



14 May 2022

**Western Queensland Alliance of Councils**

CR Jack Bawden, Chair  
North West Queensland Regional  
Organisation of Councils

CR Tony Rayner, Chair  
Remote Area Planning and  
Development Board

CR Samantha O'Toole, Chair  
South West Queensland Regional  
Organisation of Councils

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Dear Councillors Bawden, Rayner and O'Toole

Thank you for setting out the priorities for your region and for sharing the Western Queensland Alliance of Councils' impressive *Invest in the West* plan. We are keenly aware of the contributions Western Queensland will make to our national recovery and our plans for a better future will capitalise on the strengths of your region and address many of the areas you've identified as warranting federal attention and investment.

We know that councils and local government have invaluable fine-grained knowledge of how our communities work. Labor sees local government as an expert partner in our challenge to provide important basic services and develop our regions. If we are able to form government, Labor will be working with councils and local government across Australia to keep our economy moving and our trades in work, to protect our communities from natural disaster, to build resilience against crises and to develop our regions.

Labor in Government will restore full local government representation, including voting rights, to the peak Ministerial Council of the nation (currently National Cabinet).

Labor will re-establish the Australian Council of Local Government, an annual meeting with the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Mayors, Shire Presidents and Local Government stakeholders, engaging directly on matters of significance to local and federal governments.

For Australia to thrive, our regions must thrive. Australia's federal government needs to be a better partner to local government, and an Albanese Labor government will restore the standing of local government representatives in Commonwealth decision making.

We have an opportunity to build a better future across our country. By implementing the lessons of the pandemic, we can drive economic growth and invest in domestic manufacturing. We can build more things here in Australia and stand on our own two feet.

Thank you for the work your organisations and their members are already doing to strengthen our communities. We have provided a summary below of the ways an Albanese Labor government will be working in your region to build a better future for Western Queensland.

Yours sincerely

## **Labor CHQ 2022**

### **A future made in Western Queensland**

With a wealth of mineral resources including copper, silver, lead, zinc and bauxite, and access to cheap and abundant energy resources, Queensland is in a prime position to directly benefit from Labor's plan to make more things here in Australia.

Western Queensland has significant deposits of "new economy minerals". Minerals such as cobalt and tungsten that are used to make smart phones, wind turbines, electric cars, solar panels and batteries.

In addition to new, secure jobs processing minerals and value-adding here, we can strengthen agricultural supply chains through smart investment in infrastructure and new value-added processing. And we can scale up new energy production from sugar cane bagasse.

### **National Reconstruction Fund**

Labor's National Reconstruction Fund will create secure jobs for Australian workers, drive regional economic development, boost our sovereign capability and diversify the nation's economy. Regional Queensland has a significant manufacturing base that will benefit from the National Reconstruction Fund. It will create secure jobs for Queensland workers, drive regional economic development, boost our sovereign capability and diversify the nation's economy.

The NRF will begin rebuilding Australia's industrial and manufacturing base by providing up to \$15 billion of capital to invest in job-creating projects through loans, equity and guarantees. This will include:

- Allocating \$3 billion to help industry on the path to net zero by 2050, meaning cheaper energy for existing industries and more jobs in emerging ones like battery manufacturing and biofuels.
- A \$1 billion Value-Adding in Resources Fund to expand Australia's mining science technology capability, create jobs and ensure a greater share of our raw materials are processed in Australia.
- Reserving \$500 million of funding for Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Food and Fibre. This will encourage investment in value-adding and growing Queensland exports, help diversify the sector and open up new possibilities for trade.

Working with the State Government, we can strengthen agricultural supply chains through smart investment and new value-added processing. And we can scale up with new energy production such as hydrogen.

With its wealth of resources, Queensland is in a prime position to directly benefit from Labor's Plan to make more things here in Australia.

An Albanese Labor Government will use its purchasing power to incentivise the use of Australian-made goods, products and materials in government contracts as we roll out our plans.

### **More affordable housing**

It's harder to buy a house today than ever before, but it's also harder to rent than ever before.

