collection management initiatives, including documenting and caring for collections; and presentation projects, including education programs and workshops. It also supports staff or volunteers, from regional or remote organisations, to spend time learning specific skills and making valuable connections. The ANMM may also provide in-kind support to successful MMAPSS applicants.

In addition, the ANMM funds an internship program, worth up to \$3,000 per recipient. Internship applications are sought during the annual MMAPSS round. The internship program supports staff or volunteers from remote or regional organisations to spend time learning specific skills and making valuable connections.

The Australian Government has provided more than \$1.9 million to over 460 projects and over 60 internships under the Scheme, since its inception in 1995.

National Cultural Heritage Account

The National Cultural Heritage Account (the Account) is established under the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*. It supports cultural organisations to acquire Australian Protected Objects for display and safe-keeping. In doing this, the Account helps to retain and protect Australia's cultural heritage for future generations and provide public access to important objects that tell a story about our cultural identity.

In 2021-22 the Australian Government will provide funding of \$0.5 million for the Account, which is open all year.

The Government understands the importance of preserving and displaying Australia's unique artefacts locally for current and future generations. Funding has supported national and state institutions as well as regional organisations across Australia, including museums, art galleries, libraries, archives, and historic buildings to purchase significant objects that they could not otherwise afford. Regionally based organisations that have received assistance in recent years include the Orange Regional Museum, NSW, the National Motor Museum in Birdwood, SA and the Southern Tablelands Vintage Farm Machinery Club in Taralga, NSW.

National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program

Engagement with regional and remote communities is a longstanding priority for the National Collecting Institutions (NCIs). The NCIs deliver a variety of initiatives through a combination of on-site offerings, as well as physical and virtual outreach activities.

In 2021-22 the National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach (NCITO) program will make available funding of \$1.0 million to assist the NCIs to develop and tour

exhibitions from their collections. The program also promotes international awareness of Australia’s cultural heritage through touring material from NCI collections overseas, and expands Australian appreciation of international cultural material by enabling NCIs to bring works from international collections for exhibition or touring within Australia.

The program aims to make Australian and international cultural material accessible to all Australians, especially those in regional communities.

National Library of Australia – Treasured Voices

The Australian Government is providing \$10 million over four years from 2019-20 to support the National Library of Australia’s Treasured Voices program which will have far reaching positive benefits for the Australian regional community. The continued digitisation of the National Library of Australia’s collection will provide free access for all Australians, via Trove, to a significant collection of material, including the digitised papers of eminent Australians including General Sir John Monash and Sir Robert Menzies. These papers would otherwise only be available for viewing on-site in Canberra.

Since its launch in 2009, Trove has become a fundamental piece of our national research infrastructure, providing widespread access to museum pieces and documents. In 2019-20 Trove recorded 25.32 million visitor sessions, demonstrating the ongoing success of the platform as a repository of Australian heritage material.

National Performing Arts Training Organisations

Australia’s seven national arts training organisations, which in 2021-22 will receive funding from the Australian Government in the order of \$23.2 million, have a national reach as centres of excellence. These organisations are: the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA); the Australian National Academy of Music; the National Institute of Circus Art; the Australian Youth Orchestra; the Australian Ballet School; the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association; and the Flying Fruit Fly Circus.

As leaders in performing arts training, the organisations accept students from all states and territories and conduct annual auditions, including in regional areas. Those unable to attend auditions due to geographic distance are invited to submit postal and/or digital applications and show reels. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students auditioning for the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College can seek support from ABSTUDY towards travel and accommodation expenses, ensuring students from remote and regional communities have equal access to auditions.

Regional Arts Fund

The Regional Arts Fund provides support for sustainable cultural development in regional and remote Australia. The program provides funding for a mix of quick

response grants and project grants for arts projects, professional development for artists and arts workers, and community capacity building projects. The program also funds high priority strategic projects.

For 2021-22, the Government has allocated \$3.6 million to the Regional Arts Fund. The program is delivered on behalf of the Australian Government by Regional Arts Australia and organisations in each state and territory.

Register of Cultural Organisations

The Register of Cultural Organisations is a list of nearly 1900 cultural organisations that can receive tax deductible gifts. The Register aims to strengthen private sector support for the arts and encourages Australians to contribute to the nation's vibrant cultural life. Australian organisations, including those in regional areas where other sources of philanthropic funding may be more difficult to secure, can be listed on the Register if their principal purpose is to promote cultural activities in Australia.

Support for the Australian Music Industry

In the 2019-20 Budget context, the Australian Government announced investment of \$30.9 million over five years to grow Australia's thriving music industry. The programs are supporting the provision of live music to Australian communities and ensuring local artists can expand into lucrative international markets. The package includes funding to establish a grants program to support live music venues to increase performance opportunities for musicians and regional audiences; to establish a development program for Indigenous musicians and bands to support touring, recording and the set-up of touring circuits; a mentorship and training program aimed at empowering women working in the Australian music industry by assisting them to build skills and develop relationships they need to get a foot in the door and take the next step to establish and build their careers.

Visions of Australia Program

The Visions of Australia program improves access for Australians particularly in regional and remote areas to Australian cultural material held in a wide variety of national, state and local collections.

The Australian Government will provide \$2.5 million in 2021-22 through the Visions of Australia program to cultural organisations towards the costs of developing and touring exhibitions of cultural material of historic, scientific, design, social or artistic significance, with a focus on touring to regional venues.

The program also encourages partnerships between organisations, particularly collaboration across the collections sector, to form curatorial partnerships and deliver professional development.

Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) Portfolio improves the lives of Australians by providing high quality advice and support to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, portfolio ministers and assistant ministers. It takes a coordinated and innovative approach to the development and implementation of Australian Government policies, including those that impact on regional and remote communities. The Portfolio coordinates and develops policy across the Australian Government on issues pertaining to women including economic security, safety and leadership; Indigenous affairs; economic, domestic and international issues; and public service stewardship.

As at 31 December 2020, the Portfolio employed 4,224 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 3,112 staff (74 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 432 staff (10 per cent) in other capital cities and 680 staff (16 per cent) in regional areas.

The Portfolio's footprint includes office locations in, Alice Springs, Bega, Bendigo, Ceduna, Dubbo, Junee, Kalgoorlie and Kununurra, Newcastle, Orange, Port Augusta, Thursday Island, Top End and Tiwi Islands, Townsville, Wagga Wagga and Wollongong.

The Portfolio is responsible for setting the direction of Indigenous Affairs policy across the Australian Government as well as delivering a number of specific funding programs. It includes programs aimed at ensuring Indigenous Australians are able to take up the full range of opportunities our nation has to offer. Measures encouraging workforce participation, economic development, educational success and safety at home the foundations of successful communities, are some of these.

The Portfolio works closely with local service providers and communities to design and deliver services to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians across metropolitan, regional and remote locations. Regionally based staff are critical to service delivery as 63 per cent of Indigenous Australians live outside the major cities and more than 18 per cent live in remote and very remote locations.

The Portfolio supports disaster and drought affected communities and leads national efforts to reduce disaster risk and limit the impact of future natural disasters through the new National Recovery and Resilience Agency. It will continue to work hand-in-hand with communities, all levels of government, not for profit organisations and other sectors to support Australians impacted by disasters, including the 2019 North Queensland floods, the 2019-20 bushfires, and the 2021 Eastern Australia storms and floods. Recovery Support Officers are based across Australia to advise communities on support available and how to access it.

The Portfolio supports regional Australia through new and ongoing initiatives, as outlined below.

New Initiatives

National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

The Australian Government will provide \$143.1 million over four years from 2021-22 for initiatives to prevent child sexual abuse. These initiatives will contribute to the First Commonwealth Action Plan (2021-2025) under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2031.

The Commonwealth Action Plan will deliver positive impacts to regional Australians through new and enhanced services across Australia focussed on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in all settings. Initiatives will also specifically focus on delivery to rural and remote communities. The Commonwealth Action Plan includes funding to:

- Prevent child sexual abuse through building child safe capability in sporting organisations and delivering online safety education programs to prevent online harm and promote safe online practices for children and young people.
- Enhance support to victims of child sexual abuse including expanding the national specialist trauma informed legal service, establishing a specialist national legal online chat service dedicated to young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, harm and sexual abuse, coordinating access to support services, resources and information, and developing trauma-informed and culturally appropriate resources and approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Bolster Commonwealth law enforcement efforts to prevent, disrupt, investigate and combat child sexual abuse, including establishing new, and enhancing existing, intelligence, enforcement and criminal research efforts dedicated to preventing, detecting, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators of child sexual abuse.
- Prosecute child sexual abuse perpetrators, including ensuring prosecutions are not delayed due to lack of representation; managing the parole of convicted offenders; and facilitating the international exchange of information to support prosecutions.
- Enhance the Government's strategic partnerships in Australia and internationally, particularly with industry, to address the use of online platforms to commit child sexual abuse, and strengthen legal, policy and justice capacity in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance regional efforts to combat child sexual abuse.
- Improve the evidence base on the prevalence, nature, causes and impacts of all forms of child maltreatment in Australia.

New National Recovery and Resilience Agency

On 5 May 2021, the Australian Government established the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRA) in response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

The NRRA initially consolidates and builds on the success of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency, and from 1 July 2021 will incorporate disaster risk reduction, preparedness and recovery functions from the Department of Home Affairs, and the Rural Financial Counselling Service programs from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The NRRA has a strong on-the-ground presence and a focus on guiding and empowering locally-led recovery of communities impacted by disaster events and drought. Locally-led approaches are underpinned by a national network of Recovery Support Officers, who come from, live and work in the communities they support across Australia.

The NRRA also provides national leadership and strategic coordination for strengthened natural disaster resilience, risk reduction and preparedness for future disasters, across all levels of government.

In addition to funding associated with the transfer of existing functions, the Australian Government will provide \$61.1 million in departmental funding over four years from 2021-22 to support communities to better prepare for and recover from natural disasters. The NRRA will receive \$4.5 million in 2021-22 to 2022-23, for a new regional recovery exercise program and pilot two new resilience hubs.

The NRRA will deliver:

- A new \$616 million Preparing Australia program, targeting public and private disaster risk mitigation.
- A new \$280 million Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants program over three years to support the medium-term recovery needs of communities impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires, funded from unspent funds from demand driven programs under the National Bushfire Recovery Fund.

The work of the NRRA, including the new programs, will be critical in supporting all hazards recovery, and reducing the risk and impact of future natural disasters, throughout rural and regional Australia.

Jobs and Wealth Creation Package – Advancing Indigenous outcomes

The Jobs and Wealth Creation package will contribute to economic recovery and growth for Indigenous Australians following the COVID-19 pandemic through building a robust and resilient economy, improving food security in remote Australia, and supporting Indigenous job seekers in remote areas into jobs through skill development and educational attainment. The package encompasses the following initiatives:

- \$36.7 million investment from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to expand the support provided to Prescribed Bodies Corporate (PBC) that hold and protect native title rights and interests. This will ensure PBCs can operate more effectively and allow traditional owners to take advantage of opportunities for economic development or engage in transactions involving land subject to native title (much of which exists over land in regional and remote Australia).
- \$42.8 million per year from 1 July 2022 for the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP) which will be rolled out across Australia, including in regional areas to support Indigenous Australians in gaining employment and upskilling for in-demand jobs. It will also support businesses to realise the potential of the Indigenous Australian workforce and provide tailored, placed-based investment to better suit local labour markets and respond swiftly to emerging employment opportunities. Consultations (including with regional Australia) over the second half of 2021 will inform the implementation of ISEP in 2022.
- A \$5 million grant program targeting the continuous and sustainable supply of food and essential items in remote community stores, which have low resilience to interruption in the supply-chain. The investment to purchase forklifts, electrical upgrades, satellite communications and ability to improve warehouse infrastructure for stock and merchandise will improve the performance and financial viability of remote stores most of which are small businesses operating in a very high cost environment to provide food security for remote Australians. It will reduce the need for future government emergency response coordination of the remote supply-chain (as was required during the COVID-19 pandemic), and government intervention to provide food assistance if natural disasters or abnormal seasonal weather impacts the supply chain.
- A \$10 million grant program over two years targeted to activate economic opportunities on Indigenous held land by providing increased access for Indigenous enterprises and community organisations in remote Australia to reliable and affordable infrastructure, such as off-grid solar power systems, and plant and equipment to support improved water security. The program will build local capacity, support Indigenous enterprises and help create jobs for Indigenous Australians in primary industry and land management.

