



The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP  
Treasurer  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Treasurer

## 2020-21 Pre-Budget Submission: Budget priorities for the electorate of Indi

Please see below the priorities for my electorate of Indi for the 2020-21 Budget. These projects and infrastructure needs were identified in consultation with the Hume Regional Local Government Network, which comprises the nine Local Government Areas in Indi (Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta and Wodonga) and finalised in a roundtable discussion on 31 January 2020. More detail is included in the attachment.

<b>Bushfire recovery for disaster-affected communities</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Immediate recovery for communities</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Funding to fast-track implementation of local council economic development plans.....	3
Bring forward \$12 million for Albury-Wodonga Health's mental health rehabilitation unit.....	3
Ensure funding for Multi-Purpose Services matches the complexity of aged care in regional settings.	3
Co-fund \$50.2 million in game-changing tourism infrastructure projects and invest \$3 million in a locally-led tourism campaign .....	3
Bring the Ned Kelly story to life in a contemporary and immersive cultural tourism experience.....	4
\$2.1 million for urgent connection of the Tawonga Caravan Park to reticulated sewerage .....	4
<b>Increasing future resilience</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Allocate an additional \$20 million to the Round 6 Mobile Black Spot Program.....	5
Invest a total of \$15 million to build a renewable energy microgrid in Corryong .....	5
\$2.8 million for an improved Kiewa Valley Community Relief Centre .....	5
Contribute to a new Incident Control Centre at Ovens .....	5
Invest \$275,000 in an automated weather station at Corryong.....	6
<b>Electorate-wide priorities</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Local government</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Increase Financial Assistance Grants to 1% of Commonwealth taxation revenue to rural and regional local governments.....	6


Dr Helen Haines MP <sup>1</sup>

117 Murphy Street  
Wangaratta VIC 3677  
E: helen.haines.mp@aph.gov.au  
W helenhaines.org

Additional Building Better Regions Fund rounds for all local government areas and for local government areas which are bushfire-affected.....	6
<b>Rural Health</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Approve more Home Care Packages to reduce the waiting list.....	7
Implement the recommendations of the NDIS Tune Review .....	7
Invest in a skilled NDIS workforce for rural and regional Australia .....	7
<b>Education</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Fund priority actions in the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy .....	7
Conduct a second Local Schools Community Fund round and increase funding to rural, regional and remote electorates with higher numbers of schools .....	7
Invest \$2 million capital funding for Mansfield's only kindergarten .....	8
<b>Transport</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Support the strategic revitalisation and activation of the Wangaratta Aerodrome.....	8
Repurpose the \$64 million election promise for the McKoy Street Wodonga Overpass to fund other road infrastructure projects .....	8
Ensure timely delivery of the North East Rail Line Upgrade .....	8
Continue long-term funding of local road infrastructure .....	9
<b>Agriculture</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Invest in research into sustainable and regenerative agriculture.....	9
Support regional producers to capitalise on growth in the agriculture and tourism sectors.....	9
<b>Climate and energy</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Establish a \$200 million fund for the development of community renewable energy hubs across Australia .....	9
Upgrade electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure .....	9
Support feasibility studies for new hydro-electric capacity in Indi.....	9
\$2 million for a new gas City Gate at LOGIC Industrial Estate Wodonga.....	10

I request you consider these for inclusion in the 2020-21 Budget. I would welcome the chance to speak to you directly about these priority areas.

Yours faithfully



Dr Helen Haines MP  
Independent Federal Member for Indi

3 February 2020

Ref: HH7236

cc: Prime Minister Scott Morrison

## **Attachment: Budget priorities for the electorate of Indi**

### **Bushfire recovery for disaster-affected communities**

With the aftermath of the bushfire emergency affecting large parts of Indi, particularly the Towong and Alpine Shires, I welcome the establishment of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and its initial endowment of \$2 billion, in addition to existing support through the *Disaster Recovery Payment* and *Disaster Recovery Allowance*. However, these commitments must only be the start of safeguarding the viability and prosperity of Indi's fire-affected communities.

#### **Immediate recovery for communities**

##### *Funding to fast-track implementation of local council economic development plans*

The Government and the National Bushfire Recovery Agency have stressed the importance of locally-led recovery. The best way to deliver local results is to fund development priorities identified by local councils and regional development agencies. These projects have been costed and consulted on and will support both immediate recovery and future resilience. This approach will empower those with knowledge of local solutions while minimising delays in the recovery and betterment of our bushfire-affected communities.

