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THE NATIONALS
for Regional Australia

NEWSLETTER
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**Delivering what matters
to rural Australians . . .**

Rural and regional Victorians are experiencing a year like no other. Much of our state has navigated through years of drought before the heartbreak and devastation of last summer's bushfires which tragically claimed 33 lives across the country.

Then, as the recovery process started, an equally tragic pandemic swept the world and the lives of regional Victorians were impacted more than most because of the inept handling of quarantine and contact tracing by the Andrews Labor Government. It brought so many of our already hurting rural and regional communities to their knees.

At the same time I am a very proud rural Australian and proud promoter of our regions. I am of the firm belief that regional Australia has a leading role to play in our post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

The pandemic has highlighted the need to build our sovereignty and as an export-focused nation. There are endless opportunities to create jobs in advanced manufacturing, particularly manufacturers in the regions that are co-located with raw materials and inputs across our food and fibre, defence, and critical minerals sectors.

In the final sitting fortnight I was extremely proud to host a delegation of forestry and timber workers at Parliament House.

A recent Federal Court ruling said VicForests needed to do more to meet its legal requirements even though Victoria VicForests was complying with the Victorian rules for managing risks to Leadbeater's Possum.

As a Victorian Senator it is my duty to help remove the ambiguity and give confidence for the hundreds of thousands of Australians who make their livelihoods in our amazing sustainable and renewable forestry industry. It is why I introduced a Private Senator's Bill (read more inside).

The Andrews Labor Government's failure to fund the Murray Basin Rail Project in its recent Budget again shows its contempt for north-west Victoria. Member for Mallee Anne Webster and the Victorian Nations will continue to fight for this vital project, which Labor committed to. As 2020 draws to a close I encourage you to reach out to family and friends to maintain and nurture our relationships, especially as we reflect on the 12 months just past and set new goals and aspirations.

I wish you all the warmest greetings of the Season and every good wish for the coming year.

Senator Bridget McKenzie



Wishing you and your family a *Merry Christmas*
and a *Safe, Healthy, Prosperous and Happy* New Year

'BLACK JACK' RIGHTLY DESERVES PLACE IN PAGES OF AUSTRALIA'S POLITICAL HISTORY

John McEwen is a forgotten giant of Australian political history.

For a long time I have been intrigued by McEwen's work and this year I decided to dig deeper. The result is a new book *John McEwen: Right man, right place, right time*.

My work is not a chronological history of McEwen's life and contribution, rather it contains selected examples of deliberate actions and events I hope will illustrate the man and his mission, and the role he played in Australia's growth and development during the twenty-first century.

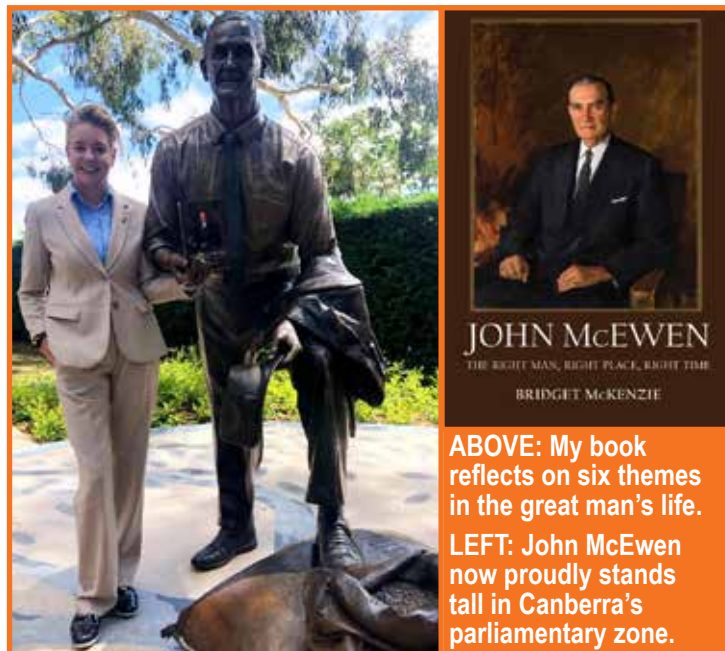
His contribution across 37 years is unparalleled, laying the very foundations of modern Australia as a first world economy and as an independent, sovereign power. And yet, McEwen rarely if ever features on even one powerpoint slide of an economics, international relations or political science lecture in our universities.

Is this because he was from the Country Party, or simply because he was from the country?

In the centenary year of The Nationals a statue of this political titan is rightfully being erected in Canberra.

Finally, humble McEwen can stand straight and tall among the pantheon of the architects of our great nation, Barton, Deakin, Menzies, Curtin and Chifley.

