

## **NSW GOVERNMENT WEEKLY UPDATE – 1 APRIL 2016**

### **CHILDREN'S CHAMPIONS GIVE VICTIMS STRONGER VOICE**

- More than 50 new Children's Champions have begun work at the NSW District Court in Sydney and Newcastle today to improve the justice experience for child sexual assault victims.
- Children's Champions facilitate child sexual assault victims' interactions with police and courts are part of the NSW Government's innovative three year pilot designed to reduce stress and trauma for victims of child sexual assault.
- This pilot will permit pre-recording of the victim's evidence, including cross-examination, so they are not re-traumatised by having to repeat their story at a trial.
- In addition, over the past 12 months the maximum sentence for sexual intercourse with a child under 10 increased from 25 years to life imprisonment and an additional 13 child sexual assault offences have been included in the Standard Non-Parole Period Scheme.

### **STRONG INDUSTRY INTEREST IN PRISON REFORM**

- Minister for Corrections David Elliott has addressed a major industry briefing on the market testing of John Morony Correctional Centre in Sydney's north-west as part of a plan to improve the performance of the NSW prison system.
- Representatives from the private sector, as well as Corrective Services NSW, will make a competing bid for the prison.
- Market testing will provide the Government with an accurate idea of how much it should cost to run a prison effectively and efficiently in NSW.

- Formal expressions of interest in JMCC must be entered by 18 May 2016, before the tender is issued in July and the successful operator will be announced in February 2017.

## **NSW SENIORS FESTIVAL KICKS OFF**

- Now in its 59th year, NSW Seniors Festival has kicked off and will run until 10 April 2016.
- Key events for this year's festival include the highly popular Premier's Gala Concerts and NSW Seniors Festival Expo at Allphones Arena on 5 and 6 April, the week-long Young at Heart Film Festival, and the Comedy Debate and Sydney Town Hall on 8 April featuring six comedians and media personalities debating if youth is wasted on the young.
- The festival is expected to attract over 300,000 people across NSW and with more than 1,000 free or discounted events being held there is something on for everyone.
- For more information about the 2016 NSW Seniors Festival and a full event listing, go to <http://www.nswseniorsfestival.com.au>

## **SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH**

- More than 260 secondary students across NSW have received a financial boost to their studies under the latest round of the Family and Community Services Youth Scholarship Program.
- The \$400,000 program assists students who live in social housing, crisis accommodation or who are on the NSW Housing Register by providing a \$1,500 grant so they can concentrate on completing their Higher School Certificate or equivalent qualification.
- The scholarship funds can be used to purchase items or services which help the student in their studies such as private tuition, IT equipment, text books and study guides.
- The NSW Government is supporting young people in their studies so they can achieve their academic potential.

## **FIRE BEHAVIOUR SPECIALISTS, IMPROVED HAZARD REDUCTION TO PROTECT COMMUNITY**

- Rural fire-fighters will be supported by fire behaviour specialists and weather balloons, as well as additional crews tasked with mid-week hazard reduction, to help better protect communities from the risk of bushfire.
- Four new fire behaviour specialists, weather balloons and portable weather stations will allow the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) to get on the spot assessments of atmospheric conditions at large bushfires in regional areas.
- Ten additional full-time mitigation crews will increase the level of hazard reduction work in NSW, supporting the Government's commitment to protect almost 600,000 homes through hazard reduction activities by 2019.
- The NSW Government has committed to giving the NSW RFS the powers it needs to create an improved, standardised and integrated fire trail network across the state.

## **MORE ENERGY SAVINGS FOR SENIORS**

- NSW seniors are being offered more great discounts on their energy bills following the renewal of the popular AGL Energy's Seniors Energy Gas & Electricity Plans.
- There are over 1.4 million people with a NSW Seniors Card which provides discounts on a wide range of products and services from more than 2,000 individual businesses across the state.
- These plans offer Seniors Card holders access to competitive discounts to their gas and electricity charges as well as special offers on solar and a range of other benefits.
- To find out more about the AGL discount energy plans, Seniors Card holders should call 1300 889 324 or visit [www.agl.com.au/seniors](http://www.agl.com.au/seniors)

## **RENT REFORM TO STOP HOMELESSNESS "CHURN"**

- The NSW Government is taking a tough stance on the "churn" of people from social housing to homelessness and is driving reform for an automatic rent reduction from Centrelink payments.

- The proposal is for rent to be deducted automatically by the Commonwealth for the more than 90% of tenants in social housing who receive Centrelink benefits as their main income. This automatic rent reduction is backed by the Commonwealth.
- In NSW 80% of evicted tenants in 2013-14 had previously participated in a voluntary scheme but had then withdrawn and fallen into significant rent arrears.

### **AGREEMENT REACHED ON FREE RANGE EGG LABELLING STANDARDS**

- Consumer Affairs Ministers from across Australia have agreed to adopt a national information standard for free range egg labelling.
- Under the agreement, free range eggs must come from hens that have meaningful and regular access to an outdoor range, with a stocking density of no more than 10,000 hens per hectare.
- Outdoor stocking densities (hens per hectare) will need to be prominently displayed on packaging.
- Information standards are a feature of the Australian Consumer Law designed to ensure product information is consistent so consumers can make informed decisions about what they are buying.