- A \$63.3 million investment over four years from 2020-21 to increase support for Indigenous Australian girls and young women to participate in girls' academies to achieve Year 12 attainment, which improves their long term employment opportunities and promotes social participation. The investment maintains 9,895 existing places, in addition to providing 2,700 new places by December 2023. Girls' academies are located in a variety of school locations nationally, with a large proportion of the academies located in regional Australia. The expansion will increase participant numbers at existing girls' academies located in regional areas and create new girls' academies in regional schools in Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

New Remote Jobs Program

A new remote jobs program, designed in partnership with remote communities is planned to replace the Community Development Program to better meet the current challenges and the changing job market.

The new program will start rolling out in 2023 and be piloted in select sites across remote Australia to address long-term unemployment by providing the assistance job seekers need to transition to sustainable employment as the economy recovers.

Pilots will be developed in consultation with local communities and will comprise a wage scheme, services for recently unemployed or under-employed job seekers, training and non-vocational support.

The current Community Development Program will modify Mutual Obligation Requirements to make Work for the Dole and other activities voluntary for job seekers, but still require job seekers to accept suitable work, and to connect with their Community Development Program service provider.

The Australian Government will also provide \$84.9 million in 2021-22 to meet the costs associated with the increased number of job seekers being referred to the Community Development Program as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This additional funding for the Community Development Program will ensure that unemployed people in remote Australia are properly supported to build skills, address barriers, and find employment.

COVID-19 Response Package – Support for Indigenous and Remote Communities – continuation

The Australian Government provided the Indigenous Advancement Strategy with \$19.7 million at Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook in 2020-21 to support Commonwealth wholly-owned Indigenous subsidiaries that have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding provided support for the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Redfern, New South Wales, and Voyages Indigenous

Tourism Australia Pty Ltd (operator of the Ayers Rock Resort in Yulara, Northern Territory, 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.

This funding built on the \$19.8 million provided at the 2020-21 Budget for the measure titled COVID-19 Response Package – Support for Indigenous and Remote Communities.

myGov Enhancements

The myGov platform is the Australian Government’s largest digital platform, allowing users to securely access government services online through a central portal. myGov supports over 20 million accounts to connect to 14 government services and is the primary entry point to government services for many people, including people in regional and remote areas.

The Australian Government will provide \$200.1 million over two years from 2021-22 for myGov enhancements which will deliver a modern platform, providing a more responsive, secure, and personalised experience of government services for all Australians. It will allow a seamless, linked-up experience designed around the key events in peoples’ lives rather than how government is structured.

myGov enhancements will be more digitally inclusive by allowing those in regional and remote areas to easily access the essential services which they rely on online. It will reduce their need to travel extended distances to visit a regional service centre and allow people to find information and services through their channel of choice. Many more regional and remote Australians will be enabled to discover, access and manage services online quickly and safely, at a time and in a way that is convenient to them.

People in regional and remote areas will also benefit from personalisation and proactive engagement. myGov also offers a digital inbox to allow connected services to send electronic mail to users, which is a convenient way for regional and remote users to receive information securely from the Government. Through myGov enhancements, the Australian Government can send proactive near real-time information to people based on their home location including information about disaster recovery payments and services, or financial support for regional areas affected by drought.

Current Initiatives

Women@Work Plan: Supporting Women’s Workforce Participation

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government provided an additional \$27.6 million to expand the Women@Work measure to build on the 2020 Women’s Economic Security Statement. This additional funding takes the total funding available under the Women’s Leadership and Development Program (WLDP) to \$75.5 million over five years from

2020-21 to 2024-25. The objectives of the WLDP is to improve outcomes for Australian women. The expansion of WLDP has already allowed:

- creation of a new Women’s Job Creation priority under the WLDP to increase employment opportunities for women
- boosting of existing priority areas, including women’s safety by supporting women experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence to return to and retain work
- expansion of proven projects such as the Academy for Enterprising Girls and Women Building Australia programs. Further expansion will allow additional projects to be supported, noting the open grant round in December 2020 was significantly over-subscribed.

Return of Cultural Heritage

In July 2020, the Australian Government announced a commitment of \$10.1 million over four years to support the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to deliver the Return of Cultural Heritage (RoCH) initiative.

Preliminary research has identified over 200 overseas collecting institutions with Indigenous Australian cultural heritage collections. Over 100,000 Indigenous Australian objects have been identified in these overseas collections.

To date, some RoCH program highlights include:

- the unconditional return of 42 objects from the United States of America to their traditional owners space – the Aranda, and Bardi Jawi peoples
- the unconditional return of 43 objects from the United Kingdom to their traditional owners – the Gangalidda and Garawa, Nyamal and Yawuru peoples
- the unconditional return of a large collection (1,848 items) of stone artefacts from the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The collection will be temporarily housed at AIATSIS while it is sorted into discrete sub-collections and further research is undertaken.

The initiative provides all Australians with the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of our nation’s history and promotes learning, healing and reconciliation. Through the return of the culturally significant materials, the initiative will directly and indirectly contribute to the improvement of regional and remote Indigenous Australian’s health and wellbeing.

Indigenous Protected Areas Program

The Australian Government has supported Indigenous Australians over two decades to voluntarily dedicate and manage their land and sea country as Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs). In 2021-22, the Australian Government will provide funding of \$17.7 million through 78 IPA projects. IPAs cover more than 74 million hectares, or 9.62 per cent, of Australia. The IPAs are exclusively in regional and remote areas where they assist Indigenous Australians to deliver sustainable environmental, cultural, social, economic and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, their families, and communities through the effective and sustainable management of their land and sea country. The IPAs contribute to the expansion and increased resilience of Australia's National Reserve System for the benefit of all Australians, and assists Australia in meeting its international obligations under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

Community Development Program

The Community Development Program supports job seekers in remote Australia to build skills, address barriers and contribute to their communities through a range of flexible activities. The CDP covers 75 percent of Australia's land mass, comprising of 46 providers operating across 60 regions and over 1,000 communities.

The CDP is supporting over 43,000 job seekers, of whom approximately 80 per cent identify as Indigenous Australians. The CDP is designed around the unique social and labour market conditions in remote Australia and is an essential part of the Australian Government's agenda for increasing employment and breaking the cycle of welfare dependency.

The CDP is making steady progress to reduce welfare dependency in remote communities by enabling people to participate in meaningful activities that prepare them for work and improve community living standards. From 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2020, the CDP supported over 27,323 job seekers into work, with 13,837 jobs filled continuously for at least six months.

A new remote jobs program, designed in partnership with the community, is planned to replace the CDP to better meet the current challenges and the changing job market. The new program will start rolling out in 2023 and be piloted in select sites across remote Australia.

Indigenous Business Australia – Regional Construction Stimulus

The Australian Government provided Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) with \$75 million in 2020-21 as part of a \$150 million equity injection over three years for new construction home loans in regional Australia. The Australian Government continues to be committed to stimulating economic activity in regional Australia and helping local

economies thrive by assisting 360 Indigenous Australians to construct new homes through the Indigenous Home Ownership Program.

While current market conditions may continue to create opportunities and challenges in the path to home ownership, this investment will also support over 1,000 jobs by unlocking financing for pre-approved, shovel-ready construction projects in regional locations. The stimulus initiative complements existing initiatives such as Home Builder.

Closing the Gap – Partnering for Delivery

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap came into effect on 27 July 2020, which commits to building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector, recognising that services delivered by this sector can achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are often preferred over mainstream services.

As part of the next phase of Closing the Gap, the Australian Government contributed \$46.5 million over four years from 2020-21 from the Indigenous Advancement Strategy 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.

A Strategic Plan has been developed and agreed in partnership with parties to the National Agreement to govern the funding. The Strategic Plan sets out investment priorities for each of the priority sectors identified in the National Agreement, including early childhood care and development, housing, health and disability. The priorities identify where funding would be most usefully directed, including national and cross-jurisdictional projects, with jurisdictions to retain administrative control of their own funding. Projects identified for funding under the Strategic Plan will be aligned with the investment priorities for each sector.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in regional Australia will benefit from high quality services delivered by stronger community-controlled organisations. There may also be indirect benefits from additional employment opportunities, skills improvement and culturally competent service provision.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

The Australian Government provides annual funding of around \$19.4 million per year to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to preserve and strengthen Australia's Indigenous culture and heritage much of which is held by, or on behalf of, regional communities. The national Indigenous collection is vital to research across a range of important areas for regional Australia, including

native title, traditional ownership, land and water management, tourism, mining, agriculture, environment and higher education. In addition through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, AIATSIS is able to continue the Return of Cultural Heritage Initiative which enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise decision-making over their cultural heritage and assists with the promotion and resurgence of their cultures, societies, language and knowledge both at regional and national level.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) is a Commonwealth company that facilitates safe, culturally appropriate and affordable accommodation for people who must live away from home to access services and economic opportunities.

As at 21 March 2021, AHL operates 45 accommodation facilities providing 1,725 beds Australia wide. 96 per cent of these beds are located in regional and remote areas (738 beds per night in regional areas, 912 beds per night in remote areas and 75 beds per night in capital areas). The Australian Government will provide funding of \$35.9 million in 2021-22 to continue to deliver these services in remote and regional Australia.

Torres Strait Regional Authority

The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is the peak representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the Torres Strait Region. The role of the TSRA is to work to close the gap and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the region to determine their own affairs based on the Ailan Kastom (island custom) of the Torres Strait. The TSRA does this by formulating, implementing and monitoring programs for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples living in the Torres Strait.

The TSRA also performs separate functions under the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)* as the Native Title Representative Body for the Torres Strait region.

Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation

The Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC) assists Indigenous Australians to realise economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits that ownership and management of land and water can bring. This includes economic independence (in particular, employment for Indigenous people); the delivery of social benefits; cultural identity and connection; and environmental sustainability.

The ILSC tabled its inaugural Regional Indigenous Land and Sea Strategies for four bio-regions: Northern Australia; Desert; South West Australia and South-East Australia and are continuing to address these in the future period and corporations. In 2021-22, the ILSC will support the implementation of more than 100 discrete projects through investment, advice, training, mentoring and other assistance.

Key sectors of the economy where Indigenous Australians may be able to secure a competitive advantage include: agribusiness, urban investment, niche Indigenous products, and tourism. The ILSC will assist Indigenous Australians to realise these opportunities through the beneficial ownership and management of land and fresh and salt water and associated rights.

Expanding Digital Identity

The Australian Government provided \$256.6 million over two years, including \$130.2 million in 2021-22, in the 2020-21 Budget as part of the JobMaker Plan – Digital Business Plan to expand Digital Identity.

Digital Identity is the Australian Government’s single secure, trusted and consistent way to verify identity online, like a digital equivalent of a 100-point identity check. Once verified, people are able to transact as individuals and on behalf of businesses securely online across many services.

The measure is transforming 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. Fourteen additional government services will be connected to Digital Identity by 30 June 2022.

As of 4 May 2021, almost 2.4 million Digital Identities have been created. This means individuals and almost 1.3 million businesses can use Digital Identity to simply and securely access 75 government services online. Digital Identity successfully integrated with the myGov platform on 5 December 2020. Over 185,000 Digital Identities have already been linked to myGov accounts, further extending the use of Digital Identity.

Residents in regional and remote areas particularly benefit from Digital Identity, through the removal of the need to visit a shopfront to prove their identity. This means regional and remote Australians and businesses can access government services online easier than ever before, at a time which they choose.

Social Services

The Social Services Portfolio comprises four non-corporate Commonwealth entities and two corporate entities. For the purposes of this statement, this includes the Department of Social Services, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the National Disability Insurance Agency, 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 and delivering essential social services to Australians, including those in regional and remote areas, through economic recovery and financial independence following the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government is providing \$9.5 billion over five years from 2020-21 to ensure people have the best opportunity to get into the workforce. From 1 April 2021, working age income support recipients received an increase of \$50 per fortnight to their payments and the income free area for JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance (other) and Parenting Payment (partnered) and related payments has been permanently increased to \$150 per fortnight.

