Dear Friends,

The last few months have been challenging times for our Upper Hunter communities having to deal with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, but we should all be proud that on the whole our communities have weathered the crisis well.

Despite the pandemic dominating headlines, throughout this period the business of government has gone on. Your NSW Government has continued to work towards the betterment of our communities, and I have worked to deliver as much funding and infrastructure projects as possible, including funding for drought relief.

In this edition you will find many of those details regarding recent government funding for roads, infrastructure work and funding for our local grass roots organisations, including sporting groups.

There will be challenges ahead, but our work together, yours and mine, will go on to ensure that our local communities maintain their cohesion, and that our towns and regions continue to provide the quality of life for which the Upper Hunter Electorate is so well known.

Kind regards,
Michael Johnsen MP
Member for Upper Hunter
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture and Resources
Earlier this year the Scone community celebrated the opening of the new bypass, delivering safer, faster journeys along the New England Highway.

The five-kilometre bypass, which was delivered ahead of schedule, will improve road safety and reduce travel times for freight and long-distance traffic, by providing an alternative route around the town.

This is another example of the Nationals in Government keeping their commitments and delivering for the Upper Hunter.

The $137 million project was jointly funded by the Federal Liberal and Nationals Government ($65 million) and the NSW Government ($72 million).

The Scone Bypass however is only one of three promised bypasses for the Upper Hunter region, so I wanted to provide you with an update below on the other two bypasses.

New England Highway bypass of Muswellbrook

- The NSW Government is providing $266 million to fund a New England Highway bypass of Muswellbrook. The bypass would improve travel times for long haul freight movements and safety for all road users.
- The first step is selecting a preferred option within the preferred route corridor, which was reaffirmed in options study and report in 2018. The preferred option for the proposed bypass will be displayed for community feedback in late 2020.
- We are also developing the concept design and environmental assessment for future community feedback.
- Planning and investigations are ongoing, including geotechnical investigations which will start in June 2020.
- We expect construction to start in 2022, subject to project approval.

New England Highway bypass of Singleton

- The NSW Government has committed $92 million towards the Singleton bypass under Rebuilding NSW and allocated $2.7 million 2019-20 to continue development of the project.
- The proposed Singleton bypass would save motorists about six minutes in travel time, bypass up to five sets of traffic lights, remove about 15,000 vehicles per day from the town centre and improve safety.
- The project is currently in the planning phase. Stakeholders and the community were invited to provide feedback on the concept design and Review of Environmental Factors (REF) between December 2019 and March 2020. A submissions report summarising community comments, our responses and details of the decision will be made available in the coming months. The report will be published on the project website at nswroads.work/singleton.
- Transport for NSW received a high number of submissions throughout the REF consultation period with a range of suggestions for further consideration.
- Transport for NSW will carry out further planning for the proposed bypass to finalise the concept design.

Rest assured that both Transport NSW and I will continue to keep our Muswellbrook and Singleton communities informed on these projects as they progress.
Our Upper Hunter Electorate secured NSW Government funding from the Stronger Country Communities program which many organisations across our Upper Hunter Electorate will benefit from.

The $400 million Stronger Country Communities Fund is part of the NSW Government’s $1.7 billion Regional Growth Fund, which is being invested in local programs and infrastructure that improve the lives of people living in regional NSW.

26 of our local electorate organisations have received funding, which in total sees $4,394,227 in funding for the seat of Upper Hunter, 9 of which are indicated below beside the map.

UPPER HUNTER RECEIVES 4.3 MILLION FOR STRONGER COUNTRY COMMUNITIES

- $256,252 for Murrurundi Youth Park
- $338,855 for Gloucester Showground Amenities.
- $3,500 for Purchase of PA system and subsidised membership fees at Merriwa Swimming Club Inc
- $52,952.00 for New seating, upgraded shade structures, and landscape design for War Memorial at Cassilis Memorial Park
- $150,000 for Stroud New Horse Sports Arena at Stroud
- $108,900 for Civic Centre Tiered Audience Seating (2x64 seat units) at Singleton Council
- $103,361 for Singleton Civic Centre Courtyard Upgrade at Singleton Council
- $220,154 for Amenities Upgrade at Singleton Rugby Club
- $6,000 for Purchase and installation of basketball backboards and rings at Scone Park at Scone Basketball Association

$300,000 FOR UPPER HUNTER IN 2019 COMMUNITY BUILDING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A couple of months ago our electorate received $300,000 in funding for a total of 19 local community projects through the NSW Government’s 2019 Community Building Partnership Program.

This grassroots funding will directly help create a more vibrant and inclusive local community with positive social, sporting and educational outcomes, which couldn’t be more important at this time.

There were 19 successful projects in Upper Hunter, a handful of which from across the Electorate are shown below.

