

Questions for candidates in the seat of Albury: While HLN is apolitical, we believe that our members deserve to understand where the various candidates stand on issues important to us – particularly concerning agricultural and environmental policies. We sent emails with ‘Questions For Our State Political Candidates’ out to Justin Clancy MP, Member for Albury (Liberal), Marcus Rowland (Labor), Eli Davern (Greens), Peter Sinclair (Shooters Fishers and Farmers) and Ross Hamilton (Sustainable Australia). Contacts were not readily available for Asanki Fernando (Animal Justice Party) or Geoffrey Robertson (Liberal Democrats). We received the following responses in time for publication in our eNewsletter 20/3/2023.



	Justin Clancy MP, Member for Albury (Liberal)	Marcus Rowland, Labor candidate for Albury
1. What do you see are the big issues facing farmers in the Albury electoral zone?	<p>The vagaries of weather and markets always mark the challenges faced by farmers. Headwinds such as supply chain issues, attracting & retaining employees, and broader economic challenges including interest rates, conflict of land usage and succession planning are part of being in this industry.</p> <p>I am reminded though of a conversation with Ross Edwards, then Chair of the HMFDP, several years ago. Ross spoke of an agriculture industry that, despite numerous challenges, also inspires through some of the best agricultural practices – our farmers, particularly here in the Riverina, are able to match it or better it with their peers across the globe.</p> <p>I’m 4th generation off the land here in the Riverina. I know of the challenges, but I also know how good our farmers are.</p>	<p>Farmers in the region are facing issues of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost of living (including rapidly rising electricity bills and rate rises); - Lack of Health options; - Weed management; - Water Resources; and - Skilled worker shortages.
2. The NSW Landcare Program 2019-2023 is due to finish in June this year. Holbrook Landcare and Landcare NSW are calling on all political representatives to support the Landcare movement and commit to funding the program for the next four years. A condensed version of the Business case is provided. Will you commit to the ongoing funding of Landcare?	<p>Custodianship is a key value for our farming community, and I know that it is a key value of the Landcare movement. I have embraced being able to connect with the Landcare movement here in this electorate, whether through the educational programmes at schools like Holbrook Public, to young leadership formation in Corowa, to important ecological projects for the Sloane froglet or Squirrel Glider LAMP Project.</p> <p>I have engaged with the Agriculture Minister for increased Government advocacy for Landcare programmes in our region, and for Landcare more broadly – and I will continue to do so.</p>	<p>Labor is a strong supporter of Landcare. There is not much more we can say at this stage as we have a policy still going through the processes. (15/3/2023)</p> <p>HLN Note: 17/3/2023 – NSW Labor has committed to provide \$59 million to deliver the NSW Landcare Program for the next four years (2023 - 2027). Media Release</p> <p>Landcare NSW’s response to the announcement: LANDCARE NSW WELCOMES ANNOUNCEMENT BY NSW LABOR TO DOUBLE FUNDING - Landcare NSW</p>
3. What commitment will you make to improving access to and the quality of health services in our region (outside of Albury)?	<p>Whilst a key focus of mine has been health infrastructure for the community of Albury, health at a regional level is also a strong passion. From advocating for improvements to IPTAAS (Isolated Patient Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme), to improvements in Coronial Services to the commitment for mobile dialysis units. I have worked with Greater Hume Council & Murrumbidgee Council on healthcare challenges within their communities – such as GP services in Culcairn. I continue to see access to primary health care and increasing opportunities for allied health professionals as major areas for ongoing improvement in regional healthcare.</p>	<p>Labor has made some incredible policy announcements in relation to Regional Health.</p> <p>On top of providing 1,200 further nurses and 500 regional paramedics, Labor is also committed to providing safe staffing levels for nurses in the following breakdown:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1 nurse to 3 patients in the ED and Midwifery services; 2. 1 nurse to 4 patients on the wards; and 3. 1 nurse to 1 patient in ICU.

