

Regional Australia – Driving Our Economy 2017-18

Statement by

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9 May 2017

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ISBN: 978-1-925531-48-0

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Printed by CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd

FOREWORD	1
AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES	6
New Initiatives	6
Current Initiatives	8
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S	24
Current Initiatives	25
COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS	35
New Initiatives	36
Current Initiatives	37
DEFENCE	45
Current Initiatives	47
EDUCATION AND TRAINING	59
New Initiatives	59
Current Initiatives	61
EMPLOYMENT	68
New Initiatives	69
Current Initiatives	70
ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY	77
New Initiatives	78
Current Initiatives	78
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE	87
New Initiatives	88
Current Initiatives	88
HEALTH	96
New Initiatives	97
Current Initiatives	99
HUMAN SERVICES	120
New Initiatives	120
Current Initiatives	121
IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION	128
New Initiatives	129
Current Initiatives	130
INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE	134
New Initiatives	135
Current Initiatives	138

INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT	153
New Initiatives.....	154
Current Initiatives	157
PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET	169
New Initiatives.....	170
Current Initiatives	170
SOCIAL SERVICES.....	182
New Initiatives.....	183
Current Initiatives	184
TREASURY.....	196
New Initiatives.....	196
Current Initiatives	196
VETERANS' AFFAIRS	199
New Initiatives.....	200
Current Initiatives	201

FOREWORD

The 2017-18 Budget builds on the Australian Government's investment in our regions to deliver the foundations for a strong and sustainable economy for all Australians. This publication outlines over 450 initiatives that benefit regional Australia, across health, education, employment, defence, infrastructure, telecommunications, agriculture and water resources and other portfolios and demonstrates our commitment to creating jobs and economic growth in Australia's regions.

Australia is a nation of great economic strength and stability and regional Australia is critical to our national economy. Nearly eight million people live outside our capital cities and 3.8 million are employed in regional areas. In 2016, our agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining industries – located across our diverse regions – made up 57 per cent of the value of Australia's merchandise exports. However, while many of our regional centres and our cities are flourishing, some regions and smaller towns are facing changing patterns of population and economic activity.

Regional Australia – Driving Our Economy 2017-18 outlines the Australian Government investments that will benefit those who choose to live, work and invest in regional Australia. It demonstrates our commitment to securing a bright future for regional Australia and spreading the opportunities and benefits of our growing economy to all corners of the country.

When government invests in regional communities it breeds confidence and encourages further investment from local businesses and families. That is why, in this Budget, the Australian Government will establish the Regional Growth Fund providing \$472.0 million for regional infrastructure projects that will make a difference to local economies. The Regional Growth Fund will include \$272.0 million to provide grants of \$10.0 million or more for major projects which support long-term economic growth and create jobs in regions undergoing structural adjustment.

An additional \$200.0 million will be provided to the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) to support the construction of community infrastructure and build the capacity of regional areas. The second round of BBRF will allow more regional communities across Australia to benefit from the fund. This brings the total Australian Government commitment to the BBRF to nearly \$500 million.

The Australian Government is creating new jobs and delivering sustainable employment through the \$220.0 million Regional Jobs and Investment Packages (RJIP). These packages help regions in Australia with untapped potential to diversify their economies and unlock new sources of growth.

The Australian Government is also committed to the development of regional communities through reductions in travel times and better transport connections that make it easier for people and goods to move between regional and metropolitan

centres for business, education and recreational purposes. This \$500.0 million package will include improvements to the North East Line, the Gippsland Rail Line, services on the Geelong Line, as well as a study into improving the Shepparton Line. There is also an additional \$20.2 million to support the construction of the Murray Basin Rail Project, supporting primary producers in accessing the ports of Portland, Geelong and Melbourne.

This Government's unprecedented investment in infrastructure is central to providing connectivity and economic growth. This includes a commitment to invest more than \$70 billion from 2013-14 to 2020-21 in world class infrastructure. These investments mean that our roads are safer and more secure, and that industries and individuals are better connected to markets, services, employment and their communities. The Australian Government is providing an additional \$8.4 billion to deliver the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail project, with construction to start in 2017-18. This nationally significant freight transport project will connect our regions to domestic and global markets by 2024. Connected regional communities will be able to move goods to ports more efficiently and take advantage of the tremendous opportunities offered throughout Asia and beyond.

Since September 2013, the Australian Government has concluded three major Free Trade Agreements with Korea, Japan and China. These agreements will open up new markets with some of our largest trading partners and provide exciting new export opportunities for regional Australia in agriculture, manufacturing and services.

The Australian Government recognises that new technologies bring opportunities to improve access to services to people living outside the major Australian cities. That is why the Australian Government is investing more in regional telecommunications infrastructure than at any time before. The Government is committed to better connecting regional communities and businesses, through providing better broadband services. The Australian Government is ensuring this occurs by delivering the National Broadband Network (NBN) quickly and efficiently to rural and regional families and businesses. By 2020, through NBN Co Limited (NBN Co), the Australian Government will roll out the NBN providing: 2.5 million regional brownfield premises with access to fixed line services; 600,000 premises with access to fixed wireless services; and 400,000 premises with access to satellite services. About \$2.5 billion of capital expenditure will be invested in NBN Co's fixed wireless network and approximately \$2.0 billion will be invested in the satellite network.

The Australian Government is also continuing to build on its commitment to improve mobile coverage with an additional \$60.0 million from 2017-18 to 2019-20 being made available under the Mobile Black Spot Program, building on the initial \$160.0 million investment.

The Australian Government is improving access of regional communities to vital services through innovative and flexible delivery. Australians in rural and remote locations will have better access to Medicare funded psychological services via

telehealth. This will remove long-standing barriers to mental health support and ensure that help will be available to those who need it. The Australian Government is continuing its commitment to improving health services in the regions through the creation of Australia's first ever National Rural Health Commissioner. Once appointed, the Commissioner will be responsible for developing National Rural Generalist Pathways. As part of this process, the Commissioner will work with the health sector and training providers to determine an accepted scope of practice, and also develop options for increased access to training and appropriate remuneration for Rural Generalists.

The Australian Government is delivering on its 2016 election commitment to establish a Regional Investment Corporation, a national body to administer \$2.0 billion of farm business concessional loans and the \$2.0 billion National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility from 2018-19. This \$4.0 billion investment will give life to the dams and water infrastructure needed to drive regional investment, agricultural production and jobs, as well as partnering with farm businesses as they manage through hardship.

Affordable and reliable water supplies are key to growth in regional Australia. In addition to the \$2.0 billion National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility, a \$500.0 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund will be in place to incentivise State and Territory governments to fast track priority projects. The thirty-nine feasibility studies under the fund are either underway or complete and construction is about to begin on the first projects supported by the capital component of the fund.

New Country of Origin Food Labels introduced by the Australian Government, will provide consumers with clear information about food products that are made in Australia and what percentage of ingredients are locally grown. For the first time, food labels will clearly identify Australian manufacturing jobs and Australian farming produce.

The Australian Government is committed to growing local jobs and boosting economic diversification across regional Australia. The Australian Government's commitment to the structured decentralisation of Australian Government jobs from Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne will benefit regional Australia through the creation of local jobs and career paths, increased economic diversification and the stimulation of economic growth. This commitment builds on the decentralisation of Australian Government activities with core relevance to rural and regional Australia, such as the relocation of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation to Wagga Wagga.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that the investments that Australia needs to support economic growth, sustainability and quality of life in our regions are delivered. However, we must also accept that we need to live within our means. This is why we are focusing on investing in the right projects at the right time, to realise the best value for the taxpayer. This is achieved by focusing on those areas of greatest need. The Australian Government is also optimising our investments by being

more innovative in how projects are funded, including leveraging private investment and working with all levels of government.

The Australian Government is committed to building sustainable regional communities where our children and grandchildren want to remain or come back to for work, business and lifestyle opportunities.

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**KEY AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN
REGIONAL AUSTRALIA BY PORTFOLIO**

AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES

The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio contributes to the productivity, competitiveness and sustainability of regional Australia. The majority of Australia's agricultural industries, worth an estimated \$63.8 billion, are based in the regions and their employees, related businesses and suppliers underpin economic development in these areas.

In 2017-18 the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio will continue its work to maintain agriculture as one of the five pillars of the Australian economy. This will be achieved through support for farm businesses, ensuring greater access to export markets for agricultural produce, improving net farm-gate returns and managing biosecurity and imported food risks. The portfolio will also continue to provide support for the important stewardship role played by farmers and regional communities over Australia's natural resource base.

The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio leads the Australian Government's contribution to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, under which the Australian Government is working towards providing responsible, long-term management of water for communities, the environment and farmers. The portfolio supports regional economies and the environment through large-scale investment to improve returns to irrigators and the community, while providing water for the environment. Through its investments in water infrastructure across the nation, the Australian Government is also working to boost economic development and productivity across rural and regional Australia more broadly.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has a strong presence in regional Australia, with more than 17 per cent of its employees based in regional areas. These officers undertake a range of functions in support of agricultural industries, including biosecurity services, plant and animal pest and disease monitoring, surveillance and management of water programs.

In 2017-18, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority will transition to its new location to Armidale, following the move of the Fisheries, Grains and Rural Industries Research and Development Corporations in recent times. These moves are an important element of the Australian Government's agenda to better support regional Australia by relocating agencies outside of the capital cities so they are closer to the communities they serve.

NEW INITIATIVES

Regional Investment Corporation

The 2017-18 Budget establishes a Regional Investment Corporation to deliver up to \$4.0 billion in farm business and water infrastructure loans. This was a 2016 election commitment made by the Australian Government to establish a national body to

administer \$2.0 billion of farm business concessional loans and the \$2.0 billion National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility from 2018–19.

Establishing the Regional Investment Corporation will have a positive impact on regional Australia. The aim of the Regional Investment Corporation is to streamline delivery of loan arrangements, deliver national consistency and ensure farm business loans are speedily approved to help farm businesses in need, as well as providing loans to State and Territory governments for the construction of nationally significant water infrastructure.

Livestock Exports Global Assurance Program

The 2017–18 Budget delivers on the Australian Government’s 2016 election commitment to contribute \$8.3 million from 2017–18 over four years to the development by industry of the Livestock Exports Global Assurance Program. This program will be an assessment and certification assurance system to enable livestock exporters to meet their existing regulatory requirements under the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) through a third-party in a more effective and cost-efficient way.

Strengthening Australia’s Food Safety System

The 2017–18 Budget provides for the Australian Government’s strengthening of Australia’s imported food safety system to better protect consumer health. The new system will reduce the regulatory burden for compliant food importers while upholding Australia’s international obligations. It is expected that the legislative amendments will become effective during 2018 and non-legislative changes will be progressively implemented throughout 2017.

New Agricultural Production Levies

The Australian Government will invest up to \$1.6 million over four years to match funding raised by a statutory research and development levy to increase the Australian thoroughbred industry’s profitability and competitiveness. The thoroughbred research and development levy will be introduced from 1 July 2017 and the Australian Government will match industry contributions up to \$0.4 million per year. The thoroughbred research and development program will continue to be managed by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. This delivers on the 2016 Australian Government election commitment.

The Australian Government will also invest up to \$0.7 million over four years to match funding raised by a new statutory research and development levy on Australian tea tree oil to increase that industry’s profitability and competitiveness. The tea tree oil research and development levy will be introduced from 1 July 2017 and the Australian Government will match industry contributions up to \$140,000 per year. The tea tree research and development program will continue to be managed by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. This delivers on a commitment in the *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper*.

National Landcare Program

The Australian Government has confirmed the allocation of funding from the Natural Heritage Trust for the next phase of the National Landcare Program, investing \$1.1 billion over seven years from 2016-17. It includes \$100.0 million of additional funding for the National Landcare Program announced in December 2016, to support on-ground community projects that protect, restore and sustain our soils, water and the diversity of Australia's unique plants and animals and threatened species, including additional funding to expand Indigenous Protected Areas.

The next phase of the program will continue to improve natural resource management to protect Australia's iconic places, plants and animals, secure agricultural productivity gains and farm-gate returns and strengthen regional economies. The funding will ensure the valuable work of Landcare groups and Indigenous communities delivering on-ground biodiversity and sustainable agriculture outcomes continues.

The National Landcare Program is jointly administered by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources and the Department of Environment and Energy.

Farm Business Concessional Loans Scheme – Extension of Eligibility

In 2017-18 the Australian Government will extend the eligibility of the existing Farm Business Concessional Loans Scheme to include Farm Household Allowance recipients who will be exhausting their 1,095 days of entitlement on or before 30 June 2018. This will assist eligible farmers to continue to improve their farm businesses and become financially self-reliant, helping their local economies to prosper.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper

The *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper* was launched on 4 July 2015. From 2015-16 the Australian Government is investing \$4.0 billion in our farmers and delivers on the 2013 election commitment. The measures under the *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper* focus on five key areas:

- A fairer go for farm businesses;
- Building 21st century water, transport and communication infrastructure;
- Strengthening our approach to drought and risk management;
- A smarter approach to farming; and
- Accessing premium markets.

A Fairer Go for Farm Businesses

The Australian Government is helping farmers achieve a better return at the farm gate.

- A total of \$11.4 million over four years from 2015–16 is committed to boost the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission engagement with the agricultural sector. Since the establishment of an Agriculture Unit and the appointment of Commissioner Mick Keogh in February 2016, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has substantially increased its engagement with the sector. This will help encourage fair-trading and improved competition in agricultural supply chains and ensure issues are dealt with swiftly.
- The Australian Government delivered on its \$13.8 million commitment to a two year pilot program to provide farmers with knowledge and materials on co-operatives and other forms of collaboration. This includes education tools and resources, customised expert support, and support to farmer groups working to get their collaborative project off the ground.
- The Productivity Commission has provided final reports to the Australian Government about their inquiries into reducing regulation in agriculture and in the marine fisheries and aquaculture industries.
- Improved country of origin labelling information, which commenced on 1 July 2016 with a two-year transition period for businesses to adjust, will give consumers clearer information on the origin of their food.
- Changes are being made to income tax averaging arrangements to allow primary producers to return to income averaging ten years after they opted out. Primary producers who opted out of income tax averaging for 2006–07, or an earlier financial year, will resume income tax averaging for the first financial year after 2017–18 in which their taxable primary production income is greater than that for the previous financial year.
- From 1 July 2016, farmers have been able to double their Farm Management Deposits to \$800,000 and banks have allowed farmers to use Farm Management Deposits as a loan offset for their interest costs.
- Agricultural users of agricultural and veterinary chemicals will get access to newer, better farm chemicals more quickly than in the past, and will get improved access to new uses of existing chemicals. This will make their businesses more competitive by reducing costs and improve sustainability. See Better Regulation of Agricultural Chemicals and Veterinary Medicines for further detail.

Building 21st Century Water, Transport and Communication Infrastructure

The Australian Government is planning ahead and thinking innovatively when it comes to our infrastructure.

- The National Water Infrastructure Development Fund is providing \$499.5 million from 2015–16 over ten years to support State and Territory governments develop secure and affordable water infrastructure that will drive regional economic growth, including the construction of dams, pipelines, wastewater reuse and managed aquifer recharge. See National Water Infrastructure Development Fund for further detail.

- The Australian Government provided \$0.7 million in 2015–16 to expand the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation’s TRANsport Network Strategic Investment Tool (TRANSIT) to support future government infrastructure investment. The tool can better identify and propose cost-effective solutions to bottlenecks in agricultural supply chains, including road and rail options that extend from the farm gate through storage and processing facilities to domestic and export markets.

Strengthening Our Approach to Drought and Risk Management

Drought is one of the biggest challenges farmers face and can have a significant impact on agricultural output, productivity and farm incomes.

- Farmers will have more accurate, more local and more frequent seasonal forecasts to assist with making decisions as part of the Australian Government’s commitment of \$3.3 million over four years from 2015–16 for improved seasonal forecasting.
- Eligible farm businesses are able to access a one-off rebate for the costs of obtaining independent and professional advice to apply for new insurance policies to assist with drought management and other production and market risks. Rebates are for half the costs incurred by eligible farm businesses, up to a maximum of \$2,500.
- The Australian Government is providing access to \$250.0 million each year in drought loans over the next ten years starting in 2016–17. See Farm Business Concessional Loans Scheme for further detail.
- From 1 July 2016, farmers and their partners receiving the Farm Household Allowance receive additional assistance in their third year of payment through an increase in case management and the activity supplement. See Farm Household Allowance for further detail.
- The Australian Government has committed \$35.0 million over four years from 2015–16 to the Drought Communities Programme, which is providing support to 23 drought-affected local shire councils across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. This involves shovel-ready projects that have created job opportunities and provides short-term help in communities that are suffering economic downturn due to drought. This program is led by the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development.
- The Australian Government has provided \$25.8 million over four years from 2015-16, to help State and Territory governments deal with the impact of feral animals and weeds in drought-stressed regions.

A Smarter Approach to Farming

The agriculture sector needs access to the most advanced technologies and practices to continue to ‘farm smarter.’

- The Australian Government has developed clearer farmer-oriented research, development and extension priorities that will direct levy funds to areas that will improve farm gate returns.

- \$100.0 million has been provided from 2015–16 to extend the Rural Research and Development for Profit Programme to 2021–22, meaning farmers will benefit from getting research out of the laboratory and onto the farm, which is key to productivity growth. See the Rural Research and Development for Profit Programme for more detail.
- A research boost over three years will be provided from 2016–17 to the export fodder industry to match the new agricultural production levy for exported fodder, as well as an increase in the matchable voluntary contribution rate for Forest and Wood Products Australia.
- The Australian Government is providing support for research, development and extension in small industries through \$1.2 million over three years from 2016–17 for the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.
- The Australian Government will be better placed to tackle pest and disease incidents, and to enable future containment and eradication programs to be put in place, with \$50.0 million committed over four years from 2015–16 to boost our emergency pest and disease eradication and national response capability.
- Farmers will have access to better tools and control methods for managing pest (including feral) animals and weeds, as well as support from the Australian Government for pest and weed management through a \$50.0 million commitment over four years from 2015–16, to manage established pest animals and weeds.

Accessing Premium Markets

Improving international trade will grow farm businesses and increase financial returns for farmers.

- The Australian Government has committed \$30.8 million over four years from 2015–16 to break down technical barriers to trade, in turn helping farmers and food processors to achieve increased returns from increased security of existing market access and access to new markets. This included appointing five new agricultural counsellors who have been working in Australia’s key export markets to assist farmers grow their markets.
- Effective biosecurity protects our agricultural industries and the community from the impact of exotic pests and diseases, and supports our access to overseas markets. The Australian Government is investing almost \$200.0 million over four years from 2015–16 to improve biosecurity surveillance and analysis to better target critical biosecurity risks, including in northern Australia.
- Sound traceability systems help to ensure markets remain open, thereby increasing access and returns to farmers. The Australian Government has committed \$12.4 million from 2015–16 over four-years to modernise traceability systems, to verify integrity of products and improve access to overseas markets.

Beef Australia 2018 and Beef Week

The Australian Government has committed \$3.0 million from 2016–17 over three years to support the next Beef Australia event in 2018. The event is Australia’s largest trade show for the beef and cattle industries, held once every three years in Rockhampton,

Queensland. It showcases the Australian beef industry to domestic and international trading partners. The last event held in 2015 attracted over 30,000 visitors including over 1,000 international visitors. The event includes a series of industry based seminars, trade shows and cattle competitions. Through its Handshakes program it provides a business matching between Australian businesses and international customers. This program is supported by Austrade, Meat and Livestock Australia, and Trade and Investment Queensland. The Australian Government has also committed \$1.0 million over four years from 2016–17 to support Beef Week, a celebration of the Australian beef industry held annually in Casino, New South Wales.

Biosecurity Integrated Information System

The Biosecurity Integrated Information System is an *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper* initiative that will allow for the collection, collation and analysis of information to support biosecurity activities. Funding of \$30.9 million over three years from 2016-17 will be used to develop new applications to improve the management of biosecurity risks through better processes, data sharing and analytics.

To improve the quality and completeness of the data collected by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, the Biosecurity Integrated Information System will replace the functionality of some legacy border systems and improve the department's capabilities in biosecurity operations and management of pest and disease threats.

The Biosecurity Integrated Information System and related *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper* initiatives to develop an advanced analytics capability will improve the identification and management of risks offshore, at the border, and during emergency responses onshore. It will support more responsive development of biosecurity policy and better decision making.

Australia's favourable pest status underpins our ability to maintain or gain access to overseas markets for our agricultural produce. The Biosecurity Integrated Information System will enable the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to better demonstrate pest and disease status to support agricultural exports and the development of biosecurity and trade policy. This will ensure that Australia keeps pace with any changing requirements of our trading partners and support Australian exporters to take full advantage of new agricultural trade deals.

Commonwealth Water Functions

The Australian Government will provide \$398.0 million over three years to 2019–20 for statutory functions and institutions established by the *Water Act 2007* to implement the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and deliver on the Australian Government's broader water reform agenda. The continuation of funding for Commonwealth water functions is critical for the long-term viability of farmers and regional and rural communities in the Murray-Darling Basin and across Australia.

Ongoing funding has been provided for the Australian Government's contribution to Murray-Darling Basin joint programs and the work of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, which contributes to the sustainability of Murray-Darling Basin communities by investing in major water infrastructure and maintaining existing River Murray assets.

Funding for water policy functions within the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has been extended for seven years, both for the Murray-Darling Basin and in other areas where the Australian Government has an important role in water policy. Continuation of these activities is essential for effective national management of water issues which underpin key economic activities, including water and food security and export capability and the ongoing health of ecological systems that protect biodiversity, river health and recreational industries.

Commodity Milk Price Index

The Australian Government is providing \$2.0 million over four years from 2016–17 to develop a Commodity Milk Price Index to provide greater transparency on domestic and global dairy prices to support dairy farmers.

The dairy industry provides employment for around 39,000 people Australia-wide and creates exports valued at \$2.5 billion. For regional Australia, the dairy industry is a key employer and contributor to regional economies and towns. The delivery of a milk price index will positively impact dairying regions by assisting in improving on-farm planning and decision making, which contributes to the profitability of farms.

Leadership in Agricultural Industries Fund

The Australian Government is providing \$5.0 million over three years from 2016–17 for the Leadership in Agricultural Industries Fund, a new program that supports initiatives to develop leadership capacity and capability within agricultural industries. This will assist farm leaders to advocate agricultural and rural issues to the Australian community, government and other stakeholders. The Leadership in Agricultural Industries Fund will also work to build skills at the grass roots level, recognising the continuing need for leadership support and mentoring in the agriculture sector. It will deliver grants to industry representative bodies under guidelines that allow applicants to describe their needs and outline how the grant could address those requirements.

National Institute for Forest Products Innovation

The Australian Government is providing \$4.0 million over five years from 2016–17 to support the establishment of a National Institute for Forest Products Innovation. This measure delivers on the 2016 election commitment to establish research hubs both at the University of Tasmania campus in Launceston and in Mount Gambier, South Australia.

Together with the Australian Government contributions, matching funding from the Tasmanian and South Australian Governments, as well from industry, the total cost of the National Institute for Forest Innovation will be \$12.0 million over five years. This investment will help boost opportunities for jobs and growth in the forest products industry into the future. The National Institute for Forest Products Innovation will also provide additional research and development across Australia to investigate innovation in forest management, timber processing, wood fibre recovery, advanced manufacturing and the bio-economy.

Northern Australia Rice Industry

The Australian Government is providing \$4.0 million over four years from 2016–17 for investment in a research and development program to assist the development of the rice industry in northern Australia. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation is administering the program.

The *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* outlined the need for further investment in agricultural research and development in northern Australia to increase competitiveness and productivity, and meet export demand from growing Asian markets. The Northern Australia Rice Industry measure is delivering research and development that is tailored to growing conditions in northern Australia and is needed to help establish a productive and profitable northern rice industry.

Establishing a rice industry in northern Australia is expected to have positive economic and social impacts on businesses, community organisations and individuals across northern Australia. It will allow farmers to diversify and improve their ability to undertake productive, profitable and sustainable enterprises by providing a lucrative alternative crop to traditional northern crops like sugar. It will strengthen Australia's rice exports by allowing the Australian rice industry to meet the existing demand for Australian rice on international markets.

Support for Recreational and Commercial Fishing Peak Bodies

The Australian Government is committed to managing Australia's fisheries to ensure that both commercial and recreational fishers can sustainably access our shared fisheries resources. To deliver on its 2016 election commitment to strengthen the voice of recreational and Indigenous fishers, the Australian Government has introduced amendments to fisheries legislation that will improve opportunities for recreational fishers to contribute to the management of Commonwealth fisheries.

The Australian Government is also establishing a National Recreational Fishing Council to provide advice on policy development and implementation. A national recreational fishing survey in 2017, the first since 2001, will provide important socio-economic data on recreational fishing. The Australian Government has provided grant funding of \$0.5 million over four years to 30 June 2018, to the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation, to develop and promote sustainable fishing practices.

Reef Programme

The Australian Government has committed over \$82.4 million over four years from 2014–15 from the National Landcare Programme to the Reef Recovery Programme. This funding is part of the Australian Government's joint commitment with Queensland to ensure a \$2.0 billion investment in the Great Barrier Reef over ten years. The Reef Programme includes funding to assist land managers across the reef catchment to adopt improved agricultural and urban management practices that reduce the discharge of nutrients, sediments and pesticides in the Reef lagoon and thereby improve the Great Barrier Reef's resilience.

The Reef Programme is jointly managed by the Department of the Environment and Energy and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Export and Regional Wine Support Package

The Export and Regional Wine Support Package will provide the Australian Grape and Wine Authority with \$50.0 million over four years from 2016–17 to fund a range of initiatives to promote Australian wine and Australian wine tourism both domestically and overseas.

These initiatives will include, but are not limited to:

- Australian wine export promotion in overseas markets;
- promotion of wine tourism to regional wine producing areas targeting both domestic and international tourists; and
- assistance for wine producers and exporters to access new markets or improve market share in existing markets.

This package will directly benefit regional wine producers by improving domestic and international wine tourism. These activities, along with broader marketing and promotional opportunities, will help to drive exports of Australian wine and take advantage of recent free trade agreements in key markets.

Wine Tourism and Cellar Door Grants

The Wine Tourism and Cellar Door Grant will provide wine producers who exceed their wine equalisation tax rebate cap to access a grant of up to \$100,000 for their cellar door sales. The grant will be available from 2019–20 and the program will be capped at \$10.0 million per year. Wine tourism is an important part of many regional economies. The grant is expected to have a positive economic and social impact on wine producers and tourism operators in regional Australia. It will encourage producers to invest in and build winery cellar doors, which may lead to more investment in tourism opportunities.

Rural Research and Development for Profit Programme

The Rural Research and Development for Profit Programme provides \$180.5 million over eight years to 2021–22, to the rural research and development corporations for collaborative research to improve productivity and profitability at the farm-gate.

Grant funding of almost \$79.0 million has been provided to date, matched by more than \$109.0 million in cash and in-kind contributions from successful applicants and their partners. This includes grant funding of \$26.7 million for 12 projects under round one and \$52.2 million for 17 projects under round two. Round three is currently under assessment and will provide funding of up to \$30.0 million for additional projects. Successful round three projects are expected to be announced by the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources in May 2017.

Investment in Rural Research, Development and Innovation

Investment in research, development and innovation is vital for ongoing growth and improvement in the productivity, profitability, competitiveness and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries, forestry and food industries. The main way that the Australian Government invests in rural research and development is through the 15 rural research and development corporations. The Australian Government will provide over \$300.0 million in matching contributions to the rural research and development corporations in 2017–18. These investments are complemented by funding to Cooperative Research Centres, universities, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and other departmental programs.

The 15 rural research and development corporations commission research for the benefit of the industries that they service and the Australian community in general. The research focuses on strategic priorities, such as improving productivity, developing new products or crop varieties, advancing profitable farming systems, managing resources sustainably, or building skills and capacity within the industry. The work of the rural research and development corporations contributes significantly to the strengthening of the economic diversity of regional Australia. Each research and development corporation has developed five-year strategic plans and, during 2017–18, each corporation will continue to advance their strategic goals.

Farm Business Concessional Loans Scheme

Under the *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper*, the Australian Government made available \$250.0 million in loans each year over ten years, starting in 2016–17. As part of this measure, the Farm Business Concessional Loans Scheme opened on 1 November 2016 with \$250.0 million available in 2017–18. The scheme offers two types of loans:

- Drought Assistance Concessional Loans, which are available to assist eligible farm businesses in need of financial assistance to manage, recover from and prepare for droughts and maintain prospects for long term commercial viability.

- Dairy Recovery Concessional Loans, which are available to assist eligible dairy farm businesses affected by the retrospective decisions of Murray Goulburn, Fonterra and National Dairy Products to reduce farm gate milk prices towards the end of 2015–16.

Loans can be used for debt restructuring, or providing new debt for operating expenses, drought recovery and preparedness or for productivity enhancement activities. Loan terms are a maximum of ten years. Loan amounts are limited to a maximum of \$1.0 million with conditions applying.

Farm Household Allowance

The Australian Government recognises that farmers may experience significant financial hardship for a range of reasons – not just during drought. The Farm Household Allowance is an uncapped, demand-driven program that provides eligible farmers and their partners who are experiencing financial hardship with assistance and support to improve their long-term financial position.

Through the Farm Household Allowance, eligible applicants can access household income support, paid at the same rate as Newstart Allowance (or Youth Allowance, if under 22 years of age). The Farm Household Allowance is administered by the Department of Human Services.

As part of this program, recipients have access to case management services and a financial supplement of up to \$3,000 to help them to undertake activities to improve their financial self-reliance. As announced in the *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper*, from 1 July 2016 Farm Household Allowance recipients who are in their final (third) year of payment have access to an additional \$1,000 for high value activities and increased case management to assist their transition off payment before their entitlement ceases.

Rural Financial Counselling Service

The Australian Government is continuing the *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper* measure to fund additional rural financial counsellors to meet increased demands on the Rural Financial Counselling Service, during periods of drought, at a cost of \$7.1 million over four years to 2019–20. This support is in addition to the Australian Government's ongoing investment of \$14.5 million annually for the Rural Financial Counselling Service.

The Rural Financial Counselling Service provides free rural financial counselling to farmers, fishing enterprises, forestry growers and harvesters, and small, related businesses suffering financial hardship. There are 12 service providers across Australia that employ rural financial counsellors to assist clients in need. The Rural Financial Counselling Service is funded by the Australian Government and State and Northern Territory governments.

Drought conditions often lead to an increased number of people in rural areas in financial distress and this funding allows eligible clients to access prompt and individualised assistance to assess their business situation.

Encouraging Investment by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation in Agriculture

Through the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, the Australian Government is delivering on its election commitment to encourage investment by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation in the agriculture sector. Investment in suitable projects, which meet the Clean Energy Finance Corporation's mandate to increase commercial investment in energy efficiency, renewable energy and low emissions technologies, can also provide opportunities for agricultural businesses to improve their energy efficiency, productivity, profitability and ultimately competitiveness at the farm gate.

Relocation of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority

The Australian Government is providing \$25.6 million over six years, from 2016–17 to relocate the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority from Canberra to Armidale, New South Wales. This measure will support the establishment of a Centre of Agricultural Excellence at the University of New England, with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority partnering with the University of New England and other specialist agricultural research centres to become an agriculture research hub.

The Australian Government is committed to boosting jobs and strengthening regional communities. Relocating the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority will deliver new local jobs, increase the availability of skilled employees and increase the diversity and resilience of the Armidale region's economy. The move will reinforce the link between the regulator of agricultural and veterinary chemicals and the communities that use them. It also provides the opportunity for the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to modernise its business processes to ensure the agency is best positioned to provide improved services into the future.

Better Regulation of Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals

In the *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper*, the Australian Government committed to streamline the regulation of agricultural chemicals and veterinary medicines while retaining protections for the health and safety of humans, animals and the environment.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources is continuing to work with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, industry and others to develop reforms that provide for a more modern, responsive and flexible regulatory environment that better aligns regulatory effort with risk. The Department of

Agriculture and Water Resources has conducted extensive consultation to inform the development of reforms and will continue to engage with stakeholders on longer-term reform opportunities.

These reforms will provide farmers and other users with access to new agricultural chemicals and veterinary medicines more quickly, improving business productivity and sustainability.

Improving Access to Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals

The small size of the Australian market can discourage chemical companies from registering a chemical for use in Australia. This is particularly the case for treating pests and diseases in specialty crops and livestock species, where the likely returns may not cover registration costs. In the 2014–15 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$8.0 million over four years to help improve farmers' access to safe and effective agricultural chemicals and veterinary medicines.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources is working closely with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, grower groups, rural research and development corporations and the chemical industry to deliver this commitment.

A number of activities are underway, including work to:

- establish an agricultural chemicals and veterinary medicines collaborative forum to allow users and chemical companies to identify and agree on chemical products and uses that deserve approval for use in Australia;
- establish an assistance grants program to help fund the generation of sufficient data to support applications to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority for taking into account the results of the collaborative forum;
- establish an official Australian crop grouping list and associated Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority guidelines; and
- migrate some Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority permits to product labels.

These initiatives, particularly the assistance grants program, will help farmers and other users get the agricultural chemicals and veterinary medicines they need while longer term solutions are developed and implemented through broader reforms.

Trade and Market Access

Agricultural export industries underpin prosperity in regional Australia through both employment and income generation. The Australian Government is continuing to develop and maintain opportunities for agricultural products to ensure they remain competitive and find new markets overseas. The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources contributes to improving market access through:

- negotiating science-based, commercially viable conditions for Australian exports;

- making representations and submissions in response to importing country measures or international standards that are not science-based or unnecessarily restrict trade of Australian products;
- engaging in bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations, including through Free Trade Agreements to remove barriers to trade and expand opportunities for Australian exports; and
- influencing international agricultural policies, management strategies, protocols and standards so that Australian exports are not disadvantaged in world markets.

Support for Small Exporters

The 2014-15 Budget implemented the Australian Government's 2013 election commitment to provide a rebate for export registration costs to assist small exporters. A total of \$15.0 million has been allocated over four years to focus on assisting small exporters to improve market access. The initiative includes funding for 2015-16 to 2017-18 for projects to improve market access, with a focus on small exporters.

Better Management of Biosecurity Risks - Advanced Analytics Capability

The Biosecurity Advanced Analytics Capability initiative will allow for better decision-making and targeting of risks that threaten our agricultural sector and the rural communities that depend on them, the environment and the broader economy. It will enhance Australia's ability to manage the impact of biosecurity risks and maximise trade.

Funding of \$15.9 million over four years from 2016-17 is being used to build an advanced analytics capability within the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, including dedicated data and analytics specialists to better support biosecurity decision making.

The initiative will ensure better access to data that is needed to improve biosecurity decision-making. This will increase our ability to know why, when, where and what pests and diseases should be the focus of biosecurity activities. Sharing of biosecurity data with States and Territories will be enhanced, to increase preparedness for potential pest and disease incursions. Access to biosecurity information will be developed in line with the Australian Government's Public Data agenda.

Stronger Biosecurity and Quarantine

The Stronger Biosecurity and Quarantine initiative delivers on the Australian Government's 2013 election commitment to provide \$20.0 million over four years from 2014-15 to 2017-18 to strengthen Australia's biosecurity and quarantine arrangements. The initiative provides early assistance to respond rapidly to pest and disease incursions in order to reduce the adverse impacts on affected regions, industries and communities.

The funding supplements existing arrangements to assess new pest and disease incursions for appropriate management, including containment and eradication where

possible. This includes deployment of response personnel as well as support arrangements such as access to technical expert advice on best practice response measures and arrangements. It augments existing preparedness activities, improving the development of standard operating procedures, training of personnel, and vaccine stores to aid early detection and rapid response.

The funding helps to maintain market access for Australian industries in the event of a pest or disease incursion by working to ensure necessary processes are in place to enable access for affected commodities to each export destination. It supports the Australian Government's capacity to respond to pest and disease incidents where overseas representation may be required to maintain or regain market access for Australia's agricultural industries.

National Carp Control Plan

Carp are the worst freshwater aquatic pest in Australia. They dominate the Murray-Darling Basin, where they can make up 80–90 per cent of fish biomass, with significant detrimental effects on water quality and ecosystem health. The economic impacts of carp infestation have been estimated at up to \$500.0 million per year, with the majority of this impact felt in regional areas.

The Australian Government provided \$15.0 million over three years from 2016–17 to support the development of the National Carp Control Plan. This funding will deliver the scientific research, operational planning, community engagement and communications activities required to support a potential carp virus release and subsequent clean up. The aim is to ensure that the National Carp Control Plan enables maximum impact on carp populations with minimum disruption to industries, communities and the environment. The plan is expected to be finalised in 2018.

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation will lead the development of the National Carp Control Plan, working in conjunction with a national coordinator, governments and relevant stakeholders. Successful implementation of the National Carp Control Plan will provide an opportunity to dramatically improve the health of our inland waterways bringing substantial benefits to regional communities and water users, including farmers, recreational fishers and tourism operators. A decision on whether to implement the plan will be subject to agreement from all jurisdictions on the best implementation and funding arrangements.

A New Post-Entry Quarantine Facility

The 2012-13 Budget included a \$379.9 million investment over seven years in the construction and operation of a new Australian Government owned and operated post-entry quarantine facility for high risk animal and plant imports. Land for a new facility was acquired at Mickleham in Victoria in 2012 to consolidate existing animal and plant services to a single location. Operations commenced in November 2015 with the first arrival of imported animals. Phase two of construction commenced in early 2016 with the first two compound extensions handed to the Australian Government in

the first quarter of 2017. The remaining buildings will be completed by late 2017, and all operations at other facilities will be transferred progressively to the new station with the process scheduled to be completed in 2018.

National Water Infrastructure Development Fund

The National Water Infrastructure Development Fund is providing \$499.5 million over ten years from 2015–16 to support State and Territory governments develop secure and affordable water infrastructure that will drive regional economic growth, including the construction of dams, pipelines, wastewater reuse and managed aquifer recharge. Up to \$200.0 million is targeted at northern Australia.

The \$59.5 million feasibility component of the fund has been fully committed with 39 feasibility studies funded to inform water resource planning and infrastructure investment decisions by States. Of this, \$40.4 million is for studies in northern Australia.

Through the \$440.0 million capital component of the fund, \$247.5 million was committed during the 2016 election to co-fund with the States and their private partners the construction of five water infrastructure projects (conditional on all planning and approvals being in place):

- \$130.0 million for Rookwood Weir (Queensland);
- \$75.0 million for Dungowan Dam (New South Wales);
- \$20.0 million for the modernisation of the Macalister Irrigation District (Victoria);
- \$20.0 million for the South West Loddon pipeline (Victoria); and
- \$2.5 million for McLaren Vale water storage (South Australia).

On 27 October 2016 the expression of interest process opened to the States for the remaining \$192.5 million to co-fund water infrastructure projects, which will be completed in July 2017.

National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility

The National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility was opened to expressions of interest on 8 February 2017, providing State and Territory governments with access to \$2.0 billion in concessional loans to fast track the construction of significant water infrastructure assets. This includes the construction of dams, pipelines and managed aquifer recharge projects that are economically viable and will generate affordable and secure water to grow regional economies.

Loans are available over ten years from 2016–17 to 2025–26, with the starting concessional rate of 2.22 per cent. The loan facility is designed to complement the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund and the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility.

Construction of new water infrastructure will help drive the development of regional economies including in the agriculture and resources industries (such as mining and energy). Access to affordable water will be a key influence over the extent to which Australia's farm and food sectors can realise export growth opportunities and meet growing demand from population growth.

Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program

The Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program is a national program investing in rural water use, management and efficiency. It is the key mechanism to 'bridge the gap' to the sustainable diversion limits under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and consists of three main components: irrigation infrastructure projects, water purchases, and supply measures.

The Australian Government has a preference for recovering water through investment in infrastructure. The majority of the funds under the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program have been committed to projects in the Murray-Darling Basin for improving the operation of off-farm delivery systems and helping irrigators improve on-farm water use efficiency. The water savings generated from these projects are shared between the Australian Government for environmental use and irrigators for consumptive use, supporting increased productivity and economic activity in regional communities. Australian Government investments outside the Murray-Darling Basin include \$201.8 million over 11 years from 2008-09 to 2018-19 in Tasmania to support the construction of dams and backbone irrigation infrastructure.

All Murray-Darling Basin State governments have agreed to arrangements that allow for up to 650 gigalitres of Sustainable Diversion Limit adjustments to be achieved through supply measure projects which offset the need for water to be acquired through purchase. These supply measure works will continue until 2024.

The Australian Government has legislated to limit purchase of surface water entitlements across the Murray-Darling Basin to 1,500 gigalitres. As at 31 January 2017, water purchases total 1,165.6 gigalitres and any further purchases will be strategic in nature. The limit on purchases helps provide Murray-Darling Basin communities with more certainty that the Australian Government will ensure a balance between agriculture, the environment and the socio-economic wellbeing of communities.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S

The Attorney-General's portfolio comprises the Attorney-General's Department and 16 portfolio bodies. The portfolio delivers programs and policies to maintain and improve Australia's law and justice framework, and strengthen our national security and emergency management. This work spans a range of significant areas and affects the lives of many Australians, including those in regional and remote communities.

The Attorney-General's portfolio manages alternative pathways and access to formal legal processes to provide greater access to justice for Australians in regional communities. The Family Relationships Services Programme delivers a range of post-separation services to families in regional communities. The Commonwealth Courts Portal and the Federal Circuit Court's eFiling service similarly improves regional access to legal processes by providing Federal Court, Family Court and Federal Circuit Court resources online and enabling online lodging of divorce applications.

The Australian Government remains committed to funding legal assistance services for regional Australia under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services 2015-2020. As part of the 2017-18 Budget, the Australian Government is providing an additional \$39.0 million over three years for community legal centres, on top of the almost \$1.3 billion already being provided to community legal centres and legal aid commissions over five years to 2020.

As part of the Australian Government's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, the Women's Safety Package will also provide integrated duty lawyers and family violence support services in ten remote and regional locations throughout Australia. Specialist domestic violence units, including those in regional locations, have also had their funding extended to 30 June 2019. These pilots will also be expanded to up to six new locations over the next two years with an additional \$3.4 million being provided in this Budget.

The Attorney-General's portfolio manages a number of crime prevention grant funding programs, including the School Security programs and grants under the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002*, including the Safer Streets Program. Approximately \$9.4 million over three years from 2015-16 is being provided to organisations to fund community crime prevention and law enforcement in regional Australia. The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory has been engaging with regional communities, and conducting public hearings, in preparation for the delivery of its final findings, due 1 August 2017.

The Attorney-General's portfolio also supports Australia's ability to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters. This year the Australian Government's Disaster Recovery Payment and Disaster Recovery Allowance initiatives assisted regional communities to recover from the Waroona bushfire in Western Australia, the Pinery bushfire in South Australia, and the severe weather and

associated flooding that occurred in Queensland and New South Wales following Tropical Cyclone Debbie.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory

Following allegations of mistreatment of children at the Don Dale detention centre in the Northern Territory, the Australian Government established the Royal Commission into the child protection and youth detention systems of the Northern Territory. On 1 August 2016, Letters Patent were issued appointing the Hon Margaret Jean White AO and Mr Mick Gooda as Commissioners. On 9 February 2017, the Governor-General issued amending Letters Patent to reflect the extension of the final reporting date of the Royal Commission to 1 August 2017, with an interim report to be delivered by 31 March 2017. The Royal Commission is examining failings in child protection and youth detention systems, including cultural and management issues, and has undertaken a variety of activities in regional areas.

The Royal Commission has hosted a series of community meetings across the Northern Territory to hear directly from people affected by the child protection and youth detention systems. The Royal Commission held meetings in the following regional areas: the Tiwi Islands, Alice Springs, Santa Teresa, Maningrida, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Yirrkala, Groote Eylandt, Yuendumu and Mutitjulu. Public hearings have been held in Darwin and Alice Springs.