Physically, McEwen was a striking man. Six feet tall, with the straight bearing of a soldier on parade, square-jawed, with piercing crystal blue eyes that were so brilliantly captured by



ABOVE: My book reflects on six themes in the great man's life.

LEFT: John McEwen now proudly stands tall in Canberra's parliamentary zone.

the artist Sir William Dargie in his official Parliamentary portrait. This painting captures not only McEwen's visionary gaze and the gnarled old hands of a farmer in his lap, but also his unflinching character.

The adjectives often used to describe McEwen can be contradictory.

On the one side is the dour, choleric, incredibly determined and unyielding hard man of politics. On the other is the compassionate, patient, humorous and generous mentor.

McEwen was indisputably a very serious man known for his stern outlook, dark often furrowed brow that seemed never to deviate and rarely to crack into a smile.

Such was his temperament that Menzies gave him his enduring moniker - Black Jack.

His was an intelligent face, but a face that had also seen deprivation, great suffering and loss, the face of a workaholic, of

single-mindedness, and of great physical pain in his later years.

The two personalities indeed seem difficult to reconcile.

And yet the forging of these traits, with all their internal contradictions, in very poor circumstances in a small pocket of north eastern Victoria were the essential qualities that propelled McEwen to be a Prime Minister.

These qualities made him able to reimagine a nation emerging from war, to be able to build entire industries from scratch, and to cleave Australia from the motherland England and carve a truly independent, sovereign vision for Australia.

These traits also enabled McEwen to stand up to powerful vested interests, to lead a minority to affect the majority, to guide an entire nation into the deepest of friendships with its most hated enemy, and to articulate such a clearly defined policy platform under his remit

that it became synonymous with his own surname – "McEwenism".

My book is intended to be a re-introduction to McEwen.

It does not cover everything.

It does not even detail McEwen's important role in four of the most significant developments in Australian political history: the founding of the United Nations with H.V. Evatt and Frank Forde; McEwen's refusal of the United States' demand for the entire Aussie wool clip during the Korean War; it does not explain his 1939 White Paper on Aboriginal Australians which aimed to extend Australian citizenship; nor even does it touch on his role in dismantling the White Australia policy and championing of a non-preferential immigration policy.

This and more has had to be omitted.

Instead, my little book reflects on six themes in the great man's life: Protectionist or Pragmatist?; Place, Party, Patriot, Power and Prime Minister.

My hope is that this modest contribution will ignite interest in the man, his approach and the critical but unique role regional Australia and their political representatives have played in our national story.

John McEwen: Right man, right place, right time, published by Connor Court Publishing, was launched on December 10 at Parliament House, Canberra, by *The Australian* editor-at-large Paul Kelly.

It is available at vicn.at/right-man-right-place-right-time.

DISCONNECT BETWEEN CITY AND COUNTRY EXPOSED

It's an understatement to say it was a great relief for border communities when NSW removed its border checkpoints on November 23.

The closure was in place for 137 days and that, coupled with Victorian Labor's cruel lockdown restrictions, cost the Victorian economy tens of billions of dollars, and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Just as the Victorian government's quarantine and contact tracing incompetence and one size fits all approach to handling this pandemic caused unnecessary distress for regional and rural communities, NSW's blanket border closure imposed on all of Victoria highlighted a real disconnect between city and country.

The fact remains if Melbourne hotspots were locked down efficiently and effectively early, it would have negated the need for state border closures, which stalled our economic recovery on the back of a devastating summer bushfire season.

I've spoken about this a lot in the media. What is very concerning is that despite dealing with this pandemic for the best part



Preparing for a live TV interview with SKY News from the Wodonga Place, Albury, border checkpoint during the Victoria-NSW border closure.

of a year our state and territory leaders still don't have an agreed national definition of a COVID hotspot.

Back in October the Senate voted in favour of The Nationals motion which acknowledged restrictions imposed by

state and territory governments negatively impacted hundreds of thousands of regional Australians despite having no local cases and urgently called on state and territory governments to adopt a clear national definition of a COVID-19 hotspot.

LEGISLATION TO BRING CERTAINTY FOR AUSSIE TIMBER WORKERS

In the final sitting week I introduced a Private Senator's Bill that will bring surety and job security to the almost 200,000 people employed directly and indirectly in Australia's valuable native hardwood timber industries.

My Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Regional Forest Agreements) Bill 2020 to amend the EPBC Act and Regional Forest Agreements Act seeks to remove uncertainty from the intersect of the EPBC Act and the Regional Forest Agreements, and reinstate the original drafters' understanding of how that works. A Federal Court ruling in May created ambiguity with respect to the provision of the EPBC Act this Bill seeks to amend.