- $169,000 for Paterson Sportsground Joint Sporting Facility Upgrade
- $350,000 for Quirindi Library Precinct
- $20,000 for Aberdeen Golf Club Fairway Watering System at Aberdeen Golf Club Inc
- $20,000 for Singleton High School Beautification
- $24,000 for Connected Community Meeting Space at Dungog Community Preschool Kindergarten Inc
- $20,000 for Installation of Solar Panels to Lower Environment Footprint at Clarence Town Bowling Sport and Recreation Club Ltd

$86,240 IN FUNDING FOR SPORT ORGANISATIONS

Sport is a vital part of the fabric of our communities in the Upper Hunter Electorate, and sports organisations have been fortunate to share in $4.6 million of grants across NSW to purchase equipment, improve facilities and increase participation opportunities.

The grants will assist local sporting organisations as COVID-19 restrictions slowly ease.

The Local Sport Grants Program awards sporting organisations up to $20,000 for projects which focus on development and participation, access and facility development.

There were 19 successful sporting projects across our Upper Hunter Electorate totaling $86,240, three of which are shown here at the bottom of the map.
The upgrade on the New England Highway between Belford and the Golden Highway is on track to start early next year.

The detailed design for the upgrade is expected to be completed in the coming months and had been shaped by community feedback.

The Nationals in Government are getting on with the job of upgrading the New England Highway to deliver a smoother, safer journey for motorists,” Mr Johnsen said.

This upgrade will provide two lanes in each direction on the New England Highway and a flyover off-ramp for vehicles turning right from the Golden Highway to improve traffic flow, travel times and safety for motorists.

Minor design changes have also been implemented after feedback during the community consultation process.

In particular, a new roundabout on the Golden Highway with a connection to the New England Highway will improve safety for motorists turning left onto the New England Highway towards Singleton and provides safer access to adjoining properties.

Early work will start on site in 2020 and this will include relocating utilities and closing the Whittingham rest area.

The rest area will be removed as part of the upgrade with motorists encouraged to visit the nearby towns of Singleton and Branxton or rest areas on the Hunter Expressway at Branxton and Buchanan and on the New England Highway, north of Singleton.

Transport for NSW will invite construction tenders to build the upgrade in the first half of 2020 and will notify the community of the timing for main construction work.

For more information on the project, please visit rms.work/B2G.
$310 MILLION BOOST TO DROUGHT ASSISTANCE FOR FARMERS AND COMMUNITIES

Despite rain in parts of NSW, most of our state is still in the grip of drought.

However, across NSW and in our local Upper Hunter Electorate, local farmers and communities will continue to receive vital drought assistance with the NSW Government providing a $310 million boost to the Emergency Drought Relief Package.

NSW has done it tough, having endured destructive bushfires, a long, hot summer and COVID-19 restrictions, but the Nationals in Government are determined to help farmers make it out of the worst drought in recorded history.

This funding boost provides the certainty that our local communities, small businesses and farmers need to make important stock and business decisions this winter.”

Support available to drought affected communities and farmers includes:

- $116 million to continue the Drought Transport subsidy
- $99 million to continue waiving of Local Land Services rates, bee site permits, Western Lands lease rent, wild dog fence rates and provide assistance for vehicle registration costs for eligible primary producers
- $28.5 million to continue existing water licence fee waivers for stock, domestic, general and high security water users
- Continuation of health and wellbeing programs, including the Farmgate Counsellors program, Aboriginal wellbeing services and Royal Flying Doctors Far West Drought Support programs.

Primary producers and small businesses already receiving support payments, subsidies, waivers and fee relief from the Emergency Drought Relief Package do not have to reapply.


Murrurundi water pipeline open

Two million litres of water a day, is able to be pumped to the town from Glenbawn Dam, via Scone. This is also a significant step in the creation of water reticulation system for villages along the pipeline.

This pipeline is part of the NSW Government’s ongoing commitment to water infrastructure for regional communities, through the Water Security for Regions program and the $1 billion Safe and Secure Water program.

As well as being on schedule, the project is within the $14.2 million budget, with over $13 million in funding provided by the NSW Government’s Water Security for Regions program established under the Restart NSW Fund. The remainder of the project funding was provided by our local Upper Hunter Shire Council.

New website to create greater connection in the Upper Hunter

Four councils of the Upper Hunter, along with myself, recently came together to launch the Upper Hunter Region Website, an online communication channel to promote catalyst projects, facilitate partnerships, and build the economic diversification network in the Upper Hunter.

The Upper Hunter Region website was developed by the Department of Regional NSW and is a collaboration between Local and State Government, industry and community, led by the Department of Regional NSW with representatives from the University of Newcastle, RDA Hunter, the Hunter Joint Organisation, and Training Services NSW.

This new website will provide new businesses and investors with insight into a region with untapped potential for development and growth.

To discover more, please visit: https://upperhunterregion.com.au