



REGIONAL AUSTRALIA: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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OVERVIEW

Regional Australia: Making a Difference

The Federal Government strongly believes that regional, rural and remote Australia has a bright and prosperous future. Through this Statement, the Federal Government renews its commitment to working in partnership with the people and communities of regional Australia to make 'the bush' a better place to live and work.

The Government's objective is to ensure that regional Australia's enormous contribution to national economic and social wellbeing is not only sustained and recognised, but also enhanced by ensuring regional people share in - to the maximum extent possible - the economic and social opportunities open to the nation as a whole.

Australia has long been renowned as a land of opportunity – arguably never more so than today, as our nation captures the benefits of a long period of growth sustained by the Federal Government's commitment to economic modernisation and responsible budgets. Continuing low inflation and interest rates are providing a secure platform for national development as Australia enjoys the fruits of tackling the challenges of economic reform.

It is now widely recognised, however, that the benefits of economic change have not flowed evenly across Australia. While many parts of non-metropolitan Australia are charging ahead, others are struggling to meet the challenges posed by globalisation and industry structural change. The Federal Government is determined, therefore, to work in partnership with country people, business and other spheres of government to help ensure 'the bush' has every opportunity to share in national economic prosperity.

The Government comes to this year's Budget with a solid record of achievement in delivering practical initiatives that are making a difference in regional Australia: in improving access to essential services such as health care and telecommunications, in addressing the challenges of sustainable natural resource management, and in improving the competitive advantages of our primary industries.

This Statement outlines the latest developments in a range of policies and programmes the Government has either put in place or enhanced, in response to the needs of regional Australia. It also details a series of new measures being taken in the coming financial year and beyond to help meet the unique challenges of living in regional Australia.

In October last year, the Government convened the Regional Australia Summit. More than 280 delegates met to develop a national appreciation of the challenges facing regional Australia. They discussed and debated a wide range of issues and concerns and, after three days, put a series of recommendations to Government on how to meet regional challenges.

Key challenges that Summit delegates identified as needing to be addressed included:

- the need for governments to be more flexible in designing and administering programmes to meet the unique and varying circumstances of different regions;
- the need for improved access to federal programmes and services as part of a sustained effort to make inroads into the service deficits country people experience in essential areas such as health, education and telecommunications;
- better coordination and cooperation between the different spheres of government and genuine opportunity for country people to have input into government decision-making processes;
- the improvement of physical infrastructure in regional areas to stimulate community and/or local industry development; and
- identifying opportunities for leadership development and community capacity building so communities are empowered to find solutions to the challenges they face.

Delegates to the Summit also examined and identified the roles that government, business and community sectors could each be expected to fulfil to achieve a better future for regional Australia. In doing this, delegates clearly identified that meeting the challenges above was a shared responsibility.

At the conclusion of the Summit, a Steering Committee was established, chaired by Professor John Chudleigh, to advise the Government on implementation strategies to deliver the outcomes from the Summit.

In its interim report, released in April, the Steering Committee recommended the adoption of an aspirational, guiding vision for the future development of regional Australia to have as a national goal:

A strong and resilient regional Australia which, by 2010, has the resources, recognition and skills to play a pivotal role in building Australia's future and is able to turn uncertainty and change into opportunity and prosperity.

The Federal Government embraces this vision and reaffirms its commitment to working to realise it in partnership with regional communities, the private sector and State, Territory and local governments. We do not pretend that this can be achieved overnight. We agree with the Steering Committee's view that making significant inroads into regional disadvantage must be a priority for the Government over the next 10 years.

The Government has already laid the foundations for this approach through its Regional Australia Strategy and has built on it through initiatives announced during the Summit and subsequently. Details are outlined in this Statement. In this Budget, the Government has announced major new initiatives tailored specifically for the

regions in health, communications, education and for agricultural industries. They reflect the Government's agreement with the Steering Committee's assessment that there are three strategic areas that require action: equity of services in regional communities; economic and business development; and community empowerment.

EQUITY OF SERVICES

Disparities in programme and service delivery in regional Australia are being addressed through a range of existing programmes discussed in this Statement. The recently announced Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, with a key emphasis on regional Australia, will play an important role in improving services in regional areas. Other examples include Regional Health Service Centres and measures to attract doctors to regional areas; the Rural Transaction Centres Programme; and major telecommunications initiatives such as Networking the Nation.

In this Budget, the Government has outlined a major new regional health strategy. There are also initiatives in the Budget to improve access to Youth Allowance for the children of farmers and small regional business operators, as well as boosting financial support for people in isolated areas educating their children. Recently, the Government announced enhanced support for families in regional areas with new initiatives in marriage and relationship support and counselling, and in-home childcare. These initiatives together represent a major contribution towards the shared responsibility of improving access to services in regional areas.

ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Support measures to help communities meet the challenges of industry structural change and to help diversify their economic base are receiving particular attention. The *Agriculture – Advancing Australia* package is being extended and enhanced, while Invest Australia is taking a lead in helping regions develop their own investment strategies and promote themselves to international investors. The major project facilitation process is bringing new investment to the regions. Area Consultative Committees have substantial resources at their disposal to implement employment-generating projects at the local level, including through business incubators.

In addition, the Government has, budgetary circumstances permitting, increased investment in key strategic infrastructure to improve regional economic performance. Finally, the Government is currently considering its position on natural resource management, beyond the current life of the Natural Heritage Trust. This will be the subject of a Statement later this year.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The Government is committed to helping regional communities develop and enhance their capacity to determine their own future. This is being achieved through support for community/industry planning and innovation and leadership development under existing programmes such as Rural Plan, the Rural Communities Programme and the Regional Assistance Programme. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy will also play an important role in community empowerment. In addition, the Government is also working to improve the delivery of its programmes and information services, with better coordination and less duplication between agencies and between governments. Provision has also been made for a new focus on regional areas experiencing economic stagnation and/or decline. The details of this programme are still to be finalised, and will be announced later in the year.

COMMONWEALTH ROLE

The Federal Coalition Government has built, and will maintain, a significant role in regional issues. We have already implemented a whole-of-Government approach to delivering programmes and services through the Regional Australia Strategy. Earlier this year, the Prime Minister made the commitment that the Government would maintain key individual services in regional Australia and ensure the overall level of Commonwealth services provided to regional areas was not diminished.

Recognising the diversity of regional communities, the Government has become more flexible in its approach to addressing regional issues. It is working towards developing partnerships that engage all spheres of government, communities and business to meet the challenges that face people living in regional Australia.

One partnership announced at the Summit was significant financial support to underpin the establishment of the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR). The Foundation provides an opportunity for business, government and communities to work together through a philanthropic foundation to improve the capacity of communities to respond positively to the challenges facing regional, rural and remote Australia. Through this partnership, support will be given to communities to develop and diversify their activities, whether it is through a regional capacity-building programme, through information and training initiatives or through the provision of grants for rural development projects. All activities supported by the Foundation will work towards improving the social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing of regional and rural Australia.

Partnerships between the Federal Government and State and local governments are also being developed. The Federal Government hosted a meeting in March 2000 of Federal and State ministers with responsibility for regional development, and the Australian Local Government Association. Ministers strongly held the view that regional and rural Australia needs the sustained support of all spheres of government to help create opportunity and prosperity.

Outcomes from the ministerial meeting included agreement to develop a clear framework for cooperation between governments in relation to regional development. Ministers also agreed to explore opportunities to work together in areas such as shopfront service delivery, one-stop shops and regional leadership development. The emphasis will be on streamlining the provision of government services and processes through better coordination and less duplication. A Taskforce has been set up to report mid-year to ministers on how to implement the agreements reached at the meeting.

Through this renewed emphasis on partnerships and building on models already used, such as the partnership agreements under the Natural Heritage Trust, the Government aims to:

- improve access to, and delivery of, programmes and services in regional areas;
- foster employment and business initiatives;
- enhance regional infrastructure;
- improve family and community lifestyles; and
- achieve sustainable natural resource management.

SUMMARY

The Regional Australia Summit has been instrumental in focusing attention on issues of concern in regional Australia. People in regional Australia want governments to work cooperatively with communities and with each other to achieve better results. They want genuine opportunities for input into government decision-making processes and they want government programmes and services to be flexible enough to meet local needs. People in regional Australia have made it clear they want long-term commitments from governments, and inroads made into the service deficits in essential areas such as health, education, telecommunications and infrastructure.

The Federal Government acknowledges that there is a clear role for the Commonwealth in encouraging regional development and coordination beyond ensuring the national economic fundamentals are sound.

The Government recognises it is in the national interest to help regional Australia be prosperous and viable. The Government is forging new partnerships for growth between regional communities and all spheres of government. It will be a time to address regional disadvantage, but without risking the fiscal discipline that delivers budget surpluses.

During the course of this decade, the Government is determined to see significant progress made in reducing the gap in economic opportunity between the city and the country. By the end of the decade, we aim to have achieved greater equity in service delivery for people living in regional Australia.

This Ministerial Statement provides the framework for the Government in fulfilling its role in helping to build a better future for regional Australia.

REGIONAL BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Budget measures totalling \$1.8 billion over the next four years will be provided for programmes and services targeted to regional Australia. The initiatives highlighted in this section are covered in more detail in the main body of this Statement, as well as in the Budget papers. A financial summary of highlights is to be found at Appendix 1. Budget highlights for 2000-01 include:

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

The Budget delivers a \$309.4 million extension of the *Agriculture - Advancing Australia* package over four years, originally unveiled by the Government in September 1997. Key features include:

- a \$167.5 million programme, *Skilling Farmers for the Future*, that combines the existing *FarmBis* and *Property Management Planning* programmes to help farmers improve their skills in business and natural resource management;
- a \$111.2 million extension and enhancement of the *Farm Family Restart Scheme*;
- a new \$18.2 million two-year on-farm innovation and diversification pilot programme to encourage the adoption of new technology/production techniques;
- a \$22.3 million boost to Australia's capacity to protect plant and animal health against exotic pests and diseases; and
- a new *Dairy Regional Assistance Programme* which will provide \$15 million in 2000-01 and for the following two years to ameliorate the potential impact of dairy industry deregulation on regional communities dependent on the industry.

COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS

The Budget contains initiatives designed to ensure that Australia's communications and information technology sectors continue to take up the opportunities offered by new technologies, to create new employment, educational, social and entertainment opportunities for all Australians - regardless of where they live. Initiatives include:

- an extensive programme of support for regional commercial television stations to assist them in meeting the costs of rolling out digital television in non-metropolitan areas. Up to \$260 million will be spent over 13 years, including \$22.6 million in 2000-01; and
- a \$10 million *Regional Communications Partnership* with the new owner of the *National Transmission Network* to assist community-based self-help retransmission groups obtain access to network sites in regional and remote areas by subsidising the commercial fees payable. These groups then retransmit

commercial and national television and radio services to smaller communities that would not otherwise have had access. The Federal Government and the new owner of the Network are each contributing \$5 million.

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

The Budget delivers on a key initiative for people in regional, rural and remote areas - alleviating the costs of educating their children. Greater support for educating children in isolated areas will be provided by increasing the Assistance for Isolated Children's Scheme basic boarding allowance, second home allowance and distant education allowance, as well as the ABSTUDY School Fees Allowance.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Budget confirms funding of \$240 million over four years for the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, about half of which will be spent in regional Australia. The Strategy will establish new partnerships to strengthen families and communities and will improve access to key services for regional and rural Australians. Measures in this Budget include:

- the Stronger Families Fund;
- early intervention, parenting and family relationships support;
- greater flexibility and choice in child care; and
- a longitudinal study of Australian children.

The Budget also delivers improved access to the Youth Allowance for student children of farmers and small business operators. The discount applying to farm and small businesses' assets under the assets test is increased from 50 to 75 per cent.

HEALTH AND AGED CARE

The Budget delivers a \$562.1 million package over four years that provides a comprehensive response to the health disadvantages faced by people in regional, rural and remote Australia. It will deliver more doctors and better health services through:

- changes to general practitioner (GP) vocational training to favour rural areas;
- an expansion of the Regional Health Services Programme;
- new scholarship schemes for medical students who agree to practice in rural areas;
- a medical specialist outreach programme taking specialists to the bush;
- support for rural general practitioners ;
- support for the employment of community-based, allied health professionals;
- a new programme targeting chronic disease in rural areas;
- a new Rural Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance to support existing pharmacies, as well as start-up assistance for new pharmacies in areas of need;

- a new support programme to help secure the viability of small rural private hospitals; and
- grants to improve the viability of small rural aged care facilities.

PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

The Budget provides a major enhancement of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme by the addition of 1,500 places in 2000-01 for regional and remote areas.

TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL SERVICES

Equitable access to services, and increasing recognition of the significance of regional Australia to the nation's future, are features of this Budget. New measures include:

- \$2 million over three years for Australia's Year of the Outback – 2002, which will celebrate the ethos of the bush through a major celebration of outback history, culture and achievements in 2002;
- an additional \$2.9 million each year to ensure that service delivery standards for the Indian Ocean territories, where possible, are comparable with similar communities on the mainland; and
- \$22 million in 2000-01 (\$69 million over four years) to upgrade infrastructure required for the delivery of mainland-equivalent services in the Indian Ocean territories to help foster the social and economic capacity of these communities.

TREASURY

Australian Taxation Office

A new fuel grant scheme will cost around \$500 million over the next four years which will benefit consumers of petrol and diesel in non-metropolitan and remote areas. Under this scheme:

- a grant will be paid to fuel retailers for sales to consumers in non-metropolitan areas with a higher rate of grant provided for sales in remote areas; and
- in addition to the excise reduction, the scheme will ensure that prices for petrol and diesel in non-metropolitan and remote areas need not rise with the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax.

