



Cathy McGowan AO MP
Independent Member for **Indi**

The Indi Budget Impact Tour Report

May/June 2017

Introduction

My vision for Indi is for a community that works with its leaders and representatives to develop opportunities for growth and solutions to challenges as they arise. This is the Indi Way, which has resulted in:

- **\$140 million funding to fix the North East rail track**
- **The highest number of submissions of any electorate to the Joint Standing Committee for the National Broadband Network rollout, and a public hearing in Wodonga**
- **\$20,875,591 infrastructure funding through the National Stronger Regions Fund since 2013**
- **38 mobile phone towers funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program**
- **A review of the Farm Household Assistance Package for dairy farmers**
- **\$20 million Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Package**

The 2017-18 Budget is the fourth handed down since my election as a member of the Australian Parliament. I have been listening to my community’s responses – what they liked, what failed to hit the mark and the suggestions they have made to help the government improve the lives of all those living in rural and regional Australia.

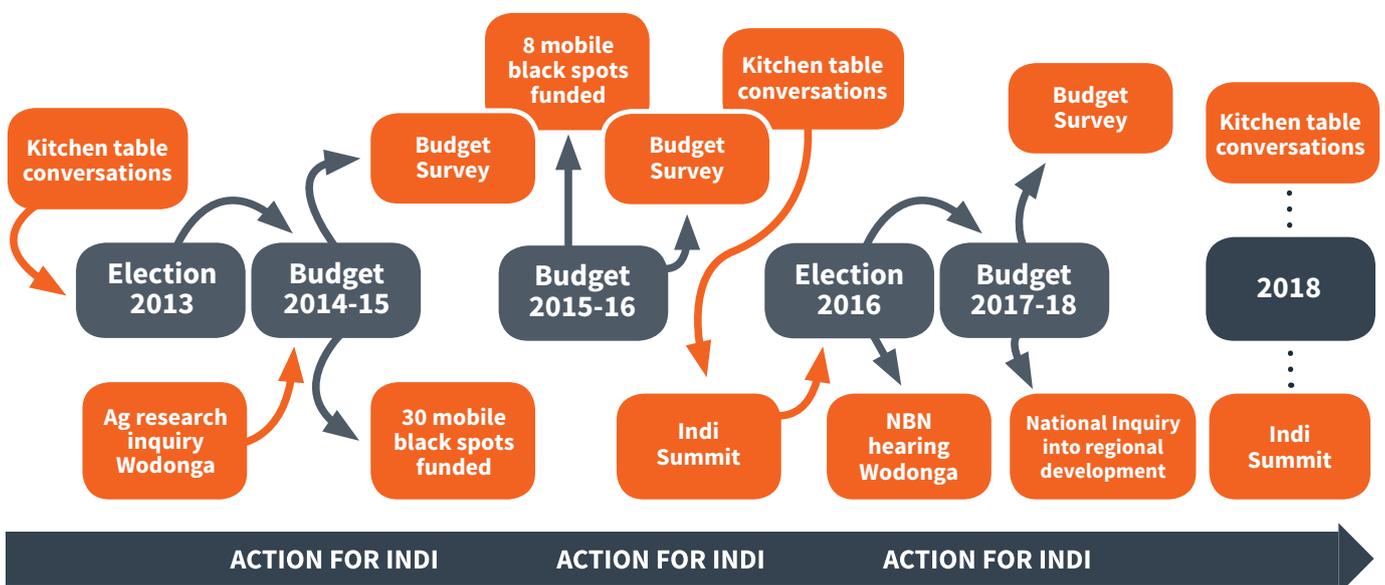
The message from my community has been clear – there is a high level of inequality supported by policy that does not consider regional Australia, and too many policy and funding models are based on metropolitan populations.

I was inspired and moved by the 75 young people who came to my budget feedback sessions and the 65 other young people who wrote to me. As their independent representative I am determined their voice be heard in this parliament.

Please circulate this report through your networks and everyone is encouraged to provide feedback and comments on all issues to cathy.mcgowan.mp@aph.gov.au.

Cathy

Progress of the Indi Way



The Indi Budget Impact Survey 2017

Each year since Cathy's election in 2013 as the Independent Member for Indi, people in the electorate have had their say on the Federal Budget. The feedback has been used to inform Cathy's speech in reply to the Budget and provides information on community priorities and possible solutions.

Following the 2017-18 Budget, Cathy, staff and volunteers carried out the 2017 Indi Budget Impact Campaign.

The process

- This report contains the main findings from the survey, as well as key achievements to June 2017.
- To read Cathy's Budget reply speech, turn to page 17.
- The focus for the campaign this year was an online survey, linked from Cathy's new-look website. 1,063 responses were received.
- Paper copies of the survey were made available to people who did not have access to the internet.
- Budget Feedback Breakfasts aimed at people aged 14-25 were held in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla.
- Cathy delivered her budget speech 30 May. The video can be viewed at bit.ly/IndiBudgetSpeech

The questions

Respondents were asked for their top three priorities. They were then asked to indicate if they were concerned about:

- Mobile phone blackspots
- NBN
- Renewable energy
- Education
- Employment
- Trains
- Regional policy
- The arts
- Health and welfare
- Other issues

Budget Timeline



About Indi: Profile Information

The electorate of Indi, home to approximately 105,000 voters, takes in much of North East Victoria, covering 28,567 km². The population is spread across nine local government areas stretching from the New South Wales border at Wodonga to Corryong up the Murray Valley, the snowfields of Falls Creek, Mount Hotham, Mount Buffalo and Mount Buller to the East and Marysville, Kinglake and Yea to the South.

Indi is a diverse electorate, incorporating the major transport and freight route of the Hume Freeway and the North East Rail Line, as well as alpine regions and resorts, lakes, river valleys and fertile soils. Its main industries are tourism, forestry, agriculture and manufacturing.

Indi's communities have a strong culture of inclusion, supporting the arts and a commitment to volunteering and participation.

