



# BUDGET

BUILDING OUR RURAL AND REGIONAL  
COMMUNITIES

**STATEMENT BY**

**THE HONOURABLE ANTHONY ALBANESE MP**

MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT, REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

AND

**THE HONOURABLE TONY BURKE MP**

MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

AND

**THE HONOURABLE MARTIN FERGUSON AM MP**

MINISTER FOR RESOURCES AND ENERGY  
MINISTER FOR TOURISM

AND

**THE HONOURABLE GARY GRAY AO MP**

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT AND NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

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# FOREWORD

Nearly two-thirds of Australians live in our capital cities but it is Australia's regions that generate two-thirds of our export earnings. The natural wealth in our regions, including resources and agriculture underpins our economy.

The past year has required us not only to address major short-term challenges but also to secure our future prosperity with sustainable policy directions for regional and rural Australia. Infrastructure shortfalls, the continuing drought, the challenge of bushfires and floods and the global economic recession has highlighted the need for decisive and immediate action by the Australian Government to cushion the impact on regions.

The Australian Government is committed to improving our regional and rural communities and securing the nation's future, through investments in transport, water, energy, housing, health, education and communications infrastructure, as well as taking a whole-of-government approach in regional policies.

In the short to medium term, the \$42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan will stimulate employment, fund better infrastructure, and support Australia's economic prosperity by helping us become more innovative, efficient and internationally competitive. In particular, funding of \$800 million for the Community Infrastructure Program – the largest one-off investment in local infrastructure in Australia's history – has been provided to stimulate growth and economic activity across the nation.

Providing both an additional economic stimulus and longer term benefits for our economy, the Budget allocates record funding of \$34.7 billion to nationally significant transport projects across Australia that will boost our nation's productivity and create jobs.

Agriculture, fisheries and forestry will continue to be an important part of Australia's economy. These sectors are at the forefront of tackling key challenges: keeping our rural and regional communities strong and building prosperity, dealing with climate change and drought, boosting biosecurity preparedness and addressing the food security needs of the world. The Government will continue to strongly support the productivity, growth and development of Australia's primary industries.

Our focus on agricultural productivity is critical and we continue to support our industry through strengthening quarantine and biosecurity systems as well as funding research into combating the issue of climate change.

The Government is mindful of the global environment and energy issues and is working towards the provision of adequate, reliable and affordable energy to meet future energy consumption needs and to underpin strong economic growth, consistent with the principles of environmental responsibility and sustainable development. To this end, the Government will introduce a new \$4.5 billion Clean Energy Initiative to accelerate the large scale deployment of carbon capture and storage, and solar

*Foreword*

technology in Australia, and to bring innovative renewable technologies to market at acceptable cost.

We will strengthen rural and regional Australia with significant investment across the spectrum of economic, environmental and social needs. We are listening to and engaging with all our regions in order to make sure we emerge from the global recession stronger and with more sustainable regional communities.

Anthony Albanese  
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport  
Regional Development and Local Government

Martin Ferguson  
Minister for Resources and Energy  
Minister for Tourism

Tony Burke  
Minister for Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry

Gary Gray  
Parliamentary Secretary for  
Regional Development and  
Northern Australia

# 1. BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The Government recognises the vital role that Australia's regions play in the economic development of the nation. Agriculture and resources dominate our exports and underpin our future prosperity. To support and stimulate the many businesses, farms and factories in rural and regional Australia, the Government is investing in infrastructure, health, local jobs, broadband, climate change action, biosecurity and quarantine, agricultural productivity and education.

Regional Australia is facing significant global challenges such as the world economic downturn, climate change and food security.

The 2009 Budget demonstrates the Government's commitment to take whatever action is necessary to cushion Australians from the worst of the global recession as well as making productivity-boosting investments to ensure that we emerge from the global recession strong and well- equipped for the future.

The Budget reflects the Government's determination to fund practical initiatives that directly respond to the challenges faced by rural and regional Australia such as ageing, inadequate and insufficient infrastructure, communications, housing, health, education and employment.

The Australian Government is continuing to support and work in partnership with the immense network of farmers, miners, regional businesses, and tourism operators to ensure that working Australian families can benefit from the stimulus these policies will provide.

Australia's rural and regional communities and economies have built the foundations of modern Australia. Primary industries and resources have played a key role in generating a large share of Australia's wealth and are an integral part of the story of our nation, our history and our culture. These vital economic sectors will continue to play an important role in generating Australia's future economic prosperity.

## **NATION BUILDING PLAN FOR THE FUTURE**

The Government's Nation Building Plan for the Future provides an additional \$8.5 billion for nationally significant transport infrastructure investment that will provide the building blocks for Australia's long term economic, environmental and social prosperity. Regional areas will benefit from improved freight supply chains and export infrastructure, better connections between major towns and cities, and improved telecommunications.

A particular highlight of the Plan is the Government's investment in Australia's key freight route, Network 1 (N1), which stretches from Melbourne to Cairns. Work will

soon start on key sections of the Pacific, Bruce and Hume highways as well as the key feeder roads: the Ipswich Motorway and the new Hunter Expressway.

## **NATION BUILDING PROGRAM**

The Australian Government's record investment of more than \$26 billion over 6 years in the Nation Building Program provides a significant injection into our national road and rail network. Projects will be funded across the interstate transport network as well as to freight corridors connecting regional Australia with major cities and ports.

## **NATION BUILDING AND JOBS PLAN**

In February 2009, the Government announced a \$42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan to invest in infrastructure and support jobs. The Plan is designed to support and stimulate employment in the short term and to improve Australia's economic prosperity in the long term. Rural and regional communities will see substantial investment in their roads, railways, schools and social and community facilities.

## **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM**

Funding of \$800 million during 2008-09 and 2009-10 has been provided through the Community Infrastructure Program to build and renew critical local infrastructure such as community centres, town halls, parks and playgrounds, pools and sports facilities. This funding, delivered through local government will stimulate growth and economic activity across Australia and improve community wellbeing.

## **JOBS FUND**

The \$650 million Jobs Fund is an Australian Government initiative over four years to support and create jobs and skill development through projects that build community and social infrastructure. Priority will be given to projects in regions experiencing higher levels of unemployment, and social disadvantage.

The Jobs Fund is a discretionary grants program that forms part of the Australian Government's Jobs and Training Compact and has been established to support families and communities most affected by the global recession.

## **BROADBAND**

In April 2009, the Government established a new company to build and operate a National Broadband Network. The company will invest up to \$43 billion over eight years to build the National Broadband Network, and will initially be public owned. Private investment will be encouraged from the initial build stage.



The Government's objective is to:

- connect 90 per cent of all Australian homes, schools and workplaces with optical fibre, providing broadband services with speeds of up to 100 megabits per second—100 times faster than those currently used by many households and businesses
- connect all other premises in Australia with next generation wireless and satellite technologies that will deliver broadband speeds of 12 megabits per second.

The National Broadband Network will include \$250 million for the Regional Backbone Blackspots Program. In addition, the \$80 million allocated for the Rural and Regional National Broadband Network initiative will assist regional, rural and remote communities in realising the benefits of broadband.

The National Broadband Network is expected to support up to 25,000 jobs every year, on average, over the eight-year life of the project.

Under the Government's new National Broadband Network, every house, school and business in Australia will get access to affordable fast broadband.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Government has a comprehensive strategy for dealing with climate change. The strategy is built on three pillars: reducing Australia's carbon pollution; adapting to climate change; and helping to shape a global solution. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) will be the primary mechanism through which Australia will seek to cap and reduce carbon emissions. As a market-based solution, the CPRS is the lowest cost way to reduce carbon pollution while supporting the interests of business and households.

The Government will support the decision making on potential entry of land-based sectors into the CPRS by dedicating \$16.1 million over four years to the development of the National Carbon Accounting Toolbox.

Under the \$2.75 billion Climate Change Action Fund, the Government is committed to providing structural adjustment assistance for workers, communities and regions where a clear, identifiable and significant impact arises, or is highly likely to arise, as a direct result of the CPRS. The fund will also provide funding to assist coal mines, especially those with high fugitive emissions, with associated benefits for the communities that rely on them.

## **BIOSECURITY AND QUARANTINE**

The Government recognises the importance of a rigorous system to minimise the risk of pest and disease incursions. It is committed to ensuring that Australians, and the rest of the world, can have confidence in the integrity of our quarantine and biosecurity systems.

In February 2008, the Government commissioned a comprehensive, independent review of Australia's quarantine and biosecurity. The review, chaired by Roger Beale, delivered its report in September 2008. The Government's preliminary response, released in December 2008, agreed in principle with all 84 recommendations. Responding to the recommendations will depend on a number of considerations, including the outcome of negotiations with the states and territories, budget considerations, development of biosecurity legislation and ongoing discussions with stakeholders during 2009 and into 2010.

In 2009-10, before finalising the Government's response to the Beale Review recommendations, the Government will provide renewed support of \$156 million to ensure that the resources needed to deliver effective quarantine measures will continue to be deployed at our airports, seaports and mail centres, and enhancing post-border biosecurity.

## **NATIONAL REVIEW OF DROUGHT POLICY**

The National Review of Drought Policy – a major election commitment – is well advanced. The Government is considering the three reports that comprise the review – reports on climate, economic and social impacts – to develop a drought policy that better prepares our rural and regional communities for the future.

Exceptional Circumstances assistance, including Exceptional Circumstance Relief Payments, the Exceptional Circumstance Interest Rate Subsidy and Interim Income Support, will continue in 2009-10. In addition, existing drought support initiatives for farmers and drought-affected communities have been extended for 2009-10.

## **LIVE ANIMAL TRADE**

The Government will form an enhanced partnership with the livestock export sector through the Live Trade Animal Welfare Partnership. This partnership will deliver a three year \$3.2 million program to continue to improve the handling of live animals in importing countries and support the growth in this trade.

## **AUSTRALIA'S FARMING FUTURE**

The Government delivered on a key election commitment in 2008-09, when it introduced the \$130 million Australia's Farming Future initiative. The four-year program is assisting primary industry sectors to adapt and respond to climate change.

In particular, under the Climate Change Research Program, the Government announced \$46.2 million in funding for research, development and demonstration activities to help primary producers manage and adapt to climate change. The \$26.5 million FarmReady program is helping primary producers develop skills and strategies to deal with the impacts of climate change.

## **CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY**

Caring for our Country, the election commitment valued at more than \$2 billion over five years, is progressing, working towards an environment that is healthier, better protected, well managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

The Government is providing \$189 million over five years from 2008-09 towards landcare for activities that support sustainable primary production and natural resource management initiatives. To date, \$38 million has been invested in 186 landcare projects across the country.

The Government released the first Caring for our Country business plan seeking proposals for around \$450 million over the next four years. An overwhelming response was received from farming, landcare, environmental, Indigenous and community groups.

## **EDUCATION**

The Government is investing \$62.1 billion in schools from 2009-2012 to ensure every Australian child receives a world class education. The biggest school modernisation program in the nation's history, the Building the Education Revolution initiative will commit \$14.7 billion over three years to provide new facilities and refurbish Australian schools to bring them up to 21st century standards.

## **RESOURCES AND ENERGY**

The Government is delivering on its commitment to accelerate the commercialisation and deployment of new renewable and low-emission energy technologies.

The new \$4.5 billion Clean Energy Initiative will support first-of-a-kind industrial-scale carbon capture and storage demonstration projects and help preserve the value of Australia's coal exports. The Clean Energy Initiative will include

## *Budget highlights*

\$2.0 billion over nine years to support the demonstration of industrial-scale carbon capture and storage (CCS) flagship projects in Australia.

In renewables, the Clean Energy Initiative will provide \$1.5 billion over six years to establish commercial-scale solar power generation projects in Australia and \$465 million over four years for a new innovation body, Renewables Australia, to promote the development, commercialisation and deployment of renewable energy.

The Government has announced the first round of successful projects under the Geothermal Drilling Program, launched the \$435 million Renewable Energy Demonstration Program, released for consultation the draft guidelines for the \$50 million Clean Energy Program and begun assessments under the Second Generation Biofuels Research and Development Program.

The Government is funding several clean-energy projects located in regional areas. New programs announced in the 2008-09 Budget targeted at the renewable energy sectors are likely to include projects located in rural and regional Australia such as geothermal drilling and large-scale renewable and low-emission coal technology demonstration projects.

The National Low Emissions Coal Initiative will accelerate the development and deployment of technologies that will reduce emissions from coal use. It is supported by the \$500 million National Low Emissions Coal Fund between 2008-09 and 2014-15, designed to generate a further \$1 billion in investment by other stakeholders, for research, development and demonstration of low-emissions coal technologies. Coal-fired power stations supply over 80 per cent of Australia's electricity and are significant employers in rural and regional Australia. The Government's initiative will enable coal to continue to make a sustainable contribution to reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent of 2000 levels by 2050, while preserving the local and national economic benefits this sector delivers for Australia.

In addition, on 16 April 2009 the Prime Minister launched the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute. In a world first, the Government has announced details of the world's first commercial release of offshore areas designated specifically for the assessment of their greenhouse gas storage potential.

To assist in the development of a comprehensive energy strategy to meet Australia's long-term energy needs, the Government has also released assessments of energy security, liquid fuels vulnerability and strategic directions for the forthcoming Energy White Paper.

## **2. COMPENDIUM OF PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES**

### **AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY**

#### **Biosecurity and Quarantine**

Biosecurity is an increasingly difficult and complex task, impacted by climate change, threats of agri-terrorism and increased globalisation. The successful eradication of equine influenza in Australia – one of the few nations in the world to do so – is testament to the commitment of governments, industry and the community to maintaining our enviable animal and plant health status.

In mid 2008, the Government commissioned a comprehensive, independent review of Australia's quarantine and biosecurity chaired by Roger Beale. Its report was delivered on 30 September 2008. The Government's preliminary response, released in December 2008, agreed in-principle to all 84 recommendations. Responding to the recommendations will depend on a number of considerations, including the outcome of negotiations with the states and territories, budget considerations, development of biosecurity legislation and discussions continuing with stakeholders during 2009 and into 2010.

Ahead of this detailed consideration, the Government will provide renewed support in 2009-10 for quarantine border security (\$132.4 million); avian influenza response measures (\$15 million); Securing the Future: Protecting our Industries from Biological, Chemical and Physical Risks (\$5 million); and AQIS International Mail (\$3.6 million).

#### **Drought Review**

The National Review of Drought Policy – a major election commitment – is well advanced. The Government has received the three assessments that comprise the review: the climate assessment by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO; an expert panel's review of social impacts; and the final report of the Productivity Commission's economic assessment. The Government is examining the recommendations from all three reports to develop a drought policy that better prepares our rural and regional communities for the future.