The Australian Government is providing a series of new funding commitments for women's safety that will build upon the work of the Fourth Action Plan (2019-2022) of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 and provide a boost to services during the transition to a new National Plan, which is due to commence in 2022.

The new measures work towards ensuring women and their children are safe at home, safe at work, and safe in their community. The measures include a focus on prevention, financial support, creating a safe online space for women and children, improving responses with support to frontline services, working with perpetrators, support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children experiencing violence, and building a strong evidence base.

Additionally, an economic and employment support package will be delivered across Cashless Debit Card sites including the regional areas of Ceduna in South Australia, the East Kimberley and Goldfields regions in Western Australia and the Bundaberg and Hervey Bay region in Queensland.

As at 31 December 2020, the Social Services Portfolio employed 37,824 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 8,337 staff (22 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 17,508 staff (46 per cent) in other capital cities and 11,979 staff (32 per cent) in regional areas. These figures include staff employed by the Digital Transformation Agency, which was part of the Social Services Portfolio on 31 December 2020.

In addition to staff located in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne, the Department of Social Services has staff located in other capital cities such as Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and Hobart and in regional areas such as Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa in Queensland and Newcastle, Orange, Dubbo, Wyong and Batemans Bay in New South Wales.

The National Disability Insurance Agency is spread across 142 different towns or suburbs; 33 across New South Wales, 32 across Victoria, 28 across Queensland, 16 across South Australia, 21 across Western Australia, five across the Northern Territory, four across the Australian Capital Territory, and three across Tasmania.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission has staff located in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney and in other capital cities such as Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Darwin and Hobart.

Services Australia works closely with Australian Government agencies, state and territory jurisdictions, providers and businesses to deliver high quality, accessible services and payments to individuals, families and communities. Services are delivered through digital, telephony and face-to-face channels, and include payments and services for social welfare, Medicare, aged care, child support and crisis recovery programs. These services are delivered to nearly all Australians, including those in regional and remote Australia.

Services Australia is committed to making government services simple so people can get on with their lives. To achieve this vision, Services Australia is making changes across every aspect of its business, to deliver a simple, helpful, respectful and transparent experience for customers.

As part of this, Services Australia is focusing on improving its digital service offering, so that Australians can engage with government services at a time and place that suits them. Improvements to digital services particularly benefit regional and remote

Australians, as helpful digital services reduce the need for customers to travel to visit a service centre.

For those who have more complex needs and require face-to-face services, Services Australia has a significant presence across Australia with many regional and remote service centres, a network of agents and access points, remote servicing teams and Mobile Service Centres. The Mobile Service Centres travel to rural and regional communities to ensure that those communities have access to the same range of services that are available at other service centres in Australia.

Services Australia also delivers payments and services on behalf of the Australian Government across regional and remote Australia during natural disasters, such as cyclones, floods and bushfires. Services Australia rapidly responded to the March 2021 flood event in New South Wales to deliver emergency payments to flood-affected communities. Services Australia mobilised a broad range of resources to deliver the flood emergency response, including redeploying staff from across the agency, redeploying mobile teams into evacuation centres and across communities, and diverting its Mobile Service Centres to key locations to support the recovery operation.

Services Australia's service delivery responsibilities require a flexible, capable and connected workforce across Australia, including in rural, regional and remote areas. Services Australia has maintained its commitment to jobs and a physical presence in regional Australia.

As at 15 April 2021, Services Australia has a total of 321 service centres across Australia:

- 5 in the Australian Capital Territory
- 103 in New South Wales
- 16 in the Northern Territory
- 69 in Queensland
- 24 in South Australia
- 10 in Tasmania
- 61 in Victoria
- 33 in Western Australia.

A significant number of these service centres are located in regional locations.

New Initiatives

Increased support for unemployed Australians

On 23 February 2021, the Australian Government committed \$9.5 billion over five years from 2020-21 for a series of permanent changes to ensure job seekers have the best opportunity to secure employment. Working age income support recipients received an increase of \$50 per fortnight to their payments from 1 April 2021. The increase to working age payments will support Australians while they look for employment.

From 1 April 2021, the income free area for JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance (other) and Parenting Payment (partnered) and related payments permanently increased to \$150 per fortnight. This change allows payment recipients to keep more of what they earn while receiving income support.

In addition, some temporary measures that respond to the COVID-19 pandemic have been extended until 30 June 2021. This includes waiving the Ordinary Waiting Period, allowing people who are required to self-isolate or care for someone self-isolating to access payments, and extending temporary portability arrangements for certain payments.

Approximately 600,000 recipients of Jobseeker Payment, Parenting Payment, Youth Allowance (including Youth Disability Support Pension), Austudy, ABSTUDY (Living Allowance), Special Benefit, Partner Allowance, Widow Allowance, Farm Household Allowance and Department of Veterans' Affairs Education Scheme living in a regional or remote area will benefit from the \$50 increase to their working age payments. They will also benefit from the \$150 income free area, allowing them to keep more of what they earn while receiving income support.

Women's Safety

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government is investing in a range of initiatives to support women and women's safety as the Fourth Action Plan concludes, and prior to the new National Plan commencing.

Improving Frontline Responses

Providing frontline services to respond to violence is primarily the responsibility of the states and territories. The Australian Government is providing up to \$260 million over two years from 2021-22 to states and territories under a new National Partnership Agreement to bolster frontline family, domestic and sexual violence supports to ensure women and children can access support when they need it. This is building on the \$130 million provided from 2019-2020 to 2020-21 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, recognising the ongoing demand for services and the continuing impacts of the pandemic on women's safety.

States and territories will be required to contribute to the National Partnership, reflecting their primary role and responsibilities in the delivery of frontline services.

New Escaping Violence Payments and Streamlined Pathways and Financial Support for Women Experiencing Family and Domestic Violence

The Australian Government is providing \$164.8 million over three years from 2021-22 to streamline pathways and provide financial support. This will include a two-year pilot program through to 30 June 2023 to provide financial support to assist women to leave a relationship because they have experienced family or domestic violence (which encompasses physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse).

Women leaving a violent relationship will have access to financial assistance packages of up to \$5,000. The package will include up to \$1,500 in cash and up to \$3,500 in goods and services and will support women with costs such as rent, and purchasing furniture and whitegoods. The pilot program will be delivered by a community service provider.

The pilot will consider the geographic spread of the Australian population, including those in rural, remote and regional Australia, and the needs of specific cohorts, such as women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Providing financial support will reduce barriers for highly vulnerable women with limited financial means to leave a violent relationship.

A pilot program in Services Australia to provide a streamlined, holistic, 'Tell Us Once' approach for Child Support customers affected by family and domestic violence will also be extended. The No Interest Loans Scheme for family and domestic violence will also be promoted to ensure that everybody who would benefit from the scheme, which provides loans of up to \$2,000 to help people get back on their feet, is aware that it is available.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Personal Safety Survey

The Australian Government is investing \$31.7 million over five years from 2021-22 to establish a new dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Personal Safety Survey to be conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Improved data will help to identify and inform improved initiatives that address family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, and work towards Closing the Gap targets. The survey will include a national representative sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including those in regional and remote areas.

National Research and Surveys

The Australian Government is providing \$30 million over four years from 2021-22 as part of ongoing funding for Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS).

ANROWS will continue their work on producing evidence to support the reduction of violence against women and their children, including for women living in rural and remote communities.

The PSS conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics will continue to collect information from men and women aged 18 years and over about the nature and extent of violence experienced since the age of 15. The PSS sample includes respondents in urban and rural areas across all states and territories.

The NCAS will continue to inform the Australian Government on how people understand violence against women, their attitudes towards it, what influences their attitudes, and if there has been a change over time. It collects data from across Australia, including in regional areas, on knowledge of, and attitudes towards, gender equality and violence against women.

Broadening the Commonwealth's Role in Primary Prevention through National Advertising Campaigns

The Australian Government is providing \$35.1 million over two years from 2021-22 to target young people and key influencers in their lives about issues that are relevant and important to them.

The Stop it at the Start campaign aims to contribute to a reduction in violence against women by changing people's attitudes towards violence and disrupting attitudes that condone it. It encourages adults – such as parents, family members, teachers, coaches, employers and other community leaders – to reflect on their attitudes and have conversations about respect with children and young people aged 10–17 years. It aims to drive a positive change in young people's attitudes towards respectful relationships and gender equality. It is important to reach young people before violence-supportive views become entrenched, and such behaviours are normalised.

Development of a fourth phase of the campaign will continue to consider effective targeting of cultural and community groups, including for regional Australia.

This funding commitment also includes a national campaign, targeting young people across the entire population, supporting materials on a website, research for age-appropriate ways to engage in consent education for children under 12 years of age, as well as evidence based professional development and learning on consent and sexual violence prevention. There is a clear need to ensure that messaging about safe and respectful relationships starts at an early age. The campaign will be informed by developmental research including to assess what parents value in supporting their children to understand consent and respectful relationships.

Safe Places Emergency Accommodation – expansion

The Australian Government is investing \$12.6 million (\$10.8 million in new investment grants) over three years from 2021-22 to fund a further five Safe Places projects that were unable to be funded within the initial Safe Places \$60 million investment in 2020-21. Safe Places is a capital works grant program funding the renovation, building or purchase of dwellings for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. Once established, it is estimated these projects will assist around 450 women and children each year. These projects will provide additional safe places for women and children in priority locations in regional and remote areas.

Increasing the number of emergency accommodation places will provide women and children in regional communities with secure and safe housing while they receive specialist support to improve their financial security and locate longer-term housing. These projects will importantly be designed to support women from priority cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

National Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Integrated Data System and Data, Monitoring and Evaluation for the New National Plan

The Australian Government has committed \$19 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish a comprehensive data and reporting system on family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV). The data and reporting system will fill gaps in the evidence base to better support policy makers and service delivery partners. This initiative will increase visibility and understanding of FDSV in regional areas. It includes an enhanced 'state of play' report that will compile and synthesise all available FDSV data, with an online presence and interactive data and scoping for a national FDSV integrated data asset.

This work will complement the development of a performance monitoring and reporting framework for the new National Plan, including commencing of work on tracking progress against this framework and establishing a prototype national family, domestic and sexual violence specialist services data collection. This initiative will have positive impacts for regional areas as improved data collection and reporting would enable better visibility and understanding of regional issues.

Temporary Visa Holders Payment Pilot – extension

The Australian Government is providing \$10.3 million over two years from 2021-22 to extend the Temporary Visa holders payment pilot to support women experiencing family and domestic violence who may be unable to access social services and welfare payments due to their visa status. The Australian Red Cross provides up to \$3,000 to eligible temporary visa holders to help them cover expenses such as food, accommodation, utilities and other essentials and medical care when leaving a violent relationship. Funding of \$3.5 million will be allocated to nine Community and Women's Legal Centres nationally to help women in these challenging situations access legal assistance and migration support. The pilot is delivered nationally, including in regional

areas. The pilot will support an increased understanding of the support needs of women on temporary visas experiencing violence.

Preventing and Responding to Violence against Women and Girls with Disability

The Australian Government is providing \$9.3 million over three years from 2021-22 to develop resources that will help drive a reduction in violence against women and girls with disability and improve responses when violence occurs. Women and girls in regional areas will benefit from these resources, including a new evidence based framework and web based education resources. Information and training will be delivered to marginalised women with disability, including culturally diverse women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Existing resources, such as the Disability Support Toolkit will be promoted and community champions will raise local sector awareness about preventing violence.

Supporting Better Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses for Diverse Communities

The Australian Government is committing \$6.8 million over three years from 2021-22 to extend targeted grants for violence prevention programs in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including support to identify opportunities to scale-up the learnings from these grants. The grants include organisations in regional Australia. Consultation on the new National Plan will be supported, including through a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council. All Australians are invited to contribute to the consultations and representation from across Australia will be considered in forming the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council.

Responding to Key Recommendations of the Respect@Work Report

The Australian Government is providing \$5.3 million over three years from 2021-22 to build the evidence base and develop primary prevention initiatives to respond to sexual harassment, building and acting on key recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission's 2020 report *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Regional areas will benefit from access to resources and research developed by this initiative. This initiative responds to four key recommendations of the *Respect@Work* report.

