

**BUILDING A STRONG
FUTURE FOR REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA
2007-08**

STATEMENT BY
THE HONOURABLE MARK VAILE MP
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL SERVICES
LEADER OF THE NATIONALS

THE HONOURABLE JIM LLOYD MP
MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, TERRITORIES AND ROADS

THE HONOURABLE DE-ANNE KELLY MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AND MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian Government is helping to secure regional Australia's long term prosperity by working in partnership with regional Australians to build stronger communities, and by investing in things which are important to our regions.

The Australian Government has invested record amounts in our local roads, rail networks, schools, hospitals, measures to address skill shortages and to sustain natural resources. Our strong economic and financial management has enabled us to invest in these important areas.

Since 1996, the Australian Government has eliminated more than \$96 billion of Hawke/Keating Labor Government debt, created more than two million jobs, cut the unemployment rate to the lowest level in 30 years, kept interest rates low and increased real wages. Above all, Australians' living standards have improved, which enables families to plan their futures with confidence.

While these strong economic conditions have opened up greater opportunities for regional Australia, more needs to be done.

The Australian Government recognises that the benefits of Australia's economic prosperity are not always spread uniformly across the country. The uneven distribution of our natural resources, skill shortages and demographic changes are just a few of the factors impacting upon some of our regions.

Above all, one of the most severe droughts in Australia's history is causing significant adversity and hardship in many communities.

The Australian Government takes these, and other factors, into account when devising policies for regional Australia. Guiding these policies is the need to ensure that the one third of Australians living outside major cities get a fair go and don't miss out on the benefits stemming from our economic prosperity.

Regional Australia is a significant contributor to Australia's export income. Our nation's future success relies heavily on the ability of our regions to continue to deliver goods and services to the domestic and international marketplaces.

The 2007-08 Ministerial Regional Budget Statement contains a range of programmes and initiatives that will build stronger regional communities, and help secure Australia's future economic growth and prosperity. These include:

- \$22.3 billion to improve the country's major road and rail links as part of the AusLink National Transport Plan;
- the \$10 billion National Plan for Water Security to improve the efficiency of water management and boost the security of water allocations;

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- \$1.9 billion for the National Action Plan on Mental Health to promote better mental health and provide additional support to people with mental illness, their families and their carers; and
- the Investing in Our Schools Programme – almost \$1.2 billion to improve infrastructure in our nation’s schools.

This Ministerial Regional Budget Statement also reflects the Coalition Government’s philosophy that the best way to support regional Australia is to work in partnership with local people who know their communities. Working in partnership helps foster the development of self reliance, and empowers people to take control of their own lives.

For example, the Australian Government’s Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions programmes are funding on-the-ground projects that are making a significant difference to the lives of millions of Australians.

Furthermore, targeted infrastructure programmes like Roads to Recovery are a good example of what can be achieved when the Australian Government works with local government to improve the country’s extensive local road network.

The projects we are funding under these programmes, and the many other new and ongoing programmes detailed in this Statement, are proof of the benefits that can occur when government and regional communities work in partnership to build a stronger regional Australia.

HIGHLIGHTS

AusLink 2

The Australian Government will invest \$22.3 billion in Australia's land transport system from 2009–10 to 2013–14, under the second stage of its National Land Transport Plan—AusLink 2. AusLink 2 is the biggest investment in land transport infrastructure ever made by an Australian Government. It is 41 per cent per cent larger than the current AusLink programme, which runs from 2004–05 to 2008–09. [Further information: Page 90.](#)

Regional Partnerships

The Australian Government has allocated \$270.6 million under the Regional Partnerships programme to fund projects that stimulate growth in regions, improve access to services, support planning and help communities adjust to changed circumstances. [Further information: Page 76.](#)

Remote Aerodromes

The Australian Government is providing \$22 million to 2010-11 under the Regional and Remote Aerodrome Funding Scheme to upgrade and maintain airstrips in regional and remote areas. This initiative will improve remote communities' access to essential services, and increase safety at remote and isolated aerodromes. [Further information: Page 92.](#)

Water management

The National Plan for Water Security is a bold new approach to ensure that rural water use is placed on a sustainable footing by improving water use efficiency and allocation reliability within the next decade. Building on the National Water Initiative, the \$10 billion plan will herald a new era of investment confidence in vital rural industries. [Further information: Page 96.](#)

Drought assistance

The Australian Government has provided more than \$1.4 billion of drought assistance to farmers since 2001. Since the Australian Government's improvements in accessibility to drought support announced in October 2006, more farmers have been able to access Exceptional Circumstances assistance than ever before. [Further information: Page 6.](#)

Mental Health

The Australian Government is providing \$1.9 billion over five years to the National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006-11. The Plan sets out agreed outcomes and specific policy directions for action that emphasise coordination and collaboration between government, private and non-government providers in order to deliver a more seamless and connected care system. [Further information: Page 68.](#)

Royal Flying Doctor Service

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$156.6 million for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) to help ensure the RFDS is on a sustainable financial footing for the long term. Under the new arrangement the Australian Government will fully fund RFDS traditional services in rural and remote communities. Further information: Page 67.

Natural Heritage Trust Phase Three

The Australian Government is providing \$2 billion over five years to Phase Three of the Natural Heritage Trust to maintain the momentum of community and industry action in partnership with the Australian Government to build capacity and deliver practical initiatives to restore, conserve and sustainably manage our environment and natural resources. Phase Three of the Natural Heritage Trust will continue to address biodiversity decline, salinity and water quality issues, and increased coastal and peri-urban pressures. [Further information: Page 44.](#)

Agriculture Advancing Australia

The Australian Government is providing \$254.7 million over four years to continue to help farmers manage changing circumstances through the Government's Agriculture Advancing Australia (AAA) policy package. AAA is an integrated package of programmes to help primary producers and rural land managers in agriculture and fishing to be more competitive, sustainable and profitable. [Further information: Page 6.](#)

Migration to our regions

The Australian Government is committed to having regional Australia share the benefits from our migration programme. For 2007-08 the Australian Government has approved an increase of 5,000 places in the skill stream. Within the skill stream it is estimated some 750 places will be available under State-Specific and Regional Migration initiatives. [Further information: Page 74.](#)

Clever Networks

The \$113 million Clever Networks programme is part of the \$1.1 billion Connect Australia Package and is intended to support the improved delivery of broadband enabled health, education, government, community and emergency sector services in regional, rural and remote Australia. [Further information: Page 81.](#)

Rural and Regional Skills Shortage Special Commencement Incentive

Under the Rural and Regional Skills Shortage Special Commencement Incentive, the Australian Government is boosting training in rural and regional Australia by providing a special commencement incentive for rural or regional employers who employ Australian Apprentices in occupations where there are skills shortages. [Further information: Page 32.](#)

Realising our potential – additional support for regional and remote schools

The Australian Government will provide \$121.1 million over four years to fund a regional/remote loading in addition to current funding delivered to non-government schools. State and territory governments will be required to provide an equivalent increase in resourcing for regional/remote government schools in 2009-12 schools funding agreement. [Further information: Page 23.](#)

AGRICULTURE: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Drought assistance

The Australian Government continues to support drought-affected farmers and agriculturally dependent small business operators. More than \$1.4 billion of drought assistance has been provided to farmers by the Australian Government since 2001. Since the Australian Government's improvements in accessibility to drought support announced in October 2006, more farmers have been able to access Exceptional Circumstances assistance than ever before.

In the last five months, the number of farmers receiving Exceptional Circumstances income support increased by nearly 74 per cent. In the three months to March 2007, business support applications approved were 49 per cent more than the average of the previous four quarters.

In response to the severity and length of this drought, further measures to assist farmers and farm families have been introduced. Increased funding has been provided to the Rural Financial Counselling Service to help meet the demand drought has placed on it. Professional Advice and Planning Grants have been introduced to help farmers get advice about managing their finances, stock and natural resources during the drought.

For the first time, Exceptional Circumstances assistance is now available to agriculturally dependent small business operators whose clients are from Exceptional Circumstances declared areas.

The Australian Government encourages all farmers and agriculturally dependent small business operators to call the National Drought Hotline - 13 23 16 to see what type of assistance is available to them.

Agriculture Advancing Australia

The Australian Government will provide \$254.7 million from 2007-08 to 2010-11 to continue to help farmers manage changing circumstances through the Government's Agriculture Advancing Australia (AAA) policy package.

AAA is an integrated package of programmes to help primary producers and rural land managers in agriculture and fishing to be more competitive, sustainable and profitable.

Improvements will better assist primary producers. The main improvements will be:

- a doubling of support – to \$40 million over four years – for the Advancing Agricultural Industries Programme (previously known as Industry Partnerships) to help industries spot changes early and put industry-led actions in place to capture opportunities and respond to emerging risks;
- the new FarmBis to be delivered nationally to ensure producers across Australia have equal and consistent access to training and education opportunities; and
- easier access to FarmHelp support for families in severe financial hardship by allowing earlier recipients a second chance to obtain advice and training and/or establishment grant. The re-establishment grant is also to be increased by 50 per cent to \$75,000. The maximum asset limit for obtaining the full grant will also be raised for those producers that choose to leave agriculture.

National Landcare Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$147.9 million over the four years to 2010-11 for Landcare activities. Landcare is an iconic natural resource management institution that provides an entry point for the community to help improve the productive and environmental value of our landscape for the long term. The Australian Government's National Landcare Programme (NLP) will continue to play a key role in strengthening the links between farmers and regional Natural Resource Management (NRM).

It will also continue to support the grass-roots Landcare movement and increase the sustainability of the agricultural sector. Around 75 per cent of farmers and land managers are involved in Landcare activities or benefit from knowledge acquired through the movement.

National Food Industry Strategy

The Australian food industry will be more globally competitive as a result of a package totalling \$75.7 million over four years from 2007-08 to 2010-11.

The package builds on the successes of the five-year National Food Industry Strategy (NFIS) which will finish on 30 June 2007.

The package will continue and build on four key NFIS programmes:

- the Food Innovation Grants programme (\$54.2 million);
- the Technical Market Access Programme (\$15 million);
- the International Food Standards programme (\$2.5 million); and
- the Australian Food Industry Council (\$4 million).

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The funding package is designed to improve the industry's global competitiveness by focussing on improved uptake of innovation, increasing investment in research and development and government-to-government negotiations to ensure that market access and trading conditions are based on sound science rather than technical barriers to trade.

ARTS, RECREATION AND ENTERTAINMENT: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Australian Screen Production Incentive – Location Rebate

The Australian Screen Production Incentive – Location Rebate, which was previously called the Refundable Film Tax Offset (RFTO), is an incentive for large budget film and television productions to locate in Australia. The Government made a number of enhancements to the Location Rebate through the 2007-08 Budget that will increase the attractiveness of Australia as a location for foreign funded large budget productions. The enhanced incentives are available to eligible productions which commence principal photography or production of the visual image after 1 July 2007.

By enhancing the Location Rebate, the Australian Government continues to recognise the economic, employment and skills development opportunities that large scale productions bring to Australia – and to Australians working in the screen production industry. The criterion to access the Location Rebate is a minimum qualifying Australian expenditure of \$15 million on the production.

Since the Refundable Film Tax Offset was introduced in 2002, over 20 large budget productions have located in Australia. A number of these productions have based location shooting in rural and regional Australia, providing considerable economic and employment opportunities. The recently completed Charlotte's Web, for example, provided a major economic boost to both Greendale and Williamstown in Victoria, while Fools Gold (due for release in early 2008) brought economic benefits to the Gold Coast, Port Douglas, Airlie Beach and Lizard Island.

The Australian Government is also introducing the Australian Screen Production Incentive – Production Rebate from 1 July 2007, to support private investment in Australian film and television production.

Small to medium performing arts companies

The Australian Government is providing additional funding of \$19.5 million over four years, from 2007-08, to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the small to medium performing arts sector. The increased funding will underpin a significant increase in new work and community activities, including skills development and training for artists and community education and access programmes.

ARTS, RECREATION AND ENTERTAINMENT: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Australian Sports Commission

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is the Australian Government body that manages, develops and invests in sport at all levels in Australia at the direction of the Coalition Government. Through the Commission, the Australian Government works closely with a range of national sporting organisations, state and local governments, schools and community organisations to ensure sport is well run and accessible so that everyone can participate and enjoy the benefits. It also works with these organisations and through the Australian Institute of Sport and state and territory institutes and academies of sport, to develop sporting excellence at the elite level.

THE ACTIVE AFTER-SCHOOL COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

The \$90 million Active After-school Communities programme commenced in 2005 and has been expanded to \$125 million over four years from 2007-08. It served 1,500 primary schools and after school care centres by the end of 2005 and by the end of 2007 is expected to be available at more than 3,000 sites. The programme enables around 150,000 young Australians to get involved in sport and develop essential motor-skills. It has been an important part of the Coalition's Building a Healthy Active Australia package announced on 29 July 2004 to tackle childhood obesity. The programme helps young Australians develop a balanced approach to nutrition and promotes healthy habits for life.

INDIGENOUS SPORT PROGRAMME

The Australian Sports Commission's Indigenous Sport Programme delivers sport-specific participation and development programmes and funding support directly to Indigenous people and communities. The programme offers an integrated development pathway that links existing sport development structures and assists Indigenous coaches, managers, trainers, athletes and officials. The Commission has in place effective, collaborative partnerships with state/territory departments of sport and recreation, other sport delivery agencies and 16 national sporting organisations.

Collections Australia Network

In 2007-08 the Australian Government will contribute \$240,000 to Collections Australia Network (CAN) with state and territory governments contributing a further \$160,000.

CAN, formerly Australian Museums and Galleries On-line, is a website that provides access to cultural heritage held in museums, galleries, libraries and archives all over Australia. The website is aimed at improving online services for small to medium and regional collecting organisations enabling them to expand into the online environment in a more effective manner. The site also allows participating institutions to remotely upload, add, delete and modify their webpages, news items, exhibitions, events and collections.

Big Screen Touring Film Festival

The Australian Government has provided additional funding of \$6.9 million over three years from 2005-06 to the Australian Film Commission's screen culture initiatives with Big Screen being a component of this. This funding was part of the 2004 election commitments and the Australian Government announced in the 2007-08 Budget that these commitments will be continued.

Big Screen is a touring film festival showcasing new and iconic Australian films in regional Australia. Big Screen is a major part of the Australian Film Commission's screen culture programme, which provides opportunities for Australian audiences to access screen content throughout Australia, with a particular focus on regional Australia.

Since its inception Big Screen has attracted audiences in regional Australia totalling in excess of 129,000 people. Under the increased funding the average number of venues visited each year has increased from 18 to 38.

Regional Digital Screen Network

The Australian Government has provided additional funding of \$6.9 million over three years from 2005-06 to the Australian Film Commission's screen culture initiatives with the Regional Digital Screen Network (RDSN) being a component of this. This funding was part of the 2004 election commitments and the Australian Government announced in the 2007-08 Budget that these commitments will be continued.

Eight cinema venues in regional Australia have been equipped with a digital cinema system, enabling them to screen films in a digital format, and providing access to Australian content that might not otherwise be seen by regional audiences.

Content provision commenced on 18 February 2007, with Sony Tropfest being beamed for the first time into the eight centres via satellite hook-up. Since then, Australian films shown to regional audiences through the RDSN include Razzle Dazzle, Suburban Mayhem, Like Minds, Bra Boys and Two Hands.

Playing Australia

The Australian Government is providing \$6 million in 2007-08 for Playing Australia, which is the Australian Government's national performing arts touring programme. It is designed to assist the touring of performing arts across state and territory boundaries where this is currently not commercially viable and there is a demonstrated public demand. A principal objective is to support tours to regional and remote Australia.

Contemporary Music Touring Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$250,000 in 2007-08 for the Contemporary Music Touring Programme to assist individual Australian musicians and groups to tour Australia. It provides access to a diversity of musical genres and reaches regional and rural audiences through touring. It also provides opportunities for emerging artists to gain performance experience and broader exposure.

Festivals Australia and Festivals Australia Regional Residencies

The Australian Government will provide around \$1 million for the Festivals Australia programme and \$500,000 for Festivals Australia Regional Residencies in 2007-08.

Festivals Australia is an Australian Government grant programme designed to assist the presentation of new arts and cultural activities at Australian regional and community festivals. The emphasis is on supporting projects which add to the quality and diversity of the arts and cultural programming of festivals.

The Festivals Australia Regional Residencies initiative enables regional communities to employ artists in residence. The role of the artists is to assist community members to explore local themes or tell their own stories in a culturally relevant way, and to present the artistic works in a festival or significant community celebration.

Regional Arts Fund including Creative Volunteering — No Limits

The Australian Government is providing a total of \$16.1 million over 4 years from 2004-05 through the Regional Arts Fund. The programme supports sustainable cultural development in regional, remote and isolated communities across Australia, with an emphasis on building partnerships and networks and facilitating skills and professional development for regional communities and regionally-based artists.

Programme administration is devolved to the regional arts organisation in each state and through the territory governments' arts departments.

Creative Volunteering – No Limits, the national arts and museums regional volunteer skills initiative, has been continued as an element of the Regional Arts Fund. Creative Volunteering provides accredited training to upgrade the skills of volunteers working in the arts and collections sectors, particularly in regional and remote areas. Currently eight training modules are available.

Visual Arts and Craft Strategy

The Australian Government will provide \$24.7 million over four years from 2007-08 to continue the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, which supports the development of a strong and dynamic contemporary visual arts and craft sector. Ongoing funding will assist artists to produce more new work, allow galleries to develop and extend their public exhibition programmes, support a broader range of Indigenous visual arts centres, support the presentation of visual arts events and the production of publications to help build the market for artists, and enable contemporary art exhibitions to tour across Australia.

The Australian Government funding is expected to be matched by state and territory government funding and, with their contribution, the total value of the initiative will be \$49.5 million over four years.

Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme

The Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme (MMAPSS) is a maritime heritage assistance programme that provides funding support to not-for-profit organisations caring for Australia's maritime heritage. It provides financial assistance of up to \$5,000 for projects and internships that will enhance the collection management, conservation and presentation of Australia's maritime heritage. Since commencing in 1996, the MMAPSS has funded more than 140 projects across Australia.

Travelling exhibitions

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

The objective of the Australian National Maritime Museum's (ANMM) travelling exhibition programme is to increase the awareness and profile of the ANMM and its collection to regional and remote areas in Australia. The ANMM's Sail Away travelling

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exhibition programme commenced in 2005 with three exhibitions that will travel to more than 30 venues in the next three years from the Eden Killer Whale Museum, NSW to the Bundaberg Arts Centre, Queensland.