#### **Drought support**

The Government has allocated \$429.5 million in the 2009-10 Budget Exceptional Circumstances (EC) measures to farmers and small businesses dealing with the current drought including EC Relief Payments, the EC Interest Rate Subsidy and Interim Income Support. In addition, the Government has announced a 12-month extension for EC assistance for small businesses, the \$20,000 off-farm salary and wages exemption for EC Relief Payments and the \$750,000 off-farm asset exemption for the EC Interest Rate Subsidy. The Government also continues to support farmers through providing professional advice and training grants and re-establishment assistance for those who choose to exit farming, providing \$52.3 million in 2009-10.

## **Australia's Farming Future**

Australia's Farming Future is the Government's climate change initiative for primary industries. It provides around \$130 million from 2008-09 to 2011-12 towards research, development, training, and adjustment advice.

### **Climate Change Research Program**

The \$46.2 million Climate Change Research Program is helping primary producers prepare for climate change, with important work being done in the priority areas of soil carbon, livestock emissions and nitrous oxide, and adapting to a changing climate.

In 2008-09, the Government committed \$25.5 million, leveraging \$37.6 million from partners, including state government, industry and research organisations, for projects addressing nitrous oxide and methane emissions and investigating the potential of soil to sequester carbon.

### **Adjustment support**

The Government is providing support to eligible primary producers to access re-establishment grants of up to \$150,000, targeted professional advice and training of up to \$5,500, and transitional income support. Transitional Income Support (for up to 12 months at the Newstart Allowance rate) is available to eligible producers who apply before 30 June 2010. Eligible producers may access up to a maximum of 12 months of support.

### **FarmReady**

The Government has allocated \$26.5 million from 2008-09 to 2011-12 to boost training opportunities for primary producers, and to enable industry, farming groups and natural resource management groups to develop strategies to adapt and respond to the impacts of climate change. In May 2009, the Government agreed to the first round of FarmReady industry grants, providing \$6.27 million for 46 projects.

### **Community Networks and Capacity Building Program**

The four year Community Networks and Capacity Building component of Australia's Farming Future commenced in 2008-09. It targets youth, women, Indigenous Australians and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Government has provided \$350,000 to the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association to support a pilot project over 2008-09 and 2009-10. The project will investigate options to increase long-term employment opportunities for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory pastoral industry.

The Government is actively supporting rural women's leadership by sponsoring the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation's 2009 National Rural Women's Award and 10 Year Reunion Forum, as well as providing \$304,000 to fund the National Rural Women's Summit in June 2008. The Recognising Women Farmers and the Next Gen Farmers grants opened in January 2009.

## **Climate change action plans**

The Government continues to work closely with industry organisations, research organisations, and state and territory governments to implement a coordinated response to climate change. The Government has implemented projects under the National Agriculture and Climate Change Action Plan and is progressing the fisheries and forestry action plans.

## **Rural Research and Development Council**

The 10-member independent skills-based Rural Research and Development Council held its first meeting in February 2009, fulfilling a key election commitment. The council's initial task is to develop a national strategic investment plan to strengthen rural research and development through improved multi-sector coordination, prioritisation of investment and performance reporting.

## **Initiatives for rural food producers**

In 2008–09, regional food programs worth \$40 million over four years began. The programs are designed to promote modern, competitive food production industries in Australia. The Regional Food Producers Innovation and Productivity Program funds projects to boost the productivity of Australia's food industry.

The Promoting Australian Produce Program helps food industries develop the capacity to better market their produce to both traditional domestic markets and new export markets. The Promoting Australian Produce (Major Events) Program is helping food and fibre industries to stage major national events that facilitate exchange of information and boost productivity through improved efficiency along the value chain, innovation and adoption of new technologies and management practices.

## **Food security**

The government recognises the need for the Australian and international community to address global food security, given the threats to the lives and health of millions of people resulting from increases in food prices. The global food security challenge must be addressed by boosting research and development, helping to remove barriers to global trade and driving productivity along the food production chain.

The government will continue to promote Australia's important role in facilitating long-term solutions through the production of more food whilst building agricultural capacity in developing countries. Concluding the Doha Round of trade negotiations will help to address global food security by reducing distortions to global food markets. Australia used its attendance at the recent G8+ meeting of world agriculture ministers to demonstrate the major role it can play in combating the global food shortage and boosting global food security.

## **Wheat marketing**

Growers are choosing who exports their wheat for the first time in 60 years under the Australian Government's reform of Australia's export wheat marketing system, which commenced on 1 July 2008. The reforms led to the establishment of Wheat Exports Australia to administer an accreditation scheme for bulk wheat exports. More than 20 companies have been accredited so far; more than 15 of those companies are already making bulk shipments to a variety of markets.

The Government previously committed up to \$9.4 million for a transitional assistance program to help producers adjust to the largest reforms to the bulk wheat export marketing system in six decades. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is receiving \$1.5 million to work with bulk wheat handling companies to ensure that there is fair and reasonable port access to other accredited exporters.

## **Live animal trade**

The Government will form an enhanced partnership with the livestock export sector through the Live Trade Animal Welfare Partnership. This partnership will deliver a three-year \$3.2 million program to continue to improve the handling of live animals in importing countries and support the growth in this trade.

## **Gippsland Lakes and Lakes Entrance**

The Government is delivering on its \$11 million three-year election commitment to improve commercial fishing industry infrastructure and water quality and flood mitigation in the Gippsland Lakes region, with funding flowing to the \$2.25 million project addressing nutrients in wetlands and flood mitigation in Eastern Creek and to the \$3 million project to enhance the Gippsland Lakes. In addition, it is investing \$5.75 million in facilities at Cunninghame Arm Quay and in constructing a new ice works and deepwater wharf at the Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Cooperative.

## **Australian Weeds Research Centre**

The Government is delivering on its \$15 million election commitment. In 2008, it established the Australian Weeds Research Centre. In January 2009, it announced funding of \$2.5 million towards 28 weeds research projects to be funded through the centre. The centre will also undertake a comprehensive fireweed research program worth \$300,000 over two years.

## **Forestry Initiatives**

The Government continues to deliver on its election commitment to invest \$20 million to support sustainable forest industries.

The three-year Australia's Forest Industry – Preparing for the Future includes:

- \$9 million for the Forest Industries Development Fund to provide grants to help boost the industry's international competitiveness. In the first round, 10 projects



have been offered a total of \$4.6 million in grants to help increase the international competitiveness of Australia's forest products. The second round will open later this year

- \$8 million to identify and address major knowledge gaps about the impacts of climate change on forestry
- \$1 million to work with regional governments and industries to address issues associated with the illegal harvesting of timber
- \$1 million for the establishment of the Forest and Forest Products Industry Skills Council. This is in addition to more than \$7 million from the Government's Industry Skills Council funding program to assist in training skilled forestry workers. The Skills Council has been established and is now in operation
- \$1 million towards updating and expanding the forestry industry database to meet future information needs.

### **Recreational Fishing Industry Development**

In 2008, the Government announced \$2 million over three years to review the 1994 national Recreational Fishing Policy and to develop and implement a Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy. The Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee has been established to advise on those matters.

### **Fisheries Research Program**

The Government has increased its investment in policy-related fisheries research by \$4.4 million to provide a total of \$17 million over four years to ensure Commonwealth fisheries are profitable and managed sustainably in the future.

### **National Fruit Fly Strategy**

The draft National Fruit Fly Strategy was released in November 2008. Key elements of the strategy are being implemented under the Government's Quarantine Research and Preparedness Plan. The Government will provide \$5.4 million over four years from 2008 to 2011, towards the strategy and related activities. To date, \$2.3 million has been invested in activities that contribute towards implementation, diagnostic tools, and guidelines for biosecurity planning. The balance of the commitment will be used to complete these initiatives by 2011.

### **Primary Industries Education**

The Government is encouraging young people to learn about our primary industries and consider a career in this field through its \$175,000 support for the Primary Industries Education Foundation and its \$5,000 contribution to a Career in Agriculture Expo held at this year's Sydney Royal Easter Show.

## **Science and Innovation Awards for Young People in Agriculture**

Australians aged 18 to 35 who work or study in primary industries will be able to apply under a national awards program aimed at encouraging innovation in the rural sector. The Government and industry will jointly award \$290,000 for 13 winners to explore, over 12 months, an emerging scientific issue.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other agriculture, fisheries and forestry initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.daff.gov.au](http://www.daff.gov.au).

## **ATTORNEY-GENERAL**

### **Native title**

The Government has committed an additional \$50.1 million in new money over the next four years, including \$4 million in 2009-10, to improve the native title system. Overall, the additional funding will help build a more efficient native title system that delivers sustainable, long-term outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

### **Prevention, Diversion, Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice Program**

The Government has allocated \$9.7 million in 2009-10 to the Prevention, Diversion, Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice Program for projects that will divert Indigenous Australians away from adverse contact with the legal system.

### **Indigenous Legal Aid**

The Government has allocated \$52.5 million to provide legal aid for Indigenous Australians in 2009-10. The Legal Aid for Indigenous Australians Program provides culturally sensitive and accessible legal aid and related services.

### **Law and Justice Advocacy Development Program**

The Government is providing \$2.5 million in 2009-10 to the Law and Justice Advocacy Development Program, to support advocacy for the advancement of the legal rights of Indigenous Australians.

### **Family Violence Prevention Legal Services**

The Government has committed \$19.3 million in 2009-10 to 31 Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, which provide legal and associated services to rural and remote areas with a high need for services.

### **Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service**

The Government is providing \$4.6 million over four years (2006-07 to 2009-10) to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service, which is jointly funded by the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government.

### **Regional Innovations Program for Legal Services**

The Government is providing \$5.8 million over four years (2007-08 to 2010-11) to maintain legal aid services in regional, rural and remote Australia.

### **Disaster Resilience Australia Package**

The Government will provide \$79.3 million in the next four years as part of an ongoing program to strengthen efforts to combat man-made and natural threats and disasters across Australia.

The Government's approach to disaster management focuses on community resilience and on partnerships with the states and territories. The Disaster Resilience Australia package will fund projects of national significance and will provide grants for projects that address disaster risks. Such projects might through:

- undertaking disaster mitigation works that minimise the risks to communities, including increased risks resulting from the effects of climate change
- supporting the work of volunteers in emergency management
- assisting local government to meet its emergency management responsibilities
- building partnerships with business, non-government organisations and community groups to improve their ability to assist their communities during and following an emergency.

The package replaces a number of existing disaster mitigation programs, combining funds to allow the flexibility to address different priorities across the states and territories over time, as well as projects of national importance.

### **National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund**

In 2009-10, \$3.2 million in funding will be disbursed through the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund to support projects that boost the recruitment, retention and training of volunteers in agencies at the front line of emergency management. The Fund will be added to the Disaster Resilience Australia package from 1 July 2010.

## **Northern Territory Emergency Response**

The Australian Federal Police supports the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). Funding of \$9.2 million was appropriated in the 2008-09 financial year and \$9.3 million has been appropriated for the 2009-10 financial year.

The Government has also committed \$80.2 million over three years (2009-10 to 2011-12) to the NTER for night patrol services, legal assistance services, and interpreter services and to continue the Northern Territory Welfare Rights Outreach Project. The funding builds on the \$21.6 million provided to the Attorney-General's Department in the 2008-09 Budget for law and order services under the NTER, which included \$17.7 million for night patrols.

## **Helping separated parents and their children**

In the 2007-08 Budget, the Government announced funding of \$36.9 million over four years for two new ongoing programs. The Supporting Children after Separation Program commenced in November 2008 and is helping children in targeted high-need areas deal with issues arising from family separation. Additionally, Post-Separation Cooperative Parenting services are being provided in 28 regional locations to assist separated parents who are experiencing conflict that is affecting contact with their children.

## **Further information**

Further information about these and other Attorney-General's initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.ag.gov.au](http://www.ag.gov.au).

Information about the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund, the Bushfire Mitigation Program and the National Disaster Mitigation Program are available at [www.ema.gov.au](http://www.ema.gov.au).

## **BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY**

### **National Broadband Network**

In April 2009, the Government established a new company to build and operate the National Broadband Network in urban, regional and rural areas. The company will invest up to \$43 billion over eight years to build the network, which will initially be publicly owned; private investment will be encouraged from the initial build stage. Within this funding envelope the Government's objective is to:

- connect 90 per cent of all homes, schools and workplaces with optical fibre, fibre to the premises or 'FTTP', providing broadband services to Australians with speeds of up to 100 megabits per second – a hundred times faster than those currently used by many households and businesses

- connect all other premises in Australia with next generation wireless and satellite technologies that will be able to deliver 12 megabits per second or better.

It is also expected that the National Broadband Network will support up to 25,000 jobs every year, on average, over the eight year life of the project. The Government is immediately investing \$250 million to address broadband 'black spots' throughout regional Australia through the timely rollout of fibre optic transmission links connecting cities, major regional centres and rural towns.

## **Rural and Regional NBN Initiative**

The Government has announced an \$80 million Rural and Regional National Broadband Network Initiative to build on the National Broadband Network by supporting initiatives which improve service delivery and promote broadband take-up and use in regional, rural and remote communities.

### **Funding boost to the Digital Regions Initiative**

The Government's initial \$46 million for the *Digital Regions Initiative*, committed earlier this year in response to the Regional Telecommunications Review, has been augmented by an additional \$14 million over four years to accelerate the benefits to regional communities of access to high-speed broadband.

### **ABC Local Regional Broadband Hubs**

The ABC will receive \$15.3 million to encourage and assist the development of user generated content and to establish community web sites and portals, creating 'virtual town squares' for communities to share experiences.

The funding provides for more than 50 enhanced regional broadband hubs to be rolled out over the next three years. Funding will be used to identify and employ local producers to work on cross-media stories and to train audiences to create their own content.

### **Rural NBN Coordinators**

\$5 million over four years has been allocated to fund the appointment of Rural NBN Coordinators to encourage local government, community and business usage of the broadband opportunities provided by the Regional Backbone Blackspots Program.

## **Regional Telecommunications Review**

The Government responded on 5 March 2009 to the recommendations made by the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, chaired by Dr Bill Glasson. In line with the recommendations made in the committee's report, the Government initially committed \$61.1 million in funding across three programs.

The Government has committed new funding of \$46 million over four years for the Digital Regions Initiative to enable the use of digital applications to improve services in education, health and emergency services in regional communities in partnership

with state, territory and local governments. As part of the *Rural and Regional NBN Initiative*, an additional \$14 million has been provided to the *Digital Regions Initiative* to accelerate the benefits to regional communities of access to high-speed broadband.

### **Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme**

The Government will provide \$11.4 million over four years, commencing in 2009-10, to continue and enhance the subsidies available under the Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme for Australians living and working in areas without terrestrial coverage.

