



The Coalition's Plan for Real Action in  
**Regional Australia**

**Stand up for Australia.  
Stand up for real action.**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coalition's plan for regional Australia is built on strong economic management and returning a fair share for the regions.

Regional Australia is usually hit first, hardest and longest during periods of economic slowdown, but we know that panicky deficit budgeting and overhanging debt will rob future generations of a decent standard of living. Our first priority in government will be to restore the Budget surplus and repay the alarming debt Labor has amassed.

The Coalition will put an end to Labor's reckless spending and, as the budgetary situation improves, secure a fair share of investment for regional Australia.

We want to ensure that all Australians have fair access to services like health and education and critical infrastructure such as good roads and telecommunications to unlock regional Australia's potential. We commit ourselves to delivering a fair go to all Australians – no matter where they live.

The Coalition will re-establish a direct relationship with regional Australia. Labor's first budget stripped \$1 billion out of regional programmes. The second budget stripped out even more, and included an emissions trading tax. The third has given us a big, new mining tax.

The Coalition will help build a strong, prosperous and vibrant regional Australia.

Australia's future depends on its regions. Regional Australia makes a major contribution to our national economy, our way of life and our identity as a nation.

## The Coalition's plan for real action in regional Australia will:

### Support regional Development by -

#### 1. Restructuring Regional Development Australia

The Coalition will establish local committees, comprising local leaders drawn from the community, business and government, to set the direction of each Regional Development Australia office.

#### 2. Broadening the Better Regions Programme

The Coalition will invest **\$350 million** to broaden the Better Regions Programme to support capital works, business activity and jobs growth in local communities.

### Connect regional Australia by –

#### 3. Investing in roads

The Coalition knows that Australia needs the best possible transport networks to keep our nation moving and our economy growing. We will progressively work to achieve our vision to upgrade the national road network from north to south, and from east to west. The Coalition will ensure that funding under the restored AusLink programme is directed towards the nation's highest priority road projects.

#### **4. Repairing and rebuilding small road bridges**

The Coalition will invest **\$300 million** to repair and rebuild thousands of ageing and decaying bridges around Australia.

#### **5. Funding the construction of 500 new roadside stops**

The Coalition will provide **\$300 million** to fund the construction of 500 roadside stops.

#### **6. Maintaining the Remote Air Service Subsidy Scheme**

The Coalition will ensure communities in particularly isolated communities continue to receive regular passenger and freight services.

#### **7. Upgrading remote aerodromes**

The Coalition will maintain funding for the Remote Aerodrome Safety Programme to assist in the upgrade of airstrips in remote and isolated communities.

### **Improve education in regional Australia by -**

#### **8. Creating a new Regional Education Fund**

The Coalition will invest **\$1 billion** into a new Regional Education Fund that will provide capital investment and additional support for schools, vocational and education training providers and universities in rural and regional areas.

#### **9. Extending eligibility for Youth Allowance**

The Coalition will extend eligibility to students in the Inner Regional Category.

### **Improve health outcomes in regional Australia by -**

#### **10. Investing in mental health treatment**

The Coalition will fund 800 new mental health beds, provide 60 youth Headspace sites and establish 20 early psychosis centres.

#### **11. Funding 2,800 new public beds**

The Coalition will directly fund 2,800 new public hospital beds to relieve pressure on our public hospitals.

#### **12. Boosting after-hours GP services**

The Coalition will invest **\$165 million** to further support family GP clinics providing access to weekend and after-hours services.

#### **13. Paying annual bonuses to Nurse Practitioners in regional towns**

The Coalition will introduce an annual \$10,000 bonus for up to 300 Nurse Practitioners who choose to practice in towns without resident medical practitioners.

#### **14. Growing the rural health workforce**

The Coalition will double the number of bonded scholarships under the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships scheme and increase the scholarships available for registered nurses in rural and remote areas to undertake qualifications to become Nurse Practitioners.

