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**CANDIDATE FOR COWPER**

**COWPER CAMPAIGN LAUNCH (BELLINGEN)**

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**A POSITIVE, PROSPEROUS AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR COWPER**

**\*\*\*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY\*\*\***

Thank you Joel (Fitzgibbon) and Kaila (Murnain),

Before getting underway, I would like to acknowledge the Gumbaynggirr and Dainggatti peoples, the traditional custodians of the land in and around the federal division of Cowper. I pay my respect to elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.

Today I am here to talk about the future. I am here to talk about a positive future for the Coffs and Mid-North Coasts. It is about a future for its people; a future for its future residents; a future for its flora; a future for its fauna; a future for its water; a future for its air. It is about a future for country.

I am talking about country that can be a great place to live, work or retire to. Country that can give you as much as you want in life - or as little as you want in life. Country that makes a positive economic contribution to the nation. Country that adds to the social fibre of the nation. Country that makes a significant contribution to the environmental future of this nation and our planet.

And the people of the Coffs and Mid-North Coasts have a choice about what sort of country they want. It is a stark choice. They can have more of the same with the National Party. Or they can have a positive, prosperous and sustainable future under a Bill Shorten Labor Government in Canberra and me as a new voice for Cowper in that Government.

Today I am going to make the case to elect a Labor Government nationally and to elect me as only the second Labor Member for Cowper since Federation.

Frank McGuren won Cowper for Labor in 1961. He defeated the Country Party's, Earl Page who had held it since 1919. Frank and I share three things in common. First, he went to St Augustines in Coffs Harbour. I went to St Augustines at Brookvale in Sydney. Second, Frank needed an 11 per cent swing. I need a swing of the same proportion. As it happened, he got a 13 per cent swing. Third, the leader of the Labor Party in 1961 was Arthur Calwell, a Victorian. In Bill Shorten, I too have a Labor leader hailing from Victoria. So, the omens are good. I am determined to get that swing and be the second Labor member for Cowper.

In presenting my case to be that person and to help ensure we have a Labor Government in Canberra, I come back to a few critical points that highlight the difference between what I offer and what my opponent offers.

Only Labor has the principles, plans, people, priorities and passion to deliver a positive future for the Coffs and Mid-North Coasts and country as a whole. And we'll be better off with a Labor voice in a Labor government.

In presenting the case for change to the positive, prosperous and sustainable future that I speak of - the future that we in this room want - I do have to touch on the negative and the shortcomings of this government, the National Party and its representative here in Cowper since 2001.

I first moved to the Mid-North Coast in 1985. I moved to Taree as a 19 year old. It was my first time out of home. I had always wanted to be in radio and got the job as the night time DJ at the local commercial station, 2RE. I played vinyl records 7 pm to 11 pm and at 11.05 pm after the news I played the national anthem and shut the transmitter down. I was told when I started that more cows listened to me than humans, as was the nature of the Manning Valley,

I've done a bit since then. I have also lived in Albury-Wodonga, Newcastle, Canberra, Sydney, Gold Coast and San Francisco. I was a frequent visitor to the area for most of this century through marriage and children. I moved back to this part of the world, for good, two years ago to this gem of a place called Bellingen.

My career at senior levels of government and business has taken me to over 30 countries and I've seen a lot. I have seen a lot of good. I have seen a lot of bad. I have learned a lot. That's why I say confidently I have the experience, expertise and energy to be a great member of parliament.

But, when I moved back to this part of the world a few years ago, I was quite shocked at what I found. Yes, it is a beautiful place. Yes the weather is great. Yes it is a great place to retire or a raise a family. Yes, its housing is way cheaper than Sydney and Melbourne.

But there are some real problems here. Some of these problems are perennial. I think on many of these problems the National Party has simply given up. And there are new problems which they're just not capable of doing anything about.

I don't say that glibly. In the Abbott-Turnbull-Joyce-whatshisname government, we have a Prime Minister and government that is out of touch and arrogant. In the National Party, we have a party that has run out of ideas and is super-glued to the past.

In the local member, who has been there since 2001, we have a nice enough guy who spends most of his time at fetes, flower shows and funerals taking selfies for glossy brochures. He never rose to any great height in the Nationals ranks. He was a low ranking Minister after 12 years in Opposition; he then got demoted to an Assistant Minister; he then got punted from the Ministry and he's been like a jack-in-the-box every year or so seeking leadership positions in the Nationals. Every time, he's been passed over and put back in his box. He's in cruise control and has run out of puff. He also calls Tony Abbott his "good friend". He wanted Barnaby Joyce to remain as leader and Deputy PM earlier this year. These alone are reasons to dump him. He's in a party and close to those that want to take Australia backwards. It is time to say goodbye to Luke Hartsuyker.