An Albanese Labor Government will:

- Deliver 50,000 Home Guarantee Scheme places nationally, 10,000 of which will be specifically allocated to regional Australia under the Regional First Home Buyer Support Scheme. The scheme will provide a guarantee of up to 15 per cent for eligible first home buyers, so buyers with a five per cent deposit can avoid paying mortgage insurance.
- Establish a Help to Buy scheme that cut the cost of buying a home by up to 40 per cent for 10,000 Australians each year.
- Establish the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund that will build 30,000 social and affordable homes to increase housing supply and reduce homelessness across Australia.
- Develop and implement a National Housing and Homelessness Plan, working with the Queensland Government, and key stakeholders, to address the severe housing crisis.

### **Investing in Town Water Security**

Labor will broaden the National Water Grid investment policy, to allow funding for more projects. This will make essential town water supplies in regional and remote communities eligible for funding, in addition to the continued use of the fund for agriculture projects.

In doing so Labor will ensure that critical water projects are able to gain access to government funding where they stack up environmentally and economically.

### **Sustainable biosecurity**

An Albanese Labor Government will take the biosecurity challenges facing farmers, regional communities and the agriculture sector seriously. An Albanese Labor Government will deliver a long-term, sustainable funding stream that will go directly to strengthening Australia's biosecurity system.

Under Scott Morrison, four damning reports have found that Australia's biosecurity system is weak and not fit-for-purpose. Farmers and the agriculture sector continue to raise concerns about imminent biosecurity risks, given the cost of an incursion is estimated to be around \$50 billion.

Labor will improve biosecurity capabilities that includes addressing the potential impact of animal diseases, supporting the adoption of livestock traceability reforms and reducing the impact of pests and weeds.

### **Land Management Partnerships**

Labor created national Landcare under Bob Hawke, and we have always supported Landcare.

If elected we will work to strengthen Landcare programs which support environmental restoration and sustainable agriculture, mobilising volunteer contributions but also assisting in the creation of employment at local and regional level.

We will continue to support natural resource management and work with regional NRM bodies, Landcare, indigenous organisations and other stakeholders to focus on protecting threatened species, expanding and establishing corridors and reducing threats like weeds and pests.

### **Better road and NBN connections in regional Queensland**

Labor will make the nation-building infrastructure investments to unlock the full potential of the vast area of Western Queensland.

We will work with the Palaszczuk Labor Government and local governments across Queensland to invest in the local projects that deliver the biggest benefits.

We need efficient and weather-resistant road and rail links to move minerals, cattle and agricultural produce from mines, properties and farms to processing facilities and ports. And we need investment to keep people and communities safely connected, and support tourism.

Labor has always understood the link between effective freight and transport links, productivity, costs and jobs.

That's why Labor is committed to ongoing investment across regional Queensland, including the Kennedy Highway – Kuranda Range Road Safety and Resilience Upgrades (\$210 million).

Unlike the LNP, whose dedicated infrastructure fund for Northern Australia has funded hardly anything in the six years since announcement, Labor will deliver the investments that will deliver long-term jobs to North and Far North Queensland.

To support tourism across the region, our gateway and regional airports need to be fit for purpose. Labor has always stood ready to support smart investment in airport upgrades where required.

### **A Faster NBN**

Labor will invest in faster NBN for regional Queensland to improve service and access for businesses and families.

We'll expand full-fibre NBN access for homes and businesses that would not be connected under the Morrison Government's plan. Fibre offers speeds up to 14 times faster than copper, with fewer dropouts and greater reliability.

Labor will also commit \$200 million for local connectivity projects, including local Wi-Fi hot spots for remote communities, and upgrades to mobile tower capacity.

Labor will invest \$30 million to expand on-farm connectivity and enable better wireless extension solutions on the field. This will enable more farmers in regional Queensland to fully utilise sensor and connected-machinery technology to improve their efficiency.

We will nearly double monthly download data allowances on the NBN Sky Muster Satellite network, and unmeter satellite downloads from midnight to 4pm.

Our investment in the NBN will grow the economy and unlock more local jobs including for construction workers, engineers and project managers.

### **Better Mobile Coverage**

Communities in regional Queensland need better mobile coverage for school, work and as a matter of safety.

A key element of Labor's Better Connectivity for Rural and Regional Australia Plan will be the establishment of a \$400 million fund to expand multi-carrier mobile coverage along roads, as well as for regional homes and businesses.