More than 1,000 people attended the community meetings – including families, individuals, children and young people, local leaders, service providers and community organisations. The Royal Commission heard from a wide range of people including: carers, principals and teachers, current and former detention centre workers, health professionals and police. Those involved in the delivery of services and programs (currently operating and disbanded) to children and young people described their experiences to the Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission's work in engaging communities is important in informing the Commissioners' understanding of the issues and ensuring its recommendations lead to positive change for children. The Royal Commission has Community Engagement Officers in Alice Springs dedicated to providing an avenue through which the views of individuals and communities can be brought forward to the Commission. They have met with communities including Abbott's Town Camp, Amoonguna, Ampilatwatja, Areyonga, Daguragu, Elliott, Finke, Hermannsburg, Imanpa, Jabiru, Kalano, Kalkarindji, Karnte Town Camp, Katherine, Lajamanu, Maningrida, Morris Soak Town Camp, Mt Liebig, Palmers Town Camp, Palmerston, Santa Teresa, Tennant Creek, Titjikala, Trucking Yards Town Camp and Utopia.

The Australian Government is providing \$57.1 million over two years from 2016-17 to fund the Royal Commission's activities, including hearings and engagement with regional communities. This includes \$3.0 million for the Department of Social Services.

The Northern Territory Government has agreed to share the costs of the Royal Commission.

Domestic and Family Violence – Initiatives to Break the Cycle of Violence

On 28 October 2016, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Women announced \$100.0 million from 2016-17 over three years for a package of measures to support the implementation of the Third Action Plan 2016-19 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. This funding package includes \$29.6 million over three years from 2016-17 for front-line legal assistance and family law services, including:

- \$6.2 million for Family Relationship Centres to pilot enhanced models of legally-assisted and/or culturally appropriate family dispute resolution to vulnerable families, particularly Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse families;
- \$18.5 million for legal aid commissions to establish integrated duty lawyer and family violence support services in family law court registries; and
- \$4.9 million to extend funding for the specialist domestic violence units and health justice partnerships under the Australian Government's Women's Safety Package by an additional year until 30 June 2019.

The integrated duty lawyer and family violence support services will be established by legal aid commissions at 14 family law court registries across Australia, various regional circuit locations and two local courts in the Northern Territory. Regional and remote service locations will include Albany, Broome, Bunbury, Burnie, Cairns, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Katherine, Mount Gambier and Townsville.

These measures expand on those being delivered under the \$100.0 million Women's Safety Package announced on 24 September 2015, which includes \$15.0 million over three years for legal assistance services from 2015-16. As already noted, funding allocated under the Third Action Plan includes an additional \$4.9 million to extend the services by a further year to 30 June 2019, and a further \$3.4 million is being provided in the 2017-18 Budget to expand this program over the next two years.

Twelve specialist domestic violence units have been established across all States and Territories which includes six regional and remote areas. Five health justice partnerships, including one as part of a domestic violence unit in Alice Springs, are being supported to deliver legal training and support for health professionals and to provide on-site legal advice at partner hospitals or health centres.

State/Territory	Region	Funded Service Provider	Four-year Funding from 2015
<i>Specialist domestic violence units</i>			
New South Wales	Dubbo	Western New South Wales Community Legal Centre	\$1.5 million
Victoria	Mallee	Murray Mallee Community Legal Centre	\$1.4 million
Queensland	Townsville	North Queensland Women's Legal Service	\$1.4 million
Western Australia	Kununurra	Kimberley Community Legal Service	\$1.6 million
Tasmania	North-West	Women's Legal Service Tasmania	\$1.4 million
<i>Specialist domestic violence units and health justice partnerships</i>			
Northern Territory	Alice Springs	Central Australian Women's Legal Service	\$1.8 million

Family Relationship Services Program

In 2017-18, the Australian Government is planning to provide \$166.3 million for the Family Relationships Services Program, \$158.5 million of which will be provided for a range of post-separation family law services under the Families and Communities Program, administered by the Department of Social Services.

The funded services are:

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

These services provide alternatives to formal legal processes and assist families which are separated, separating or in dispute to resolve disputes in a way that is in the best interests of children. The services are located throughout Australia, including regional areas. Information and resources are also available online, in a way that is accessible to regional Australia, through Family Relationships Online.

In addition, the Model Parenting Orders Handbook, published by the Attorney-General's Department in October 2016, provides advice and assistance to parents and legal practitioners with drafting parenting orders.

National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services 2015-2020

The National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services 2015-2020 commenced on 1 July 2015. The Australian Government will deliver \$1.3 billion in Commonwealth funding to legal aid commissions and community legal centres over five years. As part of the 2017-18 Budget, a further \$39.0 million will be provided to community legal centres under the National Partnership Agreement, to support the delivery of family law and family violence services. Under the National Partnership Agreement, people residing in rural or remote areas are priority clients, to be considered as part of planning and targeting of legal assistance services.

Legal Aid

The Australian Government will provide \$1.07 billion from 2015-2020 to legal aid commissions under the National Partnership Agreement.

There are approximately 80 legal aid commission offices across Australia, with around 58 per cent of offices located in regional areas. In 2015-16, 5,025 (14 per cent) of legal aid grants for Commonwealth matters were received by persons who reside in rural and remote areas.

Community Legal Centres

Including the additional \$39.0 million being provided to community legal centres as part of the 2017-18 Budget, the Australian Government will provide a total of \$235.0 million from 2015-2020 to community legal centres under the National Partnership Agreement.

Approximately 30 per cent of community legal centres are located in regional Australia. In 2015-16, 16 per cent of community legal centre representation services were received by persons who reside in rural and remote areas.

Community Legal Services Program

The Community Legal Services Program is a nationally focussed discretionary grants program, supporting the provision of legal assistance to the community by funding national service delivery projects, innovative pilot programs and program support activities. The Australian Government will provide \$7.7 million to the Community Legal Services Program in 2017-18.

The National Children's and Youth Law Centre (NCYLC) receives funding under the program to provide legal information and advice to children and young adults aged under 25. The NCYLC provides a national service through a dedicated website (lawstuff) and email advice service (lawmail). This provides significant geographic reach to assist children and young adults in metropolitan, regional and remote areas across Australia.

In June 2016, two grants were approved under the Community Legal Services Program Innovation Fund to implement innovative projects in 2016-17 aimed at enhancing the efficiency of legal assistance services in regional and remote areas:

- Bridging the Distance - the Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria received \$130,000 to purchase videoconferencing technology to improve communication, collaboration and service planning for regional, rural and remote community legal centres in Victoria; and
- Blurred Borders - Legal Aid Western Australia received \$100,000 to produce a community legal education resource kit using visual artwork. The kit will be used by community workers, community legal education workers and front-line service delivery lawyers to assist them to explain key legal concepts to remote Aboriginal people who are frequently crossing the Northern Territory and Western Australia borders.

Indigenous Legal and Native Title Assistance

The Indigenous Legal Assistance Program funds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) to deliver culturally appropriate, accessible legal assistance and related services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians so that they can fully exercise their legal rights as Australian citizens. There are eight ATSILS nationally which deliver services from 65 permanent locations in regional and remote areas, as well as court circuits, bush courts and outreach locations.

In 2016-17, approximately \$73.6 million has been provided to the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program. As part of the 2017-18 Budget, a further \$16.7 million will be provided to ATSILS from 2017-18 to 2019-20. The table below sets out funding from 2016-17 to 2019-20.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
	Revised estimate	Forward estimate	Forward estimate	Forward estimate
Indigenous Legal Assistance Program (\$'000)	73 585	74,395	74,297	75,138

Of the total legal assistance service provided in 2015-16, 66 per cent was delivered to regional and remote areas.

Region	Legal assistance services provided in 2015-16
Metropolitan	70 249
Regional	94 071
Remote	45 191
Total	209 511

The Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme provides assistance for individuals or groups, including pastoralists, graziers and fishers, to have equitable access to legal representation in the resolution of native title proceedings where their interest are likely to be affected. Funding for the Native Title Respondent Funding Scheme in 2017-18 is \$1.7 million.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Since it was established on 11 January 2013, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has undertaken a variety of activities in regional areas.

Private sessions, in which survivors of child sexual abuse in an institutional context share their stories with a Commissioner, have been held in a number of regional locations, including Rockhampton (Queensland), Ballarat (Victoria), Darwin (Northern Territory), Hobart (Tasmania) and Newcastle (New South Wales). The Royal Commission has conducted over 6,500 private sessions since May 2013, and expects to have held more than 8,000 private sessions by the time it completes its work in December 2017.

Community forums, led by Commissioners, have been conducted in 13 regional locations. Royal Commission staff have also met with local services in 27 regional and remote areas. These activities improve awareness of the Royal Commission's work and increase accessibility for those who wish to engage with the Royal Commission.

Federal Circuit Court of Australia – Commonwealth Courts Portal

The Commonwealth Courts Portal was launched in July 2007, to provide free web-based access to information about cases that are before the Federal Court, Family Court and Federal Circuit Court. The Commonwealth Courts Portal also allows parties to file documents electronically, pay fees online and view outcomes, orders and future court dates in certain matters.

In July 2016, the Federal Circuit Court commenced roll-out of electronic filing for divorce applications, and now has a fully electronic divorce file. The introduction of eFiling for divorce applications has improved access for litigants in regional Australia who cannot attend a registry to lodge documents or are required to rely on Australia

Post. Litigants can now lodge applications outside traditional registry hours via the online services without the need to travel to a registry.

The Federal Circuit Court has not mandated the requirement to eFile noting the technological difficulties facing some litigants. Despite this, the number of litigants choosing to eFile has increased over the past six months from 24 per cent to 52 per cent.

Federal Circuit Court of Australia – Administered Fund

The Court utilises a dedicated administered fund to provide private property mediations. Its major focus is to provide services to litigants, particularly in rural and regional areas of Australia, in support of the Court's circuit work. The fund enables the Court to deliver improved access to justice and creates assistance to litigants by providing:

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

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

Crime Prevention Funding Programs

The Attorney-General's Department manages a number of crime prevention grant funding programs including the Schools Security Program and funding under the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002*, which includes the Safer Streets Program. Although these programs do not apply exclusively to regional Australia (they are open to eligible applicants in all parts of Australia), funding provided under the programs is providing significant benefits to regional Australia, with approximately \$9.4 million provided over three years from 2015-16 to organisations currently delivering projects in regional Australia.

Programs under the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* address crime and anti-social behaviour by providing funding for community crime prevention and law enforcement. The Safer Streets Program is designed to provide funding for eligible organisations to install security related infrastructure in areas experiencing problems with criminal or anti-social behaviour.

The Schools Security Program is funding government and non-government schools across Australia facing a risk of attack, harassment or violence stemming from racial or religious intolerance to install lighting, fencing and CCTV and to employ security guards.

Critical Infrastructure Resilience Strategy

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring the continued operation of critical infrastructure in the face of all hazards to help support the continued provision of essential services to businesses, governments and the community (as articulated in the Critical Infrastructure Resilience Strategy). Strengthening the resilience of sectors will ensure services to the community, including regional communities, are less likely to be disrupted due to adverse events, and where a disruption does occur, that services are able to rapidly return to business as usual.

National Partnership on Natural Disaster Resilience

Under the National Partnership on Natural Disaster Resilience (the Natural Disaster Resilience Program) the Australian Government expects to provide \$78.3 million in funding over three years to 30 June 2018 to support the States and Territories to deliver local initiatives which contribute to safer and more disaster resilient communities. In 2016-17, the Australian Government made payments of \$15.0 million under this program. The projects are prioritised by the States and Territories in accordance with state-wide natural disaster risk assessments and the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience to ensure they effectively meet the needs of local communities. The Natural Disaster Resilience Program is administered through a National Partnership Agreement between the Australian Government and the States and Territories, and concludes on 30 June 2018. Projects will have ongoing benefits for regional areas, as well as metropolitan, rural and remote areas, beyond the term of the National Partnership Agreement.

Disaster Resilience Australia Package

The Australian Government is providing \$2.1 million each year in funding from 2016-17 under the Disaster Resilience Australia Package for the delivery of nationally significant emergency management projects. The package supports measures to strengthen communities, individuals, businesses and institutions to minimise the adverse effects of disasters in Australia. Projects are designed to improve the ability to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters across social, economic, environmental and governance elements. While projects must achieve national outcomes, their application can benefit regional areas, as well as metropolitan, rural and remote areas.

National Bushfire Mitigation Program

The National Bushfire Mitigation Program provided \$8.3 million over three years from 2014-15 to the States and Territories to implement long-term bushfire mitigation strategies (\$13.5 million through the Attorney-General's Department) and improved fuel reduction activities (\$1.5 million through the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources). The National Bushfire Mitigation Program is helping to strengthen community preparedness and resilience to bushfires.

Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements

Every year bushfires, floods, storms and other devastating natural disasters cause significant loss and damage in communities across Australia that require recovery efforts from individuals, communities, and State, Territory and local governments.

Under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, the Australian Government provides funding assistance to State and Territory governments to alleviate the financial burden of providing emergency and recovery assistance to disaster-affected individuals, communities, small businesses and primary producers. This includes funding for the restoration or replacement of essential public assets, and community recovery packages to restore social networks, communities' functioning and community facilities.

The Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements have been made available to individuals, communities, small businesses, primary producers and the not-for-profit sector for a range of natural disaster events across Australia during 2016-17. For 2017-18, the Commonwealth is expecting to reimburse States and Territories by an estimated \$438.5 million under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

Disaster Recovery Payment

The Disaster Recovery Payment is a one-off, non-means tested payment to eligible Australian residents who have been adversely affected by a major disaster either in Australia or overseas. It is activated if the Minister for Justice determines the impact of a disaster on individuals and families requires Australian Government assistance in addition to that provided under standard recovery assistance through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. In making this decision, the Minister for Justice will consider the number of individuals affected, the extent to which the nature or magnitude of the disaster is unusual, overall impact on a community, and the full range of Australian, State or Territory government assistance measures available to the community. The Disaster Recovery Payment provides financial assistance of \$1,000 for eligible adults and \$400 for eligible children.

During 2016-17, the Disaster Recovery Payment was made available to communities in:

- Western Australia in response to the Waroona bushfire;
- South Australia in response to the Pinery bushfire;
- New South Wales in response to flooding following Tropical Cyclone Debbie; and
- Queensland in response to severe weather and flooding following Tropical Cyclone Debbie.

Disaster Recovery Allowance

The Disaster Recovery Allowance provides short-term income support to eligible individuals who experience a loss of income as a direct result of a disaster.

When available, the Disaster Recovery Allowance assists employees, small business persons and farmers who experience a loss of income as a direct result of a major disaster. It is paid at a rate equivalent to the Newstart or Youth Allowance for a maximum of 13 weeks. If, after 13 weeks, the person is still suffering hardship from a loss of income, they will be able to test their eligibility for a longer-term income support payment such as the Newstart Allowance.

During 2016-17, the Disaster Recovery Allowance was made available to communities in:

- New South Wales in response to the June 2016 storms and flooding, as well as the flooding following Tropical Cyclone Debbie;
- Tasmania in response to the June 2016 floods; and
- Queensland in response to severe weather and flooding following Tropical Cyclone Debbie.

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

The Communications and the Arts portfolio is committed to improving communications services to regional and remote Australia, and making government services simpler and more accessible, through the increased availability of digital services. The Communications and the Arts portfolio also supports the achievement of a culturally rich Australia by supporting arts and cultural activities in regional and remote Australia.

Regional communities across Australia are benefiting from a number of initiatives, including:

- providing high-speed broadband at affordable prices, and at least cost to taxpayers as soon as possible to all Australians through the rollout of the National Broadband Network;
- improving mobile phone coverage in black spot areas through the Mobile Black Spot Program;
- providing support for digital television services;
- providing funding support for community broadcasting services;
- reforming media regulation to remove outdated media control rules and strengthening local content provisions on regional commercial television; and
- delivering tailored programs to support artistic and cultural expression, and participation and access to cultural experiences.

People living in regional areas of Australia are already benefiting from the National Broadband Network, with NBN Co Limited having completed network rollout to more than 60 per cent of homes and business outside major urban areas as at the end of April 2017. This includes the availability of Sky Muster satellite services for eligible premises across the country, completion of over 74 per cent of the fixed wireless network nationally, and the availability of the National Broadband Network to half the brownfield premises in the fixed line footprint outside major urban areas.

As at the end of April 2017, services were already available to over 2 million of these homes and businesses through fixed line, fixed wireless and satellite infrastructure, and will be available to around 3.6 million remote and regional brownfield premises by 2020.

The Australian Government's Mobile Black Spot Program will continue to invest in mobile base station infrastructure in areas that are otherwise non-commercial for mobile network operators. The Australian Government's investment of \$160.0 million for rounds 1 and 2 from 2015-16, will deliver 765 new or upgraded base stations across regional and remote Australia. In total, rounds 1 and 2 of the program will deliver more than \$598.0 million in new investment including co-investment from state governments, third parties and mobile network operators. The Australian Government

has committed an additional \$60.0 million from 2017-18 to 2019-20 to target specific mobile black spots announced during the 2016 election.

The Communications and the Arts portfolio also delivers programs which encourage the protection, development, production, celebration and exhibition of artistic and cultural expression.

NEW INITIATIVES

Broadcasting Spectrum Pricing

The Australian Government is making changes to how we tax commercial broadcasters for spectrum by moving from revenue-based fees to a fee based on spectrum use. The new fees reflect significant discounts for broadcasters in regional Australia. This means that the vast majority of broadcasters in regional Australia will experience a decrease in fees. Despite such discounts, a small amount of regional licensees will experience an increase in fees. To respond to this, the Government will compensate these licensees over a period of five years to enable transition to the new tax framework.

Community Broadcasting Program

The Australian Government provides funding to support community broadcasting services throughout Australia via the Community Broadcasting Program. The Community Broadcasting Program is administered at arms-length from the Australian Government by the Community Broadcasting Foundation via a funding deed with the Department of Communications and the Arts. In the 2017-18 Budget, the Australian Government announced an additional \$6.1 million for the Community Broadcasting Program. In 2017-18 this results in a \$19.6 million investment in community broadcasting.

The Community Broadcasting Foundation allocates the Community Broadcasting Program funding to community broadcasters in metropolitan, regional and remote locations around Australia. Grants are allocated in various categories including content development, ethnic, Indigenous, radio for the print handicapped, training, and transmission support.

Special Broadcasting Service – Operational Funding

In the current triennium (2016-17 to 2018-19), the Australian Government also committed to provide the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) with \$814.2 million in base funding over three years, and an additional \$8.3 million over three years, to maintain its commitment to multilingual, multicultural and Indigenous media services. In the 2017-18 Budget, the Australian Government further agreed to provide \$8.8 million to replace advertising revenue that SBS has been unable to realise.

This funding will enable SBS to continue connecting Australians in regional and rural areas with stories that celebrate Australia's rich cultural and linguistic diversity. As

part of the SBS family, National Indigenous Television (NITV) seeks to inform, educate and entertain Australians about Indigenous issues, by showcasing Indigenous culture, languages and talent. Each month, NITV is watched by more than two million Australians, with many located in remote areas.

Part of this funding ensures that stakeholders and filmmaking talent in regional and remote areas, which have previously included Darwin, Alice Springs, Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Rockhampton, Dubbo and Gulkula, are able to share local stories with national audiences through NITV.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Digital Literacy for Older Australians

The Australian Government will provide \$16.9 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20, with \$4.9 million allocated in 2017-18 to the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner. This will deliver a 'Digital Literacy for Older Australians' initiative to improve the digital confidence and skills of older Australians across the country, including in regional Australia. The initiative will be jointly implemented with the Department of Social Services.

The initiative includes the development of an overarching digital literacy and online safety strategy. The key deliverables of the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner include the development of a national digital portal that will provide Australian families, peers and community organisations, with a one-stop-shop for information, tools and training resources. This will assist with safe and confident participation online and access to tools and programs at any time to improve digital literacy levels.

Community Infrastructure Projects – New Announcements: Sunshine Coast Regional Council Submarine Cable Study

The Government has committed to provide \$250,000 to support the Sunshine Coast Regional Council to undertake a feasibility study into landing a potential international submarine telecommunications cable on the Sunshine Coast. The study will examine how the economic benefits from a cable to the Sunshine Coast could be realised. The study would enable the Sunshine Coast Regional Council to progress its business case for the project.

Community Infrastructure Projects – New Announcements: Mt Roland FireLight Trial Festival in Tasmania

The Australian Government provided \$40,000 in 2016-17 towards the May 2017 trial of the Mount Roland FireLight Festival in North West Tasmania. Funding will support a multimedia animation laser show beamed onto Mt Roland, which will tell the story of the rich history of the North-West of Tasmania, including Indigenous culture. The animation will be accompanied by an original soundtrack, incorporating orchestral and Indigenous musical traditions. The soundtrack will be streamed live via the

Internet and local radio during the laser show enabling broad audience engagement with the project throughout the region.

This five day trial festival aims to build on Tasmania's growing cultural tourism market and provide North-West Tasmanians with access to a cultural event celebrating the history and cultural influences of this area of regional Australia.

Community Infrastructure Projects – New Announcements: Tasmanian Winter Events Program on the North West Coast of Tasmania

The Australian Government provided \$40,000 in 2016-17 towards the development of a Winter Events Program on the North West Coast of Tasmania. The Winter Events Program will support participation in, and access to, arts and cultural activities for Australians in regional Tasmania.

It also represents an investment in cultural tourism in regional Australia that will provide economic and employment benefits for North West Tasmania.

National Broadband Network

The Australian Government is committed to completing the National Broadband Network and ensuring all Australians have access to high-speed broadband. The Australian Government is investing \$29.5 billion in equity in the National Broadband Network and will provide a commercial loan of up to \$19.5 billion to NBN Co Limited to be repaid by June 2021.

Delivering high-speed broadband to remote and regional Australia is a key priority. By the end of April 2017, services were already available to over two million of these homes and businesses through fixed line, fixed wireless and satellite infrastructure, and will be available to around 3.6 million remote and regional premises by 2020.

Regional Broadband Scheme

The Australian Government is implementing the Regional Broadband Scheme to provide a sustainable and transparent funding source for NBN Co Limited's fixed wireless and satellite networks. The company's fixed wireless and satellite networks provide essential broadband services to regional Australians and are expected to be largely complete in 2018.

Under the Regional Broadband Scheme all fixed line network owners (including NBN Co Limited) will contribute funding proportionally to the size of their networks, replacing NBN Co Limited's internal cross-subsidy.

Mobile Black Spot Program

Rounds 1 and 2 of the Mobile Black Spot Program will deliver more than \$598.0 million in new investment towards improving mobile coverage and competition in regional and remote parts of Australia, including a \$160.0 million Australian Government funding commitment from 2015-16, and co-contributions from State and Territory governments, mobile carriers and third parties.

Under rounds 1 and 2, 765 new or upgraded mobile base stations will be deployed across regional and remote Australia – 114 Optus, 577 Telstra and 74 Vodafone base stations.

The first round 1 base station was activated in December 2015. The first round 2 base station (an Optus small cell) was activated on 8 March 2017. As at 27 April 2017, 141 round 1 and 2 base stations had been activated.

The program has been highly successful in maximising co-contributions from third parties, including State and local governments and communities.

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$60.0 million to the Mobile Black Spot Program from 2017-18 to 2019-20. This funding will target specific locations announced during the 2016 election.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Operational Funding

In the current triennium (2016-17 to 2018-19) the Australian Government will provide the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) with \$3.1 billion in base funding.

The ABC will also receive an additional \$41.4 million over three years from 2016-17 to supplement local news and current affairs services, particularly those located outside the capital cities. The continuation of base funding will enable the ABC to maintain its expanded presence and continue to deliver quality news and current affairs services on television, radio, digital and mobile platforms.

Australian audiences in these areas will continue to benefit from this funding which strengthens reporting within local communities and also enables local stories to be shared with national audiences.

Media Reform

The Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Media Reform) Bill 2016 passed the House of Representatives on 30 November 2016 and was introduced into the Senate on 1 December 2016. The Bill will repeal the '75 per cent audience reach rule' and the 'two out of three rule' and introduce changes that will protect and enhance the amount of local television content in regional Australia.

To meet community concerns, stronger local programming obligations will be introduced for regional commercial television broadcasters who, as a result of a change of control of their licences, become part of a television network that reaches more than 75 per cent of the Australian population.

In these cases, regional commercial licensees would be required to commence broadcasting additional local programming six months after the change in control.

Regional communities also stand to benefit from a new points system which incentivises the local filming of news stories. The new points structure will strengthen the link between local programming and local communities.

Viewer Access Satellite Television

The Viewer Access Satellite Television program provides funding from 2010-11 to 2019-20 to broadcasters to deliver digital free-to-air television services direct to home

satellite users. The Viewer Access Satellite Television service provides free-to-air digital channels from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Special Broadcasting Service and the commercial broadcasters and, in remote central and eastern Australia, dedicated regional news channels which feature the news bulletins of regional commercial television broadcasters.

Supporting Regional Post Offices

The post office network provides important services to regional, rural and remote communities. Over 1,600 post office licensees in these communities continue to benefit from postal regulatory reforms implemented from January 2016 to help support the sustainability of the postal network.

The reforms have helped to boost payments made to regional, rural and remote licensees to an estimated \$186.0 million in 2016-17, up almost 49 per cent from payments in 2012-13.

Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture Fund

The Anzac Centenary Arts and Culture Fund is providing \$4.0 million in funding from 2014-15 to 2017-18 to support the development, production, presentation, exhibition or performance of arts and culture projects that enhance our understanding of the Anzac legacy. Projects supported through this fund are providing opportunities throughout Australia, including regional locations, for Australians to create and share activities that commemorate Australia's century of service and acknowledge experiences of conflict at home and abroad.

Regional Arts Fund

The Regional Arts Fund provides support for sustainable cultural development in regional and remote Australia. The program provides funding for a mix of quick response grants and community grants for arts projects, professional development for artists and arts workers and community capacity building projects. The program also funds high priority strategic projects.

In 2017-18 the Australian Government has allocated \$3.4 million to the Regional Arts Fund. The program is delivered on behalf of the Australian Government by Regional Arts Australia and organisations in each state and territory.

Bundanon Trust

The Bundanon Trust is a wholly owned Australian Government company limited by guarantee, established in 1993 to own and manage the properties and art collection donated by Arthur and Yvonne Boyd "as a means of a gift to the nation".

The Bundanon Trust delivers a diverse range of functions such as artist in residence and environmental programs which have long term cultural, economic and social benefits for the local community in the Shoalhaven region and beyond. In 2017-18 the Australian Government will allocate \$1.5 million to the Bundanon Trust.

Community Heritage Grants

The Community Heritage Grants Program will receive \$490,000 of Australian Government funding in 2017-18, along with support from the National Film and Sound Archive, National Museum of Australia and National Archives of Australia. The Program will deliver grants of up to \$15,000 to community groups, including historical societies, regional museums, public libraries and Indigenous and migrant organisations, to support the preservation of publicly accessible heritage collections which are locally owned and nationally significant.

These collections contain a wide range of materials including artefacts, letters, diaries, maps, photographs and audio visual material. First-time recipients also receive expert preservation and archival training at support workshops provided by the National Library of Australia, the National Archives of Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive and the National Museum of Australia. Since 1994, 1,269 projects across Australia have received over \$6.0 million in funding, almost half of which has gone to regional organisations.

Festivals Australia

Festivals Australia provides access to a diverse range of high quality, innovative arts projects that grow audiences at festivals across regional Australia. In 2017-18 the Australian Government will allocate \$1.2 million to support arts projects that encourage partnership and collaboration across the arts sector and encourage community participation in arts activities at festivals in regional and remote areas.

Indigenous Languages and Arts Program

The Government is also keeping cultural identity strong within regional and remote Indigenous communities, and enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's wellbeing, by supporting Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and arts. Indigenous languages and arts enrich Australia's cultural life, make a valuable contribution to our national economy and help promote Australia to international audiences.

In 2017-18, almost \$23.0 million will revitalise and celebrate Australia's many Indigenous languages, and support and promote both traditional and contemporary Indigenous artistic expression.

The \$20.0 million Indigenous Languages and Arts program supports a diverse, professional and community-driven network of 21 Language Centres and a range of specific language projects across regional and remote Australia. It also supports organisations that contribute to ensuring the sustainability, vitality and strength of Indigenous communities through showcasing, preserving and encouraging participation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic expression. The vast majority of projects supported through this program are in communities across regional and remote Australia.

In addition to that, as part of the Australian Government's commitment to closing the gap, an additional \$10.0 million over four years from 2016-17 has been committed to *Protecting, Preserving and Celebrating Indigenous Languages*. This funding will deliver additional language revival and maintenance outcomes across Australia, including in regional and remote locations, with a focus on community-driven projects that use digital technologies in an innovative and culturally sensitive manner. This will enhance the collection, digitisation and promotion of language and language resources as well as the teaching and learning of language for future generations.

Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program

The Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support Program supports a professional, viable and ethical Indigenous visual arts industry, with strong participation by, and employment for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In 2017-18 the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program will contribute approximately \$20.0 million to the operations of around 80 Indigenous-owned art centres, most in very remote areas, as well as a number of art fairs, regional hubs and industry service organisations that are at the heart of Australia's internationally renowned Indigenous visual art movement. Together these organisations enable the development, production and marketing of Indigenous visual art, and provide opportunities for more than 8,000 Indigenous artists and over 300 Indigenous arts workers to generate income and participate in the nation's economy.

Catalyst – Australian Arts and Culture Fund

Catalyst supports Australian arts and culture by complementing existing mechanisms. Catalyst is intended to support innovative ideas from arts and cultural organisations that may find it difficult to access funding for such projects from other sources and can include gallery, library, archive, museum, arts education and infrastructure projects.

Catalyst has provided funding of approximately \$35.0 million over four years to 189 projects. Over 77 per cent of funding has supported projects undertaken by small to medium organisations, and over 52 per cent of the locations where funded Australian activities will take place are in regional and remote areas.

On 18 March 2017, the Australian Government announced changes to the Arts portfolio funding arrangements, with the transfer of the majority of funds from Catalyst - *Australian Arts and Culture Fund* to the Australia Council. The Department of Communications and the Arts will retain \$2.0 million per year to provide an alternative avenue of funding for organisations which are not receiving funding through the Australia Council. This may include galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector and some regional organisations.

Indigenous Repatriation

This program facilitates the return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains in overseas collections, and ancestral remains and secret sacred objects held in

major government funded museums, to their communities of origin. Many of these communities are located in regional Australia.

Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme

Many cultural institutions and community organisations around Australia care for maritime items of historical and national significance.

The Maritime Museums of Australia Project Support Scheme is a grants program which collects, conserves and exhibits Australia's rich maritime heritage by helping these groups undertake this important role. The program targets smaller collecting institutions in regional Australia.

The scheme is jointly funded by the Australian Government and the Australian National Maritime Museum. The scheme provides grants of up to \$15,000 to cultural institutions and community organisations for collection management initiatives, including documenting and caring for collections; and presentation projects, including education programs and workshops.

National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program

Engagement with rural and remote communities is a longstanding priority for all the cultural and collecting institutions. The national collecting institutions provide a variety of initiatives through a combination of on-site offerings, as well as physical and virtual outreach activities.

The National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach program provides funding of \$1.0 million annually to assist the National Collecting Institutions to develop and tour exhibitions of their collections.

The program aims to make Australian and overseas cultural material accessible to all Australians, especially those in regional communities. It also aims to promote international awareness of Australia's cultural heritage through overseas tours.

Visions of Australia Regional Exhibition Touring Program

The Visions of Australia regional exhibition touring program will provide approximately \$2.4 million in 2017-18 towards the costs of developing and touring exhibitions of cultural material that has historic, scientific, design, social or artistic significance.

The Visions of Australia program improves access for Australians particularly in regional and remote areas to Australian cultural material held in a wide variety of national and local collections.

Australia Council

The Australia Council provides significant support to the arts in remote and regional Australia with grants for individuals, groups and organisations, national touring programs, and strategic national development and capacity building programs.

This includes supporting a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultural activity in regional and remote areas. The Australia Council also supports

artists and arts organisations based in metropolitan areas to deliver projects, tour and engage with regional communities.

In 2015-16 the Australia Council invested \$25.8 million in artistic activities in regional Australia, increasing access for audiences, fostering the vitality of artists and arts organisations in regional and remote communities, and strengthening the mobility of diverse and excellent Australian work. These activities reached 1.9 million people in regional areas through attendance at a performance, exhibition, schools activity or workshop.

DEFENCE

The Department of Defence (Defence) and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) make a significant contribution to the development of regional Australia through the economic activity and community linkages fostered with the establishment of Defence facilities.

The Defence regional workforce develops significant partnerships with local communities, business and government. As at 31 January 2017, the total number of Defence personnel in regional centres across Australia was 27,427, which equates to 28 per cent of the total 98,161 Defence personnel.

The Defence estate consists of 400 properties and 351 leases including bases (72 major bases), training areas and ranges, research facilities and office accommodation. Figure 1 depicts the Defence footprint across Australia.

Defence investment in regional areas and communities includes up to \$2.25 billion to be provided by the Singapore Government to support the Australia-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership over the next decade. This initiative will see enhancements to the Townsville and Shoalwater Bay training areas, bringing significant economic opportunities for both regions with the construction of associated facilities and infrastructure. The increased size of the annual Singapore rotations is also expected to provide additional and sustained economic benefits to the local regions.

The construction and presence of Defence facilities in regional areas has significant flow on effects to local economies through increased business to local suppliers and service providers. Defence recognises that there are clear benefits to drawing support from local contractors and suppliers, where there is the capacity and capability available in the local market. The Defence footprint also provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities through employment, industry, community involvement, childcare facilities, housing, training activities, cooperation on heritage issues and the economic activity of Defence members and their families.

Defence regional community involvement includes supporting local communities through a range of programs including various Defence Community Organisation programs that build the capacity of local communities to provide support services to Defence member families. These programs include financial support to not-for-profit organisations providing local services for Defence families; support to schools to provide additional activities for Defence children; Defence managed child care centres and support for Defence partners seeking employment opportunities in new locations.

Figure 1: Location of major Defence facilities across Australia

Estate and Infrastructure Group Zones

NORTHERN & CENTRAL ZONE

Northern Territory

Bradshaw Field Training Area
 Defence Establishment Berrimah
 Delamere Range Facility
 HMAS COONAWARRA
 Larrakeyah Barracks
 Mt Bunday Training Area
 RAAF Darwin
 RAAF Tindal
 Robertson Barracks
 Shoal Bay Receiving Station

Queensland

Army Aviation Centre – Oakley
 Borneo Barracks Cabarlah
 Canungra Training Area
 Cowley Beach Training Area
 Damascus Barracks Meeandah
 Gallipoli Barracks Enoggera
 Greenbank Training Area
 HMAS CAIRNS
 HMAS MORTEN
 Joint Defence Establishment – Thursday Island

EAST & WEST ZONE

New South Wales

Beecroft Weapons Range
 Beersheba Barracks Tamworth
 Bullecourt Barracks Adamstown
 Defence Business Centre – Raymond Terrace
 Defence Establishment Orchard Hills
 Defence Plaza Sydney
 DSTG Redfern
 Garden Island Precinct
 – Fleet Base East
 – Garden Island
 – HMAS KUTTABUL
 HMAS ALBATROSS
 HMAS CRESWELL
 HMAS PENGUIN
 HMAS WATERHEN
 HMAS WATSON
 Liverpool Military Area
 – Holsworthy
 – Moorebank
 Mulwala
 Myambat
 RAAF Williamtown

South Australia

Jungle Training Wing (Tully)
 Kokoda Barracks Canungra
 Lavarack Barracks
 Mount Stuart Training Area
 Porton Barracks
 RAAF Amberley
 – Evans Head Air Weapons Range
 RAAF Scherger
 RAAF Townsville
 Rockhampton
 Ross Island Barracks
 Shoalwater Bay Training Area
 Townsville Field Training Area
 Victoria Barracks Brisbane
 Wide Bay Training Area

RAAF Glenbrook
 RAAF Richmond
 Randwick Barracks
 Singleton Military Area
 Victoria Barracks Sydney
 Wollongong Hydrographic Office

Victoria

Benalla

Western Australia

Campbell Barracks
 Fleet Base West – Garden Island
 Harold E Holt
 Irwin Barracks
 Leeuwin Barracks
 Palmer Barracks
 RAAF Curtin
 RAAF Learmonth
 RAAF Pearce
 Yampi Sound Training Area

South Australia

Cutana Training Area
 DSTG Edinburgh
 Hampstead Barracks
 Keswick Barracks
 Murray Bridge Training Area
 Proof & Experimental Establishment
 Port Wakefield
 RAAF Edinburgh
 Warradale Barracks
 Woodside Barracks
 Woomera

SOUTH EAST ZONE

New South Wales

Blarney Barracks Kapooka
 Defence Service Centre – Cooma
 RAAF Wagga

Tasmania

Anglesea Barracks
 Buckland Military Training Area
 Derwent Barracks
 DSTG Scottsdale
 Fort Direction
 Stony Head Training Area

Victoria

Defence Plaza Melbourne
 AGO Bendigo
 DSTG Fishermans Bend
 Fort Queenscliff
 Gaza Ridge Barracks North
 Bandiana

ACT REGION

Australian Capital Territory

Australian Defence College
 Australian Defence Force Academy
 Brindabella Park Offices
 Campbell Park Offices
 HMAS HARMAN
 HQ JOC Bungendore
 Majura Range
 Fairbairn
 RMC Duntroon
 Russell Offices



Gaza Ridge Barracks
 South Bandiana
 HMAS CERBERUS
 Latchford Barracks Bonegilla
 Mayger Barracks
 Oakleigh Barracks
 Puckapunyal Military Area
 RAAF East Sale
 RAAF Williams Laverton/Point Cook
 Simpson Barracks
 Victoria Barracks Melbourne
 Wadsworth Barracks East Bandiana

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Australian-Singapore Comprehensive Strategic Partnership - Military Training and Training Area Development in Australia

The Joint Agreement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Australia and Singapore announced the two governments would jointly develop training areas and facilities in Australia. The Memorandum of Understanding for this training initiative allows for up to 14,000 Singapore Armed Forces personnel to undertake training for up to 18 weeks in Australia annually, and recognises the need for the enhancement of the Shoalwater Bay Training Area and Townsville Field Training Area.

The Singapore Government will provide an investment of up to \$2.25 billion to support the enhancement of the two training areas. Pending national and bilateral approvals, infrastructure works are forecast to commence in late 2019 and continue through to approximately 2025. There will be economic opportunities for the Townsville and Rockhampton regions from the construction of facilities and infrastructure on the relevant training areas. It is also expected that the increased size of the annual Singapore rotations will provide additional and sustained economic benefits to the local regions.

Management of Per-and Poly-Fluorinated Alkyl Substances (PFAS) at Defence Bases

The Australian Government set aside funding from the existing Defence budget to provide support to communities affected by PFAS contamination originating from Defence establishments in Williamstown (NSW) and Oakey (QLD). Funding will provide:

- voluntary blood testing;
- an epidemiological study;
- community support initiatives such as counselling and connecting properties to town water sources; and
- remediation and management activities such as providing temporary alternative sources of drinking water.

Defence will continue to implement its program of environmental investigations at a number of communities near Defence establishments across Australia to:

- better understand the nature and extent of PFAS contamination originating from Defence establishments; and
- provide communities with information on Defence investigations and responses.

Additionally Defence will also undertake works to prevent further migration of PFAS from Defence bases. These works will include removing known PFAS source areas, stockpiling contaminated soil and sediment, and establishing on-site water treatment facilities to filter PFAS from groundwater and surface water.

Cairns Marine Precinct Upgrade

The Australian Government has committed \$24.0 million over three years from 2016-17 to the Cairns Marine Precinct upgrade, to be implemented by 2020.

The Cairns Marine Precinct upgrade will modernise shipyards within the precinct and improve the capability and capacity of the existing maritime infrastructure to support marine maintenance and sustainment requirements, both Government and commercial.

In December 2016, the Department of Defence transferred \$24.0 million to the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, to manage the distribution of funds via the Community Development Grants program.

Officers from the Department of Defence and the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development have engaged with stakeholders to discuss the intent of the initiative and the funds distribution process. Stakeholders will identify and develop activities to deliver this intent and, once approved by the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and the Australian Government, negotiate agreements for the package of works to be delivered.

Defence Assistance to the Civil Community

Defence Assistance to the Civil Community is the mechanism by which Defence provides both emergency and non-emergency support to the civilian community.

Where the scale of the emergency or disaster exceeds or exhausts the response capacity and capabilities of a State or Territory, or where resources cannot be mobilised in time, Australian Government assistance may be sought through Emergency Management Australia, including from the ADF.

Emergency Defence Assistance to the Civil Community provides support to the civilian community where immediate action is necessary to save human life or alleviate suffering, prevent widespread loss or damage to property or prevent extensive loss of animal life. The ADF has provided emergency Defence Assistance to the Civil Community to communities in Australia affected by floods and cyclones.

Examples of Defence Assistance to the Civil Community include support to State and local services in the event of natural disasters such as the Tasmanian Bushfires and floods in South Australia and New South Wales in 2016.

Defence Industry Development

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

The 2016 Defence Industry Policy Statement fundamentally resets the Defence-industry relationship. A key initiative to foster the new Defence-industry partnership is the Centre for Defence Industry Capability. Funded to around \$23.0 million per year, the Centre for Defence Industry Capability is a close collaboration between the private sector, Defence and the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. The centre provides Australian small to medium sized companies with a range of services to maximise their competitiveness, build export potential, and facilitate access to the Defence Innovation Hub.

Through the Centre for Defence Industry Capability, the Australian Government is seeking to grow and develop an Australian industry that can support the effective and efficient delivery of Defence capability. To achieve this, the Centre has a network of business and skills advisors across Australia who work closely with the companies and guide the priorities for defence industry. The Centre for Defence Industry Capability was launched on 5 December 2016 and is headquartered in Adelaide. Services are provided across the country.

Defence Community Organisation

The Department of Defence is committed to building the capacity of local urban and regional communities to provide support services to Defence member families.

Defence, via the Defence Community Organisation, delivers community capacity building outcomes through:

- building strategic partnerships with service delivery organisations at local, state and national levels;
- a range of online and community based networking events, workshops, programs and services;
- working in collaboration with local agencies to develop initiatives to address gaps and limitations in community resources that Defence member families may require; and
- providing personalised advice and ongoing communication to Defence member families on available community resources and actively linking families to the resources they require.

The Defence Community Organisation has offices in the following locations:

- Brisbane, Townsville, Toowoomba and Cairns (Queensland);
- Sydney, Newcastle, Wagga Wagga, Nowra, Singleton and Albury (New South Wales);
- Canberra (Australian Capital Territory);
- Melbourne, East Sale, Cerberus and Puckapunyal (Victoria);
- Katherine and Darwin (Northern Territory);
- Rockingham (Western Australia);

- Adelaide (South Australia); and
- Hobart (Tasmania).

The Defence Community Organisation fosters community linkages through programs such as:

- ADF Transition Support Services (coordinated by the Defence Community Organisation) inform and encourage ADF families to access educational, financial, rehabilitation, compensation and other government services to facilitate sound transition planning. ADF Transition Support Services are delivered through 13 ADF Transition Centres nationally;
- the Defence Childcare Program provides 17 childcare centres and four out-of-school hours childcare centres nationally. Additionally, to minimise the impact of mobility on Defence children's education, the Defence Community Organisation funds 229 schools to engage Defence School Transition Aides and Mentors; and
- funding community centres (25) nationally through grants and other funding support.

Defence Force Recruiting Support to Regional Australia

The Defence regional footprint includes a number of Defence Force Recruitment Centres in the following locations:

- Newcastle, Wollongong and Albury (New South Wales); and
- Cairns, Robina (Gold Coast), Maroochydore, Toowoomba and Townsville (Queensland).

These recruitment centres are in addition to the Defence Force Recruitment Centres established in Capital cities.