##### *Bring forward \$12 million for Albury-Wodonga Health's mental health rehabilitation unit*

Ahead of the 2019 Federal Election, the Government announced \$14.5 million funding to Albury Wodonga Health as part of the *Supporting our Hospitals – Additional Infrastructure and Services* measure, comprising of \$12 million for a mental health rehabilitation unit and \$2.5 million for a new specialist clinics centre. Minister Hunt recently announced that the \$2.5 million would be brought forward to this calendar year. However, the \$12 million will not be delivered in full until 2024-25.

The need for mental health specialist services has only grown more urgent in the aftermath of the bushfire emergency. The catchment area of Albury-Wodonga Health includes the heavily fire-affected Towong, Alpine and Wangaratta councils. Bringing forward this funding to 2022-2023 will avoid a three-year delay when there is no time to waste.

##### *Ensure funding for Multi-Purpose Services matches the complexity of aged care in regional settings*

The Multi-Purpose Services Program provides funding for integrated health and aged care in bushfire-affected communities in Indi, including Corryong Health, Beechworth Health and Alpine Health. The frail aged comprise the majority of patients of these services and are the most vulnerable in emergencies. However, the current Commonwealth aged care funding contribution no longer matches the complexity of aged care in regional settings. These services receive less funding than comparable health services and are prohibited from accessing funding for capital or high-acuity aged care provisions. Increasing funding will allow these services to provide appropriate care for patients with complex needs, particularly in times of crisis.

##### *Co-fund \$50.2 million in game-changing tourism infrastructure projects and invest \$3 million in a locally-led tourism campaign*

The North East tourism industry, including the Alpine Shire and Victorian High Country, has been heavily impacted by the fires, with widespread closures, evacuations and direct fire damage contributing to an estimated loss of between \$158-\$208 million for the March quarter.

At this critical juncture, investment in tourism infrastructure projects of regional significance can help offset losses. The priority projects include:

<b>The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing</b>	Develop an iconic alpine walk that will attract both domestic and international visitors, and be a hero product for the alpine region	\$32 million
<b>Cycle tourism priority projects (phase 1, stage 1 of the North East Victoria Cycling Optimisation (NEVCO) Masterplan)</b>	Priority projects that offer the greatest cycle tourism growth opportunities for the region, capitalising on North East Victoria's status as having the strongest cycle tourism credentials in Victoria.	\$14 million
<b>Growing Mt Hotham Project</b>	Capital works to increase amenity and pedestrian safety of Mount Hotham precinct including realignment of Great Alpine Road, a transit interchange and town square.	\$4.2 million

Allocating \$3 million funding to peak tourism body Tourism North East for a high-impact, local and place-based marketing campaign to drive tourism back to the area will supplement the Government's initial funding commitment to domestic and international tourism marketing.

*Bring the Ned Kelly story to life in a contemporary and immersive cultural tourism experience*

Ned Kelly lived and died in North East Victoria, and Glenrowan as the site of Ned's last stand is a nationally significant place for destination tourism. The 'Ned Kelly Alive' project will develop a signature experience within Glenrowan that will attract visitors and expenditure involving an architecturally designed tower in the centre of town overlooking historical sites, with augmented reality enhancing the immersive experience. This project will cost \$4 million and could be co-funded by the Commonwealth, State Government and private developers. It is expected that the tower will attract 11,000 visitors per year achieving a cumulative economic impact over 10 years of over \$9.7 million and supporting 114 jobs.

*Deliver \$1.8 million to restore the Mount Buffalo Chalet and unlock tourism potential*

Despite being Australia's largest timber building and a prime example of Victorian High Country heritage, the Mount Buffalo Chalet remains closed to tourism. There has been much coverage of the ongoing fire risk to the Chalet which has renewed public interest in the building. Alpine Shire has identified government investment as critical to attracting private sector investment. If the Government provided \$1.8m to establish a café in the front rooms of the Chalet, this would unlock the tourism potential of the Mount Buffalo National Park by building confidence in the community, businesses and encourage other private investors in the region.

*\$2.1 million for urgent connection of the Tawonga Caravan Park to reticulated sewerage*

The loss of tourism in Victoria's High Country is estimated at \$79-90 million for the Alpine Shire alone. The Tawonga Caravan Park, a major accommodation provider for the region, has suffered financial loss which impacts its ability to fund capital works. Without a connection to the reticulated sewerage scheme, the Caravan Park will close and an important tourism destination and business in the Kiewa Valley will be lost.

