

# **National Party of Australia**



## **PLATFORM 2000**

*Strong foundations for the new Century*

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# The National Party of Australia

The National Party of Australia has been represented in the Federal Parliament ever since its formation over 80 years ago.

It is an independent political party with a proud record of achievement for its constituents across country and regional Australia.

It has historically delivered for its constituency by ensuring it is best positioned to be a part of non-Labor Government and so fully participate in the development of policies for Australia.

The National Party is a private enterprise organisation. It provides a vital balance, ensuring the interests of people living beyond the largest capitals are taken into full account. Without the National Party, government policy would be determined by a substantial majority of city-based parliamentarians.

The Party is a staunch advocate for the nation's wealth generating rural and resource industries. It was born out of farm organisations and still places priority emphasis on agricultural and trade policies.

Changing political, economic and demographic circumstances have required the Party to broaden its base to the point where it has policies covering the entire range of portfolio interests. It gives special attention to balanced environmental protection and sustainable development, small and family business, regional development, tourism and social and family issues.

It upholds traditional values and fights for a better quality of service, opportunity and life for all people, from remote inland communities to major regional and coastal centres.

The Party has been responsible for many landmark initiatives for Australia – the Reserve Bank, hospital and medical benefits schemes, the CSIRO, Commonwealth funds for non-government schools, the Australian Trade Commissioner Service, the Australian Institute of Sport and abolition of Federal death and gift duties.

In more recent times, the National Party has driven the development of further ground breaking policy directions – the historic *Agriculture – Advancing Australia* package, the new Roads of National Importance Program, the first ever National Land and Water Resources Audit, the Natural Heritage Trust, the Regional Australia Summit and major increases in funding for country and regional health, education and communications.

Because of the National Party, Australia is moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with more government attention being focused on country and regional areas than at any time since Federation.



# A Just and Prosperous Nation

The National Party seeks to develop a dynamic regional Australia, based on innovation, enterprise and equality of opportunity. Our objective is to encourage maximum regional and rural development, on a sustainable basis, balancing economic development with responsible conservation and environmental protection.

We are, in essence, the responsible nation builders.

We will meet our goals through a combination of policies that make regional investment attractive and, through that, ensure a genuine incentive for more private sector investment beyond the capital cities. We will provide an environment that makes more people *want* to live and work in country and regional Australia.

We will also further develop philanthropic investment by fostering a greater commitment by corporate Australia to nurture social and economic innovation and development across rural and regional Australia.

Our objectives must be met if the nation's vital regions are to grow more, develop more, produce more and prosper more. They are essential if we are to bind greater social cohesion and national unity and drive a genuine and meaningful path of reconciliation based on present and future opportunities. They will avoid a 'two nations' scenario of the city-based 'haves' and the country-based 'have nots'.

The National Party is unequivocally committed to a united Australia, where all citizens are equal, irrespective of race, sex or religion, and where all citizens, no matter where they live, have equality of opportunity and access to government services.

Innovations in on-line communications and e-commerce make 'a country life' a real option for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But they must be balanced with more traditional job opportunities in country and regional areas and matched with equitable access to the fundamentals of life including health, education, communications and community services.

The National Party is the only party in Australia that exclusively works and aspires for a better country Australia. The Federal Party was formed more than 80 years ago and has since that time never been unrepresented in the Federal Parliament. It has a proud record of nation building achievement.

Because of the National Party, there is more concentration now by the Federal Government on country and regional Australia than at any time since Federation.

The Party's basic philosophy is to protect the freedom of the individual and foster individual responsibility within society. It believes Australians can best fulfil their aspirations through a vigorous, broadly-based private enterprise economy with minimum interference from government.

**The values upon which Australia has been built are those of the National Party. Our objectives for a continuing just and prosperous nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are to:**

- promote freedom of speech, communication, worship and assembly for all Australians
- maximise individual choice and opportunity for all citizens
- maximise the contribution rural, remote and regional Australia make to national wellbeing and ensure country people receive due recognition and reward for meeting those goals
- break down the barriers between city and country Australia so all people have equality of access to government services and programs no matter where they live
- provide an economic framework that rewards individual effort
- strengthen the family as the foundation of society
- encourage the pursuit of excellence by all Australians in all fields of endeavour
- support and strengthen the Constitution and by example inspire loyalty to the nation and respect for our national institutions and the Flag
- promote pride in our nation, its history and traditions and its unique heritage and identity
- foster our democracy through free elections for governments at Federal, State and Local levels
- help the disadvantaged

- enhance the quality of life of all Australians
- develop a united Australian society free of discrimination on any grounds.

# 1.1 Constitution and Parliament

The National Party unreservedly supports the Federal system of governance enshrined in the Australian Constitution, the sovereignty of the States and their financial and administrative integrity.

We uphold our political heritage. We believe in the security of an independent judicial system and in the concept of an Executive answerable to the Parliament.

The National Party strongly supports the Australian Constitution, with the Sovereign as the nation's titular Head of State, represented by the Governor-General and State Governors appointed on the recommendation of the Prime Minister or Premiers.

We support a substantial public role for the Governor-General and State Governors.

We recognise the right of Australians to determine any change to our constitutional system by referendum and believe any such process should be isolated from the process of parliamentary elections. Governments should not seek to achieve through other means, such as entering into international treaties, expansion of their powers.

## **The National Party promotes policies which:**

- preserve a bicameral Federal Parliamentary system, with an elected Senate as an effective house of review representing the interests of the States and Territories, and the House of Representatives giving equality of representation for all Australians
- limit the unilateral use of the Commonwealth's external affairs power
- support the existing Australian Constitution and the existing Australian National Flag and ensure the Flag can only be altered by referendum
- enshrine referenda as the only means whereby constitutional change or further alterations in the balance of powers between the Commonwealth and the States in favour of the Commonwealth may be achieved
- enable amendment to the Constitution by a majority of States having equal power with the Commonwealth in relation to initiating a referendum for Constitutional reform
- ensure Australia's treaty-making processes do not compromise sovereignty and the community is properly consulted
- ensure that no foreign treaty or agreement will be made by the Federal Government except on matters of an indisputably international character
- ensure the Commonwealth does not enter into or ratify international treaties for the purpose of giving itself powers it would not otherwise have under the Constitution
- ensure the Federal Government pays compensation on just terms to any property owner whose property rights are adversely affected by the Commonwealth or whose property is acquired by the Commonwealth
- facilitate transition to Statehood for the Northern Territory, according to the Territory's preferred timetable
- uphold the right of States and Territories to make laws for the peace, order and good government of their respective areas
- extend Federal Parliamentary terms to four years for the House of Representatives and eight years for the Senate
- oppose the provision of exclusive seats to members of any sectional group within all levels of government
- provide additional, fully accountable allowances to House of Representatives Members in geographically large electorates so they can adequately represent their constituencies
- prohibit Parliaments enacting any law which discriminates between Australians on the grounds of race.

## 1.2 Law and Justice

Preservation of the Rule of Law and recognition that all Australians should be equal before the Law are essential cornerstones of a just, free and democratic society.

Federal and State judicial systems must at all times be independent, of unquestioned integrity and free from political intervention. The High Court of Australia should be the final court of appeal within the Federal system.

All Australians are entitled to equality of access to the Law and to fair representation before the courts.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- improve confidence in and access to the courts
- in conjunction with the States, work for greater help for the victims of crime, funded to the maximum extent by confiscation of the proceeds of crime and levies on the assets of convicted criminals
- give the National Crime Authority the power and long-term resources it requires to be fully effective
- provide adequate staff, resources and powers to the Australian Federal Police, especially relating to its ability to fight organised crime
- stamp out the manufacture and trafficking of illegal drugs into and within Australia
- encourage the States to take similar strong action against the illegal drug trade
- provide effective laws to protect the community, particularly children, from offensive material
- provide legal aid services so there is equality of access to fair representation in the courts
- support legal aid being made available for all those who are party to native title style claims
- develop, in consultation with the States, effective and uniform provisions to deal with commercial and computer crime
- enact a uniform set of defamation laws which are relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century technology and streamline the procedure to make the law accessible and less costly
- establish a National Institute of Forensic Science
- ensure the High Court maintains a role to interpret the laws rather than make the laws.

## 1.3 Government and Administration

A prime objective of the National Party is to ensure that Government waste, duplication and unnecessary intervention and regulation are eliminated.

Government should be no larger than it needs to be to provide necessary services and administration in a cost-efficient manner.

However, no Government services should be curtailed or transferred without a thorough assessment of the balance between savings and quality of service.

### **The National Party therefore supports:**

- maintaining the Federal Budget in surplus unless exceptional circumstances necessitate otherwise
- keeping Government administration under ongoing review to guard against unnecessary waste, intervention, duplication, inefficiency and cost
- transferring ownership of commercially competitive organisations from the public to the private sector providing
  - there is no diminution in quality of service
  - job prospects are properly considered
  - sale of shares to employees and small investors is encouraged
  - there is protection against private monopolies
  - majority overseas ownership or control is not allowed unless under exceptional circumstances
  - sale proceeds are used to reduce public debt or otherwise directly benefit the nation
- ensuring that, where Government ownership is maintained, all organisations are subject to similar operating conditions and reporting requirements as the private sector
- giving the private sector greater opportunity to compete for government contracts, especially in the multi-billion dollar information technology area, to further encourage private industry development
- greater transparency in Government decision making processes through an ongoing Charter of Budget Honesty
- providing comprehensive information on all Government programs and services through the Internet to ensure people are fully informed of their rights and responsibilities and of the services and entitlements available
- providing a toll free telephone service so those without Internet access can obtain the same information on Commonwealth services and requirements.

# 1.4 Voting and Elections

The National Party supports retention of compulsory voting for Federal elections. We believe there is a need for a comprehensive review of the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

## The National Party supports:

- full preferential voting for the House of Representatives based on single member constituencies and proportional representation for the Senate
- a tolerance in electoral boundaries of plus or minus 10% of population at the date of the redistribution, requiring community of interest, distance, remoteness, transport and communication to be taken into account as criteria in determining boundaries
- the making of additional allowances in population quotas of electorates in those electorates where this is necessary to ensure equality of parliamentary representation
- adequate absentee, postal and mobile voting facilities so sick, disabled or isolated voters are not disadvantaged
- an independent Electoral Commission to establish electoral boundaries for the House of Representatives
- a requirement for the Electoral Commission to conduct more regular habitation checks and update the Commonwealth electoral roll twice a year on a sub-division basis
- a period of 10 days from the date of issuing the writs for a Federal election for people to be placed on, or to alter their registration on, the electoral roll
- public disclosure of donations to political parties above reasonable thresholds
- requirements for political advertisements to conform to the Trade Practices Act, and for candidates for public office who engage in misleading or deceptive conduct to be restrained from doing so by action in the Federal Court or a State Supreme Court
- the requirement that questions posed at referenda fairly state the issue to be determined by electors
- the use of 'yes' or 'no' answers only to Federal referendum questions and of numerals only to indicate preferences on Federal election ballot papers
- disallowance of any person serving a prison sentence at the time of any Commonwealth election, by-election or referendum from voting in that election, by-election or referendum
- requiring the use of ink to mark the ballot paper
- requiring people enrolling to vote to give evidence of identity
- overhauling the voting system in respect of formal and informal votes, and requiring Federal and State Governments to standardise the definition
- a full and independent review of the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

## 1.5 Local Government

Local Government is the direct responsibility of the States, and the most important assistance it can be given by the Commonwealth is consistent and long-term financial aid through revenue-sharing, as well as funds for road construction and maintenance.

Local Government should be recognised as a genuine partner of Commonwealth and State Governments, to ensure the needs and priorities of communities are adequately met.

