

**PUTTING
INDI
FIRST**

5 June 2016

“The Indi Way”

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INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR INDI

A prosperous and caring community, alive with opportunities,
where everyone is able to reach their potential

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2013 when I delivered my first speech in Parliament, I said “The people of Indi have a vision for a community where people feel they belong and have a sense of purpose, where people pull together and help each other, where diversity, acceptance and tolerance are valued; a community that has quality services, infrastructure, education, jobs and health and opportunities for the next generation”.

This vision has not diminished, it has been the roadmap for my work in my first three years as the Independent Federal Member for Indi and it will continue to be the roadmap for my work in the next three years.

My work in the first term was based on commitments I made during the 2013 election campaign; this work will continue with an additional layer of issues and priorities, identified during the extensive community consultations I have held across Indi. What began as a community-driven campaign in 2013 has become **‘The Indi Way’** – a choice for the future. Indi will thrive, as more organisations, groups, communities and people gains the skills and confidence to seek their own solutions, make plans and take action to get results.

The purpose of this statement is to outline my work plan for the next three years. I will champion regional Australia at every opportunity, being guided by my community consultation priorities, working across the key government areas of:

- Health
- Education
- Jobs/Employment/Small Business
- Agribusiness, Industry and Innovation
- Infrastructure – Transport & Communications
- Environment
- Arts/Culture

The key policy areas are complemented by ‘snapshot positions’ across major areas of government, which impact regionally and nationally.

CORE WORK STATEMENT

First and foremost, I will work with the government of the day to get the best outcomes for Indi.

When I stood on my feet for the first time in the House of Representatives in 2013, I committed to listening to my community. I said that I would go anywhere in Indi to listen to people's concerns. I have listened and I have delivered the message from Indi. The message is simple. The government must demonstrate that it is listening to and taking action on behalf of the people who live in regional Australia.

I also said that I would focus especially on those who live in the more isolated regional areas—people who are disadvantaged because of poor public transport, patchy mobile phone coverage, terrible internet connections, limited access to health services, and fewer employment and educational opportunities.

I am giving voice to those who live in Indi and regional Australia more generally and it goes to the very heart of regional living. In regional Australia, government initiatives often have a disproportionate impact on communities due to the lack of infrastructure: transport - communication.

On 24 March 2015, while presenting a private members bill to the House, I called on the government, when formulating policy, to ensure that regional impact statements are prepared and accompany every budget, every year. I will use every parliamentary tool to press the government to ensure that policies are fair and equitable to communities in regional Australia.

I am proud to be your local member of parliament, standing up for Indi – not party politics – in Canberra. I ask for your support to continue to be the Independent Member for Indi in the Australian Parliament, so that I can continue to deliver for Indi.

I'm born and raised in Indi, I'm steadfastly independent and effective as your representative and advocate.

I'm up to the job and with your help I know we can achieve great things!

Cathy McGowan

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Through a process of consultation across the region, involving over 2000 people, there is a clear picture of the priorities for the Indi community for the coming years. In summary these are:

People : Ensuring connected and liveable communities

Prosperity : Building a booming economy with opportunity for all

Progress : A region that is shaped by its citizens

Planet : Maintaining a thriving natural environment

PEOPLE: ENSURING CONNECTED AND LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES

Introduction:

- Our communities have been developed by people working together and we value the strength and resilience of the bonds between families and communities and across the region
- Indi has a long history of welcoming new residents. We recognise the challenges for established communities of new arrivals from other parts of Australia, overseas immigrants and refugees and are confident that we can build community cohesion
- We share the frustration associated with inadequate local transport & internet services, and lack of access to quality health, aged care and family violence services
- We aspire to good health and wellbeing for all people and families in Indi

Vision:

We have a clear vision of strong, diverse, dynamic communities evolving with the times, with access to the quality services that are needed in towns and rural and remote areas.