Politics and people aside, let's take a moment to look at some of the issues. As I said, my full time gaze has been upon the Coffs and Mid-North Coasts for a few years now. Here are some of the things I have found since I got here.

**Unemployment** is over eight per cent - twice the rate of Sydney and 3.5 per cent above the national average.

**Youth unemployment** is just under 20 per cent and that's doubled in the past two years alone.

In our **public schools** on the Coffs and Mid-North coasts, funding is \$22 million less in 2018 and 2019 under the Turnbull Government.

In **health**, in some places like Nambucca Heads and Kempsey, you can wait three to four weeks to see a doctor just to get a prescription, thanks to the rural doctors' shortage. In Bowraville, there's no doctor at all.

In **domestic violence**, nearly two people a day reported domestic violence to police in the year ending March in the Coffs Clarence region. And that figure increased by twenty per cent in just one year.

In **housing**, Anglicare reported that rents on the Coffs and North Coasts grew by more than a third in two years due to the construction of the Pacific Highway and Grafton jail, which brought many temporary workers to the region.

Overall, Cowper has the largest percentage of people living below the **poverty line** of any electorate in Australia. Cowper ranks fifth in electorates for the **highest levels of disadvantage** in Australia.

I found a mess with the **NBN**. Parts of Cowper has great NBN with fibre-to-the-premises, installed under Labor before the 2013 election. Other places, like Urunga and Kempsey, have second rate and flaky fibre-to-the-node. Bellingen is getting fibre-to-the-curb. That's great! But stupidly they're not doing 20 per cent of the streets where they could, leaving residents on fixed-wireless. Oh, and when we get it in Bello, that's nine months late by the way. And that's only a taste of the problems with the NBN.

Let's talk about **nature**. We have lost 50 per cent of our koala populations on the North Coast in the last 20 years. The NSW Minister for Environment ridicules Labor's plans for the Great Koala National Park. And just recently, we have learned the NSW Government is giving the go-ahead for intensive logging of another 140,000 hectares of forest between Taree and Grafton. And the NSW Government has effectively outsourced its forestry policy to Forestry Corporation which has become a rogue and out of control government agency. We also have the Federal Government significantly reducing environmental protections on the Solitary Islands Commonwealth Marine Reserves.

Then there's the **Pacific Highway**. The Pacific Highway between Port and Coffs is now open with four lanes in each direction. That's great. The Nationals held a selfie fest the Friday before last to tell us about it. What they didn't tell you was that it was running six months late. They offered no reason. They offered no apology.

Then there's the **Coffs Harbour Bypass**. What a shambles. So, in April, my candidacy gets announced, Albo (Anthony Albanese) says he's coming to town for Politics in the Pub, Luke Hartsuyker panics and puts out a release calling on his government, repeat, his government, to fund the Coffs Harbour Bypass. And then they announce it in the budget. But it doesn't start for three calendar years and won't be finished until mid next decade. This project should have been shovel ready - ready to go this financial year. But let's face it, they were lucky to get it press release ready. The Nationals are that hopeless.

What else? **Penalty Rates**. Last Sunday, up to one in four workers in Cowper lost their penalty rates. One in four. In Cowper, we have 13,000 people working in accommodation, food and retail services and they lost their penalty rates if they worked weekends.

Then there's the **ABC** or "Our ABC". I chuckle every-time I hear the phrase "Our ABC". You know what it is here - "a little bit of our ABC". We have less than four hours of local programming a day on the ABC. We are half the size of Canberra and yet we only get a few hours a day of local programming. The Liberal Party agenda is to privatise or gut the ABC. The Nationals say they'll fight it but we always know who wins in the Coalition - it is the Liberals. They always roll the Nationals.

Finally, you hear a lot about a '**two speed**' economy - Sydney/Melbourne and the rest of the country. Well, how about a two speed Cowper? The Federal Government's own job predictions show that in the Coffs Grafton area for the five years ending 2022, employment will grow by 5.4 per cent. Those same predictions show the Port Macquarie Mid-North Coast end, the southern end, will grow by 11 per cent - approximately double the northern end.

Friends, these are just some of the things I have found since I got here. There's much more. But across the big issues of schools, health, employment, family safety, housing affordability, the environment, infrastructure and internet - Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and the Nationals have failed. They have no plans for regional Australia. They've run out of ideas. They have run out of puff. We're being duded. Yet, they get voted in year after year. Friends, that's about the change.