#### **15. Attracting more rural and regional dentists**

The Coalition will pilot a rural bonded scholarships scheme for dentists.

#### **16. Improving telecommunications in the bush**

The Coalition will improve telecommunications access to regional Australia through a suite of measures. The Coalition's plan will deliver a broadband network, under which 97 percent of premises nationwide are able to be served by high speed networks capable of delivering from 100 Mbps down to a minimum of 12 Mbps peak speed, using a combination of technologies including HFC, DSL and fixed wireless and satellite.

### **Maintain Australia's food security by -**

#### **17. Encouraging more research and development in primary production**

The Coalition will increase the government's contribution from a matching contribution of \$1 for every \$1 raised by industry to \$1.25 for each of the 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations.

#### **18. Upgrading water infrastructure**

The Coalition will make grants of up to \$100,000 available for farming enterprises to undertake water-saving activities such as installing pipes and troughs for stock water, and to improve grazing practices and protect environmental assets. Grants will also be available to introduce renewable energy technologies for pumps. The Coalition will also provide an additional \$200 million, making a total of \$400million, to the Strengthening Basin Communities program to allow Basin Communities to provide for funding to expand their economic and employment opportunities to create more resilient centres of commerce.

#### **19. Establishing a Biosecurity Flying Squad**

The Coalition will provide approximately \$15 million to set up an agency to ensure food integrity.

#### **20. Mapping Australia's agricultural footprint**

With trading partners increasingly demanding an environmental audit of produce, this program would audit the carbon footprint of all of Australia's agricultural production from paddock to plate.

#### **21. Eradicating feral pests**

The Coalition will fund large scale feral animal control and eradication programmes at a cost of \$20 million.

## **22. Increasing and retaining the Brains Trust**

The Coalition will provide \$5 million to ensure we keep our scientists and researchers in Australia.

## **23. Undertaking a 'Green Tape' audit**

The Coalition will provide \$2 million to audit all environmental legislation currently applicable to agriculture at a local, state and federal government level.

## **24. Developing soil carbon technologies**

The Coalition will redirect \$45 million from the Carbon Capture and Storage Flagships programme to the development and implementation of soil carbon technologies, particularly biochar, that aim to capture and sequester carbon in soils.

## **25. Pursuing trade opportunities**

The Coalition will establish the permanent position of Ambassador for Trade Reform and continue funding the Trade Representative for Australia's Agricultural Industries.

## **26. Committing to skills migration and regional Australia**

Within the context of an overall reduction to 170,000 per year (down from the present almost 300,000), the Coalition will refocus the emphasis of the permanent migration programme so that two-thirds will be for the purposes of skilled migration and, within that, the skills needs of regional areas and small business will be prioritised.

## **27. Supporting regional tourism development growth**

The Coalition will provide \$14 million towards domestic tourism development with grants for Regional Tourism Organisations. A further \$40 million will be allocated towards a Tourism Infrastructure and Development Fund and Tourism Research Australia will receive a further \$8 million to identify emerging trends and gaps in the market, such as regional tourism development opportunities.

# HOW LABOR HAS FAILED

After three years of Labor, Australia is heading down the wrong track.

Reckless spending, nearly \$90 billion of debt, a \$57 billion deficit and Labor Government borrowings of more than \$100 million every day have put the Australian economy in a highly vulnerable position.

The Federal Labor Government no longer has a direct relationship with regional Australia.

Labor's first budget stripped \$1 billion out of regional programmes. The second budget stripped out even more, and included an emissions trading tax. The third has given us a big, new mining tax.

Labor has broken its promise and abolished both the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions programmes.

Labor even refused to fund many projects already approved for funding by the former Government.

Labor has abandoned regional development at a critical economic time, leaving regions without support or direct consultative links with the Federal Government. Labor cut almost \$500 million of funding from the Regional Partnerships and Growing Regions programmes and replaced them with programmes of less than \$200 million.