EQUITY OF SERVICES

Family services

STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

The Government has committed an additional \$240 million for the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. A significant amount of funding will go toward strengthening families in regional Australia through the establishment of new partnerships. The Strategy will help address many of the challenges faced by regional and rural families including isolation, economic hardship and a lack of community resources. Local solutions will be developed in partnership with local organisations, volunteers, businesses, communities, families, individuals and all spheres of government. A key feature of the Strategy will be its flexibility in meeting and delivering tailored solutions for regional communities.

The Strategy responds to the themes expressed at the Regional Australia Summit and will improve access to key services for regional and rural Australians. Measures in this Budget will work to strengthen families by investing in prevention and early intervention, including making family counselling more widely available in regional and rural areas. In addition, the Strategy will include a leadership development programme and a youth cadetship programme to help strengthen communities by investing in community capacity to solve problems and to grasp opportunities.

The Strategy encompasses nine new measures that will commence in 2000-01. Five of these measures are outlined below, with the other four - Potential Leadership in Local Communities, National Skills Development for Volunteers, Local Solutions to Local Problems and Can Do Community - outlined in the Community Empowerment chapter.

Stronger Families Fund

A Stronger Families Fund will be established, with funding of \$40 million over four years, to encourage communities to develop new and better ways to strengthen families. The emphasis will be on early childhood and parenting and on early intervention and prevention approaches. Projects will be established in a number of communities across Australia.

Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationships Support

The Government has committed \$47.3 million over four years for this initiative which will strengthen families. It will provide services and activities such as parenting support and playgroups, marriage and relationship education and family counselling,

with a focus on regional Australia. It will also assist legal, medical and other professionals in their support for families. This will respond to emerging needs, including those identified through the Stronger Families Fund.

Greater flexibility and choice in child care

The Child Care Programme supports more than 2,000 services that provide 80,000 places in regional and rural areas. Flexible access to child-care facilities is vital in supporting families living and working in those areas. Adequate provision of child-care services will create a positive effect on regional and rural economies, on employment and on social interaction.

The Government has committed \$65.4 million over four years for a package of measures to improve the ability of families to access and choose child care that meets their needs. The measures support parents balancing paid work, education, community activities and parenting responsibilities through flexible and responsive child care. More than 7,000 new child care places will be provided.

Shift workers, families working non-standard hours, those who have a sick child or who live in rural areas without access to care will particularly gain through this initiative. The choice of child-care services for families will be increased through the introduction of a subsidy for in-home care and incentives for regional and rural service provision.

Longitudinal study of Australian children

For the first time, a national Longitudinal Study of Australian Children will be conducted. This eight-year study will be an invaluable tool in the development of Government policy on early childhood and effective early intervention and prevention strategies in the areas of health, education, child care and family support. Funding of \$6.1 million over four years is being committed to this study.

Communications strategy for Stronger Families and Communities

The Government will provide \$8 million over four years for a multi-media communications strategy to promote the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to the broader community, and to promote local partnerships that support families in their communities and workplaces.

INCREASED ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES

From July 2000, regional families will receive increased assistance. Various forms of assistance currently delivered through Centrelink or the tax system will be replaced by Family Tax Benefit, Parts A and B and will provide assistance worth over \$2.4 billion each year.

Part A will provide families with help towards the costs of children. An extra \$140 a year per child is available under Part A. An extra \$350 a year is available for single income families with a child under five through Part B. In addition, the level of income at which assistance begins to become tested will be substantially increased, and families will also be able to keep more of every dollar they earn above the free area.

The Family Allowance assets test will be abolished. This will benefit low-income families with high assets, especially farmers, as they will no longer have to apply under special hardship rules. The new system will have one set of rules administered by a single agency, the Family Assistance Office, which is a joint Centrelink, Australian Taxation Office and Health Insurance Commission venture. Over half of the 550 Family Assistance Office sites are in regional and rural areas.

INCREASE IN YOUTH ALLOWANCE FAMILY ASSETS LIMITS

The 2000-01 Budget provides for an increase in the discount for business assets for businesses, including farms, from 50 per cent to 75 per cent under the Youth Allowance family assets test. The cost of this measure will be \$131.6 million over four years, \$18.5 million in 2000-01.

This measure will financially assist families to keep young people in education to the end of secondary school and support them to go on to higher education or training. This will improve the country's skills base and, ultimately, assist the competitiveness of Australia's primary industries.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYMENT PROJECTS PARTICIPANT ENTITLEMENTS

As a result of changes to the Social Security Act, Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) participants are now able to access additional benefits, such as health care and pensioner concession cards, rent assistance, pharmaceutical and telephone allowances, family allowance and bereavement payments.

Eligible participants also receive a CDEP Participant Supplement payment of \$20 each fortnight, similar to payments available to Work for the Dole participants. This Supplement is being paid retrospectively with effect from 20 March 1999. The measures also introduces a more uniform treatment of CDEP wages for new lone-parent participants.

CENTRELINK: SERVICES TO REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Centrelink is the Commonwealth's primary service delivery agency, with responsibility for administering an extensive range of payments and services to individuals across Australia.

In the past 18 months, Centrelink has introduced over 160 new service delivery outlets in regional and rural locations. Services specific to regional and rural areas include:

- 54 per cent or 166 of the 307 Customer Service Centre offices are located in regional areas;
- sixteen Centrelink Call Centres (out of a total of 25) employing over 2,000 staff are located in regional centres;
- a total of 314 contracted community based agents in rural and remote locations (over 65 of which are partnerships with State governments and 141 are specifically targeted at assisting Indigenous customers);
- participation in seven of the 10 Rural Transaction Centres opened since October 1999;
- approximately 140 mobile and visiting services to small or remote towns, and a number of remote visiting teams servicing isolated Indigenous communities; and
- a range of specialist officers providing specific advice tailored to the needs of regional and rural communities.

Centrelink makes use of available technology to provide an efficient service to rural customers and has been participating in a multimedia payphone trial which covers 10 rural locations and is running from March to June 2000.

The Rural CD, introduced in December 1999, helps agents to deliver Centrelink services and products. It contains up-to-date information on Centrelink payments and services as well as a range of printable forms, information and fact sheets.

In the 1999-2000 Budget, funding was announced for the establishment of two Rural Call Centres in Maryborough (Queensland) and Port Augusta (South Australia). The Maryborough Call Centre was opened in February 2000 and the Port Augusta Call Centre is to be opened later this year.

Child Support Agency

From 24 January 2000, the Child Support Agency (CSA), in partnership with Centrelink, began services to its clients from 20 Centrelink offices across Australia. These Regional Service Centres will significantly enhance the access which parents, particularly those in regional Australia, will have to CSA services.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, announced by the Prime Minister at the Heads of Government National Domestic Violence Summit in November 1997, is underpinned by \$25.3 million from the Federal Government (from January 1998 to

June 2001). One of the key themes of Partnerships is 'helping people in rural and remote communities'. A number of current Partnerships projects are being implemented in regional areas, including projects providing information and referral services to women and children escaping domestic violence, and addressing family violence in Indigenous communities.

In 1999-2000, the Government committed a further \$25 million to June 2003 to renew Partnerships Against Domestic Violence and to build on its success to achieve more effective prevention of domestic violence across Australia. It will contribute to the strengthening of families and communities, with a focus on community education, children affected by domestic violence, perpetrators of domestic violence and family violence in Indigenous communities. Helping those affected by domestic violence in rural and remote areas will continue to be a theme in projects undertaken with the new funding.

Rural Domestic Violence Programme

The Rural Domestic Violence Programme, operated by the Department of Transport and Regional Services, is part of the Government's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence initiative. \$534,000 has been allocated over three years (July 1998 to June 2001).

By mid-2000, the Department plans to publish and disseminate the findings of a literature review that will consolidate existing data and examine the nature of domestic violence in regional, rural and remote areas. The Department will also manage a targeted grants programme, which will document successful local strategies and good practice case studies on preventing or reducing the incidence of domestic violence in regional, rural and remote areas. Case studies from this programme will be included in another publication, to be released during 2000-01.

LEGAL AND FAMILY LAW

Children's contact services

In the 1999-2000 Budget, new funding of \$15.6 million over four years was announced to establish 25 new contact services that would assist separated families to manage difficult child contact arrangements better. The needs analysis which has been conducted in this programme has resulted in 23 out of the 25 new services being directed to regional and rural Australia. The tendering for these services is well advanced and new children's contact services will be operational later this year.

Primary dispute resolution

The 1999-2000 Budget announced new funding of \$15.7 million over three years for additional primary dispute resolution services, with particular attention to regional and rural Australia. The first phase of implementing this programme incorporates

setting up local and regional partnerships to facilitate and support inter-agency and cross-disciplinary collaboration in family dispute management. These programmes will be implemented later this year.

Law by telecommunications

During 1999-2000, \$3.1 million was allocated over three years to establish a national telephone hotline and Internet site that would provide ready access to information and advice about family law and child support matters. This project is now being integrated with the 1998-99 initiative of establishing the Rural, Regional and Remote Legal Advice Telephone Service. This integration will maximise the benefits of both initiatives to women and men across Australia needing legal assistance, and will ensure the best possible delivery. The service will offer referral to counselling, mediation and other primary dispute resolution services.

Community legal services

The Commonwealth Community Legal Services Programme has established five new community legal services in high-need regional centres. Additional funding of \$3.6 million over three years has been provided for this initiative. The centres are located in Broken Hill (New South Wales), Gippsland (Victoria), Kalgoorlie (Western Australia), Mount Gambier and Riverland (South Australia). The additional funding also provides for outreach services in the Northern Territory to be provided from Darwin. The initiative brings community legal services to regional centres which previously had no access to these services.

Health and aged care

REGIONAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

The Federal Government is committed to improving access to health and aged care services for rural, regional and remote communities. The Budget introduces an extensive and integrated package of measures designed to provide more doctors and better health services in these areas, at a cost of \$562.1 million over four years.

This package will increase the number of general practitioners and specialists working in rural and regional Australia in the short term, and provides for this increase to continue into the future. Incentives will be provided for medical graduates to undertake their vocational training in rural and regional Australia, immediately increasing the supply of qualified medical practitioners working in these areas.

Better services will be available in rural and regional areas, through a new focus on allied health professionals, chronic disease and increased health and aged care infrastructure with more regional health services and support to ensure the ongoing

viability of bush nursing, small community and other small regional non-government hospitals.

Increasing the number of new general practitioner registrars

This measure, worth \$102.1 million over four years, will significantly increase the number of general practitioners in regional and rural areas, resulting in increased access to medical services and continuity of care.

The number of places for vocational training will increase by 50 per year, and the distribution of these vocational training places will also be changed to increase services in rural areas.

More allied health services

Many regional and rural communities lack the range of allied health services that are readily available in metropolitan areas, and many doctors who are already overcommitted provide services that allied health professionals could readily provide.

The Budget provides \$49.5 million over four years to increase the range of allied health services available to rural and regional communities, including practice nurses, psychologists and podiatrists.

Funding will be provided to employ allied health professionals to meet locally identified needs so that communities can access a wide range of services, and to complement the skills of local doctors.

Providing rural specialists through an outreach programme

A contributing factor to poorer health for many regional and rural Australians is lack of access to specialist medical services. This initiative will allow many regional and rural people to receive specialist services in their own communities, rather than having to travel long distances.

The Federal Budget provides \$48.4 million over four years for an outreach programme for specialist services. This includes incentives and/or travel costs for specialists to conduct outreach speciality work and to act as mentors for local health professionals to help them increase their skills. This will ensure that when specialist services are not directly available, regional and rural communities will have access to the skills and services required to meet their health needs.

This programme will be implemented in collaboration with the States and Territories, as well as the specialist colleges, divisions of general practice and Rural Workforce Agencies. The Commonwealth will take on a leadership role to support the availability of specialist services through the outreach programme.

Workforce support for rural general practitioners

The Budget provides \$10.2 million over four years for providing support to rural doctors in their regions, particularly those who are newly arrived.

The rural divisions of general practice will be resourced to expand their role to attract and keep general practitioners in areas of need. The support will include professional and family support, links with other health professionals, mentoring of medical students and continuing medical education.

Additional university departments of rural health and clinical schools

This initiative builds on the successes of the existing Commonwealth-supported regional clinical training school at Wagga Wagga, and the seven university departments of rural health.

The Budget provides \$117.6 million to establish nine new clinical schools in regional and rural areas and three new university departments of rural health.

This measure will strengthen the regional and rural focus in medical training, increase opportunities for medical students to complete training in regional and rural service delivery, encourage country students to pursue a career in rural medicine, and improve coordination of regional and rural placements for students and the quality of the experience gained.

It will increase the number of health professionals in regional and rural areas where clinical schools and university departments of rural health are located, and provides support and continuing education opportunities for existing health professionals in the area.

Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) reimbursement

This measure will increase the number of medical graduates willing to work in regional and rural areas, with communities benefiting from a corresponding increase in their access to local medical services.

The Federal Budget provides \$4.3 million over four years for graduating medical students who are willing to commit to regional practice to 'work off' their HECS debt in a designated regional area. One fifth of HECS debt will be foregone for each year worked in designated regional areas and the interest of the HECS debt will be foregone after five years work.

Scholarships for medical students to practice in rural areas

The Government will provide \$32.4 million over four years to create a total of 100 scholarships worth \$20,000 per year which will be offered to new medical students each year in return for their commitment to practice in regional and rural areas for at least six years after graduating.