## **Increasing future resilience**

### *Allocate an additional \$20 million to the Round 6 Mobile Black Spot Program*

While much has been done over recent years to improve telecommunications access in North East Victoria, when disaster such as bushfires strike communities are often let down by mobile phone black spots, preventing them from accessing localised information through emergency services apps. An increasing reliance on telecommunications during emergencies, such as evacuation notices being sent via SMS, highlights the ongoing fragility of the services. North East Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone regions in the world and complete mobile phone coverage is essential.

It is therefore important that existing telecommunications coverage throughout regional Australia is improved to ensure communities can reliably access communications in both everyday and emergency situations. An additional \$20 million (bringing the Mobile Black Spot Program to \$100 million) will ensure those communities most at risk of communications outages during bushfires can remain safe and connected.

### *Invest a total of \$15 million to build a renewable energy microgrid in Corryong*

The recent bushfires have highlighted the vulnerability of existing power infrastructure in Indi. This was most notably demonstrated by the destruction of dozens of kilometres of main power lines between Tallangatta and Corryong which left Upper Murray communities without power and dependant on generator power a month after the fires. The outage of the ABC transmitter for Corryong during the recent bushfire, with many unable to tune in to emergency broadcasts, demonstrated the precarious nature of reliance on mains power.

A potential solution is the development of renewable energy microgrids which would allow communities to be self-sustainable in emergency situations. AusNet and Mondo have applied for \$3 million for a Corryong microgrid feasibility study under the *Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund – Microgrids 2019-20*. This Corryong microgrid could be built for a total of \$15 million, requiring \$12 million in addition to the existing \$3 million under application. This project will significantly increase the reliability of telecommunications and power infrastructure in Corryong.

### *\$2.8 million for an improved Kiewa Valley Community Relief Centre*

Upgrades are currently needed to the Dederang Recreation Reserve to improve the facilities so that it can be used as a Community Relief Centre for residents in the Kiewa Valley in the event of future bushfire emergencies.

### *Immediately fund the \$3.2 million Mount Beauty Airport Upgrade*

The Alpine Shire has applied for funding under the Commonwealth Government's *Regional Airports Program* to increase the length and width of the Mount Beauty Airport runway. This would allow emergency services such as firefighting planes and helicopters access to the Kiewa Valley community for decades to come.

### *Contribute to a new Incident Control Centre at Ovens*

The Ovens Valley features the major population centres of Myrtleford and Bright. During the bushfires the Ovens Incident Control Centre coordinated the response to the Abbeyard Fire which threatened Mount Buffalo. A number of previously large regional fires have been coordinated from this centre, with as many as 90 responders stationed there during the January fires.

However, the facility was built in the 1950's as a tobacco research centre and is not fit for purpose, and is long overdue for a replacement.

*Invest \$275,000 in an automated weather station at Corryong*

As Corryong does not have an automated weather station (AWS) it must rely on the Khancoban weather station, which is 30km away and does not reflect Corryong weather conditions. The accurate recording of local weather conditions is vital for bushfire response and suppression, air transport of critically ill patients, search and rescue activities, and stock and crop management and domestic aircraft. My office has advocated in support of the AWS alongside Towong Shire Council, the District 24 Country Fire Authority, Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police – Corryong and the Man From Snowy River Festival. The Bureau of Meteorology estimates the AWS will cost \$222,000. I therefore encourage you to make \$275,000 available to fund site leasing and preparation, construction of the AWS and five years of operating costs.

## **Electorate-wide priorities**

### **Local government**

Regional councils face unique challenges, including maintaining large amounts of infrastructure such as roads and bridges, delivering services across broader geographic areas and accommodating on average older populations. Regional councils also have fewer options for raising revenue without placing an increased financial burden on a relatively small number of rate payers.

*Increase Financial Assistance Grants to 1% of Commonwealth taxation revenue to rural and regional local governments*

Commonwealth Government assistance to local councils through the Financial Assistance Grants program was last at 1% of Commonwealth taxation revenue (CTR) in 1996. Due to gradual reduction and a three year indexation freeze between 2014 and 2017, Financial Assistance Grants have now decreased to approximately 0.55% of CRT. I urge you to immediately return Financial Assistance Grants to at least 1% of CTR to ensure regional councils can continue to provide adequate infrastructure and services programs. The recent bushfires have highlighted the vulnerability of rural LGAs and the huge impost this places on their scarce resources.