Labor has broken its promise to expand the role of Area Consultative Committees and instead abolished the network. Its replacement, Regional Development Australia, has no programmes to administer and is part of the ever-expanding State Government bureaucracy. More than 500 voluntary committee positions have been terminated and 150 jobs were lost in the transition, in spite of repeated assurances from Minister Anthony Albanese that the jobs were secure.

Under Labor, the Federal Government no longer provides regional development funding direct to community organisations or to the private sector. This has added another layer of bureaucracy. In spite of Labor's rhetoric, Federal Government policies have become remote and fragmented under Labor.

In summary, Labor has a 'Canberra knows best' approach to the regions.

# THE COALITION'S PLAN FOR REAL ACTION IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

The Coalition will take real action to support regional Australia.

Our commitment to regional Australia is significant and enduring. Our commitments stretch across a broad range of policy areas, from communications to health and from agriculture to education.

The Coalition will bring a whole-of-government focus to the issues that affect regional Australia.

The Coalition will:

## Support regional Australia by

### 1. Restructuring Regional Development Australia

Regional Development Australia must build partnerships between government and communities to address the specific needs of regional Australia.

The Coalition will establish local committees, comprising local leaders (drawn from the community), business and government, to set the direction of each Regional Development Australia office. Committee members will be responsible for working with regional stakeholders to prepare plans which identify strategies to strengthen the region.

The restructured Regional Development Australia network will provide a gateway to Federal Government funding programmes, to support local projects and initiatives.

The Coalition will restructure the Regional Development Australia National Advisory Council to make it truly representative of the regions, and enable it to make informed contributions to regional policy development. The new committees will have direct access to senior Ministers and will be consulted on key policy initiatives.

### 2. Broadening the Better Regions Programme

The Coalition will provide an additional **\$350 million** to broaden the Better Regions Programme.

The Better Regions Programme will provide funding for community and economic projects, including those that are supported by state and local governments, the community, private enterprise and individuals.

The additional funding for the Better Regions Programme will allow for local communities across Australia to build on existing infrastructure and services. It will assist regions to build their strengths, and improve involvement in community participation.

Many sporting clubs and other community groups rely on either public funds or volunteers for their maintenance. A Coalition Government will recognise the central role that these groups play in community life by directly funding essential maintenance and infrastructure projects to ensure that these facilities can continue to be enjoyed into the future.

## Connect regional Australia by -

### 3. Investing in Roads

The Coalition knows that Australia needs the best possible transport networks to keep our nation moving and our economy growing. We will progressively work to achieve our vision to upgrade the national road network from north to south, from east to west. The Coalition will ensure that funding under the restored AusLink programme is directed towards the nation's highest priority road projects. The Coalition will:

- Complete the duplication of the Pacific Highway;
- Complete the duplication of the Bruce Highway from Cooroy to Curra;
- Construct the Toowoomba second range crossing by 2017;
- Duplicate the Princes Highway between Colac and Sale through Melbourne, ultimately providing a divided road all the way from regional Victoria to north of Gympie via Sydney and Brisbane;
- Continue upgrading the highway east of Adelaide with the eventual goal of completing a four lane road from Adelaide to Melbourne;
- Support key road improvements in Western Australia such as building the Mirabooka Bypass and the Manning Road on ramp and fund larger projects, including supporting the Accelerated Upgrade Package on the Great Northern and Victoria Highways, the grade separation of the Great Eastern and Roe Highway Interchange in northeast Perth, the widening of the Great Eastern Highway from Kooyong Road to the Tonkin Highway and upgrading of the roads around Perth Airport;
- Begin the upgrade of the Bell's Line of Road across the Blue Mountains;
- Continue work on upgrading the Outback Way;
- Provide funding of up to \$40 million per year for ten years from 1 July 2014 as the federal contribution to duplicate the Midland Highway in Tasmania.