Its main population centres are Wodonga, Wangaratta, Rutherglen, Beechworth, Benalla, Mansfield, Myrtleford, Corryong, Tallangatta, Tungamah, Bright, Mansfield, Alexandra, and Yea, with many other vibrant smaller communities.

Who responded to the survey?

Age

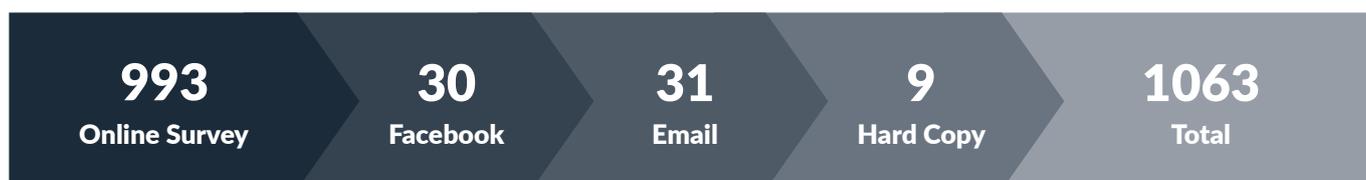
14-25	14.0%	140
26-40	10.2%	102
41-64	42.2%	423
65+	33.7%	338
		1003

Gender

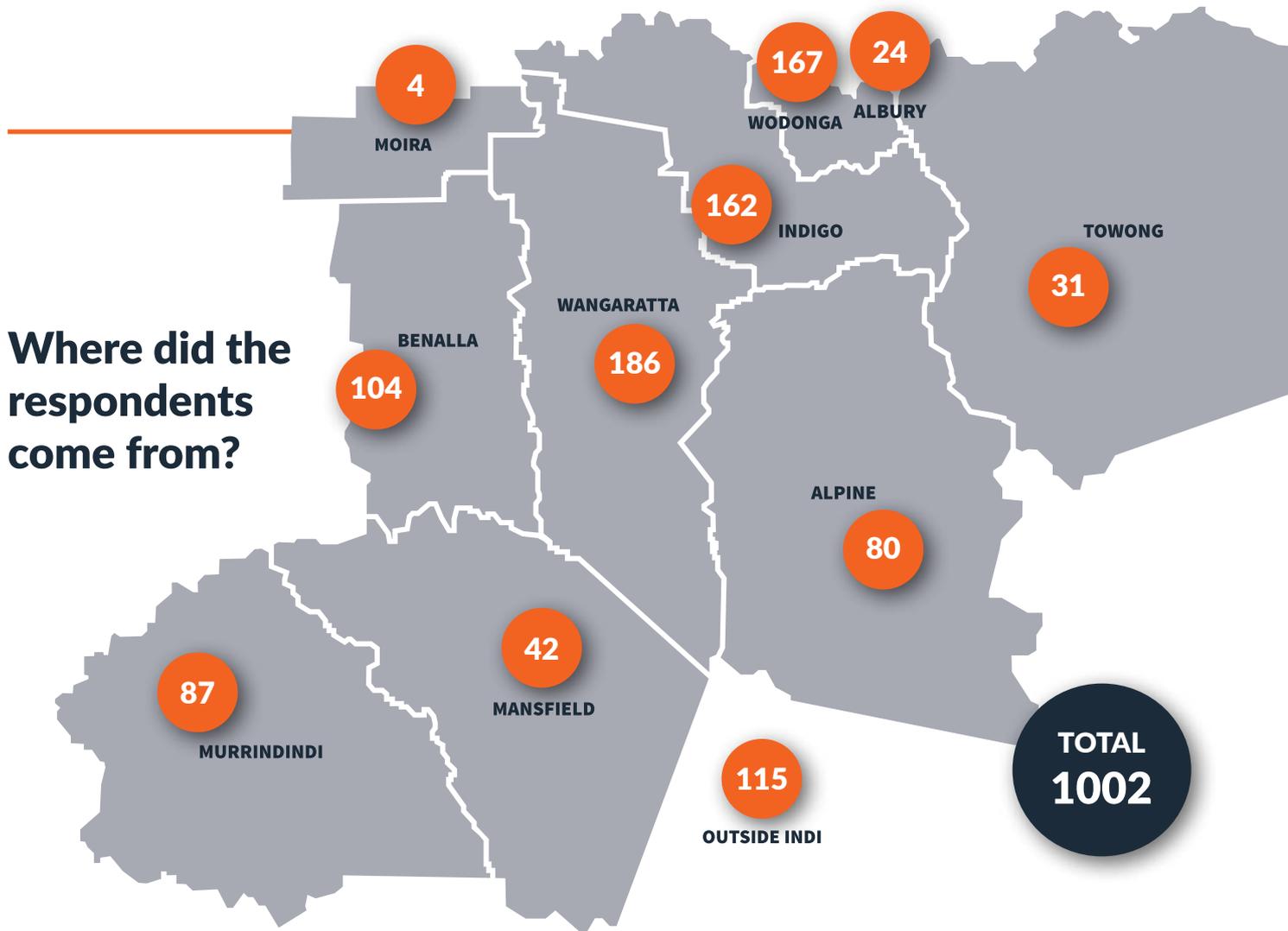
Female	54.8%	505
Male	44.6%	411
Other	0.7%	6
		922

(Respondents weren't required to answer this question)

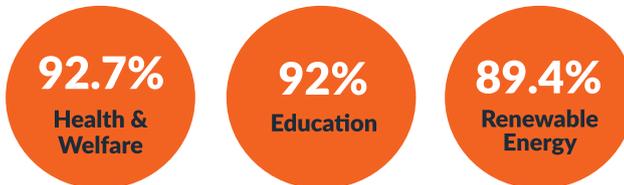
How did they answer?



Where did the respondents come from?



Indi's top priorities - a snapshot



* Not all questions were compulsory. This is the percentage of the respondents who answered this specific question.

People in Indi are concerned about:



What young people said

Access to education and university fees were the top priorities for young people. Mental health, jobs, climate change and renewable energy were also important.