*Additional Building Better Regions Fund rounds for all local government areas and for local government areas which are bushfire-affected*

Round 4 of the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) was only available to drought-affected councils. While the need in drought-affected communities is unquestionable, this meant that many of Indi's councils were ineligible to receive a crucial source of funding for infrastructure and community investment. The need remains in all councils for investment to drive economic growth and build stronger regional communities. Indi LGAs have requested that the next round of the BBRF be brought forward and made available to all councils. In light of the recent bushfires and devastating effect on infrastructure, economies and community spirit, it is proposed that a BBRF round be introduced exclusively for fire-impacted councils.

## **Rural Health**

### *Approve more Home Care Packages to reduce the waiting list*

As an electorate with 21% of people aged 65 years, higher than the national average of 16%, aged care is of particular importance to Indi. People in regional areas use residential care less than those in cities and face higher costs in travelling to services. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety heard an extra \$2-\$2.5 billion per year is needed to ensure all those approved would get their Home Care Package delivered within three months. I encourage you to approve more Home Care Packages to reduce the waiting list, particularly for those with the highest level of need.

### *Implement the recommendations of the NDIS Tune Review*

In my submission to the Tune Review last year, I made eight recommendations based on the feedback of hundreds of people who have contacted my office. Many of these recommendations have been addressed in the Tune Review, including streamlining the experience of creating and using NDIS plans. I call on you to implement all of the Tune Review recommendations. This could be funded through reinvestment of the \$4 billion of savings from NDIS underutilisation in 2018-19.

### *Invest in a skilled NDIS workforce for rural and regional Australia*

The NDIS will expand significantly over the coming years, with estimates of an additional 90,000 new workers in the disability sector. Many of these will be needed in regional areas. As above, developing this much-needed workforce could be done through reinvestment of the \$4 billion of savings from NDIS underutilisation in 2018-19.

## **Education**

### *Fund priority actions in the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy*

The Napthine Review has provided a blueprint for improving educational outcomes for rural students and has the backing of regional universities in my electorate such as La Trobe University and Charles Sturt University. I urge you to commit funding to the actions in the Review in the Budget, starting with:

1. Demand-driven funding for Commonwealth-supported bachelor-level university places for domestic students studying at regional and remote campuses and for all Indigenous students from RRR areas;
2. A new tertiary education access payment of \$5,000 available to all school leavers that relocate from an outer regional or remote location to undertake full-time, higher-level tertiary education;
3. Improving the regional-focus of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) scheme;
4. A new grants program to enhance research capacity in regional universities and identifying opportunities to establish national research infrastructure in RRR areas;
5. Establish a regional, rural and remote Education Commissioner.

### *Conduct a second Local Schools Community Fund round and increase funding to rural, regional and remote electorates with higher numbers of schools*

The first Local Schools Community Fund identified a huge demand for funding for small capital projects in my electorate. As a large regional electorate covering 29,187km<sup>2</sup> Indi has 125 schools,

more than the average outer regional electorate and more than double the national average. The \$200,000 funding in this round did not come close to meeting the \$1.1 million worth of applications. A second round will help address need for vital services and infrastructure such as air-conditioning, computer or ICT facilities and counselling or youth mental health support. A tiered funding model, where electorates with higher numbers of schools receive more funding, should be considered. In times of drought and prolonged bushfires, supporting our rural and regional schools is more important than ever.

*Invest \$2 million capital funding for Mansfield's only kindergarten*

Mansfield has an acute need for investment in its single kindergarten. The current infrastructure is over 35 years old and is no longer fit for purpose, and there is a wait list of children. The Victorian Government has provided funding for stage one in the master plan redevelopment, but \$2 million is required to undertake the whole project. The community has waited many years for investment in this vital service to improve educational outcomes.

**Transport**

*Support the strategic revitalisation and activation of the Wangaratta Aerodrome*

The Wangaratta Aerodrome supports emergency services, charter services, recreational aviation, pilot training, and heritage conservation and tourism. The revitalisation of the aerodrome set out in the Wangaratta Aerodrome Master Plan will ensure it meets commercial, recreational and emergency services needs (including air ambulance, police and air firefighting) for the next 20 years. This new development, when combined with the current employment on site, would lead to an aviation cluster with a total of 40 direct jobs and a further 6 indirect jobs by 2024. Infrastructure upgrades, works and the extension of aprons and taxiways will cost approximately \$14 million and could be co-funded by the State Government and private investors.