### 4. Repairing and rebuilding small road bridges

Through AusLink, the Coalition will allocate \$300 million over four years, to be matched by the States and local governments, to restore and rebuild local road bridges. There are over 20,000 small road bridges, many in disrepair or decay. These bridges are often the only way local communities can access the broader road network, getting people to work and school. The funding will be allocated on a transparent, merit-based competitive assessment basis.

## **5. Funding the construction of 500 new Roadside stops**

The Coalition will provide \$300 million over the next ten years to fund the construction of 500 roadside stops. Truck drivers face mandated rest breaks as a result of the recently enacted national heavy vehicle driver fatigue reforms, yet most State highways and significant sections of the AusLink national road network are not compliant with the rest area guidelines issued by the National Transport Commission. In the interim, the Coalition will support some flexibility in the new fatigue guidelines in areas where no suitable rest areas are available.

## **6. Maintaining the Remote Air Service Subsidy Scheme**

The Coalition will maintain the Remote Air Service Subsidy Scheme (RASS) so that isolated communities continue to receive regular passenger and freight services. The Coalition will preserve the En Route Charges Scheme to commercial airline carriers, with priority given to supporting low volume and new routes and services to small and remote communities. This scheme fully refunds Air Services Australia's air navigation charges for a number of regional airlines and aero-medical operators such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

## **7. Upgrading remote aerodromes**

A Coalition Government will maintain funding for the Remote Aerodrome Safety Program to assist in the upgrade of airstrips in remote and isolated communities.

## **Improve Education in regional Australia by -**

### **8. Creating a new Regional Education Fund**

The Coalition will create a \$1 billion Regional Education Fund, to be used to bridge the education gap and address the issues which lead to under-achievement in the regions. This Fund will be used to invest in twenty-first century education and communication tools to improve learning opportunities in the regions and programmes that encourage quality teachers to move to and stay in regional and remote schools.

The Fund will support capital investment in regional universities, as well as initiatives by universities, especially regional universities, to offer innovative educational opportunities for country students and to provide extra material support for students who need to move to obtain higher education.

The Coalition also wants to encourage students to complete Year 12 and to support them when they move away from home to higher education. To oversee this new commitment, the Coalition will appoint a Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education.

We will establish a dedicated regional education unit in the Education Department.

Only the Coalition is committed to review ongoing inequities affecting regional students and ensuring that these areas receive the attention and resources they need to provide the highest quality education

## **9. Extending eligibility for Youth Allowance**

The Coalition will relax the eligibility criteria for the Independent Youth Allowance which will be extended to students in the Inner Regional Category. Those students who have to move away from home and whose parents earn less than \$150,000 will be eligible for the independent youth allowance under the criteria which applied under the previous Coalition Government.

Labor changed the rules for the Independent Youth Allowance leaving thousands of students, especially in regional areas, no longer eligible and denying them the resources to access a tertiary education. Students from regional areas are much less likely to finish Year 12 than their metropolitan counterparts, and are significantly under-represented in tertiary education.

Under pressure from the Coalition and student groups, Labor eventually relaxed the criteria for students in the most remote regional areas, but more than 20,000 students in inner regional areas continue to be disadvantaged.

It is clear that the Youth Allowance system does not fairly address the particular problems and additional costs faced by distant families with a university or TAFE education. In Government the Coalition will, in consultation with student, parent and school organisations, move to establish a new, targeted program to support families with children forced to leave home for tertiary study especially from rural and regional areas.

## **Improve Health Outcomes in regional Australia by -**

### **10. Investing in mental health treatment**

The Coalition will provide a nationwide network of staged care to assist Australians access quality mental health services and pursue productive and fulfilling lives.

The Coalition will provide \$440 million in funding towards 20 Early Psychosis Intervention Centres in major metropolitan and regional areas. We will also provide \$832 million in funding towards 800 beds for acute and sub-acute care specifically to support the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centres. The Coalition will provide \$225 million towards an additional 60 Headspace sites, as recommended by leading mental health clinicians.

