

# AUSTRALIAN CONSERVATIVES

Investing in Rural and Regional South Australia

Election 2018





# Australian Conservatives

*...a better way for South Australia*

The Australian Conservatives *Investing in Rural and Regional South Australia* policy is a plan aimed at boosting rural and regional economies, growing jobs and addressing the ever-widening gap between services and investment in country regions compared to city and metropolitan areas.

We believe that Regional South Australians have been let down by a city-centric government and that bad governance, poor planning, and lack of investment have taken their toll. Nobody should have to fight for basic needs or beg a government for crumbs, no matter where they live, yet this is where 16 years of Labor rule has left many of our rural communities.

Australian Conservatives propose a better way for South Australia. A way that includes long term planning for the state as a whole, where financially responsible management and plans combine to boost business, reduce red tape, and grow jobs. Plans where regional people are treated as equal to their city-counterparts.

This document is an outline of the Australian Conservatives plan for investing in regional and rural South Australia. As a farmer and country person I am extremely aware of the importance of country S.A.



**Member of Parliament**  
**Proudly representing rural South Australia**



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## Australian Conservatives Regional Goals

- To govern for all South Australians and plan for growth in our regions.
- Australian Conservatives goal is to see a greater focus on the needs of regional and rural South Australia through changes in taxation, cutting of red tape, investment in health, infrastructure, agricultural R&D and water security.
- Stop the city-centric focus of government.
- To set up a Rural, Regional and Agriculture Standing Committee which would bring a strong and real voice to the parliament and Government of South Australia.
- The Rural, Regional and Agriculture Standing Committee would maintain a continual focus on the benefits, challenges, growth opportunities and needs of agriculture in South Australia – to be funded by abolition of obsolete committees with duplicated or redundant functions.
- Introduce Rural and Regional Parliaments. Holding a session of parliament in a regional area on a bi-annual basis so that rural and regional people can see how the parliament operates and the parliament/government can gain a better understanding of country South Australia.



## Growing Jobs and the Economy

Rural and Regional South Australia is an economic powerhouse for the state, contributing around 25% of the Gross State Product. In 2015/16 the regions contributed around \$25 billion, a figure that has grown strongly by 4.4 per cent per annum in the past nine years. Agriculture continues to grow significantly and this increase in earnings flows to the rest of the state's economy.

### FACTS

- Stifling taxes stop business growth and create barriers to job creation no matter where businesses are placed. Australian Conservatives believes Payroll Tax and Stamp Duties must be repealed to encourage business growth and investment across the state.
- As such our policy is to increase **business growth and investment by repealing Payroll Tax (\$1.2b) and Stamp Duties (\$1.5b)**.
- Farmers need less red tape and more focus from government on growing commodity prices and value adding farm gate produce.
- We welcome commercial investment into South Australia – however, strategic, non-commercial investments in our farmland and agricultural industries by foreign state-controlled entities whose interests are against those of Australia must not be allowed to take place. The state must put legislation in place to protect our farmland and industries from such investment.
- Australian Conservatives are committed to increased funding for Research and Development in order to ensure food security, to grow our exports and to make sure South Australia's primary industries remain productive and internationally competitive.

### Removing taxes to reap economic reward

In order to expand opportunities in our regions we must remove the barriers to the creation of job opportunities. SA imposes payroll tax upon businesses with payrolls of just \$600,000 or greater, effectively meaning small to medium sized businesses, which should be given the most incentive to prosper, are experiencing the most strain under the current system.



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By relying on this stream of revenue for a quarter of its tax income, the State Government is perpetually preventing our state from reaching its economic potential; fewer jobs means more reliance on government handouts and less money injected back into the local economy.

## **Our Policy Includes:**

- Repealing payroll tax. Payroll tax is a deterrent for business owners to expand their operations and causes entrepreneurs to think twice about undertaking a new venture. Part of our strategy would include a decisive long-term plan to repeal this tax, which essentially penalises the growth and success of business enterprise in almost every industry and costs thousands of jobs.
- Removing further taxes. Our notoriously overtaxing State Government can no longer afford to depend on ever-increasing taxes and new levies to counter its incessant overspending. The Australian Conservatives suggest it could be in a position to remove further taxes such as stamp duties (budgeted at \$1.5 billion for the 2017-18 financial year) to stimulate our economy.
- This can be done through good financial management and attracting new industry sectors to our state. Government must learn to live within its budget just like every South Australian family has to live within their personal budget.