The enhancements to the Scheme include:

- an increase in the subsidy for applicants in areas without access to terrestrial mobile phone coverage from sixty per cent to eighty five per cent, to a maximum of \$1000 per handset
- the ability for applicants in areas without access to terrestrial mobile phone coverage to receive additional subsidies to replace handsets that were previously purchased under the scheme two or more years ago
- the ability for health and emergency services organisations to access more than two handsets based on demonstrated need.

### **Indigenous Communications Program**

The Government will provide an additional \$3.7 million to a \$30 million refocused Indigenous Communications Program over the next four financial years, to install community phones in around 300 Indigenous communities, and to monitor and maintain the newly installed phones and around 250 previously installed phones. The program will work with states and territories to provide computer training and increased public internet access facilities in remote Indigenous communities.

### **Digital switchover**

The Government has committed \$152.3 million for a package of measures to drive the availability of improved television services as Australia makes the transition to digital. The package focuses on the regions that will lead the switch to digital-only television services: Sunraysia, centred on the city of Mildura in north-west Victoria in the first half of 2010; regional South Australia in the second half of 2010; regional Victoria in the first half of 2011; and regional Queensland in the second half of 2011.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other broadband and communications initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.dbcde.gov.au](http://www.dbcde.gov.au).

Information about the digital economy and the digital switchover is available at [www.digitalready.gov.au](http://www.digitalready.gov.au).

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **National Carbon Accounting Toolbox**

The Government is providing \$16.1 million over four years to develop the National Carbon Accounting Toolbox. The initiative will support decision making on potential entry of land-based sectors into the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). It will be a cost-effective, nationally consistent emissions estimation tool for forestry and agriculture.

Preliminary development of agriculture emissions estimation capability will be undertaken to provide for trial reporting in 2011 ahead of decisions in 2013 on CPRS coverage of agriculture.

The toolbox currently provides a capability that enables forestry emissions estimations and will provide the consistency that is necessary to underpin coverage of forestry in the CPRS forestry from the year 2011.

### **Climate Change Action Fund**

The \$2.75 billion Climate Change Action Fund (CCAF) will begin helping business, industry and community organisations prepare for the introduction of a carbon price by providing information and capital grants to reduce energy use.

The Government has committed through the CCAF to provide structural adjustment assistance for workers, communities and regions where a clear, identifiable and significant impact arises, or is highly likely to arise, as a direct result of the CPRS.

The fund will provide funding to assist coal mines, especially those with high fugitive emissions. There will be associated benefits for the communities that rely on them.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other climate change initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.climatechange.gov.au](http://www.climatechange.gov.au).

## **DEFENCE HOUSING AUSTRALIA**

### **Additional new residential housing**

Funding of \$251.6 million will be provided to Defence Housing Australia (DHA) as part of the Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan from 2009 to 2011. The focus of the funding is on jobs creation and securing long-term economic growth. Over the next two years, DHA will construct throughout Australia more than 800 residential houses in addition to the budgeted 1,500 per year.

## **DHA Apprenticeship Support Scheme**

The additional housing will supply much needed accommodation to serving Australian Defence Force members and their families and will also materially increase the supply of residential housing at a time of historically low national rental vacancy. This will assist with improving rental accommodation affordability for the community. DHA has also agreed to support the creation of 20 new apprenticeship places in the residential construction industry. This will be known as the DHA Apprenticeship Support Scheme.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other Defence Housing Australia initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.dha.gov.au](http://www.dha.gov.au).

## **EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

The Government provides a wide range of funding and services in early childhood development, education, training and employment. These initiatives are designed to meet the needs of all Australians, including those living in rural, regional and remote areas.

The Government has initiated a major reform program across all these areas to create an education revolution that will improve the quality and outcomes of education for all.

The Government recognises that rural and regional students and their families have special educational needs and there are particular barriers to their effective participation in education.

The Government supports individuals and families living in rural and remote areas to cater for these special needs in the following ways:

- specific drought-related support, including general income support and student income support
- funding for schools, which directly benefits students and their families by assisting with a wide range of education expenses
- assistance to farming communities, and financial incentives to employers in regions affected by drought
- specific programs exclusively targeted at rural and remote schools and students
- other assistance to rural and regional students and schools through a mix of national education initiatives.



The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) administers many programs and initiatives to support these areas. These programs are delivered either through direct financial assistance or incentives or through additional funding to state and territory education authorities.

The Government has also initiated a large number of new programs and support services to help retain jobs and assist people affected by the downturn caused by the current global economic crisis. Many of these programs and services are specifically aimed at helping Australians living in rural and regional areas, as many of these communities are likely to be particularly affected by the difficult economic climate.

The Government is committed to working with regional communities to develop local solutions to the particular challenges they face and develop support services that meet their needs to keep them thriving and get them through the global downturn.

The following is a summary of government initiatives aimed at students, families, schools and other organisations and systems.

### **Drought-related initiatives**

#### **Specific drought-related support for schools**

The Drought Assistance for Schools initiative is designed to benefit students and was introduced in recognition of the impact of years of drought on farming families. This measure is part of a \$715 million package of drought assistance for farmers, small businesses and communities in rural and remote Australia.

The initiative is intended to make it easier for rural families to meet ongoing education expenses and the cost of educational activities such as student excursions, which may be cost prohibitive for families experiencing financial hardship as a result of prolonged drought.

Up to \$10,000 is available each year for rural and remote schools located in towns with populations of less than 100,000 in Exceptional Circumstances (EC) declared areas.

Funding consists of a base entitlement of \$1,000 for each school plus a per capita allowance of \$100 for every enrolled full-time-equivalent student. Schools do not need to apply for funding as eligibility is automatic in EC-declared areas. All schools remain eligible for the duration of an EC declaration with funding provided as a single annual payment. The funding is delivered to schools under cooperative arrangements with state, territory and non-government education authorities.

Schools are able to spend their funding on items and activities which directly benefit students. This can include textbooks, uniforms, subject levies, excursions, school camps and other support related to schooling and offers relief to drought-affected families. Funding is not available for capital purposes, staff salaries, utilities costs,

purchase of equipment, stationery and other day-to-day consumables or school maintenance costs.

The strength of this initiative lies in the flexible funding arrangements and the fact that school communities are able to decide how the funds will be spent. This means that the funding can be used to subsidise excursions or extracurricular activities for whole classes or an entire school, or may be directed, at the principal's discretion, to families most in need.

Feedback from school principals indicates that families in severe financial difficulty who are unable to afford textbooks and subject levies appreciate that this funding measure can assist with a wide range of education expenses. To date all feedback about the Drought Assistance for Schools measure has been overwhelmingly positive. This has largely been due to the absence of red tape and administrative burden at the school level and the freedom for schools to determine how the funds will be spent.

In 2007-08 more than \$22.74 million was delivered to 3,030 government and non-government schools in rural and remote locations across Australia. Drought Assistance for Schools funding available for 2008-09 is \$23.9 million.

Drought Assistance funding has been extended until 30 June 2010.

### Vocational education and training

The Declared Drought Area Incentive is designed to encourage primary producers who hold an Exceptional Circumstances certificate to continue to offer skills development and employment opportunities to people living in a drought-declared area. Eligible employers can apply for a \$1,500 Declared Drought Area commencement incentive and a \$1,500 completion incentive for Australian Apprentices (apprentices and trainees) who meet the eligibility criteria. This is in addition to other incentives available to employers who take on an Australian Apprentice.

### Drought Force

Drought Force helps individual farms and farming communities in drought-declared areas which meet the Exceptional Circumstances criteria. The program is designed to ensure that these properties are maintained and are able to cope until the drought breaks. Drought Force also encourages people to remain in their local communities and build and retain skills that support local economies.

Drought Force activities may be undertaken on private land where workers are not displaced. Individual volunteers or people on income support, as well as groups, can assist with drought mitigation tasks such as maintaining irrigation channels, hand feeding, watering stock, fencing, general repairs and maintenance.

## **Initiatives for rural and remote communities**

### **Schools**

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme supports eligible primary, secondary and tertiary students unable to attend an appropriate government school on a daily basis because of their geographic isolation. The scheme provides financial assistance to families for the costs of boarding and other expenses for their children. In 2008, AIC assisted 11,212 rural and isolated school students at a cost of \$60.7 million.

From 1 January 2008, the AIC scheme was enhanced in the following ways:

- a \$1,000 Distance Education supplement (rising to \$1,045 in 2009) became payable to all recipients of the AIC Distance Education Allowance
- the AIC Additional Boarding Allowance increased by \$1,000 to \$2,164 in 2008 (rising to \$2,261 in 2009).

The Country Areas Program (CAP) is designed to help schools and remote communities improve educational opportunities and outcomes for students who are disadvantaged because of their geographical isolation. Between 2005 and 2008, \$114.1 million was provided under the program.

In 2008, CAP provided \$30.5 million to government, Catholic and independent schools in all Australian states and the Northern Territory. This funding is in addition to the funds allocated to schools according to the local priorities and needs identified by the relevant education authorities.

From 2009, CAP funding for government schools has been incorporated into the National Education Agreement. CAP funding for all Catholic and independent schools will be covered by the *Schools Assistance Act 2008*.

Since 2008, non-government schools have received a remoteness loading calculated as an additional percentage above their per capita general recurrent grant funding for students studying at eligible locations. Non-government schools or campuses classified as moderately accessible, remote or very remote receive an additional 5 per cent, 10 per cent or 20 per cent respectively of the funding entitlement associated with their socioeconomic status score. The funding is provided in recognition of the higher cost of delivering education services in regional and remote regions of Australia and the negative impact that this can have on student achievement levels. In 2008, 439 non-government schools across 469 campus locations received the loading.

The National School Drug Education Strategy – Indigenous, Rural and Remote Initiative helps Indigenous, rural and remote school communities to tackle drug-related problems. Between 2009-10, \$0.5 million is available for this initiative.

The Smarter Schools Low Socio-economic School Communities National Partnership will provide \$1.5 billion over seven years to improve educational outcomes in schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students. Schools will receive four years of funding, with those in rural and remote areas receiving additional weighted funding in recognition of the higher costs of delivering education in those areas. Many of the schools that will be selected by states and territories to participate in this National Partnership will be in rural and remote Australia.

### Supporting Teachers

The single greatest influence in school on student engagement and achievement is the quality of the teacher. To support Australia's teacher workforce, the Australian Government is investing \$550 million through the Improving Teacher Quality Partnership. This will help attract and retain quality teachers and leaders in schools. Of this funding, \$50 million will be directed to professional development and to support principals to better manage their schools and improve student results. Strategies to retain teachers in rural and remote areas are an important element of the National Partnership.

### Higher education

In response to the Review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley Review), the Government is introducing a package of significant reforms in the 2009-10 Budget to help achieve its education outcome objectives. The reforms will increase access to student income support and provide more equitable assistance. This will ensure more students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous students and those from rural and regional areas are able to participate in education and training.

A centrepiece of the reforms is a new Student Start-up Scholarship of \$2,254, starting in 2010, for all higher education students receiving student income support through Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY, except for those already receiving Commonwealth Scholarships. The new scholarship will ensure students from low income backgrounds, including many regional students, will have the assistance they need for textbooks and specialised equipment.

The Government is also introducing a Relocation Scholarship of \$4,000 in the first year and \$1,000 in later years, to assist university students receiving Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY with the costs of moving for study. Dependent students who have to move away from home to study and disadvantaged independent students who are unable to live in the family home will be able to access the Relocation Scholarship. Students in receipt of the Relocation Scholarship may also be eligible for Rent Assistance. Both scholarships will be paid through Centrelink.

The Student Start-up Scholarship and the Relocation Scholarship will replace the Government's Commonwealth Education Costs and Accommodation Scholarships. Existing Commonwealth Scholarships will continue to be paid to continuing students until the completion of their course of study.

Indigenous Commonwealth Scholarships will continue under the existing Commonwealth Scholarship Program.

Regional loading provides extra funding under the Commonwealth Grant Scheme to assist higher education providers with regional campuses to meet additional costs associated with operating these campuses. Regional loading recognises the unique contribution these campuses make to their local communities and the higher costs faced by providers because of their location, size and history. In 2009, \$31.2 million in regional loading was allocated. The Australian Government has made a commitment that the cost of providing quality teaching and research in regional Australia will be examined and a new, more logical basis for funding will be introduced.

The Government is funding 1,134 new Commonwealth supported higher education nursing places in 2009. More than 300 of these places have been allocated to regional campuses to create opportunities for students to study nursing without having to relocate to a metropolitan campus. More than 60 per cent of courses will provide clinical placement opportunities in rural and regional areas.

The Australian Government will provide \$394 million to increase higher education equity funding from 2010 so that it reaches approximately 4 per cent of teaching and learning grants in 2012. The increased equity funding will support higher education institutions to attract and retain students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The increased funding will deliver:

- a new partnership program to systemically link universities with schools, vocational education and training providers and adult education to increase aspirations of students to higher education and the rates of higher education attainment of low socioeconomic status, Indigenous, regional and remote students
- a major student-related component paid as a loading based on numbers of low socioeconomic status students in the enrolment profile of each institution.

This will support the Government's ambition that by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level should be of people from a low socioeconomic status background.

#### **HECS-HELP benefit**

The Government has provided \$12.4 million to reduce by about half the HELP debt of early childhood education teachers who work in areas of high need. Areas of high need are regional or remote areas, Indigenous communities, or areas of high socioeconomic disadvantage.

The benefit will reduce compulsory HELP debt repayments by up to \$1,536 a year (in 2009) for up to the equivalent of five years.

Early childhood education teachers whose income is below the minimum repayment threshold may also apply for a reduction in their HELP debt. Early childhood education teachers working in eligible locations during the 2008-09 income year will be able to apply to the Tax Office for the benefit from 1 July 2009.

#### Vocational education and training

The Rural and Regional Skills Shortage Incentive is designed to boost training in rural and regional Australia. It provides a special commencement incentive for a rural or regional employer who employs an Australian Apprentice (apprentice or trainee) in an area of skills shortage at the Certificate III or IV level. The qualification must be listed as a national skills shortage occupation. Eligible employers can receive a \$1,000 Rural and Regional commencement incentive for Australian Apprentices who meet the eligibility criteria.

The Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA) assists eligible Australian Apprentices during the first three years of their Australian Apprenticeship. The allowance is for Australian Apprentices who have to move away from their parent's or guardian's home to take up or remain in an Australian Apprenticeship, or receive essential supplementary on-the-job training with another employer. LAFHA is also available when an Australian Apprentice is homeless.

Eligible Australian apprentices receive \$77.17 a week for up to a year, \$38.59 a week for a further 12 months and \$25 a week for an additional 12 months.

In the 2009-10 Budget, the Government delivers on its commitment to increase participation in higher education. The reforms will also support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to remain in secondary education or take up opportunities in vocational education and training. Many young Australians will benefit from the fairer arrangements and receive the assistance they need to increase their educational qualifications. The measures will also benefit regional students and students who come from a regional background who must study away from home.