In response to implementing a National Sexual Harassment Research Agenda (Recommendation 4), Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety will deliver research projects into sexual harassment. Our Watch will develop and deliver primary prevention initiatives into sexual harassment and review and update its existing national guidelines for reporting violence against women to include a specific focus on sexual harassment (in line with Recommendations 8 and 13). 1800RESPECT's confidential information, counselling and support services will be promoted with a focus on sexual violence to help support the response to workplace sexual harassment (Recommendation 54).

Working with Perpetrators to Address Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence and Trial of the Coordinated Enforcement and Support to Eliminate Domestic Violence Program

The Australian Government is providing \$9 million over three years from 2021-22 to extend perpetrator-focused services and establish the trial of focused deterrence approach to known perpetrators.

People living in regional communities can find it more difficult to access supports. This can include a lack of appropriate and accessible face-to-face services, including for men seeking to change their use of violent behaviours.

No to Violence operates the Men’s Referral Service, a confidential telephone counselling and referral service for men who use violent or controlling behaviour. The Men’s Referral Service operates 24 hours per day, and provides men with information about services available to them such as a men’s behaviour change program.

Changing for Good helps to increase the safety and wellbeing of women and children who are experiencing domestic and family violence. The program is designed to help men identify and work towards their individual goals, as well as support them to access any additional services if, and when, required.

The establishment of the Coordinated Enforcement and Support to Eliminate (CEASE) Domestic Violence Program trial will use a focused deterrence approach. The CEASE program targets prolific, serious and recidivist offenders who account for a large proportion of domestic violence offending. The trial will be delivered across four sites and considers the needs of regional communities.

Strengthening Disaster Recovery Responses for Women Experiencing Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence

The Australian Government is providing \$3.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to improve the safety of women and children experiencing and recovering from disasters by creating and delivering a training package for frontline responders. This initiative will have a positive impact on regional areas affected by disasters and was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

Addressing Technology-facilitated Abuse of Women and Children

The Australian Government is providing \$3 million over four years from 2021-22 to deliver targeted support for children experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. This initiative will benefit women and children, including those in regional areas. This will include developing and implementing a new program delivering resources, training and technology-based tools to support children and young people experiencing technology-facilitated abuse.

eSafety research has found that 27 per cent of children in domestic and family violence situations have experienced technology-facilitated abuse. However, there are currently no comprehensive resources supporting children in their own right. Delivering targeted resources will enable improved responses to children’s experiences of technology-facilitated abuse, including a greater number of intervention orders that explicitly address communication through children’s devices and accounts. This initiative will help those engaging with children, such as frontline workers, school welfare officers, or educators to identify early warning signs that children may be impacted by technology-facilitated abuse, and enable them to work with children to seek help.

National Redress Scheme – further support

The Australian Government will implement a number of improvements to the National Redress Scheme (the Scheme) in response to the Second Anniversary Review of the Scheme and to address the scale, scope and complexity in delivering redress for survivors, including those in rural and regional Australia.

The investment will improve Scheme processes, engagement with survivors and increase transparency for survivors, including in decision-making. The measure includes funding to improve communication of the Scheme, including to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people with disability.

The measure also includes funding for a specialist team working in the recently established Batemans Bay, New South Wales office, who are responsible for preparing complex institution inquiries to meet legislated requirements of the Scheme.

The measure aligns with 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.

The 2021-22 Budget measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure Future National Redress Funding which provided \$104.6 million over four years to 2023-24, including \$73.1 million over four years to 2023-24, to deliver Redress Support Services across Australia.

National Housing and Homelessness Agreement – Social and Community Services Supplementation Funding

The Australian Government will provide states and territories with an additional \$124.7 million over two years from 2021-22 under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement over two years to boost local frontline services prior to the negotiations around the next phase of the agreement that will begin in July 2023.

This money will be available to use on capital works to bolster public housing stocks or to ensure states and territories to meet their responsibilities under the 2011 Fair Work Australian decision on social and community services wages.

Provision of Remote Services - continuation

The Australian Government will continue to provide people living in remote areas with access to Government payments and services via telephony services, dedicated remote servicing teams, and the Agent and Access Point network.

The Australian Government's ongoing investment of \$99.3 million over four years from 2021-22 will support the continued delivery of tailored support to Australians with limited or no access to service centres due to geographical, connectivity, or other barriers.

During times of emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government maintains its tailored and ongoing support to individuals and community third party organisations via a dedicated telephony service staffed by remote servicing specialist staff.

Cashless Debit Card – Jobs Fund and Income Management extension

The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) will continue to support communities in the regional areas of Ceduna in South Australia; the East Kimberley and Goldfields in Western Australia; Bundaberg, Hervey Bay and Cape York in Queensland; and the Northern Territory.

The CDC is a useful budgeting tool that supports income support payment recipients to direct their funds to essential items. The CDC also supports efforts to reduce social harm in communities by restricting access to alcohol, drugs and gambling products.

The passage of *the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Act 2020* meant that the 25,000 existing Income Management participants in the Northern Territory have the choice to remain on Income Management or to transition to the CDC. This measure ensures that those who choose to remain on Income Management will continue to be supported. The measure will also ensure potential participants have the information they need to choose between Income Management and the CDC.

Through this measure, consultation will be undertaken with stakeholders in other locations that are interested in using the CDC as a tool to address the social harm caused by alcohol, drugs and problem gambling.

This measure will also support additional investment in CDC technologies that will improve the experience for participants and businesses where the CDC is used, including in regional areas.

Additionally, an economic and employment support package will be delivered across CDC sites including the regional areas of Ceduna in South Australia, the East Kimberley and Goldfields regions in Western Australia; and the Bundaberg and Hervey Bay region in Queensland.

This package will support regional CDC sites by investing in services to uplift and upskill people to be job ready, and where the community is sufficiently economically advanced, create and provide employment opportunities. In addition, a data collection strategy will inform regional engagement and decision-making and measure the impact of the CDC.

This package will also support regional communities in reducing social harm caused by alcohol and drug use, complementing the support provided by the CDC in reducing access to products that can cause social harm. To support CDC participants, funding will be invested over four years in drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities in these regional CDC sites.

The Australian Government will also work with the Far West Aboriginal Community Leaders Group to develop a best practice implementation guide for working with remote communities, building on the lessons learnt in the consultation, design, implementation, operation and evaluation of the CDC in Ceduna.

Place Based Income Management

The Australian Government will extend Place Based Income Management in existing locations to 31 December 2023. This ensures around 2,500 financially vulnerable welfare recipients will continue to be supported in meeting essential needs across the regional and remote locations of: Greater Shepparton (Victoria); Rockhampton and Logan (Queensland); Playford and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands (South Australia); Ngaanyatjarra lands, Kiwirrkurra community, Peel and Kimberley regions (Western Australia); as well as metropolitan Bankstown (New South Wales), Adelaide and Perth.

Through this measure, Income Management participants will have access to budgeting support and income support payments.

Increasing the Flexibility of the Pension Loans Scheme

The Australian Government will provide \$21.2 million over four years from 2021-22 to increase the flexibility and attractiveness of the Pension Loans Scheme (PLS). This measure will:

- introduce a No Negative Equity Guarantee, to assure PLS customers they will not have to repay more than the market equity of their secured property.

- allow for capped advance PLS payments, up to a total value of 50 per cent of the maximum annual rate of the Age Pension, to give recipients greater flexibility in how they draw on the equity in their Australian real estate assets through the PLS.
- increase awareness of the PLS, so senior Australians who may benefit from a PLS loan, know it is available and understand how to access it.

This measure will ensure senior Australians, including those in regional Australia, are aware of the PLS and the benefits of drawing on the equity in their real estate assets to fund a higher standard of living in retirement, and provide greater flexibility in how they can draw on their equity through the PLS.

The 2021-22 Budget measure builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure Social Services Portfolio – additional resourcing, which provided \$9.6 million over four years from 2020-21 to enhance the PLS and improve customer experience, making it easier for senior Australians to draw on their real estate assets to maximise their retirement incomes, if they want to.

Supporting the delivery of the Volunteer Management Activity

In 2021-22, the Australian Government will provide \$6.6 million for the continuation of the Volunteer Management Activity with a further \$6.6 million one-off funding for the *Supporting the delivery of the Volunteer Management Activity* measure, to be distributed through the state and territory volunteering peak bodies.

The Volunteer Management Activity focuses on building the capacity of Volunteering Involving Organisations (VIOs), primarily through online management services, and breaking down barriers to volunteering for identified priority groups including people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and newly arrived migrants.

The online services delivered to VIOs focus on implementing best practice in recruiting, training and retaining volunteers, volunteer management and understanding regulator risk. It also provides access to online resources. To support the delivery of online services, the Australian Government is also providing a one-off investment of \$3.4 million to develop and improve volunteer management IT infrastructure.

Increasing the accessibility of volunteering opportunities for people in priority groups includes working with VIOs to engage volunteers from these groups and providing volunteers from these groups with face-to-face and other support services.

The *Supporting the delivery of the Volunteer Management Activity* measure provides additional funding to support the implementation of a new Volunteer Management Activity in its first year. It leverages the experience and resources of previously funded Volunteering Support Services to build the capacity of VIOs and increase and support

diversity in Australia’s volunteers. Approximately 40 per cent of previously funded Volunteering Support Services deliver services in regional areas.

Volunteers are accessing volunteering opportunities via online channels, including those in regional areas, and the additional \$6.6 million will ensure existing Volunteering Support Services in regional areas are well supported to inform the roll-out of the online system.

Volunteering peak bodies are required to give particular consideration to regional and rural areas when developing and implementing state/territory based strategies to support VIOs.

A National Early Childhood Program for Children with Disability or Developmental Concerns

The Australian Government will provide \$17.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish a new national children’s program for young children with disability or developmental concerns outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The program will provide a range of disability specific information and community supports for all Australian children, regardless of where they live.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers estimates there are around 115,000 children aged 0-6 years living in Australia with some level of disability. Of these children, approximately 34,000, or 30 per cent, reside outside the major cities.

The new program builds on the Australian Government’s investments in the Helping Children with Autism and Better Start for Children with Disability programs, and recent lessons from service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program seeks to improve national access by delivering information and supports in more flexible and responsive ways. These formats include:

- face-to-face, in community settings
- in a variety of online environments and formats
- over the telephone.

The program will also be open to children before a formal diagnosis is attained, which can be a particularly protracted process in regional areas. The program strengthens connections to existing supports and services, including those delivered by the NDIS.

Disability Employment Services

The Disability Employment Services (DES) program provides specialist employment assistance to people whose primary impediment to employment in the open labour market is disability, injury or a health condition. The Australian Government will provide around \$1.4 billion in 2021-22 to support this important initiative.

In 2019-20, through DES, the Australian Government invested more than \$420 million (34 per cent of the program's expenditure of \$1.2 billion) assisting people with disability in regional Australia seeking employment in the open labour market. Subject to labour market conditions, a similar amount is expected to be spent in regional areas in 2020-21.

In regional Australia, 81 organisations are currently delivering the DES program from 1,568 locations. As at the end of March 2021, regional Australians comprised 32 per cent (or about 98,000 out of 310,000) of those receiving support through the DES program.

From the commencement of DES in March 2010 until March 2021, almost 280,000 participants in regional Australia have been placed in a job.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government has announced changes to Disability Employment Services, to empower DES participants to have greater say over their employment. The proposed changes will enable job seekers with disability to choose digital services, and will link education outcomes to skills shortages in the Australian labour market. Digital services are currently only available to job seekers in mainstream employment programs through the Online Employment Services Trial. As digital connectivity and inclusion increases in regional areas, digital access to employment services will better connect regionally situated job seekers to information regarding their job search and employment support, and will reduce the need to travel to attend in-person.

Current Initiatives

Families and Children Activity

The Department of Social Services delivers a range of programs under the Families and Children Activity that seek to support families, improve the wellbeing of children and young people, strengthen relationships, and enhance family and community functioning, as well as increase the participation of vulnerable people in community life.

The Australian Government is investing more than \$290 million per year from 2021-22 under the Families and Children Activity for programs and services across Australia, with an extensive footprint in regional areas.