Community Priorities:

- Community empowerment – ensuring that the future is designed and led by the people of Indi, where community members find their own solutions and take appropriate action
- Community identity and harmony – building confidence for each area through a strong sense of history, identity and harmony between people, where new residents are welcomed and included
- Connected and liveable communities – through local transport, effective communications, bringing young people together and arts activities, festivals and celebrations
- Caring for vulnerable Indi citizens – through mental health, aged care and family violence services and promoting action that will break the cycle of disadvantage and address the fundamental issues that are fracturing communities

PROSPERITY: BUILDING A BOOMING ECONOMY WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

Introduction:

- The Indi economy has traditionally been based on agriculture, forestry and manufacturing, and this successful base is now adapting to changing markets; it needs support
- We acknowledge the growth in small business and the increasing contribution of this sector to the region's economy
- We are excited by the opportunities for developing new businesses by taking new approaches and supporting entrepreneurship
- We are committed to creating jobs and recognise the fundamental importance of educational opportunities to support and grow the regional economy
- We are committed to assisting governments to recognise that financial support is required in regional Australia to get the same outcomes as in urban Australia

Vision:

Our vision is for an adaptable, growing and diverse economic base that is attractive to new investment, provides rewarding work for residents and is an attractive for young people to build their life in Indi. This economy relies on a skilled, capable and motivated workforce supported by education providers that are focused on and connected to existing and potential local business opportunities.

Community Priorities:

- Small business – encouraging Regional Development Australia (RDA) to take leadership for a support plan and mentorship, reducing red tape, developing a “can do” attitude, supporting tourism and making creative use of our heritage assets
- Entrepreneurship – developing a culture of innovation, support development of new products and services, assistance for young people and in developing new pathways to markets e.g. Asia, improved communications access
- Agriculture, manufacturing & industry – improved transport options, quality agriculture education and accelerated learning, support for adapting to change, development of new niche products that help create a regional identity
- Social enterprise – matching a future workforce to peer mentors and trialling pilot programs
- Skilled workforce – support for new local opportunities for skill development and training, better links between schools/TAFE/universities and industries, support for women returning to the workforce

PROGRESS: A REGION THAT IS SHAPED BY ITS CITIZENS

Introduction:

- The people of Indi want to be actively involved in shaping the future of the region, and many are now committed to “the Indi way” – a choice for the future where our young people will want to make Indi home, our pride in Indi will grow and regional Australia will look to Indi as a model of diversity, hard work and community spirit
- People and communities need data and information to inform decision making and demonstrate the impact of their contribution
- Positive futures are shaped by positive strong leaders, and the engagement of leaders in measuring success and challenge is an important step in the process
- People want openness and transparency from governments and administrations. Regular reporting on outcome measures will demonstrate a commitment to take regional development seriously

Vision:

Indi will be a region where decisions are made based on data, facts and evidence. We aspire to continuous improvement, celebrating our successes and learning from our mistakes, where risk is supported and change and development encouraged. We encourage and support our young people to participate in all aspects of our economy.

Community Priorities:

- We will map our progress by using all areas of community priority where data exists. Where data is not currently collected or analysed we will advocate for regional and electorate disaggregation to enable communities to track their progress.
- Indi Action groups will be encouraged to take responsibility for acting on the finding of the community Summit held in 2015.
- Facilitate a second Indi summit in my second term

PLANET: MAINTAINING A THRIVING NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction:

- We value our land, water and ecological systems
- We understand the need to balance environmental sustainability with economic assets and community enjoyment through responsible stewardship
- We will build on current successes through continuous community action and engagement
- We will promote Indi as an area of national environmental significance

Vision:

Our strong desire is to hand on a precious and productive natural environment to future generations.

Community Priorities:

- Water – community understanding and ownership of surface and groundwater resources that balances the needs of local people with long term environmental needs and the Murray Darling system
- Natural environment – broader environmental awareness across the region about the need to reduce household consumption and chemical use and the use of plastic bags
- Climate change – sharing knowledge and good practice across the region, supporting renewable energy and the development of community energy production systems

DELIVERING FOR INDI – THE PLAN

HEALTH

Better health outcomes for everyone

Across the electorate of Indi, I have heard concerns about long waiting lists for hospitals, problems getting to see a general practitioner [GP] and concerns about mental health, disabilities and support for an ageing population. I am dedicated to getting a better deal for health in Indi. Our region will be healthier when governments work with the community to listen to service providers and patients, and fund the services needed.

