

COUNTRY LABOR DIALOGUE

CONNECTING COUNTRY COMMUNITIES – MARCH 2016

Country Labor at Conference

The 2016 NSW Labor State Conference was a great success for Country Labor, with a report highlighted as one of the most engaging debates of conference and a strong representation on the floor.



Convenor of the NSW Parliamentary Country Labor Caucus, Jenny Aitchison MP, discussed the need for the new Maitland Hospital to be a public hospital.

Motions were discussed around rural and regional issues like coal seam gas, penalty rates, and how to better engage country communities.

The traditional Friday night Country Delegates reception dinner was a huge success, with guest speakers including rural Queensland MP Shayne Neumann, Joel Fitzgibbon MP and Kaila Murnain.

Saturday's Country Labor Lunch was well attended with a packed room to hear from guest speakers Justine Elliot MP and Mick Veitch MLC.

This year's NSW Labor Conference put Country Labor on a footing to win the next election and get to work fighting for better rights for rural Australia.

Jay Suvaal writes...

It is a great honour to have been elected as the NSW Country Organiser. I'd like to thank all Country Labor members for their support both at Conference and over the last year.

I look forward to continuing to travel around country NSW working with branches as we get ready to take on the Liberals and Nationals at the Federal Election. We don't know when it's going to be, but we know it will be fought on grounds that Country Labor is so passionate about: ensuring access to quality healthcare, properly funding our local schools and building the real NBN.

For these reasons, we've all got to get ready to bring the fight to the Nationals and Liberals and win government. I look forward to working with you all to achieve that.

Jay Suvaal
NSW COUNTRY
ORGANISER



State Conference 2016

“Like the best of family reunions”

For Country Labor members there is much about the NSW ALP State Conference that is like the best of family reunions. You will catch up with long term friends, you will meet some new members of the family, there will be an argument, a good welcome speech, some Chinese and a golden pudding. And at the end of it all as you start the journey home you always leave feeling proud to be part of the Country Labor family.



This year's conference was indeed a good one for country members, it was marked for its unity, sense of purpose and stamped by history.

I know every country member there took something extra special in seeing our first ever, female General Secretary elected. As most members know Kaila grew up in Narrabri and joined the Labor party, not for preselection, not for a job, not to fight a fringe issue but like so many other Country Labor members she believed in the Labor movement and what that meant for her community.

On Friday night, Conference kicked off with our Country Delegates dinner, this time at the Hellenic club. The meal was the best ever, the speakers good and the company super friendly. I think all members would welcome next year's dinner in the

same place. Congratulations to Danny Blakemore for winning the Val Melville award.

On Saturday Country Labor members had a major win in the rules debate with an amendment, moved by Suvaal/Wilson, to ensure that at least one winnable Upper House position be held for Country Labor. We were formed in 1999 and this commitment is welcome although a little overdue.

On this note it was great to see our **Federal Leader, Bill Shorten** with Mike Kelly, Janelle Saffin, Joel Fitzgibbon and Justin Elliott behind him commit to fighting in, and winning regional seats.

Sunday started with the Country Labor debate, a debate that reflected the broader weekend. We

saw members speak with passion on policy, delegates argue about elections and importantly conference endorse the proceedings of our last Country Conference.

Luke Foley's Opposition Leader's address had education as its centrepiece, with Luke committing to make preschool affordable and accessible for every four-year-old in NSW. A great policy that will be crafted by our own Port Stephens MP, Kate Washington.

The **Life Membership presentations** were a particularly proud moment for those from the Riverina, seeing three absolute true believers (Col, Gwen and Trevor) receive their badges and certificates.

Finally, congratulations to Jay on being elected Country Organiser. He is absolutely country, he understands what it is to be a member of Country Labor and he is fully committed to taking down the Nationals.

Bryce Wilson
CHAIR, COUNTRY LABOR
POLICY COMMITTEE

“This year's conference was indeed a good one for country members, it was marked for its unity, sense of purpose and stamped by history.”

Nationals support forced Council amalgamations

Nationals Leader Troy Grant has continued to defend the Baird Government's program of forced council amalgamations despite widespread opposition amongst rural and regional communities.



Shadow Minister for Local Government, Peter Primrose, and Member for Port Stephens, Kate Washington, campaigning against the Nationals and Liberals forced council mergers.

In Question Time recently, Mr Grant was told directly: "People should make it clear that if the National

Party can't look after small country councils there's not a lot of point in a National Party."

This isn't the first time the Deputy Premier has insulted regional and rural communities. In January this year he used an interview on Dubbo Radio station 2DU to argue that communities concerned about the forced amalgamations of councils as behaving, "like it is an episode of The Simpsons".

The comments from the Nationals leader resulted in the resignation of the National Party's Dubbo Electorate Council Secretary Alison Conn and exposed the deep division within the party about forced council amalgamations.

All in all, this act of boundary rigging is a huge attack on regional Australia – and the Nationals are refusing to stand up for our communities.

UPDATE NSW regional unemployment 7.4% and rising

Almost 100,000 people are unemployed in regional NSW with mining, manufacturing and the public sector all suffering under the Baird/Grant Government.

Latest ABS statistics show that in January 2016 the regional NSW unemployment rate rose from 5.6 to 7.4% – a spike of more than 22,000 people unemployed than the previous month.

In five years under the Liberal/National government the total number of people unemployed has risen from 74,059 to 97,837 – an increase of over 23,000 since March 2011.

In 9 out of 13 regions recorded by the ABS, the unemployment rate is running ahead of the statewide rate of 5.5%.

The following regions are the worst

affected with thousands still unemployed:

- ✗ **The Hunter 24,029**
- ✗ **The Illawarra 15,732**
- ✗ **Tweed 11,189**
- ✗ **Mid North Coast 8,062**

Youth unemployment in regional NSW is unacceptably high with 39,500 young people out of work.

And yet the Baird/Grant government is patting itself on the back for "creating" jobs in the past year, with Minister for Skills and Nationals MP John Barilaro



Shadow Treasurer, Michael Daley, says workers in regional NSW have been let down by the Baird/Grant Government.

saying his Government's investment in the regions is "paying dividends".

Supporting country women

During State Conference, Country Labor hosted a successful fringe event, which focused on supporting country women.



Country Labor members discussing ideas to better support women to become more involved in the Party.

The event was well attended by members and delegates who came together to discuss how we can better support Country Labor women and ultimately increase the number of country women pursuing roles within the Party and in public office.

Those who attended heard from panellists including the first female senator in NSW Sue West, Member for Maitland Jenny Aitchison and Broken Hill Councillor Marion Browne. It was a productive discussion where the audience could ask questions and put forward suggestions about how the Party can better support country women in the party.

One of the points from this event was to have a feature article in Country Labor Dialogue dedicated to telling the stories of Country Labor women about their journey into the Party, what motivates them and any advice they have for up and coming country women in the Party. The first article will appear in next month's Country Labor Dialogue and will feature Labor's first female General Secretary, Kaila Murnain.

Congratulations Danny Blakemore

The 2016 Val Melville OAM Memorial Award for a Country Labor activist who has gone above and beyond for their community, was given to Danny Blakemore from Parkes Branch.

Country Labor would like to congratulate Danny on his success and thank him for the tireless work he does for the Party and his local community.



Val Melville Award recipient Danny Blakemore with Country Organiser Jay Suvaal and Courtney Houssos MLC.

Do you have a story or a photo for Country Labor Dialogue?

Email your story and photos to jay@nswlabor.org.au