In 2019-20, of the total 3,145 outlets delivering Family and Children Activities nationally, 1,391 were located in regional and rural Australia, and supported 99,640 clients

(41 per cent of total national clients). Those regions providing the largest number of services to clients included Rockhampton (3,541 clients), Dubbo (3,141 clients), Townsville (3,140 clients) and Albany (2,234 clients).

In an effort to provide certainty and build capability within the service sector, and ensure continuity of high quality services to families, the Australian Government is extending a large proportion of grants under the Families and Children Activity for a further five years until 30 June 2026.

This significant investment of more than \$1.2 billion over five years from 2021-22 will support children, families and local community organisations right across Australia, including many in regional areas. Services receiving funding extensions include:

- Family and Relationship Services
- Communities for Children Facilitating Partners
- Budget Based Funded Services
- Family Mental Health Support Services
- Children and Parenting Support Services.

Family Mental Health Support Services

The Australian Government is investing more than \$250 million over five years to continue Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS) to 30 June 2026, including funding \$51.8 million in 2021-22.

FMHSS are community-based mental health services that provide early intervention support for children and young people with early symptoms of mental ill-health, or who are at particular risk of developing mental illness later in life.

Through an increased investment since early 2015, FMHSS are now delivered through 227 outlets across Australia.

FMHSS can be accessed by participants either on an individual basis or as part of a group session. Of the 15,935 participants accessing FMHSS on an individual basis in 2019-20, 8,819 or 55 per cent were located in regional and remote Australia.

The regional locations delivering FMHSS to the largest number clients included Alice Springs (353), Tamworth – Gunnedah (345), Broken Hill and Far West (318), Goldfields (318) and Townsville (268).

The increased investment in FMHSS in regional Australia allows more vulnerable children and young people to access support and achieve better mental health outcomes later in life.

Fourth Action Plan (2019-2022) of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022

Women living in rural and remote areas are more likely to experience family and domestic violence than those living in metropolitan areas. Women may also face greater difficulty seeking assistance, leaving a violent relationship or obtaining access to justice.

The Australian Government has invested \$340 million in funding for the Fourth Action Plan (2019-2022) of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, to prevent violence before it happens and provide support to women and children. The Fourth Action Plan provides support to women and children in rural, regional and remote locations by helping prevent and respond to family, domestic and sexual violence.

These include the following initiatives within the Social Services Portfolio:

- A national prevention strategy, including tailored outreach initiatives for regional Australians, such as community-led projects to change the societal attitudes and behaviours which can lead to or endorse violence
- expanding the number of Specialised Family Violence Services to improve access to specialised supports for people affected by family violence, including children.

The Australian Government's investment under the Fourth Action Plan was informed by national consultations in metropolitan and regional areas in every jurisdiction, including in regional centres such as Cairns, Kalgoorlie, Alice Springs and Port Augusta.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government is investing in a range of initiatives to support women and women's safety as the Fourth Action Plan concludes, and prior to the new National Plan commencing.

1800RESPECT

The Australian Government has committed to ongoing funding for 1800RESPECT, Australia's counselling, support and information service for people in communities across Australia, including those in regional Australia, affected by domestic, family and sexual violence.

Services delivered by 1800RESPECT include:

- Telephone and online counselling support services, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week

- A website with information, resources and referrals for those affected by domestic, family and sexual violence, the community and frontline workers
- Mobile phone applications, which provide information on local domestic and family violence and sexual assault services, and ways for women with a disability to assess their safety with respect to domestic and family violence
- Sector support through a range of online resources, such as a digital frontline workers toolkit.

No Interest Loans for Women at Risk of Family and Domestic Violence

The Australian Government has provided \$20.1 million over four years from 1 July 2020, including \$4.9 million in 2021-22 to expand No Interest Loans for women experiencing family and domestic violence.

No Interest Loans of up to \$1,500 are offered to people on low incomes (women experiencing domestic and family violence can access up to \$2,000 for household items) as an alternative to other high-risk, high-interest products such as payday loans. No Interest Loans are provided in conjunction with financial literacy education to improve capacity and greater self-reliance.

The likelihood of family or domestic violence is higher in regional areas. Helping women regain control of their finances is important, given it is harder to gain employment and the challenges with mobility due to lack of public transport infrastructure in regional areas.

Good Shepherd Microfinance administers the No Interest Loans program nationally in partnership with the National Australia Bank.

This initiative will fund loans and associated support for women to re-establish their lives after leaving a violent partner. In addition to basic household items, loans can be used for rental bonds, rental payments, relocation expenses and loan consolidation where appropriate.

Women accessing these loans have access to a specialist loan caseworker to help them regain control of their finances. Loans will be delivered via an expanded network including refuges and domestic violence specialists.

No Interest Loans are available at over 600 locations including in regional areas such as Shepparton, Wagga Wagga, Bathurst and Port Macquarie and are delivered by around 170 local community organisations. Further information on No Interest Loans, including how to apply can be found on the Good Shepherd Microfinance website.

Emergency Relief and Food Relief

The Australian Government is continuing to provide emergency and food relief 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. Around \$125 million of funding has already been allocated, with the remaining funding of \$75 million 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 \$28 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 the COVID-19 pandemic and provide advice to Government on the allocation of further funding to where it is most needed.

Volunteer Grants

In 2021-22, the Australian Government will provide \$20 million for Volunteer Grants. Volunteer Grants provides small grants of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to help not-for-profit organisations to support their volunteers through the purchase of small equipment items, the reimbursement of fuel costs or to assist with the cost of volunteer training. The funding will be equally distributed, with each of the 151 electorates in Australia receiving \$132,450 (GST exclusive).

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 by providing ongoing funding at a cost of \$44.4 million from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

This commitment is ensuring the ongoing delivery of frontline social services to vulnerable people across Australia, including individuals and families in regional areas.

In addition to existing clients, these services are supporting a new cohort of vulnerable Australians facing financial hardship and loss of income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The continuation of these measures will have positive impacts on regional Australia, through:

- Supporting people who are unable to pay their bills or are at imminent risk of not being able to pay their bills, to identify options to address their financial situation.
- Improving financial capability by helping people gain basic budgeting skills and financial education.
- Assisting clients to navigate life transitions and/or financial stress or crises, which may negatively impact their wellbeing.
- Improving financial resilience and pathways to mainstream financial services by providing access to savings products and affordable credit products.

Ongoing Funding for Frontline Social Services Impacted by the Cessation of the Social and Community Services (SACS) 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.

The Australian Government has provided \$132.6 million over four years from 2020-21 for eligible Department of Social Services grant programs. The ongoing funding replaces SACS supplementation following the cessation of the SACS Pay Equity Special Account on 30 June 2021. The funding will enable organisations that provide services in regional, rural and remote locations to continue to deliver critical services for vulnerable Australians.

Digital Skills for Older Australians (Be Connected)

The Australian Government has invested a further \$28.3 million from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024, including funding of \$9.4 million in 2021-22, to make sure older Australians can continue to access the successful Be Connected program through the established network and online resources.

The Be Connected program helps older Australians aged over 50 keep safe online and navigate evolving technology, resulting in improved capacity to use online government platforms and other online services. It also helps isolated older Australians remain connected with family, friends and their communities.

The Be Connected program has exceeded its aim to establish a national network of 2,000 local organisations, and reach 300,000 learners, in the first three years. Since October 2017, Be Connected has engaged 880,000 learners, established a network of some 3,500 local organisations and 14,000 digital mentors. Managed by the Good Things Foundation, approximately 54 per cent of the network of local organisations delivering Be Connected services in the community are in regional and remote locations.

ABSTUDY – Extending Family Tax Benefit to ABSTUDY Recipients Aged 16 and over who Study Away from Home

ABSTUDY is an ongoing program to help address educational disadvantages faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. ABSTUDY helps eligible Indigenous students and apprentices, many from remote areas, with study, living, and travel expenses, including if they need to study away from home. ABSTUDY supports around 20,000 Indigenous secondary students and 10,000 Indigenous tertiary students. ABSTUDY expenditure in 2021-22 is estimated to be around \$283 million.

In the 2019-20 Budget, the Australian Government also invested \$36.4 million to extend Family Tax Benefit (FTB) eligibility to the families of ABSTUDY (secondary) student recipients aged 16 years and over and are required to live away from home to attend school.

Indigenous boarding students were dropping out of boarding school around the age of 16. In part, this was because families could lose up to \$7,000 in FTB Part A each year when their child turns 16. A small number of families also lost FTB Part B, which was an additional loss of around \$3,000 each year.

This measure ensures Indigenous families who need to send their child to boarding school can continue to access FTB payments until the student finishes Year 12. This is an important step to reducing the dropout rate. This will particularly benefit families in regional and remote areas, who do not have ready access to a local school.

The families of more than 2,000 Indigenous secondary students from regional and remote areas who need to study at a secondary school away from home are expected to benefit from this proposal each year. On average, each family will receive an extra \$5,900 per year.

This will contribute to the Closing the Gap target that by 2031 the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (aged 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification will have increased to 96 per cent. It also addresses the

recommendation from the 2014 report *Creating Parity – the Forrest Review*, that families with children at boarding school have access to FTB payments during school vacation periods until students finish Year 12. The measure extends FTB to the families of ABSTUDY (secondary) student recipients throughout their study period, in recognition of the costs parents incur during the school year.

Regional and Remote Student Access to Education

The Australian Government is addressing barriers to education for regional and remote students. Tertiary students from regional areas who need to move away from home to study benefit from ‘concessional’ workforce independence criteria designed to increase the participation rates of regional students in higher education. Provided their parental income is under a certain threshold, these students can be considered independent if they have:

- worked at least 15 hours each week for at least two years; or
- over a 14 month period, earned 75 per cent or more of Wage Level A of the National Training Wage Schedule.

While many regional students meet the 14-month criterion by working during their gap year, there is no requirement that the student must be employed full time for the entire 14 month period. Instead, the student must demonstrate that they have earned the required amount.

Prior to 1 January 2018, young people from regional areas had to be self-supporting for 18 months in order to satisfy the concessional workforce independence criteria. This meant that students were often taking two gap years in order to meet the criteria.

From 1 January 2019, changes to the parental income cut-off for the Youth Allowance workforce participation independence criteria made it easier for regional students to qualify:

- the \$150,000 threshold increased to \$160,000
- the new \$160,000 cut-off is increased by \$10,000 for each additional child in the family to take into account the extra costs of raising larger families
- students have additional certainty about whether they will meet the parental income cut-off, as the year in which the parental income is assessed is now the financial year preceding the beginning of the student’s ‘14 month self-supporting period’ (which forms part of the independence criterion). This way students will know before they decide to take a gap year whether their parental income will be under the cut-off.

The Australian Government has provided \$25 million from 2020-21 to 2023-24 to support young people whose gap year employment was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. From 1 January 2021, the six-month period between 25 March 2020 and 24 September 2020, will automatically be recognised as contributing to existing workforce independence criteria for Youth Allowance (student and apprentice) and ABSTUDY. This means young people will automatically be assumed to have earned the qualifying amount for this six month period, unless their actual earnings were higher in which case the higher amount will be assessed. Young people will be able to use the initial six month period as part of their claim up to 24 September 2022.

Assistance for Isolated Children

Families in isolated areas incur additional costs to educate their children. In 2019-20, the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme assisted more than 12,000 students unable to attend an appropriate state school on a daily basis because of geographical isolation. In 2021-22, expenditure under this program is estimated to be \$81.9 million.

In 2021, depending on the student's circumstances, the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme provides:

- Basic Boarding Allowance \$8,557 (per annum)
- Additional Boarding Allowance \$2,454 (per annum)
- Second Home Allowance \$249.28 (per fortnight, limited to a maximum of three students in a family)
- Distance Education Allowance \$4,278 (per annum).

Improved Fares Allowance for Regional Students

The Australian Government has provided \$0.7 million over four years from 2020-21, including funding of \$0.2 million in 2021-22, 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 means 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.

Incentives to Encourage Young Australians to Undertake Seasonal Work

The Australian Government has invested \$16.3 million over three years from 2020-21, including \$4.9 million in 2021-22, 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 initiative.

Young Carer Bursary Program

In 2021, the Australian Government will continue to support young carers in regional Australia through the Young Carer Bursary Program. Bursaries are currently valued at \$3,000 each.

