

Helping Rural Australians

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN

All Australians should be entitled to the same levels of health, education, communications, transport, aged care and social security but rural Australians must often make do with less and a one size fits all approach that is geared towards those in capital cities.

The Australian Democrats recognise the unique challenges of rural life, particularly during times of drought and soaring costs. We see thriving rural communities as critical to Australia's future.

We have a strong record of standing up for rural Australia in the Senate, on the sale of Telstra, media ownership, broadband, Medicare, mental health, dental services, childcare, Landcare, weeds and pests, water resources and irrigation infrastructure, to name some.

Rural Services

"We are 30%. Let's have our 30%'s worth. We want equal health by 2020, including for those of us who are Indigenous."

National Rural Health Alliance

- Provide more flexible health funding so that rural areas can receive a fair proportion of health care resources and fund the health services they need;
- Offer greater choice in health services through publicly funded primary health care centres staffed by a variety of health care professionals, including access to bulk-billed services in major towns;
- Deliver a more flexible rural workforce including the role of nurse practitioners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers;
- Fund fairer transport and accommodation allowances for away from home health treatment;
- More evenly distribute GPs throughout Australia through exploration of the allocation of Medicare provider numbers on a per capita geographic basis;
- Provide additional incentives for medical, nursing, dental and allied health workers and midwives to practise in rural areas, including HECS reimbursement schemes;
- Provide more health promotion, counselling and mental health services; including a 24 hour information and referral service;
- Fund greater use of information technology systems in rural health;
- Fund research into the effect of drought on the health of individuals, families and communities;
- Insist on high quality, accessible and affordable broadband;
- Prevent the closure of the CDMA mobile phone system until 3G is affordable and fully operational;



Other ACTION PLANS are available online at www.democrats.org.au

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- Protect community service obligations in telecommunications and other utilities;
- Provide more funding to promote rural tourism;
- Address the serious shortage of skilled workers in many regional areas;
- Include distance and isolation in funding arrangements for all services, particularly hospitals and aged care; and
- Extend fast train services to all major airports and regional centres and linking Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide for rapid, low emissions passenger and freight travel.

Rural Economies

- Investigate and monitor the disparity between the prices of supermarket food and the return to producers, and strengthen the Trade Practices Act to prevent the misuse of market power by big corporations;
- Promote innovative ideas for rural and regional revival, with an emphasis on supporting community-generated development initiatives;
- Encourage regional economic development organisations, and back them up with 'incubator centres', grants and research support necessary to get new businesses off the ground;
- Protect against risky agricultural imports that threaten both local industry and the environment, and oppose any diminution of Australian quarantine standards in trade negotiations;
- Provide regionally-based tax concessions, particularly in remote regions; and
- Lift the ban on blends of more than 10% ethanol and introduce mandatory biofuel targets of 20% of all petrol and diesel sold, phased in by 2020. Mandate ethanol petrol blend (E10 and E85) availability at all outlets.

GM Crops

- Strengthen the regulatory framework controlling gene technology including a one-stop shop for gene technology regulation and environmental impact assessment of all GMOs;
- Improve the legal supervision of genetic contamination, including a strict liability framework that details who is liable for damage and removal of genetic contamination;
- Substantially increase funding for research on long term health and environmental impacts;
- Provide community consultative committee standing and funding equal to technical advisory and ethics committees; and
- Require approval by the Environment Minister under the federal Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act for all GMO environmental releases.



CONTACT US

(03) 9416 1880

Lv 1, 62 Wellington Parade, East Melbourne VIC 3002
inquiries@democrats.org.au

Authorised by Jack Evans, 5 Poinciana Place, Wanneroo WA 6065
Printed by Senator Lyn Allison, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

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Rural Environment and Climate Change

- Provide tax incentives to protect, rehabilitate, revegetate and enhance habitat and natural resources;
- Include agriculture and land management in carbon emissions trading;
- Address salinity, land and water degradation, by progressing the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation recommendations;
- Reinstate the CRC for Greenhouse Accounting;
- Fund research into; methodologies to value soil carbon for trading purposes; agricultural practices that use less fertiliser and restore soil carbon, and; the impact of climate change on different regions and types of farming activity;
- Coordinate, align and integrate nationally all climate change, natural resources, resource security, environmental sustainability and farm management systems policies;
- Promote and reward sustainable practices and innovation which enhance productivity and economic returns to farmers;
- Establish education and extension programs to support farmers to better manage for sustainability;
- Pay land owners to manage and protect areas of environmental significance on private land; and
- Continue and expand Landcare, improve its effectiveness through good science-based strategies and better assist volunteers with training and coordination support.

Rural Water

- Establish an integrated, strategic National Water Policy, informed by a national accounting program and use and underpinned by agreed targets;
- Introduce water market rules to clarify property rights and to prevent profiteering or speculation by non-users;
- Reset water allocation to sustainable levels and institute a cap and trade water market, preserving water for human consumption and the environment;
- Immediately roll out the government's \$3 billion commitment to buy water from willing sellers to address water over-allocation;
- Fund rehabilitation projects for the environmental recovery in degraded and salinity affected areas;
- Set targets for the recovery of water for the environment in all over-allocated rivers of between 1500 and 3000 GL into the Murray by 2010;



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- Provide adjustment assistance for agri-businesses whose business is adversely affected by changes in water availability including walk off provisions;
- Provide adjustment assistance for communities whose economies are affected by changes in water availability and water use patterns;
- Coordinate initiatives to improve water efficiency in irrigation practices (drip), channel management maintenance, channel lining and piping of water to reduce loss to evaporation and seepage;
- Coordinate national freshwater research program to monitor the condition, development and use of Australia's freshwater resources;
- Monitor closely the effect of all types of drilling and boring on Australia's extensive aquifers and groundwater resources;
- Fund tertiary treatment of sewage and stormwater effluent and recycling into river systems or for productive agriculture use; and
- Improve governance by making the Murray Darling Authority Independent.



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