Some comments:

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Fair, needs-based education funding is absolutely necessary. All kids should have equal opportunity.

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“

Don't make university more expensive than it already is.

”

“

Preserve the future. Find a way to reduce emissions.

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More people need to be employed for Headspace services etc., because of the long waiting list for teenagers who can't necessarily afford other healthcare. Some need it urgently but have to wait months.

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Ensure that students and parents have got jobs and enough transport to go everywhere.

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If students are interested in trade instead of university, there is not enough resources for someone to leave school and get a job. Employers do not want to invest in training someone if they leave after the training.

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Young people in Wangaratta shared their insight at a Budget Feedback Breakfast

What Indi said about mobile phone blackspots

68.8% of respondents were concerned about mobile phone blackspots

I have no television, mobile phone or internet at my home in Biggara • It is vital to correct this problem not only for social and safety reasons but also to promote competitive business environments • Living in Harrierville and being in a bushfire area, it's essential that we don't have ANY blackspots to ensure everyone's safety • I am a working in Upper Murray as remote area nurse on call for emergencies and black spots risk lives due to inability to contact Emergency services • This is on behalf of my partner, trying to run a small business is hampered by not being able to talk to people whilst travelling across Indi • I am the Coms officer for the local CFA and usually have only one bar to SOS only • Bright is a tourist area. Heavy phone traffic congestion in the system at busy times, reducing effectiveness of service. Hotham, Falls and back of Falls have black spots • Wi fi NBN tower in view but no mobile phone coverage in home. I run my business from home and on the road so being connected is super important, when I lose phone reception and 3G/4G on the train to Melbourne I can't work until I regain connection • Requires urgent attention. Policies should be formed so that legislation can be passed to ensure Telcos to expand and improve Mobile Phone coverage • Whilst Eskdale is not a black spot, Telstra is the only provider and they are extremely expensive. It would be ideal if we were able to take advantage of the services of other providers • These black spots make study difficult but also make living unsafe.



Being unable to carry out work orientated calls while in transit is frustrating as service cuts in and out. I am heavily reliant on mobile service for my use on internet which I use for study and research.



Results for Indi:

- **Formation of the Indi Telecommunications Action Group (ITAG)**
- **38 mobile towers funded under the Mobile Black Spot Program**
- **Mobile phone towers opened at Tatong, Devil River, Dartmouth and Howqua. Still to come are Myrree, Upper Ryans Creek, Woods Point, Cudgewa, Eldorado, Moyhu, Bethanga, Buffalo River, Granya, Tangambalanga, Archerton, Sawmill Settlement, Goughs Bay, Molyullah, Edi Upper, Ancona, Rosewhite, Tolmie, Wandiligong, Highlands, Kanumbra, Killingworth, Taylor Bay, Yea, Hazeldene, Kinglake West, Mt Dom Dom, Kevington, Enochs Point, Baranduda Range, Beechworth-Wodonga Rd, Omeo Hwy, Tallangatta South and Tallangatta Valley**

What Indi said about the National Broadband Network (NBN)

75.5% of respondents were concerned about the NBN

Absolutely critical for expansion of communities and businesses to have good access to fast broadband. People will not relocate if they cannot get fast, cheap and efficient communications (also applies to mobile phone issues) • It's fast enough for now, but won't be future-proof for long. Things need to be done for people living in borderline areas such as my parents - they aren't in the wireless region, but they aren't in the wired region either, so at this stage they have no idea when - or IF - they'll get the NBN. My mum is a doctor and writes reports on patients at home, and uses the internet to access her patients files from home - but usually has to connect her mobile phone up and use the 3G data to get internet that isn't so slow it times out • A first class system plan was destroyed. Restore it • All of my business outlets use cloud based software. Speed of access, and the ability to use things like video conferencing more extensively to avoid travel will lead to massive efficiency increases • Much like the introduction of personal computers, we haven't even thought of the ways it might benefit us in future • As a rural student, internet is essential but really lacking in our area • Assists video conferencing in rural areas enabling specialist health consultations • Can't afford it on the old age pension so it's a non issue! • Currently have FTTH but feel this should be nation wide • Essential for business development in rural areas • Fibre to the home to 90+% of personal and business premises is essential to future proof our communities • FTTN is a joke. Average speeds in Wodonga are 5-6 mbps when people have contracts for 12-25mbps on FTTN. It puts Australia behind Thailand and Malaysia who are getting 12-25 mbps affordably and those countries are pushing to get 500 (five hundred) mbps in the next 3 years • It is an insult that Australia has one of the worst performing broadband systems in relation to speed and access in the developed world. This needs urgent attention • Support NBN for others Our NBN wireless is great! • The future of Australia is and will be limited by our technological restraints namely the NBN. We are already significantly behind in the world and will be no further ahead by the time the NBN is fully rolled out.

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All of my business outlets use cloud based software. Speed of access, and the ability to use things like video conferencing more extensively to avoid travel will lead to massive efficiency increases.

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Results for Indi:

- **People across Indi made the highest number of submissions of any electorate to the inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee for the National Broadband Network rollout**
- **A public JSC NBN hearing was held in Wodonga, one of only two in Victoria (the other was in Melbourne)**
- **Co-location of NBN Broadband on Telstra tower at Howqua**