Students who accept the scholarships will be issued with a restricted Medicare provider number for the six-year period. They will only be eligible to charge for and receive a rebate for medical services in urban areas after they have met their obligations.

Enhanced Rural Australian Medical Undergraduate Scholarships (RAMUS)

The Government will provide \$8 million over four years to expand the successful RAMUS scheme, supporting rural undergraduate medical students who have completed their secondary education in a rural area. It will also result in a greater number of medical graduates entering rural practice.

This measure doubles the number of RAMUS scholarships, bringing the total number of students receiving scholarships to almost 400 each year. These scholarships provide financial assistance towards the cost of accommodation, living and travel expenses.

In the longer term this initiative is expected to result in an increase in the number of doctors entering rural practice. Evidence suggests that medical graduates originally from regional and rural areas are more likely to return to practice in those areas once they have completed their training.

Getting more health services into regional Australia

The successful and innovative Regional Health Services Programme is to be substantially expanded, with a Budget allocation of \$68.9 million providing for at least 85 additional services to be established nationally over the next four years.

The Regional Health Services Programme recognises that no two communities are alike, so that there is no 'one size fits all' answer, therefore requiring local solutions to be tailored to local priorities. This Programme works with regional and rural communities to identify local priorities and develop and support integrated services to address these priorities. A wide range of services can be supported under the Programme, including community health care, child health services, substance misuse and abuse counselling, mental health and aged care.

Getting more pharmacy services into regional Australia

Pharmacies play a key role in maintaining the health of all Australians.

As part of this year's Budget, there will be greater access to quality pharmacy services in regional and rural areas. The Government will provide an additional \$41.6 million over four years to maintain and improve access to pharmacy services in rural and remote areas.

A number of new payments to pharmacists will replace the Isolated Pharmacy Allowance and the Remote Pharmacy Allowance. These new payments will be higher than current allowances and will encourage pharmacists to operate in communities in need and ensure they can remain economically viable over time. They will provide support for pharmacists who provide medications to Aboriginal Health Services in remote areas and to promote Quality Use of Medicines to these communities.

In addition, there will be a series of new pharmacy workforce development activities, including locum placement arrangements and rural pharmacy scholarships.

First-class regional hospitals

Funding of \$30.3 million over four years will be spent on revitalising bush nursing, community and other small, regional non-government hospitals.

This will give communities continued access to high-quality private health services and ensure they have a choice in their health care.

Under this initiative, hospitals may decide to re-structure their facilities to make them more viable and relevant to community needs, such as multi-purpose centres and aged-care facilities.

Combating chronic disease in regional Australia

The Government is concerned that death and disability from chronic disease is higher in regional and rural communities, particularly among Indigenous people.

To combat this, \$14.2 million over four years has been allocated to assist regional and rural communities to prevent and manage diseases such as asthma, heart disease, stroke, renal failure, Type 2 diabetes and preventable injuries.

Services for rural, older Australians

The Budget provides \$30.8 million to help ensure that older people living in regional and rural communities have access to quality, appropriate aged care facilities where and when they need it.

Too often, older people in regional and rural areas have to travel substantial distances to receive care. The Adjustment Grants for Small Rural Aged Care, comprising capital and viability funding, aim to redress this by assisting smaller facilities to improve their services and remain open.

The capital grants will assist with building new services to boost the number of aged care places available and will allow existing aged care services to expand and upgrade their buildings.

The viability funding recognises the higher day-to-day operation costs of aged care services in regional and rural areas. Around 180 regional and rural facilities currently receive viability funding. This funding will increase the support those facilities receive, and provide viability assistance to more facilities.

This important initiative will provide quality services to frail and older Australians in their local area, close to the comfort and support of their families and friends.

SERVICE DELIVERY

The Government is committed to improving access to health and aged care services for regional and rural communities, across Australia. This is demonstrated by ongoing major investment in meeting the health needs of Australians through the Medicare, Pharmaceutical Benefits, and Aged Care programmes.

During 1999-2000, estimated total Federal Government expenditure on rural and remote health and aged care is over \$6.2 billion. This represents approximately 26.8 per cent of the estimated \$23.9 billion the Government will spend on health and aged care in 1999-2000. Aged-care expenditure is expected to account for more than \$1 billion of the total.

The bulk of the remaining \$5.2 billion funds mainstream programmes such as medical and pharmaceutical benefits, and approximately \$279.6 million in 1999-2000 is directed to specific rural and remote health programmes and initiatives. Of this, \$99.5 million is allocated to workforce programmes and \$54 million to initiatives targeting health services and support programmes. A further \$107 million comprises Indigenous-specific initiatives in rural and remote areas.

NATIONAL RADIOTHERAPY SINGLE MACHINE UNIT TRIAL

An innovative system of radiotherapy service delivery for rural people is to be trialed in three locations in Victoria using single machine units. This is based on a hub and spoke service delivery model whereby rural single machine unit radiotherapy services are linked to major metropolitan services, with an aim of ensuring standards of professional and service quality are delivered.

The trial will be undertaken at a cost of \$9.7 million over four years and seeks to test the extent to which single machine units will improve access to and use of radiotherapy services without compromising quality of care. The trial will also investigate the cost-effectiveness and long-term financial viability of single machine services. The costs of this trial are to be shared between the Federal Government and the Victorian Government. It will be subject to a rigorous evaluation and will contribute to future Federal Government policy on single machine units.

SUBSIDISATION OF THE ACCREDITATION FEE FOR SMALL RESIDENTIAL AGED-CARE FACILITIES

The accreditation of residential aged-care facilities ensures continuous improvement, both in the enhancement of the level of care provided and in the improvement of business practices.

The accreditation fee structure has been developed to take account of the diversity within the industry and to reflect the costs of the assessments provided. On average, the fee for accreditation represents less than 1 per cent of facilities' annual incomes. To ensure that the fee for accreditation is less than 1 per cent of all facilities' annual incomes, the Government will pay the fee for facilities with 19 or fewer places, and a tapered fee subsidy for facilities with between 20 and 25 places. The Government will provide \$6.3 million over four years for this measure which largely benefits smaller rural and remote service providers.

EARLY DETECTION OF BOWEL CANCER

Over the next four years, more than \$7 million will be invested in improving knowledge of the early detection of bowel cancer.

Bowel cancer screening will be offered to 50,000 people aged between 50 and 75 years. A pilot programme will test the feasibility of a general screening programme for that age population in both urban and rural settings.

The pilot will focus on the efficacy of the screening protocols in order to validate reduction in mortality and to demonstrate cost effectiveness of screening. It will also examine the practical issues surrounding implementation: recruitment for screening, delivery and community acceptance of the tests, payment and funding, supporting infrastructure for a national effort and data collection and monitoring.

Screening programmes for cervical and breast cancers were introduced nationally a decade ago and this measure will build on the experience of those two programmes. The outcomes of the pilot will inform consideration of Australia-wide bowel cancer screening.

VETERANS

Thirty-one per cent of entitled veterans and war widows live in regional, rural and remote Australia. Improving their health status continues to be of prime importance and the Government has announced the following measures.

Response to the findings of the Vietnam Veterans' Morbidity (Health) Study

The package of benefits in response to the findings of the Vietnam Veterans' Morbidity (Health) Study has a broad range of treatment and preventative measures targeting the health of veterans and their families. Much of the package is based on increasing accessibility and availability of services, which will have a direct impact on veterans living in rural and remote Australia.

The satellite broadcast on 28 March 2000, *Family Dysfunction and Suicide in the Vietnam Veteran Community*, a pre-budget initiative, was primarily designed to educate and inform health professionals throughout rural and remote Australia on suicide identification and treatment issues specific to the veteran population. It is envisaged that this broadcast will act as a catalyst for many of the preventative health initiatives in the package, aimed at veterans, their partners and children. In total, the package includes over 20 separate initiatives and represents an additional \$32 million commitment over the next four years to the health and welfare of Australia's veteran community. These initiatives will be implemented progressively from 1 July 2000.

Education and training

INCREASED ASSISTANCE FOR ISOLATED CHILDREN

Rural and remote Australian families, whose children do not have reasonable access to an appropriate government school, will benefit from increases of \$16.4 million over four years to 2003-04 under the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme and the comparable ABSTUDY School Fees Allowance, for students who have to live away from home to attend secondary school.

The AIC Scheme provides funding to help rural families meet the costs associated with boarding arrangements, setting up a second family home or study via distance education, to ensure that their children's educational outcomes improve over time. The Scheme has been allocated approximately \$13.8 million in additional funding over four years.

- The Basic Boarding Allowance will increase from \$3,539 to \$3,893, while the Additional Boarding Allowance will be maintained at current levels. Both of these allowances will continue to be indexed annually in line with inflation.

- The Second Home Allowance will increase from \$2,500 to \$3,893.
- The Distance Education Allowance will increase from \$1,000 to \$1,052 for primary students and \$1,500 to \$1,579 for secondary students.
- From 2001, the Second Home Allowance and Distance Education Allowance will be, for the first time, annually increased in line with inflation to ensure that the additional funding is not eroded over time.

To ensure parity is maintained with the AIC's boarding allowances, the relevant component of ABSTUDY School Fees Allowance will also be increased to the same amount, from the basic maximum of \$3,539 to \$3,893, and will continue to be indexed in future years. This component of the ABSTUDY School Fees Allowance helps those families whose secondary school-aged students have to live away from home to attend school. The additional component of this allowance will be maintained at its current level. The total cost of the increase will be nearly \$2.7 million over four years.

The revised rates will take effect from 1 January 2001.

NEW APPRENTICESHIPS – WORKFORCE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Significant growth has been achieved in the number of New Apprenticeships in Australia, from 143,700 in 1996 to over 250,000 at the end of September 1999. Over one-third of New Apprenticeships are located in regional and rural Australia.

The Government will continue to provide targeted and flexible support through the New Apprenticeships Workforce Skills Development Programme. During 2000-01, \$22.6 million will be provided, \$27.2 million in 2001-02, \$30.1 million in 2002-03 and \$29.2 million in 2003-04.

Rural and Regional New Apprenticeship Incentive

This incentive boosts skills and opportunities for young people in regional and rural Australia, in particular by providing an additional progression incentive of \$1,000 to employers who progress New Apprentices to higher skill levels in trades and occupations experiencing skill shortages. For 2000-01, expenditure on this incentive is expected to be in the order of \$6.6 million.

COUNTRY AREAS PROGRAMME

The Country Areas Programme is continuing to improve the educational opportunities, participation, learning outcomes and personal development of rural and isolated primary and secondary students. It aims to ensure that country students have equitable access to quality education. Annual expenditure for this Programme is currently \$19.9 million.

JOBS PATHWAYS PROGRAMME

The Government will provide \$10.3 million in 2000-01 for the Jobs Pathways Programme in addition to the ongoing, base funding of \$11.7 million. This will ensure that the current level of demand can continue to be satisfied and will help students to make a smooth transition from school to work. Funding is provided to contracted service providers who, in turn, work closely with schools and the community. The ongoing availability of transition support for young people will have a positive impact on many regional centres.

TASMANIAN ENVIRONMENTAL TOURISM EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

As part of the Telstra Social Bonus (see note, below, in the Communications and Information Technology Section), the Government is funding an environmental tourism employment and training initiative in Tasmania. The Government provided \$3.2 million in 1999-2000 and will provide \$3.1 million in 2000-01 and \$3.1 million in 2001-02.

The funding provides training in the tourism and hospitality sector for over 300 people, especially those living in rural and remote areas. The emphasis is on environmental tourism and the wilderness experience.

Australia's territories

INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORIES

The isolated communities of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands are wholly dependent on the Federal Government for the funding of government services. These include services normally provided by State and local governments, such as education, health and housing.

In response to the recommendations of the *Commonwealth Grants Commission Report on Indian Ocean Territories 1999*, the Government has committed an additional \$2.9 million a year to ensure that service delivery standards are, so far as is practicable, the same as those of comparable communities on the mainland.

The Government has also committed \$22 million in 2000-01 to upgrade infrastructure required for the delivery of mainland-equivalent services. These services help foster the social and economic capacity of these communities as well as facilitating and maintaining their links with the rest of Australia and the wider world economy.

JERVIS BAY TERRITORY

The Federal Government provides most of the State and local government-type services to Jervis Bay at a standard comparable with that of the adjoining Shoalhaven region of New South Wales. An annual expenditure of \$3.3 million ensures service delivery through arrangements made with the Australian Capital Territory, Shoalhaven City Council and the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council.

NORFOLK ISLAND

The Norfolk Island community is limited in its access to regional funding initiatives as a result of the non-extension of some Commonwealth legislation to this self-governing Commonwealth Territory. The Federal Government provides annual funding of around \$370,000 to Norfolk Island for the conservation and maintenance of the Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area. Funding of \$36,000 per annum is also provided for legal aid assistance.

Communications and information technology

Note: The Telstra Social Bonus refers to the social bonus component from the sale of the second tranche (16.6 per cent) of Telstra, which is being allocated to expand many programmes delivering services to regional Australians in the areas of communications, information technology and the environment.

REGIONAL EQUALISATION PLAN: DIGITAL TELEVISION SERVICES

In 2000-01, the Government will introduce a Regional Equalisation Plan to assist the rollout of digital television and datacasting services to Australians living in regional and remote Australia. Over 13 years, up to \$260 million in financial assistance will be provided to assist commercial television broadcasters with its introduction. In 2000-01, \$22.6 million will be provided.

