



New Leadership.



Regional Development for a Sustainable Future

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Overview

All Australians should be able to participate fully in the life of the nation, no matter where they live.

Local communities are the nation building core of the future – nurturing the next generation of Australians.

Regional Australia offers enormous opportunities. Australia's regions play a vital role in our economic development as a nation – generating 65 per cent of Australia's export income.

Our regions are also a source of significant social and cultural diversity – as well as being the source of our precious natural resources base.

Labor is committed to working with regional communities to help them to respond to the challenges they face.

Labor recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach to regional development will not work. As a nation, we must capitalise on the creativity within individual local communities and respond to local needs.

Localism and local empowerment are at the core of Labor's approach to regional development.

Apart from driving the regional agenda, Labor's commitment to localism is a key part of the solution to ending to the blame game between the various levels of government, which is holding our regions back.

A Rudd Labor Government will work in partnership with local communities – to empower and resource them to develop local solutions to meet their development needs.

The key challenge is to not only develop strong national agendas on infrastructure, broadband, housing, health care, education, skills development and innovation, but to ensure they are responsive to local priorities and needs.

The message to regional communities is clear: a Rudd Labor Government will work with you to make your solutions work.

Labor's fresh ideas and new approach will harness the potential of our regions and develop them for a better future.

Labor has consistently supported regional Australia

Labor is committed to regional development.

Labor recognises that the Federal Government has a responsibility to act as both a catalyst and a partner to help meet the challenges faced by our regions, and to ensure equitable economic and social outcomes, and the provision of services.

Successive Federal Labor Governments have recognised the role of the Commonwealth in regional development and have applied innovative policies to address regional issues:

- The Whitlam Labor Government invested in regional communities by establishing a Department of Urban and Regional Development.
- The Hawke Labor Government recognised that regions, not just companies, compete against each other in the global market. It also saw the value of a location specific approach to delivering regional solutions, such as through the Country Centres.
- The Keating Labor Government put regional development firmly on the national agenda, commissioning the *Kelty Report* following the *Taskforce on Regional Development* which recommended that the government focus on regional leadership and working in partnership. Following this report:
 - The first network of Regional Development Organisations (RDOs) was established to build capacity in regions.
 - Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) were created to match training to skills needs of regions.

Labor also established the Better Cities Program to invest in gaps in urban and regional infrastructure. This program was aimed at encouraging microeconomic and institutional reform, improving social justice and the environment, and developing more effective coordination between all levels of government.

The Howard Government has abrogated its responsibility on regional development.

On coming to office in 1996, the then Minister for Regional Services and Deputy Leader of the National Party declared there was 'no clear rationale or constitutional basis for Commonwealth involvement' in regional development.

This statement has never been overturned. If the National Party does not stand for regional development, what does it stand for?

The Howard Government's actions speak for themselves. It scrapped RDOs and the Better Cities program. While the Government retained ACCs, it stripped them of the resources to

address local skills strategies and their role was reduced to that of advising on Regional Partnerships projects.

This is a worthwhile program, but it has been abused by the Howard Government. The damning recent report of the Auditor General shows how they systematically abused the \$400 million program, treating it as nothing more than a slush fund to help the Government get re-elected.

Regional communities deserve better.

They deserve a government that will administer these programs with probity, accountability and transparency.

A Rudd Labor Government will retain the Regional Partnership and Sustainable Regions Programs, and build transparency into them.

A Rudd Labor Government will genuinely empower local communities – resourcing their solutions and providing national leadership to deliver quality infrastructure and services to regional Australia.

Regional Development for a Sustainable Future

Regional Development Australia

A Rudd Labor Government will create a stronger and more participatory federal regional development structure. Labor will use that structure to restore rigour and transparency to regional programs, and to advocate local solutions to maintain funding opportunities.

Labor will build on the existing regional structure, the Area Consultative Committees (ACC) – which Labor established – to create *Regional Development Australia*.

Labor will continue to support regional organisations of councils – *Regional Development Australia* will not replace local government, but value add to it and assist local government to work across shire and municipal boundaries to deliver regional solutions.

Labor will make it mandatory that all relevant applications are developed in consultation with *Regional Development Australia*.

Labor will also use the opportunity that *Regional Development Australia* presents to enable the Federal Government to work more closely with regional communities and to deliver local solutions.

Regional Development Australia will:

- Develop strategic regional plans in close consultation local government, state, regional development bodies, private sector and regional communities.
- Support local projects in line with their plans.
- Identify infrastructure needs in their regions.
- Liaise across government about the needs of regional communities.

