

Budget response mixed

JENNY DENTON

THERE have been mixed reactions from rural Victoria to the State budget. Victorian Nationals leader and Member for Murray Plains, Peter Walsh, criticised the budget as a “bundled up collection” of recurrent funding that was already in place, which lacked “a dedicated fund” to drive decentralisation and population growth in regional Victoria,” as the Regional Growth Fund set up by the state coalition previously had.

While Mr Walsh claimed the budget showed “the Premier has no plan, no vision and no money for regional Victoria”, upper house Labor member for Northern Victoria, Mark Gepp said it delivered “plenty for the Mallee,” citing a \$150 million new jobs and investment fund, \$880 million over five years for the introduction of 3-year-old kindergarten, funding for youth services and more regional payroll tax reductions.

The Victorian Farmers Federation noted “some positive commitments but a number of glaring funding gaps for agriculture” in the budget.

The VFF was pleased with the \$486 million allocation for regional roads and the prospect of a further reduction in payroll tax for rural and regional businesses - to 1.2125 per cent, a quarter of the metropolitan rate - in 2022-23.

It welcomed an increase of \$152.5 for biosecurity, funding for an on-farm safety campaign and farmer health checks, and \$7.2 million in support for agricultural careers, including training for shearers.

But the Government had “missed an opportunity to fund dedicated agriculture liaison officers in Victoria Police to

help fight farm crime,” the organisation said.

It also pointed to a lack of funding for a rural and regional energy network, and a lack of “desperately needed rates relief while we wait for the rates review to unfold.”

VFF president, David Jochinke also described as “disappointing” the lack of a clear commitment to a completion date for the Murray Basin rail project.

With much of the budget’s regional funding going to city projects, municipal leadership group Regional Cities Victoria was broadly positive in its response, particularly to the planned payroll tax reduction, which would “make doing business in regional Victoria an even more attractive proposition,” the group said.

RCV acknowledged the funding of “a suite of transport, health, tourism and education programs and infrastructure programs.”

“We saw some strong commitments for regional Victoria by the Government before the election, and we’re pleased to see these delivered in the budget,” Regional Cities Victoria chair, Cr Margaret O’Rourke, said.

According to the Murray River group of councils - which includes Gannawarra, Loddon and Swan Hill shires - there were few surprises when the budget was released.

“Most of the money is going towards meeting the Government’s 2018 election commitments,” executive officer Geoff Turner said.

“Given the significant fall in stamp duty revenues the Government has experienced, expectations were pretty low.”

Mr Turner said the group would be meeting next week to discuss the budget in more depth.

BUDGET SPEND

IN the budget:

- \$486 million to upgrade country roads;
- \$100 million increase to the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund;
- \$136 million for an additional 500,000 regional medical specialist appointments over four years
- Further regional payroll tax reductions in 2022-23;
- \$59.5 million for a new rehabilitation centre at Bendigo Hospital;
- \$152 million for regional court headquarters in Bendigo;
- \$49.6 million for three new railway stations around Bendigo;
- three new regional parenting centres in Bendigo;
- \$149 million to build, plan and upgrade regional schools, including Inglewood Primary and East Loddon P-12 in Loddon shire;
- \$109 million for new paramedics and vehicles, with single-officer branches at Charlton, Inglewood, Rochester and St Arnaud to be transformed into dual-officer crews;
- Upgrades to all Victorian regional passenger lines;
- Funding for regional youth services
- \$880 million over five years for the introduction of 3-year-old kinder, which will be rolled out first in rural Victoria;
- \$322 million to bring back dental vans to provide free dental care for students in government schools;
- \$32 million for tourism initiatives, particularly in regional Victoria;
- \$5 million to promote Australian wine internationally.

MISSING

Absent from the budget:

- Funding for council rate relief;
- Funding for new long haul trains for regional Victoria;
- Provision for a rural and regional energy network;
- Funding commitment for dedicated officers to tackle farm crime;
- Funding for Leitchville CFA station;
- Funding for Cohuna Hospital;
- Funding for Swan Hill hospital;
- Funding for Swan Hill Specialist School

‘River Country’ brand on the border

MURRAY River Council has revealed its new tourism brand, designed to reinforce the area’s status as a major river-based tourism destination.