Commonwealth assistance under the Plan represents 50 per cent of the estimated capital and operating costs to regional commercial broadcasters in converting to digital. This assistance will be made available predominantly in the form of rebates on annual licence fees paid by the broadcasters. In order to ensure the timely delivery of digital broadcasting and datacasting services in different parts of regional and rural Australia, these licence fee rebates will be supplemented by a small grants programme for broadcasters in some single-service licence areas.

NATIONAL BROADCASTING

The Government has committed to funding the ABC and SBS to enter the age of digital television broadcasting. In order to ensure that all Australians have access to this new technology, the Government will provide \$66.2 million of capital over four years for new digital equipment, and additional funding for the costs of transmission and distribution. This will ensure that the digital broadcasting coverage of the ABC and SBS will match the coverage of analogue transmission at the end of the rollout period.

REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS PARTNERSHIP

As part of the sale of the National Transmission Network (NTN) in 1999, the Federal Government agreed to form a Regional Communications Partnership Fund with the network's new owner, ntl Australia Pty Ltd (ntl). The Fund will assist community-based, 'self-help' retransmission groups increase access to NTN sites in regional and remote areas of Australia by subsidising the commercial fees payable. These self-help groups retransmit commercial and national television and radio services to communities that would not otherwise have had access.

A \$10 million fund has been established to provide the subsidies, with the Government and ntl each contributing \$5 million.

UNIVERSAL SERVICE OBLIGATION

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) underpins the delivery of some 400,000 telephone services in regional and remote Australia, and is funded by a levy on telecommunications carriers. The Government is expanding the levy base to include carriage service providers, thereby making funding more equitable and sustainable.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ONLINE PROGRAMME

Small and medium-sized businesses are being encouraged to gain commercial business benefits across industry. The Information Technology Online (ITOL) Programme is a competitive grant programme providing catalytic support to innovative e-commerce. Projects are collaborative in nature, with participation from universities, industry associations and commercial organisations.

Grants are available for up to 50 per cent of eligible project costs, capped at \$150,000. They have been awarded for projects in areas as diverse as building and construction, agriculture, rural portals, social welfare and the health sector. The fifth round of grants is expected to open in June 2000.

SOCIAL BONUS INITIATIVES IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Networking the Nation — Building Additional Rural Networks

Seventy million dollars is being provided over five years from 1999-2000 to support the development of new regional networks and new networks services and products, with an emphasis on the adoption of innovative solutions and leading-edge technologies. Building Additional Rural Networks (BARN) will benefit regional and rural communities by supporting improvements in the cost and quality of telecommunications services in those areas. Funds are available for eligible not-for-profit organisations through the Networking the Nation grants programme.

Networking the Nation — the Local Government Fund

Forty-five million dollars over five years, from 1999-2000, is being provided for the Local Government Fund. The Fund will assist local government authorities in regional, rural and remote Australia to provide online access to information and services, including the Internet. Funds are available for local government authorities through the Networking the Nation grants programme.

Networking the Nation — the Internet Access Fund

Thirty-six million dollars over three years has been allocated for this programme from 1999-2000. The aim is to establish additional Internet local points of presence in rural and remote call zones, ensuring that all Australians have affordable access to the Internet.

The Internet is a vital business, educational and social tool that all Australians should be able to access at a local call charge, or under charging arrangements at least equivalent to local call rates. The Networking the Nation programme will distribute funds under this initiative, with those applications received considered by the independent Networking the Nation Board.

Networking the Nation — the Remote and Isolated Island Communities Fund

The Remote and Isolated Island Communities Fund is receiving \$20 million over three years from 1999-2000. The Fund will assist in meeting the telecommunications needs of people in remote and isolated island communities, such as the Torres Strait; the Cocos (Keeling) Group; Christmas, Norfolk, King, Flinders, Kangaroo and other islands; and the Australian Antarctic Territories.

The Fund will benefit these remote and isolated island communities by providing funding for infrastructure and services such as cheaper and better Internet access, mobile phone services, and improved access to a range of online services. Tasmania is

expected to receive \$10 million under this programme, based on the significant needs of Tasmania's islands.

Funds are available for eligible not for profit organisations through the Networking the Nation grants programme.

Connecting Tasmanian schools

Fifteen million dollars is being provided to assist in establishing local area and wide area networks linking Tasmanian schools. The funding will also provide additional computers and support equipment for the State's government and non-government schools. This initiative will particularly benefit those Tasmanian school students in the rural and remote areas of the State, through improved networks and access to online services. The computers and networks provided under this programme will be equipped with appropriate filtering technology to protect students from exposure to unsuitable material.

The total budget for this initiative is \$48 million: Telstra will provide \$5 million, an additional \$12 million will be sourced from Tasmania's existing Networking the Nation allocation, and the Tasmanian Government is expected to provide \$16 million. The programme is being coordinated by the Tasmanian Department of Education.

Untimed local calls in extended zones

This \$150 million initiative will fund the telecommunications infrastructure upgrade needed to enable all customers within the 'extended zones' in remote Australia to have access to untimed local calls within their extended zone. There are 40,000 services in operation in the extended zones.

Mobile phones on highways

The aim of this \$25 million programme is to provide continuous phone service along the 9,425 kilometres of nominated Australian highways. This will facilitate the use of mobile phones along these highways for social, economic and safety reasons. The Government is currently finalising the funding allocation process.

Funding to expand mobile phone coverage in regional Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania

Three million dollars is being provided to improve mobile phone coverage in regional and rural Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. This builds on the funding of \$25 million for mobile phones on designated highways, with funds being allocated in consultation with State governments.

Intelligent Island Programme (Tasmania)

The Intelligent Island Programme was announced in June 1999, with funding of \$40 million over five years from the Telstra Social Bonus. The Programme will further develop an internationally competitive information technology and telecommunications sector in Tasmania. It will fund a range of new projects and build on existing Tasmanian Government initiatives and the research capacity of Tasmania's tertiary education infrastructure.

Launceston Broadband Project

This is a joint initiative between Telstra and the Federal Government to develop information technology and telecommunications skills in Tasmania. The Project has three elements:

- establishing a Multimedia Development Laboratory (MDL) for the commercialisation of Internet-related products;
- delivering and trialing advanced Internet access (through ADSL technology) for a set of between 2,500 and 5,000 residential and business customers in Launceston; and
- stimulating new high-tech business opportunities in the Launceston region through a \$5 million Business Development Fund.

The MDL will begin operation in June 2000 with the first 500 customers to be connected by August 2000. The Federal Government is providing \$15 million from the Telstra Social Bonus, which is being matched by \$15 million from Telstra over five years from 1999-2000.

Trials in Innovative Government Electronic Regional Services

Trials in Innovative Government Electronic Regional Services (TIGERS) was launched in April 2000. Ten million dollars will be provided over three years to trial a range of innovative means of delivering government services over the Internet, through call centres and over-the-counter facilities. The TIGERS programme will be undertaken in Tasmania.

Television Fund

The Government established the \$120 million Television Fund from the proceeds of the Telstra Social Bonus, primarily to extend SBS television to transmission areas of more than 10,000 people and to fix television reception 'black spots'.

In December 1999, a three-year rollout schedule for the extension of SBS television to 1.2 million Australians in 36 regional areas was announced. The first services are expected to commence by the middle of 2000.

As part of the Television Fund, the Government is providing a two-thirds subsidy for the purchase of a transmitter and decoder necessary to provide a second terrestrial commercial-television signal to 'self-help' communities in remote areas. It is expected that around 300 community groups will benefit from this subsidy.

ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Regional infrastructure

ROADS

A network of national roads connecting 'inland ports', railheads and rural manufacturing centres with cities and coastal ports - and the efficient operation of heavy transport vehicles between them - is the centrepiece of the Federal Government's land transport budget initiatives. This strategy recognises that the community is seeking transport efficiency as an essential part of the process of structural adjustment, improved productivity and resource allocation across the national economy. As well as freight networks, the strategy reinforces the importance of roads to tourism and modern lifestyles that demand a high degree of mobility.

The total budget allocation for roads for 2000-01 is more than \$1.3 billion, \$858.9 million of this involving direct spending by the Federal Government. In recognition of the importance of transport infrastructure to regional and rural Australia, 90 per cent of the Federal Government's direct spending on roads in 2000-01 will be allocated to non-urban roads. A further \$406.4 million will be provided to councils throughout Australia for local roads, and \$41 million towards the Road Safety Black Spot Programme.

Higher mass limits

The Federal Government has introduced higher mass limits for vehicles registered under the Federal Interstate Registration Scheme and fitted with 'road-friendly' suspensions. The new limits vary with axle configuration, but for the most common long-distance truck—a six-axle semi-trailer—the mass limit has increased from 42.5 tonnes to 45.5 tonnes.

The reform will bring down export costs and means fewer vehicles will be required to perform the road freight task. It will also encourage a shift to latest-technology vehicles with better safety and environmental performance. When combined with diesel fuel rebates, the cost of road transport will fall, with resultant savings being made in production costs and the prices of goods to communities far removed from places of importation or manufacture.

The National Road Transport Commission has estimated that higher mass limits, when fully implemented, will add \$840 million to gross domestic product annually, with more than \$500 million of that being benefits to consumers.

Bridges

All States except New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory have allowed higher mass limits onto the National Highway, and the Australian Capital Territory is expected to agree when two bridges on the network within the Territory are strengthened. The Federal Government is building on this initiative by allocating additional money for bridge strengthening, including \$30 million over four years for structures on roads other than the National Highway. The Federal Government has agreed that it will fully fund any bridge upgrades on the National Highway and has made commitments to funding some bridges on other high-priority freight routes.

In addition, a separate \$44 million Murray River Bridges Programme will be rolled out over several years, starting in 2000-01, using money from the Centenary of Federation Fund. The Federal contribution will go towards the cost of new bridges over the Murray River at Corowa, Echuca and Robinvale.

Port roads

Plans to upgrade access roads to Australia's major ports under a joint funding programme with participating States worth \$543.5 million will be continued. The Federal Government contribution is \$202.7 million over four financial years.

The 'port links' objectives include improving the safety and efficiency of selected port roads; opening these routes to high mass-limit vehicles, thereby reducing transport costs for goods moved by road; strengthening the inter-connectivity of port roads with the 18,500 kilometre National Highway and Roads of National Importance; and improving Australia's export competitiveness internationally.

The roads to be funded under this element of the Commonwealth Roads Programme are:

- the Melbourne–Geelong Road: \$120 million towards its \$240 million widening to eight lanes between Werribee and Melbourne and six lanes between Werribee and Geelong;
- the Port of Brisbane Road: a \$44.6 million contribution to the \$151.3 million transport infrastructure component of the Gateway Port Precinct project;
- construction of the new Gillman Highway serving the Port of Adelaide: an \$18.5 million contribution to this \$125 million project;
- the Port of Devonport Road (completed): \$1.1 million towards the \$2.2 million cost of a new port access to the *Spirit of Tasmania* ferry terminal and roll-on roll-off cargo facilities at East Devonport;
- the Port of Gladstone Road: \$6 million towards the proposed \$15 million cost of a new port access adjacent to the existing railway line through town; and

- Portsmith Road serving the Port of Cairns, Queensland Rail's Far North Queensland freight depot and sections of the Cairns central business district. It carries 19,000 vehicles per day. The last two-lane sections of Portsmith Road are being duplicated at a cost of \$10 million.

National Highway

The National Highway passes through 21 cities and towns with a sea port, and has links to an estimated 56 commuter airports in regional Australia. It is also a major service provider to the rest of regional Australia. In addition to the capital cities, the National Highway joins 75 towns with a population greater than 10,000 people, and numerous smaller communities. It is the major inter-capital highway network. These roads include the Hume and New England highways in New South Wales, the Hume and Western highways in Victoria, the Bruce, Warrego and Cunningham highways in Queensland and the Stuart, Dukes and Sturt highways in South Australia. Funding for this network in all States during 2000-01 is \$710.2 million.

Roads of National Importance

In 2000-01, the Federal Government will contribute a further \$148.7 million to its Roads of National Importance Programme, under which it is investing jointly with the States and Territories in road projects worth a total of \$4.72 billion. Roads of National Importance include the Pacific Highway, the Great Western Highway, Geelong Road, the Calder Highway, the Goldfields Highway, Perth's Mitchell Freeway and Main Road 92.

Local roads

Local councils throughout Australia will receive \$406.4 million in untied grants for improvements to local roads that are their direct financial responsibility.

Road Safety Black Spot Programme

A further \$41 million will be spent in 2000-01 eliminating approximately 400 crash 'black spots'. Since its introduction in the 1996-97 Budget, the Road Safety Black Spot Programme has provided \$146 million for 1,502 projects.

About half of the funds allocated have been, and will, continue to be for safety-orientated projects in regional areas. This is in recognition of the high level of road trauma in regional and rural Australia.