Resourcing the regions – putting regional in the mainstream

Under the Howard Government, regional policy is financed separately to mainstream policy. Labor recognises that this has restricted the ability for long term regional programs and has led to programs built on short term political gain.

A Rudd Labor Government will require the individual portfolio budgets and the federal budget to identify how much is being spent in each region.

This will produce greater accountability in the budget papers and will allow regions to have input into the spatial allocation of funds across portfolios for better service delivery.

This funding model will drive coordination across levels of government and enabling a whole of government approach to regional development.

It will also be central in developing innovative, creative solutions to end the blame game and enable better service delivery.

We will also require the mainstream portfolios to identify regional solutions by consulting regional development bodies so they can respond to local solutions for better service delivery and economic development.

Responding to the needs of growing regions

There are key infrastructure challenges that have the potential to put the brakes on regional development.

Rapid population growth produces pressure for community and economic infrastructure. Slower growing regions must also keep up, and a failure to maintain infrastructure will only hold them back.

In contrast to the Howard Government, Labor's approach to regional development is not to throw a 'fistful of dollars' at election time. Instead, Labor is committed to investments that are targeted at specific initiatives identified by the region, for the region to meet their development challenges.

The *Better Regions Program* has been developed by Labor to build on the strengths of the region, improve liveability, and create jobs. It will invest in locally driven projects which support:

- Economic sustainability.
- Clean, safe and attractive environments.
- Vibrant communities.
- Provision of economic and social services.
- Urban renewal.
- Community amenity.
- Community infrastructure.

Labor has announced a number of key packages through our *Better Regions Program*, for the corridors that are experiencing higher growth rates than the national average such as the Mandurah-Peel region in Western Australia, the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Northern Adelaide in South Australia and the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales.

As well as dealing with the enormous growth pressures that have impacted on communities as a result of the resources boom, Labor's *Better Regions Program* will also respond to the growth pressures that are being experienced by communities on the urban fringes, regional centres and in 'tree change' and 'sea change' areas.

Not since a Federal Labor Government established the Better Cities Program has there been a strategic vision to inject funding into infrastructure to renew and sustain growth corridors.

Better infrastructure and services for regional Australia

Federal Labor believes that all Australians, regardless of where they live, should have reasonable and affordable access to services. This statement of entitlements is core business for Federal Labor.

Broadband

High speed broadband is critical for Australia's regions – for families, business and schools. It will help people in the regions stay connected and improve their access to online services. It will also help our regional centres thrive and prosper.

Labor will bring high speed broadband to the whole of the nation.

A Rudd Labor Government will facilitate the building of a National Broadband Network to bring Australia's telecommunications infrastructure into the 21st century. The network will have a minimum speed of 12 megabits per second for 98 per cent of the population. The remaining 2 per cent of Australians will receive a standard of service that is as close as possible to that delivered by the fibre network, and will use the best new wireless, satellite and microwave technologies.

Labor will invest up to \$4.7 billion in a National Broadband Network, in a public private partnership, to achieve this goal. It will be the greatest national investment in improving information and communications technology and broadband internet access in the nation's history.

Labor's plan will bring high speed broadband to over seven million Australians who live outside Australia's capital cities – including nearly 220,000 businesses and over 5,000 schools in provincial and rural areas.

High speed broadband is particularly critical for regional businesses. It can improve productivity and reduce costs in areas such as administration, marketing and supply chain contracts, where proximity to other businesses has traditionally given businesses in commercial centres a significant advantage.

While the potential benefits of high speed broadband for regional businesses are many, evidence suggests regional businesses are lagging businesses in capital cities in internet access and use.

According to the *State of the Regions Report 2005-06*, published by the Australian Local Government Association, increased broadband coverage could add almost \$1 billion to Australia's regional economies every year – generating 10,000 new jobs.

Major infrastructure

Good transport links are the lifeblood of regional communities.

Getting transport right in our regions is a key infrastructure challenge. That is why Labor will undertake a dramatic overhaul of infrastructure policy in Australia. We will take the politics out of decisions about the allocation of resources for transport and major infrastructure.

A Rudd Labor Government will establish a new agency, Infrastructure Australia. Infrastructure Australia will be dedicated to infrastructure reform – auditing, planning, development and investment, and will be charged with the development of a strategic blueprint for our nation's future infrastructure needs.

Infrastructure Australia will be required to consult with *Regional Development Australia*.

Recommendations for infrastructure investment will be made independently by Infrastructure Australia. This will ensure infrastructure priorities are guided by economic, social and environmental interests – and not narrow political interests.

Australia needs greater investment in its road and rail networks. That is why a Rudd Labor Government will invest in the progressive upgrading of national highways, key freight infrastructure projects, urban transport corridors and arterial roads, and strategic projects in our regions.