Among the measures that will better support rural and regional students are:

- relaxing the parental income test for dependants under Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY, increasing the threshold from \$32,800 to \$42,559. This will significantly expand access to student income support for young people from low-income backgrounds. It will also benefit existing students whose parents have a combined income above the threshold and who currently receive partial payments with an entitlement to a higher payment rate
- lowering the age of independence from 25 years to 22 years, commencing with 24 years in 2010

- relaxing the personal income test to \$400 per fortnight, beginning in 2011, to allow students to earn more from part-time work and retain more from scholarships awarded to them before their income support payments are reduced
- extending student income support to all masters by coursework programs, commencing in 2012
- relaxing the means testing of equity and merit-based scholarships provided by universities and philanthropic organisations. Beginning in 2010, this measure will significantly support philanthropic efforts to improve education participation in regional Australia and support students to transfer to university studies by providing targeted scholarships.

### Indigenous Students

The Indigenous Support Program (ISP) funds eligible higher education providers to help them meet the specific needs of Indigenous students and advance the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. ISP grants assist with Indigenous support activities, including activities for Indigenous students from rural and isolated areas. In 2008, \$34.1 million was allocated for this initiative.

The Indigenous Youth Leadership Program provides educational opportunities for up to 200 Indigenous youth at high-performing government and non-government schools, as well as up to 50 university places. The program is designed to give Indigenous youth from remote areas the educational opportunities and experiences they need to take on future leadership roles in their communities. Students also receive mentoring, targeted orientation, study tours and practical leadership experiences.

The Indigenous Youth Mobility Program (IYMP) is for Indigenous young people aged 16 to 24 from remote areas. With the support of their families and local communities, the program helps Indigenous youth relocate to an IYMP host location to complete the qualifications they need to obtain a sustainable job. The IYMP focuses on pre-vocational training, Australian Apprenticeships, certificate courses, and some tertiary pathways, including courses leading to qualifications in nursing, teaching, accounting and business management.

Away from Base (AFB) for 'mixed-mode' delivery covers travel costs including fares, meals and accommodation for students studying approved mixed-mode courses. Eligible providers in the higher education and vocational educational and training sectors administer AFB funding. The funding is available to increase access and participation in tertiary study for Indigenous students from rural and remote areas, increase enrolments and retention, improve educational outcomes, increase employment prospects, and enhance life choices and the quality of life of Indigenous people.

The education measures of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) are designed not only to close the gap in educational disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians but also to strengthen rural and regional Australia.

There are three NTER education measures announced in the 2009-10 Budget.

The School Nutrition Program (\$37.5 million over three years) continues the Government's contribution towards improving student engagement and attendance through a breakfast and lunch program to school-aged children in schools in communities covered by the NTER. The program also provides job opportunities and training for local Indigenous people living in remote communities.

The Teacher Housing Program (\$11.2 million over one year) addresses the urgent need for teacher accommodation in remote areas in the Northern Territory. Up to 22 additional teacher houses will be built in NTER communities. This measure builds on the \$5 million provided for up to 10 teacher houses in Wadeye. The measure will assist in teacher recruitment and retention.

Expansion of the Enhancing Education Elements Program (\$45.7 million over three years) continues the Government's commitment to remote schools and students in the Northern Territory. The measure includes an additional \$23 million for the Quality Teaching Package and \$22.7 million for the Accelerated Literacy initiative.

### **Mainstream initiatives available to rural and remote communities**

A wide range of national initiatives can assist schools, students and families in remote, rural and regional areas.

#### **Early Childhood Education and Care**

In December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to pursue substantial reform in education and early childhood development, which includes the development of a National Quality Agenda (NQA) for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The NQA includes the development of a new regulatory approach and delivery model, new integrated national quality standard and a quality rating system.

The development of enhanced regulatory arrangements is an integral component of the Government's early childhood reforms. The Government is working closely with state and territory governments to streamline licensing, regulatory and accreditation systems to minimise duplication, reduce the administrative burden on service providers and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

The development of the new standard will integrate current licensing and accreditation requirements. They will consider the prime structural indicators of quality of care such as staff-to-child ratios, group size and the educational qualifications of the workforce. The new standard will also need to be flexible and be able to be applied to a broad range of care settings.



Associated with this is the development of a rating system that will assess how an ECEC service provider is performing against the outcomes in the new national quality standard. This includes considering how relevant information about the quality of the service may be communicated to families and communities in a way that is useful to them.

As part of the NQA development process, the Government is consulting with a wide range of early childhood education and care providers, peak bodies, early childhood experts and parents.

The draft standard, rating system and proposed regulatory options will be released for public consultation during 2009.

The Early Years Learning Framework is a key component of the Government's early childhood reforms under the NQA. It will underpin universal access to early childhood education and be incorporated in the National Quality Standard to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education. The Early Years Learning Framework is an early childhood education curriculum framework, which will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs. It will describe the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age as well as their transition to school.

A Charles Sturt University-led consortium of early childhood experts from across Australia is undertaking the development of the draft Early Years Learning Framework and supporting documentation for practitioners and parents. The draft framework was the subject of extensive consultation conducted across Australia to assess stakeholder views and to discuss and refine key components of the draft framework. The draft framework is being further developed following recent field trials.

The Early Years Learning Framework will be implemented from July 2009.

## **Schools**

The Government will deliver a \$14.7 billion boost to its Education Revolution over the next three years.

Building the Education Revolution (BER) begins in 2009 and will deliver new infrastructure, facilities and refurbishments to Australia's schools, so they can meet the needs of 21st century students and teachers.

Every Australian school will have access to funds through the Government's \$987.2 million investment in 2008-09, \$8.5 billion during 2009-10, and \$5.2 billion in 2010-11.

BER complements the existing and planned investments by the states, territories and the non-government system. It is a critical component of the Government's economic stimulus package, giving schools and students the bricks and mortar infrastructure and resources they deserve.

To ensure that BER has the greatest impact on job creation, it is essential that construction and maintenance work begins as soon as possible. The program builds on the Government's commitment to deliver a world-class education to all schools throughout the country.

The three key elements of BER are:

- Primary Schools for the 21st Century – \$12.4 billion will be spent on building or renewing large-scale infrastructure in all primary schools and K-12s (primary component), including libraries, multipurpose halls and classrooms.
- Science and Language Centres for 21st Century Secondary School – \$1 billion will be allocated to build around 500 new science laboratories and language learning centres in secondary schools able to demonstrate the need, readiness and capacity to complete construction during 2009-10.
- National School Pride Program – \$1.3 billion will go towards refurbishing and renewing existing infrastructure and minor works with funding of up to \$200,000, depending on the size of the school.

The Capital Grants Program (CGP) has supported the construction and upgrading of schools in partnership with state and territory governments, non-government school authorities and local school communities. Between 2005 and 2008, as part of the CGP General Element, the Government provided \$1.21 billion to government schools and \$514 million to non-government schools in remote, rural and regional areas. An additional \$17 million in CPG funding was made available over 2005-08 for non-government schools in rural and isolated communities in the Northern Territory. From 2009, states and territories have the capital grants funding rolled into their specific purpose payment. The Capital Grants Program will continue to operate for the non-government sector over the next four years.

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) provides a subsidy for students from Years 4 to 12 to travel to Canberra as part of their civics and citizenship education. In May 2006, \$16.3 million was allocated to PACER over four years.

The Trade Training Centres in Schools Program will provide up to \$2.5 billion over 10 years to build new trade training centres in Australia's secondary schools. The program will focus on providing industry-standard trade workshops, facilities and equipment to promote the teaching of vocational education and training for students in years 9, 10, 11 and 12 in government, Catholic and independent secondary schools.

The program began in 2008. One of the program's priorities is to support Indigenous students and students from rural, regional and disadvantaged communities.

The National Secondary Schools Computer Fund is investing \$2.1 billion to improve secondary school student access to world-class information and technology as part of the \$2.2 billion Digital Education Revolution. The fund will provide for new or upgraded ICT for secondary students in years 9 to 12. Already funding has been approved for more than 292,000 computers in almost 2,700 schools.

- additional support for students with disabilities
- performance-based disability support funding
- The Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training.

In 2007, \$6.74 million was provided for this initiative.

The Regional Disability Liaison Officer initiative (formally part of the Higher Education Disability Support Program) has been merged with the Disability Coordination Officer program to form the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) program. The NDCO program began on 1 January 2008.

The NDCO program funds a comprehensive national network of 31 coordination officers. These officers offer information and referral services for people with disability who are interested in, or enrolled in, post-school education and training.

To facilitate the structural adjustment needed to implement the recommendations of the Bradley Review, the Australian Government has established the Structural Adjustment Fund, amounting to about \$400 million over four years from 2009-10. The fund replaces the Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund. It will support the development of more sustainable entities by creating greater diversity and potentially new forms of institutions, and improve the interface between higher education and vocational education and training.

The Government will transform Australia's higher education and vocational education and training institutions over the next decade with the \$8.7 billion Education Investment Fund (EIF). The EIF comprises the balance from the Higher Education Endowment Fund and funds from the 2007-08 Budget surplus.

The EIF was announced in the 2008-09 Budget and is a major component of the Government's Education Revolution. The role of the EIF is to build a modern, productive, internationally competitive Australian economy by supporting world-leading, strategically focused infrastructure investments that will transform Australian tertiary education and research. The EIF will provide funding for projects that create or develop significant infrastructure in higher education institutions, research institutions and vocational education and training providers in order to:

- transform Australia's knowledge generation and teaching capabilities
- boost participation in tertiary education
- position Australia to meet domestic skills needs now and into the future
- enhance Australia's innovation capacity
- invigorate the growth of Australia's research capabilities
- enhance Australia's international competitiveness in education and research.

#### **Additional early childhood university places**

The Government has provided \$53.9 million to create additional Commonwealth-supported university places for students wishing to undertake early childhood education qualifications, starting with 500 additional places in 2009 and rising to 1,500 additional places by 2011.

Of the 500 additional places allocated for 2009, 150 were allocated to campuses in regional areas.

#### **Partnerships and careers**

The Local Community Partnerships (LCPs) initiative supports young people aged from 13 to 19 to achieve a successful transition from school to further education, training and work. LCPs facilitate the continuation of the Structured Workplace Learning Program and have implemented the Career and Transition Support and the Adopt a School programs.

The Regional Industry Career Advisers Network provides quality regional industry career advice, information and resources to Local Community Partnerships, employers and businesses.

Industry career advisers are supported by the National Industry Careers Specialists Network, which identifies, gathers and provides industry-specific career information and advice, including information on skills needs and labour markets.

Youth Pathways is designed to help young people aged 13 to 19 who are the most at risk of not making a successful transition from school to further education, training, employment and active participation in the community. Youth Pathways is designed to reduce the number of early school leavers who are not employed or continuing their education in the 12 months after leaving school.

Connections provides a full-time education and personal development program for young people aged 13 to 19 who are disconnected from mainstream schooling. The initiative delivers accredited education, life skills and employability skills training in supported community settings. Participants are also given support to deal with

personal issues and build self-esteem and resilience. This holistic and flexible approach gives participants the foundations they need to reach their potential.

### Early learning

To increase quality and affordable integrated early learning and care, the Government has established up to 260 Early Learning and Care Centres in areas of unmet demand for child care. In the 2008-09 Budget, the Government allocated \$114.5 million over four years to establish 38 centres in priority locations (including six autism-specific centres). The funding includes both the capital costs and the ongoing costs of establishing additional child care places, including the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Tax Rebate. The Government is carefully considering how best to deliver the remaining early learning and care centres, taking account of the recent child care market developments in each priority location.

### Vocational education and training

Through the Productivity Places Program (PPP) the Government is assisting industry to respond to the current economic downturn, as well as build capacity for a future economic recovery.

The PPP, which commenced in April 2008 as part of the Skilling Australia for the Future initiative, will provide an additional 711,000 training places over five years to ensure Australians develop the skills that industry needs. Of these places, 392,000 will be allocated to existing workers wanting to gain or upgrade their skills and 319,000 places (including 20,000 places for redundant and recently retrenched workers) will be allocated to job seekers.

Australian Apprenticeships (apprenticeships and traineeships) combine training and employment through paid work and structured training and lead to a nationally recognised qualification. They are available in a variety of certificate levels in more than 500 occupations, in traditional trades, as well as a diverse range of emerging careers in most sectors of business and industry. Australian Apprenticeships are administered through Australian Apprenticeships Centres (AAC).

As part of the 2009-10 Budget, the Government will announce an increased level of support for agricultural and, in rural and regional Australia, horticultural Australian Apprentices. Currently, these Australian Apprentices may attract a combined value of up to \$1,800 under the Apprenticeship Training (Fee) Voucher Program and the Tools For Your Trade initiative. However, this level of support will increase up to \$3,800 with the introduction of the Tools For Completion payment.

From 1 January 2010, the Tools For Completion payment will replace the Tools For Your Trade initiative, the Apprenticeship Wage Top-Up and the Commonwealth Trade Learning Scholarship. It will support Australian Apprentices in skills shortage trades, agricultural occupations and, in rural and regional Australia, horticultural occupations. The Tools For Completion program will provide eligible Australian Apprentices with up to \$3,800 over the life of their Australian Apprenticeship. Eligible

Australian Apprentices will receive a tax-exempt \$800 payment at the three, 12 and 24 month points of their training and a \$700 payment at the 36 month point and on successful completion.

The Support for Mid-Career Apprentices initiative began on 1 July 2007 to help Australian Apprentices aged 30 and over who commence an Australian Apprenticeship at the Certificate III or IV level in a trade where there is a skills shortage. Depending on the industrial arrangements, the initiative provides either income support to an Australian Apprentice or a wage subsidy to their employer. From 1 January 2010, support will be extended to Australian Apprentices aged 25 and over at commencement of their Australian Apprenticeship.

The Government offers a financial incentive to employers who engage an Australian Apprentice. The commencement incentive for a Certificate III or IV or selected Diploma or Advanced Diploma qualification is higher than that paid for a Certificate II qualification in recognition of the greater contribution to the skills base offered by Certificate III or IV, selected Diploma or Advanced Diploma training.

#### TAFE fees waiver for child care diploma and advanced diploma courses

The Government has provided \$60.3 million to support an expected 8,000 people a year, including existing child care workers, to gain a vocational education and training qualification in early childhood. The funding will be used to remove regulated course fees for child care diplomas and advanced diplomas delivered by a TAFE institute or other government training provider, from 2009.

#### Language, Literacy and Numeracy

The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program provides training for eligible participants designed to increase their literacy and numeracy skills to help them participate more effectively in training or in the labour force. The program will receive \$3 million over three years for additional training places for job seekers in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory wanting to improve basic skills.