The River – Life on the Murray-Darling is also an ANMM travelling exhibition that has been developed and toured with Visions of Australia funding. This collaborative production is currently exhibited at the Morgan Museum, South Australia and will travel to regional museums along the Murray-Darling River. The national collection displayed in the exhibition is from museums, historical societies and regional communities, and the ANMM.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

The National Museum of Australia's (NMA) Travelling Exhibition Programme provides Australians with access to the NMA's collections and public programmes.

During 2007-08 the following exhibitions and programmes will travel to regional venues: Ned Kelly: Fact and Fiction; In Search of the Birdsville Track; The Dora Fay Davenport Show; and Possum Skin Cloak education programme. Students from regional schools are invited to participate in the NMA's Talk Back Classroom programme.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

The National Gallery of Australia's (NGA) Travelling Exhibitions Programme provides access to works of art in the National Collection through a diverse range of exhibitions in regional, remote and metropolitan Australia.

From the programme's inception in February 1988 to March 2007, more than 7 million people have visited 105 exhibitions at 508 locations in every state and territory in Australia, as well as 16 international locations. In addition, three suitcase exhibitions have been to approximately 526 schools and community groups in remote and regional Australia.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The Australian Government continues to support the National Archives to conduct touring exhibitions in regional areas. The National Archives conducts regional tours to raise awareness of the collection and to educate the public on how they can access this resource. Touring exhibitions deliver the National Archives collection to regional Australia in an accessible format.

National Archives exhibitions have been well received in regional Australia since the programmes started in 1993, with 15 exhibitions attracting over 2.2 million people in every state and territory. There are three exhibitions currently touring – It's A Dog's Life: Animals in the Public Service, Just Add Water: Schemes and Dreams for a Sunburnt Country, and Summers Past: Golden Days in the Sun 1950-1970.

Bundanon Trust

The Australian Government will provide financial support to the Bundanon Trust of approximately \$1.5 million per annum for four years from 2007-08. This funding will enable the Trust to continue to manage the historic properties and art collection donated to the nation by Arthur and Yvonne Boyd, and to develop programmes and facilities to create the 'living arts centre' envisaged by Arthur Boyd. The Bundanon Trust properties are situated on the Shoalhaven River near Nowra in New South Wales.

Indigenous Culture

The Australian Government will provide \$21.6 million in 2007-08 for the Indigenous Culture programme. This includes the following initiatives:

MAINTENANCE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND RECORDS PROGRAMME

The Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Programme supports the revival and maintenance of Indigenous languages as living systems of knowledge shared by communities and passed down from generation to generation. The programme supports a national network of language centres, most of which are located in regional, rural or remote Australia. The programme also provides funding to community based language activities targeting endangered languages.

INDIGENOUS CULTURE SUPPORT

The Indigenous Culture Support Programme funds activities that maintain the depth and diversity of cultural practice within Indigenous communities. It promotes Indigenous cultures as dynamic and integral elements of Australian culture and identity and aims to foster, maintain and preserve regional and local Indigenous arts and cultures and support community participation in the process of cultural transmission.

NATIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS INDUSTRY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The National Arts and Crafts Industry Support programme (NACIS) supports the growth and development of the Indigenous visual arts and crafts sector. The programme's objectives are to assist Indigenous art centres, many of which are located in remote and regional areas, to become stronger and to build a more sustainable Indigenous visual arts industry.

Indigenous visual arts special initiative

The Australian Government is providing \$4 million over four years from 2004-05 to 2007-08, including \$1 million in 2007-08, to train young and emerging Indigenous artists and art centre workers, to upgrade facilities, and to fund specific marketing initiatives. This funding complements the core operational support provided through the NACIS programme.

Visions of Australia

In 2007-08 the Australian Government will contribute \$2 million to the Visions of Australia touring exhibitions programme. Visions of Australia is a national touring exhibition funding programme which assists eligible organisations with the development and touring of exhibitions of Australian cultural material throughout Australia. It provides assistance to incorporated not-for-profit Australian organisations or public collecting institutions to assist with exhibition touring costs and for exhibition project development costs. The programme aims to make cultural material accessible to Australians, particularly in regional and remote communities as well as those in metropolitan venues.

Indigenous Sport and Recreation Programme

The Indigenous Sport and Recreation Programme (ISRP) supports community participation in sport and physical recreation activities throughout all of Australia, recognising that these activities contribute to improving the health and physical well-being of Indigenous Australians and have the potential to address Indigenous disadvantage and contribute to the broader social benefits.

BROADCASTING: ONGOING INITIATIVES

ABC NewsRadio/Local Radio extensions and enhancements

The extension of ABC NewsRadio to all transmission areas around Australia with populations over 10,000 subject to the availability of spectrum in those areas, and improved ABC Local Radio transmission services for Dubbo, Wagga Wagga and Geelong and their outlying areas.

On 22 September 2006, the Australian Government announced that the rollout of 17 sites in Stage 1 (13 new NewsRadio services, two NewsRadio enhancements, one Local Radio extension and one Local Radio enhancement) will commence on 1 April 2007 at a rate of 3 per month. Announcements about subsequent stages are expected to be made later in 2007.

Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)

SBS SELF HELP SUBSIDY SCHEME

The Australian Government provides SBS with ongoing funding of \$500,000 per annum to assist communities that wish to establish an analogue SBS radio, analogue television or digital television self-help service. As at 20 December 2006, SBS had approved funding for 58 self help TV services and 75 self help radio services, since the first round of applications in 2000.

SBS ANALOGUE TELEVISION EXTENSIONS

Extension of SBS analogue television to all transmission areas with a population of 3,000 or more. The programme involves a total of 22 extensions.

- 10 of the 22 areas accessed SBS for the first time: Clare (SA), Cobden (Vic), Collinsville (Qld), Condobolin (NSW), Eyre Peninsula (SA), Lileah (Tas), Margaret River (WA), Monto (Qld), Queenstown/Zeehan (Tas) and Wyalong (NSW).
- 12 existing SBS self help facilities were transferred to SBS: Ceduna/Smoky Bay (SA), Charleville (Qld), Derby (WA), Exmouth (WA), Longreach (Qld), Nhulunbuy (NT), Ocean Shores (NSW), Roxby Downs (SA), Smithton (Tas), Tennant Creek (NT), Thredbo (NSW) and Tom Price (WA).

As at the end of January 2007, all new services were on air and all but two existing self help services had been transferred to SBS.

Television Black Spots—Alternative Technical Solutions Programme

The Television Black Spots—Alternative Technical Solutions Programme was established in October 2002 to finance solutions for black spots identified under the Television Black Spots Programme where there was insufficient spectrum available to establish an analogue television retransmission facility or an analogue facility was considered not viable because it would not be able to serve at least 80 per cent of the households in the black spot area.

As at the end of April 2007, over \$0.9 million had been approved to fund equipment to enable access to direct-to-home satellite services and \$2.5 million for two digital retransmission solutions.

Regional Equalisation Plan

Under the Regional Equalisation Plan (REP), the Government is providing up to \$250 million to assist regional and remote commercial television broadcasters with the conversion to digital television. Assistance is in the form of capped annual rebates against broadcasters' licence fees supplemented by a grants component where necessary to achieve total agreed REP assistance. REP licence fee rebates are claimable up to 31 December 2012.

The REP meets 50 per cent of the capital costs of digital conversion and 50 per cent of the first eight years operating costs of broadcasters' digital television services.

From commencement of the REP in 2000-01 through to 2006-07, \$151.5 million of assistance has been provided. This has facilitated significant digital television rollout throughout Australia. The most recent industry estimates indicate that more than 90 per cent of Australians can now access all digital television services intended for their area, and over 96 per cent of the population has access to at least one digital television service.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Recruitment and retention initiatives

The Australian Government continues to expand the size of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to ensure that we develop a highly capable defence force. An additional \$2.1 billion has been committed over ten financial years on recruitment and retention initiatives, and this is in addition to the \$1 billion in new measures announced in December 2006. These measures will provide greater incentive to all Australians joining the defence force and, therefore, have a positive impact on regional Australia, especially the new Apprenticeship Scheme and the enhancements to the Cadet Scheme.

New Defence Apprenticeship Scheme

In 2007-08, Defence will become more competitive in attracting apprentices and increasing the number of technical training entrants. This will benefit the Australian workforce by increasing employment opportunities and employment rates. The Apprenticeship Scheme will target school leavers under the age of 17, offering them exciting and interesting work in ADF technical trades. Successful recruits would undertake their chosen trade training and would be awarded an ADF technical trade qualification.

Additional logistics sustainment funding

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$1.8 billion over ten financial years to enhance the logistics sustainment of the ADF's war-fighting capabilities. Much of this funding will be directed to Australian industry and will be spent in the regional areas where Defence contractors and the Defence Materiel Organisation's System Programme Offices maintain the ADF's weapons platforms.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Defence and regional Australia

With approximately 70 per cent of the Defence Force located in regional areas, the Australian Government's Defence policy makes a significant contribution to regional Australia. The Defence footprint is evident through employment, industry, community involvement and services, childcare facilities, housing, cooperation on heritage issues, Indigenous affairs and economic activity. The following measures positively impact on regional Australia.

National Security – enhanced protective security

As part of the 2007-08 Budget, the Australian Government announced a continuation of an existing initiative at a cost of \$135.4 million over four years to maintain security measures to protect Defence personnel, key assets, facilities and infrastructure at Defence bases. An amount of \$33.1 million will be spent in 2007-08 mostly on regions and bases across Australia. The additional funding will provide for a range of measures to continue the heightened guarding, patrolling and protective searches across Defence establishments. This will ensure that Defence personnel can continue to work safely despite uncertainty in the current security environment.

Expansion and enhancement of the Defence Force Cadet Scheme

In 2007-08, Defence will increase the number of Cadets and enhance the overall management of the Cadet programme. The programme will be linked more closely to the education system and the National Training Framework to benefit the young participants and the adult instructors, by equipping them with skills and knowledge that will be externally recognised.

Capital Facilities Projects

Defence bases around the country are being redeveloped and upgraded to ensure ADF personnel have the best possible facilities. Defence facilities will benefit from an injection totalling \$916.9 million in 2007-08. Defence will carry out \$511.4 million worth of capital infrastructure projects in 2007-08 to deliver increased capability and improved support for the ADF to undertake a wide range of Government tasks. Projects located in regional Australia include:

- \$63 million for base trunk engineering services, civil works and infrastructure upgrades at RAAF Amberley, QLD.

- \$50 million for base infrastructure upgrades and construction of facilities and accommodation at RAAF East Sale, Victoria and RAAF Wagga, NSW.
- \$45 million to construct operational and support infrastructure at HMAS Cairns, Queensland.
- \$43.8 million to equip the new Headquarters Joint Operations Command facility near Bungendore, New South Wales.
- \$19.5 million for supporting base infrastructure upgrades and working accommodation construction at Kokoda Barracks Canungra, Queensland.
- \$14.4 million for new and refurbished facilities to support the introduction of the new troop lift helicopters at RAAF Townsville, Queensland.
- \$13.7 million for construction of ordnance loading aprons at RAAF Williamtown, New South Wales.
- A further \$153.4 million will be expended on other major and medium facilities projects throughout Australia.
- A further \$405.5 million will also be expended on estate upkeep.

Securing Australia's North-West Shelf

In 2005-06 the Australian Government outlined a new measure estimated to be worth \$139.3 million over four years to enhance the security of Australia's North-West Shelf. \$27.3 million is allocated to this initiative in 2007-08. As part of this package, two additional Armidale-Class Patrol Boats will be purchased to undertake North-West Shelf surveillance and will operate out of Dampier, Western Australia. The additional Patrol Boats will be built by Defence Maritime Services/Austal in Western Australia, and this is expected to have positive implications for the Western Australian economy. These vessels will be rotated through Dampier but home ported in Darwin. Since this funding was announced, construction of dedicated Navy administrative support accommodation and logistics storage at Taylor Barracks, Karratha is nearing completion, and a multi-stage stairway on the Dampier Cargo Wharf and a cyclone-rated mooring buoy have been approved for construction in 2007. The local communities in Dampier and Karratha will derive additional benefits from the local basing of Royal Australian Navy personnel.

Skilling Australia's defence industry

In 2005-06 the Australian Government outlined a new initiative estimated to be worth \$215 million over ten years to recognise its commitment to addressing the current skills shortage facing Australia's defence industry. It is anticipated that this package will

improve the quality and quantity of specialist skills training across Australia, up-skill existing employees and generate additional skilled positions available to the Australian Defence Industry. To continue this programme, the Australian Government will spend approximately \$21 million in 2007-08 to support skills development and growth for the Australian workforce.

Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Programme

In 2006, the Australian Army undertook its tenth year of the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Programme (AACAP), with works on its infrastructure and technical training for the people of Borroloola, a community about 900 kilometres south east of Darwin. The AACAP is an ongoing commitment that reinforces the strong association between Army and the Indigenous people of Northern Australia. Army provides soldiers and equipment to complete project management, construction, health care and training support to selected communities. The programme has seen essential housing, infrastructure and health and training support to remote communities around Australia. In 2007, current planning is that AACAP will assist the Doomadgee region in Queensland's Gulf country.

Defence community organisation projects benefiting regional communities

Defence will continue to support members of the Australian Defence Force and their families through a number of projects conducted by the Defence Community Organisation (DCO). Services which particularly benefit the regions include: support for Defence community groups; regional information projects and services, such as the Family Information Network and DCO website; an extensive network of child care support; a programme of grants for Defence community groups to foster self-help and community spirit; a spouse employment assistance programme; support for posted families with special needs; and education services to ease transition and minimise the disruption of education due to mobility for ADF families.

Reserve Employer Support Payment Scheme

The Australian Government continues to provide a commitment to show the way as a major employer of Reservists by providing leave policies and employment practices that support the release of Reservists for peacetime training and deployment. Agreements are now in place to provide Reservists with access to leave for training and deployment. In addition, revised arrangements authorised under Defence Determination 2002 (Employer Support Payments), became operative on 1 July 2003 that enhanced the operation and effectiveness of the Employer Support Payment Scheme, which has seen payments totalling about \$20 million per annum made to thousands of employers throughout Australia.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Realising our potential – additional support for regional and remote schools

The Australian Government will provide \$121.1 million over four years to fund a regional/remote loading in addition to current funding delivered to non-government schools. State and territory governments will be required to provide an equivalent increase in resourcing for regional/remote government schools in 2009-12 schools funding agreement.

This initiative reflects the higher cost of delivering schooling in regional and remote Australia, and will help to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for children in regional and remote schools. The loading will be calculated using Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) classification, with schools in 'Moderately Accessible', 'Remote' and 'Very Remote' areas receiving an additional 5 per cent, 10 per cent, and 20 per cent of their socio-economic status (SES) funding entitlement respectively.

Additional funding will be available from 1 January 2008.

Understanding Money — Building Australia's Financial Literacy

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHING FINANCIAL LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

The Financial Literacy Foundation is working with all school systems to develop a national approach to providing professional development for teachers who will be teaching financial literacy from 2008 onwards. Funding of \$2 million in 2007-08 will be provided to deliver the training to over 1,000 teachers through the Department of Education, Science and Training's Australian Government Quality Teaching Programme. The needs of teachers in rural and remote areas will be specifically considered in developing and implementing the professional development programme.

EXTENDING THE UNDERSTANDING MONEY CAMPAIGN

As part of the Australian Government's commitment to lasting generational improvements in financial literacy, \$4 million will be provided to the Department of the Treasury in 2007-08 to extend the Understanding Money media campaign. Improved financial literacy will benefit individuals and families, including those in rural and remote areas, by giving them more control over their money and helping them make better financial decisions. Good financial literacy skills also build the capacity of Australians to better understand and manage financial risk, and take advantage of increased competition and choice in Australia's finance sector.

Apprenticeship wage top-up

From 1 July 2007, Australian Apprentices under 30 in trade skill shortages will be able to access a tax free payment of \$1,000 per year for the first and second year of their apprenticeship. This recognises the financial burden faced by apprentices during the early years of their training and aims to encourage more young people to enter the trades and complete their qualification.

Apprenticeship training voucher

From 1 July 2007, Australian apprentices in trades in skill shortage will be entitled to a voucher valued at up to \$500 to pay their course fees. The voucher will be available in the first and second years of their apprenticeship to encourage them to participate and complete their trade qualification.

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation – CSIRO

NATIONAL RESEARCH FLAGSHIPS - ENERGY AND CLIMATE

The Australian Government is providing \$103.2 million over four years from 2007-08 to accelerate the national response to the critical and interrelated issues of adapting to climate change, water use management and greenhouse friendly transport fuels. CSIRO will build on the success of the National Research Flagships in the areas of:

- climate change prediction and adaptation (through a new Climate Adaptation Flagship); and
- energy security and reduced greenhouse gas output from alternative transport fuel production (through an expanded Energy Futures Flagship).

NATIONAL RESEARCH FLAGSHIPS - NEW MANUFACTURING AND MINERALS INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

The Australian Government is providing \$70.8 million over four years from 2007-08 to create new opportunities for industry development in Australia through the establishment of two new National Research Flagships in the areas of:

- export-oriented niche manufacturing industries; and
- discovery and sustainable development of major new mineral deposits.

NATIONAL BIO-SECURITY – ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY

The Australian Government is providing \$16.8 million over four years from 2007-08 to enable the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) at Geelong to:

- respond to demand for greater diagnostic and emergency response capacity;
- implement new security measures;
- maintain engineering and maintenance capabilities; and
- undertake essential Occupational Health & Safety measures.

Australia's Ocean Frontier - Northwest Australia

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$5 million over four years commencing in 2007-08 to enable the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) to maintain research in Northeast Australia while expanding their research in Northwest Australia in the national priority areas of protection and sustainable development of marine resources, and environmentally sustainable offshore oil and gas development.

The measure would enable AIMS to pursue co-investment opportunities for research with the offshore oil and gas industry in the Northwest while simultaneously addressing industry and public interest research needs in the Great Barrier Reef.

