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Media release



Treasurer, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
The Honourable Curtis Pitt

Regional and rural Queensland benefit from additional Budget funding

The Palaszczuk Government's first Budget features additional funding and new programs to benefit regional and rural areas of Queensland.

Treasurer Curtis Pitt said rural and regional Queensland would see a significant proportion of infrastructure funding allocated in the Budget, with around \$4.8 billion of the overall \$10.1 billion for 2015-16 spent in these communities.

Mr Pitt said the Palaszczuk Government recognised the paramount importance of Queensland's regions and its rural areas.

"Regional and rural Queensland are part of Queensland's core – they fundamentally shape who and what we are as a State.

"Queensland is our nation's most decentralised State, and as a government we are focussed on supporting families, creating jobs and fostering economic development in regional and rural areas."

The Budget initiatives include \$200 million for a new Building our Regions program, more than \$50 million for drought relief measures, \$180 million for a new hospitals refurbishment program and a \$40 million western roads funding package.

"We have decided to bring forward an initial \$100 million in funding for the Building our Regions program to this financial year," Mr Pitt said.

"This means that projects can begin six months earlier than originally anticipated, with regional communities seeing important infrastructure projects get underway.

"A further \$100 million will be available in 2016-2017."

Mr Pitt said the Budget provided an additional \$180 million to address the state's most urgent health infrastructure through a new Enhancing Regional Hospitals program.

The investment would fund upgrades and repairs at the Roma, Hervey Bay, Gladstone and Caloundra hospitals.

For the State's north, the Budget allocates \$90 million over four years for a new primary school and towards a new high school in Townsville, and \$25 million over two years for a new special education school in Cairns to open in 2017.

The Budget also sets aside \$438.2 million as a Community Service Obligation payment to help households and small businesses in regional Queensland meet the cost of their

help households and small businesses in regional Queensland meet the cost of their electricity bills.

"The Palaszczuk Government remains committed to providing subsidies to families and households in regional Queensland," Mr Pitt said.

"Without this subsidy, households in places such as Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa would pay between 30 and 140 per cent more for their electricity than people in the south east."

Mr Pitt said the Budget included funding of \$52.1 million over four years for much-needed drought relief for primary producers in regional and rural areas.

The Budget also provides \$5 million to fund a three-year program to address the problems caused by wild dogs and feral cats in Queensland.

Mr Pitt said 14 priority road projects would be undertaken across western Queensland over the next two years as part of a \$40 million road funding package.

"We recognise the importance of a safe and reliable road network for people who live and work in western Queensland. In many ways, roads are the lifeblood of many rural and regional communities."

"This \$40 million investment will deliver a safer and more reliable road network for communities in western parts of the state. It will also provide jobs at a time when jobs and job security are more important than ever.

"It will keep road crews on the job in the north west and the south west of our State, regions which are doing it tough as a result of the drought.

"Central Queensland has also been doing it tough in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone.

"In recognition of this, the Budget provides \$25 million to revitalise the Yeppoon foreshore and \$15 million to revitalise the Rockhampton riverbank."

Likewise, regional and rural Queensland would benefit from a statewide \$763.4 million investment in state school maintenance over four years – including an uplift of \$300 million – of which \$178 million was to be spent in 2015-16.

In addition, councils in regional and rural areas would be able to access a new \$40 million Community Resilience Fund to help mitigate against natural disasters, and \$23 million in funding through the Local Government Grants and Subsidies program for shovel-ready projects to build vital community infrastructure.

Other Budget initiatives to support regional and rural Queensland include:

- \$9.8 million in 2015-16 to continue to respond to the potentially devastating Panama disease tropical race 4 threatening the state's banana industry
- \$5.8 million over two years for phase 4 of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative, assisting landholders to rehabilitate uncontrolled flowing bores and to replace open bore drains with piped water reticulation systems
- \$24.1 million over two years to boost regional transport services
- \$10 million for a Mobile Black Spot Program that will expand and improve mobile phone coverage and promote digital connectivity.

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