Indigenous Engagement

Defence has extensive engagement with Indigenous communities in remote, urban and regional Australia. In addition to direct entry into Defence employment, Defence offers a range of pathway programs for Indigenous Australians seeking a career in Defence as an ADF member or Australian Public Service (APS) employee:

- Under the Defence Indigenous Development Programs, Navy and Army aim to provide Indigenous Australians an opportunity to bridge the gap and complete employment training (recruit and initial). The programs provide Indigenous Australians from all regions an opportunity for a Defence career. Programs are conducted over a six month period in Cairns (Queensland), Batchelor (Northern Territory), Kapooka (New South Wales) and a fourth location yet to be determined.
- The Indigenous Pre-Recruit Program was piloted in 2016 and is aimed at Indigenous Australians who meet the current general entry recruiting standards for medical, education and aptitude, however need to develop their confidence and improve their physical fitness to enable them to succeed during recruit and initial employment training. The six week program is currently conducted at the Army Recruit Training Centre, Kapooka (New South Wales), with plans to expand to

HMAS Cerberus (Victoria) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Wagga Wagga (New South Wales).

- APS Indigenous Traineeships and Apprenticeships offer Indigenous Australians entry level APS employment. The Department of Defence endeavours to employ Indigenous trainees and apprentices in their current location, or in close proximity, where Defence localities and operational requirements allow.
- The Clontarf and Stars Foundations support Indigenous secondary school students to successfully complete Year 12 and prepare for future employment. Clontarf and Stars Foundation participants undertake work experience at Defence establishments close to their home location, to provide an insight into careers within the Department of Defence.
- The Army has three Regional Force Surveillance Units (RFSU) across northern Australia. The RFSUs employ a large number of Indigenous soldiers, many of whom are employed from local communities on a part-time (Reserve) basis or through the Regional Force Surveillance List.
- The RFSU's: North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE), the 51st Battalion, the Far North Queensland Regiment (51 FNQR) and the Pilbara Regiment are closely involved with local Indigenous communities and rely heavily on the commitment and knowledge of these regional communities in their Areas of Responsibility.
- NORFORCE patrols an area that covers 1.8 million square kilometres, nearly one quarter of Australia's land mass, and has squadrons based in Nhulunbuy, Darwin and Alice Springs (Northern Territory); and Broome (Western Australia). The Far North Queensland Regiment conducts reconnaissance and surveillance across 640,000 square kilometres from Cardwell north to the Torres Strait, inclusive of Cape York and the Gulf country (Queensland) and west to the Northern Territory border. This Regiment has a presence in Cairns, Weipa, Thursday Island and Mt Isa (Queensland).
- The Pilbara Regiment is responsible for an area of 1.3 million square kilometres from Port Hedland to Carnarvon in Western Australia, and from the coast to the border with the Northern Territory. It has elements located in Karratha, Port Hedland, Tom Price, Newman, Carnarvon, Exmouth and Karrakatta (Western Australia).

Defence has established or contributes to a number of other programs that engage with regional Indigenous communities:

- Army has established the Regional Indigenous Liaison Network that employs eight part time soldiers in each State or Territory assisting commanders to engage with local Indigenous communities throughout Australia.
- Since 1997, the Army has delivered a range of housing, infrastructure, essential services (power, water and sewerage) and other benefits to selected remote Indigenous communities through the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program (AACAP). The aim of the program is to improve the primary health, environmental health and living conditions of Aboriginal people. Over the past 20 years, AACAP has been delivered to 42 communities. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Australian Army are undertaking a review of

the program. The review will examine the objectives and outcomes of AACAP with a view to broadening the benefits of the program. The review is expected to finish in June 2017.

- The Jawun Program operates in nine regions around Australia, including urban, regional and remote Indigenous communities. The program adopts a partnership model across different sectors which emphasises working with Indigenous people, rather than simply providing services. The program matches individuals skill sets (within corporations and government) with the needs of an Indigenous community or organisation throughout Australia. Project work is allocated based on this need and is completed over a six week placement working with the Indigenous community or organisation. Defence has been a participant of Jawun since 2012. To date, approximately 60 Defence employees have participated across various locations.

These programs contribute to positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians, predominantly through adult employment. They are aimed at increasing enlistment and participation rates into the ADF and the Defence APS by assisting Indigenous applicants and candidates to transition into full and part-time employment. There is also a recognised benefit to both program participants and communities, when participants return to their community with the skills and knowledge to become leaders and role models.

Engaging People with Disability – Defence Administrative Assistance Program

Defence has built strong partnerships with Australian Disability Enterprises and Disability Employment Services Providers to support Defence disability employment programs. Defence offers a range of entry level employment programs for people with intellectual disability, aimed to enhance Defence capability and directly contributing to Defence’s cultural reform efforts.

- The Defence Administrative Assistance Program supports regional communities through partnerships with local Australian Disability Enterprises to provide people with intellectual disability the opportunity to engage in meaningful work. The Defence Administrative Assistance Program operates at the following sites: RAAF Base Amberley, Gallipoli Barracks Enoggera and Lavarack Barracks Townsville (Queensland); HMAS Stirling (Western Australia); Holsworthy Barracks (New South Wales); Victoria Barracks, Melbourne (Victoria); RAAF Base Edinburgh (South Australia); and Robertson Barracks, Darwin, (Northern Territory). Since 2016, 87 participants have been engaged under the Defence Administrative Assistance Program.
- The Inclusive Employment Program increases the participation of people with disability in the ongoing Defence Australian Public Service workforce. This program creates a pathway for people with intellectual disability to begin their work journey and build a career in Defence. Since 2014, 19 individuals have been recruited into the organisation on an ongoing basis.

Creating an inclusive workplace for people with disability is one of the six priority diversity areas identified in the Defence diversity and inclusion strategy 2012-2017. Defence seeks to remove barriers to, and encourage the participation of, people with disability in the Defence workforce. By increasing the representation of people with disability in Defence, and by building an organisation where diversity is respected and valued, Defence seeks to be an employer of choice for all Australians.

Defence Housing Australia

Defence Housing Australia (DHA) provides housing and related services to members of the ADF and their families in accordance with the *Defence Housing Australia Act 1987* and service agreements with Defence.

DHA has 19 offices and four contact centres across Australia. The contact centres provide the first point-of-contact for housing and maintenance services, and the allocation of on-base Living-in Accommodation. Nine DHA offices are located in regional Australia, two of which are contact centres. DHA also has a presence on four regional ADF bases for Defence personnel only.

DHA manages approximately 18,500 properties worth \$10.6 billion in all capital cities, major regional centres and some remote locations where the ADF has a presence. Approximately 30 per cent of these properties are located in regional and remote Australia.

DHA manages a multi-million dollar rolling capital program to meet its provisioning obligations to Defence and maintain the currency and quality of its property portfolio. DHA buys land, constructs properties and, as required, purchases and leases new and established properties. DHA also provides on-base regional and remote housing services to Defence.

DHA has four residential development projects in progress in regional Australia. These projects are located in Newcastle (NSW), Sale (VIC), Ipswich (QLD) and Townsville (QLD). The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$452.2 million. Subject to receiving the necessary planning approvals, DHA will undertake a further eight residential development projects in regional Australia. Two of these projects are in Newcastle (NSW), two in Ipswich (QLD) and projects in Toowoomba (QLD), Hastings (VIC), Baldivis (WA) and Rockingham (WA). The estimated value of the projects on completion is \$386.2 million.

DHA also manages a multi-million dollar Defence-funded upgrade, construction and redevelopment program. In 2017-18, DHA will manage six projects in regional Australia in Katherine (NT), Alice Springs (NT), Woonona (NSW), Port Wakefield (SA), East Sale (VIC) and Canungra (QLD) worth \$12.2 million.

DHA actively engages suitably qualified local businesses and tradespeople through tender processes to undertake construction and maintenance work. In doing so, DHA contributes to and supports local economies and job creation.

United States Force Posture Initiatives

The Governments of Australia and the United States are implementing the 25 year Force Posture Agreement. The Agreement covers two initiatives, the Marine Rotational Force - Darwin and Enhanced Air Cooperation. The initiatives will have strategic benefits for the Australia-United States Alliance and bring economic benefits for northern Australia. The Agreement allows for up to 2,500 United States Marines rotating annually for six months and increasing air activities conducted out of Northern Australia.

Both the United States and Australian Governments have committed to a package of infrastructure and facilities works concentrated at Robertson Barracks, RAAF Base Darwin, RAAF Base Tindal and training areas across the Northern Territory. Subject to national and bilateral approvals, construction is expected to start in 2018-19 and continue through to the mid 2020s. The United States and Australian Governments will fund required works separately. The Defence Integrated Investment Plan carries a \$2.5 billion provision to fund capital works under the Agreement, though the full costs of the 25 year Agreement will be informed by the nature and scope of activities undertaken during annual rotations.

Environmental Management Policies

Defence environmental management policies support regional communities through:

- promoting sustainable environmental management at Defence facilities; and
- contributing to relevant regional environmental initiatives.

The recently released 2016-2036 Defence Environmental Strategy continues to support the Defence environmental vision to be a leader in sustainable environmental management. The environment and its ongoing sustainable management is a critical enabler to ADF capability.

Defence has engaged the Australian Wildlife Conservancy in a trial to improve the biodiversity of the Yampi Sound Training Area in the West Kimberley through managing pests, weeds, bushfire and threatened species. Yampi Sound possesses outstanding conservation values as well as large and varied training environments for the ADF. The contract facilitates cooperation with the Dambimangari traditional owners, including providing employment. This investment by Defence benefits the broader Australian community through supporting national biodiversity targets as well as benefiting the local community through increased economic activity.

Defence has commenced a program to integrate its bushfire management activities more closely with States and Territories. Defence invests \$14.0 million in bushfire

mitigation works including fuel reduction works to protect communities and the environment across Australia. In 2016, Defence developed a draft Memorandum of Understanding with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service that details how the agencies interact in mitigating and responding to bushfire emergencies. This includes mechanisms for the provision of airfield and other support services to the Rural Fire Service during a bushfire.

Defence Base Service Contracts

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

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

Defence Infrastructure / Estate Projects

The Australian Government is investing approximately \$8.0 billion over four years from 2017-18 in facilities and infrastructure projects. Defence facilities and infrastructure investment are funded by the Defence Integrated Investment Program via Defence's existing annual appropriation. Major Capital Facilities projects in regional locations include the following:

- LAND 155 Enhanced Gap Crossing Capability
- JP500 Phase 2A - Electronic Warfare Operational Support
- Land 17 Phase 1B/C - Artillery Replacement Project
- Delamere Air Weapons Range Redevelopment
- Woomera Range Safety and Control System Remediation
- Cultana Training Area Infrastructure and Facilities
- C-17 Maintenance Facility, Aircraft Apron and Associated Infrastructure
- AIR 5428 Phase 1 - Pilot Training System Facilities Project
- AIR 7000 Maritime Patrol Aircraft Phase 2B
- Garden Island (East) Critical Infrastructure Recovery Project (CIRP) - Stage One
- RAAF Base Williamtown Redevelopment Stage 2

- Air Traffic Control Complex Infrastructure Project and AIR5431 Phases 2 and 3 Fixed Base Defence Air Traffic Management and Control System
- AIR 5349 Phase 3 Growler Airborne Electronic Attack Capability Facilities Project
- AIR 6000 New Air Combat Capability

LAND 155 Enhanced Gap Crossing Capability

This \$23.4 million project will provide new warehousing, storage, hardstand, maintenance and training facilities to support the introduction of enhanced gap crossing capability at Holsworthy Military Area (New South Wales), Joint Logistics Unit (South Queensland), Joint Logistics Unit (North Queensland) and Joint Logistics Unit North (Northern Territory). Subject to Parliamentary approval, construction is planned to commence in early 2017 and be completed by late 2017.

JP500 Phase 2A - Electronic Warfare Operational Support

This project will provide facilities and infrastructure to support electronic warfare capability at Edinburgh, South Australia. Parliamentary approval was received in February 2017. The project has an approved budget of \$24.9 million over two years from 2016-17. Construction is planned to commence in mid 2017 and be complete by mid 2018.

Land 17 Phase 1B/C - Artillery Replacement Project – Additional Towed Guns

This project will provide working accommodation, storage, maintenance and training facilities in support of the Lightweight Towed Howitzer ancillary equipment and simulation systems at multiple Defence sites across Australia. The project received Parliamentary approval in February 2017, and will construct facilities at eight Defence establishments, including Puckapunyal, Port Wakefield, Williamstown and Darwin. The project has an approved budget of \$57.1 million. Construction is planned to commence in mid 2017 and be complete by mid 2018.

Delamere Air Weapons Range Redevelopment

The Australian Government is investing \$74.4 million over three years from 2016-17 to redevelop key range facilities and infrastructure to enable the continued use of the Delamere Air Weapons Range (Northern Territory) including the new Growler Mobile Threat Training Emitter Systems capability. Construction is scheduled to be completed by 2018.

Woomera Range Safety and Control System Remediation

This project will provide facilities and infrastructure to support the systems developed for the Woomera Test Range. Parliamentary approval was received in February 2017. The project has an approved budget of \$48.6 million over two years from 2017-18. Construction is planned to commence in mid 2017 and be complete by late 2018.

Cultana Training Area Infrastructure and Facilities

This project will provide facilities and infrastructure for the Cultana Training Area, South Australia. The project has an approved budget of \$71.0 million. Construction is planned to commence early 2017 and be completed by late 2018.

C-17 Maintenance Facility, Aircraft Apron and Associated Infrastructure

This project will provide a maintenance facility, additional working accommodation, aircraft apron and associated infrastructure to support C-17 operations at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland. The project has an approved budget of \$219.4 million over four years from 2016-17. Construction commenced in late 2016 and is scheduled to be completed by 2019.

AIR 5428 Phase 1 - Pilot Training System Facilities Project

This project will provide fit-for-purpose facilities to support the modern joint training system being delivered by the AIR5428-1 Capability Project. The project has an approved budget of \$329.8 million over four years from 2016-17. Construction commenced in August 2016 and is scheduled for completion in 2020.

AIR 7000 Maritime Patrol Aircraft Phase 2B

The Australian Government is investing \$707.9 million over five years from 2016-17 to provide new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the P-8A aircraft at RAAF Base Edinburgh, RAAF Base Townsville, RAAF Base Pearce and RAAF Base Darwin. Construction commenced in mid-2016 and is scheduled for completion by late 2020.

Garden Island (East) Critical Infrastructure Recovery Project – Stage One

This \$213.4 million project will address critical structural, condition and engineering services risks on the Cruiser Wharf at Garden Island (East), Sydney. Subject to Parliamentary approval, construction is scheduled to commence in mid 2017 and be completed by late 2020.

RAAF Base Williamtown Redevelopment Stage 2

The Australian Government is investing \$274.0 million over six years from 2016-17 to sustain and improve the functionality and capability of RAAF Base Williamtown (New South Wales), including upgrades or replacement of critical ageing infrastructure to meet future requirements. Construction is scheduled to be completed by mid 2021.

Air Traffic Control Complex Infrastructure Project and AIR5431 Phases 2 and 3 Fixed Base Defence Air Traffic Management and Control System

The Australian Government is investing \$409.9 million over six years from 2016-17 to provide facilities in support of replacement Air Traffic Management Surveillance, Command and Control Systems under AIR5431 Phases 2 and 3, including the

replacement of aged and degraded Air Traffic Control Towers. Construction is planned to be completed by late 2021.

AIR 5349 Phase 3 Growler Airborne Electronic Attack Capability Facilities Project

The Australian Government is investing \$348.6 million over six years from 2015-16 to provide working accommodation, maintenance, warehousing and training facilities at RAAF Base Amberley, Army Aviation Centre Oakey (Queensland) and Delamere Air Weapons Range (Northern Territory) to support the introduction of the Growler Airborne Electronic Attack Capability. Construction is scheduled to be completed in 2021.

AIR 6000 New Air Combat Capability

The Australian Government is investing \$1.5 billion over eight years from 2015-16 to provide new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction of the Joint Strike Fighter at RAAF Bases Williamtown (New South Wales) and Tindal (Northern Territory). Support facilities and infrastructure will be provided at Defence Establishment Myambat (New South Wales) and at seven forward operating bases throughout Australia. Construction commenced in early 2015 and is scheduled for completion by late 2022.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Education and Training portfolio's mission is to create opportunities for all Australians to access high quality education from the early years, through schooling and tertiary settings. We want to be acknowledged for the global reach of our research and internationally recognised for the quality of our education system. The Department of Education and Training delivers national policies and programs that help Australians access world-class child care, early learning, school education, higher education, vocational education and training, and international education and research.

Through its range of programs, the Education and Training portfolio supports Australians living in and rural and regional communities. For example, the regional study hubs initiative will improve access to higher education for students from rural and remote Australia by supporting the establishment and operation of these hubs. Such hubs will support regional students to study courses locally delivered by distance from any Australian university by providing greater access to study support and infrastructure. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in preschool will benefit from the forthcoming trial of English learning applications (apps) designed specifically for children in regional and remote areas for whom English is a second language.

NEW INITIATIVES

Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education

As part of its 2016 election commitment, the Australian Government has commissioned an independent review into regional, rural and remote education. The review will consider the factors that impact on student learning outcomes and identify innovative and evidence-based approaches to help students succeed at school and in their transition to further study, training and employment. Consultations will be undertaken through public submissions and face-to-face consultations with the education community, families, employer groups, government agencies and the philanthropic sector. The final report and recommendations will be delivered to the Australian Government by December 2017.

Schools Funding

The Australian Government's new funding arrangements for schools are fairer, simpler, more affordable and more transparent than previous arrangements. Ensuring a contribution to all students' school education, the Australian Government will provide a record \$78.8 billion for schooling over 2017-18 to 2020-21. This includes an estimated \$19.0 billion to regional areas over 2018 to 2021, a 37 per cent increase from the previous period, 2014 to 2017.

The new funding arrangements will retain the Schooling Resource Standard, which comprises a base funding amount for all students and loadings to address

disadvantage. This includes the location loading, which recognises the additional costs for delivering education outside of metropolitan areas. Regional areas account for nearly 20 per cent of school students, while attracting 23.2 per cent of the funding.

Higher Education Reform Package

The Australian Government's higher education reforms will provide more equitable access for under-represented groups, ensure students graduate with skills that meet the needs of employers and the community, and hold higher education institutions accountable for the taxpayer funding they receive. These reforms rebalance the share of funding between students and taxpayers. They require students to share marginally more of the cost, universities to share some of the efficiencies of scale realised from growth in taxpayer funded places, and will ensure that debt from growth in student loans will be better managed.

We expect these reforms will save taxpayers \$2.8 billion dollars over the forward estimates in underlying cash balance terms. Regional students will particularly benefit from the Government's reforms through the enhancements to the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, the increased Australian Government support for sub-bachelor level places, and the provision of funding for the establishment and operation of regional study hubs.

Regional Study Hubs

The Australian Government will provide \$15.2 million from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to improve access to higher education for students from rural and remote Australia by supporting the establishment and operation of regional study hubs. Such hubs typically support regional students to study courses locally delivered by distance from any Australian university by providing greater access to study support and infrastructure.

The measure will assist in the establishment and ongoing operation of up to six regional study hubs across mainland Australia. In addition, funding will contribute to the ongoing operation of the two current regional study hubs in Geraldton and Cooma.

Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships

The Australian Government is fulfilling its election commitment to provide \$24.0 million over four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21 for Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships, which will support 1200 regional and remote students to undertake science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies. The scholarships are for undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational education students, and aim to improve access to educational opportunities for regional and remote students.

Universal Access to Preschool Funding

The Australian Government has committed \$427.9 million to extend the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education 2016–2017* for a further year. Early childhood education has been increasingly recognised as vital for giving young children the greatest opportunity to succeed in schooling and life. This measure will benefit over 346,000 children in the year before full-time school and provide more certainty for the preschool sector.

English Language Learning for Indigenous Children (ELLIC) Program

The Australian Government has committed \$5.9 million from 2017–18 to 2020–21 to trial English learning apps to improve literacy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for whom English is a second language. The trial will take place over 2019 and 2020 in at least 20 preschools and is based on the successful Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program.

The trial will further support the Australian Government's commitment to Closing the Gap in literacy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children. Children will access the apps on tablet devices in preschool, supported by educators trained on how to integrate ELLIC into the preschool's learning program. The selection of preschools for this program will focus on regional and remote areas, which will be identified through consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Jobs for Families Child Care Package

The Australian Government will invest extra funding for child care support over the next four years as part of the *Jobs for Families Child Care Package* to make the child care system more flexible, more accessible and more affordable. A key feature of these reforms is replacing existing child care payments with a single, means-tested Child Care Subsidy from 2 July 2018.

Support for rural and remote families is an important feature of the *Job for Families Child Care Package*. The \$1.2 billion Child Care Safety Net, aims to give the most vulnerable children a strong start. This includes specific funding in the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) to assist vulnerable or disadvantaged families and communities. \$61.8 million of the CCCF will provide a third funding stream for Budget Based Funded child care services currently operating in mostly rural and remote communities as they transition to the new child care system.

As part of the CCCF, the Connected Beginnings Program commenced in July 2016. The program provides for the integration of child care, maternal and child health and family support services with schools in a number of Indigenous communities experiencing disadvantage. Communities announced include Alice Springs, Tennant

Creek and Galiwin'ku in the Northern Territory, Doomadgee in Queensland and Ceduna in South Australia, with further sites to be announced.

Learning for Life Program

The Australian Government will provide \$48.0 million over four years, from 2016–17 to 2019–20, to expand The Smith Family's Learning for Life program which will support an additional 24,000 disadvantaged students.

The Learning for Life program provides emotional, practical and financial support to disadvantaged students to encourage them to stay at school, complete Year 12 (or its equivalent) and successfully transition from school to work or to further education and training.

The program is delivered in over 90 communities across every State and Territory in Australia, approximately half in regional areas.

Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA)

Following a successful trial involving 41 preschool services in 2015 and an extension to around 300 services in 2016, the Australian Government has invested \$5.9 million over two years from 2016–17 to make the ELLA program available to preschool services nationally.

The ELLA program is an innovative play-based language learning app available on tablet devices that provides preschool children with the opportunity to learn a language other than English, including Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, Indonesian, French, Italian, Spanish and Arabic. Modern Greek and Hindi will be added in 2018.

The apps are designed so that preschool educators do not need knowledge of the language being taught. This is particularly beneficial for use in regional and remote areas where access to qualified language teachers can be problematic.

Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Program

The Australian Government is providing \$23.8 million over 2013–14 to 2017–18 for the Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools program, which supports up to 40 remote and very remote primary schools to implement two explicit teaching approaches: Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction. The program is delivered by Good to Great Schools Australia and has been funded since 2013–14. The program seeks to:

- increase teacher pedagogical skills in teaching literacy through the use of alphabetic teaching approaches, in particular Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction; and
- improve literacy results for students in participating schools.

The Australian Government has extended the pilot to the end of 2017. This will enable service delivery over three full school years. An independent evaluation of the program is being undertaken in 2017.

Supporting More Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Careers: Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI) – National Research Internship Program

The Australian Government has committed \$28.2 million from 2016–17 to 2019–20 to support more women in STEM careers. The AMSI National Research Internship Program will support 1,400 new industry-based internships, with a particular focus on women researchers, through a nationally expanded PhD internships program run by AMSI. The national program will be open to all universities, including those in rural and regional areas, and will ensure participation by regional students. The internships will provide an opportunity for PhD students to train and build their research skills in an industry environment, and to develop their entrepreneurial skills and work-readiness.

Inspiring All Australians in Digital Literacy and STEM

As part of the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda, \$62.8 million has been allocated from 2016–17 to 2019–20 for ten initiatives to help children and young people embrace the digital age and increase their engagement with STEM education. Students who are most at risk of falling behind in the digital age, including those in regional communities, will be given opportunities to participate and engage. Support is also available for educators to increase their capacity to teach STEM subjects in preschool programs and in schools.

Teach for Australia

The Teach for Australia program fast-tracks high calibre, non-teaching graduates (known as Associates) into disadvantaged secondary schools through two years of intensive teacher training that leads to a Master of Teaching.

The Australian Government has supported Teach for Australia since 2009 and has committed more than \$77.6 million in funding to deliver ten cohorts of the program. Teach for Australia partners with schools serving low socio-economic communities. Over 40 per cent of Associates are working in regional communities, filling hard to staff teaching positions. To date over 230 Associates have been placed in regional and remote and very remote communities, including Portland (Victoria), Tennant Creek (Northern Territory), Kalgoorlie (Western Australia) and Huonville (Tasmania).

Reading Writing Hotline

The Australian Government provided funding of more than \$0.6 million in 2017–18 to TAFE New South Wales (Sydney Institute) to support the continued delivery of the Reading Writing Hotline. This important referral service supports adults to improve their reading, writing and numeracy skills. It is delivered nationally, with targeted

marketing to regional communities across Australia, where there is often a high need for services.

Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)

The Australian Government has committed \$300.1 million in 2017–18 for AMEP.

AMEP provides up to 510 hours of English language tuition to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants, within the first five years of their arrival in Australia. This helps them to successfully settle, and participate socially and economically in Australian society. Additional tuition is also available under the Special Preparatory Program, the Settlement Language Pathways to Employment and Training Program, and Adult Migrant English Program Extend.

AMEP is delivered nationally in metropolitan, rural and regional areas, including through classroom-based and distance e-learning.

Vocational Education and Training Student Loans (VSL)

The Australian Government is supporting more than 7,300 students, including 1,500 rural and regional students over the next four years to study higher level vocational qualifications aligned to workplace and economic need through the new VSL program. About 59 training organisations, including those operating in rural and regional communities, are able to offer courses funded through VSL.

VSL commenced on 1 January 2017 and replaced the VET FEE-HELP scheme, which closed to new students on 31 December 2016.

Skills for Education and Employment Program

Since 2002 the Skills for Education and Employment Program has provided training to assist job seekers to build skills necessary to gain employment or participate in further training. In 2017–18 the Australian Government is providing funding of \$103.6 million for this national program to provide over 17,100 eligible job seekers with language, literacy and numeracy training. Clients will receive free accredited training through registered training organisations. Training is delivered to meet both client and industry needs. Services are available nationally through face-to-face and distance delivery.

Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program

Eligible employers in rural and regional Australia who want to take on apprentices will continue to benefit from the Australian Government's 2017–18 investment of \$392.1 million in the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program. The program provides additional assistance for employing apprentices in regional areas experiencing skills shortages or drought. Apprentices may also be eligible for the Living Away From Home Allowance.

Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools Pilot (P-TECH)

The Australian Government has committed \$5.1 million from 2016 to 2021 to pilot the P-TECH model as part of its strategy to improve Australia's STEM capability.

Current P-TECH sites classified as regional include Ballarat, Townsville and Burnie/Parklands in Tasmania.

The pilot involves establishing partnerships between the education and industry sectors to support young people to make a successful transition from school to further education, training and work.

Jobs and Growth in Tasmania – University of Tasmania (UTAS) campuses in Launceston and Burnie

The Australian Government has committed funding of \$150.0 million to the UTAS to improve its critical infrastructure through the relocation and expansion of its Launceston and Burnie campuses. This initiative aims to be an economic stimulus giving students the educational opportunities they need.

Deakin University—Support for the Warrnambool Campus

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$14.0 million over two years from 2016–17 to Deakin University to ensure the ongoing sustainability of its Warrnambool campus.

The funding will help Deakin University to renew its Warrnambool campus to ensure a continuing, regionally focused campus for south-west Victoria that will ensure that the community has continued access to higher education.

Commonwealth Grant Scheme

The Australian Government will provide about \$6.9 billion in 2016–17 through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme to subsidise students' higher education costs. This is an increase in funding of 65 per cent since 2009. The subsidy is available for all domestic students enrolled in a bachelor degree or an eligible sub-bachelor program at a public university. Some students enrolled in other course types or with private higher education providers may also be eligible for this subsidy. Under the Commonwealth Grants Scheme, eligible universities with regional campuses will receive funding of \$70.9 million in 2017–18 in regional loading to help meet the costs associated with higher education delivery in regional areas.

Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)

The Australian Government HELP provides loans to students, including many from regional and rural areas, to help them with the cost of their tuition. Eligible students do not pay any of their tuition fees up-front and are not required to start repaying the loan until they earn over the minimum compulsory repayment threshold.

Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)

HEPPP provides funding to universities to improve access to undergraduate courses for people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, and improve their retention and completion rates. This includes providing assistance to students from regional and remote Australia who are also from low SES backgrounds. The Australian Government will provide \$592.2 million in funding to public universities under the HEPPP over four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21.

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education provides specialised tertiary education opportunities for students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote parts of northern Australia.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

The Australian Government has committed additional, ongoing funding of \$10.0 million per annum from 1 July 2016 (indexed for inflation) for the AIATSIS to preserve Australia's Indigenous culture and heritage much of which is held by, or on behalf of, Australia's regional communities. The national Indigenous collection is vital to research across a range of important areas for regional Australia, including native title, traditional ownership, land and water management, tourism, mining, agriculture, environment and higher education. The funding enables AIATSIS to continue working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the collection and preservation of critical cultural knowledge, and promote an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, traditions, languages and stories.

Research Block Grants

In 2017-18, the Australian Government is providing \$1.9 billion to universities to support research and research training through a number of performance-based schemes. Research block grants are provided to all Australian public universities and help to support regionally-based researchers and research students. Universities are key to the economic and social growth of many regions, through the employment they provide and the students they attract, as well as their role in innovation systems.

As part of the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda, new research block grant funding arrangements for universities were implemented in 2017 that will give greater emphasis to success in industry and other end-user engagement and will drive greater research industry collaboration. An additional \$180.4 million is being provided over four years to increase incentives for research collaboration.

National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy

Under the National Innovation and Science Agenda, the Australian Government has committed ongoing funding of \$152.9 million per year from 1 July 2017 (indexed for

inflation) to the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy to support the operations of major national research infrastructure.

Prior to the commencement of this funding, the Australian Government provided an additional \$300.0 million from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2017 to operate and maintain existing research infrastructure. The strategy provides important infrastructure to the Australian research community and benefits rural and regional Australia through localised research infrastructure projects and facilities.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment is the foundation of Australia's economic strength and social wellbeing. Work helps individuals to fulfil their potential, families to thrive and businesses and communities to prosper and grow.

The Employment portfolio has a central role in advising on and delivering economic and social initiatives, both at national and regional levels, to improve Australia's workforce participation, productivity and jobs growth.

The Australian Government is committed to creating jobs and promoting investment and growth in regional Australia by setting the right policy framework to facilitate stronger jobs growth, so that all Australians can take advantage of the emerging job opportunities of tomorrow.

Evidence shows that there is disparity between how regions perform. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including a region's industry base, its population's access to and participation in higher education, transport networks and infrastructure, population size, and the skill level of its labour force. Some regions will also experience more intense structural adjustment pressures than others, due to their underlying economic base. More regionally-tailored approaches help these communities to anticipate and respond to change.

The Australian Government continues to provide ongoing investment and support to help and strengthen our regions. In addition to the tailored services provided through the Australian Government's national jobactive employment services program, a number of initiatives have been announced that will improve regional employment. These include targeted measures to help more Indigenous Australians into employment; strengthening requirements for welfare recipients to look for work and participate in work related activities, including in regional areas experiencing labour shortages; helping more mature age job seekers find and keep a job, including those in regional areas; and expanding the successful ParentsNext pre-employment program to more regional areas of Australia.

NEW INITIATIVES

Closing the Gap – Employment Services

The Australian Government is committing a total of \$55.7 million over five years to work with Indigenous Australians to accelerate progress towards achieving parity in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Closing the Gap – Employment Services package outlines measures to increase the number of Indigenous Australians engaged in the labour market and build the capacity of employment services to better connect Indigenous job seekers to jobs. Components of this package include:

- Mentoring and more support for Indigenous youth
- A Prison to Work program to provide access to in-prison employment services
- Revitalising employment services for Indigenous Australians
- Place based approaches, trialling community-based delivery of employment services in Yarrabah, Queensland

ParentsNext – National Expansion

The Australian Government is committing \$263 million over the forward estimates to expand the successful ParentsNext pre-employment program to help more parents with young children at risk of long term welfare dependency to plan and prepare for employment by the time their children start school. ParentsNext is already operating in ten designated Local Government Areas, helping parents to connect to services in their local community to support their transition into employment, such as education, training, literacy/numeracy programs, and child care. From 1 July 2018, the ParentsNext program will be expanded nationally to allow more parents to access personalised assistance to improve their work readiness. The expanded ParentsNext will be delivered in two streams:

- nationally, to the most disadvantaged parents to all Employment Regions across Australia; and
- in 30 locations, which are highly disadvantaged or have a high proportion of Parenting Payment recipients who are Indigenous.

Working Age Payment Reform

Initiatives under this measure will better accord with community expectations and changes in the labour market, better positioning jobseekers to realise the benefits of work. Strengthened requirements for welfare recipients to undertake job search and participation in work related activities will be welcomed in regional areas experiencing labour shortages. From 20 September 2018, stronger participation requirements will apply to jobseekers aged 30-49, and jobseekers aged 55 to the Age Pension age.

To help mature age jobseekers find and keep a job, including those in regional areas, the Government will increase support for training and reskilling, work experience

opportunities and links to employers. Representing a total investment of more than \$100.0 million (of which \$20.4 million is new money), this package will include a new Career Transition Assistance Program to deliver a short, intensive course in which job seekers will identify transferable skills, research the local labour market, explore new occupations suited to their skills and learn resilience strategies. Commencing 1 July 2018, the program will be trialled in five regions around Australia, before being rolled out nationally from July 2020. The National Work Experience Programme will be expanded to 10,000 places per year and incentives will be introduced to increase business demand. Finally, a series of industry-based pilots will be established in selected growth industries and/or for large infrastructure projects. Up to ten pilots will be developed with two main aims: to create additional pathways for job seekers on income support to gain employment; and to help combat negative perceptions among employers of certain job seekers and encourage them to have a diverse workforce, particularly mature age and people with disability.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Seasonal Work Incentives for Job Seekers – Trial

As part of the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government announced a two year trial of incentives aimed at increasing the number of job seekers who undertake horticultural seasonal work, such as fruit picking. The trial starts from 1 July 2017 and will involve up to 7,600 participants. The measure responds to concerns about the ability of the Australian horticulture industry to attract sufficient numbers of seasonal workers.

There are three incentives aimed at increasing the number of job seekers who undertake horticultural seasonal work:

- a seasonal horticultural work income exemption allowing participants in the trial to earn up to \$5,000 each year from seasonal horticultural work without it being assessed under the social security income test (subject to passing of legislation);
- a seasonal work living away and travel allowance of up to \$300 for eligible job seekers where the job is more than 120 kilometres from their home; and
- a Provider Seasonal Work Incentive Payment of \$100 per week for up to six weeks to an employment services provider who successfully places an eligible job seeker in seasonal work as part of the trial.

To be eligible for the incentives, job seekers will need to be participating in jobactive, Transition to Work or Disability Employment Services. Job seekers must also have received Newstart or Youth Allowance (Other) continuously for at least three months.

Launch Into Work Pilot – Establishment

As part of the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government announced the establishment of the new Launch into Work program, anticipated to commence in May 2017.

This national program will improve employment outcomes for job seekers, including those in regional areas, by assisting them to become job ready. The program will provide targeted training, work experience and mentoring to prepare participants for employment.

Employers will use Launch into Work pre-employment projects to recruit for entry-level positions that have prospects for career growth. Projects will be conducted in metro and regional areas with employers across a range of industries, and incorporate a recruitment method that focuses on job seekers displaying certain values and attributes, rather than having specific qualifications or experience. Employers will be required to commit to employing suitable project participants who successfully complete the program.

The program will be primarily targeted at women, which supports Australia's G20 goal to increase women's workforce participation.

This measure delivers on the Australian Government's election commitment.

Youth Employment Package

The Australian Government's Youth Employment Package announced in the 2016-17 Budget gives young job seekers the employability skills and real work experience they need to get and keep a job. The Youth Employment Package assists regional Australia, particularly those areas experiencing high rates of youth unemployment. The main elements of the package are available to job seekers in all jobactive regions across Australia. The Youth Employment Package includes the following measures:

- Youth Jobs PaTH; and
- Encouraging Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment.

Youth Jobs PaTH – (Prepare – Trial – Hire)

The core of the Youth Employment Package is Youth Jobs PaTH for people under the age of 25 years. The pathway has three elements.

- **Prepare:** Employability Skills Training ensures young people understand what employers expect of them in the workplace, and equip them with the skills, attitudes and behaviours for them to be successful in a job. Since April 2017, job seekers in jobactive who are aged under 25 years receive training in the basic employability skills that businesses need, such as reliability, team work and punctuality. For most job seekers, the training becomes compulsory after five months in jobactive.
- **Trial:** a voluntary internship placement of between 4 and 12 weeks to give a young person valuable work experience and the chance to show an employer what they can do in the workplace. This initiative supports people aged 17 to 24 years who are on an eligible income support payment, registered with jobactive, Transition to Work or Disability Employment Services and have been in employment services for

six months or more. Businesses that host an intern receive a \$1,000 payment and the intern receives a \$200 fortnightly incentive.

- Hire: a Youth Bonus wage subsidy to support the employment of young people. A wage subsidy of up to \$10,000 is available to encourage businesses to hire, train and retain eligible young job seekers between 15 and 24 years of age, creating further job opportunities for young people. Eligible job seekers need to be registered with a jobactive or Transition to Work provider, have been in employment services for at least six months and have mutual obligation requirements.

Wage subsidies have also been streamlined to provide employers with easier access and more flexible arrangements (see below).

Encouraging Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment

The Youth Employment Package also included measures to encourage young Australians to start a business and create their own job. This builds on the success of the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, which has been helping job seekers establish viable small businesses for over 30 years.

Since December 2016, pathways for young people to pursue entrepreneurship and self-employment have been enhanced by:

- introducing two-week “Exploring Being Your Own Boss” workshops for up to 1,000 young people per year to give them a taste of what is involved in self-employment and entrepreneurship, with the option to undertake placements to gain first-hand experience in what it takes to run a small business;
- broadening the eligibility for the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme to allow access to training and mentoring for people who are not in employment, education or training, including those not on income support. Also, an additional 2,300 New Enterprise Incentive Scheme places have been funded each year, making a total of 8,600 places available annually;
- appointing Entrepreneurship Facilitators in three regions with high youth unemployment; Cairns, Hunter Valley (including Newcastle) and Launceston and North East Tasmania. Facilitators will bring together available services and programs and provide practical assistance to job seekers in the regions to develop their ideas into successful businesses; and
- the launching of the SelfStart online hub, which assists young people considering starting their own business to access inspirational and practical information on services available to support young Australians. SelfStart is available at jobactive.gov.au/selfstart.

Growing Jobs and Small Business Package

The Growing Jobs and Small Business Package announced in the 2015-16 Budget is building a stronger economy, creating the right conditions for Australian businesses to thrive and grow and helping those who are unemployed into work. Importantly, the Growing Jobs and Small Business package provides a significant additional investment

for new jobs initiatives. A National Work Experience Programme and redesigned wage subsidies provide incentives to employers to create employment opportunities for the unemployed. A Youth Employment Strategy will ensure young people are building employability skills that are relevant and targeted, and able to meet the needs and expectations of employers.

Wage Subsidies

Wage subsidies support the Australian Government's broader objectives of increasing workforce participation by providing a financial incentive to employers when they hire eligible job seekers. There are a number of wage subsidies available, including for job seekers who are long-term unemployed, Indigenous, parents, youth (under 30 years of age), and mature age (50 years or over) under the Restart Programme.

All wage subsidies were improved from 1 January 2017. The improvements mean:

- all payments are paid as a flat rate – no more complex pro-rata payments;
- providers have discretion to pay employers a kickstart payment of up to 40 per cent of the total wage subsidy, after four weeks of the job starting;
- wage subsidy agreements can be signed within 12 weeks (84 calendar days) after the job starts, instead of the previous 28 days;
- working hours are now more flexible with a requirement of an average of 20 hours per week over the six months of the Agreement;
- employers sign one Head Agreement and simply add a payment schedule for each new employee; and
- paid work trials can be included in a wage subsidy agreement, as long as they are not funded by the Employment Fund.

National Work Experience Programme

The National Work Experience Programme gives employers the opportunity to develop the skills of potential employees and test their suitability with lower risk and lower financial burden of hiring. Eligible job seekers can undertake voluntary work experience in businesses for up to 25 hours per week for four weeks. Participants continue to receive their income support payment and a supplement to assist with the costs of participating.

Transition to Work

The Transition to Work service for people aged 15 to 21 years offers intensive pre-employment support to participants to improve their work readiness and help them into work or education. The service providers support young people through strong connections with employers, community services and schools in their local area.

Empowering YOUth Initiatives

The Empowering YOUth Initiatives are testing new approaches to assist young people, 15 to 24 years of age and at risk of long-term welfare dependency, on the pathway to sustainable employment. A range of innovative initiatives in locations across the country, including regional locations, have been funded for a maximum of two years each. An evaluation of each initiative will provide learnings to inform future policy design and service delivery to young people.

jobactive

On 1 July 2015 the Australian Government introduced the jobactive employment services model to better meet the needs of job seekers and employers, promote stronger workforce participation and build a prosperous economy. jobactive is delivered from over 1,700 sites across Australia. jobactive providers have the flexibility to deliver services based on the needs of job seekers and employers, tailored to local labour market conditions. For the first time, specific Indigenous Outcome Targets have been incorporated into the jobactive performance framework to increase providers' focus on outcomes for Indigenous job seekers in regional and other parts of Australia.

Employment Fund

The Employment Fund is included within the budget for jobactive employment services model. All jobactive providers across Australia have access to the Employment Fund which is a flexible pool of funds that can be used to assist eligible job seekers to build the experience and skills to get and keep jobs. The Employment Fund has a focus on training that meets the specific needs of job seekers and employers, work-related items including clothing and safety equipment, post-placement support to help a job seeker stay in the job. Job seekers can also receive assistance for travel costs (including public transport, fuel or vehicle expenses), vehicle licences and driving lessons which are of particular importance to job seekers in rural and remote locations. The use of the Employment Fund is at the determination of the jobactive provider.

Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job Programme

The Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job Programme helps to connect job seekers to regional jobs by providing practical and financial assistance to eligible long-term unemployed job seekers who relocate to take up ongoing work. The Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job Programme provides relocation payments of up to \$6,000 for eligible job seekers who move to a regional area or up to \$3,000 for eligible job seekers who move to a metropolitan area. Families with dependent children can receive up to an extra \$3,000.

Work for the Dole

The jobactive Work for the Dole program was rolled out nationally on 1 July 2015. Work for the Dole provides work-like experiences for job seekers across Australia to help improve their job readiness and employability skills, as well as meeting their

mutual obligation requirements. At the same time, Work for the Dole provides an opportunity for job seekers to give back to their local community.

Employee Assistance – Protection for Unpaid Employee Entitlements

The Australian Government's Fair Entitlements Guarantee is a safety net of last resort to protect employees who lose their job through liquidation or bankruptcy of their employer and are left with certain unpaid employment entitlements. Employees in this situation may claim financial assistance under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee for unpaid wages, annual leave, long service leave, payment in lieu of notice and redundancy pay. Some eligibility conditions and payment thresholds apply. Further information including how to apply is available on the department's website at <https://www.employment.gov.au/fair-entitlements-guarantee-feg> or by calling the Fair Entitlements Guarantee Hotline on 1300 135 040.

Structural Adjustment Programs

A number of structural adjustment programs are in place to assist retrenched workers to transition to new employment as quickly as possible. They help to reduce the regional impacts of large-scale redundancies by providing retrenched workers from eligible companies with immediate access to intensive employment support services. Structural adjustment programs are available for workers in the automotive manufacturing industry as well as workers retrenched from companies including Arrium and Alinta Energy, Queensland Nickel, Caterpillar in Northern Tasmania and BlueScope Steel in the Illawarra. In 2016-17 a structural adjustment program was introduced for Hazelwood Power Station workers in the Latrobe Valley. The programs include employment facilitators in North Queensland, Gippsland, the Illawarra, Geelong, Whyalla/Port Augusta, Adelaide and North/North-West Tasmania. Support is also provided for migrant workers to obtain employment opportunities through the Nhill Migration Employment Coordinator.

Harvest Labour Services and National Harvest Information Service

Harvest Labour Services help employers in horticultural areas to supplement local labour with out-of-area workers where there is an acknowledged shortfall in a local labour market. Harvest Labour Services are delivered by five organisations through 15 sites across 11 harvest areas, in the Northern Territory and all States except Tasmania. The National Harvest Labour Information Service coordinates and disseminates information about harvest-related work opportunities across Australia, including those areas not serviced by Harvest Labour Services.

