

## **SPEECH TO COALITION CAMPAIGN LAUNCH**

**By John Anderson  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Leader of The Nationals  
Brisbane, 26 September 2004**

Mark Vaile and I, as Deputy Leader and Leader of The Nationals, are delighted and honoured to be here in this great city in this great State to launch the Liberal-National Party Coalition's campaign for re-election, jointly with the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party and of course the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Prime Minister of Australia.

It is our unshakeable belief that the government we are privileged to help lead is the stronger because it is a Coalition.

And we are equally unshakeable in our belief that the team you see, together, before you today is the better team to take our nation forward over the next three years.

Peter Costello – let me say how much I've enjoyed working with you in government over the past eight-and-a-half years.

Let me record my respect for you, for your competency, and your commitment to Australians, and let me acknowledge the crown you've surely earned as Australia's best-ever Treasurer.

The outstanding economic management of the past eight and a half years - the lowest inflation in decades, the lowest interest rates in decades, the lowest transport and waterfront costs ever in real terms - has been totally critical to the survival of countless farms and small businesses during the worst drought in 100 years.

As Warren Truss points out, serious as it has been, the damage wreaked by this drought has been much less serious than the devastation of the 90s drought, when farmers and small businesses in the country were paying more than 20 percent interest rates. Remember them? Don't ever forget who gave them to you.

In those days the major tenant in the main streets of our regional towns was someone called "For Lease".

Over our time in office no less than 440,000 new jobs have been created in regional Australia. Unemployment is down from 9.3 percent in March 1996 to 6.1 percent today, compared with 5 percent in the cities.

We aim to bring it down still more.

Country Australians will never be forgotten Australians while we are in government.

We've not forgotten them as we have tackled big policy issues like water and transport infrastructure and trade and the future of agriculture.

The National Water Initiative coupled with the \$2 billion water package announced by the Prime Minister and I in Adelaide two weeks ago restores certainty and security in water management for the environment and for water users.

The money will help us do so much more, so much better, on the driest inhabited continent on earth, where the residents use more water per year than anyone else in the OECD.

Australia will see the equivalent of two Snowy Mountain Schemes in road and rail nation building over the next five years. We can invest \$12.5 billion because we have managed the economy properly.

Mark Vaile's work on the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement sees him earn his place with John McEwen, who secured the Australia-Japan Pact in 1957.

Like Black Jack, Mark Vaile could see the jobs that his trade agreement would bring – while the Australian Labor Party was blind to the opportunities.

Warren Truss with the Agriculture Advancing Australia initiative, through programmes like Farm Management Deposits, FarmBiz and his vital sugar assistance package, has developed clear pathways for the future for those who grow our food and fibre.

We went into office in 1996 with a vision. It's a vision that we still hold to now:

- to restore the regional services that had withered under Labor;
- to encourage new businesses and industries into our regional towns and cities;
- to help rebuild regional communities so they were once again places where we could not only bring up our children in safety, but also offer our young adults a secure and rewarding future; and
- to give the people of regional Australia the power to make their own decisions about what is best for them and to give them the tools to do it.

And because we are practical people in The Nationals, it has been a practical vision – with practical outcomes.

We found a new way to give country people an effective mobile phone service, after the Labor Government's disastrous and cynical decision to close the analogue mobile phone network.

We have helped small centres restore the government, financial and community services lost in the Labor years by helping them set up rural transaction centres.

And we have made sure that local people – not bureaucrats in Canberra – choose the services that local people get.

We have ensured that universities take more country kids into their medical schools, because we know that country kids are more likely to return to the regional Australia they grew up in, and become country doctors and nurses.

We have made sure that Australian Government money to improve local roads is paid direct to local government, so that local councils can apply their own local priorities.

And we rewrote the rules for regional development programmes to forge a partnership between Commonwealth and community, because we know that the best solution to a local problem is the solution that local people find and support.

There is now a real sense of resurgence in many country towns and communities.

The “For Lease” signs are coming down and being replaced by new business names as people are encouraged by a stable and growing economy to get out and have a go.

There are new industries, more jobs, better jobs, and towns are again looking neat and proud and their business centres more vibrant.

The revitalisation of regional Australia is also encouraging people to stay in regional Australia.

Three weeks ago, I met a young couple living and working in Gladstone. They have just bought their first home with the help of this Government’s first-home owners’ scheme, and are planning a family.