What Indi said about renewable energy

89.4% of respondents were concerned about renewable energy

A move to more localised power generation could help prevent the SA scenario. We have seen too often that big is not better • A sensible solution is needed to transfer smoothly to a majority renewable power system • A start has been made in this Budget but more needs to be done if climate change is to be mitigated • Addressing these issues is vital for future generations and the planet. Commitment to the Adani coal mine and the investment of tax payer money into this unwanted development is frightening and needs to be stopped immediately • Alternative energy will leave us behind if all we do is talk and think about coal • Any country with assets like Australia has should be investing in both research and funding of infrastructure. Whilst natural gas is not renewable it is relatively clean compared to coal and should be exploited. Australia has unlimited supplies of gas. Imagine the boost to the economy and employment if Australia could provide the cheapest energy in the World • As a young adult I don't want to grow up in a world damaged by previous generations and I want to ensure that future generations can thrive in a balanced world • As we transition from coal, it's essential we increase the availability of various types of renewable energy generation. Not nuclear energy • Aust has best renewable resources in the world and we could become an energy super-power. See <http://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/hydro-storage-can-secure-100-renewable-electricity> • Australia is significantly lagging behind other developed nations in terms of how much energy is renewable or not, we still rely on non renewable sources for more than 80% of our electricity • Be advised by studies and science. Give industry a clear long term policy to allow industry to progress • Cannot understand why feed-in tariffs do not match electricity charges! It has cost ME to produce that energy. Why is it not valued equally? • Fund and support the renewable energy industry. That is where the jobs lie as well as our future energy. • Don't worry about base load. Concentrate on regional supply and reduce the need for a national grid and poles and wires to deliver. • Look at community renewable electricity schemes that can be shared by local communities • Make feed in tariff for solar at least equal to consumption charge.

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Totally Renewable Yackandandah is leading the way in showing how renewable energy can be utilised. Use TRY as a nation-wide template.

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Results for Indi:

- **Led a debate in Parliament, as a Matter of Public Importance, calling for sensible, community-focused energy policy**
- **Supported community energy projects undertaken by local sustainability groups: Totally Renewable Yackandandah, Renewable Albury Wodonga, Benalla Sustainable Future Group, North East Sustainability Group**
- **Welcomed the Singapore High Commissioner to Indi to share local renewable energy solutions**
- **Established the Indi-wide Renewable Energy Reference Group**

What Indi said about health and welfare

92.7% of respondents were concerned about health and welfare

Bulk billing is essential for many families and individuals. Many rural practices do not bulk bill • Homeless youth are more at risk of mental health issues • A community needs good access to health services. My hubby has just recently suffered a stroke, and he suffered more disabilities because there was no fast access to services • Access to specialists has always been a problem in rural areas • After a recent health scare I am a fervent supporter of Benalla Health and the work they do • Aged care facilities are grossly understaffed • Aged pension is a right from a life of working • Agree with increased Medicare levy. Disagree with continued private health funding increases eg Medibank price rises • Being a pensioner I have very good free Health Care by my local Surgery in Yea. It's an example to other towns. Keep up the good work • Better facilities would allow older people to live away from the cities. It is shocking that young women cannot have their babies close to home • Better support for rural Integrated Health Services (Acute, Aged and Community) • Bring in a sugar tax • Can't for the life of me understand why dental is not part of Medicare • Teenage mental health is terrible. Headspace doesn't suit all young people • Where is the investment in drug rehabilitation centres and alternatives to custodial terms for the vast majority of our prison system • Continuing to keep a careful eye on reform of welfare payment thresholds and sensible effective tax rates; a 'dole' that is not significantly below the poverty line • Starving pensioners & welfare recipients who can't get a job as they sold it overseas only adds to the costs as people get sicker • Government needs to stop denigrating people receiving pensions and allowances. I am a full time carer receiving Carer pension and allowance. I am on-call 24/7, 365 days a week. I don't get time off, I don't get holidays and worst of all I don't get super. I am saving the government thousands of dollars a year caring for my partner at home yet I'm made to feel like dirt because I'm on welfare • I think a basic income should be a thing. Dealing with Centrelink is exhausting, and this robo-debt thing is ludicrous • Health is important and country people should not always have to go to the capital cities. With greater emphasis on decentralisation high quality health services should be available in the regions • Homeless youth are more at risk of mental health issue • I work in welfare. I have spent my whole career on 1-2 year contracts, no job security, and no long service leave. All this in low-paid high-stress job. If I didn't care about helping my clients I'd be long gone • Leave Medicare alone. No co-payments • NDIS is a good concept so long as it is not diluted, over priced, made difficult to access or otherwise spoiled by government ineptitude and inefficiency.



Access to specialists has always been a problem in rural areas.



Results for Indi:

- **Successfully amended the Health Insurance Amendment (National Rural Health Commissioner) Bill 2017 to ensure the role was accountable to the Parliament**
- **Review into Farm Household Allowance and changes to Centrelink to assist dairy farmers**
- **Spoke out against the Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 saying it does not demonstrate compassion or efficiency**

What Indi said about education

92% of respondents were concerned about education

TAFE in regional communities is so important • Ethics should be taught to all children no matter what age by well qualified teachers • More funding to allow children with learning disabilities to have access to properly trained professional support • Something needs to be done to support country kids for their tertiary education when they can't live at home • It's the future of our country. Don't slash university funding. We need their research and clever graduates • Free University education, better funded public schools. Investing in our people is one of the best investments for future solutions • The Gonski approach is essential but was butchered by politics. What is happening now is better than the last few years but we have a long way to go • Proper funding of state schools. Parents should have choice but the state system should be so attractive and effective that parents will choose it • Provide more arts teachers in non-government schools • Education should increase the employability of the population but only if jobs exist currently many tertiary educated are unemployed or underemployed • Education and equitable access to all ensures diversity and access to information and better decisions and innovation • Education is the basic pillar of a developed advanced society, is the platform on which the knowledge economy is built and support innovation and self-sufficiency. Quality accessible education for all is a basic right • Stop being a nanny state and wrapping students in cotton wool. Students are allowed too many 'outs' which doesn't prepare them for life after school • Education is essential for all, it not only teaches the three 'R's but educated people learn tolerance, acceptance of other people's rights • Rural students should be supported to enable them to undertake tertiary study • Better and more targeted funding for rural schools and education to deliver better services and education/subjects. Learn from good models, and use them to create more ie Agribusiness at Mansfield Secondary College, or Buller Annexe program - we need more of these great programs! • Support for regional kids to attend university. This includes regional subsidies, better and more relevant transport, and more contact with regional major centres • Stop the increase of fees on higher education - we should be encouraging those to access higher education • Country students are handicapped in accessing tertiary education. There needs to be more support for such students • For diplomas and certificate courses it feels so wrong that people need to pay thousands of dollars- especially if they are low income.

