

Labor



Julie Collins MP

Federal Member for Franklin

Mr Adam Kay
Chief Executive Officer
Cotton Australia
Suite 4.01
247 Cowards Street
MASCOT NSW 2020

Dear Adam

Thank you for taking the time to write to Federal Labor outlining Cotton Australia's (CA) Federal Election Priorities for 2022.

I appreciate the information you have provided to me about the significance of the cotton industry and its contributions to the Australian economy.

In your correspondence you also make reference to the National Farmers Federation's (NFF) *Renewing Our Regions* document. You may be aware that Labor has provided a comprehensive response to the NFF on 2 May 2022 in relation to its *Time to Thrive – Stronger Regions for all Australians* platform.

Labor's agriculture and regional communities policy

Labor has announced its agriculture and regional communities policy and the details of it can be found by visiting www.alp.org.au/policies

Of great interest to cotton growers is Labor's National Reconstruction Fund. If elected, Labor will reserve \$500 million for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, food and fibre. This is an important measure that will help diversify the sector, open up new possibilities for trade and create more jobs and economic activity in the regions.

Labor's agriculture policy also has a strong focus on:

- Strengthening Australia's biosecurity system;
- Addressing the crippling agriculture workforce shortage;
- Revitalising Regional Development Australia and supporting the Regional Australian Institute;

- Improving protections for farmers against unfair contract terms; and
- Improving connectivity for farmers and across regional areas.

Better connectivity

Better mobile coverage on roads, as well as improved connectivity for regional communities and on farms, will lead an Albanese Labor Government's approach to upgrading regional telecommunications.

A key element of Labor's *Better Connectivity for Rural and Regional Australia* Plan will be the establishment of a \$400 million fund to expand multi-carrier mobile coverage along roads, as well as for regional homes and businesses.

To support this, Labor will commit \$20 million, to commence an independent national audit of mobile coverage in 2022, to establish an evidence baseline to guide future priorities.

A competitive tender process will be used to identify a partner company capable of placing mobile signal measurement devices on Australia Post's transport assets, to gather the best information possible.

Priorities will be assessed independently to maximise benefits, and this will include consultation with Infrastructure Australia, and the broader community.

Labor will also commit \$200 million to continue investing in place-based connectivity projects.

Drawing from the Regional Connectivity Program, funded projects could include better mobile voice and data coverage, targeted fibre deployments and improved microwave and fibre backhaul capacity to locations across regional and remote Australia.

To support the productivity and safety of our farmers, Labor will also commit \$30 million to help expand on-farm connectivity and enable better wireless extension solutions on the field.

This will enable more farmers to fully utilise sensor and connected-machinery technology to improve the efficiency of domestic food production and support the export growth potential of the sector.

Labor will boost funding for the Regional Tech Hub by \$6 million to serve as a trusted intermediary and source of free and independent advice.

These initiatives supplement existing commitments Labor has made to:

- Expand full-fibre NBN access to 660,000 more regional homes and businesses.
- Upgrade the NBN fixed-wireless network to offer speeds between 100 and 250 megabits per second for all users.
- Increase NBN satellite data allowances to 90 gigabytes a month and unmetered data between midnight and 4 pm, with an ambition to go beyond 100 gigabytes.

Addressing the crippling workforce shortage

We know there is a crippling workforce shortage across the agriculture sector. Farmers and primary producers have been telling Labor how hard it is to get workers on their farms for a long time. There are shortages of skilled workers right across the economy, and agriculture is no different.

An elected Albanese Labor Government will deliver a dedicated Agriculture Workers Visa that not only provides portability but also protections for workers. Labor's ag visa will draw on the stability of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility program.

Labor will also establish Jobs and Skills Australia as a national partnership to drive VET education and strengthen workforce planning by working together with employers, unions and the training and education sector.

We will create 465,000 new fee-free TAFE places in areas of demonstrated labour shortage. These fee-free TAFE placements will help rebuild industries hit hardest by the pandemic, like hospitality and tourism, as well as meet current and future needs in the care economy, including jobs like child care, aged care, disability care, nursing and community services. This can only be a good thing for regional communities.

Labor Members, Senators and candidates have had an extremely constructive relationship with the agriculture sector in the past and in the lead up to this Federal Election. Should Labor form government, we will continue to work constructively with those in the agriculture industry to further develop policy that provides benefits to farmers and primary producers.

Only Labor will back a better future for the agriculture industry across all corners of Australia.

Once again thank you for writing to me.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Collins MP
Shadow Minister for Agriculture
Federal Member for Franklin

18 May 2022