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Guy Barnett, Liberal Member for Lyons

Country Courier – Opinion Editorial

It has been an absolute privilege to serve the people of the Northern Midlands for the past four years as a member of the majority Hodgman Liberal Government.

After four years in Government, there is a renewed sense of pride and optimism in the future of Tasmania.

Over 10,600 jobs have been created in our first term of Government, investment has returned to our shores, the tourism industry is booming, and importantly the Budget has returned to surplus, meaning we can invest more into essential services such as health and education.

And this is exactly what we have done.

Our ambitious plan to extend regional and rural High Schools to years 11 and 12 is paying off, with students in isolated areas given the opportunity to undertake further study at their local school, rather than having the extra hassle of travel or having to move completely.

Cressy District High School extended this year, and Campbell Town High School will be ready for the 2018 School term.

Extending High Schools to years 11 and 12 is part of our Plan to create a job ready generation. Students who undertake additional schooling will have the best chance of getting a good job and living a fulfilling life.

It is important that road infrastructure is continually upgraded to keep up with demand, and the Hodgman Liberal Government set aside \$185.3 million for road upgrades in the 2017-18 Budget, which will further improve the Midland Highway.

With improved road facilities, the Northern Midlands is in a great position to capitalise on the record number of tourists coming to see our State.

The Hodgman Liberal Government recognises the importance of growing Tasmania's visitor economy and will target a 50 per cent increase in the average per visitor spend, and aim for 70 per cent of all visitors to stay overnight in regional areas on their trip to Tasmania by 2022.

Achieving these targets will create jobs in the State's hospitality and tourism industries, and contribute to regional economies.

We are already seeing results.

In the year ending September 2017, Campbell Town had 6207 overnight stays, up from 5132 in the year ending September 2014.

Similarly, Longford's overnight stays rose to 15564 in the year ending September 2017 from 12550 in the year ending September 2014.

And no wonder, as the Northern Midlands is a naturally stunning area, with lush green rolling hills, rustic agricultural atmosphere, and stunning built colonial heritage.

Some of the rich and diverse collection of historic heritage places found in the Northern Midlands include Brickendon Estate, Quamby Estate and Woolmers Estate.

To drive tourism and protect these heritage icons we committed \$1.75 million to the Woolmers Visitor Centre development prior to the 2014 election, and \$50,000 has previously been made available for important conservation works at Brickendon Estate.

And let's not forget the fine produce that can be found in the midlands, which couples nicely with our tourism industry, with people coming to taste our amazing produce.

Agriculture is a key pillar of Tasmania's economy, and the Hodgman Liberal Government has set the ambitious target to primary industries on the path to realising our vision of a ten-fold increase in the value of the sector by 2050.

A re-elected Hodgman Liberal Government will continue to invest in our agricultural industries, and the commencement of work on the \$30 million North Esk Irrigation Scheme is one such example, providing 4685 megalitres of high security irrigation water to the Northern Midlands and increase the irrigation footprint in the region.