### **To this end the National Party will:**

- help councils reduce debt, improve services and reduce rates and charges by reducing local government running costs
- develop policies and programs to sustain local communities and build vibrant local economies by working cooperatively with Local Government
- develop partnerships with Local Government to ensure national initiatives are delivered effectively, without imposing unreasonable costs and responsibilities on councils
- continue funding programs for local Black Spots on local roads
- continue funding to Local Government for the provision of aged care, disability and children's services
- work with Local Government to improve service delivery to Indigenous communities
- work with Local Government to promote environmentally sustainable land management, planning and infrastructure development practices
- work with Local and State governments to develop integrated approaches to funding arts and recreation initiatives
- help Local Government to develop disaster mitigation strategies to minimise the cost of natural disasters to local communities
- assist rural and regional councils in flood-prone areas to undertake flood mitigation works to protect lives, homes, businesses and community infrastructure
- maintain Federal funding to Local Government in real terms
- work to improve the financial capacity of Local Government and the certainty of its funding
- support Local Government in fostering regional economic development in partnership with other governments
- continue to help councils improve the range and quality of Local Government services by the introduction of new technologies, by promoting innovation and through the implementation of best practice.

## 2.1 Population

The National Party supports the development of a comprehensive population policy within the context of a continuing immigration program based firmly on Australia's best interests and social and economic needs.

The objective of the policy should be to make a socially sustainable contribution to the ongoing growth of our population.

Developments in environmental and economic circumstances require the overall objectives of such a policy to be kept under regular review, in consultation with the community.

Migrants should be encouraged to embrace the interests of Australia first and become Australian citizens after a reasonable qualifying period.

The National Party recognises the value of the cultural diversity and international contacts which a properly focused population policy can provide.

### **The National Party supports a policy which:**

- can be monitored to take account of changing economic, demographic and social trends and so ensure population levels that are in the best interests of Australia's social and economic future
- attracts migrants, according to a program which recognises Australia's national interest in terms of its social and economic needs on a non-discriminatory basis
- recognises the right of Government to adjust policy from time to time to ensure it continues to meet those needs
- attracts more people to live and work in country and regional Australia through mechanisms including meaningful zonal tax allowances for distant and remote areas
- ensures services and infrastructure are adequate to underpin population growth in regional and rural Australia
- develops options for new regional city development to ease pressure on our largest cities
- encourages the continued development of a united Australian society, free of discrimination on grounds of race, sex or religion, which builds upon the many different cultures that Australia's people have contributed to the nation
- ensures migrants have equal opportunity in all aspects of society
- emphasises the importance of business and skilled migrants in the overall intake
- encourages migrants to effectively participate as full members of the Australian community – loyal to Australia, its institutions and its values
- encourages migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds to gain a reasonable proficiency in the English language
- educates migrants about Australia's Constitution, political institutions, history and heritage
- disqualifies any person with a prior criminal record or previous bad character from migrating to Australia
- ensures all permanent residents and residents on working visas are aware that on taking up residence their residency or work visas will be terminated if they are convicted of an indictable criminal offence which carries a jail sentence of three years or more
- deports aliens who are convicted of major crimes, especially drug related crimes, prostitution and child pornography after they have served their Australian penalty
- recognises Australia's obligations to political refugees
- places emphasis on providing humanitarian help for refugees closer to the country or region in question before considering temporary relocation to Australia
- seeks to minimise the flow of illegal immigrants to Australia and reserves the right to deduct the cost of detaining and returning illegal immigrants from foreign aid grants to the relevant country where possible.

## 2.2 The Family

The family is the fundamental unit from which our society is nurtured and thrives, and the foundation of all that we do. Government policies should preserve and promote that.

Families living in rural and regional Australia should be entitled to reasonable equality of access to government programs and services.

Priority must be given to helping families, particularly single income families with young children and families experiencing unemployment.

The tax system should recognise the needs of families and take their contribution to the national welfare into account.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- give priority consideration to families with dependent children, especially single income families, in the continued development and reform of the tax system
- provide realistic family payment, child, maternity and paternal leave support
- support families in rural and regional areas by improving access to the Youth Allowance and by ensuring they have access to infrastructure such as communications, transport, education and health
- emphasise the primary responsibility of both parents for the care, protection, education, health and social development of their children
- give families with young children greater freedom to choose whether one parent cares full-time for the children at home or whether both parents work and seek childcare assistance
- promote flexibility in the workplace so employees can meet family responsibilities
- maintain private health insurance affordability
- provide quality, affordable child care facilities and services where the need exists, particularly in rural and regional areas
- encourage the maximum involvement of private enterprise in the provision of child care facilities
- encourage the role of family through the education system with parenting and financial family management programs, family health, family recreation and leisure promotions, drug and related disease awareness, and in coping with disability
- support the promotion of pre-marriage and family counselling services
- provide support services for family crises such as domestic violence, substance abuse and family breakdown
- give priority to the development of community education programs specifically designed to help eliminate domestic violence
- ensure an Australia which is clean, safe and offers maximum opportunity for family development.

## 2.3 Family Law

There is a responsibility on Government to provide a framework of assistance and legal recourse in cases of family breakdowns.

Such a framework should be built on the fundamental basis that the prime responsibility of all parents, irrespective of their own separate relationships, is the care, protection, education, health and social development of their children.

**Accordingly, the National Party supports policies which:**

- continue to develop the Family Law Act to ensure that
  - no final divorce is granted until matters of care, access to children and distribution of matrimonial property are resolved
  - children spend their time more equitably between access and custody parents, and where applicable, grandparents or members of the extended family
  - fairness prevails in all property settlements and all child matters
  - appropriate educational programs are developed and implemented to inform adolescents and adults of their rights and issues on child raising and parenting
  - adequate funding is provided to reduce and minimise delays between the start and finish of Family Court hearings
- provision is made for Family Law matters to go through the Legal Aid system to reduce the number of self-represented parties
- ensure non-custodial parents meet their maintenance payment obligations
- ensure legal mechanisms are provided to adequately enforce and collect maintenance payments where necessary
- ensure property that a party takes into a marriage is taken into account in determining property settlements
- ensure the Supporting Parents Benefit is a ‘last resort’ benefit and not used to avoid parental responsibility
- ensure the interests of children are given priority consideration in determining a parenting plan.

## 2.4 Women

The National Party recognises the changing needs of women and the contribution of women to the economic, social and political fabric of our society. Women must have access to more equitable participation in employment, education and training, sport and recreation, decision making and politics and should not be subjected to any form of discrimination.

The National Party recognises that economic security, safety and balancing the demands of family and work are key issues for women.

### **The National Party is committed to achieving for women and believes:**

- women should be encouraged to meet their full potential in whatever their chosen field or capacity
- all forms of discrimination, harassment or violence against women should be opposed
- women should have an equal opportunity to share in the responsibilities of governing Australia, being represented on government and private boards, and being appointed to managerial and leadership positions
- violence against women should be prevented by all available means, and women should be given support in domestic crises
- particular attention should be paid to domestic violence, particularly in Indigenous and remote communities
- women should be encouraged to achieve financial security and have access to superannuation benefits
- women should have access to equal remuneration and flexibility in the workplace, childcare services and be assisted in achieving a balance in work and family responsibilities
- women's access to sport and their representation in all areas of leadership, management and decision-making in sport should be encouraged
- government should listen to the specific needs of Indigenous women to ensure they receive access to funds for relevant programs
- consideration should be given to remoteness, isolation and small populations when calculating expenditure on opportunities and services for women
- migrant women should be encouraged and given community support to fully participate in Australian life by assisting them with matters concerning health, education, language and social support
- the development and promotion of home employment opportunities for isolated women, particularly through work emerging via on-line communications, e-commerce and other flexible workplace arrangements, should be encouraged
- the Rural Women's General Practitioner Service, including fly-in services for remote areas, must be maintained
- women should have equal access to undertake leadership training courses
- the circumcision of women has no religious or medical basis and should be opposed.

## 2.5 Children

Effective care, protection and education of children is the key to the nation's health and prosperity. It is essential that all levels of government recognise the value of investing in the early years.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- promote early intervention programs which strengthen families and encourage their independence
- encourage inter-agency cooperation, communication and coordination in all areas affecting children and their families
- focus on early childhood development, especially the first five years
- promote equality of educational opportunities for children in rural and regional Australia
- promote pride in being Australian and an understanding of our National Anthem, the Flag and other national symbols and emblems
- provide children with a proper understanding of our history and cultural heritage
- work for uniform legislation in child protection matters, including those affecting victims of child abuse and their families
- provide greater resources to help the prevention of child abuse and the investigation and prosecution of those who commit crimes against children
- eliminate child pornography
- restrict screening of violence and pornography via television, video and the Internet
- encourage the production of Australian television programs for children
- encourage parenting programs and in particular support fathers on their parenting role
- promote workplace childcare
- provide rural and regional communities with mobile services such as mobile toy and book resources, immunisation, dental clinics and play groups
- educate parents and the wider community on the importance of the immunisation program
- promote life skills education in schools, focusing on parenting responsibilities, social responsibilities, child development, conflict resolution, self esteem, nutrition, household management and drug abuse protection including smoking and alcohol
- ensure equal access to all government services for children with special needs and their parents.

## 2.6 Young Australians

Young Australians represent the future of the nation and governments must be prepared to invest in their development. A prime responsibility of governments is to ensure the best possible educational opportunities for young people and an economic, social and political climate which encourages them to contribute and prosper.

An appreciation of our traditional standards and values, a knowledge of our history, a pride in being Australian, an understanding of obligations under the law, and a determination to strive for personal excellence and responsibility should be integral to all that they do.

Unemployment, divorce, violence, suicide, homelessness, substance abuse, crime, isolation and poverty are issues with which youth must sometimes deal and policies should aim to support young people in need or crisis.

### **The National Party supports policies which ensure:**

- education and training opportunities which encourage young people to reach their full potential and find their place in society
- promotion of pride in being Australian and a determination to contribute to the country's future
- encouragement of active and constructive participation in community and political affairs
- employment opportunities for youth across Australia
- the pursuit of excellence in education, sport and recreation, and in the workplace
- encouragement of participation in aid and development programs in Australia and overseas
- opportunities to develop leadership and decision-making skills
- opportunities to develop expertise in the new economy through access to on-line technologies, especially in country and regional areas
- opportunities for young people who live in regional, rural and remote areas particularly in education, health, business, finance and cultural activities
- eligibility for isolated students education assistance is based on income and realistic hardship provisions apply to the Youth Allowance
- better opportunities for disadvantaged young Australians
- consultation mechanisms between young people and government
- protection and assistance for youth in violent homes and family break-up
- protection and assistance for youth involved in the legal system
- strategies to help young people who are homeless, mentally ill, suffering from substance abuse or sexual abuse and involved in crime
- quality programs, particularly in small country and remote areas, including family support or parent education programs, community and professional education activities or campaigns, personal safety programs and offender programs.

## 2.7 Senior Australians

Senior Australians represent the nation's experience, and their continued ability to contribute to the nation must be recognised, encouraged and welcomed.

The National Party's primary objectives are to ensure a legislative, administrative and economic environment in which people can plan their retirement with confidence that they will be financially secure and have access to adequate health care and accommodation.

The Party is determined to ensure those in genuine need are given adequate financial security in their old age.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- encourage maximum participation in superannuation schemes to help Australians plan for their retirement and relieve pressure on the social welfare system
- allow superannuants to take benefits in the form of annuities or pensions as an alternative to lump sums, and assign benefits to non-income earning spouses
- encourage the self-employed and full and part-time employees without superannuation to enter private superannuation arrangements
- provide retirement savings accounts especially for part-time, casual and itinerant workers, to encourage greater personal savings
- provide a deferred pension plan which will increase pensions for those who qualify and wish to remain employed beyond the pension age
- simplify and streamline the pension income test to ensure it is fair and does not unduly discourage those who wish to supplement their retirement income with part-time work
- ensure greater stability in income testing of pensioner investments, to eliminate disincentives to reasonable investments, and ensure no retrospectivity in future changes
- encourage the expansion of home equity conversion loan products
- provide a first class system of aged care, including hostels and nursing homes, and adequate facilities for those with special needs
- nurture the volunteer skills and talents of retirees to benefit the community
- expand domiciliary and home nursing services, including those in the private sector
- ensure retiree representatives are consulted on retirement incomes policies
- ensure superannuation funds are properly and efficiently administered in the interests of investors
- provide aged pensions on a fair and equitable basis
- recognise the obligation of Government to assist in the provision of health and housing for aged citizens
- ensure pensioners and beneficiaries are encouraged to supplement their incomes to avoid poverty traps.

