

# Labor's Plan for Local Government

Labor is committed to investing in local infrastructure – the sports grounds, community hubs, libraries and arts and cultural centres that turn places into communities.

Councils are great partners in this project because they have the resources, expertise and are accountable to their communities. When Labor was last in government, we partnered with local government to keep our economy moving and our tradies in work.

Local councils are an important part of our economy. They employ around 134,000 people and contribute 2 per cent to Australia's GDP.

A Shorten Labor Government will partner with local government to build better local communities and tackle some of the key challenges.

We will contribute more than \$900 million in new funding to local government through the initiatives outlined in our Local Government Plan. This is in addition to \$9.5 billion in Financial Assistance Grants, \$2 billion in Roads to Recovery Funding and \$419 million for the Bridges Renewal Program.

Local councils are on the frontline of many big challenges:

- Climate change is threatening coastal communities with inundation and impacting the whole country with extreme weather events.
- The financial and economic burden of waste management falls heavily on local government but councils have little control over packaging and national recycling schemes.
- Cost shifting and funding cuts have left local councils with extra responsibilities but no funds. The Abbot-Turnbull-Morrison Government's freeze on indexation of Financial Assistance Grants has cost local councils at least \$925 million in lost funding.
- On the fringes of our cities, rapid new urban growth means councils struggle to provide the local infrastructure to keep pace with community need.
- Sporting facilities are stretched and the growth in participation by women in sports like soccer, cricket and football a positive we can be proud of – but it shines a light on how inadequate many of our local sports facilities are, particularly changerooms.
- Many councils, particularly in our regions, are facing financial pressure to meet an increased need to provide services, to maintain and upgrade existing community infrastructure and to plan for future needs and growth.

## **Our Plan**

### *An Important Tier of Government*

Labor supports local government's aspiration to be recognised in Australia's Constitution. This is Labor policy. Labor will work with local government bodies to achieve the bipartisan consensus critical to achieving this objective.

### *Sustainable Finances and Local Government Financial Assistance Grants*

The Commonwealth Government has been contributing to the financial sustainability of local government since the Whitlam government introduced a financial assistance grants scheme in 1974–75. Around \$50 billion in Financial Assistance Grants has been provided by the Commonwealth to local government since then.

This direct assistance will be supplemented with a range of other programs that provide funding or direct benefit to local councils including Labor's National Bike Path Strategy (\$260 million), Regional Tourism and Growing Regional Airports (\$100 million), Recycling and Waste Strategy (\$75 million), Climate Adaptation and Coastal Rehabilitation Plan (\$62 million) and funding for Indigenous Housing (\$1.5 billion).

Labor recognises that there is a problem with the financial sustainability of local government.

Cost-shifting and rate-capping by state governments is an issue for councils but the Commonwealth cannot be held to account for the costs incurred. Labor has committed to work with state and territory governments and local government, with the aim of reaching an agreement on the financial sustainability of local government.

In the interim, Labor will bring forward \$1.2 billion of Local Government Financial Assistance Grant funding from 2019-20 to 2018-19 to fast-track local government projects and support local jobs.

### *Local Community Projects – more than \$450 million in new investment*

Labor is committed to partnering with local government to improve sports grounds, community hubs, libraries, arts and cultural centres which improve amenity and build community. Labor has committed to more than \$250 million to local government infrastructure over the next four years.

In addition, Labor's \$200 million **Local Community Projects Program** will provide funding to improve social amenity and support regional development.

This program will provide funding through a competitive, merit-based process to support community infrastructure projects of up to \$10 million to demonstrate Labor's commitment to create jobs, drive economic growth and build stronger healthier communities into the future.

Labor's Local Community Projects program will be open to regional and outer metropolitan areas – particularly rapid growth areas –to build or upgrade community infrastructure so that councils in can keep up with demand for improved community facilities.

This program will enable councils to upgrade community facilities, including town halls, libraries, community centres, sports grounds and environmental infrastructure.

It will help to address regional inequality by supporting the improved amenity and social infrastructure of regional and outer metro areas.

The program will have two streams:

- Community Infrastructure stream for projects that involve construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure.
- Community Investments stream for capacity building and to support community activities such as festivals, significant local events, strategic regional plans and leadership capability activities.

#### *A \$260 million National Bike Path Strategy*

Cycling contributes to healthy lifestyles, reduces car reliance and pollution and is a major tourism drawcard. Australia can be a bigger part of this \$300 million tourism sector which will also help regional communities link up local tourism attractions via bikeways.

Labor will invest \$260 million to upgrade the nation's cycling paths to encourage more people to ride bicycles to work or school and capitalise on the rapidly expanding cycling tourism market.

Labor will also develop a national guide for cities for the effective design and delivery of bicycle infrastructure to boost cycling and improve the entire transport system.

#### *Growing Regional Airports – \$100 million*

Regional tourism provides more than half a million jobs with 43 cents in every tourism dollar spent in regional Australia. Better maintenance of regional airports will boost tourism and ensure that airports maintain high levels of safety.

There is a significant backlog in airport maintenance at council-owned airports. A Shorten Labor Government will invest \$100 million to help local councils maintain and grow regional airports – ensuring they can operate safely and connect more Australians with the regions.

#### *A \$75 million Strategy for Recycling and Waste*

Waste and recycling management is a major responsibility for councils, and is significant socially, environmentally and economically. Offshore processing of waste was never a good long-term option and our communities expect more.

It is inevitable that other countries will impose tighter restrictions on waste importation. This creates an opportunity to create a new waste management industry.