Training initiatives for Indigenous adults in regional and remote communities

The Australian Government is providing \$21.4 million for four years starting 2007-08, with \$4 million allocated in 2007-08, for training initiatives for Indigenous adults in regional and remote communities. This initiative will increase the effectiveness of

Building a Strong Future for Regional Australia

Work Skills Vouchers under the Skills for the Future package, in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Work Skills Vouchers will make a substantial contribution to reducing the number of adults aged 25 years and over who have not completed Year 12 and have no post-school qualifications. However, there is a need to provide additional support to ensure that the Vouchers can be used effectively to expand the post-school employment, education and training options for Indigenous Australians, in regional and remote areas. In these areas, there is often limited or no choice in training providers.

It is anticipated that the funding would be used to address the specialist education needs of the clients, higher delivery costs (such as low student numbers), development of courses targeted at local employment needs and, in some cases, inadequate learning facilities.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Investing In Our Schools Programme

In 2004, the Coalition Government announced almost \$1 billion for the Investing in Our Schools Programme to directly assist schools throughout Australia. The Prime Minister announced a further \$181 million on 19 February 2007.

Over the five years to 2008-09, \$827 million in funding will be injected into state schools throughout Australia to help repair, replace or install new items critical to the school's overall infrastructure needs.

A total of \$354 million will be provided over the same period to Catholic and independent schools through the Block Grant Authorities (BGAs).

The focus of the programme has been on delivering projects which improve the infrastructure of schools in accordance with priorities identified by school communities parents, friends, the teaching profession and students associated with the school.

The Investing in Our Schools Programme commenced in 2005 and will continue until the end of 2008.

Projects funded under the Investing in our Schools Programme include \$102,664 to the Bundaberg State High School to upgrade library facilities and \$148,641 to the Coffs Harbour Public School to build a specialised learning area.

Capital Grants Programme

The Capital Grants programme will provide state and territory governments with an estimated \$1.7 billion over four years from 2005 to 2008 (calendar years) to assist them to build, maintain and upgrade state schools throughout Australia. Australian Government funded projects typically include the construction of new schools, additional classrooms, libraries and other vital school facilities to improve educational opportunities for our children.

The Australian Government will provide an estimated total of \$508.4 million over four years from 2005-06 to 2008-09 in capital funding to non-government schools. These funds include an allocation of \$17 million from 2005-06 to 2008-09 to provide capital grants for Catholic and Independent schools in isolated areas and communities in the Northern Territory.

Building a Strong Future for Regional Australia

This funding makes a real difference to non-government school communities in remote and isolated regions who face substantially greater costs for capital construction and refurbishment than metropolitan and regional schools.

Projects funded under the Capital Grants Programme include \$4.5 million for the Kalbarri District High School in Western Australia to redevelop the secondary block, and \$1.1 million for the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School at Thursday Island, Queensland for the refurbishment of the administration area and other associated works.

Country Areas Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$115 million from 2005 to 2008 (calendar years) to the Country Areas Programme. The Australian Government recognises that students attending primary and secondary schools in geographically isolated areas often have more limited access to educational opportunities than metropolitan students. Australian Government funds for the Country Areas Programme are provided to state and Northern Territory government and non-government schools.

Funds can be used to support projects which:

- enhance the curriculum through excursions and visits, attendance at cultural and sporting events;
- assist with the transition to further education, training or work; and
- provide access to professional development for teachers.

Extra Funding For Regional Universities

The Australian Government is providing \$29.9 million in 2007-08 in regional loading through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) for regional campuses. This supports the provision of higher education at regional campuses which face higher costs as a result of such factors as location, size and history.

Career Advice Australia

Career Advice Australia (formerly known as the Australian Network of Industry Careers Advisers initiative) is an Australian Government initiative supporting young Australians aged 13-19 to make successful transitions through school and from school to further education, training and work. With funding of over \$348 million from 2005-06 to 2008-09, CAA provides career information and advice, meaningful work experience and information about opportunities in industries to help young people make informed choices about their futures.

The networks of Regional Industry Career Advisers and National Industry Career Specialists increase access to industry career advice and information and promote vocational education and training opportunities particularly in skills needs areas. The Youth Pathways programme supports young people who are at risk of leaving school before completing Year 12 and the Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM) programme offers education and training options for those who have already disconnected from school.

Fares Allowance

The Australian Government is providing \$1.6 million in 2007-08 for the Fares Allowance programme. The Fares Allowance programme covers the cost of specified travel for eligible tertiary students who need to live away from home to study.

Extension of Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY Payments to new apprentices

The Australian Government continues to extend eligibility for Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY payments to eligible full-time Australian Apprentices. Australian Apprentices are now able to apply for the same payments that are currently available to full-time students. This will assist them in the early years of their Australian Apprenticeship when their wages are generally at their lowest.

National Disability Coordination Officer Programme

From January 2008, the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Programme will replace the current Regional Disability Liaison Officer (RDLO) Programme and the Disability Liaison Officer (DCO) Programme. It will build on previous achievements of the RDLO programme and the DCO programme in facilitating a smooth transition for people with a disability from school or the general community on to further education. Funding for 2007-08 will be \$4.7 million.

Non-Government School Term Hostels Programme

The Non-Government School Term Hostels Programme was an Australian Government initiative that commenced in January 2005. The programme is targeted at not-for-profit, non-government school term hostels that operate principally to accommodate primary and secondary students from rural and remote areas of Australia. Under this four year initiative eligible hostels will attract a grant of \$2,500 per eligible student (in 2005 prices, indexed annually) per year. The programme also supports rural communities by providing an affordable alternative to boarding school or distance education for rural and remote families.

Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme

The Australian Government has significantly increased funding under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) since 2005. In 2007-08 the Australian Government will provide an estimated \$60 million under the scheme. AIC helps the families of primary, secondary and under 16-year-old tertiary students who are unable to attend an appropriate government school on a daily basis primarily because of geographic isolation. The scheme assists students who have no choice other than to board away from home at a school, hostel or private home.

Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Programme

The Australian Government will provide over \$1.8 billion between 2005-2008 calendar years for the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN) Programme. The LNSLN is the Australian Government's key targeted programme to provide additional assistance for educationally disadvantaged students, including students from rural areas or who are geographically isolated.

In addition, the Non-government Centres Support element will contribute an estimated \$144 million over the same period to improve the educational opportunities and learning outcomes of children with disabilities.

The National Projects element will also provide an estimated \$46 million funding from 2005 to 2008 (calendar years) for national projects and initiatives to improve the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students, including improved literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Regional Loading — Extra Funding For Regional Universities

The Australian Government is providing \$29.9 million in 2007-08 in regional loading through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) for regional campuses. This supports the provision of higher education at regional campuses which face higher costs as a result of such factors as location, size and history.

New Commonwealth-supported higher education places

The Australian Government funded 9,100 new Commonwealth-supported higher education places in institutions from 2005. More than 45 per cent of the new places

were allocated to regional universities or regional campuses of metropolitan universities.

The Australian Government also introduced 440 new university places in nursing with a focus on aged care in 2005. Regional universities and regional campuses of metropolitan universities received half of these new places.

In the round of new places to commence in 2007, the Australian Government allocated over 1,600 places to regional campuses. This represents over one third of the places available for allocation.

This year, there will be a further allocation of new places to commence in 2008 (around 1,800 places as part of the Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future package and 500 engineering places as part of the Skills for the Future package). The new places will be targeted to areas of workforce shortage and student demand, particularly in regional and outer-metropolitan areas.

Commonwealth Learning Scholarships

By 2009, in excess of \$418 million will have been allocated for around 43,000 scholarships through the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships programme. The programme provides assistance with costs associated with higher education to students from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those from rural and regional areas and Indigenous students.

The programme has two components:

- Commonwealth Education Costs Scholarships (CECS) assist with general education costs, and in 2007 are worth \$2,120 per year for up to four years; and
- Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships (CAS) assist with accommodation costs for students from rural and regional areas who move to undertake higher education and incur accommodation costs, and in 2007 are worth \$4,240 per year for up to four years.

Both scholarships are indexed annually. More than 25,000 CECS are being offered over five years from 2005 and almost 18,000 CAS over the same period.

Australian Technical Colleges

The Australian Government has previously invested \$468.4 million to establish 25 Australian Technical Colleges. The announcement in this year's Budget of three new Colleges brings the total investment to \$552 million for the 28 Australian Technical Colleges. The Australian Technical Colleges programme is part of a long-term plan by the Australian Government to build the status and prestige of the trades, address the

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barriers to trade training in the school system and ensure the nation can better plan and meet the needs of trade industries in the future. A number of the 20 new Colleges currently operational and the remaining five to open this coming year are located in regional Australia.

The Colleges are being established in areas where there are skills needs, a high youth population and a strong industry base and will offer training in metal and engineering, automotive, building and construction, electro-technology and commercial cookery.

The Colleges offer young people the opportunity to study in an industry-led environment where partnerships with local business and industry ensure curriculum is relevant and meets regional labour market needs. The other advantage of the Colleges is that they enable students to undertake their trade training through an Australian School-based Apprenticeship at Certificate III level whilst also completing their Year 12 Certificate. The teaching of enterprise education, small business and employability skills ensure that students acquire the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a competitive business environment.

National Skills Shortages Strategy

Under the National Skills Shortages Strategy, the Australian Government is funding a number of regional skills pilots to identify and develop practical strategies to address a region's current and future skills needs. In each pilot, the Australian Government will work with regional stakeholders such as industry, education providers and the broader community to:

- profile existing and potential industries in a region;
- identify common factors and solutions to skills issues;
- engage relevant national, state and local industry and training bodies;
- identify skills and training needs; and
- pilot practical strategies that could be used in other regions.

Pilots are already underway in Townsville, Illawarra and the Hunter. Recently, submissions were called for under this strategy to broaden the number of projects and approaches.

Rural and Regional Skills Shortage Special Commencement Incentive

Under the Rural and Regional Skills Shortage Special Commencement Incentive the Australian Government boosts training in rural and regional Australia by providing a special commencement incentive for rural or regional employers who employ Australian Apprentices in occupations where there are skills shortages.

Group Training

The Australian Government is providing \$5 million to Group Training in 2007-08. Group Training is an arrangement whereby an organisation employs apprentices and trainees under an Apprenticeship/Traineeship Training Contract and places them with host employers. The organisation provides for continuity of their employment, additional care and support and manages their training. There are Group Training Organisations located in most regional centres.

Group Training in the Trades Programme

The Group Training in the Trades Programme aims to address current critical skill shortages, including those in regional Australia, in traditional trades through group training arrangements. The Australian Government is providing \$45.9 million to assist 11,500 people nationally over four years, from 2005-06 to 2008-09, to undertake a Australian Apprenticeship in the trades, either through a School-Based Australian Apprenticeship or by undertaking pre-vocational training.

Tools for Your Trade Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$142.3 million over six years from 2005-06, to assist Australian Apprentices to acquire tools up to \$800 in value that are associated with their trade. This initiative applies to eligible Australian Apprentices starting out in skill shortage trades from 1 July 2005. This will help alleviate the financial burden on the Australian Apprentice when they enter an apprenticeship in the identified skill shortage trades.

Support for Mid-Career Apprentices initiative

The Australian Government will provide \$306.6 million over the five years from 2006-07 to 2010-11 for the Support for Mid-Career Apprentices initiative. Under this initiative, Australians aged 30 and over who wish to upgrade their skills will attract new financial incentives to support their move to an apprenticeship in a trade in high demand.

The initiative provides financial assistance to the employer to subsidise wage costs or the apprentice to boost their income depending upon the industrial arrangements. The amount payable to either the employer or the Australian Apprentice is \$150 per week (\$7,800 per annum) in the first year and \$100 per week (\$5,200 per annum) in the second year.

When fully implemented, the new incentives will be provided to up to 10,000 people per year.

Work Skills Vouchers

The Australian Government is providing \$80.5 million in 2007-08 for Work Skills Vouchers. Work Skills Vouchers will provide vouchers worth up to \$3,000 to people aged 25 years and over without formal qualifications to undertake year 12 or equivalent or vocational certificate II qualifications. Vouchers can be used at public, private or community training providers. Once fully implemented 30,000 vouchers will be available each year.

Business Skills Vouchers

The Australian Government is providing \$1.5 million in 2007-08 for Business Skills Vouchers. Business Skills Vouchers will provide vouchers worth up to \$500 to apprentices in traditional trades or newly qualified tradespeople to undertake accredited business skills training. Once fully implemented up to 6,300 vouchers will be available each year.

Commonwealth Trade Learning Scholarships

The Australian Government will provide around \$106.3 million over the five years 2004-05 to 2008-09 for Commonwealth Trade Learning Scholarships. Under this initiative eligible Australian Apprentices employed in small and medium businesses in skills shortages trades may apply for a \$500 incentive payment on completion of their first and second years.

Australian Apprenticeships Access Programme

The Australian Government has provided \$51.7 million over five years for an extra 5,000 places in the Australian Apprenticeships Access Programme, bringing the total to 9,500 places available annually. Under the programme, which is targeted at industries and regions experiencing skills shortages, participants receive pre-vocational training, support and assistance to obtain and maintain an Australian Apprenticeship. Eligible client groups include the long term unemployed, Indigenous Australians, early school leavers and people aged 45 and over. Priority for the additional places is to be given to

job seekers who have successfully participated in the Work for the Dole programme or are receiving intensive support from the Job Network, thus supporting the Australian Government's aim of moving people from welfare into sustainable employment outcomes.

Rural Australian Apprenticeship Options

The progressive implementation of the Rural Production and Horticulture National Training Packages across Australia has significantly expanded the range of rural production and horticulture Australian Apprenticeship options that are available for primary producers in all sectors, for production and other horticulturists, for gardeners and landscape gardeners, and for nursery operators.

Living Away From Home Allowance

Australian Apprentices may be eligible for Living Away From Home Allowance for the first three years of the Australian Apprenticeship if they have had to move away from the parental or guardian home to commence or remain in an Australian Apprenticeship.

Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme

The Australian Government will provide around \$165.1 million over the three year contract period 2006-07 to 2008-09 for the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme.

The Programme is designed to help job seekers to improve their language, literacy and numeracy skills. A new initiative for the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme is complementary training which targets disadvantaged client groups including Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and isolated female clients. Under the programme, face to face services are available from more than 300 sites around Australia and services are also available by distance education.

Targeting Skills Needs in Regions Programme

In response to an agreement at the Council of Australian Governments meeting in February 2006 to address regional skills needs, the Australian Government developed the Targeting Skills Needs in Regions programme in collaboration with the states and territories. The programme will help increase the supply of skilled labour in industries and regions of strategic economic importance.

The Australian Government is funding \$2.5 million in 2007-08 under the Targeting Skills Needs in Regions programme. The projects will provide a coordinated response

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to skills needs, quality training, workforce mobility and training system flexibility and responsiveness in target regions across Australia.

Note: further information on Budget initiatives can be found at www.budget.gov.au

EMERGENCY SERVICES: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Working Together to Manage Emergencies

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Australian Government is providing \$8.7 million in 2007-08 under the Local Grants Scheme to assist local governments to implement community risk management initiatives, identify vulnerabilities with a view to enhancing protective measures for critical infrastructure and provide emergency management and security awareness training for staff working in local government. Grants will support initiatives aimed at addressing all hazards likely to impact on communities with a view to improving their resilience. States and territories will be involved in determining priorities. In total, the Working Together to Manage Emergencies initiative offered \$30 million in funding over four years through the Local Grants Scheme.

VOLUNTEERS

In 2007-08, \$4.3 million in funding will be provided through the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund to support projects that boost the recruitment, retention and training of volunteers in agencies at the frontline of emergency management. In total, the Working Together to Manage Emergencies initiative offered \$16 million in funding over four years through the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund.

Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements

In 2007-08, the Australian Government will continue to support individuals and communities to recover from cyclones, floods, storms and other devastating natural disasters through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).

Since 2001-02, the Australian Government has provided more than \$300 million in assistance under the NDRRA to the states and territories to help alleviate the financial burden that natural disasters cause state and territory governments and the community.

Once the cost of a natural disaster exceeds \$240,000, the Australian Government will reimburse 50 per cent of eligible personal hardship and distress expenditure by states and territories, covering:

- emergency food, clothing, accommodation and repairs to housing; and
- the replacement of essential household items and personal effects.

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Subject to set thresholds, the Australian Government will also provide extra assistance by reimbursing up to 75 per cent of eligible state expenditure on a range of measures, including:

- restoration or replacement of essential public infrastructure, such as roads and bridges;
- concessional interest rate loans to small businesses and primary producers and voluntary non-profit bodies.

In December 2006, the Prime Minister announced a number of enhancements to the NDRRA including the introduction of a community recovery package to improve the focus on long term holistic recovery. Several communities, small businesses and primary producers have since benefited from this enhanced assistance including:

- Victoria and Tasmania Bushfires, 2006-07: The Australian Government established a community recovery package of up to \$700,000 in each state to provide support to those affected by severe bushfires in Victoria and Tasmania during the summer of 2006-07. On 13 April 2007, the Prime Minister announced an additional contribution of \$350,000 to the Victorian Government for their recovery package.
- Esperance Flooding in Western Australia and Renmark Storms in South Australia, 2006-07: Recovery grants up to \$15,000 were also made available for primary producers and small businesses in Renmark and Esperance following recent storms and flooding.

Prior to the enhancements announced in December 2006, the Australian Government, in consultation with the Queensland Government, developed a tailored package to provide relief to the communities affected by Tropical Cyclone Larry. Due to the extensive damage sustained as a result of Tropical Cyclone Larry, the relief package was over and above standard assistance provided under the NDRA.

In addition to a \$40 million advance to the Queensland Government, assistance measures such as a one-off concessional interest rate loan/grant measure for primary producers and businesses was implemented along with a contribution of up to \$10 million towards Operation Farm Clear and a donation of \$1 million towards the Prime Minister's and Premier's Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal.

Natural Disaster Mitigation

In 2007-08, the Australian Government will continue to support natural disaster mitigation at each level of government by providing funding through the Natural Disaster Mitigation Programme and the Bushfire Mitigation Programme.

In 2007-08, \$48.6 million will be made available to support natural disaster mitigation projects and activities such as the construction of flood levee banks, cyclone shelters and fire trails. This funding includes \$43.6 million for the Natural Disaster Mitigation Programme (including \$13 million for the Launceston Levee measure) and \$5 million for the Bushfire Mitigation Programme.

Together, these partnership programmes provide funding to states and territories for cost-effective mitigation activities that contribute to safer, sustainable communities better able to withstand the effects of natural disasters.