## 2.8 Veterans

To think of veterans is to think the spirit of ANZAC, the courage of Gallipoli, and the birth of a modern nation.

Australia owes an enormous debt to its war veterans, particularly those who are disabled. It must also acknowledge the pain suffered by those who lost loved ones in war.

Our record of contribution to helping resolve international conflict on land, sea and air is second to none and respected world-wide. The Aussie Digger is an internationally respected figure. Our honour roll stretches from the Boer War, the two World Wars, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, the Gulf War and on to peace keeping activities in many trouble spots including the recent leading role played in East Timor.

The National Party deeply respects the contribution made by Australian service men and women and believes their service should be proudly honoured by fellow Australians, especially younger generations.

Government policy must give Australian veterans and war widows the greatest understanding, recognition and support that a responsible government can afford, administered through a separate Department of Veterans Affairs

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- retain a separate Department of Veterans Affairs
- consult fully with veterans' organisations before any significant changes are made to the repatriation system
- maintain a continuing review, in consultation with veterans' organisations, of the services provided to ex-service men and women, to ensure they continue to meet their on-going needs
- retain the benchmarks for adjusting service-linked pensions, including for war widows and widowers, to increases in the CPI, or 25pc of male total average weekly earnings when CPI increases would fail to maintain pensions at that level
- improve access by veterans to quality hospital care as required, including encouraging State governments to provide adequate repatriation beds for veterans
- continue to monitor and improve the operation of the Veterans Entitlement Act
- retain the Veterans Review Board as a separate body to provide veterans with a specialist review process in addition to the Administrative Review Tribunal
- maintain quality of access to the Defence Services Home Loans Scheme, with concessional rates of interest, and including the portability of existing loans
- continue to expand eligibility for the Gold Card as responsible budgets allow to include veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars
- compile rolls and databases of all who have served Australia in all conflicts from the Boer War onwards, as an essential historical record and for use in community research and health studies
- develop a civilian service medal for those who directly contributed to Australia's efforts in all wars since Federation.

## 2.9 Indigenous Australians

The National Party acknowledges Indigenous Australians as the first Australians.

It supports meaningful reconciliation between individuals, groups and local communities as essential to furthering the development of a united, unified, proud and determined Australian community.

It believes this can best be achieved by concentrating on present and future opportunities and challenges, while recognising the injustices of the past.

All Australian citizens, irrespective of their origin, should have equal opportunity and equal access to government programs and services.

All Australians should respect the heritage of Indigenous culture and the customs and aspirations of our Indigenous people.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- recognise the rights of occupancy of those Indigenous groups which have continued to occupy traditional lands within the framework of the law of land title applicable to all Australians
- develop Indigenous programs in full consultation with Indigenous people, State and Local governments
- provide appropriate, accountable financial assistance to economically viable Indigenous enterprises
- apply the same rights and responsibilities to land vested in Indigenous Australians as to land vested in other Australians
- give Indigenous land holders the same freedom to negotiate agreements directly with exploration/mining companies and other commercial interests as applies to other Australians
- in conjunction with the States, improve Indigenous health programs to reduce infant mortality, drug and alcohol abuse
- encourage Indigenous Australian communities in their efforts to reinforce the authority of their traditional leaders
- ensure maximum preservation of Indigenous languages, history and culture and encourage their continued development through performances and exhibitions, recording, education and promotion in Australia and overseas
- recognise Indigenous associations and structures (including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) in law on a basis which requires comparable accountability and service delivery to that applying to similar bodies operating in the general community
- recognise the right of the States and Territories to enact their own native title regimes
- In acknowledgment of the Mabo and Wik decisions
  - Balance the legitimate interests of resource based industries, pastoralists, native title holders and other Australians
  - Reduce the uncertainty that native title has brought to land management and resource industries
  - Ensure native title holders and pastoral lease holders have equal procedural rights in relation to mining and development proposals
  - Improve the workability of the Native Title Act
  - Recognise that all Australians are entitled to predictable and certain land management and that all Australians should be treated equally.

## 2.10 Australians with Disabilities

Disabled Australians contribute extensively to community and national development, and should be encouraged to do so.

The Federal Government should cooperate with the States, people with disabilities and their families and representative organisations to ensure maximum opportunities are available throughout Australia.

Discrimination against disabled people should never be tolerated. Every effort should be made to remove barriers to education, employment, recreation and sporting opportunities.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- encourage people with disabilities to live as normal a lifestyle as possible
- regularly review the Disability Services Act to ensure ongoing recognition of people with disabilities
- extend the Attendant Care Scheme to support young people with disabilities living in the community who would otherwise require admission to a nursing home
- provide special assistance to parents and organisations involved in caring for children with disabilities
- ensure children with disabilities have fair access to education opportunities and facilities within their own communities
- examine, in conjunction with the States, third party insurance and compensation laws to help the return to the workforce of individuals disabled by accident
- support sheltered workshops satisfying the special needs of people with disabilities
- ensure mental health professionals involve carers in consultations about in-patient treatment and home care and treatment, and provide carers with written and oral information about diagnosis, medication (and its side effects) and proposed treatment
- ensure Federal Government buildings and offices are accessible to disabled people.

## 3.1 Regional Development

The National Party believes it must be a national priority for the first decade of the new century to meet and overcome the economic and social challenges facing regional and rural Australia.

Our aim is to achieve a strong and resilient regional Australia with the resources and skills to play a pivotal role in building Australia's future, and with the ability to turn uncertainty and change into opportunity and prosperity.

The Federal Government has a pivotal leadership role to play in this vision through a long-term investment strategy in regional Australia involving all levels of government, business and communities. The strategy should be built around three key areas for change: community empowerment, economic and business development and equity of services.

**Accordingly, the National Party supports policies which:**

- implement a regional development strategy to help in the establishment of new industries in regional Australia
- within that strategy, develop options for new regional city development to ease pressure on the largest cities
- in conjunction with the private sector research and develop ecologically sound ways to further harness Australia's water resources
- foster the commitment of corporate Australia in philanthropic investment to nurture social and economic innovation and development across rural and regional Australia
- provide meaningful zonal tax allowances to attract more people to distant and remote areas
- support consultation and communication programs to ensure the concerns of rural, regional and remote Australia are recognised and addressed
- encourage the maximum private sector provision of venture capital to develop new and expanded enterprises, especially in non-metropolitan areas
- encourage more decentralisation of new small business enterprises in country and regional Australia
- ensure maximum opportunity for small business, especially in country and regional areas, to participate in the new economy and take full advantage of the latest in info-technology, e-commerce and on-line communications
- establish a high level task force to coordinate services from the three tiers of government to improve delivery of existing services, reduce over-servicing and duplication, and identify gaps in existing services
- maintain specific ministerial representation for regional Australia within Cabinet
- develop clear, fair and swift procedures for approving new resource projects, incorporating environmental and economic assessments
- increase opportunities for the private sector to invest in major infrastructure in regional Australia
- enhance cooperative development schemes such as the sharing of common infrastructure
- ensure privatisation of government services provides a net benefit in both economic and social terms
- deliver world's best telecommunications services to regional Australians by 2010, including equal access for all Australians to on-line communications technology, no matter where they live
- make the restoration of the local road network in regional Australia a Commonwealth funding priority
- increase educational, employment and training options for disadvantaged sections of the community
- deliver long-term strategies to counter salinity across Australia
- adopt a coordinated regional approach to the development of appropriate cultural, artistic, sport, and recreation facilities and activities
- actively promote the positives of living and investing in inland and coastal Australia
- encourage the development of leadership and business skills in country areas
- provide assistance on a competitive grants basis to rural communities and/or Indigenous groups to help implement local economic development projects
- recognise the special needs of women, older Australians, people with disabilities, young people, and people from a non-English speaking background in remote areas of Australia
- facilitate cooperation between governments, primary industries, communities, and Indigenous Australians to develop clear strategies relating to native title including access to land and the settlement of land-use conflicts, and to preservation of the environment
- promote the involvement of Indigenous Australians in economic development programs.



## 3.2 Regional Services

All Australians should have equitable access to Government programs and services.

The National Party recognises the cost of providing services to non-metropolitan areas is generally higher than to the capital cities. It therefore believes this should be reflected in the resourcing of Government departments and agencies.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- ensure equitable access to health, education, new technologies and government services for those living in regional, rural and remote centres
- enhance planning processes by the collection of adequate socio-economic information to develop reliable social indicators of locational disadvantage
- facilitate cooperation between governments, primary industries, communities and Indigenous Australians to develop clear strategies relating to native title, including access to land and the settlement of land-use conflicts, and to preservation of the environment
- develop an integrated approach to needs-based funding for each sphere of government, including through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), recognising higher costs faced by rural communities
- increase the educational, employment and training options, particularly for the disadvantaged sections of the community
- increase the options for the delivery of adequate, accessible and affordable child care
- adopt a coordinated regional approach to the development of appropriate cultural, artistic, sport and recreation facilities, tours and activities
- maximise government accountability and eliminate the over-servicing, duplication and waste resulting from the three-tier system of government
- recognise the special needs of women, the aged, people with disabilities, youth and ethnic people in remote areas
- encourage Indigenous people to develop their own policy framework and mechanisms, acknowledging the differences between disparate community groups
- develop a strategy to encourage Indigenous women to implement a range of initiatives to improve the issues of concern to them and their communities
- promote Indigenous involvement in economic development programs
- recognise and respect ATSIC members as the elected representatives of Indigenous Australians and for their role in regional and local area planning
- ensure consultation with ATSIC in all relevant regional or local area planning
- take advantage of e-commerce, e-mail, electronic publishing and on-line communications technologies to further enhance rural, remote and regional business opportunities and break the tyranny of distance across Australia.

## 3.3 Tourism

Tourism is one of Australia's fastest growing industries and has enormous potential to contribute to the community and environmental interests of Australia and its citizens. The Australian tourist and service industries can best be encouraged by governments providing the right economic conditions and support.

Regional tourism represents about 70% of all tourism expenditure, with tourists spending more than \$14 billion in regional Australia. It is estimated domestic overnight holiday visitors spend more than \$12 billion and international visitors \$2.4 billion in the regions.

Regional tourism requires many policy action points coming together – the Federal Government, State governments, Local Government and regional tourism organisations. The National Party supports a growing, dynamic national and international tourism industry, from which the regional tourism industry will further expand.

### **Therefore, the National Party supports:**

- implementation of a national tourism strategy in cooperation with State, Territory and Local Government and the private sector
- development and utilisation of inter-capital railways, including very fast trains and mainline electrification as new dimensions of tourist movement
- the most professional marketing, nationally and internationally, of Australia's tourist destinations
- support for a major national domestic tourism marketing campaign encouraging Australians to 'go bush' on their next holiday
- support for Year of the Outback 2002 as a major regional tourism initiative
- development of an on-line tourism strategy, in cooperation with industry and the States and Territories, to improve the on-line capabilities of the tourism sector, particularly in regional Australia
- increased competitiveness in Australia's air, road and rail services, combined with innovative and competitive travel packages to promote tourism within Australia, particularly to regional and remote areas
- further liberalisation of international air services, which will benefit the tourism industry, by delivering more flights, more airline seats, innovative travel products and more competitive airfares
- continued access for regional airlines to Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport
- provision of a transport system of a standard that encourages visitors to regional and rural Australia
- the growth of more tourist attractions in regional and country Australia
- the continued viability and expansion of small tourist business operations
- support for product and niche market development

- Federal support for tourism and hospitality studies in higher education by way of capital grants to tertiary institutions and TAFE colleges which, by their strategic location or specialised research facilities, provide tourism faculties or support services to the tourist industry
- greater private sector involvement in the Australian Tourist Commission
- recognition that it is the performance of regional tourism that determines the fortunes of the tourism industry
- acknowledgment that 80% of tourism businesses in regional Australia are small businesses
- recognition that regional tourism employs around 600,000 Australians, with the potential for further growth
- establishment of a regional tourism secretariat for country tourism operators to help with skills to market and develop local and regional tourism products
- appointment of a representative Regional Tourism Advisory Board to advise the Ministers for Tourism and Transport and Regional Services on regional tourism issues
- facilitation and partnership of local communities, business and Government to drive tourism development
- continuation of programs such as the Regional Tourism Development Program with the Government's role primarily being as a funding provider, while management and implementation takes place at the regional and local spheres
- continued funding support for the Bureau of Tourism Research
- support for and promotion of Indigenous cultural tourism.