Commonwealth Roads Programme targets

The Commonwealth Roads Programme is on target to deliver these outcomes by 2006:

- construction of a four-lane divided highway over much of the distance between Melbourne and Noosa;
- re-alignment of the Hume Highway into Melbourne;
- a start on providing six lanes for the Bruce Highway north of Brisbane to Caboolture, and upgrading of the Pacific Highway south of the city;
- an upgraded Federal Highway to provide a continuous four-lane road between Sydney and Canberra by August 2000;
- new port roads or upgrading of existing accesses between Melbourne and Geelong and to the ports of Brisbane, Adelaide, Gladstone, Cairns, Darwin and Devonport;
- elimination of all narrow sealed sections along the National Highway in rural Australia, and opening up of most of the rural National Highway network to unimpeded access by freight-efficient heavy transport;
- fast, efficient heavy-vehicle access from Toowoomba and the Darling Downs to Darwin along a more reliable route offering greater flood immunity;
- elimination of 80 per cent of remaining flood-prone bridges on the National Highway that are considered below acceptable standard, with special emphasis on northern Australia;
- reconstruction of sections of the Summerland Way in northern New South Wales;
- continuous upgrading of the Eyre Highway, which links Perth with eastern Australia across the Nullarbor Plain;
- a sealed road will have been built linking Kalgoorlie with the Pilbara Region of Western Australia, thus ending a 1,000 kilometre detour for heavy vehicles via Perth;
- an upgraded Kidman Way to provide sealed road access on the most direct land access between the Riverina foodbowl and Darwin—Australia's Gateway to Asia;
- a reduced annual road toll; and
- elimination of an estimated 1,000 crash black spots on Australian roads.

Greater capacity of States and Territories to deliver on roads

The revised Commonwealth-State financial relations applying from 1 July 2000 give the States a greater say in their expenditure programmes. All revenue raised from the new Goods and Services Tax will go to the States. Prior to the new tax system, States received untied grants from which they could fund State Arterial roads. Goods and Services Tax revenue will replace these untied grant funds. The revenue base will grow as the economy grows and States will have an enhanced capacity to meet their road-funding responsibilities from their new revenue source.

RAIL

The Federal Government is at the half-way point in its four-year investment programme for the mainline standard gauge track, and is supporting feasibility studies into a Melbourne–Brisbane inland freight railway and the Sydney–Canberra Very High Speed Train.

Alice Springs to Darwin railway

The rail sector, and reliant industries in South Australia and the Northern Territory, will receive a huge boost from construction of the Alice Springs - Darwin railway. The project, costing more than \$1 billion, will generate 7,000 jobs during the three-year construction phase.

The Government has committed \$100 million from the Centenary of Federation Fund and an additional \$65 million towards the railway, which is to be built and operated by a private consortium. The 2000-01 Budget allocation for the project is \$40 million.

The railway has the potential for opening new export markets to Asia for food and goods produced in rural Australia. The railway is also expected to generate employment and opportunities for Australian industry in regional areas.

\$250 million mainline track investment

A sum of \$46.9 million has been allocated to the programme in 2000-01. This will be spent upgrading track in Western Australia, and in ensuring a greater market share for rail on the Melbourne to Sydney corridor.

Spending under the programme has been carefully targeted, and has already delivered significant transit time reductions and axle-load and train-length increases to the network. When combined with other federal rail reform initiatives, the track improvements will significantly improve the efficiency of rail transport, thereby reducing freight costs for people in rural and remote areas.

Other rail investments

Five million dollars has been allocated to upgrade rail infrastructure in Tasmania, with \$1 million from the 2000-01 Budget. The programme is in its final year and is expected to contribute to enhanced rail operations in Tasmania, especially its competitiveness.

The Government has also committed \$20.5 million from the Centenary of Federation Fund to restore the original Abt Railway between Queenstown and Strahan on Tasmania's West Coast. The 2000-01 Budget allocation for this project is \$9 million. This capital investment is expected to contribute to economic growth through new investment and tourism opportunities, as well as boosting employment on Tasmania's west coast.

The Government has contributed \$300,000 towards a pre-feasibility study of an inland railway between Melbourne and Brisbane, to be carried out by the Australian Transport and Energy Corridor Limited. The Government is committed to working with private consortia to facilitate this project, which is the first stage of the Melbourne to Darwin inland railway proposal. The project has the potential to provide new economic opportunities for regional Australia, boosting regional employment and enabling access to more competitive freight rates for regional industries.

AIRPORTS

The Government is providing \$7 million for the upgrade of Rockhampton Airport, \$1 million in 1999-2000 and \$6 million in 2000-01. The airport's runway extension has now been opened, with the final stage of the upgrade likely to be completed in June this year.

The upgrade will enable the airport to handle heavily-laden Boeing 767 and some Boeing 747 aircraft. It will position Rockhampton as the main staging point for international military exercises conducted at Shoalwater Bay and is expected to create almost 400 extra jobs in the region, contributing an extra \$40 million to the regional economy.

The upgrade of Flinders Island Airport was completed in April 2000, with \$200,000 allocated towards it in 1999-2000.

DEFENCE INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2000-01, planned capital investment on existing and new Defence bases in regional centres such as Darwin, Townsville, Ipswich, Nowra, Eden and Newcastle will total \$178.4 million. In addition, it is estimated that Defence will spend some \$118 million on regional facilities and minor capital works at its regional bases.

In a further boost to two New South Wales regional centres, the Government has announced that Defence will retain the Royal Australian Airforce base at Wagga Wagga and will establish its personnel services centre in Cooma.

Regional industries

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

Continuation of *Agriculture — Advancing Australia* package

In 1997, the Federal Government introduced the *Agriculture — Advancing Australia* (AAA) package. This package delivers a comprehensive set of programmes to support the farming sector by helping farmers to improve their business and risk management skills and by introducing an effective safety net for farmers in financial difficulties. In this Budget, the Government will commit a further \$309.4 million over four years to maintain funding levels for the AAA package. Successful AAA programmes will be improved and new programmes will be introduced to focus on other key areas.

- The FarmBis and Property Management Planning Programmes will be amalgamated and extended as Skilling Farmers for the Future, to continue the advances made in business and land management training. The National Component of the FarmBis programme will be enhanced to support a national approach to important issues such as industry adjustment, creating national and international supply networks, and product quality and safety.
- The Farm Family Restart Scheme will be continued and enhanced as Farm Help – Supporting Families through Change to provide improved assistance to farmers in difficulty while they consider their future options.
- A new two-year pilot programme, the Farm Innovation Programme, will be implemented. This Programme seeks to encourage further innovation and diversification practices by farmers.
- Exceptional circumstances will continue to provide farm families with a welfare safety net in situations of hardship caused by exceptional natural events such as drought.
- To develop improved market opportunities, links between Government, business and overseas markets will be strengthened through the continuation and expansion of International Cooperation Agreements.
- The Retirement Assistance for Farmers Scheme is to be extended to 30 June 2001. It will provide a continued opportunity for low-income, pension-age farmers to gift their farms to a younger generation while retaining eligibility for the age pension.

This programme is delivered by the Departments of Family and Community Services and Veterans' Affairs.

A comprehensive 18-month communication campaign is planned to ensure that regional Australia is fully informed of the services provided under the AAA package.

The new package will have a positive effect on rural Australia. It will provide targeted incentives to farmers to improve farm profitability, sustainability and competitiveness, and a social safety net for farm families adversely affected by change. This package will also assist regional Australia more generally because the health and vibrancy of many regional communities is underpinned by the profitability of local agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries.

Exceptional circumstances recovery assistance in south-western New South Wales

The Federal Government will provide \$0.2 million in 1999-2000 and \$0.4 million in 2000-01 for exceptional circumstances assistance in south-western New South Wales. The National Rural Advisory Council recommended that recovery assistance be provided to eligible farmers in the Wentworth, Broken Hill, Hillston, and Balranald Rural Land Protection Board districts. The assistance will be for 12 months and will constitute business support in the form of interest-rate subsidies for farmers in financial hardship.

Assistance to farmers in central north-east South Australia

The Federal Government will provide \$2 million for a Regional Adjustment Programme to address longer-term structural issues in the central north-east of South Australia, with the South Australian Government to provide matching funds. The focus of the Programme will be to develop the region's economic capacity and self reliance by facilitating sound business decisions, encouraging sustainability and promoting innovation. The Government will also provide \$100,000 for administration costs. This follows the \$200,000 the Federal Government provided under Rural Plan to the region to evaluate new economic opportunities.

Many farmers in this area are facing significant financial hardship due to seasonal and structural pressures. This Programme supplements immediate, special financial assistance for eligible farmers in the form of ex gratia payments similar to social security benefits, administered by the Department of Finance and Administration. This assistance is expected to run for three months and is estimated to cost \$655,000 in 1999-2000. This is a cross-portfolio measure between the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Department of Finance and Administration.

Wine equalisation tax rebate

From 1 July 2000, the Federal Government will fund a wine equalisation tax (WET) rebate scheme to assist small wine makers in regional Australia. The measure will cost \$46 million over three years from 2000-01.

As part of The New Tax System, the current wholesale sales tax regime for wine will be replaced by the Goods and Services Tax and WET. The Commonwealth WET rebate scheme will augment existing States' schemes by providing an additional 14 per cent rebate on cellar door and mail order sales up to \$300,000 per annum. This rebate then tapers to zero for sales between \$300,000 and \$580,000 per annum. The combination of the existing State subsidy and the Commonwealth rebate will mean that cellar door and mail order sales of wine up to \$300,000 per annum are effectively WET free.

Building a national approach to animal and plant health

Australia's clean, green image enhances our competitive advantage over other exporting nations and this image must be maintained, even strengthened. The Government will provide \$22.3 million over the next four years to help secure Australia's reputation as a supplier of high-quality, clean and green agricultural produce. The funding will be used to reinforce current animal and plant health infrastructure by strengthening surveillance, enhancing disease prevention and awareness, and improving Australia's emergency response capacity.

These Federal Government efforts will be strengthened further by being in partnership with the community, industry and State governments.

Quarantine

The Government will provide a one-off increase of \$1.5 million in the first half of 2000-01 for quarantine activity associated with the Olympic and Paralympic Games. An additional \$100,000 will be cost recovered from inspections of cargo vessels. This is essential to the full maintenance of Australia's quarantine integrity during the Games period, when significantly increased flows of passengers and cargo are expected.

The Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) will undertake additional quarantine activities associated with United Nations operations in East Timor.

Regional employment with AQIS will increase, with 18 additional staff placed in Darwin who will draw on local business to provide supporting services. The cost of these activities will be budget neutral, and will be met by the Department of Defence (\$0.3 million per annum) and AusAID (\$1.6 million per annum).

Regional Forest Agreements

Good progress has been made with the negotiation of 20-year Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) between the Commonwealth and the relevant State governments. As at 31 March 2000 RFAs had been finalised in 10 regions, with the southern region in New South Wales being delayed by New South Wales unilateral decisions. Negotiations on a south-east Queensland RFA have been suspended.

Completion of these RFAs is a significant achievement in implementing the National Forest Policy Statement. The RFAs provide certainty for industry, identify industry development opportunities, provide for ecologically sustainable forest management and establish a comprehensive, adequate and representative national forest reserve system. Importantly, they provide stability for regional and rural communities dependent on the native forest timber industry.

In total, the Government has committed \$218 million to regional industry development associated with RFAs and the native timber industry in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania.

AVIATION

Airservices Australia

The Federal Government will provide Airservices Australia with a subsidy of \$7 million in 2000-01 to help pay for air traffic control towers at regional and general aviation airports. It would be prohibitively expensive for the aviation industry to use some of our major regional airports without this subsidisation.

The Government funded the subsidy by a modest increase in the duty on aviation gasoline and aviation turbine fuel in 1999-2000 and 2000-01. The duty on avgas is still 85 per cent lower than it was when the Government took office in March 1996 and the Government is committed to reducing the cost of tower services in the longer term.

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority is in the process of developing safety standards to cover the provision of alternative service providers.

Remote Air Service Subsidy Scheme

The Remote Air Service Subsidy (RASS) Scheme currently subsidises five air operators to provide regular services to 205 remote ports in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The Government will double the Scheme's funding, from nearly \$1.3 million in 1999-2000 to \$2.5 million in 2000-01. Over the next four years, the Government will spend an additional \$5.2 million on the Scheme to allow greater service range to a larger number of communities.

The Government will be calling for fresh tenders for RASS services later this year. The additional funding will enable all RASS operators to provide a passenger service as well as carrying mail and freight. Under the existing Scheme, 96 isolated communities and stations are served by operators that only carry cargo. The eligibility criteria for the Scheme will also be revised so it can be expanded to cover more communities.

SHIPPING

Shipbuilding Innovation Scheme

The Shipbuilding Innovation Scheme (SIS), introduced on 1 July 1999, is designed to develop a stronger, sustainable and internationally competitive Australian shipbuilding industry by encouraging product research and development and design (R&D) innovation. The estimated value of this Scheme for 2000-01 is around \$10 million.

Under SIS, shipbuilders registered under the relevant legislation will be entitled to the payment of a benefit at the rate of 50 per cent of eligible research and development expenditure, up to a total of 2 per cent of eligible production costs of a bountiable vessel. Eligible research and development expenditure includes adaptive engineering directed at product and process innovation in the shipbuilding industry.

The Scheme will have an impact on the regional economies of North Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania. These regions will benefit from a financially viable, innovative and internationally competitive shipbuilding industry.

Shipbuilding bounty

The Government has committed \$28 million over four years to 2003 towards the Shipbuilding Bounty, of which approximately \$12 million will be provided in 2000-01. This programme will provide transitional support to the Australian shipbuilding industry while international measures are being developed to phase out subsidies to the industry.

Shipbuilding has a major impact on the regional economies of North Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania, and the bounty scheme will ensure that these regions are not disadvantaged as the other major shipbuilding economies move to lower assistance regimes.

Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme

The Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme (TFES) helps shippers to offset the transport-cost disadvantage associated with moving non-bulk goods across Bass Strait. The Scheme benefits the Tasmanian manufacturing industry by reducing the cost of importing raw materials and machinery from the mainland, and the cost of exporting manufactured or processed goods to the mainland. The basis of TFES assistance was

amended in 1999-2000. As a result, it is estimated that some \$60 million in assistance will be provided to shippers during 1999-2000, representing an increase of around \$15.2 million over the 1998-99 levels of assistance.

Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme

The Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme provides a rebate of up to \$300 for each return trip for a driver with a passenger vehicle travelling by sea across Bass Strait.

Since its introduction in 1996, there has been a 90 per cent increase in passenger vehicles being carried between the mainland and Tasmania. The latest estimates for 1999-2000 indicate that TT-Line will carry some 120,000 passenger vehicles on the *Spirit of Tasmania* and the high-speed catamaran *Devil Cat*. In the year prior to the Scheme's introduction, TT-Line carried some 63,000 passenger vehicles across Bass Strait. It is estimated that \$15.5 million in rebates will be provided to passengers during the 1999-2000 financial year.

TOURISM

Regional Tourism Programme

For 1999-2003, the Government committed \$14 million to the Regional Tourism Programme (RTP), of which \$4 million will be provided in 2000-01. The Programme aims to improve the capability of organisations, businesses and individuals to deliver quality tourism products and services in regional Australia.

Funding is provided through the RTP for the development of tourism attractions, facilities and services, including tourism projects that complement other regional industries and build on our natural and cultural heritage. Projects also funded include industry leadership initiatives, those which raise industry standards, and those developing regional niche markets and establishing web sites for regional tourism organisations.

TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR

Post-2000 Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Assistance Package

The Package represents continued Government support, particularly as a regional initiative, for textiles, clothing and footwear (TCF) industries facing restructuring. It has been designed to promote investment in innovation, research and development to improve the competitiveness of Australia's TCF industries. This is in preparation for the more internationally competitive trade environment after 2005.

The most significant component is the TCF (Strategic Investment Programme) Scheme, a five-year scheme designed to promote an increase in investment by the TCF industries in capital plant and equipment; research and development, including innovative product development; and assistance for regional re-configuration.

A new Internet resource (TCFOZ) is now available. It includes databases of companies, industry-specific educational courses, government programmes and business information, a bulletin board for the exchange of ideas, useful links and a help-desk facility for industry members. A series of roadshows showcasing TCFOZ will be conducted during May and June this year, travelling through regional centres such as Ballarat, Newcastle, Cairns, Fremantle and Launceston, as well as to various clusters in the capital cities.

REGIONAL MINERALS PROGRAMME: NORTH-WEST TASMANIA

The Government is providing \$5 million from 1999-2001 for infrastructure development in north-west Tasmania, of which \$4 million will be spent in 2000-01. The infrastructure support will create employment in a very depressed region following the closure of the Burnie pulp and paper mill and decline of other industries in the area. It will help to stimulate new mineral projects and have flow-on effects to other industries.

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FREIGHT SUBSIDY SCHEME

The Petroleum Products Freight Subsidy Scheme (PPFSS) reimburses oil companies and other fuel distributors part of their cost of supplying eligible petroleum products to customers in over 100 eligible remote communities. The aim of the PPFSS is to benefit consumers in these locations by reducing the freight costs of petrol, diesel, aviation gasoline and aviation turbine fuel.

The Government has budgeted \$17 million from 1999-2004. It is expected that the Scheme will be worth around \$3 million in 2000-01. Administrative expenses (\$200,000 per annum) are paid on a pro rata basis to oil companies to compensate for expenses incurred in participation in the Scheme.

FUEL SALES GRANT SCHEME

Consumers of petrol and diesel in non-metropolitan and remote areas will benefit significantly from the new Fuel Sales Grant Scheme to be introduced from 1 July 2000. Under the Scheme, a grant will be paid to fuel retailers for sales to consumers in non-metropolitan areas with a higher rate of grant provided for sales in remote areas. In addition to the excise reduction, the Scheme will ensure that prices for petrol and diesel in non-metropolitan and remote areas need not rise with the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax. The Scheme will cost around \$500 million over the next four years.

Fostering business

EXPORTS AND INVESTMENT

The Government is committed to ensuring that Australia benefits from international trade and investment flows. This includes trade negotiations in multilateral, regional and bilateral forums; business tax reform; and programmes and services to assist industry and small business in their export and investment efforts.

Austrade provides a range of services and assistance to businesses in regional and rural Australia, including advice on exports, overseas markets and opportunities, and grant availability for export marketing. In 2000, the cornerstones of Austrade's service delivery to regional and rural Australia will continue to be the **Regional Trade Commissioner** network and the **TradeStart** and **Export Access Programmes**.

E-commerce for Exports workshops

Since the programme was launched in September 1999, Austrade has delivered around 57 workshops in regional Australia, with 90 more expected to be held in regional locations by the end of 2000. The workshops target small to medium-sized export companies and those considering how e-commerce may pave the way to international business. They focus on techniques that could put Australian businesses at the cutting edge of on-line exporting.

TradeSat

Austrade's TradeSat facilities enable the simultaneous provision of Austrade's annual series of export market seminars and other events to 31 locations across regional Australia, using leading-edge Internet video-streaming technology.

Invest Australia

Invest Australia, the Federal Government's national investment agency, facilitates sustainable and productive investment in Australia. Invest Australia is undertaking initiatives designed to ensure that regional Australia has the same service quality in investment attraction and facilitation as the rest of Australia. It has established a dedicated regional partnership team to facilitate that business investment in association with State and Territory investment agencies and local communities.

During 1999-2000, six major projects have so far been facilitated in regional areas, involving a capital expenditure of \$1.7 billion and 1,200 jobs.

In December 1999, Invest Australia appointed an investment outreach officer for the Upper Spencer Gulf region. This officer's primary task is to develop an investment strategy for the region in partnership with the South Australian Government, the

Upper Spencer Gulf regional community and the Upper Spencer Gulf Implementation Team. The feasibility of expanding this investment outreach programme to other areas of regional Australia is being examined.

Invest Australia is also committed to increasing awareness among potential Australian and overseas investors of the business investment opportunities in regional Australia through the development of a regional information web site.

Business assistance

GST START-UP ASSISTANCE

Goods and Services Tax (GST) start-up assistance is being delivered to small businesses, community organisations and education organisations all over Australia, including rural and remote Australia. The GST Start-Up Assistance Office has commissioned sectoral and professional organisations to deliver 10,000 seminars and workshops to inform organisations how to prepare their operations for the introduction of the new tax system. Some programmes, such as those being delivered by State farming organisations (\$15.3 million) are specifically focused on rural Australia. Contracts with organisations such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the National Aboriginal Controlled Health Organisation ensure that GST seminars and workshops are being delivered to Indigenous people in remote Australia.

AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE

Service delivery initiatives in regional and rural Australia

Service initiatives are being introduced by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) in line with the Government's commitment to improving service delivery in regional and rural Australia. These include:

- a programme of visits by senior ATO staff to regional tax agents lodging more than 1,000 returns. The purpose is to build relationships and demonstrate commitment to working with and supporting those implementing tax reform. Conversely, these visits will provide insights into small business readiness for tax reform and help improve service and support;
- enhancements to e-tax service which will mean that people in remote areas who have access to the Internet will be able to use e-tax to prepare and lodge their income tax returns. Taxpayers in regional areas will also be able to use the Internet to pay most tax accounts through the banking system's Bpay service. This service, effective from 1 July 2000, will also be available via telephone.

AUSTRALIAN COMPETITION AND CONSUMER COMMISSION: REGIONAL OFFICE PRESENCE

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), as a national agency covering competition, consumer protection, public utilities and tax exploitation issues, has offices in all State and Territory capitals, as well as Townsville and Tamworth. Additional staff are being allocated to work specifically on regional and rural assistance. The ACCC's data collection and monitoring function for the GST will take place throughout Australia, while the Commission's GST hotline will reinforce its ability to respond to regional and rural Australians.

The ACCC will also be establishing a Regional and Rural Advisory Committee to provide feedback on its activities.

BUSINESS ENTRY POINT

The Business Entry Point (BEP) initiative is an Internet-based service, supported by a phone hotline, that provides free access for business to all spheres of government through a single entry point. The BEP framework has been endorsed at the Federal, State and Territory, and local government levels, as well as by the business sector. It is the on-line channel for businesses dealing with the Commonwealth and became the key on-line access point to the Australian Business Register in July 1999.

The BEP aims to simplify and reduce the compliance processes for business. Through it, the business community can access over 60,000 business-related resources that cover all stages and aspects of a business's life. One of these is a facility to conduct a range of transactions online with a number of government agencies. BEP improves access to whole-of-Government information and services, regardless of the location, giving rural and remote Australians the equivalent access to government information as that received by people in metropolitan areas.

Enhancements of the BEP are being developed to enable a powerful, customised tool of particular benefit to regional and rural users.

Funding for the development of the BEP is \$1.7 million in 2000-01. The Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business portfolio has also set aside \$6.5 million in 2000-01 for the further development of BEP.

AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

There are 56 Area Consultative Committees (ACCs), funded through the Regional Assistance Programme (RAP), which operate throughout Australia. Of the 56 ACCs, 43 are located in regional, rural and remote areas. The ACCs comprise business and community representatives who work towards finding community-based solutions to enable jobs growth, skills development, regional growth and improved service delivery.

Area Consultative Committees also promote Government-wide initiatives, and provide advice and feedback to the Government on regional needs and the delivery of and access to relevant government programmes. In regional Australia they have also been involved in delivering Goods and Services Tax start-up assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises, charities and education bodies.

In 2000-01, \$52.3 million has been provided for RAP and ACC operations, including RAP projects, business incubators and funding for projects of national significance.

REGIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

The Regional Assistance Programme (RAP) contributes to achievement of national employment goals in regional Australia. It does this by encouraging business and communities to take action in partnership with government, to build business growth and to stimulate sustainable employment. Assistance to regions is provided through seed funding to not-for-profit organisations, and is aimed at generating employment and building the skills base of regions. RAP projects are developed in the context of the relevant Area Consultative Committee regional strategic plan.

For the 1999-2000 financial year, the Government has already provided over \$16 million for 311 projects which will generate significant jobs growth across Australia. Around three-quarters of this funding has been for projects in regional and remote Australia.

A new Dairy Regional Assistance Programme (DRAP) will provide additional financial assistance to ameliorate the potential impact of dairy industry deregulation on regional communities dependent on the industry. DRAP will commence on 1 July 2000, with the Government providing \$15 million in 2000-01.

BUSINESS INCUBATORS

Business incubators are designed to assist new and growing businesses to become established and profitable by providing premises, advice, services and support. Business incubators are known to increase the success rate of new start-up businesses.

Around 900 businesses have graduated from incubators funded by the Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business portfolio and employ about 3,200 people. It is also estimated that there are around 2,370 people currently employed in tenant businesses and a further 180 people directly employed by incubators.

Incubators are located in all States and Territories, with 58 per cent in regional areas. In 2000-01, \$5 million has been set aside for a new round of incubator proposals.

SMALL BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CULTURE PROGRAMME

The Small Business Enterprise Culture Programme (SBCEP) began in 1999-2000 with a funding allocation of \$6.4 million. Funding of \$5.1 million will occur over the next three financial years, including \$2.2 million in 2000-01. The SBCEP aims to develop and enhance the business skills of small business owner-managers and demonstrate the contribution that such skills can make to business viability and growth. Another key element is assistance to women in business.

Applications are assessed in two funding rounds each year. Programme funding for 1999-2000 had a specific preference for regional projects, which will continue in 2000-01. The first round saw 29 offers made, 20 of which are located in regional areas.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Network

Job Network is a national network of around 200 organisations dedicated to finding jobs for unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed. The second Job Network contract, which runs from 28 February 2000 to 2 March 2003, is building on the success achieved since May 1998 during the first Job Network contract.

In Job Network 2 there will be more than 2,000 Job Network sites across Australia (including over 300 outreach sites), a 50 per cent increase on the 1,400 sites under the first contract. This compares with the 296 Commonwealth Employment Service sites that were available Australia wide to metropolitan and regional and rural job seekers under the old scheme. The total number of Job Network sites in regional Australia will nearly double from about 600 to around 1,100. More than 250 locations (half in regional and rural areas) will have employment services for the first time.

In Job Network 2, there will be 29 Job Network members delivering Specialist Intensive Assistance Services from more than 100 sites across Australia (including 12 outreach sites) to job seekers with particular needs, for example Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with a disability, those from a non-English speaking background or young people.

The Budget provides for \$3 billion over three years for the purchase of Job Network employment services.

Job Network Access

All job seekers are able to use, free of charge, the job search facilities provided through the Job Network Access Centres (Employment Self Help). This has been implemented in Centrelink Customer Service Centres, 166 of which are located in regional and rural areas.

Computers in these self-help areas will shortly be connected to the Internet, enabling job seekers to place their resumé details on the Australian Job Search Resume Builders web site. This will allow job seekers to be matched automatically against positions on the national vacancy database, and to be considered by employers who scan the resumé database. This initiative will benefit all job seekers, but will significantly improve the options of those resident in regional and rural areas.

Work for the Dole

The Work for the Dole Programme is a key component of the Government's mutual obligation arrangements. Since 1997, almost 1,600 projects have been funded across Australia to provide work experience for unemployed people. Around 60,000 people have participated in projects sponsored by community-based and government organisations.

The objectives of the Work for the Dole Programme are to develop work habits, involve the local community in quality projects that cater for and assist the unemployed, and provide communities with Work for the Dole activities that are of value to those communities. These activities are located primarily in areas of high youth unemployment, with an emphasis on outer-metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

In 2000-01, the number of Work for the Dole places for job seekers funded by the Government will be 50,000 compared with 32,500 in 1999-2000. Just under half of the funding available in 2000-01 is expected to be directed to projects in regional Australia.

