



Merry Christmas!

Dear Residents of the Berowra Electorate,

This is my last newsletter for 2020, and so I wanted to take this chance to wish you and your families a safe and very Merry Christmas. 2020 was the year we didn't expect, one many of us will be glad to have behind us, but it is also a year we saw the true strength, generosity and resilience of our community and our country.

Bushfires, floods, storms and COVID-19 have challenged our resolve, however we have emerged from 2020 in a good position and there are so many reasons to have hope.

Australia has performed better on the health and economic front than almost any other country in the world.

Over the last five months, 650,000 jobs have been created. 80% of the 1.3 million Australians who either lost their jobs or saw their working hours reduced to zero are now back at work. In October, there were 2 million fewer workers on

JobKeeper and around 450,000 fewer businesses on JobKeeper, compared to September.

It was wonderful to finish the year with the news that the OECD has upgraded its outlook for the Australian economy by 0.3 percentage points following the release of the Federal Budget.

All of this is great news for Australia and a great end to a challenging year.

In addition, the border openings have enabled so many of us to be reunited with family and friends for Christmas.

To wrap up the year, this newsletter includes some final updates that affect our community, things to be aware of this holiday season, as well as updates from the last Parliamentary sitting fortnight of the year, including:

- Sharing your NorthConnex stories in Parliament
- Update on my committee work
- Round two of the Manufacturing Modernisation Fund now open
- Helping travel agents to process your travel refunds
- Further changes to support Family Visa applicants
- Protecting Australians from scam calls
- Protecting you from cybercrime
- Other updates from Parliament

Please feel welcome to share this newsletter with others who may be interested. I encourage you to follow my social media for up-to-date news too. Anyone who wants to be added to the newsletter distribution list should email julian.leeser.mp@aph.gov.au.

If ever my staff or I can assist you in any way, please don't hesitate to phone my office on (02) 9980 1822 or send an email.

Kind regards,
Julian Leeser

Sharing Your NorthConnex Stories in Parliament

In my last newsletter I asked you to share your NorthConnex story, and how it has made a difference to your lives. The response was overwhelming. Thank you to all who wrote to me - I was able to share many of the stories you shared with me in the Parliament.

Gail from West Pennant Hills said: *'What a relief not to be squeezed between trucks on Pennant Hills Road anymore. You can see the jacarandas and bougainvilleas in full bloom, and I don't actually have to make plans anymore about how to avoid Pennant Hills Road when I need to go out locally.'*

You can listen to the full speech below:



Round Two of the Manufacturing Modernisation Fund open

To create jobs, drive recovery and make Australia stronger, we're investing \$1.5 billion in Australian Manufacturing. One of the first programs delivered will back manufacturers to invest in new technologies to boost production and create jobs. If you are running a manufacturing business have a look and see if the Manufacturing Modernisation Fund can assist you.

Applications for Round Two of the Manufacturing Modernisation Fund are now open.

[Find out more](#)

Setting the Policy Agenda in Immigration and Indigenous Affairs

In the last sitting fortnight, the two committees I chair have tabled their final reports for the Inquiries referred to them by the respective Ministers.

These reports are for:

- The **Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program**, which has already had significant impact on the decisions made by Government to address the agricultural labour shortages our farmers are facing this harvest season; and,
- The **Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities**.

I have included detail about the two reports and their recommendations below, and media coverage of the reports below.

Recommendations dealing with agricultural and tourism labour shortages arising from international border closures

As Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, I tabled the Final Report for the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) Program. This program is better known as the backpacker visa. The program contributes \$3.1 billion annually to Australia's economy and creates jobs all over Australia, particularly in regional areas.

WHMs also play a critical role in filling skills shortages across Australia, particularly in our horticulture, agriculture and tourism sectors.

The interim report dealt with the substantial agricultural and horticultural labour shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, this report largely focuses on longer-term changes to the visa program.

Industry groups, including [BYTAP](#) and [ATIC](#), have already expressed their support for the recommendations proposed by the Committee. As Simon Westaway of the Australian Tourism Industry Council said, *"This Report delivers tangible outcomes and if adopted by Government can help address future seasonal work vacancies for many tourism businesses across our regions."*



Speaking on the Final Report for the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program

Read the Final Report for the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program

Addressing high food prices in remote Indigenous communities

As the Chair of the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs I tabled its report on food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities.

The report finds that food costs are very high in many remote communities, reinforcing long-held concerns regarding food security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who are living remotely, however we did not find evidence of systemic price-gouging taking place in remote community stores.

Food security issues for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are not new. The supply of quality and affordable food is often unstable due to poor infrastructure, seasonal changes, the high costs of living and operating stores remotely.

The report makes 16 recommendations to Government and can be accessed and downloaded from the inquiry website.



Speaking on the Report for the Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities in Parliament

Read the Report for the Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities

Industrial Relations Reform: Supporting Jobs and Our Economic Recovery

The Morrison Government's vital reforms to the industrial relations system are driven by one simple goal – breaking down the barriers to job growth so that we can get Australians back to work.

The reforms were developed after extensive consultation with employer and employee groups who sat down with the Government for more than 150 hours to find innovative solutions that will support struggling businesses, as well as protect and enhance the rights of workers.

The Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill 2020 is the end product of that process, representing the most substantial reforms to Australia's industrial system since the Fair Work Act was introduced in 2009.

