



08 OCT, 2020

Tax breaks, aid for recovery

Kalgoorlie Miner, Kalgoorlie

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TOM ZAUNMAYR

Budget No.1 for the week has been laid out and, with it, tax windfalls and thousands of jobs promised.

The headline-grabbing item was a bevy of tax breaks which could see an extra \$20 per week in the pockets of low and middle-income earners this month if Labor supports the move.

A bigger windfall — dependent on income — will be available once tax returns are lodged at the end of the financial year.

Among the piles of papers were a selection of key measures which affect the Goldfields-Esperance region.

Attention now turns to the WA Government's Budget to be handed down at 2.15pm today.

Cashless debit card

A minor change in wording for the cashless debit card's budgetary allotment foreshadowed an important policy change.

Until Tuesday the phrase "cashless debit card" had been followed by the word "trial".

No longer. Tuesday's Budget committed "ongoing" funding to the income management program for current trial sites such as the Goldfields.

Federal Member for O'Connor Rick Wilson said legislation would be on the table shortly.

"The legislation is going to be introduced if not this week, in the next sitting week, so it is a matter of the Government has made the decision and we are going to implement it," he said.

The Federal Government hopes to cement the card as a permanent fixture in Australia's welfare mix by the end of the year.

Mining

The critical minerals industry, of which rare earths miner Lynas plays a key role, will ben-

efit from \$2b in funding under the Research and Development Tax Incentive.

Also on the cards is a \$1.2b allocation for 100,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships to subsidise their wage and fund a further 2000 Indigenous students through Clontarf.

Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA chief executive Paul Everingham said these measures would encourage investment.

"While WA mining and resources operations have been able to safely and effectively continue throughout the pandemic, global competition is increasingly intense and we can never take it for granted that this investment will continue," he said.

Mr Everingham said budget measures to boost female and Indigenous employment and improve mental health services would benefit the resources sector.

BHP boss Mike Henry yesterday applauded the Budget's jobs focus.

"We've said for some time now that we're in absolute agreement with what the Prime Minister has been saying around this needing to be a business-led recovery with a strong focus on jobs," he said.

Drought

The National Water Infrastructure Development Fund has more than doubled to \$3.5b to fund dams, weirs, pipelines, water recycling plants and other projects over the next 10 years.

Under the plan, work will continue to establish the National Water Grid to secure reliable water supply for regional Australia.

Mr Wilson said it was not yet

known how much of the \$50 million top-up to the On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme would flow to WA.

Mr Wilson said it was now over to the State Government to put funding on the table.

The Drought Communities Program, which has caused significant friction in WA between farmers, pastoralists and all three tiers of government, will continue.

Local government

\$1b will flow to councils through the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program on top of an existing \$500m kitty announced in May.

The program invests in shovel-ready projects such as roads and community facilities put forward by local governments.

The Financial Assistance Grant program, which directs money to councils to spend on priority projects, has received a shot in the arm too.

"This year's allocation of \$2.6 billion is the highest ever under the Financial Assistance Grant program and I also encourage regional councils to take advantage of the Coalition's \$200 million injection into the highly successful Building Better Regions Fund," Federal Local Government Minister Mark Coulton said.

An extra \$400 million will fund the Roads to Recovery Program for another year.

Agriculture

The Federal Government's \$328 million support package for agriculture will make the industry a core focus of Australia's COVID-19 recovery, Agriculture Minister David Littleproud says.

Businesses with a turnover of up to \$5 billion will be able to deduct immediately the full



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cost of eligible depreciable assets, a move the Government says will assist 99 per cent of business.

"This suite of reforms will modernise Australia's export systems by slashing red-tape and streamlining regulation and service delivery for our farmers," Mr Littleproud said.

"We're making it faster and cheaper for farmers to get their product to market, while retaining the levels of quality and assurance that have made our exports world-class."

WA Farmers chief executive Trevor Whittington welcomed the \$80 million set aside for the Wheatbelt Secondary Freight Route Network.

"The Federal Government needs to realise the grainbelt is not just the Wheatbelt, it includes Esperance and the Great Southern, so hopefully they're not going to miss out," he said.

He said the biggest advantage for farmers was the acceleration of tax deductions.

Infrastructure

Some \$1.1 billion was committed to WA transport infrastructure in Tuesday night's Budget, including \$16 million to seal 17km of the Wiluna-Meekatharra Road and \$9.6m for Goldfields-Esperance Highway.

RAC corporate affairs general manager Will Goldsby said the funding was welcome.

However, Mr Goldsby said delivery of the full Regional Road Safety Improvement Program remained uncertain.

Other

The Stronger Communities Programme will be funded for a sixth round with \$22.7m. It offers grants of \$2500 to \$20,000 to community projects.

**With Shannon Verhagen and
Stuart McKinnon**



Rick Wilson



Paul Everingham



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Trevor Whittington