Natural resource management and climate change

There are huge challenges in water, natural resource management and drought proofing the nation.

The nation does not lack resources to deal with the issue, as evidenced by the government's multi billion dollar initiative, but they are dollars without coordination or strategic direction.

Labor in government understood the importance of coordination and leveraging partnership commitments from other stakeholders.

We developed a national drought policy, a national disaster relief policy, flood mitigation, investment in infrastructure for water sourcing and Landcare.

A Rudd Labor Government will end the blame game on water and climate change.

The national water crisis represents a significant infrastructure challenge for our regions.

Labor's response includes programs that will assist communities and families to take action at the local level. They include:

- Establishing a \$250 million National Water Security Plan for Towns and Cities to secure water supplies by repairing water pipes and reducing leaks, wastage and evaporation.
- Investing \$250 million in rebates of up to \$500 each for around half a million households across Australia to install rainwater tanks and third pipes for grey water.
- Setting a national target of recycling 30 per cent of wastewater by 2015, and providing support to achieve that target.
- Investments in water recycling, piping infrastructure, better stormwater management and aquifer development for stormwater storage, as well as clean energy powered desalination.

Embracing the opportunity of renewable energy for regional jobs

Federal Labor understands the significant future growth opportunities for regional Australia in the renewable energy sector including wind, solar, geothermal power.

A Rudd Labor Government will support this sector through a range of measures including by setting a renewable energy target of 20 per cent by 2020.

The renewable energy target is not just about addressing climate change – it is also about creating significant new economic and job opportunities for regional Australia.

In regions where there is a proud history of generating renewable energy, Labor's increased renewable energy target will provide those regions with greater opportunities to expand their industry.

The renewable energy sector has welcomed Labor's policy saying in a statement that they see it as a 'big step forward for their industry'.

A Rudd Labor Government will work cooperatively with State and Territory Governments to bring both the national renewable energy target and existing state based targets into a single, national scheme.

Under a Rudd Labor Government, Australia will become the clean energy hub of the Asia Pacific, making clean energy central to Australia's economic and environmental future.

There will be real economic opportunities for regions to become key parts of this hub and to generate economic activity and jobs.

Specific initiatives to help Australian businesses take a larger slice of the renewable energy market will include a \$15 million Clean Energy Export Strategy and up to \$20 million for a Clean Energy Enterprise Connect Centre.

This is a key part of Labor's plan to tackle climate change, which also includes:

- Immediately ratifying the Kyoto Protocol.
- Practical measures to improve household energy efficiency, including generous rebates for solar power systems and solar hot water, and low interest loans to help Australians to undertake practical water and energy efficiency measures in their homes.
- Establishing a national emissions trading scheme by 2010 to put a price on carbon and cut greenhouse emissions.
- Committing \$500 million to a National Clean Coal Fund to accelerate the development and deployment of clean coal technologies to cut emissions and secure coal industry jobs.
- Investing \$500 million in a Renewable Energy Fund to support the development and demonstration of renewable energy technologies.
- Investing \$50 million to establish an Australian Solar Institute, and a \$50 million geothermal initiative to help companies with the cost of drilling.
- Establish a \$500 million Green Car Innovation Fund to generate \$2 billion in investment in the automotive industry and tackle climate change by manufacturing low emission vehicles in Australia

Health

Together with key infrastructure, Labor recognises that Australians living in regional communities can face critical difficulties in accessing health services.

A Rudd Labor Government will implement a \$2.5 billion National Health Reform Plan to improve Australia's health and hospital system and ensure better health services for patients.

At the centre of that agenda is Labor's commitment to developing flexible, long term solutions – developed in partnership with local communities to meet their local needs.

It also recognises that good health infrastructure is essential to ensuring good quality health services and to attracting medical professionals to in rural and regional communities.

To improve health services in regional areas, a Rudd Labor Government will:

- Reform the Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund (RMIF) to improve health infrastructure in rural communities and make more regional towns eligible to apply.
- Establish GP Super Clinics throughout Australia to provide access to doctors, nurses, specialists and allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists, podiatrists, dieticians and psychologists, all in one centre, in their local community where they need them.

Labor's GP Super Clinics will provide infrastructure funding to establish a greater range of convenient and quality services in local communities – particularly in rural and regional areas where Medicare has not been utilised to its fullest because of workforce shortages.