Seasonal Worker Programme

The Seasonal Worker Programme contributes to the economic development of ten participating countries by supporting workers to undertake certain low and unskilled jobs so they can work in Australia and send money back to their countries. It also assists Australian employers who are unable to source enough local workers to meet their seasonal labour needs by providing access to a reliable, returning

workforce. Over 90 per cent of seasonal workers undertake placements in the agriculture sector in regional Australia including in Robinvale, Mildura, Shepparton and Koo Wee Rup in Victoria, Griffith and Coffs Harbour in New South Wales, Renmark in South Australia, Cairns, Bowen and Mundubbera in Queensland, Katherine in the Northern Territory and Carnarvon, Margaret River, Kununurra and Broome in Western Australia. The ten countries participating in the Seasonal Worker Programme are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, all of which experience challenges such as small economies of scale, remoteness from larger markets and low levels of investment.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

The Environment and Energy portfolio supports the Australian Government in achieving a healthy environment, strong economy and thriving communities now and for the future. New and existing initiatives support strong and diverse regional economies through protecting and improving the natural asset base they rely on. Reliable and affordable energy provides the foundation for our economy and society to function.

In the 2017-18 Budget, the Australian Government has reconfirmed its commitment to the National Landcare Program – the primary mechanism for Australian Government investment in environment conservation and protection and sustainable land management. The program is delivering long-term improvements to Australia's biodiversity and natural resource condition by supporting communities to address national environmental, agricultural and Indigenous priorities that provide economic and social benefits locally and regionally. The program is administered collaboratively by the Department of the Environment and Energy and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Effective environmental management, including of our six Commonwealth national parks, fifty-nine Commonwealth marine reserves and nineteen World Heritage Areas including the Great Barrier Reef, helps to protect the country's most iconic natural destinations, Indigenous culture, unique ecosystems, biodiversity and threatened species. This work is critical to continued growth in nature based tourism sectors, which contribute more than \$23 billion to the Australian economy each year. This has significant positive impacts on regional economies and communities as the majority of nature based tourist destinations are located in regional areas.

Ensuring secure and affordable energy for regional Australia supports jobs, families and economic growth. The Environment and Energy portfolio is working with States and Territories to assess energy security and support the efficient operation of Australia's energy markets.

The Emissions Reduction Fund supports Australian businesses, farmers and landholders to take practical and direct action to reduce emissions. Around 80 per cent of all contracted emission reductions under the fund are from the land sector. Participants, including farmers, landholders and Indigenous communities, receive a stable diversified income stream, and incentives to implement new and better practices. The Environment and Energy portfolio contributes to the ongoing effort to understand the impacts of climate change so that response efforts are based on the best available science. The 2017 Review of Climate Change Policies will examine the impact of policies on jobs, investment, trade competitiveness, households and regional Australia.

The Environment and Energy portfolio has a strong presence in regional Australia through the work of the Department of the Environment and Energy, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Director of National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

NEW INITIATIVES

National Landcare Program

The Government has confirmed the allocation of funding from the Natural Heritage Trust for the next phase of the National Landcare Program, investing \$1.1 billion over seven years from 2016-17 to 2022-23. It includes \$100.0 million of additional funding for the National Landcare Program announced in December 2016, to support on-ground community projects that protect, restore and sustain our soils, water and the diversity of Australia's unique plants and animals and threatened species, including additional funding to expand Indigenous Protected Areas.

The next phase of the program will continue to improve natural resource management to protect Australia's iconic places, plants and animals, secure agricultural productivity gains and farm-gate returns and strengthen regional economies. The funding will ensure the valuable work of Landcare groups and Indigenous communities delivering on-ground biodiversity and sustainable agriculture outcomes continues.

Energy for the Future – Gas Supply and Affordability

In 2017-18, the Environment and Energy portfolio will work with the Industry, Innovation and Science portfolio to roll out the Australian Government's new \$86.3 million Gas Supply and Affordability measure. This measure is part of the Australian Government's Energy for the Future Package which takes significant steps to ensuring all Australians including those in regional communities, can access secure, reliable and affordable power as we transition to a low emissions future. The measure will deliver important reforms across Australia's gas market to secure reliable and affordable energy for Australian consumers.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Protection of Threatened Species

The Australian Government is working directly with local communities to protect the species that matter to them. Since the appointment of the Threatened Species Commissioner in June 2014, the Australian Government has mobilised \$210 million through programs to support threatened species recovery. The Commissioner's work is guided by the Threatened Species Strategy which has strong and measurable targets to tackle feral cats and recover Australia's threatened mammals, birds and plants. The Australian Government is investing \$5 million under the National Landcare Program

from 2016-17 to 2018-19 in the Threatened Species Recovery Fund to support community led threatened species projects aligned with the Strategy.

Feral cats endanger over 120 threatened species in Australia and have caused the extinction of ground-dwelling birds and small to medium-sized mammals. Feral cats are a threat to some farming livestock. Action to control feral cats is guided by the Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats and the Threatened Species Strategy. Priorities under the Threat Abatement Plan include: making toxic baits available for use across all of Australia, eradicating feral cats from islands, and establishing more fenced reserves free from feral cats to reduce pressure on threatened species.

The Australian Government has mobilised over \$30 million to feral-cat related projects since the appointment of the Threatened Species Commissioner in June 2014, including trials of new control methods such as grooming traps and baits. This complements the Department of Environment and Energy's development of the broad-scale toxic bait – called Curiosity® – which, once commercially available, could be aerially deployed over national parks and other key conservation sites. Curiosity® includes a new humane toxin in a small plastic pellet that is designed for feral cats, but not native wildlife, to consume.

Invest in Our Great Barrier Reef

As well as being one of the world's greatest natural assets, the Great Barrier Reef supports tourism, fishing, recreation, traditional uses, and research, which generate some 69,000 jobs and are worth \$5.6 billion a year to the Australian economy. The Australian Government's investments are helping to protect and preserve the Great Barrier Reef and to maintain environmental health and tourism activities in regional Queensland.

The Australian Government is continuing to deliver its joint commitment with the Queensland Government towards a \$2 billion investment in the reef over ten years.

Funding is being allocated towards 2016 election commitments including:

- \$6 million over three years from 2016-17 to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for a new Southern Reef Ranger vessel to enable better protection of the marine park against illegal fishing;
- \$1.3 million over two years from 2016-17 to develop a Citizens of the Great Barrier Reef web platform;
- \$400,000 over four years from 2016-17 for emerging science and partnership priorities; and
- \$150,000 over three years from 2016-17 to expand the Run for the Reef initiative beyond Port Douglas.

In the 2016-17 Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government committed \$49.1 million over five years from 2016-17 and \$15 million each year from

2021-22 to stabilise funding for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. This funding will enable the Authority to continue to deliver outcomes for the Great Barrier Reef, including supporting the operating costs for the new Southern Reef Ranger and delivery of the Australian Government's Reef 2050 Plan. Further, this funding will enable the Authority to undertake improvements to the Reef HQ Aquarium located in Townsville.

The Reef Funding Program, managed by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, has been established to tackle two of the biggest threats facing the Great Barrier Reef – climate change and the need to improve water quality. Through the Reef Funding Program, up to \$1 billion in investment finance (debt and equity) is available over ten years for clean energy projects that support delivery of the Reef 2050 plan, either directly (such as by improving water quality), indirectly (by reducing emissions primarily in reef catchment areas) or both. The Reef Funding Program was announced by the Government in June 2016 and commenced on 11 January 2017. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation has identified target sectors with the strongest potential to invest in clean energy projects through the Reef Funding Program, including agribusiness, tourism, renewables, property and infrastructure.

Support Your Local Parks and Environment

The Australian Government has committed \$30.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to the Support Your Local Parks and Environment election commitment. Under this commitment the Environment and Energy portfolio is supporting regional communities through funding of:

- \$22.8 million over four years from 2016-17 for the Improving Your Local Parks and Environment Program which supports communities across Australia to revitalise, maintain and improve local parks, nature reserves, rivers, coastal areas and community facilities, ensuring better and more accessible green spaces;
- \$6.2 million over three years from 2016-17 to the Solar Communities program which will support local responses to climate change and deliver lower electricity costs for community organisations. The program will provide funding for community groups in selected regions across Australia. Community groups will be able to install rooftop solar PV, solar hot water and solar-connected battery systems. Of this, \$1.2 million is being provided over two years from 2016-17 to support four food rescue charities to invest in solar photovoltaics, solar connected battery systems, energy efficient refrigeration systems and/or vehicles fitted with energy efficient refrigeration systems; and
- \$1.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to the Surf Life Saving Cleaner Outboard Engines Scheme which will provide grants to surf lifesaving clubs to upgrade outboard engines.

Director of National Parks

The Director of National Parks manages Australia's six Commonwealth national parks, the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and Australia's network of Commonwealth

marine reserves. The Director of National Parks employs around 200 staff in regional Australia. The majority are located at Booderee, Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta national parks and in Hobart. There are also small offices in the remote locations of Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

In Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Booderee national parks, the Aboriginal owners lease their land to be managed jointly with the Director of National Parks, to be protected as national parks for the enjoyment of all Australians. In addition to Aboriginal staff, trainees and apprentices, the parks provide service delivery agreements with local Aboriginal organisations and businesses. Trainee programs are designed to provide employment pathways for local people through on the job training in various aspects of park management, and the completion of nationally accredited certificates in conservation and land management.

Commonwealth Marine Reserves – Implementation

The Australian Government is providing \$56.1 million over four years from 2016-17 to implement new management arrangements for Commonwealth marine reserves. The funding will support the commercial fishing sector to adjust to changes and provide more opportunities for engagement with recreational fishers, community groups and dive operators. It will promote local growth in tourism and protect our unique aquatic assets. This investment will have a positive impact on regional Australia through targeted investments that support local marine businesses and increase regional engagement in marine reserve management.

Protecting National Historic Sites

The Protecting National Historic Sites program supports activities that protect, manage and conserve places on Australia's National Heritage List recognised for their historic values. The Australian Government will provide funding of \$17.7 million over four years from 2017-18 for this program. Many of the 66 eligible National Heritage places are found in regional Australia, each listed for local historic heritage values that have been considered of outstanding heritage value to the nation. Grant funding supports owners and managers in their efforts to better manage these places. The funding helps owners and managers promote the properties' values to local and regional communities and to visitors more broadly.

Macquarie Island Research Station

The Australian Government will provide \$49.8 million over 11 years from 2016-17 to build new scientific facilities on Macquarie Island and replace the existing research station. Macquarie Island is located in the Southern Ocean around 1,500 kilometres southeast of Tasmania. The island's location makes it important for Australia's contribution to a range of international scientific monitoring and Southern Ocean research programs. The Australian Government's continued operation of a year-round research station will ensure that high priority scientific, monitoring and management programs conducted on Macquarie Island continue. This includes continuing

meteorological observations at Macquarie Island, which contribute to international climate science programs.

The Antarctic and Southern Ocean sector was estimated to contribute \$187 million to the Tasmanian economy in 2011-12. The construction and ongoing operation of a new research station on Macquarie Island, including the provision of Hobart-based logistics support, will bring economic benefits to Tasmania. It will contribute to the development of Hobart and its surrounding area, as the premier logistics gateway and scientific research hub for East Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

Emissions Reduction Fund

The Emissions Reduction Fund creates positive incentives for Australians to adopt smarter practices and technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In less than three years, the Emissions Reduction Fund has achieved outstanding results. Funding of \$2.2 billion has been committed under contracts of up to ten years, involving 435 projects to deliver around 189 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emission reductions.

Regional Australia is benefiting from the fund, with a large proportion of projects outside capital cities. This includes projects that will allow native forests to regrow, store carbon in the soil and reduce methane emissions from the intensive livestock industry. In addition to reducing emissions and diversifying income streams, these projects have other social, economic and environmental benefits. For example, farmers are using revenue generated through the sale of carbon credits to invest in new and innovative farm practices. Savannah fire management projects in northern Australia deliver significant emission reductions and reduce late season wild bushfires. Of equal importance is that these projects improve the protection of cultural and environment values, allowing Indigenous people to remain living on country and to actively manage important cultural sites.

Clean and Renewable Energy Innovation – Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency

The Clean Energy Finance Corporation is working to mobilise capital investment in renewable energy, low emissions technology and energy efficiency in Australia through commercial loans, equity investments and limited loan guarantees. More than half of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation's investments support projects in regional Australia, including many in the agriculture sector. In February 2017, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to facilitate the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources providing assistance and support to the work of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to increase investment in the agribusiness sector.

Through a joint arrangement between the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, the Australian Government is delivering

\$200.0 million to invest through the Clean Energy Innovation Fund to provide debt and equity financing support for emerging clean energy projects and businesses. The funding is provided by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation for investment opportunities by businesses, including in regional Australia, to develop innovative clean energy projects and businesses. The Clean Energy Innovation Fund is building on the strong support the Clean Energy Finance Corporation is already providing in rural and regional Australia.

The Clean Energy Finance Corporation's Sustainable Cities Investment Program will make up to \$1 billion of investment finance at a rate of \$100 million a year over ten years, from 2016-17 for clean energy, renewable energy, and energy efficiency technology in cities, including major regional centres. This program will leverage private sector capital to accelerate the deployment of cutting-edge projects, such as next-generation transport management systems, green buildings, and new build plus retrofit of social and affordable housing.

The Australian Renewable Energy Agency has a long-standing focus on delivering energy innovation in regional Australia. The 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook reflected the restoration of \$800.0 million from 2017-18 to the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, giving the agency a greater capacity to support research and development. The agency is focusing on investments which increase the affordability and reliability of energy for Australians, including those in regional communities.

Between 2014 and 2016, the Regional Australia's Renewables initiative committed \$150.0 million across 14 projects to support communities and industry in regional Australia to use renewables. Four projects are designed to improve energy supply and security at the fringes of the electricity grid, including the Lakeland Solar and Storage project north-west of Cairns and the Barcaldine Solar Farm in central Queensland. The remaining projects displace diesel consumption in remote locations and include Degussa Solar Project located on a copper mine in Western Australia and several small systems supplying energy to Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

Through its large-scale solar photovoltaics competitive round the Australian Renewable Energy Agency is delivering \$88.9 million to 12 projects in regional Australia, from Collinsville in Queensland to Emu Downs in Western Australia.

The Australian Renewable Energy Agency is working to bring the next generation of renewables to market through pilots, trials and research in regional Australia. Examples include Carnegie Wave Energy in Western Australia, Vast Solar in New South Wales and Southern Oil's Biorefinery in Gladstone.

National Wind Farm Commissioner and the Independent Scientific Committee on Wind Turbines

The National Wind Farm Commissioner and the Independent Scientific Committee on Wind Turbines were appointed in 2015. The National Wind Farm Commissioner receives and refers complaints about wind farms from concerned community residents. The Commissioner is improving transparency of information and promotes best practice for industry and government to adopt in relation to proposed and operating wind farms.

The Independent Scientific Committee on Wind Turbines – an independent, multidisciplinary, expert group – is improving science and monitoring of the potential impacts of sound from wind turbines (including low frequency and infrasound) on health and the environment.

Antarctica – Maintaining Australia’s Presence

Australian Government funding for Antarctic science and environmental management continues to boost the Tasmanian economy, as Australia’s operational work for Antarctica out of Hobart contributes to employment and local investment. The Australian Government is progressing implementation of key priorities in the Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan. This includes the investigation of runway options to deliver year-round aviation access.

Through the *Antarctica – acquisition of new icebreaker* measure, the design of and preparation for construction of a new world-class icebreaker to support the Australian Antarctic Program has commenced. The icebreaker will be home-ported in Hobart.

Funding for the Australian Antarctic Program has flow on benefits for the Tasmanian economy. Sustainable funding for the Australian Antarctic Program ensures that the critical functions that support Australia’s presence and scientific research activities in Antarctica are maintained, and that Australia retains its influence in the Antarctic region. The Antarctic sector largely centres around the activities of the Australian Antarctic Division in Kingston and represents a significant element of Tasmania’s knowledge-based economy (including through employing and retaining staff in highly skilled jobs in scientific and research fields, and local specialised service industries). The Australian Antarctic Program is contributing to employment and investing locally through purchases for its operations.

National Environmental Science Program

The National Environmental Science Program assists decision-makers to understand, manage and conserve Australia’s environment by funding world-class biodiversity and climate science. The program supports on-ground scientific research across regional Australia delivered through six research hubs:

- the *Marine Biodiversity Hub* is researching Australian oceans and marine environments, including temperate coastal water quality and marine species, based in Hobart;
- the *Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub* is supporting the sustainable development of our northern landscapes, based in Darwin;
- the *Threatened Species Recovery Hub* is supporting the management of threats and improving recovery of threatened species, based in Brisbane;
- the *Tropical Water Quality Hub* is researching coastal water quality and coastal management focused on the Great Barrier Reef and other tropical waters, based in Cairns;
- the *Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub* is supporting environmental quality in urban areas, based in Melbourne; and
- the *Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub* is increasing our understanding of the drivers of Australia's climate, based in Melbourne.

Bureau of Meteorology

In the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided ongoing funding from 2017-18, including \$91.8 million over three years to 2019-20 to extend the Bureau of Meteorology's Water Information Program. The Bureau of Meteorology will continue to provide information and services that are critical to the profitability and productivity of Australian agriculture.

Regional engagement is integral to the delivery of Bureau services. The Bureau has seven regional offices that provide forecasts, warnings and long-term outlooks on weather, climate and water to a broad range of stakeholders and customers including the general public, regional industries such as primary producers, state and local government and emergency services agencies.

The Bureau's information on streamflow, storages, soil water, water use and markets, and water forecasts is essential for farmers, irrigators and rural water agencies, and supports Australia's international competitiveness and community well-being.

Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development

The Department of the Environment and Energy continues to support the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development, which provides advice to Australian governments on the water-related impacts of these proposals. The Department of the Environment and Energy is addressing critical gaps in the scientific understanding of the water-related impacts of developing coal and coal seam gas resources. This includes continuing to deliver targeted bioregional (regional scale) assessments of the impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining development on water resources in regions across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

Commonwealth Water Functions – Commonwealth Environmental Water Office

The Commonwealth Environmental Water holdings are managed so that increased flows of water are provided to protect and restore water dependent ecosystems throughout the Murray-Darling Basin. In the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government provided ongoing funding from 2017-18, including \$136.3 million over three years to 2019-20 to support the management of the Commonwealth's environmental water holdings. As at 31 January 2017, a total of 6,289 gicalitres of Commonwealth environmental water had been delivered to rivers, wetlands and floodplains of the Basin, contributing to the sustainability and amenity of these unique regional landscapes. Early results of the long term intervention monitoring program indicate that Commonwealth environmental watering has already made contributions to key environmental objectives in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder has recruited six local engagement officers working within the Basin, to assist members of the community participate in environmental water planning and decision making.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio's objective is to help make Australia stronger, safer and more prosperous by promoting and protecting Australia's interests internationally and contributing to global stability and economic growth. A prosperous regional Australia is at the core of these national interests.

Recognising the importance of regional Australia, the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio has a significant presence across Australia through offices of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade, Tourism Australia, the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation and over 1,600 Australia Post outlets delivering passport services. This is complemented by Australia's expanding international diplomatic network, which advances Australia's national interests around the world. In particular, the diplomatic network also connects regional Australia to export markets and investment opportunities, while advocating and promoting regional Australian interests. As an example, the heads of Australia's diplomatic network took the opportunity presented by the March 2017 Global Heads of Mission Meeting to engage with a range of stakeholders in rural and regional Australia, and State and Territory capitals.

Openness to international trade and investment is central to Australia's economic prosperity. The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio assists regional Australian companies to identify and pursue international commercial opportunities. This openness is underlined by Australia's many free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries including China, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio is working with regional Australian businesses to help them best realise the benefits of these FTAs, including through a program of information seminars across the country.

The Australian Government is working to drive regional growth by promoting foreign direct investment that is in the national interest and contributes to growth. Australia has a clear comparative advantage in agribusiness, resources and energy, all largely based in regional areas. In northern Australia, the portfolio is working to attract investment through 'gateway' infrastructure projects that will link Australia's north with the Indo-Pacific region, improving our ability to trade and access international markets.

Almost two-thirds of Australia's total export earnings come from regional industries. Where private financial markets are unable or unwilling to support regional business to take advantage of commercial export and overseas investment opportunities, the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio can provide practical support through working capital, insurance and other financial solutions. The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio is also supporting widespread efforts to help regional Australia benefit from labour mobility, including through the Seasonal Worker Program.

Tourism remains a key contributor to many regional economies as a significant source of income; 44 cents in every tourist dollar is spent in regional Australia. Working in partnership with State and Territory governments, industry and commercial partners, the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio is implementing programs to build demand and increase visitor numbers and spending. This includes encouraging tourists to regional areas.

NEW INITIATIVES

Supporting Jobs and Growth

The Australian Government is providing \$16.6 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-2020 for several new initiatives supporting jobs and growth, including across regional Australia, through trade and investment. As part of these initiatives, the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio is helping connect regional Australian producers to global export markets by: working towards the establishment of a single window for export documentation (supporting the Department of Immigration and Border Protection); pursuing the recognition of professional qualifications internationally; and expanding the portfolio's outreach activities to explain FTAs to the community.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Expanding Australia's Overseas Representation and Strengthening Australia's Ability to Trade and Attract Foreign Investment

The Australian Government has allocated \$57.9 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 for the expansion of the nation's diplomatic footprint. This includes new embassies in Rabat (Morocco) and Bogota (Colombia), and consulates in Surabaya (eastern Indonesia) and Shenyang (north-eastern China).

These new posts build on posts opened in 2016-17, including the embassies in Doha (Qatar) and Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia), and consulates in Lae (Papua New Guinea), Phuket (Thailand) and Makassar (Indonesia).

Australia's new diplomatic missions are bolstering trade and investment opportunities for regional Australia, including in the resources sector. They provide important gateways into emerging markets, helping businesses in regional Australia to capitalise on the opportunities available.

Helping Business Make the Most of Australia's Free Trade Agreements

Australia's ten FTAs – including with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea – provide Australian businesses with preferential access to markets and a legally guaranteed framework for trade and investment for the benefit of regional producers and service industries. FTAs deliver benefits to Australian exporters and investors that give them an immediate and longer-term competitive advantage over competitors including: significant elimination and cuts to import tariffs, including for Australian

beef, dairy, horticulture, wine, resources and energy and manufacturing sectors; and enhanced services market access in priority sectors such as education, professional and telecommunications services. Regional Australia will also benefit from reduced import costs for businesses and consumers.

To help regional Australian businesses connect with global markets, the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio conducts FTA information seminars for regional, rural and metropolitan businesses. The seminars complement the FTA Training Provider Grants program, which enables organisations across Australia to provide training to SME's on using the FTAs.

Additional to the FTA information seminar series and grants program, the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio works closely with other relevant agencies, industry groups, business associations and firms to gain information on barriers to trade and investment which is factored into FTA negotiating strategies, and to help promote FTAs to business stakeholders to encourage them to utilise the benefits of the agreements.

The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio is enhancing the Australian Government's online FTA portal by extending it to all ten of Australia's FTAs.

Bilateral, Regional and Plurilateral Trade Negotiations

The Australian Government is committed to further opening new markets and pursuing trade liberalisation and reforms globally. A core priority is to secure new market opportunities and greater certainty over operating conditions in sectors of particular importance to regional Australia, notably agriculture and food, resources, and services.

The Australian Government attaches a high priority to the conclusion of bilateral FTA negotiations with Indonesia, along with negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP, which involves ASEAN, China, Japan, India, the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand), and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus.

FTA negotiations with India are also ongoing and we are seeking the resumption of negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council. Steps have been taken toward the launch of FTA negotiations with the European Union, and discussions on a future possible FTA are underway with a number of countries including the United Kingdom and countries in Latin America.

In addition, the Australian Government is pursuing built-in work programs and negotiations under existing FTAs. A major review of the Singapore FTA in 2016 generated major outcomes on services and investment. Negotiations have also been launched with China to upscale the commitments in the China-Australia FTA (ChAFTA) on services and investment.

World Trade Organization (WTO)

Australia continues to support the WTO multilateral trade rules system, including as the primary mechanism for resolving disputes, and is actively seeking to achieve outcomes that would generate benefits for the rural and regional economy, notably in the area of agriculture where Australia has led the Cairns Group coalition of countries for more than 30 years in support of agricultural trade reform. While FTAs open new markets, only in the WTO can disciplines be agreed to address trade-distorting measures such as subsidies.

At the next WTO ministerial meeting in Argentina in December 2017, Australia will work with others, including the Cairns Group, to continue to press for further reforms in key sectors that will support open world trade and compliance with WTO rules.

The entry into force in February 2017 of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation will free up the movement of goods across international borders and will deliver practical benefits to regional Australian businesses who import or export, as well as to Australian consumers, through reduced costs.

The Government also continues its efforts to accede to the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement, and to conclude the plurilateral Environmental Goods Agreement and the Trade in Services Agreement, a services-only negotiation covering around 70 per cent of world services trade, which will benefit regional services suppliers.

Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement

Although the US Administration has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), the Government is engaged in discussions with other TPP signatories to explore options that would enable the economic and commercial benefits of the agreement to be captured. These discussions reflect a view by Australia and other TPP parties on the significance of the agreement in terms of new access opportunities and trade-enhancing rules as well as its value as a contribution to the long-term goal of regional economic integration.

Advancing Economic Reforms and Regulatory Coherence Globally and Addressing Non-Tariff Measures

The Australian Government is pursuing a more open and predictable business environment, by engaging in discussions to promote economic reforms, regulatory coherence and structural reforms in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, the OECD, Codex and the World Customs Organization (WCO). These organisations establish or influence standards and norms that can impact Australia's commercial interests.

The Australian Government is active in addressing non-tariff measures (NTMs). Our FTAs and WTO processes provide avenues for doing this. WTO rules are designed to ensure that Members apply regulations in a manner that is not more trade restrictive

than necessary to fulfil a legitimate policy objective. Australia regularly raises concerns about the WTO consistency of particular NTMs through various WTO committees.

TradeStart

TradeStart delivers Austrade's export advisory services through local public sector and industry organisations throughout Australia. The prime objective of the TradeStart network is to assist export ready SMEs to develop international markets for their products and services.

Of the 28 TradeStart locations, 23 are in regional areas, providing greater access to Austrade services for businesses in these regions. Recent investments in IT platforms will allow regional businesses, through TradeStart, to digitally connect to Austrade's global network.

TradeStart advisers provide practical export advice to around 2,000 export-ready companies throughout Australia each year, and work closely with the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio's international network to facilitate assistance for these exporters in overseas markets.

Attracting Investment into Northern Australia

The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio is working to attract investment in northern Australia through 'gateway' infrastructure projects linking Australia's north to the Indo-Pacific region, improving our ability to access international markets.

As part of this, Austrade will continue to support regional businesses by providing international investors with information about the various forms of land tenure and native title across northern Australia as part of a broader approach to informing investors about opportunities. Austrade will also work with selected Indigenous landholders to develop case studies on how project proponents can work with investors.

The Northern Australia Agribusiness Partnership is also helping encourage investment-led development of northern Australia.

Austrade will continue to hold the Northern Australian Investment Forum to build investor engagement, highlight progress and opportunities, and demonstrate government and community commitment, including state and territory buy-in, to foreign investment in northern Australia. The next forum is scheduled for late 2017.

Promoting Foreign Direct Investment

The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio will continue to build on its investment promotion work, which was strengthened in 2015-16 with new funding of \$30 million over four years. Austrade and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will continue to promote Australia's credentials and develop our position as a preferred investment destination.

EficDirect

The Export Finance and Insurance Corporation (Efic) has developed an online platform that allows Australian SMEs to apply for export finance entirely online. This is in line with the Australian Government's focus on making it easier for SMEs to do business. The platform – called 'EficDirect' – has a quick, simple and efficient application process, which can be completed in as little as 30 minutes and a loan could be provided within nine business days. Online access will be particularly beneficial for SME exporters that are based in remote areas of Australia.

Labour Mobility

The Australian Government's Seasonal Worker Program, led by the Department of Employment and supported by the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio, assists in addressing the low-skilled seasonal labour needs of Australian employers. Since its launch in 2012, the Seasonal Worker Program has enabled 14,000 workers from participating Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste to undertake seasonal work in Australia's agriculture sector, the accommodation sector (in selected locations) and northern Australia tourism industries.

In addition, the Northern Australia-Pacific Microstates Pilot Program, launched in June 2015, aims to bring up to 250 workers from Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu to undertake non-seasonal work for two to three years in Australia, focused on the tourism and aged-care sectors. Both the Seasonal Worker Program and the Northern Australia-Pacific Microstates Pilot Program help address labour shortages in regional Australia, support Australian businesses and grow regional economies, where there are not enough local Australian job seekers to meet demand.

The Australian Government has also sought to ensure Australia remains an attractive destination for working holidaymakers through a global youth-targeted advertising campaign.

New Colombo Plan

The Australian Government's New Colombo Plan gives undergraduates from around Australia the opportunity to participate in study and internship programs in the Indo-Pacific region. Since 2014, close to 20 per cent of New Colombo Plan scholarship recipients have been from regional and remote areas. The numbers of student grants provided to regional universities under the New Colombo Plan increased by 40 per cent in 2017. The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio will continue to promote the benefits of the New Colombo Plan in deepening relationships between Australia and the region, both at the individual level and through expanding university, business, people-to-people and other links.

Promoting International Education

Austrade continues to work closely with the Department of Education and Training to promote opportunities for regional Australia under the *National Strategy for*

International Education 2025 and *Australian International Education 2025*, including by working with education institutions and regional providers to internationalise their business.

The *Future Unlimited* education brand launched in 2011 for promoting Australian education internationally is administered by Austrade and is available for use by regional providers – demonstrating the positive outcomes of an Australian education. Austrade also continues to manage the Study in Australia website (www.studyinaustralia.gov.au), the official Australian Government platform, which provides information for existing and potential international students and showcases regional study locations in each jurisdiction. The social media and marketing channels managed by Austrade are further used to repurpose and leverage marketing content produced across Australia and are open to joint-campaigns and activity to showcase regional opportunities.

International Agricultural Research

The Australian Government is committed to improving agricultural productivity and profitability throughout the Indo-Pacific region, with significant flow-on benefits for regional Australia in areas such as biosecurity, innovation, technology, research capabilities and trade. Through the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Australia's world class agricultural researchers in a range of State and Commonwealth agencies, universities and the private sector are working with counterparts in developing countries to enhance and promote agricultural competitiveness and sustainability, increased market access, and value-chain efficiencies and effectiveness. These benefits also flow back to Australia's agricultural industries.

Export Market Development Grants Scheme

The Export Market Development Grants scheme is a key Australian Government financial assistance scheme. It encourages small to medium-sized, aspiring and growing export-ready businesses to increase international marketing and promotional expenditure to achieve more sustainable export sales.

Administered by Austrade, the Export Market Development Grants scheme reimburses up to 50 per cent of eligible export promotion expenses above \$5,000 provided the total expenses are over \$15,000. Subject to available funds, the maximum grant for eligible applicants is \$150,000.

Of the 2,969 grants paid for the 2014-15 grant year, more than 17 per cent were awarded to recipients from rural and regional Australia, providing almost \$18.0 million in financial support to 515 regional recipients (up from 441 in the 2013-14 grant year).

Australia Week Events

The Australian Government will continue to create opportunities for businesses from regional and metropolitan areas to build and expand their business ties overseas. Austrade will deliver business-focused missions in important markets to showcase Australian capabilities and investment opportunities and promote Australia as a world-class tourism destination and education partner. This will build on the success of Australia Week events in China (2014 and 2016), Indonesia (2015 and 2017), India (2015) and the United States (2016).

Tourism

Australia's Tourism 2020 national tourism strategy aims for over \$115 billion in overnight visitor expenditure by the end of the decade. It includes initiatives such as Tourism Employment Plans, Major Project Facilitation and the Tourism Demand-Driver Infrastructure Program. These programs will help regional communities grow jobs and diversify their economic base.

Practical initiatives, including Tourism Employment Plans, help regional businesses build a skilled tourism workforce. Pilot plans have been completed in eight 'hot spot' regions, addressing recruitment, retention and up-skilling needs across Broome, Red Centre, Mornington Peninsula-Phillip Island, Kangaroo Island, Tropical North Queensland, Canberra, Sydney, and in the North West and West coast of Tasmania.

The Australian Government's "There's nothing like Australia" global marketing campaign highlights the attractions and experiences Australian tourism has to offer. The campaign currently focuses on promoting beach, coastal and inland aquatic tourism experiences, including the Great Barrier Reef and Great Ocean Road. Tourism Australia will also continue the Restaurant Australia campaign and support campaigns focused on business events, youth and working holidaymakers, and Indigenous tourism experiences, all of which resonate strongly in regional Australia.

In response to Tropical Cyclone Debbie's damaging impact on Queensland's tourism sector the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, together with the Queensland Government, has announced an additional \$3.5 million to the Tourism Demand Driver Infrastructure Program. This will be allocated to individual infrastructure programs in cyclone affected tourism regions. Additionally, up to \$1 million of Tourism Australia's marketing investment will be reprioritised to promote Queensland tourism destinations.

Regional Tourism Infrastructure Investment Attraction Strategy

Austrade and Tourism Australia have also developed a five-year *Regional Tourism Infrastructure Investment Attraction Strategy* that will better coordinate efforts to attract foreign investment into regional tourism infrastructure.

Landing Pads in Innovation Hot Spots

As part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda, Austrade has established five Landing Pads in Berlin, San Francisco, Shanghai, Singapore and Tel Aviv. Landing Pads provide market-ready start-ups from right across Australia with access to some of the world's most renowned innovation and start-up ecosystems. The immersive environment is designed to accelerate the development of a start-up's product or service business model by exploring in-market business development, investment, mentorship and strategic partnership opportunities.

HEALTH

The Australian Government recognises that people living outside the major Australian cities can face barriers in accessing the same range of health and aged care services as those living in urban areas. To help with these barriers, the Australian Government directs significant assistance to improving the quality of, and access to, health and aged care services for people living outside metropolitan areas.

The Australian Government has worked to improve health outcomes in regional areas and is continuing this effort with the aforementioned benefits. These improvements arise from the delivery of services tailored to meet the needs of local communities and improvements in the coverage of the health workforce. Additionally, Rural and Regional Health Australia provides easily accessible information about health programs in regional Australia through its website (see www.ruralhealthaustralia.gov.au) and its free call 1800 020 103 telephone line.

Assistance is provided through general health programs, and programs targeted specifically at regional Australia, where the Australian Government provides funding to address factors that specifically impact on the health and wellbeing of people living in rural and remote communities. In addition, substantial Australian Government assistance is provided to States and Territories through various specific purpose payments, with a significant amount directed to people living in regional Australia.

The Australian Government continues to provide targeted initiatives and incentives to improve service delivery and the health workforce in regional, rural and remote Australia. These initiatives and incentives have resulted in, but are not limited to:

- tailored services that meet the needs of local communities;
- increased accessibility to services; and
- improvements to workforce coverage and distribution.

Of particular note, in 2017-18 the Australian Government will provide \$4.4 million over four years to support the National Rural Health Commissioner; an independent, statutory position, supported by departmental staff. The National Rural Health Commissioner will work with rural, regional and remote communities, the health sector, universities, specialist training colleges and across all levels of government to better target and address the health needs in rural and remote Australia, and champion the cause of rural practice.

NEW INITIATIVES

Prioritising Mental Health – Improving Telehealth for Psychological Services in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia

The Enhance Telehealth Access for Psychological Services in Rural and Regional Australia measure will remove barriers to telehealth through enabling better access to psychological services in rural and regional Australia via a range of telehealth delivery channels. This will provide \$9.1 million over four years from 2017-18 to increase access to psychological services for those living in rural and remote areas who would otherwise have limited access to those services. Access via telehealth will allow appropriate health professionals to connect with patients sooner than otherwise might have been the case, and without the time and expense involved in travelling to major cities or larger regional centres.

National Partnership Agreement on Rheumatic Fever Strategy – Continuation and Expansion

The Australian Government will provide funding of \$18.8 million over four years from 2017-18 to the Rheumatic Fever Strategy. The strategy supports the prevention and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease in Indigenous communities, including those in regional and remote areas, through:

- state-based register and control programs to improve detection, monitoring and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease; and
- national coordination to develop national education and training resources, support jurisdictions and establish a data collection system.

Strengthening Aged Care – My Aged Care – Operations

The Australian Government will provide funding of \$3.1 million in 2017-18 for ICT systems support to keep the My Aged Care platform operating for one year. My Aged Care supports over 1 million older people to access the \$17 billion of aged care services funded by the Australian Government annually.

Strengthening Aged Care – Developing an Aged Care Workforce Strategy

The Australian Government will establish an aged care industry-led Taskforce to explore short, medium and longer term options to boost supply, address demand and improve productivity for the aged care workforce. It will also harness existing employment services to match local job seekers to local jobs and establish regional coordinators to support providers adjust to a rapidly expanding competitive market based on consumer choice and control for both the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the aged care sector.

Supporting Living Organ Donors – Continuation and Expansion

The Supporting Living Organ Donors Program will provide funding of \$4.1 million over four years from 2017-18 to ensure that cost is not a barrier to living organ donors to donate.

The Supporting Living Organ Donors Program is a continuation and expansion of the Australian Government's Supporting Leave for Living Organ Donors Program that will cease on 30 June 2017.

The Supporting Living Organ Donors Program will continue to make a financial contribution to employers to either replenish an employee's leave or reimburse an employer who has made a payment to their employee (who may have exhausted their leave) in place of income lost due to organ donation.

From 1 July 2017, the Supporting Living Organ Donors Program will be expanded to allow donors to claim reimbursement for some out-of-pocket expenses, enabling donors who are not employed to participate. As transplant units are based in major metropolitan hospitals, providing for some out-of-pocket expenses will particularly assist living donors from regional or rural Australia.

Preventative Health – Targeted Activities

The Healthy Heart Initiative will invest \$15.0 million over four years from 2017-18 to implement the Prime Minister's January 2017 Press Club announcement of a focus on preventive health. It will address the critical preventive health focus of cardio-vascular programs through partnerships with the Heart Foundation and General Practitioners:

- \$10.0 million over four years for the PM's Walk for Life Challenge, designed to raise awareness of the benefits of physical activity and start a national conversation about being more physically active, delivered through both schools and universities as well as broader community networks; and
- \$5.0 million over four years to develop education and training material to enhance the knowledge and skills of General Practitioners to more effectively manage and support overweight/obese patients.

Prioritising Mental Health – Research

The Mental Health Research measure will invest \$15.0 million over two years from 2017-18 to support mental health research within Australia by providing one off funding that will contribute to infrastructure and research targeted at mental health.

BreastScreen Australia Program – Additional Support

This measure will provide \$64.3 million over four years from 2017-18 to continue an expansion of the BreastScreen Australia program to actively invite women aged 70-74 years to participate in the program, through agreements with States and Territories which will be extended for a further four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21. The program includes a number of initiatives to encourage participation by women living in regional areas, including mobile BreastScreen units.

Cancer Screening – Victorian Cytology Service – Continuation

This measure will provide \$41.6 million over four years from 2017-18 to continue services delivered under an agreement with the Victorian Government for its Cytology Service which provides high-quality cytology services to support cervical screening. As part of these services, the Victorian Cytology Service will also continue to assess cervical screens taken by nurses and Aboriginal Health Workers, which provides important flexibility to ensure equal participation in regional areas.

Improving Access to Medicines – Maintaining Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services Pharmaceutical Dispensing

From 1 January 2018, arrangements will be established to enable eligible pharmacists, providing Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines that are labelled for individual chronic disease patients who are clients of Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services, to be able to claim these as standard Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme items and to receive the applicable remuneration.

Proposed Options for Communities Affected by Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Contamination

The Australian Government will provide \$12.5 million over four years to establish a national research program into the human health effects of prolonged exposure to per and poly-fluoroalkyl (PFAS) contamination. This funding also includes the establishment and administration of an expert health panel, which will use its expertise to identify research priorities and gaps in the knowledge base.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Rural Health Workforce Support Program

The Rural Health Workforce Support Program consolidates the International Recruitment Strategy and Rural and Remote General Practice Programme. Under this program, the Australian Government funds the Rural Workforce Agencies (one in every State, and the Northern Territory) to support the rural health workforce in three priority areas:

- **Health Workforce Access:** to improve access and continuity of access to essential primary health care, particularly in priority areas identified by the Department of Health and through the Health Workforce Needs Assessment process involving a jurisdictional Health Workforce Planning Stakeholder Group.
- **Improving Workforce Quality:** to build local health workforce capability with a view to ensuring communities can access the right health professional at the right time; and ensuring health practitioners have the right skills and qualifications for their positions.
- **Building a Sustainable Workforce:** to grow the sustainability and supply of the health workforce with a view to strengthening the long-term access to appropriately qualified health professionals, with consideration of continuity and growing the sustainability of the health workforce.

Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia

Central to the Australian Government's mental health reforms is a regional approach to service planning and integration, and better matching of services to individual needs. The Australian Government's response to the Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services takes a whole of system perspective, enabling Australian Government services to complement the role of States and Territories in mental health care.

In 2016-17, the Australian Government commenced implementing its mental health reform agenda, with an immediate focus on initiating the delivery of the expanded Primary Health Network role, child and youth integration, the Digital Mental Health Gateway and the new community-based approach to suicide prevention.

In 2017-18, work will continue on the phased implementation of the reforms and will be combined with the election commitments under the Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia measure announced in the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. The focus will include expansion of the headspace network, suicide prevention trials across 12 sites in regional Australia, and build on the investment in digital services, including through enhancement and promotion of the Digital Mental Health Gateway. The Digital Gateway will bring together and streamline access to existing evidence-based information, advice and digital mental health treatment and will connect people to the services they need through a centralised telephone and web portal, including for people in regional and rural areas.

Headspace – Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia

The Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia measure provides an additional \$28.9 million over three years from 2017-18 for an additional ten headspace centres across Australia by 2019. These additional headspace services will assist to increase access for young people aged 12-25 years living in regional and remote areas, increasing headspace services from 100 to 110 across Australia.

Funding will be provided to Primary Health Networks as the current commissioners of headspace services to promote integration and regional approaches in the delivery of headspace services for young people.

Suicide Prevention Trial Sites – Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia

The Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia measure provides an additional \$34.0 million over three years from 2016-17 to fund the implementation and evaluation of 12 suicide prevention trial sites in identified priority areas. The trials will be led by Primary Health Networks and will bring together the best evidence-based strategies and models to better target people at risk of suicide and to ensure a more integrated, regionally-based approach to suicide prevention.

The national suicide prevention trial will also improve our understanding of what strategies are most effective in preventing suicide at a local level and for at-risk

populations. Findings from the trial will be made available to all Primary Health Networks to guide future suicide prevention activities, and will inform Australian Government policy development going forward.

The Australian Government is also providing \$11.1 million over three years from 2017-18 as part of the measures Investing in Mental Health – suicide prevention support programs, to help prevent suicide at high risk locations.

New Investment in Digital Technologies for Mental Health – Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia

The Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia measure provides an additional \$32.4 million over three years from 2016-17 to support a new investment in digital technologies which will support regional access to services. Funding will enable Project Synergy, which has been trialled as an online system of care, to continue as a research and capacity building project. Synergy will trial customised IT-based solutions, and develop the next generation of digital mental health services and apps. Funding will also enable Lifeline Australia to trial a new text service for crisis support and suicide prevention.

Youth Mental Health – Early Psychosis Youth Services Program – Strengthening Mental Health Care in Australia

The Australian Government will provide \$115.6 million over three years from 2016-17 to continue efforts to reduce the impact of severe mental illness on young Australians aged 12-25 and their families by restoring funding to six Early Psychosis Youth Services in South East Melbourne, Western Sydney, Gold Coast, North Perth, Darwin and Adelaide. During this time, the program will be independently evaluated. Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, will provide guidance, support and expert advice to Primary Health Networks commissioning early intervention services for young people with, or at risk of, severe mental illness, including early psychosis.

Rural Health Commissioner and Pathway for Rural Professionals – Establishment

The Australian Government is providing \$4.4 million over four years from 2016-17 to establish a National Rural Health Commissioner to provide advice on opportunities to reform rural health services, including the development of a National Rural Generalist Pathway for the training of rural doctors.