The Workplace English Language and Literacy Program provides funding to organisations to train Indigenous workers in English language, literacy and numeracy skills. Funding of \$18.1 million will be available to organisations for language and literacy training linked to job-related workplace training. The program is designed to help workers meet their current and future job and training needs.

#### Jobs Fund

The Jobs Fund is a \$650 million initiative to support and create jobs and skills development through projects that build community infrastructure and social capital in local communities. The Jobs Fund forms part of the Government's Jobs and Training Compact.

The Jobs Fund is a discretionary grants program which will begin on 1 July 2009. Some funding has been brought forward to 2008-09 and the program will finish on 30 June 2011. Funding will be in the form of one-off grants. They will support the delivery of innovative social or infrastructure projects that create jobs and employment opportunities in communities affected by the economic downturn, while delivering positive environmental, heritage and social outcomes. Projects will focus on directly generating jobs for people in communities with high unemployment, a rise in unemployment or vulnerability.

The Jobs Fund is a three-pronged initiative comprising:

- Local Jobs – \$300 million (including \$60 million for heritage-related projects and \$40 million for the construction of bike paths)
- Get Communities Working – \$200 million
- Infrastructure Employment Projects – \$150 million.

#### Reforms to Employment Services — Job Services Australia: People, Skills and Jobs

The Government's new employment service, Job Services Australia, commences on 1 July 2009 and represents a \$4.9 billion investment in supporting people who are unemployed. *Job Services Australia* folds seven separate employment services programs into a 'one-stop shop' that provides job seekers with a more personalised service.

Under Job Services Australia, job seekers will receive assistance tailored to their individual needs and level of disadvantage. Job Services Australia providers will help job seekers access training, work experience and other assistance to help them to find employment.

An Employment Pathway Fund (EPF) will enable providers to purchase a range of support for job seekers, specific to their needs. The amount of funding available in the EPF increases relative to a job seeker's level of disadvantage and can be used to purchase services such as counselling and rehabilitation as well as undertake personal development and self-esteem courses. The EPF can also be used to fund wage subsidies, travel assistance and training courses.

Job Services Australia will also have a greater focus on employers, and providers will work with local employers to understand their labour needs and how best to fill their job vacancies.

As part of Job Services Australia, a panel of employer brokers has been established to ensure that employment services have a strong focus on matching the needs of job seekers with the labour requirements of employers. Brokers will coordinate and target the efforts of employment services providers to better match the labour needs of employers with appropriate job seekers.

The Australian Government has established a \$41 million Innovation Fund to address the needs of the most disadvantaged job seekers (such as Indigenous Australians, people with mental health conditions, the homeless or those at risk of homelessness, and people from jobless families or who are living in areas of entrenched disadvantage). Projects will be funded that foster innovative solutions to overcome barriers to employment which these job seekers face. The first projects will commence from 1 July 2009.

### Disability Employment Services

From 1 March 2010, the Government will be implementing new streamlined Disability Employment Services. Under the new Disability Employment Services, places will be uncapped and all job seekers with disability will have access to individually tailored employment services.

### Indigenous Employment Program

Improving employment opportunities and the job readiness of Indigenous Australians is crucial to building pathways out of poverty and disadvantage. The Government is committing \$778.8 million over five years to the Indigenous Employment Program (IEP). Reforms to the IEP will begin on 1 July 2009. The new Indigenous employment services will allow the Government to work with Indigenous communities, organisations and individuals to deliver a broad range of projects suited to their own local circumstances and focusing on the best employment outcomes. The reformed Indigenous employment services will enable organisations from around Australia to tender to become a member of one or both new panels which will deliver local employment solutions for Indigenous Australians.

Reforms to the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Program together with the IEP are a key step towards meeting the target of halving the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

### Early access to intensive employment services for workers made redundant

The Government is committing a further \$298.5 million to ensure that, from 1 April 2009, workers who have been made redundant are eligible for immediate access to intensive employment services.

In addition, the Government is providing additional training opportunities for workers made redundant with 10,000 new training places through the Productivity Places Program (\$77.2 million) and 5,888 new Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program Places (\$28.2 million).



## **Further information**

Further information about education and schools initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.dest.gov.au](http://www.dest.gov.au). This includes the Indigenous Support, Indigenous Youth Leadership and Indigenous Youth Mobility programs.

Information about apprenticeships, skills shortages and the Declared Drought Incentive is available at [www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au](http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au).

Information about Newstart Allowance and ABSTUDY is available at [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au).

Information on Youth Allowance is available at [www.myaccount.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.myaccount.centrelink.gov.au).

Information about the Drought Force initiative is available at [www.workplace.gov.au](http://www.workplace.gov.au).

## **ENVIRONMENT, WATER, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS**

### **Caring for our Country**

Caring for our Country provides more than \$2 billion in funding over five years from 1 July 2008 to June 2013. It will achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well managed and resilient, and will provide essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

The program will focus on securing improved strategic outcomes across six national priority areas:

- the National Reserve System
- biodiversity and natural icons
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
- sustainable farm practices
- natural resource management in northern and remote Australia
- community skills, knowledge and engagement.

The Government released the 2009-10 Caring for our Country business plan in November 2008, and sought investment proposals against the above priority areas to achieve targets that will lead to the delivery of specified five-year outcomes for Caring for our Country

## **Landcare**

As one of the components of Caring for our Country, the Government is providing \$189 million over four years, from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2012, towards activities that support sustainable primary production and natural resource management initiatives. To date, 186 landcare projects valued at \$38 million have been announced.

## **Reef Rescue**

Through the \$200 million Caring for our Country Reef Rescue initiative, the Government is working with farmers, regional bodies, non-government organisations, researchers and other stakeholders to improve water quality in the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon. Reef Rescue will operate over five years (2008-09 to 2012-13).

## **Water for the Future**

The Australian Government recognises the immense challenges in tackling Australia's water scarcity and the impact of climate change. Water for the Future is a comprehensive national response to meet these challenges in both rural and urban areas.

Water for the Future is built on four key priorities: taking action on climate change, using water wisely, securing water supplies, and supporting healthy rivers. These priorities will be delivered through a 10-year \$12.9 billion investment in strategic programs, improved water management arrangements, and a renewed commitment to water reform nationally.

The success of 'Water for the Future' relies on all levels of government responding in a cooperative and coordinated way to secure sustainable, long-term water supplies for the benefit of all Australians.

The Australian Government has devoted an unprecedented level of investment in driving reform in water resources management and use.

### **Driving reform in the Murray-Darling Basin**

The Government is supporting agencies at the frontier of driving water reform to ensure that they meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) – The development and administration of the Basin plan will ensure sustainable and integrated management of Murray-Darling Basin water resources.

National Water Commission (NWC) – The National Water Commission will independently audit the effectiveness of the implementation of the Basin Plan and make public those reports.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) – The ACCC will regulate water trading and water charge rules to ensure efficient water markets in the Murray-Darling Basin.

#### **Restoring the balance in the Murray-Darling Basin**

Half a billion dollars has been brought forward over four financial years from 2008-09 to accelerate water recovery purchases from willing sellers in the Murray-Darling Basin to improve the health of river systems.

The entitlements purchased through this program will be managed by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to protect and restore the environmental assets of the Murray-Darling Basin.

#### **Small Block Irrigators — Exit Grant Package**

The Government is bringing relief to small block irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin who have been affected by drought and climate change. Through the Exit Grant Package the Government has committed \$107 million for transitional assistance for farmers wishing to exit the irrigation sector but remain in their family homes and continue to be part of their local communities. Such farmers are entitled to assistance grants of up to \$150,000. Two complementary grants of up to \$10,000 for advice and training and the removal of production-related infrastructure are also offered.

#### **Bioremediation and revegetation works for the Lower Lakes**

The Government has committed \$10 million to bioremediation and revegetation works to address the impacts from exposure of acid sulfate soils around lakes Alexandrina and Albert, in South Australia, in a process that will engage with local communities.

#### **Support for Antarctic operations**

The Antarctic support industry is one of the largest industries in Tasmania, with approximately 60 per cent of Antarctic expenditure being directly injected into the Tasmanian economy. The Government is making significant investments in this area that will provide an important financial stimulus to the Tasmanian economy over the next two years.

#### **Maintaining Australia's Antarctic engagement**

Australia's international reputation as a leading nation in Antarctic affairs and science will be maintained through an additional investment of \$25.2 million over two years (2009-2011). The Australian Government has undertaken scientific research expeditions to Antarctica for more than 60 years. This investment will ensure Australian operations and scientific research into priority areas such as climate change and environmental protection will continue.

### **Australia–Antarctica Airlink**

The Australia–Antarctica Airlink is an innovative, fast and efficient way of transporting scientists and other expeditioners between Australia and Antarctica. The Airlink, which operates out of Hobart, enables Australia to significantly increase the efficiency, capacity and flexibility of its Antarctic science efforts. As the single biggest boost to the Australian Antarctic program since it began more than 60 years ago, the Airlink is a much appreciated contributor to Australia’s Antarctic endeavours. The Australian Government is confirming its commitment to the Airlink, providing continued funding of \$11.7 million in 2009–10.

### **Bureau of Meteorology**

The Bureau of Meteorology is receiving \$78.5 million over seven years to enhance its radar network and implement a next generation forecast and warning system, increasing the level of service available to rural and regional Australians.

#### **Strategic radar enhancement**

The Bureau of Meteorology will commission four new radars to be installed over a five year period from 2009-10 to 2012-13 and invest in the underlying science to integrate this technology into the current radar network at a cost of \$48 million over seven years.

For the surrounding communities this will mean:

- enhanced weather surveillance for areas of significant population mass that currently have limited or no radar weather surveillance
- improved cyclone tracking and early warning capability
- improved rainfall, storm and flood threat protection
- improved wind prediction (important for bushfire surveillance).

#### **Next generation forecast and warning system**

The Government is supplying \$30.5 million over five years (2009-2014) to the Bureau of Meteorology to roll out advanced weather forecasting and warning technology throughout Australia to enable more efficient and enhanced weather service delivery.

The number of towns receiving seven-day weather forecasts will be increased from the current seven capital cities to 650 towns across rural and regional Australia, ensuring more equitable weather services for city and rural communities.

### **Heritage jobs projects**

The Government will provide \$60 million for heritage-related projects as part of its \$650 million Jobs Fund. Funding will be provided to 30 June 2010 for projects that

deliver employment and economic benefits while achieving the best possible heritage outcomes.

### **Protecting and conserving national and Commonwealth historic built heritage**

From 2010-11, the Government will provide ongoing funding of \$5 million a year for national and Commonwealth Historic Built Heritage grants.

The funding will provide ongoing investment in historic built heritage protection and conservation beyond 2010, support emerging historic built heritage needs and redress the decline in historic heritage grant funding that has occurred over the past decade.

### **National Collecting Institutions — touring and outreach**

The Government will provide \$4 million over four years (2009-10) to the National Collecting Institutions to support touring of cultural exhibitions across Australia. The funding will be made available through changes to the existing Art Indemnity Australia Program.

### **Territory orchestras**

Continued funding of \$200,000 will support the Darwin and Canberra symphony orchestras, providing territory musicians with employment opportunities, performance experience and artistic development and territory communities with opportunities to experience performances of high-quality symphonic music.

### **Strengthening Australia's Indigenous visual arts industry**

The Australian Government is investing additional \$9.9 million to further strengthen Australia's Indigenous visual arts industry. The funding provides increased operational support for Indigenous art centres and arts support organisations through the National Arts and Craft Industry Support (NACIS) program and support for industry implementation of an Indigenous Australian Art Commercial Code of Conduct. The measures will help build a stronger, ethical and sustainable Indigenous visual art industry by expanding economic and social opportunities, especially in remote Australia, while reinforcing the value of Indigenous culture.

### **Management of Commonwealth terrestrial reserves**

The Australian Government will provide an additional \$26 million over four years (2009-2013) for the Commonwealth's parks and reserves, including Christmas Island National Park and the World Heritage-listed Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta national parks.

This investment will create employment opportunities, particularly in northern and regional Australia, while enhancing the quality of our parks, which have attracted, and will continue to attract, visitors from across Australia and all over the world.

## **Reef HQ Aquarium**

The Australian Government will continue to fund the Reef HQ Aquarium in Townsville to create greater awareness of the critical issues affecting the health and status of the Great Barrier Reef.

## **Further information**

Further information about these and other environment, water and heritage initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au).

Information about the arts is available at [www.arts.gov.au](http://www.arts.gov.au) and Antarctic information is available at [www.aad.gov.au](http://www.aad.gov.au).

## **FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

### **National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children**

Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009-2020) (the National Framework) was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments on 30 April 2009. The National Framework demonstrates the Australian Government's commitment to working closely with state and territory governments and non-government agencies to develop a national approach to tackling child abuse and neglect. Through the National Framework all agencies will be working collaboratively to build a system with a stronger focus on prevention, better collaboration between services and improved responses for children in care and young people leaving care.

In addition to the Australian Government's existing significant support for children and families – for example through income and family support payments, child care assistance, education, health, parenting support and family law – in the past six months the Australian Government, through COAG, has agreed to provide over \$84 billion (over four years) to states and territories in the areas of health, disability, education, Indigenous reforms and housing. Many of these measures support families and children and will deliver improved outcomes for children at risk of abuse and neglect in line with the goals of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*.

In recognition of the need for even greater effort to achieve better outcomes for our most vulnerable children, in the 2009-10 Budget, the Australian Government has allocated \$63 million over the next four years to achieve better outcomes for our most vulnerable children. Specific measures to support priorities identified in the National Framework are:

- ambitious National Standards for out-of-home care
- improved support for young people leaving care

- new demonstration sites in disadvantaged communities with enhanced service integration for children at risk
- better utilisation of early intervention and prevention services, including enhanced access to quality child care for children at risk
- national leadership projects to improve the evidence base and enhance national consistency, including
  - a National Research Agenda for Child Protection
  - information sharing and data improvement projects
  - workforce development projects.

### **Family Support Drought Response Teams**

The Family Support Drought Response Teams (FSDRT) initiative has been extended to June 2010. A total of \$7.5 million will be provided to the 25 existing teams that operate in drought-affected regions across Australia to continue to provide a whole-of-family approach to counselling individuals, families and small businesses affected by drought. Available services include early intervention, crisis intervention, case management, outreach and home visiting services. The services are free and help many families who would not otherwise have access to such intensive outreach support. The initiative will also result in greater support for families in crisis where drug and alcohol abuse, family violence and mental illness are affecting relationships.

### **Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership**

The Australian Government is providing \$5.5 billion over 10 years to the states and the Northern Territory to lay the foundations for major reforms to Indigenous housing in remote Australia.

The funding is provided under the Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership with all states and the Northern Territory and will mean up to 4,200 new houses are built and 4,800 major upgrades are made to existing houses to ease the housing shortage and improve living conditions for over 9,000 Indigenous families living in remote communities.