The easy thing to do would be to say look at how badly they have done, vote for me, leave it at that and hope for the best. That's not good enough. Those who know me know I make things happen. Now let me tell you what Labor and myself have on our agenda for a better Australia and even better Coffs and Mid-North Coasts.

There are three platforms to my candidacy - employment, environment and fairness. They're all about as important as each other and they're interlinked. I will start on employment.

The foundations for strong employment on the Coffs and Mid-North coasts start with your upbringing and education.

That includes a good school education and for a start, we'll put back the \$22 million Malcolm Turnbull and the Nationals have taken out.

With technical training, we're going to waive the upfront fees for 100,000 TAFE courses in our first three years of government. So instead of importing workers on skills visas, we will just train our own as should be the case.

And, we'll make degrees affordable and provide for 200,000 more university places over the next ten years.

But these intelligent and well-trained people need a place to go. At present, our employment comes from health care and social assistance, retail trade, construction, accommodation and food services and education and training. And that's all good.

We need to do more than just grow these categories. That's the Nationals plan - just more of the same. We need to diversify and broaden. The world has changed since the Nationals last looked up and out. Our future prosperity is linked to connectivity, future businesses and sustainability.

What will make this area attractive for business is great connectivity. We have that with air access to Coffs and Port from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and we now have a Motorway standard road all the way from Coffs to Melbourne. By the end of 2020, we will have it all of the way north to the Sunshine Coast. That's great for business and jobs.

But we also need great connectivity by way of the NBN. To many in Cowper, the NBN means the NO BROADBAND NETWORK. Labor is committed to Fibre-to-the Curb where it is technically possible and to ending the digital divide. With better internet connectivity, we have a greater chance to make this place more attractive to those escaping the high housing prices of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

We need to work with the public and private sectors to encourage flexible working to encourage remote working so people can live in our regions. We can provide an army of skilled workers for businesses based in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra.

We also need to invest in jobs of the future - renewable energy, carbon farming or sequestration, forest restoration, sustainable resource supply, sustainable agriculture and sustainable fishing. And is there a place in New South Wales better positioned to do this? No. Labor believes and I believe in renewable energy. The National Party believes in more coal-fired power and, unbelievably, dirty, dangerous and expensive nuclear power and CSG galore on the north coast.

By consolidating what we've got; by marketing our new attractiveness through connectivity and by investing in future and sustainable industries - we will have a much brighter future in this part of the world..

I want to see general unemployment and youth unemployment no greater than state averages. With leadership, hard work and cooperation we can do it. I want to lead it.

Let's talk about the environment. If you want to get me mad, present to me an argument that it is jobs *or* the environment. That is a stupid proposition. We can have protection of our precious environment. We can have the jobs we need to have an appropriate quality of life. It is environment *and* jobs. Repeat, *and* - not *or*.

I believe, as many others do, that climate change is the biggest threat to our ecosystems, our economy and our society as a whole. It is an existential threat to all of us.

On the Coffs and Mid-North coasts, rising sea levels threaten our homes, roads, airports and business districts; storms, heatwaves and fires will become more frequent and ferocious; and our agriculture will suffer through water shortages, high temperatures and new pests and disease.

Our elderly will suffer from excessive heat; native flora and fauna will die off; we won't be the tourist attraction or icon we should be or want to be and scarce government funds will be directed to mitigation rather than prevention. For every one dollar we spend on prevention today, we will save four to six dollars in the future on mitigation and repair. It is not wrong to call it a climate crisis.

Labor has a Climate Change Action Plan and it is one I fully endorse. It addresses renewable energy, real action on climate change, sustainable development, conservation and preservation and assistance for impacted industries and communities so we become carbon neutral by mid-century, if not sooner.

Yet Malcolm Turnbull remains weak-kneed on climate change and renewables. Many in the Nationals and the Liberals want to build coal-fired and nuclear-powered stations. Old mate, Tony Abbott, wants us to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement.

So what can we do about it locally? As I said, we need leadership and that's a mantle I want to take up. I believe we can be a renewable energy powerhouse. I believe we can be a renewable resource powerhouse. I believe we can be a conservation and restoration icon. I believe we can be an environmental centre of excellence. I believe we can be an internationally famous nature based tourism attraction. And I believe we can play a key role in helping Australia exceed its Paris commitments.

I believe all of this will create sustainable, quality and long-term employment which will reduce unemployment, draw people to the area, create new export industries for the region and make us self-sufficient. In other words, we will be sustainable. So, how do we do all of this?