Elimination of Trachoma in Indigenous Communities – Extension

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$20.8 million to States and Territories for the elimination of trachoma in Indigenous communities for four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to reduce the incidence of trachoma. Trachoma continues to be a significant problem in hotspots in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. Continued investment supports screening and treatment of children and provides an increased focus on health hygiene and efforts to improve environmental conditions.

Medicare Benefits Schedule – Listing of Photography with Non-Mydriatic Retinal Cameras

This measure will provide \$33.8 million over four years from 2016-17 to list new items onto the Medicare Benefits Schedule to cover the testing of Diabetic Retinopathy with a non-mydriatic retinal camera. This service will benefit approximately 370,000 people with diabetes, of which approximately a quarter are Indigenous. The introduction of this service will improve the monitoring of diabetic eye disease especially in rural and remote regions and amongst Indigenous populations. Complications from diabetes, including blindness, are expensive to the health care system and are easily prevented if diagnosed early through this type of service.

Medicare Benefits Schedule – Support for Rural and Remote Registrars

This measure, which is providing \$8.0 million over four years from 1 November 2016, enables general practice registrars training on the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine Independent Pathway to claim Medicare benefits (at the A1 level 1) for the services they provide whilst training. Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine is one of two colleges accredited by the Australian Medical Council for setting professional medical standards for training, assessment, certification and continuing professional development in the specialty of general practice. Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine Fellows receive full vocational recognition for A1 Medicare rebates and may practise unsupervised anywhere in Australia (A1 is a consultation type where there is personal attendance by a practitioner. The personal attendance of the medical practitioner upon the patient is necessary before a consultation may be regarded as a professional attendance).

This measure will have a positive impact on regional Australia, as registrars training on the Independent Pathway are likely to be providing services in regional and rural areas during their training. The program also leads to Fellowship of the College; the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine advises that most of their Fellows choose to practise in rural and remote communities so that they can fully utilise the scope of clinical skills and knowledge they have gained through the Fellowship program.

Management of Per- and Poly-Fluorinated Alkyl Substances at Defence Bases

The Australian Government will provide \$14.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to undertake human health related initiatives to support communities in Williamstown, New South Wales, and Oakey, Queensland affected by Per- and Poly-Fluorinated Alkyl Substance (PFAS) contamination. These initiatives include:

- an epidemiological study that will look at potential causes and patterns of health effects in the Williamstown and Oakey communities;
- a Voluntary Blood Testing Program for those who have lived or worked in the Williamstown and Oakey investigation areas;
- additional dedicated mental health and counselling services in affected communities of Williamstown and Oakey; and

- a communication strategy focusing on human-health related aspects of PFAS contamination.

Rural General Practice Grants Programme

This measure will provide \$13.1 million over two years from 2016-17 to support the whole-of-government priority of strategic investments in health infrastructure in rural, regional and remote Australia, and supports general practice to deliver increased health services and increased opportunities to provide teaching and training for health practitioners. The Rural General Practice Grants Programme will provide grants of up to \$300,000 to general practices and is intended to deliver improved health services through additional infrastructure, increased levels of teaching and training for health practitioners, and more opportunities to deliver 'healthy living' education to local communities.

Healthier Medicare – Trial of Health Care Homes

In 2017-18 the Australian Government will commence service delivery of the Health Care Homes trial in 200 general practices and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services across Australia, including rural and remote regions. A total of \$21.3 million has been allocated to support the measure from 2015-16 over four years to better support patients with chronic and complex illnesses, reducing the risk of hospitalisation. This is in addition to \$93.3 million in re-directed funding from the Medicare Benefits Schedule for two years from 2017-18. Participating practices are located across ten Primary Health Network regions, including rural and remote areas.

With many aspects of the Health Care Homes model already in place in regional and remote general practices and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services across the country, this initiative will support them to formalise their approach and build on local innovative solutions.

An evaluation of the impacts of the trial will be conducted and a report considered in 2018.

Rural Locum Assistance Programme

The Rural Locum Assistance Programme supports the health workforce in rural locations by enabling eligible allied health professionals, obstetricians and anaesthetists to access continuing professional development or to take leave for recreation purposes. The Programme also provides an opportunity for urban General Practitioners to experience regional and rural practice by enabling them to undertake emergency medicine training in return for a commitment to undertake a locum placement in regional and rural Australia.

Drug and Alcohol Programme

The Drug and Alcohol Programme provides funding of \$685.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 and aims to reduce the impact of alcohol and other drugs on individuals, families and communities across Australia through funding a range of activities that will improve access to quality alcohol and other drug treatment services

and improve the evidence base behind alcohol and other drug treatment approaches and related issues.

These activities include:

- funding non-government organisations to operate a range of drug and alcohol treatment services;
- supporting alcohol and other drug treatment services across Australia to provide better outcomes for clients through a range of capacity building activities;
- supporting early intervention and prevention activities relating to alcohol and other drug misuse and promoting evidence-based information about alcohol and other drugs through education;
- supporting the development of evidence-based alcohol and other drug treatment service delivery and national policy through research and data collection; and
- supporting the development of evidence-based alcohol and other drug treatment service delivery commissioned through Primary Health Networks across Australia and national policy through structured advisory mechanisms.

These activities are all available in regional and rural areas.

The Australian Government's Response to the National Ice Taskforce Final Report

In response to the findings of the National Ice Taskforce, the Australian Government is providing an extra \$298.2 million over four years from 2016-17 towards a number of measures aimed at reducing the impacts associated with ice and other drugs to individuals, families and communities. This funding will strengthen responses across education, prevention, treatment, support and community engagement.

A number of these measures focus on empowering local communities, including those within regional areas, with the establishment of a new online portal of information for parents, teachers and community organisations, the implementation of Local Drug Action Teams to bring together community groups to reduce drug related harms, with a focus on ice, and support for community sporting clubs to deliver prevention messages about ice with a focus on rural, regional, remote and Indigenous communities.

This additional investment also includes \$241.5 million for Primary Health Networks to commission more alcohol and other drug treatment services, with a focus on ice, including \$78.6 million for Indigenous-specific services, based on what is necessary and appropriate to the needs of their local communities. Primary Health Networks are well-placed to fund local services according to agreed evidence and based on population planning, to ensure the coordination of services across the continuum of care.

National Tobacco Campaign

In 2017-18, the Government will allocate \$6.9 million to continue to support the National Tobacco Campaign. The National Tobacco Campaign forms part of the Australian Government's comprehensive range of initiatives designed to contribute to a reduction in the prevalence of adult daily smoking rates.

Macular Disease Foundation

The Macular Disease Foundation provides education to general practitioners on macular disease and awareness sessions to the general public on macular disease and diabetic retinopathy across urban, regional and rural locations.

Macular Disease Foundation is funded by the Australian Government under the Health Peak and Advisory Bodies Programme to:

- share information with the health sector and community in relation to the eye diseases macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy; and
- provide training and education to general practitioners in relation to macular degeneration.

Funding of \$1.4 million for the period 2015-16 to 2018-19 is provided to the Macular Disease Foundation to undertake this work across urban, regional and rural locations.

Closing the Gap Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Co-Payment Measure

The Closing the Gap Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Co-payment Measure improves access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines for eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with, or at risk of, chronic disease in urban and rural settings. This measure lowers or removes the patient co-payment for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines. More than 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people benefit from the measure each month, many in regional and rural areas.

Section 100 Remote Area Aboriginal Health Service Programme

The Remote Area Aboriginal Health Service Programme is administered under section 100 of the *National Health Act 1953* and allows for the supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines to clients of eligible remote area Aboriginal Health Services at the time of medical consultation, without the need for a normal prescription form, and without charge.

The Remote Area Aboriginal Health Service Programme aims to address geographic, financial and cultural barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in remote areas of Australia in accessing essential medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Section 100 Remote Area Pharmacy Support Allowance

The Section 100 Remote Area Aboriginal Health Service program provides an annual financial allowance that supports visits by pharmacists to provide targeted quality use of medicines and medication management support services to remote area Aboriginal

Health Services which participate in the program. The visits assist in improving health outcomes for clients of remote area Aboriginal Health Services by supporting quality use of medicines at those services.

Remote Area Pharmaceutical Dispensing – Additional Remuneration

From 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017, surplus funding from the Section 100 Remote Area Pharmacy Support Allowance will be redirected to provide additional remuneration to eligible pharmacists providing Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme medicines that are labelled for individual chronic disease patients who are clients of Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services (rather than just in bulk). This is an interim measure pending establishment of longer term arrangement and is expected to cost approximately \$3.3 million.

Medication Management Review Programmes

These Medication Management Review Programmes aim to improve the quality use of medicine and reduce the risk of medication misadventure, including in rural and remote areas. Services include Home Medicines Review and the Residential Medication Management Review, which are conducted by an accredited pharmacist in the consumer's home or in an Australian Government funded aged care facility respectively. The Home Medicines Review Programme also includes a Rural Loading Allowance to provide support to pharmacists to enable patients in rural and remote locations to access this Programme. Other services include the MedsCheck and Diabetes MedsCheck, which aim to improve the use of medicine by providing an in-pharmacy review of a patient's medicines by a registered pharmacist.

Pharmacy Practice Incentives Programme

The Pharmacy Practice Incentives Programme provides incentives to community pharmacies, including those in rural and regional areas, which deliver services to consumers to a defined quality standard, with the goal of improving patient health outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Pharmacy Workforce Programme

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Pharmacy Workforce Programme supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the pharmacy workforce, which in turn provides improved culturally appropriate pharmacy services to better meet the needs of Indigenous communities and patients. It is preferred that applicants for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pharmacy Scholarship Scheme are from rural or remote localities, although, this is not mandatory. Sixteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pharmacy Assistant traineeships are offered annually, with up to \$10,000 available to a community pharmacy that employs and supports a trainee through the course of their studies (up to two years). Three undergraduate or post graduate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pharmacy scholarships of up to \$15,000 per annum are offered annually. The normal course length is four years (students can access up to \$60,000 over the period of their degree).

Rural Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance

This Rural Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance is paid monthly to eligible rural or remote Section 90 pharmacies, in recognition of the additional burden of maintaining a pharmacy in rural and remote areas of Australia.

Rural Pharmacy Workforce Programme

This Rural Pharmacy Workforce Programme aims to maintain and improve access to quality community pharmacy services in rural and remote communities and strengthen and support the rural and remote pharmacy workforce in Australia. It comprises various initiatives designed to recruit, train and retain pharmacists for rural and remote areas, including undergraduate scholarships, intern support, professional development support and an emergency locum scheme. There are 30 Rural Pharmacy Scholarships offered annually of up to \$10,000 per annum. The normal course length is four years (students can access up to \$40,000 over the period of their degree).

Streamlining Health Workforce Scholarships

This measure is delivering \$72.5 million in savings over four years from 2015-16 and provides greater flexibility and consistency in targeting scholarships to areas of need by streamlining a number of existing scholarship programs into one – the Health Workforce Scholarship Programme. Additionally, a rural return of service obligation will be associated with some scholarship types to provide a greater return on the investment. Obligations under the scholarships ensure exposure to practices in rural settings, and to the lifestyle and types of work available, to encourage these healthcare professionals to continue to work in rural areas.

Better Targeted Rural Financial Incentives for Doctors

In 2015, the Australian Government reprioritised existing financial incentives for doctors to work in rural areas by introducing a new geographical classification system, the Modified Monash Model, to more effectively direct incentives to areas that experience greater difficulty in attracting and retaining a general practice workforce. Through the measure several activities (such as the More Doctors for Outer Metropolitan Areas Relocation Incentive Grant and the Higher Education Contribution Reimbursement Scheme) ceased, with funding redirected to the redesigned General Practice Rural Incentives Program. The redesigned General Practice Rural Incentives Program provides \$457.8 million over four years from 2016-17.

Full implementation of National Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

The National Bowel Cancer Screening Programme invites eligible people from across Australia to undertake bowel screening tests in the privacy of their home. The program currently provides screening to Australians aged 50, 54, 55, 58, 60, 64, 68, 70, 72 and 74 years, and from 2018 those aged 62 and 66 years will be added.

Participation in screening has the potential to significantly reduce the number of deaths from bowel cancer. In the 2014-15 Budget, the Australian Government

announced a further \$95.9 million over four years to accelerate the implementation of biennial screening for all Australians aged 50 to 74 years by 2019-20.

McGrath Foundation Breast Care Nurses – Continued Funding

McGrath Foundation Breast Care Nurses are specially trained registered nurses who provide information, care, and practical and emotional support to women diagnosed with breast cancer, their families and carers. There are currently 57 Australian Government funded McGrath Foundation Breast Care Nurses in place around Australia, with 80 per cent required to be located in regional and remote areas.

On 4 November 2016, the Australian Government announced a further four years of funding of \$20.5 million for the McGrath Foundation Breast Care Nurses from 2017-18. It is anticipated that in this four year period the McGrath Foundation Breast Care Nurses will support up to 15,000 women and their families.

World leading Cancer Care package – Additional Funding for Prostate Cancer Nurses

The Specialist Prostate Cancer Nurse Initiative currently supports the placement of 14 full time equivalent prostate cancer nurses in 15 locations across Australia, assisting up to 4,000 men and their families from 2013-14 to 2016-17.

This initiative will continue for three years from 2017-18 to 2019-20 to support the needs of men and their families living in metropolitan and regional Australia who have been affected by prostate cancer, by providing information, care and support to men with prostate cancer and their families. The Australian Government is providing funding of \$5.9 million from 2017-18 over three years to the Prostate Cancer Foundation Australia to deliver this initiative. It is anticipated that approximately 4,000 men and their families will be supported by this measure from 2017-18.

Block Funding for Small Rural and Regional Hospitals

To ensure rural and regional communities continue to have access to vital public hospital services, the Australian Government provides States and Territories with a dedicated block funding contribution for small rural and regional hospitals. The Australian Government will provide approximately \$4.0 billion over four years from 2017-18 in block funding to States and Territories to support services provided by small rural and regional hospitals.

Emergency Medicine Education and Training Programme

The Australian Government will provide \$112.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to the Emergency Medicine Education and Training program. The program, with 33 participating hub hospitals, provides training and educational support to non-specialist doctors and other staff working in emergency departments in regional and rural areas.

National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre

The Australian Government provides funds to the Northern Territory Government to support the operation of the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre based in Darwin. The centre is equipped and ready to assist in response to large scale emergencies and disasters in Australia and the region. Beneficiaries of the program include regional Australians, particularly during times of emergency when an event has the potential to overwhelm or exhaust a State's or Territory's health resources. The location of the centre also supports a positive regional impact by attracting health expertise and infrastructure to the Northern Territory. Funding of \$63.5 million is being provided from 2015-16 to 2018-19 to support its continued operation.

Developing Northern Australia – Positioning the North as a Leader in Tropical Health

The Northern Australia Tropical Disease Collaborative Research Programme is providing \$6.4 million over four years from 2015-16 to the Menzies School of Health Research to undertake innovative high quality research into the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of tropical diseases in Northern Australia.

The Northern Australia Tropical Disease Collaborative Research Programme will strengthen partnerships with research institutions across Australia, by undertaking a research agenda that will help close the gap in Indigenous health disadvantage, protect Northern Australia from emerging infectious threats and engage regional neighbours.

A Northern Australian network will be established that will incorporate Indigenous engagement, mentoring and knowledge translation, and facilitate collaboration with southern partners.

This investment is part of a broader Australian Government strategy to build Australia's primary research capacity and support the development of Northern Australia as outlined in the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*.

Centres for Innovation in Regional Health

The National Health and Medical Research Council will recognise and promote leading collaborations between health care organisations, academia and research institutions, through the designation and promotion of Centres for Innovation in Regional Health.

The Centres for Innovation in Regional Health will encourage leadership in health research and translation of direct relevance and benefit to regional and remote areas of Australia. The initiative provides National Health and Medical Research Council recognition (not funding) for Centres for Innovation in Regional Health that are exemplars of collaboration in health and medical research, research translation and research-infused education, training, and health care in a regional and/or remote setting. In 2017-18 these collaborations will increase the translation of research into better clinical practices.

National Partnership Agreement on Specified Projects – Addressing Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections

The Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Prevention Program aims to address rising rates of blood borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections (STI). One of the elements of the Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Prevention Program is the delivery of STI reduction programs targeted towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority populations in regional and remote settings. This element of the Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Prevention Program aims to increase STI testing and treatment, and raise awareness about STI prevention. Areas of focus include models of care that reach high prevalence communities and young people. This agreement provides funding of \$4.5 million over four years from 2016-17.

National Partnership on Management of Torres Strait – Papua New Guinea Cross Border Health Issues

The Australian Government provides funding for the Project Agreement for the management of Torres Strait/Papua New Guinea cross border health issues. Under this agreement, the Australian Government contributes funding to the Queensland Department of Health for the treatment of Papua New Guinea nationals who travel through the Torres Strait Treaty Zone and access health facilities in the Torres Strait and elsewhere within the Queensland Health hospital network. This Agreement provides funding of \$19.0 million over four years from 2016-17.

National Partnership on the Torres Strait Health Protection Strategy – Mosquito Control

The Australian Government provides funding for the Project Agreement for the Torres Strait Health Protection Strategy - mosquito control and cross border liaison in the Torres Strait Protected Zone. This agreement supports surveillance, control and elimination, if possible, of *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes in the Torres Strait, and to prevent the spread and establishment of *Aedes albopictus* from the Torres Strait to mainland Australia. The agreement also supports the employment of a Torres Strait Communications Officer to coordinate improved data sharing with Papua New Guinea on communicable diseases and health issues arising from cross border movements in the Torres Strait Protected Zone. The National Partnership Agreement on Specified Projects – Addressing Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections provides funding of \$4.5 million over four years from 2016-17.

National Partnership on the Torres Strait Health Protection Strategy – Saibai Island Health Clinic

The Australian Government provides funding for the National Partnership on the Torres Strait Health Protection Strategy – Saibai Island health clinic to provide additional staff for the treatment of communicable diseases at the health care clinic on Saibai Island, and for development and implementation of a culturally appropriate sexual health education campaign for people in the Torres Strait. This program targets young people to make them aware of Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections and to encourage them to access clinical services and health checks. Work

will continue to develop short and long-term options to address the lack of health staff accommodation on Saibai Island. The success of this program will improve the health outcomes of Saibai Island inhabitants under the objectives of the partnership arrangement between the Australian Government and Queensland.

Practice Incentives Program

The Australian Government will provide \$1.5 billion over four years from 2017-18 to the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) to support general practice activities that encourage continuing improvement and quality care, enhance capacity and improve access and health outcomes for patients. There are currently 11 incentives under the PIP that focus on eHealth, teaching, Indigenous health, asthma, cervical screening, diabetes, quality prescribing, general practitioner aged care access, procedural services, after-hours access and rural health. A rural loading is paid in recognition of the difficulties of providing care, often with little professional support, in rural and remote areas and to provide access to services which are available through other means to patients in metropolitan and other urban areas.

The rural loading ranges from 15 to 50 per cent (depending on the remoteness of the practice location) and is applied to the incentive payments of practices in rural and remote areas.

In the 2016-17 Budget, the Australian Government announced it will work towards introducing changes to the PIP through the measure: Quality Improvement in General Practice - Simplification of the PIP. This measure will establish a new Quality Improvement Incentive to be delivered through the PIP. The changes will consolidate some existing PIP payments into one quality improvement incentive, available to all PIP eligible practices. This incentive will streamline and simplify current PIP payments to help general practice achieve high quality health care and improved patient outcomes.

Primary Health Networks

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) are a national network of 31 independent, regionally based, primary healthcare commissioning organisations, established to improve efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for patients, particularly those at risk of poor health outcomes and to improve the coordination of care. Ten PHN regions have populations where the remoteness area (RA) is classified at five, the most rural area. Twenty Two PHNs have populations with rural areas classified between RA3 and RA5. The Australian Government has currently provided approximately \$2.6 billion over three years from 2015-16.

- PHN functions include planning, integrating and coordinating primary health care services, and the commissioning of services, across their regions.
- PHNs receive funding which includes loading for rurality, Indigenous population and low population density.

- The commissioning model provides opportunities to identify and implement iterative and innovative solutions to local and remote problems, and work within the unique circumstances of different communities.
- PHN Boards are supported by GP-led Clinical Councils and by Community Advisory Committees. In rural areas some PHNs have established multiple branches of Clinical Councils and Community Advisory Committees to appropriately reflect the diversity of their regions.
- PHNs are aligning planning and designing activities with other funded stakeholders in their regions (for example, Rural Workforce Agency and Royal Flying Doctor services).

After Hours Primary Health Care Arrangements

Amended after-hours primary health care funding arrangements commenced on 1 July 2015 to ensure access for all Australians to primary health care services during the after-hours period. This included:

- a Practice Incentives Programme after hours incentive payment to eligible accredited general practices registered for the Practice Incentives Programme;
- funding to Primary Health Networks to support locally tailored after hours services, including support for 'at risk' populations such as those in rural and remote areas (\$287.9 million over four years from 2015-16); and
- an after-hours general practice advice and support line for all Australians who do not have access to face to face general practice services in the after-hours period (\$47.4 million over four years from 2015-16).

Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal investment – Health Component

The health component of the National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment provides \$26.4 million from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to reduce the incidence and severity of ear and oral disease in Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory, with a focus on remote areas. The Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment commenced in 2015-16, continuing the ten year commitment to this activity which commenced in 2012-13 under the National Partnership on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory.

Indigenous Australians' Health Programme

The Australian Government will provide \$3.6 billion over four years from 2017-18 to the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme. Through the program, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to effective health care services in areas of need (including medical outreach to rural and remote areas), targeted initiatives to improve prevention and primary health care management of chronic diseases, and maternal and child health activities. In 2017-18, continued implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan will ensure that regional investments are made in priority areas in consultation with the Indigenous health sector.

Quality Assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Services Programme

The Australian Government is providing \$5.5 million over four years from 2017-18 to the Quality Assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Services Programme. The program supports the better management of diabetes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by enabling participating health services to provide culturally appropriate and clinically effective point-of-care diabetes related pathology testing. The program also includes training, technical support, quality assurance and a consultation program for community leaders to support program management on site.

As at 31 December 2016, a total of 200 sites participated in the program, with the majority of these located in rural and remote areas.

Support for Outreach Health Services

The Rural Health Outreach Fund improves access to health services for people living in rural, regional and remote Australia by supporting a range of outreach health activities. Four health priorities are specifically addressed: maternity and paediatric health, eye health, mental health and support for chronic disease management.

Services are provided directly to communities by specialists, general practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals. The Rural Health Outreach Fund commenced in 2013-14 following the consolidation of five previous rural outreach programs and provides \$111.0 million over four years from 2016-17.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service is funded by the Australian Government to deliver primary aero-medical evacuations, primary health clinics, remote consultations and medical chests containing pharmaceutical and medical supplies to remote locations. The Royal Flying Doctor Service has been funded by the Australian Government since the 1930s. The Government committed to extend funding arrangements for a further three years to 2020 as part of 2016 election commitments.

Royal Flying Doctor Dental Services – Continued Delivery

The Australian Government announced it would continue to support the Royal Flying Doctor Service by providing \$11.0 million over two years from 2016-17 to enable the Royal Flying Doctor Service to expand its existing dental outreach service.

Australian Government Hearing Services Programme

The Australian Government is expected to provide around \$2.3 billion over four years from 2017-18 to the Hearing Services Programme to provide eligible people with access to a range of high quality hearing services and devices. Eligible clients in regional communities can access these services through two mechanisms:

- the Voucher program uses a national network of approximately 270 contracted service providers, including Australian Hearing, with 119 service providers located at 1,299 regional sites across Australia; and

- Community Service Obligations – Australian Hearing is funded to deliver specialist services from permanent, visiting and remote sites across Australia, to children and young adults up to the age of 26, and to other high risk groups such as eligible Indigenous Australians. Australian Hearing works closely with local services to deliver its Indigenous outreach program providing hearing services to more than 130 of Australia’s most remote communities. In 2015-16, (the most recent full year data), 8,256 outreach services were delivered at 235 sites across Australia.

Visiting Optometrists Scheme

The Visiting Optometrists Scheme provides outreach optometry services for people in rural and remote areas, who would not otherwise have access to eye health services. Funding of \$20.7 million will be provided over three years from 2017-18.

Rebuilding General Practice Education and Training to Deliver More General Practices

The Australian Government will provide \$981.9 million over four years from 2016-17 to the Australian General Practice Training Program to support training for 300 extra general practitioners a year by increasing commencing training places from 1,200 to 1,500 from 2015. The new training positions are based in rural areas as much as possible, and at least 50 per cent of the new trainees are required to train on the rural pathway. As registrars deliver services to the community while training, the increase in training places is providing more services to communities in rural and regional areas.

Improving Maternity Services in Australia – General Practitioner Procedural Training Support Programme

The General Practitioner Procedural Training Support Programme aims to improve access to maternity services for women living in rural and remote communities by supporting general practitioners to attain procedural skills in obstetrics or in anaesthetics.

The General Practitioner Procedural Training Support Programme targets existing general practitioners in rural and remote areas.

Funding to CRANApplus

Funding to CRANApplus supports the remote and isolated health workforce through programs such as the Bush Support Services (including the Bush Support Line), which provides access to trained counsellors for remote health workers and their families. This initiative also encourages health service providers in remote areas of Australia to network and engage in professional development.

Remote Vocational Training Scheme

The Australian Government will provide \$10.5 million over two years from 2016-17 to the Remote Vocational Training Scheme. The scheme supports doctors practicing in some of Australia’s most remote locations to undertake vocational general practice

training. It delivers structured distance education and supervision to doctors completing general practice vocational training, while they continue to provide general practice medical services to remote and/or isolated communities. The training includes weekly tutorials through video and teleconferences, twice yearly education workshops, remote supervision and individualised training advice.

The Remote Vocational Training Scheme supports 22 new training places each year. Since 2015, an annual cohort of ten registrars has commenced training in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services under the Remote Vocational Training Scheme.

Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Programme

The Australian Government will provide \$775.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to the Rural Health and Multidisciplinary Training Programme. The program is designed to encourage the recruitment and retention of rural and remote health professionals by:

- providing effective rural training experiences for health students;
- developing an evidence base for the efficacy of rural training strategies in delivering rural health workforce outcomes;
- supporting rural health professionals to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health;
- increasing the number of rural origin health and medical students; and
- maximising the investment of program funds in rural, regional and remote areas for the maintenance of well supported academic networks to enhance the delivery of training to students to support the provision of medical services to communities.

The Rural Health and Multidisciplinary Training Programme supports a network of 18 rural clinical schools, 12 University Departments of Rural Health and six dental schools that support extended rural placements. The Rural Health and Multidisciplinary Training Programme also incorporates funding support for Northern Territory Medical Programme and the Indigenous Transition Pathways to Medicine Programme. The Regional Training Hubs component of the Integrated Rural Training Pipeline for Medicine will be delivered through the Rural Health and Multidisciplinary Training Programme.

Funding is also provided for the National Rural Health Student Network, a national, rural health focused, multidisciplinary student network representing more than 10,000 medical, nursing, and allied health students and supporting 28 university rural health clubs around Australia.

Practice Nurse Incentives Programme

The Practice Nurse Incentives Programme provides up to \$125,000 per year to eligible general practices to expand the role of their practice nurses, to deliver services and support to best meet the needs of their patients, while allowing General Practitioners

to focus on more complex care. Practices may also be eligible for a rural and remote loading in Australian Standard Geographic Classification - Remote Areas (ASGC-RA) 2-5 locations. The Practice Nurse Incentives Programme was introduced in January 2012, replacing the previous incentive arrangements.

Bonded Medical Places Scheme

The Bonded Medical Places Scheme provides a medical place at university in exchange for which participants agree to work in a District of Workforce Shortage or Modified Monash Model category 4-7 for a period of time equal to the length of their medical degree (less any credit obtained through scaling) once they become fully qualified fellows. Funding is provided by the Department of Education and Training through the Commonwealth Grants Scheme to universities. Up to 98 per cent of the 7,241 participants in the Bonded Medical Places Scheme are still to reach the stage at which they will be expected to commence their return of service obligation. Return of service commencements are expected to rise significantly over the next few years, approaching 700 per year by 2022.

Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships Scheme

The Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships Scheme provided up to 100 Commonwealth-supported medical school places with an attached scholarship each year (\$27,131 in 2017, indexed annually) to commencing Australian medical students. Recipients signed a contract requiring them to work as a doctor in a rural or remote area for six years once they have attained fellowship (less any credit obtained through scaling incentives). The Scheme was closed to new entrants after the 2015 academic year but continuing participants will be funded \$19.1 million from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The one hundred bonded places relinquished by the Scheme's closure were transferred to the Bonded Medical Places Scheme and continue to be bonded. Up to 83 per cent of the 1,405 participants in the Scheme are still to reach the stage at which they will be expected to commence their return of service obligation. Return of service commencements are expected to rise significantly over the next few years, approaching 140 per year by 2019. The scheme was first implemented in 2001, and is now closed to new entrants.

John Flynn Placement Programme

The Australian Government will provide \$15.2 million over four years from 2016-17 to the John Flynn Placement Programme. The program is designed to enable medical students to form a long-term relationship with a community and to gain a better understanding of rural or remote medical practice and non-metropolitan health services. The program focuses on forging a link between medical students and regional, rural and remote communities.

Medicare – Continued Higher Rebate for Other Medical Practitioners in Rural Areas

The Rural Other Medical Practitioners Programme recognises the value of services provided by non-vocationally registered medical practitioners in rural and remote areas, and provides higher Medicare benefits for their patients. The Rural Other

Medical Practitioners Programme also provides an incentive to encourage non-vocationally registered medical practitioners (both Australian and overseas trained) to provide general practice services in eligible rural and remote locations. Funding for the Rural Other Medical Practitioners program is through the Medicare Special Appropriation Bill, but has an annual spend of \$145.0 million on average.

Strengthening Medicare – Rural Procedural Grants Programme

The Australian Government will provide \$73.3 million over four years from 2016-17 to the Rural Procedural Grants program. The program enables procedural general practitioners in rural and remote areas to access grants to attend training and up-skilling in emergency and procedural medicine.

Scaling Incentive for Overseas Trained Doctors

The scaling incentive is a non-cash incentive offering overseas trained doctors and foreign graduates, of an accredited medical school, opportunities to reduce the ten year moratorium restriction period for access to the Medicare system. Time reductions are significantly greater for doctors who choose to work in more remote areas. The effect of scaling is to ensure that benefits will be significantly greater for doctors choosing to live and work in more remote areas of Australia. Moratorium restriction periods for access to the Medicare system by area are:

- Major cities – 10 years;
- Inner Regional – 9 years;
- Outer Regional – 7 years;
- Remote – 6 years; and
- Very Remote – 5 years.

National Health and Hospitals Network – Workforce Training Specialist Doctors

The Australian Government will provide \$616.8 million over four years from 2016-17 to the Specialist Training Programme. The program, which commenced in 2010, increases the capacity of the private and community health care sector to provide high quality training opportunities for trainee medical specialists. In 2015 and 2016, 900 training full time equivalent places were funded, this will increase to 950 places in 2017 and 1,000 places in 2018, following the announcement of funding for 100 new dedicated rural training places in December 2015. Around 45 per cent of current training places include a rural component.

Aged Care Provider Funding – Addressing Growth in Residential Aged Care

To address any impacts from the changes to the Aged Care Funding Instrument, the Australian Government announced on 6 December 2016 that eligible rural, remote and homeless service providers eligible under the 2017 scheme will receive an increase to the Viability Supplement. From 1 July 2017, the 2017 scheme of the Viability

Supplement will be increased by \$19.3 million over four years, through a flat rate increase of an additional \$2.12 per resident per day.

Aged Care Provider Funding – Improving the Targeting of the Viability Supplement for Regional Aged Care Facilities

The Australian Government is providing an extra \$102.3 million over four years from 2016-17 to increase and better target the viability supplement under the Modified Monash Model. Changes to residential care, home care and flexible care came into effect on 1 January 2017. Approximately 250 mainstream services benefitted from the new arrangements.

The majority of these services are small services in or near outer regional towns, for example, Holbrook (New South Wales), Childers (Queensland), and Rushworth (Victoria). Around 3,000 out of 59,300 home care packages previously attracted viability supplement funding. Around 7,000 older Australians on these packages benefitted from higher funding. Around 100 multi-purpose services attracted higher rates of viability supplement funding under the new arrangements. Five National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Programme providers also benefitted from higher funding.

Residential Aged Care Viability Supplement

The Residential Aged Care Viability Supplement is paid to eligible home care providers operating in rural and remote areas. This supplement provides support for the higher operating costs (such as wages, fuel and training) associated with providing care in rural and regional locations.

Home Care Viability Supplement

The Home Care Viability Supplement is paid to eligible home care providers operating in rural and remote areas. This supplement provides support for the higher operating costs (such as wages, fuel and training) associated with providing care in rural and regional locations.

Multi-Purpose Services Program – Aged Care Subsidies

The Multi-Purpose Services Programme is a joint initiative of the Australian Government and State and Territory governments, and provides integrated health and aged care services for small regional and remote communities. The Australian Government is providing \$743.6 million over four years from 2017-18. As at 30 June 2016, there were 179 Multi-Purpose Services delivering 3,630 aged care places through this program.

Sporting Schools Programme

The Government will continue funding of \$59.6 million for the Australian Sports Commission-managed Sporting Schools Programme for 18 months from 1 July 2017 until 31 December 2018, to reach up to 1.1 million children (up from 860,000). The program helps schools maximise the significant contribution that sport participation offers to physical health, and social, cognitive and community development. Sporting Schools runs nationwide and is open to schools in regional and remote areas.

Support Australia's Surf Life Savers

The Australian Government is providing funding of \$10.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 to Surf Life Saving Australia. This funding will help develop the skills of volunteers and keep its trainers up-to-date with the latest teaching methods.

Water and Snow Safety Programmes

The Australian Government has a long standing commitment to support water and snow safety and will provide \$46.0 million over four years from 2017-18 to major water and snow safety organisations for activities delivered Australia wide. This is done through: the Water Safety: Reduce Drownings program; the National Recreation Safety Programme; and Saving Lives in the Water-Element 1 and Element 2.

HUMAN SERVICES

The Department of Human Services is committed to ensuring all Australians, including those in remote and regional areas, have access to a range of high quality, flexible and convenient Australian Government services. The Department provides services to people living in regional areas through regional service centres, as well as agents and access points in remote areas. Further outreach services are provided by the Department's remote servicing teams and mobile service centres.

During 2016, mobile service centres visited over 390 towns, travelling more than 70,000 kilometres and helping over 9,000 people. Services for regional Australians are also provided through the Department of Human Services' nationally networked call centres, certain Centrelink numbers can also be called free of charge from a landline or Telstra mobile.

The Department of Human Services continues to expand its digital services. For example, faster and easier self-service options are now available for people to make claims for a payment or concession, update personal details and changes in their circumstances. The Department also provides a range of mobile applications allowing simple transactions such as reporting income to be done quickly and easily using a range of mobile devices. This allows people to engage with us at a time and place that suits, which is of particular benefit to people located in regional areas by reducing their need to travel to service centres.

The Department of Human Services also delivers payments and services on behalf of the Australian Government across rural and regional Australia during natural disasters such as floods and droughts. In 2016, the Department of Human Services' Emergency Reserve members and mobile service centre teams worked alongside others assisting communities impacted by the Waroona bushfires in Western Australia, and the East Coast storms and floods in New South Wales and Tasmania. More broadly, in 2017 the Department has been working with the Queensland and New South Wales communities impacted by Tropical Cyclone Debbie. The Department also provides continuing support to communities affected by the South Australia Pinery bushfire in November 2015.

NEW INITIATIVES

Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation – Tranche Two

The Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation – Tranche Two measure builds on the success of Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation – Tranche One and provides \$313.5 million funding over four years to progress the overhaul of Australia's welfare payment system from January 2017.

Over 18 months, Tranche Two will focus on developing new welfare payment processes and services, and will start with the administration and delivery of student payments.

Tranche Two will not, itself, have a significant direct impact on regional Australia. However, when subsequent tranches of the Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation program are fully implemented, building on foundational work completed in Tranche Two, Australians will benefit from the integrated delivery of payments, simplified processes and smarter access to services. The program will be underpinned by a digital service model and will enable the majority of transactions to be completed online, reducing the need for people in regional Australia to travel large distances to access face-to-face services.

Prioritising Mental Health – Improving Telehealth for Psychological Services in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia

The Department of Human Services will be implementing changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) to allow mental health professionals, including psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists to access Medicare benefits for video consultations provided to clients who live in rural and regional Australia. This will increase access to psychological services for those living in rural and remote areas who would otherwise have limited access to these services.

Improving Access to Medicines – Maintaining Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services Pharmaceutical Dispensing

Remote Aboriginal Health Services (RAHS) are able to order and dispense medicines directly to patients at no cost as part of the Government's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023. This ensures remote Indigenous Australians have access to the medicines they need, when they need them.

This measure will simplify delivery arrangements by enabling pharmacists who supply individually labelled and packaged medicines to RAHS to directly invoice the Department of Human Services for payment, reducing administration on these health professionals.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation – Tranche One

Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation – Tranche One is one of the world's largest social welfare information and communications technology system transformations. This significant multi-year transformation project will modernise welfare payments processes and build a new information and communications technology system and enables the Department of Human Services to:

- provide faster, more connected and automated digital services;

- give staff a modern information and communications technology platform that makes it easier for them to do their jobs; and
- position the Department of Human Services to meet the future policy needs of the Australian Government.

This measure provides \$60.5 million over four years from 2015-16 to progress Tranche One of the Welfare Payments Infrastructure Transformation program, this tranche will build a solid foundation for Tranche Two and later tranches of this program.

Farm Household Allowance

The Department of Human Services delivers the Farm Household Allowance payment. Since the commencement of the program in 2014 over 7,000 customers have been granted Farm Household Allowance. Farm Household Allowance recipients are required to complete a Farm Financial Assessment and enter into a Financial Improvement Agreement to assist them to improve their financial self-reliance.

In 2016-17, the Department of Human Services progressed a number of key activities regarding the Farm Household Allowance, including:

- participating in a series of roundtables in regional Victoria. The Department of Human Services provided intensive one-on-one support to customers during the roundtables, provided additional information and support to many other attendees and received valuable feedback on delivery of the Farm Household Allowance;
- reviewing business processes to simplify and streamline the Farm Household Allowance application process; and
- conducting a pilot for new claims processing to reduce the time taken to assess claims for Farm Household Allowance and to provide additional support to claimants.

Changes to the Farm Household Allowance claim process are being rolled out nationally following the success of a Department of Human Services pilot that aimed to improve the experience for farmers. This includes:

- reducing processing times for most new claims from four months to four - six weeks;
- significantly increasing outbound contact with farmers at the beginning of the claims process;
- delaying the Farm Financial Assessment until after their claim has been granted; and
- ensuring that, where possible, farmers also spoke to the same specialist staff member throughout the claim process to ensure continuity of support while their application was finalised.

ABSTUDY

ABSTUDY provides financial support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from secondary school (including boarders) through to Masters and

Doctorate studies. The Department of Human Services has trialled an innovative approach that significantly simplifies the ABSTUDY claim process by removing the need for Indigenous students to complete and return paper claim forms.

Indigenous Students can now complete a binding verbal declaration, meaning that the entire claim process can be completed over the phone. Claims lodged through the new streamlined process in 2016-17, compared against the same period in 2015-16, were finalised nearly 50 per cent faster. The trial actively supports the Government's Closing the Gap commitments for Indigenous education outcomes.

Agents and Access Points

The Department of Human Services' agents across 351 sites and access points across 239 sites provide essential and effective services to remote and rural people where accessing existing service centres is difficult.

Access points provide free self-help facilities where people can conduct their business with the Department. This includes services such as certifying proof of identity documents, phone, photocopying, fax and internet facilities in over 100 sites.

Agents provide the same facilities as access points with the addition of staff who can support people to do their business with the Department, primarily through digital channels.

While the Department of Human Services' network of agents and access points currently only provides access to the Department's services, the necessary connectivity is currently being developed to provide access to other government services in the future.

Government Remote Servicing – Continuation and Extension

Remote servicing ensures a person can access Australian Government payments and services, regardless of their location.

The Australian Government's investment of \$117.4 million over five years from 2015-16 supports the continued delivery of government payments and services in remote locations in Western Australia, Northern Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania. The Department of Human Services continues to provide direct access to services through remote service centres, agents, access points and remote servicing teams.

Remote servicing is also a source of employment in remote communities, especially for Indigenous Australians. For example, the large majority of staff in the Department of Human Services' Northern Territory remote service centres are Indigenous Australians.

Mobile Service Centres

The Department of Human Services operates a number of mobile service centres that travel to rural and regional communities to provide hard-to-reach and disadvantaged people with information and access to Australian Government services, where they need it.

These fully equipped mobile offices travel on pre-determined itineraries in regional areas to communities located more than 50 kilometres from a service centre. Mobile service centres are an important part of the Department's emergency response service delivery capability. In 2016 the fleet visited over 390 towns with the additional aim of partnering with other Australian Government agencies where possible to improve service delivery.

Remote Smart Centre Services

In April 2014 Remote Smart Centres were established to streamline processes, and to deliver effective and efficient services. As a result, there are more staff on hand for general enquiries, with complex enquiries handled by the Indigenous telephony queue whose staff have training and experience in the complexities of Indigenous specific payments and programs. Calls to the Indigenous telephony queue have been separated into remote and non-remote and improves access to Australian Government payments, programs and services.

National Indigenous Coalition

The National Indigenous Coalition has been established as the Department of Human Services' internal peak Indigenous forum. Through collaboration, the National Indigenous Coalition forms a united position on key policies and future service delivery approaches. The unique challenges of providing access and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regional Australia are considered by the forum. The National Indigenous Coalition is consulted to ensure effective development of strategies that support and secure outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and employees.

Regional Citizenship Testing

The Department of Human Services has been working with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to make citizenship tests available in regional locations. Staff of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection previously visited regional centres to conduct tests, usually on a monthly or bimonthly basis. Some 150,000 citizenship tests are taken nationwide every year. Around 13,000 of these are taken in regional areas, assisted by staff from the Department of Human Services. Each week about 300 tests can take place across 33 service centres in regional areas across Australia, from Kalgoorlie in Western Australia to Mackay in Queensland.

Videoconferencing in Regional Locations

The Department of Human Services is trialling delivery of limited specialist services such as Job Capacity Assessments and access to Social Workers and Financial Information Service Officers by video conferencing in a number of regional locations. The Job Capacity Assessments are offered at over 30 mainly regional locations. Social Work services are provided to Halls Creek and Kununurra (Western Australia), Inverell and Glen Innes (New South Wales) and Financial Information Services are provided to Mildura (Victoria), Bega, Cowra, Inverell and Glen Innes (New South Wales). The Department of Human Services also offers access to Auslan interpreter services 'on-demand' at 80 sites, mostly in regional Australia.

Online Servicing

In 2015-16, over 130 million transactions were completed via online and the Express Plus mobile apps (compared to 123 million in 2014-15).

The Department's website humanservices.gov.au is a convenient way for regional Australians to access information and conduct their government business online. Every month the Department's website has over eight million visitors.

The Payment Finder tool makes it easy for people to discover payments and services relevant to them. Payment Finder on humanservices.gov.au is used more than 240,000 times each month.

Once they have authenticated themselves, users can conduct many of their transactions with the Department online at a time and place convenient to them. In 2015-16 an average of more than 356,000 transactions were completed online each day, an increase of five per cent from the previous financial year.

A range of Centrelink payments are also claimable online, taking advantage of a streamlined claiming process which pre-populates the claim with already known information, and uses dynamic questioning to ensure that only necessary questions are asked. For some payments, the online process now accounts for 80 per cent of new claim activity.

myGov

The myGov digital service is a simple, secure way for all Australians to access services, including in regional Australia. For Australians living in regional areas, the ability to access multiple government services online is a convenient way to do business and minimises the need to travel significant distances to regional service centres and multiple government agencies.

There are now over 11 million active myGov accounts providing people with secure access to a growing range of Australian Government online services using one username and password. With a myGov account, people can link a range of Australian

Government services to do their business online, including lodging claims, and accessing correspondence to updating contact details quickly and easily.