The Young Carer Bursary Program assists young carers, aged 12 to 25 years, in greatest need across Australia, including in regional areas, to continue to study and to relieve the financial pressure on them to undertake part-time work in addition to their educational and caring responsibilities.

In 2021, a total of 167 Young Carer Bursary Program recipients were from regional Australia.

Hobart City Deal – Improving Social Housing Outcomes

The Australian Government has provided a total of \$30 million to three providers to increase the supply of new social and affordable housing and supported accommodation in Greater Hobart. This includes funding to house people on the Tasmanian social housing priority waitlist and people with disability.

By 30 June 2022, this initiative will support building more than 100 new social housing dwellings that provide people with access to stable, safe and affordable housing in Greater Hobart.

All new dwellings will be managed as social housing or supported accommodation for a minimum of 30 years, and social housing tenants will be supported to maintain their tenancy.

The project is progressing well with 52 properties already tenanted and by 30 June 2021, it is expected up to 10 more dwellings will be delivered, totalling 62 dwellings. The remaining dwellings will be delivered in 2021-22.

Support Services during the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

The Australian Government has established free and independent supports for people engaging with or affected by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission), including:

- a trauma-informed national telephone counselling and referral service, delivered by Blue Knot Foundation (the National Counselling and Referral Service)
- in-person counselling services for people who have more complex needs and require more in-depth support
- Indigenous-specific counselling services, advocacy support and sector development
- individual advocacy support for people with disability who need significant support to tell their story and assistance in drafting submissions
- systemic advocacy support.

Counselling Services

The Australian Government has allocated around \$23 million in 2021-22 for counselling supports for people engaging with or affected by the Disability Royal Commission.

Supports are available across Australia, including outreach support to regional and remote areas. Counselling providers under this program have a total 18 outlets located in inner regional, outer regional and remote Australia.

As at 4 April 2021, the National Counselling and Referral Service has received 5,745 calls, delivered 3,214 counselling sessions and made 2,678 referrals.

As at 31 December 2020, in-person counselling services have been accessed by 879 individual clients across 9,820 sessions, and 112 group clients across 148 sessions, this includes 262 people who live in regional and remote areas.

Advocacy Services

The Australian Government has allocated over \$11 million in 2021-22 for advocacy supports for people engaging with the Disability Royal Commission.

Over 1,100 people have received individual advocacy support to date under the Disability Royal Commission advocacy program. This includes 290 people from regional areas. Advocacy providers under this program have a total of 35 outlets located in inner regional, outer regional, and remote and very remote Australia.

National Disability Advocacy Program

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring people with disability have access to effective disability advocacy that promotes, protects and ensures their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights, enabling full community participation. Through the commitment to the National Disability Strategy, all levels of government are responsible for supporting disability advocacy.

Funding of \$20.8 million in 2021-22 is committed to 59 advocacy agencies across Australia, including in most regional locations, under the National Disability Advocacy Program. Approximately 12,500 people receive individual support each year including around 5,000 from regional areas. A search option available on the Department of Social Services website enables people to identify their nearest National Disability Advocacy Program agency.

Ensuring a strong future for supported employment

In 2019, the Australian Government committed \$67 million over five years from 2018-19 to support the Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) sector once the Fair Work Commission finalises its review of the Supported Employment Services Award 2020 (the Award).

The majority of supported employees working at ADEs are employed under the Award. Approximately one third of ADEs are located in regional, remote or rural area, providing important employment opportunities and support for people with disability in areas where other opportunities may be limited.

Integrated Carer Support Service

In 2020, under the Integrated Carer Support Service, a national network of ten Carer Gateway service providers commenced delivering carer support services across 16 Carer Gateway service areas. The 16 Carer Gateway service areas are aligned to existing Primary Health Network regions to ensure the servicing of carers in regional and remote Australia as well as metropolitan areas. The total grant funding provided to Carer Gateway service providers is approximately \$539 million over five years to 30 June 2024.

The Integrated Carer Support Service delivers a consistent approach to carer support services with tailored and targeted early intervention, preventative and skill building supports available at the national, regional and remote levels. There are approximately 243,500 carers living in outer regional and remote areas who could benefit from this initiative.

Boosting the Local Care Workforce

The Australian Government is committed to supporting jobs in regional and remote Australia. By 2024, around 45 per cent of the additional 83,000 jobs in the NDIS sector by 2024 are expected to be in regional and remote areas.

As part of the 2020-21 Budget measure *Australia's Care and Support Workforce Package*, the Australian Government provided 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. This measure continues to provide supports to the care and support sector by employing regional coordinators to assist organisations to address workforce challenges, ensuring market growth to meet the needs of people with disability, older Australians and veterans.

The program has a particular focus on boosting local job opportunities in rural, regional and outer suburban areas and includes the expertise of rural and remote subject matter specialists who provide 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 in the care and support sector.

Coordinators support providers in the care and support sector to connect with employment service providers and educational institutions. 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.

The Australia's Care and Support Workforce Package also included communication activities that would improve the perception and understanding of work in the care and support sector, including in regional Australia. Funding of \$2.4 million over two years from 2021-22 was also provided to expand the existing NDIS Demand Map to incorporate aged and veteran's care information, by service type and geographic location.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

From 1 July 2020, the NDIS has been available everywhere in Australia, including in the Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands. It is estimated the NDIS will support more than

500,000 people with significant and permanent disability, 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 to 353,000 workers by 2024 (an increase of 83,000 workers). Of the total workforce, around one-third will be in regional and remote areas.

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 included 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.

National Disability Insurance Scheme Appeals Program

The Australian Government has committed \$9.0 million in 2021-22 to the NDIS Appeals program. NDIS Appeals was set up in 2013 to ensure that all people with disability affected by reviewable decisions of the National Disability Insurance Agency, have access to support when they are seeking a review of those decisions in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. While the focus of NDIS Appeals is the provision of advocacy support, funding for legal assistance is available where there is wider community benefit and/or a disadvantage that would substantially benefit from legal representation. NDIS Appeals support is available across Australia including in most regional areas with offices in towns such as Broome, Albany, Kalgoorlie, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Broken Hill, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Mildura, Shepparton, Mt Isa, Cairns and Rockhampton.

National Disability Insurance Scheme – continuity of support

The Australian Government has committed to provide Continuity of Support to people with disability currently receiving Australian Government services, but who are ineligible for the NDIS, to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in the transition to the NDIS. Existing clients of transitioning Government programs who are ineligible for assistance under the NDIS will have access to a level of support that is consistent with that which they currently receive through five Continuity of Support packages including Mental Health, Carers, a Continuity of Support Fund, and the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service. Existing Government clients in regional and remote Australia who are ineligible for the NDIS may receive Continuity of Support.

The Continuity of Support Fund provides support to existing clients of the following programs:

- Better Start for Children with Disability
- Disability Employment Assistance
- Helping Children with Autism
- Outside School Hours Care for Teenagers with Disability
- Remote Hearing and Vision Services for Children
- Work Based Personal Assistance
- Younger Onset Dementia Key Worker Program.

Continuity of Support arrangements for clients of these programs who are ineligible for the NDIS, including clients in regional and remote Australia, commenced on 1 April 2021. Mobility Allowance was scheduled to cease in June 2020, however, the program is still open to new clients. Continuity of Support arrangements for existing and new clients of the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service who are aged 65 or over, including in regional and remote Australia, commenced from 1 April 2021.

The Australian Government has implemented funding agreements and/or variations with relevant service providers in 2020-21 to ensure seamless delivery of Continuity of Support for Government clients, including in regional and remote Australia.

National Disability Insurance Scheme – Jobs and Market Fund

In 2018-19, the Australian Government committed \$45.6 million to the Jobs and Market Fund to support the growth of the NDIS market and workforce in capacity and capability to meet the needs of NDIS participants. In 2021, the Jobs and Market Fund was extended to 2023-24 and will additionally fund the implementation of initiatives outlined in the NDIS National Workforce Plan 2021-2025.

An open grant round, hosted in 2019, funded a number of organisations to deliver projects across the disability sector relating to workforce attraction, education and training and the provision of services in thin markets. Grantees provide support across Australia, including in regional and remote locations.

In 2020, the Australian Government provided \$5.9 million over two years to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to strengthen culturally safe NDIS services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including those in

regional and remote areas. This project will help build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to transition to and operate as NDIS providers, in turn growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander NDIS market and workforce.

From 2021 onwards, remaining funds will be used to commission projects that enable market and workforce development, including in regional and remote Australia. This includes projects that support the delivery of planned initiatives under the NDIS National Workforce Plan 2021-2025.

Individual Placement and Support

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$45.7 million over four years from 2020-21 as part of the Prioritising Mental Health – continued support measure, to expand the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program.

The IPS program targets vulnerable young people with mental illness up to the age of 25, who are at risk of disengaging from education and employment and who are at risk of long-term welfare dependency.

The IPS model integrates employment and vocational support with clinical mental health and non-vocational support, and focuses on the needs of people with mental illness seeking to remain in employment and/or education.

Professional employment specialists located in headspace sites will provide vocational and employment assistance, in tandem with clinical support.

An additional 26 sites are commencing service delivery in 2021 as part of the expansion. 12 of the 26 new sites are located in regional areas of Australia. This will mean a total of 28 of the 50 sites are delivering services in regional or remote Australia.

The regional sites are located in:

- New South Wales: Bega, Dubbo, Grafton, Nowra, Tamworth and Wagga Wagga.
- Victoria: Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton and Warrnambool.
- Queensland: Cairns, Hervey Bay, Mackay, Mount Isa, Rockhampton and Townsville.
- Western Australia: Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie.
- South Australia: Mount Barker, Port Augusta and Whyalla (remote).
- Tasmania: Hobart and Launceston.

- Northern Territory: Darwin and Alice Springs (remote).

Following a successful trial at 24 sites, this additional funding will expand the IPS 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 IPS program is complemented by headspace National’s Digital Work and Study Service. The Digital Work and Study Service provides work and study services to young people with mental illness up to the age of 25 years via a digital platform and is integrated with clinical mental health services. The service complements the intent of the IPS program by providing work and study services nationally. It prioritises regional locations, as well as Indigenous young people and early school leavers.

Farm Household Allowance

Services Australia delivers the Farm Household Allowance payment (FHA) on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. FHA is a time-limited payment that can be paid for up to four cumulative years (1,460 days). FHA customers are required to complete a Farm Financial Assessment and enter into a Financial Improvement Agreement that aims to improve their financial self-reliance and the viability of their farming business.

From the commencement of the program in 2014 up until 18 March 2021, more than 16,000 customers have been granted FHA. Changes to eligibility were introduced in 2018 to support farmers in financial hardship, including drought-affected customers, extending the length of time customers can receive the payment (from three to four years), relaxation of the asset test and simplifying the claim form to make it easier for people to use.

From 1 September 2018, eligible FHA customers received the FHA Supplement, which provided customers receiving FHA up to two supplement payments, up to \$12,000 per household. From December 2019, the Relief payment of up to \$7,500 for customers was paid to FHA customers who had exhausted their 1,460 days on payment by September 2020. From December 2019, the Farm Business Loss measure became available to allow farming families to earn off-farm income that can be offset by their farm business losses up to \$100,000. Further changes from June 2020 include a standard maximum rate of payment to all customers entitled to receive FHA; a simplified asset test with a total asset threshold of \$5.5 million; and the increase in the Activity Supplement, a voucher used to pay for training and education activities, from \$4,000 to \$10,000.

A strengthened case management framework has been developed by Services Australia to improve the support provided by Farm Household Case Officers to FHA customers during their time on FHA.

National Agent and Access Points Program

Australians in regional locations benefit from the Services Australia National Agent and Access Point Program. Agents and Access Points provide essential services to customers in locations where accessing service centres is difficult. As at 28 February 2021, Services Australia has 349 Agents and 230 Access Points across regional and remote locations. Access Points provide free self-help facilities for customers to access government services through a digitally focused self-service offer. This includes internet enabled computers, upload document functions (for scanning to customer records), free customer Wi-Fi, telephone, photocopying and fax facilities. At Access Points, customers can also have identity documents certified.

