

## **NSW GOVERNMENT WEEKLY UPDATE – 1 November 2013**

### **FURTHER WORKCOVER PREMIUM CUTS AS SCHEME RETURNS TO SURPLUS**

- The NSW Government has announced a further reduction to WorkCover premiums while confirming the scheme is now back in the black for the first time since 2008.
- Employers will benefit from an average premium rate reduction of five per cent - on top of an average 7.5 per cent rate cut that came in earlier this year.
- The former Labor government left WorkCover with an unsustainable \$4.1 billion deficit, but now following our reforms the scheme has a \$309 million surplus.
- The NSW Government's WorkCover reforms are delivering a fairer system, with more generous payments being provided to severely injured workers and businesses receiving incentives to improve workplace safety.
- For more information visit:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=aeFZHTDE644](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=aeFZHTDE644)

### **POLICE ARREST POWERS CLARIFIED AND STRENGTHENED**

- Legislation has been introduced to NSW Parliament to give police clear and effective arrest powers to protect the community.
- There was evidence criminals were using the lack of clarity around arrest powers as a loophole to escape conviction and in some instances sue police for large payouts.
- Loopholes around police arrests powers were put in the 'too hard basket' for too long – these reforms will fix them.
- The changes to the *Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act* come after former Police Minister the Hon Paul Whelan and former Shadow Attorney General Andrew Tink conducted an urgent review into the laws because of concerns about police arrest powers.

### **NSW GOVERNMENT DELIVERS IMPROVED 2012-13 BUDGET RESULT**

- NSW Treasurer Mike Baird has welcomed the final Budget result for 2012-13 of a \$239 million surplus.
- The modest improvement on the estimate of a \$374 million deficit in the 2013-14 Budget adds momentum to the recovery in the State's fiscal position and creates additional capacity to invest in vital infrastructure.
- The improvement largely arises from higher than estimated revenues, including stamp duty collections which contributed higher receipts of around \$198 million.

- Any surplus is encouraging, because it improves the State's credit metrics and bolsters our AAA rating, which was confirmed by Standard & Poor's last week.

## **WESTCONNEX DELIVERY AUTHORITY ANNOUNCED**

- Australia's largest infrastructure project moved a step closer with the creation of the WestConnex Delivery Authority (WDA).
- In an important milestone for WestConnex, the WDA will oversee the construction, financing and management of the \$11-\$11.5 billion motorway, under the authority of its own Board of Directors, which will report directly to the Minister for Roads.
- WDA Chairman Tony Shepherd heads a highly impressive board with extensive infrastructure and public private partnership experience, including Peter Brecht, Rod Pearse, Robert Hamilton, Peter Regan, Peter Duncan and David Stewart.
- WestConnex will revolutionise the way Sydneysiders travel cutting 40 minutes off a typical journey from Parramatta to the airport, bypassing up to 52 sets of traffic lights and taking 3,000 trucks a day off Parramatta Road while creating up to 10,000 jobs during construction.

## **RECORD NUMBER OF HOUSING APPROVALS FOR NSW**

- NSW has recorded the highest month of new housing approvals in 11 years, new data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows.
- More than 5,000 new homes were approved in NSW in September 2013 – the highest monthly figure since 2002.
- A total of 43,870 new homes were approved in the 12 months to September 2013, the highest level since 2005.
- The figures demonstrate the success of NSW Government policies such as the half-a-billion dollar Housing Acceleration Fund, targeting first home owner grants to new homes and the introduction of Urban Activation Precincts.

## **NSW GOVT ANNOUNCES DROUGHT PREPAREDNESS AND SUPPORT PACKAGE**

- Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson has announced a suite of immediate assistance measures to help primary producers in North West NSW deal with adverse seasonal conditions as well as longer-term drought preparedness measures.
- Some of these measures include concessional loans, extension of the funding for the Cap and Pipe the Bores Program and \$6 million for the Mallowa Creek Water Supply Project, to guarantee stock and water supply for a group of landholders between Moree and Collarenebri.
- The NSW Government wants to help producers be prepared for adverse seasonal conditions rather than simply assisting after the fact.
- For further detail on the assistance measures, contact the NSW Rural Assistance Authority on 02 6391 3000.

## **ALCOHOL INTERLOCK PROGRAM TO TARGET REPEAT DRINK DRIVERS**

- Alcohol interlocks are to be made mandatory for high range and repeat drink-drive offenders, in a bid to reduce the number of drink-driving offences and make NSW roads safer for everyone.
- Alcohol interlocks are an electronic device connected to the ignition of a vehicle preventing it from starting if the driver has been drinking, providing an effective physical barrier between drinking and driving.
- Road safety experts estimate the introduction of mandatory interlocks will prevent at least 140 alcohol related crashes, six fatalities and 102 injuries in the first five years alone.
- The decision to introduce them follows a suggestion from NRMA Motoring & Services.