Early psychosis intervention is recognised by the majority of those working at the frontline of mental health as the next priority in addressing Australia's mental health challenges. It was a key recommendation of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission. Labor has failed to provide the resources necessary for this proven model of care.

### **11. Funding 2,800 new hospital beds**

To relieve pressure on our public hospital systems and address access blocks for emergency departments, the Coalition will directly fund 2,800 new public beds over the next four years. This includes the 800 new mental health beds. The Coalition's plan will deliver 1,500 more beds than the Rudd-Gillard Government has promised as part of its National Health and Hospital Network.

## **12. Boosting after-hours GP services**

A Coalition Government will provide \$165 million over four years towards supporting family GP clinics to provide access to weekend and after-hours services. The Coalition wants to encourage more practices to remain open in the evenings and on weekends. Giving greater financial incentives to provide minor after-hours emergency services by experienced GPs will relieve some of the pressure on public hospital emergency departments. The Coalition will retain and strengthen the After-Hours Practice Incentive Payment to ensure quality after-hours care coordinated by a GP is affordable and accessible for all patients. To assist patients and general practitioners with the costs of after-hours care, a Coalition Government will provide \$140 million to increase Medicare rebates for a range of after-hours consultations and \$25 million to increase the Practice Incentive Payment.

## **13. Paying annual bonuses to Nurse Practitioners in regional towns**

A substantial number of small regional centres do not have resident medical practitioners because of the difficulty of establishing economically viable practices in these areas. The Coalition will introduce an annual \$10,000 bonus for up to 300 Nurse Practitioners who choose to practice in these centres. It is envisaged that the bonus will be provided to Nurse Practitioners who choose to practice in remote communities that have no resident medical practitioner. The Coalition will provide \$12 million over four years towards the cost of this programme.

## **14. Growing the rural health workforce**

The Coalition will double the number of bonded scholarships under the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships scheme from 100 to 200. These scholarships offer \$24,207 per annum for students who study medicine and commit to a bonded term of six years in a rural community. However, the length of the bonded term is a significant deterrent to its uptake. The Coalition will reduce the length of the bonded term to three years. The scholarships will apply for the duration of the student's course. The Coalition will provide an additional \$10 million over four years towards the enhanced Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships programme.

The Coalition will also increase the scholarships available for registered nurses in regional and remote areas to pursue qualifications to become Nurse Practitioners. The Federal Government funds scholarships of up to \$15,000 per annum for two years full-time study or the part-time equivalent for the duration of their course. The Coalition will fund an additional 100 scholarships for nurses and midwives working in regional and remote areas to undertake postgraduate training to become Nurse Practitioners. The Coalition will provide \$3.1 million over four years towards this programme.

## **15. Attracting more rural and regional dentists**

To address the shortage of dental care in rural areas, the Coalition will pilot a rural bonded scholarships scheme for dentists. An initial 20 scholarships will be offered on similar terms to the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships. The Coalition will consider funding additional scholarships, subject to evaluation of progress of the pilot scheme. The Coalition will provide \$2 million over four years towards this initiative.

## 16. Improving telecommunications in the bush

Australians need fast, reliable and affordable broadband services – delivered over an affordable high speed broadband network using the best mix of optical fibre, wireless, DSL and satellite technologies. The Coalition's plan will deliver a uniform national broadband network, under which 97 percent of premises nationwide are able to be served by high speed networks capable of delivering from 100 Mbps down to a minimum of 12 Mbps peak speed, using a combination of technologies including HFC, DSL and fixed wireless and satellite.

In order to significantly increase the number of households which can receive a DSL service or high speed equivalent, the Coalition will commit \$750 million of funding for a 'Fixed Broadband Optimisation' grant programme to fill gaps in regional and remote areas as quickly as possible.