An additional \$20 million towards the Bushfire Mitigation Programme was announced in May 2007. This funding will continue to help fund fire trails and other practical measures that make it quicker and easier for fire fighters to get bushfires under control.

The Bushfire Mitigation Programme, to date, has helped to fund significant infrastructure works, including the construction and upgrade of 4,000 km of fire trails, the maintenance of more than 9,000 kilometres of fire trails, the construction or repair of 58 bridges, the installation of 74 culverts, 39 water tanks, 11 other water supply projects and 88 signage projects.

Announced in May 2007, the Australian Government will provide \$41.2 million over the next four years to help the states and territories lease more aerial fire fighting equipment in the lead-up to bushfire seasons. This is an important measure as aerial fire fighting is one of the key weapons in the fight against major bushfires, and the funding will enable the states and territories to lease more helicopters and fixed wing planes, above and beyond the 25 aircraft that the Australian Government subsidised in 2006-07.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

A Better Future for Indigenous Australians – Building an Indigenous Workforce in Government Service Delivery

The Australian Government is providing \$97.2 million over four years from 2007-08 to convert Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) positions into at least 825 jobs in government service delivery. These Indigenous Australians will receive the full benefits of normal employment arrangements, including access to real career pathways. This initiative will remove the cross-subsidisation of government service delivery by CDEP in targeted sectors. These jobs will be in environment and heritage protection, community care, childcare and Indigenous community policing.

A Better Future for Indigenous Australians – Enhanced Opportunities for Participation in Remote Communities

The Australian Government is providing \$23 million over five years from 2006-07 to reduce welfare and stimulate employment and participation opportunities in remote communities. Under this initiative the removal of activity testing exemptions in remote areas across Australia will continue, with all remote area exemptions to be removed by 2010-11. The Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, has been working to progressively remove remote area exemptions in communities where sufficient employment opportunities or appropriate participation alternatives are available.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Welfare to Work – Employer Demand and Workplace Flexibility Strategy

Commencing in 2005-06 the Employer Demand and Workplace Flexibility Strategy aims to increase workforce participation for priority groups in key industry sectors through a range of measures including improving employer awareness of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, parents, mature age job seekers and very long term unemployed and of the flexibility of workplace arrangements which are available to them.

The strategy increases employment opportunities for priority groups and assists business in regional areas to meet labour and skill shortages and the challenges of current and future demographic changes, such as an ageing population, and improving productivity through the implementation of flexible working arrangements.

Job Network

Job Network is a national network of private and community organisations assisting the unemployed, particularly long-term unemployed people, to find jobs.

Job Network has a strong presence in regional Australia with over 1,000 Job Network and other Job Placement Organisation sites located outside major metropolitan centres. During the 2005-06 financial year, Job Network members and other Job Placement Organisations placed more than 281,000 people in jobs in regional Australia, in line with the record performance of the previous financial year.

In addition, from 1 July 2006 the Government introduced the Remote Services Deed 2006-2009 to cover job seekers in the most remote parts of Australia, including the northern parts of Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and most of the Northern Territory. This is designed to enable employment programmes to be delivered in a manner that suits regional and remote locations and different labour market conditions. Thirteen organisations have been contracted under the Remote Services Deed 2006-2009 to provide a suite of employment services to communities in 16 remote Employment Services Areas, including Job Network; Community Work Co-ordinators; Disability Employment Network; Job Placement, Employment and Training; Personal Support Programme; and New Enterprise Incentive Scheme.

Under the deed, providers can deliver services to local job seekers in a manner responsive to the needs and conditions of Indigenous communities. Providers are required to have strategies that maximise service quality, coverage and results for Indigenous communities. Providers are also required to develop strong linkages across

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the range of employment programmes covered in the deed to deliver the best quality service to Indigenous communities.

This approach complements the Australian Government's Welfare to Work reforms and supports policy changes aimed at maximising the economic independence of Indigenous Australians.

The Australian Government also provides Harvest Labour Services to assist rural industries to find labour to harvest crops, including the recruitment and placement of workers in harvest jobs such as fruit picking.

The New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) assists eligible unemployed people to establish and manage viable new small businesses. NEIS providers in remote areas are paid higher fees recognising the additional barriers faced by people in these areas and ensuring a high quality NEIS service for participants in regional Australia.

Work for the Dole

Work for the Dole provides work experience opportunities for unemployed people in their local communities. In 2007-08, there will be 64,000 Work for the Dole places and 16,500 Full Time Work for the Dole places available for participants.

In December 2002, the Prime Minister announced an extension to the Work for the Dole programme specifically aimed at assisting communities seriously affected by drought. Drought Force activities allow local unemployed people to volunteer on drought-affected properties. These activities encourage people to remain in their community and support the local economy. Between December 2002 and March 2007, almost 600 Drought Force activities in regional areas across Australia have accommodated over 1,400 job seekers in Drought Force activities.

Disability Employment Network

Disability Employment Network members assist job seekers with a disability who have ongoing support needs by providing a range of assistance including training, job placement and on-the-job support. In 2005-06, Disability Employment Network services assisted over 55,000 people with disabilities.

Under Welfare to Work, a new uncapped stream of the Disability Employment Network was introduced from 1 July 2006. This stream provides guaranteed assistance to people with a disability who have a partial work capacity and an obligation to seek employment. This has increased the assistance available to Australians, including those in rural and remote areas.

Across Australia, 234 organisations provide Disability Employment Network services from around 750 sites.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) provides specialist employment assistance, combined with vocational rehabilitation, to help people with a disability, injury or health condition find and retain safe and sustainable employment in the open labour market. VRS assists job seekers to understand, compensate for and manage their injury or disability by building work capacity and/or developing new work strategies to avoid re-injury.

In 2005-06, VRS assisted over 44,000 people with disability or injury. From 1 July 2006, as part of the Welfare to Work package, an additional \$280 million has been allocated for Vocational Rehabilitation Services over three years from July 2006. This will fund approximately 47,000 extra vocational rehabilitation services for eligible job seekers with part time participation requirements and part time work capacity.

CRS Australia is currently the sole provider of VRS through a national network of 176 outlets. In addition, from July 2007 a new network of 18 private organisations will be contracted for up to 30 per cent of the vocational rehabilitation services.

Job Placement, Employment and Training Programme

The Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) programme is a pre-employment programme which assists young people aged 15 to 21 who are homeless, at risk of being homeless and/or facing multiple non-vocational barriers. It helps by stabilising their circumstances in order to re-engage them in education or training, access employment assistance or enter employment.

Funding of \$20.7 million will be provided for this programme in 2007-08, assisting around 14,000 young people.

Involvement in the JPET programme aims to help young people with:

- reconnecting with education or study;
- engaging with employment assistance;
- participating in programmes with a workforce participation focus;
- accessing specialist support services;
- stabilising accommodation; and
- increasing social connections and participation in the community.

JPET seeks to bridge the gap between short-term or crisis assistance and employment related assistance. Providers draw on and work collaboratively with existing community support services and networks in their local community to give young people the most appropriate support for their needs.

Green Corps — Young Australians for the Environment Programme

Green Corps is an Australian Government youth development and environmental training programme for people aged 17-20 years. Green Corps allows young people to volunteer their commitment to conserve, preserve and restore Australia's natural environment and cultural heritage.

In 2007-08, \$25.4 million will be allocated to the programme.

Each Green Corps project involves ten young people taking part in a range of activities and experiences over a 26-week period. Participants receive an allowance and take part in projects mostly located in regional and remote areas of Australia.

Green Corps participants gain improved career and employment prospects through accredited training and personal development opportunities in areas such as leadership and teamwork. Participants are also provided with an opportunity to develop improved connections with the community.

Indigenous Employment Policy

The Indigenous Employment Policy (IEP) was implemented in July 1999 in recognition of the particular disadvantage of Indigenous Australians in the labour market and aims to generate more employment opportunities for Australia's Indigenous people.

The major components of the IEP include the Structured Training and Employment Projects, the Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment Project, Wage Assistance, the National Cadetship Project, the Indigenous Small Business Fund and Indigenous Community Volunteers.

Emerging Indigenous Entrepreneurs Strategy

In regional areas where employment opportunities are limited, a strategy worth \$4.5 million over four years from 2004-05 will encourage and empower potential Indigenous entrepreneurs toward self employment and small business opportunities. The Emerging Indigenous Entrepreneurs Strategy will link emerging Indigenous entrepreneurs with private sector intermediaries who have financial expertise and provide financial literacy training to community members seeking to start a business.

ENVIRONMENT: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Natural Resource Management

NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST PHASE THREE

The Australian Government has announced funding in the 2007-08 Budget of \$2 billion over five years starting from 2008-09 for phase three of the Natural Heritage Trust. The funding will maintain the momentum of community and industry action in partnership with the Australian Government to build capacity and deliver practical initiatives to restore, conserve and sustainably manage our environment and natural resources. Phase three of the Natural Heritage Trust will continue to address biodiversity decline, salinity and water quality issues, and increased coastal and peri-urban pressures.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

The Australian Government is providing \$50 million over four years from 2007-08 to provide incentives for private land managers to improve the quality and extent of targeted matters of national environmental significance through contracts of up to 15 years.

The programme will provide incentives and ongoing payments to farmers, among others, to encourage them to undertake environmental work beyond what they should be expected to do as part of their business responsibilities. On-ground work could include fencing, replanting and restoring degraded areas, and weed and pest management.

Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation

The Australian Government is providing \$126 million over five years from 2007-08 to establish Australian Government leadership in climate change adaptation, including through a new national Centre for Climate Change Adaptation. The funds will support practical action across highly vulnerable sectors to manage the risks of climate change impacts in partnership with scientists, governments, industries and communities.

A Better Future for Indigenous Australians – Building an Indigenous Workforce in Australian Government Service Delivery – Working on Country

The Australian Government is providing \$47.6 million over four years from 2007-08 to employ Indigenous Australians in remote and regional Australia to deliver the maintenance, restoration, protection and improvement of Australia's environment.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

FIELD MANAGEMENT

The Australian Government is providing \$15.6 million over four years from 2007-08 to provide an increased level of protection for the reef, which will ensure sustainable recreational opportunities, tourism and fishing industries that support local economies.

WATER QUALITY MONITORING PROGRAMME

The Australian Government is providing \$14.2 million over four years from 2007-08, through the Natural Heritage Trust, to support comprehensive monitoring and reporting of water quality, to address threats to the reef such as coral bleaching. The funds will help gauge the success of strategies being implemented to improve water quality.

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Sunrise Viewing Platform

The Australian Government is providing \$15 million in 2007-08 to complete the commitment to build a new Uluru Sunrise viewing platform and associated facilities and roads in Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The platform offers incomparable sweeping vistas of the Park and views of Uluru, and opens up a new section of the park to visitors.

Coal mine methane reduction

The Australian Government is providing \$18.5 million over five years from 2007-08 , partly funded from the existing Greenhouse Gas Abatement Programme, to provide new incentives for reducing methane emissions from coal mines including capture, flaring or possible use at operating mines.

Crazy Ant control on Christmas Island

The Australian Government is continuing funding at \$4 million over four years from 2007-08 to continue work aimed at reducing the destructive impact Yellow Crazy Ants have on Christmas Island's ecosystem.

World class weather forecasting

The Australian Government is providing \$33.7 million over four years from 2007-08 to help maintain the national observational and monitoring networks which are critical to the Bureau of Meteorology's services. This will advance forecasting across timescales ranging from a few hours (nowcasting) to seasonable climate predictions.

Carbon sink forests

The Australian Government will introduce depreciation for the costs of establishing a qualifying carbon sink forest under the horticultural plant provisions with effect from 1 July 2007. As an additional enhancement to encourage the early establishment of carbon sink forests, the Australian Government will introduce immediate deductibility for costs incurred in establishing a qualifying carbon sink forest during a five year period commencing on 1 July 2007. The immediate tax deduction will take precedence over the general horticultural provisions during the initial five year period.

Providing this concession will increase the rate of establishment of carbon sink forests in regional areas and will deliver substantial carbon sequestration and natural resource management benefits.

ENVIRONMENT: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Envirofund

The Envirofund is the local component of the Natural Heritage Trust and provides grants of up to \$50,000 each to small projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and sustainable resource use. It helps individuals and community groups take action to solve local problems and to engage more broadly with natural resource management activities. Approximately \$20 million is available for grants in each financial year.

Low Emissions Technology Demonstration Fund

The \$500 million Low Emissions Technology Demonstration Fund is designed to demonstrate break-through technologies with significant long-term greenhouse gas reduction potential in the energy sector. The six projects announced under round one with a total public investment of \$410 million are located in the Gorgon fields off Western Australia, Biloela in Central Queensland, Injune in south-west Queensland and Mildura and the Latrobe Valley in Victoria.

Renewable Remote Power Generation Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$123.5 million over four years from 2007-08 to support the replacement of diesel-powered electricity generation and water pumping systems with renewable energy. The programme supports energy efficiency projects and industry development activities that promote the uptake of renewable energy technologies by rural and remote communities.

Wind forecasting

The Australian Government has provided \$14 million over five years from 2004-05 to support the development of a wind forecasting system for Australian conditions. This funding will be used to develop and install systems to provide accurate long range forecasts for wind output, facilitating greater penetration of wind in energy markets and allowing for more strategic planning of new wind farms across Australia.

Replacement of Field Meteorological Offices

The Australian Government has committed \$19.8 million over six years from 2005-06 to 2010-11 to help rebuild 12 of the Bureau of Meteorology's 50 field meteorological offices. These field offices, many of which are in rural and regional Australia, are vital components in the Bureau's surface and upper atmosphere observations and service

delivery networks. Offices in rural and remote Australia are valuable outlets for information on Bureau services.

Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities

The 2005-06 Budget provided \$100 million from 2005-06 to 2009-10 to improve Australia's capacity to understand and respond to priority environment concerns. The Commonwealth Environment Research Facilities (CERF) programme is supporting environmental research that demonstrates public good outcomes in a range of critical areas, and draws on multiple disciplines, professional partnerships and existing research efforts.

Under this programme, \$40 million is being dedicated to specific regional support in North Queensland for a Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility for research relating to the Great Barrier Reef, tropical rainforests and coastal issues. A total of \$60 million is allocated through national funding rounds.

Radar Infrastructure Upgrade

The Australian Government has committed \$62.2 million over five years from 2003-04 to 2007-08 for the nationwide upgrade of weather radar infrastructure. These operational weather watch radars will enhance detection and warning services to many areas of rural and regional Australia. This funding will provide for six Doppler radars and 15 new weather watch radars.

New Tsunami alert system for Australia

The Australian Government has committed \$68.9 million over four years from 2005-06 to 2008-09 to improve tsunami warning services in Australia. Australian Government investment in this project will lead to the development of a comprehensive national tsunami warning system. This initiative will be implemented through the collaborative efforts of the Bureau of Meteorology, Geoscience Australia and Emergency Management Australia.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND CENTRELINK: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Helping separated parents and their children

This Budget provides an additional \$55.6 million over four years from 2007-08 to benefit separated families. This will include two new programmes in regional Australia. The first will help children in regional areas deal with issues arising from family separation and enable them to participate in decisions that impact on them. The second is an educational programme in 28 regional locations to assist separated parents experiencing high conflict that is affecting contact between parents and children.

In the 2005-06 Budget, the Australian Government committed an additional \$397 million over four years from 2005-06 for a package of reforms to the family law system. The reforms aim to enhance family relationships and to help separated families. Many of the new services are or will be accessible to rural and regional communities. These include:

- Family Relationship Centres, which are the first point of contact for people wanting information, advice and assistance with strengthening family relationships, overcoming relationship difficulties or dealing with separation. There will be 40 Centres in place by July 2007, with the final 25 to be rolled out by July 2008.
- The Family Relationship Advice Line is a national telephone service designed to strengthen family relationships, help families stay together and assist families through separation.
- Family Relationships Online, which is a service designed to provide all families, whether together or separated, with easy online access to information about family relationship issues.
- Early Intervention relationship services, which aim to help people build stronger, healthy relationships. A total of 60 new and expanded Early Intervention services will be operational from July 2007, followed by a further 22 to commence in 2008. These include additional counselling, family therapy, services for men and their families, education and skills training and services to address family violence. Many of these services are in regional areas and available to men and their families.
- Additional Family Dispute Resolution services, Children's Contact Services and Parenting Orders Programme services, which are being implemented between July 2006 and mid 2008. These services are designed to help separated parents resolve disagreements related to the separation and divorce, make parenting agreements,

allow them to spend time with their children when there are high levels of conflict, and better focus on the needs of their children after separation.

Boarding hostel places for Indigenous students

The Australian Government will provide \$58.3 million over four years from 2007-08 to offer student boarding hostel places for up to 170 Indigenous students from remote areas. The hostels will allow students from nearby communities and homeland centres to access secondary education while remaining reasonably close to their families.

This measure will also provide additional support services for these students through existing programmes Reconnect and Youthlink.

Integrated child care quality assurance

The Australian Government will provide \$10.7 million over five years from 2006-07 to integrate quality assurance long day care, family day care and outside school hours care into a streamlined single system. This measure also introduces spot checks to provide assurance that ongoing performance of child care services is consistent with quality assurance requirements and Indigenous-specific child care.

The implementation of these changes will assist in ensuring high quality child care.

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

The Australian Government will provide funding of \$4.2 million over two years from 2007-08 to the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), an organisation that brings together researchers, policy makers and practitioners who focus on children and young people's health and wellbeing.

This measure will support ARACY in its work of encouraging collaboration between researchers, policy makers and practitioners to enhance outcomes for children and youth.

Additional support for child care in regional and remote Australia

The Australian Government will provide \$43.8 million over four years from 2007-08 to provide financial support to child care services in outer regional and remote areas to ensure parents have access to quality child care. The additional funding recognises a higher cost of providing care in outer regional and remote communities.

Assurance of Support

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$13.1 million over four years to simplify the Assurance of Support (AoS) scheme and to assist in the administration of the Scheme by Centrelink. This includes funding for Centrelink of \$5.2 million in 2007-08, \$2.1 million in 2008-09, \$2 million in 2009-10 and \$2.1 million in 2010-11.

The simplification of the scheme involves abolishing Assurance of Support requirements for Skilled Migrant, Carer and Emergency Visa categories and reducing the time taken to review initial applications.