The Bill contains a range of practical measures targeting five key areas of the IR system:

- **Award simplification** – Cutting red tape, improving flexibility and job opportunities in 12 Awards covering the retail and hospitality sectors, which were hit hard by the pandemic and saw heavy job losses;
- **Greenfields agreements** - Boosting investment in job-creating mega-projects by making them more attractive to global investors through new maximum eight-year life-of-construction agreements, complete with appropriate safeguards and guaranteed wage increases;
- **Casual employment** - Ending the confusion and uncertainty surrounding the legal status of casuals, while providing a clearer pathway for those working regular shifts to convert to permanent roles after 12 months if they wish to do so;
- **Enterprise Bargaining** - Reversing the decline in agreement making by simplifying the BOOT test and setting a 21-day approval deadline to help drive productivity gains and real wage growth;
- **Compliance and enforcement** - Reducing the risk of wage underpayments by helping employers comply with their obligations, providing improved mechanisms to rectify underpayments where they do occur, and protecting employee entitlements by introducing a new criminal penalty with a four-year jail term for the very small number of employers who deliberately exploit their workers.

Detailed fact sheets covering each of the reform measures will be available shortly here:

[More information about the industrial relations reform](#)

Helping Travel Agents to Process Customer Refunds

Recently I shared with you a speech I made to the Parliament about the unique challenges travel agents have faced during COVID-19, operating on little to no profit for more than six months, yet working hard to ensure Australians get their travel refunds. I suggested that the unique characteristics of the industry warranted industry-specific support.

The Morrison Government has just announced it will provide a one-off payment to assist travel agents. This announcement has been welcomed by the Tourism industry and I know will make a significant difference for many travel agents in the Berowra electorate.

[Read more about the announcement here](#)

Further Changes to Support Family Visa Applicants

Throughout 2020, people in our community have written to me regarding partner visas and the uncertainty international border closures have caused.

The Morrison Government is making further changes to the Family visa program to support applicants impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes providing visa holders flexibility to remain in Australia, or to continue their visa pathway even if they have been unable to travel due to the current international border restrictions. The changes are in addition to the Government's decision to almost double the number of Partner visa places in 2020-21.

[Find out more](#)

Protecting Australians from Scam Calls

Scam calls aren't new, however they are getting more sophisticated, and many Australians still fall victim to them.

So far in 2020, Australians have lost nearly \$36m to scam calls. This is a reminder to be vigilant and avoid giving your details to people over the phone.

The Morrison Government is taking actions to detect, trace and block scam calls, unveiling a new industry code that will help put a stop to the calls. You can read more here:



[Find out more](#)

Protecting You from Cybercrime

Cybercriminals can target anyone, anywhere at anytime. Operating around the clock and around the world, they are relentless in their bid to steal data and money from Australians – including from business owners.

A new national cyber security campaign, 'Act Now, Stay Secure', was recently launched and provides easy-to-follow advice for individuals, families, business owners and organisations on how to better protect themselves against cybercrime.



With Australians reporting more than one cybercrime every 10 minutes, it's more important than ever that we all remain alert to the threat of cybercrime.

I urge you to visit cyber.gov.au for tips on how to protect yourself and your business from cybercriminals.

cyber.gov.au

Further Updates from the Community

Binnowee Kindergarten

Binnowee Kindergarten buried their time capsule today to celebrate 85 years. I wasn't able to make it in person but was delighted to be involved virtually and to be able to speak about the significant event in the Parliament. I don't think they could have picked a better year to bury a time capsule!



St John Ambulance

Congratulations to all those at St John Ambulance Hornsby Division and Hornsby Cadet Division who were recipients of the Long Service Medal, New South Wales Premier's citation or Volunteer Recognition Awards from the Centre for Volunteering.

In addition to serving around Australia during the bushfires, this year many St John Ambulance volunteers have also served on the front line during COVID at testing clinics and hotels, and checking temperatures at events.

On behalf of everyone in the Berowra electorate, thank you to everyone at St John Ambulance.



Honouring the Hon. Warren Snowden MP

It is rare that I pay tribute to someone on the other side of politics in these newsletters but I wanted to acknowledge the service of a good Labor man and a very significant Australian. Last week, the Hon. Warren Snowden MP, the longest standing Member in the Federal Parliament at 31 years—and the last Member left in the Parliament to have served in Old Parliament House—announced that he won't run again at the next election.

Representing the electorate of Lingiari in the Northern Territory, Warren has devoted his life to the betterment of Indigenous Australians, bringing to the Federal Parliament a wealth of knowledge, understanding and experience of Indigenous people.

Warren and I are on opposite sides in Parliament and don't always agree, but I have

had the privilege of working closely with Warren as my Deputy Chair for my work as Chair of the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs. He has always been generous in sharing his knowledge and has been a very good parliamentary colleague. He made mention of our work together in his speech announcing his retirement from the Parliament, saying *"I want to briefly pay tribute to the cooperation across the parliament on parliamentary committees. We have the adversarial politics across the chamber; we all understand that. But the truth of it is this parliament works really well in the committees. My colleagues who are here and who chair the committees that I've been on over the last little while will, I'm sure, agree that we've been blessed by the way in which the committee system has worked... And I thank the Member for Berowra for his companionship and good work. He's a good person."*

I wish Warren all the best in this next stage of life and all the health and happiness as he spends more time with Elizabeth and their children.

You can read the Hon. Warren Snowden's full speech below.

[Read Mr Snowden's Full Speech](#)

Recent Media

Over the last couple of weeks, there has been significant coverage of the Migration and Indigenous Affairs reports I tabled in the Parliament. You can read some of the coverage here:

- Sydney Morning Herald: [More nations, refugees needed to fill skills shortage with working holiday visas](#)
- Australian Financial Review: [Inquiry urges expansion of backpacker visa plan](#)
- The Australian: [Outback grocery bills 60pc higher](#)
- Sydney Morning Herald: [Consumer watchdog must monitor Indigenous food and grocery prices](#)



Speaking Patricia Karvelas about the findings from the Inquiry into food pricing and food security in Indigenous communities.