As at December 2016, the myGov Inbox service has delivered more than 175 million mail items since the commencement of the service in March 2014. The myGov 'Update Your Details' function enables the millions of myGov account holders to update selected contact information and share these with participating linked myGov member services in a single transaction from their myGov account.

Through the National Innovation and Science Agenda, the Australian Government is committed to making services digital by default, and leading cultural and technological change in how those services are delivered. With the high volume of transactions made through the myGov digital service, the modernisation of myGov and its future direction is central to these efforts.

The Department of Human Services considers myGov to be a critical enabler of service delivery, particularly to people in rural and regional areas, and the Department continues to innovate and refine the myGov service to meet the new and evolving needs of users.

A joint project team with the Digital Transformation Agency and Australian Taxation Office has been established to re-examine the myGov digital service, including the technology supporting it, how it is delivered and managed, as well as the user's experience.

This work will also assess myGov's consistency with the Government's Digital Service Standard. The project team will deliver a broad, long-term enhancement program for the capability of myGov.

Funding for this initiative is \$50.5 million over five years from 2015-16.

Express Plus Apps

The Department of Human Services' Express Plus mobile apps continue to be popular with people wanting to engage with government services. The apps for Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support provide the option to complete many common, simple transactions on the go from any location, without having to call or visit an office. These mobile apps provide a convenient, flexible option to do business with the Department, including uploading documents, reporting income, claiming Medicare benefits, viewing balances and making Child Support Payments.

As at 31 January 2017, Express Plus mobile apps have been downloaded more than 9.5 million times. In 2015-16 over 63 million transactions were completed through the apps. The Department continues to deliver enhancements to mobile apps, to improve the effectiveness of this digital channel, with additional functionality continually being considered for Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support apps.

In addition, the Centrelink Express Plus Lite version enables the reporting of earned income in English, Arabic, Chinese, Persian (Farsi) or Vietnamese.

Electronic Claiming of Medicare Benefits

Electronic claiming from point of service is the most convenient way for claimants to lodge claims for Medicare benefits.

The Australian Government is actively working with medical practitioners, software vendors, financial institutions, health insurers and members of the public to increase the availability and use of electronic claiming of Medicare benefits.

Health Professional Online Services

Health Professional Online Services is a fast and secure service that enhances and improves the interaction between the Department and healthcare providers and their administrators (health professionals). It offers health professionals a single entry point to a range of health related programs and online services. In Health Professional Online Services, health professionals can do a range of business and administrative tasks, including submitting claims online, manage provider details, retrieving statements and reports, verify patient information, and authorise and manage delegations.

Health Professional Online Services is now accessed using a Provider Digital Access account. Provider Digital Access is a secure online authentication system that replaces the use of a Medicare Public Key Infrastructure certificates to access Health Professional Online Services. It is a portable, digital end-to-end solution that requires no additional hardware or software making it easier for the health professional to interact with Medicare when delivering services in regional and remote communities.

Strategy, Innovation and Design

The Department of Human Services' Strategy, Innovation and Design branch provides user-centred design support through citizen engagement in face-to-face interviews, small group conversations or large design sessions. The aim of these engagements is to seek citizen input into new processes, service delivery improvements, policy initiatives and system design.

In the 2016-17 financial year, the Strategy, Innovation and Design branch undertook citizen engagement activities in regional areas, including Colac and Shepparton in Victoria, Gympie and Caboolture in Queensland, and Geeveston and Bridgewater in Tasmania. The Department engages with citizens in regional areas to ensure overall design and delivery meets the needs of all Australians, recognising the unique requirements of citizens located in regional areas of Australia.

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION

The Immigration and Border Protection portfolio is committed to supporting rural and regional communities in Australia. A number of the portfolio's programs specifically target regional Australia and encourage migrants to settle in regional areas.

The permanent annual Migration Programme supports regional Australia to respond to unique economic and labour market conditions by helping to fill the need for skills in a range of regions and sectors.

The Seasonal Worker Programme offers seasonal labour to employers in agricultural and accommodation industries who cannot meet their seasonal labour needs with local jobseekers. This program is administered by the Department of Employment, supported by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

The Working Holiday Maker Programme has a special focus on helping employers in regional Australia to meet short-term employment needs. Working Holiday Makers who work in regional areas can access additional Working Holiday Visas and extended stays.

The Safe Haven Enterprise Visa encourages people granted temporary protection visas to work or study in a designated regional area. The purpose of the visa is to provide temporary protection while encouraging enterprise through earning and learning and strengthening regional Australia.

Australia's investment and business visa programs encourage business migrants and retirees to either invest or to set up businesses in regional or rural areas of Australia and enables States and Territories to nominate the type of business people and investors they need for the economic development of their regions.

In September 2015, the Australian Government committed to resettling an additional 12,000 people displaced by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, with a focus on vulnerable people and persecuted minorities. All 12,000 additional humanitarian visas have now been granted. A proportion of Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian entrants have resettled in regional areas.

These programs have significant positive impacts on regional communities by encouraging more people to move to, work in and visit regional areas, supporting jobs and growth in regional economies.

NEW INITIATIVES

Community Support Programme

The Community Support Programme (CSP) provides new pathways for refugees to resettle in Australia. 1,000 places will be available within the planned Humanitarian Programme.

The CSP will enable businesses, community groups, families and individuals to support the settlement of humanitarian entrants into their community. Refugee proposers under the CSP will provide all support, including employment, for the first 12 months in Australia.

The CSP provides an opportunity for refugees with skills or relevant experience to be welcomed into a regional community. Regional communities have the opportunity to harness new skills and experience from humanitarian entrants. The CSP will enhance the cultural diversity of regional areas.

Regional resettlement of refugees can occur with the support and involvement of local and State governments, service providers and the local community.

Employer Sponsored Skilled Migration Reforms

On 18 April 2017 the Prime Minister of Australia and the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection announced that the Australian Government will abolish the Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457) (457 visa) and replace it with a new Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa in March 2018.

The new TSS will better target genuine skills shortages, including in regional Australia, and help train Australians to fill the skills gaps in the workforce. Under these reforms, employers in regional Australia will be able to sponsor shorter term skilled workers in a broader range of occupations than employers in non-regional areas. Twenty-four occupations eligible for 457 visas and the visas under the new Temporary Work and Skill programs can only be accessed in regional Australia (e.g. occupations relating to farming and agriculture).

Complementary reforms to Australia's permanent employer sponsored skilled migration programs were also subsequently announced. Existing permanent visa concessions for regional Australia, such as waiving the nomination fee and providing age exemptions for certain occupations, will be retained.

Implementation of these reforms will be completed by March 2018.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Australian Trusted Trader Programme

The Australian Trusted Trader Programme (ATT) will deliver an ongoing positive impact on regional Australia. ATT supports exporters in regional Australia by providing simplified and greater access to export markets, and more efficient access to imported goods needed for production. Independent economic modelling completed in support of ATT estimates that over ten years, household consumption will increase by \$2.2 billion and business investment by \$953.0 million as a result of trade facilitation benefits offered to ATT participants.

Industry interest has been strong with over 450 expressions of interest received since ATT opened on 1 July 2016. Interest has come from importers and exporters across multiple sectors including regional Australia. It is expected that industries that operate in regional Australia, including agriculture, fisheries, and food processing, will be particular beneficiaries of an ongoing program. For example, entities that trade in perishable commodities can derive benefit from faster and more efficient movement of goods across international borders.

Our North, Our Future – Business, Trade and Investment Gateway

This measure provided the Immigration and Border Protection portfolio additional funding of \$26.9 million over four years from 2015-16 to implement a range of initiatives the Australian Government agreed as part of the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* (led by the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science). The measure will attract more investment and increase the number of international tourists travelling to northern Australia. As part of the measure, revenue collected by the Australian Government is expected to increase by \$37.7 million over four years from 2015-16.

The following initiatives have been delivered in the 2016-17 financial year:

- trial of ten-year validity Visitor visas for China – commenced on 12 December 2016;
- trial of online lodgement of Visitor visa applications in Mandarin (Simplified Chinese) – commenced on 12 December 2016; and
- full roll-out of online lodgement for Visitor visas to Chinese nationals - commenced on 20 February 2017.

Emerging International Airports

At the 2015-16 Budget, the Australian Government established a border clearance capability at Townsville and Sunshine Coast airports. Further, at the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, the Australian Government established ongoing border clearance services at the Canberra International Airport to support regular international air services. These measures are supporting the continued growth of international air services in regional Australia, encouraging businesses to invest, and delivering increased visitor numbers and providing a boost to the tourism industry.

Safe Haven Enterprise Visa

The Safe Haven Enterprise Visa is a temporary protection visa which encourages enterprise through work and study, while also strengthening regional Australia. The Safe Haven Enterprise Visa is available to people who have been assessed as engaging Australia's protection obligations and who have fulfilled health, character, security and identity checks.

Holders of the visa will be able to apply for other substantive visas, including permanent visas (with the exception of the Permanent Protection visa) if they demonstrate that they have worked and/or studied in a designated area of regional Australia for at least three and a half years of their visa.

All the States and Territories of Australia have opted into the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa arrangements, and are responsible for identifying areas to be designated as regional for the purpose of the visa.

Humanitarian Programme – Allocation of Places

The Australian Government will continue to explore opportunities to increase regional settlement given existing pressures on major metropolitan centres. Currently, around 20 per cent of humanitarian entrants are settled in locations outside capital cities.

The Humanitarian Programme for 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 is set at 13,750, 16,250, 18,750, 18,750 and 18,750 places respectively, in line with an instrument made under section 39A of the *Migration Act 1958*.

Regional resettlement of refugees can occur with the support and involvement of local and State government, service providers and agencies, and the local community. The Humanitarian Settlement Services Programme is delivered by service providers on behalf of the Department of Social Services which works closely with local and State governments to support successful settlement outcomes.

2017-18 Migration Programme

The Australian Government seeks to maintain the size and composition for the 2017-18 permanent annual Migration Programme at 2016-17 levels (up to 190,000 places), which includes 128,550 Skill stream places. The Skill stream of the Migration Programme will continue to appropriately support the labour market, and benefit regional Australia by helping fill the need for skills in a range of regions and sectors.

The Migration Programme contributes directly to productivity and employment in regional Australia through the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme and the State/Territory and Regional Nominated visa category.

The Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme is a demand driven program that helps businesses in regional, remote or low population growth areas (outside the major metropolitan centres of Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong and Melbourne) to recruit the skilled workers they need to manage and grow their

operations. The State/Territory and regional nominated visa category will also continue to benefit regional areas experiencing labour market shortages.

Seasonal Worker Programme

The objective of Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) is to contribute to the economic development of Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste while assisting Australian employers to meet their demand for seasonal labour when they are unable to source local labour. Seasonal workers benefit through employment experience, remittances, skills and knowledge transfer. Australian employers benefit by having access to a reliable seasonal workforce that is able to return in future seasons.

Australia's SWP is targeted at selected Pacific Island countries and Timor Leste, modelled on New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employers Scheme. The countries currently participating in the SWP are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The SWP commenced on 1 July 2012 and was available only to the Australian horticulture sector. However, a trial of seasonal labour mobility arrangements in the accommodation, aquaculture, cane and cotton sectors in selected locations provided an opportunity to expand the program within these sectors. On 1 July 2015, the cap on the number of seasonal worker stream visas was removed. Subsequently, as a part of the Australian Government's *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*, Australian employers in the tourism industry in Northern Australia can now participate in the SWP.

The Department of Employment is the lead agency responsible for the implementation and management of the SWP. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection supports the program by managing related immigration processes and providing assistance to train participating countries on Australia's visa requirements. Other key stakeholders in the SWP include the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Fair Work Ombudsman, Austrade and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Working Holiday Maker Programme

The Working Holiday Maker Programme allows young adults from partner countries to take extended holidays in Australia and support their travels with work. It is comprised of the Working Holiday (subclass 417) visa and the Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa.

Since 2005, the Working Holiday (subclass 417) visa has been helping to address acute labour shortages in certain industries across regional Australia. A participant can acquire eligibility for a second Working Holiday visa by undertaking three months of 'specified work' in regional Australia while on their first working holiday visa. This creates an incentive to perform work in particular industries and regions, but does not obligate participants to do so. Participation is voluntary.

'Specified work' for this purpose includes employment activities in the agriculture, mining and construction industries. Regional Australia is defined by a list of postcodes developed in 2004-05 in consultation with State and Territory governments.

The agriculture industry remains the primary beneficiary of the Working Holiday Maker Programme, with around 90 per cent of specified work being agricultural in nature. Around eight to nine per cent performed specified work in the construction industry and around one to two per cent in the mining industry.

On 19 November 2016, Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa holders became eligible to apply for a second year visa, if they undertake three months of 'specified work' in tourism and hospitality or agriculture in northern Australia while on their first visa. This was announced as part of the Australian Government's *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*.

In September 2016, the Australian Government announced a package of reforms relating to the Working Holiday Maker Programme to improve the supply of working holiday makers in Australia, including:

- increasing the eligibility age from 30 to 35 years - implementation is in progress; and
- allowing visa holders to work for the same employer for up to 12 months, as long as the second six months is worked in a different region or location - this has been implemented and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's website is being updated to effectively communicate this policy.

INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

The Industry, Innovation and Science portfolio contributes to the Australian Government's economic agenda by enabling the growth and productivity of globally competitive industries. The portfolio supports scientific capability, strong science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills, and scientific literacy as critical requirements for productivity and economic growth. Our activities:

- facilitate nationwide action on deregulation, skills, collaboration, commercialisation, and international engagement;
- support businesses to innovate and collaborate with scientists and researchers to maximise commercial returns from public investment in science, research and development;
- facilitate competitive marketplaces which are conducive to business growth;
- encourage business investment to improve competitiveness and to achieve or support sustainable adjustment to competitive sectors or areas of growth;
- contribute to unlocking the potential of northern Australia; and
- streamline the way businesses access Government information and services via www.business.gov.au.

The Industry, Innovation and Science portfolio has a broad regional presence through its networks and agencies, including: AusIndustry; the National Measurement Institute; the Office of Northern Australia; the Australian Institute of Marine Science; the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation; and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. Specifically, the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science has 35 per cent of staff located outside Canberra in 31 locations throughout Australia. The portfolio interacts with around 200,000 businesses each year, in metropolitan, regional and remote locations. The program and service delivery division, AusIndustry, provides knowledgeable referrals to other streams of support that contribute to local business activity and economic development.

NEW INITIATIVES

Advanced Manufacturing Fund

The Australian Government has allocated \$100.0 million over two years from 2017-18 to boost innovation, skills and employment in advanced manufacturing, an enabler for both urban and regional areas. Measures include:

- \$47.5 million for a new Advanced Manufacturing Growth Fund, building on the existing \$155.0 million Growth Fund that helps industry adjust to the wind-down of car manufacturing. The funding is for up to a third of the project cost of capital upgrades to establish and expand high value manufacturing in South Australia and Victoria. This will help make businesses more competitive through innovative processes and equipment;
- \$4.0 million for the Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre to support small scale and pilot research projects in advanced manufacturing, benefiting small firms and early stage researchers, allowing them to quickly move to larger scale research or commercialisation;
- \$20.0 million under the Cooperative Research Centre – Projects initiative for larger scale advanced manufacturing research projects of up to \$3.0 million in funding over three years;
- \$10.0 million to establish Innovation Labs in South Australia and Victoria to serve industry in a variety of roles including test centre facilities and business capability development, delivered through existing government services like the Entrepreneurs’ Programme, Industry Growth Centres and Austrade;
- \$5.0 million to maintain engineering excellence by investing in student research at universities, technology institutions and in industry to continue the flow of highly trained engineers to the automotive design and engineering sector; and
- \$13.5 million tariff reduction on imported vehicle prototypes and components used by Australian motor vehicle design and engineering services that operate in a global network.

Cooperative Research Centre Programme

The Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Programme, established in 1990, is a competitive, merit-based grant program that supports industry-led collaborations between industry, researchers and the community. The CRC Programme has two funding streams:

- CRCs, which undertake medium to long term, industry-led high quality collaborative research; and
- CRC Projects (CRC-Ps), which undertake a short-term, industry-identified and industry-led collaborative research project.

Businesses investing in research and development through CRCs and CRC-Ps are increasing their income, competitiveness and productivity. The CRC Programme

continues to support CRCs and CRC-Ps that have impacts on rural and regional Australia.

CRCs and CRC-Ps contribute to strengthening rural and regional development in areas such as our agriculture and mining industries, farming systems, participation of remote communities and improving health outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Regional businesses (including small and medium-sized enterprises), Rural Research and Development Corporations, universities and other research organisations can be a part of CRCs and CRC-Ps and their activities.

Maintaining Australia's Optical Astronomy Capability

The Australian Government is investing an additional \$26.1 million from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to maintain Australia's reputation for world-renowned astronomical research and instrumentation through unparalleled international collaboration and opportunity. This measure secures the continued operation of the Anglo-Australian Telescope, located in regional Coonabarabran, until at least 2024, benefiting jobs, tourism and the local economy. The investment involves a ten-year strategic partnership with the European Southern Observatory from 1 January 2018. This partnership will provide Australian scientists and businesses competitive access to research infrastructure and industry opportunities with the world's foremost eight-metre optical/infrared telescopes at La Silla and Paranal Observatories in Chile. This partnership will also be complemented by the transition of Australia's world-leading research and commercial capabilities in optical astronomy, through the Australian Astronomical Observatory, from government to research-sector ownership from 1 July 2018. This is expected to create new options and pathways to expand industry engagement across Australia, and to commercialise innovative technologies and spin-off applications on an international stage. This measure addresses the critical gap in astronomy capability identified in the *Decadal Plan for Australian Astronomy (2016-2025)*.

Digital Earth Australia

Digital Earth Australia has received funding in the 2017-18 Budget through the Public Service Modernisation Fund. \$15.3 million over two years, from 2017-18, supports a national, open big-data analysis capability that will enable measurement and detection of changes across the Australian landscape over time. Digital Earth Australia will translate almost three decades of existing satellite imagery of the Australian continent and coastline into insights about the health and productivity of the Australian continent. Digital Earth Australia will provide comprehensive, timely and accurate information about regional and remote Australia, on par with urban Australia. This will provide individuals, governments and businesses with open data and new capabilities to increase efficiency, bolster profits and create jobs. For example, Digital Earth Australia could allow the assessment of cropping, pasture management and livestock decisions made at any time during the last three decades. The Australian and State and Territory governments will use Digital Earth Australia as an evidence base to improve the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs and

regulations. This is a world first. Digital Earth Australia will also support Australia's developing digital economy by providing access to reliable, standardised satellite data that can be used to build new algorithms and applications for commercial purposes. This will create opportunities for new businesses and innovations and will allow businesses to deliver products in a more efficient way, saving time and money.

National Business Simplification Initiative – Connecting Government Digital Business Services

The Connecting Government Digital Business Services initiative allocates \$9.1 million in 2017-18 to simplify, improve and enable the linking of businesses registration and licensing services across all levels of government. Businesses, including those in regional areas, will be guided through the registration and licensing processes, easily moving between different government sites or services. This will deliver benefits to businesses including greater consistency and reliability of government information, reduction in time spent, and reduction in complexity and duplication. Businesses will be able to access registration and licensing services either through a State website or through the national business.gov.au website. Further, the initiative will give businesses greater confidence that they have met their obligations. This initiative has been estimated to save Australian businesses over \$50.0 million per annum.

Energy for the Future – Gas Supply and Affordability

Energy for the Future - gas supply and affordability provides \$28.7 million over four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to support positive state-based programs, increase community benefits from gas development and provide better information to landholders, to accelerate the responsible development of onshore gas.

Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Energy Council, this initiative will also explore opportunities to improve landowner benefits from gas activities, including the development of a model land access agreement to educate landowners in negotiating access, compensation and remuneration agreements with onshore gas operators. A communications strategy will also be developed to communicate technical and scientific research to non-experts. Through addressing community concerns, this initiative will encourage investment in new supplies of gas and reduce the risk of domestic gas shortage which may occur in 2020 in the absence of new supply.

Alcoa Portland Aluminium Smelter – Financial Assistance

In 2016-17 the Australian Government provided a \$30.0 million grant to the Alcoa Portland Aluminium Smelter as part of efforts by the Australian Government to secure the ongoing viability of the smelter following the damage caused by the power outage incident on 1 December 2016. The grant will be used to restore operations and provide certainty for workers. In conjunction with a support package from the Victorian Government, this assistance will enable the smelter to maintain operations until at least 30 June 2021. Industry transition assistance, such as this support to Alcoa in the Portland region in Victoria, recognises the value of businesses and industries to regional communities.

Installation of Solar Photovoltaic System

Through the Public Service Modernisation Fund, \$1.8 million (over 2017-18 and 2018-19) has been allocated to deliver an off grid solar photovoltaic system to provide supplementary low cost electricity to the Australian Institute of Marine Science's regional Cape Ferguson headquarters. This site houses the National Sea Simulator, a world-class marine research aquarium facility for tropical marine organisms in which scientists can conduct cutting-edge research. This investment will help lift the current utilisation of the National Sea Simulator from 65 per cent to 90 per cent while reducing costs and carbon emissions. This investment will also help the local region through the employment of local contractors to install the solar photovoltaic system.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

White Paper on Developing Northern Australia

In June 2015, the Australian Government released *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* (White Paper). The White Paper is a vision and a plan to unlock the great potential and opportunities of the north, capitalising on the region's strengths and removing barriers to investment. The White Paper underscores the importance of ensuring regulation protects the community and the environment while also supporting markets, investment and innovation.

The Office of Northern Australia in the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science is coordinating the delivery of 51 discrete initiatives under the White Paper, across 14 different government agencies. As of 20 February 2017, 25 initiatives from the White Paper have been implemented, although deliverables under some of these initiatives will continue into the medium and long term and will be actively monitored.

In addition to this coordinating role, the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science has responsibility for the delivery of the following measures:

- the \$5.0 billion Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility;
- expanded access to the Entrepreneurs' Programme to include tourism and smaller northern Australian businesses;

- \$75.0 million for the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia;
- what is now known as the Major Projects Facilitation Agency in Darwin; and
- the Office of Northern Australia in the north.

The Darwin Office of the Office of Northern Australia was opened on 18 December 2015. The Major Projects Facilitation Agency's Darwin office was opened on 18 January 2016.

The following initiatives stem from the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia:

- Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility;
- Northern Australian Tourism Initiative;
- Northern Australia Water Resource Assessment; and
- Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia.

Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility

The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF), announced in the 2015-16 Budget, is a major initiative of the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* and is integral to the Australian Government's strategy for the north.

The NAIF opened for business on 1 July 2016 and will offer up to \$5.0 billion over five years in concessional finance to encourage and complement private sector investment in economic infrastructure (such as rail, water, energy, communications networks, ports and airports) that otherwise would not be built or would not be built for some time.

The NAIF is an independent corporate Commonwealth entity that operates at arm's length to the government. The NAIF Board makes decisions about the eligibility and financing of all economic infrastructure projects in accordance with the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Investment Mandate, under the *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act 2016*. This support for transformative economic infrastructure will be a significant step for the longer term expansion of the economy and population in northern Australia. Investment will be spread across the three jurisdictions in northern Australia.

Northern Australian Tourism Initiative

The Northern Australia Tourism Initiative is one of a suite of new programs announced in response to the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*. This initiative was launched in February 2016 and provides \$13.6 million over four years to provide more help to tourism businesses in northern Australia to grow, be smarter and be more internationally competitive. It extends both

the Entrepreneurs' Programme and the Australian Small Business Advisory Services (ASBAS) program to better target the needs of the northern Australian tourism industry.

The Entrepreneurs' Programme provides northern tourism businesses with practical support to build management and business capability, helping businesses to improve their performance and grow. A new tourism service has also been developed to assist small groups of businesses to address a joint challenge so they can work together to make the most of northern Australian tourism market opportunities.

Under ASBAS Northern Australia Tourism Initiative, not-for-profit small business advisory services are funded to improve their capability to provide low-cost advisory and information services to Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism small businesses and tourism small business intenders in northern Australia. Seven ASBAS projects commenced delivery of services to tourism small businesses and tourism small business intenders in northern Australia on 1 July 2016. The projects will continue until 30 June 2019.

Northern Australia Water Resource Assessment

As announced on 26 February 2016, the Australian Government provided \$15.0 million in funding, over three years to June 2018, under *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) to work with northern jurisdictions, research partners and communities to undertake assessments as part of the Northern Australia Water Resource Assessment. The assessments focus on the Mitchell river basin in Queensland, the Darwin river basins (Finniss, Adelaide, Mary and Wildman) in the Northern Territory and the Fitzroy river basin in Western Australia. These assessments will be similar to the work CSIRO undertook in the Flinders and Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment which identified up to 50,000 hectares of new irrigated agriculture opportunities for north Queensland and informed the revision of the Gulf Water Plan.

Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia

The *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* included \$75.0 million over ten years to establish a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Developing Northern Australia, which is expected to be operational in 2017-18. The CRC will assist businesses, governments and researchers to work together to identify opportunities for business and growth in the north. The industry-led CRC, based in Townsville is focusing initially on agriculture, food and tropical health areas where the north has particular strengths.

The Australian Government has called for applications for short-term collaborative research projects that will lead to direct impacts and improve the competitiveness of industries in northern Australia. This early funding round will provide grants of up to \$3.0 million over terms of up to three years for projects that address industry problems

in tropical health and medicine, including: models of care; and, tropical and northern agriculture including animal and plant improvement and sustainability. Applications for the funding round close on 22 May 2017.

National Positioning Infrastructure Program – Satellite-Based Augmentation System (SBAS) test

The Australian Government, through Geoscience Australia, has invested \$12.0 million over two years, from 2016-17 to test a Satellite-Based Augmentation System in Australia. The Satellite-Based Augmentation System uses space and ground-based infrastructure to improve the accuracy (from five metres to five centimetres), integrity and availability of basic Global Navigation Satellite System signals, such as those provided by the USA's Global Positioning System. This kind of high-quality augmentation signal is critical to a range of applications and services currently being employed across industries internationally (notably in transport, agriculture, construction and mining) and in applications being developed for tomorrow, particularly in automation, augmented reality, location services and intelligent transport systems. The Satellite-Based Augmentation System allows the high-quality signal to be delivered anywhere in the nation, to anyone, at any time, making the technology especially pertinent to regional and remote areas of Australia and its maritime jurisdiction. The New Zealand Government is investing \$2.0 million to test the Satellite-Based Augmentation System there, paving the way for a regional positioning technology capability.

The testing of the Satellite-Based Augmentation System in our region will allow us to investigate how the technology might enable growth, innovation and increased safety across agriculture, aviation, construction, maritime, mining, rail, road, spatial, and utilities.

Growth Fund

The Australian Government established a \$155.0 million Growth Fund, to which it is contributing \$100.6 million, over six years from 2013-14. The Growth Fund is supporting employees, businesses and the regions most affected by the closure of Australia's car manufacturing industry. The Growth Fund is helping workers from Holden and Toyota to transition to new jobs, encourage automotive supply-chain firms to diversify to new products and markets, and to accelerate new business investment in sectors outside of car manufacturing in Victoria and South Australia. The Growth Fund includes the following elements:

- the \$90.0 million Next Generation Manufacturing Investment Programme to accelerate private sector investment in high value manufacturing in Victoria and South Australia;
- the \$20.0 million Automotive Diversification Programme to help automotive Australian supply chain firms capable of diversifying to find new markets;
- the \$15.0 million boost to the Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Programme to extend the program until 30 June 2018. The program provides

retrenched automotive workers with instant access to intensive employment support; and

- the \$30.0 million Skills and Training Initiative to help currently employed Holden and Toyota workers recognise their skills and train for new jobs. Holden and Toyota have contributed \$15.0 million funding each.

National Resources Development Strategy – Exploring for the Future

Over four years from 2016-17, the \$100.5 million exploring for the future program is investigating the potential of mineral, energy and groundwater resources in northern Australia and South Australia, both regions where the resource potential is relatively poorly known. The program aims to de-risk and renew the appetite for investment in mineral exploration, and help identify major new gas and minerals resources.

Exploring for the future will deliver a comprehensive prospectus of Australia's resources through the collection and release of nationally significant geological data and information. Access to new and more detailed geological data and information will assist all participants in the resources sector increase the potential and level of exploration activities in Australia. The new pre-competitive data has the potential to stimulate investment and employment opportunities in minerals and energy exploration and resource development as well as development associated with groundwater resources.

Exploring for the future will provide a broad-regional understanding of resource potential across the entire northern Australia region. This broad understanding will be linked to a series of focussed regional minerals, energy and groundwater projects in areas with the greatest knowledge gaps.

Industry Growth Centres

The Industry Growth Centres Initiative provides \$250.5 million over four years from 2016-17 to industry sectors with growth potential. There are six sectors with high growth potential where Australia has competitive strengths:

- advanced manufacturing;
- cyber security;
- food and agribusiness;
- medical technologies and pharmaceuticals;
- mining equipment, technology and services; and
- oil, gas and energy resources.

The Australian Government has established these Industry Growth Centres in a long-term partnership with key industry leaders to improve the productivity and competitiveness of these sectors, help firms grow and prosper, and generate economic growth and employment.

Industry Growth Centres focus on four key areas: (1) improving management and workforce skills; (2) improving collaboration between industry and research to commercialise ideas; (3) improving access to international markets and global supply chains; and (4) optimising the regulatory environment.

Two of these growth centres in particular—food and agribusiness, and mining equipment, technology and services—are primarily sectors operating in and benefitting regional areas. Other growth centres such as advanced manufacturing and cyber security are enablers for both urban and regional areas.

Industry Growth Centres are helping align industry and innovation policy and programs, including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and Cooperative Research Centres, to contribute to improving the productivity, competitiveness and innovative capacity of their sectors.

Entrepreneurs' Programme

The Entrepreneurs' Programme is the Australian Government's flagship initiative for business competitiveness and productivity at the firm level. It provides practical advice and support for businesses, including: from people with private sector experience; co-funded grants to commercialise novel products, processes and services; funding to take advantage of growth opportunities; and connection and collaboration opportunities. This is building the capabilities of small and medium enterprises in key growth sectors. Services and grants are delivered through four elements: Business Management; Innovation Connections; Accelerating Commercialisation; and Incubator Support. Services are flexible, tailored and focused on value added advice and support. Services can be accessed by all Australian businesses, including those in regional Australia, subject to meeting the program's eligibility requirements.

In line with the Australian Government's priority on regional development, the Government has refocused the Incubator Support element to better facilitate entrepreneurial activity in the regions. This will enable the initiative to support the competitiveness of regional start-ups by strengthening new or existing incubator's capabilities to support them. New features include additional facilitative support, combined with more generous funding arrangements and revised eligibility criteria to maximise outcomes for regional areas.

Centre for Defence Industry Capability

The Centre for Defence Industry Capability (CDIC) is a ten year initiative of the Defence Industry Policy Statement worth \$230.0 million, from 2016-17. Its purpose is to help transform the relationship between the Department of Defence and the defence industry, and to fund defence industry development, critical skilling and export initiatives.

A national footprint has been established for the CDIC and comprises around 40 highly experienced business and innovation advisers and support staff. The CDIC is

headquartered in Adelaide, with advisers located across all States and Territories to form a national advisory network which extends to regional areas.

The CDIC is coordinating tailored region-based engagements to bring together stakeholders in a united effort to deliver defence capability, grow the Australian industrial base and present a national position to overseas markets. The CDIC and the Department of Defence are working with States and Territories to:

- involve them in industrial development activities and support for new and established defence companies;
- involve region-based activities in trade shows, related industry events and communication strategies;
- better connect businesses with opportunities in other sectors, markets and international opportunities; and
- exchange information with region-based defence industry development agencies on current and emerging industrial capabilities to aid in the development and delivery of support programs and initiatives.

Radioactive Waste Management Facility - Community Benefit Programme

A \$2.0 million Community Benefit Programme was made available in 2016-17 to the community around the shortlisted site of Wallerberdina Station in South Australia. This is in acknowledgment of the community's contribution to the ongoing community consultation process to site a National Radioactive Waste Management Facility and the short-term disruption during the site identification process.

On 25 January 2017, Senator the Hon Matt Canavan announced that 11 projects in the Hawker and Quorn regions of South Australia will be funded (totaling \$2.0 million) under the Australian Government's Community Benefit Programme. The 11 approved projects will receive an additional \$391,033 in cash and in-kind contributions creating a total investment of almost \$2.4 million.

The projects selected all demonstrate social and economic benefits to the local region.

Major Projects Facilitation Agency

The Major Projects Facilitation Agency provides services to ensure that investors and developers are aware of all regulatory approval and compliance obligations that affect their project. The Major Projects Facilitation Agency is a 'single point of entry' into the Australian Government and works closely with State and Territory governments to complement their activities. It provides information and advice across all tiers of government and across jurisdictions. The Major Projects Facilitation Agency also supports red tape reform by monitoring regulatory impacts on development and identifying opportunities for improvement.

While the agency provides a national service, it has offices in Tasmania and Northern Territory. Under the Australian Government's economic plan for Tasmania, the Major Projects Facilitation Agency's Tasmanian office was established in 2014 and allocated \$2.7 million in funding over three years to July 2017. The Major Projects Facilitation Agency's Darwin office was established in January 2016 as part of the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* initiative and was allocated \$2.1 million in funding to July 2019.

Single Business Service

Consistent with the Australian Government's Digital Transformation Agenda, the Single Business Service is putting the needs of Australian businesses first by simplifying and streamlining access to information and advice.

Funding has been provided to implement the initiative as part of the Entrepreneurs' Programme. The Single Business Service initiative recognises that, in the past, businesses have struggled to access Australian Government services and navigate the wealth of Australian Government information available to find what they need or who to talk to. Businesses, including those in regional Australia, can now get information and help through one website (www.business.gov.au), one contact centre (13 28 46) and, AusIndustry's national network to:

- get a business up and running;
- develop and commercialise ideas and products;
- improve, innovate and grow a business; and
- reach new markets.

Inspiring Australia – Science Engagement Programme

The Inspiring Australia – Science Engagement Programme is a \$29.8 million initiative, announced under the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda. This program runs over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20. Specific elements within the program with regional implications include the following:

- Inspiring Australia – Targeted Science Communications;
- Regional Science Hubs;
- Inspiring Australia – Citizen Science;
- Inspiring Australia – Maker Projects;
- Inspiring Australia – Sponsorship Grants for Student Science Engagement and International Competitions; and
- Inspiring Australia – National Science Week.

Inspiring Australia – Targeted Science Communications

The Targeted Science Communications element provides funding of \$4.1 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 to fund a range of science engagement activities that identify opportunities or needs that contribute to greater public engagement with the sciences, including among others those with a regional focus. Through arrangements with State and Territory governments and local organisations, programs are being developed and delivered to contribute to the advancement of Australian Government, State and Territory policy priorities and needs in regional Australia.

To ensure Australian communities are able to engage in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) programs throughout the year, the national network of Inspiring Australia officers is working with regional STEM hubs to build capacity in regional areas and encourage the development and promotion of combined and inter-linked community calendars of STEM activities. This initiative aims to support deeper community engagement in STEM and build connections to further learning and participation opportunities.

Regional Science Hubs

Over the next two years, Inspiring Australia will continue to expand its network of regional science hubs across Australia to establish local collaborations of organisations that will work together to deliver science engagement events for their regions. This will create a platform through which as many Australians as possible can participate in science and gain access to quality science engagement activities. This initiative is increasingly realising and contributing to opportunities for alignment between State-based regional development authorities and local communities. There are currently 35 regional science hubs.

Inspiring Australia – Citizen Science

The Citizen Science Grants element of the Inspiring Australia – Science Engagement Programme provides funding of \$4.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 for competitive grants rounds. This element aims to provide opportunities for the public to engage in science by participating in scientific research projects that include the collection or transformation of data in Australia. Participants in successful projects will be able to take part in scientific research projects by a range of means, including collecting and analysing data, formulating research questions and organising research teams. Participants will be empowered by learning new skills, forming new networks, and receiving updates on their participation in research projects. Projects could take place anywhere in Australia, including in regional areas or through the internet, enabling citizens to participate in science who may previously not have had the opportunity to participate in science to do so.

Inspiring Australia – Maker Projects

This program element is supporting development of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills in students and youth under 18 years of age in design,

engineering and programming, through hands-on learning. The objective of the Maker Projects is to encourage practical skills, creativity and entrepreneurial thinking through the development of maker spaces and activities in schools and communities. This is with the view to reaching as many students as possible, including those in regional and disadvantaged areas. The funding of \$4.0 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 will be provided in two streams: (1) for eligible Australian schools to purchase equipment required to establish a maker space for students to access and work on STEM-related activities; and (2) for Australian communities and regions to run events and education activities in partnership with industry for youth under 18 years of age.

Inspiring Australia – Sponsorship Grants for Student Science Engagement and International Competitions

This program element supports young Australians to develop skills and potential career opportunities in a Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) field through funding of \$6.4 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20. This is facilitated by providing grants to organisations (for example, schools and community groups) to sponsor eligible young Australians to participate in conferences, competitions and other STEM-related events both in Australia and overseas. This is of particular importance to students living in regional areas who may not otherwise have access to these types of STEM engagement opportunities or who may have difficulty funding the costs of travelling to these STEM events.

Inspiring Australia – National Science Week

Held during August of each year, National Science Week has a truly national reach with activities occurring in almost every corner of Australia, providing opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to engage in science, technology, engineering and maths. Funding of \$6.8 million over four years from 2016-17 to 2019-20 supports activities that reach regional and remote Australia, including through local events as well as online activities for anyone who is not able to physically reach an event near them. Locally-organised National Science Week committees ensure diverse programs of activity are available in regions throughout Australia.

Women in STEM and Entrepreneurship Programme

Under the National Innovation and Science Agenda, the Australian Government is investing a total of \$12.0 million of administered funding over four years, from 2016-17 to encourage more girls and women to choose to study Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and pursue STEM-based and entrepreneurial careers. This includes:

- \$8.0 million over four years for a grant program to support outreach programs targeting girls and women to identify and celebrate STEM role models in science and research, promote entrepreneurship and foster an interest in STEM studies and careers;

- \$2.0 million over three years supporting the expansion of the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) project to cover more Australian science and research institutions; and
- \$2.0 million for a project that is drawing on the highly effective 'Male Champions of Change' model, focused on leaders in STEM-based industries and the research sector.

The \$8.0 million grants program aims to support women in STEM and remove barriers that stop women taking part in STEM education and careers, including entrepreneurship. In the first round, a number of the supported projects were based in regional areas, which will benefit girls and women in those areas.

The Tasmania Jobs and Investment Fund

The Tasmania Jobs and Investment Fund provides \$24.0 million over the three years from 2015-16 to 2017-18 to assist business investment projects leading to new jobs and growth in Tasmania. The Tasmania Jobs and Investment Fund is made up of \$16.0 million from the Australian Government and \$8.0 million from the Tasmanian Government. Grants are offered on the basis of one dollar for every two dollars matched by the successful applicants. The Tasmania Jobs and Investment Fund is a merit-based, competitive grants program that is delivered by AusIndustry.

Business Research and Innovation Initiative

The Business Research and Innovation Initiative Pilot provides \$12.0 million over two years from 2016-17 in competitive grants for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to help the Australian Government to tap into leading-edge thinking and find the most innovative solutions to important challenges in public policy and government service delivery.

Entrepreneurs receive funding to create innovative products and services. Businesses retain the intellectual property and the right to commercialise the ideas in Australia or overseas.

Critical early-stage financial support to innovative startups and SMEs will help them test their new ideas and provide a path to market through developing a track record. The initiative also acts as a catalyst for SMEs with government as a customer thereby driving employment and economic growth.

Regional and rural Australia will be assisted through the solutions to current and future challenges. For example, a current challenge "improving transparency and reliability of water market information" will assist participants and farmers with the confidence to participate in Australia's water markets and in turn contribute to the sustainable management of water resources across Australia.

Regional and rural SMEs are also eligible for and being assisted through the Business Research and Innovation Initiative with Feasibility Study recipients from areas such as

Wollongong and North Bruny in Tasmania working on providing solutions to Government procurement challenges.

Research and Development Tax Incentive

The Research and Development (R&D) Tax Incentive is the Australian Government's principal measure to encourage industry investment in R&D. It encourages industry to undertake R&D activities that might otherwise not be conducted because of an uncertain return from the activities, in cases where the knowledge gained is likely to benefit the wider Australian economy. The R&D Tax Incentive is a broad-based program available to all industry sectors and companies of all sizes, and provides assistance to those sectors prominent in rural and regional Australia.

The program is jointly administered by the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science and the Australian Taxation Office.

Tradex Scheme

The Tradex Scheme provides an upfront exemption from customs duty and goods and services tax on eligible imported goods that are intended for direct export or incorporated in other goods that are exported. This program is broad-based and available to all eligible applicants. The upfront exemption can provide significant cash flow advantages that can also assist the competitiveness of Australian business, including those operating in regional areas, in developing their export markets.

Anti-Dumping measures

The purpose of Australia's anti-dumping system, which is administered by the Anti-Dumping Commission, is to give Australian producers the opportunity to compete with imports on a level playing field.

Anti-dumping measures are currently in force on certain imported goods that compete with goods produced by a number of industries that are located in regional Australia. These include the food processing industry located in Shepparton, Victoria, and the steel industry, which has its manufacturing hubs in regional New South Wales and South Australia.

Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project

The Rum Jungle Rehabilitation Project provides \$10.8 million in funding, from 2016-17 to 2019-20 to finalise a detailed plan for the environmental rehabilitation of the Rum Jungle mine site in the Northern Territory and its continued site management and maintenance activities. It also supports maintenance activities at the Rum Jungle Creek South site, a public recreation area.

National Carp Control Plan

The National Carp Control Plan is a \$15.1 million three-year (2016-17 to 2018-19) project to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive national

plan for controlling carp populations, including the release of a viral bio-control agent. The National Carp Control Plan involves consultations with stakeholders including governments, research agencies and local communities to examine the possibility of releasing a bio-control agent in conjunction with complementary control measures to create maximum impact on carp populations while minimising disruption to industries, communities and the environment.

Common carp are the worst freshwater aquatic pest in Australia with estimated economic impacts reaching \$500.0 million per annum. The majority of this impact is felt in regional areas of Australia. The National Carp Control Plan will prevent degradation of rural and regional water supplies and prevent harm to river and wetland ecology while limiting the impact on local communities.

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science works closely with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the development of the National Carp Control Plan.

Questacon Smart Skills Initiative

Questacon Smart Skills is a free program developed for secondary school students that creates an awareness of technology, engineering and design thinking amongst young Australians. The program includes: virtual workshops and regional tours; in-school workshops for students; and professional development workshops for teachers. Complementing the Smart Skills program is the Questacon Invention Convention, a three day program that delivers intensive innovation and enterprise focused workshops in regional centres. The Invention Conventions involve partnerships with local and national enterprises to assist in fostering innovation. The Questacon Smart Skills Initiative has ongoing funding of \$1.7 million per annum through the National Innovation and Science Agenda.

Questacon Virtual Excursions

Questacon reaches rural and regional Australia through its Schmidt Studio and its Virtual Excursions that are part of the Questacon Smart Skills Initiative program, which involves one hour hands-on workshops covering topics including environmental science, physics of flight and the innovation process. These videoconference workshops are designed for students in primary and secondary school and are an effective means for schools who have limited opportunities due to their location.

Shell Questacon Science Circus

The Shell Questacon Science Circus is an award-winning partnership program between Questacon, the Australian National University and Shell currently in its 32nd year. The Science Circus program tours nationally, returning to the same communities every few years.

The Science Circus facilitates and hosts a temporary science centre in regional and remote areas, presents in-school science shows to pre-primary, primary and secondary school students and families, and facilitates teacher professional development workshops. The team of presenters consists of up to 16 students studying towards a Master of Science Communication Outreach at the Australian National University. The program has ongoing funding of \$150,000 per annum through the National Science and Innovation Agenda.

Travelling Exhibitions

Questacon tours travelling exhibitions to a range of regional and metropolitan venues across Australia, fulfilling Questacon's national role and responsibility of providing access to hands-on informal learning experiences outside the centre of Canberra. The interactive exhibitions are developed in-house by Questacon and provide engagement for all ages. The travelling exhibitions provide a range of size, topics and complexity options suitable for most venue requirements. Travelling exhibitions, as part of Questacon's core business activity, are funded through ongoing Questacon departmental appropriation.