Agents provide the same digital self-service facilities as the Access Points as well as face-to-face customer support and assistance in digitally engaging with government. Specified Personnel at an Agent site can respond to customer enquiries, provide assistance, guidance and referrals as appropriate.

Services Australia has invested in improved infrastructure and connectivity across the Agent and Access Point service delivery footprint ensuring regional and remote customers receive a consistent service offer to those in metropolitan areas.

Mobile Service Centres

Services Australia operates three mobile service centres that travel to regional communities, providing information and access to Australian Government services.

These fully equipped mobile offices travel across regional Australia to communities located more than 50 kilometres from a service centre.

Mobile Service Centres are also an important part of Services Australia's emergency response service delivery capability, including for January/February 2020 bushfire response efforts in New South Wales and Victoria and during the 2021 bushfires in Western Australia. All three Mobile Service Centres were deployed in March 2021 to deliver services to affected communities during the New South Wales floods.

Regional Citizenship Testing

Services Australia delivers citizenship tests in regional locations on behalf of the Department of Home Affairs. Each week, about 450 tests take place in 36 service centres in regional areas across Australia, from Kalgoorlie in Western Australia to Mackay in

Queensland. Previously, the Department of Home Affairs staff visited regional centres to conduct tests, usually on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

National Indigenous Coalition

The National Indigenous Coalition (NIC) is Services Australia's peak strategic and advisory forum on the effective delivery of payments and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Where payments and services have a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers or staff the NIC is consulted to provide Indigenous insight and perspectives to improve and support better outcomes, including in regional and remote areas.

Online Servicing

Services Australia's website (servicesaustralia.gov.au) is a convenient way for regional and remote Australians to access information and conduct their government business online. In 2019-20, the website received 324 million web page views. The Payment and Service Finder tool, available on the Services Australia's website, helps people discover payments and services relevant to them.

In 2020-21, it is expected that over a billion transactions will be completed online or via the Express Plus mobile apps. This is particularly valuable for Australians in regional and remote Australia, as they can conduct many of their transactions with Services Australia online at a time and place convenient to them. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Services Australia saw an unprecedented surge in demand for online, contactless support. To help keep our customers and staff safe, Services Australia rapidly increased its online capacity and the range of transactions customers could complete without having to queue at Service centres.

A range of Centrelink payments can be claimed online, with customers able to take advantage of a streamlined process that uses dynamic questioning to ensure that only necessary questions are asked. Over 95 per cent of Youth Allowance claims for students are now lodged online. The online claim process has been further simplified for existing customers, with some online claims pre-populating with existing information from the customer's record.

Services Australia also assists regional and remote Child Support customers to undertake several self-service activities online. The enhanced Child Support Online system enables customers to view payment details, securely provide documents via the Upload documents service, and advise or update their details and those of their authorised representatives.

A range of Medicare Services are also available online allowing customers to view and update information without having to visit a Service centre including submitting claims,

updating personal information including bank account details, view their immunisation history statements and view digital copies of their Medicare card.

myGov

myGov is the Australian Government's largest government digital platform, allowing users to securely access government services online through a central portal. myGov supports over 19.8 million accounts to connect to 14 government services and is the primary entry point to government services for many people, including people in regional and remote areas. For these people the ability to access multiple government services online is a convenient way to do business and update their details, minimising the need to travel to regional service centres to deal with multiple government agencies.

myGov also offers a digital inbox allowing connected services to send electronic mail to users, which is a convenient way for regional and remote users to receive information securely from Government.

myGov Code Generator App

The myGov Code Generator App (formally called the myGov Access App) is a smart device App (offered via the App Store and Google Play) that was originally released in December 2017. The myGov Code Generator App is an option for myGov users who choose to apply two-factor authentication for signing into myGov. This feature provides an alternative to SMS-based two-factor authentication, which is particularly useful for customers travelling overseas or in regional or remote areas where mobile phone access or mobile coverage is limited.

Express Plus Apps

Services Australia's free Express Plus mobile apps for Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support services, which can be downloaded onto mobile phones and tablets, continue to be a popular and convenient way for people to engage with Services Australia's online services without the need to travel to a Service Centre or telephone Services Australia particularly benefiting those in regional and remote areas. Using mobile apps, customers can upload documents, report employment income to Centrelink, claim Medicare benefits, view Child Support account balances and access a range of other services.

Over the years, changes have been introduced into the Express Plus Centrelink mobile app to enable users to report their income in four languages other than English – in Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Persian (Farsi), and Vietnamese.

Digital Assistants

Finding clear, relevant and easily located online help is particularly important to Australians in rural and remote locations. Services Australia currently offers

Digital Assistants to help customers to find information and to use our online services at any time of the day or night:

- ‘Sam’ is available from the Services Australia’s website and allows people to ask general questions about a range of payments and services.
- ‘Oliver’ is available within the Centrelink online account, and helps customers with a range of online claims and services specific to their circumstances.
- ‘Cassius’ the Express Plus Centrelink mobile app Assistant provides help ‘on the go’.

Together, the Services Australia’s Digital Assistants provide help to students, job seekers, families, parents, carers, people with a disability and older Australians. *Sam* and *Oliver*, have answered more than six million customer questions since March 2017. *Cassius* was released in late 2018 and has since responded to 5.4 million questions.

The questions and answers provided by these Digital Assistants are regularly reviewed and refined to align with customer needs and any peaks in customer demand. This ongoing refresh of content ensures we continue to improve a customer’s digital experience.

Additionally, the myGov Digital Assistant was released in October 2018, providing targeted assistance to citizens using myGov. The service is available 24/7, improving access for all Australians, including in regional and remote areas. Since its release, it has answered 6.82 million questions. This will enable staff to assist customers who need greater support with more complex queries.

Electronic Claiming of Medicare Benefits

Electronic claiming from point-of-service is the most convenient way for people to lodge claims for Medicare benefits. The Australian Government is actively working with medical practitioners, software vendors, financial institutions, health insurers and members of the public to increase the availability and use of electronic Medicare claims, including in regional and remote areas. In the period from 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021, 99.5 per cent of Medicare services were lodged digitally at the point of service. This rate increases to over 99.7 per cent in remote and very remote Australia.

Health Delivery Modernisation – Phase Two

In the 2020-21 Budget, the Australian Government invested a further \$116.3 million over four years, including \$64.9 million in 2021-22, for Phase Two of the Health Delivery Modernisation Program. This measure will continue to secure health payments and services and make it easier for customers, including those in rural and regional Australia, when interacting with Services Australia.

Customer improvements to be delivered during Phase Two include new event based digital services in the Medicare Online Account and Medicare Express Plus App. The new digital services will enable Medicare customers to move between or to their own Medicare card, manage their Medicare Family Safety net and lodge a Medicare claim with a private health component, removing the need for face to face or telephone transactions.

Treasury

Treasury's role is to support and implement informed decisions on policies for the good of the Australian people, consistent with achieving strong, sustainable economic growth and fiscal settings.

The Treasury has offices in Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. It has been increasing its 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. The 2021 Census will provide detailed regional data for all very small areas on the main demographics.

As at 31 December 2020, the Treasury Portfolio employed 26,776 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 10,390 staff (39 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 13,633 staff (51 per cent) in other capital cities and 2,753 staff (10 per cent) in regional areas. The 2021 Census will recruit some 20,000 field staff to assist in field collection and some 5,000 (25 per cent) will be in regional areas.

Further details are provided in the Treasury Portfolio Budget Statements.

New Initiatives

Family Home Guarantee

The Australian Government is establishing the *Family Home Guarantee* to assist up to 10,000 single parents with dependants (predominantly women) over four years from 1 July 2021, including those in regional Australia, to enter or re-enter the housing market sooner with a deposit of as little as 2 per cent. Consistent with the *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme*, the *Family Home Guarantee* will be available through participating lenders, with geographic reach across Australia.

First Home Loan Deposit Scheme – extension – New Home Guarantee

The Australian Government is building on the success of the *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme* and the first tranche of 10,000 New Home Guarantees announced in the 2020-21 Budget by introducing an additional 10,000 New Home Guarantees in 2021–22. This will allow more 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.

The *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme* and the *New Home Guarantee program* have broad geographical reach. Regional Australia is well represented, with the Scheme attracting strong interest from first home buyers in outer metropolitan and regional areas. Within the first six months of the *First Home Loan Deposit Scheme* commencing on 1 January 2020, almost 40 per cent of first home buyers purchased a home in a regional area.

Northern Australia insurance access and affordability package – Establishment of a cyclone and related flooding reinsurance pool

The Australian Government has announced it intends to establish a reinsurance pool for cyclones and related flooding, backed by a \$10 billion Government guarantee, to improve insurance accessibility and affordability for properties in areas subject to high cyclone risk. The Treasury will receive \$2.4 million in 2021-22 to establish a taskforce that will develop and consult with industry on the final design of the pool, with establishment expected from 1 July 2022.

The reinsurance pool would lower insurance premiums by lowering the cost of reinsurance, which can make up a significant component of premiums for policies with high cyclone and related flood risk. Eligible policies would include home building, home contents, residential and mixed use strata, and select small business property insurance policies.

While the reinsurance pool would cover cyclone and related flooding policies across Australia, its benefits will be most pronounced for areas that face the greatest risk of cyclone and related flood damage, which are predominantly located in coastal areas of northern Australia.

Northern Australia insurance access and affordability package – North Queensland Strata Title Resilience Pilot Program

The Australian Government has announced \$40 million in funding for the *North Queensland Strata Title Resilience Pilot Program*. This is a capped, three-year pilot program to subsidise the cost of cyclone risk mitigation works for eligible strata title properties (residential and mixed use residential) in North Queensland.

The Government will seek to enter into an agreement with the Queensland Government on the delivery of the program, with the aim of sustainably improving insurance access and affordability for strata title properties in North Queensland by improving their cyclone resilience. Implementation of the pilot program is expected to commence from January 2022. Further details will be announced prior to the commencement of the program.

2021 Storms and Floods – tax treatment of qualifying grants

The Government will provide an income tax exemption for qualifying grants made to primary producers and small businesses affected by the storms and floods in Australia.

Qualifying grants are Category D grants provided under the *Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018*, where those grants relate to the storms and floods in Australia that occurred due to rainfall events between 19 February 2021 and 31 March 2021. These include small business recovery grants of up to \$50,000 and primary producer recovery grants of up to \$75,000. The grants will be made non-assessable non-exempt income for tax purposes.

Aligning the Excise Refund Scheme for brewers and distillers with the producer rebate for wine producers

The Government is increasing the available support to brewers and distillers by aligning the benefit available under the *Excise Refund Scheme* for alcohol manufacturers (the Scheme) with the *Wine Equalisation Tax Producer Rebate*.

From 1 July 2021, eligible brewers and distillers will be able to receive a full remission (up from 60 per cent) of any excise they pay, up to a cap of \$350,000 (increased from \$100,000).

The changes to the Scheme will: provide additional support to small distillers and brewers affected by COVID-19; assist the growth of Australia's craft brewing and distilling industry; and reduce inconsistencies in support arrangements for alcohol producers.

The increased generosity of the Scheme builds on the 2020-21 MYEFO measure titled *Alcohol Taxation – automatic remission of excise duty for alcohol manufacturers* which introduced an automatic remission of alcohol manufacturers' excise refund entitlements. Together, the 2020-21 MYEFO measure and the Budget proposal will reduce participants' administrative burden associated with the Scheme and increase the financial benefit they are entitled to receive.

Of the approximately 600 brewers and 400 distillers in Australia currently, around two-thirds operate outside major cities. Additional support to largely regionally based distillers and brewers across the country will serve as much-needed relief for those

severely impacted by COVID-19 and will assist in growing and developing Australia’s alcohol manufacturing sector.

Current Initiatives

HomeBuilder

The Government announced *HomeBuilder* on 4 June 2020 to support jobs in the residential construction sector, including in regional Australia, by providing eligible owner-occupiers with a grant to help towards building a new home or substantially rebuilding an existing home.

As part of the 4 June 2020 announcement, a \$25,000 grant was made available for eligible contracts signed on or after 4 June 2020, and up to and including 31 December 2020. On 29 November 2020 the Government announced it would extend *HomeBuilder* by providing a \$15,000 grant for eligible contracts signed on or after 1 January 2021 until 31 March 2021 (inclusive).

