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MAJOR REVIEW INTO REGIONAL EDUCATION

It a great step forward for education in the regions, I was delighted to join Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce and Education Minister Simon Birmingham to announce a comprehensive review of regional education.

The aim of the review to be led by Professor John Halsey of Flinders University, (pictured above left) is to identify and address key barriers and challenges that impact on educational outcomes in regional, rural and remote areas.

My regional colleagues and I have worked towards this move for the past two years as well as holding forums and consulting with regional educationalists.

This review, an election commitment by the coalition, will provide the blueprint for further work in the area. Professor Halsey is a perfect fit to head the review which will be of great benefit to all regional students.

Your postcode should not matter and should never determine your educational opportunities.

This issue has been a problem in this country for many years, it is time, in the 21st century, that we actually solve it.

As part of the review, there will be a call for submissions from interested parties and face to face consultations with key stakeholders, including representatives from the education

community, families, employers and employer groups, relevant government agencies and the philanthropic sector.

This is a significant step forward by the federal government in looking at some of the challenges and barriers that impact on the learning outcomes of regional, rural and remote students.

It will look at education from school entry to job success and how we can improve results for regional students.

Professor Halsey has had extensive experience in regional education and understands the unique challenges faced by regional students.

A discussion paper and online platform for public submissions will be available from next month.

Further details at:

<https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>



FAST FACTS

- 81% of urban students more likely to have obtained their Year 12 compared with just 67% of regional students
- Just 25% of students from regional areas are at university
- University completion rates - 18.3% of 25-34 year olds from remote and very remote areas
- 20.4% from regional areas obtaining a Bachelor Degree or above compared with 42.4% from capital cities

REVIEW BACKED BY EDUCATIONALISTS

Education leaders in the Bendigo region were among the many that supported the review announcement.

Among them, La Trobe University vice-chancellor, John Dewar (pictured left) said it had the potential to improve students' access to and the quality of education.

"We welcome review and look forward to working with Government and the Opposition on this important issue.

"La Trobe has been applying its research skills to search for practical solutions in this space for some time. We have proposed a number of ideas already in fora such as CEDA and the Australian Regional Development Conference.

"We think it's important to lift Higher Education participation rates in rural and regional Australia and prevent brain drain to the capital cities.

"Over the last decade (2006-2015) La Trobe's regional presence has delivered over 14000 graduates from our regional campuses, over half of whom commenced their careers in the region in which they studied," Mr Dewar said.

ACCC STUDY INTO THE CATTLE AND BEEF INDUSTRY

The ACCC Study into Australia's cattle and beef markets which goes to the heart of problems in the industry raised with me over many years is most welcome.

For decades, I have been hearing about a culture of fear and intimidation throughout the beef industry and the ACCC Study addresses many of those concerns.

A constant complaint that I have heard over a considerable time is the lack of transparency around how decisions are made inside the processing plant once a carcass is on the hook.

The recommendations that look at implementing an objective carcass rating scheme are much needed.

For a market to operate effectively and to deliver returns to the entire supply chain, there needs to be transparency around how prices are set.

Everybody needs to be able to understand why that particular beast fetched that particular amount of money on that market.

Farmers need to have that information available to them in a manner they understand, to use that information in their farming practices and to know if they are meeting market expectations.

At the moment that is not occurring and the ACCC recommendation that price grids should be made publically available and that they are easy to interpret and compare is a good one and vital for farmers.

As I have also been suggesting, the ACCC Study found that improvements to market reporting are needed with cattle prices reported across sales channels on the same basis so that indicative prices for each channel are easily comparable.

I particularly support the recommendation that the Red Meat Advisory Council should develop a uniform and independent complaints and dispute resolution process to give confidence back to the industry.

Another positive recommendation is that selling agents should display the terms of auction in a prominent position at all saleyards.

I support the ACCC recommended that the Red Meat Advisory Council should have prime responsibility for overseeing the recommendations and for monitoring their compliance.

Now, I would also like to see the Red Meat Advisory Council and other interested parties including the ACCC appear before the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee before the its Senate Report is finalised in coming months.

UPDATE ON DAIRY ROUNDTABLES

In the last edition of this newsletter, I reported on the series of Dairy Industry Roundtables held in regional Victoria late last year.

I am pleased to report that Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce has acted decisively and quickly to the concerns of dairy farmers who attended a series of Roundtables.