A Better Future for Indigenous Australians

ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION AND HEALTH

The Australian Government is providing \$29 million over four years from 2007-08 to build and operate a number of accommodation facilities for Indigenous people. These facilities include a 40-bed secondary student accommodation hostel in Kununurra, Western Australia and a 45-bed aged care nursing home in Kenwick, Western Australia.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

The Australian Government is providing \$23.5 million over four years from 2007-08 to expand the number and quality of child care and early childhood services in regional and remote areas. The new Child Care Hubs will provide access to child care for 7,000 additional children in regional and remote communities. Support for existing services will improve the quality of care provided to approximately 840 children and enable their families to claim the Child Care Benefit.

LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

The Australian Government will provide \$12 million over four years from 2007-08 to conduct a longitudinal survey from 2008 to 2011 that will collect data about Indigenous babies under 12 months, and Indigenous children between four and five years. The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) will provide information on early childhood experiences that can be used to design programmes and policy that lead to better outcomes for Indigenous children.

CONTINUATION OF THE CAPE YORK DIGITAL NETWORK

The Australian Government is providing \$2.2 million over four years from 2007-08 to continue the operation of six community online access centres in remote communities in Cape York. These online centres, which are located in Hopevale, Napranum, Umagico, Coen, Injinoos and Lockhart River and are provided by the Cape York Digital Network, increase access to online commercial and government services, and help improve IT skills in these communities.

INDIGENOUS HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE REFORMS

The Australian Remote Indigenous Accommodation (ARIA) programme will commence in 2008-09, and involve an overall commitment by the Australian Government over four years of \$1.6 billion from 2007-08. Under the new ARIA programme, Indigenous people will pay normal public housing rents for decent housing, and fulfil normal community obligations around caring for their homes. They will also have real prospects for buying their own home.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND CENTRELINK: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Medicare Easyclaim access points

The Australian Government will provide \$9.9 million over three years from 2007-08 to continue the operation of 600 Medicare Easyclaim access points including in rural and remote pharmacies, post offices, shops and Rural Transaction Centres.

These facilities were established to provide Australians living in rural and remote Australia, who do not have access to a Medicare office, with better access to Medicare services.

Child Support Agency

INCREASED FACE TO FACE SERVICES

Through an increased mobile workforce and the opening of an additional five new Regional Service Centres (over the 2007-08 financial year), the Child Support Agency will be enhancing its face to face service delivery and providing parents with greater flexibility in how they interact with the Child Support Agency.

PERSONALISED SERVICES APPROACH

A new service approach providing more personalised services is being introduced in 2007-08 for up to 10,000 parents with complex and difficult cases. Staff with specialised skills are being recruited for this more complex area of customer service.

Concessional assets test treatment for rural homeowners

The Australian Government will provide \$173 million over four years commencing 1 January 2007, so that, subject to certain criteria, the maximum amount of land adjacent to a pensioner's principal home that can be exempt from the assets test has increased from two hectares to encompass all the land on the same title as their home. To qualify for the concession the pensioner must have a long-term (20 year) continuous attachment to their principal home and adjacent land, and satisfy that they are making effective use of productive land to generate an income, given their capacity. The concession is designed to balance the need to ensure that there are incentives to use one of Australia's greatest resources, productive farm land, effectively, with the

community expectation that older Australians in rural and rural residential areas should not be forced to move from their long term home, to gain an adequate retirement income.

Centrelink

MOBILE SERVICES

The Australian Government has committed \$11 million over three years from 2006-07 to 2008-09 for three vehicles to provide mobile Centrelink services and expand Centrelink's specialist Rural Services Officers network to better support the mobile service. This measure will improve access to Australian Government support and assistance for people in regional and remote areas, particularly those affected by drought.

RURAL CALL CENTRES

The Australian Government will provide \$33.1 million over four years from 2007-08 to continue funding for Centrelink's two rural call centres in Maryborough, Queensland and Port Augusta, South Australia. The provision of specific Rural Call Centres provides equity of access to information and advice on Australian Government programmes and services by experienced operators sensitive to the needs of individuals, families and communities in rural and regional Australia.

Carers

RESPITE SUPPORT FOR CARERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Australian Government is providing \$29.8 million over four years from 2007-08 to continue and expand the Respite Support for Carers of Young People with Severe and Profound Disabilities programme. The programme helps carers whose needs are not being met because no other support or services are available through existing state or territory government services or other Commonwealth initiatives. The programme supports carers of young people under 30 years of age and carers who are experiencing significant stress in caring for a person with a disability under 65 years of age. It includes options such as overnight or weekend respite care or equipment to significantly reduce the stress of the carer. This continuation and expansion will provide immediate and short-term respite support to a further 1,000 carers, in addition to the 5,000 carers previously assisted by the programme each year.

YOUNG CARER RESPITE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

The Australian Government has committed \$26.6 million over four years from 2004-05 for the Respite and Information Services for Young Carers Programme. The programme helps carers up to 25 years of age who are at risk of leaving education prematurely and not completing secondary education. Young carers can gain access to up to five hours in-home respite per week during the school term to attend education or training. They can also access one fortnight of respite care each year to undertake activities such as studying for exams, training or recreation. Age-appropriate information, advice and referral services are provided through a telephone hotline, on-line advice and an information package.

PEER SUPPORT GROUPS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY PROGRAMME

The Australian Government has committed \$9 million over four years from 2006-07 for the Peer Support Groups for Parents of Young Children with Disabilities Programme. The programme supports parents of young children with disabilities or a chronic medical condition under school age. The programme is expected to eventually benefit over 2,500 families per year. Seventy nine groups are expected to become operational by 30 June 2007 and this will increase to a national network of more than 300 parent peer support groups by 2009 in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Reconnect

The Australian Government is providing \$85 million over four years from 2007-08 to continue the Reconnect programme.

Reconnect is an Australian Government initiative that provides early intervention support to young people aged between 12 and 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. Reconnect also builds community capacity to address youth homelessness. There are 100 Reconnect services around Australia and these are located in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations.

Mentor Marketplace

The Australian Government has committed \$12 million over four years from 2005-06 to 2008-09 for the Mentor Marketplace programme which increases the mentoring opportunities available to young people. The programme engages the business and community sector to provide mentoring to improve outcomes for young people aged 12 to 25, who need assistance staying connected to family, community, education, training and the workplace. The programme also aims to develop a mentoring culture in schools, business and communities, that will result in service providers engaging

business and community sectors in mentoring activities and providing in-kind support. Mentor Marketplace projects provide access to mentoring for a wide range of young people, including, but not restricted to: those in foster care; young carers; young people with disabilities; Indigenous young people; and those from disadvantaged groups and localities. Nine of 26 mentor marketplaces are in regional areas.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance

The Australian Government has provided funding of \$10.6 million over four years from 2005-06, with \$2.6 million in 2007-08, for the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) which helps young people between 15 and 25 years to make the transition from care to independent living. TILA is administered through non-government organisations in each state and territory to assist young people who are exiting care, who as a group are at high risk of disengaging from education, employment and/or the community. Up to \$1,000 in goods or services can be accessed on behalf of these young people.

The Australian Government has expanded the eligibility criteria to now include young people who are exiting juvenile justice, Indigenous kinship care or out of home care and are moving to independent living. This expansion will further the take-up of TILA, which helps young people leaving care to achieve stability and improved participation in community and economic life.

Family Income Management

The Australian Government is providing \$16.6 million from 2006-07 to 2009-10 to support money management, the wellbeing of children and home ownership in remote Indigenous communities. These initiatives help build Indigenous people's financial literacy skills, savings patterns, encourage families to use family assistance payments for the wellbeing of their children and support Indigenous home ownership on Indigenous land.

Financial Counselling

The Australian Government continues to support the Commonwealth Financial Counselling Programme (CFCP), with funding of approximately \$2.7 million each year allowing 41 community and local government organisations to provide free financial counselling services to people experiencing personal financial difficulties.

Emergency Relief

The Australian Government provides funding of over \$31 million each year through the Emergency Relief Programme (ERP) to around 800 community organisations to

deliver emergency, financial or other assistance to individuals and families in immediate financial crisis. The ERP is designed to assist the most disadvantaged in the community, through short-term emergency support that maintains the dignity of the individual and encourages self-reliance.

Concessions on Great Southern Rail services

The Australian Government provides around \$6.5 million each year to continue the reimbursement of concessional fares on Great Southern Rail services. The measure enables the provision of concessions for pensioners, certain veterans and Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders travelling on the Indian Pacific, the Ghan and the Overland rail services.

Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

The Australian Government has provided \$142 million over four years from 2004-05 for the Communities for Children initiative which helps children under five get the best possible start in life by providing practical assistance to their families and communities. The initiative provides funding to 45 sites across Australia. In each site, a lead Non-Government Organisation works in collaboration with service providers, community members, community organisations, business and all levels of government to develop and implement a strategic plan and an annual service delivery plan tailored to community needs.

INVEST TO GROW

The Australian Government has provided \$70.5 million over four years from 2004-05 for Invest to Grow, an initiative which funds a range of early intervention and prevention programmes for young children, their families and communities. Invest to Grow builds the Australian evidence base about what works in prevention and early intervention in early childhood, a priority identified during the National Agenda for Early Childhood consultation process in 2004. Invest to Grow funding also supports the development of resources for parents, community groups, professionals and government organisations to support positive early childhood development. Invest to Grow has also provided funding for the Child Care Links initiative. This initiative uses child care centres in disadvantaged areas as community hubs to link families with young children to local support services and to strengthen community networks.

LOCAL ANSWERS

Local Answers complements other initiatives of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy by providing funding of \$151.6 million over five years (2004-2009) to local community organisations including those in rural and regional areas. Funding is available for local, small-scale, time-limited projects that help communities build skills and capacity, identify opportunities and take action for the benefit of their members in partnership with community organisations, business and local government. Local Answers funds projects that build parenting and relationship skills to develop self-reliance in families and communities, or that build skills and opportunities to assist individuals to get involved in community life through volunteering, mentoring and training to build leadership skills.

Local Answers also funds the Volunteer Small Equipment Grants (VSEG). A total of \$71.1 million will be available each year over four years. VSEG provides for grants of up to \$3,000 to encourage and support volunteers by enabling local community organisations to purchase small equipment items.

Responding Early Assisting Children (REACH)

The Australian Government is providing \$4.3 million in 2007-08 to the REACH programme. REACH is an ongoing programme that funds services that provide early intervention support for children and families at risk of child abuse and neglect. The programme has a focus on prevention, developing resilience in families and children, and promoting successful transitions for children in vulnerable families. The programme funds initiatives such as parenting education, home visits by counsellors, family support, playgroups, mentoring and community development.

Playgroup Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$6 million in 2007-08 to the Playgroup programme. Playgroups provide important social and development benefits for children, their parents, caregivers and the general community. The Australian Government funds three playgroup models - Community Playgroups, Supported Playgroups and Intensive Support Playgroups (ISP). Currently around 105,000 families and 145,000 children access over 8,500 Community Playgroups across Australia.

The Australian Government will provide funding of \$13.8 million over four years from 2007-08 to expand playgroup services for vulnerable Indigenous families. Specifically, the new services will include:

- additional ISPs delivering mobile services across a number of sites;
- increased funding for nine existing ISP services; and

- the introduction of a new playgroup service model in 30 facilitated Locational Supported Playgroups.

Indigenous Children Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$5.7 million to the Indigenous Children Programme (ICP) in 2007-08. The ICP has an emphasis on early intervention and prevention approaches in the delivery of services targeted at improving outcomes for Indigenous children and families, particularly those at risk of neglect or abuse. ICP aims to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities and build their resilience and support networks. It is intended that the programme will:

- support the wellbeing of children;
- build culturally strong parenting skills and support for families; and
- build stronger and more sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Australian Early Development Index: Building Better Communities for Children

The Australian Government will provide \$3.7 million over two years from 2007-08 to re-run the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in up to 61 current AEDI communities, implement it in a further 14 disadvantaged communities and develop and trial an Indigenous AEDI.

The AEDI is a community-based population measure of young children's development. It comprises a checklist which is completed by the child's teacher during the first year of school. AEDI results enable communities to understand how children are developing by the time they reach school. It provides communities with data to better allocate resources towards the development of targeted programmes and strategies focused on improving outcomes for children. Alternatively, AEDI results can reaffirm the effectiveness of early childhood strategies already implemented. The project has been funded for up to 61 communities, including 28 regional and remote communities.

Child Care Benefit

The Australian Government has provided unprecedented support for Australian families and the child care sector. On top of record levels of expenditure, the Australian Government will provide an additional \$727.9 million over four years to

increase the rate of Child Care Benefit by over 13 per cent from 1 July 2007. Child Care Benefit (CCB) assists with the cost of child care for eligible families using approved child care services or registered carers. Assistance provided is higher for lower income families. Families can have the benefit paid directly to the child care service to reduce their ongoing fees or alternatively can receive the benefit as a lump sum payment after the end of the financial year. Families using registered care, such as care provided by a relative, friend or neighbour registered as a carer with the Family Assistance Office, may be eligible for the minimum rate of CCB for up to 50 hours per week of work-related child care. In addition, eligible grandparents who have the primary care of their grandchildren can now have access to more hours of CCB, and for grandparents on income support, access to a grandparent rate of CCB which covers the full cost of approved care for up to 50 hours per week per child.

Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance

The Australian Government has increased funding for the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care fee assistance programme by \$15.4 million over four years in the 2007-08 Budget. This increased funding will assist around an additional 20,000 parents to enter or re enter the workforce. JET Child Care Fee Assistance provides extra child care assistance to eligible parents wishing to undertake rehabilitation, study, work or job search activities so they can participate more fully in work and community life. JET Child Care fee assistance can help meet the costs of child care in approved child care services by paying most of the gap fee. The gap fee refers to the difference between the full child care fee and Child Care Benefit (CCB). Parents receiving this assistance will usually be expected to make a small co-payment towards their child care costs.

National Disability Advocacy Programme

The National Disability Advocacy Programme assists people with a disability to participate fully in the community by helping them overcome barriers in their lives, such as physical access, discriminatory attitudes, abuse or neglect. The Australian Government has provided \$12.2 million over four years from 2007-08 to enhance the National Disability Advocacy Programme by providing a 20 per cent increase in funding for the programme, increasing promotion of disability advocacy services across Australia and introducing an independent quality assurance system for disability advocacy services.

The enhancements to the programme will:

- assist in meeting some of the unmet demand for individual advocacy services by increasing the level of support available for up to an additional 3,400 people with disability and their families;

Building a Strong Future for Regional Australia

- improve geographic coverage of disability advocacy services in rural and regional areas;
- ensure that people with disability and their families can more easily access disability advocacy services; and
- ensure that people with disability and their families receive quality services.

Aboriginal Rental Housing Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$95.4 million in 2007-08 to the Aboriginal Rental Housing Programme (ARHP). The ARHP was introduced in 1979 to address Indigenous housing needs by supplementing Commonwealth State Housing Agreement base funding.

Whilst there is significant housing need in both urban and rural and remote regions, ARHP funds are directed to rural and remote areas where there are limited public or private housing markets.

Home Ownership on Indigenous Land

The Australian Government is providing \$107.4 million over four years from 1 July 2006 under the Home Ownership on Indigenous Lands Programme (HOIL) for initiatives to promote Indigenous home ownership on community title land.

HOIL assists Indigenous people living on community owned land to buy their own home where a long-term individual lease can be obtained. It provides access to affordable home loan finance, discounts on the purchase price of houses, money management training and support, and the construction of additional houses for the purposes of home ownership. The first loans are expected to be issued in late 2007.

National Homelessness Strategy

The Australian Government provided \$10 million over four years from 2005-06 to fund the National Homelessness Strategy (NHS). Since its inception in 1999, the NHS has provided leadership in developing approaches for the prevention and reduction of homelessness and broken new ground in integrated service delivery to people who are vulnerable to homelessness. The NHS is available to applicants from all over Australia. A number of the projects announced under the NHS are located in regional locations including Mareeba, Walgett, Bunbury and Kakadu.

Household Organisational Management Expenses

The Australian Government allocated \$10.4 million over four years from 2004-05 to fund the Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice programme. HOME is designed to assist families to maintain their existing appropriate accommodation.

The Australian Government recognises that it is better to assist people at risk of homelessness through an early intervention approach. This programme helps families stabilise their housing and financial circumstances and assists them with access to community services, education support, services for children, labour market programmes, health services and parenting skills.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme

People who have nowhere to sleep for the night can seek accommodation and assistance from Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP). SAAP will not only provide them with a bed while they have nowhere to live, but will also link them up to services which will help them resolve the issues which contributed to their homelessness.

SAAP is a programme funded jointly by the Australian, state and territory governments, with the Australian Government offering funding of \$932 million over five years (to 2010). SAAP provides emergency and transitional supported accommodation and related services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Each day, 1,300 SAAP agencies provide assistance to 22,000 Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Commonwealth State Housing Agreement

The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) is a jointly funded programme between the Australian and state and territory governments, providing affordable public, community, Indigenous and crisis housing to those most in need and low income earners. Through the 2003 CSHA, the Australian Government is providing around \$4.75 billion in grants to state and territory governments over five years from 1 July 2003. States and territories will contribute around \$1.82 billion in matching funds over the life of the agreement. While the strategic directions for housing assistance are subject to Australian Government agreement, the management of public housing is the responsibility of individual state and territory governments.

CSHA funded housing operates throughout Australia. Those dwellings located in regional Australia equate to around 26 per cent of public, 48 per cent of Indigenous

and 32 per cent of community housing. A further number are located in remote Australia, namely about 2 per cent of public housing, 17 per cent of Indigenous and 2 per cent of community housing.

Indigenous Women's Development Programme

The Indigenous Women's Development Programme provides \$16.5 million over four years from 2004-05. It targets the development of the leadership capacity of Indigenous women. Its purpose is to identify, develop and support Indigenous women to take leadership positions in large numbers. This will enhance the status of Indigenous women within their own and the wider community and encourage Indigenous women to assume leadership positions and raise the profile of important community issues.

Indigenous Women's Programme

The Indigenous Women's Programme provides about \$4 million annually to fund activities which are designed to meet the identified needs and aspirations of local Indigenous women. It aims to enhance Indigenous women's leadership, representation, safety, well-being and economic status.

Indigenous Community Leadership Programme

The Indigenous Community Leadership Initiative builds on the Indigenous Women's Development Programme. It provides \$13.4 million over four years from 2006-07 to extend the development of leadership capacity to Indigenous men and young people. It will strengthen and increase men's capacity and further develop their skills to lead more effectively at the local level. It will also target young people aged 18-25 years displaying leadership in their communities and lay the foundation for enhanced community leadership.