Teacher Development Programmes

Questacon delivers a broad range of accredited programs to pre-service, casual and registered teachers through the national outreach programs and through stand-alone activities. The programs build confidence, skill and content knowledge in teachers in the delivery of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) activities in the classroom. The STEM X Academy is an intensive five-day program delivered each January in partnership with the Australian Science Teachers Association and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation that joins teachers with researchers to develop new activities for the classroom. Teacher development, as part of Questacon core business activity, is funded through ongoing Questacon departmental appropriation.

Square Kilometre Array Project

The Australian Government is a partner in a ten nation project to establish the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Observatory, which will operate radio telescopes with unparalleled scientific and technical capabilities. The telescopes will be co-hosted in Australia (which will host the SKA 'low' frequency element) and South Africa (which will host the SKA 'mid' frequency element), with the global headquarters in the United Kingdom. As part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda announced in December 2015, the Australian Government announced \$293.7 million over ten years from 2016-17 to further support Australia's involvement in the SKA project. The project is currently in its pre-construction design and engineering phase, with construction currently scheduled to commence in 2019.

The Australian elements of the SKA will be sited in the remote Murchison district in the Mid West region of Western Australia, with support and computing facilities in

Geraldton and Perth. Constructing and operating the SKA-Low telescope will generate a variety of benefits for the region, including economic activity, employment and skill development opportunities. The traditional owners of the SKA-Low site—the Wajarri Yamaji—will be amongst the local beneficiaries. Negotiations for an Indigenous Land Use Agreement for the site are currently underway.

The Australian Government is partnering with the Western Australian Government to enable the SKA project in Australia. The State and Australian governments are actively engaging with a range of regional stakeholders including Indigenous communities, pastoralists, local government, regional development agencies and local business. The Australian SKA Office also meets twice a year with its Regional Stakeholders Group. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss the progress of the SKA project and any related issues such as infrastructure, opportunities for education and industry development.

Onshore Gas Social and Economic Research Fund

The Onshore Gas Social and Economic Research Fund provides scientific and independent research so that Australians can form their own views of the social, economic and environmental impacts and benefits of gas projects based on local data and regional characteristics. Addressing community and land holders concerns about the impacts of onshore gas is essential for the development of the gas industry.

In 2014-15, the Australian Government invested \$1.5 million in the expansion of the Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance (GISERA) from Queensland into New South Wales. The New South Wales Government, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and key industry players matched this funding. The Australian Government is providing \$4.0 million in funding to CSIRO over four years from 2016-17 to further expand the alliance, becoming the Onshore Gas Social and Economic Research Fund, to regions where unconventional gas activity is occurring or has the potential to be developed.

GISERA's research program includes: research on surface and ground water; greenhouse gas footprint; agricultural land management; terrestrial biodiversity; marine environment; and socio-economic impacts and opportunities. GISERA's research independence is ensured through the strong governance framework, which includes project approval from Regional Research Advisory Committees and undergoing CSIRO's peer review process. All research is available on GISERA's website: www.gisera.org.au.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio contributes to investment, delivering jobs, productivity improvements and economic growth to all Australians. Our regions are our nation's backbone and are critical to our economic prosperity.

Through this portfolio, the Australian Government is delivering vital infrastructure to enable our regions to prosper and grow. These infrastructure investments connect regions to the global economy and enable the safe and efficient movement of millions of tonnes of freight from farm gates and factories, to markets across Australia and overseas. These transport links also ensure access to employment and training opportunities, health, education and other vital services that are central to sustainable communities and economies.

The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio also contributes to strengthening regional Australia through facilitating local partnerships with communities, between all levels of government and supporting effective governance of Australia's local governments and territories. It is critical that our communities have the support they need to build local leadership expertise and maximise opportunities that flow from their comparative advantages. We are continuing to invest in our regions to ensure they are places of commerce and community.

The Australian Government has made an unprecedented commitment to the upgrade and construction of safe and reliable land transport infrastructure across the country. This investment is central to providing connectivity and economic growth. The Australian Government will deliver the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail project by a combination of an additional \$8.4 billion equity investment in the Australian Rail Track Corporation and a public private partnership for the most complex elements of the project. Work will commence in 2017-18. Inland Rail will connect regional Australia to domestic and global markets, bring Australian rail into the 21st century and help build a stronger and more competitive nation. Inland Rail will complement existing road and rail infrastructure by creating a highly efficient, integrated, freight transport network. The project will improve access to and from regional markets for large numbers of businesses by opening new transport service options, lowering freight costs and enhancing competition in the freight market.

The Australian Government will establish the Regional Growth Fund providing \$472 million for regional infrastructure projects that will make a difference to local economies. The Regional Growth Fund will include \$272 million to provide grants of \$10 million or more for major transformational projects which bring together the three levels of government with businesses and the community to support long-term economic growth and create jobs in regions undergoing structural adjustment.

An additional, \$200 million will be provided to the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) to support the construction of community infrastructure and build the capacity of regional areas. BBRF will make sure our regional communities are sustainable and strong into the future, by building communities that people want to live in and come

back to for work, business and lifestyle opportunities. This commitment acknowledges that regions are more than bricks and mortar with funding also available for projects that bring social benefit like attracting major events or building local leadership capability. The second round of BBRF will allow more regional communities across Australia to benefit from the fund. This brings the total Australian Government commitment to the BBRF to nearly \$500 million. The BBRF will fund only projects in rural, regional and remote Australia and follows the conclusion of the highly successful National Stronger Regions Fund, which delivered hundreds of projects across the nation.

The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio is also investing in sustainable regional economies. The \$220.0 million Regional Jobs and Investment Packages supports the Australian Government's commitment to stimulate economic growth and create jobs in ten pilot regions enabling these communities to design unique solutions that are best suited to diversify their economies, drive long-term growth and deliver sustainable employment.

The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio will set a future direction for growth and connectivity in regional Australia by releasing a whole-of-government regional development policy in 2017. This policy will focus on investing in rural, regional and remote communities to: drive economic growth and create local jobs; build transport and communications infrastructure; improve access to education and healthcare services; and create confident and strong regions working in partnership with local communities.

The \$18.3 million Regional Development Australia Committee program supports the Australian Government commitment to strong, confident and vibrant regions. The Regional Development Australia Committees will have an active and facilitative role in their communities with a clear focus on delivering local jobs, attracting investment and building economic growth in their regions.

NEW INITIATIVES

Regional Jobs and Investment Packages

The Australian Government is further committing to the Regional Jobs and Investment Packages by providing \$20.0 million to the Latrobe Valley which will bring total funding for the program to \$220.0 million over four years from 2016-17. This will help diversify regional economies, stimulate economic growth and deliver sustainable employment in ten pilot regions: Tropical North Queensland (\$20.0 million), Bowen Basin (\$30.0 million), Wide Bay Burnett (\$20.0 million), NSW North Coast (\$25.0 million), NSW South Coast (\$20.0 million), Upper Spencer Gulf (\$20.0 million), Latrobe Valley (\$20.0 million), Goulburn Valley (\$20.0 million), Geelong (\$20.0 million) and Regional Tasmania (\$25.0 million).

Local Planning Committees will be established in each region to develop a Local Investment Plan that outlines industry growth sectors, new market opportunities and future workforce needs. Grants will be available in targeted competitive funding

rounds to projects that align with the priorities in each region's Local Investment Plan. Once a region's plan is finalised, funding is available across three streams: local infrastructure, business innovation, and skills and training.

Regional Growth Fund

The Government will provide \$472.2 million over four years from 2017-18 to establish a Regional Growth Fund.

The Regional Growth Fund will include \$272.2 million to provide grants of \$10.0 million or more for major transformational projects which support long-term economic growth and create jobs in regions undergoing structural adjustment.

Also in the Regional Growth Fund is \$200 million for the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) for four years from 2017-18, building on the commitment to the BBRF at the 2016 election, to allow more regional communities across Australia to benefit from the fund. This brings the total Australian Government commitment to the BBRF to nearly \$500 million from 2017-18 to 2020-21.

The BBRF will invest in eligible projects in regional and remote Australia, outside the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, and Canberra. Successful projects will be required to deliver economic and social benefits, and grant funding is available through two funding streams:

- The Infrastructure Projects Stream supports projects that involve construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure.
- The Community Investments Stream funds community development activities including, but not limited to, new or expanded local events, strategic regional plans, leadership and capability building activities.

Inland Rail – Delivery

The Australian Government is committing an additional \$8.4 billion in new equity funding for the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) to deliver the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail project. Inland Rail will connect regional Australia to domestic and global markets, bring Australian rail into the 21st century and help build a stronger and more competitive nation.

Inland Rail will provide a seamless new freight corridor between Brisbane and Melbourne via Toowoomba, Moree, Parkes and Albury, and link to other mainland state capitals through the ARTC network. The project will improve the productivity of the national land freight network and be an enduring economic asset for regional communities in south-east Australia. Inland Rail will complement existing road and rail infrastructure by creating a highly efficient, integrated, freight transport network. The project will improve access to and from regional markets for businesses by opening new transport service options, lowering freight costs and enhancing competition in the freight market.

Spanning three states and 1,700 kilometres, Inland Rail will be a nationally significant civil engineering project. Around 98 per cent of construction and capital expenditure will occur in regional areas particularly in south-east Queensland and north-west New South Wales. In addition to 500 kilometres of new rail track and the upgrade of 1,200 kilometres of existing rail corridor, the project will involve over 8 kilometres of tunnelling in southern Queensland through the Toowoomba Range, which will be among Australia's largest tunnel projects. Around 16,000 direct and indirect jobs will be supported during the peak of construction and the project will require about 260,000 tonnes of steel.

This investment builds on the Australian Government's previous commitment of \$893.7 million in funding, which has allowed the ARTC to progress work on the Inland Rail corridor and bring the project to construction readiness.

Stronger Communities Programme

The Australian Government will make available an additional \$22.5 million to deliver a third round of the Stronger Communities Programme (SPC) in 2017-18, to fund small capital projects in local communities that will improve local community participation and contribute to vibrant and viable communities across Australia.

Under the program, \$150,000 will be available in each Federal Electorate in 2017-18. Applicants will be able to seek a grant of at least \$5,000 and up to a maximum of \$20,000 and will be required to match the SPC grant in cash or in-kind on at least a dollar for dollar basis.

The input of the community is a key element of the SPC. Each Member of the House of Representatives is required to establish a community consultation committee, to identify projects for consideration under the program.

Regional Rail in Victoria

The Australian Government is committed to the development of regional Victorian communities, particularly as the population, outside greater metropolitan Melbourne is forecast to reach over two million people by 2031.

The Australian Government will invest \$500.0 million in regional rail in Victoria to improve travel times, reliability and frequency of services which will increase the patronage of regional public transport services. This will include improvements to the North East Line, the Gippsland Rail Line, services on the Geelong Line, as well as a study into improving the Shepparton Line, to support economic productivity and efficiency by connecting people with jobs, education, health facilities, markets and services in Melbourne.

Faster Rail Connecting Capital Cities and Orbital Regional Centres

The Australian Government is focussed on improving the use of rail transport to ease the pressures within Australia's largest cities, and provide important links to regional centres. It is seeking to improve opportunities for regional centres while mitigating

population growth pressures (including congestion, housing supply and affordability, and job accessibility) on our major capital cities.

In 2017-18 the Australian Government will encourage the development of proposals for improving passenger rail services between our big cities and nearby regional centres through faster and higher-speed services. It will call for the submission of formal proposals, and assess them to support the development of formal business cases. Business cases may have the opportunity to attract Australian Government project funding in future years from the \$10.0 billion National Rail Program.

The Australian Government will provide \$20.0 million in 2017-18 to support business case development.

Keys2drive Learner Driver Programme

The Australian Government will continue to support Keys2drive with a funding commitment of \$16.0 million over four years from 2017-18. The program delivers a free lesson to learner drivers and their parent or mentor and will include a number of enhancements to expand uptake in regional areas.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Building Better Regions Fund

The Australian Government is investing nearly \$300 million under the Building Better Regions Fund from 2016-17 to 2019-20. The Building Better Regions Fund invests in eligible projects in regional and remote Australia, outside the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, and Canberra.

Successful projects are required to deliver economic and social benefits, and grant funding is available through two funding streams, the Infrastructure Projects Stream and the Community Investments Stream.

National Stronger Regions Fund

The Australian Government has conducted three funding rounds of the National Stronger Regions Fund and is investing more than \$630.0 million in infrastructure projects across Australia.

These projects will deliver economic benefits and address disadvantage, with most projects located in regional areas across Australia.

There will be no further funding rounds under this program.

Community Development Grants Fund

The Community Development Grants Fund provides funding for critical projects where the local community has identified the need for new or upgraded facilities. Projects range from new sporting facilities, to upgrading community centres and small-scale infrastructure projects.

Community Development Grants Fund projects contribute to the local economies, create jobs and boost the confidence within a region. To date, funding of more than \$941.2 million has been committed to more than 750 projects including more than 450 projects from the 2016 Federal Election.

Drought Communities Programme

The Drought Communities Programme is designed to provide employment for people whose work opportunities have been affected by drought in eligible local government areas. The Australian Government is providing \$35.0 million over four years from 2015-16, including \$5.0 million in 2017-18.

Funding is targeted at local infrastructure projects that offer the greatest potential to stimulate local community spending, use local resources, and provide a long-lasting benefit to communities and the agricultural industries on which they depend. Eligible local government areas receive funding of up to \$1.5 million to support projects. Projects must be completed by 30 June 2019.

Declared councils eligible to receive Drought Communities Programme funding are: Balonne, Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall-Tambo, Boulia, Bulloo, Burke, Carpentaria, Diamantina, Flinders, Longreach, McKinlay, Murweh, Paroo, Quilpie, Richmond and Winton in Queensland; Brewarrina, Coonamble and Walgett in New South Wales; and Buloke, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack in Victoria.

Tasmanian Jobs and Growth Package

Delivered by a number of departments, the \$106.5 million Tasmanian Jobs and Growth Package is an initiative that complements the Australian Government's Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania—a package of measures aimed at stimulating Tasmania's economy by supporting growth and employment.

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development is administering \$80.3 million from 2013-14 to 2016-17 for 30 projects which support the economic development of Tasmania.

Roads to Recovery

The Roads to Recovery program will deliver funding of nearly \$4.0 billion from 2013-14 to 2019-20, 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 the life of the program.

In the 2016 Budget, the Australian Government committed to an extension of the Roads to Recovery program, with a further \$50 million per annum from 2019-20 onwards to support construction and maintenance of local roads. The annual base funding for the program will increase to \$400.0 million from 2019-20 and, of this, around \$300.0 million will be provided to local councils in rural and regional areas.

Black Spot Projects

Black Spot Projects will receive funding of \$624.5 million from 2013-14 to 2019-20, to help make roads safer for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. Each State and Territory receives a share of the total funding, based on population and crash data.

Black Spot Projects will continue to receive \$60.0 million a year from 2020-21 for road safety works such as roundabouts, crash barriers and street lights at places where there have been serious crashes or where serious crashes are likely.

More than 60 per cent of road deaths and a significant proportion of serious injuries occur outside metropolitan areas. In line with national road safety policy objectives, approximately 50 per cent of Black Spot funds in each State (other than Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory) are reserved for projects in non-metropolitan areas. This ensures that crash locations in rural areas are treated.

Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity

The Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity program will receive \$288.0 million from 2013-14 to 2019-20, to provide funding to infrastructure projects that improve productivity and safety outcomes of heavy vehicle operations across Australia.

The Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity program funds road infrastructure that contributes to the safety and productivity of heavy vehicle operations across Australia delivering benefits to all road users.

Projects funded under the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity program include rest stops and parking bays, upgrading the capacity of roads, and technology trials aimed at improving heavy vehicle productivity.

Bridges Renewal Programme

The Bridges Renewal Programme will receive \$360.0 million from 2015-16 to 2019-20 to provide funding for upgrades and repairs to bridges that enhance access for local communities and facilitate higher productivity vehicle access.

Since 2015-16, the Bridges Renewal Programme has funded 205 projects over two rounds with round three until 15 May 2017.

Developing Northern Australia – Improving Northern Cattle Supply Chains (Northern Australia Beef Roads Programme)

The Australian Government has committed \$100.0 million from 2016-17 to 2019-20 to improve the productivity and resilience of the cattle industry in northern Australia. Funding will be used for road infrastructure upgrades, with contributions also being provided by the three northern jurisdictions, local governments and potentially industry, for projects which aim to reduce costs to the northern Australia cattle industry.

Opportunities to improve productivity were modelled using state-of-the art transport logistics modelling developed by the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation, (referred to as the 'TraNSIT' model). Successful projects were announced in October 2016 and construction on projects is expected to commence from mid-2017.

The Australian Government is also working with jurisdictions to agree Indigenous employment and supplier use targets for all northern Australia road projects under both the Northern Australia Roads and Beef Roads programs.

Northern Australia Roads Programme

The Australian Government has committed \$600.0 million for the Northern Australia Roads Programme for priority road projects in northern Australia.

Roads identified in an audit of northern Australian infrastructure by Infrastructure Australia, along with other roads identified as priorities by the States and Territories, such as those connecting communities, or regional towns to ports were considered for funding, with successful projects announced throughout 2016.

Works will include upgrades, as well as safety and productivity improvements, such as widening, overtaking lanes, and pavement renewal. Construction on some projects is expected to commence from mid-2017.

National Highway Upgrade Programme

The Australian Government is investing \$225.8 million from 2014-15 to 2019-20 under the National Highway Upgrade Programme.

The National Highway Upgrade Programme provides funding for improvements to Australia's key national highway networks through works such as shoulder and centreline widening, wire rope barriers, overtaking lanes, turning lanes, bridges, and pavement improvements on highways around Australia.

Developing Northern Australia – Freight Rail Analyses

The Australian Government committed \$4.9 million in 2015 as part of the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* to undertake freight rail feasibility studies in northern Australia, including a pre-feasibility study on a potential rail line between Mount Isa and Tennant Creek.

The analysis is considering the viability and economic opportunities of a new freight transport link between Queensland and the Northern Territory, also considering the broader context of the corridor reaching from Townsville to Darwin.

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development is collaborating with relevant governments on delivering the freight rail analyses measure.

Tasmanian Freight Rail Revitalisation

The Freight Rail Revitalisation program will raise the quality of the major lines on the Tasmanian rail network through selective re-sleepering and track replacement. The total project cost is \$119.6 million with an Australian Government contribution of \$59.8 million.

The program will reduce the operational costs of freight movements by providing additional rail capacity, improved reliability and reduced transit times. These upgrades will support the economic viability of high-tonnage businesses in regional Tasmania such as those in the cement and paper industries.

The current Freight Rail Revitalisation program builds on upgrades that were designed to keep the lines at an operational standard, with the objective of improving overall safety, reliability to support the competitiveness of the Tasmanian rail network.

Regional Aviation Access

Through Regional Aviation Access, the Australian Government provides targeted support for aerodrome infrastructure and air services to remote areas where they are not commercially viable.

The 2015-16 Budget allocated \$33.7 million over four years to the Remote Airstrip Upgrade funding component to undertake safety and access works at airstrips in remote locations. On 10 February 2017, the Australian Government announced funding of \$11.8 million for 91 projects across Australia, with many projects supported into 2017-18 to undertake works that are more complex. This follows the approval of 52 grants totalling \$11.6 million announced in December 2015. The program improves the reliability of air transport for communities to access larger centres and receive essential flights.

The Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme subsidises flights to ensure residents of 260 remote communities have access to regional service centres. \$54.1 million is allocated to the Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme over the four years from 2017-18.

Payment scheme for Airservices Australia's En Route Charges

The Airservices Australia En route Charges Payment Scheme supports regional commercial airlines operating low volume, commercially vulnerable routes as well as aeromedical providers flying to regional and remote communities. The Airservices Australia En route Charges Payment Scheme offers eligible airlines a rebate of the Airservices Australia en route navigation charge for applicable flights.

Sixty per cent of the applicable en route charge is available to eligible airlines flying commercial routes. As an incentive to promote new services, new routes are eligible to

be considered for funding equal to 100 per cent of applicable en route charges. Eligible aeromedical providers receive up to 100 per cent of applicable en route charges.

Aviation Security Enhancements – Regional and Remote Aviation Security Awareness

The Australian Government allocated \$4.9 million from 2016-17 to 2020-21 for aviation security training at category 3-6 airports under the Regional and Remote Airports Security Awareness program.

In consultation with aviation industry representatives, security awareness training for people working at security-controlled regional and remote category 3-6 airports has been developed. Other airports and airport industry participants may also access the training if desired.

The training, which is voluntary, aims to embed security awareness into day-to-day operations and ensure that all staff are prepared for a security or emergency incident, should it occur. It also aims to assist workers and managers at airports to develop and/or refresh their understanding of their obligations toward contributing to a secure aviation environment.

Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme

The Australian Government supports the Tasmanian economy and regional Australia by assisting with the cost of transporting freight across Bass Strait. The Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme helps address the sea freight cost disadvantage incurred by the shippers of eligible non-bulk goods moved by sea between: the mainland of Australia and Tasmania; King Island and the main island of Tasmania; and the Furneaux Group of Islands and the main island of Tasmania. This assistance is provided because of Tasmania's geographical location and because, unlike shippers on the mainland of Australia, shippers on these islands do not have access to a network of road and rail transport.

On 1 January 2016, the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme was extended to provide assistance to all currently eligible goods leaving Tasmania that are being shipped to locations beyond mainland Australia that are being trans-shipped through the mainland.

In 2017-18, the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme is forecast to provide \$171.6 million in assistance to eligible Tasmanian shippers.

Victorian Infrastructure Package

In November 2016, the Prime Minister announced that the Australian and Victorian governments had reached agreement on a separate \$3.0 billion Victorian Infrastructure Package that will unlock critical funding for more than 40 key road and rail projects across the State.

This package is being jointly funded by the Australian and Victorian governments on a 50:50 basis and, includes Australian Government funding of \$345.0 million towards a \$690.0 million Rural and Regional Roads package that will improve safety and increase productivity across regional Victoria. Projects to be funded include a new crossing of the Murray River between Echuca and Moama and targeted road upgrades in the Green Triangle.

The \$440.0 million Murray Basin Freight Rail project is also jointly funded under the Victorian Infrastructure Package. The project, which will upgrade 1,000 kilometres of freight rail infrastructure across the Murray Basin, is expected to better connect primary producers to the State's major ports, reduce transportation costs by allowing larger trains to move more product with each trip, and boost export opportunities.

Great Ocean Road (Victoria)

The Australian Government is investing \$50.0 million from 2013-14 to 2018-19 to the \$100.0 million upgrade of the Great Ocean Road in south-west Victoria. The upgrade is rehabilitating existing pavement, stabilising cliff and land slip sites, strengthening bridges and improving drainage assets between Torquay and Allansford. The upgrade will better connect villages along the south-west coast and increase tourism at famous attractions such as the Twelve Apostles and Bells Beach. The upgrade will also improve safety and reduce travel times.

The Australian Government committed \$25.0 million towards this project in 2013 and a further \$25.0 million under the Rural and Regional Roads Package that forms part of the \$3.0 billion Victorian Infrastructure Package. Both commitments have been matched by the Victorian Government to enable a substantial upgrade of this iconic regional road. Construction commenced in August 2014 and the Victorian Government is developing a schedule of additional works to be undertaken utilising the additional funding.

Great Western Highway (New South Wales)

The Australian Government is contributing \$200.0 million towards the \$250.3 million upgrade of the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Lithgow. The works include the upgrade of the highway at Forty Bends, safety upgrades between Katoomba and Mount Victoria, and a program of safety works between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. The project will improve road safety and road freight efficiency, while protecting the area's natural environment, heritage and community amenity.

Pacific Highway (New South Wales)

The Australian Government is investing \$5.6 billion over seven years from 2013-14 towards the upgrade of the Pacific Highway to a four-lane divided road between Hexham and the Queensland border. Over 70 per cent of the final highway length has been constructed and the full upgrade is due to be completed by 2020. This package of projects will reduce travel times, deliver significant freight benefits and reduce crash

and fatality rates while meeting the needs of the coastal communities that live along the Highway.

Bruce Highway (Queensland)

The Australian Government is investing up to \$6.7 billion towards the ten year program of works on the Bruce Highway from 2013-14 to 2022-23, focusing on a range of specific upgrades and safety packages agreed with the Queensland Government as part of the Infrastructure Investment Programme.

The projects include major upgrades and realignments, strengthening and widening type works, plus a range of safety and efficiency measures to target sites with poor crash histories, widen pavements and to provide additional overtaking lanes and rest areas.

Cape York Region Package (Queensland)

The Australian Government is investing \$208.4 million from 2014-15 to 2018-19 to facilitate upgrades to infrastructure including improved road access into Cape York from the south.

The Cape York Region Package will consist of upgrading and sealing priority sections of the Peninsula Developmental Road, five sections of the Endeavour Valley Road and delivering community infrastructure projects to nine local government areas on the Cape.

The projects will provide benefits to the Cape York local community and local industry, including the mining sector.

Outback Way (Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia)

The Australian Government is investing \$42.0 million from 2014-15 to 2018-19 towards the \$75.8 million Outback Way project to upgrade sections to improve safety and access to remote areas. The project will unlock the potential benefits of the Outback Way, benefitting Indigenous and remote communities and the Australian economy, particularly in the areas of tourism, mining and freight.

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$100.0 million to continue upgrading the Outback Way across Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Funding between these jurisdictions has been notionally allocated, with actual funding splits to be informed by an investment strategy to be developed by the Australian Government in consultation with the jurisdictions.

Adelaide to Tarcoola Re-Railing Upgrade Acceleration (South Australia)

The Australian Government has committed to fully funding up to \$252.0 million in equity over three years from 2016-17 to the Australian Rail Track Corporation for the delivery of the Adelaide-Tarcoola Rail Upgrade Acceleration project. The Adelaide-Tarcoola section of track forms part of the Melbourne to Perth corridor and is

approaching the end of its asset life with the majority of the rail between 45 and 60 years old. Production of steel rail and early preparation works have commenced for the upgrade of this section with stronger 60 kg/m rail.

The project will bring forward an order for approximately 73,000 tonnes of steel from Arrium Steel over the next three years and create up to 130 direct and indirect jobs over the life of the project, as well as other local jobs in the region.

Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands (South Australia)

The Australian Government is investing \$85.0 million from 2015-16 to 2019-20 towards the \$106.3 million upgrade of sections of the 210 kilometres of main access road between the Stuart Highway and Pukatja, and improving up to 21 kilometres of community roads.

This package of work will provide all weather access to airstrips in Pukatja, Umuwa, Fregon, Mimili, Indulkana, and to the Umuwa and Fregon homelands.

South Australian Regional Roads Package

The Australian Government will provide \$11.0 million towards the \$13.8 million South Australian Regional Roads Package to boost the economy, increase productivity, improve safety and create jobs. The Australian Government has allocated funds to road projects for regional South Australia, including works on the Sturt Highway, Eyre Highway, Lincoln Highway, Augusta Highway and Riddoch Highway.

Great Northern Highway – Muchea to Wubin Upgrade (Western Australia)

The Australian Government is investing \$275.8 million from 2014-15 to 2019-20 towards the \$344.8 million upgrade of the highway between Muchea and Wubin which will significantly improve freight efficiency and safety on this section of the National Network. Upgrades to this link will also contribute to the long term objective of enabling road trains to travel further south to Muchea before “breaking down” to B-double or single trailer configurations (road trains are currently required to “break down” at Wubin, some 220 kilometres north of Muchea).

NorthLink WA – Swan Valley Bypass (Western Australia)

The Australian Government is investing \$648.4 million (including \$54.4 million from the National Partnership Agreement on Infrastructure Projects in Western Australia) from 2014-15 to 2019-20 towards the \$810.3 million project to construct a new 37 kilometre highway from the intersection of the Tonkin and Reid highways in Malaga to the Great Northern Highway at Muchea.

This will be divided into two stages: the Central Section from the Reid Highway to Ellenbrook and the Northern Section from Ellenbrook to Muchea. The new route will replace the Great Northern Highway through the Swan Valley as the main road freight route from Perth to the north of Western Australia.

Midland Highway (Tasmania)

The Australian Government is investing \$400.0 million from 2014-15 to 2024-25 towards the \$500.0 million upgrade of the Midland Highway to a minimum three star Australian Road Assessment Programme safety rating. This package of works will involve approximately 30 individual projects over the length of the highway.

The highway is the major route between Tasmania's two largest cities, Hobart and Launceston, and the key freight route between Hobart and the northern ports. The project will improve connectivity and road safety on this key north-south corridor in Tasmania.

Regional Roads Productivity Package (Northern Territory)

The Australian Government is investing \$90.0 million from 2013-14 to 2017-18 towards the \$106 million project. Works include replacing bridges on the Roper Highway, improving flood immunity on Port Keats Road, sealing sections of the Santa Teresa Road, constructing a new bridge over Rocky Bottom Creek on Central Arnhem Road, strengthening, widening and sealing sections of the Buntine Highway, and installing gravel on sections of the Arnhem Link Road.

The Australian Government is also fully funding a \$77.0 million package of works from 2014-15 to 2017-18 for the strengthening and widening of road pavements, flood immunity improvements, and fatigue management measures such as upgrading rest areas and intersection improvements through the Northern Territory Roads Package.

Regional Development Australia Committees

The Regional Development Australia Committee program provides a network of 55 committees of community leaders, working to strengthen Australia's regions and build stronger communities. They achieve this by enhancing economic development opportunities and fostering effective communication between communities, business and all three spheres of government.

The Australian Government is continuing the Regional Development Australia Committee program, providing \$74.3 million for the period 2017-18 to 2020-21. Current funding agreements have been extended until 31 December 2017. Key tasks for Regional Development Australia Committees include maintaining three to five year regional plans and advising on critical issues affecting economic development, as well as priority activities to drive economic development in their regions. Regional Development Australia Committees also assist local community stakeholders to develop project proposals, identify appropriate funding sources and promote Australian Government programs.

Local Government Financial Assistance Grant

The Local Government Financial Assistance Grant program established under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995* provides financial assistance to local

governments across Australia to enable them to meet local priorities. The Australian Government is continuing the Financial Assistance Grant program which will provide an estimated \$8.8 billion to local government over the period 2017-18 to 2020-21 – approximately \$2.5 billion per year. The funding is untied and consists of two components:

- a general purpose component which is distributed between the States and Territories according to population; and
- an identified local road component which is distributed between the States and Territories according to fixed historical shares.

Services to Territories

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development administers the Territories of the Ashmore and Cartier Islands, Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, the Coral Sea Islands, Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay, and manages national interest in the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory.

The Department delivers services, provides funding support and undertakes capital works with the objective of ensuring that Territory communities have access to similar services as equivalent mainland communities.

Indian Ocean Territories

The Australian Government continues to support the communities of Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands through the provision of essential services and funding for the operation of major infrastructure. These include healthcare, education, policing and ports and airports management. In 2016-17 the Australian Government provided \$118.4 million in funding for services to the Indian Ocean Territories. The Australian Government continues to support air services arrangements for the Indian Ocean Territories, with a focus on placing these on as commercial a setting as possible. The Australian Government further provided funding for water-mapping and stormwater management studies and a Master Plan for Flying Fish Cove on Christmas Island.

Norfolk Island

Since passing legislation which extended Commonwealth laws to Norfolk Island from 1 July 2016, the Australian Government has continued to invest in improvements to service delivery. In addition, New South Wales has agreed for its laws to be applied, creating a modern body of State law. These will be phased in over time in consultation with both New South Wales and the Norfolk Island community so as to facilitate a smooth transition.

State Government type services are provided by New South Wales, the Norfolk Island Regional Council and the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development. In 2016-17 the Australian Government provided \$22.6 million in funding for services to Norfolk Island. The Australian Government has further invested \$16.4 million over four years from 2015-16 in the upgrade of the Cascade Pier which will facilitate greater access to Norfolk Island by cruise ships and support containerised cargo, in addition to \$3.4 million from 2016-17 for the Norfolk Island Central School and \$2.8 million over

two years from 2015-16 for the Norfolk Island Health and Residential Aged Care Service.

Jervis Bay

The Australian Government supports the community of the Jervis Bay Territory by funding the provision of State and Local Government type services. In 2016-17 the Australian Government provided \$6.4 million in funding to support these services. State Government services are delivered by the Australian Capital Territory. The Australian Government, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory continue to consider the proposal for New South Wales to deliver State Government type services in Jervis Bay.

PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

The Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio provides high quality advice and support to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, portfolio Ministers and Assistant Ministers to achieve a coordinated and innovative approach to the development and implementation of Australian Government policies, including those that impact on regional and remote communities. The portfolio coordinates and develops policy across the Australian Government in economic, domestic and international issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, cities policy, including regional cities, and public service stewardship.

While responsibility for Indigenous outcomes sits across all portfolios, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is responsible for broad policy directions, and some specific funding programs, aimed at ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to take up the full range of opportunities our nation has to offer. This includes measures to encourage workforce participation, economic development, educational success and safety at home – the foundations of successful communities. Two thirds of Indigenous Australians live outside the major cities, with over 20 per cent living in remote and very remote locations.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Regional Network is located in the communities they serve and has ensured practical change on the ground through implementing and supporting the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. Introduced on 1 July 2014, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy replaced more than 150 individual programs and activities with five flexible, broad-based programs.

The Australian Government is committed to working with governments, business and the community to position our cities, regional and metropolitan, to reach their full potential. The Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio is leading delivery of the Government's Smart Cities Plan, released in April 2016. This plan supports productive, accessible, liveable cities that attract talent, encourage innovation and create jobs and growth. The Smart Cities Plan represents a new framework for cities policy at the federal level - and it is a framework that will guide action across various portfolios, to deliver better outcomes for our cities, the people who live in them and all Australians. To deliver the Smart Cities Plan, the Australian Government has invited State, Territory and relevant local governments to partner on City Deals.

NEW INITIATIVES

Indigenous Entrepreneurs Package

Prior to the 2016 election, the Australian Government committed to provide \$115.0 million from 2016-17 to establish an Indigenous Entrepreneurs Package of targeted support for Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses. This includes:

- investing \$90.0 million over three years in an Indigenous Entrepreneurs Fund to establish and grow Indigenous businesses by providing business advice and support to assist new and existing businesses to access commercial finance, as well as one-off grants for business infrastructure, primarily in remote and regional Australia;
- developing an Indigenous Business Sector Strategy. The Indigenous Business Sector Strategy is expected to be finalised in early 2017-18; and
- refocusing Indigenous Business Australia's Business Development and Assistance Programme.

From 2017-18, \$146.9 million over four years will be redirected from Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to facilitate the delivery of innovative and effective support for Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs (Business Support for Indigenous Entrepreneurs – Extension). This will include providing \$27.5 million per year to IBA's Business Development and Assistance Programme.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Enhanced Evidence and Evaluation in Indigenous Affairs

The Government will provide \$52.9 million over four years from 2017-18 to implement a whole-of-government research and evaluation strategy for policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians. This includes the establishment of an Indigenous Research Fund.

The strategy includes three components:

- \$40.0 million over four years from 2017-18 to strengthen evaluation of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy;
- \$10.0 million over three years from 2017-18 to establish an Indigenous Research Fund that will add to the Indigenous policy evidence base; and
- \$2.9 million over four years from 2017-18 for the Productivity Commission to enhance its role in Indigenous policy evaluation and to expand the Commission to include an additional Commissioner with relevant experience in Indigenous policy.

Implementing the National Cities Agenda

On 29 April 2016, the Australian Government launched its Smart Cities Plan. The Smart Cities Plan will improve the productivity, liveability and accessibility of

Australian cities, helping to build an agile, innovative and prosperous nation. City Deals will be the primary mechanism for delivery of the Smart Cities Plan. The Australian Government has invited State, Territory and relevant local governments to partner on City Deals. The first two signed City Deals are Townsville and Launceston.

Townsville City Deal

The Australian Government, Queensland Government and Townsville City Council agreed the Townsville City Deal on 9 December 2016. The City Deal is a long-term plan to secure the economic success of Townsville by bringing all relevant policy, program and funding levers together to achieve a shared vision for Townsville as an economic gateway to northern Australia, and a lifestyle-rich city for residents and visitors alike.

Key commitments under the Townsville City Deal include:

- \$150.0 million to support development of the Townsville Eastern Access Rail Corridor, including \$3.0 million toward development of the business case due for completion in 2017;
- identifying innovative funding and financing opportunities in 2017, to help accelerate investment in the State Development Area and the expansion of the Port of Townsville;
- creating the Townsville Development Corporation to deliver urban renewal and drive further investment across the city;
- establishing a Townsville Industrial Development Board to drive investment and market engagement to attract freight and port-related industries;
- establishing an intergovernmental water taskforce in 2017 to improve Townsville's water security supply and usage;
- developing a program of energy efficiency measures across Townsville; and
- building the 25,000 seat North Queensland Stadium commencing in 2017, with completion due in time for the 2020 National Rugby League season.

Launceston City Deal

The Australian Government, the Tasmanian Government and the City of Launceston agreed the Launceston City Deal on 20 April 2017. The Launceston City Deal is a commitment between governments for a collective program of planning, reform and investment aimed at building on the region's natural advantages to improve the lives of local residents. The City Deal objectives are:

- jobs and skills growth;
- business, industry and population growth;
- a vibrant, liveable city;
- innovation and industry engagement; and
- a healthy Tamar Estuary.

Key commitments under the City Deal include:

- \$130.0 million to relocate the University of Tasmania's Launceston campus (delivered through the Department of Education and Training);
- \$7.5 million to rejuvenate the Launceston central business district, through the City of Launceston's City Heart project (delivered through the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development); and
- \$2.0 million for the delivery of a National Institute for Forest Products Innovation Hub (delivered through the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources).

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Regional Network

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Regional Network encompasses 12 regions across Australia that have similarities in culture, language, mobility and economy. The Regional Network is responsible for providing expertise and information about the local circumstances of communities, stakeholders, services, issues and sensitivities. Each region is led by a senior officer (Regional Manager), who is accountable for achieving outcomes in their region.

The Regional Network engages with Indigenous individuals, communities and leaders across Australia. It focuses on understanding the needs and aspirations of Indigenous people to affect practical change on the ground in the Australian Government's key priority areas, including strengthening opportunities for economic participation. The Regional Network will work to design and implement tailored and culturally appropriate local solutions in partnership with Australian Government agencies, State and Territory governments, local governments, Indigenous communities, service providers and other stakeholders.

Indigenous Student Success Program

The Indigenous Student Success Program commenced on 1 January 2017. Under the program, universities share in \$67.5 million in 2017 to offer scholarships, tutorial assistance and other support helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate, successfully progress through university, and graduate. The funding for 2016-17 is \$33.7 million and for 2017-18 it is \$68.0 million. The program features a loading that recognises the additional support students from remote and regional locations require.

Indigenous Advancement Strategy

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy began on 1 July 2014 and replaced more than 150 individual programs and activities with five flexible, broad based programs:

- Jobs, Land and Economy;
- Children and Schooling;
- Safety and Wellbeing;

- Culture and Capability; and
- Remote Australia Strategies.

Through these five broad programs, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy supports a wide range of activities, including many activities designed by Indigenous communities and organisations to achieve local aspirations.

Jobs, Land and Economy

Getting more adults into employment, fostering Indigenous business and assisting Indigenous people to benefit socially and economically from the use of their land are essential to delivering the Australian Government's commitment to improving the lives of Indigenous Australians. Since commencement of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy on 1 July 2014, over 25,000 job placements have been supported by the employment initiatives under its Jobs, Land and Economy program.

The Australian Government is leading by example by committing to a three per cent employment target across the Australian Government by 2018. For the first time, the Australian Government has set agency-level targets for Indigenous representation to help drive accountability, taking into account agencies' current representation and regional presence. In the 12 months to 30 June 2016, Indigenous employment in the Australian Government has increased from 2.2 per cent to 2.4 per cent.

Partnering with some of Australia's largest employers, the Employment Parity Initiative aims to increase the number of large Australian companies with a workforce reflective of the size of the Indigenous population. The Employment Parity Initiative aims to get 20,000 more Indigenous job seekers into jobs by 2020. To date, 11 companies have entered into Employment Parity Initiative agreements committing to an additional 7,265 jobs for Indigenous Australians.

The Australian Government's Indigenous Procurement Policy began on 1 July 2015 and provides opportunities for Indigenous businesses to win an increasing share of the Australian Government's contracts. This is helping stimulate Indigenous entrepreneurship and business development, and providing Indigenous Australians with more opportunities to participate in the economy.

In the first year of the Indigenous Procurement Policy, the Australian Government awarded around 1,500 contracts to almost 500 Indigenous businesses with a total value of \$284.2 million, well exceeding the first year target of 0.5 per cent of Australian Government domestic contracts.

Given the success of the Indigenous Procurement Policy, the Australian Government brought forward the 2020 target of three per cent of contracts to Indigenous businesses to 2016-17, which is nearly three years ahead of schedule.

Further, from 1 July 2016 under the Indigenous Procurement Policy all businesses that win Australian Government contracts valued at or over \$7.5 million, in eight industry sectors, must meet minimum Indigenous employment requirements or use Indigenous businesses in their supply chains. This will ensure Indigenous Australians gain skills and economic benefit from some of the larger pieces of work the Australian Government outsources.

The Australian Government's Community Development Program aims to deliver better opportunities for remote job-seekers and to foster stronger economic and social outcomes in remote Australia.

The Community Development Programme supports around 34,000 job-seekers each day, 82 per cent of whom identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The Programme is designed around the unique social and labour market conditions found in remote Australia, which feature fewer employment opportunities.

The Community Development Programme is making steady progress to reduce welfare dependency in remote communities through enabling people to participate in meaningful activities that prepare them for work and make their communities better places to live. Between 1 July 2015 and 31 March 2017, the Community Development Programme has supported job seekers into 14,680 jobs. In the same period, the Programme supported job seekers to stay in 4,887 jobs for at least six months.

The Australian Government has committed up to \$99.4 million to support around 7,500 Indigenous Australians into guaranteed jobs through the Vocational Training and Employment Centres model. Already, Vocational Training and Employment Centres have supported almost 5,800 job placements for Indigenous Australians, many of them in regional and remote regions.

In addition since 1 July 2014, the Australian Government has committed more than \$140.0 million to Tailored Assistance Employment Grants to connect working age Indigenous Australians with real and sustainable jobs, as well as support Indigenous high school students' transition successfully from education to sustainable employment. This has supported 10,083 job placements. A further \$25.6 million has been committed to employers to support 729 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students undertake their first undergraduate degree.

The Council of Australian Governments' Investigation into Indigenous Land Administration and Use and the *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* developed a comprehensive strategy for improving Indigenous land systems to support Indigenous landowners to use their land for economic development. The Australian Government and the States and Territories are implementing the recommendations of the Council of Australian Governments' investigation. Indigenous Land Administration systems are transitioning from a focus on recognition and protection of rights to supporting Indigenous Australians' choice to

use those rights in the mainstream economy. There are a range of Australian Government initiatives underway to empower and support Indigenous land owners to embrace the new phase of land rights, ensure the right capacity support is available, and claims are resolved to allow the land rights and native title systems to fully transition.

The Australian Government funds a national network of Native Title Representative Bodies and Service Providers to assist native title groups across Australia. In 2017-18, funding of approximately \$88.9 million is available for 14 Native Title Representative Bodies and Service Providers to assist native title claimants and holders. In addition, the Northern Territory Land Councils received funding of approximately \$46.6 million in 2016-17 to perform their functions to represent and assist traditional owners under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.

The *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia* includes funding of \$48.0 million over four years from 2015 for a number of Indigenous specific measures. These include ongoing funding of \$20.4 million for Prescribed Bodies Corporate to build capacity, \$10.6 million for land tenure reform pilots that broaden land use and economic opportunity, and \$17.0 million over three years for township leasing and land administration to support the Northern Territory. Funding available in 2017-18 across these initiatives is \$13.8 million. In addition to these initiatives, the White Paper included Indigenous employment and supplier targets for major infrastructure projects.