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Forcing graduates to repay loans at a lower income threshold will just create a new category of poor. Better to leave them enough money to spend to live, to invest in housing, to have families, etc.

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Results for Indi:

- **Minister for Education and Training the Hon Simon Birmingham and Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills the Hon Karen Andrews have visited Indi in recent months to see first-hand the innovation and challenges from Indi's education providers**
- **Cathy facilitated delegations from the North East Local Learning Network and the Alpine Valleys Dairy Pathways Project to visit Parliament House.**
- **Supported the Australian Education Amendment Bill 2017 to provide good governance and transparency, and committed to continue lobbying hard for adequate funding for all schools in Indi – State, Independent and Catholic**

What Indi said about employment

88% of respondents were concerned about employment

We need smart technology to provide future employment for rural regions • There are too many little courses that the unemployed are being sent to do. They rarely lead to jobs. This is costing the government money that has little useful result. I also find it uncomfortable that agencies that are privately set up to help the unemployed can result in people becoming very rich. I would like to see the government take back control of this area • It is a worry when workers are shut out of the local mill which employs half the town's workers • There is too much part time work and too many unscrupulous employers robbing their employees of their earnings • Youth employment has to be priority • Invest in Regional areas. Give older people incentives to reduce their hours of work to free up jobs for younger Australians • More jobs in the country. I hope the NBN will be able to help more people live where they want and work the job they want. I also think a better regional train network will help this • Stop 457 visas • By supporting small business, and reducing the bureaucratic requirements on them, we could make it a lot easier for them to employ people. This is especially important in smaller, rural communities where people have to travel such long distances to work • Regional employment seems to be declining, rather than growing • Continue the Green Army program which has been wound up • More support for structured workplace learning for schools and traineeship incentives • We can't all be hairdressers and make coffee. We need new industries • I'm concerned about prevalence of internships, casualisation and undercutting of awards • 64% unemployment aged 17-24 says it all • Lower taxes for farmers so they can compete better overseas and at home! • I need confidence in that when I leave university jobs will be available • Vibrant economy means vibrant community • Jobs are not a focus of government. They truly don't seem to care • The community need to come together for gap year jobs or jobs for those just finishing school. We do want to work however the opportunity is not here.

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Greater support for small business to allow for growth and employment

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Results for Indi:

- **Facilitated a meeting between North East Local Learning Network (NELLEN) with Assistant Minister for Vocational Training the Hon Karen Andrews in Parliament House and Minister Andrews' resultant visit to Wodonga**
- **Welcomed \$20 million funding in the Jobs and Regional Growth fund**
- **Called on the Prime Minister for relief for manufacturers from escalating energy costs, to protect local jobs - around 20,000 people are employed in manufacturing in Indi**
- **Partnered local government to deliver \$20,875,591 for infrastructure through the National Stronger Regions Fund since 2013, supporting local jobs and industry**

What Indi said about trains

82.3 % of respondents were concerned about trains

The trains from Wodonga (and Albury) to Melbourne are an ongoing irritation. The line needs to be properly fixed by the Federal Government and no argy bargy about the cost

- Public transport not only supports the mobility of people with limited budgets but is a way to reduce some of the pollution from using cars
- The actual cost is building up all the time when buses are used to replace trains
- The Melbourne to Albury train line is terrible and unreliable. We need fast trains
- We use the train service from Albury to Melbourne that can be unreliable
- Poor public transport options from Corryong to Albury/Wodonga to facilitate persons unable to drive - to participate in business, schooling, medical appts, shopping, further travel connections etc
- North East rail service is still dreadful. Victoria needs more Commonwealth input
- As a user of the Albury to Melbourne line, we hope that the ARTC will spend enough money to fix the problem at last. Locally our politicians have tried to move heaven and earth to make the train line function properly
- What happened here to put us so far behind the rest of the world
- I would travel by train to Melbourne if I could rely on getting to the destination on time
- Decent public transport is simply essential. For environmental and climate change reasons, for road infrastructure reasons, for efficiency. City folk take it for granted. I hate having to drive so much. I love our new bike trails, but I also so wish we still had the train!
- The train service cannot be relied on if there is a critical time allowed for the journey, it is a barrier to the regional economy and decentralization. The lack of WiFi and presence of mobile black spots adds to the feeling of a second rate service
- I cannot arrange meetings until after 11.30 as I don't trust the train to get me there, and bus travel restricts your ability to work during the trip as you may encroach on fellow passenger's space
- Lack of services means you are starting the day very early and ending very late which impacts on family time
- A very expensive way to move 10% of people and freight in a highly subsidised manner.



Establishing a reliable, fast link between the cities and the regional areas can make a huge difference to the appeal of living regionally.



Results for Indi:

- **Met with the State and Federal Ministers for transport to encourage cooperation at all levels of government to fix the North East rail line**
- **Met with the CEO and Board Chair of the Australian Rail Track Corporation to press for information on the maintenance of the line**
- **Led a debate in the Parliament calling on the government to ensure ensure passenger services are considered core business for the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC)**
- **Introduced a Private Members Bill in Parliament that would ensure infrastructure decisions including rail take into account the social benefit for rural and regional Australia**
- **Secured \$140 million for the North East rail upgrade**
- **Gained commitment from the Victorian government of new carriages when the line is repaired**