Women's Safety Agenda

The Women's Safety Agenda delivers on the Australian Government's election commitment to eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault. It reflects recent research and evidence that there are strong policy grounds to continue the Australian Government's agenda in this area.

The Australian Government is providing over \$19.3 million in 2007-08 for the Women's Safety Agenda to address four broad themes – prevention, health, justice and services. Together they aim to reduce the incidence and decrease the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault upon the community by building on the achievements of previous initiatives.

A specific element of the initiative is training for nurses in regional and rural areas. Women in rural and regional communities are often afraid to come forward for fear of being identified. The Australian Government will provide funding to train practice nurses in regional and rural areas to assist them to identify and respond to domestic violence. Doctors will also receive assistance to release the nurses for this training. This will give people in regional areas access to a personal, confidential referral service. Following extensive consultation and development, pilots of the training will be conducted later in 2007 ahead of a national rollout over the next two years.

The highly successful national campaign – Violence Against Women. Australia Says NO. – is being run again throughout 2007 as part of the Women’s Safety Agenda. Its extensive reach includes TV, radio, cinemas, magazines and rural press.

Another element of the Women’s Safety Agenda is funding for community-level action projects across the country designed to deliver local responses to local issues in relation to domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Women’s Leadership and Development Programme

The Women’s Leadership and Development Programme delivers on the Australian Government’s election commitment to build women’s participation and capacity in decision making and leadership.

The Australian Government is providing \$14.4 million over four years from 2005-06 for the Women’s Leadership and Development Programme for a number of initiatives which will assist women, including those in regional Australia. For example, the Young Women’s Leadership and Mentoring Programme is being piloted in three regional locations in 2007 to link young women in the community with high-achieving women from their community. Skills such as personal development, goal setting and governance will be targeted.

Grants and secretariat activities supported through the Women’s Leadership and Development Programme include a focus on rural women.

Indigenous social and economic research

The Australian Government will provide \$0.8 million over four years to fund Indigenous research that will enable the government to develop sound evidence-based policy and programmes across a broad realm of social and economic areas. All Australians, especially Indigenous Australians, will benefit from research outcomes that facilitate better targeted Indigenous policy and programmes.

Note: further information on Budget initiatives can be found at www.budget.gov.au

HEALTH AND AGEING: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Mental health for drought affected areas

The Australian Government will provide \$51.7 million over five years (including \$13.9 million in 2010-11) to improve access to mental health services for people in rural and remote areas. Funding will be provided to increase access to treatment services provided by allied and mental health nursing professionals such as social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, mental health nurses, Aboriginal health workers and Aboriginal mental health workers in rural and remote communities throughout Australia. This measure forms part of the Government's contribution to the COAG Mental Health package, announced on 5 April 2006.

In recognition of the special needs of people in drought affected communities and to assist in their access to mental health services, an extra \$20.6 million over four years is provided in the 2007-08 Budget to expand the Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas initiative. This will provide additional mental health services by allied and mental health nursing professionals in drought affected communities.

The Australian Government also recognises that the mental health consequences of the ongoing drought require additional resources. Funding of \$10.1 million is being provided over two years through 39 divisions of general practice to support communities in defined drought declared areas to respond to the psychological impact of drought. It will provide additional crisis counselling services for distressed individuals in rural towns, as well as education and training support for clinicians. It is also intended to raise community awareness of mental health issues and the services available.

Family centred primary health care

This initiative will expand comprehensive primary health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, specifically targeting rural and remote regions where mainstream services are unavailable. The measure will provide funding for additional staff, clinic upgrades and expanded outreach services in six Indigenous health services in rural and remote Australia. Funding of \$38.2 million over four years will be provided, starting 1 July 2007.

Visiting Optometrists Scheme

The Australian Government will provide \$8.6 million over four years to continue and enhance the Visiting Optometrists Scheme (VOS).

The revised VOS will ensure that assistance is better targeted to the most isolated communities, including Indigenous communities, and will increase financial incentives to optometrists to participate in the Scheme.

Funding will be provided for optometrists' travel, accommodation, hire of consulting rooms, and administrative support at outreach locations. As a result, the number of optometrists participating in the Scheme is expected to increase from 70 to 100.

Rural Clinical Schools Programme

Funding of \$16.3 million is being provided over four years from 2007-08 to the existing Rural Clinical Schools Programme to enable the University of Wollongong to establish a new rural clinical school. This new rural clinical school will operate across a range of rural and remote sites in New South Wales, utilising general practices as major teaching sites for medical students. Up to 60 more medical students each year will be able to complete a substantial part of their clinical training in rural areas.

Improved dental care

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$12.5 million over four years from 2007-08 to attract more dentists to work in regional Australia by providing training to city-based students in country towns, as well as offering scholarships to Indigenous dentistry students. Funding will be provided to offer 30 annual rural clinical placements to city dental students across a range of rural towns and increase Indigenous participation in the dental workforce through three \$15,000 scholarships per year under the expanded Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme.

Health @ Home Plus

The Australian Government is providing \$37.4 million over four years from 2007-08 for Health @ Home Plus. From birth to two years of age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in targeted outer regional and remote areas will benefit from dedicated, intensive home visiting services by health professionals. Those children most in need will also be supported through to the age of eight to help equip them to make a successful transition to school.

Quality of care in Indigenous health services

The Australian Government is providing \$36.9 million over four years from 2007-08 to ensure that funded Indigenous health services will meet nationally recognised Australian health accreditation standards. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities will benefit from high quality and better managed

Indigenous health services that are accredited against the same standards applicable to mainstream health services.

Rural women's GP services

The Australian Government will provide \$14 million over four years from 2007-08, including an additional \$4.3 million, to continue and expand the Rural Women's GP Service (RWGPS). By 2011, the RWGPS will be expanded by 32 locations, resulting in an additional 6,200 consultations per year. It will provide more women from more communities in rural and remote Australia with a choice between consulting a female or a male GP.

The RWGPS facilitates the travel of female GPs to rural and remote locations across Australia, improving access to primary health care services for women who have little or no access to a female GP. The RWGPS is administered by the Royal Flying Doctor Service and currently operates in 152 locations across all states and the Northern Territory.

Royal Flying Doctor Service

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$156.6 million for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) for the five years from 2006-07 to 2010-2011, bringing the Government's funding support for the Service over this period to a total of up to \$274 million. This extra funding will ensure the RFDS is on a sustainable financial footing for the long term. Under the new arrangement the Australian Government will fully fund RFDS traditional services in rural and remote communities. The funding package will cover the operational costs of RFDS traditional services, include emergency aero-medical evacuations, primary health and community care clinics, telehealth consultations and medical chests at remote locations. The package will also provide funding to support the capital requirements of the RFDS, including aircraft replacement. The increased funding will mean that, for the first time, the RFDS will provide primary care services to islands in the Bass Strait. The Australian Government will also provide a capital contribution towards the purchase of an aircraft for the delivery of RFDS services in Central Australia.

MRI in Dubbo

The provision of a Medicare-eligible MRI service in Dubbo supports an election commitment made by the Australian Government in 2004. A grant of \$2 million over four years, concluding in 2009-10 will ensure affordable access to an MRI unit in Dubbo. People will no longer have to travel around 150 kilometres to use the nearest MRI unit, located in Orange. The MRI unit provides for better access to Medicare-eligible services in central-western New South Wales, with no out-of-pocket cost to concessional patients. Since 1998, the Australian Government has managed

access to Medicare-eligible MRI carefully because of its cost. Expansions have focused on improving access in under-serviced areas and hospitals with a clinical need.

Rural Retention Programme

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$9.6 million over four years from 2007-08 for the existing Rural Retention Programme to meet increased demand for incentives by an estimated 400 new general practitioners in rural and remote Australia. The Rural Retention Programme was introduced in 1999-2000 to encourage general practitioners to stay in these areas.

HEALTH AND AGEING: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Mental health

On 5 April 2006, the Prime Minister announced the Australian Government's contribution of \$1.9 billion over five years to the National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006-11. The Plan sets out agreed outcomes and specific policy directions for action that emphasise coordination and collaboration between government, private and non-government providers in order to deliver a more seamless and connected care system.

This National Action Plan represents a commitment to deliver mental health services in a more integrated way – between governments, and between the government and non-government sectors. Governments have agreed to a model of community-based coordinated care for people with serious mental illness who are most likely to benefit and who are most at risk of falling through the gaps in the system.

This National Action Plan also outlines a series of new initiatives that will be implemented over a five-year period. All governments have agreed to continue investment in the area after this time. The Plan focuses on promotion, prevention and early intervention; improving mental health services; providing opportunities for increased recovery and participation in the community and employment, including through more stable accommodation; providing better coordinated care; and building workforce capacity.

Mentoring for regional cancer services

The Australian Government is providing \$14.1 million over four years from 2005-06 to 2008-09 to assist hospitals, providers and support networks to develop and implement cancer care mentoring. A cancer services networking and mentoring system linking regional with metropolitan services is helping to foster multidisciplinary approaches in regional areas where on-the-ground support is less comprehensive. This networking and mentoring programme is supporting linked groups of health professionals and organisations from primary, secondary and tertiary care to work in a coordinated manner to provide equitable provision of high quality services throughout their region.

Nurse Scholarship Programme

The Australian Government has committed \$20.6 million over three years from 2005-06 to 2007-08 to continue the Nurse Scholarship Programme which provides support to nurses, former nurses and nursing students in rural and remote areas of Australia.

Since its inception more than 3,000 scholarships have been awarded under this programme.

Strong rural and remote health workforce

The Australian Government has provided \$17.2 million over three years to 2007-08 for the National Rural and Remote Health Support Services Programme. This programme supports the rural and remote workforce through a number of initiatives including the funding of undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships for allied health students and professionals.

Additional practice nurses for rural Australia and other areas of need

The Australian Government is continuing to provide support to general practices in rural and remote areas to employ practice nurses. The Additional Practice Nurses for Rural Australia and Other Areas of Need initiative was continued in the 2005-06 Budget, and provided funding of \$129.7 million over four years to 2008-09. Over 1,100 general practices in rural and remote Australia are accessing the rural practice nurse initiative through the Practice Incentives Programme.

Rural and regional respite services

The Australian Government is providing \$9.3 million over four years from 2005-06 to 2008-09 for an additional supplement of \$20.45 per day for Multipurpose Services that provide respite services for older Australians and their carers living in rural and remote areas.

HERITAGE: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Distinctively Australian

The Australian Government is continuing funding at \$15 million over four years from 2007-08 to support the continued development of national heritage arrangements introduced in 2004. It will fund National Heritage List assessments, best-practice management arrangements for Australia's National and Commonwealth Heritage places and the public engagement of all Australians with the National Heritage List.

HERITAGE: ONGOING INITIATIVES

National Heritage Investment Initiative

In 2005, the Australian Government announced the National Heritage Investment Initiative, a four year \$10.5 million programme commencing in 2005-06, to assist restore and conserve Australia's most important historic heritage places. In 2007-08 funding of up to \$3.5 million will be provided under the programme. The programme assists individuals, governments and non-government organisations undertake conservation management planning activities and on-ground works. In keeping with the Australian Government's focus on places of national significance, priority is given to places that are on the National Heritage List.

Indigenous Heritage Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$14.4 million over the next four years from 2007-08, including \$3.5 million in 2007-08, to identify, conserve and promote Australia's Indigenous heritage through the Indigenous Heritage Programme. This programme provides Indigenous organisations or not-for-profit bodies with financial assistance to manage Indigenous heritage values.

Community Heritage Grants Programme

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$800,000 over four years from 2005-06 for the Community Heritage Grants Programme. The Community Heritage Grants Programme provides grants of up to \$15,000 to support preservation projects undertaken by community organisations such as local historical societies, public libraries, Indigenous and migrant community groups, which hold cultural heritage collections of national significance. The programme has operated for 13 years and has distributed over \$2 million.

LEGAL SYSTEM AND SERVICES: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Regional Innovations Programme for Legal Services

The Australian Government is providing \$8.3 million over four years from 2007-08 to 2010-2011 to maintain legal aid services in regional, rural and remote Australia. \$2.1 million will be spent on the programme in 2007-08. The Regional Innovations Programme for Legal Services (RIPLS) seeks to strengthen the partnership between the private and public sector in delivering legal aid services in the regions by assisting regional law firms recruit young lawyers, and by helping to offset some of the high costs of providing services over long distances. The initiative responds to research that shows that private sector firms are withdrawing from legal aid. This situation is particularly critical in the regions where there are already fewer qualified people available to provide legal services and the cost of service delivery is high.

LEGAL SYSTEM AND SERVICES: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and Early Intervention and Prevention Programme

The Australian Government has committed \$18.7 million in 2007-08 to provide legal and associated services to rural and remote high need service areas. The Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) and the Early Intervention and Prevention Programme (EIPP) will benefit Indigenous Australians who are victims, survivors or at risk of family violence or sexual abuse.

The Australian Government expanded this programme in 2004-05 allocating \$22.7 million over four years and again in 2006-07 allocating a further \$23.6 million over four years, taking it from the original 13 to 31 service providers in 2006-07.

Prevention, Diversion, Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice Initiatives Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$6.1 million in 2007-2008 for the Prevention, Diversion, Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice Programme (PDRR). The funds will support organisations undertaking projects that will divert Indigenous Australians away from adverse contact with the legal system. The programme is also intended to facilitate projects that will rehabilitate and support Indigenous Australians who have been incarcerated or are in custody and seeks to fund projects that will also lessen the need for legal aid through early resolution of disputes, including through restorative justice practices, with greater involvement of agencies, the victims, offenders, and Indigenous communities.

Law and Justice Advocacy Development Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$2.5 million in 2007-08 for the Law and Justice Advocacy Development Programme (LJAD). The programme seeks to support Indigenous Australians in developing policy and law reform projects and in delivering community legal education. The funds help ensure partnerships are developed between advocacy organisations and tertiary and research institutions, and government and non-government agencies to research, develop policy and encourage law reform.

National Community Crime Prevention Programme

The Australian Government has committed \$64 million over four years, from 2004-05 to 2007-08, to the National Community Crime Prevention Programme (NCCPP). The

centrepiece of the NCCPP is a national community grants scheme, and another specifically for the Greater Western Sydney Region, providing funding for local projects to enhance community safety and crime prevention by preventing or reducing crime and anti social behaviour, improving community safety and security, and reducing the fear of crime.

Indigenous Legal Aid

Indigenous Australians experience much higher rates of adverse contact with the justice system than other Australians. In recognition of this, the Australian Government has allocated \$50.5 million to provide legal aid for Indigenous Australians in 2007-08, and a further \$154.7 million has been allocated for the three year period from 2008-09 to 2010-11. The Legal Aid for Indigenous Australians Programme (LEGA) provides culturally sensitive and accessible legal aid and related services.

The LEGA Programme includes funding for casework to review laws and practices with a discriminatory effect; and for the recognition of social, cultural, economic, legal and political rights, and the resolution of inconsistencies and ambiguities in the application of existing laws, through the conduct of litigation.

Native Title

The Australian Government has committed \$117.2 million for the native title system in 2007-08. \$58.7 million of this funding has been allocated to assist native title claimants through the funding of a network of 17 Native Title Representative and Service Bodies (NTRBs). A component of this funding is used to assist in the capacity building for NTRBs.

The Native Title and Land Rights programmes aim to enhance the delivery of native title and land rights services to Indigenous people. The programmes fund the operation of bodies recognised under the *Native Title Act 1993* to provide professional services to claimants and other stakeholders in the native title system, and Indigenous organisations established under Commonwealth land rights legislation.

Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service

The Australian Government has committed \$4.6 million for four years from 2006-07 to 2009-2010 to fund the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) in the Northern Territory. Funding will be allocated by the Northern Territory Government for the purchase of interpreting services from the AIS. The Australian Government and the Northern Territory have jointly funded the AIS since September 2000.

IMMIGRATION: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Supporting regional migration

The Australian Government is committed to having regional Australia share the benefits from our migration programme. For 2007-08 the Australian Government has approved an increase of 5,000 places in the skill stream. Within the skill stream it is estimated some 750 places will be available under State-Specific and Regional Migration initiatives. The actual number achieved will be largely contingent on the extent to which state and territory governments use the State-Specific and Regional Migration initiatives. The Australian Government continues to work with state and territory governments to identify and fill skill shortages in regional Australia.

Humanitarian settlement in regional areas

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$1.5 million over four years from 2007-08 to 2010-2011 to continue long-term settlement of refugees in regional areas, particularly where there are employment opportunities. This funding includes \$1 million for a small discretionary fund to develop the expertise of settlement services in regional locations and \$0.5 million to improve data capture of employment and skills history, to facilitate the matching of humanitarian entrants with regional employment opportunities.

IMMIGRATION: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Regional and Industry Outreach Officer Networks

The Australian Government maintains a Regional Outreach Officer Network, and an Industry Outreach Officer Network. Regional Outreach Officers work closely with state and territory governments and regional authorities to provide regional employers with information on programmes. Industry Outreach Officers work with key industry organisations, such as the National Farmers Federation, to provide regional employers with information on how migration can help fill skill shortages.

‘Australia Needs Skills’ Expos

The ‘Australia Needs Skills’ expos commenced in 2005 to connect overseas skilled workers with Australian employers and state and territory governments. These expos promote the Australian Government’s skilled migration programme and assist employers to find skilled staff from overseas.

‘Australia Needs Skills’ expos have been run in Kolkata, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Manila, London, Manchester, Dublin, Amsterdam, Berlin and Chennai. The expos have been very successful, with good representation by regional employers and will be continued in 2007-08. It is estimated that the Australian Government will provide \$1.7 million in 2007-08 to support the ‘Australia Needs Skills’ Expos.

Christmas Island – New Immigration Detention Centre

In late 2007, the new Christmas Island Detention Centre is scheduled to be handed over to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). With the new Centre, the DIAC infrastructure portfolio on the island will have total asset value of \$380 million. There is currently a permanent on-island facility manager, engaged to maintain DIAC facilities. Recruitment for a further three island-based facility management support staff will begin shortly.

In addition, DIAC will shortly undertake an expression of interest for outsourced maintenance services with a focus on island based small business enterprises delivering these services. It is anticipated the maintenance arrangements, when tendered, will provide for potential traineeships and skill transfer for island residents.