The Roundtables heard the views of dairy farmers regarding the delivery of assistance measures, including the Coalition Government's \$579 million dairy assistance package to support farmers affected by reduced farm gate milk prices.

The subsequent report was prepared by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources and the Department of Human Services.

I heard from a number of dairy farmers who attended the Roundtables in the Kiewa Valley, in Shepparton, Camperdown and in Gippsland about long waiting times for benefits, lost documents and the mountain of forms.

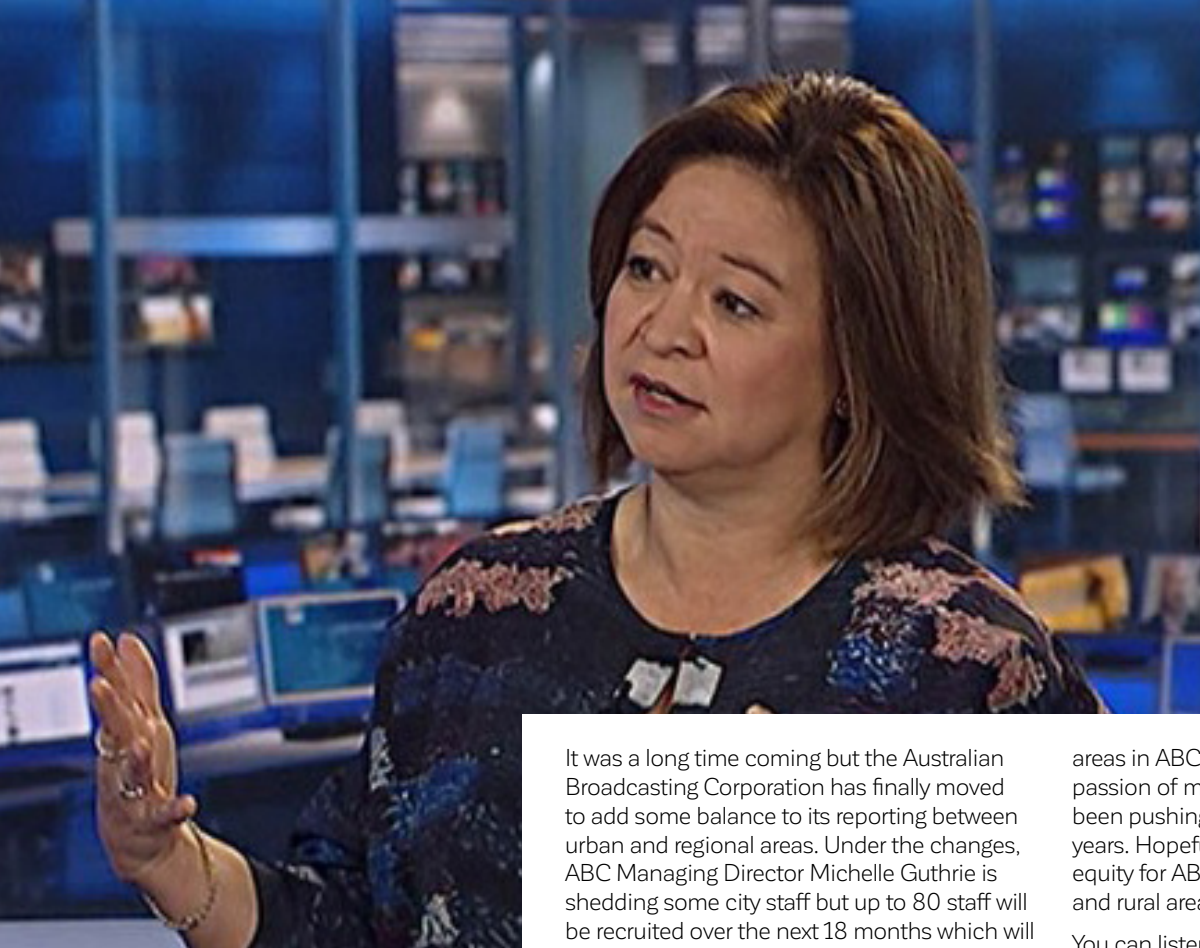
I took their frustrations back to the Deputy Prime Minister, who had asked me to Chair the Roundtables and he has already implemented immediate measures to make it easier for dairy farmers experiencing hardship, to speed up payments of the FHA.