There are challenges to providing adequate GP services in regional areas, and while some improvements have been made many rural towns are still far behind our metropolitan counterparts. I will campaign for the government to implement policies that will deliver nationwide standards of availability of GP services per capita to all Australians. Many of our regional hospitals are in need of capital funding to expand and improve facilities; I will lobby to ensure that the funding needs of regional and small rural health services are heard by all Governments.

Mental Health: While the government has endorsed the *National Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services – Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities* and announced a reform package in response to the report, I will continue to push for the implementation of recommendations which include locally planned and commissioned mental health services through Primary Health Networks, and an associated flexible funding pool, joined up support for child mental health, a renewed approach to suicide prevention and integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and social and emotional wellbeing services. These are ‘must haves’ in rural and regional Australia.

ACTIONS:

- Demonstrate the need for funding for hospital capital works
- Seek equity and access to bulk billing in rural and regional towns
- Urge the government to review the current Medicare rebate freeze
- I will continue to hold the government to account on the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]

AGRIBUSINESS, INDUSTRY AND INNOVATION

A prosperous and vibrant agriculture and food sector

Agribusiness and food production is central to the past, present and future of Indi. We are proud of our locally produced food and fibre, providing exports and boosting our tourism sector. Indi also captures nearly half the water that flows into the Murray-Darling Basin, which in turn supports agriculture and food production elsewhere in Australia.

Our farmers are amongst the most efficient, innovative and least subsidised in the world. However they face many challenges. Droughts and floods will continue and these will be further impacted by climate change. Tackling trade barriers and managing increasingly volatile international markets will be essential for an industry that exports 60% of its production. Trade agreements assist agriculture and the food manufacturing sector to become more internationally competitive. Research and innovation are important drivers of industry productivity growth and increased profitability, and need to have the full support and financial backing of government. Efficient and reliable connectivity and infrastructure is critical for future success, as more farmers use the internet to access high-tech products and services.

The many smaller farms in our region bring new resources, skills and capital that benefit Indi's economy. Support for Landcare groups and regional coordinating networks will improve the natural resource base for future agricultural production.

The food processing sector is a major industry of Indi. Like all businesses, it needs modern and reliable transport and telecommunication infrastructure, as well as access to a skilled workforce.

Innovation is important to rural and regional communities:- new products, creative ideas, entrepreneurship and competition are just as important in the country as they are in the cities and urban areas. I will take a lead in connecting innovative and sustainable rural industries and communities in Indi.

ACTIONS:

- Support Hume RDA as it identifies key investment areas and determines investment readiness for agribusiness
- Support a national 10 year Agricultural Industry Development Plan which outlines clear direction for the future of regional food manufacturing
- Urge the government to abolish the backpacker tax

- Pay particular attention to the roll out of the Murray Darling Basin Commission's (MDBC) Constraints Management Strategy, and support local communities and farm businesses in documenting and advocating to address the potential impact on local assets
- Champion local provision of agricultural education from school through TAFE and University
- Continue to argue for increased allocation of Commonwealth funding for agricultural research and extension

EDUCATION

Develop skills for rewarding careers and fulfilling lives

Education must be resourced to provide opportunity for all people to be innovative, to participate in Australian life and add value to our current strengths of unique natural and agricultural resources and human capabilities.

Education facilities must have access and capacity via an inexpensive, fast and powerful universal broadband to tap into all those opportunities for continuing education and skills development that are available Australia-wide.

Education and development starts early. Indi's rural and regional environment means a 'one size fits all' approach to resourcing early child education and care services is insufficient. Current programs taking services to rural people are working well and can continue to improve and grow. These services not only provide for young children's education and development but provide support for other benefits to occur, as parents are better able to participate in developing farms and businesses, knowing their children are professionally assisted to grow, learn and develop.

In particular young people in Indi should have fair and equitable access to education, in our regional centres or towns. I support the Gonski plan and agree that Australia was under-investing in education and there were alarming gaps in achievement between students from different locations and backgrounds. Under the Gonski plan, all schools are funded according to the individual needs of their students and what is required to educate them to a high level.

Government funding in education is an investment in our future. People want to see universities and TAFE colleges in regional areas, giving regional students the chance to study locally and work locally.