The Coalition will commit up to \$1 billion in grant funding for new fixed wireless networks in rural and remote Australia. Fixed wireless networks can be rolled out more quickly than fixed networks, fixed wireless networks have a lower capital cost (reducing the scope of subsidy required and also increasing the probability of private sector entry) and fixed wireless networks perform well as an overlay to fixed networks to fill the gap, for example in areas which are too far from an exchange to receive DSL services. To ensure prices to end users in rural and regional Australia are comparable to those for similar services in metropolitan areas, the operator(s) of these wireless broadband networks will be required to provide a service over the network at a price comparable to similar DSL services in metropolitan areas. The requirement will apply for the life of the contract (expected to be fifteen years).

The Coalition will provide grant funding to address mobile coverage blackspots in urban and rural areas. We will provide \$30 million to support the deployment of the telecommunications infrastructure necessary to ensure communities have adequate and reliable mobile phone coverage.

To ensure Australians living in regional areas have a voice in the future of telecommunications the National Broadband Commission's board will include people with experience and knowledge of rural telecommunications.

The Universal Service Obligation is a key safeguard for consumers ensuring Australians in rural and remote communities have access to essential telephone services and payphones. The Coalition supports the need for enhanced consumer protections within the existing Universal Service Obligation Framework. We will review the USO to see whether it should be replaced with a broader framework as recommended by the Glasson Review.

## Maintaining Australia's food security by -

### **17. Encouraging more research and development in primary production**

Productivity has levelled out in the agriculture sector after years of growth. Increasing cost pressures on farmers – particularly in inputs such as energy and fertilisers – are starting to make good farms unviable. Agriculture research and development has been scaled back, particularly at a state level. At the federal level, Labor has shifted funding out of research designed to boost our economic productivity towards research for environmental purposes. Australia needs new developments to provide farmers with the tools to help them maintain a competitive advantage in the market place. From 1 July 2011, the Coalition will increase the Federal Government's contribution to research and development from a matching contribution of \$1 for every \$1 raised by industry to \$1.25 for each of the 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations. This will increase research funding by up to \$150 million over the next three years.

### **18. Upgrading water infrastructure**

Too much of Australia's water is lost due to poor water storage and evaporation. Improved on-farm water infrastructure and management practices could help prevent these valuable water losses. The Coalition will introduce a 'Water Works' programme to provide grants to help farmers save water. Grants of up to \$100,000 will be made available for farming enterprises to undertake water-saving activities such as installing pipes and troughs for stock water, and to improve grazing practices and protect environmental assets. Grants will also be available to introduce renewable energy technologies for pumps. The Coalition will provide \$50 million over four years for this initiative.

The Coalition will also provide an additional \$200 million, making a total of \$400million, to the Strengthening Basin Communities program to allow Basin Communities to provide for funding to expand their economic and employment opportunities to create more resilient centres of commerce.

### **19. Establishing a Biosecurity Flying Squad**

Maintaining our clean, green, disease-free status is vital for the future of agricultural production in Australia. Any outbreak of imported disease could wipe out entire sectors of the industry, leading to the loss of billions of dollars of income and thousands of Australian jobs. The Coalition will restore funding of \$93.1 million to reverse Labor's cuts and dramatically improve Customs' capacity to inspect incoming cargo. This additional funding will enable Customs to inspect an estimated additional 52,500 sea cargo consignments and at least 7.5 million additional air cargo consignments. The Coalition will also provide \$15 million to establish a special agency to provide urgent additional resources when a bio-security risk is identified. The new agency will also randomly audit quarantine facilities and procedures, identifying problems and resolving them through direct co-operation with relevant agencies and industry.

## **20. Mapping Australia's agricultural footprint**

There is increasing concern that some countries may use environmental issues as a trade barrier. In some cases, trading partners are demanding an environmental audit of produce and concepts such as the United Kingdom's 'Food Miles'. Often these give a distorted picture of the real environmental impact of food production - to the detriment of Australia's exporters. It is important that, as a large exporting nation, Australia is able to prove our reputation as a supplier of clean, green products is factual and defended in the global market place. For example, Australian lamb uses about half the energy per kilogram of the equivalent United Kingdom produced kilo of lamb, even when transport is taken into account. This \$8 million program would be a third party auditable map of the carbon foot print of all of Australia's agricultural production, from paddock to plate. This will then be used to ensure that our primary products can compete in the global market place.

