

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### REGIONAL ROADS KEY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Inland Queensland Roads Action Plan (IQ-RAP) Working Group applauds the Australian Government's commitment in the Federal Budget 2017-18 to investing in rural and regional roads.

The Northern Australia Roads Program will deliver up to \$223.8 million for projects in Queensland, with \$37.3 million to be provided in 2017-18.

While the Northern Australia Beef Roads Program will deliver up to \$56.9 million for projects in Queensland, with \$26 million to be provided in 2017-18.

We also welcome the continuation of funding to vital road programs, such as the Black Spot Program and the Roads to Recovery.

In our highly decentralised state, an accessible and safe road network is the key regional economic growth.

While the federal budget has delivered much needed funding to regional Queensland roads, there is still a long way to go to bring our inland road network up to standard, with the IQ-RAP revealing 3,000km and 300 bridges across the network are not up to scratch.

The IQ-RAP prioritises inland road upgrades over the next 18 years and is designed to assist stakeholders and governments to assess and prioritise projects for funding to ensure maximum economic and social benefits.

We look forward to further commitment to regional roads from both the state and federal government.

- Cr Rick Britton, Mayor of Boulia Shire and Chair of the Inland Queensland Roads Action Plan

### BURKE SHIRE CONGRATULATED ON FIBRE LINK PROJECT

I would like to congratulate the Burke Shire Council on its vision to improve communications infrastructure for its community to ensure the economic growth



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and social connectivity of its region now and well into the future.

The Doomadgee to Burketown Fibre Link Project was officially opened last week.

The fibre optic link went 'live' earlier this year, delivering high-speed broadband, 4G mobile and public Wi-Fi to Burketown for the first time.

Improved access to the internet will open up more opportunities for communities and local businesses, as well as emergency and health services, education and tourism operators.

The Burke Shire Council secured almost \$2 million in funding for the Fibre Link Project through the Australian Government's National Stronger Regions Fund.

Regional Development Australia Townsville and North West Queensland (RDA) was pleased to have supported the council's funding application.

The RDA Committee's Regional Roadmap 2015-18 identifies investment into communications infrastructure and services as one of the region's top four "Economic Develop-

ment Priorities".

It is crucial that townships in our region have access to high quality and reliable internet to ensure the continued vitality of their communities.

RDA will continue to play a lead role in conducting workshops and working with councils and not-for-profit organisations to help secure funding through the new Building Better Regions Fund for local projects that bring about economic and community benefit.

Round 1 funding announcements are expected in coming months and Round 2 is expected to open later in the year. We encourage potential applicants to consider developing their projects now and calling RDA for advice.

- Glenys Schuntner, CEO, RDA Townsville and North West Queensland

### SEND US YOUR LETTERS!

Are you passionate about an issue? Please email your letters direct to the editor at [penelope.arthur@fairfaxmedia.com.au](mailto:penelope.arthur@fairfaxmedia.com.au)

## GAB BOOST

ONE of Australia's most important water resources is the Great Artesian Basin, which houses approximately 65 million megalitres of fresh water underground in an area stretching from Cape York to Dubbo. It's estimated that water from the Basin underpins at least \$12.8 billion in economic activity annually.

Over the past 15 years, the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative has been a fantastic water saving program delivering wins for the environment, primary producers and rural economies.

However, the job is not yet done, with an estimated 185 bores still requiring rehabilitation and about 5250km of associated bore drains needing to be replaced. In the lead-up to this year's Federal Budget, AgForce advocated for funds to keep flowing so the program keeps going, and we were pleased to see the Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce commit an extra \$8 million over the next two financial years. It's important the roll-out of this new funding occurs as quickly as possible so there is no gap after the completion of phase four of GABSI at the end of June, and we would look to the Queensland Government to also commit its share of funding in the upcoming State Budget. AgForce is keen to see the program settings allow sufficient time for water drillers to complete works within reporting cycles as the current 12 months has proven difficult for projects to be proposed, approved and have the work completed to allow the release of government funding contributions.

AgForce stands ready to work with Governments to develop a new funding model to ensure continued investment in water infrastructure in the Basin. However in doing so, we need to acknowledge the financial pressures on bore owners associated with the ongoing drought and the lengthy recovery period producers will need.

With more than \$75 million in infrastructure improvements still required, it's vital a sensible co-investment approach is developed to carry the program through to completion to deliver benefits for all the industries and communities that rely on a healthy Great Artesian Basin.

- AgForce General President  
Grant Maudsley

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