What Indi said about regional policy

78% of respondents said they were concerned about regional policy

A sound regional development policy would look at infrastructure and service development across industry, health, ageing, culture, sport, recreational tourism, education, transport and consider the risks of extreme weather events, disasters and impact of climate change across all these facets. It would address wealth inequality, housing affordability and the NBN • Without a regional policy those residing outside of large cities will be forgotten. Failure to support regional areas will take away the ability of farmers and the distribution network to get produce to the supermarket • Roads, rail, and air all contribute to the standards of supply that we are used to • Have a look at the process of the development of Albury Wodonga and the AWDC which has been a successful example of decentralisation, certainly more methodical than shifting government departments willy-nilly • Don't sell our food growing land, don't build houses & other infrastructure on it • Get help from traditional people about managing it - after all, they did it well for 60,000 years • Support our farmers to keep producing food • The growth of the major capital cities and the plight of regional areas shows the failure of both State and Federal Governments • There needs to be a lot more decentralisation of businesses and both Federal and State Government departments. Farming communities need to be supported more in their enterprises • More focus from all parties, less pork barrelling • Regions best know the local needs and cannot successfully be run remotely from big cities • The border anomalies persist. I travel to Shepparton from Wodonga for a service which is provided in Albury, but am unable to access because I live in Victoria • Can we please have a co-ordinated approach to regional planning - especially for tourism/business development. Access is also important - roads! roads! roads! dropping speed limits instead of fixing roads is great for the bottom line but deters visitors and makes access for locals impossibly difficult • Regional policies must focus on enhancing regional growth in ways that improves on the quality of life in both regional areas and our major cities, where growth is no longer sustainable.



Decentralisation is important to ease pressure on capital cities and to make regional areas viable



Results for Indi:

- **Successfully lobbied for a national inquiry into best practice for regional development and decentralisation. Cathy is a member of the Select Committee to carry out the inquiry**
- **The Murray Darling Basin Authority is relocating ten staff to Wodonga**
- **Introduced a Private Members Bill to require the government to provide detailed statements about the impact of budgets on rural and regional Australia**

What Indi said about the arts

58.4% of respondents said they were concerned about the Arts

We need to train creative thinkers in all jobs and celebrate our culture through the arts and community health • A strong and vibrant arts community is at the core of every successful society and it needs government and community support. It's OK but it can and should be much better • Encourage fundraising, philanthropy and giving as a campaign • Cultural heritage recognition through the arts creates community harmony and employment opportunities. and builds cultural bridges to the wider community • There are so many talented people in our region and we need to give them opportunities to be recognised • Don't allow huge sums to be wasted on expensive art pieces • They're important, but I just think that the environment and education are higher priorities •

I haven't any money to use them and nowhere to go for them except

Melbourne and can't afford the time to travel for 6 hours to see a film or play I can't afford anyway • Funding is so difficult to get and often is just for a year. We know that the arts can revitalise a community, help people heal, give some of our most disadvantaged a voice and make a huge contribution to the well-being of society. Yet funding & support continues to decrease • Arts is the poor relation to sport in Australia • I'd love to have more access to theatre and art galleries in this region but it's a city thing and I don't mind the odd trip to Melbourne to see a major exhibition or show • Now government galleries such as Murray Arts Museum Albury charge for artists to exhibit and they also want to take a 40% cut on sales. Museums like this get huge funding from state and federal governments. But the support they give the artists comes at a high price • The arts also creates a culture in a community that brings people together and improves wellbeing. Governments need to acknowledge this and support creative opportunities • Going fine. We 'punch above our weight' in the Arts but the Arts will only sustainably follow employment • I think it's great for children's education and wonderful if that's your thing but I really think there are much better things to be investing a lot of money in at the moment • We won't know their funding has been gutted until we turn up to our national galleries to see an exhibition, and discover it is \$50 plus to get in the door. Are we going to fund these public places so only medium to well off people can afford to use them? • The Arts communities in the North East are very pro-active with events & exhibitions and there is always something on. But the Arts still need government support in the schools • Mansfield does a fabulous job encouraging the arts in our region. We have so much but it would be wonderful to see more. How about some of the big shows and ballet and MSO and MTC having a regular series to which we can subscribe in the town? Why should we have to go to Melbourne for our big arts events? • Better trains would facilitate access to cultural events in Melbourne. Organisations like BPACC needs secure, ongoing funding • Promote the arts. Multiplier factor for economic activity is very positive, I would assume as well as community benefits.

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Often funding the arts is considered an expendable luxury when in fact art feeds the creative minds of all human beings

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Results for Indi:

- **Celebrated and promoted arts activities throughout Indi including Hot House Theatre and Short Black Opera**
- **Acknowledged contribution of Yackandandah potter John Dermer and his wife Shirley to regional arts and to the Parliament**
- **Highlighted the importance of arts in Indi by sitting for portraits by Yackandandah artist Charles Sluga in the Archibald Prize in 2017 and MariJana van Zanten in 2015**
- **Supported lifting the profile of the Indi Makers**

What Indi said about other issues

A focus on saving money by reducing the amount spent in the low socio economic demographic will only increase the need for law enforcement

- I work and my wife works. Cost of living has increased over the years. We budget with expenses. We are grateful to have jobs, and very lucky to live in Australia compared to other countries
- Thank you for all you do to make Indi a more inclusive and just electorate
- Want to congratulate Cathy for her efforts to improve our rail line and for the way she motivates and directs those of us who have a issue to act on it
- I grew up in the 50's and have a great respect for our Australian culture, but it seems the emphasis is more on the minorities such as refugees, gay marriage etc. when really we should be more concerned with our deficit and where that will land us
- The NE region has a great base of innovative people who want to contribute and make a difference towards a better stronger society. Government needs to be an "enabler"
- We are such a large and lucky country - I would like to see us being a bit more generous to refugees and offering them a place of sanctuary
- I notice there is no area about Law and Order in your survey (Federal) More laws stopping illegal weapons, harsher penalties for drug importation. Further restrictions on who enters our country
- It seems as if all the institutions and corporations including politics and the media need a refresh button to look at who they are serving
- The problems are huge and I see massive amounts of money being wasted, embezzled and misspent and that could be used to build a cohesive and stronger society. We seem to have become a people with less care for others, self indulgent, and entitled. I find that sad
- Instead of the confusion of the adjustments of taxes just collect 15% GST so as it is an equal playing field for everyone (aged pensioners included)
- Regional infrastructure being kept in the forefront of government policy at all times would be wonderful so please keep up the pressure
- Fix the disgraceful treatment of the helpless souls on Manus Island who only want to be treated with a little human dignity and compassion; just like we would give to our own citizens
- We are a wealthy and fortunate country and need to welcome with enthusiasm people who are in difficulty. We also need to support with much greater enthusiasm work to eliminate starvation and poverty both in Australia and the rest of the world
- Just so so sad that bipartisanship has gone out the window on issues of such magnitude such as climate change, indigneous affairs, etc
- Balance the budget with a fair mix of savings and tax increases
- Increase foreign aid
- Drop foreign aid

There are still many well educated, switched on people living in rural areas. We care about the big picture but are tired of being overlooked, going without services or paying much more than our city counterparts.... and We Vote!!