Applications for *HomeBuilder* closed on 14 April 2021. On 17 April 2021, the Government announced that it would invest an additional \$774.8 million to extend the construction commencement timeframe from six months to 18 months for all applicants, bringing the total cost of the program to around \$2.7 billion.

Extending the construction commencement requirement ensures that those who had entered into eligible contracts by 31 March 2021 and submitted their applications by 14 April 2021 are still able to access the grant, including those living and working in regional Australia. Applicants have until 30 April 2023 to lodge all supporting documentation in support of their application.

JobMaker Plan – temporary full expensing and temporary loss carry back to support cash flow

Temporary full expensing

The Government has introduced a time limited investment incentive that allows eligible businesses to fully expense the cost of eligible depreciating assets. This lowers the after-tax cost of business investment and encourages businesses to bring forward, rather than delay, capital expenditure.

To be eligible for temporary full expensing, businesses must:

- Have an aggregate annual turnover of less than \$5 billion, or be a corporate tax entity that meets the alternative income test requirements, and
- Purchase eligible depreciating assets from 7:30pm (AEDT) on 6 October 2020 and first use or install the assets by 30 June 2022. The cost of improvements to existing

eligible depreciable assets made during this period can also be deducted in full, as long as those improvements are first used or installed by 30 June 2022.

Businesses with an aggregate annual turnover of less than \$50 million may also fully expense the purchase of eligible second-hand depreciating assets.

Temporary loss carry back

The Government also introduced a time limited cash flow support measure that allows businesses with turnover less than \$5 billion to apply tax losses to offset previously tax profits, generating a tax refund in the loss year.

Loss carry back complements full expensing in supporting cash flow and encourages eligible companies, including in regional areas, to invest by providing them with earlier access to refundable tax offsets generated by full expensing deductions.

To be eligible to carry back, the company must satisfy several conditions, including:

- Having an aggregated turnover less than \$5 billion;
- Incurring a tax loss in the 2019-20, 2020-21 or 2021-22 income year; and
- Having sufficient franking credits so as not to generate a franking account deficit.

Temporary full expensing and loss carry back both formed part of the *JobMaker Plan* announced as part of the 2020-21 Budget.

JobMaker Hiring Credit

The Australian Government will continue to support both businesses and young job seekers through the *JobMaker Hiring Credit*, including those in regional areas. The *JobMaker Hiring Credit* will support growth in employment during the recovery by giving businesses incentives to take on young job seekers.

The Hiring Credit scheme began on 7 October 2020 and employers can continue to hire new eligible employees and join the scheme at any time until 6 October 2021, with support under the scheme continuing until October 2022. 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, for 12 months, provided they continue to meet all the eligibility requirements.

This will help unemployed young people in regional areas access job opportunities and rebuild their connection to the labour force as the economy recovers.

Veterans' Affairs

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) supports the wellbeing of those who serve, or have served, in the defence of our nation, and their families.

DVA delivers effective programs and benefits that enhance the wellbeing of veterans and their families, and provides and maintains war graves and delivers meaningful commemorative activities to promote community recognition and understanding of the service and sacrifice of veterans.

All those who have served their nation in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) deserve access to a world class veteran support system that enables them to continue their meaningful contribution to our nation, while providing strong and stable support structures.

Many of the veterans and families that DVA supports are located in regional, rural and remote communities. DVA has offices in regional centres around Australia including Launceston, Lismore, Townsville, Newcastle, Maroochydore, Broadbeach and Wodonga, and DVA staff are co-located with Services Australia in regional offices including Morwell, Ballarat, Geelong, Robina, Tweed South and Woden.

DVA and the Department of Defence also work together to support Australian Defence Force members to access their DVA entitlements. This includes DVA Veteran Support Officers working from major Defence bases and routinely visiting small Defence bases in a hub and spoke model of service delivery that extends to rural and remote locations across Australia. DVA Veteran Support Officers routinely visit locations as far and wide as RAAF Base Tindal, HMAS Cairns, RAAF Base East Sale, Bandiana Military Area and Swartz Barracks in Oakey.

DVA is committed to delivering equitable access to a system that empowers veterans and their families to live fulfilling lives after service by creating and implementing simpler and more effective programs, services, and benefits to deliver better and more timely outcomes for veterans and their families.

The 2021-22 Veterans' Affairs Budget Package provides targeted support for priority areas in mental health, wellbeing, transition and support for the families of veterans across Australia, including in regional, rural and remote communities.

The Government has announced its Veteran Wellbeing Centre network will be expanded over the next four years, including establishing new centres in Tasmania and South-East Queensland to provide support for transition, employment, health and social connection. The Government is committed to maintain and continuously improve the network for veterans and their families in regional Australia.

The Wellbeing and Support Program (WASP) will also continue to provide quality intensive mental health support for highly vulnerable veterans who are either transitioning into civilian life after service, or who have complex care needs. The WASP is a national program and regional veterans will be supported with face-to-face services where possible, supplemented by online and over the phone services.

To encourage early engagement with rehabilitation and voluntary participation, the Government has launched a pilot program to provide participants access to vocational and psychosocial rehabilitation without the requirement for any liability claim to be lodged. Evidence gathered as part of the pilot will inform future initiatives on removing barriers to veterans accessing rehabilitation.

The *Family Support Package* will be expanded to more veterans' families and widowed partners and allow them greater choice in how to use the services provided through the program. Intensive support will be provided for families to adjust to new or challenging life circumstances, complementing other DVA and Government services. This enables more families in regional and remote Australia to access existing services in their region.

As at 31 December 2020, the Veterans' Affairs Portfolio, which includes the Australian War Memorial, employed 2,030 staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Of this total, 1,368 staff (67 per cent) are employed in Canberra, central Melbourne and central Sydney, 619 staff (30 per cent) in other capital cities and 43 staff (2 per cent) in regional areas.

For what they have done, this we will do.

New Initiatives

Wellbeing and Support Funding

Support for Highly Vulnerable Veterans through the Wellbeing and Support Program

The Wellbeing and Support Program (WASP) provides support to vulnerable veterans with complex medical and or psychosocial needs, including veterans transitioning from the Australian Defence Force, to access their DVA entitlements and health services to support their independence in the community. The 2021-22 Budget provided \$23.3 million over four years to transition the Program to an ongoing measure. Through the WASP, veterans have access to intensive community-based case management to support engagement with health and rehabilitation services. The WASP is a national program and regional veterans will be supported with face to face services where possible, supplemented by online and over the phone services.

Expanding the Wellbeing Centre Network to Tasmania and South-East Queensland

The Australian Government is providing \$10.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to expand the national network of six Veteran Wellbeing Centres announced in the 2019-20 *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook*. This includes \$5 million to establish a wellbeing support centre in Tasmania, through one or two hubs with associated outreach via physical and digital support services, and \$5 million to establish a wellbeing support centre in South-East Queensland, also with associated outreach. The remainder will support the Department in delivering these important centres.

This will deliver integrated wellbeing support to Tasmanian and South Eastern Queensland veterans and their families from all levels of government, business and community partnerships. It will help connect these veterans and their families to a range of core services that will include support for transition, employment, health and social connection.

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 2021-22 to continue establishment of 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. 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. The Perth Centre opened in November 2020 and the remaining centres are expected to be fully operational prior to June 2022, with interim services expected to be available across all locations in 2021. For example, an opening was held for the Adelaide Centre in April 2021, with service delivery to commence from June 2021.

Expanding Support for Veterans and their Families

Non-Liability Rehabilitation Pilot

The Australian Government is investing \$2.3 million to conduct a two-year pilot commencing 1 January 2022. This will provide timely access to vocational and psychosocial rehabilitation without requiring a veteran to have lodged a compensation claim. The pilot will leverage existing national arrangements for needs and capacity assessment; trial streamlined planning and delivery of rehabilitation activities; and evaluate the outcomes for veterans when these services are uncoupled from liability for compensation. The aim is to raise awareness of the benefits of early engagement with rehabilitation and encourage voluntary participation. The additional benefit will be the evidence gathered to inform future initiatives on removing barriers to veterans accessing rehabilitation, including any findings on the quality and accessibility of metropolitan and regional services.

Expand Family Support Package

This \$5.1 million initiative provides simpler access to a greater range of support for more veterans' families. It extends eligibility beyond families and widowed partners of the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (MRCA) veterans, to families of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA) and the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988* (DRCA) veterans at risk of, or in crisis and their widowed partners. It no longer ties eligibility to a veteran's type of service or rehabilitation participation, and includes the families of recipients of the veteran payment.

Around two in five DVA clients reside in regional or remote Australia. This initiative enables more families in these locations to access existing services in their region, which will have a positive impact particularly in areas of high veteran population. The proposal does not increase services available in regional areas, but rather extends eligibility for veterans' families to receive financial assistance under the *Family Support Package*. This will enable veterans' families to seek support through existing services, including in crisis situations.

Veterans' Health Care

Care Workforce Fee Increase

The Australian Government will invest \$61.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to increase fees for occupational therapists and podiatrists and undertake a comprehensive review of the Veterans' care and support sector. The measure is aimed at ensuring sustainable access to DVA funded services and strengthening the viability of businesses operating under DVA arrangements. This initiative builds on the 2020-21 Budget measure titled *Increasing DVA Fees to Improve Access to Mental Health Support for Veterans*.

This funding is expected to positively impact more than 50,000 DVA Card holders and 1,600 occupational therapists and podiatrists who live and work in regional or remote locations. The review element of this measure will also develop recommendations to streamline Veterans' care and support arrangements and address many of the non-price factors that may impede business viability, particularly those factors that disproportionately impact regional providers.

Current Initiatives

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 from 2020-21, including \$1.6 million in 2021-22. The funding was allocated for the provision of 10 additional case managers in the *Coordinated Client Support Program* to provide support to young and vulnerable medically and administratively transitioning ADF members. As at 28 February 2021, since 1 July 2020, a team of case managers has been established and has provided case management services to 130 medically or transitioning veterans aged 30 and under. Transitioning members are referred to the program from the Department of Defence to DVA for case management prior to transition. Case Management support is focussed on assisting veterans to access their DVA entitlements and any additional external support they require based on a wellbeing assessment. To date the service has been well received with positive feedback from veterans reporting gratitude for the timely and tailored assistance that is offered.

Veteran Family Advocate Priorities

The Veteran Family Advocate was funded by the Australian Government in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update over five years to directly engage with the families of veterans and promote their voice to help shape policy and improve the design of programs and services provided through the Veterans' Affairs Portfolio, including those relating to veteran mental health.

Commissioner Gwen Cherne was appointed as the inaugural Veteran Family Advocate and has identified five priorities for the Veteran Family Advocate role:

1. Suicide prevention and postvention
2. Family policy resourcing and direction
3. Building community awareness
4. Identifying and addressing concerns around Transition
5. Increasing the data and research holdings creating evidence for actions.

In 2021, the Veteran Family Advocate has been conducting awareness and information gathering engagements in each state and territory of Australia. This process is to collect the unique experiences of the veteran communities in each of these locations and to further understand the different experiences of those in metropolitan and regional areas

of Australia. In 2021–22 the engagements will evolve into area specific, targeted, co-designed and co-implemented initiatives with the veteran and family communities, Ex-Service Organisations and the DVA around the five priorities of the Veteran Family Advocate.

Mental Health Support for Veterans and Their Families

The Australian Government provided 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

The Government provided \$94.3 million over four years from 2020-21, including \$26.6 million in 2021–22, to provide for a permanent one-off fee increase and fee simplification for mental health providers, social workers and community nurses. 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 supports strengthening the capacity of the healthcare workforce to provide timely and high quality services to veterans. This measure benefits 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. The fee increase came into effect on 1 February 2021.

The measure also provided \$5.5 million over four years to strengthen the psychiatry workforce capability to respond to unique needs of veterans and military personnel. Funding will be provided for 10 specialist psychiatry training places over the next four years for psychiatric registrars to specialise in military and veteran mental health. The program will support training places in areas of unmet need, including in regional Australia. Arrangements are anticipated to be in place with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry to manage the training program by end June 2021, with first placements from February 2022.

Expansion of Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling

The Australian Government provided \$5 million over four years, including \$1.5 million in 2021-22, 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 included \$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. This 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.