ACTIONS:

- The Coalition's plan to deregulate universities will have severe and long term negative impacts on regional universities, our workforces and ability to attract investment. I will continue to oppose any legislation that moves to deregulate universities
- I will urge the Federal Government to continue the Gonski reforms in full
- Fight for increased support for rural and regional families to support access to higher education

ENVIRONMENT

Cleaner and smarter

Human activity is changing the climate. Our region is heavily dependent on farming and tourism, industries that are being affected by our changing climate. Action on climate change is critical to ensuring our local economy and way of life is preserved and enhanced. I will work with the government to reduce atmospheric carbon, while safeguarding industry in regional Australia.

I support the targets agreed to at the 2015 Paris Conference: to limit global temperatures to between 1.5% and 2.0% of pre-industrial levels.

Renewable energy offers huge opportunities for Indi in terms of employment. We know that transitioning away from fossil fuels is inevitable and I would like to see Indi lead the way in embracing industrial renewable energy generation. I support moves away from coal-fired electricity generation to solar, wind and other sources. This transition provides opportunities for renewable energy technologies to enter the market. Given Indi's abundant natural and demographic advantages, the inevitable transition to energy-generating sources provides an opportunity to promote investment in 'Clean Technologies'. The flow-on impact is more jobs and more investment into Indi.

ACTIONS:

- Establish an Indi Renewable Energy Action Group – support the roll out the Totally Renewable Yackandandah [TRY] model across Indi
- Provide support and data to those groups who are dedicated to the betterment of our environment (e.g. North East Regional Sustainability Alliance, Managing our Waters Resourced Working Group)
- Ensure that the voice and wisdom of Indigenous people, traditional landowners is heard and recognised in how we value and manage country and environment
- Support young people to take on roles to lead change

JOBS AND SMALL BUSINESS

Growing a prosperous Indi

Standing up for local jobs across Indi will continue to be a priority. I am proud to have helped provide a secure future for families, particularly those in manufacturing. For better employment prospects, a strong regional focus is required. It starts with providing sufficient resources to all levels of education, to then create the capacity and environment for innovation, leading to value-adding in agriculture and related manufacturing.

Building and promoting agri-related and environmental tourism, connecting to our regional education resources, will create jobs that will ensure our young people have a choice to remain in a vibrant Indi. Opportunities must be created for older workers to re-skill and have support for travel and special programs to remain in the workforce for longer.

I strongly support small business and the regional economy in Indi which relies on agriculture/horticulture/timber, food manufacturing, transport and industry. Cross border anomalies in the building, transport and regulatory frameworks continue to impede small business growth and development. A Federal Cross Border Commissioner would work with each state and territory government, to minimise and where possible, eradicate cross border anomalies across all government portfolios.

ACTIONS:

- Champion jobs in Australia's solar PV industry in Indi
- Support the extension and growth of the Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship [ACRE] as a model across Indi
- Fight for a Federal Cross Border Commissioner to address anomalies impacting on cross border businesses

INFRASTRUCTURE – TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORT

Connecting Indi

Reform and investment is required by the Commonwealth and state governments so that rural and regional Australians have affordable, innovative and competitive telecommunications and transport services.

Telecommunications and transport are critical issues for our region. Mobile phone coverage and internet access is improving across Indi, and more investment is needed. The Commonwealth government must commit to the continuation of the Mobile Black Spot Programme, so that rural and regional communities and businesses can have the same level of access as in city areas. The Government must continue to give priority to the NBN rollout across Indi, so that our towns and regions are connected in the most efficient timeframe – this includes a mixture of fibre to the home, NBN phone towers and satellite coverage.

I support the work of local government, particularly in advocating for funding and grants from the federal government to Local Government Areas [LGAs]. LGAs are the backbone of service delivery to the community, they have my full support.

Transport is a critical issue for our region. National key freight routes, which form the backbone of our national land transport network, run through Indi. Priority needs to be given to the funding and completion of the proposed inland freight route and the High Speed Rail [HSR] link, by both the Commonwealth and state governments. Public transport and priorities for Indi should be developed collaboratively with a focus on interregional buses, shuttle/commuter services and ride sharing [e.g. Tolmie TOAST [Tolmie Offers A Seat to Town]].