To facilitate this increase in places and to strengthen the links between local communities and the Programme, Community Work Coordinators have been contracted from January 2000 to manage the Programme in local communities. Of the 119 different organisations providing Community Work Coordinator services, 85 have been contracted to provide services in regional and remote Australia.

Indigenous employment

The Government's Indigenous Employment Policy (IEP), announced in May 1999, aims to address the severe disadvantage in employment faced by Indigenous people. IEP creates opportunities in the private sector for job seekers and emphasises support for small business. There are three main elements to the Policy: the Indigenous Employment Programme (\$55 million for 2000-01), the Indigenous Small Business Fund (\$2 million per annum), and continuation of measures to improve Job Network outcomes.

The Indigenous Employment Programme comprises a range of complementary initiatives, including: Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP), Wage Assistance, a bonus system for Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) project sponsors, an Indigenous Cadetship Project and the CEOs for Indigenous Employment Project.

Structured Training and Employment Projects provide employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people, particularly through new apprenticeships. More than 100 projects are expected to be approved under STEP in the 1999-2000 financial year. Projects have a strong focus on rural and remote areas, including assistance to private sector employers sponsoring projects that provide community infrastructure or involve capital outlays.

The **Wage Assistance** component is particularly relevant to small business in regional areas and around 1,050 unemployed Indigenous people have been placed in the nine months of operation to date.

The **Indigenous Small Business Fund**, launched in October 1999, has been developed to encourage and support the development and expansion of Indigenous small businesses. A total of 24 proposals from organisations have been received to date. The Fund will help Indigenous people to develop business management and planning skills, to start commercially viable businesses and to access business capital and support services. It also aims to enhance their business prospects by supporting skills development programmes, mentoring, networking, advisory services and market development (including export opportunities).

Community Development Employment Projects

The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme will continue to provide employment opportunities for Indigenous people in remote and isolated communities. The scheme will be further enhanced in 2000-01 through an expansion of 1,500 extra participant places costing \$20.7 million over four years, bringing total places to around 35,000.

Employee Entitlements Support Scheme

On 8 February 2000, the Government announced the establishment of the new, national Employee Entitlements Support Scheme. The Scheme provides assistance to employees whose employment has been terminated as a result of their employer's insolvency and who are owed certain employment entitlements. The Scheme covers those employees dismissed on or after 1 January 2000.

Significant business insolvencies have a particular effect on regional centres, where local economies are sometimes largely dependent on the business concerned. In the short time that the Scheme has been operating, a number of cases have come to light in regional Australia where employees may be eligible for assistance under the Scheme.

The Federal Government is providing up to \$55 million for the Scheme in 2000-01, and has asked State and Territory governments to provide matching contributions.

Sustainable natural resource management

THE NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST (NHT)

Australia's long-term economic prospects depend on the sustainable use of our natural resources and conservation of our unique biological diversity. There are significant challenges in repairing past damage to our land and water resources and restoring our environment for future generations.

The Federal Government has responded to these challenges by the successful implementation of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), through which it is investing \$1.5 billion over six years. To date, over \$700 million has been approved for more than 6,400 NHT and related projects that address biodiversity conservation and sustainable agriculture issues in an integrated manner.

It should be recognised that the Commonwealth NHT contribution is one part in community efforts to undertake worthwhile environmental and sustainable agriculture projects. In 1999-2000, for every \$1,000 approved by the Commonwealth for One-Stop-Shop NHT projects, funds and in-kind goods to the value of about \$7,000 were also leveraged.

Cape York Natural Heritage Trust Plan

The Cape York Natural Heritage Trust Plan is providing up to \$40 million to protect the outstanding natural and cultural values of Cape York. The Plan was developed by the Federal Government in consultation with the Queensland Government and is being delivered by both governments in partnership with the Cape York community.

Since June 1998, the Natural Heritage Trust has provided over \$3.8 million to 21 projects, including the development of property plans with individual land holders. The project is building in momentum, with community organisations across the Cape now putting forward substantial proposals to protect and enhance its natural and cultural value.

LAKE EYRE BASIN REGIONAL INITIATIVE

In recognition of the role of the community in maintaining the nationally important economic, social, environment and heritage values associated with the Lake Eyre Basin, the Federal Government is continuing to support the Lake Eyre Basin Regional Initiative, in partnership with the South Australian and Queensland Governments.

Under the Regional Initiative, the Basin community is taking responsibility for achieving sustainable regional development outcomes while protecting the Basin's unique environmental, social and cultural values.

LAKE EYRE BASIN AGREEMENT

The Federal Government is continuing to work with relevant Queensland and South Australian agencies and the community to develop and implement the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement.

The Agreement will provide a framework for the cooperative management of the water and related natural resources associated with cross-border river systems in the Lake Eyre Basin, and, through this, the protection of dependent aquatic ecosystems. The Agreement will also establish a Ministerial Forum and formalise associated community and scientific advisory arrangements, ensuring community views and local knowledge are fully recognised in decision-making and management processes.

RENEWABLE REMOTE POWER GENERATION PROGRAMME

The Renewable Remote Power Generation Programme, announced by the Prime Minister in May 1999 in *Measures for a Better Environment*, will begin on 1 July 2000. The Programme will provide a rebate of up to 50 per cent of the capital costs of converting diesel-based, remote, off-grid electricity supplies to renewable energy technologies.

The Programme will be funded from excise paid on diesel used to generate electricity by publicly-owned power utilities. States and Territories will be allocated funding on the basis of the relevant diesel fuel excise paid in that State or Territory. Up to \$264 million will be available over the four-year life of the Programme, with \$66 million in 2000-01.

GREENHOUSE GAS ABATEMENT PROGRAMME

The Government is providing \$400 million from 2000-01 to 2003-04, with \$100 million in 2000-01, under the Greenhouse Gas Abatement Programme. The funding is to reduce Australia's net greenhouse gas emissions by supporting activities that are likely to result in substantial emission reduction or substantial sink enhancement in regional Australia. This Programme significantly builds upon the \$180 million Greenhouse Programme, which is already taking practical steps to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.

BUSH FOR GREENHOUSE

As part of the Prime Minister's *Safeguarding the Future* Statement, the Government has allocated a total of \$5.5 million from 1998-99 to 2002-03 for Bush for Greenhouse, with \$2 million in 2000-01. The programme will enhance Australia's greenhouse sinks estate by facilitating corporate investment into re-vegetation activities.

DIESEL AND ALTERNATIVE FUEL GRANTS SCHEME

The Diesel and Alternative Fuel Grants Scheme seeks to maintain the current price relativities between diesel and alternative transport fuels, with on-road transport operators who are eligible for the diesel fuel grant also eligible for alternative fuel grants. The Scheme will encourage wider use of alternative fuels, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality.

Eligible users of alternative fuels such as compressed natural gas, liquid petroleum gas and recycled waste oil, and renewable fuels such as ethanol and canola oil, will attract alternative fuel grants.

GLADSTONE REGIONAL STRATEGY

In January 2000, the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) launched its first regional greenhouse reduction strategy with the Gladstone region. Under this strategy, the AGO is providing up to \$760,000 over three years for the delivery of a range of AGO programmes. The Gladstone Regional Sustainability Group (consisting of local government, State government, industry, local business and community groups) is matching the funds.

BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY

The Bureau of Meteorology provides a broad range of on-going weather and climate related forecasting and information services to regional Australia. An initiative aimed at enhancing the services to provincial cities and rural areas has been under way since 1996, with the main focus being improvements to the infrastructure within the Bureau's field offices to enable the staff to respond more effectively to local needs for information and services.

In 2000-01, some \$355,000 will be directed towards improving on-line communications and equipment at the offices and upgrading services of particular interest to rural areas.

CHEMCOLLECT

ChemCollect is a joint Commonwealth and State initiative which is being funded through Environment Australia under the Chemwatch initiative. ChemCollect will allow existing unwanted agricultural and veterinary chemicals, which represent a major risk to the community, agricultural markets and the environment, to be safely collected from rural areas and appropriately disposed of.

The three-year programme will be completed at the end of 2001-02 and will have a particular focus on hazardous farm chemicals which are no longer registered for use, particularly persistent organochlorine pesticides.

The Federal Government contribution will approximate \$10.8 million and will be matched on a dollar for dollar basis by State and Territory governments. This one-off, Government-funded collection scheme will be followed by an ongoing chemicals collections scheme funded by the rural chemicals industry.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Community partnerships

REGIONAL AUSTRALIA STRATEGY

The Regional Australia Strategy, announced in the 1998-99 Budget, provides \$2.5 million each year for four years for communication and coordination of whole-of-Government activities impacting on regional areas. The Strategy aims to better coordinate awareness of, and access to, Government programmes and services in regional areas through targeted policy advice and whole-of-Government communications activities.

Regional Forums Australia Programme

An important part of the communications and whole-of-Government component of the Regional Australia Strategy is a regional forums and visits programme, known as the Regional Forums Australia Programme.

The forums are more than just an information exchange or a consultation exercise, they aim to bring a considered approach to the sustainable future of a region. They are also a mechanism for governments, particularly the Federal Government, to address how they interact with, and provide services for, a region.

The first trial forum was held in Whyalla in the Spencer Gulf area of South Australia in July 1999. It was attended by about 160 people and included representatives from local business, community organisations, State and local government, and Federal Government portfolios. The process resulted in a better understanding by the Federal Government of the needs and priorities of the region, and closer links between Federal Government agencies and the region.

Specific outcomes from that forum included:

- a total of \$165,000 in Federal Government funding under the Regional Assistance Programme for three major projects;
- a much closer working relationship between the Area Consultative Committee, regional development boards and the community;
- the establishment of a case manager within the Department of Transport and Regional Services to be the first point of call for people from the region seeking information on Government programmes and services (trial for six months);

- the placement of an *Invest Australia* officer in the region to develop a detailed investment strategy to encourage investment in the region; and
- the placement of a TradeStart and Export Access officer position based in Port Augusta. The position will be jointly funded by Austrade, the South Australian Government and the Upper Spencer Gulf Common Purpose Group.

Northern Australia Summit

Northern Australia: Summit for Growth into the New Century will be held in Katherine in the Northern Territory in October 2000.

The Summit will draw together the expertise and experience of industry, communities and government across northern Australia to help identify the future direction for development, especially economic development. It will build on the outcomes of last year's Regional Australia Summit by taking account of the particular economic, social and environmental priorities of the north. It will be preceded by a series of local consultations across northern Australia and in the Indian Ocean territories.

THE FOUNDATION FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL RENEWAL

The Federal Government will provide \$14.5 million to the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR). The Foundation is a philanthropic organisation that will help provide a viable social and economic future for Australia's regional, rural and remote communities.

The Foundation's aims are to encourage innovative collaboration between business, community and government in philanthropic endeavours that will boost the economic and social stocks of regional Australia. The Foundation will have three key areas of operation: rural capacity building, information and research, and seeding grants for development projects. The focus will be on economic development, job creation, and stimulating regional and rural renewal.

EDEN REGION ADJUSTMENT PACKAGE

The Eden Region Adjustment Package (ERAP) was announced by the Federal Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government and the Minister for Forestry and Conservation on 18 August 1999.

Federal Government funding of \$3.6 million will be provided under ERAP. It will supplement private-sector investment in the development and implementation of long-term, employment-generating projects in the Eden region.

RURAL COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME AND RURAL PLAN

The Rural Communities Programme and Rural Plan aim to strengthen regional and rural Australia. Through them, communities and industries in a region are encouraged to work together to identify, develop and implement strategic plans and projects to assist their development. These three-year funding programmes commenced in 1998 and will cease in June 2001.

Under the Rural Communities Programme, small regional communities are funded to undertake projects in community planning and development, information provision, information services technology and financial counselling.

Rural Plan assists communities, industries and local businesses at the regional level to work together developing a framework for sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

REGIONAL FLOOD MITIGATION PROGRAMME

Recognising the need to address the problem of repeated flooding in rural towns and regional centres, the Federal Government announced the Regional Flood Mitigation Programme, in May 1999, in partnership with the States, Territories and local government.

The Federal Government is providing \$20 million over three years. This is to be at least matched by the States and Territories, with local government making a contribution. This funding is in addition to existing State and Territory programmes.

The Programme is designed to help regional and rural areas prevent the physical, social and economic costs of flooding. Disaster prevention efforts of this kind can achieve savings far in excess of the initial capital costs of the measures taken.

In the first year of the Programme (1999-2000), \$6 million was available for the implementation of approved flood mitigation works and measures. Over \$5.5 million of the available Federal funding has been allocated for 43 priority flood mitigation projects.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Financial Assistance Grants

The Federal Government recognises the important role local government plays in regional Australia. In 2000-01, local government is expected to be paid over \$1.3 billion in financial assistance grants from the Federal Government, an increase of about 4 per cent, or around \$50.9 million, over the amount paid in 1999-2000. About one third of these funds is notionally allocated to councils for spending on local roads. These

funds are untied and councils can spend them according to the needs and priorities of their local community.

Around \$881 million of the funds will go to more than 580 councils in rural and regional Australia.

Local Government Incentive Programme

The Local Government Incentive Programme (LGIP) was introduced in the 1999-2000 Budget. It provides funds to local government to contribute to economic development in regional Australia, and to increase the efficiency with which it regulates business activities. From 1999 to 2001, this Programme is providing funding of \$7 million.

Creating capacity

Four of the nine new measures under the **Stronger Families and Communities Strategy** are outlined below. These four focus on community development. (The other five measures are outlined in the Equity of Service chapter.)

POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The Government has committed \$37.1 million over four years for this initiative, which will identify and support potential community leaders who live in socially disadvantaged areas and come from outside industry and government structures. Once fully phased in, it will involve up to 400 communities in a leadership programme and network, developing between 1,600 and 2,400 leaders who will work on projects of benefit to their local community. Through a youth cadetship programme covering a variety of cadetships, approximately 10,000 young people in over 200 communities will be funded to participate in community activities.

NATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR VOLUNTEERS

This initiative provides \$15.8 million over four years to help people involved in volunteer work build their skills. During 2001, communities will be able to select from a range of activities to celebrate the International Year of the Volunteer, including promotion of volunteer activity, greater recognition of volunteers, and initiatives to foster volunteer efforts in regional and rural communities.

This measure will also enable people to gain the skills needed to support programmes that rely heavily on volunteers. It will provide on-going, specific skills training necessary for volunteers to provide a better standard of service to the community group with which they are involved.

LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL PROBLEMS

The Government has committed \$15.4 million over four years to help communities find local solutions to local problems. It will fund over 500 projects over the next four years in recognition of the great diversity in communities and the potential local responses.

CAN DO COMMUNITY

The Can Do Community initiative will showcase Australian best practice and encourage people to participate in community life. The Government will provide \$5.2 million over four years for this initiative, which will:

- identify and promote best practice examples of local solutions to local problems;
- develop a project ideas bank;
- encourage people to get involved in their community;
- network community leaders and community builders; and
- publicly recognise best practice examples of collaborative community actions which effectively address local issues.

REGIONAL WOMEN'S ADVISORY COUNCIL

More than two million women live in regional, rural and remote Australia and contribute significantly to their local economies through town-based enterprises, community work and rural industries. Women have a significant contribution to make to policy debates, and their experience and knowledge bring an important and often innovative perspective to meeting the challenges facing regional, rural and remote communities.

The Government has strengthened its interaction with women in regional and rural Australia through the Regional Women's Advisory Council, established in September 1999. The Council comprises women with expertise on key issues facing regional Australia. Its nine members represent every State and the Northern Territory and were appointed by, and report to, the Minister for Transport and Regional Services.

The Council, which plays an important role in strengthening the voice of women in decision-making processes, will conduct an action-research project over the next 18 months looking into the critical success factors for communities working with change. The action-research process will provide the opportunity for women in each State and the Northern Territory to participate in workshops that will form the basis of this research.

Following completion of the research, a publication of good practice case studies that determine critical success factors and impediments to positive change will be released by the Deputy Prime Minister and distributed nationally. The research will also profile women leaders and community builders from regional Australia. These outcomes will be available on the Regional Women's Advisory Council web site following each of the workshops.

REGIONAL AND RURAL WOMEN'S UNIT

The Regional and Rural Women's Unit was established in the Department of Transport and Regional Services in April 1999. An important role of the Unit is to facilitate two-way communication between the Federal Government and women from regional, rural and remote areas of Australia in order to take into account the aspirations, perspectives and needs of women from these areas.

The Unit provides support to the Regional Women's Advisory Council in its provision of advice to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. The Unit undertakes research and provides advice to the Federal Government on the specific needs of women in regional, rural and remote areas. Regional women's groups are kept informed on opportunities to contribute to and participate in major Federal Government inquiries, forums and programmes, such as the Rural Domestic Violence Programme.

GRANTS TO WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

During 1999-2000, \$20,000 was provided to the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women to undertake leadership workshops for current and future rural women leaders. This will bring together approximately 16 rural community participants, including Indigenous women, who have demonstrated potential and leadership ability within their community.

Ten thousand dollars was also provided to UNIFEM Australia (United Nations Development Fund for Women) for the extension of UNIFEM's International Women's Breakfasts in additional locations across Australia, including regional locations.

EXTENSION OF *THEIR SERVICE – OUR HERITAGE* COMMEMORATIVE PROGRAMME

This initiative builds on the existing *Their Service – Our Heritage* commemorative programme and extends it through the Centenary of Federation with a range of current and new initiatives. Funding of \$4.3 million will be provided in 2000-01. Planned initiatives will include the restoration of local memorials and the provision of education programmes to ensure that military history and an appreciation of wartime heritage is passed on to younger generations of Australians. Local contractors will benefit from restoration work on local memorials.

Service delivery

RURAL TRANSACTION CENTRES PROGRAMME

The Government has committed \$70 million over five years (1999-2004) for the Rural Transaction Centres Programme. This Programme will help small, rural communities to establish centres that provide access to basic transaction services, such as banking, post, phone, fax, the Internet, Centrelink Services and Medicare Easyclaim. Local communities with populations under 3000 are expected to benefit from the Programme.

REMOTE COMMUNITIES LIAISON SERVICE

As a means of promoting effective two-way communication and understanding between the Federal Government and people living in regional, rural and remote Australia, a pilot remote communities liaison service is being trialed in Western Queensland. The service commenced in October 1999, and aims to achieve higher levels of community awareness of, and access to, a range of Federal Government programmes. The remote communities liaison officer, based in Longreach, works with regional and rural communities on development in their region and provides them with information and direct links to the Federal Government.

COUNTRYLINK AUSTRALIA

Countrylink Australia provides people living in non-metropolitan areas with a personalised, free-call information service about Federal Government programmes and services. Countrylink Australia also provides *The Rural Book*, a guide to major Federal Government programmes and services, which is updated annually, and provides information stands to regional and rural towns and a travelling shopfront to rural areas.

RURAL YOUTH INFORMATION SERVICE

The aim of the Rural Youth Information Service (RYIS) is to provide information, advice and referrals to young people in rural and isolated areas on a range of issues, with emphasis on employment, education and training. The RYIS is located in 21 rural and isolated areas across Australia where there is limited access to other Commonwealth services.

Showcasing regional communities

YEAR OF THE OUTBACK — 2002

In 1999, the Federal Government declared that 2002 would be Australia's Year of the Outback and has agreed to provide \$2 million over three years for this project, beginning in 1999-2000. It is envisaged that the Year of the Outback - 2002 will raise awareness of regional Australia and its importance in the development of our culture and economic wealth.

The Year of the Outback - 2002 will celebrate the ethos of the bush through a major celebration of outback history, culture and achievements. The year-long series of events will generate awareness of how much regional, rural and remote areas have contributed to Australian life.

FEDERATION FUND INITIATIVES IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

In 1999-2000 and 2000-01, the Federal Government will spend \$226.3 million on 18 major Federation Fund projects in regional Australia. These projects will make significant and ongoing economic, social and cultural contributions. The following projects in regional Australia are receiving funding from the Federal Government:

- Gunnedah Performing Arts Centre;
- Naval Aviation Museum at Nowra;
- Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame, Kalgoorlie;
- Australian Shearers' Hall of Fame;
- Line of Lode Museum, Broken Hill;
- Queensland Heritage Trails Network;
- Victorian Regional Galleries;
- Alice Springs to Darwin Rail link;
- Abt Railway, Tasmania;
- National Marine Science Centre, Coffs Harbour;
- Jervoise Bay, Western Australia;
- Murray River bridges at:
 - Corowa,
 - Robinvale
 - and Echuca;
- Sporting facilities at:
 - Bendigo and
 - Ballarat;
- Oddfellows Hall, Corowa;
- Walhalla Goldfields Railway, Victoria.

THE FEDERATION CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PROJECTS PROGRAMME

The Federation Cultural and Heritage Projects Programme (FCHP) provided a total of \$70.4 million from the Federation Fund to fund medium-sized cultural and heritage projects throughout Australia. Under the FCHP, support has been provided for cultural and heritage projects which are:

- principally capital works (including restoration and conservation) projects of a lasting nature;
- nationally significant; and
- appropriate to the Centenary of Federation.

Sixty proposals were successful in their bid for funding, and these are being managed jointly by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, and the Department of Environment and Heritage. Of these, 36 projects totalling \$45 million are in regional Australia.

FEDERATION COMMUNITY PROJECTS PROGRAMME

On 6 July 1999, the Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation announced over 1,000 grants under the \$30 million Federation Community Projects Programme. The Programme assists community groups, schools, churches and local councils throughout Australia to commemorate the Centenary of Federation. A great many of the projects are located in regional and rural areas.

CENTENARY OF FEDERATION PROGRAMME

This is a cooperative initiative between the Federal Government and State and Territory governments to develop a programme of events and projects for Australians to celebrate the Centenary of Federation across the country.

The Programme will inject funds into the regional economy and will be a valuable contribution to tourism and Australia's economy. Twenty million dollars will be spent by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation on major, centrepiece events and national activities, including for events and activities that will be delivered regionally.

APPENDIX

Table of new Budget measures for regional Australia

Assistance to Rural and Regional Australia	2000-01 \$m	2001-02 \$m	2002-03 \$m	2003-04 \$m	Total \$m
EXPENSES					
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry					
<i>Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</i>					
Assistance to farmers in central north-east South Australia	1.1	1.0	-	-	2.1
Building a national approach to animal and plant health	4.5	6.3	6.2	5.3	22.3
Continuation of the Agriculture Advancing Australia Package	37.8	74.2	90.7	106.7	309.4
Exceptional circumstances recovery assistance	0.4	-	-	-	0.4
Portfolio total	43.8	81.5	96.9	112.0	334.2
Communications, Information Technology and the Arts					
<i>Australian Communications Authority</i>					
Universal service obligations contestability arrangements	1.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	4.8
<i>Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts</i>					
Regional Communications Partnership Fund	-	-	-	-	-
Regional equalisation plan for digital television - taxable grants	-	-	0.3	0.3	0.6
Portfolio total	1.8	1.0	1.3	1.3	5.4
Education, Training and Youth Affairs					
<i>Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs</i>					
Additional resourcing for the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme	2.2	4.5	4.8	5.1	16.4
Regional Health Package: More Doctors, Better Services	1.8	3.6	5.8	8.1	19.1
Portfolio total	3.9	8.0	10.5	13.1	35.6
Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business					
<i>Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business</i>					
Dairy Regional Assistance Programme	15.0	15.0	15.0	-	45.0
Portfolio total	15.0	15.0	15.0	-	45.0

Family and Community Services					
<i>Department of Family and Community Services</i>					
Continuation of payment to voluntary work agencies	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.7	6.2
Expansion of the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme	-6.9	-14.2	-14.6	-15.0	-50.7
Extension of the Retirement Assistance for Farmers Scheme	1.5	1.9	1.9	2.0	7.4
Increase in Youth Allowance assets limits for farms and businesses	18.5	36.8	37.7	38.6	131.5
Portfolio total	14.3	26.1	26.6	27.3	94.3
Finance and Administration					
<i>Department of Finance and Administration</i>					
Assistance to farmers in central north-east South Australia	-	-	-	-	-
Portfolio total	-	-	-	-	-
Health and Aged Care					
<i>Department of Health and Aged Care</i>					
National radiotherapy single machine unit trial	1.0	2.9	2.9	2.9	9.7
Regional Health Package - More Doctors, Better Services	66.2	123.0	161.3	192.5	543.0
Subsidisation of the accreditation fee for small residential aged care facilities	1.8	1.3	1.3	1.9	6.4
Portfolio total	69.0	127.2	165.5	197.4	559.1
Prime Minister and Cabinet					
<i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</i>					
Expansion of the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme	9.2	19.0	19.5	20.0	67.8
<i>Torres Strait Regional Authority</i>					
Expansion of the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme	0.5	1.0	1.1	1.1	3.7
Portfolio total	9.7	20.1	20.6	21.1	71.5
Transport and Regional Services					
<i>Department of Transport and Regional Services</i>					
Beef 2000 Exposition	-	-	-	-	-
Provision of services to the Indian Ocean Territories	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	11.6
Year 2002 - Year of the Outback	-	0.2	0.4	-	0.6
Portfolio total	2.9	3.1	3.3	2.9	12.2
Treasury					
<i>Australian Taxation Office</i>					
Administration of the Fuels Sales Grants Scheme	9.5	-	-	-	9.5
Fuels Sales Grants Scheme	110.0	120.0	125.0	135.0	490.0
Portfolio total	119.5	120.0	125.0	135.0	499.5

Veterans' Affairs					
<i>Department of Veterans' Affairs</i>					
Extension of the Retirement Assistance for Farmers Scheme	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4	1.4
National radiotherapy single machine unit trial
Portfolio total	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4	1.4
Total expense measures	280.3	402.3	465.1	510.5	1658.2
REVENUE					
Communications, Information Technology and the Arts					
<i>Australian Broadcasting Authority</i>					
Regional equalisation plan for digital television - licence fee rebates	-22.6	-22.6	-26.9	-27.1	-99.2
Portfolio total	-22.6	-22.6	-26.9	-27.1	-99.2
Total revenue measures	-22.6	-22.6	-26.9	-27.1	-99.2
CAPITAL					
Transport and Regional Services					
<i>Department of Transport and Regional Services</i>					
Indian Ocean Territories Infrastructure Development Programme	21.9	15.7	15.7	15.7	69.0
Portfolio total	21.9	15.7	15.7	15.7	69.0
Treasury					
<i>Australian Taxation Office</i>					
Administration of the Fuels Sales Grants Scheme	1.7	-	-	-	1.7
Portfolio total	1.7	-	-	-	1.7
Total capital measures	23.6	15.7	15.7	15.7	70.7
TOTAL ASSISTANCE TO REGIONAL AND RURAL AUSTRALIA	326.5	440.6	507.7	553.3	1828.1