

**Candidate Name:** Helen Haines MP

**Party:** Independent

**Electorate:** Indi

## 1. What local infrastructure priorities will you support to help benefit farming business/communities in the electorate you are running for?

### RESPONSE:

Farmers tell me we need investment in three key areas of infrastructure: roads, telecommunications, and freight infrastructure.

On freight, I've put forward a proposal to Government for \$20.2 million of upgrades to the Wodonga Logistics Hub for enabling infrastructure to expand the capacity of the hub, enabling local producers to take advantage of the Inland Rail project.

On roads, I am campaigning for upgrades to key routes like the Benambra-Corryong Road and the Wangaratta-Whitfield Road. In the last three years, Indi has been hugely successful at securing funding for roads, with almost \$90 million having come into the electorate.

And on telecommunications, I have helped secure funding for 12 new mobile phone towers across Indi, but clearly there is much more to do. We need to fix the remaining black spots in Indi, and we need to legislate a requirement to deliver faster internet to regional people.

## 2. How will you (or your party) address the agriculture labour crisis and support farmers in getting the workers they need on-farm?

**Background:** *Australia's agricultural industry is experiencing widespread labour challenges which threaten the viability of many farming businesses. These challenges have been compounded by COVID-19, and border restrictions which have severed access to overseas workers. Labour shortages result in produce going uncultivated and unpicked; productivity being choked; and the viability of farm businesses being challenged. The next Australian Government must act urgently to attract domestic and overseas workers to end this crisis.*

### RESPONSE:

Two key things the next Government must do to tackle the agricultural worker shortage is roll out the Agriculture Visa and tackle the housing crisis in the regions.

The NFF has been calling for an Agriculture Visa since 2016. The Government said it would be in place by the end of last year, but we've seen way too little progress in striking bilateral deals with partner countries. And the Labor Party's decision to ditch the Agricultural Visa is short-sighted.

Put simply, we should be putting in place visa arrangements to quickly bring in any person who wants to work on an Australian farm from whatever country they come from.

But we need to not only bring in workers, we also need somewhere for them to stay while they're here. We already have a housing crisis in the regions, we need investment in dedicated accommodation for farm workers.

### 3. How will you (or your party) work to safeguard Australia's farm sector from future supply chain disruptions?

**Background:** *Agricultural supply chains stretch deep into global markets, enabling Australian farmers to sell their produce across the world. Recent turbulence in the global economy has disrupted many of these supply chains. Export and critical input supply chains, such as fuel, fuel additives, agricultural chemicals and fertilisers, almost came to a grinding halt in 2021. These near misses threatened to have a profound impact on Australia's economy and society. Action is needed as Australia transitions to a 'new normal' for international trade and supply chains. Australia needs a collective government-industry civil society approach to establishing robust contingencies for the next inevitable supply chain disruption, and a strategy for domestic manufacturing strategy for highly-vulnerable critical inputs.*

#### **RESPONSE:**

COVID-19 showed us how important it is for Australia to be more self-reliant in terms of critical manufacturing industries and fuel. The AdBlue crisis is a classic example of how Australia's heavy reliance on imported fuels and exposure to the global supply shortage of urea threatened Australian agriculture.

The Australian Government needs to examine the security of supply chains of critical products and commodities across sectors, and put in place plans to ensure that we are never again exposed to shortages that would cripple our economy.

Renewable energy and the industrial opportunities it presents are a key part of this picture. We should be substantially investing in scaling up renewable-based hydrogen and ammonia-based fertiliser production. We should be investing in electric, hydrogen and biofuel-based transport including on-farm equipment and vehicles so that farmers have lower fuel costs, and so we can fuel our national transport system with domestic sources.

### 4. How will you (or your party) support farmers to access the telecommunications services needed to grow their businesses?

**Background:** *Australia's farm sector has a vision to be Australia's next \$100 billion dollar industry by 2030. Achieving this vision requires significant innovation – including in how we connect regional Australians to critical telecommunications services. Economic modelling has found that adoption of digital agriculture can add an estimated \$20.3 billion to farm output, and lift the Australian economy by an estimated 1.5% (\$24.6 billion) by 2030. Of course, realising this potential requires adequate connectivity for farms – regardless of how remote they are.*

#### **RESPONSE:**

The Communications Minister says that the NBN build is complete - that's complete rubbish. Spend a day in a rural area and it's pretty clear we are some way off a functioning NBN.

The Commonwealth should stump up the cash to finish the NBN build in regional Australia, instead of forcing regional councils to pay as they are proposing. And the Government should adopt and pass my Faster Internet for Regional Australia Bill which would set in law a requirement for 25 megabits per second average speeds for the NBN.

On mobile phones, Indi has been the most successful electorate in Victoria at securing mobile phone towers, having secured 12 new towers in my term of Parliament. But the Government should put money on the table to fix all the remaining blackspots in the regions instead of continuing to drip-feed this funding.

That's the ambitious telecommunications policy the regions deserve.

## 5. How will you (or your party) arm farmers with the information and tools needed to respond to a changing climate and to participate in carbon markets?

**Background:** *Climate change will play a major role in Australian agriculture's next decade, exacerbating climate risk while creating diverse new income opportunities. The VFF supports an economy-wide aspiration of net zero emissions by 2050 provided:*

- *there are identifiable and economically viable pathways to net neutrality, including impacts from inputs such as energy; and*
- *Commonwealth and State legislation is effective, equitable and helps deliver on-ground programs that benefit agricultural interests and do not create unnecessary regulatory impediments.*

### **RESPONSE:**

The Government has signed Australia up to net zero by 2050 but has given us absolutely no plan to get there, and that is especially true for agriculture. There is a growing market for carbon credits, but farmers tell me they have no idea how to participate in those markets.

At the same time, countries around the world are drawing up plans to slap tariffs on Australian agricultural exports because the Government has not done enough to reduce emissions.

I have proposed a 21st century agricultural extension network of 200 officers based around regional Australia to work one-on-one with farmers to help them reduce emissions, earn carbon credits, and if they choose, become certified carbon neutral.

This will help farmers access these new income streams, access price premiums for their products, and protect access to critical export markets. My plan would actually make life easier, not harder for farmers.

## How will you (or your party) respond to the needs of farming communities in dealing with the Murray-Darling Basin Plan?

**Background:** *The Murray-Darling Basin Plan continues to challenge the farm sector. After a decade of implementation, farmers are fatigued, Basin communities are weary, many struggle to keep up as implementation remains vexed and there does not appear to be any end in sight. Governments must all work together to provide farmers with certainty and confidence, adapt the plan and develop alternative solutions. Basin communities must not be faced with the prospect of more water buybacks. A pathway beyond 2024 must be articulated, utilising the pathways identified in the Productivity Commission report. Appropriate and balanced engagement with affected communities, respecting farmers' rights, and developing collaborative and supported outcomes remain key tasks for the process - especially in the context of constraints and Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanisms (SDLAM).*

### **RESPONSE:**

The Murray Darling Basin Plan needs to work for both irrigators and the environment. Water supply supports \$24 billion worth of primary production so we need to get this right.

But the Government has left Basin Plan implementation too late, so now the 2024 deadlines for water recovery will not be reached. In two years' time, we might be staring down the barrel of huge water buybacks because the Government has not delivered on its commitments under the plan. The Government needs to outline what it will do.

If that means greater investment in efficiency projects, then I would back that in. If the Government plans to push back the deadlines then they should come clean on that.

But we also need to tighten up the rules around water trading, to make sure the water market delivers for farmers, not financiers.