All governments are working together to improve housing delivery in remote Indigenous communities by developing better ways of managing new construction and by improving property and tenancy management practices.

Local people will be provided with training and real job opportunities, learning trades through construction work and working on property management such as ongoing repairs to and maintenance of the houses.

This package will also ensure land tenure arrangements are in place where new houses are being built and upgraded and is a critical first step for housing reform and for fostering economic development in Indigenous communities. Without long-term tenure, ownership is uncertain and residents and tenants have no security or certainty.

The Commonwealth, the states and the Northern Territory will also work towards clearer roles and responsibilities with respect to the provision of municipal services and essential services in Indigenous communities.

Housing investment for the benefit of Indigenous people in remote Indigenous communities is a central plank in achieving the targets for 'Closing the Gap' on Indigenous disadvantage.

### **Funding of the Business Services Wage Assessment Tool**

Access to the government-funded Business Services Wage Assessment Tool (BSWAT) will be indefinitely extended for Australian Disability Enterprises.

This will allow approximately 100 Australian Disability Enterprises lacking the infrastructure to administer internal wage assessments to continue to rely on the externally assessed BSWAT. Australian Disability Enterprises need access to this wage assessment tool to calculate pro-rata award based wages for their supported employees.

Australian Disability Enterprises collectively employ around 10,000 employees with disability. They need ongoing support to continue employing people with disability who contribute significantly to the economic growth of the nation.

Smaller Australian Disability Enterprises in regional Australia will benefit from continued access to BSWAT assessments.

### **National Rental Affordability Scheme**

The Australian Government is investing \$623 million in the National Rental Affordability Scheme over four years to increase the supply of affordable rental dwellings by 50,000. The scheme, which offers investors annual tax offsets or payments every year for 10 years, has two components:

- an annual \$6,000 refundable tax credit or payment for each dwelling from the Australian Government to construct new affordable rental properties and rent them at 20 per cent below market rents
- an annual contribution by states and territories of at least \$2,000 for each dwelling, which can be provided through a direct payment or in-kind, through, for example, reduced stamp duty or fast-tracked development approvals.

Both components are indexed to the rental component of the Consumer Price Index.



From the first round of applications, incentives were allocated for almost 4,000 new rental homes. The second call for applications closed on 27 March 2009. Early assessment applied to applications received by 1 February 2009 for dwellings available for rent by 30 June 2009. Offers of incentives will be made to successful applicants once the assessment of each application is finalised. The outcomes of all other Round 2 applications will be finalised by mid July 2009.

### **Housing Affordability Fund**

The Housing Affordability Fund is being established to provide assistance over five years to state and territory governments, local government, local government associations and developers to lower the burden of infrastructure and regulatory costs built into the purchase price of a new home.

The fund will address two significant supply-side barriers to housing development: infrastructure costs (such as water, sewerage, transport, and open space) and 'holding costs' associated with the time taken in planning and approval processes. Grants will target greenfield and infill areas where high dwelling demand currently exists and is forecast in the next five years, as well as those demonstrating a lack of infrastructure.

Through the fund, the Government will invest up to \$30 million to roll out nationally electronic development assessments of development applications and reduce processing times and holding costs associated with new developments.

### **Broadband for Seniors**

The Government has committed \$15 million (2008-09 to 2010-11), to establish free internet kiosks in approximately 2,000 community locations such as senior citizens centres, clubs and retirement villages. Broadband for Seniors has been created to address the issue of older Australians feeling isolated from and left behind the broader community as technology becomes more advanced and more widely used as a form of communication.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has selected NEC Australia and its consortium members – Adult Learning Australia, the Australian Seniors Computer Club Association and the University of the Third Age Online – to deliver the Broadband for Seniors initiative nationally. NEC Australia and its consortium partners aim to assist community organisations to establish a supportive learning environment for seniors, provide tutor and student training materials, and provide a path for kiosk users to engage in their community, both locally and online.

More information on the Broadband for Seniors initiative is available on the Broadband for Seniors website [www.necseniors.net.au](http://www.necseniors.net.au) or alternatively on the Broadband for Seniors Hotline 1300 795 897.

## **Volunteer Grants — helping volunteers**

Volunteer Grants recognises the valuable work of Australia's volunteers and is part of the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to supporting volunteers and encouraging volunteering in local communities.

Funding is available to not-for-profit organisations to purchase small equipment to help existing volunteers and to encourage more people to become volunteers. Organisations are able to request funding to contribute towards reimbursement of their volunteers for fuel costs incurred in their volunteering work.

This funding is to assist volunteers who use their cars to transport others to activities, deliver food and assist people in need.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other family, housing, community services and Indigenous affairs initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au).

## **FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE**

### **Export Market Development Grants scheme**

The Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) scheme is a key government financial assistance program for current and aspiring exporters. The scheme, administered by Austrade, aims to encourage small and medium-sized Australian businesses to develop export markets by reimbursing up to 50 per cent of eligible export promotion expenses above a threshold of \$10,000. The scheme is open to eligible Australian businesses who can claim up to a total of eight grants of a maximum of \$200,000 each.

Of the total number of EMDG grants paid in 2007-08 (relating to eligible expenditure incurred in 2006-07), 23.4 per cent were awarded to recipients from rural and regional Australia, an increase of 5.7 per cent over the previous year. For the same year, 80.4 per cent of all grants were awarded to small businesses with an annual income of \$5 million or less.

Consistent with its election commitment, the Government has implemented changes to revitalise the EMDG scheme which will apply to eligible export promotional expenditure incurred from 1 July 2008. Of particular relevance to regional Australia are the changes allowing approved regional not-for-profit economic development bodies, including tourism bodies which promote Australian exporters, to access the scheme; cutting the minimum threshold of expenditure by \$5,000, to a \$10,000 minimum; and replacing the list of eligible services provided in Australia with a negative list, which means all services will be considered eligible unless otherwise specified.

Other changes included increasing the maximum grant by \$50,000 to \$200,000; allowing as an eligible expense the costs of patenting products; lifting the maximum turnover limit from \$30 million to \$50 million; and extending the limit on the number of grants from seven to eight annual grants. An additional \$50 million has been provided to the scheme for 2009-10.

### **TradeStart program**

Currently 50 TradeStart offices operate across all states and territories, providing small and medium-sized companies with access to export assistance wherever they are located in Australia. Funding for the TradeStart network extends to 30 June 2010.

The TradeStart network ensures that businesses in regional and rural Australia have access to services under Austrade's new Getting into Export program. The program is designed to assist eligible Australian businesses to develop the skills required to become successful and sustainable exporters and includes a tailored package of services such as export coaching, advice and information about overseas markets, assistance with market selection and access to a specialist referral network of service providers.

Austrade delivers TradeStart in partnership with local partners such as chambers of commerce, private sector organisations, and state and territory governments. By leveraging Austrade's knowledge of international markets with its partners' local expertise, TradeStart is an effective way of helping companies into export.

Since its establishment in 2002-03, TradeStart has helped more than 2,266 businesses achieve export success in excess of \$1.3 billion.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other foreign affairs and trade initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.austrade.gov.au](http://www.austrade.gov.au).

## **HEALTH AND AGEING**

### **Ageing and aged care**

#### **Increasing the viability supplement**

This measure will provide \$14.8 million over two years to increase the level of government funding provided through the viability supplement, which is paid to eligible aged care providers in regional, rural and remote areas to operate viable businesses, by assisting with the extra cost of delivering services in these areas. This will help ensure continued investment by the industry to meet the increasing demand for aged care in those areas.

The measure helps ensure that older people living in regional, rural and remote areas have continued access to sustainable aged care services.

## **Mental health and the workforce**

### **Health response to the Victorian bushfires — additional psychological support**

The *Health response to the Victorian bushfires – additional psychological support* is providing \$7.3 million over two years, for the provision of additional mental health support to individuals and communities affected by the Victorian bushfires, many of which are located in rural and regional areas.

This measure will increase access to specialised psychological support for individuals, including targeted counselling for young people, and community capacity building activities aimed at promoting broader emotional recovery. It will also provide education, training and support to health professionals supporting the individuals with persistent psychological symptoms.

### **Extension of the Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative**

The extension of the Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities Initiative is providing \$5.2 million in 2009-10 to enable the continuation of community outreach and crisis counselling for individuals, families and communities who are in distress due to drought.

This initiative will raise community awareness of mental illness, promote help-seeking behaviours and improve access to crisis counselling and support for drought-affected rural and regional communities.

### **Continuation of Existing Rural and Remote Mental Health Services**

The Continuation of Existing Rural and Remote Mental Health Services measure provides additional funding of \$6.7 million over four years to maintain the provision of mental health services in rural and remote areas that have very limited or no access to mental health services.

The measure will maintain around 11,000 mental health services to 3,000 clients in rural and remote communities in a 12-month period and continue to employ 47 allied and nursing mental health professionals.

## **Health and Hospital Fund**

Through the Health and Hospital Fund, the Government is providing critical infrastructure for rural and regional communities, including:

- A total of \$560 million to build a network of up to eleven best-practice regional cancer centres, to help close the gap in outcomes for cancer patients in rural and regional Australia
- \$7.9 million to replace the current paediatric ward at the Broome Hospital
- A \$27 million integrated Narrabri district health service in Griffith

- \$8.6 million for a much-needed expansion of renal dialysis services in the Kimberley
- \$76 million to expand Rockhampton Hospital
- \$13.6 million to build a new Emergency Department on the grounds of the Alice Springs Hospital and relocate the Medical Imaging Department.

## **Primary and ambulatory care**

### **Improving rural health**

Australians in rural and remote communities have poorer access to medical services than people in urban Australia. This measure will improve the supply of doctors in regional, rural and remote Australia by providing more GPs where they are needed, especially in the most remote communities. To reward rural GPs, existing incentives will be better targeted and the geographic classification systems used to underpin these programs will be updated.

Funding of \$134.4 million over four years will encourage more doctors to remain in and relocate to rural and remote areas. Overseas-trained doctors and Australian-trained doctors with restrictions on where they can practice will be able to discharge their obligations sooner by working in remote communities. A new national locum service will be introduced, and rural doctors will be supported to undertake further education and training. The Government will also implement a new Rural Primary Health Services program that will introduce flexibility into primary health care service provision in small rural and remote communities by consolidating four existing health service delivery programs.

## **Population health — preventive health**

### **National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health**

The Council of Australian Governments announced the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health on 29 November 2008. The Australian Government will provide \$872.1 million over six years from 2009-10 to the partnership. The partnership will fund measures addressing the rising prevalence of lifestyle risks of chronic disease, which accounts for the greatest part of the burden of disease in this country.

Under the agreement, \$72 million will be made available for the Healthy Communities initiative to fund the rollout of lifestyle modification programs focusing on poor nutrition, physical inactivity, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. These community-based interventions will be managed by local government organisations, with priority given to socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, many of which are in rural and regional Australia. The program will reach around 115 local government areas by 2013.

## **Indigenous health**

### **Torres Strait Health Protection Strategy**

The Government will invest \$13.8 million over four years to enhance health prevention and security for communities in the Torres Strait and northern Australia.

This funding will contribute to a joint package of measures being developed by the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments to reduce the risks associated with cross-border transmission of communicable diseases. These diseases include tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. An estimated 50,000 people move between Papua New Guinea and the Torres Strait each year.

The funding also continues the Australian Government's support to Queensland for the detection, control and elimination of exotic mosquitoes to prevent the spread of diseases such as dengue fever.

### **Quality Assurance for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Services (QAAMS) pathology program**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are diagnosed with diabetes at an estimated rate of 3.4 times that in the general population. Preliminary studies have shown that immediate access to diabetes testing that is provided on the spot (at the point of care) has improved the health care outcomes for the program participants.

The Government is committing \$3.8 million over four years to the QAAMS program for the training and support of health care workers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care services and for the quality assurance of pathology testing undertaken at the point of care. In 2009-10, \$0.8m will be allocated for this program to support the existing 130 participating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service sites. This will expand over four years to \$1.1 million in 2012-13 to support approximately 170 participating services. Approximately 80 per cent of these sites will be located in regional and remote areas throughout Australia and this program builds the capacity of Indigenous health care workers to provide high-quality technical services in their own communities.

### **Mobile dental services pilot for rural and regional Indigenous communities**

Indigenous Australians in rural and regional areas have poorer dental health than almost any other group of Australians, in part because of poor access to dental services.

The 2009-10 Budget includes funding of \$11 million over four years to pilot mobile dental service delivery in rural and regional areas where access to dental services is poor. Communities with access to a mobile dental clinic provided under the pilot will benefit from the project.

### Indigenous early childhood development — increasing access to antenatal care for young Indigenous women

The Government is providing funding of \$108.4 million over five years to states and territories to improve access to antenatal care for young Indigenous mothers and to support young Indigenous women to make informed decisions about their transition to adulthood, with a particular focus on family planning. States and territories will implement new strategies to reduce barriers to access and improve service provision for young Indigenous women. Specific strategies will vary across jurisdictions, and will be developed in consultation with Indigenous groups and experts. States and territories will focus efforts in areas with significant numbers of young Indigenous women and high numbers of births to teenagers.

### Continuation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response

This measure will provide funding of \$131.1 million over three years for the continued regional reform of remote Indigenous primary health care services to ensure comprehensive and coordinated delivery of care to the benefit of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the Northern Territory — including children. This includes providing additional funding to complete follow-up services for dental and ear, nose and throat conditions identified through the Northern Territory Emergency Response child health checks.

Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory will continue to be serviced by doctors, nurses and other health professional through the Remote Area Health Corps; they will continue to have access to expanded drug and alcohol services; and they will also have access to expanded services responding to child abuse-related trauma.

### Improving eye and ear health services for Indigenous Australians for better education and employment outcomes

The Government will provide \$58.3 million over four years to increase access to eye and ear health services for Indigenous Australians, including those residing in regional and remote areas. Key components of this measure include the expansion of the Visiting Optometrist Scheme, increased services to address trachoma, training for health workers in hearing screening, maintenance and purchase of equipment for hearing screening, additional eye and ear surgery and hearing health promotion activities.

The measure will lead to better education and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and support increased participation in community life.

### Expanding Link Up Services for the Stolen Generations

This measure will provide \$13.8 million over three years to reduce the impact of loss, grief and trauma on the mental and physical health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and promote their social and emotional wellbeing.

Members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants, families and Indigenous communities affected by past government removal policies and practices, including those in regional areas, will benefit from this initiative through the provision of:

- over 100 Return to Country or Institutional reunions
- additional case workers, together with the administrative support needed to address a critical backlog in Link Up services.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will also benefit from improvements to the preservation of and access to records for family tracing and reunions.