These include amendments to the Farm Household Support Act to more precisely define farm assets when assessing eligibility as well as removing the requirement to serve an Ordinary Waiting Period or Liquid Assets Waiting Period before people can receive payments.

However the feedback received during the four Roundtables was broader and included concerns about dairy processor behaviour, the need for social and other supports, dairy industry representation and industry structure, strategy and politics.

The Roundtables are further evidence of the Coalition Government's commitment to support Australia's dairy farmers.





RIGHT MOVE (AT LAST) BY THE ABC

It was a long time coming but the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has finally moved to add some balance to its reporting between urban and regional areas. Under the changes, ABC Managing Director Michelle Guthrie is shedding some city staff but up to 80 staff will be recruited over the next 18 months which will give at least some balance to staff numbers. The imbalance between the cities and regional

areas in ABC broadcasting focus is a real passion of mine and something that I have been pushing in the Senate and elsewhere for years. Hopefully it will bring some fairness and equity for ABC viewers and listeners in regional and rural areas at last!

You can listen to the details at:
www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2016/s4631937.htm



ON THE OTHER HAND

Michelle Guthrie told a Senate hearing that I was involved in that the decision to axe ABC shortwave services in Northern Territory and elsewhere, including out of Shepparton to S.E. Asia didn't attract more than a handful of protests.

However in a Public Hearing of the Environment and Communications Legislation in Darwin recently, evidence suggested a large number of protests with the decision to axe the service affecting an estimated 50,000 listeners.

SMALL BUSINESS BENEFITS FROM PENALTY RATES CHANGES

Small business operators I have spoken to throughout Regional Victoria say the recent decision by the Fair Work Commission will mean many of them will have the opportunity to open again on Sundays, creating more local jobs.

Sunday penalty rates have been reduced in four industries, retail, hospitality, fast food and pharmacy – 4 out of 122 awards.

Thousands of small businesses have been competing on an uneven playing field against big business that have negotiated with unions through enterprise agreements that mean they already avoid high Sunday penalty rates.

What has been lost in all of the union and Labor Party hoo har in all of this is the fact that, just as interest rate

decisions are made independently by the Reserve Bank to remove any suggestion of political interference, decisions about employment awards and conditions are made independently by the Fair Work Commission.

And by the way, The Fair Work Commission was set up by the Gillard Labor Government in 2009 to review all awards every 4 years. So when the decision doesn't go the way he wants, Bill Shorten doesn't accept the umpire's decision, from the body his own party, when in government, established.





LEAVING THE CITY BEHIND

There have been a flood of submissions to the recently announced Get out of the City Campaign, a campaign launched by The Nationals to decentralise more government offices and agencies to country Australia to boost job opportunities in the bush.

I think this is a great incentive by the Deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce, and obviously many towns think the same with around 800 submissions from country Australia to a new Senate inquiry into decentralising government offices and agencies.

This is a great campaign which I believe can play a really strong part in attracting Commonwealth jobs to the regional areas.

Every public service job in Regional Australia

flows through the community and means more money for the local coffee shop, to the local mechanic, implores doctors to move there, schools to grow, and helps to deliver better transport services.

Regional Australia deserves its fair share of government services and opportunities; and that includes being able to access quality public sector careers just as much as any capital city.

Regional areas deserve well-paid, skilled job and Centres of Excellence to be established to create knowledge hubs which continue to attract and grow those jobs.

I will keep you up to date on what happens now in this push to revitalise country areas with much needed government agencies and commonwealth offices.

IN OTHER NEWS.....

Ballarat turned on one of its best mornings recently for the launch of the Central Highlands NDIS, a major reform to support Australians with a permanent and significant disability. Locally over 4600 people with disability will join the scheme, providing 700 jobs and injecting \$1.2 mill into the local economy.



Former Deputy Prime Minister, Tim Fischer is the driving force behind a campaign to posthumously promote General Sir John Monash to Field Marshall. Loved by his troops, greatly respected by serving hierarchy in the Australian and British forces but not by the Prime Minister at the time, Billy Hughes who, Tim says was jealous of Sir John's achievements on the battlefield. I have attended two events to promote the campaign and Tim is confident the promotion to Field Marshall will happen.



HAVE YOUR SAY

I am always keen to hear your views on any issue that interests you. Please contact my Bendigo office if I can assist you in any way or if you want to raise an issue with me that interest you.

You can email me at:
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Or phone the office on
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