Where it is hydrologically sound to do so, let's invest in pumped hydro and solar. We will pay less for power. We will be self sufficient. We will be a net exporter. This creates jobs.

Timber is a great renewable resource. It is better for the environment than the manufacture of steel and concrete. We are a great place for timber. But we have a problem. We currently do some of our forestry or logging in the wrong places and in the wrong way. I want to see double the number of jobs in timber but I want to see logging done in the right way and in the right places - those places being those with low conservation value.

We can be a conservation and restoration icon. We need to move national parks off the World Heritage Listing waiting list and on to the proclaimed list. And, here in Bellingen, I am pleased to say we will start that by moving the Bellinger River National Park off the waiting list, where it has been for seven years under the Nationals, and on to the World Heritage List for the Gondwana Rainforests, filling in the missing link between the World Heritage Listed New England National Park and the Dorrigo National Park.

We need to repair the lands and forests we have damaged. This will draw visitors from all over the world. We can be the Cairns or Daintree of New South Wales. A starting point for the repair and restoration of forests is the creation of Labor's Great Koala National Park. This is something New South Wales Labor is committed to. It is something I am committed to. I hope Bellingen Shire can be the headquarters for what will become an international icon.

There's many others things we can do. Australia and the world needs carbon farming. That's a fancy term for lots of trees to suck in carbon pollution. Since white man came to Australia, we have lost two thirds of our trees. And that's changing everything. We need more trees and we're the perfect place for it. We have plenty of available land. We need soil repaired. We need to stop erosion. Our land holders need an income. We can be a leader in carbon farming, something that people invest in and something that creates jobs.

None of what I have spoken about will just happen. We need education and a pipeline of future workers. We have no shortage of universities and TAFE in the region. Let's get them to deliver courses to deliver workers for us and the rest of the world. And let us be a place where wildlife comes to convalesce, be they air, land or sea animals.

Finally, I see a big future for us in nature based tourism. We have the flights. We have the roads. Under Labor, we will have more World Heritage Listed areas; we will have the Great Koala National Park; we will be a leader in regeneration, restoration and renewables. We can be a place that people comes to see, experience and learn from. It just requires leadership, industry development and marketing.

I have a vision for the Mid-North, Coffs and North Coasts of New South Wales. It is a future based on nature, conservation, restoration, renewable resources, learning and tourism. And that's all in addition to what we already have.

But most importantly, there's no downside to anything I have spoken about today. No one loses. It doesn't cost a lot. It just requires some leadership from Canberra, Sydney and this part of the world. And in Joel Fitzgibbon, Mark Butler, Tony Burke, Penny Sharpe, Mick Veitch and Walt Secord, we have a team of people who can make this happen.

My third platform for election is fairness. Fairness is something Labor owns. The other lot just don't get it. And they don't. Every day we see things that are blatantly unfair. Try this for size.

Corporate profits in the last two years in Australia have increased 20 per cent. Wages growth in the last two years has pretty much flat-lined. Prices are rising. Every day, there's a new email saying starting "Dear Valued Customer". You know where that goes.

And what's the government's answer? \$80 billion in tax cuts for big business, including \$17 billion for the banks. What's their other answer? Stripping weekend penalty rates from people, as I said, potentially one in four workers in Cowper.

So what are we going to do about it? A Shorten Labor Government within 100 days of winning government will restore weekend penalty rates.

We will restore the energy supplement for pensioners and for people on Newstart, to provide those who need it an extra bit of help with their bills.

We will cap increases in private health insurance premium increases.

If you are on Newstart or any form of welfare, we get that it is inadequate and we're committed to a 'root and branch' review of all welfare payments.

We understand the housing affordability issues. We have short and long term plans to help people get into home ownership and myriad initiatives to help those that rent. We'll also have plenty to say about social housing in the months ahead.

Fairness, This is what we're about. This is what we do. This is what we are good at.

And to my earlier points on employment and environment - these are fairness issues.

Is it fair to say, as the Nationals do, this is as good as it gets? No. Is it fair to let our natural environment decline so future generations can clean up our mess? No. Is it fair to simply talk about and encourage contracts and gig economy with no regard for what this means for people. No.

I have no issue with a business doing well. I think that's great. I have no issue with someone getting rich. That's fine. You should be rewarded for your toil, intellect, creativity or other value you create. All I ask is that if you are one of these businesses or individuals is that you treat your staff and contractors well; you pay their entitlements; you pay their invoices; you play by the rules; and you don't damage the environment on the way through.

Finally on fairness, let me talk about tax cuts. Labor is committed to delivering bigger, better and fairer tax cuts. And you know what? It is as if they were devised for the people of Cowper.