To support this, a Labor government would commence an independent national audit of mobile coverage before the end of this year, to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities. A tender process will be used to identify a partner company capable of placing mobile signal measurement devices on Australia Post's transport assets, to gather the best information possible.

### **Cheaper Power for More Jobs**

Labor's Powering Australia plan will close the yawning gap between our current Federal Government and our business community, agricultural sector and state governments when it comes to investing in the energy that will power our future. Our plan will create 604,000 jobs, with 5 out of 6 new jobs to be created in regional Australia. It will spur \$76 billion of investment.

It will also cut power bills for families by \$275 a year by 2025. Electricity costs for businesses will also fall, providing a shot in the arm for electricity intensive industries.

Alongside the economic benefits, our plan will reduce Australia's emissions by 43% by 2030 – which will become Australia's target under the Paris Agreement, keeping us on track for net zero by 2050.

Over time, electric and hydrogen vehicles can reduce household and business costs as well as emissions, and reduce Australia's reliance on imported oil.

Labor's Driving Australia Plan is a \$500 million investment to support cheaper energy for families and businesses:

- Labor will invest \$39.3 million to develop a National Electric Vehicle Charging Network - to deliver 117 fast charging stations on highways across Australia to address "range anxiety". Labor's policy will give priority to making it possible to drive an EV from Brisbane to Mt Isa and on to Tennant Creek.
- Labor's Hydrogen Highways program will develop refuelling stations for heavy vehicle transport, reducing emissions and capitalising on Australia's opportunity to

harness hydrogen as a transport fuel. Labor's \$80 million investment could deliver 16 hydrogen refuelling stations on Australia's busiest freight routes.

### **Strengthening Regional Health Care**

After nearly a decade of attacks and neglect by the LNP Government, Labor will strengthen Medicare and improve health services for communities across regional Queensland.

Under the LNP, average out of pocket costs to see a GP in your region have increased by 31 per cent, while to see a specialist they have increased by 51 per cent.

Labor will address the neglect of our Medicare system and make it easier to see a doctor.

### **Medicare Urgent Care Clinics**

Labor will deliver new Medicare Urgent Care Clinics to take pressure off local hospital emergency departments and make it easier for families to see a doctor or nurse when they have an urgent, but not life-threatening, need for care.

Urgent Care Clinics will provide time critical and bulk billed treatments for injuries such as sprains and broken bones, wound care, minor ear and eye problems and minor burns, avoiding long wait times at the emergency department.

### **Cutting the cost of medication**

Labor will cut the cost of medications by reducing the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme general co-payment from the current maximum of \$42.50 per script, to a maximum of \$30 per script. This will keep the costs of medications down and ease some of the cost of living pressures that North and Far North Queenslanders are facing.

### **Restoring Regional Mental Telehealth services**

During the COVID pandemic, the Morrison Government cut crucial support for remote telehealth psychiatry consultations. Labor will reinstate the 50 per cent Medicare regional loading, allowing Queensland residents in regional and rural areas to access bulk billed telehealth psychiatry consultations.

### **Supporting our nurses**

Labor will establish a National Nurse and Midwife Health Service to provide critical health and wellbeing support to our frontline nursing heroes. Labor's service will help prevent burnout for nurses and midwives, keeping them in the job.

### **National Melanoma Nurse Network**

Labor announced in Cairns that it will deliver 35 extra melanoma nurses nationally. Over 16,000 Australians are diagnosed with melanoma every year and one person dies every six hours.

Queenslanders have the highest risk of melanoma of all Australians. Melanoma nurses have specialist knowledge, training and experience to make sure people have continuity of care – and someone to talk to who knows exactly what's going on.

**Newborn screening**

Labor will make sure all Australian babies have a better start to life by expanding the newborn screening program. Australia hasn't updated its screening program since the 1980s – and children are going without treatment despite tests being available. Labor's plan will increase the number of screened conditions from around 25 to 80, helping kids get the care they need from the start.

**First Nations Health**

Labor will train 500 new First Nations health workers, expand access to lifesaving dialysis treatment and double federal funding to help eradicate rheumatic heart disease.