## 3.4 Communications

The final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been marked by an historic shift in industrial development from centralised to decentralised technology through major advances in communications systems.

New communications technology offers significant potential to offset the tyranny of distance that has always constrained development of rural and regional Australia. To turn this potential into economic and social realities, and advantage, regional Australians must have full access to new and emerging technology in equal measure with city Australians.

The national communications network is a major area of responsibility for the Federal Government, but the Commonwealth must be careful that legislation promotes and does not hinder technological development and availability

The National Party currently does not support any further sale of Telstra unless specific criteria are met, particularly with regard to service delivery and maintenance in country and regional areas and the full delivery of telecommunications infrastructure promised from the previous partial privatisation of Telstra. The Party will keep this position under review in light of progress on the criteria, public opinion and rapidly advancing technologies and competition in the telecommunications industry.

The Party unequivocally commits itself to achieving practical equity in communications services between metropolitan and non-metropolitan Australians as a matter of national priority.

### **To achieve this aim, the Party supports policies which:**

- deliver world's best practice for telecommunications services in non-metropolitan Australia as a matter of national priority
- encourage the introduction of new telecommunications technologies, especially distance-neutral technologies (such as satellite) able to provide services at the same cost irrespective of customer location
- ensure telecommunications services are provided to all Australians on an equitable basis
- deregulate telecommunications but maintain the Australian Communications Authority's powers under legislation to supervise the Australian telephone network
- maintain a Universal Service Obligation (USO) in legislation, the minimum requirements of which are provision of the standard voice telephony service and access on demand to a 64kbps data service, to all Australians
- maintain a Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) in legislation, which defines acceptable service standards for connection of phone services and fault repair and imposes penalties on carriers and service providers for non-performance
- progressively tighten CSG requirements until service delivery standards for rural and remote Australia match those applying in metropolitan areas, with a reasonable allowance for travel time
- foster the expansion of mobile phone networks in regional and remote areas to achieve 100 per cent coverage
- achieve continuing reductions in telephone charges
- provide un-timed local phone calls for all Australians
- progressively reduce the number of telephone call charging zones across Australia with the ultimate aim of a single standard national call rate
- balance public ownership of telecommunications assets or infrastructure against the requirements of efficient and equitable delivery of telecommunications services
- ensure the ABC maintains services to all parts of Australia, especially in regard to local program production and the maintenance of radio and television broadcasting facilities in regional areas
- make special provision for the continuing operation of commercial radio and television broadcasters in regional areas
- extend SBS television broadcast services throughout non-metropolitan Australia
- foster the development of digital television and its introduction to regional areas, ensuring maximum consumer choice both in regard to cost of its adoption and the services available

- promote competition within, and Australian ownership and control of, the electronic and print media
- encourage a high level of Australian content, and a broad diversity of opinion and viewpoint, within the Australian media
- retain Australia Post in full public ownership while continuing to provide the entire nation, including those in rural and regional Australia, with a standard letter service at uniform rate
- provide a high level of postal communications access for rural and remote Australians
- provide for Australia Post to continue current top up scheme payment arrangements to Licensed Post Offices in regional and rural Australia
- ensure Australia Post maintains current concessional rate arrangements for the delivery of distance education material to isolated children
- maintain a Service Charter for Australia Post to promote and protect consumer rights underpinned by a set of performance regulations developed under the Act
- monitor the Service Charter to ensure compliance by Australia Post
- maintain regulations which require Australia Post to meet the following performance standards
  - 94% of letters to be delivered on time by ordinary post
  - 98% of delivery points to receive a minimum of five deliveries a week
  - 99.7% of delivery points no less than two deliveries a week
  - A minimum retail presence of 4000 postal outlets, of which at least 2500 must be in rural and remote areas
  - A minimum dispersion of 10,000 street posting boxes
- encourage the establishment of post office agencies as small businesses especially in country areas.

## 3.5 Land Transport and Fuel Pricing

Australia's land transport system of roads and rail is vital to the economic health and well being of export industries, and central to the support and development of people and communities in regional Australia.

The National Party believes the Federal Government has a core funding responsibility for the development and improvement of road infrastructure at Commonwealth, State and Local levels.

Recognising that many local roads in regional Australia have reached or are near the end of their economic life, the National Party identifies infrastructure spending on the local roads network as a policy priority for the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The cost of land transport, and fuel in particular, has significant economic and social impact across regional Australia. The National Party applauds the significant and historic reductions in Commonwealth fuel excise achieved through the New Tax System and will work to achieve further reductions in fuel taxes and land transport costs.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- promote the most efficient and competitive land transport systems throughout Australia
- require the Commonwealth to take a lead role in establishing, in cooperation with State and Local Governments, a long-term program to restore local roads in regional areas
- increase Commonwealth road funding in real terms
- retain direct Commonwealth funding for national highways and roads of national importance and identified but untied roads grants to Local Government
- remove tax impediments to private sector investment in transport infrastructure
- ensure as much road development work as possible is open to private tender
- upgrade the National Highway One to an all-weather highway as early as possible
- upgrade the Pacific Highway to four-lane dual-carriageway standard as early as possible
- retain the Federal Black Spot roads program with an emphasis on regional cities and country towns
- encourage the further development of safe and competitive inter-State road freight and passenger bus industries
- in cooperation with the States, continue development of uniform national transport standards and traffic codes
- remove CPI-linked indexation of Commonwealth fuel excise
- maintain and enhance the national rail freight system
- proceed with the privatisation of National Rail
- encourage expanding participation by the private sector in the national and State rail freight and passenger tasks, including
  - a high speed rail link between Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, and
  - the Australian Transport and Energy Corridor project for an inland railway from Melbourne to Darwin
- complete construction of the Darwin to Alice Springs Railway and provide the most efficient management of the north-south railway system
- retain exemption from Commonwealth fuel excise for diesel and alternative fuels used in rail transport
- retain exemption from Commonwealth fuel excise for diesel and alternative fuels used off-road in primary industries, tourism and marine transport, and extend the exemption to include all off-road business purposes and power generation in remote areas
- retain the Diesel and Alternative Fuel Grants scheme for road transport, and expand it to include all commercial vehicles of 3.5 tonnes GVM or greater used in any part of Australia
- retain Fuel Sales Grants for petrol and diesel sold in non-metropolitan regions with adequate powers for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to ensure the benefits are passed on to consumers, and with regular oversight of zones and rates to ensure price differentials are adequately addressed
- direct a larger percentage of Commonwealth fuel excise to road funding.

## 3.6 Shipping and Aviation

Australia must have efficient and competitive shipping and aviation industries to support its vital export industries and trade links with the world.

An efficient and productive waterfront capable of handling goods and commodities at world competitive rates, is a vital part of the country's export effort.

A domestic aviation industry meeting the highest safety standards and providing timely and cost-efficient services for people in regional Australia is essential to the economic and community development of the nation.

### **The National party supports policies which:**

- promote efficient and competitive air and sea transport systems throughout Australia
- where practical, transfer ownership of airports around Australia to the private sector
- maintain the efficiency of Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport, commensurate with its importance as the primary tourist gateway to Australia
- ensure the continued access to Kingsford Smith Airport by regional airline services
- ensure cost recovery policies are applied fairly to all sectors of the aviation industry, including to the general aviation sector
- ensure the ability of commuter airline services to operate efficiently to small and isolated areas of Australia
- encourage the deregulation of domestic air services but ensure airline safety is not compromised
- oppose restrictions on domestic and international air freight carriage
- exempt aviation fuel used for agriculture and other export industries from fuel taxes
- oppose any moves to close Essendon as Melbourne's second airport in view of its major importance to regional Victorians
- encourage competition in international shipping services to Australia
- ensure adequate competition exists between all vessels operating in the Australian coastal trade and across the Tasman
- continue the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme
- in cooperation with the States, improve the efficiency and reliability of the Australian waterfront.

## 3.7 Housing

Home ownership has always been a priority for Australians and Government policy must aim to encourage and increase it in the future.

A priority of the National Party is to ensure economic policies which bring home ownership within the reach of more people.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- encourage people to own their own homes
- continue support for negative gearing of rental properties
- maintain a viable secondary mortgage market to provide maximum competition and innovation in the home finance industry
- outsource the maximum construction functions of the Government to the private sector
- in cooperation with the States, provide houses for low income earners, the aged and people with disabilities and special needs
- improve access to innovative and flexible forms of private sector finance in partnership with financial and industry groups
- provide uniform consumer protection legislation across States and Territories
- address locational factors in funding under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement recognising the higher costs of housing construction and maintenance in rural and remote Australia
- encourage flexibility of superannuation fund investment in housing
- develop programs with States and service providers to better target those in need
- continue exemption from fringe benefits tax for housing provided to employees in remote areas.

## 4.1 Health

Good health and access to adequate health facilities is a fundamental key to encouraging population growth in country and regional areas.

The prime objective of Federal health policies should be to provide adequate health services throughout the nation, encourage competitive freedom of choice in health insurance, and provide services for those in genuine need.

**Therefore, the National Party supports policies which:**

- retain Medicare and bulk billing
- provide differential Medicare rebates for medical practitioners in rural areas and include in the Medicare rebate a component for the work which regional general practitioners undertake with other care providers in planning care for people with chronic and complex needs, particularly the aged
- ensure the Royal Flying Doctor Service has adequate resources to provide a comprehensive medical service utilising state of the art medical and communications technology
- increase spending to combat the high incidence of chronic illness and injury in regional areas
- provide funding to upgrade and ensure the viability of rural private hospitals
- provide specialist services in areas of need through the Rural Surgical Service Program so specialists can undertake a greater number of procedures in rural and regional centres
- provide access for regional general practitioners to immediate specialist advice via the Internet, a toll-free phone service and an expansion in the use of tele-health advisory services
- maintain the Rural Retention Program and priority emphasis on attracting more doctors to rural areas
- maintain the locum assistance program for GPs in rural areas
- maintain the Rural Women's General Practitioner Service for rural Australia
- provide funding for the continued expansion of regional health service centres and Medicare Easyclaim facilities
- boost the Rural and Remote Pharmacist Workforce Development Program to encourage more pharmacists to rural and remote locations
- recognise the special working conditions and needs of regional and rural health professionals and allow local health administrations to negotiate localised and flexible packages with these employees
- encourage rural students to study medicine, nursing and allied health occupations by promoting such career opportunities to rural and regional secondary students and providing scholarships to do so
- ensure country students have access in rural and remote high schools to subjects required and applicable for medicine, nursing and health care courses
- expand the Rural Australia Medical Undergraduate Scholarship Scheme to encourage more country students to study medicine
- provide a HECS liability rebate to doctors, nurses and allied health professionals who undertake to work in disadvantaged regional areas
- grant Medicare provider numbers to suitably qualified, foreign-trained doctors who are willing to work in regional and remote areas which have demonstrated they are unable to attract Australian-trained doctors and facilitate the immigration and registration of such doctors
- give all Australians freedom of choice in health insurance, with access to public and private hospital and nursing facilities
- encourage greater participation in private health insurance through the lifetime health cover system and the 30 per cent private insurance rebate
- encourage maximum competition and innovation in the health insurance industry
- maintain Government assistance for hospital, medical and pharmaceutical care for the chronically ill, low-income families and individuals unable to afford private insurance
- continue to support the James Cook University Medical School, Townsville, and the University of NSW Clinical School, Wagga Wagga
- establish a Rural Health Division within the Department of Health and Aged Care having responsibility to work in cooperation with federal rural health programs

- in conjunction with the States and territories, continue to place priority on programs to improve the health of Indigenous people
- encourage maximum participation in national child immunisation programs
- recognise, assist and further support carers in rural and regional Australia, particularly respite care
- maintain the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and ensure the provision of high quality services, particularly in country areas, and provide consistency and viability for pharmacies
- oppose mail order pharmacy as it undermines the advisory role of the pharmacist, the quality use of medicines and the pharmacy as part of the social, economic and health delivery fabric of regional Australia
- encourage religious, charitable and private sector involvement in hospitals and nursing homes
- ensure a viable and reasonable Isolated Patients' Travel and Accommodation Scheme to give equitable access to medical and hospital treatment and facilities for Australians living in remote and isolated areas
- provide widely accessible mammography tests within the national health program throughout Australia
- include the provision of mammary prosthesis in the Medicare schedule
- support an Australia-wide prostate cancer early detection campaign
- place maximum emphasis on street-level programs to combat drug and alcohol addiction
- support community based rehabilitation programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Quit for Life
- place greater emphasis on health education in the community, with particular emphasis on AIDS and drug and alcohol abuse, from primary school level upwards
- in conjunction with the private sector, increase funding for medical research
- ensure mental health professionals provide patients and carers with intensive home support in the first week after discharge from in-patient care, as well as ongoing monitoring
- ensure support for mentally ill people and their families living in country areas who face barriers to proper treatment and support from appropriate mental health services.