Young people respond to Federal Budget



Cathy's Budget Feedback Breakfasts for young people were held in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla in May. They were attended by 75 young people who offered their opinions about how the Federal Budget would affect them.

There were another 65 young people aged 14-25 who responded to the Budget survey online.



Cathy's budget speech

Delivered in the House of Representatives, 30 May 2017

As I rise today to speak about the 2017-18 budget—Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2017-2018—the fourth since my election as a member of the Australian parliament, I want to highlight to the residents of Indi my focus on the electorate I proudly call home. My vision for Indi is for a community that works with its leaders and representatives to develop opportunities for growth and solutions to challenges as they arise. It is a vision for a prosperous and caring community which values inclusiveness, diversity, honesty and the hard work of all those who seek to realise the goal of making life in our part of regional and rural Australia the best it can be and admired by all.

Today in this speech, I will focus on three main topics: the findings of the Indi survey on the budget, the priority of regional higher education, and I will conclude with my actions on behalf of my community and the next steps in the process of engagement.

Since the Turnbull government's second budget was handed down, I have been listening to my community's responses—what they liked, what failed to hit the mark and what suggestions they would make that would help the government to improve the lives of all those living in rural and regional Australia. The message has been clear—there is a high level of inequality supported by policy that does not consider regional Australia, and too many policy and funding models are based on metropolitan populations.

We have just heard very strongly— endorsed by the member for McMillan—that same point.

I will go to the survey. My community is familiar with my call for their opinions. After the 2014 and 2015 budgets, I toured Indi to gauge their priorities and suggestions. Alongside the meetings and informal gatherings in towns and cities throughout the electorate, the phone calls received and walk-ins to my electorate offices by those wanting to share their thoughts, this year I have also sought to engage online with constituents. So thank you to all those individuals, who made in excess of 1,000 responses to my survey.

In summary, 54 per cent of responses were from women; 41.7 per cent were from people aged 41 to 64; and 33.6 per cent were from people aged over 65. Most heartening for me of all that has been done was that young people aged between 14 and 25 heard my call to share their thoughts and opinions. Increasingly, they are responding to my commitment to them to ensure that young people's voices are heard by this government. Almost 140 young people, or 17 per cent of the survey's respondents, got online and on their phones and let me know what they thought about a budget that will play a major role in shaping their futures.

“

The message has been clear - there is a high level of inequality supported by policy that does not consider regional Australia

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During the week following the budget, I hosted three young people's breakfasts, in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla. Youth workers Anthony Nicholson and Rachel Habgood, of Wodonga; Tom Arnold, of Wangaratta; and Amanda Aldous, of Benalla, together with my staff, were instrumental in bringing together these young people before they headed to school, university and TAFE and to work. And their message was clear: to recognise their energy and commitment and remove the barriers to their education, employment and wellbeing.

Many of these young people made mention of the government's proposed changes to higher education, rightly arguing that rural students should be on an equal footing with their metropolitan counterparts. These proposed changes will further disadvantage young people in my electorate, forcing them to pay higher university fees on top of housing, transport and other living costs that they must pay when they move away from home. Some respondents argued that Australia can afford to educate its citizens for free, in turn creating a smarter workforce with better paid jobs, who pay their taxes and thus provide a higher standard of living for us all. They encouraged the government to support schools in lower socioeconomic areas ahead of wealthier schools and in turn lift overall standards in our clever country and to provide additional financial support to students in regional and rural areas through more scholarships, bursaries and grants, helping them to meet the added costs of their relocation.

Deputy Speaker, I give notice that next week, as a result of this survey, I will introduce a notice of motion seeking to provide financial incentives for those wanting to study in rural and regional areas.

The proposed tertiary education changes are also a challenge for regional universities in their bid to provide relevant degree courses in the regions. The Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University, Professor John Dewar, describes the budget as a 'triple whammy' for regional higher education, incorporating three threats to the university's long-term viability. The first is by increasing student contributions and lowering the threshold at which the debt becomes payable. He believes that demand will fall among regional students. They already participate in higher education at a much lower rate than their city counterparts, and many are the first member in their family to go university.

The need has never been greater for a highly educated and skilled regional workforce. Economic development and job creation in Indi will be dependent on the skills provided by postsecondary education. We want more, not fewer, students studying.

The second blow, says Professor Dewar, is the likelihood that the demand-driven system will continue to take a growing number of regional students away from their communities and to city universities, which is known as the ‘brain drain’—present company excepted. Alarming, already that number has increased by more than 76 per cent between 2008 and 2014.

The third and final blow is the rising cost of delivering courses at regional campuses. Professor Dewar argues that there is no budget measure that will address higher costs for regional universities, which want to remain in their regional communities.

I welcome the government’s commitment to an independent review of regional, rural and remote education, led by Emeritus Professor John Halsey, of Flinders University. The latest advice from the federal Minister for Education and Training, Senator Simon Birmingham, and his department is that this review will cover the full gamut of education throughout rural and regional Australia, from preschool through to university and the transition to work. The final report is due by the end of the year. I will invite Professor Halsey to visit Indi and meet the education community, families, employers, government agencies and students.