It means if a forestry company is acting under the local regulator's rules, or even a formal legal direction, a Federal Court judge can decide to take a different view.



Senator McKenzie with timber workers outside Parliament House.

For example, in Victoria VicForests was complying with the Victorian rules for managing risks to Leadbeater's Possum - however the Federal Court ruling said VicForests needed to do more to meet its legal requirements.

This means all forestry companies in Australia operating under a state based regulatory regime approved through an RFA cannot rely on any direction or approval from the local regulator. This impossible situation can only be solved by making the law clear.

NATS VIEW BACKED

During a Senate inquiry into management of the Murray Darling Basin Plan, Bret Walker SC, who headed SA's Murray-Darling Basin Royal Commission, dismissed suggestions the 450GL environmental water recovery could not be delivered without buybacks. Southern basin communities should take heart to hear Mr Walker say it is 'vandalism' and 'selective cruelty' to require environmental watering if it comes at the expense of rural families who live in the southern basin.

THE FAST TRACK TO BETTER RAIL SERVICES

Passengers on the North East Line are enjoying more reliable and comfortable journeys thanks to a massive program of accelerated works undertaken in recent months.

The construction team capitalised on the border closure, which saw buses replace trains on the North East route had forged ahead with critical track works to help make services on the North East Rail Line more reliable and improve ride quality for passengers.

The works are delivering these benefits sooner than expected and we're well on track to complete construction by mid-next year.

The Nationals in Government are investing \$244 million in the package of works to improve this major rail corridor and we're now more than three-quarters of the way through construction.

Major construction on the North East Rail Line Upgrade started earlier this year, with more than 300 kilometres of tamping, mud hole removal works and drainage reinstatement now finished.

The project will also include works to upgrade an additional 20 rail bridges than previously foreshadowed and renewing track turnouts at Seymour and Violet Town to improve ride quality and reduce delays for passengers on the line.

The upgrades formed part of the \$2 billion Regional Rail Revival Package, which is upgrading every regional passenger train line in Victoria and boosting the local economy.

This reflects The Nationals commitment to regional Australia under our \$110 billion infrastructure pipeline.

ABC ON NOTICE FOR INCORRECT ATTACK OF BEEF PRODUCERS

I'm a proud champion of the ABC, but if our national broadcaster airs a program that denigrates our rural industries, misinforms children and impacts our rural economies and towns - without fact checking thoroughly - I will call it out.

During a senate estimates hearing, I asked the ABC to provide information on whether organisations including Meat and Livestock Australia, the CSIRO and the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance were consulted ahead of broadcasting *Fight for Planet A: Our Climate Challenge*, which is listed as a documentary on both Screen Australia and the ABC's websites even though it is factually incorrect and imbalanced in its reporting.

The documentary is completely imbalanced and misrepresented aspects of Australian agriculture, in particular it makes false claims about the Australian beef industry's carbon emissions.

At the hearing I highlighted the fact that the beef industry is one of only two major Australian sectors who have lowered their emissions since 1990.

Our red meat industry is certainly not standing in the way of change.

While the ABC executive may not have thought the program was misleading, the



During a Senate Estimates hearing I questioned the ABC about its factually incorrect attack on our cattle producers.

conversation was biased and skewed towards climate.

The program is published as factual entertainment, but this is misleading and the fact a response from the Cattle Council of Australia is posted on ABC iView with the program is evidence of this.

The ABC revealed that they would meet with the National Farmers' Federation regarding their concerns with the program and that they have been investigating a formal complaint that was received.

You can watch the estimates hearing at <https://vicn.at/emissions-facts>

ANSWER THE CALL

The Nationals are continuing to expand mobile coverage across regional and remote Australia. The next round of the Mobile Black Spot Program is open and will focus on improving coverage along major transport corridors and in disaster-prone regions. More info is available at:

<https://vicn.at/mbbsp-r5a>

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Our farmers and businesses will benefit from better export opportunities with the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between Australia and 14 Indo-Pacific countries. It covers the fastest growing region in the world and will open new doors for Australian farmers, businesses and investors.

MEDICAL HELP

From December 1 families of children with Spinal Muscular Atrophy will be able to access life changing medicine for \$41 or \$6.60 a script with a concession card after a life-saving and life-changing medicine was listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Without the subsidy, families would pay more than \$367,000 a year for treatment.

WORKING FOR YOU

If you have any questions about COVID-19 or other support services and need some help, please contact my office on 02 6024 2560 or by email at this address: senator.mckenzie@aph.gov.au

During tough times The Nationals have your back.