## Royalties for Regions

For the past 16 years country services have been downsized by a city-centric government at the expense of families, individuals, businesses, farmers and young people.

Australian Conservatives believe rural and regional South Australia deserves better, which is why we will fight for 35% of state mining royalties to be annexed and used specifically for programs and infrastructure in rural and regional areas under a Royalties for Regions program. Such a program would provide around \$88 million dollars per annum extra to be used specifically for regional needs (based on state budget figures).

We believe Royalties for Regions would provide guaranteed investment in infrastructure and programs for this state's heartland, providing the necessary funding needed to develop our rural areas into vibrant regions with strong economies and the socio-economic foundation needed for job growth.

### Facts:

- Regional SA contributes around 25% of the Gross State Product adding around \$25 billion to the state economy each year.
- The only growth we've seen across industries in SA in recent years is in the area of agriculture and mining.
- Since 2010, the Weatherill Government has collected \$1.5 billion in mining royalties.
- For the past 16 years country South Australia has been ignored in city-centric Labor budgets. As such we have seen roads deteriorate, country hospitals left to decline and unemployment in regional SA reach an incredible 5.85% with youth unemployment as high as 15.8% in some areas.

### Our Policy Includes:

- Australian Conservatives will push for 35% of all mining royalty revenue to be annexed into a fund to be used for infrastructure needs and programs in regional and rural areas of South Australia.



## Food Producers' Right to Farm

Australian Conservatives are determined to secure a commitment from the next Government to passing Food Producers' Right to Farm legislation and creating a Mining Ombudsman within 12 months of being elected to office. Australian Conservatives are not anti-mining but believe that mining and agricultural interests should be balanced. Farmers need to be given rights to protect them to make sure that nobody can interfere with the legitimate use of agricultural land. We also intend to amend the new mining act to protect arable farm land from invasive open cut mining.

### Our Policy Includes:

- Protecting farmers from nuisance complaints and unnecessary law suits when their behaviour and practices are simply part of normal farming activities.
- Legally requiring that anyone buying a property in a farming area be told upfront about the types of activities taking place on neighbouring properties. This includes being told about the agricultural use of neighbouring land, the types of noises and smells found on nearby farms or use of any chemical or spray or machinery.
- We will legislate to ensure there are no-go zones in this state to protect sensitive farming areas from mining intrusion so that we have the guarantee of food security for the future. This includes no fracking in the South East.
- Create the position of Mining Ombudsman as an avenue to resolve complaints and act in an advisory role regarding issues related to the conduct of resource operations. The intent of the role is to combat issues where mining companies disregard the concerns of farmers or other affected parties in relation to accessing land, lease and licence agreements. A Mining Ombudsman would provide an effective, equitable and transparent grievance mechanism.
- Amending the mining act to zone out all arable farming and grazing areas of South Australia from invasive mining practices next term when the new mining act comes to parliament.



## Fixing the Hole in South Australia's Road Maintenance Backlog

South Australia's roads are a mess with the maintenance backlog now estimated in the BILLIONS of dollars. The lack of investment in road maintenance is seen everywhere but is even more apparent in regional and country areas where and a third of serious road crashes happen. The lack of upkeep of this public asset puts lives at risk and negatively affects our economy. The situation has become so dire that at least two industry groups ran campaigns during 2017 where the community could report roads of concern.

### Facts:

- The South Australian Government has neglected state managed roads with the maintenance backlog now estimated to be in the billions of dollars and the work expected to take decades to complete.
- This is despite the fact the State Government is only responsible for one third of the state's roads (13,000km of sealed and 10,000km of unsealed). They handball the responsibility for another 75,000 kilometres of SA Roads onto councils and ratepayers.
- Roads are a public asset and need to be maintained at a safe level for both public protection, road safety and the economic wellbeing of our industries which rely on the roads and freight corridors for produce to be brought into and out of the state.
- In July 2015 the State Government promised to increase investment in road maintenance in rural areas but the 2015/16 budget contained only four new road projects aimed at improving road infrastructure and safety across the state. In 2016/17 there were no new projects and in the last state budget only two new investments directly related to roads which included a roundabout upgrade at Blackwood and ten new speed "safety" cameras.

