

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 to 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!

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EDITORIAL

I WAS away last week when the federal government released its 2017 budget, which has the look of a government preparing for election.

It's not the worst budget I've ever seen handed down but there was one glaring omission.

There is still no price signal in carbon and its lack was the elephant trading scheme in the room of Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison's second budget.

The media has dubbed it a "Labor lite" budget, spending big on health care, education and infrastructure and paying for it by taxing the banks.

But its failure to understand the role of carbon in our economy is hobbling Morrison's equally Labor-like promise the budget was a "credible path back to surplus".

Like Wayne Swan in 2011 and 2012, Morrison predicted this would happen in four years but given Turnbull's recent public commentary against an Emissions Trading Scheme it is just as difficult to believe about 2021 as 2016.

Australia's last budget surplus was when the price of iron ore and coal were through the roof. Though the prices for both have increased recently even the government says it is "prudent to assume" neither will return to massive revenues in the future unless they can somehow deal with carbon emissions.

A day before the budget, ABC Four Corners program exposed the energy crisis as a failure in public policy. But a night later its budget analysts in Canberra more or less ignored the issue.

But from talking to small and big businesses I know energy reliability and cost is becoming the single biggest burden on the Australian economy. Government plans such as Snowy 2.0 and putting a reserve price on gas will barely scratch at the surface. Cyclone Debbie was seen as a one-off disaster but one of the predictions of climate change is for stronger and deadlier storms so another Debbie, Yasi or worse in the coming years is hardly out of the question.

Solar and wind barely merited a mention in the budget but they will surely be the key to solving the "debt and deficit disaster". Australian coal is the best in the world but it must remain in the ground for now.

Derek Barry

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