Buying a house is a big commitment and for this couple it is not just a financial commitment, but a commitment to Gladstone as well. They have made a decision to stay in their regional city.

The low mortgage interest rates flowing from this government’s policies played a big part in their decision to buy a house; and their confidence in the economic future of Gladstone underwrites their decision to stay.

They have a lot at stake. Gladstone and Charters Towers here in Queensland, Murwillumbah and Ballina in NSW, Sale and Bairnsdale in Victoria – the whole of regional Australia – has a lot at stake in this election.

Because all the good work and progress that this government has achieved for regional Australia is under threat from a Latham Labor government.

The Nationals have achieved a lot for regional Australia because we have been a strong and hard-working responsible coalition partner with the Liberal Party.

I know how coalitions work, and I know what can be done.

What concerns me is the possibility of the future of regional Australia being in the hands of a different sort of Coalition – an alliance between a Latham Labor government and Bob Brown's Greens.

This is an alliance that would remove the certainty of economic management that underpins Australia's low interest rate, low inflation economy, and would drive up the cost of home ownership and business investment in every regional city and country town.

It is an alliance that would be held hostage to radical green environmental agendas, and would undermine the investment in our minerals industries that is the basis of regional economies like that of Gladstone – where our young couple is about to start a family.

It would blame farmers for growing food, and rob them of the water they use to provide our cities with the freshest and best value food in the world.

Labor states and territories would feel free to plunder the Commonwealth purse to prop up their own failed budgets while continuing their mismanagement of our public hospitals and public schools  
- or, in the case of regional Australia, to simply close the hospitals and schools and walk away.

And it is an alliance that would undermine the family and social values that country people – I believe most Australians – hold dear, by dangerous social experimentations in drug policy.

Ladies and gentlemen, Labor's pronouncements in this election campaign have shown that a Latham Labor government would be one that has forgotten what governments should be about:

- to ensure the country is secure,
- to manage the economy properly,
- ensure that the needy are cared for
- – and then to get out of the way and allow Australians families and businesses to get on with it.

This is a truth that The Nationals and the Coalition have not forgotten, and will not forget.

My particular vision for a fourth term in government, and the task I give my party as a partner in Coalition with the Liberal Party, is to ensure that our regional cities and country towns and communities obtain the services and infrastructure they need to build on their renewed foundations and realise the promise of their future.

This vision presents us with significant challenges but The Nationals are determined to meet them.

This will be a term when we will complete the business of ensuring that city and country people have comparable services.

We should never accept – and The Nationals will not accept – that the answer to the problem of providing services to regional Australia is to give up: to either remove services or to simply not offer them in the first place.

All too often, that has been the solution applied by Labor state governments.

That must not be our answer, because that means there would be a great divide in our nation:

- a city Australia enjoying all the benefits of a successful and growing modern economy;
- and a regional Australia constantly lagging behind and deprived of the proper rewards for its contribution to the nation.

The real answer lies in two parts. The first is to work with regional communities in identifying specific problems and finding specific answers.

On Friday, I announced a substantial expansion to our regional policy. We continue to listen to regional Australians and to put their needs into action.

We have listened to the needs of families in isolated and remote areas who are struggling with the growing cost of educating their children, and will provide significant additional help with the costs of hostels, remote education, and boarding fees.

And we will help small rural communities to build medical centres, and expand Medicare so there are more practice nurses carrying out preventive health checks – particularly for rural women.

The second part of the answer for regional Australia is to continue to get the national economy right.

The best policies any government can give regional Australia are:

- Low interest rates,
- Low inflation, and
- Low unemployment

In this uncertain world, I would add a fourth to that list: national security.

On all counts, this government and this Liberal-National Coalition has performed very well in delivering these policies for regional Australia.

Rebuilding and securing Australia's national economy has not been an easy task and, particularly in the early years, has required tough decisions that have not always been popular.

My Nationals team has stayed the course, because we knew how vital it was to get the job done

It has required dedication and teamwork from National and Liberal Ministers, Members and Senators.

It could not have been achieved without a strong Coalition partnership – and it could not have been done without the understanding and support of the man I am about to introduce.

This is a man of great leadership, a man of conviction, with the courage to do what he knows is right rather than just what happens to be popular – and the determination to see it through.

He is a man who takes counsel readily, but brings his own wisdom and sound judgement to the matters of the day.

A man who doesn't flinch when the going gets tough.

Australia is fortunate to have such a man leading this government, and it is my great pleasure to invite him forward: the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard.

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