#### **COAG — Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes — Commonwealth Chronic Disease Package**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across urban, regional and remote areas will benefit from this comprehensive package of \$805.5 million over four years, which will tackle chronic disease risk factors, improve chronic disease management in primary care, improve follow up care and increase the capacity of the primary care workforce to deliver effective health care. Through this initiative, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including those living in regional and remote areas, will have increased access to preventive and primary health care services.

#### **Continuing 2008-09 Budget measures**

##### **John Flynn Placement Program (JFPP) expansion (Support for rural health)**

In the 2008-09 Budget, the Government provided \$4.6 million over four years to expand the JFPP. This national initiative provides placements to rural and remote communities with a Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area classification of four and above (rural and remote areas with fewer than 25,000 people).

The program brings medical students from the city to live and work in rural communities during their vacation periods. Students complete two week annual placements at the same location over a four year period. The scheme provides for travel costs, accommodation fees and general living expenses (paid directly to each student) and also reimburses mentoring doctors and community hosts for their time supporting each student.

##### **Support for rural health — Specialist Obstetrician Locum Scheme (SOLS)**

The Specialist Obstetrician Locum Scheme (SOLS) supports the access of rural women to quality local obstetric care by providing the rural specialist obstetrician workforce with locum support. In 2008-09, an expansion to include GP obstetricians and GP anaesthetists was announced with funding of \$7.9 million over four years.

During 2008-09, SOLS continued to provide locum support to rural obstetricians and GP obstetricians. GP anaesthetists will gain access to locum support in early 2009-10. Since 1 October 2008, over 60 placements have been provided.



### **Support for allied health in rural areas**

This national initiative will help allied health students meet reasonable travel and accommodation costs involved in a rural clinical placement.

The Government has committed \$2.5 million over three years from 2008-09 to provide funding for a scholarship program for allied health students from metropolitan, rural and remote backgrounds to undertake clinical placements in rural or remote communities. Scholarships are for allied health disciplines (such as psychology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and podiatry) and are proposed to commence in the 2009 academic year. Subsequent rounds will open in March / April each year.

This measure will have a long-term impact on the rural workforce by increasing the capacity of the allied health workforce. By increasing the number of qualified allied health professionals working in rural areas, it will also contribute to improving the quality of the primary and allied health service provision.

### **New Directions: An Equal Start in Life for Indigenous Children — child and maternal health**

In 2008-09 the Government provided \$90.3 million over five years to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and their children, specifically those children aged 0–8 years, better access to child and maternal health services, including home visiting. Additional child and maternal health services will be established in targeted areas, including regional centres. This will contribute to the Australian Government's commitment to halve the gap in infant mortality rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children within a decade.

### **COAG — Reducing Alcohol and Substance Abuse and its Impact on Families, Safety and Community Wellbeing in Remote Indigenous Communities**

This 2008-09 measure was provided with funding of \$49.3 million over four years to establish new residential treatment and rehabilitation services for people from remote Indigenous communities, fund minor upgrades of facilities or housing to accommodate additional staff, and create new positions for drug and alcohol workers. The measure includes new drug and alcohol services to support Welfare Reform initiatives in remote Cape York communities.

Through this initiative, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in remote Australia, will have better access to drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services.

### **Link Up and Bringing Them Home**

The commitment to the Link Up and Bringing Them Home programs aims to reunite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stolen Generations members with their families and communities. Established in 2008-09 with funding of \$15.7 million over four years, it will also support the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities through the provision of 20 additional Bringing Them Home counsellor positions nationally.

The measure provides improved Link Up and Bringing Them Home services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including those in regional areas.

#### **Better Outcomes for Hospitals and Community Health — \$21 million boost to health services in the Northern Territory**

Better Outcomes for Hospitals and Community Health aims to improve patient treatment and outcomes care through both hospital and community care initiatives.

The \$21 million boost to health services in the Northern Territory will provide funding from 2008-09 for new and upgraded health infrastructure to improve health service capacity, particularly in remote areas; provide mobile sexual assault counselling services for Indigenous children and families in targeted regional areas; and bring renal dialysis services closer to Aboriginal people in remote areas, making it easier for them to access much needed health treatment.

#### **Northern Territory Emergency Response — Expanding health service delivery in the Northern Territory**

This initiative received funding of \$99.7 million over two years from 2008-09 to enable Aboriginal people in remote communities and regional areas in the Northern Territory to have their health checked regularly and receive follow-up care through better coordinated regional primary health care services. It will establish a remote area health corps agency to bring more health professionals to the Northern Territory, and will also deliver more regionally based, comprehensive primary health care services to meet the complex health needs of Aboriginal people.

#### **GP Super Clinics**

The GP Super Clinics Program was established in 2008-09 with funding of \$275.2 million over four years. GP Super Clinics will provide the physical infrastructure to improve local access to multidisciplinary, team-based health care. The provision of infrastructure will also support education and training opportunities for medical, nursing and allied health students and GP registrars. Successful funding recipients have already been announced in over a third of the 31 locations identified for a GP Super Clinic.

#### **Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program (MSOAP)**

In 2008-09, additional funding of \$12 million over four years was allocated to the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program (MSOAP) to support medical specialists to deliver an expanded range of outreach services in rural and remote communities.

The expansion of the MSOAP commenced on 1 July 2008, and is providing opportunities for the delivery of new or expanded medical specialist services, assisting in addressing waiting lists for patients requiring treatment and reducing the need for patients to travel to metropolitan areas to access services.

### **National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program (NRRHIP)**

In 2008-09, the Australian Government established the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program (NRRHIP), which is an amalgamation of the former Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund and the former Rural Private Access program.

The NRRHIP commenced on 1 July 2008, and will direct more than \$46 million over four years to the provision of essential health infrastructure (capital works, purchase of equipment or both) in rural and remote communities with populations of up to 20,000, and strategic service planning for small rural private hospitals. Since 1 July 2008, 58 projects to the value of approximately \$13.7 million (GST exclusive) have been approved under the NRRHIP.

### **Active After-school Communities Program**

The Active After-school Communities (AASC) program is a free after school hours sport and structured physical activity program offered to all Australian primary schools and Child Care Benefit-approved out of school hour care services during the 3.00 pm to 5.30 pm timeslot. The program provides primary school children with a fun and safe introduction to over 70 sports and 20 other structured physical activities.

The AASC program currently involves up to 150,000 primary school children and up to 3,250 sites. The AASC program reaches all regions and populations of Australia, including Indigenous (14 per cent of sites), remote/rural (48 per cent of sites), sites that cater for children with special needs (14 per cent) and school of the air.

### **National Talent Identification and Development Program**

The National Talent Identification and Development (NTID) program is designed to help sports identify talented athletes (12 years and older) and prepare them for participation in domestic, national and international competition. The program uses information across all disciplines of sports science to identify young athletes with characteristics associated with elite performance. Once identified, the young athletes are provided with the opportunity to realise their potential in a high-quality talent development program. The NTID program also has project coordinators located at various locations around Australia, including Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane and Adelaide.

Australian University Sport closely supports the NTID program through talent assessment centres at regional universities, which provide infrastructure support to national recruitment and testing initiatives undertaken by NTID.

The Talent Assessment Centre (TAC) network, which has the purpose of extending the reach of the NTID program into regional areas of Australia, has now conducted more than 30 testing sessions on behalf of the NTID program. In addition to this, the development of the fully national, interactive website ETID now extends the metropolitan reach of the NTID program to every corner of Australia that has an internet connection. This works to provide the considerable regional athletic talent

residing in this country with another avenue to come to the notice and attention of high performance sport.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other health and ageing initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).

## **HUMAN SERVICES**

### **Centrelink Call Centre**

The Government will provide funding of \$120.5 million over two years to ensure that Centrelink call centres continue to deliver efficient telephone services for families, pensioners and job seekers. This measure will assist Centrelink in responding to an increase in the number of calls and a trend towards longer and more complex calls. This funding is in addition to an increase in Centrelinks overall funding in 2009-10 of over \$200 million provided to Centrelink under established funding arrangements to respond to the rising customer numbers, primarily resulting from the economic downturn. Access to call centres is important to those customers who do not reside near Centrelink Offices, particularly those in rural and regional areas.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other human services initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.humanservices.gov.au](http://www.humanservices.gov.au).

## **IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

### **Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme**

The Government will provide \$23.6 million over four years to support the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme. The measure will allow up to 2,500 workers from Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to be employed in the Australian horticulture sector over three years. The Government is conducting the pilot to examine whether a seasonal worker scheme could contribute to foreign aid objectives and assist Australian employers.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other immigration initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au).

## **INNOVATION, INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND RESEARCH**

### **Regional Managers Network**

The Regional Managers Network has officers located in 15 regional centres to improve access to information and programs directly benefiting regional businesses. The Government has provided \$5.7 million over two years to fund the network.

### **Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics**

The Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics undertakes scientific research into plant genomics and evaluates the commercial potential for products and services resulting from the research. In particular, the centre will focus on improving the resistance of wheat and barley to drought, salinity and mineral deficiencies and on improving the heat tolerance of canola. The centre has received funding of \$7.8 million over four years to support its research.

### **Cooperative Research Centres Program**

The Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program is to deliver significant economic, environmental and social benefits to Australia by supporting partnerships between researchers and end users. To enhance rural and regional development, the Government allocated \$201.5 million over four years. Currently, 26 CRCs operating across the rural-based manufacturing, environment, and mining and energy sectors make a contribution to strengthening rural and regional development. The CRCs operating in these fields have contributed significantly to the education and training of industry-ready graduates.

### **Enterprise Connect**

Enterprise Connect provides support to small and medium-sized enterprises to help them become more innovative, efficient and competitive. The Government began establishing Innovation Centres in 2008 in the Northern Territory, Queensland, and New South Wales. The most recently established centre, the \$20 million Clean Energy Innovation Centre, in Newcastle in New South Wales, opened in April 2009. The Government also established a national Manufacturing Network. Launched on 21 August 2008, the Innovative Regions Centre is designed to boost productivity, improve innovation and increase the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises in a number of regions around Australia, including Geelong in Victoria and North Adelaide in South Australia. Enterprise Connect is a \$251 million initiative over five years with an additional \$20 million recently added for the Defence Industry Innovation Centre.

### **Commercialising Emerging Technologies**

Commercialising Emerging Technologies (COMET) supports individuals, early-growth stage and spin-off companies to improve their potential for successful commercialisation of their innovation. Support is provided in the form of business assistance through a network of business advisers located across Australia. In April 2009, the Government announced grants totalling more than \$2.1 million for 33 innovations.

### **Institute for Environmental Research Program**

The Institute for Environmental Research is undertaking research in water and air pollution in southern Australia, the Pilbara region in Western Australia, the Darling

River, the Macquarie Marshes and the Namoi Valley in New South Wales. The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation is working with local councils in New South Wales to undertake research on the fine particle air quality in regional communities. The Government will provide \$615,000 in 2009-10 to support this research.

### **National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training**

The new National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training, \$30 million over five years, has been established to undertake scientific research in all aspects of groundwater. It will provide high-quality training for post-graduate and postdoctoral students and for professional hydrogeologists, groundwater engineers and groundwater managers.

### **North-East Tasmania Development Package**

The North-East Tasmania Development Package will provide competitive, merit-based grants to local businesses and groups for new employment creation in the north-east region of Tasmania. The assistance will be delivered through the North East Tasmania Innovation and Investment Fund and the Business Micro Capital Scheme. The Government announced 19 successful projects in March 2009, which will create 63 sustainable jobs in the north-east region of Tasmania. The Government has provided \$4.5 million over two years to support the economic development package.

### **Super Science Initiatives**

The Government will make targeted investment to support the following three fields of scientific research: space, science and astronomy, \$160.5 million over four years; marine science and the climate frontier, \$387.7 million over five years; and future industries – nanotechnology and life sciences – \$504 million over five years.

This investment will limit the impact of the global financial crisis by providing funds for critical infrastructure needs across Australia, including rural and regional centres. These major infrastructure developments will create highly skilled jobs, as well as provide important research capabilities and information gathering on natural resource management, forestry and agriculture to benefit rural and regional Australia.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other innovation, industry, science and research initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.arc.gov.au](http://www.arc.gov.au).

## **INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

### **Better Regions Program**

Under the Better Regions Program, the Government has committed to assist regions build on their strengths, improve liveability and create jobs.

Through the Better Regions Program the Government is providing \$176 million over four years from 2008 to help local communities deliver local infrastructure and other regional community projects. Better Regions funds commitments made by the Government during the 2007 election campaign.

### **Community Infrastructure Program**

The Community Infrastructure Program is boosting local economic development and supporting jobs in communities around the country. It includes funding of \$250 million in 2008-09 for all councils and shires to address immediate critical community infrastructure needs.

The Government is also providing \$550 million over two years under the Community Infrastructure Program – Strategic Projects for major community infrastructure projects such as town halls, libraries, community centres and sports centres. This initiative is part of the Government's Nation Building and Jobs Plan.

### **Local Government Financial Assistance Grants**

Local Government Financial Assistance Grants are provided under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*. They have a general purpose and an identified local road component, both of which are untied to enable councils to fund local infrastructure and service priorities.

Local government grants commissions have been established in each state and the Northern Territory to recommend the distribution of these grants to local governing bodies in accordance with the Act and its accompanying National Principles. The 2009-10 estimated grant payment of \$1.9 billion is \$47.2 million more than the 2008-09 payment.

South Australian councils will also receive \$58.2 million in supplementary local road funding under existing arrangements from 2007-08 to 2010-11 to address the relative disadvantage of South Australian councils in the local road component of the Financial Assistance Grants.

### **Australian Council of Local Government**

On 18 September 2008, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government announced the establishment of the Australian Council of Local Government (ACLG) to forge a new cooperative engagement between the Commonwealth and local government.

ACLG held its first meeting on 18 November 2008 where over 400 mayors and shire presidents from councils and shires across Australia and representatives from state and territory governments met at Parliament House, Canberra.

An ACLG Steering Committee has been established which will continue the engagement, policy coordination and close cooperation between local government and the Australian Government between the annual meetings with mayors and shire presidents. The Steering Committee met on 5 February 2009. The next ACLG Meeting will be held on 25 June 2009.

### **East Kimberley Development Package**

The East Kimberley region in Western Australia, including its Indigenous communities, will benefit from the significant injection of funds from the Australian Government and the Western Australian Government. The Australian Government is contributing \$195 million over 2008-09 and 2009-10 to support economic development in the region around Kununurra.

The investment package is part of the Government's \$4.7 billion Nation Building initiative and is to be matched by the Western Australian Government's investment in the Ord Expansion project.

The Government's investments are being targeted to meet the current and future social and economic needs of the East Kimberley region, including infrastructure to support sustainable growth and improve productivity, work training and productive employment opportunities, and investment in much needed social infrastructure.

### **Nation Building Program**

Funding of \$4.4 billion will be provided in 2009-10 for road and rail initiatives across Australia, including in regional areas, to support jobs and stimulate the economy.