REGIONAL SERVICES: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Women on Boards

'At the Table: Getting the best people and making the right decisions for regional and rural Australia' is the report of the inquiry into women's representation on regional and rural bodies of influence in Australia. The report was presented to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services in August 2006. The recommendations of the report focus on developing strategies to increase the number of regional and rural women on boards thereby improving diversity and decision-making capacity in regional and rural Australia.

The 2007-08 Budget delivers \$4.5 million over four years to underpin the Australian Government response to 'At the Table' and to implement the Regional Women's Action Plan for Women's Representation. The Action Plan comprises four elements:

- improving information on the benefits of increased participation by regional women;
- influencing demand from regional boards;
- improving pathways for women's participation on regional boards; and
- increasing networking and mentoring opportunities for regional women.

In 2007-08, two key initiatives will be funded:

- a mentoring programme for board candidates and high performing boards in regional areas will be established; and
- a board toolkit for regional boards will be developed.

REGIONAL SERVICES: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Regional Partnerships

The Australian Government's approach to regional development, as set out in "Stronger Regions, A Stronger Australia" is to work in partnership with communities, government and the private sector to foster the development of self-reliant communities and regions.

The Australian Government has allocated \$270.6 million from 2006-07 to 2009-10 under the Regional Partnerships programme to support this approach to regional development. The Regional Partnerships programme focuses on projects which help stimulate growth in regions, improve access to services, support planning and help communities make structural adjustment.

On average, the Regional Partnerships programme attracts a further three dollars from other sources for every dollar invested by the Australian Government.

Australian communities continue to benefit from funding to deliver commitments made during the 2004 Election. Funding of \$27.8 million is available for six significant regional icon projects, \$2.8 million to share between 15 Tasmanian projects and \$10.8 million to benefit 14 other projects across Australia. The Supporting Regional Post Services is being delivered with Australia Post for \$10.7 million from 2004-05 to 2007-08.

RURAL MEDICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

In the 2004 Election, the Australian Government provided \$15 million over three years for the Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund. To date, \$2.1 million has been allocated to a total of 14 projects in regional Australia. Examples include \$200,000 to the Warialda Medical Centre and \$168,880 to the Tottenham Walk-In Walk-Out Centre in NSW. Many other applications are currently under consideration and the Australian Government remains committed to improving the access of regional communities to doctors, dentists and allied health providers.

Sustainable Regions

The Australian Government is providing \$15.4 million in 2007-08 for the Sustainable Regions Programme, which assists selected regions undergoing major economic, social or technological change and supports community leadership in the development of local solutions. The programme helps the selected regions plan for the future and build capacity for strategic and informed decision-making at the regional level. Priorities are determined by locally-based Advisory Committees comprising business, community

and local government representatives, after consultation with communities. Applicants for grants are actively encouraged to seek partners to ensure that there is broad and integrated consideration of the issues within the regions.

Ten regions across Australia have benefited from the Sustainable Regions programme. The Darling Matilda Way and the Northern Rivers and North Coast New South Wales Sustainable Regions were established from a 2004 Election commitment and are still accepting funding applications. The eight original Sustainable Regions under the programme are the Atherton Tablelands, Wide Bay Burnett, Far North-East New South Wales, Campbelltown-Camden, Gippsland, North-West and West Coast Tasmania, Playford-Salisbury and the Kimberley. While the original regions are no longer accepting applications for funding, they will leave legacy of significant projects which will continue to have a positive impact in the regions for years to come.

Area Consultative Committees

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$53.4 million from 2007-08 to 2009-10, with \$17.4 million in 2007-08 for the Area Consultative Committee (ACC) network. ACCs promote the Regional Partnerships programme in their areas and help applicants prepare applications for funding to the programme. Under their Charter, ACCs also facilitate whole-of-government responses to opportunities in their communities, foster regional development, and are the link between government, business and the community. ACCs assist regional communities to manage change at the local level and to lead their own development with the support of both the government and the private sector.

Federal Assistance for Local Government

In 2007-08, local government is expected to receive \$1.7 billion in Financial Assistance Grants, comprising \$1.2 billion in general purpose grants and \$537.7 million in local road grants. This is an increase of \$65.2 million over the 2006-07 allocation.

These grants are untied so councils can use them for local priorities. As councils are responsible for over 85 per cent of the nation's roads, the grants contribute to maintaining these roads and providing other essential council services. The grants are allocated between councils primarily on the basis of relative need. As a result more than \$1 billion will go to councils in rural and regional Australia.

In 2007-08, South Australian councils will receive \$13.5 million in supplementary local road financial assistance grants as part of a \$57 million package over four years from 2007-08 which addresses South Australia's relative disadvantage in the local roads grant funding formula.

Australian Government Regional Information Services

Australian Government Regional Information Service (AGRIS) brings together a number of practical ways for Australians, especially those in regional, rural and remote Australia, to obtain information about programmes and services delivered by the Australian Government.

AGRIS provides people with information on relevant services and programmes along with contact details for responsible agencies. AGRIS consists of:

- a free-call telephone information service - 1800 026 222 - available Australia-wide Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm AEST;
- a website (www.regionalaustralia.gov.au) – The Regional Entry Point, providing information on and links to Australian Government services and programmes; and
- a printed directory - the Australian Government Regional Information Directory (previously known as the Commonwealth Regional Information Directory and the Rural Book), a comprehensive guide to Australian Government services and programmes with associated contact details. The 2007 edition marks the Directory's twentieth anniversary and can be ordered by calling 1800 026 222 from the end of May 2007.

Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal

The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) is Australia's only national foundation dedicated to the needs of rural and regional Australia. The FRRR was established through the support of the Sidney Myer Fund (\$1 million) and the Australian Government.

The FRRR is a philanthropic foundation, with an independent board, to help provide a viable social and economic future for Australia rural and regional communities. It aims to encourage innovative collaboration between business, community and government in philanthropic endeavours that will boost the economic and social well-being of regional Australia.

Over the life of the programme, until 2008-09, the Australian Government's total cash contribution will be \$14.5 million. This includes up to \$3.8 million over that period to match contributions from the business, government and community sectors. Donations to the Foundation are tax deductible. The FRRR also has key funding partnerships with The Pratt Foundation, ANZ, the Gardiner Foundation, Bendigo Bank's Community Enterprise Foundation and Rural Education Programme Founding

Donors, Sarah & Baillieu Myer, Tim & Gina Fairfax, John & Janet Calvert-Jones and a large number of private trusts and foundations.

The Foundation sets out to achieve its objectives in a variety of ways including funding projects that have the potential to achieve significant results for people within rural and regional Australia.

The Foundation also administers a number of small grants programmes, which have developed to help rural and remote communities with small, well-targeted grants. This Programme is aimed at (but not limited to) communities with a population of 10,000 or less and provides grants up to \$5,000 or \$10,000.

The Foundation's 'Community Foundations Kit for Australian Communities 2nd Edition' provides useful tools for community leaders who want to create and develop a community foundation in their community. The Foundation can also provide funds for feasibility studies and the establishment of community foundations.

Regional and Rural Research and Development Grants

Regional and Rural Research and Development Grants (\$228,000 per year) facilitate research into issues affecting Australia's regions, and support this research being communicated to national and regional decision makers.

Regional Women's Advisory Council

The third Regional Women's Advisory Council is a body of 12 influential women appointed in June 2006. The Council's objective is to support the development and maintenance of resilient, vibrant and sustainable communities - harnessing the potential of young women leaders and indigenous women. Council members make use of their contacts and networks to provide feedback to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services and other relevant Australian Government ministers. The Council may commission research and may also invite members of other representative bodies, departmental representatives and members of the community to provide briefings, or to participate in their meetings. The Council maintains alliances with other women's councils and advisory groups nationally.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Australian Broadband Guarantee

The Australian Government announced the \$162.6 million Australian Broadband Guarantee on 7 March 2007. The ABG complements the \$600 million Broadband Connect Infrastructure Programme and provides incentive payments to eligible broadband service providers who are able to offer a metro-comparable service to Australians who cannot otherwise receive such a service.

Broadband Connect Infrastructure Programme

On 21 September 2006, the Australian Government announced the \$600 million Broadband Connect Infrastructure Programme with applications closing on 18 December 2006. This is a part of the Broadband Connect programme. The programme will fund major infrastructure projects in regional Australia to ensure equitable access to high quality, scalable and sustainable broadband services.

Clever Networks

The \$113.4 million Clever Networks programme is part of the \$1.1 billion Connect Australia package and is intended to support the improved delivery of broadband enabled health, education, government, community and emergency sector services in regional, rural and remote Australia. The programme includes an Innovative Services Delivery element to co-fund projects that utilise broadband to support improved services in the range of priority sectors. The programme also includes a Broadband Development element to co-fund Project Managers (for each state/territory) and Project Officers (for specific projects), to help improve broadband skills and capabilities, enhance business practices and aggregate demand in under served communities.

The Broadband Blueprint

Released in December 2006, the Broadband Blueprint outlines the Australian Government's vision for the future provision of broadband services across Australia in a strategic and coordinated manner. Implementation of the Blueprint will be coordinated by the National Broadband Development Group comprising representatives of all three levels of government and industry.

Coordinated Communications Infrastructure Fund

The Coordinated Communications Infrastructure Fund is providing \$23.7 million over four years from 2003-04 to fund broadband infrastructure projects in regional, rural and remote areas. This infrastructure will support improvements in the delivery of health, education, government and other services that will lead to significant economic and social outcomes. Projections indicate the remaining \$5.3 million will be allocated in 2007-08.

TRADE, BUSINESS, TOURISM AND INVESTMENT: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

Enhanced Australian Tourism Development Programme

The Australian Government is enhancing the Australian Tourism Development Programme (ATDP) by allocating an additional \$34.9 million until June 2011. The programme is being enhanced to support tourism projects in drought-affected areas. The ATDP promotes tourism development in regional Australia, contributes to long term economic growth, increases visitor numbers and enhances tourism expenditure in regional areas. The ATDP is a highly competitive merit-based grants programme that aims to assist in the development of a continuous tourism experience across Australia.

Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$2.6 million in 2007-08 and a further \$11.7 million in 2008-09 to assist small business under the Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business Programme (BESB). Small businesses make an invaluable contribution to Australia. However, many are time poor and find it difficult to quickly access reliable sources of information and advice. The BESB Programme is meeting this need by funding over 70 third party service providers, in its first two rounds, to deliver skills development, mentoring, succession planning, incubator and advisory services to about 10,000 small businesses throughout regional Australia. The other key element of the BESB Programme is the network of about 70 Small Business Field Officers (SBFO) who deliver these vital referral services across Australia. Over 60 of these SBFOs are located in regional Australia and to date have made over 1 million contacts with small businesses in regional Australia.

Global Opportunities

As part of the Industry Statement, the Global Opportunities programme will provide ongoing support of \$96 million over the next four years, starting in 2007-08. The programme will provide dedicated resources to help smaller Australian manufacturing and services firms win work in global supply chains and major international projects. The programme will provide practical support such as identifying opportunities in other countries, facilitating trade missions and placing Australian industry experts in international procurement offices to build linkages between global firms and Australian businesses. The programme will provide positive benefits for regional Australia as it targets firms in trade exposed sectors, which may include firms located in regional areas.

Australian Industry Productivity Centres

As part of the Industry Statement, the Australian Government is providing ongoing funding of \$170.8 million over the next five years from 2007-08 to establish Australian Industry Productivity Centres. The Centres will provide business improvement services to assist firms to respond strategically to change and to capitalise on its opportunities. The Centres will also provide matching funding of up to \$20,000 to firms for Tailored Advisory Services and Technology and Knowledge Solutions.

It is anticipated that the Centres will have a positive impact upon regional areas. The Centres will assist small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the trade-exposed manufacturing and services sectors, many of which are located in regional areas. Productivity Centres will have a presence in key locations throughout Australia and staff of the centre will travel to regional locations to provide services to SMEs.

Intermediary Access Programme

As part of the Industry Statement, the Australian Government is providing \$15 million over the next four years from 2007-08 to extend the Intermediary Access Programme which will help overcome the cultural and resource barriers faced by Australian small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in collaborating with others to acquire and apply new knowledge and technology.

Intermediaries are trusted third parties who work closely with SMEs to assist them to collaborate, identify and use research, access and adapt new technologies, and develop partnerships within Australia and overseas.

The Intermediary Access Programme will deliver intermediary services to metropolitan and regionally-based companies, increasing linkages between companies and research organisations, and between large and small companies. This will lead to improved economic development with increased employment and profits for regional companies and boost the regional Australian economy.

Scottsdale Industry and Community Development Fund

The Scottsdale Industry and Community Development Fund has been allocated \$10 million in administered funding of which \$6 million relates to a merit-based grants programme. The purpose of the Fund is to provide financial support for a range of development initiatives for the benefit of the Scottsdale community in northern Tasmania, and also to assist with improvements to road access to the planned eco-tourism development at Musselroe Bay. The initiatives will be aimed at creating or

retaining long-term sustainable employment opportunities for the Scottsdale community.

Commercial Ready Plus

From 2007-08, the Australian Government is providing an additional \$32.1 million over four years to establish a new element of the Commercial Ready Programme – Commercial Ready Plus – that will provide grants of up to \$250,000 to innovative businesses. The new element will have a simpler more streamlined application process providing faster access to funding. Commercial Ready, and Commercial Ready Plus have the potential to improve local economies in regional areas, by increasing the commercial viability of innovating small businesses and consequent employment, and private and public investment.

TRADE, BUSINESS, TOURISM AND INVESTMENT: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Automotive Competitiveness and Investment Scheme

The Automotive Competitiveness and Investment Scheme (ACIS) provides transitional assistance to the Australian automotive industry. ACIS commenced on 1 January 2001 and will conclude on 31 December 2015. Over this period, ACIS will provide \$7 billion to the industry.

Eligible ACIS participants are located across Australia, including a number of regional locations. They include: motor vehicle producers; automotive component producers; automotive machine tool and automotive tooling producers; and automotive service providers.

Commercialisation of Emerging Technologies

In 2004 the Australian Government provided an additional \$100 million to extend the Commercialising Emerging Technologies (COMET) programme to 2011. COMET has engaged private sector business advisers across Australia, including in regional areas. The programme assists successful applicants commercialise their products. The programme also assists in business skills development. COMET provides both financial assistance and access to business advice.

Mt Isa/Georgetown Project

The Mt Isa Project is a combined initiative of the Australian Government and Queensland State Government. The project is an integrated geoscience project aimed at encouraging investment in exploration in the Mt Isa region and in undercover areas east of Cloncurry. The implication for rural communities is the potential for increased employment and infrastructure through successful exploration.

Beginning July 2007, this project will be expanded to encompass the neighbouring Georgetown mineral province to the east of Mt Isa with a view to better understanding the mineral and geothermal potential of this part of northern Queensland. It is anticipated that this new initiative will encourage exploration in greenfield areas that have not received the same amount of attention as Mt Isa. Of particular interest is the region of little or no exposure between Mt Isa and Georgetown.

Commercial Ready

Commercial Ready is a competitive merit-based grant programme supporting innovation and its commercialisation. It aims to stimulate greater innovation and productivity growth in the private sector by providing around \$200 million per year in competitive grants to small and medium-sized businesses. A wide range of programme recipients are located in regional Australia.

Export Hubs

The Australian Government has committed \$6.4 million over five years from 2004-05 to establish eight new export hubs in regional Australia. The hubs will provide easier access to government trade and industry programmes by bringing together the services and products provided by TradeStart and AusIndustry. Export hubs, which provide Australian companies with a one-stop shop for export and industry related services, are located in Ballarat, Carnarvon, Bega, Bundaberg, Port Augusta, Tweed Heads, Launceston and Darwin.

AusIndustry Regional Managers

To help customers with product and eligibility information, AusIndustry has customer service managers located in 26 offices across Australia. In particular, AusIndustry's regional managers raise the level of awareness of Australian Government business assistance in their regions, and assist businesses in these locations to access relevant programmes, with a focus on programmes delivered by AusIndustry. Regional managers are located in Ballarat, Bendigo, Bunbury, Darwin, Gladstone, Gold Coast, Launceston, Mount Gambier, Newcastle, Port Augusta, Tamworth, Townsville, Traralgon, Wagga Wagga and Wollongong.

Textile Clothing and Footwear Structural Adjustment Programme

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$5 million per year from 2005-06 for ten years to the Textile Clothing and Footwear (TCF) Structural Adjustment Programme to support further TCF industry consolidation and labour market adjustment. The programme has three elements:

- labour adjustment assistance through the Job Network;
- a Restructuring Initiative Grant Scheme; and
- TCF community assistance through the Australian Government's Regional Partnerships programme

An application for approval of a restructuring initiative must be made by all eligible entities intending to apply for a grant under the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Restructuring Initiative Grant Scheme (TCF RIG Scheme).

business.gov.au

As part of the Australian Government's commitment to reducing the compliance burden for business, continued funding of \$36.4 million over four years from 2005-06 to 2008-09 will be provided to support Online eBusiness Services – business.gov.au.

The website provides around-the-clock service to business in all parts of Australia, including regional areas. The website offers simple and convenient access to government information, transactions and services for business, in particular for small to medium sized businesses. It is a whole-of-government service providing essential information on all stages of the business cycle.

Invest Australia

A significant proportion of the investment attracted to Australia, by Invest Australia, occurs in regional areas. Of the 94 projects that Invest Australia had a verified role in attracting or facilitating in 2005-2006, 21 involved investment in regional or remote locations in Australia. If these projects proceed as planned they will generate investment totalling \$15 billion, create or safeguard over 2,600 jobs and generate \$2.5 billion in export earnings.

Industry Capability Network Limited and Supplier Access to Major Projects Programme

The Australian Government provided \$3.8 million over three years from 2005-06 to continue the Industry Capability Network Limited and the Supplier Access to Major Projects (SAMP) Programme. The objective of these initiatives is to maximise opportunities for Australian industry in major projects and global supply markets, especially for small to medium enterprises including those in regional areas.

Funding for the SAMP Programme was expanded in 2006-07 by \$4.2 million to facilitate increased opportunities for Australian industry to integrate into global supply markets and participate in major projects overseas. This brings Australian Government investment for SAMP to \$7.2 million over 2005-06 to 2009-10.