## 4.2 Education

State and Federal governments must work cooperatively to meet the nation's education needs. Importantly, this must be achieved in a way that avoids overlapping, duplication or waste and ensures equitable education opportunity for all Australians.

The National Party pioneered government funding for independent educational institutions and continues to support the right of parents to educate their children at schools of their choice.

The National Party recognises the special needs of children with physical or mental disabilities and their right to equitable education opportunities.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- provide equitable funding for government and independent schools to ensure equality of educational opportunity and freedom of choice
- strengthen national policy development and coordination
- improve education facilities to non-metropolitan Australia by increased funding of rural and regional education and by maximising access to satellite and on-line technology
- ensure eligibility for isolated children's education assistance is based only on an income test
- provide particular attention to the disadvantaged, including children with special learning difficulties and those for whom English is not the first language
- ensure children with disabilities have access to education opportunities and facilities within their own communities
- ensure increased education from primary school upwards of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases and teach young people about domestic violence and sexual abuse
- encourage private sector involvement in and support for all levels of education
- abolish compulsory student unionism in higher education institutions
- provide realistic assistance for the accommodation of students who must live away from home to attend tertiary institutions
- ensure the Assistance for Isolated Children's Scheme is effective in meeting the needs of remote area families
- provide greater opportunities for rural and remote students to benefit from the Country Areas Program.

### **Regional Universities**

- increase undergraduate places in regional universities and places for country students wishing to study medicine and allied health professions
- ensure regional universities have access to the infrastructure necessary to support growth in student numbers
- encourage the establishment of centres of research excellence in regional universities
- ensure regional universities have affordable access to high quality communications, so they can compete with metropolitan universities in the provision of distance education
- encourage more autonomous, flexible and responsive universities to the needs and demands of rural and regional Australians
- ensure university fees are not deregulated and vouchers are not introduced
- ensure the current system of Government subsidies and funded places remain, with no additional loan system or real interest attached to HECS
- provide incentives to enable students to study at regional universities and remain in the regions.

## 4.3 Social Welfare

It is the role of Government to provide assistance on a fair and equitable basis to those in genuine need, while promoting personal responsibility for individual wellbeing and acceptance of mutual obligation on the part of those receiving Commonwealth support.

It is also the role of Government to implement economic and tax policies which encourage people to save for their future and provide for themselves during their retirement.

The National Party strongly supports a welfare safety net for the disadvantaged but believes continuous scrutiny of social welfare programs is necessary to ensure maximum funds are available to those who need them most and that those who are able to care for themselves do not adopt welfare dependency as a lifestyle choice.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- encourage personal savings, investment and superannuation, so people can provide for themselves, especially in retirement, to the maximum extent possible
- ensure the benefits of Australia's social security system meet the needs of those genuinely unable to provide for themselves
- recognise social security should work as a mechanism to help benefit recipients become self-reliant wherever possible
- strictly monitor and regularly review all welfare payments
- recognise the contribution of families which support the aged and frail within the family home
- take into account the special contribution made by spouses who remain at home for their children by a realistic system of family support
- review the financing and awarding of Commonwealth employees compensation
- further improve the capacity of the Department of Family and Community Services to undertake audits and crack down on fraud and overpayment
- improve the operation and efficiency of the Child Support Agency
- expand the reach of the work for the dole scheme into smaller rural communities that do not have the resources to finance projects.

## 4.4 Consumer Affairs

The National Party has a commitment to the development of a fair and informed market place which operates as a balanced partnership between successful business and satisfied consumers.

The National Party will continue to improve, in cooperation and consultation with the States, uniformity in consumer protection laws, including appropriate laws to ensure products are safe and properly labelled. We encourage and support self-regulation programs and industry-based dispute resolution processes.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- establish a market place for consumers and business where there is a competitive environment, effective representation, accurate information, maximum flexibility of choice, protection from unsafe goods and services, adequate means of redress and effective legislation
- maintain a Ministry for Consumer Affairs with responsibility for matters relating to national consumer interests
- vigorously pursue, in co-operation with the States, a uniform national scheme of readily understandable consumer protection laws, including appropriate regulations to ensure products are safe and properly labelled
- improve information programs ensuring appropriate education material is available to those with limited English, those with low incomes, and those who live in remote areas
- encourage the further development of self-regulation programs and non-litigious avenues for consumer redress such as industry-based ombudsmen schemes, voluntary codes of conduct, mediation and small claims tribunals
- apply mandatory codes of conduct in circumstances where voluntary codes have proved to be ineffective
- require government departments, agencies and utilities to develop performance criteria covering their dealings with consumers
- warn consumers of unfair trading practices, prosecute offenders and ensure unsafe goods are expeditiously removed from sale
- promote the benefits of buying Australian
- provide an effective country of origin labelling system to guarantee the integrity of claims to Australian origin
- require all food products imported into Australia to meet the same quarantine, hygiene, health and labelling standards as Australian produced goods
- require truth and accuracy in advertising, packaging and labelling
- ensure the benefits of the competition reform process pass on to consumers through a wider choice of services and lower prices.

## 4.5 Sport and Recreation

Australia has a proud and strong record of excellence in national and international sporting endeavour – a record that is second to none considering our relatively small population base.

Sport focuses national pride and helps sustain a healthy community. The National Party supports policies that continue to encourage achievement and excellence across all levels of sporting and recreational activity, be it the pursuit of individual goals or team effort.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- promote the maximum participation in sport at all levels of education from primary school onwards
- maintain the Australian Institute of Sport
- help Australian athletes attain the highest standards of performance and develop their maximum potential
- support Commonwealth involvement in the provision of national sporting facilities of an international standard
- help national sporting associations maximise their administration and coaching potential
- encourage participation in and promotion of sport by private enterprise
- encourage national sporting organisations to support regional competition and coaching programs in country areas
- encourage maximum participation in sport by disabled Australians and representation by Australia at international disabled sporting events
- seek to eliminate all forms of illegal drug use in sport and maintain Australia's position as a world leader in the fight against drugs in sport
- develop partnerships with the community and the private sector to secure sport and recreation opportunities for all Australians
- ensure the benefits from the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Para-Olympic Games flow through to all Australians, especially in regional areas
- develop the potential of the sport and recreation industries as major contributors to growth in jobs and export earnings.

## 4.6 Firearms

The National Party believes people who have the legal right and legitimate need to own and use a firearm should not be unreasonably restricted by Government regulation or bureaucratic interference.

The right of individuals to own firearms should not extend to anyone who has any record of instability, violent crime, the unsafe use of weapons, or drug or alcohol dependency.

Priority should be given to eliminating the causes of crime and the social and economic conditions which have lead to rising crime rates. Attention must be given to the influence of the visual media and its depiction of both violence and the irresponsible use of firearms and other weapons.

### **The National Party supports:**

- recognition of legitimate sporting, professional and recreational shooting activities and the needs of the rural sector within a framework of accountability for firearms ownership
- the availability to Australian competitors, on a restricted basis if necessary, of the equivalent shooting equipment being used by sports shooters in international shooting events, such as the Olympic and Commonwealth Games
- a ban on rapid fire, fully automatic weapons, such as machine guns, large calibre weapons or other military-style weapons
- a national register of prohibited people, naming those who are not allowed to purchase or own guns and who should not be able to hold a shooters or firearms licence
- the provision of adequate identification by people wishing to buy a firearm, and a withholding period before they can take delivery, to enable full checking of the identification against the prohibition register
- application of a uniform shooters licensing system across Australia, achieved through agreement by the States and Territories rather than imposed by the Commonwealth
- an open and public review, conducted in each State and Territory, once every three years of the nation's gun laws, to ensure they are in tune with community attitudes and the reasonable needs of legitimate shooters.

## 4.7 Art and Culture

Art and culture represent the creativity and expression of the nation. They flourish best in a democratic and open society, free of political direction or influence.

The National Party believes in continued Government support for the arts, under a non-partisan system based on the judgment of experts in the relevant fields.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- promote the widest understanding and appreciation among all age groups of the many forms of artistic and cultural presentation available in Australia
- promote the vast variety of Australia's artistic and cultural heritage and prowess to the world to the greatest extent possible
- encourage maximum opportunity for Australian artists to strive for excellence
- ensure that all Australians, particularly those in rural and remote areas, have access to art and cultural performances and exhibitions
- ensure that funds via the Australia Council are distributed fairly
- increase corporate support and sponsorship of art and culture
- recognise community arts and the cultural needs of communities outside major cities
- maintain funding for Commonwealth grants for art and culture in real terms
- maintain strong support for the Australian film industry
- continue support for the Australia Council and Australia's major national institutions, including the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery, National Library, Stockman's Hall of Fame, Australian Maritime Museum, Film and Sound Archive, Aviation Museum and Museum of Australia
- maximise preservation and appreciation of Indigenous art and culture and encourage its continuing development
- maintain support for the Australian music industry and encourage the maximum number of tours to non-metropolitan areas
- ensure the continuation of State-based symphony orchestras and encourage them to tour regional and country areas
- encourage increased development of regional art galleries, touring opera and musical presentations, cultural centres, museums and historic exhibits
- continue the development of library facilities throughout the nation, including remote and isolated communities.

## 4.8 Heritage

Responsible preservation of the nation's heritage is a matter for all governments, communities and individuals.

The National Estate marks our progress through history, and must be properly preserved.

Federal, State and Local governments, as well as community interest groups and the private sector, must cooperate on matters relating to responsible National Estate preservation.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- ensure a Federal, State and Local Government commitment to the continued preservation of the National Estate in a responsible, coordinated and planned manner
- emphasise the role of the private sector and individuals in heritage protection
- provide tax incentives for the restoration of approved National Estate properties
- review the operation of the Australian Heritage Commission to ensure National Heritage Listings are genuinely worthwhile
- support appropriate heritage and conservation organisations, especially the National Trust
- ensure the Australian Heritage Commission is structured so that it can best meet its responsibilities
- maintain the Natural Heritage Trust to ensure ongoing repair, regeneration and maintenance of Australia's primary environmental heritage assets
- provide an ongoing program to collect and protect Australia's diverse cultural heritage
- provide a national database, available on-line, so all Australians have access to the record of the nation's history and heritage
- ensure children from primary school onwards are taught the importance and significance of Australia's history and heritage.

## 5.1 National Industry Policy

The National Party supports a comprehensive National Industry Policy, developed cooperatively by all State, Territory and Federal Governments and in consultation with industry organisations.

Such an over-arching policy would be instrumental in helping Australia maximise its business and industry growth potential and competitiveness.