Our tax cuts are bigger, better and fairer because they stop at those earning \$125,000 a year (individuals) or more. The Liberals and Nationals reward the high income earners - those who least need a hand right now.

Research from The Australia Institute shows the federal seat of Cowper is ranked 135th out of 146 seats that will derive the biggest benefit from Malcolm Turnbull's tax cuts.

People in Malcolm Turnbull's electorate will get 192 per cent of the average benefit. People in Cowper will get 77 per cent of the average benefit. And Luke Hartsuyker voted for this.

Let's get away from the percentages. Let's talk dollars and cents. In Cowper, 87 per cent of people earn less than \$80,000 a year. In Cowper, 51 per cent of people earn less than \$37,000 a year. Let's talk about these people.

If you earn \$80,000 you will be \$928 better off under Labor each year. That's \$398 more than under the Liberal and National plan.

If you earn \$37,000 a year, you will be \$350 better off under Labor each year. That's \$150 more than under the Liberal and National plan.

And if you are a couple and one earns \$80,000 and the other person earns \$37,000, you will be \$1,278 better off under Labor each year. That's \$548 more than under the Liberal and National plan.

We proudly say our tax plan is bigger, better and fairer. It gives a hand to those that need it, which as we know, is always the Labor way.

I want to close by talking about some personal things. Running for office is a serious business. I am serious about running. I am serious about winning. I am serious about change.

Nothing I have said today has been said because it sounds good or might get a round of applause or a good headline. It has been said because I have thought it through and believe it and it is achievable with some handwork and leadership. It has also been said because Labor has thought it through and believes it. We have had the discussions internally and externally, we have done the research, had the arguments, considered the options and come up with robust and well thought through policy. And, unlike the minor parties and independents, we're a serious party of government and are held to account, as we should be. We just don't make stuff up.

We can say what we say because it is what's right for that positive, prosperous and sustainable future I speak of. I believe I have the experience, energy and expertise to be a worthy representative of the people of the Coffs and Mid-North Coasts and a solid contributor to the success of a Shorten Labor Government.

I am 100 per cent Labor. No ifs, no buts. I am a social democrat. I am a proud union member and as we all know, the union makes us strong and solidarity is forever.

Labor values underpin everything that I have spoken about today. I get energy from the need for equality and fairness. I get energy from seeing all people do well irrespective of your sex, education, race, age, faith, background, sexual orientation, opinion, politics, location, status or physical and mental abilities. I hate seeing one person succeed at the expense of another. I want to see all people do well.

My second key motivator concerns nature or 'the environment'. I take a very straight forward view that the earth has been here for 4.5 billion years, and we're all here for less than 100 years (well, most of us anyway). Thus we're a temporary visitor, and as such we have a responsibility to look after the place and leave it in better shape than we found it.

My third and final key motivator is that I get energy from the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We can learn much from them. Quite simply, as I heard an Aboriginal elder say once "If you look after country - country will look after you". This is my 'light on the hill'.

Finally, there's one important question for any potential candidate. It goes to the heart of what they're about. It is a simple question, what's your vision? John Howard wanted us to

be 'relaxed and comfortable'. All he did was put the country to sleep for a decade. It is an important question. It tells you much about the person.

I want an Australia where you can be what you want to be. I want people to have choices. The more choices you have the better quality of life you will have.

Government has a key role to play in this. It should lay the foundation for potential, ambition and success. Government can do that by giving people security, stability and protection.

Government can set an agenda for the future. Government can give people the outlook to explore what's important to them.

Government can give people the basic tools a healthy body and mind, a clean, safe and sustainable environment, an education, shelter, connectivity and experience. And Government can give people a hand when they need it.

It is all about Advancing Australia, fairly, by caring for country and putting people first. That's the Labor way. That's my way.

We're all about a fair go for Australia.

Nothing riles me up more than hearing someone say "*the big parties are the exactly the same*". Friends....

Are we the same on schools, TAFE and uni? No.

Are we the same on health and Medicare? No.

Are we the same on schools and hospitals before stadiums? No.

Are we the same on tax cuts for big business and the banks? No.

Are we the same on personal tax relief? No.

Are we the same on broadband? No.

Are we the same on the ABC? No.

Are we the same on climate change and the environment? No.

And are we the same on a positive, prosperous and sustainable future for Cowper? Hell no!

Friends, thanks for coming today, thank you for coming to the aid of the party.

We **can** win Cowper.

We **must** win Cowper.

And with your help, we **will** win Cowper.