People in Indi and across regional Australia rely on strong local TV content for information relevant to their communities. I am proud to support the protection of local news, sport and events. The ABC is integral to the fabric of life in rural and regional Australia. It delivers our news, our weather, our fire and flood warnings, it connects our communities and gives us a window to the world. Rural and regional communities rely on the connectivity and access provided by Australia Post. People should be able to pay their bills, post a letter or a parcel, locally, easily and cost effectively.

Looking long term, we must aim for services comparable to those available in metropolitan areas. High speed broadband will level the playing field for regional areas, creating huge opportunities for the delivery of health, aged care and education throughout Indi. This will facilitate new businesses moving to regional areas, and further the development of existing businesses.

ACTIONS:

- Support the establishment of an Indi Integrated Transport and Logistics Land Use Advisory Group in Indi
- Continue working with local councils, residents and the government to eliminate mobile blackspots across Indi
- Continue to hold the government to account on NBN delivery timetable and system speeds
- Continue to work closely with the federal and state governments to improve the track and upgrade the rolling stock on the Albury/Wodonga line
- Support a review of the Universal Services Obligation (USO) and Customer Service Guarantees [CSG] as long as the changes to the CSG don't disadvantage rural and regional communities
- Phone towers are important and need to be built, I will support communities having a greater say in where phone towers are built
- Continue to push for adequate funding for local government

ARTS AND CULTURE

Showcasing our strong cultural economy

Indi has a rich arts culture that covers a wide range of mediums and interests, playing a significant role in the lifestyle enjoyed by individuals and communities.

The value of a strong and vibrant cultural economy to Indi must be acknowledged. The term “cultural economy” describes the impact to a region through the arts:- visual arts, music, writing, architecture, theatre, film making and any other creative source. The impact is split into two arms, firstly the traditional economic impact. This is quantifiable in monetary terms, and the revenue created by cultural practices and secondly, the impact a strong cultural economy has on the lifestyle of people living in the region. This is especially important for Indi as a rural and regional electorate where so many people are ‘tree changers’ and move to the region because of its lifestyle benefits.

ACTIONS:

- Support practical initiatives such as an online directory for community and audiences to identify arts, culture and heritage connections; and introduce an Indi Arts Award for recognition of all forms of art and culture, showcasing local talent.
- Establish an Indi Arts Action Group to advocate for the arts sector
- Oppose cuts to arts funding in Indi

'SNAPSHOT' POSITIONS 2016

1. Improved telecommunications infrastructure so that all rural and regional Australians have the right to access vital online government services.
2. Establishment of an Independent Office for Animal Welfare to maintain Australian's high animal welfare standards
3. Refugees have a right to seek asylum and to be treated humanely, under Australia's commitment to the United Nations
4. A strong and supported national Australian Defence industry
5. Against cattle grazing in our national parks based on scientific evidence of negative impact to the environment
6. Retention of face-to-face Centrelink services in small regional towns
7. Digital radio and greater access to regional news and media services
8. Tougher legislation to protect those affected by family violence
9. Establishment of a Federal ICAC to provide greater transparency at a national level
10. Legitimate use of licenced firearms and no roll back on existing legislation
11. Extension of the House of Representatives terms to four years fixed term
12. Systems which ensure a healthy Australian food supply including better labelling of origin so it is easier to buy Australian made food
13. No deals with any political party in a hung parliament, I will continue to put the interests of Indi first when considering each and every piece of business put before Parliament
14. Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the process to progress a treaty and efforts to meet the Close the Gap targets
15. Against further expansion of water storage on the Buffalo river system
16. Marine sanctuaries in line with scientific evidence and sustainable fishing in Australian waters
17. Removal of discrimination and marriage equality for all
18. New medical school for this region
19. Support the Australian Government's approach to National security through Australia's Counter Terrorism Strategy
20. Support community driven initiatives for gambling reform
21. Protection of regional news, sport and events
22. Support the Federal and State Government's approach to funding and sustaining safer schools, including the Safe Schools Coalition Australia program
23. Save funding for our ABC
24. Reform of superannuation but not retrospective legislation
25. Reforms for a fairer tax system
26. Free Trade Agreements ("FTAs") that are transparent and benefit Australia without compromising our independence

NOTE: Additional detail on these 'snapshot' positions can be found on www.cathymcgowan.com.au