**Accordingly, the National Party supports a policy which:**

- provides a national policy framework to ensure a growing, diversified, efficient and internationally competitive manufacturing sector in Australia as a primary source of jobs and employment growth
- ensures an integrated National Industry Policy, covering State, Territory and Federal administrations, to encourage the establishment of more export oriented industries and individual business expansion, especially among small and medium enterprises in rural and regional areas
- links inter-related policy areas such as taxation, trade, micro-economic reform, industrial relations, primary and secondary industry and Federal/State financial arrangements
- provides clear directions so businesses have the confidence to make long-term investment and growth decisions
- provides an internationally competitive tax system
- encourages maximum private sector investment in major infrastructure development and provision of venture capital to develop new and expanded enterprises, especially in non-metropolitan areas
- encourages growth through an increased commitment to research and development, export market development and business establishment in rural and regional centres
- provides business and industry, especially in country and regional areas, with the opportunity to participate in the new economy through the use of e-commerce and other on-line technologies
- fosters the commitment of corporate Australia in philanthropic investment to nurture social and economic innovation and development across rural and regional Australia
- strengthens support for investment by industry in research and development
- builds educational opportunities in Australia around the identified needs of industry
- encourages an industry-sponsored annual National Industry Outlook Conference, separate from and in addition to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) Conference, to fully analyse Australia's total industry performance and identify growth opportunities across the board of farming, mining, manufacturing and service, thereby ensuring the continuing relevance of National Industry Policy to changing domestic and international trends.

## 5.2 Small and Family Business

Small and family business is the backbone of the economy, especially in regional Australia. More than 80% of jobs growth over the past decade has been in small business and this trend is expected to continue.

There are more than 900,000 small businesses in Australia employing nearly half the national workforce and generating up to 40% of the nation's gross domestic product.

The National Party's objective is to entrench small and family business as the engine room for growth and jobs across regional Australia. Moreover, we see a growing and dynamic small business sector as essential to ensuring the widest possible distribution of national wealth, thereby avoiding a concentration of economic power.

### Accordingly, the Party supports policies which:

- maintain low inflation and interest rates, reduce debt, and reduce the tax burden on small business
- simplify the tax system, reduce compliance costs and minimise red tape, waste and duplication
- encourage the maximum private sector provision of venture capital to develop new and expanded enterprises, especially in non-metropolitan areas
- encourage more decentralisation and establishment of new small business enterprises in country and regional Australia
- ensure maximum opportunity for small business, especially in country and regional areas to participate in the new economy and take full advantage of the latest in info-technology and on-line communications
- continue to strive for realistic reform of unfair dismissal laws, including exempting small businesses employing 15 people or less from unfair dismissal requirements
- increase competition and protect small and family business and industry from abuses of market power
- provide a workplace relations system that enables maximum flexibility in employment arrangements, suited to individual workplaces and free from rigid industry-wide awards and union interference
- retain junior rates of pay to ensure the ongoing availability of thousands of jobs for young people
- continue to increase the number of apprentices across small business and industry, with emphasis on increasing the availability of apprenticeships in regional areas
- maintain the right of employees to choose voluntary union membership
- protect small business and industry from secondary boycotts in industrial disputes
- ensure the Federal Government contracts out to the private sector to the maximum extent possible, with emphasis on giving regionally based business and industry ample opportunity to tender
- require the Federal Government to pay within 30 days of receipt all properly documented and undisputed accounts due to the private sector
- maintain small business as a Cabinet portfolio and require all Government departments to assess small business impacts when reviewing existing or new regulations
- improve the Business Entry Point service to give small business access to Government departments and agencies via electronic channels for transactions and communication
- upgrade the provision of small business management courses in the education system
- review the Franchise Code of Conduct to ensure it adequately nurtures certainty within the franchise industry
- provide a national scheme to safeguard employee entitlements in cases of business insolvency
- give Australians choice of superannuation fund and portability of members' balances between funds
- maintain the Small Business Ministerial Council to ensure ongoing dialogue between small business organisations and the Government
- ensure National Competition Policy does not unfairly advantage large businesses and Government enterprises.



## 5.3 Information Technology

The revolution in information technology is just beginning. The National Party sees the growth of electronic commerce, of Internet-based communications and the information economy as offering exciting and major new opportunities for Australia and particularly for people in rural and remote areas.

We also recognise the potential for job displacement as companies move to the new economy and substantially change traditional work practices. There is a need to balance this with the fact that growth of electronic business will do more than anything else to break down the tyranny of distance that has for so long been a major factor in Australia's development.

### **The National Party therefore supports policies which:**

- provide all Australians with equitable access to the Internet and related services, no matter where they live
- further develop Networking the Nation to get more communications infrastructure to rural and remote Australia
- through the Innovation Investment Fund provide finance to venture capital funds including for IT
- outsource as much of the Federal Government's multi-billion dollar IT requirements as possible, giving emphasis on outsourcing to small and medium IT companies, especially in regional areas
- deliver all appropriate Federal Government services over the Internet and provide a single Commonwealth Internet entry point
- maintain the National Electronic Authentication Council to ensure consumer confidence in electronic commerce and develop on-line transaction authentication schemes in the market place
- maintain the Australian Information Economy Advisory Council to ensure industry and community input into Government decision making on information industries and information economy issues
- take all reasonable steps to protect consumers, particularly children, from violent, illegal and offensive material on the Internet, including tough penalties for Australian companies or individuals found responsible for publishing such content
- recognise the need for a code of conduct to provide acceptable guidelines for any form of electronic publishing, be it hosted in Australia or from foreign sources
- through 'NetAlert', provide a community advisory body for on-line content
- take measures as necessary to protect the privacy of people using e-commerce, e-mail, electronic publishing and on-line communications technologies
- enforce tough penalties for criminal activities involving e-commerce, e-mail, electronic publishing and other on-line communications.

## 5.4 Structural Reform and Efficiency

A major inhibiting factor to Australia's international competitiveness in the past has been a range of inefficiencies, duplication, waste and outmoded work practices.

In recent years, under a Federal Government involving the National Party, Australia has seen much reform in these areas. But more needs to be done to maximise cost efficiency, productivity, and international competitiveness.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- place maximum emphasis on reducing interest rates and inflation
- eliminate unnecessary duplication of Federal, State and Local Government services
- cut costs, charges and taxes to the private sector to increase competitiveness, productivity and employment
- cut unnecessary Government intervention in and regulation of the private sector
- encourage the value-adding of export commodities and industries
- provide business and industry the opportunity to participate in the new economy
- upgrade efficiency and competitiveness of national road, rail and air freight services
- ensure as much road development work as possible is open to tender
- increase efficiencies in communications, especially in rural and regional Australia
- increase the efficiency of the waterfront, transport, handling and coastal shipping, tug and harbour marine services
- eliminate unnecessary duplication of Federal, State and Local Government services
- increase cost efficiencies in all public services and statutory authorities
- increase cost efficiency and productivity in the workplace as a direct benefit to employees, employers and the nation
- ensure that National Competition Policy (NCP) adequately takes into account the social impact of competition reform through an ongoing and thorough examination of NCP and the National Competition Council (NCC)
- develop and apply a consistent public interest test under NCP that assesses the full socio-economic impacts of reform, especially in regional areas
- continue progress towards national electricity and gas markets to deliver greater competition between suppliers and security of supply.

## 5.5 Employment and Industrial Relations

The fundamental principle of this policy is to allow employers and employees, together, to improve working conditions and productivity. It is only when voluntary agreements and freedom of choice replace coercion and rigid prescriptive rules that work satisfaction, productivity and national economic potential will be recognised.

The National Party's objective is to ensure Australian workers receive higher pay in more productive workplaces.

### The National Party supports:

- assistance for employers and employees to enter into direct negotiations about wages and conditions at individual workplaces - for those workplaces with no union members, the availability of union assistance when requested by employees
- maintenance of the jurisdiction of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) to deliver safety-net wage increases for the lowest paid
- enhanced flexibility within the labour market
- minimum conditions for agreements to ensure protection, especially for the low paid, including the relevant applicable classification award hourly rate
- retention of a "no disadvantage" test against a fair and reasonable set of minimum entitlements for employees
- maintenance of the secondary boycott provisions of the Trade Practices Act
- reform of unfair dismissal laws, including exempting small businesses employing 15 people or less from unfair dismissal requirements
- the right of workers to belong or not belong to a union of their choice, abolition of preference for union members and the right of members of a union not to contribute to political activities of the union
- optional deduction of union membership fees from government employees' wages
- where union dues are paid directly from employees' pay, a requirement that employees renew their authority every twelve months
- the right of unions to dis-amalgamate
- adequate resources to ensure meaningful job training, including more apprenticeships, is available to all young people seeking to enter the workforce
- adequate avenues of appeal against standards, promotions or demotions for employees within the public sector to a degree at least comparable to those available in private enterprise
- democratic accountability within industrial organisations on a basis similar to that applicable to public companies.

## 5.6 Taxation

The National Party's motivation in pursuing tax reform is to ensure country and regional Australians have a better opportunity to share in the nation's wealth.

It is the responsibility of the Federal Government, in conjunction with the States and Local Government, to raise only as much revenue by way of taxation as is necessary for the efficient provision of necessary services.

Australia's tax system should achieve world's best practice in terms of fairness and equity and as such the National Party supports the New Tax System as an essential development for tax reform.

All income-earners should pay their fair share of taxation, but the tax system should recognise the importance of families, especially single income families and those with children.

It should be structured so the burden of taxation does not fall disproportionately on Australians living outside non-metropolitan areas.

The National Party supports measures to minimise tax avoidance and evasion but rejects anything that treats taxpayers as guilty and requires proof of innocence, or imposes excessive compliance costs on taxpayers generally.

The provision to the States of a guaranteed source of revenue growth through the New Tax System should be continued.

### **The National Party therefore supports:**

- the ongoing development and simplification of Federal tax laws
- a tax system enforced fairly on all sections of the community, which encourages greater wealth creation and employment, and provides incentive for effort, investment, initiative, productivity and self-reliance
- the ongoing monitoring of tax reforms to ensure they meet the political objectives of helping Australian business, industry, individuals and families
- progressive flattening of the personal income tax rate scales
- priority consideration of families with dependent children, particularly those on single incomes
- a tax mix which ensures there is no disadvantage to people living and working in regional and rural Australia
- the provision of meaningful zonal tax allowances that appropriately address the needs of people in distant and remote Australia
- the removal of tax barriers to private investment in infrastructure projects financed wholly by the private sector or jointly with governments
- reform and simplification of the fringe benefits tax and its application to isolated and remote area industries
- control of transfer pricing between trans-national companies
- the enactment of a taxpayers' charter enforceable in the courts which provides certainty, equity and equality under the law, full explanation of any assessment, right of appeal at reasonable cost, the right of proper professional representation and the right to compensation for loss resulting from unlawful actions by revenue authorities
- no reintroduction of Commonwealth death or gift duties and no new wealth or inheritance taxes
- establishment of a statutory board to address the operations of the Australian Tax Office
- rejection of any changes to the taxation of trusts which prejudice their use by small business, including farmers, for legitimate business purposes
- a 'do it yourself' or 'self managed' superannuation fund which enables borrowing against accumulated funds to acquire real property as an investment for the fund
- an independent review of the compulsory superannuation guarantee scheme.

## 5.7 Foreign Investment

Australia needs overseas investment to stimulate competitive development of business and industry and provide jobs.

Multinational companies are ensuring work opportunities for thousands of Australians – for example, McDonalds employs 55,000 Australians, BP Australia 2,200, Toyota 4,300 and Cadbury Schweppes 3,600.

Notwithstanding this, the National Party believes foreign investment should always maximise Australian involvement, help add value to raw materials and commodity products, and be in Australia's interest.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- encourage overseas investment which is consistent with the needs of the Australian community
- ensure maximum employment of Australians, use of Australian materials, processing of raw materials within Australia, and use of Australian science and technology in research and development
- provide for reciprocity of investment opportunity
- prohibit restrictive market franchising
- provide the Australian Government, through the Foreign Investment Review Board, with the ability to monitor and report on foreign investment, adjust policy as necessary, and maintain a register of foreign land ownership
- ensure foreign owned enterprises in Australia fully comply with the same laws that apply to Australian owned enterprises and meet their tax and other social obligations.