### Our Policy Includes:

- Australian Conservatives are committed to investing in road maintenance as a matter of urgency. If our economic blueprint is adopted, this would provide significant addition revenue flow to the state, and would make it possible to increase the budget for road maintenance and safety upgrade by an additional **\$250 million**.



## Health for Our Regions

Health services and health infrastructure in rural and regional South Australia has been neglected for too long and focus must be aimed at undoing the damage and bringing services back to our country areas.

### Our Policy Includes:

#### Addressing the Maintenance Backlog

- We will be calling for an immediate commitment of \$50 million to be allocated over two years to rural and regional hospitals across the state to address the urgent backlog of maintenance and further commit \$70 million to the balance of work to be completed within four years.

#### Regional Health Boards

- Australian Conservatives will set up regional country health boards to put country health decisions and planning back in the hands of country communities.

#### Mental Health

- A committee to be formed to inquire into regional mental health issues including causes and available support and to be informed by the use of case studies and local experience. Funding for mental health, lack of support services, availability of qualified staff and available facilities would form part of this inquiry. The Mental Health committee would be required to report their findings and recommendations to the Rural, Regional and Agriculture Standing Committee and to parliament.
- We also commit to fund qualified psychiatric nurses on a 24/7 on-call roster in each major regional hospital emergency department.

#### Leaders in Palliative Care

- Australian Conservatives are committed to investment in palliative care for South Australians. We believe that every person in the state, whether at home, in hospital or under the care of



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a hospice, should be entitled to access the best medical care they can during the last stages of their illness.

- We do not support Euthanasia but believe best practice health care can look at a patient's circumstances and provide the best support and comfort possible.
- Australian Conservatives believe that all people should have access to the best palliative care available and as close to home as possible. It is unacceptable that funding has not been committed by the current government to make this happen or that the best end of life care is not equally accessible to all members of the community regardless of their economic circumstances or geographical location. More resources must be made available and those resources must be shared in a way that brings equality for people in rural and regional South Australia.
- We believe with proper funding, that palliative care industry representatives (Palliative Care South Australia), medical specialists in the field, and the South Australia's Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) could collaborate to develop a system of best practice palliative care initiatives that would make South Australia world experts and leaders in the field.
- When parliament returns in 2018, Australian Conservatives will be moving for the adoption of this cross sector model of representation and the funding necessary to make it happen.
- Australian Conservatives also support the call by Palliative Care SA for the parliament to invest \$24.5 million per annum to improve access to palliative care services:
  - \$14m a year to support people in their final stage of life at home, with the help of their GP and a community of palliative care nurses.
  - \$4m a year to make sure this care is available 24/7 not just during office hours.
  - \$6m a year to integrate palliative care into chronic disease clinics; and
  - \$400K a year to provide up-to-date, reviewed information about palliative care to the community.



## Police and Justice

Australian Conservatives believe the rule of law is a fundamental building block of civil, respectful society and a strong criminal justice system is an essential part of that society. Our criminal justice system must be strong and its primary focus must be on community safety.

Australian Conservatives believe our laws, system of justice and punishments should apply to all South Australians, regardless of circumstances and we believe that those accused are entitled to a fair trial and presumed innocent until proven guilty.

We believe that rural and regional South Australians should have equal access to the justice system from police and legal representation to the courts.

### Our Policy Includes:

#### Police

- Increasing police budgets to reverse the trend which has seen too many regional police stations either close their doors or have their opening times severely limited and support staff sacked. Our policy position is that rural and regional police stations must be adequately funded and staffed to facilitate community as the Australian Conservatives believe police stations build relationships between the community and police which aids communication, trust and helps reduce criminal activity.
- A dedicated stock squad: Freedom of Information documents show that the government's response to stock theft is simply not working and Australian Conservatives are calling for the reinstatement of a dedicated Stock Squad. More than \$2million worth of stock has been taken in South Australia over the past two years. We believe a dedicated stock squad, as part of the South Australian Police force, is an important investment in protecting the \$3 billion SA beef and sheep production market.