*Repurpose the \$64 million election promise for the McKoy Street Wodonga Overpass to fund other road infrastructure projects*

The Hume Regional Local Government Network has advised that this \$64 million election commitment by Prime Minister Morrison is not supported. Alternatives to the overpass exist, and there are far greater needs in the region than a single overpass on the freeway. The Local Government Network advises that a proper study would almost certainly find better arrangements, and funds can be diverted to more pressing infrastructure needs in the region.

*Ensure timely delivery of the North East Rail Line Upgrade*

The adequacy of passenger rail services between Albury and Melbourne is a significant issue for residents and businesses within the region. The service is regarded as one of the poorest in the state, with infrequent services, trains not arriving on time and slow journeys. The recent derailment of freight carriages in Barnawartha which narrowly missed colliding with a passenger service demonstrates the urgent need for improvement. The Government has committed \$235 million to this upgrade with completion scheduled in 2021. Construction on the line has now begun, and I call upon the Government to ensure that the project delivers the upgrade to the standard and within the timeframes promised.



### *Continue long-term funding of local road infrastructure*

In Indi, local councils maintain tens of thousands of kilometres of sealed and unsealed roads, annually renewing sections of the road network to improve access, connections and safety. This road network underpins tourism, agricultural and business sectors and provides vital links for employment, educational, health, social and recreational needs. Long-term funding allows councils to proactively look at current and future renewal and upgrade needs of the community. These funding sources include the Bridges Renewal Program, Roads to Recovery Program and the Black Spot Program.

### **Agriculture**

#### *Invest in research into sustainable and regenerative agriculture*

As noted in MYEFO, the recent drought has hurt the agriculture industry with farm GDP detracting from growth in 2018-19 and is expected to detract again in 2019-20. Prioritising funding for agricultural adaptation research and translation can equip farmers with the know-how to grow their business and strengthen their resilience. This can include eco-services remuneration for farmers undertaking vital biodiversity work and carbon sequestration.

#### *Support regional producers to capitalise on growth in the agriculture and tourism sectors*

This support includes intensive programs for producers, manufacturers and service providers about best business practices, succession planning, exporting, marketing and branding, research and development, sales, and value-adding. These programs will support local growers and producers to expand their offering to both the domestic and international markets, creating long term job security and drive job creation within our region. \$500,000 to \$1 million needs to be spent each year on this program. Funding partners can include the Commonwealth Government, State Government departments, trade and investment agencies and private enterprise.

### **Climate and energy**

#### *Establish a \$200 million fund for the development of community renewable energy hubs across Australia*

This fund would provide early stage grants to support technical and social feasibility studies and as co-contributions to support the construction of projects including small-scale renewable generation; battery, pumped hydro or chemical storage; or development of mini-grids and virtual power plants. Grants would be available to community groups, councils, cooperatives and small businesses. Such a fund would promote energy security particularly for regional towns whilst lowering the cost of electricity and providing resilience in times of disaster by providing local power generation capability.

#### *Upgrade electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure*

Of particular importance to my electorate is investment in upgrading of transmission and distribution infrastructure to enable increased renewable energy generation in my electorate and investment in distributed energy resources technologies.

#### *Support feasibility studies for new hydro-electric capacity in Indi*

The Hume Region, which encompasses nearly all of Indi, has 13 times more pumped hydro storage potential than is required to support a 100% percent renewable grid for all of Australia. Increasing

funding for Clean Energy Finance Corporation and Australian Renewable Energy Agency would enable feasibility studies to be conducted into pumped hydro in my electorate – a technology that is critical in providing storage for the increased uptake of solar and wind renewable energy.

*\$2 million for a new gas City Gate at LOGIC Industrial Estate Wodonga*

A gas network City Gate would open up possibilities for the LOGIC Industrial Estate site including a new manufacturing facility, extending the gas supply to the nearby township of Barnawartha and creating up to 34 jobs injecting \$2.5 million into the local economy. A total cost of \$5.2 million has been identified, with project costs of approximately \$6 million. Wodonga City Council has requested \$2 million funding from the Commonwealth Government, with equal contributions from the State government and the council has allocated \$2 million over 2019-21 for the project in its capital investment budget.