Councils want to develop markets for recycled glass, paper and plastics to improve the quality of recycling and reduce contamination levels.

Labor's strategy includes:

- **Working towards a National Container Deposit Scheme:** Joining with state and territory governments and local government to ensure existing schemes are consistent and to ensure we are more self-reliant on waste management.
- **Investing \$15 million to establish a National Waste Commissioner:** To work with state and territory governments and local government to help educate the community on solutions to waste and work with industry to expand recycling and Product Stewardship Schemes.
- **Investing in the domestic recycling industry:** With a \$60 million National Recycling Fund. This will fund projects to encourage recycling, including funding for innovative waste solutions, local government recycling facilities and material processing facilities, and new approaches to tackling food waste.
- **Setting targets for government to purchase recycled products:** As one of Australia's largest procurers, there is an opportunity to make the Australian Government a national leader in waste and recycling by prioritising the purchase of recycled products.

#### *Labor's \$62 million Climate Adaptation and Coastal Rehabilitation Plan*

Labor will provide \$62 million to ensure our communities are able to adapt and grow resilience to climate change impacts by coordinating local, state and national efforts to support climate adaptation and resilience and delivering direct support to local communities and government to restore already impacted coasts.

Our plan includes:

- Developing a National Framework for Building Climate Resilience bringing together state and territory governments and local government, community groups, the businesses community, researchers and relevant Commonwealth agencies and departments to develop plans, coordinate efforts, share information and inform other private and government processes and efforts.
- Reinvigorate the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) to support the creation and dissemination of research into local climate change impacts, through re-funding of the program with a \$12 million funding boost.
- Introduce a Coastal Rehabilitation Fund to work with communities, local governments, and the Australian Coastal Councils Association to directly support

local coastal rehabilitation projects that restore beaches and other environments, and improve their resilience with \$50 million of grant funding.

Labor's Climate Adaptation and Coastal Resilience Plan will also be informed by Labor's triennial Australian Climate Change Assessments, which will provide the most comprehensive and detailed assessment of actual and potential climate change impacts on Australia ever performed.

### *Indigenous Housing*

In 2014-15, more than half of Indigenous Australians in very remote areas lived in overcrowded households, and overcrowding is the leading contributor to Indigenous homelessness. Housing shortages and chronic overcrowding contribute to poor outcomes in health, education, employment and community safety for residents living in remote communities.

Labor will address overcrowding and create jobs in remote Indigenous communities with a \$1.5 billion, ten-year investment.

Labor will:

- Provide a decade of funding certainty to the Northern Territory, by committing an additional \$550 million over 5 years from 2023-24, doubling the commitment by the Liberals.
- Provide \$251 million in funding to Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia in 2019-20.

Following these interim arrangements, Labor will work with state and territory governments to develop a genuine, ongoing partnership to tackle the issue of overcrowding, as part of the Closing the Gap Refresh.

### *City Partnerships*

Local government plays a critical role in shaping our cities, particularly through strategic land-use planning and development facilitation, public works and its ability to drive community engagement and ownership of projects.

City Partnerships will engage all three levels of government through genuine collaboration, as well as with the private sector, to set out a strategic vision for our cities and linked to a renewed National Urban Policy.

Labor's City Partnerships will better engage local government and the private sector and ambitiously structuring collaboration to achieve clearly defined outcomes and targets and treat local government as a partner, rather than as just another stakeholder.

### *Drought Communities Program*

The Drought Communities Program provides funding for eligible councils for local infrastructure projects. For 81 councils with this funding announced in 2018, projects are due to be completed by 30 June 2019. For an additional 15 councils that became eligible in March 2019, these projects are due to be completed by 31 December 2019.

Projects submitted through these timelines will be honoured. If elected, Labor will review the operation of this program to ensure it is delivering the relief that drought affected councils are supposed to be getting.

### *Labor's investment in Infrastructure*

Labor is committed to building the nation-building infrastructure Australia needs. We will work with state and territory governments and local government to get projects up and running.

Through this new infrastructure investment, Labor will create thousands of jobs nationally with new work in every state and territory.

We will build on the record of the previous Labor government, which doubled road funding, rebuilt a third of the interstate rail freight network and committed to more urban public transport infrastructure than every previous federal government combined.

Over nearly six years of cuts and chaos, the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government has slashed infrastructure investment. Budget papers show that over their first five budgets, the Liberals and Nationals have failed to deliver \$5.1 billion promised for transport infrastructure alone.

A Shorten Labor Government will address the Liberals and Nationals' backlog in transport infrastructure investment by boosting existing federal investment levels in the short-term, before the next election due in 2022. Much of the Liberals' new spending is at least two elections away.

### *Better Communications*

Local councils have told Labor that improving communications infrastructure is a major priority for them, to help regional development and create jobs.

A Shorten Labor Government will invest \$245 million to address mobile black spots, improve digital literacy and fund local projects to improve connectivity in regional communities.

Local government is a key partner in the rollout of this initiative to support local productivity, jobs and enhanced connectivity in regional Australia.

In addition to the \$160 million in funding for mobile black spots, Labor has set aside \$85 million for digital connectivity and literacy in regional areas. This will fund innovative projects in regional areas which will boost connectivity and digital skills.

### *Fixing the NBN*

A Shorten Labor Government will start the job of fixing the NBN. We will establish a new NBN Customer Service Guarantee and conduct trials in selected in fixed line areas to upgrade to a fibre broadband connection.