## **21. Eradicating feral pests**

According to the CSIRO, pest animals directly cost Australian agriculture more than \$740 million per annum. This does not include long-term losses associated with land degradation, native vegetation destruction and the loss of native wildlife. Australia's most destructive pests include rabbits, wild dogs, foxes, feral pigs, cane toads and feral camels. Rabbits, in particular, are again on the increase and have built up a resistance to biological controls employed in the past. The Coalition believes that control programmes must be put in place now before too many pest animals once again reach plague proportions. The Coalition will commit \$20 million over four years towards a large scale Feral Animal Control Programme.

## **22. Increasing and retaining the Brains Trust**

Australia needs to replenish our agricultural scientific 'brains trust' and ensure our scientists and researchers remain in Australia. Future Australian productivity relies on keeping our best minds working in Australian agricultural science. The Coalition will establish a \$5 million four-year pilot programme offering grants of up to \$50,000 for specialised research, mentoring or further study. The programme will provide access to mentoring and professional development in the applicant's chosen fields, especially in areas where Australia currently lacks skills such as taxonomy (discovery, description, identification and classification of organisms) and entomology (study of insects).

## **23. Undertaking a 'Green Tape' audit**

An incoming Coalition Government will immediately commence an audit of all environmental legislation and regulation at local, State and Federal levels. The audit will identify the 'green tape' which is unworkable, contradictory or incompatible with other legislation, affects food production or puts Australian lives at risk. The audit will also look at the impact environmental legislation can have on property rights. The Coalition will commit \$2 million to this initiative.

## **24. Developing soil carbon technologies**

The single largest opportunity for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction in Australia is through bio-sequestration, especially the replenishment of our soil carbons. It is also the lowest cost CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction available in Australia on a large scale. It also has the added benefit of improving soil quality, farm productivity and water efficiency. The Coalition will redirect \$45 million from the Carbon Capture and Storage Flagships programme to the development and implementation of soil carbon technologies, particularly biochar, that aim to capture and sequester carbon in soils.

## **25. Pursuing trade opportunities**

The Coalition will establish the permanent position of Ambassador for Trade Reform. We will continue funding the Trade Representative for Australia's Agricultural Industries and establish Trade Representatives for Australia's Manufacturing Industries and Services Industries. We will make greater use of the WTO dispute settlement system more aggressively to ensure that markets are not unfairly closed to our exporters. The Coalition will pursue Free Trade Agreements with China, Japan, Malaysia, the Gulf Co-operation Council, the Republic of Korea and Indonesia that are comprehensive and provide real benefits for Australian exporters. We will increase the Export Market Development Grant Scheme cap to \$200 million.

## **26. Committing to skills migration and regional Australia**

Within the context of an overall reduction to 170,000 per year (down from the present almost 300,000), the Coalition will refocus the emphasis of the permanent migration programme so that two-thirds will be for the purposes of skilled migration, and within that the skills needs of regional areas and small business will be prioritised. A Coalition Government will also seek to resettle more entrants from our refugee and humanitarian programme in regional areas, where resettlement programmes have proven to be highly successful.

## **27. Supporting regional tourism development growth**

The Coalition will provide \$14 million over four years towards Domestic Tourism Development with grants of up to \$100,000 per annum for Regional Tourism Organisations. A further \$40 million over four years will be allocated towards a Tourism Infrastructure and Development Fund to drive investment in the tourism sector and provide grants to support projects that help to drive the development of local tourism. Tourism Research Australia will receive a further \$8 million to investigate ways to make the industry more sustainable and to identify emerging trends and gaps in the market, such as regional tourism development opportunities.