



John Forrest MP

Federal Member for Mallee



COMMUNITY WATER GRANTS PROGRAM THAT DELIVERED OVER \$19 MILLION TO MALLEE—SCRAPPED!

Dozens of local community groups have been stripped of their ability to carry out water-saving projects under Budget cuts announced by the Rudd Government.

The bad news was confirmed with the scrapping of the Coalition Government's popular *Community Water Grants* program, which has delivered over 20 million dollars to the Mallee electorate over the past three years.

The program provided up to \$50,000 for water-saving projects and inspired community groups across Mallee to become leaders in the conservation of our precious water supply.

Successful local projects included the installation of water saving initiatives at St Mary's School, Cohuna, Ultima Football Club, Horsham Golf Club and Mildura West Primary School.

The Rudd Government has made much of its promise to give \$10,000 grants to surf life saving clubs to install rainwater tanks, whilst other sporting groups get nothing.

This shows the Rudd Government's complete disregard and contempt for country sporting clubs and the role they play in rural communities.

Similarly, the Rudd Government has made much of its promise to give \$20,000 grants to local schools. This alternative program has effectively slashed \$20,000 from the maximum grant they can receive for projects.

For a Government attempting to trade on environmental credentials, ending water grants to dozens of local community groups sets a poor standard and places a giant question mark over its commitment to saving water.

BUDGET REPORT 2008 ... BUDGET REPORT 2008 ...

Dear North West Victorian Resident

It was with personal disappointment for my Mallee constituents when I listened to the Rudd Labor Government's first Budget. These initial feelings were confirmed after having time to take in the potential negative consequences of a government that does not understand rural and regional communities.

Labor was left a strong economy by the Coalition Government, which had clear strategies to keep the economy growing, so all Australians could plan their future with confidence. The 2008 Rudd Labor Government Budget fails the test, and definitely fails the Mallee electorate.

This Budget is just an old, regurgitated Labor Budget, using their tried and failed recipe of spending enormous amounts of money, then having to increase taxes to do so. Spending has gone up by \$3 billion in this current financial year and by \$14.9 billion over the forward estimates.

Unfortunately three key areas that are important to Mallee; regional development, communications and agriculture have been attacked, with Labor stripping away more than \$1 billion from regional and rural Australia.

- The highly successful Regional Partnerships and Growing Regions programs have gone and agriculture programs worth \$334 reduced.
- The program for broadband rollout by *Opel* has been scrapped, but there has not been any alternative put forward. Labor has only extended the Coalition's Broadband Guarantee, which is not adequate to meet the needs of rural, regional and remote communications needs on its own.
- Road and rail funding have also been cut at the knees, losing at least \$10 billion less than what was promised by the Coalition.

It is difficult to comment on many aspects of the Budget because it is lacking in detail, has no clear explanations, and, frankly is very disappointing.

As your elected representative I will pursue these funding matters and endeavour to clarify what, in my belief, is a smoke and mirrors Budget. Once exposed it will reveal the true depth of what Labor has stripped from Mallee electorate and other rural and regional communities across Australia.

Yours faithfully

John Forrest MP
Federal Member for Mallee

MILDURA OFFICE

Suite 1, Level 1, 50 Madden Avenue (PO Box 1133) Mildura VIC 3502 . Telephone (03) 5021 5987.

SWAN HILL OFFICE

1/60 Campbell Street (PO Box 487) Swan Hill VIC 3585 . Telephone (03) 5032 4510.

Toll Free 1300 131 620 .

Web www.jforrest.com . Email j.forrest.mp@aph.gov.au

INSULIN PUMP SUBSIDY WELCOMED – BUT MORE FUNDS NEEDED

The urgent need for insulin pumps in Mallee electorate was recently highlighted when my office received a touching letter from a very brave young resident, Luke Fiebig. Luke suffers from Type 1 diabetes and was able to relay in his letter how the condition affects him in every day life.

Therefore, although the funding figure falls short of the need, it was encouraging to learn the Government will provide \$5.5 million over four years to provide subsidies to young people with Type 1 diabetes. This delivers an election commitment which was made by both sides of politics.

The subsidies, of up to \$2,500, can be used towards the cost of insulin pumps for people under the age of 18, who have type 1 diabetes.

Each year Australia is able to fill up the Melbourne Cricket Ground with people who have developed diabetes, so the fight for further funding is very important, and people like Luke should be congratulated for bringing it to the attention of Members of Parliament and the broader community.



Luke meets John Forrest at his Canberra office.

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM WORTH MILLIONS TO MALLEE — AXED

The Regional Partnerships Program, worth \$236 million dollars, is another victim in this year's Budget.

This is yet another reminder that rural and regional Australia is not important to the Rudd Government.

The Budget Papers acknowledge that *"Regional, rural and remote Australia accounts for over one third of the population and two thirds of Australia's export income. Australia's regions have made, and continue to make a major contribution to Australia's economy and way of life. Australia's future prosperity and well-being depends to a significant degree on the strength of its regions"*.

Yet the Minister responsible for regional, rural and remote Australian's has axed the program, which was designed to ensure these areas can continue to make a significant contribution to the Australian economy.

The importance of the Regional Partnerships Program to

Mallee cannot be understated, with projects such as funding for the Wimmera Machinery Field Days Pavilion, the construction of the Karkaroc Industrial Skills Centre office and training rooms, and assisting the Gannawarra Shire Council to purchase and refurbish a disused bunk house and relocate it to the Quambatook Caravan Park.

It is also disappointing that the Government is going to take 18 months to 'consult' before it *may* introduce a replacement program – just in time for the next election.

Worse than that, the government has refused to honour projects which were successful in receiving grants prior to last years' election, but had not started contract negotiations.

Regional Partnership grant applicants which have been waiting for over six months for an answer on the future of their applications have also been treated with absolute contempt by the Rudd Government, and none of them will be funded.

LABOR'S RAZOR GANG AXES LOCAL SMALL BUSINESS FIELD OFFICERS

Local businesses in Mallee will no longer have access to their Small Business Field Officers to seek free advice or information after Labor axed the program in the Federal Budget.

Small Business Field Officers were a vital resource for Mallee small businesses, providing free advice, referrals, contacts within the industry and tips on how to expand or even export.

Labor's decision to add local Small Business Field Officers to its budget chopping block will have a real impact here in Mallee, as the officers had real local knowledge and experience that helped many local operators.

At a time when small business confidence has plummeted to a 15-year low, the Labor Government has made a terrible decision to sack Small Business Field Officers, and only adds to the nervousness of local businesses.

Small Business Field Officers were rolled out under the Coalition as part of the Building Entrepreneurship Program, and strategically placed in areas where they could offer real assistance to local businesses.

AGRICULTURE SUFFERS AT THE HANDS OF LABOR

The agricultural industry has suffered at the hands of the Rudd Labor Government's Budget with pre-existing agricultural programs worth \$334 million being replaced with programs worth a mere \$220 million.

Funding cuts and program cost shifting appear to be the order of the day, and although Labor have indicated the \$220 million will largely go to climate change projects, which is welcomed, it does not detract from the fact the agricultural industry is facing multiple hurdles and need a raft of strategies and funding streams to combat these difficulties.

As a part of the cuts, the Agriculture Advancing Australia program is gone, and along with it FarmBis. FarmBis was a flexible program that had assisted over 165,000 farmers, fishers, and land managers to undertake business management education and training.

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Authorised by John Forrest MP, 1/60 Campbell Street, Swan Hill, Victoria 3585

Printed by Jamesprint, 7 The Crescent, Mildura, Victoria 3500