This funding is part of the Australian Government's more than \$26 billion injection into our national road and rail network through the Nation Building Program. Projects will be funded across the interstate transport network as well as to freight corridors connecting regional Australia with major cities and ports.

As well as putting in place the modern, well-planned transport infrastructure vital to Australia's long term prosperity, the Australian Government's record investment in this Program will support jobs and provide an immediate stimulus to local economies.

### **Black Spot Program**

The Black Spot program provides funding for safety works such as roundabouts, crash barriers and street lights at places where there have been serious crashes or where serious crashes are likely.



Funding of \$144.7 million is available in 2008-09 (this includes the additional \$60 million announced in December 2008 as part of the Nation Building package and an additional \$30.0 million announced in the February 2009 Nation Building and Jobs Plan). An additional \$60 million was also allocated to the Black Spot Program in 2009-10 bringing total funding to \$119.5 million.

Funding of \$59.5 million per year is available from 2010-11 to 2013-14. Each state and territory has a set annual allocation based on proportion of population and number of fatal crashes. State and territory allocations have recently been revised and the new allocations apply from 2009-10.

### **Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program**

The Government announced \$70 million for the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program in the 2008-09 Budget. The program is aimed at reducing the proportion of road accidents involving heavy vehicles by targeting heavy vehicle driver fatigue and speed. It is also aimed at increasing productivity by enhancing the capacity of existing roads. The program is available to state and territory road authorities to provide funds for projects such as rest areas, truck parking and decoupling bays, road and bridge enhancements, and technology trials.

The Government has received submissions for the first round of the Program and will call for submissions from state and territory road authorities for the second round of \$40 million later this year.

### **Roads to Recovery program**

The Roads to Recovery program provides funding direct to local councils for road works chosen by the councils and to states and territories for roads in areas where there are no councils. Each funding recipient has a set allocation of funding over a program life. Funding for the program has been increased from \$307.5 million to \$350 million a year for the five-year period 2009-10 to 2013-14.

### **Boom Gates for Rail Crossings Program**

Funding of \$150 million during 2008-09 and 2009-10 has been provided to accelerate the installation of boom gates and other active rail crossing control mechanisms at high-risk level crossings throughout Australia under the new Boom Gates for Rail Crossings Program. The aim of the program is to improve the safety and efficiency of the transport system in Australia.

The program will provide for the installation of boom gates and other active protection measures such as active advance warning systems.

### **Infrastructure Australia**

Infrastructure Australia, the advisory council established to provide advice to the Australian Government on infrastructure issues, completed a national audit of infrastructure and presented its findings in December 2008. It provided the

Infrastructure Priority List to the Government in March 2009 which has informed infrastructure investment decisions.

In its national Audit, Infrastructure Australia identified seven themes for action, the majority of which affect regional areas. The themes are:

1. Developing a more extensive, globally competitive broadband system;
2. Developing more effective ports and associated land transport systems to cope with exports;
3. Development of our freight networks;
4. Transforming our cities, particularly through increasing public transport capacity in our cities;
5. More extensive national energy grids to enable greater flexibility and competition in the nation's power and gas systems, whilst creating opportunities for the development of renewable power sources;
6. More adaptable and resilient water systems to cope with climate change; and
7. Improved services for indigenous communities.

### **Nation Building Plan for the Future**

This Budget allocates an additional \$8.5 billion for nationally significant transport infrastructure projects across Australia that are critical to boosting our economy's productivity.

Projects will help to connect our regional areas with major towns and cities, improve the movement of freight, and will help bring about long term economic benefits to regional Australia. Projects of particular benefit to regional Australia include: Regional Rail Express in Victoria, Pacific Highway – Kempsey Bypass in New South Wales and Oakajee Port Common User Facilities in Western Australia.

A particular highlight of the Plan is the Government's investment in Australia's key freight route, Network 1 (N1), which stretches from Melbourne to Cairns. Work will soon start on key sections of the Pacific, Bruce and Hume highways as well as the key feeder roads: the Ipswich Motorway and the new Hunter Expressway.

### **Office of Northern Australia**

The Office of Northern Australia (ONA) was established in March 2008 to:

- provide advice on sustainable development issues in or affecting northern Australia

- improve coordination between governments, businesses and communities in northern Australia and when they are involved in issues about northern Australia.

Funding of \$2 million a year for four years was provided in the 2008-09 Budget.

### **Remote Aerodrome Inspection Program**

The Australian Government's Remote Aerodrome Inspection (RAI) Program provides an aerodrome inspection service for 59 designated Indigenous communities. It was initiated as part of the Australian Government's response to recommendations contained in the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Normally, aerodrome inspections of this type would be the responsibility of the aerodrome owner/operator. However, they require specialised technical expertise not readily available in remote communities. This Commonwealth-funded service is seen as a practical way of assisting remote communities heavily reliant on air services.

The program also facilitates training of aerodrome reporting officers as required for compliance with aviation safety regulations.

Funding of \$0.3 million in 2009-10 is being provided for the RAI Program.

### **Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme**

The Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme (RASS) subsidises weekly passenger and freight air transportation to communities who would otherwise have no regular access to transport. In 2007-08 the scheme provided services to approximately 9,000 people in 240 remote communities, including 75 Indigenous communities, in 10 remote regions across the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania. The Government is providing funding of \$12.27 million in 2009-10 to support this program.

### **Remote Aviation Infrastructure Fund**

The Government is providing \$3 million in the 2009-10 Budget to upgrade remote area airstrips identified under RASS as requiring priority work. This will make them safer and more accessible. The airstrips present a vital lifeline to those living in remote regions, including Indigenous communities, across Australia. The airstrips allow those living in these areas to be supplied with essential items such as medical and business supplies, fresh food and long-distance educational materials.

### **Remote Aerodrome Safety Program**

The Remote Aerodrome Safety Program (RASP) assists in funding maintenance and repairs to airstrips in remote and isolated communities across Australia. Projects funded under the program help improve the safety and accessibility of airstrips and facilitate the provision of non-commercial essential community air services including delivery of food supplies, community mail, passenger transport services, medical

supplies and medical care. Funding of \$7 million is available in 2009-10 to support this program.

## **Regional Development Australia**

The Australian Government is committed to engaging effectively with regional Australia.

At the 30 July 2008 meeting of the Regional Development Ministers' Council, which includes the Australian Local Government Association, ministers agreed to work together to align RDA closely with state and territory regional development organisations and local government. Following this meeting, the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, has been working with the states and territories and local governments on practical opportunities for more closely aligning RDA with existing regional development organisations. A memorandum of understanding has been signed with New South Wales and arrangements with other states and territories are close to being finalised. These arrangements will see the Australian Government, state and territory governments and local governments working closely together to support the growth and development of regional Australia.

RDA will provide targeted advice to governments about the challenges and opportunities in regional Australia and act as a conduit between government and regional communities. RDA will, for example, undertake consultation and community engagement, regional planning, community development, and promote and facilitate access to government programs.

## **Regional Development Council**

The Australian Government and state, territory and local governments are committed to working together to deliver government policies, programs and services tailored to the needs of regional communities.

The Regional Development Council (RDC) works to facilitate more effective cooperation across all spheres of government to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes for regional Australians. Its terms of reference are:

- to provide leadership to all areas of government, industry and the community in working collaboratively to achieve sustainable regional development
- to provide a forum for Australian Government, state and territory ministers and local government to consider and facilitate national strategic approaches to sustainable regional development.

Membership of the Council comprises Australian Government, state and territory ministers responsible for regional development and a representative from the Australian Local Government Association. The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport,

Regional Development and Local Government chairs the annual council meetings. The department provides secretariat support to the council.

At its last meeting, on 30 July 2008, the RDC agreed to a set of principles which will form the basis for further work or for closer alignment and integration of regional development activities and structures across all levels of government.

### **Further information**

Further information about these and other infrastructure, transport, regional development and local government initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.infrastructure.gov.au](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au).

## **RESOURCES, ENERGY AND TOURISM**

### **Clean Energy Initiative**

The new Clean Energy Initiative will support first-of-a-kind industrial-scale carbon capture and storage demonstration projects and help preserve the value of Australia's coal exports. The Clean Energy Initiative will include \$2.0 billion over nine years to support the demonstration of industrial-scale carbon capture and storage (CCS) flagship projects in Australia.

In renewable, the Clean Energy Initiative will provide \$1.5 billion over six years to establish commercial-scale solar power generation projects in Australia and \$465 million over four years for a new innovation body, Renewables Australia, to promote the development, commercialisation and deployment of renewable energy

### **Renewable Energy Fund**

The Government launched the \$500 million Renewable Energy Fund over seven years in February 2009. It includes the \$435 million Renewable Energy Demonstration Program to accelerate the commercialisation and deployment of new renewable energy technologies; the \$50 million Geothermal Drilling Program to accelerate the development of the geothermal industry, and the \$15 million Second Generation Biofuels Research and Development Program to support the research, development and pre-commercialisation of second-generation biofuel technologies.

### **Energy Innovation Fund**

The Energy Innovation Fund provides \$150 million over four years (2008-09 to 2011-12) to support research and development in the energy sector. It includes \$100 million for research into solar thermal and solar photovoltaic technologies and \$50 million for the Clean Energy Program to support projects in the area of renewable energy technology, energy efficiency, energy storage and hydrogen transport fuels.

### **National Low Emissions Coal Initiative**

The National Low Emissions Coal Initiative will accelerate the development and deployment of technologies that will reduce emissions from coal use. It is supported

by the \$500 million National Low Emissions Coal Fund between 2008-09 and 2014-15, designed to generate a further \$1 billion in investment by other stakeholders in research, development and demonstration of low emissions coal technologies.

### **Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute**

The Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute, hosted by Australia, was launched in April 2009. The Australian Government will provide up to \$100 million each year to the institute to accelerate commercial deployment of carbon capture and storage (CCS). Australia will benefit from the work of the institute in deployment of CCS across coal-fired power stations and natural gas processing plants throughout Australia. These industries generate significant employment in rural and regional Australia.

### **Tourism initiatives**

The Government is developing a National Long-Term Tourism Strategy to consider the supply-side challenges facing the tourism industry and to promote investment in tourism initiatives and increase Australia's competitiveness as a travel destination. The Government is also developing a National Tourism Accreditation Framework to ensure the quality of tourism products and services.

### **TQUAL Grants**

The Government launched TQUAL Grants in April 2009, with up to \$8.5 million available over two years (2009-10 and 2010-11) under a competitive program to fund eligible tourism projects across metropolitan and regional Australia. The new program will promote innovation in Australia's tourism offering and greater local/regional economic linkages.

### **Regional tourism projects**

In the 2008 Budget, the Government committed to supporting 11 regional tourism projects totalling around \$4.6 million. These projects are being funded through the Australian Tourism Development Program and will develop quality tourism precincts, experiences and strategies for growth.

### **Queensland Tourism Assistance Package**

A package of support to Tropical North Queensland is being successfully implemented to assist the region manage and plan for changes arising from significant aviation cuts. The Government announced a \$4 million recovery package during 2008, which comprised \$2 million for marketing measures and \$2 million for supply-side measures.

### **Tourism Bushfire Recovery Package**

Following the February 2009 Victorian Bushfires, the Government worked to develop and secure support for a joint Victorian-Commonwealth package of assistance to tourism businesses in the affected and adjoining areas, through demand and supply measures. The \$10 million Tourism Bushfire Recovery Package will help get tourists

back to regions economically affected by the bushfires, including Victoria's High Country, Gippsland and the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges.

### **Rum Jungle — Northern Territory**

The Government has provided \$8.3 million over four years between 2009-10 and 2012-13 to contribute to the resolution of environmental, economic development and Indigenous land access issues currently presented by the Rum Jungle site. The initiative will have a positive impact on the Batchelor region in the Northern Territory.

The project will:

- undertake site monitoring and maintenance activities at the former Rum Jungle site, which will provide regional employment opportunities and contribute to the protection of the Finnis River system
- bring together the site's traditional owners, the Northern Territory Government and industry to guide and contribute to this process
- support ongoing management of the site to maintain and improve the effectiveness of the current rehabilitation structures.

### **Ethanol Production Grants Program**

The Ethanol Production Grants Program is designed to encourage the use of ethanol in transport in Australia, commencing in 2002 and operating until 30 June 2011. Grants are paid to ethanol producers at a rate of 38.143 cents per litre. Recipients include Dalby Biorefinery (Dalby, Queensland), CSR Distilleries (Sarina, Queensland), Honan Holdings (Nowra, New South Wales), Schumer (Woongoolba, Queensland) and Tarac Technologies (Nuriootpa, South Australia).

### **Encouraging the expansion of the uranium industry**

The Uranium Industry Framework is a government-industry partnership established to address the key issues facing the uranium industry, including skills shortages, transport impediments, regulatory streamlining and ensuring Indigenous engagement and community benefits from the sector. In 2008, the Government allocated \$10.6 million to support the development of the uranium industry from 2008-09 to 2011-12. The Government is considering a number of uranium projects for development in rural and regional areas of Australia.

The change in policy in Western Australia to allow uranium mining means that a number of mines are undergoing assessment for development in the next three to four years in remote and regional areas of the state, which could generate up to \$3.2 billion in gross state product to 2030. The Australian Government is working with the Western Australian Government to ensure that regulatory requirements are in place for uranium mining to meet Australia's stringent standards.

## **Gen2 Biofuels Research and Development Program**

Second-generation biofuels have the potential to reduce Australia's reliance on fossil fuels, reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the transport sector, and enable fuels to be derived from low-cost, non-food materials. The \$15 million Gen 2 Program was launched in October 2008 to support research, development and demonstration of new biofuel technologies. During the initial process, 32 applications were received, seeking grant funding of \$90 million, to leverage projects valued in total at \$230 million.

## **Working in Partnership Program**

The Working in Partnership (WIP) Program is allocated \$0.5 million a year to support and encourage cultural change taking place in relations between Indigenous communities and the mining industry, promoting long-term, effective partnerships that benefit all stakeholders. It provides funding for regional workshops and support for committees and projects that address issues such as employment, education and training, business opportunities, cultural awareness, capacity building and economic empowerment. To date, 13 workshops have been held in regional centres around the country and two forums have been held in Adelaide and Mount Isa, resulting in increased cooperation between the Indigenous communities, industry and government service providers in the area.

## **Kimberley LNG Precinct**

The Government is working with the Western Australian Government, Woodside Energy and the Kimberley Land Council to establish a site for a new regional LNG precinct in the Kimberley to develop Browse Basin gas reserves. The aim is to maximise the opportunities for Indigenous communities to participate in, and take advantage of, the economic development that will arise from this project.

## **Further information**

Further information about these and other resources, energy and tourism initiatives relating to rural and regional Australia is available at [www.ret.gov.au](http://www.ret.gov.au).