## 5.8 Industry Assistance

The National Party supports trade liberalisation matched with appropriate structural measures in conjunction with reforms in tax, industry support and micro-economic policy, and imposition of an effective anti-dumping and countervailing duties system.

The Party supports a further gradual tariff reduction backed by robust public interest assessment.

In implementing changes to tariff levels, regard must be taken of the national interest and international developments - in particular the progress of moves towards general trade liberalisation, which will be of significant benefit to Australian exports.

### **The National Party supports:**

- tariff reductions made on the basis of
  - measurable progress in trade liberalisation by overseas competitors
  - clear progress in domestic reform, and
  - the structural adjustment costs facing industries
- parallel development of a fair and competitive trading and investment environment
- annual publication of total and industry by industry details of the cost of tariff and other assistance to the Australian consumer consistent with the global rules-based trading system
- a flexible response to specific circumstances and recognition of the special situation of such industries as motor vehicles and textiles
- withdrawal of tariffs on imported goods for which Australian substitutes are not available
- provision of structured adjustment assistance jointly with the States and Territories to facilitate and ameliorate economic change in regional areas
- training and other adjustment opportunities for employees and employers affected by these reforms.

## 6.1 Agriculture and Fishing

Australia has a proud record as the world's most efficient, low cost, producer of clean, quality agricultural commodities. Our primary industries remain central to our economic strength.

The National Party is committed to further developing sustainable agriculture and fishing, with emphasis on sustainable economic and environmental management practices, to take full advantage of the challenges of the future.

The opportunities are enormous. It is projected that by the year 2005 the world will need to double its production of food. The future offers exciting prospects for Australia to be a major supplier of high quality, clean food and fibre, particularly to the Asian region.

In addition to specific industry policies, the nation's primary industries are helped by economic and labour market reforms that enhance international competitiveness by maintaining the lowest possible levels of inflation and interest rates, reducing foreign debt and industry input costs, and increasing productivity.

### The National Party supports policies which:

- promote the continuing viability of Australian agriculture through support for the family farm as the foundation of agricultural industries, the provision of rural services, and strengthening of rural income potential
- encourage banks and financial institutions to increase investment in the rural sector and take a longer term view of primary industry in the context of their investment and lending policies
- promote the development of rural-based cooperatives as business entities to help primary producers achieve greater market power
- maintain the effectiveness of an integrated rural policy program, especially in relation to farm family welfare, succession planning and business development, within the *Agriculture - Advancing Australia* package
- maintain a viable and effective farm management deposit scheme as a tax effective vehicle for managing variability of farm income
- ensure exceptional circumstances criteria are applied in a fair and non-discriminatory manner
- maintain tax incentives for water storage, reticulation and drainage, salinity and water table control, and soil conservation and tree planting
- maintain exemption from excise for diesel fuel used off-road in primary production
- provide relief from asset tests, including for Youth Allowance, Age Pension, and other social security benefits, for farm families in recognition of the often non-realizable nature of farm business assets
- carefully monitor and encourage the development of gene technology, recognising its potential benefits and its implications for agriculture, having regard to the interests of rural and regional people, both as producers and consumers
- maintain uniform national regulations covering the safe use and disposal of agricultural and veterinary chemicals, and of notification and control procedures covering hazardous chemicals and other pollutants
- support compensation for primary producers whose product is adversely affected by chemical residues through factors beyond their control
- continue to develop an Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) that is more responsive to Australian producers, more efficient, less costly and increases competitiveness for exporters
- ensure Australia's quarantine system is adequately resourced to minimise the risk of exotic pests and diseases entering Australia
- support effective anti-dumping laws and countervailing duties, including the shorter inquiry periods introduced in 1998
- require all products imported into Australia to meet the same quarantine, hygiene, health and labelling standards required for domestic goods
- retain the single desk export powers for the Australian wheat crop and work with the industry in the development of long-term future arrangements for the industry
- uphold the Queensland Government's responsibility for the Queensland sugar industry's single desk selling arrangements

- support a world competitive, innovative and efficient wool industry with ownership and management control by woolgrowers
- maintain restrictions on the export of Merino genetic material
- ensure that, in shaping the dairy industry's global competitiveness and in moves toward deregulation, full account is taken of impacts on individual operators, farming communities and regions with substantial investment and employment in the industry
- retain concessional tax arrangements on winery cellar door sales
- ensure adequate funding to control noxious weeds and feral animals
- continue to provide secure, long-term access rights to operators licensed to fish in areas managed by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority
- enhance the value of the seafood industry by encouraging quality assurance strategies, industry coordination, value adding and continued development of aquaculture
- support the continued development of recreational fishing in Australia and the adequate stocking of rivers and lakes with native fish
- protect the Australian Fishing Zone from poaching by using Defence Force or covert operatives and satellite technology on a 24-hours per day, 365 days a year, basis
- provide structural adjustment to those Federal fisheries where management changes have seriously impacted on the ecological sustainability and viability of fishing operations
- ensure restrictions on commercial fishing in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park area are based on competent scientific assessment of all relevant facts and circumstances and offer assistance to those affected by such controls on a proper commercial evaluation of their losses
- ensure the wild catch fisheries sector has access to the FarmBis program
- ensure that in the further development of oceans policy proper regard is given to all users of the marine environment as well as to land based industries that may affect it
- encourage the development of a bio-mass based alternative fuels industry in regional Australia.

## 6.2 Timber

Australia's native forests are a unique, renewable resource, which must be responsibly conserved. The National Party's central objective is to ensure a proper balance between responsible utilisation and conservation, coupled with the expanded development of plantation forestry.

The National Party endorses the National Forest Policy Statement (NFPS) and the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) made under it for the sustainable management of native forests. The Party believes the 20 year timeframe for RFAs provides significant investment security for the forest industries and will not support locking up further areas of forest in a manner inconsistent with individual RFAs.

Independent studies indicate that, given the right opportunities, employment in the timber industry could go from its present level of 72,500 direct jobs to more than 211,000 by the year 2030. Similarly, our forest products, now worth nearly \$6 billion a year, could increase to \$8.3 billion in five years and reach \$23 billion by the year 2030. At present Australia imports up to \$2 billion worth more timber products than it exports.

Meeting environmental targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions offers further incentive for plantation forestry and native revegetation, to provide sinks for carbon dioxide storage and opportunities in carbon credit trading.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- ensure the ongoing development of an ecologically sustainable timber industry and timber jobs in regional areas
- continue Plantation 2020 Vision with the aim of trebling the area of plantation forestry by the year 2020
- encourage the increased development of farm forestry
- provide guaranteed harvesting rights for plantation and farm forestry
- fully evaluate and take advantage of the opportunities offered through carbon credit trading
- remove Federal controls on the export of timber from public and private plantations
- recognise the primary responsibility of the States in native forest management
- provide legislative resource security to RFAs, negotiated between the Federal and State Governments
- ensure Australia continues to have a world class forest reserve system as delivered under RFAs
- ensure Australia receives international recognition of and accreditation for its sustainable forest management practices.

## 6.3 Minerals and Energy

Australia's future development and wealth is heavily dependent on its ability to explore and develop its minerals and energy resources.

The minerals, petroleum and energy industries provide more than 80,000 direct and nearly 330,000 indirect jobs. They account for over 60% of Australia's commodity exports and have enormous potential for future growth. These resources should be developed in a way that benefits all Australians and meets world's best practice in environmental management.

Security of land tenure is of paramount importance to these industries, but is threatened by uncertainties caused by native title and environmental issues.

It is in the interests of all Australians that these difficulties be resolved. The National Party will maintain a primary policy emphasis on facilitating increased resource exploration and mineral development.

**In conjunction with overall economic policy, the National Party supports policies for the development of the nation's mineral and energy resources which:**

- provide long-term policy certainty so the resource industries can plan and invest with confidence
- ensure internationally competitive standards in domestic economic conditions, taxation policies, industrial relations, workplace safety and transport
- implement clear, fair and efficient procedures for assessing and approving new resource projects
- adopt principles of multiple and sequential land use, based on the need for responsible development, conservation and land rehabilitation
- fully develop the export potential of the uranium industry under strict international safeguards agreements
- encourage greater use of alternative energy sources such as solar and bio-mass energy, wind, hydro-electricity and natural gas, and increase private sector research into fuel substitutes and alternative fuels
- encourage the corporatisation and privatisation, as appropriate, of publicly owned electricity generators, distributors and transmission systems
- target energy efficiency programs to address areas of greatest need, and ensure Government procurement and operations maximise energy efficiency
- maintain the exempt status of natural gas and LPG from petroleum product excise
- maintain the existing excise/royalty regime applying to petroleum production from the North West Shelf
- ensure access to prospective exploration areas under a system of multiple and sequential land use
- simplify the administrative and compliance requirements associated with secondary taxation provisions for petroleum producers
- ensure the mix of programs, contracting out, commercial opportunities and the provision of user pays services, maximises the development of a diversified, internationally competitive Australian industry
- implement a more transparent wholesale pricing formula such as terminal gate pricing for petroleum fuels
- maintain world parity pricing of oil to encourage continuing exploration and exploitation of Australia's domestic petroleum resources
- continue fringe benefits tax exemption for housing provided by employers for employees in remote areas
- continue immediate deductibility for expenditure on the removal of mining overburden, prospecting and exploration and research and development tax concessions
- continue the five year rolling excise exemption for LPG and maintain the excise free status of other alternative fuels
- continue to benchmark the whole of government energy report so that energy efficiency targets are met
- oppose any reintroduction of export controls on any minerals except uranium
- encourage the States to extend grid power to all electricity users within their boundaries.



## 6.4 Soil and Water Resources

Australia is a land of environmental contrasts and contradictions. It is the driest inhabited continent on earth, where drought is a recurring problem. At the same time, northern Australia lies in the monsoon belt and huge areas of the country are subject to regular flooding. Australia has a temperate climate suitable for raising a wide range of crops and animals, but our soils are ancient and many are shallow, unstable and of low fertility. These characteristics present unique and complicated challenges to all Australians in achieving balanced and sustainable management of our natural resources.

The National Party's policies reflect its determination to preserve and enhance soil and water resources, and the vital contribution to the nation's economy made by industries which utilise those resources. The Party recognises the environmental and economic imperative of continuing to provide Federal leadership and substantial taxpayer investment to achieve sustainable natural resources management and redress resource degradation that has occurred in the past.

### The National Party supports:

- the broad objectives of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Water Agreement to achieve an efficient and sustainable water industry based on the concept of full cost recovery, but with any cross subsidies being transparent and justified in public interest terms
- recognition of water entitlements as property rights and the payment of compensation where these are reduced or withdrawn
- a comprehensive review of the COAG Water Agreement, in conjunction with the review of National Competition Policy, to ensure it does not effectively prevent governments from investing in new and/or upgraded water harvesting schemes in the public and/or regional interest
- continuing implementation of the national water quality management strategy
- comprehensive and ongoing action on the outcomes of the nation's first ever National Land and Water Resources Audit, initiated by the National Party
- in conjunction with the private sector, research into and development of ecologically sound ways to further harness Australia's water resources
- initiatives to increase revegetation and improve the quality of the nation's rivers and catchments
- greater community participation in soil and water conservation initiatives, including through employment-linked programs such as Green Corps
- continuing Federal funding for a major integrated environmental package with strong involvement from community groups in rural and regional Australia, such as the Natural Heritage Trust and its associated elements including Landcare, Bushcare, Rivercare, Coast and Clean Seas, and Coastcare
- an ongoing emphasis on combating salinity and the provision of Federal funding to address the sustainability of the soil and water resources of the Murray-Darling Basin
- water conservation programs which provide Federal funding for capital works and infrastructure
- priority consideration in the development of water conservation programs for flood mitigation, irrigation, and town water supply
- integrated flood mitigation projects like the Regional Flood Mitigation Program which includes both the construction of new and the repair or upgrading of existing infrastructure
- incentive for increased private sector involvement in soil and water research
- promotion of sound management practices and education at all levels of society to generate the highest level of protection for soil and water resources
- continued funding for the Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation
- tax incentives to increase soil and water conservation on farms
- in conjunction with the States, programs to control and or eradicate feral animals and noxious weeds and plants
- recognition of salinity as the major threat to the long term sustainability of dry land and irrigated farming regions and to water quality in cities and towns throughout inland Australia, through specific policies which
  - pursue a national strategy of remedial action for salt-affected land
  - provide specific funding for research into salinity causes and control
  - encourage private sector measures to assist in the reclamation of salt-affected land

- provide urban water supplies to World Health Organisation standards.