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- We support an adequately-resourced police force focussed on targeting the criminal element, not law-abiding citizens. We oppose revenue-raising measures that governments force upon police that are not genuinely about improving community safety.

## Criminal Justice System

- All South Australians are subject to the same laws, system of justice and punishments and that those accused are entitled to a fair trial and presumed innocent until proven guilty.
- Legal equity. Unfortunately for many rural South Australians access to legal advice and representation has been diminished with the government pulling funding for Community Legal Centres in regional areas which saw a number of them closed. Australian Conservatives are committed to seeing the state-based portion of funding for these centres not only restored but increased so that all South Australians can have better access to legal representation.
- We agree with the Law Society of South Australia that extra funding must be allocated to help employ interpreters in our court systems to address the language barriers faced by Indigenous Australians in accessing and understanding the court system.
- We also agree that funding must be allocated to help the courts address issues relating to barriers such as remoteness for all South Australians.
- We support the restoration of the \$6m funding cut to Legal Services Commission made by the Labor Government as legal aid funding is paramount for proper access to the courts for disadvantaged people.



## Natural Resource Management and Water

### Natural Resource Management

Wherever Australian Conservative members have gone, we have heard significant complaints about the management of our natural resources during the past 16 years under Labor. These grievances include the cost of the NRM Levy, the emerging bureaucracy in the system and the lack of on the ground work being done in many areas. People are saying that pest plants and feral animals are more out of control now than they were when the government brought in the NRM Act in 2004.

### Our Policy Includes:

- Australian Conservatives will repeal the NRM Act and before agreeing to any replacement act will call on the next parliament to have a round table investigation into the best way forward to manage our natural resources.
- This round table would need to be made up of a significant number of people from the agriculture sector and local government.
- Much less focus on the extreme environmental views that have dominated much of the management in this area for too long.
- If our economic blueprint is adopted, this would provide significant addition revenue flow to the state, and would make it possible to remove the \$43 million per annum NRM Levy in its entirety as we would be able to fund this need from general revenue.

### Water Reform

The Labor Government has created huge imposts for farmers, irrigators and horticulturalists during their 16 years in office by bringing in exorbitant water charges, taxes and levies. It has got to the point now that when you combine this impost with rising electricity costs, food producers are finding it too difficult to maximise production opportunities. This therefore costs the South Australian economy in both reduced revenue and the loss of jobs that could be created in regional South Australia if these imposts were removed.



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## Our Policy Include:

- Australian Conservatives will remove the need to have meters on dams and will remove any push for low fly bypasses on dams.
- With a water inquiry imminent in the next parliament, we will be moving for a review of all water charges, levies and costs.

## Mains Water Costs

The Labor government's policy to increase water costs was unnecessary and was a deliberate policy to grab more revenue from SA Water. Since 2002, the price of water per kilolitre (KL) has risen by up to 1467% with the average cost of water now \$3.45 per KL. The cost of water for livestock is now unviable with cattle producers left relying on mains water and needing to spend \$100 per vealer to get it from birth to market in water costs alone. This is unsustainable and Australian Conservatives will be moving for policy change.

## Our Policy Includes:

- Allowing two separate metres on an agricultural property. One metre for the house and garden with water charged at the standard rate for metro or country townships. The other metre, which would supply mains water for livestock and agriculture use would be charged at a lesser rate.
- We would move for a water price reduction of 50% which would put the average cost of mains for livestock and agriculture at **\$1.73 per KL**.



## **Branding South Australian Agriculture**

Australian Conservatives are committed to raising awareness of the importance of agriculture in South Australia and educating the community at large about farming practices and the need for a strong healthy agricultural presence.

We are concerned about the ever-growing disconnect between our country areas and metropolitan areas and the misinformation spread about farmers and farming by well-funded animal rights activists.

Therefore we are committed to funding for promotional and educational efforts to see the dissemination of factual information in order to reverse this disturbing trend.

### **Our Policy Includes:**

- Investing \$4 million over four years to be used to market the importance South Australian farmers play in food production and for people to buy South Australian food.