“River Country” will soon be used as Council’s primary tourism identity name as new collateral and digital information tools are rolled out this year.

The mayor, Cr Chris Bilkey said the new brand accurately reflects the tourism offering of the region.

“The brand name of ‘River Country’ clearly explains the tourism offering,” he said.

“The word River recognises the mighty Murray, but importantly also recognises the other rivers across the council that give life to the communities and are assets for the local tourism industry.”

“By including the word Country the assets that are not on the

Murray, or necessarily on other rivers, are also recognised, creating the image of welcoming communities, open space and nature,” he said.

The identity also allows for a variety of regional assets to fit easily under the brand; including the red gum forests, the Aboriginal heritage, the farming villages, the food trail, the river experiences and many more.

The brand also delivers a tag line - “Where the best memories are made” – providing a visual depiction of what holidaying in the region is all about.

The new brand was developed by council’s economic development and tourism team, supported by robust research and sensible rationale.

Council’s economic development and tourism manager, John Harvie said the brand not only emphasises the area’s offer-

ing, but will also deliver a unified tourism identity through strong imagery and visual style.

“The new brand is a clear and appealing representation of what the area is famous for,” he said.

“The use of earth tones will harmonise with the colours found within the region and complements the simple yet effective brand name.

“ ‘River Country’ ensures that the whole Council is accurately represented and is now the catalyst to tie everything together in regards to destination marketing for this area.”

Residents will start to see Murray River Council’s new tourism brand in action when a new visitors guide and website is unveiled in spring 2019.

It will also continue to be rolled out across a number of mediums in consultation with local groups and operators.

People can also hear the brand development story at council’s budget and brand reveal community information sessions, held at the following locations:

MATHOURA: Tuesday, June 4, 6pm, Mathoura Visitor & Business Centre.

MOAMA: Wednesday, June 5, 6pm, Moama Seniors Community Centre.

MURRAY DOWNS: Thursday, June 6, 6pm, Murray Downs Club.

BARHAM: Tuesday, June 11, 6pm, Riverside Reception Rooms, Murray Street.

TOOLEYBUC: Wednesday, June 12, 6pm, Tooleybuc Sporting Club.

MOULAMEIN: Monday, June 17, 5.30pm, Moulamein Bowling Club, Endeavour Drive.

A date for Wakool will be determined in the coming week.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Every Thursday: Weekly Storytime, intended for 2-5 year olds. 11am at Sir John Gorton Library

Every Sunday: Jacqui’s Dog Obedience, Nancarrow Park, Kerang at 9am. Enquiries: 0427 521 350.

JUNE

Saturday 8: Bus Stop Recycle Shop Garage Sale, 9am – 12 noon.

Monday 10: Queen’s Birthday.

Monday 10: Kerang Show Society Poultry Auction, 10am.

Saturday 22: Kerang Community Market, 9am – 12 noon.

Thursday 27: Kerang Senior Citizens Luncheon, 12 noon.

JULY

Thursday 25: Kerang Senior Citizens Luncheon, 12 noon.

Saturday 27: Kerang Community Market, 9am – 12 noon.

AUGUST

Saturday 24: Kerang Community Market, 9am – 12 noon.

Thursday 29: Kerang Senior Citizens Luncheon, 12 noon.

SEPTEMBER

Saturday 8: Bus Stop Recycle Shop Garage Sale, 9am – 12 noon.

Thursday 26: Kerang Senior Citizens Luncheon, 12 noon.

Friday 27: AFL Grand Final Friday.

Saturday 28: Kerang Community Market, 9am – 12 noon.

OCTOBER

Saturday 13: Bus Stop Recycle Shop Garage Sale, 9am – 12 noon.

Saturday 26: Kerang Community Market, 9am – 12 noon.

Thursday 31: Kerang Senior Citizens luncheon, 12 noon.

NOVEMBER

Tuesday 5: Melbourne Cup.

Saturday 10: Bus Stop Recycle Shop Garage Sale, 9am – 12 noon.

Saturday 23: Kerang Community Market, 9am – 12 noon.

Thursday 28: Kerang Senior Citizens Luncheon, 12 noon.

Only events that are advertised in Gannawarra Times will be included in the Calendar of events



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