Education was one of three priorities in my survey, rated among the most important by a staggering 92 per cent of all those who responded to the budget survey. The next priorities were health and welfare at 93 per cent, and the environment and renewable energy came third at 89 per cent. Also important to more than 70 per cent of respondents was employment, passenger train services and regional policy, the NBN and mobile phone blackspots.

There was much good news for Indi in the budget. My community welcomed the \$100 million to finally fix the North East rail line. Led by the Hume Rail Corridor Group and the Border Rail Action Group, many years of hard work has made the case for providing an updated, reliable, punctual and comfortable passenger rail service between the Albury-Wodonga and Melbourne. This service has the potential to deliver up to 385,000 extra trips a year, benefitting the economies of all towns and cities in my electorate, driving economic growth and improving quality of life. It is time this overdue project is delivered and no more money or time is wasted. It is time for a plan that makes crystal clear the responsibilities of all stakeholders, the timetables and the outcomes that must be met. Today in question time I asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to take the leadership role to make this happen.

Increased investment in roads and infrastructure programs will support the electorate’s nine local governments to build their communities and address real need. We welcome the increase in Roads to Recovery funding by \$50 million per annum, continuation

of the Stronger Communities Program, which is a great program for our communities, and the announcement of round 2 of the Building Better Regions Fund, another program that is delivering enormous benefits in the country areas. I also welcome the lifting of the financial assistance grants indexation freeze.

I particularly welcome improved mental health services for veterans of the Australian Defence Forces, the energy offset payment for pensioners and the \$4.7 billion investment in inland rail. What a difference that is going to make to rural and regional Australia—truly nation-building.

Indi is well placed to claim a share of the \$1.5 billion announced in the budget for vocational training and employment skills programs. Vocational education leaders in my electorate have made progress to develop local and cross-border training programs for young people in the north-east. These programs will go a long way to improving the options for the more than 15,000 young people in my electorate aged between 15 and 24. Minister, can I say what a delight it was to have you in my electorate. Thank you for your support for this really important age group.

On health, there is a strong view that it should be higher income earners who bear the cost of the Medicare levy and there is an expectation that lifting the freeze on GP co-payments should see more bulk-billing services in small rural towns. There is recognition of the burden of the higher cost of health services, particularly the rising costs of private health care to a declining membership.

Deputy Speaker Morton, as you know as a rural person, country people are innovative and no more so than in my electorate. I will work with the community on the many suggestions and solutions they offered as part of the survey: incentives for specialists for regional areas; greater use of remote diagnostics via the internet; the increased need for funding for appropriate mental health services for the young, right through to our senior citizens; and funding for aged care and pension payments, particularly for the pensioners reliant on rental accommodation and those whose incomes are not supplemented by retirement savings. The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme is welcome and its funding via an increased Medicare levy is viewed as a positive move by government to improve services in the long term, particularly for the disabled and their families. However, there is a note of caution among respondents that the money needs to be spent wisely for those most in need.

On the environment and renewable energy, there is a clear push throughout Indi for sustainability and financial support to make the most of renewable energy sources. Rising costs of energy have impacted heavily, both domestically and on businesses and is a

particular concern to the people in my electorate. The respondents, however, made clear that there is strong opposition to coal and coal seam gas exploration and objection to tax-funded support for those operating within this sector.

Indi residents want the government to plan for the effects of climate change, and they seek support for the development of solar and wind energy.

The largest number of submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network into the rollout of the NBN came from Indi, and my community reinforced their comments, saying that copper wire is outdated and that the NBN program should utilise fibre-optic cabling. Moving from ADSL to NBN is described by some as a complete shambles, and many are indignant at the slow pace of the rollout. Those unable to access the NBN resort to expensive mobile broadband, and slow internet speeds make it very difficult for young people to study. Indi has been blessed to receive funding to address 38 mobile phone blackspots, but the pace of the rollout is slow. Emergency services during fire seasons continue to be impacted by black spots, and it is not just remote areas where services are poor; some areas very close to the city have no coverage.

In summary, the Indi budget survey has identified health, education and environment as the electorate's major priorities. The percentage of respondents who highlighted their priorities were 93 per cent for health and welfare; 92 per cent for education; 89 per cent for renewable energy; 88 per cent for employment; 82 per cent for trains; 78 per cent for regional policy; 76 per cent for the NBN; and 58 per cent for the arts.

The next step is my publishing of the report and the distribution to the more than 400 constituents who asked for a hard copy. There will be a new round of kitchen table conversations and the second Indi Summit in 2018.

In closing, I highlight my vision for Indi, a prosperous and caring community. I look forward to reporting back to my electorate, reflecting the priorities they have highlighted. I highlight my commitment to work with the Minister for Education and Training on higher education, to work with the Prime Minister for a minister for youth, and to work with my community so we are not just coming and asking the government to solve the problems but doing it together. Finally, thank you to the people of Indi. It is an absolute pleasure to be your representative.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Indi for stepping up and having a say!

- Thank you to all who took the time to participate in the survey
 - Youth Coordinators Anthony Nicholson and Rachel Habgood (Wodonga City Council), Tom Arnold (Rural City of Wangaratta) and Amanda Aldous (Benalla Rural City) for engaging young people to participate in the budget feedback breakfasts
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There are many ways you can stay in touch, keep up with what is happening around Indi and find out how to get involved:

Sign up for weekly news updates at:
www.cathymcgowan.com.au/sign_up

Find Cathy on social media:

-  [Facebook.com/CathyMcgowanForIndi](https://www.facebook.com/CathyMcgowanForIndi)
 -  [Twitter.com/Indigocathy](https://twitter.com/Indigocathy)
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Write a letter or an email, call or drop in:

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Other reports - and where to find them:

- **Indi Talks 2013**
- **2014-15 Budget Impact Tour Report**
- **2015-16 Budget Impact Tour Report**
- **Kitchen Table Conversations Report 2015**
- **Indi Summit Report 2015**
- **Putting Indi First June 2016**

Find all these by searching at: www.cathymcgowan.com.au **or** contact the office for copies.

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