<p>4. Does state government need to contribute more funds to the management of weeds and feral animals, particularly in the eastern portion of the Albury electorate and will you as a candidate commit to doing so?</p>	<p>Weed & pest control is a constant challenge faced by landholders – and yes, the state needs to continue to have a focus on this – assisting private landholders but also ensuring that Crown Land is managed effectively. This does relate to funding, but it is also about making sure that there are constructive relationships between Crown Land, National Parks, LLS, Forestry & Private landholders. Whether it has been my involvement in working together with stakeholders on roadside vegetation or on the issues of feral dogs, I have played an active role in this space. And we will need to continue to be working together on this, as our landscape responds to impacts of climate variations and bushfire risks.</p>	<p>NSW Labor believes biosecurity is everyone’s responsibility and as such has sought not to play politics in this important public policy area. We have committed to matching the Governments expenditure in this area and our announcements are in addition to the government’s expenditure. NSW Labor will legislate and fund a NSW Biosecurity Commission. It will be headed by a new Biosecurity Commissioner who will provide independent advice to Government and will report to Parliament annually. The first task of this new Commissioner will be to work with the Natural Resource Commission to get a clear picture of the extent of invasive species and the damage they are doing. Not just to the environment, but to agricultural productivity as well. The Commissioner will increase the visibility of biosecurity across Government and the community. There is a need for improved education and awareness of biosecurity threats - not just in the community but also within Government. NSW Labor will also co-operate with the Commonwealth Government to ensure stronger national borders and better checks against incursions. NSW Labor will also direct \$10 million to a good neighbour program to tackle weed and pest infestations on government land neighbouring private property as a matter of urgency. NSW Labor will also provide more protection for our best farmland. We will legislate and properly implement an independent NSW Agriculture Commissioner to identify and protect State significant agricultural land. The Agriculture Commissioner will also investigate, and provide direction to Government on, the numerous issues around renewable energy sites in NSW. This is a fundamental aspect of food security and the creation of a more productive and sustainable agriculture industry in NSW.</p>
<p>5. How should waterway management be managed or better supported by the State outside of the regulated system (e.g. MBDA)?</p>	<p>Waterways management at the head of systems ultimately impacts on the lower parts of the system. I have been a passionate advocate in this space, fighting for increased recognition of the impacts of sedimentation for example and its impact not just in the local environment but downstream at places such as the Barmah Choke. I am concerned when major waterways are sometimes treated as just a canal, not as a river. We need to empower and enable our landholders to continue waterways management such as fencing off riparian zones and we cannot expect landholders to do this on their own. We need to recognise and provide assistance for change management practices such as access to watering points. I am very much interested in the Refreshing River Management Project – a joint venture involving local Landcare – funded with \$9 million from the NSW government and the impact that this may have on waterway health.</p>	<p>Labor has always supported the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and the role of the MDBA in implementing it. The effort to bring all of the Basin states together and agree on the management of water based on best-available science is an important principle that we will defend in government. The implementation of the MDBP has been frustrated by over a decade of inaction from the NSW Government (assisted for many years by the Liberal National Federal Government). Investments that should have been made in regional communities to implement the plan and deliver more efficient water infrastructure were not made. Labor would like to see more flexibility in terms of the delivery of the Plan and water management - both in terms of time-frames (which are now very tight) and potential projects, but that can only be done if the Federal Government knows NSW is a serious partner in delivering on its commitments. We think a major area of concern has been the lack of local community consultation, many regional communities have not been adequately</p>

		<p>consulted on water projects that directly affect them. Labor will work closely with regional communities to ensure that are able to have their voice heard on water management in NSW.</p>
<p>6. What mechanisms should the State Government be implementing (and you as a candidate be calling for) to ensure the enhancement of our natural ecosystems in the region on private land?</p>	<p>A key part of the mechanism for enhancement of natural ecosystems on private land is through the Biodiversity Conservation Trust. I regularly engage with local landholders and hear of the challenges they face with BCT. The state does need to focus on meaningful developments so as to improve uptake by landholders – and sharing the lived experience of our local landholders is key to this.</p>	<p>After the Liberals and Nationals removed environmental protections in 2016/2017 that Labor installed when last in Government, land clearing rates accelerated 72% in NSW. There is even more land clearing in the pipeline, with clearing approvals exploding 1300% since the laws were changed.</p> <p>A Labor Government will take quick action to restore environmental protections, starting with ensuring the statutory review of the <i>Biodiversity Conservation Act</i> strengthens environmental protections, stops run away land clearing, and fixes the biodiversity offsets scheme so that it genuinely works to protect habitat. NSW Labor is also committed to working with stakeholders in local communities, including residents, industry, forestry workers and their unions, conservationists, and other stakeholders on an evidence-based approach to the use and protection of NSW native forests and other native habitat on both public and private land into the future. Further, Labor will ensure the role of the Agriculture Commissioner is strong and independent and will focus on resolving critical land use issues between agriculture, natural resources, renewable energy and population growth.</p>
<p>7. Renewable energy infrastructure (e.g. Snowy Valley Hydro Scheme, powerlines, wind towers and solar farms) are increasingly appearing in our region. How do you intend to ensure positive outcomes for both the renewable energy sector and landowners?</p>	<p>Conflict of land usage – whether urban development, forestry or transmission and solar developments – is an ongoing challenge for our regions. Along with other regional members I have been fighting for improved consultation, and for better recompense for infrastructure on private land. A particular passion I have is to see community benefit that is genuine. I will continue to advocate to see that transmission infrastructure should be enabled to allow co-location of digital and mobile services as I feel strongly that this would be of far better value to our communities than a light gesture such as a coat of paint on the local hall. We also must continue to engage in strong, constructive dialogues, as the risk of polarised debate will send only further trauma to our local communities.</p>	<p>There are a number of key learnings from the current government’s approach to renewable energy infrastructure. Firstly, private participants were encouraged to start planning for infrastructure with no set guidelines on how to approach landowners or do community consultation. This has seriously impaired social license. It is clear that to bridge the bipartisan 2030 and 2050 emissions reduction targets there will be an increased need for renewable energy infrastructure. To achieve this, NSW Labor would legislate a Net Zero Commission; an independent, expert-led body that would guide Parliament on how to reduce emissions on a sector-by-sector basis in line with key objectives. These objectives would include both the need to ensure that social license is obtained and wherever possible the need to protect prime agricultural land. This will provide the broad architecture to strike the balance and find positive outcomes for both the renewable energy sector and landowners.</p>
<p>8. A fun one to end on... What song would make the best theme music for you?</p>		<p>Arguably, the hardest question! I will have to leave this, as the music and genre changes weekly at the moment!</p>

Short statement provided by Sustainable Australia for Ross Hamilton. “Sustainable Australia Party is an independent community movement with a science and evidence-based policy platform. As part of our plan to better support regional Australia, we would further develop land stewardship funds to support relevant farmers and regional landowners to help manage biodiversity values on their properties, including areas that are either high conservation value and/or unsuitable or marginal for agricultural use. We also commit for on going funding for Landcare, improving access to and the quality of health services in regional Australia and investment in renewable energy infrastructure.”