

The Herald

4 February 2009

Nation Building and Newcastle

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The current Global Financial Crisis is an unprecedented economic emergency. To restore confidence, encourage investment and to maintain jobs dictates an extreme response. The Rudd government's \$42 billion *Nation Building and Jobs Plan*, following on the heels of the November \$10.4b economic stimulation package, is a massive injection into the national economy.

A good portion of that will come directly to the Newcastle and Hunter region. All our schools will share in hundreds of millions of dollars. Construction and maintenance work, community housing and infrastructure projects, energy efficiency initiatives, cash bonuses and assistance for small business will see hundreds of millions of dollars go into our local economy.

Overall, unemployment in our region has remained stable, but we need to prepare for the fact that local unemployment will increase as a result of this economic crisis. This is a good time to consider what each of us can do to make sure Newcastle gets the biggest bang for its buck out of this Government spending.

So what can we do to keep our economy growing?

I am encouraging Newcastle residents to 'think local' when they access the Government's benefits.

For example, many households will take advantage of the \$1,600 rebate on insulation. It is useful to know therefore that the Hunter has local manufacturers of insulation products as well as local

contractors for installation. If we source local labour and materials, our construction, transport and maintenance sectors will also benefit.

The \$950 individual one-off bonus payments are designed to help people retain discretionary spending to use for clothing, appliances, repairs, entertainment, school needs, occasional meals out or an overnight stay somewhere. Newcastle has an exciting accommodation sector and a great local hospitality and catering industry. Retail remains a big employer in our region. We should be looking to support these industries where we can.

Apart from providing jobs, these industries create the character of the region. They are a big part of why we love this city.

There are practical things we can do to help sustain and protect these local industries and our local jobs. Ask your retailer if the products you are buying are locally produced; holiday locally, choose local manufacturers and trades people; or buy food from local providers like the Newcastle City Farmers Markets.

I also call upon our local industries to be responsible with any increase in business that comes from this stimulus by retaining apprentices and trainees – often the first discarded in a downturn.

Newcastle has always provided for the national economy, boosting export dollars through our coal shipments and our manufacturing. Our first class industrial and research sectors have increased the knowledge capacity of our nation. It isn't protectionist or irresponsible to put our area first in this time of economic need.

I am confident our region can come through this crisis, stronger and better than before. But we need to pull together. It is after all, one of the things we do best.