## **FIRST OVERHEIGHT TRUCKS ORDERED OFF THE ROAD**

- The NSW Government has announced the first trucks have now been deregistered for entering Sydney tunnels with overheight loads, under tough new penalties aimed at preventing traffic chaos and damage to infrastructure.
- Minister for Roads Duncan Gay said we have tough penalties on truck drivers with fines over \$2,200 and six demerit points - but the message hasn't made it through to operators of these rogue companies.
- New laws were introduced in July this year which allow us to hit operators where it hurts and suspend a vehicle's registration for up to three months if it's driven into a tunnel when overheight.
- Three operators have now been advised of registration suspensions that will send a strong message to the heavy vehicle sector, especially in the lead up to the busy Christmas season.

## **MANAGING BUSH FIRE ASBESTOS RISKS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS**

- The NSW Government is taking steps to ensure properties containing asbestos which were destroyed in the Blue Mountains bush fires are rendered safe.
- More than 300 homes were lost or damaged in the bush fires and the NSW Government is ensuring residents and contractors involved in the clean-up are protected from the risks of asbestos.
- The NSW Government initially provided a \$200,000 commitment to Phase 1 of the asbestos clean-up effort - that has now been followed with a further \$1.2 million.
- More funding will flow for Phase 2 of the asbestos clean-up when the full assessments have been completed.

## **BETTER PROTECTION FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT WITNESSES**

- Laws protecting sexual assault victims from coming face-to-face with their attacker will be made more comprehensive, Attorney General Greg Smith SC has announced.
- Already a complainant is able to give evidence via closed circuit television or behind a screen at the trial of the person accused of committing a sexual offence against them.
- But under current laws, they may not always be entitled to such protections when giving evidence at a separate trial involving the same accused person, but a different victim.
- The NSW Government will amend the law so that sexual offence witnesses would be able to testify from a private location at these trials, regardless of what type of evidence they were required to give.

## **NURSES AND MIDWIVES BOOST FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW**

- Health Minister Jillian Skinner has announced the distribution of an additional 40 nursing and midwifery clinical educator and specialist positions for the state's rural and regional Local Health Districts.
- These important positions will complement the 4,100 (2,800 FTE) extra nurses employed in the health system since the election.
- These positions provide specialist skills and expertise to assist in educating and supporting less experienced staff, to ensure quality care for patients and their loved ones.
- Nurses and midwives are at the very heart of our health system and the NSW Government is committed to bolstering this workforce for the benefit of patients.

## **ST GEORGE HOSPITAL MENTAL HEALTH UNIT OFFICIALLY OPENED**

- Minister for Health Jillian Skinner and Minister for Mental Health Kevin Humphries officially opened an Older Persons' Sub-Acute Mental Health Unit at St George Hospital this week.
- The Older Persons' Sub-Acute Mental Health Unit will provide assessment and recovery-based treatment for people aged over 65 years who require sub-acute mental health care.
- The purpose-built facility provides 16 inpatient beds (including one bariatric bed), an activity room, lounge and dining rooms. Ancillary accommodation includes consultation rooms, meeting rooms and staff offices.
- In addition to this new mental health unit, the NSW Government has invested \$39 million in a new emergency department for St George Hospital redevelopment and is planning for the further redevelopment of St George Hospital and Sutherland Hospital.

## **HELPING SMALL COMMUNITIES OVERCOME SUICIDE**

- Communities in NSW will be helped to develop suicide prevention strategies following the launch of a new resource - *Communities Matter: A toolkit for community-driven suicide prevention*.
- With about 550 lives lost to suicide in NSW every year it is important to break the stigma surrounding suicide and to help small communities work to prevent acts of self-harm and suicide, as well as deal with the impacts when they occur.
- The toolkit will give community leaders and local residents the ability to develop evidence-based suicide prevention strategies that will meet their local needs.
- The toolkit is being trialled in Hay and Walgett in western NSW and it was launched during Mental Health Month.

## **REFORMS DELIVER SAVINGS ON FORMER PREMIERS' ENTITLEMENTS**

- Reforms to former Premiers' entitlements have delivered a saving to taxpayers of nearly \$900,000.
- In 2012/13, entitlements to former office holders totalled \$663,104, compared with \$1.55 million the year before.
- The saving is higher than usual because Bob Carr's entitlements were suspended while he was in the Federal Parliament. Now he has resigned, Mr Carr will be re-eligible to receive the same level of support as Premiers Greiner and Wran, which is estimated to increase the annual cost to about \$1 million – meaning a saving of about \$550,000 under the reforms.
- The NSW Government has made a commitment to drive efficiencies across the public sector and it was only fair former Premiers did their bit.

## **NSW GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT ATTRACTS STARS AND JOBS**

- Thanks to support from the NSW Liberals & Nationals Government, seven new film and television productions will be made in NSW - including the film *Strangerland*, starring actors Nicole Kidman, Guy Pearce and Hugo Weaving.
- The NSW Government is providing more than \$1.4 million in production funding through Screen NSW's Production Investment Fund, including \$200,000 in Regional Film Funding grants.
- The seven projects will generate almost \$14 million of direct production expenditure in NSW, create more than 630 jobs and once again put an international spotlight on NSW's dynamic screen industry.
- This latest funding follows the NSW Government's investment of more than \$4.6 million in 28 screen projects through Screen NSW in 2012-13 which injected an estimated \$100 million into the economy and created about 5,000 jobs.