## 6.5 Environment and Conservation

The National Party is determined to protect the environment and conserve the unique beauty of Australia's natural landscape and its flora and fauna.

The Party has a deep commitment to the land and conservation. Our policies reflect our understanding, care and concern for environment and conservation. They lay down broad principles through which protection of the environment and the sustainable use of its resources can be integrated.

The National Party strongly affirms that the States have primary constitutional responsibility for natural resource management and expects the States to meet their obligation to manage the environment in a sustainable manner.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- ensure Commonwealth involvement in environmental issues is restricted to matters of genuine national environmental significance
- increase private and public expenditure on national soil, water and vegetation conservation programs
- nationally coordinate audits of the extent of land and water degradation and their economic and social costs to the nation
- increase revegetation and improve the quality of the nation's rivers and catchments
- advance the cause of sustainable land and water resource management in the Murray-Darling Basin
- maintain a world class forest reserve system
- provide financial incentives to encourage land holders to voluntarily preserve native vegetation and forest areas on their properties
- ensure any restrictions on land clearing are based on independent scientific assessment and are supported by adequate compensation to land holders for lost development opportunities
- properly manage world heritage listed areas in cooperation with State Governments
- establish, in conjunction with stakeholders, accountable, scientific and objective assessment procedures for determining land use in World Heritage areas and decisions of the Australian Heritage Commission
- support sensible multiple use land management programs, including environmental and socio-economic impact statements
- coordinate with the States and Territories notification and control procedures covering hazardous chemicals, toxic waste and other pollutants
- implement uniform regulations covering the safe use and disposal of agricultural and veterinary chemicals
- protect endangered species of flora and fauna, including migratory birds and marine animals
- contribute to Australia meeting its greenhouse gas reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol, while minimising any negative impacts on industry
- assist the establishment and/or expansion of regional industries which can make a contribution to meeting Australia's greenhouse gas reduction targets
- provide for an internationally harmonised system of tradeable carbon credits in Australia
- encourage industry to enter into voluntary agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

## 6.6 Science and Technology

Science and technology are the pathways to the future.

Our standard of living and the fulfilment of our aspirations will depend on ensuring Australians benefit fully from scientific research and technological development.

The National Party is determined to lift the level of Government-funded research and encourage increased private investment in research and development by Australian companies and individuals.

### **The National Party supports policies which:**

- promote public recognition of the importance to the economy and general standard of living of productivity gains achieved through technological innovation
- ensure the CSIRO maintains its position as the critical centre of the nation's research effort, including agricultural research, able to maintain worldwide recognition and prestige
- maximise the decentralisation of CSIRO research facilities
- maintain and improve the current dollar for dollar funding arrangements for rural research and development
- achieve a balance between applied and basic research in the agricultural, mining and manufacturing sectors
- ensure all research sectors are on a commercial footing and able to provide for rapid technology transfer
- place greater emphasis on the commercialisation of publicly sponsored research and development
- maximise the commitment of private sector involvement in research and development by accurately targeting Government incentives
- improve the management of intellectual property in Australia and encourage the flow of venture capital to allow research and development breakthroughs to be commercialised in Australia
- streamline regulatory processes to remove impediments to innovation without compromising public health and safety
- strengthen the Cooperative Research Centre Program to encourage collaboration between industry, educational institutions and government
- encourage collaboration between Australian researchers and global research networks
- enhance opportunities in molecular bio-science through commercial ventures to encourage new discoveries and commercial ventures in the bio-medical, agricultural and other biotechnology fields under the auspices of the Institute of Molecular Bio-science
- improve public awareness of the issues surrounding greater adoption of biotechnology by Australian industry
- maintain scientific and research programs including research and development START and the Innovation Investment Fund
- maintain funding in real terms for the Land and Water Resources R&D Corporation and the Rural Industries R&D Corporation
- support scientific centres of excellence including the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation and the Australian Institute of Marine Science
- ensure a comprehensive range of projects are supported by the National Health and Medical Research Council
- meet the strategic research and development priorities identified by the comprehensive scientific capability review of the Chief Scientist.

## 7.1 Foreign Affairs

The primary objective of Australia's foreign policy must be to protect and promote the national interest.

This is best done by strengthening international and regional dialogue to increase understanding and enable the forging of lasting agreements to enhance diplomatic, trade and other relations.

In direct negotiations and through organisations like the United Nations, Australia's diplomatic effort must always place a priority on enhancing Australia's standing in world affairs, especially in our region.

### **The National Party therefore supports policies which:**

- support Australia's engagement in Asia as a major foreign policy priority
- maintain ongoing support for and involvement in the Commonwealth of Nations
- ensure cooperative arrangements are in place to maintain the security of sea lanes, air routes and communication links
- support the tabling of treaties not containing sensitive defence information in Parliament, prior to their signing by Government, so there can be widespread community consultation and parliamentary debate
- maintain the focus on bilateral relations as the basis for Australian foreign policy through strong and appropriate global diplomatic representation, with a particular emphasis on Australia's regional neighbours
- enhance measures to combat terrorism in the region, in cooperation with other nations sharing common interests
- strengthen treaty arrangements for mutual security in the region, including participation in United Nations peacekeeping and relief programs
- respect national sovereignty, while working to protect human rights, and uphold individual freedom
- provide for even handed treatment of all Middle Eastern countries
- accept there are occasions when trade and economic sanctions are appropriate, provided the cost of such sanctions to the Australian economy is shared by the whole community
- maintain a foreign aid program with increased emphasis on providing assistance in kind rather than direct financial grants
- recognise Australia's obligations to political refugees
- place emphasis on providing humanitarian help for refugees closer to the country or region in question before considering temporary relocation to Australia
- support the world-wide reduction in nuclear and conventional arms and particularly support the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
- continue to work through international forums towards universal agreements on a comprehensive nuclear test ban in all environments - atmospheric, underground, underwater and in outer space
- contribute to the abolition of anti-personnel land mines throughout the world.

## 7.2 Trade

Australia's economy is based on its ability to trade and the Federal Government must help make our export industries as competitive as possible on world markets.

The objective of the National Party's trade policy is to promote Australia's growth through trade and thus improve the living standards of all Australians on a sustainable basis. It is a single policy objective best pursued through five different avenues or trade policy 'tracks'.

**Therefore the National Party will:**

### 1. Trade and Domestic Policy

- ensure international competitiveness is enhanced by taxation, regulatory and industry policies
- encourage the value-adding of Australian raw materials
- encourage research and development in knowledge-intensive industries and environmentally-sound technology
- promote Australia as a centre for research and development
- allow business to contribute to policy advice for international negotiations
- continually review and monitor the effectiveness of Austrade
- monitor the effectiveness of assistance to exporters
- improve the efficiency of delivery of export assistance products
- support improved market access for Australian exporters through negotiations in multilateral and regional bodies, as well as increased emphasis on bilateral relationships

### 2. Trade and Multilateralism

- support the start of a new market access World Trade Organisation (WTO) round
- lead efforts to place agriculture on the same footing as industrial products in the WTO
- continue to fight discriminatory trade practices within the international community
- be aware of new issues such as environment and labour standards, and monitor their impact on international trade
- encourage the Cairns Group to be the 'watchdog' on agricultural agreements reached in the context of the Uruguay Round and as the main vehicle to pursue resumed agricultural negotiations

### 3. Trade and Regionalism

- actively support and encourage the development of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)
- ensure the process of the removal of trade barriers is sustained
- campaign against the 'bureaucratisation' of APEC and encourage the engagement of business in APEC processes
- develop our trade relations with New Zealand under Closer Economic Relations (CER) towards single market access
- develop the trading relationship between the ASEAN countries, Australia and New Zealand
- maintain trade relations with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) countries, using the strength of APEC as the vehicle for greater market access
- create the groundwork for Indian Ocean Economic Cooperation as an adjunct to APEC
- expand Australia's markets in Europe, and ensure the European Single Market presents genuine opportunities for Australian traders and investors
- expand Australia's markets around the world including the Middle East, Africa and Latin America

### 4. Trade and Bilateralism

- maintain bilateral representations to facilitate trade
- pursue bilateral negotiations to expand market access and ensure Australia's markets remain open and committed to global trade liberalisation
- initiate WTO dispute action if countries introduce WTO incompatible policies that adversely affect Australian exporters

## 5. Trade Promotion and Export Assistance

- maintain the quality of Austrade services and ensure the location of trade posts overseas and offices in Australia reflect the requirements of Australian business
- maintain and expand the TradeStart program to provide easy access to Austrade services for businesses in regional, rural and outer metropolitan Australia
- maintain and refocus the Export Access program to further enhance practical assistance to companies in regional Australia and in the new economy
- direct trade promotional efforts towards encouraging business to diversify into and seek out new markets
- enhance the Government's community awareness campaigns to promote public understanding of Australia's trade and investment direction, export programs and promotion of Australia's image internationally
- further expand the delivery of Austrade's services through Internet and communications technology to take the geography out of access to information
- expand Austrade's e-commerce education activities to help Australian companies take advantage of opportunities arising in the area of e-commerce and business-to-business operations
- ensure close correlation between trade and investment promotion
- maintain the Export Market Development Grants Scheme and review its efficiency and effectiveness on a five year rolling basis
- expand Austrade's role in the area of Federal Government coordination and advice on export programs so business entry points for government assistance are clarified and reduced.

## 7.3 Defence

The first responsibility of Government is to promote the security of Australia, its people and its interests.

The prime roles of the Australian Defence Force are the defence of Australia's national interests and the rights and liberties of her citizens and support for recognised peacekeeping operations, such as the leading role played in East Timor. Australia must be able to contribute independently to the peace of its regions and meet its international obligations to promote security, political freedom and democratic rights.

Australia must strive for maximum defence self-sufficiency compatible with its financial resources and population, and a level of skills and equipment sufficient to retain the deterrent capacity of its armed forces. The pay and conditions of our serving men and women and their families must be fair, and the contributions made by service personnel should be respected.

### **The National Party will:**

- maintain a strong, adequately trained and self-sufficient Australian Defence Force able to operate independently in the region of Australia's prime strategic interest, and in conjunction with our allies, to meet Australia's defence responsibilities
- work for upgraded terms and conditions of service in the Australian Defence Force, with special concern for housing and family support
- contribute to UN and other internationally-recognised peacekeeping forces when in Australia's national interest
- support the abolition of anti-personnel landmines throughout the world and retain land mine detection equipment
- extend resources available to the Reserve Forces, with emphasis on integration with Regular Forces and development of special capabilities
- maintain a strong counter-terrorist capability
- ensure coastal surveillance capability is adequately funded and equipped to protect Australia's coastline and coastal waters so that entry to Australia is by lawful means only
- ensure proper consultation with all interested people in planning and locating defence facilities, range and training areas, having regard to private ownership of land and its use for agricultural and other purposes, and ensure prompt payment of just compensation for compulsory land acquisition
- further develop a private sector-based Australian defence industry with a capacity to design and manufacture the most modern equipment and technology for the Australian Defence Force and our allies, especially within our region
- review and strengthen regional defence cooperation programs, encourage joint military exercises with our regional neighbours, and appoint military attaches to countries of prime strategic interest to Australia
- work cooperatively with the United States, New Zealand, ASEAN and other APEC nations, Papua New Guinea and the remaining countries of the Pacific to maintain regional peace and security.

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