In addition, to help attract and support health professionals to rural and regional areas, a Rudd Labor Government will:

- Dedicate at least 400 of the additional 1,000 nursing places to be offered each year under our \$81 million nursing plan to universities offering clinical experience in regional and rural hospitals.
- Invest \$2.5 million to double the number of scholarships currently available under the John Flynn Scholarship Scheme, for medical students to undertake clinical placements in rural areas.
- Invest \$2.5 million to establish an Australian Allied Health Rural and Remote Clinical Placement Scholarship Scheme, to support allied health students to undertake clinical placements in rural areas.
- Provide \$6 million to expand the Specialist Obstetricians Locum Scheme, to support obstetricians in rural areas.
- Invest an additional \$9 million to support specialists to provide outreach services to rural communities.

Labor's new National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission will also be asked to explicitly identify a long term plan for improving health services in rural areas.

Improving aged care in our regions

In most regions around Australia the number of residential aged care beds does not match need.

A Rudd Labor Government will reform residential aged care planning and allocation arrangements.

The provision of aged care beds should reflect local needs and local demographics.

A Rudd Labor Government will ensure that the time between the allocation of residential aged care beds and these beds becoming operational is reduced to a minimum by streamlining the Aged Care Approval Round (ACAR) process. This will be done by:

- Identifying regions where need is high and prioritising the allocation of new beds to these areas through the ACAR process.
- Tighter monitoring of the milestones between allocation of beds and the beds becoming operational.
- Allocating beds in line with the receipt of census data to ensure a steady flow of bed allocations and development.
- Developing a system of 'reserve' applications in the ACAR process so that unsuccessful applications remain valid within a cycle of allocation.
- Tighter matching of the number of operational places with the planning ratio.

A Rudd Labor Government will also review the current aged care planning ratios which were originally introduced in the mid 1980s. This will be done on a regular basis to take better account of demographic changes and changing patterns of use of aged care services. This will be essential in addressing aged care services in regional Australia.

Education and skills

Labor has argued that investment in human capital is central to the next wave of economic reform that will position Australia as a competitive, prosperous and knowledge based economy in the future.

If Australian regions are to continue to succeed in the global economy they need a sizeable, highly skilled and productive workforce. The key to building such a workforce is having a high quality, internationally competitive education system.

A Rudd Labor Government will lift the level of investment in education in Australia. It will also oversee a revolution in the quality of outcomes across the education system.

Labor will deliver an Education Revolution to ensure that Australians rank among the best educated in the world and that the economy benefits from having the best trained workforce in the world.

Training

Skill shortages are being acutely felt in many regional and rural areas as the demand for skilled labour increases.

Labor's *Skilling Australia for the Future* plan will increase and deepen the skills capacity of the Australian workforce and ensure demand for skills and skills training are matched.

Regional Development Australia will also have a strong input into closing the skills gap in their regions.

The Keating Labor Government set up the Area Consultative Committees to match training programs with local needs. The local approach worked, and 300,000 jobs placed in the last six months of Labor's term in office.

This approach can work again if the Federal Government resources and consults with Regional Development Australia to deliver its *Skilling Australia for the Future* plan to close the skills gap in our regions.

Labor's *Skilling Australia for the Future* plan includes:

- Funding an additional 450,000 skilled training places over the next four years - 200,000 more than the Howard Government
- Ensuring that 90 per cent of these places lead to a higher qualification than the Howard Government's proposed new training places.
- Placing industry demand at the heart of the skills training system – so that training providers equip Australians with the skills that industry needs.

Schools

Labor understands that information and communications technology can help to increase the educational opportunities of children in regional Australia.

Through a high speed broadband network and computer resources, students from anywhere in Australia can get immediate access to the latest and highest quality educational content from around the nation and across the globe.

A Rudd Labor Government will invest \$1 billion over four years to turn every secondary school in Australia into a digital school.

Under Labor's *Digital Education Revolution*, most schools in provincial and rural areas will get access to high speed broadband connections of up to 100 megabits per second, while the remainder will get improved access via the best available fixed line, wireless and satellite technologies.

A Rudd Labor Government will also invest \$2.5 billion over ten years to build trades training centres in regional secondary schools.

Higher education

To provide more opportunities for students from regional areas to attend university, a Rudd Labor Government will significantly improve and expand Australia's Commonwealth Scholarship program.

Over four years from the start of the 2009 university year, Federal Labor's \$202 million Scholarships for a Competitive Future will double from 44,000 to 88,000 the number of undergraduate students receiving a Commonwealth Learning Scholarship, including accommodation bursaries for students from rural and regional areas. Under Labor's plan commencing Accommodation Scholarships will increase from around 3,500 currently to around 10,000 in 2012.

Labor will also provide more opportunities for students to study at university in areas of national priority. At least 400 of the additional 1,000 nursing places Labor will offer each year under our \$81 million nursing plan will be dedicated to universities offering clinical experience in regional and rural hospitals.