Innovation and Investment Fund for South Australia

Building on the success of the Structural Adjustment Fund for South Australia to facilitate and attract new investment, the Australian and South Australian

Building a Strong Future for Regional Australia

Governments announced a \$30 million package to assist with industry development in South Australia.

The Australian Government has contributed \$25 million, and the South Australian Government has contributed \$5 million to the Innovation and Investment Fund for South Australia (IIFSA) to support new investment that will create sustainable job opportunities. The programme will be funded from 2007-08 to 2009-10.

Business Ready Programme for Indigenous Tourism

The Australian Government has allocated \$3.8 million over four years from 2004-05 to the Business Ready Programme for Indigenous Tourism (BRPIT). The programme is designed to assist existing and start-up Indigenous tourism businesses to develop the business skills and knowledge required to establish and run a commercially viable tourism operation. The programme is funding six business mentors across Australia to work directly with a portfolio of businesses to transfer skills to individuals in the businesses on all aspects of small business and the tourism industry.

Working in Partnership Programme

The Australian Government has provided \$2 million over four years to 2008-09 to foster and support effective partnerships between Indigenous communities and the mining industry. The programme is supporting effective partnerships in remote communities where there are very few alternative employment prospects. Activities under the programme include the publication of case studies highlighting effective partnerships and a series of local workshops in regional areas bringing stakeholders together to discuss the development of better relations and outcomes.

Export Market Development Grants Scheme

The Export Market Development Grants scheme (EMDG) is a key Australian Government assistance programme for current and aspiring exporters. The scheme aims to encourage small and medium sized Australian businesses to develop export markets by reimbursing up to 50 per cent of eligible export promotion expenses above a threshold of \$15,000. Eligible Australian businesses may claim up to a total of seven grants of a maximum of \$150,000 each.

Reflecting the Australian Government's changes to the scheme in 2003 to place greater focus on small and emerging exporters, 79 per cent of all 2005-06 grants were awarded to businesses with an annual income of \$5 million or less. Nearly a quarter of all grants were awarded to recipients from rural and regional Australia. Recognising the success and strong demand for the scheme, the Australian Government has extended its operation until 2010-11. Measures to simplify and enhance the capacity of the scheme will apply to applications received from 1 July 2007.

TradeStart Programme

In 2006-07 the Australian Government committed \$23.3 million over four years to extend the TradeStart network programme. Currently there are 52 offices operating across all states and territories to ensure that small and medium sized companies have access to export assistance wherever they are located in Australia.

The TradeStart network also ensures companies in regional Australia have access to services under Austrade's New Exporter Development Programme. It provides one-on-one advice to new exporters to help them realise their export potential and to succeed in international markets. TradeStart is delivered in partnership between AusTrade and local partners including chambers of commerce, private sector organisations, and state and territory governments. By leveraging Austrade's knowledge of international markets with its partners' local expertise, TradeStart is an effective way of helping companies into export.

Since its establishment, TradeStart has helped around 1800 new exporters achieve export sales in excess of \$745 million.

TRANSPORT: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

AusLink 2

The Australian Government will invest \$22.3 billion in Australia's land transport system from 2009-10 to 2013-14, under the second stage of its National Land Transport Plan—AusLink 2. AusLink 2 is the biggest investment in land transport infrastructure ever made by an Australian Government. It is 41 per cent larger than the current AusLink programme, which runs from 2004 to 2008-09. The Australian Government is now investing \$15.8 billion under the current programme from 2004 to June 2009, including \$250 million in extra funding that the Government will spend on AusLink Strategic Regional projects in 2006-07.

AusLink 2 will include \$16.8 billion over five years for projects on the AusLink National Network—22,500 km of roads and 14,000 km of intercapital rail lines. These projects will make it quicker, safer and cheaper to travel between our major cities and will make it easier for exporters to get their products to the docks.

Expenditure on maintenance of the road elements of the Network will increase by one-third to \$400 million a year.

The Government will announce details of AusLink 2 projects in due course. The projects will reflect the results of 24 AusLink corridor studies that the Australian Government is conducting with the states and territories. These studies will set out the strategic investment priorities to make our major transport links work more efficiently.

Under the AusLink 2 arrangements:

- the Roads to Recovery Programme will be extended until June 2014 with a 14 per cent increase to \$350 million a year from 1 July 2009;
- the Strategic Regional Programme will provide \$300 million across the five years of AusLink 2, building on the \$470 million provided under AusLink 1, including the additional \$250 million in the 2006-07 announcement in this budget; and
- the Black Spot Programme, which was due to end in June 2008, will now be extended. In AusLink 2 (from 1 July 2009), its funding will increase by one-third to \$60 million a year. For 2008-09, it will be maintained at the existing annual level of \$45 million.

ROADS TO RECOVERY PROGRAMME

The Australian Government will continue the AusLink Roads to Recovery programme until June 2014 and increase its funding by 14 per cent from June 2009. The programme

was scheduled to end in 2008–09. The Australian Government will increase its funding from \$307.5 million per year at present to \$350 million per year, from 2009–10.

The Roads to Recovery Programme provides local councils with extra funding to maintain and upgrade their road networks. Since the Government established the programme in 2001, councils have used it to build more than 25,000 projects on the roads that Australians use every day.

The funding increase will help offset the rising cost of road construction and enable councils to fix more local roads.

On top of this increased spending, in 2007–08 the Australian Government will provide local councils around Australia with \$537.7 million in grants identified for expenditure on local roads. These grants are part of the Government's untied funding for local government. Over the next five years to 2011–12, these local road grants are expected to total more than \$2.9 billion.

South Australian councils will also receive an additional \$13.5 million in 2007–08 in supplementary local road grants to compensate for the disadvantage they suffer under the distribution of the local road grants.

STRATEGIC REGIONAL PROGRAMME

The Australian Government increases its spending commitment under the AusLink Strategic Regional Programme to \$770 million. A key element is the fostering of stronger ties between the Australian Government and regional Australia, local government authorities, regional groups of councils, the private sector, community organisations and state and territory governments.

The Government has invested \$220 million in the programme in December 2006, allowing 107 projects to be funded. The programme received a \$250 million boost in 2006–07 in this Budget.

In addition, the Australian Government will provide an extra \$300 million through the AusLink Strategic Regional Programme to help local councils fund transport infrastructure projects that will boost their local economies and create jobs. Councils have to apply for this funding under the programme guidelines.

The extra \$300 million will be allocated in two \$150 million application rounds, held in 2009–10 and 2011–12.

BLACK SPOT PROGRAMME

The Australian Government will increase its targeted spending on fixing crash 'black spots' to save more lives on the nation's roads.

The 2007-08 Budget confirms that the Government will continue the AusLink Black Spot Programme until June 2014, with a 33 per cent increase in funding from 2009-10. The programme prevents approximately 500 casualty crashes a year. It had been scheduled to end in June 2008.

The Government will provide \$45 million in funding in 2007-08 and again in 2008-09 as part of its current AusLink Programme. This will be directed at various safety works such as roundabouts, crash barriers and streetlights where there have been serious crashes or where serious crashes are likely.

On 1 July 2009, annual programme spending increases to \$60 million a year from 2009-10 to 2013-14.

Funding for Remote Aerodromes

The Australian Government is providing \$22 million over four years from 2007-08 to 2010-11 under the Regional and Remote Aerodrome Funding Scheme to upgrade and maintain airstrips in regional and remote areas. This initiative will improve remote communities' access to essential services, and increase safety at remote and isolated aerodromes. The programme will also help the Royal Flying Doctor Service in providing assistance to people in remote areas with limited access to medical services.

The scheme will provide funding for such projects as:

- upgrade of airstrip services;
- installation of lighting and navigation equipment; and
- fencing projects to keep wildlife and livestock away from airstrips.

The scheme will be a competitive application based programme with most projects to be jointly funded by the Australian Government, state governments and the local community.

Strengthening regional aviation security

The Australian Government is providing \$15.4 million over four years, from 2007-08, to assist 26 regional airports with the introduction of security screening of checked baggage.

Building a Strong Future for Regional Australia

The \$36.5 million Regional Airport Funding Programme assists up to 150 regional airports to implement basic security measures required under the Aviation Transport Security regulatory regime. In 2007-08 work will continue to deliver upgrades to physical security at regional airports such as fencing, lighting and security alarm systems.

In August 2004 the Australian Government provided \$48 million for the Securing Our Regional Skies package which aims to improve regional airport and airline response preparedness to a change in aviation threat levels. The package consists of seven measures to enhance regional aviation security arrangements. The initiatives include:

- Australian Federal Police Protective Service Regional Rapid Deployment Teams to enhance response capacity for airports;
- joint training and exercise programmes for state and territory police;
- delivery of a metal detection hand-wand capability for 145 airports, to be implemented in the event of alert levels being raised;
- a trial of closed circuit television at selected regional airports;
- aviation security training for regional airline and airport staff;
- a targeted public awareness campaign to encourage the reporting of suspicious activity at regional airports; and
- funding for the installation of hardened cockpit doors for charter aircraft with 30 seats or more.

In 2007-08, the Australian Government will continue to work with aviation operators and law enforcement bodies to develop response capacity, capability and deterrence at regional aviation facilities.

TRANSPORT: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Tasmanian Passenger Vehicle and Freight Subsidy Schemes

The Australian Government has budgeted \$130.1 million in 2007-08 for rebates for shipping passenger vehicles and freight across the Bass Strait. The schemes acknowledge that people taking their cars to and from Tasmania must ship their vehicles by sea, and that Tasmanian shippers do not have the option of transporting goods interstate by road or rail. The Australian Government's subsidy schemes will continue to enhance tourism and trade opportunities between Tasmania and the mainland, and make a major difference to the ability of Tasmanian firms and operators to compete on an equal footing with their mainland counterparts.

Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme

The Australian Government is providing \$18.1 million from 2007-08 to 2010-11 under the Remote Air Services Subsidy (RASS) Scheme to subsidise the cost of air operators contracted to deliver a weekly passenger and freight service (including essential medical, food, educational and other services) to around 235 remote communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and Cape Barren Island in the Bass Strait. RASS services are provided through commercial air operators chosen through public tender.

Enroute Charges Rebate Scheme

The Australian Government will spend \$24 million over the next four years, commencing with \$6 million in 2007-08, to continue subsidising the enroute air traffic control charges paid by more than 35 regional airlines and other operators.

The subsidy has a vital role in supporting Australia's small airlines, which carry over 2.3 million passengers a year and connect Australia's regions to the major cities.

The subsidy also helps support aeromedical operators like the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the state Air Wings. It saves the Royal Flying Doctor Service over \$1 million per year, which is money they can spend on looking after people in remote areas.

Indian Ocean Territories

The Australian Government is improving infrastructure in the Indian Ocean Territories by constructing a deep water freight and passenger handling facility on

Cocos (Keeling) Islands and removing asbestos from Australian Government-owned buildings and infrastructure in these Territories.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS: ONGOING INITIATIVES

Veteran & Community Grants

Veteran & Community Grants provide funding to maintain and improve the independence and quality of life of veterans and war widows/widowers living in the community. The partnerships that develop between the veteran community and local community services through projects funded by Veteran & Community Grants improve veterans' access to services and provide a cost effective way to offer community organisations minimal funds for locally based services which benefit the veteran community. Approximately 50 per cent of the total funds available are directed to projects in rural and remote areas as part of the Australian Government's efforts to ensure that veterans and war widows in these areas do not miss out on services or assistance.

Rural and remote service delivery arrangements

In 2007-08, the Australian Government will continue funding for the Department of Veterans' Affairs programme of agency arrangements in rural and regional areas. During the year the Department will commence a review of options for the effective provision of information and community support to veterans in the short and longer term. Agency arrangements use other Australian Government, state and local organisations to deliver information and assistance to the veteran community in regional areas where the Department of Veterans' Affairs is unable to maintain a permanent full-time presence.

WATER: 2007-08 BUDGET INITIATIVES

\$10 billion plan to improve water management across the nation

The National Plan for Water Security is a bold new approach to ensure that rural water use is placed on a sustainable footing within the next decade. Building on the National Water Initiative, the plan will improve water efficiency and address over-allocation of water in rural Australia through targeted works in five key areas:

NATIONAL PLAN FOR WATER SECURITY – MODERNISING IRRIGATION IN AUSTRALIA

The Australian Government is providing funding to reduce the loss of water through leakage, evaporation and obtaining efficiencies through updating outmoded irrigation methods. The funds will also improve metering, monitoring and accounting of water and improve the efficiency of river flow and water storage operations. The efficiencies gained will be shared between farming communities and the environment for river and wetland health.

NATIONAL PLAN FOR WATER SECURITY – ADDRESSING OVER-ALLOCATION IN THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN

The Australian Government is providing funding to address over-allocation of water in the Murray Darling Basin and to improve security of entitlements and river health. This will involve the provision of structural adjustment assistance, with only modest amounts of water intended to be bought from willing sellers to achieve the required outcomes.

NATIONAL PLAN FOR WATER SECURITY – REFORMING THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN COMMISSION

The Australian Government is providing funding to reform the Murray Darling Basin Commission as an Australian Government agency with sole responsibility for water management functions in the Murray Darling Basin. The Commission will administer a basin-wide strategic plan setting sustainable diversion levels in the Murray Darling Basin, and set rules for water trading and charging regimes.

NATIONAL PLAN FOR WATER SECURITY – IMPROVING WATER INFORMATION (BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY)

The Australian Government is providing funding to develop the capacity to enable management, interpretation and free public access to water information, including forecasting and establishing comprehensive water accounts. The funds will also standardise information to support sustainable management of water resources.

NATIONAL PLAN FOR WATER SECURITY – NORTHERN AUSTRALIA AND THE GREAT ARTESIAN BASIN

The Australian Government is providing funding to examine the potential for future land and water development in Northern Australia. In addition, the Australian Government will provide funding to help ensure a sustainable future in the Great Artesian Basin through further investment. This builds on funding previously provided for the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative which caps old, free flowing bores and replaces open drains with pipes to reduce wastage and encourage better land and water management in the Basin.

Scouts Australia 100 Year Anniversary – Water Saving Infrastructure

The Australian Government is providing \$17.7 million in 2006-07 for rain water tanks and related water saving infrastructure in scout halls across Australia to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Scouts Australia. This will reduce the impact on local water supplies and raise awareness of wise water use.

WATER: ONGOING INITIATIVES

The Living Murray Initiative

The Living Murray Initiative was established to help improve the health of the River Murray. In 2004, the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council committed \$500 million (\$200 million from the Australian Government) over five years to recover an annual average of up to 500 gigalitres of water for environmental use at six icon sites. At the same time, the Council committed a complementary investment of \$150 million under the Living Murray Environmental Works and Measures Programme.

In the 2006-07 Budget, the Australian Government committed to a further \$500 million to bolster the capacity of the Murray Darling Basin Commission to accelerate the implementation of the Living Murray and other initiatives, and to complete essential works across the Basin that have been identified as necessary to ensure the river system is operating at optimal efficiency.

Australian Government Water Fund

The Australian Government will provide \$2 billion over six years from 2004-05 to 2009-10 to assist with the funding of practical, on-the-ground water solutions. The Australian Government Water Fund represents a major investment by the Australian Government in water infrastructure, improved knowledge and water management, and better practices in the stewardship of Australia's scarce water resources. The fund will benefit all Australians, including those in rural and regional areas. Investment under the fund will be made on the basis that it is consistent with, and helps to achieve, the objectives, outcomes and actions of the National Water Initiative.

There are three programmes under the Australian Government Water Fund:

- Water Smart Australia;
- Raising National Water Standards; and
- Community Water Grants.

WATER SMART AUSTRALIA

A total of \$1.6 billion will be provided to implement the Water Smart Australia programme. The programme will invest to accelerate the development and uptake of smart technologies and practices in water use across Australia. To gain greatest effect from these investments, competitive bidding will be the primary mechanism for allocating grants. Examples of the type of projects that could be eligible are outlined in

Building a Strong Future for Regional Australia

the policy statement, *Securing Australia's Water Future*, which was released by the Prime Minister in 2004. They include:

- improving river flows;
- on-farm water use efficiency improvements;
- desalination of water for use in cities and towns;
- recycling and reuse of stormwater and 'grey' water;
- more efficient storage facilities;
- alternatives to ocean outfalls and better management of sewage;
- improvements in irrigation infrastructure; and
- developing water efficient housing design.

This component of the Australian Government Water Fund is administered by the National Water Commission.

Projects funded under Water Smart Australia include \$167 million over six years towards the construction of the \$501 million Wimmera Mallee Pipeline. The project targets water savings of 103,000 megalitres by replacing 16,000 kilometres of open water channels with 8,000 kilometres of pipeline.

RAISING NATIONAL WATER STANDARDS

The Raising National Water Standards programme will invest \$200 million over six years in Australia's national capacity to measure, monitor and manage its water resources. These investments will be designed to help achieve National Water Initiative outcomes. Projects that could be eligible are outlined in the policy statement *Securing Australia's Water Future*. They include the following areas:

- facilitating a nationally consistent system for collecting and processing water data;
- strategic assessment of groundwater resources;
- working with local communities to improve the conservation of water systems with high environmental values through measures such as planning, voluntary conservation agreements and improved knowledge; and
- establishing and promoting the Water Efficiency Labelling Scheme for household appliances, and implementation of the Smart Water Mark regime for household gardens.

This component of the Australian Government Water Fund is administered by the National Water Commission.

Projects funded under the Raising National Water Standards Programme include \$7.4 million to improve understanding of the complex surface and groundwater interactions in the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) in South Australia and the Northern Territory. The project will:

- improve the security of the water resource;
- build the capacity of water managers and users to sustainably manage water allocations from the GAB; and
- enhance the management and protection of water dependent ecosystems.

COMMUNITY WATER GRANTS

The Australian Government Water Fund provides Community Water Grants to promote the wise use of water. A total of \$200 million is available from 2004-05 to 2007-08 for grants of up to \$50,000 each to save and protect water resources. A further \$200 million has been allocated over six years from 2007-08 for grants of up to \$50,000 for community groups to install water tanks and water efficient devices. This will reduce the use of mains water in urban and rural areas, sustain community amenities such as sporting fields and promote wise water use.

A total of \$118 million has been spent since the programme commenced. Funded projects are community oriented, have public benefits, and involve practical on-ground works to save or protect water resources. For example, the Australian Government has provided \$45,000 to the City of Bunbury in Western Australia for a new weather station to control irrigation, which will help save 50 million litres of water per year.