Township leases are a proven model for achieving long term tradeable tenure and economic development on Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory by simplifying land use and access to subleases across communities. Building on the Gunyangara community entity township lease and Mutitjulu township sublease, negotiations will continue for township leases in other interested communities in 2017-18, including Jabiru, Pirlangimpi and Yarralin.

The Australian Government currently supports Indigenous rangers to deliver environmental outcomes and address Indigenous disadvantage by providing jobs to Indigenous people. At February 2017, the Australian Government was providing funding for the training and employment of over 2,600 full time, part time and casual rangers, across 110 Indigenous ranger groups, mostly in remote and regional areas. These measures are funded under IAS Programme Stream 2.1 and the Natural Heritage Trust (through the Department of Environment and Energy).

The 75 Indigenous Protected Areas now make up more than 65 million hectares, or approximately 44.4 per cent of the National Reserve System, Australia's network of protected areas.

Children and Schooling

The Children and Schooling program supports activities which nurture and educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and adults. The program has a strong focus on increased school attendance and improved educational outcomes which lead to employment. Through this program the Australian Government is aiming to contribute to:

- having 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025;
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018;
- attaining 90 per cent school attendance for Indigenous children by 2018;
- halving the gap for Indigenous people aged 20-24 years old in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020;
- assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attend high performing schools, including both day and full boarding support;
- mentoring support to improve rates of school attendance, Year 12 attainment and transition to further education;
- assisting tertiary students who are required to travel away from their permanent home for short periods to undertake approved course-related activities; and
- sporting academies across Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales to support improved rates of school attendance and Year 12 attainment.

Remote School Attendance Strategy

The Remote School Attendance Strategy is a flexible, place-based strategy which aims to increase school attendance in remote areas by providing assistance to remote families, schools and communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales. The Remote School Attendance Strategy commenced in January 2014 and now operates across 78 schools with a combined enrolment of approximately 14,000 students. \$81.3 million in funding has been allocated from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2018.

Since 2014 the Remote School Attendance Strategy achieved some promising results, with the greatest average improvements in participating schools in Queensland. The Remote School Attendance Strategy also provides employment for around 500 people, 94 per cent of whom are Indigenous.

Safety and Wellbeing

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that Indigenous Australians grow up in a healthy and safe home and community, including in regional and remote areas. Under the Safety and Wellbeing program, the Australian Government is

providing over \$261.6 million in 2016-17 and \$267.7 million in 2017-18 for a range of targeted, evidence-based activities to help increase Indigenous community safety and wellbeing. This includes activities that:

- reduce alcohol and other drugs misuse through treatment, rehabilitation and education;
- prevent crime and reduce offending and re-offending through diversion and prevention activities and prisoner rehabilitation services that help prisoners to successfully integrate back into their communities;
- support victims of family and domestic violence through family safety activities, Indigenous women's legal services and family violence prevention legal services;
- improve safety, through additional support for policing in remote Indigenous communities;
- prevent community violence by promoting connection to family, culture, community and land, including through sport and recreation activities;
- reduce the impacts of grief and trauma through social and emotional wellbeing support services for members of the Stolen Generations and other Indigenous people experiencing trauma;
- promote safe and functional physical environments in remote areas through community and night patrols; and
- reduce petrol sniffing in regional and remote areas of Australia by supporting local community action and promoting the use of low aromatic fuel as an alternative to regular unleaded fuel with around 175 sites currently supplying low aromatic unleaded fuel.

Culture and Capability

Activities funded under the Culture and Capability program support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to maintain their culture, and participate equally in the economic and social life of Australia. Strengthening Indigenous culture and capability underpins the Australian Government's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in working together to understand and develop tailored responses to meet the aspirations and priorities of communities.

Funding of up to \$63.3 million from 2017-18 to 2019-20 is available for more than 120 licensed Indigenous broadcasting and media services. These organisations achieve cultural outcomes by providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to access information and share their cultures and languages.

Other activities supported include:

- community led healing initiatives;
- establishing Empowered Communities regional backbone organisations;
- raising awareness of the importance of Constitutional Recognition;

- reconciliation activities, including the use of Reconciliation Action Plans;
- leadership and governance training;
- interpreter services; and
- celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture including NAIDOC activities.

Remote Australia Strategies

Funding of approximately \$160.0 million over three years to 2018-19 has been provided to address the disproportionate disadvantage of Indigenous Australians in remote Australia. This funding supports community-led initiatives that are delivered through Indigenous organisations, and support Indigenous employment outcomes.

The Army Aboriginal Community Assistance program (AACAP) is a joint venture between the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Australian Army to improve primary and environmental health and living conditions in remote Indigenous communities. Up to \$7 million from 2017-18 is provided through the program to deliver one project in a community each calendar year, providing infrastructure, health services and vocational training. The AACAP will be delivered in Toomelah (New South Wales) in 2017 and in Yalata (South Australia) in 2018.

Funding of \$14.8 million over three years to 2017-18 is helping ensure remote Indigenous communities have better access to telecommunications like phone and internet services. Through the Remote Indigenous Internet Training activity, the Australian Government is providing internet access, training and/or essential infrastructure, while a remote telecommunications project provides phone services across Australia in remote Indigenous communities in nearly 550 locations.

Aboriginals Benefit Account

The Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) is legislated under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Land Rights Act) to receive and distribute royalty equivalent monies generated from mining on Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory. The ABA is funded by the Australian Government from consolidated revenue.

ABA beneficial grants, as legislated under subsection 64(4) of the Land Rights Act, are distributed for the benefit of Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory. Generally two funding rounds are held each year with a focus on:

- supporting communities;
- supporting enterprises;
- supporting culture, language and leadership; and
- supporting land, sea and waters management and use.

ABA is also funding two strategic infrastructure projects:

- funding of \$55.8 million has been provided to build or upgrade Indigenous-owned community stores across 18 communities in the Northern Territory, and establish appropriate store manager housing in ten of those communities. This project is due for completion by June 2017.
- funding of \$40.0 million over four years from 2013 has been approved to provide improved living conditions and outcomes for Aboriginal people living on homelands in the Northern Territory. Infrastructure and activities will be delivered by Indigenous organisations and engage Community Development Programme participants in their delivery. Delivery of the project will commence in 2017.

A New Remote Indigenous Housing Strategy

The Australian Government has allocated \$776.4 million to partner States across 2016-18 under the Remote Housing Strategy, which has replaced the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. The Remote Housing Strategy continues to build on the investment in remote Indigenous housing in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. The investment facilitates new housing, refurbishments and housing-related infrastructure. It also provides incentives to States against agreed outcomes to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, business engagement and improved opportunities for home ownership. Property and tenancy management reforms continue to develop more sustainable housing systems in remote Indigenous communities.

Portfolio Bodies

Indigenous Business Australia

The Australian Government continues to support Indigenous home ownership, businesses and investments through Indigenous Business Australia, a corporate Commonwealth entity within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. Indigenous Business Australia provides new and existing Indigenous business owners access to expert advice, business finance and products that allow groups to build wealth and maximise economic outcomes from their land and other assets.

Indigenous Business Australia facilitates Indigenous Australians into home ownership by providing affordable housing loans to customers who would generally not qualify for housing finance elsewhere. This includes addressing barriers such as lower incomes and savings, credit impairment, and limited experience with loan repayments.

Indigenous Business Australia provides extra assistance to Indigenous Australians living in remote communities through a specifically targeted initiative, the Remote Indigenous Home Loan program. There are 33 locations eligible for assistance, 28 of which are nominated communities under the Australian Government's Remote Indigenous Housing Strategy.

In 2017-18, Indigenous Business Australia expects to provide:

- approximately 540 new concessional home loans to eligible low and middle income Indigenous families to assist buying their first home, including 40 Remote Indigenous Home Loans;
- business loans, and other forms of capital and business support, to assist eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to start up, or grow a successful business; and
- investment assistance to 90 Indigenous co-investors and organisations.

Indigenous Land Corporation

The Indigenous Land Corporation is a Commonwealth entity within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. It assists Indigenous Australians to acquire land, and manage Indigenous-held land, so as to provide economic, environmental, social or cultural benefits for Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders. In 2017-18, the Indigenous Land Corporation will work closely with Indigenous land holders in regional Australia to deliver against its mandate through:

- developing strategic alliances which maximise opportunities for Indigenous enterprises, jobs and training on Indigenous-held land, particularly in emerging and niche markets;
- contributing to policy leadership to realise the potential of the Indigenous estate to enable greater economic development;
- partnering in the implementation of more than 100 discrete projects by providing investment, advice, training, mentoring and other assistance to land based enterprises that generate returns for Indigenous landholders. Around half of these projects will also assist in the management and preservation of cultural and environmental heritage values;
- using tailored investment products to mobilise Indigenous Land Corporation funds to support Indigenous land based enterprises that are economically sustainable, can leverage investment and take advantage of markets such as agriculture, tourism, renewable energy, property development, and supply chain opportunities; and
- working collaboratively with Indigenous land holders through flexible and supportive processes to ensure that properties granted to Indigenous Corporations are sustainable, productive and remain within the Indigenous estate to deliver intergenerational benefits to Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Aboriginal Hostels Limited is a Commonwealth Corporate Entity within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio that facilitates safe, culturally appropriate and affordable accommodation for Indigenous Australians who must live away from home to access services and economic opportunities.

As at 2 March 2017, Aboriginal Hostels Limited operates 47 accommodation facilities Australia wide, predominately in regional and remote locations. Aboriginal Hostels Limited provides 1,776 beds for residents per night across the country, with 70 per cent of these beds located in regional and remote areas (349 beds per night in regional areas, 899 beds per night in remote areas and 528 beds per night in capital areas).

SOCIAL SERVICES

The Department of Social Services is a critical source of social policy advice for the Australian Government, and is responsible for policies, payments, programs and services that improve the lifetime wellbeing of people and families across the country. The Department of Social Services is responsible for around one quarter of the total Australian Government budget, with effort particularly focused on vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, families and communities, including those in regional and remote areas.

The Department of Social Services works in partnership with stakeholders including other Australian Government agencies, State/Territory and local governments, non-government organisations and the community services industry to understand need and invest in services to Australians including, those in regional locations.

In 2016-17, more than 2.1 million regional Australians are receiving financial assistance through income support, pension and family payments. The Australian Government's \$20.7 million commitment to the Australian Investment Approach to Welfare is ensuring evidence based policy and program development for vulnerable Australians at high risk of long-term welfare dependency. The \$96.1 million Try, Test and Learn Fund will initially target investment into innovative activities to reduce the vulnerability and welfare dependency of young parents, carers and students, including those that live in regional locations.

The Third Action Plan 2016-19 of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22* is supported by a \$100.0 million investment over three years from 2016-17 to complement State and Territory government investments. The Third Action Plan drives interventions including targeted support to women and children in rural, regional and remote locations.

Other important ongoing program investments benefitting regional Australians, total around \$780.0 million in 2016-17, and include:

- emergency relief for people experiencing financial hardship;
- playgroups for children with special needs;
- help for job seekers with disability to prepare for, find and keep a job;
- children and parenting, family relationship and family law services providing counselling, mediation, education and support to vulnerable families; and
- specialist settlement support for newly arrived migrants and refugees.

NEW INITIATIVES

Extension and Expansion of Cashless Debit Card

The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) is aimed at supporting disadvantaged communities to reduce the consumption and effects of drugs, alcohol and gambling on the health and wellbeing of communities, families and children. Under the CDC, 80 per cent of welfare payments are placed onto a recipient's card, with the remaining 20 per cent placed into their regular bank account. The CDC looks and operates like a normal bank card, except it cannot be used to buy alcohol or gambling products, or to withdraw cash.

The CDC was implemented in the Ceduna region, South Australia, in March 2016, and the East Kimberley, Western Australia, in April 2016. The Australian Government has invested over \$2.6 million over 2015-16 to 2016-17 in additional community services to support the trial, including more drug and alcohol services, a 24/7 mobile outreach, and financial counselling.

The implementation of the CDC in these two sites has been extended until 30 June 2018. This follows positive early evaluation results and community feedback. Building on this success, the CDC is being expanded to two other communities during 2017 and 2018.

While the expansion communities have not yet been identified or agreed, the Department of Social Services is working with communities that are expressing an interest in joining the trial. The communities selected for expansion are likely to be regional sites. This is expected to have positive impacts on regional Australia including reducing alcohol consumption, illegal drug use, and gambling. The expansion is also likely to improve access to banking services, and telecommunications infrastructure in remote and regional areas.

Extension of Income Management

Income Management is part of the Australian Government's commitment to reforming the welfare system, and currently assists 25,033 people (as at 30 December 2016) to budget their welfare payments to ensure they are getting basic essentials. This helps people to stabilise their lives so they can better care for themselves and their children.

Income Management ensures that part of an individual's welfare payments are directed towards meeting priority needs such as food, clothing, housing, utilities, education, and medical care. People can spend their income managed funds by organising direct payments to people or businesses such as stores, landlords, or utility providers, and by using the BasicsCard. Money that is income managed cannot be spent on alcohol, tobacco, pornography or gambling.

Income management will continue to operate in different forms across regional and metropolitan Australia, with a total investment of \$145.5 million in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards

The Quality and Safeguarding Framework (the framework) was released by the Disability Reform Council on 3 February 2017. The Framework will provide nationally consistent protections for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants from full scheme.

Under the framework, a new Commonwealth agency, the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission, will offer safeguards for an estimated 460,000 people with disability and their families; regulate providers; manage complaints and reportable incidents; and oversee investigations.

To assist regional Australians to have choice and access to NDIS services and support, the new body will offer financial assistance to providers in rural, remote and regional areas to help meet the cost of registration. This will reduce the extent to which the cost of registration is a barrier to providers delivering services in regional Australia.

Reducing Pressure on Housing Affordability – Reform of the National Affordable Housing Agreement

The Australian Government will provide \$6.0 billion over four years from 2018-19 for a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). The NHHA consolidates the existing National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), the associated National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment (NAHSPP) and National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The initiative includes new homelessness funding of \$375.3 million over three years from 2018-19. The NHHA will achieve better outcomes for housing and homelessness funding and is expected to have a similar impact in regional areas as it would in urban areas.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Try, Test and Learn Fund

In 2016-17, the Australian Government committed \$96.1 million over four years to support the Try, Test and Learn Fund as part of the Australian Investment Approach to Welfare.

The Try, Test and Learn Fund will initially target funding to innovate activities to reduce the welfare dependency of young parents, carers and students, including those that live in regional locations.

The aim is to trial and test policy interventions that promote independence and employment thus breaking the welfare cycle, to better inform the evidence base as to what works. The Try, Test and Learn Fund is designed along a commissioning approach; with a process of outcomes definition, ideas generation and co-design undertaken prior to funding. It is expected that the Try, Test and Learn Fund will open

for the submission of ideas a number of times over the four year period. Information concerning the Try, Test and Learn Fund is available on DSS Engage at: <https://engage.dss.gov.au/try-test-and-learn-fund/>.

Digital Literacy for Older Australians

The Digital Literacy for Older Australians measure delivers on the Australian Government's election commitment to strengthen the skills, confidence and online safety of older Australians in using digital technology.

It adopts a family and community-centred approach to help older Australians realise the social and economic benefits of being online and access the growing number of government business and community services moving online.

In 2017-18, \$29.6 million will be allocated to support the delivery of appropriate learning tools and resources, including assistance for community organisations located in metropolitan and regional areas to provide one-on-one tutoring and support to older Australians.

Domestic and Family Violence – Third Action Plan

Women living in regional Australia are more likely to experience domestic violence than those living in capital cities (Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, 2014; Personal Safety Survey, 2013). The Australian Government recognises the vulnerabilities of women and their children in regional Australia to domestic and family violence, including issues in accessing services, a lack of privacy due to services often knowing both the victims and perpetrators, and issues around isolation and social and cultural characteristics of living in small communities.

The Third Action Plan 2016-19 of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22* drives interventions including targeted support to women and children in rural, regional and remote locations. These are implemented across the following six key priority areas:

- preventing and intervening early to address the attitudes and practices that excuse, justify and promote violence against women;
- improving responses and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children;
- providing greater support and choice for women and children leaving or trying to leave domestic and family violence;
- sharpening the focus on sexual violence as a key component for women's safety;
- responding to children exposed to domestic and family violence to help them feel safe and to recover from their experience; and
- holding perpetrators to account across all systems and targeting responses that work to change their behaviour.

The Third Action Plan marks the half-way point for the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22*, and will continue Australian Government and State and Territory efforts to break the cycle of violence, informed by recommendations of the Council of Australian Governments Advisory Panel.

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-20 is a joint commitment between the Australian Government, State and Territory governments and the non-government sector to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children. The Third Action Plan 2015-18 focuses on three strategies:

- early intervention with a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1,000 days for a child;
- helping young people in out-of-home care to thrive in adulthood; and
- organisations responding better to children and young people to keep them safe.

Activities underway as part of the Third Action Plan 2015-18 emphasise prevention and early intervention, and supporting children and young people exposed to risk factors for abuse and neglect, including children and families in regional Australia. As part of this work, the Australian Government is funding the Building Capacity in Australian Parents trial, which will provide support and tools parents need to help their children thrive in the first 1,000 days and normalise families asking for help in a number of regional Queensland locations.

Under the Towards Independent Adulthood trial, personal advisers will be engaged to provide intensive, holistic support and mentoring for 80 young people in Western Australia, including some young people from regional areas, as they transition from formal out-of-home care into adulthood. The Third Action Plan 2015-18 also includes a focus on the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to address their overrepresentation in the child protection system.

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-20* and the Third Action Plan 2015-18 form part of the Australian Government's commitment to supporting the wellbeing of Australian children. There are close links between the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-20* and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22*.

Seasonal Work Incentives for Job Seekers – Trial

The trial forms part of the Australian Government response to concerns about the inability of the Australian horticulture industry to attract sufficient numbers of seasonal workers, and the impact of this on industry and opportunities for job seekers.

Three incentives have been developed that are aimed at increasing the number of job seekers in horticultural seasonal work, such as fruit picking. It also provides job

seekers with a practical opportunity to enter the workforce and to build work experience and skills.

The incentives will be available from 1 July 2017 for two years and are expected to cost \$27.5 million. Newstart and Youth Allowance (Other) recipients who have been receiving those payments continuously for at least three months will be eligible to participate in the trial, which will be capped at 7,600 participants over the two years.

The three incentives are:

- a Seasonal Horticultural Work Income Exemption under which trial participants will be able to earn up to \$5,000 from horticultural seasonal work during the 12 months after they join the trial without it being assessed under the social security income test;
- a Seasonal Work Living Away and Travel Allowance of up to \$300 each year for trial participants who undertake horticultural seasonal work more than 120 kilometres from their home; and
- employment providers would receive a Provider Seasonal Work Incentive Payment of \$100 a week for up to six weeks a year for each trial participant that they place with eligible farmers.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

On 1 July 2016, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) commenced transition to full scheme across Australia, following bilateral agreements with New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Participants in Western Australia commence transitioning to a WA-delivered nationally consistent NDIS from 1 July 2017; and the NDIS in the Australian Capital Territory is now fully operating.

New South Wales and South Australia will reach full scheme in July 2018. Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory will reach full scheme in July 2019 and Western Australia will reach full scheme by July 2020.

The NDIS will create new employment opportunities in regional Australia, in response to additional demand for services from NDIS participants. As the NDIS rolls out across Australia, around 70,000 people in regional and remote areas are expected to receive support in 2016-17, rising to 155,000 in 2017-18.

By 2019-20, the scheme will support an estimated 460,000 people with significant and permanent disability, regardless of where they live, including around 250,000 people in regional areas.

National Disability Advocacy

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring people with disability have access to effective disability advocacy that promotes, protects and ensures their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights, enabling full community participation.

As part of this commitment, \$17.7 million was provided in 2016-17 to 58 advocacy agencies across Australia, including ten in regional locations, under the National Disability Advocacy program.

Approximately 12,000 people received individual support, and a broader group benefitted from agency support. A search tool on the Department of Social Services website enables people to identify their nearest National Disability Advocacy program agency.

People with disability, advocacy agencies, the National Disability Insurance Agency, State and Territory governments and key stakeholders such as public guardians have been consulted in the development of a way forward for advocacy support. This review will provide a direction and model for the provision of services funded under the program from 1 July 2018.

Families and Children

The Families and Children's activity aims to help families improve the wellbeing of children and young people by strengthening relationships, building parenting and financial management skills, providing parenting support, and delivering school readiness programs and home visits. The Australian Government will allocate over \$266.6 million in 2017-18 to enable these services to continue to be delivered across Australia, with an extensive footprint in regional areas.

Communities for Children Facilitating Partners services operate in 28 regional areas to support early childhood development and wellbeing. Under this model, a Facilitating Partner is funded to work with each community to identify local needs and tailor services accordingly. Services may include parenting support, home visitation, supported play groups and life skills programs. In 2015-16 79,578 clients in regional areas received these services.

Other Families and Children's services include:

- Family and Relationship Services;
- Children and Parenting Support Services;
- Intensive Family Support Services; and
- Family Law Services.

Settlement Services

In 2017-18, \$178.1 million will be provided for Settlement Services, which assist eligible people who have recently arrived in Australia to establish their new lives. Funding for Settlement Services in regional areas helps new arrivals to become active and contributing members of their local communities.

Settlement Services are currently being delivered in regional areas that include: Geelong, Mildura, Shepparton, Wodonga (Victoria); Hobart, Launceston (Tasmania); Albury, Wagga Wagga, Newcastle, Wollongong, Coffs Harbour (New South Wales); Toowoomba, Townsville, Logan, Cairns (Queensland); and Mount Gambier (South Australia).

On 9 September 2015, the Australian Government announced that an additional 12,000 humanitarian entrant places would be made available for people displaced by conflict in Syria and Iraq (in addition to the 13,750 places in Australia's 2015-16 and 2016-17 Humanitarian Program). People who come to Australia as part of this intake are being settled in a number of Australian communities, in both metropolitan and regional areas.

As at 27 February 2017, 3,511 humanitarian entrants have been referred for Settlement Services in these regional locations across Australia in 2016-17.

Building Social Cohesion for Recently Arrived Migrants - Career Pathways Pilot

In the 2016-17 Budget, \$5.2 million was allocated to a three year Career Pathways Pilot for Humanitarian Entrants under the Building Social Cohesion for Recently Arrived Migrants Budget measure.

Pilot services will assist newly arrived humanitarian entrants who are unemployed or underemployed, with professional or trade skills or qualifications and vocational English language proficiency, to find employment opportunities that utilise their skills/qualifications in the same or a similar career.

Pilot services will be delivered in six locations around Australia. The two regional locations are Toowoomba and Hobart.

Building Social Cohesion for Recently Arrived Migrants - National Community Hubs program

Community Hubs bring together vulnerable people, including recently arrived migrants, women and children in local facilities such as schools, to build community connectedness and equip participants with knowledge and skills to be active members of the community.

In the 2016-17 Budget, \$5.7 million was allocated, under the Building Social Cohesion for Recently Arrived Migrants Budget measure, to increase the National Community Hubs program to support the establishment of new hubs in settlement locations, including regional Australia.

The new Community Hubs will be located in a minimum of five locations around Australia, including a regional trial in Wollongong.

Financial Wellbeing and Capability

Services funded under the Financial Wellbeing and Capability activity operate across 1,300 outlets in regional Australia, assisting the most financially vulnerable and disadvantaged people and families.

This includes support through the provision of emergency relief and material aid, financial counselling and capability including literacy and budgeting support, as well as access to microfinance schemes. Funding is also provided to support a national financial counselling helpline, providing access to financial counselling for people who are unable to attend a face to face service.

In 2017-18 over \$96 million will be allocated to continue services under the Financial Wellbeing and Capability activity.

Approximately 17,750 people in regional locations access Commonwealth Financial Counselling services. This equates to 51 per cent of all clients accessing these services nationally.

Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters

The Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) is a two-year, home-based parenting and early childhood learning initiative that currently operates in 65 regional or remote communities of high disadvantage.

During the 2016 calendar year, a total of 2,213 children were actively engaged or had graduated from HIPPY in these communities.

HIPPY builds the confidence and skills of parents and carers to create a positive learning environment to prepare their child for school. Each HIPPY site has its services delivered by a local not-for-profit organisation.

Strong and Resilient Communities

The Strong and Resilient Communities activity aims to build strong, resilient, cohesive and harmonious Australian communities with opportunity to thrive, capacity to respond to local needs and challenges, and free from intolerance and discrimination.

Resilient and inclusive communities are characterised by a strong sense of community belonging, high levels of community participation and volunteering, strong leadership and community engagement, well-integrated and well-used support services, and opportunities for social mobility. Funding will be provided to regional and metropolitan communities, to help build these attributes, to ensure improved individual, family and community outcomes.

From 1 January 2018, the Strong and Resilient Communities Activity will replace the current Strengthening Communities Activity.

In 2017-18, the Australian Government will allocate around \$18.0 million to organisations under the Strengthening Communities and the Strong and Resilient Communities Activities (from 1 January 2018). An additional \$10.0 million will be allocated to Volunteer Grants in 2017-18. This is expected to benefit regional communities at similar levels to 2016-17, which resulted in around 44 per cent of grants and 47 per cent of funding allocated to regional Australia.

Community Mental Health

The Community Mental Health, Family Mental Health Support Services are community-based mental health services that provide early intervention support for children and young people with early symptoms of mental ill-health, or who are at particular risk of developing mental illness later in life.

Through an increased investment since early 2015, Family Mental Health Support Services is now delivered in 100 locations across Australia. \$48.5 million was provided in 2016-17 to 52 service providers delivering support to children and young people in 58 regional or remote locations. Of 53,291 participants accessing Family Mental Health Support Services in 2015-16, 28,091 (53 per cent) were located in regional and remote Australia.

The increased investment in Family Mental Health Support Services in regional Australia allows more vulnerable children and young people to access support and achieve better mental health outcomes later in life.

The Community Mental Health, Individual Placement and Support Trial provides employment support, as part of a broader strategy aimed at tackling high youth unemployment.

The Trial targets vulnerable young people with mental illness up to the age of 25, who are at risk of disengaging from education and employment and who are at risk of long-term welfare dependency.

The Individual Placement Support model integrates employment and vocational support with clinical mental health and non-vocational support, and focuses on the needs of people with mental illness seeking to remain in education and/or employment. Professional employment specialists located in headspace sites will provide vocational and employment assistance, in tandem with clinical support. There are 14 trial sites nationally over three years. Nine of the 14 trial sites are being delivered in regional or remote Australia.

Disability Employment Services

The Disability Employment Services program provides specialist employment assistance to people whose primary impediment to employment in the open labour market is disability, injury or a health condition. The Australian Government will provide around \$800.0 million in 2016-17 to support this important initiative.

In 2015-16, the Australian Government invested more than \$290.0 million in assisting people with a disability in regional Australia achieve sustainable employment outcomes in the open labour market. Subject to labour market conditions, a similar amount is expected to be spent in regional areas in 2016-17.

In regional Australia, Disability Employment Services (DES) are delivered by 70 organisations from nearly 1,000 locations. Regional Australians currently comprise nearly 40 per cent of those receiving support through DES, or over 72,000 of the 186,000 participants registered in the program.

From the commencement of Disability Employment Services in March 2010 until the end of 2016, more than 113,000 participants in regional Australia have been placed in a job through DES.

The Australian Government is currently working with the sector to reform the program by moving towards a more open and competitive market with a stronger emphasis on employment outcomes. The current contracts for Disability Employment Services are due to cease in 2018. The new Disability Employment Services model, to be introduced from 2018, will create better financial incentives for providers to assist participants equally, including those living in regional Australia.

Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services

The Australian Government is progressing work on an Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services, as announced in the 2015-16 Budget. The vision for the Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services is to streamline and better coordinate carer support services. In developing the Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services, a service delivery model for a proposed new integrated carer support service system has been co-designed with carers and the sector throughout 2016. The proposed new service system would introduce a range of early-intervention services and new ways to access those services that would support all carers, including those in regional Australia.

National Carer Gateway

Stage One of the Integrated Plan for Carer Support Services was the development and implementation of a national carer gateway. On 15 December 2015, Carer Gateway commenced and allows carers in regional areas to obtain practical information and resources to support them in their caring role via a national phone line and website. The Website features an interactive service finder that helps carers connect to local support services and includes information on services delivered by phone or online.

The national carer gateway and co-design activities for the development of a proposed new carers support service is budgeted to cost \$33.7 million over four years to 2018-19.

National Respite for Carers

The National Respite for Carers program assists carers in their caring role. The program funds 34 regional Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres to assist carers with short-term and emergency respite options, based on assessed need, and

provide advice and coordinate access to respite services in a carer's local area. The National Respite for Carers program also supports the National Carer Counselling program Carer Information Support Service and Consumer Directed Respite Care.

Young Carer Bursary Program

The Young Carer Bursary Program was a 2013 election commitment to assist young carers in greatest need across Australia including regional areas, aged 25 years and under to continue to study, and to relieve the financial pressure on them to undertake part-time work in addition to their educational and caring responsibilities.

The first bursary payments were made in February 2015 to 150 young carers to support them as they began the 2015 academic year. On 30 March 2015, the Australian Government announced further funding of \$0.5 million to deliver an additional 150 bursaries for the 2015 calendar year.

On 5 August 2015, the Australian Government announced 333 annual bursaries valued at \$3,000 each will be provided in both 2016 and 2017.

In 2017, a total of 113, or one-third of Young Carer Bursary Program recipients were from regional Australia.

Counselling, Support, Information and Advocacy – Carer Support

In 2015-16, approximately \$3.4 million was provided to 17 Counselling Support Information and Advocacy carer support services in regional Australia to provide specific information, education and training for carers to assist them to understand and manage situations, behaviours and relationships associated with care needs of the person they are caring for. The type of activity and support provided varies depending on the needs of the carer.

Dementia Education and Training for Carers

The Dementia Education and Training for Carers initiative aims to improve the quality of life of people living with dementia. The Dementia Education and Training for Carers initiative provides training and education for carers of people with dementia, with 22 services in regional Australia. There is an emphasis on increasing the competence and confidence of carers by providing courses that aim to enhance their skills or processes that connect a carer to information.

The Australian Government has allocated \$1.1 million to the Dementia Education and Training for Carers initiative in 2016-17.

Regional and Remote Student Access to Education – Additional Support

Subject to passage of legislation, from 1 January 2018, the period young people from regional and remote areas of Australia have to earn the amount required to satisfy the workforce independence provisions for Youth Allowance (student) or ABSTUDY, will be reduced from 18 months to 14 months. Students will continue to be required to earn

at least 75 per cent of Wage Level A of the National Training Wage (\$24,042 for 2016-17) during the reduced period.

This measure recognises that students from regional and remote areas face additional costs in pursuing tertiary education and have a much lower participation rate in higher education than students from major cities.

An estimated 3,700 students in 2017-18 may qualify for Youth Allowance (student) or ABSTUDY Living Allowance as independent under this measure, with 2,500 of these students qualifying four months sooner than under current arrangements. This measure is estimated to cost approximately \$81.1 million over the forward estimates.

This measure also provides \$12.2 million over the forward estimates to increase by 50 per cent the Additional Boarding Allowance under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme and the equivalent ABSTUDY payment (the means-tested component of Group 2 School Fees Allowance). This increase, which took effect from 1 January 2017, brings the allowance to \$2,322 for 2017.

Assistance for Isolated Children

Families in isolated areas incur additional costs to educate their children. In 2015-16, the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme provided \$70.7 million to the families of 10,958 students unable to attend an appropriate State school on a daily basis because of geographical isolation. In 2016-17, it is estimated expenditure will be \$73.9 million.

Depending on the student's circumstances, the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme provides:

- Basic Boarding Allowance (\$8,095 in 2017);
- Additional Boarding Allowance (\$2,322 in 2017);
- Second Home Allowance (\$235.81 per fortnight in 2017); and
- Distance Education Allowance (\$4,047 in 2017).

ABSTUDY

ABSTUDY is an ongoing program to help address educational disadvantages faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ABSTUDY helps eligible Indigenous students and apprentices, many from remote areas, with study, living, and travel expenses, including if they need to study away from home. In 2015-16, ABSTUDY supported 20,526 Indigenous secondary students and 10,316 Indigenous tertiary students. ABSTUDY expenditure in 2015-16 was \$259.6 million and it is estimated to be \$274.5 million in 2016-17.

National Rental Affordability Scheme

The National Rental Affordability Scheme aims to increase the supply of new affordable rental housing by offering financial incentives for ten years, to build and

rent dwellings to low and moderate income households, at a rate that is at least 20 per cent below market value rent.

The National Rental Affordability Scheme is now closed to new dwelling allocations but will continue to operate until the current ten year incentive periods are complete.

In 2016-17, the annual National Rental Affordability Scheme incentive is \$11,048.04. Australian Government expenses for 2016-17 are estimated at \$308.5 million.

As at 31 December 2016, there were 32,715 dwellings available for rent in the National Rental Affordability Scheme, of these:

- 4,321 (13.2 per cent) dwellings are located in inner regional areas;
- 2,762 (8.5 per cent) dwellings are located in outer regional areas;
- 263 (0.8 per cent) dwellings are located in remote areas;
- 36 (0.1 per cent) dwellings are located in very remote areas; and
- 25,333 (77.4 per cent) dwellings are located in major cities of Australia.

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness – Extension

Under the 2017-18 Transitional National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness the Australian Government will provide \$117.2 million in funding to support frontline homelessness services while governments continue to work together on long-term homelessness reforms (funding will be matched by States and Territories).

Under the agreement States and Territories retain responsibility for determining services locations, providers and funding.

The 2017-18 Transitional National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Project Plans will require each State and Territory to identify which geographical areas they will prioritise when considering expenditure for priority groups, including women and children experiencing domestic and family violence and homeless youth.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare will collect and report information on the specialist homelessness services funded under the 2017-18 Transitional National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, and the National Affordable Housing Agreement, through the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection.

In 2015-16, the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection reported that (of a total of 279,197 clients):

- 60,013 (21 per cent) clients presented to agencies in inner regional areas;
- 30,790 (11 per cent) clients presented to agencies in outer regional areas;
- 13,650 (5 per cent) clients presented to agencies in remote or very remote areas; and
- 174,744 (63 per cent) clients presented to major city agencies.

TREASURY

The Treasury provides policy advice on a range of issues from macroeconomic policy settings to microeconomic reform, social policy, as well as tax policy and international agreements and forums.

The Treasury portfolio, through the Australian Taxation Office, administers a range of transfers and benefits back to the community that assist individuals and businesses that satisfy the eligibility criteria, including those that are located in regional areas.

Further details are provided in the Treasury Portfolio Budget Statement.

NEW INITIATIVES

Extending the Immediate Deductibility Threshold for Small Businesses

The Australian Government will extend the 2015-16 Budget measure *Growing Jobs and Small Business – expanding accelerated depreciation for small businesses* by 12 months to 30 June 2018 for businesses with aggregated annual turnover less than \$10.0 million.

Small businesses, including those in regional areas, will be able to immediately deduct purchases of eligible assets costing less than \$20,000 first used or installed ready for use by 30 June 2018. Assets valued at \$20,000 or more can continue to be placed into the small business simplified depreciation pool, and the pool can be immediately deducted if the balance is less than \$20,000 over this period.

This measure will improve cash flow and support small businesses to invest in assets that will help them grow, such as small businesses in regional areas seeking to purchase assets to expand or set up their business in new locations.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Ten Year Enterprise Tax Plan — Increase the Small Business Entity Turnover Threshold

The Australian Government is increasing the small business entity turnover threshold from \$2.0 million to \$10.0 million per annum from 1 July 2016. The current \$2.0 million annual turnover threshold will be retained for access to the small business capital gains tax concessions, and access to the unincorporated small business tax discount is being extended to entities with turnover less than \$5.0 million per annum.

Over 90,000 additional business entities will gain access to the small business tax concessions, such as the lower small business corporate tax rate, immediate tax deductibility of certain assets and simplified depreciation pooling provisions as a result of this measure.

This measure forms part of the Australian Government's Ten Year Enterprise Tax Plan announced in the 2016-17 Budget, which is encouraging Australians to work, save and invest.

Ten Year Enterprise Tax Plan — Reduce Taxes on Business

The Australian Government is reducing the company tax rate to 27.5 per cent in 2016-17 for companies with aggregated annual turnover less than \$10.0 million. The tax rate will then be phased down to 25 per cent by 2026-27.

The Australian Government is also increasing the tax discount for unincorporated businesses from five per cent to eight per cent in 2016-17. The discount will then incrementally increase to 16 per cent in 2026-27. The current cap of \$1,000 per individual for each income year will be retained.

The tax discount applies to the income tax payable on the business income received from an unincorporated small business entity. Access to the discount is being extended to individual taxpayers with business income from an unincorporated business that has an aggregated annual turnover of less than \$5.0 million.

This measure forms part of the Australian Government's Ten Year Enterprise Tax Plan announced in the 2016-17 Budget, which is encouraging Australians to work, save and invest.

Income Tax Averaging for Primary Producers – Allowing Re-entry

Tax averaging allows primary producers to smooth out their income tax liability. A primary producer may opt-out of tax averaging and previously was not able to access the scheme again. From 2016-17 primary producers can re-access tax averaging ten years after the year in which they chose to opt-out.

This measure is part of implementing the Australian Government's *Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper*.

Working Holiday Maker Reform Package

The Australian Government has implemented a comprehensive package of reforms to meet seasonal labour supply needs and ensure Australia remains an attractive destination for working holiday makers.

From 1 January 2017, the tax rate applying to working holiday makers is 15 per cent up to \$37,000, with ordinary marginal tax rates applying after that.

The 15 per cent tax rate is internationally competitive in terms of after tax income compared to key working holiday maker destinations, such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The reform package received Royal Assent on 2 December 2016.

Australian Small Business Advisory Services

The Australian Small Business Advisory Services program improves the capacity of established, not-for-profit small business advisory service providers to deliver low cost small business advisory and information services.

Under the Australian Small Business Advisory Services Business Solutions 2014 Round, 33 projects are funded until 31 March 2018. Two additional Australian Small Business Advisory Services National Interest projects have also been funded. Since the projects commenced in March 2015 over 17,500 services have been provided to small business operators and those who intend to start small businesses in 200 local government areas across Australia. Twenty-two of these projects deliver services to regional or remote Australia.

On 29 April 2016, the Australian Government announced the establishment of seven new Australian Small Business Advisory Services under the Northern Australia Tourism Initiative. These projects received \$4.2 million in funding for three years from June 2016. The majority of the Australian Small Business Advisory Services Business Solutions Northern Australia Tourism Initiative projects are delivering services in regional or remote northern Australia.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The Department of Veterans' Affairs' purpose is to support those who serve or have served in the defence of our nation and to commemorate their service and sacrifice by:

- maintaining and enhancing the quality of life of clients by improving their financial wellbeing and self-sufficiency;
- maintaining and enhancing the quality of life of clients by improving their physical and mental wellbeing; and
- acknowledging and commemorating veterans' service and sacrifice, and promoting an increased understanding of Australia's wartime history.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs provides support and services to current and former members of the Australian Defence Force, and their families, including those living in regional and remote communities.

In the 2017-18 Budget, \$11.3 billion was provided to support around 294,000 clients, including veterans and dependants. The funding comprised: \$6.2 billion for income support and compensation; \$5.0 billion for health services for veterans and their families; and \$105.5 million for commemorative activities.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs has offices and shopfronts in each State and Territory of Australia, including in regional areas such as Townsville, Lismore, Wodonga, Maroochydore and Newcastle, where a large number of veterans and their families reside. The shopfronts also offer outreach services for clients who require additional assistance. Outreach also includes community-based activities such as grants, day club visits, men's health peer education, and presentations on services and entitlements. Where face-to-face interactions are not possible, or where clients prefer, they can access information and support through telephone and online services.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs also supports the acknowledgement and commemoration of those who served Australia and its allies in wars, conflicts and peace operations through promoting recognition of service and sacrifice, preservation of Australia's wartime heritage, and official commemorations.

In 2017-18, the Department of Veterans' Affairs will continue to implement the Anzac Centenary national program. Throughout the centenary period from 2014 to 2018, the nation will remember not only the Anzacs who served at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, but all Australians who have served in uniform across a century of service. The Anzac Centenary program is a national commemoration that comprises domestic and international activities and events. Anzac Centenary activities are also being planned and delivered by State, Territory and local governments, and business and community organisations, including in regional areas.

NEW INITIATIVES

Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program

The Prime Minister launched the Veterans' Employment Program, one of the Government's 2016 election commitments, on 17 November 2016. Its aim is to raise awareness of the unique skills and experience that veterans can bring to businesses and promote greater employment opportunities in the business community.

The Government is providing \$2.7 million over four years to implement a number of initiatives under the program involving the public and private sectors and ex-service organisations. These include the establishment of an Industry Advisory Committee and an Ex-service Organisation Industry Partnership Register. Annual awards to recognise the achievements of companies in creating employment opportunities for former members of the Australian Defence Force will also be established.

At its inaugural meeting held on 31 March 2017, the Industry Advisory Committee on Veterans' Employment agreed to focus initially on compiling data on the employment profile of veterans, translation of skills gained in the military to civilian roles and the development of principles to support veteran-friendly human resource policies for businesses.

The Australian Government's jobactive website now includes information for veterans and an optional 'Defence Force experience desirable flag' that allows job seekers to search for vacancies suited to former members of the Defence Force.

Expanded Eligibility for Non-Liability Health Care – Mental Health Treatment for Current and Former Members of the Australian Defence Force – Improved Access

Non-liability health care provides access to treatment for certain conditions under Department of Veterans' Affairs arrangements without the need to link the condition to the person's military service, and without the need for a compensation claim. The 2017-18 Budget provides a further \$33.5 million to extend the range of mental health conditions treated under the non-liability health care arrangements.

This measure means that all those who have any period of full-time service in the Australian Defence Force are now eligible for health care for mental health conditions without needing to prove that the condition has arisen from, or is linked to, their service.

Veteran and Veterans Families Counselling Service – Client Eligibility Expansion – Partners, Families and Former Partners

The Veteran and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS) provides free and confidential, nation-wide counselling and support for war and service-related mental health conditions, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.

VVCS also provides relationship and family counselling to address issues that can arise due to the unique nature of military service. VVCS counsellors have an understanding of military culture and can work with clients to find effective solutions for improved mental health and wellbeing.

A family inclusive service, VVCS client eligibility has expanded over time. Today, VVCS supports not only current and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members but also their immediate family. Supporting families is fundamental to the VVCS service delivery paradigm, which recognises that military trauma rarely impacts on the individual alone. The 2017-18 Budget has made VVCS even more accessible to families, extending access to the partners and children of current and former ADF members who hold a Repatriation Health Card – Gold or White for an accepted mental health disability. The former partners of eligible ADF personnel will also be able to access VVCS support for five years following separation or while co-parenting a child under the age of 18.

Regardless of where you reside in Australia – in a city, in rural or in regional Australia – VVCS counsellors are available to support ADF veterans and their families.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Community Care Services

The Department of Veterans' Affairs provides a range of community care services to eligible veterans and war widowers, the most significant being Veterans' Home Care and community nursing.

Veterans' Home Care provides low level home care support whilst clinical nursing and personal care services can be accessed through the community nursing program. Both programs focus on maintaining veteran's health and independence at home and avoiding early admittance to hospital or residential care.

These programs are available in varied locations across Australia including to those who reside in regional and remote areas, where in 2015-16 a third of the veteran community using both services reside.

Saluting Their Service

Saluting Their Service is the Australian Government's commemorations grants program.

Under Saluting Their Service funding is available for projects, including events and activities that are directly commemorative of Australia's involvement in war, conflict and peace operations.

The program provides grants of up to \$4,000 under the community Commemorative Grants category for projects that assist people at a community level and enable small

communities to build memorials and preserve wartime memorabilia that are locally significant.

Funding is also available under the Major Commemorative Grants category of the program for significant projects at a national or State/Territory level.

Grants are approved each year in most electorates across Australia, many in regional areas. In 2015-16, 332 grants were provided to 117 of the 150 electorates across Australia.

As at 31 March 2017, 139 grants provided to 71 electorates across Australia have been approved for 2016-17, with an estimate of a total of 195 grants to be provided to 95 electorates for 2016-17.